

MINNESOTA PADDLER

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Cottonwood River, June 19, 2012

By Mary Hoffman

Tom from New Ulm says, "This is my favorite river...you can talk with your friends, and then run some riffles, and it goes on like that back and forth for the whole trip..." I have to agree that the Cottonwood has enough calm and enough waves for an interesting day.

The drive from the Twin Cities was overcast and threatening. As we got further into southwestern Minnesota the sky cleared up. At a couple of pit stops some customers talked about a bad thunderstorm during the night and earlier that week. So, we went from unpredictable weather to a very hot, windy 90°F summer day. The destination was the Cottonwood River near New Ulm, MN.

Sponsor

The Redwood-Cottonwood Rivers Control Area sponsored the trip. The RCRA sponsors a day trip every summer on the Cottonwood



River and on the Redwood River. The idea is to promote river awareness for the watershed by running a cruise. I was only able to run the Cottonwood.

Who

About 60 people showed up for the cruise! It was a Tuesday. The ages were from about age 4 to 70. The count was about 20 canoes, 7 kayaks, and 3 solo boats. Someone from the RCRA and the DNR were in the Lead Boat and the Sweep. Two or three helpers launched the boats at the bottom of a steep staircase. Other experienced paddlers helped boats through the trickier, rockier rapids. A few canoes had first time paddlers at the bow. One "boat" was made out of two aluminum canoes, having two crossbars latching them together.

Logistics

The trip was about 11 miles. We put in at the County Road 11 bridge, south of Essig. Many of us parked on the shoulder of the highway. You can drive your car down to the staircase landing, but parking is limited. With such a large number of people and boats, using a reverse shuttle worked well. Plus it was free. Using this method, our large group was able to immediately start the trip rather than deal with driving cars back and forth. The RCRCRA made this possible by having a school bus take us back to our cars at the end of the trip. Even though it was great not to have to drive the shuttle, it still took time to park, figure out where to unload, unload, re-park, sign-in and get directions from the sponsors. At the take out at



Flandreau State Park, the RCRCRA had some sub sandwiches and homemade goodies waiting for us. The paddle took us about 2 hours, including a few short stops. Since we came from Burnsville, we were gone from about 8am to 5pm.

The River

I was surprised that the Cottonwood wasn't affected by the recent heavy rainstorms. Although Cannon Falls is nowhere near New Ulm, I thought the river would be higher. The river runs 83 miles through southwestern Minnesota and empties into the Minnesota near New Ulm. The Minnesota River had been 10-20ft higher than normal earlier this summer. The flow on the Cottonwood that afternoon was about 600 cfs. The gage reading read 4.8ft (NewUlm).

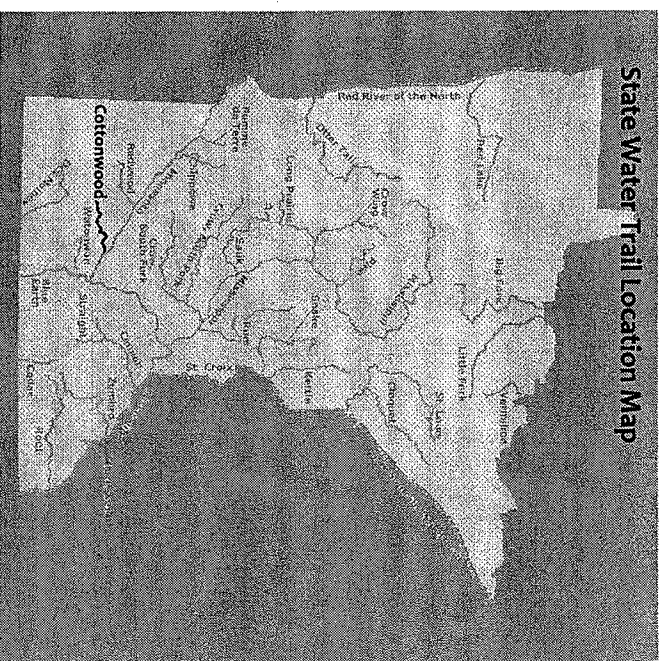
READING

COTTONWOOD RIVER SECTION. PADDLING SOUTHERN MINNESOTA, LYNNE AND ROBERT DIEBEL, TRAILS BOOKS, MADISON, WI.

The gradient is 4.7ft/mile. Talk was that it was low and rocky, especially for the tandem canoes. But, I thought the current was swift. Enough for lazy paddling.

Beautiful hills and bluffs rise above each side of the river. Many trees are cottonwood. The sandstone bluffs are full of holes where the swallow live. Looking at the map, I first imagined an old winding river, all bends and turns. The kind that moves slowly through farm fields. Wrong! Although the water was low, the current was swift. The best paddling is between 500 to 1000cfs. At 600cfs, it was fine for a kayak. The heavier canoes had trouble on the shallows.

For most of the trip, I only saw two houses. The adjacent land is agricultural. The route was clean, as in, I did not see any garbage hanging off the strainers or see empty cans and bottles. No airplane noise. No railroad noise. Too shallow for motorboats. I did hear some highway noise, but the wind covered most of that.



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The color of the water is green-brown, with sediment. Certainly not as thick as the Minnesota. In the past, the Cottonwood has had bacteria level warnings. The RCRA and other agencies work to keep it healthy. I tried to keep track of my location, but no landmarks for ¾ of the trip. I had the DNR Water Trail Guide (Minnesota River Section 3), but the scale is small. Someone said to count the bends and turns. No matter, we were with a group. Easy to land on gravel bars to take a rest.

You couldn't miss the takeout, the helpers were waiting on the gravel bar. Over the ridge you could hear tons of kids swimming at the Flandrau park man-made swimming "lake". After eating and talking, the bus arrived to shuttle us back to the cars. It was a nice, hot summer day to try this new river.

Little Cottonwood Virtual Tour

http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/sites/mrbdc.mnsu.edu/files/public/major/midmin/subshed/leotwd/lc_1.html

Little Cottonwood Watershed, MIN River Basin Data Center

<http://mrbdc.mnsu.edu/sites/mrbdc.mnsu.edu/files/public/Maps/CottonwoodWatershed.pdf>

COTTONWOOD RIVER CRUISE

River Ramblers will run a trip on September 1, 2012. Contact the trip leader, Laura Huberty, 612-810-9588.

EVENT New Ulm River Blast Days

Festival at the River • Free Cultural Event • Radical Fun! Friday & Saturday • August 31 & September 1, 2012 Labor Day Weekend • Dock available for canoes and boat traffic loading and unloading.

Minnesota Canoe Association



June 2012

May 2012							July 2012						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
29	30	1	2	3	4	5	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
27	28	29	30	31	1	2	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	29	30	31	1	2	3	4

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
27	28	29	30	31 6:45 PM - Hoigaard's Paddle Derby	1	2 12:00 AM - River Rambler Cruise
3	4 5:00 PM - Rookie Racers	5	6	7 6:45 AM - Hoigaards Paddle Derby	8	9 12:00 AM - River Rambler Cruise
10	11 5:00 PM - Rookie Racers	12	13	14 6:45 PM - Hoigaard's Paddle Derby	15	16 12:00 AM - River Rambler Cruise
17 12:00 AM - River Rambler Cruise	18 5:00 PM - Rookie Racers	19 10:00 AM - Cottonwood River-RCRCA	20	21 10:00 AM - Redwood River-RCRCA 6:45 PM - Hoigaard's Paddle Derby	22	23 12:00 AM - River Rambler Cruise
24 9:00 AM - The Jensen Handicap Canoe Race	25 5:00 PM - Rookie Racers	26	27	28 6:45 PM - Hoigaard's Paddle Derby	29	30 12:00 AM - River Rambler Cruise
1	2 5:00 PM - Rookie Racers	3	4	5 6:45 PM - Hoigaard's Paddle Derby	6	7 12:00 AM - River Rambler Cruise 12:00 AM - Muscoda Canoe Race