

## Tales of Water Trails: Straight 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 Straight River.

Lynne:

The Straight River – it's *not* straight, so don't expect anything but one of the curviest rivers in southern Minnesota! The best part of it runs between Owatonna and Faribault, for a stretch of about 26 miles. There's more of it further upstream, but that's a little trickier paddling.

If you put in at Owatonna, you are going to have to either put in at a steep embankment or go down a fish passage. You can put in there and head down to Clinton Falls in Medford, or you can put in at Medford, where there's a really nice landing, and go down to Faribault.

The river itself is one of those beautiful, winding corridors of woods and wildlife, and the experience is really loveliest when you get to the River Bend Nature Center in Faribault and you go through some of the best scenery of the whole trip.

Bob:

The speed picks up as you get toward Faribault. The river goes through some very high cuts and high banks, and is quite beautiful. The second part of the trip is also quieter than the first because you get further away from the Interstate.

Lynne:

One of the tricky parts of the river is at Clinton Falls. There used to be a dam there, and it was the power for a mill – it's now a class II-III rapids, depending on water levels. You can portage it, and you should, unless you're really experienced at class II drops, because it's a curving drop filled with

boulders. So, portage on the left, and when you hear the noise of the Clinton Falls ahead, pay attention!

Bob:

I'm glad you mentioned that, because we had been going down the river and did not expect the rapids to be where it was because of the way we were reading the map that we had at the time. We were debating whether or not we could be encountering the rapids from where we thought we were on the river according to the map, and we trusted our ears, which is a good thing, because we found it to be a pretty challenging drop – it was good to portage. And then we later found out that three weeks prior to our canoeing that stretch, a young boy in a kayak drowned in that rapids.

Lynne:

The best place to get out in Faribault is Teepee Tonka Park, which is right before you get to the highway bridge that comes into Faribault – but you can go further downstream to where the Straight joins the Cannon. Now, the Straight is a tributary of the Cannon, but it's bigger than the Cannon where they join, which is an interesting thing about rivers. The decision is not always made as to which is the tributary and which is the main stem based on size, but rather on other factors.

Bob:

So we wouldn't call the Straight River really a good camping river, but if you want to combine it with the Cannon you could make a very nice journey from Owatonna all the way down to Red Wing.

Lynne:

We really like the Straight – we had some really fun paddles on it. And the second paddle that we took, between Medford and Faribault, we took at a time when the water was up. Now, the Straight can rise quickly and it can also rise in dangerous ways, because it carries debris with it. But if you can catch it at just the right level of high water – but not *too* high – you get a lot of fun rapids through the River Bend Nature Center. So pay attention to the water levels! There's information on the DNR website about how to find out what the water levels are and how they're going to affect your paddle.

Watch out for the wildlife, there's a lot to look for. You'll see snapping turtles, songbirds, hawks, eagles, owls, kingfishers and herons. It's a very pretty river.

Bob:

It is a nice little river. Give her a try!

