

Tales of Water Trails: Vermilion 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 Vermilion River.

Lynne:

Minnesota has two Vermilion Rivers. One of them runs through Hastings and is familiar to metro area paddlers, but the Vermilion we're going to talk about is the Vermilion that runs from Lake Vermilion to Crane Lake, up on the northern border of the state. It's about a 39-mile river, right on the edge of the Boundary Waters – so the scenery is Boundary Waters scenery, which is beautiful. We describe about 35 miles of that trip, because the last couple miles are very challenging rapids.

This river runs through a couple of different state forests. It's also a route that is used by the Border to Border race, where people run and bike and paddle across the state. They end in Crane Lake after having done all the portages and paddled all of the Vermilion River.

Bob:

The river has many rapids that require some advanced boating skills; these can also be portaged, of course. The first one you encounter is immediately after you put in – Shively Falls and rapids, a class III at high water. There's an 80-rod portage on the left, and a campsite. The next one down has a special meaning for us; it's called Lifter Falls, and we kind of think of it as "Tipover Falls," because this was one which, in a moment of not very good judgment, I urged us to canoe over this small waterfall. It's about a four-foot drop.

Lynne:

I said, "Let's not do it!"

Bob:

Yeah, so Lynne said, "I think we shouldn't," and I said, "oh, we'll be fine," and so she secured all her gear very carefully, and I was so overconfident I didn't put my camera into a waterproof container. So over we went, and it was like riding a staircase banister with a canoe because we just tipped right off to the side and went in, ruining my camera. Luckily all the pictures were on the card, which were saved, but the camera was shot. And the really odd thing to end this story, is that I called up the manufacturer of the camera and told them I'd – to simplify the story – I'd dropped my camera in the lake, and they sent me a brand new one with no questions asked, so that was a nice end to a story that had a very stupid beginning.

Lynne:

Dry bag next time.

Bob:

Yes.

Lynne:

Following Lifter Falls, there are a couple of rapids in there. There's Table Rock Falls, which is a huge drop and it's not recommended that anybody paddle it unless they're in an inflatable raft. However, there's a nice portage trail, it's almost a mile long, around the Table Rock Falls. Following that is a long series of quiet water interspersed with class I – class II rapids, including Chipmunk Falls, which isn't a falls but a class II rapids. And there's a nice tributary called Pelican River, which you can paddle up for a short distance to a nice campsite. Then you get down to the end where you get to High Falls, which is an enormous waterfall, not anything that anybody would want to paddle, and that's where you take out and portage around it.

Now, you can end your trip there, but if you're really curious about the remainder of the river or if you just want to explore on some trails, you can go through the Chute and the Gorge; trails follow both of these so that you can see the class III – V whitewater that follows the takeout point. And then you get to Crane Lake.

So this is an exciting northern river! It's wild, it's beautiful, it's good fishing, and you'll feel really like you're on a Boundary Waters trip.

Bob:

And the river is long enough and has enough good campsites to offer a good river tripping opportunity.

Lynne:

The end of the trip, before you get to High Falls – the Vermilion sprawls out into a wide area where wild rice beds are pretty thick, and this is a really beautiful spot. The wild rice grows quite tall toward

the end of the season. Water levels are fairly predictable all year, but you always want to check those – if you go at the end of the year, you're going to see wild rice probably six feet tall.

Bob:

We really enjoyed this river and would highly recommend it.