

## Tales of Water Trails: Zumbro 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 Zumbro River.

Lynne:

The Riviere des Embarras – that's the "River of Difficulties" in French – subsequently became the Zumbro, and it does have its share of challenges. It's got floods and piles of deadfalls, but it's also a great paddling river with a lively current, gorgeous scenery and good access points. Don't miss it.

There's a sandy bottom. There are gravel bar riffles. You've got a couple of small towns to paddle through – Zumbro Falls, Hammond, Jarret, Millville, Theilman. You've got about 46 miles on the main stem, and then there's the North Fork, which gives you another 15 miles, and the South Branch of the Middle Fork – I told you, the Zumbro's a complicated place! – which has 8 miles between Mantorville and Oxbow Park.

So you've got lots of choices – these are all good paddles. Mantorville to Oxbow, I would recommend you do early in the season and check your water levels. There's a water level line on the dam upstream of the put-in where you can see whether it's down too low to get around all those little rock gardens. The Zumbrota to County Road 7 trip involves going under nine bridges, and the first of those is in Zumbrota – it's Minnesota's last original covered bridge. There are riffles on those but no rapids, and the trip through Mazeppa does include some dodging of boulders.

Bob:

The Zumbro is an interesting river because it is a rather large watershed, and they kind of tried to recycle the Zumbro name many, many times instead of naming its feeder rivers different names. You have the South Fork and North Fork, the West Branch of the various forks, and it's a whole web of

rivers that all have the same name, so it gets rather confusing. We paddled mainly the main branch and the one tributary to it.

Lynne:

In addition to the bluffs, there's plenty of wildlife to see and wildflowers on the South Branch of the Middle Fork. In the spring we saw lots of bluebells, wood anemones, marsh marigolds – it's a rather colorful place under the hardwoods.

On the main stem, in the Zumbro Bottoms Unit of the state forest, is the Funk Ford Bridge; it's a really funky old bridge that's a cutie. There's hiking in the Kruger Unit when you get done with your paddle, and on the South Branch you'll see some really beautiful limestone outcrops.

Bob:

This is the last river that we're talking about in the Driftless Area, and it's right up there with the Root in my opinion as far as good paddling in this area.

Lynne:

Couple of cautions – deadfalls are quite possible on the North Fork, and especially near Mazeppa, where there used to be a dam. You may have to portage around a deadfall or two. There are boulders in Mazeppa as well, which I mentioned before. And there are a couple of bridge remains on that North Fork trip.

Bob:

We found this a very enjoyable river. It's good for camping as well – long enough to camp on, with campsites along the way to take advantage of.

Lynne:

We like it, you'll like it too. Thanks for joining us.