THE CANNON RIVER

By A.D. 1000 the mouth of the Cannon River was a major center in the Minnesota culture, the Indians frequently built their canoes near the river’s mouth, so when the French and traders arrived they called this stream La Baye Aneau, Conoco, “the river of canoes.” Although the name was later mispronounced by English-speaking settlers, the Cannon description remains appropriate, for the Cannon still Livingston many to its waters.

In the early 1850s, flour and saw mills began operating in the Cannon River Valley. By 1877, there were 18 mills along the 19-mile stretch of river between Faribault and Northfield. At Dunwoody, travelers can still see the aging limestone mill of the Archibald Mill, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

West of Faribault, the Cannon River winds quietly through farmland dotted with lakes and marshes. Below Faribault, the river twists and turns, at times wide and quiet, at times narrow and fast. From Faribault to its mouth, the Cannon falls 280 feet, an average of 4.9 feet per mile. Below Faribault the river loses its gradient. There are a few rapids but none are difficult. Several dams must be portaged and downed trees and snags can be hazardous in high water.

The Cannon River is one of six designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in the state. Bounded by rolling hills, bluffs, and the small rural communities situated on its banks, the Cannon is a narrow, intimate stream. Fields, pastures and farm buildings are screened from the river by a narrow strip of trees on either bank. The trees, predominantly ash, maple, aspen, and poplar, reach out over the stream, forming a leafy canopy.

The Straight varies from 30 to 80 feet wide and from 1 to 4 feet deep. There are numerous areas of wild rapids and fast water, with rock and channel stream channel making canoeing a challenge. There are areas of difficult rapids on the Straight, located at Clinton Falls that should be portaged. Canoeing on the Straight in the fall, during the spring and early summer, by July the river may be too low for enjoyable river travel.

The Straight water is good for all recreation, but it is not drinkable without treatment. Ask the DNR Information Center or the Department of Health for the most recent issues of the fish consumption advisory.

THE STRAIGHT RIVER

Straight may be an appropriate name for the meandering, turning stream. The river’s name is actually a Lakota translation of “Owatonna,” a Dakota Indian word meaning mostly strong or honest.

Flowing through the southeastern Minnesota, the Straight meanders north from Owatonna to Faribault, where it joins the Cannon River. Away from these cities and the small rural communities situated on its banks, the Straight is a narrow, intimate stream. Fields, pastures and farm buildings are screened from the river by a narrow strip of trees on either bank. The trees, predominantly ash, maple, aspen, and poplar, reach out over the stream, forming a leafy canopy.

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The Straight river is noted for its wildlife, including bald eagles and mink. Songbirds are especially plentiful during the spring and fall migrations. Field mice, muskrat and grey fox can be observed along the rivers.

Rescue protection efforts in the Cannon River Watershed are coordinated by the Cannon River Watershed Partnership, a non-profit organization founded in 1990 to protect and improve the surface and groundwater resources, and the water systems of the watershed. That mission is carried out by landowner associations, educational programs, engineering, and the facilitation of small-watershed groups. The partnership operates an annual river clean-up and participates in the DNR Adopt-a-River program. Call 507-332-0484 for more information.

Planning A Safe River Trip

A successful river trip is safe. To enjoy a safe journey, you should be prepared by doing the following:

- Get acquainted with your route. Plan your trip with a map before you depart and have copies of your plans including planned departure and arrival times.
- Travel with a companion or group.
- Choose a distance that is comfortable for you, most people paddle two to three river miles per hour.
- Wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device that state law requires to be on board the boat for each person.
- Be cautious of river obstructions, such as overhanging and dead trees in the river.
- Bring a first aid kit that includes waterproof matches. Wear the U.S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device that state law requires to be on board the boat for each person.
- Be cautious of river obstructions, such as overhanging and dead trees in the river.
- Bring an extra paddle in your canoe.
- You must pack out all trash.
- Leave only footprints; take only photographs!

Best Areas and Camping Sites

Public rest areas are available along the route to rest, picnic and explore.

Camping is allowed in designated campgrounds which are available on a first-come-first-serve basis, or at designated sites reserved at local DNR campgrounds.

Boating Information

Boating is only available at limited numbered of rest areas. Drinking river water is not recommended, but if you must it should be treated. 

Rate White Water

Rivers and rapids are rated according to the International Scale of River Difficulty. Ratings are estimates based on observations at low and moderate water levels or on secondhand reports.

CLASS I. Easy rapids with small waves and few obstacles. Some maneuvering is required.

CLASS II. Rapids with waves up to three feet high. Some maneuvering is required.

CLASS III. Difficult rapids with high, irregular waves capable of swamping an open canoe. Narrow chutes may require information maneuvering. Usually considered the limit for an experienced paddler in an open canoe.

CLASS IV. Long, turbulent rapids with high, irregular waves, constricted passages and blind drops. Forcible rapids and keyhole rapids are possible. Portages may be required.

CLASS V. Long, violent rapids with complex waves and steep drops or waterfalls. Hazards in the event of a mishap. Maneuvering by experts in enclosed boats.

Sustainable Ecosystems

Outdoor recreation depends on a healthy and attractive natural environment. Sustainable outdoor recreation enables people to enjoy the outdoorswithout negative impacts on the environment.

Communities working together can improve water resources by promoting environmentally sustainable land-use practices along rivers and throughout watersheds.

Natural shoreline buffers improve water quality by filtering out nutrients and sediments. Healthy and diverse native shoreline plant communities are attractive and provide important shoreline habitat for birds and wildlife.

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