

Tales of Water Trails: Sauk River

Welcome to 'Tales of Water Trails' presented by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Our guests, Lynne and Bob Diebel, are experienced canoeists and kayakers who have paddled more than 2,400 miles of Minnesota water trails. They describe these routes for other travelers in their two books, *Paddling Northern Minnesota* and *Paddling Southern Minnesota*.

For this series of programs, the Diebels are sharing their insights about Minnesota's state water trails. The Minnesota DNR manages over 4,000 miles of water trails for canoeing and kayaking including the north shore of Lake Superior and dozens of rivers statewide.

Here are Lynne Diebel and Bob Diebel, talking about paddling on the Sauk River.

Lynne:

The Sauk meanders quietly until it reaches St. Cloud, and then as it drops into the Mississippi Valley, it rushes through a series of class I – II rapids. Our favorite stretch of the Sauk was the last 22 miles. It becomes urban in the last 10, but between Cold Spring and Rockville it's a very interesting series of wildlife opportunities. And then at Rockville, you'll meet a garden of giant boulders in the middle of the stream that are pretty spectacular. There's a tamarack swamp along the way. There used to be a blue heron rookery that's no longer inhabited, but there are lots and lots of blue herons along the river.

Bob:

We put in at Cold Spring, right below the dam. It flows freely from there to the Mississippi. We chose just to do the last 20 miles because the river was pretty obstructed by deadfalls and difficult to paddle upstream of there, but we have since learned that the river is going to be cleaned out and deadfalls removed and is now, for about 120 miles of its length, part of the state water trail system. So we'd recommend that you get out there and try it, because I'm sure it's a very interesting stream further upstream from where we paddled.

Lynne:

The section that you choose to paddle is going to depend on whether you like your rivers a little quiet or whether you like them real lively. From Cold Spring to the Knights of Columbus Park in St. Cloud, you'll find it's a pretty peaceful river. That's about a 17-mile stretch. From the Knights of Columbus Park to the Mississippi is where it drops into the Mississippi Valley and the rapids get interesting, they're filled with boulders. There's a low-head dam that you actually go right over, and that can be a

real issue. It's got some broken areas at each end that form chutes for you to get through. There are other hazards – pieces of rebar and concrete in the bottom of the stream. It's a challenge, though, and most paddlers like a challenge. So that last 4.5 miles is good if you're really good on boat handling and you like class I – II rapids.

Bob:

It's a river well worth trying.

Of course there is wildlife along all the rivers in Minnesota that are part of the water trail system. We saw songbirds, green herons, great blue herons, eagles and kingfishers on our day of paddling the river.