Kark's Canoeing and Kayaking Guide to 309 Wisconsin Streams

By Richard Kark
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Introduction

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 100th Wisconsin stream was Sawyer County’s Teal River in 1983. In 1996 I paddled my 200th 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

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 306 – 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 unintimidated 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
Southeastern Wisconsin Rivers and Streams

This section includes 44 rivers and streams that either originate or are mostly confined to these southeastern Wisconsin counties: Dodge, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Jefferson, Kenosha, Marquette, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Rock, Sheboygan, Walworth, Waukesha, Washington.

**Ashippun River**  
**Bass Creek**  
**Cedar Creek (Ozaukee County)**  
**Des Plaines River**  
**Fond du Lac River (East Branch, West Branch and mainstem)**  
**Fox River (“Illinois Fox”)**  
**Kinnickinnic River**  
**Menomonee River**  
**Milwaukee River (East Branch)**  
**Montello River**  
**Mullet River**  
**Neenah Creek (South Branch)**  
**O’Keefe Creek**  
**Ox Creek**  
**Pigeon River**  
**Puchyan River**  
**Rock River**  
**Rubicon River**  
**Sheboygan River**  
**Turtle Creek**  
**White River (Green Lake County)**  
**Whitewater Creek**  

**Bark River**  
**Beaver Dam River**  
**Crawfish River**  
**Fond du Lac River**  
**Honey Creek**  
**Koshkonong Creek**  
**Milwaukee River**  
**Milwaukee River (No. Branch)**  
**Mukwanago River**  
**Neenah Creek**  
**Oconomowoc River**  
**Onion River**  
**Pewaukee River**  
**Pike River**  
**Rock River (East Branch)**  
**Root River**  
**Scuppernong Creek**  
**Sugar Creek**  
**Westfield Creek**  
**White River (Walworth Cty.)**
Ashippun River

Location
Dodge County.

Natural Features
This stream begins high in the Kettle Moraine south of Hartford and Pike Lake State Park. It flows southwestward and joins the Rock River in northeastern Jefferson County near the city of Oconomowoc. Originally this was a land of oak savanna and scattered prairies. I experienced a section dominated by bottomland trees like silver maples before I passed through a marsh and then across a lake. The water quality is reasonably good.

Human History and Influence
The dam and millpond at Monterey figured prominently into my trip. Several new, large homes had recently been built above the river bottoms and were clearly visible. Domiciles of various sizes lined the shores of the millpond.

Navigability and Difficulty
Too many fallen silver maple trees for most.

Trip Ideas: My experience
On the morning of April 10, 2007, I was pondering if and where I might explore this small stream. My first idea was to explore it from the millpond and paddle upstream but I chose the more challenging idea of putting in on County P upstream of the pond. As I feared I encountered countless fallen trees in the bottomland, but perversely enjoyed working my way slowly towards the millpond. I was out of the canoe pulling over and around obstructions nearly as much as I was in the boat. Several times I “cheated” by taking shortcuts between river bends. About one hour after putting in I emerged from the trees into a treeless marsh. To my surprise, I noticed an attractive stand of tamarack trees on river left and also noted several sandhill cranes. The current fizzled out in another half hour and I proceeded to paddle across the millpond to my awaiting bicycle near the dam. The bike ride back to my car was easy and pleasant.

Further Ideas
Likely few have been crazy enough to explore the Ashippun though I did see evidence of old attempts at chainsaw clearing of the corridor. A riverside resident I talked to told me he had never seen a paddler go by. Local paddlers would be well advised to follow my first idea of skipping any one way river trips and just taking a brief voyage upstream from the top of the millpond as far as they choose to go and then turning around.

Conclusion
Too small and deadfall choked for most. Consider paddling upstream from the millpond and turning around.
Bark River

**Location**
Washington, Waukesha and Jefferson counties.

**Natural Features**
The Bark River begins in the hills and forests of the Kettle Moraine. Initially it flows through several lakes near Oconomowoc and over glacial deposits. Here the river bottom is mostly sandy or gravelly. Further downstream the Bark passes through a former glacial lake bottom which now features marshy sections. Vegetation types along the Bark vary from wetland to bottomland to sections of upland oaks and other deciduous trees. The Bark joins the Rock River in the city of Fort Atkinson.

**Human History and Influence**
Milwaukee urban sprawl threatens the beauty of upper reaches including the lakeshores. Just west of Gramling Lane east of Sullivan, a one mile section of the river is depicted as perfectly straight in the Wisconsin Gazetteer. It looks this way because it was trenched in the 1940s to create a “muck farm.” Several dams and millponds interrupt the river’s course between County E and Hebron. Agriculture strongly impacts downstream sections of the river.

Fort Atkinson is a prosperous town or about 10,000 people which started at the site where General Henry Atkinson stopped while he was pursuing the Sauk Indians during the 1832 Blackhawk War. Water quality in the upper reaches is quite good, as agriculture is not prominent. Here the river flows through porous thick glacial till which filters the water well and slows the erosive runoff. Downstream the water becomes sediment and chemical-laden. Multitudes of carp stir the muddy sediment.

Retired Marquette University English professor Milton Bates’ *Bark River Chronicles* catalogs the history and ecology of the river and tells all you may want to know about the Bark.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
There are no rapids so the only problem is fallen trees. Water levels are usually adequate. These can be monitored at the USGS website. Deadfalls cause major problems from County E in Jefferson County to County D. Dams and flowages also block the way through that section, though a dam on the eastern edge of Delafield was removed in 2014. The going is easy between County D and the Rock River confluence.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
I have been on the Bark on four separate occasions: The first is hardly worth mentioning when I ascended it a short distance to access the Scuppernong River going upstream from County D in Jefferson County.

On a perfect late August day in 2008 I explored a gorgeous section of the Bark with my fellow solo-paddling buddy Ron Rosner. We put in at a friend’s dock on river right just below the outlet from Lower Lake Nemahbin near County P. Most paddlers will use the DNR landing at the west end of Lower Lake Nemahbin. Here the Bark was a surprisingly wild, narrow, and crystal clear stretch of water. It wound through a marshland which was largely unobstructed. We were required to duck under several low; private bridges. Towards the end of our trip it was necessary to portage around one of them. It was fun to follow several “keeper” bass as they swam around aquatic vegetation through the clear water.
In 1998, I explored the Bark for a couple of hours with a friend in my tandem canoe. Our pleasure was enhanced by our shuttle ride on the Glacial Drumlin State Trail. We first deposited our bikes by the County E bridge. Then we drove to our put-in at the Hwy. 18 wayside west of Dousman. Initially, the river was narrow yet unobstructed and the water clarity was excellent. The first disturbing human influence was a noisy Go Cart track on river left. Soon we traveled a man-made straight away along a uniformly high levee on river left. This was where the “muck farm” I mentioned above had been constructed. Carp wakes were continuously forming along this stretch, so the water was very muddy. Much prettier to observe were scores of dragon flies and damsel flies.

After we reached the County E bridge it was easy to peddle north to Sullivan and turn right onto the Glacial Grumlin State Trail. We followed it to Gramling Lane where we turned left and found our way to the wayside where we had left our vehicle.

In August of 2005, a friend and I left our bicycles at the boat landing on the Rock River right in downtown Fort Atkinson and then drove to our chosen put-in point at the County N bridge. What seemed like the slowest current in the state barely helped to carry us westward past farm fields, green ash, black willow and silver maple trees. Fallen trees required some maneuvering but never forced us to portage. Back sloughs became more numerous as we went along. Standing in the shallows of one of those was a bird not seen every day in the Badger State. It was a great white egret!

Near the end of the trip the natural river took a long loop towards the northwest. We found a shortcut to the left which bypassed this loop. It was a 300 yard man-made channel which is easy to spot because it is spanned by a footbridge. Once we hit the Rock River in Fort Atkinson there were houses, docks and pleasure craft to observe before we reached our take-out.

**Experiences of Others**

In *Paddling Southern Wisconsin* Mike Svob writes about several sections on the Bark.

Denny Caneff paddled the stretch from downtown Hartland to Delafield. At Hartland you float through a culvert under a street. From there the surroundings alternate between remote marshy areas and suburban industrial parks. Just before Delafield you enter Nagawicka Lake. The river slithers out of the lake on the southwest side and wends its way through the city (with a few obstacles here and there).
Conclusion
The lower Bark from County D is easy to paddle but not very pretty. The middle section my friend and I paddled down to County E was interesting enough and provided a nice bike-shuttling option on the Glacial Drumlin Trail. The stretch starting at Lake Nemahbin is the prettiest and is quite canoe-friendly.

The old millhouse on the Bark River on the edge of the city Delafield remains, but the dam that turned its old grist wheel was removed in 2013 after years of contentious litigation between homeowners on Nemahbin pond and the property owner, Margaret Zerwekh.
Bass Creek

Location
Rock County

Natural Features
Very small stream which drains the west-central portion of the county into the Rock River between Janesville and Beloit. Original prairie and oak savanna with bottomland trees along the banks alternate with dry and wet meadows. Sandy bottom is devoid of rocks. Sandstone bedrock is exposed on a river right cliff at Afton.

Human History and Influence
This is an agricultural area. The villages of Footville, Hanover and Afton along its banks. One dam at Afton has been removed. Water quality is fairly good considering the nearby farms.

Navigability and Difficulty
Not a stream for those who do not like to maneuver around obstacles including (for me) one beaver dam. Yet the deadfall required me to get out of my canoe only twice. In past years I know that the Rock County Canoe Club had worked with chainsaws to keep this stream open. I cannot, however, remember seeing evidence of any recent work. Low water times should still allow passage. There are no rocks and no rapids on Bass Creek.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In April of 2006 I spent 2 and a half hours paddling my solo freestyle canoe from the Kesler Road bridge to the bridge in Afton. Then I biked back to my car. I was surprised by the quality of the scenery and I did spot several Canada geese, a couple of wood ducks and at least 2 sand hill cranes. I enjoyed paddling down its narrow and tortuous course while ducking a dodging limbs and fallen trees. Several new channels had recently broken through as short cuts across wide meanders.

Further Ideas
Try continuing down the final mile from Afton to the Rock River and to the boat landing which appears soon on river right.

Conclusion
I can recommend my trip to anyone who enjoys tight maneuvering on a small stream. Deadfall obstacles, however, will become more prominent as time goes by unless a group with chainsaws keeps the creek clear.
**Beaver Dam River**

**Location**
Dodge County.

**Natural Features**
Several streams feed Fox Lake in far northwestern Dodge County. Mill Creek drains that lake and soon enters Beaver Dam Lake. This waterway becomes the Beaver Dam River at the outlet of that lake. The stream then flows southward until it merges with the Crawfish River in southwestern Dodge County. Before settlement its drainage area included oak savannas, southern hardwoods and prairies. Wetlands were common and still are. The land is low and quite flat. The banks are muddy as is the river and rocks are few.

**Human History and Influence**
The loamy soils of the region have long supported a thriving agricultural community. Farming practices have not been kind to the river. In 1840 the city of Beaver Dam was founded where the river begins at the outlet of Beaver Dam Lake. A dam keeps the lake at a constant level. Further downstream is another low dam at Lowell. In its final few miles before it enters the Crawfish River, the Beaver Dam River flows through an extensive wetland known as the Mud Lake State Wildlife Area.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Most of the river is navigable most of the time. It can get too low during extended dry periods. Fallen trees may present minor problems in some sections. Water levels can be monitored at the USGS website. There are no rapids.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
My experience: I explored the Beaver Dam River by canoe sometime in the early 1990s. I lost my notes and remember little of the experience.

**Further Ideas**
Denny Caneff has paddled the river just east of the city of Beaver Dam and Lowell. It was shallow but passable when he was there. His experience on the stream was pleasant but not very inspiring. He encountered few fallen trees but suspects there are more of them downstream of Lowell. The water was some of the most intense green (algae-infused) he’d ever seen.

**Conclusion**
The Beaver Dam River is muddy and slow. The scenery is unspectacular. But it does provide an easy and fairly reliable canoeing opportunity for paddlers in the Beaver Dam area.
Cedar Creek

Location
Washington and Ozaukee counties.

Natural Features
This stream begins in Cedar Lake high in the Kettle Moraine about three miles southwest of West Bend. It flows in an easterly direction past remnants of the original eastern broadleaf forest, through bottomland woods, past agricultural fields, and through a major marsh. Then it cuts steeply through bedrock dolomite forming an attractive “Dells” mini-canyon at Cedarburg before it joins the Milwaukee River. The stream floor becomes rocky when it is cuts through moraines on its final journey to Lake Michigan. In the Jackson Marsh the stream slows, narrows and deepens through a State Wildlife Area.

Human History and Influence
Much of Cedar Creek’s corridor was logged and cleared for agriculture. Cedarburg grew up in the 1800s and its mills prospered by capturing the power generated by the creek’s rapids. A series of dams were built to harness this power. One of those dams was removed in 1988. The reclaimed land has been turned into parkland. Four dams remain, causing dolomite walls and bedrock ledges (and whitewater) to be buried by water behind the dams. Today, Cedarburg is prospering as a Milwaukee bedroom community with an attractive historic district complete with local artists who display their wares for tourists in dolomite-walled old buildings. Wisconsin’s last covered bridge was decommissioned in 1962 but can still be admired where it spans the creek next to a new bridge for Covered Bridge Rd. a few miles northwest of Cedarburg.

Navigability and Difficulty
Jackson Marsh is always navigable. Sections between there and Cedarburg can get a bit low at times and there will be a few trees to pull over or around. Water level adequacy for this section can be judged at the Covered Bridge. Higher water will be preferred by whitewater boaters who choose to paddle through the Dells. The creek’s final few miles from County T into the Milwaukee River will generally have enough water. The American Whitewater website includes water level information and recommendations. It also describes the rapids.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I spent a couple of hours on Cedar Creek with my friend Ron Rosner, in July of 2000. Ron wanted to try his new solo canoe on a quiet stream and I wanted to explore a new one. We choose Cedar Creek and put in at the Ozaukee County Road G bridge. First we paddled a ways upstream into Jackson Marsh before we turned around and headed downstream. The limited part of the marsh we saw was reasonably attractive but we thought the stream corridor between G and Church Rd. was less so.

The marsh was gradually replaced by upland banks. Carp stirred the sediments causing the water to turn muddy. The streamside flora was not particularly scenic. Junk left by humans marred the scene. The creek’s appearance improved after the landing on river left at the dead end of Church Rd. Now the water was clearer, there was less junk, and the marshy grasses, silver maples and black willows looked prettier. Our trip ended at the County M bridge and I ran back to fetch our vehicle.

Experiences of Others
Cedar Creek down into the Milwaukee River is written up in the American Whitewater website. Included is a whitewater “Dells” section which would more fun to run without the four dams it contains. To run it now paddlers must put up with flat water behind the dams and with difficult portages around two of them. Reportedly there was a 40 feet per mile gradient when the water ran free. There still is some Class II-III
whitewater to be had in the 2.3 miles between the city park put-in and the County T bridge. For a longer trip, a now defunct website described the option of continuing on from T to County C on the Milwaukee River which adds 3.5 miles. This latter piece of water reportedly contains some short rocky shoals but no real whitewater.

**Further Ideas**
Exploring further into the Jackson Marsh than Ron and I did should be a nice wetland paddling experience. I would like to explore the creek from County M down to the Covered Bridge Rd. bridge. My Sierra Club paddling friend Don Lintner told me he likes this section and generally finds it contains enough water although I imagine it can be “scratchy” at times. A final idea would be to start at County T below Cedarburg, paddle the 3.5 miles onto the Milwaukee River and then another 6.5 miles down to Vila Grove Park Landing.

**Conclusion**
Creek provides three kinds of paddling opportunities for Milwaukee area canoeists and kayakers. These include marshland exploration, a whitewater section, and some pleasant “in between” stretches. Low water times and scattered downed trees make it an imperfect stream for those seeking reliably hassle-free experiences.
**Crawfish River**

**Location**
Columbia, Dodge and Jefferson Counties.

**Natural Features**
The Crawfish is a tributary of the Rock River which drains a lowland section of the state punctuated by glacially deposited, tear-shaped hills known as drumlins. It moves slowly across former prairies, oak savannas and eastern hardwood forests. The land is covered by a fertile silt loam so the river banks and stream floor are muddy and rocks are few. Several branches converge near the city of Columbus where the river enters Dodge County. Next it flows through a couple of marshy state wildlife areas. Finally it flows southward and joins the Rock River in the city of Jefferson.

**Human History and Influence**
Aztalan State Park is located on the right bank about 7 miles upstream of Jefferson. Mound-building Native Americans built an agricultural society here and a village which was erected around 1000 AD. Park visitors including river paddlers can see the mounds and a recreated stockade. There are no dams on the navigable portion of the Crawfish but human influence is considerable because of so much land has been cleared for agriculture. The river is muddy and polluted with agricultural chemicals. Sizable towns on its banks include Columbus and Jefferson.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The river is wide and generally navigable from Danville on down though fallen trees can be problematic in the first few miles. Water levels should always be adequate. There are no rapids and the current is slow.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
In 1978 I paddled with a tandem canoe partner from County A to Jefferson which was a distance of 9 ½ miles. We battled strong headwinds and did not consider the trip to be particularly scenic. We did enjoy stopping and exploring Aztalan State Park.

**Further Ideas**
Mike Duncanson described two consecutive sections of the Crawfish in his out-of-print *Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin*. First was the 20 miles from Danville to Hubbleton. Second was the 18 1/2 miles from that village to Jefferson which he subdivided into two sections divided by County A. He mentions two places where the muddy river is interrupted by brief rocky stretches. The first is just downstream of the Dodge County BB bridge and the second is just downstream of the Dodge County GbBridge.

**Conclusion**
The Crawfish River is not especially attractive but several sections are easy to paddle and interesting to explore.
**Des Plaines River**

**Location**
Kenosha County.

**Natural Features**
Begins outside the Racine County community of Union Grove near the Great Lakes Dragway. Flows south into Illinois, through Chicago’s near-in suburbs and on to Joliet where it merges with the Illinois River. A north-south oriented moraine keeps the Des Plaines from breaking through to nearby Lake Michigan. In fact, its waters never reach that big lake. They flow on to the Mississippi instead. This slow-flowing stream drains a land of original prairies, oak savannas and extensive marshes. The stream floor is mostly muddy but there are scattered dolomite rocks.

**Human History and Influence**
Mike Svob writes that the Des Plaines was an early important route linking Lake Michigan with the Mississippi. Its entire corridor is now heavily agricultural and urbanized.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Upstream sections may be obstructed at times by fallen trees and beaver dams but these are not major impediments below I-90/94. There is no whitewater and water levels should usually be adequate. Svob recommends monitoring levels on the USGS website.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
One late summer day in the early 1990s I spent some time solo paddling the Des Plaines. I put-in at the Cty. C bridge and paddled upstream a ways. This endeavor was made difficult not by the current but by thick aquatic vegetation. So I turned around and headed downstream. The vegetation remained thick, the water was unusually low and I feared a slew of fallen trees ahead so I turned around after less than a half hour of paddling. Thus I ended the trip where I had begun and was disappointed with my experience.

**Experiences of Others**
Mike Svob likes the Des Plaines better than I did. I should have given it a better chance and ventured further. His write-up in *Paddling Southern Wisconsin* is quite upbeat about the 6.5 miles from Pleasant Prairie to Russell Road in Illinois. The immediate river corridor is fairly wild because building and agriculture are difficult on the river’s wide and marshy floodplain.

**Further Ideas**
Because the current is so slow, it should be possible to avoid a shuttle like I did by starting a round trip from the Russell Rd. Bridge.

**Conclusion**
The above 6.5 mile day trip should be suitable for most paddlers during most seasons though there will be limbs to dodge and possible short portages. Local paddlers may want to check out the Des Plaines.
Fond du Lac River (East and West Branches, and mainstem)

Location
Fond du Lac County.

Natural Features
Fond Du Lac County is the source of more streams than any other county in Wisconsin. They flow away in all four directions. The West Branch of the Fond Du Lac River originates near the Winnebago County line and flows southeasterly. The East Branch drains lands to the south and west of the city of Fond Du Lac. It flows in a northeasterly direction until it merges with the West Branch in this city to form the main Fond du Lac River which exists for only a mile before it empties into Lake Winnebago.

Rocks are largely lacking as these streams cut through pink loamy soils and lake sediments across a flat landscape. The flatness and lake sediments are explained by the fact that much of this drainage area once lay under Glacial Lake Oshkosh. A smaller version of that lake persists today as Lake Winnebago. El Dorado Marsh is a large wetland complex along the West Branch. Some have dubbed it “The Everglades of the North.”

Human History and Influence
Humans have long inhabited this “foot of the lake” region. This is roughly what Fond du Lac means in French. Ancient Winnebago (Ho Chunk) villages were eventually replaced by white settlements. The city of Fond du Lac was incorporated in 1847 and grew to 15,308 people by 1875. At that time there were 10 sawmills and the city seemed destined to be the major processing center for logs driven down the Wolf River into Lake Winnebago. However it was soon eclipsed by Oshkosh, its neighbor to the north. The river became heavily impacted by rural agriculture and by industries in the city. The Eldorado Marsh was heavily diked and otherwise engineered for human purposes. It now is a State Wildlife area.

Navigability and Difficulty
The branches of the Fond du Lac are smallish in size so most upstream sections are prone to inadequate water and to deadfall obstructions. One author has called the El Dorado Marsh an “unknown canoeist paradise” because it contains several miles of waterways which have reliable water and are easily navigable. I found the downstream sections of both branches within the limits of Fond du Lac to be easily navigable at a low water time in mid-summer.

Trip Ideas: My experience
Within the city limits of Fond du Lac I put-in on the West Branch at the Western Ave. bridge on a mid-July day in 1995. The current was weak enough to allow a rich profusion of blossoming white water lilies on the surface of the muddy water. I stroked my Wildfire past old factories, a huge pile of crushed automobiles and other signs of a neglected urban waterfront.

When I reached the East Fork confluence I turned into the weak head current of that branch and soon encountered two latter day “Huck Finns.” These two teenage boys were standing on a large piece of floating Styrofoam. With long sticks they were propelling their makeshift water craft. I admired their ingenuity and adventuresome spirits. Soon I turned around and paddled down to the U.S. Hwy. 45 bridge on the very short lived Fond du Lac River. There I took out and ran the city streets back to my car.

Experiences of Others
Denny Caneff has run the stretch several times starting in the Eldorado Marsh, passing under Hwy. 23 and carrying on to a small town park on Townline Road with local river aficionado Laura DeGolier. When the water level is right (which is the case in spring, and after at least a 2-inch rain), paddling this piece of water can be
quite exhilarating. It is narrow, has surprisingly steep gradient given the relatively flat terrain, and features some tight turns and deadfalls to sharpen your steering ability.

**Further Ideas**

Local paddlers may wish to explore more of the East Branch in the city. Others may wish to explore the Eldorado Marsh which Greg Marr wrote about in a 1980s article in Silent Sports magazine. He mentioned the high likelihood of seeing many waterfowl among the islands of this shallow flowage. It should also be possible to ascend the West Branch for a ways from the upstream side of the flowage. The access point is the parking lot off Marsh Rd. on the east side of the marsh.

**Conclusion**

The Fond du Lac River and it branches provide a variety of canoeing opportunities. The Eldorado Marsh is reportedly a good place for wetland explorers and for those who like birding.

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*Navigating the West Fork of the Fond du Lac River in thrillingly high water.*
Fox River ("Illinois Fox")

**Location**
Waukesha, Racine and Kenosha counties.

**Natural Features**
The valley of the "Illinois Fox" is oriented in a north-south direction between the hills of the Kettle Moraine to the west and another series of moraines to the east. Those moraines block the Fox from entering Lake Michigan so instead the river flows southward into Illinois and eventually to the Illinois River. Its headwaters are in northern Waukesha County near the Washington County line. In the city of Waukesha it cuts through rocky ground moraine deposits. There is enough gradient here to form some minor rapids.

After that the Fox enters “pitted” glacial outwash terrain where sand and mud prevail and rocks are few. The gradient slows to a crawl as the river meanders slowly past cattails and other wetland plants. Originally this was a land of marshes, prairies and oak savannas. Remnants of these plant communities persist among the farm fields, buildings and roads of this highly developed area.

**Human History and Influence**
Waukesha is the major city on the Fox. Its banks also house the residents of Waterford, Burlington and several smaller towns. A series of minor rapids provided the hydropower for grist mills and sawmills at Waukesha which was founded in the 1830s. In the 1870s this growing city bragged of being the “Saratoga of the West” because several resorts exploited the supposed healing power of springs which fed the Fox. Today there are dams at Waukesha, Waterford and Rochester. The second of these backs up a shallow impoundment known as Tichigan Lake.

The volume of the Fox is “fortified,” if you will, by the effluent of the city of Waukesha. If Waukesha gets its way and secures permission to draw its drinking water from Lake Michigan instead of underground aquifers, it will be required, under the Great Lakes Compact, to send its effluent whence it came – Lake Michigan (likely via the Root River). That would be several million gallons of “base flow” diverted away from the river.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The Fox is reliably navigable downstream of Waukesha County I. The American Whitewater website includes flow information and runnability advice for the rapids in downtown Waukesha. It sites the USGS gauge in Waukesha which can be monitored by potential paddlers. Downstream of Waukesha woody obstructions should not be a problem. Upstream sections are prone to shallowness and deadfall.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
Through much of the 1970s I was training to be a physician in Milwaukee. On occasion I was able to escape the grind with a paddling partner and my Grumman standard 17 foot aluminum canoe. Twice I found myself on the Fox River between Big Bend and Tichigan Lake. My main memories of those outings are cattails, docks and tiny streamside cabins. Also I remember persistently slow and muddy water. We must have passed at least one higher bank with attractive hardwoods because I have a fall color photo print which proves it.

**Experiences of Others**
In the 1980s Hanson and Schluter created a booklet they called a Paddling Guide to Southeastern Wisconsin Streams. It included a “surprisingly rustic 5 mile section” from Springdale Road to Frame Park in Waukesha. The American Whitewater site unenthusiastically describes a .5 mile Class I “whitewater” stretch which develops on a rocky section in downtown Waukesha when the water is high. It starts below the dam at Barstow St. and ends at the Wisconsin Ave. bridge.
Paddlers who put-in at the Highway I bridge will soon enter the Vernon Marsh. This wetland is scenic enough to rate as a “favorite Sunday escape” for my Sierra Club acquaintance Don Lintner. He raves about its excellent birding. I also talked to Don’s friend Scott Enerson. He is another lover of Vernon Marsh where he has spotted black terns, cormorants, yellow-headed blackbirds, and swans. Don told me his marsh outings usually end at the National Ave. bridge near Mukwonago.

Mike Svob’s featured Fox trip is the 14 mile section from the County ES bridge near Mukwonago to the Tichigan Lake public landing on the right past the Bridge Drive bridge. In the out-of-print Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin, Michael Duncanson includes that same trip lengthened by 5 miles to Rochester. He also described the following 14 miles to Hwy. 50. In order to avoid 2 dams and their flowages I would not paddle beyond the Tichigan Lake public landing but I might consider putting in below the Rochester dam to explore the 14 miles to Hwy. 50. This section would include a cruise past a golf course and a tour of Burlington.

**Conclusion**
The “Illinois Fox” is always canoeable downstream of Waukesha County I. Because of dams it is not free-flowing. Most of the stream corridor is not very attractive. The reported exception is Vernon Marsh which I have yet to explore.
**Honey Creek**

**Location**
Racine and Walworth counties.

**Natural Features**
Honey Creek begins at the outlet of a series of three lakes known as the Lauderdale Lakes. These are natural lakes which filled depressions in the “pitted outwash” left behind when the Wisconsin Glacier melted. The creek flows eastward across the level terrain of northeastern Walworth County. Then it turns abruptly southward near the Racine County line. At Burlington, Honey Creek joins the Fox River. Along upstream stretches its banks are higher and drier. Here they hold remnants of the original oak savanna vegetation. Further downstream the banks of Honey Creek become marshier.

**Human History and Influence**
At the outlet from the Lauderville lakes sits the tiny community of Lauderdale. East of that town the creek looks extremely straight in the Wisconsin Gazetteer. Undoubtedly this means that the creek has been artificially channelized to aid in the drainage of agricultural lands. Small impoundments exist at East Troy and Hilburn. Further downstream there are larger dams which create the flowages known as Honey Lake and Echo Lake. The latter sits astride the bustling community of Burlington. A 2002 DNR report states that the Honey Creek-Sugar Creek watershed is heavily impacted by agriculture with 58% of the land devoted to that purpose. Yet the report also states that there remains a fairly high diversity of warm water forage and game fish species. It recommends the planting of vegetation buffer strips to decrease the impact of runoff from farm fields.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Water levels upstream of Honey Lake will be too low at times. Bridge scouting will be needed to determine if there is enough water to float the stream. Fallen trees will be problematic at times but less often downstream of East Troy. Water levels should be reliable and obstacles few on the marshy stretch downstream of Honey Lake.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
My Experience on Honey Creek was very brief. In early April of 2006 I ran Sugar Creek down into Honey Lake where I portaged the dam and continued down Honey Creek to the Spring Prairie Rd. bridge. The Honey Creek portion was wide, marshy, slow and easy to paddle.

**Experiences of Others**
I spoke on the phone about Honey Creek with Arvid Cummings and Don Lintner. Arvid has successfully paddled it starting from the Hilburn millpond when the water was high. Dave Bybee told Don that Honey Creek can be floated starting as far upstream as Bowers Rd. when the water is high.

**Further Ideas**
The current should be weak enough to allow round trip excursions between Echo Lake and Honey Lake.

**Conclusion**
Upper Honey Creek is a paddling option when there is adequate water. I am not sure how scenic or enjoyable such a run would be. Consider paddling down Sugar Creek into Honey Creek. Read about it under my Sugar Creek write-up.
**Kinnickinnic River**

**Location**
Milwaukee County.

**Natural Features**
These days there is not much natural to observe along this totally urban river. Its drainage area is very small but it does make an important contribution to the Milwaukee harbor. Originally this water complex was a swampy estuary edged by wetland vegetation including tamarack trees. Now it begins in the Milwaukee suburb of Greenfield. It flows past houses, factories, and parks. I am not sure how much of the dolomite bedrock it flows over is exposed.

**Human History and Influence**
Milwaukee’s long and rich history began with the Mascoutin and Fox Indians who settled on higher ground next to beds of wild rice. They were followed consecutively by other tribes, French fur traders and Yankees. The estuary was eventually dredged and otherwise altered into a major harbor. Milwaukee and its suburbs expanded along the entire length of the Kinnickinnic, known locally as the “KK.” Much of the river was lined with concrete and degraded by sewers, industry, and polluted runoff. In 2007 this stream made American Rivers’ list of 10 Most Endangered Rivers in the USA. Fortunately, many local organizations and agencies have made restoring this river a priority. Some of its old concrete lining is being removed and the floodplain restored by removing flood-prone houses.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
I am not sure if high water would make sections of the upper river navigable or not. The lower river near the harbor is free of obstructions and plenty deep but commercial watercraft of varying sizes will be encountered. In 2006 the three rivers which enter the Milwaukee harbor became part of a National Urban Water Trail. Access sites are being developed and a map of the trail can be found on the Internet and obtained from the Milwaukee County Parks System. We had access problems when I paddled the Kinnickinnic in the summer of 2006. (See below).

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
With Bob and Carol Diggelman and Ron Rosner I explored part of the lower KK in late July of 2006. We had a trail map which was not too useful because the designated access sites we checked were not ready for use. We somehow managed to find an access near the Becher St. bridge. First we paddled upstream for a while against a slight current. The water was barely deep enough to paddle and was plagued by floating debris. We passed under a couple of bridges and noted the campsites of homeless individuals. Soon we turned around and headed towards the harbor. We passed all manner of working and pleasure boats on the water and docked along the shore.

Most of the shoreline was stabilized by wood and metal structures. We noticed several rusting railroad bridges on swivels. No longer in use, we could see how they were rotated to allow the passage of boats. As the harbor waters widened we witnessed a large ship receiving grain into one of its holds. The downtown skyline loomed ahead and the Hoan Bridge towered above on the right. Mechanical noises emanated from every direction. We hugged the vertical metal sheets along the left bank to keep out of the wind. Closer to downtown we passed under a bridge just as lights began to flash and a horn blared. After we passed under it we looked back to see the bridge split in half with its middle edges rising to allow the passage of a sailboat. The same thing happened after we passed under the next bridge. This one lifted to allow the passage of a coal barge being pushed by a
tugboat. By now we had reached the confluence with the Menomonee River and turned leftward into that stream. (See my entry on that river).

Eventually we turned back to find the landing near where we had spotted a car near the western shore of the Milwaukee River just north of the Young St. bridge. We took out and discovered that the road from this landing to the street was now closed by a locked gate. Fortunately our car was not locked in because it was outside the gate. We are able to crawl under the gate and then lifted our canoes over a section of the high fence which was not topped by barbed wire. We had spent about 2 1/2 hours on the Urban Water Trail. The bulk of our time was on the Kinnickinnic River.

**Further Ideas**
By now there are probably many usable access points to Milwaukee’s Urban Water Trail. There should be multiple options for exploring the lower Kinnickinnic, Menominee and Milwaukee Rivers in the Milwaukee harbor area.

**Conclusion**
It is interesting to observe the workings of a city and its harbor from vantage points like the KK River. There are now maps available on the Internet and elsewhere which contain trip ideas and access points.
Koshkonong Creek

**Location**
Dane and Jefferson counties.

**Natural Features**
Koshkonong Creek drains the rolling agricultural lands of southeastern Dane and southwestern Jefferson counties. It cuts through muddy soils where rocks are rare. Mud plus agriculture equal a murky and polluted stream. Much of the immediate stream corridor is lined by silver maples, black willows and box elder trees. Burr oak remnants of the original oak savanna can also be seen. Koshkonong Creek flows into Lake Koshkonong which was a huge marsh before it became a shallow lake in 1917 after the construction of a dam. The creek’s final two miles are very marshy before it reaches the open water of the lake.

**Human History and Influence**
Several of its headwater feeder streams have been dug into straight agricultural drainage ditches. Polluted runoff consisting of suspended soil, manure, fertilizers, and pesticides has severely degraded this stream. A couple of miles north of Cambridge it drains the farm which was homesteaded my Norwegian immigrant ancestors in 1845. After skirting Cambridge it flows southward to Rockdale where a dam was removed a few years ago after the usual controversy.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Much of this stream is choked with deadfall.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
For me floating a Wisconsin stream is invariably enjoyable. Koshkonong Creek was an exception. I like pulling around a few obstructions but this was ridiculous. The hot, humid day, the deer flies, and the muddy banks added to my displeasure. Repeatedly I was forced to haul my canoe through nettles and poison ivy. After I put in at the Aarback Rd. bridge the coast was fairly clear for a while. Then the trouble started and I wondered if I would ever reach my planned take-out at Busseyville on Hwy. 106. In fact, I never did arrive there because I aborted the trip after about three hours. In desperation I pulled my canoe across a field which led to a road which I jogged along back to my car.

**Conclusion**
I do not recommend this stream but perhaps someone knows of easier sections to explore. Perhaps paddling it upstream a ways from Lake Koshkonong would be fun.
Menomonee River

Location
Washington, Waukesha, and Milwaukee Counties.

Natural Features
This Menomonee River (as opposed to the Menominee [note the different spelling] that forms the border between Wisconsin and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula) begins in southeastern Washington County and flows southeastward to Lake Michigan where it joins the Milwaukee and Kinnickinnic Rivers in the Milwaukee harbor. Before it was dredged, this harbor area was a low delta which contained wild rice. In the city of Menomonee Falls the river plunges through a gorge cut through an ancient reef comprised of Silurian dolomite. Here there are minor rapids and a small waterfall. Continuing downstream streambed rocks are present as the stream marches through the stony debris of glacial terminal moraines.

Human History and Influence
In the 1800s water power was harnessed and the dolomite was mined at Menomonee Falls for the operation of a lime kiln. The river’s entire watershed became heavily urbanized by Milwaukee and its suburbs. The riverway has been beautified somewhat by a parkway which lines it for many miles. Much of the riverbed has been altered by human development including concrete banks, though the city of Milwaukee and the regional sewage district are committed to removing the concrete and re-establishing the river’s flood plain. The river is subject to very rapid runoff after rains and snowmelt when nasty chemicals are channeled into the river. The river’s final mile was once lined by industries which contributed toxic discharges. These industries are now mostly gone, and the lower riverway is being redeveloped as parkland. The Henry Aaron Trail now parallels the Menomonee and connects Miller Park Stadium to downtown trails and to Lake Michigan.

Since 2005 the lower Menomonee, Milwaukee and Kinnickinnic Rivers have comprised the Milwaukee Urban Water Trail. Maps including access points to the Trail are available from the Milwaukee Parks System.

Navigability and Difficulty
This stream has been run at high water times by boaters who are willing to face man-made hazards, fast water with rolling waves and minor rapids. Access points are rare and often illegal to use. Perhaps in the future the Menomonee River will be developed as a more boater-friendly place. From Miller Park to the harbor there should be no difficulties for boaters and plenty of water. Water levels can be monitored on the USGS website since there is a gauge in Menomonee Falls.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In late July of 2006, I joined Bob and Carol Diggelman plus Ron Rosner for a Milwaukee Urban Water Trail experience. We put in on the Kinnickinnic, canoed through the harbor to the mouth of the Menomonee. There we turned upstream and fought a heavy headwind but virtually no current to 16th Street bridge where we turned around. It was interesting to tour an old city and its working harbor in a canoe.

Further Ideas
Perhaps the river can now be accessed near Miller Park. I can imagine a trip down the Menomonee and utilizing the Henry Aaron State Trail as a bicycle shuttle route.
Conclusion
The best option on the Menomonee is to explore it and the other two rivers on the Milwaukee Urban Water Trail.
Milwaukee River (mainstem)

Location
Fond du Lac, Washington, Ozaukee and Milwaukee counties.

Natural Features
The Milwaukee River arises high atop the Niagara Escarpment about 6 miles north of Campbellsport. From an elevation of about 1050 feet, it drops southward and eastward to an elevation of 590 feet where it empties into Lake Michigan. This stream is profoundly impacted by glacial geology as descends past the lakes and forests of the Kettle Moraine. After that it encounters a series of moraines which push it in different directions. Boulders and outcrops of dolomite bedrock dot the river and line the shores. At times this bedrock comprises the stream floor. A dolomite ledge forms a small waterfall at Estabrook Park (on which a dam was built) in Milwaukee. Shale is also exposed along the river in that park. Like many other southeastern Wisconsin streams nearing Lake Michigan, the Milwaukee is forced by a north-south oriented moraine into a southerly route for several miles before it finally breaks eastward into Lake Michigan.

Before settlement the entire watershed of the Milwaukee was thickly forested by a variety of hardwood trees and scattered white cedar groves. Though these have been much reduced, river travelers will still find stands of hickory, oak, sugar maple and walnut. Maple-beech forests can also still be found.

Human History and Influence
Ancient Indians lived and hunted this river’s shores as early as 7000 BC. Effigy mound-building people inhabited the area from around 200 AD until the 1600s. One of the mounds they built near Waubeka is a 334 foot long representation of a panther.

Native peoples long inhabited the lands around the mouth of the Milwaukee River. They harvested the wild rice which grew there in the marsh. White settlers established a trading post here in 1795. Reportedly the name of the river and of the city was taken from the Indian words for “good land” or “great council place.” Numerous other communities grew up along the banks of the river. Often they were built where small rapids provided water power for mills. Many dams were erected too, though many of now been removed creating a more free flowing river and the attendant benefits to fish and to paddlers.

Agriculture and increasing urbanization have also impacted the river. Numerous parks now grace its shores including the River Edge Nature Center at Newburg which is helping to preserve a particularly beautiful stretch of the river near that town. In Milwaukee the river was once terribly abused but is now being reclaimed for river walkers, paddlers and other river lovers. Until 1857 its mouth at Lake Michigan was located a half mile south of the current location. Because of a large obstructing sand bar a straight short cut to the lake was dug that year. In fact, the entire harbor area was markedly altered by dredging and construction. In 2005 the lower Milwaukee, Kinnickinnic, and Menomonee Rivers were officially designated the Milwaukee Urban Water Trail. Access points and improvements on the Milwaukee River portion are being developed starting at Mequon and continuing downstream to the harbor. A map of this water trail can be found online at mkeriverkeeper.org.

Navigability and Difficulty
Mike Svob (see below) reports that the Milwaukee becomes canoeable below the dam at Kewaskum. Many sections are wide and rocky so that navigation becomes difficult at low water levels. There is a USGS gauge at Cedarburg which can be checked on their website. Svob suggests that shallow shoals can become tough to navigate when the water falls below 300 cfs at that site. River reading skills and beginner whitewater skills will come in handy through rocky sections. The small waterfall in Estabrook Park probably qualifies as a Class II
drop. The American Whitewater Website gives flow information and runnability advice on a short section at Grafton and another one in the City of Milwaukee

**Trip Ideas: My experience**

I lived in the Milwaukee area for several years in the early and mid-1970s during my medical school and residency training. In 1975, Mary Jo Martin and I explored River Hills from the vantage point of my Grumman aluminum canoe. We put in at the Brown Deer Road bridge and took out after the dam in Ketzsch Park. It was fascinating to observe the palatial homes and their landscaping. With care we identified and portaged the low head dam in the above park because we had read it was a dangerous one which had claimed lives.

My second canoeing experience on the Milwaukee River was a brief excursion during a September drought in 1996. Pat Christopherson and I slid my Mad River Explorer into the current at the end of River Park Rd. southwest of Waubeka. We hopped aboard and found a surprisingly wide and clear river. Extensive waving beds of river plants were clearly visible underneath but did not impede our progress. After the North Branch merged from the left our paddling task became more difficult because the riverbed became shallower and rockier. We were frustrated enough to abort the trip when we reached River Drive on river left. From that point we walked to my awaiting bicycle at the west edge of Waubeka. The small flowage behind the dam there no longer exists since the dam was removed in the year 2000.

**Experiences of Others**

I highly recommend Mike Svob as a source of ideas on how to explore the Milwaukee River. His *Paddling Southern Wisconsin* was originally published in 2001. In it he describes trips on most sections of the river from Kewaskum to Milwaukee. In 2009 he wrote an article in *Midwest Silent Sports* which described some of his favorite sections of the river and provided an update on dam removals. The American Whitewater website covers two sections with some whitewater. The first is the Class I-II 2.7 mile “Grafton Dells” between Bridge St. and Cty. T in the village of Grafton. The second one is the 3.7 mile Class I-II (III) section between the Hampton Ave. dam and the former site of the North Ave. dam.

Denny Caneff recommends his organization’s annual “Milky Moonlight in Milwaukee” paddling event, sponsored by the River Alliance of Wisconsin and sister organization Milwaukee Riverkeeper. A full moon night in July or August is selected for an extraordinary urban paddling experience. The round-trip paddle starts and ends at the Milwaukee Rowing Club (permission granted for this event only; don't use their docks without it) as dusk descends on the downtown area. Paddlers see the full moon rising over Lake Michigan, framed by the Hoan Bridge before heading back upstream against an almost non-existent current.
Conclusion
With adequate water, many sections of the Milwaukee are excellent for canoeing. Often this river way is surprisingly scenic.

The Milwaukee River, from downtown Milwaukee to its confluence with Lake Michigan, makes for a superb urban paddling experience.
Location
Sheboygan, Fond du Lac and Washington counties.

Natural Features
The East Branch of the Milwaukee River is unique in that it follows the heights of the Northern Kettle Moraine. One headwater branch begins near the Parnell Esker in far western Sheboygan County. The other one begins a few miles farther north and flows through Long Lake before joining the other branch a few miles north of Mauthe Lake. The East Branch then flows through that kettle lake and surrounding marshlands before it drains higher banks on its way to the main Milwaukee River near Kewaskum. The Kettle Moraine is classified as an “interlobate” moraine deposited between the Lake Michigan and Green Bay Lobes of the Wisconsin Glacier when these lobes were melting at the end of the Ice Age. The river’s stream course reveals rocks derived from the underlying dolomite bedrock as well as erratics carried down from northern Wisconsin, Upper Michigan and Canada. Plant communities along the East Branch include the following types of forests: red oak-mixed, sugar maple-basswood, floodplain, and swamps. There is also an extended shallow marsh around Mauthe Lake.

Human History and Influence
Fortunately, the beautiful Kettle Moraine landscape has been adored by many people for a long time. Much of the region and the river corridor are protected by the Kettle Moraine State Forest. The nearby nationally designated Ice Age Trail provides additional protections. Near Dundee the river’s banks are included within an Ice Age Scientific Reserve. The Henry S. Ruess Ice Age Interpretive Center is also located nearby. A small dam at the outlet of Mauthe Lake holds that lake at a consistent level. The same may be true for Long Lake, but I am not sure. There is a dam and small mill pond at New Fane.

Navigability and Difficulty
Most of the East Branch is too narrow and tree choked for easy navigation. Low water will also be a frequent problem. An easy paddling section is described below.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I explored a beautiful boggy section of this river in July of 2005. First I had viewed the river from Youth Camp Rd. bridge and decided it looked impossibly small and shallow. Then I drove to the Mauthe Lake boat landing parking lot and walked down the Tamarack Circle Trail for a look at the river. There I walked onto the footbridge which spans the river over a one foot high outflow dam built with rocks. The marshy river downstream looked appealing and slow-currented enough to consider a round trip with no need for a shuttle. So I put my Bell Wildfire in below the dam and proceeded downstream.

The water was clear enough to easily see several carp and a 20 inch northern pike. The marshy river was lovely and easy to paddle because it was plenty wide with no fallen trees. Hundreds of white lilies were blooming on the slack waters next to shore. Blossoming meadowsweets graced the low banks. Green ash trees were the dominant tree beyond the immediate grassy corridor. I spotted a number of great blue herons and several American coots. Veerys were the songbird of the day. Those lovely white lilies were perfectly mirrored in the still water. After about an hour and a half the stream was narrowing and the green ash trees were closing in. When I neared one which had fallen across the stream course I decided to turn around and paddle back to where I had started. The current was consistently weak so this was easy to accomplish.
Experiences of Others
Frank Piraino explored the same section as I paddled but extended it to a longer trip from both ends. He wrote about his adventure in *Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin*. He put in above Mauthe Lake at the County SS bridge. Initially the river was “very narrow, shallow and brushy, but possible.” Then he paddled across Mauthe Lake and portaged the small dam at the outlet. He mentions a “brief fast rocky stretch above Youth Camp Rd.” That was the place that looked so impassible the day I viewed it. He took-out at the Mill Rd. bridge after portaging the dam there on the right side.

Further Ideas
After paddling from Mauthe Lake to Youth Camp Rd., Mill Rd. or County S it would be fun to walk or jog back to Mauthe Lake along the Ice Age Trail which parallels the river a few hundred yards away on the river’s east side.

Conclusion
I highly recommend paddling the beautiful marshy stretch of the East Branch of the Milwaukee River downstream of Mauthe Lake. There should always be enough water there.
**Milwaukee River (North Branch)**

**Location**
Sheboygan Washington and Ozaukee counties.

**Natural Features**
Three small creeks join in southwestern Sheboygan County to form the North Branch of the Milwaukee River. Then that stream flows southward across glacially deposited ground moraine and outwash terrain until it joins the main Milwaukee River two miles west of Waubeka. Originally this landscape was a southern hardwood forest. Streamside bottomland trees persist but most of the surrounding land has been cleared for agriculture.

**Human History and Influence**
Farms but no human settlements encroach upon the river. A Sheboygan County tributary known as Melius Creek begins as a spring where the Kettle Moraine Springs Fish Hatchery is located.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
I paddled the furthest downstream section on a high water day which made for easy paddling. I did pull over two deadfalls and suspect that navigation is significantly more difficult when the water is low.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
On April 10, 2006 I spent an hour and a half paddling from the Trading Post Trail bridge to a roadside place I chose along River Rd. near Waubeka on the main Milwaukee River. The water was high and spilled into the lowlands of which there were many because this is mainly a bottomland section of the river. After the County M bridge the wooded corridor grew wider and wilder and I saw numerous wood ducks and Canada geese. The banks elevated and the current increased over a rocky stream floor downstream of the confluence with Milwaukee River. The bike ride back to my car was easy and pleasant.

**Further Ideas**
At high water it should be possible to explore this branch further upstream.

**Conclusion**
A reasonable option for local paddlers when the water is high enough.
Montello River

Location
Marquette County.

Natural Features
The Montello River drains a portion of northwest and central Marquette County. Several of its headwater streams begin in pitted glacial outwash country where the soils are sandy and small kettle lakes are common. The river descends into the Fox River Valley with its flat terrain and sediments which once lay beneath Glacial Lake Oshkosh. At the city of Montello, the river skirts an unusual feature before it joins the Fox River. That town straddles a granite monodnock, a remnant of an ancient mountain range. Before settlement the trees of this region were mostly oak savanna.

Human History and Influence
This region is now a mix of farmland, woodlands and lakes which attract tourists. Two upstream tributary dams have created Lawrence Lake and Harris Pond. A dam at Montello backs up Lake Montello. High quality reddish monument stone was quarried at Montello for about 100 years until operations ceased in 1977. Both Grant’s tomb and Custer’s tomb in the Black Hills were fashioned from this stone. The old quarry pit in downtown Montello had been transformed into an attractive park. Water fills the pit and is pumped up to create three waterfalls which cascade over granite walls. A marker at the west edge of downtown along Hwy. 23 notes the presence of an unusually large cottonwood tree. “The biggest tree in Wisconsin” measures 23.3 feet in girth and 138 ft. in height.

Navigability and Difficulty
I found the Montello to be choked with fallen trees. There is a USGS gauge at Montello which can be monitored at their website.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In July of 2002 I tackled the Montello. First I left locked my bicycle near the last bridge upstream of Lake Montello. Then I drove to the Evergreen Rd. bridge less than three miles upstream. The fact that this short trip took over two hours indicates how rough it was to navigate. In fact, I initially turned around after 100 yards and returned to where I had put in because of the maze of downed trees I saw ahead. Something made me change my mind. Perhaps it was a masochistic urge. After about 2 dozen portages I quit counting and resigned myself to spending just as much time out of my canoe as in it. At least the weather was nice, there were no bothersome insects, the water was clean and the stream floor was sandy rather than muddy. I passed beneath a large flock of turkey vultures perched atop several trees. They were ready in case I did not survive this ordeal. I persevered, finished the trip, and rode my bike back to the car.

Further Ideas
Perhaps it would be easier and more fun to explore the Montello between that last bridge and Lake Montello. The distance is only about a mile. An even shorter trip would be one through the city of Montello to the Fox River confluence.

Conclusion
I do not recommend the trip I took because of all the deadfall.
Mullet River

Location
Fond du Lac and Sheboygan counties.

Natural Features
The Mullet River begins in eastern Fond du Lac County marshes. It cuts through the Kettle Moraine in the Greenbush area. Continuing eastward it merges with the Sheboygan River before that stream empties into Lake Michigan. The underlying bedrock is dolomite which contributes rocks and gravel to the streambed. Before settlement most of the Mullet’s drainage area was forested by hemlocks and beech trees.

Human History and Influence
The Mullet passes Greenbush where the Old Wade House is maintained by the Wisconsin State Historical Society. This dwelling was originally built as an inn along the oak plank road which linked Fond du Lac with Sheboygan. A millpond and sawmill have been restored at the site. After it leaves the forests of the Kettle Moraine State Forest the Mullet drains many dairy farms. It flows through the city of Plymouth where there is a dam and mill pond. At least two more dams stop the river before it merges with the Sheboygan River in Sheboygan Falls.

Navigability and Difficulty
The Mullet features rocky riffles and a few Class I and II rapids. This small stream presents potential deadfall and shallow water problems. Bridge scouting will likely be needed to gauge water levels. The difficulties I experienced on the river were minimal. I was surprised to find the Mullet River on the American Whitewater website. They recommend the USGS reading on nearby Otter Creek as a guide to runnability.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I spent two hours on the Mullet on April 10, 2006. It turned out to be a nicer trip than I expected. First I left my bicycle at the Old County PP bridge in Sheboygan Falls. Then I drove to the Sumac Rd. bridge where I put in. The river was narrow with a fairly swift current. Only two deadfall obstructions required portages. The water level was perfect that day but I am sure it is often too low. Several wood ducks took flight when I invaded their territory. I noticed an attractive variety of trees and other plants. The second half of the trip was less scenic because there were more farms and also increasing signs of urban development. The current gradually came to a stop as I approached a small dam which required a portage. From there it was less than a mile to the take out.

Experiences of Others
The Mullet is listed at the American Whitewater website. Described there is a fast and shoal 2.34 mile stretch on an upstream section between Camp Evelyn and Woodland Rd. The writer warns of footbridges and snags and rates the section Class I-II.

Further Ideas
Perhaps there are other upstream sections which are navigable and fun to paddle.

Conclusion
The Mullet River is a small stream paddling option when there is enough water. It has scenic sections and even some mild whitewater.
Neenah Creek

**Location**
Adams, Marquette, and Columbia Counties

**Natural Features**
There are low hills nearby which are typically forested with oak trees. The headwaters of Neenah Creek drain parts of a terminal moraine located a few miles northwest of Oxford. This moraine was deposited at western edge of the Green Bay Lobe of the Wisconsin Glacier. Nearby are numerous small kettle lakes which occupy depressions which filled with water where ice chunks melted. South of Oxford Neenah Creek drops into marshy lowland along most of its journey to the Fox. The stream floor are mostly sandy and rock free. The current varies from slow to medium and the water quite clear. The marshes of Marquette County support the state's highest population of sand hill cranes.

**Human History and Influence**
These days the drainage area of Neenah Creek includes farmland, woodland and marshes. The only significant creek side community is Oxford where there is a dam which forms Neenah Lake. The South Branch of Neenah Creek is a major tributary. It is impacted by a dam and a town called Briggsville.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Most of Neenah Creek is runnable all year. Deadfall obstructions are rare. Rapids are totally lacking.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
In 2002 I devised a semi-circular creek adventure which started on O'Keefe Creek and ended on the South Branch of Neenah Creek. The bulk of my journey was on Neenah Creek itself. First I left my bicycle locked to a tree at Briggsville near the bridge over the South Branch. Then I drove to the County A bridge and put in there. I did so with some trepidation because of “No Trespassing, Game Farm” signs. Feeling like a criminal I lifted my Wildfire over a barbed wire fence and put onto 12 feet wide O'Keefe Creek.

For the first half mile I dodged rocks and skirted a prominent hill on creek right. After I paddled under the Third Ave. bridge I entered a treeless marsh. The creek wound tortuously and slowly towards Neenah Creek which I reached 45 minutes later. Neenah Creek was much wider and clearer than O'Keefe Creek had been but its banks were similarly marshy. Inside turns were typically shallow and sandy bottomed whereas the outside turns were deeper with mucky bottoms. At this mid-July low water time I usually needed to hug the outside corners to find sufficient water depth. Since it was a warm day I stopped for a swim from a sandy beach. The water was refreshingly clear and clean.

Soon I was back on the water chasing carp in all directions. I also spotted two sizeable largemouth bass. A fisherman I spoke with told me he had caught a five-pounder the previous day. Kingfishers, green herons and multitudes of red-winged blackbirds darted in every direction. Sandhill cranes also made their presence known. Before I reached the Hwy. 23 bridge I skirted a burr oak covered hill on river left. After that bridge the creek narrowed and black willow trees leaned across the stream from both banks. A couple of brief portages were required. Less than two hours after entering Neenah Creek I spotted the South Branch merging from river right. It surprised me to see tamarack trees lining this branch beyond the immediate grassy corridor. I turned up this tributary and soon passed under the Third Ave. bridge. The tamaracks vanished and I found myself in a vast, treeless marsh. I could see Briggsville in the distance but it took 45 minutes of hard paddling to reach that community. Shallow water slowed my progress. I even resorted to grabbing my spare paddle and using its
handle end to pole my way forward. When I finally reached my bike it was only a three mile ride back to where I had put in on O’Keefe Creek.

On another occasion in 1984 I canoed a downstream section of Neenah Creek with a tandem partner and several others. I remember being in a vast marsh but few other details.

**Experiences of Others**
I recall that Joan Redman used to lead Sierra Club trips down Neenah Creek but I never joined in. My friend fellow Sierra Club paddler and Brigsville resident Bob Donner has also explored Neenah Creek. I got the idea of exploring the South Branch from him. Frank Piraino also explored Neenah Creek and wrote about it in his *Small River Adventures of Wisconsin*. He put in at the County I bridge on the outskirts of Oxford and took out about 4 hours later at the County P bridge. The first mile to Hwy. D was difficult because of various obstructions. He carried his canoe around a few logs and ducked carefully under several foot bridges. Perhaps he wishes he had put in at the Hwy. D bridge.

**Further Ideas**
I can imagine a long day trip from the County D bridge to the first available take-out on the Fox River.

**Conclusion**
Neenah Creek is appealing because of its clean water and small size. Much of it is easy to paddle even for novices. And it is runnable even when the water is quite low. I liked my circle route which included the three different creeks. Those who try this trip should probably avoid that “No Trespassing” sign by putting in at the Third Ave. bridge instead of the County A bridge.
Neenah Creek (South Branch)

See Neenah Creek entry
Oconomowoc River

Location
Washington, Waukesha and Jefferson Counties.

Natural Features
The Oconomowoc River drains the eastern slopes of the Kettle Moraine hills near its headwaters in southwestern Washington County. It receives water from Holy Hill which at 1335 feet is the state’s highest peak. Through most of its course this stream drains pitted outwash deposits left behind when the Wisconsin Glacier melted. The pits are now lakes and the Oconomowoc River flows through several of them. The outwash here is so deep and porous that it can absorb large volumes of precipitation. Consequently, flooding along the Oconomowoc River is rare and always minor. After it crosses the Jefferson County line the river leaves the lakes behind and soon merges with the Rock River.

Human History and Influence
Holy Hill is famous for its Romanesque church whose spires can be seen from many miles away. The city of Oconomowoc is an attractive and historic town with several beautiful lakes linked by the river. It first prospered as a lumbering city and later as a resort city. By the late 1880s numerous wealthy industrialists had built lavish mansions along the shores of the lakes. Further upstream several miles of the river shoreline are included in a unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest. A dam just downstream of the County Q bridge creates a small impoundment. Lac LaBelle in the City of Oconomowoc is kept at a constant level by a dam at its outlet.

Navigability and Difficulty
Upstream marshy sections are usually easy to navigate. Downstream sections are narrow and include shallow sections. From Lac LaBelle to the Rock River the Oconomowoc will usually have enough water. Deadfall obstructions are infrequent.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In mid-July of 1989 I solo-canoeed a marshy stretch of the Oconomowoc. I put-in at the County F bridge in Jefferson County and took out at the next bridge which was West River Road.

In mid-summer of 2002 I was back on the river with my buddy Jim Hine from medical school days. At the County Q bridge on the Washington-Waukesha County line we found a public landing and slid my We-No-Nah Sundowner into the calm waters behind a dam located just south of the bridge. Early in the trip the only shoreline plants were cattails. As the waterway narrowed we detected a slight head current we were beginning to see a greater variety of wetland plants. We paddled upstream for about three miles to Lowes Lake. Soft stem bulrushes and giant reed grasses grew along this lake’s shores. Homes and other buildings were totally absent. We found the Oconomowoc River inlet along the north shore and were able to ascend it for about 10 minutes before shallow water and rocks forced us to turn around. On our way back to the put-in we were passed by several small motor boats. We spent a total of 2 ½ hours on the river.

Experiences of Others
The UW Extension sponsors a website called Mid Kettle Moraine canoe/kayak routes. They list a 4 mile trip from Oconomowoc Lake to Fowler Lake. Also included at this website is the Monches to Lowes Lake section of the Oconomowoc River. This is the same route Jim and I took in 2002. Those who wish to explore the latter section might wish to combine it with a hike on the nearby Ice Age Trail.
The Miles Paddled website includes a 15 mile canoe trail from South Concord Rd. to the Jefferson County P bridge on the Rock River. Mike Svob describes essentially the same section in Paddling Southern Wisconsin. He shortens it to 11.2 miles by taking out at North Shore Drive bridge on the Oconomowoc River.

Denny Caneff, executive director of the River Alliance of Wisconsin, likes to paddle the Oconomowoc. He feels the current is weak enough on the lower sections (downstream of Oconomowoc) to paddle up and down the river obviating the need for a shuttle.

**Conclusion**

The Monches to Lowes Lake section is an easy round trip section. The lower Oconomowoc River is a reasonably attractive small stream. Obstructions are few and water levels are usually adequate.
O’Keefe Creek

**Location**
Marquette County.

See Neenah Creek entry in this section.
Onion River

Location
Sheboygan County.

Natural Features
Two small creeks join to form the Onion River about 3 miles southwest of Plymouth. From there the river flows southeastward for many miles before it abruptly turns northward. At that point a major moraine blocks its path to Lake Michigan and causes the change in direction. In Sheboygan Falls it joins the Sheboygan River which soon empties into Lake Michigan. The Onion cuts through red clay soils past lands which were thickly forested before settlement. Remnants persist of the original northern hardwood-hemlock forest whose indicator species are sugar maples, basswoods, yellow birches, hemlocks and beech trees. The Onion flows quickly at times over dolomite rocks, but true rapids are lacking.

Human History and Influence
Most of the Onion’s drainage area was long ago cleared for agriculture. It flows through the tiny villages of Waldo and Hingham where small dams still form mill ponds. Another town called Gibbsville has a cheese factory. I suspect it discharges some wastes into the river. Sheboygan Falls is an attractive and historic town with 7,700 inhabitants.

Navigability and Difficulty
Snowmelt or recent rains are needed to supply enough water. Bridge scouting will be needed to determine this. Some sections will be deadfall-prone but I encountered none on the stretch I paddled.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I spent a delightful hour on the Onion River on April 10, 2006. First I locked my bicycle near the County EE bridge in Sheboygan Falls. Then I drove to Our Town Rd. bridge a couple of miles south of town. Class I riffles started right at the put-in. For the first 15 minutes they were nearly continuous. After that they were intermittent but still frequent. They were fun to negotiate in my Bell Wildfire canoe. High riverside bluffs were frequent and held birches and pines among other trees. The water was clouded by suspended clay sediments. I saw numerous wood ducks and mallards. One interesting aspect of the trip was a long stretch through a golf course. It followed an especially tortuous path past several fairways. Many of the banks had been rip rapped with rocks.

Further Ideas
With enough water upstream sections of the Onion might be navigable and nice.

Conclusion
My brief excursion on the Onion was a delightful surprise. It is an appealing option for local paddlers who can catch it with enough water.
**Ox Creek**

**Location**
Marquette County.

**Natural Features**
This may be the smallest drainage system of any stream I have paddled in Wisconsin. It begins in central Marquette County and, after about 5 miles; it enters the Buffalo Lake section of the Fox River. About midway it flows through a natural lake called Lake Emery. Before settlement this was oak savanna country. Oaks are still a prominent species in the forests of this drainage area.

**Human History and Influence**
Ox Creek's drainage area contains both farms and woodlands. Lake Emery is very small but has a boat landing and a few lakeshore dwellings. A dam at Montello creates a higher and more consistent water level on Buffalo Lake. As a result, water is backed up unnaturally into the lowest reaches of Ox Creek.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Paddling upstream from Buffalo Lake creates no problems until the stream narrows drastically.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
In late summer of 2003 I explored Ox Creek. My Sierra Club friend Bob Donner had suggested I check it out. I put in by the County C bridge though I could have lengthen the trip by using the nearby boat landing on Buffalo Lake. It was easy to paddle upstream against a weak head current. I plunged my paddle into the stream floor to determine its consistency. The blade easily pierced a thick muck. Cattails lined the shore. I reached a thick mat of floating vegetation which was difficult to paddle through. But I persevered and soon entered a more natural-looking and scenic section of the marsh. The bottom became sandy and the cattails were replaced by rushes and sedges. Scores of small fishes darted through the water and hoards of damselflies weaved through the air. Around one corner I surprised two sand hill cranes standing in shallow water. They croaked at me and quickly took flight.

One half hour into the trip the creek narrowed and alders began to close in. Despite a stronger head current and shallow water I was able to ascend the creek for another five minutes. Then I gave up and abandoned my craft. I left it behind and sloshed upstream on foot for an additional 25 minutes. Eventually I reached a barbed wire fence and saw signs of cattle. I squeezed under that one I soon reached a second fence and a "No Trespassing" sign. Being a law abiding citizen I dutifully turned around. Back on the water in my canoe I was witness to something special. A huge snapping turtle swam alongside my canoe and then underneath to the other side. I watched it with fascination through the clear water.

**Conclusion**
This very small stream provides a brief but nice wetland exploration opportunity. I doubt anyone else will abandon their canoe and proceed upstream on foot like I did.
**Pewaukee River**

**Location**
Waukesha County.

**Natural Features**
Pewaukee Lake is the largest of the lakes west of Milwaukee which filled “pits” left behind when ice chunks melted at end of the last Ice Age. The lake is spring-fed, but water is also added by two small inflow streams. The Pewaukee River is the lake’s outflow stream. It flows east for around 8 miles before it joins the Fox River. This is the Fox River which flows southward into Illinois. Its better known namesake to the north flows into Green Bay. Before European settlers arrived this was an oak savanna vegetation zone. Sands, gravels, dolomite rocks and loamy soils take turns comprising the stream floor.

**Human History and Influence**
Potawatomi Indians preceded European settlers along the shores of Lake Pewaukee. Today’s Clark House Museum is housed in a former stage coach inn which linked Milwaukee with Watertown along Watertown Plank Road in the mid-1800s. Because of its lake the city of Pewaukee became a resort town. Nowadays it qualifies as a Milwaukee suburb. A timed race down the Pewaukee River has been held every May since 1973. The eight mile race starts at Hammel Machine Products in Pewaukee and ends on the Fox River at Frame Park.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Slow upstream sections are usually navigable. The rocky final descent to the Fox River will often be too shallow. Gauge information and runnability information for the whitewater section is available on the American Whitewater website.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
I spent about 25 minutes on the Pewaukee River late one April day in 2006. It was easy to access the river near the Pewaukee Lake outlet directly behind the “Old Town” development. As usual, it was interesting to see a town from the river perspective. The water was quite high from recent rains, but I suspect that this “in town” stretch usually has enough water for a viable run. I took out at the Wisconsin Ave. bridge and walked the shuttle back to my car.

**Experiences of Others**
The American Whitewater website describes a 1.6 mile Class I-II fast water stretch which can be good practice for whitewater beginners. The put-in is Hwy J and the take-out is Hwy F on the Fox River in Waukesha. Before it disappeared from the Internet the Midwest River Inventory covered the same section in more detail. Its author mentioned two high water hazards. One was a low auto bridge requiring head ducking and the other was a railroad bridge requiring the same maneuver.

**Further Ideas**
It makes sense to paddle all the way to downtown Waukesha on the Fox after starting somewhere on the Pewaukee River.

**Conclusion**
With enough water the Pewaukee River is an option for paddlers who like to explore small rivers or who like to participate in races. Its final stretch features some easy whitewater.
Pigeon River

Location
Manitowoc and Sheboygan counties.

Natural Features
Two major headwater branches begin in southern Manitowoc County kettle lakes. Picking up more branches this Pigeon River flows south and east into Sheboygan County and eventually reaches Lake Michigan at the northern outskirts of the city of Sheboygan. Remnants of the original conifer-hardwood forest remain. The river descends over dolomite bedrock outcrops and across sand and gravel moraine deposits. In its final mile the current stops in an estuary of Lake Michigan.

Human History and Influence
The Sheboygan area was first permanently settled by whites in 1844. Much of the forest was cleared back then for timber and farms. Howards Grove and Millersville occupy the Pigeon’s banks as do the northern outskirts of Sheboygan. Golfers face water hazards created by the river at a course on the west edge of that city. The Pigeon River Environmental Park encompasses both sides of the river near the city’s northern city limits. Totaling nearly 300 acres this park features nature trails and hiking trails.

Navigability and Difficulty
The Pigeon will often be too shallow. The river should be scouted from bridges before runs are attempted. The stretch I explored was deadfall free but upstream sections will likely include deadfall obstructions. Minor rapids and riffles will be encountered.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I spent less than an hour exploring the Pigeon River from the Hwy. 42 bridge to Lake Michigan. In that brief time I had close encounters with hundreds of fish. They lingered along the rocky riffles and repeatedly bumped my canoe when they fled. I came upon a fisherman who was fishing without success for trout. He confirmed my suspicion that my encounters had been with suckers. I suspect I had been interrupting their spawning activities. The series of riffles were fun to run in my Wildfire. There was just enough water to keep me from scraping the rocks.

The Pigeon’s wooded shores were attractive and produced no deadfall obstructions. I floated under three bridges including the Lakeshore Drive bridge which was the last one before the Lake Michigan. Though I knew I should stop at that bridge my curiosity caused me to paddle on to the mouth of the river. I faced a dilemma because there was no good place to take out. One option was to paddle southward along the high bluff of the Lake Michigan shore. Eventually I would have found a suitable take out spot. Instead I trespassed onto private land on river right at the mouth of the river. I climbed an elaborate wooden staircase to the top of the bluff. At the top was a mansion with a nicely landscaped back yard. There seemed to be no one around, so I descended the stairs to retrieve my canoe and gear. I carried both past the house and no one caught me in the act. Then I crossed the street and hid my equipment in a grove of spruce trees. Finally I jogged the city streets back to my car. Starting out, I glanced to my left and noticed the yard I had crossed was posted with a “No Trespassing” sign.

Further Ideas
DON’T TAKE OUT WHERE I DID!! Better to take out at the Lakeshore Drive bridge. You can still paddle to the mouth and then easily paddle back to that bridge because there is no current. Most will desire a longer trip
and should be able to find access points further upstream. The Wisconsin DNR website has a map of Pigeon River access points.

**Conclusion**

With adequate water this Pigeon River is a neat little stream to explore and it includes an estuary.
Pike River

Location
Racine and Kenosha counties.

Natural Features
This Pike River’s South Branch flows northward from south central Kenosha County and joins the North Branch which flows southward from south central Racine County. After these branches join, the main Pike River flows eastward for several miles. Along the way it breaks through a moraine and briefly drops at a steep rate of 20 feet per mile. Then it meets another moraine which forces it southward for about 4 miles before it breaks through to Lake Michigan. These moraines contribute rocks which produce some minor rapids. Much of the area’s original vegetation was prairie but a corridor of trees lines most of the river.

Human History and Influence
Evidence of local native cultures date back to the Ice Age. An unusual piece of oak was found floating nearby on Lake Michigan in 1997. Radiocarbon tests identified it as part of an 1850 year old dugout canoe. Pike is a translation of the original Potawatomi Indian word for the river. New Englanders who first settled in the area in 1835 used that word to name both the river and the settlement which was became Kenosha. By the early 1900s that city was a major builder of automobiles. Farming practices and urbanization influences have significantly degraded the river.

Navigability and Difficulty
Except its final two or three miles the Pike presents a gauntlet of hazards. High water is needed as is the skill and willingness to face the hazards mentioned below. I was surprised to find this river described at the American Whitewater website. They rate the whitewater section as mostly Class I with a little Class II. Consult their website to determine if water levels are sufficient which only will be the case after heavy rains or a big snowmelt. The slow section I explored near the mouth of the river is another story. In this mostly estuary section, there will always be enough water and a paucity of obstructions.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In September 1996 I explored the lower Pike in my solo freestyle Ladybug canoe. My outing covered the two miles from the Hwy. 32 bridge to the park at the mouth of the river in downtown Kenosha. There were not many students or faculty around as I wound through the campus of Carthage College. The few people who did see me were probably unaccustomed to seeing a canoe on their little stream. Box elder trees grew along the shores as did one shapely bur oak tree. Joe-Pye weeds and Black-eyed susans were blossoming. After slightly more than an hour my journey ended and I jogged the 2.5 miles back to my car.

Experiences of Others
The American Whitewater Website describes the 4.5 miles from Petrifying Springs Park to Cty as being fraught with hazards including multiple snags, low bridges, and 3 foot dam, a possible cable, etc. The reward, with enough water, will be a few waves and some minor rapids.

Conclusion
Gluttons for punishment with whitewater skills and quick boat exiting abilities may wish to tackle the upper Pike when the water is high. A better idea for most will be a repeat of the easy and brief trip I took.
Puchyan River

**Location**
Green Lake County.

**Natural Features**
Green Lake is a large body of water which happens to be Wisconsin’s deepest lake at 237 feet. It gets its water from groundwater seepage and from several small feeder creeks which originate as springs. These factors create an unusually clear body of water. The Puchyan River drains Green Lake from its northeastern corner. From the outlet it runs for about 8 miles before it empties into the Fox River. The river’s upper reaches were originally oak savanna but the lower river corridor has always been marshy. These wetlands were formerly inundated by Glacial Lake Oshkosh.

**Human History and Influence**
Agriculture and human development pressures both strongly influence the river. Locals boast that the nation’s first resort west of Niagara Falls was built on the shores of Green Lake in 1867. The lake is still a prime resort area.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
There is often enough water to run the Puchyan but some sections become uncomfortably shallow after prolonged dry spells. Water levels can be checked from bridges or by monitoring levels at the river’s USGS Website. Whitewater is totally lacking and the current is slow. Trees are sparse in marshy sections so deadfall obstructions rare.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
My friend Colette Sisco and I were viewing the Puchyan from the County J bridge around the year 2000. It looked very shallow and choked with pond weed. We were discouraged but decided to check it from another bridge. At the County A bridge the river was deeper and narrower so we decided to leave her vehicle there and drove to another bridge just downstream of the Hwy. 49 bridge. There we launched our tandem canoe.

What followed was a very pleasant 1.5 hour run. Soon after we started a couple of short log jam portages were required but then the coast was clear. The water was so clear we could easily see hundreds of small fishes plus several large carp and one sizeable northern pike. We watched the antics of several sand hill cranes and then stopped at a sand bar for a swim on this warm August day. On the river again we paddled past a few black willows and green ashes which leaned across the narrow stream. None of them blocked our path.

**Experiences of Others**
There is a boat landing on the south shore of the Fox River about a mile upstream of the Puchyan-Fox confluence. It is located just downstream of a lock and dam which was removed in the early 200’s. Joan Redman, a fellow Sierra Club paddle, told me about her trip down the Puchyan from County J bridge and then up the Fox to this landing. Frank Piraino made the same trip and wrote about it in *Small River Adventures of Wisconsin*. Both Frank and Joan mentioned a tricky spot with a brief fast current and rocks located about one half mile downstream of the County J put-in. Both of them feel that, with adequate water, the lower Puchyan is a near wilderness run which teems with waterfowl. Piraino recommends allowing about 6 hours for this trip. He faced a very stiff headwind on the final leg up the Fox River.
Further Ideas
It would be a long day trip but one could also travel down the Puchyan from the County J bridge and then turn downstream on the Fox River. Then it’s about 8 miles to the boat landing just upstream of Berlin.

Conclusion
Hey canoeists and kayakers who are visiting Green Lake: Why not escape from its crowds and non-flowing waters? There is a pretty and wild little stream nearby called the Puchyan River.
Rock River (East Branch)

Location
Washington and Dodge counties.

Natural Features
The East Branch is the longest of several headwater branches of the Rock River which merge to form the main Rock River within the Horicon Marsh. Its headwaters arise near Allenton on the western slopes of the Kettle Moraine. Those glacially deposited hills are underlain by a ridge of dolomite known as the Niagara Cuesta. The ridge forces surface waters to drain westward instead of eastward towards Lake Michigan. The river feeds into the Horicon Marsh which is a massive and important Wisconsin wetland.

Human History and Influence
Much of the original oak forest and oak savanna of the region was long ago cleared for agriculture. Today the river pierces a series of State Natural Areas. The East Branch skirts the city of Mayville which has around 5,000 residents. German immigrants settled that community in the mid-1880s. The area’s original inhabitants were Fox, Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk Indians. Small dams create impoundments at Kekoskee and Theresa.

Navigability and Difficulty
The lower river is easy to paddle into the Horicon Marsh where water levels will always be adequate. I am not sure about the navigability of upstream stretches.

Trip Ideas: My experience
Ron Rosner and I explored the East Branch in solo canoes on April 11, 2006. Our original plan was to put in at Kekoskee but we changed our minds because of a very strong southwest wind. Instead we put-in at the boat landing off Bay Rd. a couple of miles northwest of Mayville. First we paddled upstream for about a half hour. It was easy because the current was very weak and the wind was not a major factor. This section was tree lined for the most part and featured some high banks. We turned around, passed our put-in point and proceeded towards the marsh. The streamside trees were gradually replaced by cattails which meant we had lost our natural windbreak. Faced with a fierce gale headwind we gave up after a while and turned around. With the wind now at our backs we hardly noticed that we were paddling upstream. We heard several sand hill cranes but the majority of Horicon Marsh’s famous waterfowl must have been hunkered down in the wind. One beaver reacted to our presence by slapping its tail several times.

Further Ideas
The East Branch is reliably navigable downstream of the dam at Kekoskee. Most paddlers will use the East Branch as a way to enter the Horicon Marsh. There are signs which guide paddlers through the Marsh and to other access points near the City of Horicon. A variety of day trips between access points can be designed with the help of maps which are available locally.

Denny Caneff, the River Alliance of Wisconsin’s executive director, has paddled the other two source-water branches of the Rock – the South Branch and the West Branch. The South Branch starts west of Waupun and is generally not navigable until it reaches the city of Waupun, where you can access it from two city parks and paddle to where it enters Horicon Marsh (at Hwy. 49). On the other hand, the West Branch’s upper reaches are a jungle and not recommended. If you are making your own “rivers paddled” list, you could attempt heading upstream on the West Branch, which meets the South Branch near the boat landing on Hwy. 49.
Experiences of Others
Denny Caneff, the River Alliance of Wisconsin's executive director, told me he paddled the river from Theresa to Mayville. He characterized the stretch as "unspectacular" overall but an excellent place to see examples of glacially deposited hills called drumlins.

Conclusion
The East Branch of the Rock River has some nice features. It is a good way to enter the Horicon Marsh.
Location
Fond du Lac, Dodge, Jefferson and Rock counties.

Natural Features
Numerous headwater branches of the Rock River converge in the vast wetland complex known as the Horicon Marsh. From there the river flows south and eventually enters Illinois on its way to the Mississippi River. Why does it not take the short cut to Lake Michigan? That is because this large drainage system is blocked to the east by a high dolomite ridge known as the Niagara Cuesta. Instead it follows a vast lowland trough scoured by the glaciers. The gradient is so low that the Rock drops only 34 feet in the 58 miles between the Horicon Marsh and the Watertown dam. At Watertown the gradient temporarily increases to a 30 feet drop over one mile. The resultant rapids have long been buried under an impoundment behind a dam.

Glacially formed hills known as drumlins can be seen at times from the river. They have a distinctive tear-shaped appearance. The tops of several of them form the islands in the impoundment known as Lake Sinissippi. The river runs consistently muddy because of the rich soils it drains and because of human influences. In far southern Wisconsin the Rock widens into Lake Koshkonong which once harbored the highest population of canvas back ducks in the US.

Human History and Influence
The Rock River valley is steeped in Native American and subsequent history. Important towns like Horicon, Watertown, Jefferson, Ft. Atkinson, Janesville and Beloit grew up on its banks. There are ten dams along the river. The drainage area's original prairies, oak savannas, and southern hardwood forests have been markedly altered by human activities. Toxic agricultural runoff is pervasive. The river flows past many sewage treatment plants. At least their discharges are much cleaner than they used to be. The Rock runs muddy because of erosion and hordes of carp which stir up the bottom. In 1881, more than a 100,000 of these rough fish were released into southern Wisconsin streams including the Rock. It was felt that these “edible” fish would beneficially populate stagnant sections not favored by other fish. They were also considered to be excellent scavengers whose cleaning habits would improve stream quality. What a joke! Another misguided human effort.

The history of Horicon Marsh is also filled with human errors. In 1846 a dam was built which created the largest artificial lake in the world at the time. Decades of dredging and draining to foster agriculture followed the collapse of that dam in 1869. These engineering efforts all failed miserably. In the process an important refuge for waterfowl was severely damaged. The birds which remained were hunted to hear extinction. Successful restoration efforts began in the 1920s. The Horicon Marsh is now healthy again.

In recent years, the efforts of a newspaper publisher from Rockford, IL, have garnered a national trail designation for the Rock River, which has considerable historic, natural and cultural features from source to mouth. The Rock River Trail offers maps for driving, hiking and paddling.

Navigability and Difficulty
Most of the Rock is always navigable. Woody obstructions are rare because of its generous width downstream of Horicon. Water levels can be monitored by several gauges on the USGS website.
Trip Ideas: My experience
I have spent very little time on the Rock. It is generally too slow and unscenic for my taste. Around 1980 I explored two different sections of the Rock near Horicon. The first time we paddled from Horicon into Horicon Marsh and the second time we paddled downstream from to Lake Sinissippi.

Experiences of Others
In his out-of-print *Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin*, Michael Duncanson included every mile of the Rock River from Horicon to Beloit. As I read his descriptions, I kept seeing words like muddy, dairy herds, powerboats, very slow current, etc. You get the idea. The Rock River is not an ideal canoeing stream. Mike Svob’s guidebook *Paddling Southern Wisconsin* includes three sections he considers to be the nicest. The first one is about 7 miles downstream of Watertown. Here the river is “narrow, densely wooded and “peaceful.” His recommended access points for a 14 mile trip which includes this “prettiest part” are Watertown and Johnson Creek. Svob also likes the 16 miles from County CW to Pipersville. Finally he recommends the 7 mile section between Janesville and Happy Hollow Park.

Further Ideas
I suppose that someone looking for a unique adventure could paddle the Rock all the way from Horicon to the Illinois border at Beloit. But why stop there? Why not keep going all the way to New Orleans? Finding campsites along the river would be a challenge. The dams and headwinds would not be much fun either.

Conclusion
The Rock River features lots of easy paddling. Most of it is not very scenic.
**Root River**

**Location**
Milwaukee and Racine counties.

**Natural Features**
The Root River’s source is within the city limits of New Berlin in Waukesha County. From there it flows southward through a corner of Milwaukee County into Racine County. Soon the Root turns eastward towards Lake Michigan. Then it is deflected southward by a north-south oriented glacial moraine for several miles before it breaks through to the big lake. River boulders and rocky shoals were deposited by the Wisconsin Glacier. A series of dolomite and shale ledges create some rapids along one section. Finally, the river slows to a stop where it becomes an estuary of Lake Michigan.

**Human History and Influence**
The Root is an urban river which flows through several Milwaukee suburbs and the city of Racine. For agricultural purposes, the river’s East and West Branches were engineered to become drainage ditches. The Horlick Dam creates one small flowage and there is a lower dam at the steelhead salmon rearing facility. The eggs of various trout and salmon species are captured at this fish hatchery. Fishermen line the shores of the lower river when adults of these species are “running.” Since around 2009, various organizations have collaborated to implement the recommendations of “Back to the Root: An Urban River Restoration Plan.” The plan intends to develop a long-neglected stretch of the Root in downtown Racine for commercial, residential and recreational purposes.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Downed trees and log jams will be occasional problems for boaters on the upper river. Water levels are often too low. The American Whitewater website uses a USGS gauge to make runnability advice. There are a few Class I rocky shoals upstream of the Horlick dam pond. When the water is high the rapids just downstream of the Horlick dam are rated Class II or III.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
In September of 1996 I explored a quiet, estuary portion of the lower Root in downtown Racine. My put-in was just upstream of the Spring Street bridge. For a few yards I dodged a few rocks in shallow water. Soon the current stopped, the water deepened and I paddled by some baseball fields. Several baseballs floated with me. Then I entered a corridor lined by docked powerboats and sailboats. My take-out was the marina in downtown Racine. I biked back to my car that day but a jog back would have been easy too.

**Experiences of Others**
My Sierra Club acquaintance, Don Lintner, lives near the Root River in Oak Creek. He likes to paddle the Root and gave me some tips for paddling it above the Horlick dam pond. When the water is high he told me there are several “marginal” put-in sites along the County Line Rd. between 43rd and 51st Streets. He has also accessed the river at the 43rd Street bridge. Farther downstream, Don rates the bridges at 5-Mile Rd. and 4-Mile Rd. as good access points. After work he sometimes makes a round trip from the Hwy. 31 bridge. From there he paddles to the Horlick dam pond and back. Towards the end he faces a weak head current.

The Trailville.com website gives a surprisingly detailed account of all navigable sections on the Root. I highly recommend checking it out. I read also an account at the Miles Paddled website. It describes the Root’s 7.75 miles between 5 Mile Rd. and the Horlick dam. The author loved the first half but despised the second half of
this stretch. Scenic shores and river riffles were common before Hwy. 31. But beyond that bridge the river turned monotonous and unattractive from that writer’s viewpoint.

The American Whitewater website describes two sections of the Root. Check it for guidance and to view a short film clip of several kayakers running over the Horlick dam. One section the site describes is the .6 mile section from the dam to Quarry Park. At the right water levels this section’s ledges reportedly create some of the best play waves in the state.

**Conclusion**
When the water is up there is a variety of paddling opportunities on the Root River. This southern Wisconsin stream even contains some whitewater. The estuary section I explored should always be navigable.

*The city of Racine is working to make the river an urban recreational amenity. Paddling this urban river is a pleasant experience, especially in higher water.*
Rubicon River

Location
Washington and Dodge counties.

Natural Features
The headwaters of this stream originate on western slopes of the Kettle Moraine. Upstream sections feature some minor rapids caused by rocks and a moderate downhill gradient as the stream descends to the Rock River Lowland. Near Slinger it flows naturally through Pike Lake. Downstream sections wind slowly through muddy soils. The Rubicon joins the Rock River which flows southward into Illinois on its way to the Mississippi River.

Human History and Influence
I wonder who crossed the Rubicon in Wisconsin and named this stream after its famous namesake in Italy. It flows through the prosperous city of Hartford which was founded in 1844 at the site of a sawmill. Neosho Pond is an impoundment of the Rubicon River. The small community of Neosho is situated on its shores. The Rubicon usually runs muddy because of urban and agricultural runoff.

Navigability and Difficulty
Most of the Rubicon is tough to navigate because of downed trees. It is easier to run when the water is high enough to cover some of them.

Trip Ideas: My experience
On a cold day in early May of 2005 I spent 45 unrewarding minutes on the Rubicon. I put-in at the County EE bridge intending to reach the Elmwood Rd. bridge over the Rock River just downstream of the confluence. I pulled off early along Elmwood Road, so I never reached that destination. My brief trip was not a total disaster. I liked the Rubicon’s narrow winding quality. Panicked rough fish created multiple wakes but I could not see their bodies because the water was so murky. Three early portages were tolerable, but the river became increasingly deadfall choked. The scenery was not holding me either so I aborted the trip.

Experiences of Others
I first heard of the Rubicon from a man named Herb Reynolds. Over the phone he gave me some advice which I probably should have heeded. His more positive experience was paddling between Saylesville and North Jefferson Rd. on a day when the water was high.

Conclusion
The Rubicon is not a prime canoeing destination but trips are possible.
Scuppernong River

Location
Waukesha and Jefferson counties.

Natural Features
The Scuppernong originates from springs and surface waters flowing off the western slopes of the Kettle Moraine. Glacial deposits in this area include gravels, rocks and sands. These materials underlie upstream sections of the stream. The plant communities of the upper Scuppernong basin are described by Randy Hoffman in *Wisconsin's Natural Communities*. He begins at the river’s headwater lake named Ottawa. Groundwater percolates into this lake and into its surrounding “marl fen.” Hoffman recommends viewing this rare fen from the vantage point of a canoe along the Ottawa Lake shore. He also mentions a series of hard water springs which emanate from the base of moraine hills and feed into the upper Scuppernong River. Specialized floras have evolved near these springs. Near Palmyra the river flows through Upper and Lower Spring Lakes. Then it leaves the moraines behind and drops into the wide trough known as the Rock River Lowland. There it slows and winds through loamy soils. Finally it crosses a major marsh before it joins the Bark River which eventually joins the Rock River.

Human History and Influence
Tourists visit the Southern Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest and hike its scenic trails. Many years ago the town of Palmyra was known for its six natural mineral springs. Until the 1920s it was a nationwide destination for those in need of its purported healing qualities. Further downstream the Princes Point State Wildlife Area draws hunters and a few fishermen. Lower sections of the river suffer from agriculture-related pollution. The Wildlife Area includes a man-made canal. It was dug to drain land for “muck farming.”

Navigability and Difficulty
Much of the Scuppernong is often too shallow for good canoeing. Fallen trees will be problematic at times. Bridge scouting should help to determine the adequacy of flow. There are no rapids.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I briefly explored the Scuppernong in July of 1989 from an access point by the Jefferson Co. D bridge. Two fishermen there were trying to catch catfish. I wished them luck and headed up the Bark River which merges with the Scuppernong just upstream of the bridge. A gauntlet of fallen trees kept me from getting very far. I turned around and paddled back to the confluence and then up the Scuppernong into Princes Point Marsh. It was easy to ascend because the head current was weak. There were no obstructions and I could have continued farther but I turned around after about 45 minutes. Scores of carp fled as I moved across the water. Their bodies were hidden by the cloudy water but their wakes were hard to miss. A prominent dike was evidence of past drainage engineering.

Experiences of Others
Joan Redman is a Sierra Club paddler who wrote to me about the Scuppernong. She has paddled it from Hwy. 106 Bridge north of Palmyra downstream into the Princes Point Marsh. She probably took out at the D bridge. Her recommendation was to reserve the run for high water times. She did not mention deadfall problems. Her final advice was to bear right in the marsh to avoid entering the man-made canal.
Conclusion
Paddlers who like wetlands can explore the Princes Point Marsh on the Scuppernong River.
Sheboygan River

**Location**
Fond du Lac and Sheboygan counties.

**Natural Features**
Several headwater branches come together in a marshy area of northeastern Fond du Lac County. The Sheboygan River remains marshy after it enters northwestern Sheboygan County. After several more miles the river turns rocky and begins a faster downhill descent over glacial deposits of the Kettle Moraine. Intermittent riffles appear. Eventually it drops precipitously over a series of dolomite ledges at Sheboygan Falls. A few miles later it slows into estuary status before it empties into Lake Michigan. After the marshes the river passes bottomland forests and uplands which hold the remnants of an original northern hardwood-hemlock forest. Species represented include hemlocks, sugar maples, yellow birches, and beeches.

**Human History and Influence**
Whites settled this area early in Wisconsin history. Numerous grist mills and sawmills were built in the mid 1880s where settlements arose on the river’s banks. Many of those dams still exist. The city of Sheboygan at the mouth of the river grew into a major port and manufacturing center. Other major towns along the river include Kiel, Sheboygan Falls and Kohler. The latter became a company town dedicated to making well-known toilets and related products. A smaller riverside community known as Johnsonville is home to a famous bratwurst-making facility. Agriculture and urban influences degrade the river to moderate degree.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Fallen trees are intermittent but tend not to occur with prohibitive frequency. Much of the river is deep enough for canoeing except during extended dry periods. Water levels can be monitored by checking the Sheboygan gauge at the USGS website.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
I paddled about 6 miles on the Sheboygan in mid-July of 1995. My put-in was a parking lot along County PP in the village of Kohler. I took out by the County A bridge just downstream of the Kohler factory. Drought conditions created a challenge for me in my solo-freestyle Ladybug canoe. Twice I got and dragged my canoe for short distances. The rest of the time I was able to maneuver through shallow rock gardens. An attractive, tree-covered bluff appeared on river right after I portaged around the left side of Waederhaus dam. Then I journeyed through the famous Black Wolf Run golf course. Luckily for me the golfers were hitting the narrow fairways quite well. There was no need for anyone to yell “fore.”

At the end of my 2 ½ hour outing I ran the streets of Kohler back to my car. It was interesting to jog past many of the small brick homes Kohler Company had built for its employees in this “company town.”

**Experiences of Others**
Anyone thinking of paddling the Sheboygan should consult Mike Svob’s *Paddling Southern Wisconsin*. The author is quite high on the river despite its many dams. His detailed descriptions begin at Johnsonville. Mike mentions the 10-mile Millhome to Johnsonville section briefly in his guidebook. He subsequently described it more comprehensively in a June 2005 Silent Sports magazine article. This article expressed his admiration for the river’s narrow, curvy course and the attractive wooded hills it passed. He warns that the Johnsonville take-out by the dam is dangerous because it is too close. Svob advises that less-skilled boaters should take out before they get close to the dam.
Upstream take-out options include the County FF bridge or somewhere along the river bank at Franklin. Mike really liked the 16-mile section he describes beginning at Johnsonville. His put-in was the “grassy bank upstream-right from the County JM bridge in Johnsonville, near the fire department parking lot.” He took out “after the first pedestrian bridge at the river-right boat landing, alongside County PP (Monroe St.)” in Sheboygan Falls. For the following 12.4 mile section, Svob put in at Rochester Park in Sheboygan Falls and took out just downstream of County TA on river right. (My personal experience on the Sheboygan River was on this section.)

There is also a .5 mile Class II-IV whitewater run in downtown Sheboygan Falls. The American Whitewater Website describes it and makes water level recommendations using the USGS gauge.

**Further Ideas**
The Sheboygan Marsh County Park can be explored by canoe from several boat landings marked in the Wisconsin Gazetteer. Paddling should be possible on the estuary portion of the river near its mouth in the city of Sheboygan.

**Conclusion**
The Sheboygan River is a good canoeing river with something for everyone.
Sugar Creek

**Location**
Walworth County.

**Natural Features**
Turtle Creek and Sugar Creek originate close to each other a few miles north of Delavan. The former stream flows west to the Rock River whereas the latter stream flows eastward and eventually joins the (Illinois) Fox River after it merges with Honey Creek. Sugar Creek drains gently rolling ground moraines deposited by the Wisconsin Glacier. These deposits are overlain by silt loams which blew in from the west. The streambed is alternatively rocky, sandy and gravelly. Many remnants of the original oak forest remain.

**Human History and Influence**
Sugar Creek is severely impacted by agricultural runoff. The Wisconsin Gazetteer depicts channel-like sections which were dug to facilitate drainage. There are no significant human communities on its banks and no dams until Honey Lake where Sugar Creek merges with Honey Creek.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Like any narrow stream, Sugar Creek is subject to deadfall obstructions. I encountered only one of those on my trip. Sugar Creek definitely needs high water for good canoeing. Look to paddle it after a significant snowmelt or after a heavy rain. Bridge scouting will be necessary to determine the adequacy of flow.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
Early April of 2006 brought some heavy rains to southern Wisconsin so I saw it as a good opportunity to explore Sugar Creek. I put in at the Potter Rd. bridge and paddled to Honey Lake which receives water from both Sugar Creek and Honey Creek. After I paddled across the lake I portaged around the right side of the dam and proceeded down Honey Creek to the Spring Prairie Rd. Bridge where I took out. I had already left my bicycle there so I rode it back to my vehicle at the put in. Sugar Creek was fun to paddle in my solo-freestyle Bell Wildfire canoe. The water was high and fast. Small waves developed over rocky sections. Chorus frogs were calling on this lovely spring day. Only once was I required to portage past a fallen tree. Honey Creek below the dam was a very different stream. It was wide, slow and marshy. My outing was over in an hour and 20 minutes.

**Experiences of Others**
My Sierra Club acquaintance, Don Lintner, told me he had heard from Dave Bybee that Sugar Creek can be run from the Bowers Rd. bridge when the water is high enough.

**Conclusion**
Sugar Creek can be a fun run when the water is high. High water can be hazardous for beginners who should stay away at those times.
Turtle Creek

Location
Walworth and Rock counties.

Natural Features
The headwaters of Turtle Creek gather on a terminal moraine landscape near Delavan. The creek soon reaches a level land covered by silt soils and underlain by glacial outwash deposits. Flowing westward, it drains original prairie land before it hits the Rock River just south of the border in Illinois. Its gradient is too low for whitewater but dolomite rocks do create riffly sections.

Human History and Influence
At Delavan, a small dam creates Comus Lake. Between 1847 and 1894 this town housed the headquarters of 26 circuses including PT Barnum’s company. A dam at Shopiere was removed in the year 2000. At Tiffany an historic railroad bridge spans Turtle Creek. That beautiful dolomite structure is proclaimed “the world’s only remaining five arch stoneway bridge.” Wisconsin’s first gristmill was built at Beloit by a dam which was removed many years ago. Urban and agricultural sources both pollute Turtle Creek.

Navigability and Difficulty
Deadfall problems are few. Shallow water can be problematic at times. The USGS website includes Turtle Creek gauge readings. In a 2001 Silent Sports magazine article, Mike Svob recommended a minimum flow of 125 cfs.

Trip Ideas: My experience
My first Turtle Creek paddling experience came in the late fall of 1996. It was November 21st and an inch of snow had fallen the day before. I paddled from Shopiere to the County S bridge and jogged the 4 miles back to my car. The creek bed was wide and shallow but my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe never got stuck. I put in just downstream of the dam which was removed four years later. The water was clearer than I expected it to be and the scenery also exceeded my expectations.

In mid-June of 2011 I joined a group which included Denny Caneff, Lindsey Wood Davis, Beth Wentzel, Dale Dean and Edie Dean. We paddled the 8 miles from O’Riley Rd. to Shopiere in about three hours. Yellow lilies floated near quiet water banks. Blue flags were also blooming. Marshy edges were dominated by invasive reed canary grasses. Upland banks held black walnuts, bur oaks and box elders. We were dismayed to encounter cattle in the water next to a trampled mud bank. Many sections were slow and muddy but others were speedy, narrow and riffly. It was thrilling to see and paddle under the Tiffany Stone Arch Bridge.

I talked over the phone with Joan Redman about upstream sections of Turtle Creek. She was especially high on the Turtle Creek Wildlife Area between Hwy 11 and County C.

I was surprised to discover the amount of attention given to Turtle Creek on the Internet. There is even a local outfitter who offers a “dine and paddle” experience. The Beloit Water Trails website describes trips down the Turtle and into the Rock. It lists several access options in Beloit. At this website I viewed a U-Tube Video shot by Tom Lindblade which takes the viewer with him on his kayak through the city of Beloit. His footage makes it evident that the riffles are more challenging during the final descent to the Rock River. Additional hazards on this stretch are a couple of bridges where log jams tend to form.

The Miles Paddled website describes two sections of Turtle Creek. First is the 9.5 mile section from O’Riley Rd. to Sweet-Allyn Park in Shopiere. Second is the 11.5 mile section from that park to an access behind Papa John’s
on Dickop St. in South Beloit, Illinois. Describing the downstream section the writer was especially fascinated by people’s back yards.

**Further Ideas**
With many bridge access points there are many day trip options on Turtle Creek. Some may choose to start on the Turtle and continue down the Rock River. Others may choose to explore an upstream stretch like Joan Redman did.

**Conclusion**
Turtle Creek is an interesting, often runnable, and surprisingly attractive stream. Most of it is suitable for beginners but more skills and experience are required on the riffly sections through Beloit.

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*The stone arch railroad trestle over Turtle Creek, at Tiffany.*
Westfield Creek

Location
Marquette County.

Natural Features
Several creeks merge to form Westfield Creek in northwestern Marquette County. This stream is a tributary of the Montello River which merges with the Fox River. Oak savanna was the original vegetation of the region. Westfield Creek’s gradient is low so there are no rapids.

Human History and Influence
Lawrence Creek State Wildlife Area and Cave Creek State Fishery Area both lay along Westfield Creek tributaries. The village of Westfield is the only significant creek side human community. There is a dam on the Lawrence Creek tributary and another one which forms Harris Pond on Westfield Creek itself. This is a farm to forest transition region of the state, so agriculture does impact the stream.

Navigability and Difficulty
The section I paddled was essentially clear of deadfall. There was evidence of chainsaw work to keep it that way. This stretch should always have enough water. Much of it lacks deadfall because of its open marsh character.

Trip Ideas: My experience
This was one of my “make it up as you go” days. Drive east of Westfield on County E and you will encounter three consecutive bridges across Westfield Creek. On September 2, 2006, Caroline Garber and I slid my tandem Nova Craft canoe into the water by the middle bridge. First we paddled upstream on delightfully clear water through an attractive marsh. Gradually the wetland vegetation was replaced by an array of upland trees. We saw evidence of chainsaw clearing of the stream. Most of this work seemed necessary, however, because the stream’s width averaged 40-50 feet.

We almost reached the westernmost County E bridge but a large fallen tree was blocking our path so we turned around and retraced our route back to where we had started. Then we continued downstream into a widening marsh. Giant reed grass was starting to predominate as the current slowed but did not totally halt. We paddled under the easternmost County E bridge and paddled south towards Harris Pond. Our plan was to eventually turn around and paddle back upstream to that last bridge or, perhaps all the way back to where we had started. We thought we would eventually reach wide expanses of open water on Harris Pond but this never happened. Most of this shallow impoundment has been taken over by giant reed canary grasses.

Tiring of the monoculture monotony we sought an escape. I spotted some higher ground on the right and we heard road traffic coming from that direction. So we headed that way and spotted a narrow watery path which led us to a small beach. We landed and walked up a narrow lane which led to County B. We walked the mile back to our car and then returned to pick up our boat and gear. Before we got there we noticed a “No Trespassing” sign which meant we should not have used this access.

Further Ideas
This stream may or may not be navigable from Harris Pond to the Montello River. Multiple obstructing snags are likely along that stretch. I think the most appealing part of Westfield Creek is the three mile section among the three County E bridges. Consider a round trip outing with no need for a shuttle. I advise putting in by the easternmost of the three County E bridges and paddling upstream as far as desired before turning around.
**Conclusion**
Westfield Creek is an easy place to explore an attractive wetland. Stay away from Harris Pond unless you like to be surrounded by acres of giant reed canary grasses.
**White River (Green Lake County)**

**Location**
Waushara and Green Lake counties.

**Natural Features**
Several headwater creeks gather near Wautoma in central Waushara County to form the White River. Its drainage area consists of pitted glacial outwash so the soil is sandy and lakes are common. The river flows slowly south and enters level terrain once inundated by Glacial Lake Oshkosh. Here the White feeds a vast wetland which extends to the river’s confluence with the Fox River and beyond. The Fox eventually reaches Green Bay of Lake Michigan. According to Randy Hoffman in *Wisconsin’s Natural Communities*, the 11,100 acre White River Marsh is home to the following plant communities: floodplain forest, wet-mesic prairie, wet prairie, shrub-carr southern sedge meadow, shallow marsh and river. This wetland is also Wisconsin’s biggest staging area for sandhill cranes. The DNR called it the state’s most important wetland grass area for birds.

**Human History and Influence**
Farms and forests alternate in the region drained by the White River. Area lakes draw tourists and fishermen. Part of the upper river corridor near Wautoma has been designated a State Fishery Area. Wautoma (pop. 2,218) and Neshkoro (pop. 434) are the only towns which lie along the banks of the White. The White River Marsh State Wildlife Area was so designated in 1962. According to a DNR website the marsh was heavily cultivated prior to that time: “The marsh grass (sedge, bluejoint, and prairie cordgrass) was used for cattle feed, bedding, and for production of carpet fibers at factories in Oshkosh. The marshes were cut by horse drawn equipment and shipped to Oshkosh via the lock and dam system on the Fox River.”

The White River is dammed at least twice in the Wautoma area and again at Neshkoro. The White River Flowage and Neshkoro Millpond impoundments are both seriously silting in. The village of Neshkoro struck a terrible deal with the dam’s owner, Eagle Creek Renewable Energy, by which if village residents want to draw down the dam for purposes of removing invasive species or sediment, the village has to pay the dam owner for lost power during the drawdown of the pond.

Curiously, tiny Neshkoro is home to two independent hydropower companies, World Renewable Energy and Eagle Creek Renewable Energy. They are rival companies with their headquarters 100 feet from each other, near the dam at Neshkoro.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The White River’s marsh section should always have enough water. The section I paddled was deadfall-free but this is not the case in all sections. This is entirely a quiet water stream.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
I paddled through part of the White River Marsh with my wife and another couple in 1989. It took us about 2 hours to explore the river between the County D bridge and White River Rd. It was a warm day, so we stopped twice for swims. These were refreshing and enjoyable because the water was clear and the bottom was sandy. The grassy river corridor was rather monotonous. Parts of it were a reed canary grass monoculture. It was difficult to see beyond the immediate banks but we did spot several birds and heard sandhill cranes. In the final 300 yards we dodged several snags and portaged around one fallen tree.
Experiences of Others
Joan Redman told me over the phone that she once explored the river from Neshkoro and encountered no difficulties. Denny Caneff also paddled the White downstream from Neshkoro. For a time he was swept through man-made side channel which was perfectly straight and very fast.

Frank Piraino described two separate sections of the White in his Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin. First he spent three hours paddling from 22nd Ave. to County D. His second trip took him from that bridge to the Fox River where he paddled a mile upstream to the White River Lock and Dam landing. That dam has since been removed. He experienced easy canoeing and saw lots of birdlife along the upstream section. His second trip became more difficult near the Fox River confluence. Here the White broke into multiple, shallow channels through a wooded swamp. He reached the main channel of the Fox with difficulty and then paddled it a mile upstream to his planned take-out point. Observers say the White-Fox confluence is well-camouflaged by swamp trees.

My friend Denny Caneff and his paddling partner tried in vain to identify it from the Fox River in early spring of 2013. They had hoped to ascend the White from the confluence but were forced to abandon their plan. But Denny was determined to find this junction. He soon returned with the idea of getting there from the White River. Alone he put in at the White River Rd. bridge but was soon forced to turn around – the channel was ill-defined due to high water. Weeks later Denny was back for one more try. This time the water was low enough to identify the channel but high enough to easily connect the White to the Fox. His group returned upstream to White River Rd., where a jump from the bridge into the river is a refreshing break after a steamy paddle.

Conclusion
There are many wetland miles to explore on the White River between Neshkoro and the White River Road bridge. The paddling is easy, the water reliable and the birding will often be excellent. Boating from that bridge to the Fox River is feasible but challenging because of a swamp forest maze.

Beware of deadfall on the White River.
White River (Walworth County)

**Location**
Walworth and Racine counties.

**Natural Features**
The White River is the outflow stream from famous Geneva Lake. That 5,401-acre body of water fills a pit previously occupied by a huge chunk of ice when the Wisconsin Glacier was melting. Because of its great depth (135 feet at one point) and its “spring-fed” nature, Geneva Lake is unusually clear. Its outlet stream possesses this quality too. The White River exits the northeastern corner of the lake and flows east to the Fox River. The latter is the “Illinois Fox” which flows southward into Illinois and eventually merges with the Illinois River. This White River flows past former prairies and oak woodlands. Its gradient is low and the corridor often marshy except for a 3 mile section where the river drops 13 feet per mile. Rocks plus this gradient create some low grade rapids.

**Human History and Influence**
The resort community of Lake Geneva surrounds the White River outlet from Geneva Lake. Wealthy Chicagoans began building elaborate summer homes along the lakeshore when the Civil War ended. A tourist boom started which continues to this day. The region’s level land and loamy top soils support a successful agricultural economy. Though the White looks clear it does receive urban and rural runoff pollutants. A low dam at the outlet of Geneva Lake holds that body of water at a consistent level. The White River-Fox River confluence is buried beneath a Fox River impoundment known as Echo Lake, at Burlington.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The rocky section described below is often too shallow. The American Whitewater website uses a USGS gauge reading to make runnability advice. Levels lower than this recommendation are probably OK downstream of Lyons. Deadfall problems are few.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
Recent heavy rains lured me to the Walworth County area in April of 2006. After I locked a bicycle near the Spring Valley Rd. bridge at Lyons I drove to the Sheridan Springs Road bridge. There I launched my Bell Wildfire onto the slowly moving waters of the White River. Immediately I found myself in an attractive marsh which is part of the Lyons State Wildlife Area. I heard sandhill cranes and saw wood ducks and Canada geese. Several goose eggs lay unattended in a nest which was nearly buried by the high water. It seemed the flooding conditions had forced this sad abandonment.

The wetland ended about midway through my three mile trip. Now the White was speeding down a riffly, narrow corridor. One small log jam stopped me briefly. At my trip’s end under the Spring Valley bridge I encountered a river feature known as the “Lyons Wave.” From upstream it looked challenging enough to scout. Caution was required because I was paddling my “non-whitewater” canoe. From the shore I saw a safe looking “tongue” which angled from right to left. I followed this route and had a successful run. Then I took out and biked back to my car at the put-in.

**Experiences of Others**
I talked over the phone with several people who all told me that the Lyons to Echo Lake stretch is canoe-friendly and attractive. There appear to be two potential access points at bridge crossings. No official landings are marked on Echo Lake in the Gazetteer but it must have take-out options. I was surprised to see the White River included at the American Whitewater website. It describes the same three mile section I paddled and
gave it a Class I or II rating depending on the water level. According to that site the “Lyon Wave” is a good one for surfing at certain water levels.

**Conclusion**
Most paddlers who visit this area will cruise the shores of Geneva Lake. They are missing a neat little stream which features a lovely wetland and a short whitewater section.
Whitewater Creek

Location
Jefferson and Walworth counties.

Natural Features
The Green Bay Lobe of the Wisconsin Glacier reached its southernmost extension in northern Rock and Walworth counties. It deposited hills of gravel and rock which were “pitted” by depressions which filled with water. One such “kettle lake” is Whitewater Lake which is the source of Whitewater Creek. From the outlet this stream descends northward towards the Bark River which it joins about 5 miles before that river joins the Rock River. Rocks create a few riffles but no true rapids. Its drainage area was originally a mix of prairies, oak forests and oak savanna.

Human History and Influence
According to a Wisconsin Travel website the original inhabitants of this area were Potawatomi Indians. A word in their language referred to a whitish appearance caused by white sands on the stream floor. So “whitewater” in this case refers to this phenomenon and not to rapids. The Kettle Moraine State Forest includes parts of the drainage area which feeds Whitewater Lake. The city of Whitewater was founded in 1836 at the confluence of Spring Brook and Whitewater Creek. A dam was erected at the site to provide power for a gristmill. It also created Cravath Lake. Whitewater currently is home to more than 14,000 citizens and to the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Farms are ubiquitous outside the city limits. Whitewater Creek is polluted by city and farm runoff.

Navigability and Difficulty
This is a shallow and narrow stream. Running it requires extra water. The brief section I paddled contained several obstructing logjams.

Trip Ideas: My experience
After a rainy period I traveled to Whitewater Creek in 2006. My first move was to put in at County U after I left my bicycle by a bridge at Cold Spring. Soon I encountered such a nasty gauntlet of downed trees that I turned around and paddled back upstream to where I had started.

Plan B was to paddle from downtown Whitewater to the County U bridge and this idea worked out better. This time I did not leave my bike at the take-out because I figured I would jog back to the put-in through the streets of Whitewater. When I chose my put in site I did not realize that there are two separate spillways through the dam in downtown Whitewater. So I ended up putting in on the first waterway I encountered which was the one to the west. Later I discovered that the other channel was larger. Even so, it looked even harder to access than the channel I had chosen.

With some difficulty I wrestled my gear down a bank to the edge of the narrow and junky west channel. Then I hopped aboard my Wildfire and proceeded downstream. In about 100 yards the other channel merged from the right and the creek widened. The water sped rapidly under one downtown bridge and even kicked up a few standing waves. Paddling through town it was interesting to observe the backyards of grand old homes along Fremont Street. During my jog back to the put-in I observed the same homes from the street side. As I paddled downstream several logjams blocked my path. They all were infused with disgusting amounts of floating junk. None were easy to get by but I managed to stay in my canoe. Eventually the muddy stream left town and flowed through some woods and a grassy marsh. Soon I reached the County U bridge and took out.
jogged back through town I spotted a bike trail which appeared to follow the creek. So I used it for part of my return route.

**Further Ideas**
The City of Whitewater seems to be developing its creek-way for recreational purposes. In my opinion they should pay more attention to Whitewater Creek itself by cleaning it up and removing logjams.

**Conclusion**
The navigable portion of Whitewater Creek will never be a significant destination for paddlers. Local paddlers would use it more if it were cleaned up and the logjams were removed.