

# **Kark's Canoeing and Kayaking Guide to 309 Wisconsin Streams**

**By Richard Kark  
May 2015**

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## ***Introduction***

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### **A Badger Stream Love Affair**

My fascination with rivers started near my hometown of Osage, Iowa on the Cedar River. High school buddies and I fished the river and canoe-camped along its lovely limestone bluffs. In 1969 I graduated from St. Olaf College in Minnesota and soon paddled my first Wisconsin stream. With my college sweetheart I spent three days and two nights canoe-camping from Taylors Falls to Stillwater on the St. Croix River. "Sweet Caroline" by Neil Diamond blared from our transistor radio as we floated this lovely stream which was designated a National Wild and Scenic River in 1968. Little did I know I would eventually explore more than 300 other Wisconsin streams.

In the late 1970s I was preoccupied by my medical studies in Milwaukee but did find the time to explore some rivers. I recall canoeing the Oconto, Chippewa, Kickapoo, "Illinois Fox," and West Twin Rivers during those years. Several of us traveled to the Peshtigo River and rafted "Roaring Rapids" with a commercial company. At the time I could not imagine riding this torrent in a canoe. We also rafted Piers Gorge on the Menomonee River. Our guide failed to avoid Volkswagen Rock over Mishicot Falls. We flipped and I experienced the second worst "swim" of my life. Was I deterred from whitewater? Just the opposite, it seems.

By the late 1970s I was a practicing physician, but I found time for Wisconsin rivers. In 1979 I signed up for the tandem whitewater clinic run by the River Touring Section of the Sierra Club's John Muir Chapter. After learning about whitewater strokes and tactics from the Burtons and the Bindrichs I was forever hooked on whitewater and was also beginning to appreciate the unique beauty of Wisconsin's rivers. Like many others I soon switched from tandem to solo whitewater canoeing. Being the "captain of one's own fate" in a solo canoe is too tempting for most of us. Weekends often found me paddling whitewater streams like the Wolf, the Red, and the Pike with fellow Sierrans.

But unlike most of my buddies I was also drawn to quiet water and I realized I liked to explore new streams by myself. I was developing a strong desire to see "what was around the next bend" on multiple rivers in Wisconsin and beyond. In 1983, Bob Diggelman, Pat Brennaman and I began a tradition which lasted nearly 30 years. Joined by a cast of characters which changed through the years we explored more than 50 Class III and IV Appalachian streams between Pennsylvania and Alabama. Scott and Susan Watson were with us more of those years than were the others. As time passed several of us also undertook major expeditions on "far north" Canadian rivers like the Burnside and the South Nahanni. Many rivers in the

American West like the Middle Fork of the Salmon and the Grand Canyon of the Colorado were added to our river lists. But Wisconsin streams always lured me back. My own list began to include more and more streams in the Badger State.

In 1982 I realized I had already paddled quite a few Wisconsin streams and I decided to count them. To my surprise the total was nearly 100. From that point I kept a running total and began to take notes on my adventures. Eventually I began to write about these experiences which were mostly solo day trips. My 100<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin stream was Sawyer County's Teal River in 1983. In 1996 I paddled my 200<sup>th</sup> stream which was Paint Creek near Chippewa Falls. I kept counting but had no idea I would reach 300! In 1998 I reached another milestone. That November I paddled Walworth County's Mukwonago River into Lulu Lake. Prior to that day I had paddled at least one river in all of Wisconsin's 72 counties except Walworth.

I have loved so many things about this crazy quest. It has been fun deciding which stream to explore next and which section. I always enjoy the logistical planning including which shuttle mode to use. Every conceivable method to get back to my vehicle at the put-in has been in my repertoire. Included have been hitch-hiking, mountain biking, jogging and cross country skiing. The challenge of pulling my canoes over and around hundreds if not thousands of woody obstructions like fallen trees and beaver dams is something I actually enjoy (most of the time).

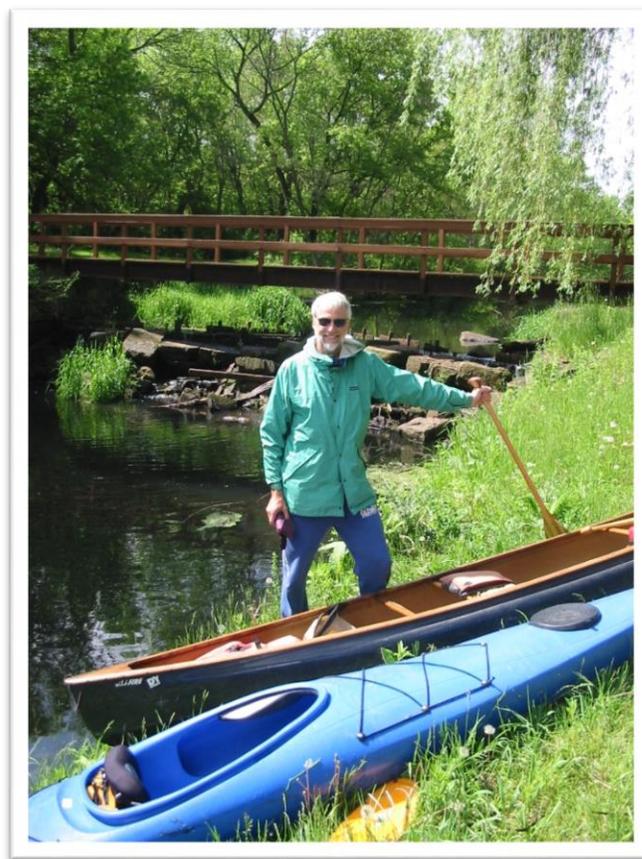
My appreciation for the beauty of Wisconsin rivers grew ever greater. I noted with dismay the many ways our streams have been neglected and abused. I also became a student of the stream natural history. The streamside flora fascinated me but I especially enjoyed studying the bedrock and glacial geology which moving water reveals. Eventually I was giving slide show presentations around the state which stressed geology but included other natural features, human history, and also trip recommendations.

April 14, 2007 was a momentous day for me. With a flotilla of fellow paddlers I floated the East Twin River from Mishicot to Two Rivers. Following the trip a luncheon was held to celebrate the completion of my goal of navigating 300 Wisconsin rivers. At a restaurant in downtown Two Rivers I was presented a plaque by the city's mayor and the president of the city council which commemorated my accomplishment. Since that day of have added several new ones but am pretty sure I will never reach 400.

It may be that no one else has paddled 300 streams in any other single state. Stream- rich Wisconsin may be the only state where such a feat is even possible. That said, I can truthfully say that my "odyssey" was more about the journey than the goal. In the process I developed a love affair for the Badger State and its rivers which will last as long as I live.

Thanks to all of you for supporting the River Alliance of Wisconsin. The work of this organization has been indispensable to the health of Wisconsin streams. Thanks also for being here to help launch that organization's website link to my river descriptions. I hope at least some of you will utilize the site to help you discover a Wisconsin stream you may have wondered about. Perhaps it will be a "gem" near where you live.

Richard Kark  
Asheville, North Carolina



## **Foreword**

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### **So Many Rivers.....**

This compilation of 300+ summaries of river excursions, small and large (rivers), short and long (the excursions) is a remarkable accomplishment. Even more remarkable is the effort and commitment that led to its creation. Somewhere, somehow – he doesn't make it clear here – Rick Kark decided he would paddle as many Wisconsin streams as he could get his canoes into, taking careful notes each time of the flora, fauna, and underlying geology of the river he was traveling. He includes the useful logistical information paddlers come to expect from these publications, but Rick adds color and insight and good humor to each of his entries, making this compendium the most useful and the most entertaining of any I have read.

I'm not sure Rick coined this adage he uttered to me one time, or if he read it on a bumper-sticker. Whatever its origin, you can see how it might become the rallying cry for paddling 300+ streams in Wisconsin:

#### **"I brake for bridges."**

Any river rat knows this phenomenon. You are driving along and you see a bridge. You slow down, then quickly turn your head right and left to see what potential the stream you just drove over might have. Is it navigable? Where does it flow? What are its origins? What is its story?

These questions, and a keen sense of adventure, drove Rick to explore these Wisconsin streams and catalog his experiences. With a boat tied on top and a bike racked on the back of his car (or jogging shoes in his dry bag), Rick would sometimes drive over a bridge, pull over and stop, and throw in his boat to see where the stream would lead him. Others were more carefully planned. What is especially impressive, in these days of GPS and Google Maps, is that Rick wandered up and down these rivers (yes, UP – many streams he made round trips on) without the kind of minute detail we now expect to have before slipping a boat into the water.

Rick was not after setting some Guinness record or scoring bragging rights for how many streams he'd "vanquished." This was not a contest or a race. It was a three-plus decade odyssey rooted in the sheer joy of paddling and a deep appreciation for rivers.

There are some truly obscure streams Rick writes up that may not have seen a single paddler on them since he dipped his paddle into them in the early 1990s. But there are no doubt many of them that will tempt and beckon you. (Do take note, though, that conditions will have changed on many of the rivers Rick describes here.) The count – roughly 309 – is a count of the number of discretely different streams Rick has paddled on since he began this adventure in the late 1970s. It does not count the multiple trips on scores of rivers that would no doubt take Rick’s count into the thousands.

I have to thank Rick for introducing me to “guerilla paddling” (a term coined by our good friend and Rockford-based river rat Tom Lindblade), whereby you seek out the obscure, the small, and the unknown stream; you are unimpressed by the lack of paddler knowledge of that stream; and you are not bothered in the least by a few pullovers or deadfall maneuvering. (In fact, the latter, and the skill they demand, are part of why you go on small, obscure streams.)

With this compendium, Rick has made the obscure more tantalizing, the seemingly inaccessible more approachable, and the fascinating but complicated geology of Wisconsin more understandable. It is an impressive accomplishment that I hope will bring more people to more rivers, thereby bringing more love and more protection for these watery veins that shape and define Wisconsin.

Denny Caneff  
Madison, Wisconsin



## **East Central Wisconsin Rivers and Streams**

This section includes 40 rivers and streams that either originate or are mostly confined to these East Central Wisconsin counties: Adams, Brown, Calumet, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marathon, Outagamie, Portage, Shawano, Taylor, Waupaca, Waushara, Winnebago, and Wood:

**Ahnapee River**

**Big Rib River**

**Branch River**

**Duck Creek**

**East Twin River**

**Embarrass River**

**Embarrass River (North Branch)**

**Fox River**

**Hemlock Creek**

**Little Eau Pleine River**

**Little Wolf River (South Branch)**

**Manitowoc River (North Branch)**

**Mecan River**

**Mud Creek**

**Pine River**

**Rat River**

**Shiocton River**

**Tomorrow River**

**Waupaca River**

**Willow Creek**

**Big Eau Pleine River**

**Big Roche-a-Cri Creek**

**Crystal River**

**East River**

**Eau Claire River**

**Embarrass River (Middle Branch)**

**Embarrass River (South Branch)**

**Grand River**

**Kewaunee River**

**Little Wolf River**

**Manitowoc River**

**Manitowoc River (South Branch)**

**Mill Creek**

**Pigeon River**

**Plover River**

**Red River**

**Suamico River**

**Trappe River**

**West Twin River**

**Yellow River**

# Ahnapee River

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## **Location**

Door and Kewaunee counties.

## **Natural Features**

Most of this short river is an estuary of Lake Michigan. Trees are sparse and farmland encroaches closely on the river corridor. Marsh vegetation predominates as Algoma nears.

## **Human History and Influence**

Always a fishing town, Algoma, now is a top Lake Michigan charter sport fishing departure point. Water quality: is just fair; lots of agriculture upstream

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

Only navigable in its estuary portion from County X down to Lake Michigan. But from there the going is easy due to adequate width, few or no downed trees and a total lack of rocks. Current is essentially non-existent and water levels should always be adequate.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

I solo paddled from County X to the boat landing along County M. It took about an hour and 15 minutes. From the take-out I biked back to my car along the Ahnapee State Trail.

## **Further Ideas**

Should be easy to paddle all the way to Lake Michigan. Due to the slow to non-existent current, paddlers can design trips going in either up- or downstream directions.

## **Conclusion**

Not very scenic or challenging, but easy and reliable paddling plus a great opportunity to combine canoeing or kayaking with a bike shuttle on a state trail.

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# Big Eau Pleine River

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## Location

Taylor and Marathon counties.

## Natural Features

Descends from the Northern Highland Geographical Province towards the Central Plain. The relatively steep gradient creates frequent minor rapids over and past granite boulders and bedrock. The Big Eau Pleine begins as East and West Branches which both arise in Taylor County a few miles southeast of Medford. After these branches combine, the river enters Marathon County and flows in a southeasterly direction to the Wisconsin River. The original vegetation here was a northern conifer-hardwood forest.

## Human History and Influence

Marathon County is one of the state's top dairying counties. It also has produced as much as 95 percent of the nation's ginseng. The Big Eau Pleine flows through no towns, so it is only agriculture and past logging influences which tame its natural wildness. The river's flow completely stops in the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir. This body of water is created by a major dam – it is considered a storage reservoir to feed water into the Wisconsin River system at low water times -- just above the Wisconsin River a few miles north of Stevens Point.

## Navigability and Difficulty

Becomes wide enough to paddle at Cherokee County Park. Frequent rapids necessitate intermediate-level whitewater skill and experience. The rapids and riffles will be difficult to navigate at low water times, so scouting from a bridge or two is a good idea. The river is best run in early spring or after significant rains. A gauge on the Big Eau Pleine is listed on the USGS Website, so it is possible to monitor its water levels. I do not know what a minimum level is.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

In 1981, I paddled my Blue Hole OCA whitewater canoe down a section of the Big Eau Pleine. I am not even sure which section it was though I believe it was from the County P bridge to the next bridge near Stratford. Besides many rocky riffles I recall two rapids I would rate as Class II's. Included within the forested shores were several nice sugar maple stands. After the trip I returned to my car via bicycle which I had locked and hidden away near my chosen take-out spot.

## Experiences of Others

Frank Piraino's [Small River Adventures of Wisconsin](#) is a good source for paddling this stream. He describes two consecutive sections requiring 3-4 hours each between the County N bridge at Cherokee County Park and the County M bridge a couple of miles east of Stratford. He too, found frequent riffles and several Class II rapids.

**Conclusion**

Fast and fun with relatively easy whitewater for those with experience. Extra water needed, however, for a good run. I would like to tackle both sections described by Piraino in one long, high water day.

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# Big Rib River

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## Location

Taylor, Lincoln and Marathon counties.

## Natural Features

Begins in the sparsely populated, conifer-northern hardwood forests of northeastern Taylor County. It descends quickly, forming many riffles and rapids on its downhill descent from the heights of the Northern Highland to the Wisconsin River. Outcrops of granite bedrock and boulders in the stream help to make the Big Rib a stream of considerable beauty and character. After it passes under U.S. Hwy 29 near Marathon City it slows markedly as it dissects glacial outwash gravels and sands. Finally, it enters a broad wetland complex on the outskirts of Wausau.

Dott and Attig in Roadside Geology of Wisconsin explain the existence of this complex as the result of a damming effect of an originally higher Wisconsin River floodplain. It holds more open water now than it formerly did because a Wisconsin River flowage called Lake Wausau backs up into the final several miles of the Big Rib. Before it reaches the Wisconsin, the river skirts Rib Mountain, Wisconsin's highest bedrock peak. The state has three other peaks which rise to higher elevations but their bedrock is covered by glacial drift.

## Human History and Influence

Logging, farming, roads and cities have all left their marks. The only real towns of consequence are Marathon City and Wausau, which has around 38,000 people and qualifies as northern Wisconsin's most important commercial and industrial center. The entire river is dam-free which enhances its appeal to paddlers and anglers. There had been a dam at Rib Falls which washed out in the 1960s. Water quality is very good in the upper reaches. Downstream it remains reasonably good despite the addition of manure and pesticides.

## Navigability and Difficulty

Fallen trees tend not to be a problem but low water and rapids both can be. Intermediate whitewater skills are required. Mike Svob (see below) suggests scouting the rocky stretch downstream of the Cty. F bridge to see if there is enough water. Consulting the [americanwhitewater.org](http://americanwhitewater.org) website should also be helpful in this regard.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

On my way to a Sierra Club trip in 1982, I deviated two miles north of Hwy 29 on County S to look at Big Rib Falls. It looked like a fun quick plunge so decided to run it right then and there. It was a tricky, solid Class III, but I did just fine. Later the same year I returned with a partner. After she watched me run Big Rib Falls we tandem paddled from Hwy S to Marathon City in about 2 hours. Actually, she paddled the last two miles from the Hwy 29 bridge by herself while I was jogging back to retrieve our vehicle at Big Falls. On the water I remember several islands, easy riffles, and nice scenery.

The next time I paddled the Big Rib was on a Sierra Club trip in 1986. We put in at the Lemke Bridge a few miles north of Hwy 64 and paddled down to the Amco County Park on County F. which was about 9 miles. The upper river was narrow and often fast, but devoid of real rapids. I cannot recall deadfall problems.

Less than a mile downstream of Hwy 64 is where the real fun begins. The Rib Dells begin with a challenging Class II+ series of ledges. Lesser rapids continue for about a mile. We all ran the entry drops well in tandem and in solo canoes and then pulled over for lunch to eat and to savor the beautiful, rocky surroundings.

Fourteen years later in mid-July of 2000 I returned to the Big Rib alone with my Bell Wildfire solo freestyle canoe. That day I paddled the 11.3 miles from County F to Big Rib Falls. Since I did not have a whitewater boat, I did not run the falls. This stretch is very scenic and fun to paddle. I agree with Mike Svob (see below) that the Big Rib is underappreciated by paddlers. I enjoyed weaving among the glacial erratic boulders through minor rapids and riffles. It was a pleasure to observe granite outcrops topped by hemlocks and yellow birches. There were no visible buildings. The outing was nearly four hours of pure pleasure followed by an exhilarating 12 mile bicycle ride back to my vehicle.

In 2002 some friends and I were canoeing in the area after some heavy rains. We talked to some other very good paddlers who had portaged the Rib Dells because it looked so frightening. So, be aware that the Rib Dells can become a dangerous Class III-IV at higher water levels. Friends and I were back to the Dells when the water level was perfect in the spring of 2004. We all had successful and enjoyable runs.

### **Experiences of Others**

Mike Svob describes two consecutive sections of the Big Rib in his [Paddling Northern Wisconsin](#) guidebook. His Section 1 is Hwy 64 to County F and Section 2 is County F to Rib Falls. Frank Piraino has paddled the entire river all the way to Wausau and describes it in several sections in his [Small River Adventures of Wisconsin](#). There is also a brief description of the 2.5 mile Dells run in the American Whitewater website. The Miles Paddled website also contains a nice description of the Big Rib Dells section along with some good photographs.

### **Further Ideas**

Black Creek is a major tributary which has been paddled. Most have confined their paddling on this stream to the short whitewater section near the community of Athens. It might be possible to begin a Big Rib outing from an access point on lower Black Creek.

### **Conclusion**

With adequate water nearly all of the Big Rib River is wonderful, but water levels are not reliable and a low water runs have the potential to be frustrating. Whitewater skills are needed to run the Big Rib Dells.

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# Big Roche-a-Cri Creek

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## Location

Northwestern Adams County.

## Natural Features

Several headwaters creeks begin in the sandy and gravelly glacial outwash soils and rolling terrain of northeastern Adams County. Headwater branches coalesce in heavily forested lands which are flat and sandy because they once lay under Glacial Wisconsin. Originally the flora was pine savanna dominated by jack pines. Now the forest is more diverse. The stream flows slowly and without rapids throughout because of a very low gradient and a lack of rocks.

## Human History and Influence

The name Roche-a-Cri means "crevice in the rock" in French. It refers to a defect in a prominent and well-known sandstone mesa or "mound" which rises 300 feet above the surrounding flat terrain just a few miles south of the creek. Here a state park helps to preserve the mound's natural features and also protects a highly unusual combination of Native American pictographs and petroglyphs situated right next to each other. This mesa was once an island in Glacial Lake Wisconsin. The natural mouth of the river is now buried by Castle Rock Lake, a flowage of the Wisconsin River. Water quality is good because of sandy soils and limited agriculture.

## Navigability and Difficulty

Sandy soils do not hold tree roots very well. Thus fallen trees across the narrow stream create frequent obstructions. There are no rapids and water levels should nearly always be adequate

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

My brief 1981 outing was a frustrating one which I aborted before my planned finish. I traveled the short distance from Arkdale to the 18<sup>th</sup> Ave. bridge where I stopped and ran the 3 miles back to my car. There were way too many fallen trees.

## Experiences of Others

Official Sierra Club River Touring Section outings were held at least twice on the Big Roche-a-Cri back in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In May of 1999, Joan Redman showed up with several chainsaw-wielding friends to help clear the way for a scheduled outing two weeks later. She decided on a further downstream section after giving up on clearing a section just downstream from the dam near Cottonville. On the official outing two weeks later she and her companions reportedly had a positive experience paddling downstream from the 18<sup>th</sup> Ave. bridge. Some of her group took out at the 20<sup>th</sup> Ave. bridge while others continued downstream into Castle Rock Lake and then took out at the public landing a half mile up the lake's eastern shore. Joan told me that deadfall were only minor irritants on the lower creek.

**Conclusion**

Big Roche-A-Cri is not a prime paddling destination because of the potential for fallen trees and other features which are unspectacular. For paddlers living or vacationing nearby, the creek below the 18<sup>th</sup> Ave. bridge might be worth checking out.

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# Branch River

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## **Location**

Manitowoc County.

## **Natural Features**

The Branch River begins in Brown County where its headwaters flow eastward off the Niagara Escarpment, a ridge known locally as "the ledge." With a steady current it descends towards its rendezvous with the Manitowoc River which it joins for that stream's final 12 miles into Lake Michigan. Its banks are generally high and dry as the Branch flows past end moraines on a rocky stream bed. The underlying bedrock here is dolomite, as are some of the loose boulders. Other rocks, often granite, were carried down from the north and dropped by the Wisconsin Glacier. They are known to geologists as "glacial erratics." Vestiges of the original northern conifer-hardwood forest find their way to the river's edge. Included are a good number of handsome white cedar trees and stately white pines.

## **Human History and Influence**

The original forest was logged off and much of the Branch's drainage area is now being farmed. Its water power was once harnessed for milling at Reif's Mills. Water quality is undoubtedly influenced by agricultural runoff but it looked quite good the day I saw it.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

Rocky riffles but no real whitewater. Deadfall was amazingly lacking. The river will often will be too low for a good run. Bridge scouting should help to determine runnability. Internet monitoring of the USGS gauge reading on the Manitowoc River should be helpful.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

The Branch was my 299<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin river. The next day I paddled the East Twin River at Two Rivers which was my 300<sup>th</sup>. That day I was to be joined by many other paddlers who helped me celebrate my accomplishment.

Back on the Branch, alone in my Bell Wildfire, I was amazed by its beauty and the lack of deadfall. The date was April 13, 2007 so the river was at a nice springtime medium-high level. First I left my bicycle by a small bridge just upstream of Hwy 10 in the community of Branch. I did not plan a long trip because I expected deadfall problems. Instead, after putting in at the Cty. T Bridge, I found a nearly perfect small river. It was easy and delightful to slide past more white cedars than I have ever seen along a Wisconsin stream. The brisk current became riffly at times but never presented significant challenges. But it was obvious that the rocky stream floor would be difficult to float over during low water times.

I disturbed many whitetail deer and a few splashed across the stream in front of me. Several turkeys also flew across the river. . It took me 45 minutes to reach my planned take-out which was way too soon. I wanted more so I reshuttled my bike down to a park in Manitowoc and

returned to run the rest of the Branch. Along this stretch there were more signs of civilization and fewer cedars but the river corridor was still unobstructed and attractive. It took 35 minutes to reach the Manitowoc River where I began an exciting ride down the Manitowoc Rapids. (See Manitowoc River)

### **Further Ideas**

Consider exploring upstream of County T when the water is medium-high to high.

### **Conclusion**

With adequate water this is an excellent river for those who like to explore seldom paddled small streams. With the exception of rank beginners, most paddlers should be able to handle it.

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# Crystal River

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## **Location**

Waupaca County.

## **Natural Features**

This short stream is well named because it drains a chain of very clear spring-fed lakes. The region's sandy soils help to maintain this clarity. The Waupaca Chain includes 22 lakes located just southwest of the city of Waupaca. The Crystal often moves quickly over sand, gravel, and rocky stretches. From its origin at the outlet of Long Lake, the Crystal River flows for only twelve miles before it merges with the Waupaca River. Streamside vegetation varies widely from oaks to white pines. Originally this was oak savanna land which closely bordered Wisconsin's "North woods." Logging, agriculture and streamside settlements have greatly altered the landscape.

## **Human History and Influence**

The Crystal is not subject to the hazards of flooding. It does feature several small rapids which require some skill to negotiate but the penalties for mistakes are minimal because the river is so shallow. At times this quality is frustrating for those in heavier craft or with poor river-reading skills. The light, low-volume canoes rented at Ding's Dock are well suited to this stream. The water level does not vary greatly. The river tends to stay navigable during dry seasons. Mike Svob suggests checking the water level at the Rural Rd. bridge rapids. Commercial interests keep the stream open with their chainsaws.

An old dam on the Crystal River at County K was removed in July 2015, clearing out that obstacle and freeing up water from a silted, weedy millpond.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

Nearby Waupaca became a major logging and flour mill city in the mid 1800s. The town of Rural was settled by "Yankees" of English origin. Many of the homes they built are preserved today as nearly the entire village is on the National Registry of Historic Places. Tourists have flocked to Rural and to the Chain of Lakes for a long time. Dams halt the river at Rural and a mile upstream of the Waupaca confluence. An old "Red Mill" which boasts the biggest water wheel in the state has been restored where the Crystal passes under County K and nearby Nelson County Park.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

Ding's Dock on Columbia Lake has been renting small canoes to tourists since 1946. Classic wooden power boats carry paddlers and tow their rented canoes to the Long Lake outlet where the river voyage begins. I took advantage of this service several times in the 1970s with a variety of friends. We always had a good time in these little fiberglass canoes. I am quite sure that these trips ended in Parfreyville.

For years I had been wanted to float the Crystal in a "real canoe" and finally did it with my sister Sylvia in early October of 2004. First we left my bicycle by the Shadow Lake Road bridge and

then drove to the Columbia Lake boat landing. In my tandem Nova Craft we battled headwinds across Columbia and Long Lakes before we reached the outlet origin of the Crystal River. The upper river was narrow and very shallow but we made it down the rocky stretches without getting hung up. It was pretty and quite wild with variable streamside vegetation.

The clear water revealed a changing stream floor which was alternately sandy, weedy, muddy and rocky. In the village of Rural it was fascinating to float by the historic homes and view their attractive back yards. In Rural we carried our canoe around a small earthen dam and also passed under several small bridges. A strong tail wind blew us across the marshy widening known as Junction Lake. Then the stream narrowed and sped through a rocky section where some of the glacial erratic boulders were surprisingly large. It became necessary to stop and back up several times in order to negotiate this bouldery maze in our 17 foot canoe.

The roughest rapids were just upstream of the Smith Road bridge. At the Hope Mill Pond we portaged the dam (now removed) and continued past the Old Red Mill and covered bridge where a wedding was being held. Sylvia and I paddled to the brink of the dam and were able to portage on that right side at the edge of the dam. We accessed the water again just upstream of County K and paddled under its bridge. Soon a flock of eight turkeys flew across the stream directly in front of us. Our 8 mile trip ended at the Shadow Lake Rd. bridge after less than three hours on the water. My bike carried me back to the put-in.

### **Experiences of Others**

Thousands of people, most of them inexperienced, have bumbled their way down the Crystal through the years. Many of them tip over but enjoy getting wet on hot summer days. . More serious paddlers have two guidebooks to consult: First is the out-of-print [Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin](#) written by Michael Duncanson in the 1970s. He rates that rapids just upstream of the Smith Rd. bridge as a Class II and calls it the "most exciting" on the river.

In his [Paddling Southern Wisconsin](#), Mike Svob uses that same adjective to describe this 75 yard stretch just above the Smith Rd. bridge. He rates it a Class I+. Potential paddlers may wish to scout this rapid from that bridge before attempting the run. Svob's description concentrates on the 4 miles between Rural and the Shadow Lake Rd. bridge. He discourages paddling the Crystal's final 6 miles beyond the latter bridge because of access problems, downed trees, and a flowage behind another dam. A brief description of the Crystal can be found on the American Whitewater Website.

### **Conclusion**

This is a pretty, fun, and clear little river which most will explore in those Dings Dock rental canoes. Those wishing to use their own boats should consider paddling the Crystal at off season times when the hordes of renters are not around. Rank beginners should avoid the Crystal because of its rapids.

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# Duck Creek

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## **Location**

Outagamie and Brown counties.

## **Natural Features**

Duck Creek begins just south of the village of Black Creek in central Outagamie County. It meanders slowly over flat terrain and cuts through lake deposits which once lay under Glacial Lake Oshkosh. It skirts several glacially deposited upland areas where glacial erratic rocks are seen in the stream course. Most of the rock it exposes, however, is dolomite bedrock. At times the stream floor consists solely of this sedimentary rock. Originally, this area was forested by conifers and hardwoods, but most of the trees were logged off long ago. Now, much of the stream flows through agricultural land and is lined by bottomland trees such as box elder. As it nears Lake Michigan, Duck Creek becomes a marshy freshwater estuary.

## **Human History and Influence**

Green Bay is Wisconsin's oldest city and Duck Creek skirts its northern edge. Consequently, much of its corridor has been developed for a long time. Its water quality is rather poor. The stream courses through the Oneida Indian Reservation. That tribe originated in New York but was relocated to Wisconsin in the 1800s. The Brown County section of the creek is heavily urbanized.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

Downstream of Brown County FF, Duck Creek should be runnable most of the time. The only difficulty will be dodging a few rocks and short shallow sections at low water times. Fallen trees should not be a major problem.

## **Trip Ideas: My experience**

Ron Rosner and I explored Duck Creek in July of 2008. First we viewed it from the County FF bridge and considered putting in there. After some discussion we opted for a shorter trip. Next we drove to Howard Memorial Park on river left just downstream of the Velp Ave. bridge. We locked our bicycles there and proceeded to our chosen put-in spot at Pamperin Park. There we put in and paddled upstream of the dam for about 5 minutes. We could have ascended considerably further but decided to turn around.

The current was slow to non-existent along this quiet stretch of river which featured a largely solid dolomite bedrock floor. Our paddles struck this solid rock when they went too deep. We easily ran the small dam in the park and then navigated the short, shallow, rocky section which followed. About 100 yards downstream we encountered another small dam which I scraped over but Ron portaged to avoid damaging his canoe. A shallow riffly section of about 200 yards followed which required us to drag our canoes for a short distance. Then the water deepened and it was smooth sailing the rest of the way. The current slowed and eventually disappeared.

Box elder trees gave way to cattails along the shore. I noticed a grove of balsam poplars which I have not often seen along Wisconsin streams. The birdlife we viewed included several green herons. Near our take-out we greeted one kayaker who was paddling upstream. The take-out was rather hard to identify. It was at the end a narrow opening in the cattails about a third of a mile downstream of the Velp Ave. bridge.

### **Further Ideas**

Putting in at County FF should be a viable option. Round trips should be easy on currentless estuary sections. The kayaker we saw was planning to return to where he had started. There are several boat landings marked in the Wisconsin Gazetteer where such outings can begin.

### **Conclusion**

For Green Bay area paddlers looking for brief outings, the trips described above are viable options.

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# East River

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## **Location**

Southwestern Brown County.

## **Natural Features**

This a small stream which drains the Brown County portion of the Niagara Escarpment, known locally as "the Ledge." The river begins in extreme southwestern Brown County and picks up a series of tributaries which descend the escarpment in northwesterly directions. Most of the East River flows slowly through red clay soils across a landscape formerly inundated by a larger, post-glacial Lake Michigan. Eventually, its current slows to a stop in estuary waters near that Great Lake. Remnants of the original conifer-hardwood forest are in evidence as are bottomland trees, but many nearby trees have been removed for agricultural and urbanization reasons. The estuary contains marshy sections.

## **Human History and Influence**

Metropolitan Green Bay and intensive farming influence the entire watershed. Consequently, the river is subjected to polluted runoff from multiple sources. Original marshes in the cities of Green Bay and Allouez have been reduced by fill.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

Most of the river is too small to be navigable, but the lower river and especially its estuary will always have plenty of water and obstructions will be scarce.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

I spent an hour on the East River in July of 1995. I put-in at the Allouez Rd. bridge. I found a marginal take-out in the city of Green Bay by a bridge near a small commercial strip. At the end of my trip I hid my canoe as best I could and ran through the streets of Allouez back to my car. On the water, I enjoyed a unique perspective of the back yards, commercial buildings and parks I passed along the way. The current was initially slow and soon disappeared entirely. Cattails and purple loosestrife dominated the shorelines. The water quality was pretty abysmal.

## **Further Ideas**

I could have paddled all the way into Lake Michigan. There should be better take out places than the one I used.

## **Conclusion**

The East River is a viable paddling option for local paddlers looking for a brief excursion. With no current it should be easy to put in and take out at the same place.

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# East Twin River

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## Location

Kewaunee and Manitowoc counties.

## Natural Features

Several headwater branches coalesce in central Kewaunee County and flow south instead of east into Lake Michigan. A long north-south oriented moraine prevents this potential short cut. Though the area is heavily farmed, remnants of the original Northern conifer-hardwood forest persist, including many attractive white cedars. The banks are of red clay and the stream floor is often sandy though glacial erratic boulders are occasionally present. Before it reaches Lake Michigan, the East Twin drops into a marshy estuary which was once inundated by a larger Glacial Lake Michigan.

## Human History and Influence

Settlement came early to this part of Wisconsin, so much of the forest was felled in the mid-188's. Farmers carved up the land. Mishicot grew up on the East Twin's banks as did the larger city of Two Rivers at its mouth. Mishicot has a dam which I presume was once a mill site.

## Navigability and Difficulty

I am not sure about the river above Mishicot. Downstream of that community the river will often be runnable though there will be shallow stretches when the water is low. Bridge scouting should provide adequate runnability information. Local chainsaw wielders works to keep the river way open, but major obstructions are probably rare. When I was on the river there was one fallen tree which required a brief portage.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

April 15 of 2007 was my day to be a celebrity. The East Twin was my 300<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin river. With a large fleet of followers I put in on river right below the dam in a local Mishicot park. Three hours later more than 30 canoes and kayaks took out on river left in Two Rivers at the Paddlers Park Landing. The river closely parallels Hwy. 147 and agricultural land so it is far from pristine. I did like its moderate current, its narrow width and the big white cedar trees which graced its higher banks. The local organizer, Phil Rohrer, insisted that I with my tandem partner stay out in front of the pack. By the time we reached the Cty. VV bridge the river was widening and slowing into a wide marsh. Signs of urbanization gradually came into view. After the outing I was honored for my accomplishment at a banquet in Two Rivers. There I was presented with a plaque by the city mayor and the president of the city council. It was a great honor!

## Conclusion

This is a fine half day trip for local paddlers. I hope that Phil Rohrer and the local paddling club keep up the tradition of paddling the East Twin and that they keep it open with chainsaw work as needed.

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# Eau Claire River

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## **Location**

Langlade and Marathon counties.

## **Natural Features**

The East and West Branches of the Eau Claire River join together in far southwestern Langlade County. The main river then flows southwestwardly and joins the Wisconsin River at the edge of Wausau. It descends swiftly at times forming rapids as it descends from high country to the valley of the Wisconsin River. The whitewater sections are frequently lined by Precambrian bedrock and dotted with glacial erratic boulders. The bedrock is typically granite but at the Eau Claire Dells County Park another type of igneous rock is represented. Here the cliffs are mylonite which is metamorphosed rhyolite. The vertical configuration of the bedrock columns here are unusual and striking.

## **Human History and Influence**

The tiny berg of Hogarty by the Hwy. 52 bridge is the only streamside community upstream of Wausau. Streamside domiciles appear in greater numbers as the river nears that urban area. Agriculture is seldom seen from the water but does influence the river. There is a dam just upstream of Eau Claire Dells County Park. The river merges with the Wisconsin River in the impoundment waters of Lake Wausau.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

The river will often be too low. The USGS (Eau Claire River at Kelly) and the American Whitewater websites are helpful to check for flow adequacy. In his guidebook, Mike Svob suggests calling the DNR office at Antigo for advice. There are some very significant Class II and III rapids (and one which rates IV at some levels) on this river which require intermediate or greater whitewater skills. There are, however, many suitable sections for lesser skilled paddlers. Fallen trees tend not to be a problem.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

After paddling the Dells several times I finally explored an upstream section in June of 2002. That day I paddled the eight miles from Bear Lake Rd. bridge into the flowage above the Dells. I was paddling my non-whitewater Bell Wildfire which increased the difficulty of the journey and resulted in one swim. The river was initially quiet but rocks and faster water appeared about a mile into the run. There were three consecutive Class II drops linked by rocky Class I's. I did OK until the third bigger drop which was a three foot ledge. I ran it as well as I could but my canoe struck a submerged rock and flipped over at the base of the sheer plunge. This drop should not be difficult for experienced boaters in whitewater craft. The rest of the trip was easy to navigate over intermittent shoals through a pretty corridor.

On several occasions, with fellow Sierra Clubbers, I have paddled the 4.6 miles from the top of the Dells down to the County Z bridge. The river initially drops 65 feet in a mile and a half. The

average gradient for the whole run is 47 feet per mile. So, this run is for whitewater paddlers only. Even experienced boaters will sometimes avoid the first quarter mile where there is a very tricky class III-IV drop at the entry of the Dells section. This sheer drop of about 5 feet has been called an "ugly boiling cauldron." I have run it successfully but I have seen many spectacular flips at this site.

The second pitch is also challenging. Then the Dells settle down into a series of Class II drops. Most will put in on river right in the park below the difficult pitches. Those crazy enough to run the whole Dells can put in on the flowage upstream of the Cty. Y bridge and run a Class II shoot over the dam on river right. The water will often be too low here for a good run.

I had a second hair-raising experience on this Eau Claire River in my Bell Wildfire. The date was June 13 of 2003. Again, I would have had a much easier time in my solo whitewater canoe. That day I explored the 10 miles between Z and the Cty J bridge. My big challenge came a half mile into the trip where high water created a major challenge for me in my shallow little canoe. In front of me was a class II "mini dells" lined with bedrock and featuring several large, midstream "pour-overs." I scouted it first and fortunately made it through safely, but with a boat full of water and pounding heart. The rest of the trip was easy and scenic but evidenced increasing numbers of streamside homes. Shallow rocky stretches alternated with quieter, deeper sections. Farm fields were visible at times. After 3 and a half hours I reached my bicycle parked near the J bridge and peddled the 10 miles back to my car.

### **Experiences of Others**

Consult [Paddling Northern Wisconsin](#) by Mike Svob and the American Whitewater website.

### **Further Ideas**

Mike Svob's guidebook includes the 9.5 miles between Hwy 64 and the Bear Lake Rd. bridge. There is no whitewater and Svob describes the river here as "narrow, winding, with many small islands, wooded shoreline, and fairly low banks." Local paddlers also may wish to explore the final few miles of the river into the Lake Wausau.

### **Conclusion**

With adequate water there are several attractive sections of this river to explore. Most sections require whitewater skills.

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# Embarrass River

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## Location

Shawano, Waupaca and Outagamie counties.

## Natural Features

The main Embarrass River is born when its Middle and South Branches merge at Caroline in Shawano County. Here the river still lies within the Northern Highland geographic province. Consequently, the bedrock is granite and the river has not yet finished its descent to the Central Sandstone Plain. Boulders and the downhill gradient create some rapids on the upper Embarrass. At Pella, however, the river reaches the Plain and slows markedly. Rapids totally disappear when the river drops further into the flat former lake bed of Glacial Lake Oshkosh. Here extensive silver maple bottomlands and low, marshy banks replace conifer-hardwood upland banks. The stream floor becomes muddy or sandy instead of rocky. The banks become even marshier as the river enters Outagamie County on the way to its rendezvous with the Wolf River at New London.

## Navigability and Difficulty

There is not always enough water to run the river's easy whitewater or its single class III rapid. Water level advice is posted on the American Whitewater website. Downstream of Pella adequate water is the norm. I was not bothered by fallen trees where I paddled.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

One early summer evening in 2000 I spent about an hour paddling the Embarrass from the Outagamie County F bridge to the Hwy 176 bridge. Hordes of deer flies were bothersome, but I still enjoyed the late day scenery. The low light accentuated the attractiveness of the black willows, silver maples and walnut trees. Many birds were busy with their pre-sunset activities. As darkness set in I was riding my 60cc Yamaha motorcycle back to my car.

## Experiences of Others

The American Whitewater website includes a description of Hayman Falls near Pella. Access it by driving a half mile west of County D on Branch Road and then turning south on a dead end road. I once scouted this drop but never ran it. It was quite long and looked like a legitimate Class III.

Frank Piraino paddled the Embarrass from the County XX bridge on the Waupaca-Outagamie County line to the Outagamie County F bridge. He described his experience in his [Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin](#). Frank found it to be peaceful, quiet, and quite wild but with scenery which was "not terribly inspiring." He was not required to portage around any logjams or fallen trees.

### **Further Ideas**

The rest of the Embarrass should be easily navigable and reasonably interesting to explore during all seasons.

### **Conclusion**

One significant rapid for whitewater paddlers but mostly a quiet and somewhat monotonous river. Lower sections are family-friendly and should present canoe-camping opportunities.

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***Throughout all sections of the Guide, you will encounter these long-time paddling friends of Rick's, with whom he's logged thousands of miles on the water. From left to right: Scott Watson, Rick Kark, Susan Watson, Pat Brenneman, and Mahin Schroeder. This picture was taken in May 2015, following a trip on the Sugar River commemorating the completion of this Guide.***

# Embarrass River (Middle Branch)

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## Location

Langlade and Shawano counties.

## Natural Features

The Middle Branch is the longest of the branches of the Embarrass River. It begins in extreme southern Langlade County about 5 miles south of Antigo. It descends rather steeply across rocky terrain through Shawano County until it joins the South Branch at Caroline to become the main Embarrass River. Numerous rapids are in evidence because of the gradient and the bouldery course. The rocks are old, "Precambrian" specimens which were dropped as "glacial erratics" by the Wisconsin Glacier. Granite bedrock is also exposed at times. An attractive conifer hardwood forest lines most of the stream though farm fields are often not far away.

## Human History and Influence

Past logging and past and current agricultural practices have influenced this river. Yet much of the corridor appears relatively untouched and wild. The river passes close to the city of Wittenberg where there is a dam which forms Homme Pond. At least two more dams farther downstream are too small to form significant impoundments.

## Navigability and Difficulty

Class I and II rapids are common. At higher levels there may be a Class III or two. The water is frequently too low. The American Whitewater website lists this branch and includes water volume readings. It suggests a minimum level of 300 CFS. Two of the above mentioned dams may be runnable at certain water levels. Fallen trees may occasionally obstruct the river course.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

On June 6 of 1996 I explored the Middle Branch between the West Town Rd. bridge and the Weasel Dam Rd. bridge. I covered the three mile stretch in less than 2 hours but got a nice "taste" of this nifty stream. Immediately after launching my Dagger Genesis whitewater canoe, I began a one mile descent through constant Class I-II boulder gardens. The water was at a perfect moderately high level. The second half of this stretch was much slower. There I entered a silver maple bottomland where there were several fallen trees which required pulling over. Towards the end of the trip I paddled easily and safely over a small dam.

## Experiences of Others

Frank Piraino paddled the Middle Branch and described it in his [Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin](#). He put in farther upstream than I did and paddled all the way to the flowage at Caroline. This impoundment no longer exists because the dam has since been removed. Downstream of where I took out he encountered several log jams and a "thrilling grade II-III rapids and several more long class II's."

Kayaker Dag Rada wrote about the Middle Branch in an email he sent me in March of 2000. He described running it with buddies between Cemetery Road and Boldig Road. They found a "near continuous Class II rockbed" with several deadfall obstructions. It was no problem to run the small dam just upstream of Boldig Road.

### **Further Ideas**

Dag Rada suggested it should be possible to explore the Middle Branch between Homme Pond and Cemetery Rd. I think it would be fun to spend a long day running the frequent rapids all the way from Cemetery Rd. to Caroline.

### **Conclusion**

The Middle Branch is underutilized by whitewater paddlers. That is probably because it is mainly a Class II and most are looking for tougher rapids. Yet, with adequate water this narrow stream can be a lot of fun for those with intermediate paddling skills and the patience to portage around some fallen trees.

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# Embarrass River (North Branch)

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## Location

Shawano County.

## Natural Features

Begins in the rolling, forested land of northwestern Shawano County. It descends fairly rapidly over boulder beds and past granite bedrock from higher elevations of the Northern Highland to lower elevations as it nears the main Embarrass River and Wisconsin's Central Plain. Streamside trees are typical of Wisconsin's Northern conifer-hardwood forest. After joining the main Embarrass these waters eventually merge with the Wolf River at New London.

## Human History and Influence

Much of the land is still forested but there are farms near the tiny streamside communities of Bowler, Tilleda, and Leopolis. There is a dam which backs up a small pond at Tilleda. An even smaller dam holds back the river at Leopolis.

## Navigability and Difficulty

The North Branch will often have insufficient water for a good run. The American Whitewater website shows the gauge reading and recommends 175-600 cfs as a runnable range. Scattered fallen trees might cause minor problems. Whitewater skills are needed to navigate the Class I and II water and one drop which approaches a Class III at high water.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

In the late 1980s my wife and I tandem paddled my Mad River Explorer from North Town Line Rd. to the Tilleda Pond. It would have been more fun with more water but we made it through the frequent Class I and II rock gardens without getting hung up.

## Experiences of Others

The American Whitewater website describes a 1.6 mile run from Leopolis dam to Branch Road which is less than a mile upstream of the main Embarrass confluence. Following  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of riffly water there reportedly looms a horizon line and a sloping 5-6 foot ledge which rates as a Class II-III. This is followed by some Class II water.

## Further Ideas

It should also be fun to explore the North Branch between Tilleda and Leopolis. Undoubtedly it will contain some Class I and II whitewater.

## Conclusion

For those who enjoy exploring small Class II whitewater streams in the scenic Northwoods, this one is worth checking out when water is plentiful. Consider combining it with trips on the other Embarrass branches.

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# Embarrass River (South Branch)

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## Location

Western Shawano County and far eastern Marathon County.

## Natural Features

Like the other Embarrass branches, the South Branch plunges downward from the Northern Highland on its way to the Central Sandstone Plain. Granite boulders dot the stream's course and the surrounding landscape. This smallish stream cuts a dramatic "Dells" through course granite bedrock at the "Tigerton Dells." It flows past attractive conifer-hardwood forests. When the Middle Branch joins the South Branch at Caroline, the river becomes the main Embarrass which eventually joins the Wolf River at New London.

## Human History and Influence

Historically, logging was followed by efforts at agriculture despite the very rocky soil. Farms and other human activities affect the river near Birnamwood, Wittenberg and Tigerton. A dam at Tigerton creates the Tigerton Pond. The Tigerton area was a hotbed of Posse Commitatus activity in the 1980s. I was shocked one day to see a group of rifle bearing members of this anti-government paramilitary group marching in a nearby field.

## Navigability and Difficulty

Tigerton Dells becomes very challenging when the water is high. At high levels it approaches a Class IV but it eases to a III or even to a II+ when the water is low. An ideal level at the nearby Middle Branch gauge is 250 cfs but the South Branch can probably be run as low as 100 cfs. The American Whitewater website states that the Dells "turns into an incredible class IV rapid" when the water on the Middle Branch gets up around 650 cfs. These figures can be checked on the American Whitewater website. The river is often too low for a good run. Fallen trees are potential concerns. During one Sierra Club outing we were confronted by a tree which had fallen across the stream in the middle of the gorge. Reluctantly and with difficulty we portaged around it. There is at least one barbed wire fence which spans the river and interferes with passage.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

On three occasions I have run the Dells with friends from the River Touring Section of Wisconsin's John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club. In the spring of 1981 I ran it successfully in a tandem canoe with my friend Kevin Thies from Madison. It must have been at an easy low level because we were inexperienced at the time. A few years later I had a good run in my solo whitewater canoe.

By far my most memorable trip was a high water Sierra Club outing in early April of 2001. Unfortunately I do not know what the gauge reading was. On that day, as always, we put in just downstream of the Hwy 45 bridge on river left at Tigerton. We took out on river left just upstream of the County M bridge. The 2.5 mile run was short but packed with excitement. We were concerned about the high water, so many of us first scouted the Dells by walking along the

Dells on river right from the County M bridge. The walk persuaded several would-be paddlers not to attempt the run because it looked so difficult.

Those of us who chose to run it encountered a few Class I and II ledges in the first mile. This was a nice warm-up. At one point we carefully worked our way under a barbed wire fence. When we reached the Class III-IV drop which initiates the Dells, we stopped to scout and plan our routes. All runs were successful but one. This was a tricky pitch which required threading the needle between a big hole on the right and a giant rock on the left. We managed to rescue our friend. Then made the 90 degree turn into the heart of the Dells. It was a long and challenging Class III. At the take out we celebrated our exciting and successful runs.

### **Experiences of Others**

The American Whitewater website site includes a description of the Dells section.

### **Further Ideas**

There should be at least some whitewater between County M and Caroline. Perhaps there is navigable water upstream of Tigerton.

### **Conclusion**

The Tigerton Dells is an adrenaline pumper for experienced and competent whitewater paddlers. Those who can take the time to glance around will find it to be very beautiful too.

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# Fox River

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## Location

Columbia, Marquette, Green Lake, Waushara, Winnebago, Outagamie and Brown counties.

## Natural Features

The Fox is one of those rare North American streams which flow mainly north. The ridge of dolomite known as the Niagara escarpment blocks its potential flow eastward or southeastward into Lake Michigan. Instead it takes a longer route over a low plain in a northeasterly direction. It eventually flows into Lake Winnebago. To this point the river has dropped only 47 feet in 127 miles. The final 39 miles from Lake Winnebago to Green Bay are much steeper. Here the descent is 185 feet. Near its headwaters the river runs clear through the sandy soils of northern Columbia County. It flows westward for a few miles before it turns north. Most of the Fox Valley once was inundated by Glacial Lake Oshkosh. Because of this most of its shores are low and marshy.

Along the way the Fox widens into Buffalo Lake and into Lake Puckaway. The soils it traverses become less sandy and more loamy and mucky. In Lake Winnebago the waters of the Fox mix with those of the Wolf River and several lesser streams. At the outlet of Lake Winnebago it begins its steep descent through dolomite bedrock and boulders to the waters of Green Bay.

## Human History and Influence

The Fox was a major highway for Native Americans and early European explorers. Jean Nicolet reached the "Red Banks" of Green Bay and was guided up the river by the Ho Chunk (Winnebago) Indians. The river was named Fox after those Indians because the French referred to them by this name.

In 1763, Marquette and Joliet ascended the Fox and, guided by Indians, they made the 1.3 mile portage across to the Wisconsin River at what is now the city of Portage. Then they descended that river to the Mississippi River confluence and beyond. By the 1800s steamboats were reaching upstream as far as Princeton. It was hoped they could proceed further. The plan was for a commercial waterway linking Green Bay and Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi River. To complete this link a canal was dug between the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers at Portage. Mainly because of frequent low water on the Fox this route was never a commercial success. The coming of the railroads sealed its fate.

Numerous towns grew up along the bustling upper Fox River. The largest were Portage and Berlin. They were puny compared to the industrial cities which arose along the lower Fox. Oshkosh started as a major logging city as it received most of the timber which was driven down the Wolf River. The papermaking industry fueled the growth of cities like Appleton, Kaukauna and other towns which developed along the lower Fox because of ready water and hydropower generated by the rapids.

By the 1960s this hard working river supported 19 paper mills – the highest concentration in the world. These mills dumped tons of pollutants into the Fox including the infamous PCBs. By the 1970s, the Fox had made the EPA's "Dirty Dozen" list. As of 2015 the cleanup is proceeding, but not complete. Where it has been completed, the recovery of certain fish species has been remarkable.

A series of 17 locks were built along the lower Fox which aided navigation for some types of vessels but ruined its whitewater boating potential, as most of the whitewater was buried under flowages behind dams. The dams are still there, but, as of 2010, only three locks are operational. There is a state navigational authority charged with managing and maintaining the Fox lock system. Pleasure boats ply the river via the locks, giving the river another users' group. The very last (lowest) lock on the Fox, called Rapide Croche, is closed permanently to prevent Lake Michigan invasive species from getting upstream.

The Upper Fox river corridor is also far from being untouched by human influences. Farm fields are never far away. There are numerous towns, dams, industries and domiciles along the river and its lakes.

### **Navigability and Difficulty**

From Portage on down there should always be enough water. Obstructions with the exception of dams should be rare from that point. Some minor rapids can still be found between those flowages along the Lower Fox. At high flows there are more challenging short runs immediately downstream of several dams, especially in the Thousand Islands section at Kaukauna. The American Whitewater website contains flow information and runnability advice for the 1.5 mile "1000 Islands" section between Hwy 55/Main St. and County ZZ. Due to negotiations with the utility that owns two hydro dams in the Kaukauna area by state and federal agencies and the River Alliance of Wisconsin, recreational releases for whitewater kayaking will be available in 2015.

### **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

Twice now I have paddled the Fox between the Hwy 33 bridge at Portage down to Governors Bend Park, a distance of 4.5 miles. This is a great place to visit nearby historic places including the Portage Canal, the Ice Age Trail, Fort Winnebago and the Indian Agency House. In early August of 2002 I first drove to Governor's Bend Park to make sure I would know how to identify it when I arrived there and to see if I could locate the trailhead for the Ice Age Trail. My plan was to run that trail on foot back to my car at the put-in.

Back in Portage I put in on the Portage Canal where Hwy. 33 crossed it rather than on the river itself. I was surprised that the canal water was clear as I glided along over duckweed and past white blooming water lilies. There was a slight downstream current heading towards the Fox and away from the Wisconsin River which flowed past the western terminus of the canal. Within 20 minutes I had reached a small dam located a few yards from the Fox. So I portaged around it on the left. Across the way was an artist with his easel capturing the beauty of the scene.

Once on the river I was delighted by the clarity of the water which allowed a close view of a large carp which swam lazily under my Bell Wildfire canoe. Is Portage a haven for artist types? First the painter and now a guitarist caught my eye and my ear on river left. Though sizeable trees had grown up along the banks, many of them were perched on top of obvious dredgings from the old days when they were trying to keep the channel open for vessels needing more freeboard than my canoe. Also artificial were side ditches entering the river which had been dug for agricultural land draining purposes.

It was a good birding day as numerous kingfishers criss-crossed the river. I heard but did not see several sandhill cranes. I was observing the erratic flight of a red-headed woodpecker when I large carp bumped my canoe nearly causing me to capsize. At Governor's Bend Park I beached and hid my canoe. Then I started my run back along the Ice Age Trail which initially climbed to high ground above a marsh and then descended down to the riverside where it followed the top of an old dredgings ridge for most of the way back to my put-in.

In May of 2006 I repeated this trip from a different put-in. Denny Caneff, Lindsay Davis, Scott Froehle Cory Mason and I started at the Hwy 33 wayside. We dodged intermittent rain showers but enjoyed each other's company and the river environs.

I was on the Fox for two other short outings. In 1981 I was very briefly on the Fox after having paddled the lower Mekan River with my medical school buddy, Jim Hine with his wife and four children. We took out along Hwy 23. In 1995 I explored a 3.5 mile stretch of the river immediately upstream of Omro. That day I left my bike near a landing in that community I drove up to the old Island Park development a few miles west of town. There I found a public landing and launched my Wildfire onto the slow moving, muddy river. It was not a notable outing but certainly an easy one followed by a bike ride back to my car.

### **Experiences of Others**

Frank Piraino explored the far upper Fox and wrote about it in his [Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin](#). He put in at the Hwy 22 bridge near Pardeeville. Soon he encountered "many tight spots through tangled branches and logs." Yet these obstructions never forced him to portage. Soon the narrow river broadened into a marsh and then into 2-mile long Swan Lake. From that point Mr. Piraino enjoyed easy paddling through a State Wildlife Area which teemed with birdlife. Eventually he took out at the Hwy 33 wayside at Portage. Since he recommends springtime as the best time to explore this stretch I presume the water can become too low.

Mike Svob includes two outings on the Fox in his [Paddling Southern Wisconsin](#). First he describes the ten miles between Portage and County O. Then he describes the 15 miles between Princeton and Berlin. In the out-of-print [Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin](#) Michael Duncanson describes every mile of the river in seven different sections from Portage to Oshkosh. This includes several lakes and the need to portage around several dams.

Finally, the American Whitewater website describes 1.5 miles of whitewater of 1000 Islands at Kaukauna. For advanced to expert whitewater boaters this is becoming a popular "play" area with up to Class III (IV) rapids, with scheduled recreational releases to begin in 2015.

### **Further Ideas**

Here's an ambitious one! Paddle the entire Fox upstream to Portage. Then paddle the Portage Canal to the Wisconsin River and then down that mighty river to the Mississippi--just like Marquette and Joliet did in 1673. My friend Eric Wheeler and I were planning to repeat that epic voyage (which would include locks and dams they did not face). We decided against it, but I still think it would be an interesting challenge.

Die-hard river rat and veteran paddler John Sullivan included the Fox in his epic 2014 journey down the Mississippi from his home town of La Crosse; up the Wisconsin River to Portage; then down the Fox River to Lake Winnebago. He completed the full round trip with some long portages and by utilizing the Rock River system, including the Madison lakes, to return to La Crosse.

### **Conclusion**

The Fox River is a long and historic Wisconsin stream. Much of it is not especially scenic or challenging. There are, however, sections which are easy and appealing to travel by canoe or kayak. Then there is that brief whitewater challenge at Kaukauna.

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# Grand River

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## Location

Fond du Lac, Green Lake and Marquette counties.

## Natural Features

The Grand River is born south of Ripon in far western Fond du Lac County. It drains land which was oak savanna before settlement. It flows through an original prairie between Kingston and Markesan. Past Kingston its shorelines become consistently marshy because this lowland once lay beneath Glacial Lake Oshkosh. Eventually it flows into the Fox River about 4 miles southeast of Montello.

## Human History and Influence

The Grand's drainage area is farmed extensively. Markesan, Manchester and Kingston are small communities along its shores. There are several dams including the one which raises the water in the Grand River Marsh State Wildlife Area.

## Navigability and Difficulty

I am not sure if upstream sections of the Grand are navigable or not. It should never be difficult to explore the marsh from boat landings in the Wildlife Area or to float from the last dam down into the Fox. Throughout these areas the current is slow and obstructions are non-existent.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

My wife and I explored the Grand River Marsh in early September of 1989. We put in just above the dam near the end of Puckaway Road and spent about an hour and a half paddling across this shallow impoundment and back. We were delighted by the relatively clear water and the birdlife. Included were sand hill cranes, great blue herons, egrets and hundreds of tree swallows.

On May 25 of 2007 I returned to the Grand with my Bell Wildfire canoe. I drove towards Montello on Hwy. 22 and found the road which leads to the DNR Landing on the Fox River at the former site of the Grand River Lock and Dam. From there I descended the Fox for about 3/4ths of a mile and then turned right and ascended the Grand River to the dam which raises the water in the Grand River Marsh. I turned around and paddled back to where I had started. It was a perfect day to spend 3 hours exploring this marshy waterway.

The Fox River portion was lined by silver maples whereas cattails and reed grass dominated the shores of the Grand. A fishing couple near the dam showed me their stringer of catfish. On the way back an osprey put on quite a fishing show for me. It hovered for a long time over the water before it dove and caught a good one.

## Experiences of Others

Frank Piraino followed my route on the Fox and Grand exactly. He reported on the trip in his [Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin](#). In fact, that's where I got the idea for my trip.

**Further Ideas**

It should be possible to paddle the Grand River into the Grand River Marsh from Kingston and to take out at one of the marsh's boat landings. Alternatively, the current should be weak enough to paddle back to Kingston. Another idea is to put in below the last dam, descend the final section and turn right onto the Fox River for a trip on that stream.

**Conclusion**

Both the Grand River Marsh and the Grand's lower river corridor are wetland waterways which are easy to paddle and which teem with birdlife.

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# Hemlock Creek

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## **Location**

Wood County.

## **Natural Features**

Hemlock Creek and its tributaries begin in northern Wood County. It flows southward to the Yellow River near Babcock. Drained by this stream system is a small region which begins in the Northern Highland and ends in the Central Sand Plain. Because of this elevation drop there must be some rapids near Hwy 13-70 where the creek likely cuts through granite bedrock. Several miles east of Dexterville it enters the Central Plain in a region which was once covered by the waters of Glacial Lake Wisconsin. As a result the landscape was flattened by lakebed deposits. Later these deposits were covered by windblown sand. Expansive wetlands eventually emerged. Downstream sections of Hemlock Creek wind slowly through this terrain. Before settlement the entire watershed was forested with a variety of northern conifer-hardwood trees.

## **Human History and Influence**

These days northern Wood County is rolling dairy country where many of the trees have been cut down. Further downstream the soil quality deteriorates and farms are replaced by forests and marshes. Several commercial cranberry growing operations now utilize the wetlands of this region. Hemlock Creek flows through no human communities. There are no dams.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

Hemlock Creek is too small for practical navigation. Low water and fallen trees will present problems.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

I spent about an hour on Babcock Creek in Mid-May of 1990. Next to the Hwy 173 bridge just east of Babcock I slid my solo freestyle Ladybug canoe into the water. The creek wove a slow and tortuous path through a silver maple bottomland. Where the banks were higher the sandy soil held red oaks and sugar maples. The forest rang with the sounds of ovenbirds and woodpeckers. I pulled my canoe over and around multiple fallen trees and logjams. As I rounded one corner I surprised a raccoon which quickly scaled a tree and watched me pass by. I might have traveled further had the conditions been better. When a private looking bridge and road came into view I decided to abort the trip. I jogged down the road in the direction I judged to be correct. In a few minutes I reached an Ocean Spray Cranberry processing plant and from there was able to find the way back to my car.

## **Conclusion**

Boaters should avoid Hemlock Creek

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# Kewaunee River

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## Location

Kewaunee County.

## Natural Features

The Kewaunee River begins high on the Niagara escarpment about 2 miles from Dykesville, situated on the south shore of Green Bay. Despite its close proximity to Green Bay the Kewaunee drains away from this body of water and crosses the Door Peninsula in a southwesterly direction on its way to Lake Michigan. Before white settlement its watershed was a northern conifer and hardwood forest of which only remnants remain. In [Roadside Geology of Wisconsin](#), Bob Dott reports that part of the lower Kewaunee flows through a steep-walled valley which was cut when it was an outlet gusher from Glacial Lake Oshkosh. As it nears Lake Michigan the Kewaunee becomes a marshy freshwater estuary.

## Human History and Influence

Potawatomi Indians were the original inhabitants. Father Marquette landed at present day Kewaunee in 1674 on his way to Green Bay and, eventually, the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers. By the mid-1800s the land had been logged and the soil was good enough to support a thriving dairy industry. These days the watershed is 79% agricultural, according to the DNR. Though the Kewaunee is Class I steelhead stream it suffers from significant sediment, nutrient and chemical runoff from these fields. There is a low head dam which allows the passage of fish at a salmon egg producing facility just west of Kewaunee. Wastewater treatment plants discharge effluents into the stream at Luxemburg and Kewaunee. Industries in both communities also discharge pollutants into the stream.

## Navigability and Difficulty

My only experience was on the estuary portion of the river where water levels and obstructions will never be problematic. I am not sure about upstream sections.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

I spent an hour and 15 minutes on the river in July of 1995. It would have taken longer had it not been for a stiff tail wind during the last half of the trip. There were times I raised my paddle and used it as a sail instead of paddling because the wind was so strong. My put-in had been the Cty. C bridge a mile west of Kewaunee. Almost immediately I entered the current-less water of the estuary. Lined by occasional homes and docks this was by no means a pristine wetland experience. When I reached the Hwy 42 bridge I hid my canoe as best I could and jogged the streets of Kewaunee and Cty. C back to my car.

## Further Ideas

Another way to explore the marsh is to walk the 1,500 foot boardwalk which begins near Hwy 42. I do wonder if upstream sections of the Kewaunee are navigable. Likely the water will often be too low and woody obstructions frequent.

**Conclusion**

The estuary portion of the Kewaunee is a paddling option for local canoeists and kayakers. Though not pristine it does feature birdlife and an easy paddling.

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# Little Eau Pleine River

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## Location

Clark, Marathon and Portage counties.

## Natural Features

The Little Eau Pleine River originates in Clark County a couple of miles west of Unity, situated on State Hwy 13. The stream flows easterly among rolling ground moraines deposited by the Wisconsin Glacier. Before logging days this was a land dominated by a northern hemlock-hardwood forest. This stream drops considerably from higher ground to the Wisconsin River. Consequently there are rapids. Along the way it exposes granite bedrock along its shores. Many stretches are boulder strewn.

## Human History and Influence

Much of the drainage area was logged off and is now prime dairy farm country. This stream flows through no municipalities but it is heavily impacted by agriculture and numerous dikes and dams. A few miles north of Marshfield the McMillan Marsh State Wildlife area consists of a marsh and three dammed flowages. A few miles to the east the Little Eau Pleine flows through Wisconsin's largest state owned wildlife area. Before this area became the George W. Mead State Wildlife Area, the river was straightened into a canal to drain the land for agricultural purposes. When farming failed it naturally reverted to wetland. Then in the 1930s much of the land was purchased by Consolidated Papers Co. of Wisconsin Rapids. They intended to build a power dam creating a reservoir, but this never happened. In 1959 the land was donated to the state and the wildlife area was named after the company's founder. The Little Eau Pleine meets the Wisconsin River in the flowage waters of Lake Du Bay.

## Navigability and Difficulty

Deadfall problems are minimal but lack of water is a frequent problem. Class II whitewater skills are needed and there is one Class III. The American Whitewater Website contains detailed runnability advice on 3.4 or 9.3 mile sections. These short and long sections both include a "dells" which rates Class III. Bridge scouting at places like the Hwy 97 bridge should also prove helpful.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

Riding my solo freestyle Ladybug canoe I spent a pleasant one hour and 45 minutes of my time on the Little Eau Pleine in mid-May of 1990. My trip began at County E and ended at the Hwy 97 bridge. I was delighted to discover that there was plenty of water swirling around numerous, large glacial erratic boulders. No rapids rated higher than easy Class II's along this five mile stretch. Stands of hemlocks and scattered yellow birches caught my appreciative attention.

## Experiences of Others

It was a good thing I did not continue past the Hwy 97 bridge in 1990. In my non-whitewater canoe I would have been ill-prepared for the Class III dells which follows. According to one

narrative the river narrows here to less than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> its normal width. Then it plunges through a "wild, rocky gorge" when there is enough water. This is followed by a technical boulder bed run out. Then the river turns consistently placid for the rest of the run. The American Whitewater Website includes an excellent description of the whitewater stretch.

Evidently there are those who explore both of the above-mentioned wildlife areas by canoe. Views from the canal portion of the Mead Wildlife Area will be restricted by high levy banks. I can imagine numerous trips within these areas which should feature good waterfowl viewing.

### **Conclusion**

With adequate water the free flowing section of the Little Eau Pleine is attractive and intimate with intermediate whitewater challenges. Birdwatchers (or duck hunters) may wish to explore the river's state wildlife areas.

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# Little Wolf River

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## Location

Marathon, Portage, Shawano and Waupaca counties.

## Natural Features

The Little Wolf's headwater branches all begin in the region where the above four counties meet at one point. The river flows eastward across northern Waupaca County before it turns south and then east again towards the Wolf River which it joins just north of New London. The current is usually swift as the river descends from the Northern Highland to the Central Sandstone Plain. Rapids form as it cuts through bedrock and across boulder fields. Granite bedrock is revealed along a "dells" section and again over a major falls near the community of Big Falls.

Soon after that the river drops into the sandstone bedrock plain, but granite boulders continue to dot the riverbed. These "glacial erratics" were dropped by the Green Bay Lobe of the Wisconsin Glacier after it had chewed up bedrock to the north and carried it southward. The tree mix here includes many hemlocks and cedars. A few miles before it meets the Wolf River the Little Wolf drops into marshy lowland which once inundated by Glacial Lake Oshkosh.

## Human History and Influence

Native Americans were followed by white loggers and then by farmers even though the many rocks and borderline soils were less than ideal for agriculture. Farms are even fewer in upstream Northern Highland sections of the drainage area. The lack of farms coupled with rocky and sandy soils cause the water to be quite clear. The first sawmill along the Little Wolf was built in 1848. Big Falls, Symco and Royalton are small communities along the river. Manawa is somewhat larger and has a dam which creates a mill pond. There also is a dam at Big Falls which creates another small flowage.

## Navigability and Difficulty

The upper stretches of the river are often too low. Most paddlers think mainly of running these sections in the early spring. Lower stretches are more reliable but shallow water and rocks do create challenges for those with poor maneuvering skills. Intermediate whitewater skills are required upstream of Big Falls. Lesser skilled paddlers can "get by" downstream of Little Falls. Deadfall is not a significant problem in recommended sections. Bridge scouting may be required. Runnability advice and flow levels can be found on the American Whitewater website.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

In years past the John Muir Sierra Club Chapter's River Touring Section would often run the upper Little Wolf in April. I recall joining these trips three times starting at the Wolf River Rd. bridge. The first time I was in a 17 foot Grumman canoe with my tandem partner Kevin Thies. We paddled all the way to Big Falls that day in the late 1970s. On the subsequent two trips we took out at County J before the dells. The upper river is boulder strewn and contains a long Class II rapid. The Dells is a Class II wave train featuring attractive granite walls.

In July of 2008 I came to the Little Wolf with my friend Ron Rosner. First we locked our bikes to a tree at a developed landing by the Ostrander Rd. bridge just southeast of Royalton. We could tell that this landing had been constructed to service the inner tube renting business located at a campground near the Hwy X bridge. I understand that this livery, the Wolf River Trips and Campground (920 982-2458) also rents canoes.

Next Ron and I drove to Manawa and launched our solo freestyle canoes into the river near a ballpark about a quarter of a mile below the dam. This first section was slow and might have been boring had it not been for the clear water which revealed attractive water plants and dozens of fish. Besides a solitary monster carp and schools of smaller rough fish we saw quite a few "keeper" smallmouth bass and one yard long muskie. We passed one especially attractive grove of pines along a Class I rapid. Then we paddled past some lovely hemlocks. At the 5 mile point we noticed the South Fork of the Little Wolf merging from the left. From that point the river widened and the bottom became sandy and less biologically alive. We encountered Class I rapids under the bridge at Royalton and again in the final mile leading to our take-out.

### **Experiences of Others**

The out-of-print guidebook Whitewater-Quietwater covered the 7.7 mile section between Wolf River Rd. and Big Falls. It mentioned that Big Falls Rapids just below the dam has been run during high water when it rates a Class IV. Mike Svob included the Little Wolf in his Paddling Southern Wisconsin guidebook. First he describes the 7.5 miles from Wolf River Rd. to Big Falls. I appreciated his description of the dells which he calls a 150 yard mini-canyon. He recommends paddling into the left channel and stopping to scout it from the left bank. The mile which follows the canyon he describes as especially beautiful because of large granite outcrops and cedar trees.

Next Svob describes the 12 mile section from Manawa to County X. This includes the section that Ron and I paddled plus an additional two miles. Ron and I evidently missed the "best rapids" of this stretch which Svob calls a long Class I at the end of the trip within sight of the Cty. X bridge.

In an August 2003 Silent Sports article, Svob wrote about "the middle section of the Little Wolf River." This is the 13.2 mile section from Little Falls along Hwy E to the Hwy 22 bridge at Symco. He found this section to be attractive with several Class I+ rapids and one 200 yard Class I-II boulder garden. Towards the end he encountered a wild bottomland area where he had to maneuver among fallen limbs and make two small portages around fallen trees.

In another Silent Sports article written in 2002, Stanley Piekarczyk described a day trip from the public fishing access three miles south of Manawa to the New London Fish and Game Club boat ramp at New London on the Wolf River. Most who to reach the confluence with the Wolf River will want to paddle the shorter two mile distance to the Shaw Landing marked in the Wisconsin Gazetteer.

The American Whitewater website describes the whitewater section from Wolf River Rd. to Big Falls. It also describes Class IV Big Falls.

### **Conclusion**

The Little Wolf has something for everyone. Paddlers will find challenging whitewater in upstream sections and easy whitewater in downstream sections. Most will appreciate the lovely scenery and clear water.

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# Little Wolf River (South Branch)

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## Location

Waupaca County.

## Natural Features

Trout and Peterson Creeks converge about 2 miles south of Scandinavia. They form the South Branch of the Little Wolf River. This stream then flows eastward until it joins the Little Wolf River near Royalton. Far upstream sections of this branch flow downward quite rapidly from a granite bedrock formation known as the Wolf River Batholith. There must be some rapids but I am not sure how difficult they are. Exposed along the stream course are countless "erratic" boulders which were dropped by the Wisconsin Glacier. These rocks continue even after the river has dropped into lands underlain by sandstone. The stream passes through bottomlands and past uplands covered by northern conifer-hardwood trees.

## Human History and Influence

This is farm-forest transition country where farming is difficult due to marginal soils and many boulders in the fields. No towns lie along the South Branch but the headwater branch known as Trout Creek flows through Scandinavia. Here that tributary has been dammed forming a small flowage.

## Navigability and Difficulty

The section I paddled was void of rapids though some sections must feature at least riffles or a Class I or II. Deadfall obstructions were few where I paddled. High water is not required but I imagine the South Branch can get uncomfortably low during dry spells. Bridge scouting may be required. There is a gauge at Royalton on the main branch of the Little Wolf which can be monitored at the American Whitewater website or the USGS website.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

In early May of 2003 I explored the South Branch of the Little Wolf in my Bell Wildfire canoe. First I locked my bike near the Baldwin Mills Rd. bridge and then drove to the Sunnyview Rd. bridge. Here I put in and soon was busily maneuvering through a silver maple bottomland. Someone with a chainsaw had cleared the way so I was not required to portage over or around any fallen trees. Light green skunk cabbage leaves were emerging from the soggy ground. Several wood ducks exploded from the water and I appreciated the sounds of calling chorus frogs. This narrow stream became interesting after the Hwy K bridge when it left most of the bottomlands behind. Now the scenery varied from bend to bend as it narrowed past uplands, sped past alders and slowed alongside grassy meadows.

## Further Ideas

I wonder what upstream sections would be like? There should be some rapids but the stream's narrow width could be problematic. Sections downstream of where I paddled should be navigable and might include some minor rapids. Starting on the South Branch is one way to

start a trip which could end somewhere along the Little Wolf River or even on the main Wolf River.

**Conclusion**

The South Branch of the Little Wolf River is an intriguing and attractive small stream paddling option. Deadfall, minor rapids and shallow water may all be encountered.

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# Manitowoc River

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## Location

Calumet and Manitowoc counties.

## Natural Features

The Manitowoc River possesses two distinctly different characters. Its north and south branches are slow and marshy as are the first few miles of the main river. The upstream drainage areas consist of agricultural lands which were once forested with southern hardwood trees. Soon after the branches join the Manitowoc enters a northern conifer forest which also has been mostly cleared for agriculture. Several features make the lower river more attractive. River rocks become common as the river cuts across rocky glacial moraines. Dolomite bedrock is revealed as bluffs along the river and as ledges on the river bottom. These ledges and rocks coupled with the increased gradient lead to a series of rapids. Conifers including white pines and large white cedar trees frequently populate the shores and top the bluffs. At the city of Manitowoc, the river briefly slows into an estuary before it empties into Lake Michigan.

## Human History and Influence

This part of Wisconsin was logged and settled early in Wisconsin's history. Mills were constructed by numerous rapids including the Manitowoc rapids. There the city of Manitowoc began as a lumbering town. Later it became a trading and industrial center. Shipbuilding emerged as a major industry. Several dams were built on the Manitowoc but the only one remaining is at Clarks Mills just north of Valders. There are no municipalities on the river besides Manitowoc.

## Navigability and Difficulty

There will usually be enough water upstream of Clarks Mills. It was a bit scratchy, however, when I paddled there. Flow levels and runnability advice can be found on the American Whitewater website. Downstream sections of the river will frequently be too low for good runs. Class II boating skills will be needed on the lower river because of rapids. Deadfall problems are rare on the entire river.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

I found myself on a rather boring section of the river in July of 2005. This upstream section was so low that it was rare when I could get my whole paddle blade into the water. I was in my Wildfire on the stretch between Quarry Rd. bridge and County JJ. The muddy, slow water was crowded with hundreds of carp that shot off in every direction. They bumped the bottom of my canoe repeatedly as they fled. At least the stream floor was firm enough to give me solid footing as I walked the canoe through some shallow sections. The weather was pleasant so I enjoyed watching the activities of kingfishers, kingbirds and killdeers.

After a total of an hour and 20 minutes I reached the JJ bridge and paddled another 5 minutes downstream. There I encountered a rocky section which looked to be even more unnavigable

than what I had struggled through already. So I turned around and paddled back upstream to the JJ bridge where I ditched my canoe and ran back to my car.

In April of 2007 I took a delightful trip down the Branch River into the Manitowoc. (See my Branch River write-up in this section.) Once I hit the Manitowoc I was treated to 9 lively miles on its continuous Class I and II rapids. The challenge was greater because I was in my non-whitewater Wildfire canoe. The water was at an ideal medium-high level. Several cedar-adorned bluffs were lovely to look at. It took me 3 hours and 15 minutes to paddle from County T on the Branch River to my take-out in Manitowoc. I had chosen the river access at the dead end of Mill Rd. off of County R. Finally I rode my bicycle back to the put-in.

### **Experiences of Others**

I recall that the River Touring Section of the Sierra Club used to run spring trips down the rapids of the Manitowoc. Mike Svob's guidebook [Paddling Southern Wisconsin](#) includes the Manitowoc. He divides the river into two sections: First the 10.7 miles from Collins to Clarks Mills and then the 13.8 mile section from County S to Manitowoc. He describes the prettiest part of the trip as being beyond Cty. JJ where the river becomes "unmarshlike" with the appearance of cedars and pines. After the Leist Rd. bridge the river again narrows and speeds into a Class I rapids followed by the two ledges of Upper Cato Falls which Svob rates as Class II's. T

hose with the skills and desire to run Class II+ Lower Cato Falls can put in below the dam at Clarks Mills and run the 2.5 miles down to County S. Here the highlight is a "beautiful stretch where limestone (technically dolomite) cliffs form a mini-canyon" culminating in the falls. This cascade can be tricky and deserves a scouting by all boaters.

Svob describes the rapids of the lower section in detail. Though there are initially many riffles and Class I's the real action begins about a third of a mile above the I-43 bridge. Immediately after this bridge there is a "more demanding" Class II which "begins with a couple of ledges followed by a seemingly interminable mass of boulders to maneuver through."

The American Whitewater website describes two whitewater sections of the Manitowoc. First is the Class I-II, 4.5 mile stretch between Leist Rd. and County S. This one includes both Upper and Lower Cato Falls. Second is the "Manitowoc Rapids" stretch between Logwood Lane and Michigan Avenue. This 3.85 mile stretch also is given a Class I-II rating.

### **Further Ideas**

It might be interesting to explore the populated slow water sections of the river within the city of Manitowoc.

### **Conclusion**

Something for everyone on the Manitowoc. It features the best whitewater in southern Wisconsin.

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# Manitowoc River (North Branch)

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## Location

Calumet County.

## Natural Features

Glacial Lake Oshkosh was a larger version of the current Lake Winnebago which existed when the Wisconsin Glaciers were melting. This ancient lake extended into lands which now lie in northeastern Calumet County. As Lawrence Martin speculates in [The Physical Geography of Wisconsin](#), "A large inter-glacial Manitowoc River may have drained part of the Winnebago lowland (and Glacial Lake Oshkosh) through low ground near Brillion." The small river which remains here today is the North Branch of the Manitowoc River. It is a slow-moving, marshy river which flows through red clay soils over glacial lake sediments. Eventually it joins the South Branch and reaches Lake Michigan as the main Manitowoc River. Before the land was cleared for agriculture it was covered by a southern hardwood forest. Nowadays, the streamside trees, where they exist, are mostly bottomland trees like silver maples and willows. Marshy grasses predominate elsewhere.

## Human History and Influence

Streamside lands were farmed early in Wisconsin's history except where they were too marshy. The North Branch and a couple of small tributaries flow through a wetland which has been designated the Brillion State Wildlife Area. There are no streamside human communities of significance.

## Navigability and Difficulty

Water levels and deadfall should never be a problem south of County PP. I am not sure about the river north of there.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

One day in the late 1990s I explored the North Branch from County PP to Riverview Road, about one half mile upstream of the South Branch confluence. Had it not been such a beautiful morning the trip might have been boring. But I enjoyed the pastoral scenes including farm silos framed by puffy clouds. Numerous killdeer and other shorebirds skittered along shoreline mud flats. Three sandhill cranes rose slowly and gracefully as they were lifted by a light breeze. I was thankful not to be facing stiff winds along this open corridor. Steady paddling was required across the muddy water because there was virtually no current. On another outing in April of 2007 I saw the final half mile of the North Branch when I traveled down the Killsnake River, down the South Branch of the Manitowoc and, finally, up the North Branch to the Riverview Rd. bridge.

## Further Ideas

I suspect it would be interesting and possible to paddle upstream from County PP into the Brillion State Wildlife Area and possibly even into side stream feeders before returning for a

round trip adventure. Certainly one could start on the North Branch and continue down into the main Manitowoc River.

**Conclusion**

The North Branch of the Manitowoc is muddy and slow. Yet it can be beautiful and easy to paddle.

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# Manitowoc River (South Branch)

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## Location

Calumet and Fond du Lac counties.

## Natural Features

Like the North Branch, most of the South Branch of the Manitowoc is marshy, muddy and slow. Sections of it also once lay beneath Glacial Lake Oshkosh and some of its valley once channeled a mighty river which drained that mammoth body of water into Lake Michigan. The South Branch is longer than the North Branch. It begins in northwestern Fond du Lac County and flows northward before turning east. Though this was once a southern hardwood forest; the trees which remain are mostly bottomland species like willows and silver maples. Clay soils make the stream floor muddy and rocks are lacking.

## Human History and Influence

Farm fields have long dominated the area and they encroach closely on the river except where the shores are too marshy. The city of Chilton lies on its banks. This town has two small dams which back up small flowages. Downstream of Chilton the South Branch flows freely until it joins the North Branch on its way to Lake Michigan as the main Manitowoc River. Erosion and agricultural practices cause it to be a muddy and polluted stream.

## Navigability and Difficulty

Most of the lower reaches of the river should see consistently adequate water levels. Deadfall might be a problematic where there are streamside trees. The coast was clear where I paddled.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

I was on the South Branch for less than two miles on April 10 of 2007. It comprised the middle portion of a three-river outing which went like this: I drove along Lemke Rd. until I reached the bridge over the Killsnake River. There I put in and paddled that narrow and marshy stream down into the South Branch which I followed for a couple of miles until I saw the North Branch flowing in from the left.

I turned into the weak current of that stream and paddled upstream about a half mile to the Riverview Rd. bridge where I ended my hour and a half journey. Finally I jogged back to my car. The trip was rather monotonous through a monoculture corridor of reed canary grass along a wide and slow riverway. Breaking my boredom were hundreds of ducks including mallards, coots and hooded mergansers. Around one bend I noticed a sandhill crane standing about 20 feet away. I admired it for several seconds before it flew away.

## Experiences of Others

Frank Piraino paddled from the Lemke Rd. bridge over the South Branch to the Collins Rd. bridge on the main Manitowoc. In his [Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin](#) he described

a scenic trip through an extensive marsh with many birdlife sightings. No logjams or portages were reported on his 3 hour trip.

**Further Ideas**

This stream may be navigable between Chilton and Lemke Rd.

**Conclusion**

This slow, muddy and marshy river is suitable for paddlers of all skill levels. Water levels will usually be adequate. It may be especially attractive to birdwatchers.

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# Mecan River

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## Location

Waushara and Marquette counties.

## Natural Features

The Mekan River is born in the Mekan Springs of western Waushara County. It flows southward into Marquette County and joins the Fox River a handful of miles west of Princeton. Especially in its upper miles the Mekan runs unusually clear. Three factors contribute to this delightful feature: First, its origin from springs; second, the sandy soils it courses through; and third, a relative paucity of agricultural runoff. Originally this was oak savanna country, but remnants of the Northwoods extend along the banks of the Mekan. White pines and birches are common. This narrow little gem also passes through bottomland forests and several marshes. Waterfowl are plentiful as are other birds. I read somewhere that Marquette County has the largest population of sandhill cranes in the nation.

## Human History and Influence

Early in the 2000s, activists successfully fought off efforts of the Perrier bottled water company to tap the Mekan Springs for their product. Back in 1860 a 7 mile canal was built from the Mekan River to the Fox River to harness water power for grist mill near Princeton. Remnants of this canal can still be identified. At some point the upper Mekan was designated a trout stream and an electric weir was erected to stop carp from entering the upper river. The Germania Marsh is a state wildlife area managed by the DNR. A dam at Germania was constructed as part of the marsh's restoration. The Mekan is a popular canoeing stream served by at least two outfitters who rent canoes and can arrange shuttles. They are the Mekan River Outfitters (920-295-3439) and Lake of the Woods Campground (920-787-3601).

## Navigability and Difficulty

Parts of the Mekan are challenging for novices because of its tight turns, especially on upstream sections. Water levels hold quite well though upstream sections can get low. Mike Svob (see below) recommends calling the Mekan River Outfitters for water level information. (920-295-3439). Though the river is narrow, deadfall problems tend to minimal. It helps that the outfitters regularly work to clear the way.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

On several trips through the years I have run all sections of the Mekan from Cty. JJ to the Fox River except for the short section behind the Germania Dam. This is among my top three favorites in the southern part of the state because of its clear water, intimate size and the beauty of its shores. My favorite section is the 5 miles from JJ to Dover Ave. Here the Mekan is at its beautiful best due to its narrow width, "Northwoods" shores, and amazingly clear water.

Further downstream, the trees tend to recede from the banks and are increasingly replaced by wetland grassy species. Tamarack will also be seen and are especially noticeable when their

needles are golden before they are shed in the late fall. My first trip down the upper Mekan was with a tandem partner in the summer of 1979. We enjoyed swimming from a sandbar in the cool clear waters of the Mekan. Sometime in the 1980s I traveled the river with my old medical friend Jim Hine and his wife and three of their four children. We explored the lower river between Germania and the Fox River where we took out on a bank along Hwy. 22. It would have been easier to take out two miles further downstream on the Fox at a landing by the lock and dam. This was about a 9.5 mile trip and I recall that the kids found the constant turns tiresome. What they remember most now is a bloated dead cow floating next to the shore. See below for Mike Svob's description of this section.

I will mention one particular outing which occurred on July of 2005. That day Caroline Garber, Cynthia Moore and I first left our bikes next to the electric fish barrier at the Dike Rd. bridge. Then we drove up to the JJ bridge where I helped launch my two friends in my Nova Craft before I hopped into my Bell Wildfire. After 5 miles we decided to ditch my Wildfire and the three of us shared paddling duties in the Nova Craft for the remaining 5 miles. Along the way we stopped for lunch and enjoyed watching a pair of rose-breasted grosbeaks. After 5.5 total hours of paddling we reached the take-out and enjoyed the bike ride back to our vehicle.

### **Experiences of Others**

Mike Svob's [Paddling Southern Wisconsin](#) includes the Mekan. I found his description of the section downstream of County N to be valuable because he advises bearing right around both of two islands in the first couple of miles. He also mentions the presence of several high sandy banks which I had forgotten about. Though the lower Mekan is not as scenic as the upper, its marshy sections are interrupted by attractive uplands.

Denny Caneff of the River Alliance has run the Mekan several times from the tiny crossroads of Budsins, at the intersection of County D and Hwy. 22, up to the Germania dam. At summer water levels, the stretch through the marsh behind the dam can be a muddy slog that is no fun.

### **Further Ideas**

Longtime Sierra Club paddler Joan Redman told me she has enjoyed paddling the Mekan between Mekan Springs and Cty JJ when the water was high. Ron Rosner and I decided to explore this section after leaving our bikes at the JJ bridge. We put in at the Hwy 22 bridge and ran into so much deadfall that we aborted the trip at the Cumberland bridge. From that point I ran back to our vehicle. Perhaps the stretch between the latter bridge and JJ is more open and I hope to explore it sometime in the future. On another day, Ron and I ran into a group which was taking out at that bridge and they raved about their experience.

Canoe-camping along the Mekan is problematic but Mike Svob mentions one nice camping spot on a high bank after the N bridge. This spot must be reserved with the Mekan River Outfitters.

### **Conclusion**

This is a uniquely beautiful stream suitable for most paddlers.

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# Mill Creek

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## Location

Wood and Portage counties.

## Natural Features

This creek's headwaters arise within the city limits of Marshfield. It flows eastward into Portage County and southward to the Wisconsin River which it joins a few miles downstream of Stevens Point. Until it turns south Mill Creek is a very slow flowing stream which crosses nearly level land covered by loamy soil. Originally this land was forested with Northwoods species but most of the trees have been cut down. As depicted in the Gazetteer there are extensive portions of the creek which are braided and which widen into small lake-like sections. Eventually, Mill Creek plunges downhill towards the Wisconsin River. It cuts through granite bedrock and weaves among glacial erratic boulders. Upland banks start to look more like the real Northwoods.

## Human History and Influence

The level terrain and loamy soils of northern Wood County make this prime agricultural land. Most of the trees were logged off years ago. Mill Creek starts in Marshfield near a zoo, so it begins its life accepting runoff from that facility and from city streets. Runoff from an industrial park and then from a series of farms add to the toxic mix. It is said, however, that the treated sewage from the Marshfield treatment plant actually improve the water quality of Mill Creek by diluting the agricultural runoff coming in to it. Mill Creek meets the Wisconsin River in the impounded waters of the Biron Flowage.

## Navigability and Difficulty

Narrow upstream sections might be prone to deadfall. The lower river will often be too low. Bridge scouting may be necessary but the American Whitewater website contains flow information and runnability advice for the whitewater section. Class II whitewater skills are needed on lower Mill Creek.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

In early June of 2002 this region had been blessed with generous recent rains. After scouting Mill Creek from the Cty. PP bridge and from the road paralleling the river from that bridge to County P, I became convinced that the flow was sufficient for some whitewater fun. So I locked my bicycle to a tree near the County P bridge and drove to my chosen put-in at the County C bridge. The silver maple bottomland I entered might have been boring had it not been for the beautiful early morning lighting. Backlit leaves and arching silhouetted tree trunks created a very attractive canopy and shoreline. I was amazed to encounter no deadfall in the first 35 minutes, but then my luck ran out.

At least it was easy to pull around several fallen trees. Soon the current quickened and I could hear rapids. Boulders began to dot the streambed and solid Class II rapids darted among several islands. I was enjoying the challenge in my non-whitewater Bell Wildfire canoe. At one point an

overhanging branch grabbed and flipped my prescription sunglasses into the murky water. My uncorrected myopia made the whitewater ahead more challenging. A rocky Class II was followed by several Class I's. Squinting eyes and dumb luck got me through unscathed. The blurry scene reminded me of a Monet painting. I could see well enough to appreciate the beauty of granite bedrock shores and upland trees like birch and hemlock. The stream alternately widened into slow stretches and then narrowed into fast chutes. The final half mile from PP to P featured nearly continuous Class I and II rapids. After a total of about two hours I reached my take-out bridge.

The American Whitewater Website describes the 4 miles of Class I-II whitewater from Robin Lane to West River Rd.

### **Further Ideas**

It could be interesting to explore those wider and braided sections near the Wood-Portage County line. Trees may be sparse enough to make deadfall problems manageable. Also, the current should be slow enough to allow round trip explorations from one point eliminating the need for a shuttle vehicle.

### **Conclusion**

Lower Mill Creek is a short but fun Class II whitewater option. High water is needed. The water quality will likely not be good but the scenery is surprisingly attractive.

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# Mud Creek

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## **Location**

Manitowoc County.

## **Natural Features**

Mud Creek starts in a marsh just north of the Manitowoc-Brown County line. It flows southward past irregular low hills and then enters a larger marsh which once lay beneath an arm of Glacial Lake Oshkosh. Before the surrounding uplands were logged they were covered by a conifer-hardwood forest. These days the uplands contain more oak and ash trees than conifers. Mud Creek merges with the Manitowoc River in a large wetland called Collin's Marsh. The Manitowoc then flows eastward to Lake Michigan. Collin's Marsh is a major stopover place for migrating waterfowl.

## **Human History and Influence**

Most of the surrounding countryside was logged and converted to agriculture. There are no nearby towns or cities. Collins Marsh has been managed by the DNR since 1946. Many animal species thrive here including more than 260 species of birds. A dam near the Cty. JJ bridge creates a flowage which raises the water and expands the marsh. It also creates the swamp where I had the challenging experience described below.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

The current is slow throughout and water levels are usually adequate. Swamp trees and logjams present challenges to navigation.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

Robert Zimmer wrote the article which inspired me to explore Mud Creek. I was inspired to explore Collins Marsh by paddling into it from Mud Creek. I never dreamed I would get lost in the process. Sleeping on the floor of my small canoe would have been difficult to say the least but I was nearly forced to do so.

Here is what happened: Alone in my Bell Wildfire I put onto the creek next to the Hilltop Rd. bridge. Initially the waterway was wide and easy to paddle. It was lined by reed canary grass and no trees. Ahead I could see a line of trees but never guessed the creek would be so difficult to follow in the swamp. My plan was to reach the confluence with the Manitowoc River that day. I did not get nearly that far. When I reached the trees there was initially no problem. Several snags blocked my way but they were easy to dodge or to portage around.

The going got tougher when the creek narrowed and broke into multiple channels. Soon I could identify no channels at all. For a while I pulled my self along by grabbing alder branches. I considered trying to turn around but keep pulling and hoping the trees would disappear and I would reach open marsh. There were so many trees I could only see a short distance ahead. It was a cloudy day so I had no sun to help guide my direction.

Eventually I was forced to exit my canoe. For a long time I dragged my canoe through the shallow water which hid logs and other obstacles. The mud was not deep or sticky but I still tripped and fell several times. When a middle aged man falls down in a mucky swamp does it make a sound? I was afraid I might be walking in circles. The hour was getting late so it occurred to me that I might have to spend the night in my canoe.

Then I heard a mechanical sound in the distance. I followed this noise figuring it would at least keep me going in one straight direction. Finally, I broke through a line of trees and could see across an open marsh. On the other side I could see the source of the mechanical sound. It was an auger feeding grain into a metal storage bin. I was exhausted but seeing this escape route gave me new energy. A wide cattail marsh separated me from the storage bin. Crossing it was even more grueling than the swamp ordeal. Past the cattails it was easier to drag my canoe over a grassy field and, finally, a corn field. Beyond that I reached a dirt road. I had no idea where I was but some sense told me to turn right. About 20 yards down the road I reached an intersection and noticed a road sign which read "Hilltop Road." I glanced to the right and was amazed to see my car about 200 yards away! I had literally come full circle back to where my challenging outing had begun. In the swamp I had somehow veered far west of the main Mud Creek channel.

### **Experiences of Others**

Zimmer's "Collins Marsh" article was published in the March 2000 issue of Silent Sports Magazine. Zimmer also put in at the Hilltop Rd. bridge. He paddled the creek at "near flood stage" so it may have been easier for him and his group to follow the main channel through the swamp. He appreciated cedars and hardwoods plus "an oasis of colorful wildflowers and sweet-singing birds." And he saw a large colony of nesting blue herons. "The loud, frightening screams of young herons pierc(ed) the deep shadows of the cedars, the giant shadowy forms of adult herons like pterodactyls soaring through a prehistoric forest."

### **Further Ideas**

It should be easy to put-in at the County JJ bridge and to paddle northward across the flowage and up Mud Creek as far as desired before turning around for a round trip. Another idea is to begin a trip down the Manitowoc River by starting below the dam at the JJ bridge and proceeding the short distance down Mud Creek to the confluence.

### **Conclusion**

This creek offers a nice opportunity to paddle through both an open marsh and a tree-filled swamp. It's a great place to view a heron rookery and other wildlife. Try not to get lost like I did.

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# Pigeon River

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## **Location**

Shawano and Waupaca counties.

## **Natural Features**

The North and South Branches of the Pigeon River both arise in Shawano County south of the community of Tigerton. This is rocky country where bedrock granite mixes with other Precambrian rocks. Both branches descend from the Northern Highland to the Central Sandstone Plain. After they join they drop to a lowland comprised of sediments deposited under Glacial Lake Oshkosh. There the Pigeon joins the Embarrass River. Northern mixed conifers and hardwoods grow from upland shores. Silver maples predominate along bottomland shores.

## **Human History and Influence**

The community of Marion lies along the banks of the North Branch where a dam creates Marion Pond. The main Pigeon is dammed at Clintonville to create a flowage known as Pigeon Lake. Farm fields alternate with forests in this transitional region of the state.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

I paddled downstream of Clintonville and encountered just one fallen tree. This section should usually have enough water. There was no whitewater. One article I read characterized the river as largely unobstructed between Marion (here the North Fork) and Clintonville. This section may contain some riffles and low grade rapids.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

I spent a lousy hour paddling the Pigeon River in mid-July of 1989. It was an unpleasant experience because I was attacked by hordes of deerflies. I recall little more about that stretch between the Jepson Rd. Bridge and County Y on the Embarrass. Fortunately, the deer flies did not follow me when I was strolling the 2.5 miles back to my car.

## **Experiences of Others**

In the 1980s, Silent Sports Magazine featured a series of articles about the recreational opportunities in all of Wisconsin's counties. In the one about Waupaca County, Gregg Marr sited a local source who characterized the Pigeon as "quiet, clean and largely unobstructed" between Marion and Clintonville. The first half of this trip would be on the North Fork of the Pigeon River.

## **Further Ideas**

One could put in at Clintonville, paddle to the confluence with the Embarrass River and then take a trip down that stream.

## **Conclusion**

Not a great river but an OK option for local quietwater paddlers.

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# Pine River

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## Location

Waushara County.

## Natural Features

This Pine River originates in the sandy soiled lands just west of Wild Rose. It flows eastward in a region of kettle lakes which fill pits left behind after ice chunks melted at the end of the Wisconsin Ice Age. Before it meets Lake Poygan the Pine enters a vast lowland once inundated by Glacial Lake Oshkosh. Here the land transitions from woods to open marsh. The river empties into Lake Poygan, which is fed by the Wolf River. Soon these waters join the Fox River on its way to Lake Winnebago and eventually to Green Bay.

## Human History and Influence

This stream flows through the community of Poy Sippi. The public library there reports that the Pine River was named Poygan Sippi by the native Potawatomis because it flowed into Lake Poygan. At some point in time the name was shortened to Poy Sippi. Upstream, the communities of Wild Rose, Saxeville and Pine River are also situated along its shores. The state of Wisconsin manages much of the upper river as a State Fishery Area and manages the marsh near Lake Poygan as a State Wildlife Area.

## Navigability and Difficulty

This is a small river which has fallen trees to portage over or around. There are also several footbridges. Navigation is easier in the open marsh. Water levels on lower stretches should usually be sufficient but shallow water can be a problem upstream.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

I explored a handful of miles on the Pine in my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe. It was mid-July of 1989. I put-in at the 28<sup>th</sup> Court bridge and paddled to the landing on the river right side of the flowage at Poy Sippi. The short corridor I explored was forested and attractive. The water was quite clear as the river carried me past scattered glacial erratic boulders over beds of sand and gravel. During my hour and a half journey I portaged over and around quite a few fallen trees. The number was not enough to frustrate me but enough to frustrate most others. One major treat was the sight of an osprey which dove successfully to catch a fish. It was an easy three mile bike ride back to my car.

## Experiences of Others

I was surprised to read that Frank Piraino found an upstream section which did not drive him crazy because of too many portages. In [Small Stream Adventures of Wisconsin](#) he describes the section between the Apache Rd. bridge and the Cty. A bridge. He could clearly see trout and suckers in the water as explored this tiny stream which was "lined with up banks of mature hardwoods with a few scattered pines through a quiet state fishery area." He also encountered

several small footbridges requiring carry-arounds. Mr. Piraino advises avoiding the river's next section from Saxeville to Pine River because of log jams and too many cabins and footbridges.

### **Further Ideas**

Why not explore the final stretch of the Pine down into Lake Poygan? It also would be interesting to locate the river's mouth after departing from one of the boat landings on the southwestern edge of Lake Poygan. I can envision a round trip along that lake's western shore, up the Pine as far as desired and then back.

### **Conclusion**

This clear and pretty little stream should not be ignored by quiet water paddlers who like such streams and don't mind the hassle of mini-portages around deadfall obstructions. Wetland sections should be easy and interesting to explore.

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# Plover River

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## Location

Langlade, Marathon and Portage counties.

## Natural Features

The Plover River begins in far southwestern Langlade County. From there it flows southward and westward to an eventual rendezvous with the Wisconsin River. It cuts across two types of glacial deposits. First are end moraines which include rocks and gravels, and second are areas of pitted outwash which include sandy areas and kettle lakes. A short distance downstream of the dam at Jordan Pond the Plover drops over a large outcrop of granite. At that point it leaves the Northern Highland Province and enters the Central Sandstone Plain. The surrounding forest is typical Northwoods. The rapids are mild except for the granite plunge after Jordan Pond.

## Human History and Influence

Canoeing Native Americans were the first to use the Plover. They were followed by the European explorers and then the logging industry. Stevens Point grew up at the confluence of the Plover and the Wisconsin River. It became a major logging town known as the Gateway to the Pines. These days, upper stretches of the river are suitable for trout and are managed as State Fishery Areas. Agricultural practices impact the river as farms become increasingly common as the stream flows south. Several small villages occupy its banks and two dams create flowages known locally as "ponds."

## Navigability and Difficulty

Much of the Plover is reliably navigable during most seasons. There are no USGS gauges on the river. Obstructing snags are rare except on far upstream sections. Out of necessity, the bottomland section near Stevens Point is cleared regularly by local work crews. Most rivers this far north feature significant rapids, but not the Plover. Besides the big Class IV at Jordan Pond there are only a few gentle riffles.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

In August of 1982 I explored a 5 mile stretch of the Plover in my Lady Bug solo freestyle canoe. After the outing I ran the 5 miles back to my car. My put-in was the Cty. J bridge near Shantytown and my take-out was the Cty Y bridge over Bentley Pond. Along the way I had saw a plethora of late summer wildflowers and several blue and green herons. Though occasional farm fields approached its shores, the river's corridor was mostly forested with mixed broadleaves, spruces, pines and a few white cedar trees. The corridor was marshier towards the end when I entered the flowage known as Bentley Pond.

In April of 2000 I led a Sierra Club trip down the Plover with co-leader Bob Diggelman. We put in 5 miles from just downstream of Jordan Dam to Iverson Park in Stevens Point. Several of the whitewater boaters in the group took a good look at the big Class IV near the put-in and decided it would be runnable at the right water level. We put in just downstream of that rapid

and entered a bottomland corridor lined by silver maples. Were it not for chain sawing efforts, the river here would have been hopelessly obstructed by fallen trees.

My final trip down the Plover came on November 8<sup>th</sup> of 2002. The occasion was a River Alliance of Wisconsin sponsored conference called Watershed 2002. The event was held at a Lions Camp near Rosholt. TV crews filmed us where we launched next to the County K bridge. For two leisurely hours our group floated from that point down to Jordan Pond where we took out at the Jordan Park boat landing. Plentiful clear water flowed over sand and gravel past alternating marshy and forested shores. Stands of cedars and spruces demonstrated two shades of green which contrasted with the gold needles of tamarack trees. Trees were totally lacking along the marshy shores of the former Christensen Pond. Our leader informed us that the owner of the dismantled Van Order Dam retains the legal right to replace it. Hopefully he never will. Most of us ran the rocky Class I-II plunge at the former dam site with ease.

### **Experiences of Others**

Mike Svob includes the Plover River in his Paddling Southern Wisconsin guidebook. He divides it into three sections including the 8.7 miles from Shantytown Rd. to Bevent, the 7.6 miles from Bentley Rd. to Jordan Park, and the 6.4 miles from Jordan Park to Stevens Point.

### **Conclusion**

The upper two sections of the Plover are scenic and suitable for beginners. The third section near Stevens Point is less scenic but is very handy for boaters from that town. Most of the river is boatable during all seasons.

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# Rat River

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## **Location**

Winnebago and Outagamie counties.

## **Natural Features**

The Rat River is a small drainage system which feeds Lake Poygan near the mouth of the Wolf River. This slow, marshy stream once was entirely inundated by Glacial Lake Oshkosh. Consequently, the surrounding terrain is flat and its bed is devoid of rocks. Marshy vegetation and water loving trees predominate.

## **Human History and Influence**

Runoff from farms seriously degrades the waters of the Rat River. No municipalities are located on its banks. Powerboats roam its deepening waters as it nears Lake Poygan and the lower Wolf River.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

Upper stretches are often too shallow but downstream of Hwy. 110 there will usually be enough water. With no obstacles, generous width and a slow current the paddling is easy on downstream sections of the Rat River.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

I was looking to explore the Rat in May of 2003. First I viewed the river from the County W bridge where it looked small, muddy and shallow. It would have been difficult that day to access the river there because of road construction. So I looked into options further downstream. After some bridge scouting I decided to leave my shuttle bicycle by the South Road bridge and to start my journey by the Hwy 110 Bridge. From that access point I first paddled a ways upstream but found I was paddling through a farm which was not very attractive. So I turned around and the scenery improved rapidly after I passed under Hwy 110.

Groves of green ash trees were visible beyond the cattails and other wetland species. I roosted a pair of blue-winged teals and several Canada geese. The current slowed and virtually stopped as the muddy Rat River wound along its steadily widening course. The scene was somewhat monotonous but the sounds I was hearing were wonderful. I could hear the calls of red-winged blackbirds, sand hill cranes and other birds plus some leopard frogs. When I reached the South Road bridge I was not ready to end my trip so I continued downstream for another half hour. By then the waterway was more like a lake than a river so I decided to turn around. When I reached my bicycle by the South Rd. bridge, I had spent 1.5 hours exploring the Rat River in my Bell Wildfire canoe.

### **Experiences of Others**

Frank Piraino put in at the County W bridge access point I rejected the day I paddled the Rat. His write-up in Small Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin makes the stretch I missed sound worthwhile. He mentions no problems with navigation. Piraino took out where I did at the South Road bridge.

### **Further Ideas**

Piraino considered starting his trip even further upstream at the County M bridge but decided against the idea when he saw the river disappear into a maze of cattails with no clear channel. So scratch that idea. I did want to mention more take-out options for those who choose to explore the Rat all the way to Lake Poygan. There are 3 boat landings on the northeastern shore of that lake.

### **Conclusion**

Winnebago County's Rat River is not especially scenic but the birding can be excellent and easy outings can be designed.

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# Red River

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## Location

Langlade, Menominee, and Shawano counties.

## Natural Features

The headwaters of both the Main Branch and the West Branch of the Red River originate in far southwestern Langlade County. Both branches flow through reservation forests of southwestern Menominee County (which is the Menominee Reservation) and into the Stockbridge-Munsee Reservation of Shawano County. Then they merge and exit the reservation. Finally the Red River flows eastward to the Wolf River just north of Shawano. The region is thickly forested. Granite bedrock and river boulders are present in abundance. The river's gradient is steep at times forming rapids as it drops from the Northern Highland Province to the Wolf River lowlands.

## Human History and Influence

The Stockbridge-Munsee tribe numbers about 1,500 members. Their ancestors were driven westward from Connecticut, New York and Delaware in the 1820s. The land they currently occupy was ceded to them in 1860 by the contiguous Menominee Reservation. A beautiful riverside structure known as the Alexian Novitiate was used for many years as a religious center. This site gained national attention for many weeks in the mid 1970s when protesting Menominees occupied the site. Since then the building has fallen into total disrepair. Agriculture and other human impacts are minimal, so the Red River is largely pollution free. Two dams create two impoundments downstream of reservation land near the community of Gresham. These bodies of water are ringed by cabins and homes.

## Navigability and Difficulty

In recent years the Stockbridge-Munsee Reservation has not allowed access to the river. Their land is where the advanced to expert whitewater is located. Downstream sections of the river are suitable for paddlers with intermediate whitewater skills. The big upstream rapids are often too shallow to run. Water levels are more reliable on the easier rapids downstream. The American Whitewater website contains USGS gauge information and runnability advice for both sections. The [Paddling Northern Wisconsin guidebook](#) includes Mike Svob's water level advice for the downstream whitewater section.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

I have been lucky enough to run the upper Red on two separate occasions. The first time was with the Sierra Club sometime in the 1980s. My main memory was of running the Class IV drop known as Suzy Falls. Most of us portaged the upper third of the drop and then ran the lower two thirds managing to survive the huge hole at the bottom. In 2001 I was on the upper Red again as co-leader of a Sierra Club outing. I am not sure if was legal to be there that year or not. If it was illegal we got away with it and had a very exciting day in the process. We put in somewhere along River Rd. upstream of the West Branch confluence and we took out at the Morgan Rd. bridge. The total run was around 7 miles. An early Class II plunge was almost totally

blocked by a log jam until Phil Johnsrud jumped into chest deep water and singlehandedly dismantled the jam. When we reached Class IV Suzy Falls we all portaged it on the right side because it looked downright frightening. The next three miles featured two challenging class III's and three Class II's.

On numerous occasions I have paddled the lower Red with fellow Sierra Club paddlers. That organization's whitewater instructors have often used this stretch as a follow up outing to their instructional clinics. It features several Class II drops and a beautiful mini-canyon known as Monastery Falls which rates a solid Class III. This cascade should be scouted from river right. The total distance from the put in at the Lower Red Lake powerhouse to the town of Red River on County A is 4.1 miles. Many paddlers shorten the trip by taking out on river left at Ziemer's Falls or a bit further downstream at the Finley Court access. Both sites can be located on river left by driving along Butternut Rd.

### **Experiences of Others**

The American Whitewater website warns that the upper Red is currently off limits to paddlers. Even so it does contain a detailed description of the section. The same website also includes a description of the Monastery Falls section. Mike Svob describes only the latter section in his [Paddling Northern Wisconsin](#) guidebook.

### **Further Ideas**

It would be interesting to explore the rest of the Red River all the way to the Wolf River confluence.

### **Conclusion**

The beautiful and challenging upper Red River is off limits these days to non-tribal members. The Monastery Falls run is lovely and nearly ideal for intermediate whitewater paddlers.

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# Shiocton River

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## **Location**

Shawano and Outagamie counties.

## **Natural Features**

The West Branch of the Shiocton begins near Bonduel along Hwy 29. It joins the East Branch and their combined waters flow southward to the Wolf River. Most of the Shiocton River flows slowly across a level land comprised of sediments which were deposited at the bottom of Glacial Lake Oshkosh. Wetlands are common and rocks are rare. Nearby uplands are covered with northern hardwoods and hemlocks. Bottomland species like silver maples commonly line the shores.

## **Human History and Influence**

The original forest was logged off and much of the drainage area is devoted to agriculture. The West Branch drains a marshy section of the Navarino State Wildlife Area. The community of Shiocton sits at the Wolf River confluence. Spectators gather at Bamboo Bend every April to watch the spawning sturgeon.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

Deadfall obstructions are frequent. Water levels are less of a problem. There are no rapids.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

In July of 1995 I put in by the County P bridge northeast of Shiocton. I had already locked my bicycle to a tree near the bridge in that town and planned to take out there. Initially the river corridor was attractive and easy to paddle. Pulling my canoe over three beaver dams was not much of a hassle. But soon the river narrowed and became impossibly blocked by fallen trees. Exasperated I pulled my Ladybug over to the left bank and climbed it to see if I could escape. Beyond some farm fields I could see the water tower of Shiocton. So I dragged my canoe in that direction until I reached a dirt road. There I ditched my canoe and started running. I eventually reached my bicycle and rode it back to my car at the put-in.

## **Experiences of Others**

The August 2001 Silent Sports Magazine featured an article entitled the "Tri-Rivers Nature Area." It promoted several recreational virtues of the region where the Shiocton, Embarrass and Wolf Rivers come together. Author Robert Ziemer was quite positive about canoeing the Shiocton River. I am not sure what section he paddled but it must have been better than the one that I explored.

## **Conclusion**

Perhaps there are navigable sections of the Shiocton River. I cannot recommend the section I paddled.

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# Suamico River

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## **Location**

Shawano, Outagamie and Brown counties.

## **Natural Features**

South, West and North Branches of the Suamico River coalesce in northern Brown County. The main or "Big" Suamico then flows across a flat plain of red clay lake sediments. These were deposited at the end of the Ice Age when Lake Michigan was larger version of its current self. The river flows eastward into Green Bay of Lake Michigan. Before settlement this region was a Northern Hardwood-Hemlock forest with a prominent beech tree component.

## **Human History and Influence**

Much of the Suamico River basin is now influenced by urban "Greater Green Bay." The village of Suamico was established in 1848. By the 1850s and 1860s several grist mills and lumber mills had been established along the river. The Village has grown considerably since the 1980s as a suburb of Green Bay. Streamside farms along upstream sections adversely impact the river.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

The lower river I explored should usually have enough water and be obstruction-free. There is no whitewater.

## **Trip Ideas: My experience**

On October 7, 2001, I explored the Suamico River from Fireman's Park in Suamico to the boat landing at the end of Sunset Beach Rd. Soon after putting in I got out to pull my Bell Wildfire over a line of rocks. After that the paddling was easy over a shallow but sufficiently watered streambed. Clear water with a slow current carried me about a third of the way to Green Bay. Then the current disappeared in estuary water so I needed to paddle more diligently. I passed a series of clay cutbanks which were topped by cottonwoods and black willows. Then I paddled by a series of homes with docks. A solitary cormorant led me much of the way. When it was not flying overhead it stopped to fish and then to dry its outstretched wings. After I reached the boat landing I jogged the two miles back to my car.

## **Further Ideas**

With extra water it might be possible to paddle upstream stretches of the Suamico.

If paddlers like the name "Suamico," and are in the neighborhood, they might try the Little Suamico, located about 20 miles north on Hwy. 41, at the suggestion of Denny Caneff. This little river runs through farmland and exurban Green Bay. Start no farther west than Hilbert Road. This stream needs water for good paddling; if it appears to be confined to its normal banks, or you can see a lot of riffles, it's probably too shallow. The estuary stretch from the village of Little Suamico to Green Bay will have sufficient water and is a pleasant run – an easy round trip.

**Conclusion**

The Suamico River offers estuary paddling and possibly more when the water is high. Local paddlers may wish to explore it.

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# Tomorrow River

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## Location

Portage County.

## Natural Features

The Tomorrow River drains a landscape of end moraines and pitted outwash left behind by the Wisconsin Glacier. Its clear water washes over gravel bars and rocky sections. A wide variety of Northwoods conifers, northern hardwoods and bottomland tree species grace its banks. The Tomorrow also pierces wetlands. From its headwaters west of Rosholt this stream flows southward to the Amherst vicinity where its name changes to the Waupaca River. Then it turns east and eventually empties into the Wolf River.

## Human History and Influence

After logging days the Tomorrow's drainage area became a mixed land of farms and forests. The towns of Nelsonville and Amherst grew up along its banks. The latter town still sports a mill pond but the former town lost its pond when the dam was removed a few years ago. At Amherst, the village flirted with removing the dam in 2014, but a village-wide referendum confirmed the citizens want it repaired, not removed.

The Rising Star Mill at Nelsonville has been restored and now hosts a series of arts performers in the summertime. The river has been reclaimed as a viable trout stream and an appealing paddling destination. Local boaters with chainsaws work to keep its narrow stream course open. Exactly where the Tomorrow River ends and the Waupaca River begins is subject to debate. Locals evidently consider the change site to be ½ mile south of Amherst at the Bear Creek confluence.

## Navigability and Difficulty

There is usually enough water and deadfall is not a problem. Mike Svob's advice is to consult the Interactive Weather Information website for water level information on the nearby Waupaca River. The Tomorrow lacks any whitewater.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

In July of 2005 I explored the Tomorrow alone in my Wildfire canoe. First I left my bicycle at the Cate County Park at the river left head of Amherst pond. Then I drove to Nelsonville and put in by the mill. I was struck by the narrowness of the stream but trusted it would be navigable and it was. Right away I noticed the engineering projects which have stabilized its banks. These include strategically placed rocks, tree trunks and branches. The restoration efforts seemed to be working because I spotted several small trout swimming in the clear water.

Upstream stretches of the stream were especially narrow and were typically lined by upland banks which held a variety of attractive trees. These included cottonwoods, green ashes, sugar maples and basswoods. Pines, balsam firs and white birches grew from higher banks. Further

downstream marshy sections became more common and there were fewer boulders to dodge. Alders and reed canary grass lined the banks. I rounded one corner and encountered two sandhill cranes. One flew away but the bolder one walked alongside me for several yards. I startled several deer drinking the clear water before my rude arrival. About 40 minutes into the trip I reached a farm bridge which required a brief portage. Ten minutes later I passed under Lake Meyers Rd. where the river was starting to slow and widen. An hour and 20 minutes after I had launched I reached Cate County Park and my awaiting bicycle. The trip was a brief four miles in length but it far from a waste of time.

### **Experiences of Others**

Mike Svob includes the Tomorrow River in his [Paddling Southern Wisconsin](#) guidebook. He seemed to like it just as much as I did. This is the narrowest stream ever traveled by one [Miles Paddled](#) website writer. That writer lengthened the trip by putting in a mile upstream of Nelsonville at the County Q bridge. Denny Caneff reports that the Tomorrow can be paddled even further upstream. Denny also says avoiding the Amherst pond is important; it is slow, shallow, muddy and unpleasant.

Trout Unlimited volunteers and others are working to keep the river open for fishermen and paddlers. Evidently the river is now navigable from River Road bridge in the Richard Hemp State Fishery Area.

### **Further Ideas**

Portage past the Amherst dam and continue down the Waupaca River.

### **Conclusion**

The Tomorrow River offers only four navigable miles, but they are all wonderful. I especially like this stream's narrowness, its clear water and the lovely vegetation on its banks. It is safe enough for beginning paddlers and it is seldom too shallow.

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# Trappe River

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## **Location**

Marathon and Langlade counties.

## **Natural Features**

The Trappe's headwaters gather in the swampy forests of far southwestern Langlade County. At times its gradient steepens considerably along its descent to the Wisconsin River. Here it exposes granite bedrock, broken ledges and large boulders. It drains predominately conifer-hardwood forests.

## **Human History and Influence**

There are no cities or towns in the river's path but it does wind through a golf course near the Wisconsin River. Scattered farms negatively influence the Trappe's water quality but the water is often clear. Some headwater sections lie within the Ackley State Wildlife Area.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

The Trappe needs lots of water for a good run so its season is limited. The American Whitewater Website uses the nearby gauge on the Prairie River at Merrill to predict the Trappe's runnability. The main whitewater section contains a long rapid which usually rates a solid Class III. Deadfall has not been a problem in this section on my trips. Perhaps there are deadfall obstructions downstream of Rocky Ridge Rd.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

I first ran the Trappe in April of 1996. I had never read about it nor had I ever talked with anyone about the river. I knew it had to contain some whitewater so running it alone might be risky. Did that knowledge give me pause? Not really.

In my Dagger Genesis I put-in at the County J bridge and entered a delightful river corridor. It was a small and scenic Northwoods stream which flowed speedily over Class I riffles without deadfall interruptions. In less than an hour I heard the sounds of significant whitewater. Without scouting I entered a 200 yard maze of boulders and broken granite ledges. Several times I eddied out behind large boulders and marveled at the steep, scenic, and challenging cascade I had discovered. It was challenging but not terribly difficult. So I was not too worried when I returned to the Trappe River 6 years later as co-leader of a Sierra Club trip. Bob Diggelman and I were leading our annual spring "Little Rivers Exploratory" weekend outing.

We should have been more wary because the water was higher than it was during my previous visit. We put in at the County G bridge and soon were enjoying minor rapids. Numerous hemlocks and spruce trees blocked the nearby farms from view. The scene was serene but the river would soon live up to its name by setting a "trap" for us. About a mile downstream of Trappe River road I was paddling "sweep" with Phil Johnsrud and telling him that the bigger drop I remembered was probably coming soon. Too late I tried to pass the word that scouting

this rapid would be a prudent action. By the time Phil and I reached this bizarre jumble of rocks, holes and side curlers, most of our companions had already tipped over. He, I and one other boater managed to stay upright and did our best to help the others. Everyone was OK but one canoe sustained heavy damage. I had never seen this much "carnage" on any Wisconsin whitewater outing. We took out at the Rocky Ridge Rd. Bridge after a six mile trip.

Two years later I returned to the same section with another group of Sierra Clubbers. The water was lower this time so the long Class III was not nearly as frightening. We all ran it safely, though a couple of paddlers got temporarily hung up on rocks.

### **Experiences of Others**

The 3.5 mile stretch between County J and Rocky Ridge Rd. is described at the American Whitewater website. It rates that long, steep "boulder garden" as a Class III and calls it a "pinball course."

### **Further Ideas**

Perhaps at high water one could put in by a bridge farther upstream and have a good run. I would also be curious to know what the Trappe is like downstream of Rocky Ridge Rd. It should contain at least some whitewater.

### **Conclusion**

The Trappe River is a serious whitewater run. Its long Class III is one of Wisconsin's best in that category.

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# Waupaca River

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## Location

Portage and Waupaca counties.

## Natural Features

The Tomorrow River begins in northeastern Portage County. Its name changes to the Waupaca River just south of Amherst. Upstream from here the river system drains a land of end moraines and pitted glacial outwash. Lakes dot the sandy-soiled landscape. At the city of Waupaca the river's underlying bedrock changes from sandstone to granite. Here the Waupaca River drops several feet over this exposed bedrock before it again reaches a sandstone plain. Preceding downstream it drains a region of sediments which once lay under Glacial Lake Oshkosh. The marshy river soon merges with an equally marshy section of the Wolf River. The flora of the Tomorrow-Waupaca River system changes three times. The upper half drains original oak savanna lands. Near Waupaca the river pierces a section of Northwoods. Finally it enters a region of southern hardwoods.

## Human History and Influence

While the dam at Nelsonville on the Tomorrow River has been removed, dams remain at Amherst, Waupaca (where there are two) and Weyauwega. Agriculture degrades the river but it runs quite clear because of springs and the sandy soils. The city of Waupaca is one of Wisconsin's major "Fall Line" cities. Black River Falls, Wisconsin Rapids and Chippewa Falls are the others. Each of them is situated beside river rapids which exist because the water is dropping from the harder Precambrian rocks of the Northern Highland to the softer sandstone rocks of the Central Plain. They were ideal places to exploit water power for sawmills and gristmills.

Waupaca was founded in 1839 for this reason. Exactly where the Tomorrow River becomes the Waupaca River is subject to debate. Evidently locals consider the change to occur at the Bear Creek confluence about a ½ mile south of Amherst.

## Navigability and Difficulty

The Waupaca River contains riffles and minor rapids. Much of the upper river is narrow which leads to occasional deadfall obstructions. The water at Waupaca and upstream is often too shallow. There is a gauge at Waupaca which can be monitored at the USGS website but I do not know what a good level is. Bridge scouting may be necessary to determine the adequacy of flow.

## Trip Ideas: My experiences

I first paddled the Waupaca River in the summer of 1981. My put-in was next to a bridge in Amherst where the river is still called the Tomorrow. After several minutes I floated past a park where many people had gathered for softball, food, and general Sunday socializing. At the edge of town I passed under Hwy 10 and began to appreciate the clarity of the water. I could see scores of crayfish scurrying among the stones of the stream floor. Bear Creek merged from the

right so the volume increased. Now I was on the Waupaca River and not the Tomorrow. Several green herons cruised among the branches of black willow trees. After a trip of 4-5 miles I took out at one of two closely spaced Hwy 10 bridges. Those contemplating a trip on the Waupaca River will want to consult "Experiences of Others" sited below.

My next trip on this river came in early April of 2000. It had been a skimpy snow runoff year and a dry spring. Unfortunately, the water was too low for a good run. Bob Diggelman and I were leading one of our annual Sierra Club River Touring section "Little River Exploratory" outings. Our small group struggled down the 4-mile section between Otto Rd. and Stedman Park which is located near the junction Counties D and DD. More water would have made the minor rapids of this section much more fun to navigate. Portaging over and around several fallen trees wasn't much fun either.

### **Experiences of Others**

In his [Paddling Southern Wisconsin](#), Mike Svob describes two sections of the Waupaca. Trip One is the 10 miles from Amherst to Cty DD. Trip Two is the 7.2 miles from County Q to Brainards Bridge Park in Waupaca. Regarding the first trip he does warn of deadfall obstructions and low bridges. He also mentions a three foot drop under the Keener Rd. bridge which I cannot recall from my trip. For this drop he writes, "Find the tongue in the middle and ride the wave train to the pool below." He also writes that the "best riffles of the day" with more boulders and gradient are found in the last mile of Trip One. Svob seemed to like Trip Two better because of fewer obstructions, better scenery and a more challenging Class I rapid at Brainards Bridge Park.

I recommend checking the Waupaca River entries at the [Miles Paddled](#) website. Described there are the 7 miles from County DD to County Q and the 7.75 miles from County Q to Brainards Bridge Park in Waupaca. The website's writers liked the clear water, scenery and rocky riffles of both sections.

### **Further Ideas**

At least 15 miles of river remain between Waupaca River and the confluence with the Wolf River. This stretch should be easy to paddle with no whitewater, few obstructions and reliable water levels. I once did paddle a section between Waupaca and Weyauwega Lake but have little recollection of it. It should be easy to explore the river's final four miles from below the dam at Weyauwega to Gills Landing at the confluence with the Wolf.

### **Conclusion**

The Waupaca River upstream of Waupaca is pretty but it requires some whitewater skills and the patience to wait for adequate water. A few portages around obstacles will also be needed. The lower river is easier and more reliable but offers only a couple of short trip options.

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# West Twin River

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## **Location**

Manitowoc County.

## **Natural Features**

The West Twin River is formed when the Devils and Nashota rivers merge in northern Manitowoc County. Both of those tributaries drain the heights of the Niagara Escarpment. This resistant dolomite ridge is the same one which forms the famous Niagara Falls. Both tributaries feature falls and rapids as they descend to the south and east. After they merge into the West Twin there is one more bedrock falls before the river slows on its journey to Lake Michigan. The West Twin briefly merges with the East Twin River within a few hundred yards of Lake Michigan. A late 1990s DNR Land Legacy Study described both Twin Rivers as excellent flat water canoe rivers "with patches of old growth white cedar and beech forest." The river's final six miles are a wide and nearly currentless estuary of Lake Michigan.

## **Human History and Influence**

Agricultural fields dominate the drainage area. The West Twin flows through the tiny settlements of Kingsbridge and Shoto. The latter village is the site of a dam which forms Shoto Lake. The river soon becomes an estuary downstream of this dam. The East and West Twin Rivers merge in the city of Two Rivers. With its 12,600 residents this municipality has a long history as a shipping port and fishing town.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

Upstream sections will often be too shallow. Deadfall problems should be minor. The final 6 miles should always have enough water. There is no USGS gauge on this river but the nearby Kewaunee and Manitowoc river gauges can be monitored at the USGS website.

## **Trip Ideas: My experiences**

Twice in the late 1970s I paddled the last six miles of the West Twin with friends from Milwaukee. We rented canoes and were shuttled by a local vendor.

## **Further Ideas**

The West Twin above Shoto should be a delightful stream to explore when there is enough water. Narrow at times and with riffles it probably is not for beginners. The distance from the 147 Bridge to Shoto is roughly 15 miles. Adventurous whitewater boaters may want to try the Devils and Neshota River tributaries of the West Twin. Both feature Class III and IV challenges. They are written up at the American Whitewater website. Trips on either one could be extended into the West Twin River. Be aware that the Wisconsin Gazetteer marks a "falls" soon after the two rivers merge just upstream of Maribel Caves County Park.

**Conclusion**

Upstream sections of the West Twin River are for whitewater boaters. Middle sections should be riffly and scenic with occasional deadfall obstructions. The river's last 6 miles are easy and slow but somewhat monotonous.

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# Willow Creek

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## **Location**

Waushara County.

## **Natural Features**

Several headwater branches originate between Wild Rose and Waushara in central Waushara County. They drain a region of kettle lakes and moraines left behind after the Wisconsin Ice Age. After these branches merge into Willow Creek this growing stream slides by granite outcrops which break to the surface at the village of Redgranite. Then the creek drops into level lowland which once was inundated by Glacial Lake Oshkosh. Its streamside flora transitions from oak forest to bottomland forest to wetland vegetation. Finally, Willow Creek enters Lake Poygan which drains to Lake Winnebago, the Fox River and Green Bay of Lake Michigan.

## **Human History and Influence**

Intermittent sections of the upper stream have been set aside as State Fishery Areas. In its final three miles Willow Creek flows through the Poygan Marsh State Wildlife Area. Redgranite flourished as a "boomtown" from 1905 to 1913. The granite quarried there was used for paving blocks in cities like Chicago. Auroraville is situated next to a dam and a millpond. Tourists visit Olsen's Mill at the site. Several cranberry bogs upstream of County D drain into Willow Creek. I am sure they add some nasty chemicals.

## **Navigability and Difficulty**

The river below Auroraville should consistently hold enough water. Deadfall problems are minimal upstream of the marsh and totally non-existent in the marsh itself.

## **Trip Ideas: My Experience**

This was one of my "make it up as you go" adventures. Here is how this early May 2003 outing developed:

First I drove to the County D bridge in the heart of the Poygan Marsh. It was getting late in the day and a strong wind was blowing across the wide expanse of treeless marsh. The wind would be in my face and would significantly impede my progress. Knowing this I decided not to leave my bike at this potential take-out site and began to consider other options. Peering downriver from the bridge in Auroraville I made the decision to put in there. I figured I would paddle my Wildfire towards the marsh, turn around at some point, and then paddle back upstream to where I had started.

So I slid my Wildfire into the water and headed downstream into an attractive bottomland forest. Spring wildflowers grew in abundance. Especially prevalent were spring beauties and violets. Skunk cabbage leaves blanketed many of the lowest areas. I was enjoying the trip so much that I could not bear to turn around. As has happened countless times, I could not resist the urge to see what was around the next bend. As the bottomland forest transitioned to open

marsh the creek narrowed and its depth increased. I passed numerous duck blinds but saw very few ducks. I heard many croaking sandhill cranes but saw only a handful. After an hour and a half of easy paddling I noticed a channel merging from the left and decided to follow it.

My hope was that this would be a navigable tributary which would be a short cut in the direction of Auroraville. I knew if I paddled all the way to the County D bridge it would be twilight by the time I reached it. I would have to hitch hike back or cover the long distance to Auroraville on foot. It soon became apparent that my left turn had not taken me into a tributary because the current was still with me. The waterway I was on was so straight that it had to be some sort of man-made diversionary channel. It was ugly but it did turn out to be a shortcut.

By the time it rejoined the main channel of Willow Creek I was beginning to worry. It was getting late and the stiff headwind was becoming even more powerful. The wetland here was less scenic and I was very much ready for my journey to end. As luck would have it, I glanced to my left and spotted a road about 200 yards beyond a farmer's unplowed field. I decided to pull ashore and dragged my canoe and gear across the field to the road. I started jogging in a southerly direction and somehow found my way to Auroraville. Later I determined I had followed 32<sup>nd</sup> Lane, Buttercup Rd. and Hwy 49. The total distance was about 3 miles. Had I paddled all the way to the County D bridge I would have faced seven miles of road in the gathering darkness with no shuttle vehicle.

### **Experiences of Others**

Frank Piraino had another creative idea for Willow Creek and wrote about it in [Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin](#). He put in at the County D bridge I mentioned above. Then he took out at the next County D bridge to the east. That bridge spans a stream called Pumpkinseed Creek. How did he get there? First he paddled down Willow Creek until he reached Lake Poygan. He then followed its shoreline to the right until he reached the mouth of Pumpkinseed Creek. Finally he ascended that stream to the County D bridge.

### **Further Ideas**

One option would be to paddle from Auroraville to Lake Poygan where there is a handy boat landing not far from the mouth of Willow Creek. There may also be navigable sections between Redgranite and Auroraville to explore.

### **Conclusion**

Willow Creek is an easy pathway through an extensive marsh. I thought the bottomland section immediately upstream of the marsh was more scenic than the marsh itself. I doubt that anyone will be tempted to retrace the route I took. For me, however, it was a most interesting adventure.

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# Yellow River

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## Location

Clark, Wood and Juneau counties.

## Natural Features

This Yellow River originates in far western Clark County a few miles west of the town of Spencer. Upstream sections drain rolling ground moraine glacial deposits topped by yellow silt loams. Conifer trees observed here will usually be white pines. The underlying bedrock here in Wisconsin's Northern Highland is granite. About seven miles south of Marshfield the Yellow begins a steep descent to the Central Sandstone plain. As it descends it develops rapids as it cuts through granite bedrock. Then the river slows suddenly as it enters level lands which formerly lay beneath Glacial Lake Wisconsin. Interrupting this plain are sandstone bluff "outliers" which once were islands in that lake. One prominent example is Castle Rock near Necedah. Here the Yellow is draining "pine barrens" where jack pines replace white pines as the predominant conifer species. Large wetland areas also occupy this level lowland.

## Human History and Influence

Dairy farms dot the landscape in eastern Clark County and northern Wood County. They contribute to the pollution of the Yellow River. The degradation is worse after rains when the yellow silt loams of fields are easily swept into the river. A major tributary is Hemlock Creek which receives polluted runoff from several commercial cranberry bogs. The "Exact Center" of Wisconsin is Pittsville which sits astride the river in southern Wood County. Further downstream are Dexterville and Necedah, both prominent logging towns at their inceptions. Logs were floated down the Yellow into the Wisconsin River.

This stream has its share of dams. There are two small ones at Wood County Park. A larger one backs up a flowage at Dexterville. Castle Rock Lake is a huge flowage of the Wisconsin River, created by a hydroelectric dam, which backs up many miles into the Yellow River.

Several wildlife areas and one state park occupy parts of the vast wetland complex drained by the lower Yellow River. Included are the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, the Sandhill State Wildlife Refuge, the Wood County Wildlife Area, and the Buckhorn State Wildlife Area. Buckhorn State Park straddles the peninsula between the Yellow River and Wisconsin River arms of Castle Rock Lake.

## Navigability and Difficulty

The river downstream of Dexterville should always have sufficient water. Some sections will have deadfall problems. Whitewater skills are needed downstream of Wood County N. Here there will need to be extra water. Check the American Whitewater website for gauge levels and runnability advice. When I ran the whitewater section there was a gauge painted on the center pillar of the County N bridge. A local source sited below recommended a level of 0-2 on that gauge.

### **Trip Ideas: My Experience**

I was inspired to experience the Yellow's whitewater after reading a March 2000 [Silent Sports](#) magazine article. So, I checked it out in June of that year. First I left my bicycle next to a bar along Wood County A. Its location is 1.8 miles north of Wisc. Hwy 13. This establishment overlooks Little Bull Falls. Next I drove to the Wood Co. N bridge and embarked on my 6.4 mile journey. It had rained recently so the water had risen to 1.3 on that bridge's gauge. At that level it was risky to paddle the upcoming whitewater alone, but, of course, I did.

Within about a quarter of a mile the muddy water had carried me down to a whitewater "dells." The above article names this long series of granite ledges and boulders the "Big Bowl." Its author rated it as a Class III which it certainly deserved at this level. Without scouting but with my full attention I plunged down this long and challenging rapid in my Daggar Ovation. It was exciting and successful run.

Proceeding downstream I encountered two Class II drops and then pulled ashore in North Wood County Park. There I scouted two small dams. The first one looked safe to run so I did, but the second one looked more hazardous. So I portaged that one on river left. The Yellow then slowed for a while but soon sped over a Class I drop followed by a more challenging Class II-III ledge about 400 yards above the County C bridge. Just downstream of that bridge I ducked just in time under a single wire which spanned the river at neck level.

A particularly scenic section followed. It featured easy rapids, rocky shores and towering hemlock trees. Then I spotted a horizon line and heard a roar. It was time to head for shore to see what was in store. Little Bull Falls was a tricky looking "10 feet of ledges" as described by the American Whitewater website author cited below. I choose a conservative route on far river right to avoid some large holes. After a successful run I took out near the bar and biked back to my car.

Actually, I also had been on the Yellow way back in 1982. With a woman companion I paddled from Necedah to the first landing on Castle Rock Lake. My Mad River Explorer was loaded with camping gear and my bicycle. That was one of only two times I have carried my shuttle bike with me down the river. Traveling down the muddy river we successfully dodged many tree limbs. Silver maples and river birches arched over the riverway. We found a suitable campsite and then finished our journey the following day. An interesting series of channels and islands preceded our entry into the open lake.

### **Experiences of Others**

I cited both the [Silent Sports](#) article and the American Whitewater website above. A third source I read was Frank Piraino's [Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin](#). He explored the entire river from Dexterville to Castle Rock Lake. Doing so required 21-26 hours of his time. Frank found excellent birding along the Yellow's remote bottomlands. Though he encountered scores of downed trees he was always able to stay in his canoe. Swampy sections alternated with upland banks with their pines and northern hardwoods.

I have read that Buckhorn State Park offers an appealing flat water paddling experience along its flowage portion of the Yellow River. Here there are interesting islands and backwater sloughs to explore.

### **Further Ideas**

It may be possible to paddle the river upstream of County N. The river here may contain some minor rapids. A multi-day canoe camp trip is feasible between Dexterville and Castle Rock Lake.

### **Conclusion**

The Yellow features a legitimate Class III run which should be a destination for whitewater boaters seeking a new experience. The lower river has no rapids but many limbs to dodge. Much of it is remote and fairly scenic though the water quality is not good. Several sections are suitable for day trips. Multi-day canoe-camp options are available too.

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