

Tales of Water Trails: Snake 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 Snake River.

Lynne:

Wild and challenging in its headwaters, exciting near the confluence, moderate in between – the Snake's got a reach for every paddler! We recommend you try out any one of the reaches of the about 67 miles of river between Aitkin County Park and the St. Croix River. The Snake River and Chengwatana State Forest make for some beautiful country to paddle through. You'll pass the towns of Mora and Pine River. There is a low-head dam to watch out for at Pine River at Cross Lake.

This is a really gorgeous river. It's one of Minnesota's most beautiful. And it is indeed a Minnesota wild and scenic river.

Bob:

Lynne mentioned the wild upper part, and there are some significant rapids to consider when you're going to start out paddling. The first thing you encounter after putting in at Aitkin County Park is about three and a half miles down the river – you come to the upper falls, which is a II – III, class II – III, and about another mile and a half down the lower falls, which is a III – IV. We portaged around both of those, and there are good portage trails. If you're a kayaker and you want to paddle through those things you really ought to scout them before you make your choice about whether to do that or not.

Lynne:

The stretch between Aitkin Park and Ford Township Bridge is where you'll find the upper and lower falls, and they aren't really falls, they're steep rapids. They're also beautiful. Even if you're not going to paddle those waters it's worth visiting, because you'll find pink granite rock outcrops with white pines growing from them. It's really scenic and it's worth doing that portage if you're not going to paddle it.

Downstream of Ford Bridge you're going to find that it's class I - II rapids, and these are manageable by most experienced river paddlers. Boulder beds – very pretty country and you're going to find that all the way down to County Road 6. After you leave County Road 6, all the way down to the town of Pine River, the river is flat. It's flat, flat, flat. You're not even going to find a very strong current. That is not to say it's not pretty. It's really very pretty, and it's a good river for beginning river paddlers to enjoy without any stress.

After you portage around the low-head dam at Cross Lake, there's another stretch of almost 12 miles of class I, and at high water class II – whitewater with just one little break in the middle.

Bob:

We finished that first section from Aitkin County Park to Walleye Landing and then had an interrupted section where we started again after the Cross Lake Dam down to the St. Croix River. The last part – as is typical in the final descent to the river that the river that you're paddling on joins – it's steeper, and has continuous fast water, some class I rapids, or II if the water was high.

Lynne:

The deadfalls are rarely a problem along this river, but since the river rises and falls quickly, this is one of those rivers that you don't know what the water level's going to be like in the second half of the day when you started out in the morning. You do want to be aware of deadfalls! If you're going to paddle the upper, be sure to check the levels before you leave. The USGS gauge will give you a read, and you'll know whether or not you're going to be able to paddle it.

There's a high risk of accident in those remote headwater areas and there's also high risk of being stranded with nothing but a boulder bed to hike through and no nearby roads. So check your water levels, be aware of your paddling ability, and you'll have a great time on the Snake.

Bob:

Yeah, this is a beautiful river not to be missed. It's an exciting paddle, clear water, and wonderful countryside. Good paddling.