Kark's Canoeing and Kayaking Guide to 309 Wisconsin Streams

By Richard Kark
May 2015
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 “guerrilla 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
Southwestern Wisconsin Rivers

This section includes 39 rivers and streams that either originate or are mostly confined to these southwestern Wisconsin counties: Columbia, Dane, Grant, Green, Juneau, La Crosse, Lafayette, Monroe, Richland, Sauk, and Vernon.

- Bad Axe River
- Baraboo River
- Black Earth Creek
- Coon Creek
- Duck Creek
- Grant River
- Kickapoo River
- La Crosse River
- Little Platte River
- Little Yellow River
- Maunesha River
- Mississippi River
- Pecatonica River (Dodge Branch)
- Pecatonica River (East Branch)
- Pine River
- Seeley Creek
- Starkweather Creek
- Sugar River (West Branch)
- Wingra Creek
- Yahara River

- Badfish Creek
- Billings Creek
- Blue Mounds Creek
- Dell Creek
- Galena River
- Honey Creek
- Kickapoo River (West Fork)
- Lemonweir River
- Little Sugar River
- Marsh Creek
- Mill Creek
- Nine Springs Creek
- Pecatonica River
- Pheasant Branch Creek
- Platte River
- Six Mile Creek
- Sugar River
- Token Creek
- Wisconsin River
Bad Axe River

Location
Drains most of Western Vernon County and empties into the Mississippi River.

Natural Features
The longest and, possibly, the widest ridge in Wisconsin’s Driftless Area (the never glaciated southwestern region) runs north-south across most of the county and includes the cities of Viroqua and Westby. Originally this ridge top was prairie whereas its sides and much of the rest of the county were oak savanna. The Bad Axe River drains the west side of this ridge whereas waters flowing off the east side feed the Kickapoo River. The Bad Axe’s tributaries occupy narrow valleys known locally as “coulees”. Nowadays these coulee hillsides are heavily forested with a mix of deciduous trees. The river’s immediate banks are mostly lined by bottomland species like silver maples and box elder trees.

Human History and Influence
Deforestation and agricultural practices have long led to rapid precipitation run off from the steep slopes of this region causing frequent floods and poor water quality due to erosion. Ridge tops and valley floors remain heavily agricultural.

The Bad Axe lives in infamy as the site of a particularly tragic moment in history. Here at the river’s mouth about 150 men, women and child members of the Sauk tribe were slaughtered as they tried to flee across the Mississippi River to the Iowa side. Chief Blackhawk and his tribe members had been chased across the state from Northern Illinois. The year was 1832.

Water quality
Poor because of muddy banks, steep slopes subject to run off, and agricultural practices.

Navigability and Difficulty
No rapids or fast water but plenty of opportunities for deadfall. My particular trip, however, was mostly obstruction free.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In June of 1990 I spent slightly less than an hour paddling alone from the Beverhill Rd. Bridge to the Amann Rd. Bridge. The river flowed slowly through a corridor of box elder trees. When finished I strolled the short distance back to my car.

Further Ideas
The American Whitewater website speculates there may be some Class I and II whitewater to be found on the North and South branches of the Bad Axe. Fallen tree will undoubtedly be encountered but it might be interesting to find out.

Conclusion
The Bad Axe is more interesting for its history than for its paddling potential. If I lived closer I am sure I would explore more of it including its two forks.
Badfish Creek

Location
Begins in Dane County south of Madison and flows southward into Rock County and then eastward into the Yahara River a few miles upstream of that river’s confluence with the Rock River.

Natural Features
Flows among small moraines exposing small dolomite rocks on the stream floor at times. Grassy open meadows often lead to upland stands of widely spaced burr oaks, a quality which harkens back to the days before widespread tilling when oak savannas dominated this landscape.

Human History and Influence
Flows past Cooksville which features classic “Yankee” homes which date back to the 1840’s. Many have been lovingly restored. Of greater interest to paddlers is the creek’s relationship to the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District. According to Mike Ivey (sited below), 38 million gallons of sewage effluent are pumped into Badfish creek daily accounting for about 50 per cent of the flow. Now that’s a major human influence!

Water quality
Fairly good due to major improvements in sewage treatment in recent years. Clarity is better than most area streams. I have detected a slight sewer odor at times.

Navigability and Difficulty
A few limbs to dodge in the main section described below. Chainsaw wielders work regularly to keep it open. Surprisingly swift current and a few minor rapids make maneuvering skills helpful and safer than going without. Water levels are nearly always adequate because of that 50 % boost from the sewage plant. The Mike Ivey article sited below quotes a Madisonian who recommends checking the USGS website, wi.water.usgs.gov for water levels. Ivey’s source, Kevin LeRoy, says that “At about 200 cfs. it’s doable. At 300 it’s a lot of fun and at 400 it's a little on the scary side.”

Trip Ideas: My experiences
The two-hour trip from the State Hwy 138 Bridge to the State Hwy 59 bridge over the Yahara has become my favorite short trip near Madison, so I have now traveled it multiple times. I like its intimate size, the opportunities to maneuver around limbs and through class one rapids and I find the scenery very pleasant and variable. It’s a great place to take my solo freestyle Bell Wildfire canoe but this stretch is also suitable for tandem canoeing. Both bow and stern paddlers will stay busy keeping the canoe on course. On one occasion I did explore the section immediately upstream of Cookeville beginning at the now closed Leedle Mills Rd. Bridge. My fellow paddler Ron Rosner and I found it to be less interesting than downstream sections. Continuing down to the Yahara, however, we were struck by two things: First the plethora of blooming, alien, multiflora roses climbing everywhere over the other flora. Second, at the Yahara confluence we saw a bald eagle ahead which appeared to be in trouble struggling in the water. After it easily lifted off and flew away we paddled up to a badly injured large carp which the eagle had been in the process of killing before we scared it off.

Experiences of Others
Larry Splinter told me over the phone in the mid-1990’s how his Rock County Canoe Club enjoyed the Badfish and worked with chainsaws to keep it open. He told me his group would often put in at the Old Stone Road Bridge. From this put in paddlers will immediately enter the Badfish Creek State Wildlife Area which, presumably, will increase the chances of seeing wildlife.
Mike Ivey wrote an article about Badfish Creek for Silent Sports Magazine for the April 2000 issue which really picked up my interest in this stream. He wrote about the Madison Metro Sewage Dept. connection and also quoted a Madison paddler who called it “probably the closest thing we have to whitewater around Madison”. Mike called the Old Stage Road Bridge a “favorite put-in spot.”

The Miles Paddled website contains many entries for Badfish Creek. It seems that that clear sailing can be expected on all sections below Old Stage Rd. Bridge. The section leading to that bridge is a different story. Starting at the Old Stone Rd. Bridge, four portages were required according to one account.

**Further Ideas**
I would like to see for myself if the river is reasonably navigable and pleasant upstream of Cooksville. I also envision for myself and others a longer day trip down the Badfish and into the Yahara River to Fulton and perhaps further into the Rock River. I have seen this stretch of the Yahara and it qualifies as that stream’s wildest and most scenic stretch.

**Conclusion**
A slight taste of whitewater and nice scenery on an intimate stream close to Madison with reliable water levels.

---

*Badfish Creek can be enjoyed year-round, because it is the outfall stream for the Madison Metropolitan Sewage District.*
Baraboo River

**Location**
Monroe, Juneau, and Sauk counties.

**Natural Features**
The upper two thirds of the Baraboo River courses through lands originally forested by eastern-southern hardwoods. Then the river enters a land of original oak savanna. Agricultural land is close throughout. Bottomland trees like silver maples are very common. Several bluffs hold trees such as white pines and hemlocks which are more typical of points further north.

The river begins east of Kendall in Monroe County and flows through the valleys and steep-sided hills of the Driftless (never glaciated) section of SW Wisconsin. In Juneau County and much of western Sauk County it flows though a broad, flat valley comprised of soils deposited at the bottom of Glacial Lake Baraboo. Wetlands are common here. Arising at times from the valley floor are buttes revealing bedrock sandstone vertical walls. Many were once islands in that Lake back when the glaciers were melting around 10,000 years ago.

At Rock Springs west of Baraboo the river breaks through the North Range of the Baraboo Range exposing cliffs of quartzite at the Upper Narrows. Then, near the City of Baraboo, vertical walls of sandstone are revealed. Through the City of Baraboo, the river's gradient picks up from a very low level to over 10 feet per mile through the Baraboo Rapids. Then, east of Baraboo the river again breaks through the Baraboo Range at the Lower Narrows. Here quartzite and small exposures of a volcanic rock called rhyolite are revealed as impressive cliffs.

The Baraboo’s final miles wind slowly through an extensive bottomland forest to the Wisconsin River.

**Human History and Influences**
Farms and farm communities are frequently seen along the river. In 1882 the Ringling Brothers Circus was founded at Baraboo. Visitors today still flock to the Circus World Museum. Baraboo is also a hopping off place to attractions such as Devil’s Lake State Park, the Wisconsin Dells and the International Crane Foundation.

Many dams were built along the Baraboo River but four in the Baraboo area have been removed in recent years. This was accomplished through the efforts of the River Alliance of Wisconsin and other organizations concerned with the health of the river. Most, including river runners and small mouth bass fishermen have been pleased with the results. By every measure the lower Baraboo is now a healthier stream than it was. The city of Baraboo is actively reclaiming its riverfront as a beautiful place to visit. For paddlers and other river lovers, a total of 120 miles are now dam-free. This makes it the longest stretch of reclaimed flowing water east of the Mississippi.

Railroad lines were built along sections of the upper river but have since been abandoned. These old beds now hold the Elroy-Sparta and 400 State Trails which are used mainly by bicyclists.

**Water quality**
Clarity and general quality are not very good because of widespread agricultural practices, loamy soils, and frequent erosion.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The only rapids are on a four mile section through Baraboo. These are class 1’s and easy class 2’s but do require maneuvering skills. Here the water can get too low for a good run. Linking the American whitewater website should provide useful water level information. The rest of the river is always generally navigable except
for intermittent sections which are deadfall prone. Such obstructions are less problematic downstream of North Freedom.

**Trip Ideas**

I have paddled the Baraboo on three separate occasions. The first was a frustrating trip I took with Kevin Thies back in the late 70’s using my tandem canoe. We were forced out of the canoe on numerous occasions as we pulled over and around fallen bottomland trees after our trip began in downtown Reedsburg. I am not even sure where we took out but based on this experience, I would not recommend any stretch between Reedsburg and North Freedom.

Also in the late 1970’s another companion and I paddled from the Hwy. 33 wayside just upstream of I-90/94 to Dekorra on river left on the Wisconsin River. We were able to maneuver around most of the limbs but the bottomland forest was somewhat monotonous.

In July of 2002, I paddled my solo-freestyle canoe from Union Center to Wonewoc. I had left my bicycle near the 400 Trail in the latter community so I could bike the shuttle back to my car along that trail. This 5.5 mile piece of river was fun mainly because of its narrow and winding nature. These qualities made it fun to “slalom” my way downstream in my easy-turning canoe. The silver maples and box elders were prettier than usual due to the way they were backlit by the early morning sunlight. Recent chainsaw work was in evidence and will be necessary to keep this section open for paddlers. I enjoyed viewing the 150 foot exposed sandstone butte known as “Third Castle.” I had learned about this feature in Mike Svob’s description. (See below). The ride back along the 400 Trail traversed wetlands and included several stops where I read interpretive signs.

My best trip on the Baraboo included the newly exposed “Baraboo Rapids” which I tandem paddled with Caroline Garber in the summer of 2003. We did not check the water level but there was just barely enough water for us to negotiate the shallow rock gardens. Many others would have had difficulty getting through but our skills were up to the task. It was interesting to view the town from river level including the Circus World Museum complex. We had started our trip two miles west of the U.S. Hwy. 12 Bridge at the Hatchery Rd. landing which is marked in the Wisconsin Atlas and Gazetteer. So our trip to the Hwy 113 Bridge at the east side of Baraboo totaled about 7 miles.

**Experiences of Others**

The American Whitewater website includes a description and recommended water level for the 4 mile Baraboo Rapids section.

Frank Piraino has described three sections of the Baraboo in his *Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin*. Two of these are between Wonewoc and the Millpond at LaValle. He warns of many obstructing fallen trees between the Strawbridge Rd. Bridge and Dutch Hollow Bridge. He reports much easier canoeing between the latter bridge and the boat landing at the boat landing on the LaValle Millpond. The latter part of this trip will be on water backed up from the dam. The third trip Frank describes is the one I took from the Hwy 33 Wayside down into the Wisconsin River. Here he describes the river is very wild and densely wooded.

In *Paddling Southern Wisconsin*, Mike Svob describes two sections of the Baraboo in detail and, briefly mentions several others. His Section One is the Union Center to Wonewoc section I described above. His second section is the 10.7 mile section from North Freedom to Baraboo. He makes that one sound like a nice trip. Personally I have only seen the final four miles of this stretch.

The Miles Paddled website includes several sections of the Baraboo.
Conclusion
The Baraboo River contains several good sections to explore. The scenery is quite good at times, especially when bedrock is exposed. With enough water it is fun to ride the rapids through Baraboo.
Billings Creek

Location
Monroe and Vernon counties.

Natural Features
Billings Creek is miniaturized Kickapoo River featuring vertical sandstone bluffs which extend down to the water level. Like the Kickapoo these bluffs are often capped by hemlock and yellow birch trees. These species are usually found further to the north. Most of the surrounding woodland, however, is occupied by varying species of Southern Wisconsin hardwoods such as several species of oaks. Crystal clear waters gather from numerous coulees in this Driftless (never glaciated) region of the state and coalesce into a first class trout stream. Billings Creek is a tributary of the Kickapoo River.

Human History and Influences
Trout fishermen use Billings Creek much more often than do paddlers of canoes and kayaks. Wildcat Mountain State Park contains a separate unit called the Ice Cave Picnic Area located near the junction of Cty. F and Hwy 33. Visitors who hike to the Ice Cave should notice this pristine little stream along the way.

Water quality
Usually excellent

Navigability and Difficulty
Too shallow at times for some canoes. Also, there will be woody obstructions. Swift water and fast corners along a very narrow stream require skillful maneuvering abilities.

Trip Ideas: My Experience
It was a summer’s day in 1999 when I spent a delightful hour on Billings Creek. I put in at the Hwy F Bridge midway between Hwys. 131 and 33. My Bell Wildfire solo freestyle canoe was perfect for negotiating a series of fast turns along a narrow stream course. The creek was usually shallow and rocky but my canoe never hung up. Its clear water afforded a perfect view of waving stream floor vegetation and schools of rough fish. Among those I am pretty sure I spotted a few brown trout. I always love to paddle beneath sandstone cliffs and gaze at the ferns and other greenery they hold. This was a very good day for that activity. Between several of those bluffs were low grassy meadows which teemed with wildflowers. It was easy to pull over and around a handful of fallen trees because the water was so shallow and the rocky stream floor so solid.

After I reached the Kickapoo River it required only ten more minutes of leisurely paddling for me to reach the Winshell Valley Ave. bridge where I had hidden my mountain bike the night before.

Experiences of Others
I got the idea to explore this creek from reading Mike Duncanson’s account of the Kickapoo in his out of print Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin. He mentions Billings Creek as a “pretty” option though it is unclear whether he actually canoed it.

Further Ideas
One could start on Billings Creek and paddle further down the Kickapoo than I did. It should also be possible to put in near the Ice Cave Picnic Area parking lot just west of Hwy 33 along Hwy F. This would add about a mile to what I paddled.
**Conclusion**
Billings Creek is a relatively pristine and beautiful tiny stream, but would be a challenge for inexperienced paddlers in long or heavy canoes.
Black Earth Creek

Location
Dane and Iowa counties.

Natural Features
Black Earth Creek begins as a high quality trout stream. "Today, this stream receives its water from smaller tributaries fed by cold, clear spring water seeping from hillsides at the base of the Prairie du Chien dolomite." (Quotation is from the Roadside Geology of Wisconsin). That book’s authors, Robert Dott and John Attig also mention that this small creek flows through a wide valley which was a major melt water path when the Wisconsin Glacier was melting about 10,000 years ago.

Just east of Cross Plains, where the Creek begins, the above-mentioned dolomite bedrock is covered by terminal moraine hills deposited at the furthest advance of the Wisconsin Glacier’s Green Bay Lobe. Water flows westward off these hills onto the outwash plain of the above-mentioned valley and then onto the broad outwash plains of the Wisconsin River. Finally, it merges with that river just north of Arena. West of the terminal moraine it flows past never-glaciated (Driftless Region) bluffs covered with oak forests and stands of red cedar trees. It also flows past prairies and bottomland tree species like silver maples and box elders.

Human History and Influence
Nowadays, Black Earth Creek closely follows Hwy 14 and its communities of Cross Plains, Black Earth and Mazomanie. Run off from those towns and farm fields along the creek constitute threats to the health of the stream. Yet it retains its high quality trout stream reputation.

Navigability and Difficulty
No rapids, but generally too deadfall-choked to be a good paddling stream. Water levels, though, will generally be sufficient.

Trip Ideas: My experience
On a cold day in March of 1981 I explored a short section of Black Earth Creek in a tandem canoe with Kevin Thies. It was not a good time. We struggled down about two miles of river just west of Mazomanie. Our portaging time probably equaled or exceeded our time on the water. There were just too many woody obstructions.

Experiences of Others
Denny Caneff and friends undertook a “guerilla paddle” down Black Earth Creek in October of 2014. They traveled from Cross Plains to Black Earth. Along the way they battled several marginally legal cattle barriers and at least 6 tree snags which forced them to portage. Cattle standing in the creek grudgingly moved aside as they approached.

Conclusion
This is fine stream for trout fishermen but not for canoeists or kayakers unless they have “guerilla” tendencies.
Blue Mounds Creek

Location
Iowa and Dane counties.

Natural Features
Most of U.S. Hwy 18 from Mt. Horeb to Prairie du Chien follows the top of a wide ridge known geologically as the Galena-Platteville “cuesta” more popularly as “Military Ridge.” Between Mt. Horeb and Barneveld, water which flows northward off the steeper, “escarpment” side of this ridge coalesces into the East and West Branches of Blue Mounds Creek. The West Branch drains the two prominent “Blue Mounds” which give the creek its name. Both branches flow past steep hills which are typical of southwestern Wisconsin’s Driftless Region. The region’s valleys and ridge tops are typically farmed but its hillsides are forested, usually by oak trees of various types. Bottomland trees like silver maples and box elders dominate the shores of Blue Mounds Creek.

Just north of Hwy 14 the two branches merge to form Blue Mounds Creek. The stream then flows across a flat area of sandy outwash deposited by glacial meltwaters. Finally it enters the marshy back waters of the Wisconsin before it empties into that river’s main channel just north and east of Arena in Iowa County.

Human History and Influence
The two Blue Mounds have long served as natural landmarks for Native Americans and others who followed. The West Mound can be seen from more than 20 miles away. Blue Mounds State Park now includes both mounds and their surrounding forests. Since 1989 most of the creek’s final two miles have been part of state-owned land administered by the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway. Blue Mounds Creek does suffer from agriculturally derived pollution.

Water quality
Only fair and often muddy.

Navigability and Difficulty
Generally too choked with fallen trees and logjams to be of interest to most paddlers. Downstream sections should always have enough water for those willing to venture down.

Trip Ideas: My experience
Caroline Garber and I braved Blue Mounds Creek in late April of 2006 in my tandem canoe. I had warned her that we would likely be dodging and pulling over a gauntlet of fallen trees and we were. Luckily she enjoyed the challenge and so did I. A delicious lunch of cheese, wine, bread and grapes probably made us more tolerant. Along the way we noted river birches, black willows and grassy meadows. We scared up many mallards and a few wood ducks. Once we reached the Wisconsin River the distance was than a half mile downstream to our awaiting bicycles. The whole trip had taken us 2 and a half hours including a leisurely lunch.

Conclusion
Not for most because of all the deadfall. Yet this tiny stream had its positive moments.
Coon Creek

Location
Vernon County.

Natural Features
Coon Creek drains far northwestern Vernon County and empties into the Mississippi River. Southwestern Wisconsin was never glaciated and thus is called the “Driftless Region” because of the lack of glacially deposited “drift.” The region is characterized by rugged hills and bluffs. Oak savanna was the main vegetation type before whites settled the area and cleared much of the land for agriculture. Geologists have unearthed glacial lake deposits in the lower Coon Creek valley. This means there was a temporary lake here which formed when the Wisconsin Glacier was melting. The lake’s legacy is a marshy valley. Coon Creek is a muddy stream because it flows through thick deposits of dark, loamy soil which blew in from the west and covered the lake deposits after the glaciers were gone and the land dried out.

Human History and Influence
This watershed made history in 1933 during the Great Depression. It was the site of the country’s first official soil conservation project. Numerous measures were initiated to curb serious soil erosion. The towns of Coon Valley, Chaseburg and Stoddard grew up along Coon Creek’s banks. With its heyday in the 1980s, the Coon Creek Canoe Race grew into a sizeable event and a huge party. Pervasive drunkenness and rowdy behavior led to its cancelation.

Navigability and Difficulty
Driftless area streams are generally void of rapids and Coon Creek is no exception. Small and narrow, it is prone to deadfall obstructions. During the years of the canoe race, the section from Coon Valley to Chaseburg was kept open with the aid of chainsaws, but I doubt this is being done now. Perhaps lower stretches of the stream which are marshier with fewer trees will prove to be more navigable. I am not sure.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I paddled with my then wife, Pat, down Coon Creek in June of 1990. The local canoe race was still on in those days and we could see the frequent evidence of chainsaw work. Even so, we were forced to deal with a fair number of fallen trees. The stream was not attractive enough to justify all the work, so we aborted the trip after a couple of miles when we reached the first bridge. I ran back to Coon Valley where we had started our one hour trip.

Further Ideas
Explore marshy downstream sections which may be less obstructed with deadfall. It might be best to scout a section by checking a few bridges and walking some banks.

Conclusion
Because of deadfall this is generally not a good canoe stream unless lower marshy sections are more navigable than I think they are.
Dell Creek

Location
Sauk County

Natural Features
Dell Creek drains a small portion of Northern Sauk County after it begins just north of the county line in far southern Juneau County. It flows through a land which was originally oak savanna and hardwood forest. Eventually it joins the Wisconsin River. The glacial geology in this area is interesting in a couple of ways. Much of the subsoil is comprised of sediments which once lay under Glacial Lake Baraboo. When that lake was draining the pre-glacial course of Dell Creek was radically diverted by a terminal moraine deposited by the Wisconsin Glacier. The southwesterly flowing creek was forced into a new channel which found its way to the Wisconsin River in a northwesterly direction. Sandstone cliffs now line a narrow gorge where the massive glacial melt waters cut through sandstone bedrock. Towering white pines top the cliffs as remnants of ancient days when the Northwoods extended further into southern Wisconsin.

Human History and Influence
Two flowages behind Dell Creek dams are prime Wisconsin tourist destinations in the Wisconsin Dells area. Mirror Lake is bordered by Mirror Lake State Park. Lake Delton is surrounded by homes and various types of tourist attractions. The earthen dam holding back the latter lake gave way in 2008 resulting in a major catastrophe. Television sets around the whole country pictured an entire house being swept away by the torrent of water which was released as the lake rapidly drained into the nearby Wisconsin River.

Navigability and Difficulty
Shallow water and fallen trees will present problems for those trying to explore upper stretches of this small stream. Most paddlers will confine themselves to the lake portions and limited free-flowing stretches.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I had a nice adventure on Dell Creek in late August of 1991. First I locked my bike near the Hwy 12 Bridge in the village of Lake Delton. Then I drove to the Hwy 23 bridge over the extreme upstream end of Mirror Lake. From there I paddled my Ladybug upstream for a half hour before I turned around and headed back into the main lake. As I paddled upstream there was initially no current. The narrowing waterway was lined by docks, pleasure boats and cabins. Eventually I was paddling against weak current and increasingly shallow water. Reluctantly I turned around when navigation became too difficult. On the main part of Mirror Lake a noisy weed cutting machine which was attempting to clear overgrown waterweeds. At the east end of the lake I entered the first of two sandstone gorges. It was narrow enough to be a flowing river but there was no current because I was still behind the dam which creates Mirror Lake. When I spotted the Ishnala Restaurant on the right I pulled over hoping to buy some lunch but the place was closed. Poking around the nearby property I came upon the famous Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Peterson Cabin. Back on Mirror Lake I entered the second gorge section and admired its sandstone cliffs. When I passed under the I-90/94 bridge I glanced up to see its underside. I could have taken out on river left at the dam but chose to portage on that side and continue down to Lake Delton. That second flowage was preceded by a brief stretch of free flowing water. Near the Hwy 12 bridge I took out on the left, found my bike and peddled back to my car. I followed the back streets of Lake Delton as long as I could to avoid vehicular traffic. My journey on the water from my original put-in had covered about 4.5 miles and my bike trip back was probably about the same distance.

Experiences of Others
Thousands have rented canoes at Mirror Lake State Park and explored Mirror Lake.
Conclusion
I found an interesting way to explore Dell Creek. Most will confine their explorations to the main Mirror Lake and its sandstone gorges.
Duck Creek

Location
Entirely within Columbia County.

Natural Features
Duck Creek and its branches drain a swath of land in eastern Columbia County. It flows through rolling ground moraine and then across a level plain which once lay under a glacial lake. Finally it empties into the Wisconsin River about 4 miles south of Portage. Before settlement this was oak savanna country. Nowadays the stream’s frequent wetland sections are mostly lined by the monotonously invasive reed canary grass. Very close by to the north land is drained by the Fox River which flows northward into Green Bay. The waters of Duck Creek, in contrast, are destined to reach the Gulf of Mexico.

Human History and Influence
A dam in the village of Wyocena creates Lake Wyona. I suspect that this lake receives a heavy load of phosphorus from upstream fields because the day I paddled downstream of the dam the water looked like pea soup. At some point, humans introduced the reed canary grass mentioned above which has since crowded out native marshland species.

Navigability and Difficulty
Though the stream is narrow, much of it is navigable because of a paucity of streamside trees. Usually there is enough water because of the creek’s slow speed and adequate depth. Streams such as this often dig relatively deep channels through marshes. The main difficulty will be fallen trees through less marshy stretches.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In August of 1999, my friend Colette Sisco and I explored Duck Creek. We put in at the County G bridge, paddled upstream for about 2.5 miles and then we turned around for a round trip back to our vehicle. Wildlife was sparse; the banks were monotonous and the water quality was terrible, so it was not one of our favorite trips.

Experiences of Others
My friend Bob Donner told me that putting in below the Wyocena Dam and then paddling down to US Hwy. 51 is usually a viable option. Frank Piraino, in Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin, also explored this section of Duck Creek. His put-in was the County G bridge. He took out at the end of Dead End Levee Rd. just downstream of the Hwy 51 Bridge. Frank cautions that finding the correct channels through the wide marsh towards the end of the trip can be challenging.

Piraino also ventured downstream of the above take-out to the Dekorra take-out on the Wisconsin River. He characterizes the channels here as poorly defined and deadfall prone. This latter trip is probably not a great choice.

Conclusion
This is far from a pristine wetland stream, but Duck Creek is a viable paddling option. Because of the slow current it also offers trips which require no shuttle. Paddlers can put in at the Cty. G bridge or at the landing just downstream of the Hwy 51 bridge. Round trips can start from either place.
Galena River

Location
Lafayette County.

Natural Features
The Galena River arises just east of Platteville near the Platteville Mounds. It flows southward, enters Illinois and soon joins the Mississippi River. Prior to settlement the predominant vegetation type in its drainage area was prairie grass. The surrounding landscape was never flattened by glaciers so the Galena River’s valley is surrounded by steep-sided hills. Bedrock dolomite cliffs line some sections of the river. The stream’s floor often consists of these same rocks. They create riffly sections when the gradient picks up as it does quite frequently. The water is runs fairly clear during dry spells but it quickly turns muddy when it rains.

Human History and Influence
Green Bay and Prairie du Chien are Wisconsin’s two oldest cities in that order. Next oldest are several towns which grew up not far from the Galena River. The region was rich in lead deposits. Thus it drew many miners in the 1820s and 1830s. New Diggings is the closest such town to the Galena River. A few miles to the south the river reaches Galena, Illinois. Because of the lead industry this town was once more important than Chicago. It served as the industry’s main river port. In those days the river was large enough to carry sizeable lead-laden vessels. Within a few years though, it silted in and became too shallow. The silt came from agricultural practices and building projects. Today, agricultural runoff continues to impact the river. The Wisconsin section of the river holds no streamside communities and no dams.

Navigability and Difficulty
Intermediate maneuvering skills and river-reading skills will come in handy in order to dodge limbs and find the best routes through riffles. When the water is low those sections can be pretty scratchy. How to decide if there is enough water? Bridge scouting may be necessary. Or one can monitor the USGS website for gauge readings on the nearby Platte and Grant Rivers.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I paddled a short section of the Galena around the year 2000 but lost my trip notes and remember it poorly.

Experiences of Others
Consult Paddling Southern Wisconsin for a description of the 5.8 miles from County W to Buncombe Rd. With enough water he recommends the Galena for its “multitudes of pleasant riffles, often in combination with lovely wooded bluffs and rock formations“. In his Paddling Illinois guidebook author Svob also describes the Galena as it continues into that state.

Further Ideas
Paddle all the way down to Galena, Illinois and take the time to explore that historic town.

Conclusion
With adequate water, the Galena is a very nice little canoe stream.
**Grant River**

**Location**
Grant County.

**Natural Features**
Several headwater branches flow southward off the south side of the Galena-Platteville Cuesta which is also known as the Military Ridge. For many years U.S Hwy 18 has followed this ridge top. Headwater branches flow south of Fennimore and Mt. Hope and merge to form the Grant River a few miles west of Lancaster. From there the river meanders southward until it joins the Mississippi River near Potosi. The valley is relatively narrow because the Grant cuts through erosion-resistant dolomite. Exposed along the riverside are outcrops of both dolomite and sandstone. The stream floor is often muddy or sandy but becomes rocky where rocks from these cliffs have fallen into the river. Multiple riffles result but there are no significant rapids. The Grant flows through lands which were long ago cleared for agriculture. The steep hills are largely forested as are most of the immediate banks. Before settlement the Grant flowed through prairies, eastern hardwood forests and oak savannas.

**Human History and Influence**
Grant County was one Wisconsin’s earliest regions to be settled by whites. Today Potosi is a small town, but it was larger and more important during the lead mining days. In the 1840s it was the busiest port on the upper Mississippi. The St. John mine in Potosi is now a tourist attraction. That town isn’t far but there are no towns on banks of the Grant and no dams that I know of. Agriculture is the county’s major industry which, of course, contributes to the degradation of the river. The river is popular enough to support at least one canoe-rental livery. There is also the Potosi Brewery and the National Brewing Museum all in one complex.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Downstream of Porter Hill Rd. deadfall problems will be minimal. Paddlers need enough skill to maneuver through narrow spots and over riffles. Low water is sometimes a problem. Water levels can be monitored on the USGS website. In *Paddling Southern Wisconsin*, Mike Svob suggests calling Grant River Canoe Rental (608 794-2342) to ask about water levels.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
I was first on the Grant in the late 1970s with a Mitch Tuttle-led Sierra Club trip. My tandem partner and I used my Grumman aluminum canoe. Since 2004 I have paddled the Grant at least four times. Alone and with others I have enjoyed this river immensely. In May of 2004 I explored the 11 mile section between just off Hwy 81 on Porter Mill Road to the County U bridge. Alone in my Bell Wildfire I appreciated this river’s many attractions. The water was quite clear, the abundant rocky outcrops were lovely and I saw lots of wildlife. Stately white pines topped the bedrock cliffs. I chased many schools of rough fish, and I spotted a several smallmouth bass. In the air and on branches I spotted phoebes, a green heron, and a bald eagle which did not leave its perch as I passed underneath. A long creature swam under my canoe which looked like a muskie. Soon I realized it was an otter.

I have also explored the 8 miles from County U to Chaffee Hollow Road by myself and with others. This stretch is equally beautiful with the same river dolomite cliffs.

**Experiences of Others**
In *Paddling Southern Wisconsin* Mike Svob also describes the above two sections. According to him the second section has fewer bluffs but more riffles.
Further Ideas
It would be interesting to explore upstream of Porter-Hill Rd. and also downstream of Chaffee Hollow Rd. There are about 13 mile river miles from the latter bridge to the Mississippi.

Conclusion
The Grant is one of my favorites because of its intimate size and its attractive bedrock cliffs.
Honey Creek (Sauk County)

Location
Southwestern Sauk County

Natural Features
Honey Creek and its headwater tributaries originate near the town of Plain. Much of the creek east of that village occupies a wide valley which once was inundated by a glacial lake. Oak savanna was the original vegetation type in this region. Bottomland deciduous trees become more prominent as the stream nears its confluence with the Wisconsin River. In those final few miles, the river winds through outwash soils deposited by melt waters of the river which preceded our current Wisconsin River. The East Branch of Honey Creek and another tributary called Otter Creek drain southern portions of the Baraboo Hills. Ferry Bluff is situated at the confluence of Honey Creek and the Wisconsin River. It is now a State Natural Area and a designated haven for bald eagles.

Human History and Influence
Honey Creek valley is heavily farmed. The only town on its banks is the village of Plain. Six miles north of that community the creek has been dammed to form White Mound Lake where there is also a county park. Ferry Bluff was the location of a ferry which carried wagons and passengers across the Wisconsin River around the time of the Civil War.

Navigability and Difficulty
Low water will not generally be the problem on navigable sections. Frequent tree snags are major impediments.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In the late 1990s I drove with my canoe and gear to the end of Ferry Bluff Rd. First I climbed the bluff to enjoy the view. I admired huge shagbark hickory trees and black oaks but never saw any of the prickly pear cactuses which are reportedly found there. I put into Honey Creek from the same parking lot which services Ferry Bluff. My plan was to paddle upstream and eventually turn around. I decided to skip the upstream put-in possibilities because I was wary of deadfall. I weaved my way upstream against a lazy current over a slalom course of overhanging branches. I exited my canoe several times to pull it over logs. After 45 minutes I was tiring of this routine and turned around. The scenery was nothing to write home about anyway.

Experiences of Others
Frank Piraino explored more of Honey Creek than I did and he described his experience in Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin. He put in at the County O bridge and took out at the same place I had accessed the creek. His trip also included considerable time out of his canoe pulling it over fallen trees and logjams.

Conclusion
Honey Creek does not come highly recommended by me or Frank Piraino.
**Kickapoo River**

**Location**
Monroe, Vernon and Crawford counties.

**Natural Features**
The Kickapoo is the longest river contained entirely within the never-glaciated region of Wisconsin known as the Driftless Area. It begins a few miles north of Wilton in southern Monroe County and flows south to the Wisconsin River. The steep sided hills and wide valleys of the region were originally covered by an oak savanna plant community. Remnants of this group survive today as do hemlocks, yellow birches and white pines which grow on some of the steeper north facing slopes. These typically more northerly trees are relics of the last Ice Age. This very old river has eroded down through bedrock dolomite which is exposed at higher elevations like the peaks at Wildcat Mt. State Park. At the river level it has eroded down to sandstone which it has fashioned into shapely cliffs. The result is a very pretty, narrow and winding stream. The water, though often murky, does clear considerably if it has not rained for a while.

**Human History and Influence**
Moving bands of hunters used the overhanging cliffs for shelter thousands of years ago. Mound Builders came later and were followed by the Ho-Chunk people. Whites settled the valley in the mid-1880s. They logged the steep slopes and built flour and lumber mills at riverside communities like Ontario, LaFarge, Soldiers Grove and Gays Mills.

Denuded slopes and sloppy agricultural practices created a flood-prone river. Repeated floods led to proposals for a dam to help control floods. This started a controversy which lasted for many years. Construction on an earthen dam a few miles north of LaFarge began in 1971 after 140 families were forced to leave their farms. The dam was halted through the efforts of canoeists and environmentalists and by 1991 the dam was defeated for good. The deciding factor turned out to be lake quality studies. These determined that the envisioned tourist attraction would soon turn green from algae overgrowth because of nutrient and pesticide runoff from upstream farms.

But what to do with all the public land which had been condemned? It became the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, created in 1994 as the only state-owned, locally managed reserve in the nation. Its director and its board which includes Ho-Chunk tribal members are charged with developing the site for low-impact eco-tourism. Preserving archeological sites is a priority. Canoeing is just one “silent sport” which is being encouraged. Not that it needs that much encouragement. The Kickapoo is probably the most paddled Wisconsin stream besides the Wisconsin River.

Controversy again came to the Kickapoo Valley in the late 1990s when a major upgrading of Hwy 131 was proposed. I opposed the idea and marched against it fearing that the new bridges and road engineering efforts would degrade the river. In hindsight I will say that the new road has not caused the problems I had feared.

Canoeing the Kickapoo has been a major economic boost for the area. Each year thousands of canoeists ply the river from Ontario where they often rent canoes and spend their money in other ways. Major floods are still a problem for communities along the river. Back in 1978, with federal aid, much of Soldiers Grove relocated to higher ground and built the nation’s first “solar village.” Floods in 2008 left Gays Mills contemplating a similar move.
Navigability and Difficulty
Numerous spring-fed trout streams feed the Kickapoo and keep the water level sufficient. Those without good river-reading skills may get hung up in shallow sections. The Ontario canoe liveries collaborate to clear away the fallen trees. The river south of LaFarge is prone to deadfall obstructions. This is not a huge problem for those willing to execute a few portages. The Kickapoo features scattered rocky riffles. Inexperienced canoeists often get turned around on these riffles and on the fast corners.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I have paddled the Kickapoo too many times to mention. Most of these trips have started at Ontario and proceeded various distances down the river. Typically, I have paddled the first 8.5 miles to Bridge 7. I always appreciate the sandstone cliffs with their clinging ferns and the hemlocks on top. In recent years I have usually stopped at the landing by Wildcat Mt. State Park. The routine is to have lunch with my paddling buddies and then to climb Mt. Pisgah. This lovely forest climb through a State Natural Area leads to a great view of the Kickapoo Valley.

I vividly remember a trip I took down the Kickapoo in the summer of 1973. Somewhere past Rockton my tandem partner and I encountered a gauntlet of felled trees. It caused us to abort our trip. We climbed up the bank on river right to a farmhouse where the owner listened sympathetically and with great interest to our story. Turns out he was one of the few dam opponents in the area. He had just returned from Washington, D.C. where he had testified against its completion. After hearing from us he informed the Milwaukee Journal of the vandalism and it was reported in that paper the next day. Obviously the purpose of the vandalism was to thwart canoe-loving dam opponents.

In August of 1996 I explored a downstream section of the Kickapoo starting at the Hwy 61 Bridge in Soldiers Grove. I passed under a couple of bridges and pulled over and around a few fallen trees. Then I biked back to where I started. With no sandstone bluffs this section of the river is much less scenic.

There is one more very appealing section of the Kickapoo. That is the final stretch down to the Wisconsin River at Wauzeka. In September of 2004 Ron Rosner and I explored it together in our solo canoes. We liked it because the going was easy on a surprisingly wild and attractive stretch of river. Our trip included the 6.5 miles between the Plum Creek Landing along Plum Creek Rd. to the Hwy 60 Bridge just east of Wauzeka. Beef cattle grazed along the right bank for the first three miles. We enjoyed slaloming among many fallen trees which only partly obstructed our paths. After the river turned eastward we left the cattle behind and entered a river corridor which showed few signs of human development. We passed stands of river birch, green ash and silver maples. Grassy meadows of formerly tilled land opened up expansive views of forested hills which were showing early fall color.

Experiences of Others
Many articles about the Kickapoo have been written through the years in journals such as Wisconsin Trails and Midwest Silent Sports. Mike Svob describes five different sections of the river in his Paddling Southern Wisconsin guidebook. He skips the 11 miles from LaFarge to Viola because of several large logjams. He also does not include the 12 miles from Soldiers Grove to Gays Mills. Also excluded by Svob are the 27 miles from Gays Mills to the Plum Creek Landing. He does describe the final miles from there to Wauzeka.

Further Ideas
It is possible to canoe camp the entire 97 miles of the Kickapoo, but it is not easy. Logjams and fallen trees make it difficult. Also the shores are mostly in private ownership. Svob mentions several campsite options in his narrative. Those sections not described by me or Mike Svob are navigable for those willing to pull around a few
log jams. But why bother when upstream sections are so much prettier? A seven foot dam must be portaged at Gays Mills.

**Conclusion**
The Kickapoo is a very popular canoe stream for good reason. From Ontario to LaFarge it is easy to paddle, intimate and the scenery is gorgeous. Personally I stay away from it on summer weekends because of the crowds. That final stretch to Wauzeka is also very nice and will never be crowded.
Kickapoo River (West Fork)

Location
Vernon County

Natural Features
The West Fork’s headwaters gather in northern Vernon County near the Monroe County line. It flows south for about 20 miles before it empties into the main Kickapoo River just north of Readstown. Drained are multiple “coulees” typical of this “Driftless Region” of the state. These rugged hills and valleys were never glaciated. The soils of the region are loamy and fertile and they muddy the river after it rains. Often though, this spring-fed stream runs cool and relatively clear. It helps that the stream floor is often rocky instead of muddy. Low bedrock sandstone bluffs line some sections. The original upland vegetation here was mostly oak savanna. Along the river I saw a few white oaks but mostly box elders, black willows and basswoods.

Human History and Influence
Dairy farms dot the drainage area of the West Fork but their negative influence has lessened in recent years. Fewer acres are now farmed so more land lies fallow. Conservation efforts have also contributed to the stream’s improved water quality. Numerous groups including at least one land conservancy, Trout Unlimited, and local landowners have worked to buffer the stream from field runoff. There are no significant human communities in the drainage area. The West Fork of the Kickapoo River is now considered to be one of Wisconsin’s best Class I trout streams.

Navigability and Difficulty
The water becomes too shallow after prolonged dry spells but there is often sufficient water. I put in from the trout fisherman parking lot about a half mile north of Hwy. 82. That spot should be a good place to determine the adequacy of flow. Often the current is quick across shallow, rocky riffles, but there are no true rapids. The corridor was surprisingly free of deadfall. I was told that logjams may be more common south of Hwy. 56.

Trip Ideas: My experience
Somehow I missed this gem until June 2, 2015. I had bridge-scouted it once in the past and had incorrectly concluded it would be choked by logjams. Fortunately, the River Alliance of Wisconsin’s Denny Caneff urged me to give it a try because he had enjoyed paddling it himself. So I drove to the river and locked my bicycle near the Hwy 56 bridge. Next I pulled into the fisherman’s parking lot north of Hwy. 82 and decided to put in there.

What a lovely little river this was! It helped that the weather was perfect and there was nary a mosquito. Despite the stream’s narrowness I encountered only one logjam 50 yards upstream of my take-out bridge. The water was quite clear and I was surprised by the ubiquity of large and small rocks which comprised the stream floor. Two long river-right stretches were lined by continuous 8-10 foot sandstone bluffs. They were partially covered by ferns and a variety of other attractive plants. Red-winged blackbirds were the commonest birds of the day. Their calls were familiar to me as were the “witchety-whichety” calls of yellow throats. I was fortunate to glimpse several of these pretty little birds. My duck sighting feelings were more ambivalent. Never had I disturbed so many wood duck moms with their ducklings. I hope these families were all eventually reunited.

Much of the stream corridor was lined by grass monocultures which might have been boring except that the openness allowed expansive views of forested hills. Other sections were lined by attractive varieties of trees. There was just enough water to float easily over rocky sections which created riffles in many places but especially among multiple islands. A muskrat swam by carrying tufts of grass. It came so close I could see every
detail of its face. I never knew these little critters were so cute. When I spotted the Hwy 56 bridge ahead it made me sad because I was starting to realize this might be my last new Wisconsin river.

309 is enough and I am now more interested in revisiting old favorites.

Experiences of Others
Denny Caneff and his group put in near Avalanche on the property of the West Fork Sports Club. They took out on private property around a mile upstream of Hwy 56. Denny reports that the river between his put-in and mine at the fisherman’s parking lot was also lovely and unobstructed.

Further Ideas
There are 5 or 6 more miles from Hwy 56 to the Kickapoo confluence which are begging to be explored though one source told me this section may contain more deadfall. Perhaps there is also more navigable water upstream of the West Fork Sports Club, especially when the water is high.

Conclusion
The West Fork of the Kickapoo River was a perfect ending to my Wisconsin river canoeing odyssey. Between 1969 and 2015 I have explored 309 different Wisconsin streams. This one featured many of my favorite qualities including small size, bedrock bluffs, and good water quality. Consider paddling it when the nearby and popular Kickapoo River is too crowded. Because of shallow and narrow sections, light kayaks or solo canoes are preferable to loaded tandem canoes.
La Crosse River

Location
Monroe and La Crosse counties

Natural Features
The La Crosse River originates in northern Monroe County within the Ft. McCoy Military Reservation. This sandy "barrens" region features jack pine trees and scrub oaks. Near Sparta the vegetation becomes oak savanna characterized by widely spaced bur oak trees. White oaks and other broadleaves are common now too since the land has been altered by logging and agriculture. After Sparta the river turns westward and winds through a broad, loamy-soiled valley on its way to the City of La Crosse and the Mississippi River. Much of this valley was inundated about 10,000 years ago by a temporary glacial lake which was backed up by ice dams on the Mississippi. Rugged hills and bluffs can often be seen from the river. These are typical landforms in this “Driftless” region of southwestern Wisconsin which was never glaciated. Rocks are rare and rapids are lacking. Wetlands and sloughs are common along the lower river. The river’s final miles traverse a sizeable marsh in the City of La Crosse.

Human History and Influence
I do not know if the US Army has been a good steward of the river or not. The upper river is spring-fed and runs quite clear at times. Several cold water trout streams are tributaries. The La Crosse River skirts several communities including Sparta, Bangor, West Salem and La Crosse. The river is degraded by runoff from these communities and from farms. Neshonoc Lake is a flowage of the river behind a dam at West Salem. A second impoundment is Perch Lake at Sparta.

Navigability and Difficulty
Since the river is heavily spring-fed, it tends to hold enough water for canoeing during most seasons. Prolonged dry spells, however, will result in shallow sections along the river near Sparta. There is a gauge there which can be monitored on the USGS website. Fallen trees, though not absent, are not major concerns.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In August of 1981 I canoed the 10.4 miles between Hammer Rd and Bangor with a friend in my Mad River Explorer. We particularly enjoyed a section of speedy channels among small islands. Open meadows revealed blooming prairie wildflowers and offered views of distant hills. In October of 2000 I returned to the La Crosse with my friend, Eric Wheeler. First we locked and hid our bicycles near the George St. Bridge in La Crosse. Then we drove to Veterans’ Park in West Salem where a large gathering of Hmong people was being held. It looked like a major cultural event. Our 12 mile river journey took us about 3.5 hours. We tandem paddled the same canoe I had used 18 years earlier. Most of this section of the river was swifter and less marshy than upstream sections. The banks were higher too. Sandstone cliffs arose on river left as the river cut into the north end of La Crosse Ridge. At one point we concluded that the river had recently forged a broad new channel. Instead of a long 180 degree meander the river had eroded a short cut through a narrow strip of land. Someday the original channel will be partially abandoned forming a slough. Eventually it will be cut off completely leaving a small oxbow lake. Soon Eric and I passed under Hwy 16 and entered the expansive La Crosse River Marsh. At the take out we hid our gear and biked public roads to the LaCrosse River Bike Trail which we followed back to West Salem.

Experiences of Others
The out-of-date guidebook *Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin* includes the La Crosse River as does Mike Svob’s *Paddling Southern Wisconsin*. Svob skips the 12 miles from Rockland to West Salem. The former guidebook does include that section. It includes many sloughs and islands according to author, Michael Duncanson. Those who paddle beyond Bangor will eventually reach Neshonoc Lake where they can find a landing on the southern shore. Svob’s Sparta to Rockland section covers 9 miles and begins at a designated canoe landing in Sparta. His 13.3 mile section between West Salem begins downstream-left of the Cty. C Bridge in West Salem and ends at the County B Bridge at the edge of La Crosse. He does not mention the George St. Bridge take out Eric and I used because it is not a formal access. Instead he writes that the trip can be extended to 17 miles by taking out at Riverside Park at the Mississippi River confluence.

**Further Ideas**
The La Crosse River Trail goes all the way to Sparta which means this bike route can be used as a shuttle route along the entire navigable part of the river.

**Conclusion**
The La Crosse River has several virtues as a canoe stream. It is easy and safe yet intimate in size. The scenery is often good. Trips of various lengths can be planned. Finally, the LaCrosse River Trail presents an attractive “silent sport” shuttling option.
Lemonweir River

Location
Jackson, Monroe, Wood and Juneau counties.

Natural Features
Most of this river’s drainage area is flat and sandy or boggy. This is the case because much of it once lay under Glacial Lake Wisconsin whose sediments were deposited evenly. The Lemonweir’s headwater wetlands and creeks cluster around the border region where the above four counties meet. Before settlement the predominant vegetation type here was pine savanna. As the river flows south it eventually enters original oak savanna country. It meets the Wisconsin River a few miles east of Mauston. The underlying bedrock is sandstone, but most of the riverbed is muddy or sandy rather than rocky or gravelly. Rapids are lacking and the current is slow because the region is so flat. The sandstone bedrock is only revealed at the Wisconsin River confluence and along one small dells section between New Lisbon and Mauston.

Human History and Influence
The origin of the river’s name? It may be from a French word, an Indian word, a river in Ireland or the name of a logger. Take your pick. The marshy headwaters of the Lemonweir have been markedly altered by a series of drainage ditches and small dams which create flowages. Some of these are recreational but much of this engineering has created commercial cranberry bogs. Dams at New Lisbon and Mauston create artificial lakes. Traditional agriculture impacts the river between these towns, but forests again predominate between Mauston and the Wisconsin River. The river’s water quality and clarity are quite poor.

Navigability and Difficulty
Low water is not usually a problem. Deadfall obstructions are common upstream of Mauston. Downstream of that town the Lemonweir is quite easy to paddle. Even though there will be limbs to dodge, the slow current gives ample time to make the necessary moves.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In the middle 1970’s, Mary Jo Martin and I canoed from Mauston to Wisconsin Dells on the Wisconsin River with another couple. We camped overnight a short distance downstream from the confluence of the two rivers. I remember a pleasant trip through a forest dominated by silver maples along the lower shores and with oaks, maples and both white and jack pines topping the higher banks. We put-in just downstream of the dam in Mauston on river left. From there it was 16 miles to the confluence with the Wisconsin. That junction was a maze of channels and islands.

In 1999, I met my friends Ron Rosner and Tom Watkins for an outing on the Lemonweir. We were impressed by the slow and winding nature of the stream and its many back sloughs. We found a put-in near the northern terminus of Town Line Rd. and paddled our solo boats two hours before we reached our take out at the Cty. HH Bridge.

In early June of 2008 I returned to the Lemonweir after rereading the below guidebooks. I had concluded there was one section of the upper river I needed to sample. This was the 4.6 mile stretch from the 6th Ave. Bridge to the River Rd. Bridge. For me it was an interesting slalom course through multiple woody obstructions which I felt good about completing without the need to exit my canoe. It was a swampy run through a mosquito-infested maze of islands and backwater sloughs. Silver maples, river birches, and swamp oaks dominated the shores. The outing took about 90 minutes and then I jogged back to my car at the put-in.
Experiences of Others
Michael Duncanson’s out-of-print *Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin* described consecutive trips from Hwy H to New Liston (15 miles), New Lisbon to Mauston (10 miles) and Mauston to the Wisconsin River (16 miles). The *Paddling Southern Wisconsin* guidebook includes the same 4.6 mile trip I paddled above and also a 10.8 mile trip from the 19th Ave. Bridge about 3 miles downstream of Mauston to the County HH Bridge. Its author Mike Svob also mentions that the short 3 mile stretch immediately upstream of New Lisbon is a popular canoe trail. This one begins at Kennedy Park and ends at Riverside Park on New Lisbon Lake. Duncanson describes the sandstone “Little Dells” about halfway between New Lisbon and Mauston. Years ago there were many more canoeists who passed this point. That was when there was an annual canoe race between the two towns. When that race was canceled the incentive to clear the riverway disappeared. Nowadays this stretch is reportedly deadfall choked. Though his second described trip ends at Cty HH, Svob does mention the availability of using a boat landing on river right shore at the confluence of the Lemonweir with the Wisconsin for those wishing to travel another 3.5 miles to that point.

Further Ideas
Remember the canoe-camp option of starting on the Lemonweir and finishing at the Wisconsin Dells (See Wisconsin River description).

Conclusion
The Lemonweir is suitable for family canoeing through much of the year between Mauston and the Wisconsin River. It is reasonably wild and scenic.

*Lemonweir River “delta,” near its confluence with the Wisconsin River.*
Little Platte River

Location
Iowa, Lafayette and Grant counties.

Natural Features
Several branches merge near Platteville to form the Little Platte River. This small stream then flows southwesterly towards the Mississippi but it merges with the main Platte River about 3 miles upstream of that confluence. It flows through the ridge and valley country which is typical of the never glaciated “Driftless Region” of Wisconsin. Typically, rivers in this region have no rapids, but the Little Platte reportedly sports at least one solid class II. The lower river is mostly devoid of rocks but evidence of the St. Peter formation will be seen as low cliffs along upstream stretches.

This particular formation includes sandstone with some limestone, shale and conglomerate. Though glaciers never flowed here the lower Little Platte valley was influenced by the Ice Age. When the glaciers were melting and the Mississippi was much bigger than it is now it backed up into the valleys of the Platte and Little Platte. As a result the valley floor consists of lake deposits. Later these deposits were covered by loess soils which blew in from the west. Originally, the drainage area of the Little Platte was an oak forest featuring black, white and bur oaks plus black cherry trees. These species can still be seen on upland shores while bottomland species like silver maples are dominant elsewhere.

Human History and Influence
Because of lead mining this was one of the first areas of Wisconsin to be settled by whites. Molten lead was poured into pits forming “plats.” That explains the names Platteville, Little Platte River, etc. The mining museum in Platteville is worth a visit. Another interesting area attraction is the Grotto at Dickeyville. My canoeing partner Ron Rosner and I viewed it the same day we paddled the Little Platte. Agriculture and other human developments have created a river which is subject to polluted runoff from steep slopes. The Little Platte River has no streamside towns but a major branch known as Rountree Creek skirts the south edge of Platteville.

Navigability and Difficulty
Most sections are prone to deadfall on this narrow stream. The American Whitewater website lists a section which contains a class II (III) rapid. Elsewhere paddlers may encounter minor riffles. Upstream sections will be too shallow during dry spells but the stretch that Ron and I paddled should generally hold adequate water. Bridge scouting is always an option and there is a gauge on the nearby Platte River which is listed on the USGS website. Advice on runnability for the whitewater section can be found at the American Whitewater website.

Trip Ideas: My experience
Ron Rosner and I explored the Little Platte in early June of 2006. We paddled tandem in my 17 foot Nova Craft canoe. First I locked my bike to a tree near the Hwy 61 Bridge over the main Platte River. Then we drove to our put-in at the Oak Rd. Bridge. Though we encountered a half dozen log jams, they were fairly easy to wrestle the canoe over. When we weren’t engaged in those chores, we enjoyed the scenery even though the river was very muddy. The corridor was consistently forested after we left the initial farm fields behind. Growing from the banks were Canada anemones, wild geraniums and towering angelica. Towards the finish the banks became lower and marshier as the river widened near its confluence with the main Platte River. My bike ride back to the car at the put-in was at first challenging and then downright exhilarating. A long uphill climb was followed by a 1.7 mile downhill run!

Experiences of Others
The American Whitewater website lists a 5.5 mile “local run” for whitewater boaters in the spring and after heavy rains. It commences at Old Lancaster Rd. and ends at Stumptown Rd. Surprisingly this website rates the run a Class II which approaches Class III at high flows.

Further Ideas
For those not wishing to arrange a shuttle, trip options include a round trip starting on the Platte and continuing a ways up that stream and/or up the Little Platte. Such an outing could begin at the Hwy 61 Bridge. At least initially the upstream current faced will be very weak.

Conclusion
The Little Platte is a viable canoeing option for paddlers who like a small stream and don’t mind a few woody obstructions. It even features a rare southwestern Wisconsin whitewater section.
Little Sugar River

Location
Green County.

Natural Features
The Little Sugar is a tributary of the Sugar River. That stream flows southward into Illinois where it merges with the Rock River north of Rockford. Several headwater branches of the Little Sugar originate near the Green-Dane County border. The flow direction of these and the Little Sugar itself is first southward and then eastward. The glacial geology of this stream’s drainage area is complicated because it skirts the border between glaciated terrain and the never glaciated “Driftless Region” of southwest Wisconsin. Its western headwater branches drain ridges and valleys typical of the Driftless Region. Headwater tributaries to the east and parts of the Little Sugar itself flow across relatively flat terrain underlain by lake deposits. When the glaciers were melting a large ice dam to the south created a glacial lake which existed around 10,000 years ago.

Before the region’s dairy farms arrived this was oak savanna. Uplands featured scattered bur oaks. Black oaks and white oaks were common near the river’s edge. These oak species can still be seen among the silver maples and box elders which grow along the river’s edge. The river bottom is muddy to sandy and rocks are rare in most sections.

Human History and Influence
This is dairy farm country which was settled by the Swiss starting in 1845. Nowadays tourists flock to New Glarus to enjoy the sights, sounds and tastes of a Swiss village. A dam at Albany on the main Sugar River creates Lake Albany. The Little Sugar flows into that man-made lake. This stream is usually muddy and polluted by farm runoff. The river’s last few miles pierce the Albany State Wildlife Area.

Navigability and Difficulty
The Little Sugar is narrow and very prone to deadfall obstructions. See below for ideas on how to minimize this problem. Lower sections will generally have enough water.

Trip Ideas: My experience
On September 27 of 2005 I explored the Little Sugar with Beth Wentzel. We both used our solo freestyle canoes. I still had limburger cheese and raw onions on my breath when we put in at the Tin Can Road Bridge. We had just eaten at Monroe's Baumgartner tavern and washed our sandwiches down with beer. We knew that deadfall would be a problem so we took a cautious approach which worked out well. Our plan was to paddle upstream a ways and then to turn around. For about 45 minutes we enjoyed the challenge of maneuvering our way upstream among countless logs. Only once were we required to exit our canoes. We enjoyed observing the shapely shadows, backlit leaves and dappled sunlight as we paddled under an attractive canopy of silver maples and box elders. When this challenge started to became tedious we turned around and returned to our put-in bridge where we ended the outing.

Further Ideas
Someone with a high tolerance for deadfall may wish to try putting in at the Schneeberger Rd. Bridge. Two other options should be easier. One idea is to put-in at Tin Can Rd. Bridge and to paddle downstream into Lake Albany. Hopefully the deadfall is not too prominent along this stretch. Another idea is to paddle upstream as far as possible from the Albany Lake and eventually turn around for a round trip.
Conclusion
The Little Sugar is only for paddlers looking for a seldom paddled small stream and who enjoy the challenge of maneuvering around logs.

The Little Sugar River, somewhere between New Glarus and Monticello.
**Little Yellow River**

**Location**
Juneau County.

**Natural Features**
Numerous headwater branches arise and then join together in northwest Juneau County. The Little Yellow eventually empties into Castle Rock Lake which is a large impoundment of the Wisconsin River. Its entire drainage area consists of peat bogs and sandy soils which were left behind after the draining of Glacial Lake Wisconsin. Scrub oak and jack pine barrens emerged from the poor soils. The river winds slowly as little elevation is lost. Rocks are rare.

**Human History and Influence**
This land was extensively ditched and drained for farming in the late 1800s. But the region was ill-suited for agriculture. So, in 1939 the Little Yellow River headwater region was included in the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge. Today this 44,000 acre refuge is home to over 220 species of birds. Several flowages are maintained. The river way remains wooded and undeveloped even after it leaves the boundaries of the refuge.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The only practical trip on this very small stream is described below. It will always be an easy one with plenty of water unless paddlers lose their way. There is no danger of becoming permanently lost.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
I loved my brief outing on the Little Yellow. All I did was to paddle from Hwy. 58 down to Castle Rock Lake and back. It was a lovely swamp with interesting sloughs and backwaters. I found it necessary to follow channels with current to avoid blind alleys. This was not always easy because the current was almost imperceptible. The waterway was lined by river birch, Hill’s oaks, jack pines and silver maple trees. Closer to the water’s edge grew alders, red osier dogwoods, ferns and blooming blue flags. Wood ducks were plentiful. After I reached an open water arm of Castle Rock Lake in about 20 minutes I decided to really take my time going back. So I explored several backwaters and paid special attention to the sounds of nature, the reflections on the water and the pretty clouds overhead.

**Further Ideas**
I can imagine exploring Buckhorn State Park as part of an outing on the Little Yellow. That park is immediately across an arm of Castle Rock Lake from the Little Yellow River confluence. Those wishing to explore the same swampland I explored could also do so by entering from the Castle Rock Lake side. The Wisconsin Gazetteer marks two boat landings in the northern shore of the Little Yellow as it is opening up into the larger lake.

**Conclusion**
This is a gorgeous little backwater which is easy to access and to explore. My trip only required an hour of time, but explorations could easily be extended in this interesting watery world.
**Location**
This is a very short waterway located adjacent to the Wisconsin River just east of Avoca in Iowa County.

**Natural Features**
This stream might be considered a backwater of the Wisconsin River, but it does independently drain a small area south of that river. Its entire drainage area falls with the Wisconsin River flood plain. For about two miles Marsh Creek becomes Avoca Lake before it narrows and its current resumes on a final two mile leg to the Wisconsin River. Parts of this creek way are lined by bottomland forest but a sizeable portion of the northern bank is occupied by the largest virgin tall-grass prairie east of the Mississippi. In a *Seasonal Guide to the Natural Year* (in Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin), John Bates writes that “the 1,885-acre site is dominated by little bluestem, northern drop seed, and June grass...”. This important ecosystem is known as the Avoca Prairie.

**Human History and Influence**
That prairie is managed by the DNR which also manages the rest of this waterway as part of the Lower Wisconsin River State Wildlife Area. It also falls within the boundaries of the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway. There is development, however, in the form of cabins along Lake Avoca. Avoca Park is also situated near those cabins. This park features a couple of Indian effigy mounds.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Fallen trees and logjams will be present but can largely be avoided by making Avoca Lake the main feature of a trip.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
Hay Lane is a back road marked by a dotted line in the Wisconsin Gazetteer. I followed it northward towards the Avoca Prairie parking lot after I turned northward from Hwy 133 a mile and a half east of Avoca. Where it hits Marsh Creek this road becomes a concrete and rock ford which partially dams the stream. This is where I put-in after I left my bicycle at the west end of the dead end road which follows the southern shore of Lake Avoca. First I paddled my Wildfire upstream to the east against a barely perceptible current for about 5 minutes before I encountered a fallen tree and turned around. After I got back to the aforementioned ford I paddled westward into a picturesque watery corridor. On my right was as open marsh and sections of prairie. Beyond the treeless terrain I could see bluffs on the opposite side of the Wisconsin River. On my left was a sandy bank covered by silver maples and other deciduous trees. About halfway across the lake the right shore also became wooded. Soon cabins appeared along the left shore. Two children were swimming at Avoca Park by the boat launch. Soon the waterway shrank into a narrow stream and I passed the spot where I had left my bicycle. The current force had increased slightly but I decided it would be easy to eventually turn around and head back upstream. So I continued downstream. After an additional 25 minutes the creek was getting even narrower, fallen trees loomed ahead and the current seemed stronger. It was time to turn around and return to the spot where I had left my bike. From there it was an easy 4 mile ride back to my car.

**Further Ideas**
One could use the boat launch on Lake Avoca as the departure point for a round trip as far up and downstream as desired. Though deadfall might be a problem, it should also be possible to continue downstream into the Wisconsin River and on to Muscoda which is the first available take-out site.

**Conclusion**
This is a neat little backwater paddling option which can be combined with a trip to the Avoca Prairie.
Maunesha River

Location
Dane, Jefferson and Dodge counties.

Natural Features
This stream drains a small portion of the Rock River lowland. It cuts through glacial ground moraine resulting in scattered dolomite boulders in the streambed. Overlying the moraine materials are grayish-brown silt loams. Much of the land was originally oak savanna though prairies were also present. Wetlands also appear in the Maunesha drainage landscape. The Maunesha starts in northeastern Dane County and flows mainly eastward towards the Crawfish River. It picks up a major tributary named Stony Brook which merges from the south after it drains parts of extreme northwestern Jefferson County.

Human History and Influence
The Maunesha is far from pristine. Farmland is always nearby. It flows through the communities of Marshall and Waterloo. There are at least two dams.

Navigability and Difficulty
The streambed is so narrow that deadfall is a potential problem. However, the Madison based-group, Capitol Water Trails has taken on the task of keeping the river open for a few miles upstream of Marshall. The water will be too low at times though this should be infrequent down stream of Waterloo and on the most popular section described below. Fast water and rapids are lacking.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In 2005, Caroline Garber and I joined the Mad City Paddlers for an outing on the Maunesha. We paddled my tandem Nova Craft canoe. In about two hours we took a round trip from an access by a parking lot off of Canal Rd. about a mile and a half northwest of Marshall in Dane County. Most of the way there was no current because we were on flowage water behind dam. The muddy water was plenty deep, so the paddling was easy though there were several limbs to dodge. Thanks to Capitol Water Trails, the coast was mainly clear. We enjoyed the outing on a lovely June evening. Numerous blossoming high bush cranberries beautified the corridor. Huge cottonwood trees arched overhead and were releasing their cottany seeds. After passing under the County TT Bridge we paddled into the Deansville Marsh against a weak current. We might have reached Greenway Rd. had we not become concerned about the coming darkness. So we stopped short of that bridge and turned around.

Further Ideas
A couple of weeks before the above outing, Caroline and I were trying to figure out where to paddle the Maunesha. We launched our canoe by the Hwy 19 Bridge just east of Waterloo and paddled a short ways downstream. Soon we spied a gauntlet of downed trees ahead and decided to abort the trip. Instead we found another nearby section of the river to explore. We spent about 20 minutes on a deadfall-free section of the river within Waterloo’s city limits. I suspect that the river is too clogged with deadfall between Marshall and Waterloo. A better idea is to explore the Waterloo Wildlife Area section of the river. It can be accessed two miles northeast of Waterloo where an undeveloped boat landing is marked in the Wisconsin Gazetteer. Trees should be rare in the marsh enabling explorations up the river or down the river to the confluence of the Crawfish River. The current should be weak enough to allow up and downstream paddling obviating the need for a shuttle.
Conclusion
The Maunesha is a small stream which offers opportunities for river explorers who live near Madison.
Mill Creek

Location
Iowa County.

Natural Features
The Galena-Platteville Cuesta is a long east-west ridge which extends across Iowa County and several contiguous counties. Streams which arise on the north side this ridge are destined to descend its steeper “escarpment” side to the Wisconsin River. Mill Creek is one of those streams. It originates just upstream of Governor Dodge State Park and flows past steep ridges and hills which are typical of Wisconsin’s “Driftless Area” which never experienced the smoothening effects of glaciations. Before settlement this was oak savanna country typified by groves of bur oak trees.

Human History and Influence
Mill Creek’s headwaters are dammed twice within Governor Dodge State Park forming small flowages. After the park it passes woods and dairy farms but no towns on its journey to the wide flood plain of the Wisconsin River. At its mouth there once flourished a river town known as Helena. All that remains is a cemetery which now lies within the boundaries of Tower Hill State Park. The town’s major industry was lead shot which formed from droplets of molten lead dropped down a 120 foot shaft. Park visitors can still tour this tower which was built in the 1830’s. In the year 2000, the Wisconsin DNR compiled a list of “places potentially important in meeting Wisconsin’s future conservation and recreation needs.” This document described the Mill Creek-Trout Creek Valley area as a “corridor (which) supports many hill side prairies, old savanna and oak woodland, rock outcrops, scenic vistas and significant springs. The valley offers the opportunity to link Governor Dodge State Park with the Lower Wisconsin Riverway.”. The same document speculated that, with proper management, Mill Creek could easily be canoed.

Navigability and Difficulty
Referring to the last sentence it would take a lot of persistent chainsaw work to keep Mill Creek open for canoes. The upper creek would usually suffer from insufficient water for navigation. Further downstream within the Wisconsin River’s original flood plain the creek’s depth should be adequate most of the time.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In August of 1991 I put-in at the Hwy. C bridge just east of Tower Hill State Park. I paddled upstream which was easy because of the lazy current and adequate depth. Black willows and bur oak trees arched over the muddy stream as I propelled my solo freestyle Lady Bug. After about three quarters of an hour, a tangle of logs and low branches loomed ahead. Not wishing to portage around this obstruction I turned around and completed a 1.5 mile round trip.

Further Ideas
I am not sure how clogged the creek is between Hwy. C and the Wisconsin River, but I may check it out someday. I have read that some Wisconsin River travelers turn their canoes up Mill Creek on their way to camping at Tower Hill State Park.

Conclusion
This is another one of those small stream experiences which will appeal to only a few.
**Mississippi River**

**Location**
Forms the western border of Wisconsin with Minnesota and Iowa between Prescott, Wisconsin and Dubuque, Iowa.

**Natural Features**
This is the Mississippi River’s most physically impressive section. The deep gorge we see today is a product of the Ice Age. Gargantuan melt waters dug a deep trench through sandstone and dolomite bedrock. Bedrock bluffs rise more than 500 feet above the valley floor. North of Prairie du Chien the cliffs are comprised of sandstone capped by dolomite. South of there dolomite predominates. Swampy backwaters and marshlands have always guarded the main channels. A reasonably healthy ecosystem persists despite human interventions. This river way remains a paradise for waterfowl. The Mississippi Flyway is one of the nation’s largest and most important. Up to 60% of America’s migrating tundra swans use it. 70% of all the canvasback ducks in the world feed on wild celery near La Crosse during their migration.

**Human History and Influence**
This River has always served as a major highway for humans. The first travelers were Native Americans who were followed by the European explorers. In 1673 Marquette and Joliet completed their historic journey from Montreal to the Mississippi. By canoe they had traveled the Great Lakes, ascended the Fox River, portaged to the Wisconsin River, and then descended that river to the Mississippi. Later the river carried cargos of lead mined in southwestern Wisconsin. Logging came to dominate the river’s commerce by the late 1880s. Drives carried logs downstream to mills in cities like La Crosse.

Since 1878 the river has been subjected to multiple engineering projects to aid navigation. First came dredging and wing dams and then a series of locks and dams were constructed to maintain a 9 foot shipping channel. Barge companies are currently lobbying for even bigger locks and deeper channels to accommodate their giant vessels which carry products as diverse as corn, wheat, coal, fertilizer and road salt. The river’s ecosystem has suffered mightily from these projects as well as from multiple sources of pollution. It has been profoundly altered by the locks and dams. Yet it does enjoy protections from legislation like the federal Clean Water Act. The Upper Mississippi National Fish and Wildlife Refuge extends for more than 260 miles along the river bottoms between Wabasha, Minnesota and Rock Island, Illinois.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Competing with barges and other water craft in the main shipping channel can be hazardous. Wing dams must be avoided and locks must be negotiated. Canoes and kayaks are allowed through the locks. The backwaters are usually safer and certainly more serene but getting lost is a distinct possibility. Detailed maps are available to help prevent such scenarios. They can be obtained from the US Fish and Wildlife Headquarters at Winona or at the district office in La Crosse. Water levels will never be too low.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
I prefer backwater experiences and have rarely ventured into main channels of the Mississippi. I first plied Old Man River during fall color time in 1985. Alone I slid my solo freestyle Ladybug into the Chippewa River at the landing next by the Hwy 35 Bridge north of Nelson. As I paddled down the Chippewa towards the Mississippi a powerful headwind drove me towards the left shore where I spotted a side-channel. Partly to escape the wind and partly for the sake of adventure I followed this narrow channel. There was a downstream current so I figured it would eventually lead me back to the Chippewa or to the Mississippi.
Soon I was enveloped by a swampy fall wonderland. Yellowing river birches and silver maples framed a cloudless sky. I followed one dead-end channel and was forced to turn around. Worrying that I might get lost in the maze I bore to the right and eventually found the main Mississippi River channel. Then for about a mile I hugged the left shore to avoid boat traffic. This necessitated deviating from the shore on several occasions to avoid getting swept into wing dams. Eventually I spotted a promising side channel and entered a peaceful backwater. Fortunately it led me to the boat landing just east of the bridge over the main channel at Wabasha, Minnesota. My bicycle was waiting there so I climbed on for a wind-aided ride back to my car along Highways 25 and 35.

I returned to the Mississippi backwaters in 1996. My inspiration had been a Wisconsin Trails magazine article written by John Hildebrand which he entitled "Backwater Journey." Eric Wheeler and I planned to follow the same route he described in the article. At the Buffalo city boat landing we slid our solo boats into Spring Lake. This body of water comprises part of the pool behind Lock and Dam #5. We paddled southward across a wide expanse of water towards the dike we saw in the distance. When we got there we portaged over the dike and found ourselves in a waterway known as Running Slough. Hildebrand describes this waterway as "a shining ribbon through a forest of oak, ash and soft maple."

We were surprised by the clarity of the water. I learned later that most of the water in Running Slough comes not from the muddy Mississippi but from a spring-fed tributary known as Indian Creek. Along the way we could have gotten lost in some blind alley backwater but it was reasonably easy to follow the main current and to stay in the main channel. About 2.5 hours after our journey began we spotted a triangular canoe trail sign. We had found the marked canoe trail at Merrick State Park whose landing was our planned take-out point. There I located my 50cc Yamaha motorcycle which carried me back to our vehicle. On two other occasions I again found myself on parts of Merrick State Park's canoe trail. Both of these trips were Waumandee Creek excursions which ended at the same Merrick State Park landing. (See my Waumandee Creek narrative.)

On several occasions I have paddled the Long Lake Canoe Trail just down river from Trempealeau. It starts at a parking lot which can be found along the road which hugs the river downstream of Lock and Dam #6. Actually, I have never paddled this entire circle trail because I have only used the second half of the trail as the final pathway for trips down Tank Creek. (See my trip descriptions for that interesting stream.)

I paddled another marked canoe trail in June of 2005. That year I explored the Mississippi's backwaters at Wyalusing State Park. From its boat landing I paddled counterclockwise into a weak head current. Silver maples arched overhead and arrow weeds grew from the shallow water near the shores. Soon the waterway narrowed and the head current became more forceful. A bullfrog called and tree swallows darted over the water. The channel was isolated and beautiful. After paddling for about an hour I could see a power boat ahead and knew I was approaching the main channel of the Mississippi.

I located and followed the canoe trail signs which turned me leftward into the downstream current of the big river's main channel. I hugged the left bank and wondered if Marquette and Joliet had done the same thing when then emerged onto the Mississippi from the Wisconsin River in 1673. My view may have been similar to theirs because no came by and I saw no buildings or bridges in the distance. With the aid of the trail map I had picked up at the State Park office I turned leftward into the backwaters at the correct point. I was glad to have the map because I had seen no canoe trail sign. The return channel back to the landing followed a railroad grade.
Experiences of Others
Way too many to cite or acknowledge.

Further Ideas
I know of at least one more designated canoe trail on the Mississippi backwaters. That’s the one around Goose Island just south of La Crosse. Day excursions or multi-day excursions can be planned on the main channel.

Conclusion
The backwaters of the Mississippi are wild and beautiful. Marked canoe trails are the best way to explore them. Some will chose to brave the barges and locks of the main river channel.
**Location**
Dane County.

**Natural Features**
There must be several springs (perhaps nine of them) located just east of Fish Hatchery Rd. in Fitchburg, a suburb of Madison. Nine Mile Springs Creek begins a short distance upstream of the Nevin Fish Hatchery near the County PD Bridge. Its entire marshy drainage area was lake at the end of the Ice Age. Now it empties into Mud Lake which links Lake Monona and Lake Waubesa.

**Human History and Influence**
The creek is heavily impacted by the greater Madison area. It runs very close to the Madison Sewerage District’s main plant. In the past this plant’s effluent was discharged into this stream but this is no longer the case. Now the plant’s effluent is piped to the headwaters of Badfish Creek. Efforts are underway to return Nine Springs and its surrounding wetlands to a more natural state. One such project has been the removal of biosolids. This creekway will never again look untouched or pristine. Obvious engineering legacies include levees and ditch-like stretches. The E-Trail parking lot off Moorland Rd. serves nearby boardwalks, interpretive signs, hiking trails and cross country ski trails. One of those signs reveals plans for a canoe access sometime in the future.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Most of Nine Springs Creek is easy to paddle and water levels should always be adequate.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
I was living in Madison in September of 2005 and decided to explore this nearby waterway. My route included the creek, Mud Lake and Lake Waubesa. I finished at Lake Farm County Park where it was less than a two mile jog back to my car at the Moorland Rd. Bridge where my journey began.

First I paddled my Wildfire 25 minutes upstream until I reached some tree snags which blocked my way. I decided to turn around. I had enjoyed ascending the narrow creek which wound through a monoculture of reed canary grass. The water was clear so I could observe the stream floor vegetation. I passed under two foot bridges which are used by hikers and cross country skiers. Downstream of the Moorland Rd. Bridge I spotted the boardwalk and viewing platform to my left. Then the winding stream straightened and widened alongside a levee on my left. Cattails now predominated on the right and tall cottonwoods grew from the levee top on my left. The current was slow but perceptible all the way to the railroad trestle which immediately preceded the junction with Mud Lake. Before it opened up into the lake, the narrow waterway lost its current and was totally covered with duck weed. A slow moving powerboat drew alongside me and the driver inquired “Does this stuff fall from trees?” A naturalist this guy was not!

I crossed Mud Lake and was pleased to notice fields of lotus pads along its western shore. Then I passed under a second railroad trestle and entered Lake Waubesa. Hugging the right shore I could see a boat landing in the distance but decided to shorten my trip by taking out near a picnic area. There I hid my canoe as best I could and jogged back to my car.

**Further Ideas**
Other options are available when paddlers reach Mud Lake. A left turn instead of a right one leads to take-out options on the Yahara River near Lake Monona. Paddlers can also turn around and return to the Moorland Rd.
Bridge. This should be easy because of the weak current. I think this would be a fun and safe adventure to try at night under a full moon.

**Conclusion**
All Madison-area lovers of intimate waterways should explore Nine Springs Creek. My route worked out well.
See Pecatonica River
**Location**
Iowa, Lafayette, and Green counties.

**Natural Features**
This river’s headwater branches flow off the south side of the Galena-Platteville escarpment between Dodgeville and Montfort. This ridge is followed for many miles by US Hwy 18. Several branches join to form the Pecatonica River which then winds through southwestern Iowa County. Next the river bisects Lafayette County before it crosses a small section of far southwestern Green County. Then it enters Illinois where it eventually joins the Rock River. Upstream of Green County this is a Driftless Region stream where the land was never glaciated. The surrounding ridges and coulee valleys are typical of that region. The lower Pecatonica’s broad valley is underlain by thick layer sediments which were deposited at the bottom of a large glacial lake. The river flows across original prairies, oak savanna lands and southern hardwood forests. Bedrock dolomite cliffs appear sporadically.

**Human History and Influence**
Lead mining brought the earliest white settlers to this part of the State in the early 1800s. The streamside community of Darlington was one of the early settlements. The area’s thick and fertile soils were conducive to agriculture. Rapid runoff from fields and steep hillsides creates a flood-prone, muddy and polluted stream. Darlington is the only community of any size though several hamlets also populate its banks. Surprisingly there are no dams. The Cheese Trail bike route follows the Bonner Branch and then the main Pecatonica from Calamine to Browntown. At the time of this writing Darlington is preparing for its 49th annual Canoe Festival in 2015 which will feature races on the river along with other activities.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Water levels will usually be adequate downstream from Calamine. The stretch from that village to Darlington is always deadfall-free because it is regularly cleared for the annual June Canoe Festival. Fallen trees are frequently encountered on the rest of the river. There are no rapids. Water levels can be monitored on the USGS website.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
In May of 1989 I tandem canoed with my wife Pat from Calamine to Blackbridge Park on Darlington’s north edge. Much of the narrow, chainsaw- cleared river was shaded by a canopy of attractive bottomland trees including silver maples and box elders. It was an easy and pleasant 8 mile trip.

**Experiences of Others**
The out-of-print Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin included three sections of the Pecatonica from Calamine to Martintown on the Illinois line. Author Michael Duncanson mentioned the need to dodge trees but seemed to minimize the degree of deadfall problems.

Mike Svob includes the 8 mile Calamine to Darlington stretch in his guidebook, Paddling Southern Wisconsin. He characterizes the rest of the river as “obstruction prone.” I found an account of a Pecatonica trip written for the Miles Paddled website. Its author was pleasantly surprised by the 11.75 mile trip from Blackbridge Park in Darlington to Wells Landing on Walnut Rd. near Red Rock, Wisconsin. The section was totally free of woody obstructions. There was even some fast water with riffles at an old dam site.
Further Ideas
It would be interesting to explore downstream sections of the Pecatonica and determine for myself the degree of deadfall difficulties. Multi day canoe-camping options probably exist. These should extend into the Illinois section of the river. Another idea is to use the Cheese Country Trail as a bike shuttle route.

Conclusion
The 8 miles ending in Darlington should always be a pleasant option for paddlers of all abilities. Many more miles of the Pecatonica are canoeable but might require some portages around deadfall obstructions.
Pecatonica River (East Branch)

**Location**
Iowa and Lafayette counties.

**Natural Features**
Like the main Pecatonica, the East Branch drains the south slope of the Galena Platteville Escarpment whose crest follows US Hwy 18. Waters flowing southward from that highway between Dodgeville and Blue Mounds wind up in the East Branch. The river then flows southward through extreme eastern Lafayette County until it joins the main Pecatonica near the community of South Wayne. Along the way it exposes several dolomite cliffs. Its drainage area was never glaciated so it features broad ridges and steep-sided valleys. The current is slow and rocks are rarely seen except beneath the bluffs. Muddy banks create muddy water, especially after it rains.

**Human History and Influence**
In 1832 the Battle of Pecatonica was fought along this river as part of the Black Hawk War. The site is memorialized by a monument at the Black Hawk County Park in Woodford. The river pierces the 3,000 acre Argyle Wildlife Area just north of Argyle. The river is dammed under the Hwy 78 Bridge in that town. Agricultural practices significantly degrade the East Branch.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
There are no rapids but a few fallen trees may be encountered. They should not be a big problem. Water levels should be reliable throughout the year. There is a USGS gauge at Blanchardville. Its website can be used to monitor water levels.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
On a cold day in late March of 1981 Kevin Thies and I paddled from near Hollandale to Blanchardville. We actually started on the Dodge Branch which we followed for a mile or two before it hit the East Branch. Our craft was my old Grumman aluminum canoe. I recall no deadfall problems but not much else. We stayed dry and warm on the river but that night our tent was toppled by a storm at Yellowstone Lake State Park.

**Experiences of Others**
Several sources have convinced me that most of the East Branch is a scenic and viable canoe stream. The Miles Paddled website describes four separate sections down to Woodford. Only the uppermost section from County HK to Hollandale is deadfall prone. The most unusual section is the one just upstream of Argyle. Here paddlers can explore the Argyle Wildlife Area and a small artificial lake. A small dam requires a portage at Argyle. The out of print Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin adds one more section of the East Branch. That 11 mile stretch begins at Woodford and ends at the Hwy 11 Bridge over the main Pecatonica.

**Conclusion**
The East Branch of the Pecatonica River is probably underappreciated by paddlers. Much of it is scenic and easy to paddle. It is a better canoe stream than the main Pecatonica River.
Pheasant Branch Creek

Location
Dane County

Natural Features
Pheasant Branch Creek has two branches which join about ¼ mile north of where this creek flows into Lake Mendota near its northwest corner. The western branch is much longer and originates in the rolling hills northwest of Middleton. The branch to the east begins in a spring about 1 ½ miles straight north of the confluence with the other branch. The shorter branch is a wetland stream which was under water at the end of the Wisconsin Ice Age when Lake Mendota was considerably larger.

Human History and Influence
The western branch is markedly influenced by agriculture and urbanization. These influences are less evident on the eastern branch. The Pheasant Branch Conservancy is a 160 acre tract which protects part of this waterway and includes hiking trails.

Navigability and Difficulty
The western branch is deadfall choked whereas the eastern one lacks trees and stays open. Navigation on that branch, however, may be hampered by thick mats of aquatic plants by the end of the summer. Stream depth stays consistently adequate.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Ron Rosner and I used our solo freestyle canoes to ascend the Pheasant Branch in late June of 2008. Our launch site was the Middleton boat ramp on Lake Mendota. We paddled eastward along the cottage-filled lake shore for about 50 yards before we spotted the mouth of the creek. We turned up it and passed under the County M Bridge. We watched the western shore in order to identify the western branch confluence. When we did it was so choked with fallen trees that we were not tempted to explore it. Instead we followed the shorter eastern branch into a treeless marsh. It briefly widened into a lake-like stretch before it narrowed again. The clarity of the water improved markedly as we neared its headwater spring. Before we got there we portaged around a very small dam. Another 50 yards upstream we reached the spring and watched water bubbling up through the sand. Getting that far upstream was somewhat of a challenge. The head current was weak and not a problem but the thick aquatic vegetation was. Heading back downstream was somewhat easier. After a total of an hour and 15 minutes we arrived back where we had begun.

Conclusion
Ron and I enjoyed exploring this tiny wetland stream all the way to its headwater spring.
**Location**
Richland County.

**Natural Features**
This Pine River is one of those Driftless Region streams which drain lands that were never glaciated. It winds among rugged hills through fertile valleys. Beginning near the Vernon County line it flows southward to join the Wisconsin River. The original forest which is still well represented was a deciduous mix of sugar maples, black cherries, and various types of oaks. Towering white pines often cap the bluff tops. The often muddy Pine is devoid of significant rapids.

**Human History and Influence**
Loggers liked the mix of hardwood trees in the Richland Center area. Consequently that town developed as a mill town noted for its timber-related industries. In the early days there were barrel makers, cabinet makers and a bed frame company. There was also factory which built butter tubs and cheese boxes. Dairy and tobacco farms quickly filled the valleys after settlement began. Famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright was born in Richland Center. In 1915; his A.D. German warehouse was constructed on the edge of downtown. I once toured this unique building which is known locally as the Mayan House. The village of Gotham is located at the Pine River-Wisconsin River confluence. For a short time in the mid-1800s this town was an important steamship stop.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
South of Richland Center the slowly moving Pine usually has enough water for a good run. Deadfall problems steadily decrease south of that town to become nearly non-existent in the final ten miles.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
In 1981 I explored the Pine from Richland Center to Sawmill Rd. There were four of us in two tandem canoes. My sister Sylvia and her husband joined me and my partner. I do not recall much about the trip, but I do remember a few fallen trees which we portaged over or around.

Colette Sisco and I tandem-canoed the marshy section from Twin Bluffs Rd. to the landing at the Wisconsin River confluence in the summer 2001. It was obstruction-free and afforded nice views of distant bluffs. The water depth was adequate as it should always be. What I liked best was the opportunity to shuttle back to our car along the Pine River Bike Trail which parallels the river on an old railroad grade. When we reached the take out landing our locked bikes were waiting where we had left them. The bike trail crossed numerous bridges. On one of them we spotted a body lying in the middle of the Trail. Fearing the worst, we approached it with a willingness to help if necessary. To our relief he was breathing. Nearby was fishing gear and many empty beer cans. So now the scenario was clear.

**Experiences of Others**
I recall reading somewhere in the past that there were years when local paddlers worked with chainsaws to keep the river open to navigation upstream of Richland Center.

The *Miles Paddled* website includes two sections of the Richland County Pine River. First is the section from Rockbridge to County AA at Richland Center. The author describes it as very lovely with its many sandstone cliffs. The presence of many deadfall obstructions, however, was very frustrating. The same author also reported the existence of a new local paddling livery and outfitter who is working to clear the deadfall. Hopefully these efforts will be ongoing. *Miles Paddled* also includes the section between Krouskop Park in
Richland Center and Twin Bluffs Rd. It has no cliffs but is reasonably scenic and is much less obstructed with deadfall.

Guidebook author Frank Piraino paddled the same stretch that Colette and I did. He enjoyed observing a nice variety of birdlife as he paddled past “wooded bottomland shores.” Also mentioned in his *Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin* narrative were numerous fallen trees he described as easy to dodge because of the wide channel.

**Conclusion**
The lower Pine is a nice family canoe outing option. It’s easy and water levels are reliable. The Pine River Trail creates an ideal shuttle mode and the opportunity to flex some different muscles.
Platte River

Location
Grant County.

Natural Features
This stream’s headwaters are near Montfort which sits on the ridge known to geologists as the Galena-Platteville Cuesta. It drains a swath of rugged “Driftless Region” terrain on its way to the Mississippi River. The valley of the Platte is similar to other rivers in this part of the state. Rivers north of the above Cuesta tend to have wider valleys because they are underlain by softer, more erodible sandstone. The Grant’s valley is narrower and rocky outcrops are more common because the river is cutting through resistant dolomite. It crosses several original vegetation zones including oak savanna, prairie, and southern hardwood forest.

Human History and Influence
The region of the Platte River was first settled by whites in 1824 when Wisconsin’s “Lead Rush” began. The river and nearby Platteville took their names from “plattes” which were bowl-shaped plates of smelted lead. According to Dott and Attig in Roadside Geology of Wisconsin these were made by Native Americans using a technique taught to them by French traders. Potosi grew up near the mouth of the Platte and became a major river port serving the lead industry. During the early 1840s it was the largest town in Wisconsin. All this early settlement led to a quick denuding of steep hillsides and resultant erosion. Today a variety of agricultural practices pollute the Platte and its tributaries. One plus for this river is that dam builders have pretty much left it alone.

Navigability and Difficulty
Downstream from Ellenboro, the Platte is largely free of significant deadfall problems. The river sports numerous rocky riffles but no real whitewater. Water levels are usually adequate but can be too low during droughts. The USGS website can be used to monitor water levels. The St. John Mine at Potosi rents canoes for trips down the Platte and its proprietor will likely give out water level advice over the phone.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
My only trip down the Platte was in the 1980s when I paddled from near Quarry Rd. to the Steinbach Bridge and jogged the two miles back to my car along Platte Rd. I recall a sandy bottom and some gravelly shoals. Two fences spanned the stream requiring me to duck but not exit my canoe.

Experiences of Others
Mike Svob features two sections of the Platte River in his guidebook Paddling Southern Wisconsin. He says to expect frequent rock formations which are attractive but less dramatic than those along the nearby Grant River. The 12.4 miles from Ellenboro to Steinbach Bridge feature numerous speedy riffles. The river slows down with fewer riffles in the following 8.4 miles to Banfield Bridge.

A Miles Paddled website author describes four different trips on the Platte which cover the same span of river described by Svob. The only complaint registered there are the presence of several barbed wire fences across the stream between Ellenboro and the Platte Rd. Bridge.
Conclusion
The Platte is a scenic small river which requires only minimal skills to paddle. The nearby Grant River receives more attention but the Platte is almost as nice. Why not spend several days in Grant County exploring both?

A group of paddlers enjoy the lush green landscape through which the Platte wends its way through classic Driftless Area countryside.
Seeley Creek

Location
Sauk County.

Natural Features
Seeley Creek is a tributary of the Baraboo River. Its source is in the Baraboo Hills about two miles north of Natural Bridge State Park. It passes southern hardwood forests and cuts several sandstone bluffs during its journey.

Human History and Influence
Upstream sections are managed as a trout stream but Seeley Creek quickly turns muddy from agricultural runoff. One dam forms a flowage known as Seeley Lake which richly deserves to be eliminated. This eutrophied lake was weed choked and covered with duck weed when I saw it. Nearby North Freedom is home to the Mid-Continent Railway Museum. In 1984 I purchased a cedar lapstrake style canoe at Freedom Boatworks which I still treasure and still paddle. It was built just outside North Freedom but the shop has since moved to Baraboo.

Navigability and Difficulty
Logjams are a problem but less so downstream. There are no rapids and stream depth should always be sufficient.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I had a bad experience on Seeley Creek. My put-in was just below the Seeley Lake Dam off Seeley Lane. After an hour of pulling over and around multiple log jams I aborted my trip at the Freedom Rd. bridge. I had traveled only about a half mile. The portages were especially challenging because of a muddy stream floor, deep water, and nettles on the bank.

Experiences of Others
I read the account in Miles Paddled before my trip but should have paid attention to the details. The author wrote that the first section was awful because of all the logjams. I should have followed his advice and begun the trip where mine ended. From that point the logjams are evidently much fewer and the scenery improves including some “astonishing” rock outcrops. His trip continued to the Baraboo River and ended at the Hatchery Rd bridge. The total distance was 9.25 miles from Seeley Lake to that point.

A writer for the wisconsinrivertrips.com website took a 5 mile round kayak trip from the Seeley Dam by paddling up the lake and as far upstream as he could before turning around. He did not highly recommend the trip, citing the muddy water and the thick pond weeds.

Conclusion
Seeley Creek is a small stream which should always hold enough water. Had I started at the Freedom Rd. bridge I likely would enjoyed passing sandstone bluffs on my way to the Baraboo River. Despite some inevitable logjams it should be a good way to start a trip down the latter stream.
Six Mile Creek

Location
Dane County.

Natural Features
This is a small drainage system which enters Lake Mendota from the north. It starts with several small tributaries which feed a marsh west of Waunakee. The stream flows through a second wetland near Lake Mendota.

Human History and Influence
Much of the wetland west of Waunakee is protected as a State Wildlife Area. Agricultural and urban influences are strong, however, as the creek winds through Waunakee and suburban developments. From County M into Lake Mendota the creek lies within the borders of Governor Nelson State Park.

Navigability and Difficulty
The creek’s marshy section near Lake Mendota is easy to navigate in both directions because the current is so slow. Some tree-lined sections are deadfall-prone but chainsaw work keeps downstream sections open. I am quite sure that Capitol City Water Trails work groups are the folks to thank. There will always be enough water for round trip outings on lower Six Mile Creek.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Because I lived in Madison several years, this was a handy “home creek.” I first explored Six Mile Creek in early June of 2006 with a partner in my tandem Nova Craft canoe. We put on Doan Creek at the Dowd Rd. Bridge and paddled the 50 yards to Six Mile Creek. There we turned left and entered a wide, shallow and nearly currentless stretch of the creek. Scores of carp fled in every direction. We paddled under the County M Bridge and the creek soon narrowed considerably. Now we could feel a weak head current. The cattail monoculture gradually became less monotonous with the addition of willows and red osier dogwoods. We passed a single sand hill crane walking in the grass. This stately bird was being harassed by a red wing blackbird. The creek narrowed further and we continued to wind our way upstream for another 15 minutes or so. When we encountered a deadfall obstruction we decided to turn around.

I liked Six Mile Creek well enough to return two other times. I was by myself the first time and with Ron Rosner the second. On both occasions I got further upstream than I had the first time but I never reached the Woodland Rd Bridge. Once I viewed the creek from that bridge where it looked to be severely blocked by deadfall. It did not look like a good place to start an outing.

Experiences of Others
A submitter to the Miles Paddled website contributed a Six Mile Creek entry. This paddler put in at the Waunakee Village Park. This paddler took out at the Woodland Rd. Bridge and liked the creek’s first 2 ½ miles to the Mill Rd. Bridge because it included riffles, wildlife and an interesting mix of woods and backyards. To that point deadfall encounters were few. The situation changed drastically downstream of the Mill Rd. Bridge. This paddler counted no fewer than two dozen portages around fallen trees and log jams. At the Woodland Rd. Bridge they tried to continue downstream but found still more snags requiring portage. So they gave up and returned to that bridge where the trip ended.
**Further Ideas**
The trip I did three times could begin at a different place. Governor Nelson State Park’s boat landing on Lake Mendota is a good access point. From there follow the shoreline to the east and turn into the mouth of Six Mile Creek.

**Conclusion**
For paddlers who limit their trip to the marshes near Lake Mendota, Six Mile Creek is an easy and pleasant outing.
Starkweather Creek

Location
Dane County.

Natural Features
Starkweather Creek is a highly engineered and degraded urban river with few unaltered natural features. It drains much of north and east Madison plus parts of two adjoining townships to the east. The lowlands it drains were once inundated by Glacial Lake Yahara. At that time there was just one Madison area lake instead of five. Starkweather Creek has West and East Branches which join less than a mile upstream of where the creek empties into Lake Monona.

Human History and Influence
This stream has been seriously degraded by urban developments. Numerous efforts are being made to improve this stream. Various management plans including a Master Plan for Starkweather Creek are on the books. One development is a bike trail which now follows parts of the creek. Stormwater management has improved and shorelines are being restored to more natural states. The Friends of Starkweather Creek sponsors clean up crews and generally advocates for the creek. Near Lake Monona the creek flows through a lovely public garden named Olbrich.

Navigability and Difficulty
Downstream sections of the creek will always have enough water. Fallen trees might be a problem upstream of the East Washington Ave. bridge. The current is non-existent or weak enough to paddle upstream with relative ease.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I explored both branches of Starkweather Creek in September of 2005. My put-in spot may have been unique. I consulted a map which showed the creek passing near Commercial Ave. where it closely parallels Hwy. 30. So I drove east on that road until it reached a dead end. From that spot I carried my Bell Wildfire across railroad tracks and through a weedy field. The creek bank I reached was a lousy place to launch but somehow I got onto the water. At the time I did not realize that there are two branches of Starkweather Creek and that this was the East Branch.

After about 30 yards I had to climb out of my canoe to portage around an obstruction which consisted of a log, floating trash and a culvert. From there it was clear sailing along the narrow and trash-laden stream. About a quarter of a mile further I reached a wider branch of water merging from the right. Later I learned this was the creek’s West Branch. I ascended it for about 20 minutes before I turned around and headed back downstream. There was more to see and admire along the West Branch. I liked peering into people’s back yards and glancing up at giant cottonwood branches arching over the stream. Metal vertical walls which channelized the stream were pervasive and not attractive. The City of Madison Engineering website tells me that these walls have since have been removed.

I saw lots of junk including two bicycles thrown into the creek. When I reached the East Washington Ave. bridge my canoe was scraping rocks and the current was stronger. Nevertheless I made it up to the Commercial Ave. bridge near McCormick St. before I turned around. Minutes later I passed the East Branch confluence again and paddled on toward Olbrich Gardens. Before I got there I paddled through an attractive marshy section. Here I was surprised to see two tamarack trees. After that my Wildfire canoe floated under three consecutive bridges: A railroad bridge; the Capitol City Bike Trail bridge and a picturesque arching metal...
footbridge in the Gardens. The latter span leads to the beautiful Thai pavilion and garden. It was now only a short distance to the Olbrich Park boat landing where I took out and then I ran back to my car.

**Experiences of Others**
I checked the website called Miles Paddled which is a “tracking journal for a group of amateur paddlers.” Their map shows a creek access point a couple of blocks upstream of Aberg Ave. at Carpenter and Ridgeway. Evidently, Starkweather Creek is navigable there.

**Further Ideas**
Some like to paddle the Yahara River from Lake Mendota to Lake Monona. Next they follow the northern shore of Lake Monona eastward to the mouth of Starkweather Creek. Their last leg is an exploration of the creek.

**Conclusion**
Starkweather Creek is an interesting option for Madison area paddlers.
Sugar River

Location
Dane, Green and Rock counties.

Natural Features
The Sugar River is a major stream with many tributaries. It eventually enters Illinois where it flows into the Pecatonica River on its way to the Rock River. Geologically, the Sugar is interesting and varied. The headwaters of its West Branch begin near Mt. Horeb where it drains the heights of the escarpment known locally as the Military Ridge. The north and west sections of this branch’s drainage area fall within the never glaciated “Driftless Region.” Here the landscape features ridges and deeply dissected valleys. The main Sugar River to the east flows across a flatter landscape. Much of its immediate valley floor was laid down as “outwash” from the melting Wisconsin Glacier. Bedrock is not exposed here and loose rocks are rare. The river’s banks and stream floor are alternately sandy or muddy. As the Sugar nears the Illinois border it enters an extensive swamp which once lay under a glacial lake.

Originally this was a land of oak savannas and oak forests. Many remnants of these remain including stands of rarely seen white swamp oaks. Sycamore trees are seen only in far southern Wisconsin. Examples of this species are seen along the Sugar.

Human History and Influence
The Sugar River valley was settled by whites early in Wisconsin's history. Several towns grew up along its banks. Supporting dairy farms was their prime reason for being. Mills were constructed which exploited the water power of the river. One such site described by Mike Svob (see below) is the millrace channel, grist mill and power facility at Brodhead. Electric power was generated there until 1963. Madison area urban development is influencing the main river’s headwaters near Verona. Dams create flowages at Belleville, Albany and Brodhead. Several State Wildlife Areas have been designated along the river’s corridor. The Sugar River recreational bike trail closely follows the river between Albany and Brodhead. Campgrounds exist along the river and at least two offer canoe rentals and shuttles. In recent years Dane County has purchased parcels of land along the river near Paoli for purposes of protection. The city of Belleville has invested heavily in improvements to their Sugar River impoundment called Lake Belle View. In the process they have diverted the river’s main flow around the lake.

Navigability and Difficulty
The only problems are upstream shallow stretches and fallen trees. Many sections are reasonably easy to navigate. There is a gauge at Brodhead which can be monitored at the USGS website. Commercial campsites along the river have phones and are happy to give reports on water levels.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In a tandem canoe I paddled the Sugar in the late 1970s. My paddling partner Kevin Thies and I were on the river somewhere near Albany but I recall little about the day. In 2005 I was living in Madison again and began a series of Sugar River explorations. Here are some of my experiences from upstream to downstream:

On July 22 of 2006 I wanted to determine if the Sugar was navigable north of Hwy 18. I left my bike at the Valley Rd. Bridge and then drove my car along White Crossing Rd. between Verona and Mt. Horeb. Along the way I crossed two bridges over small headwater branches of the Sugar. For no particular reason I chose the one to the east and put in there. Within about 200 yards the two branches joined and I found myself winding through a reed canary grass wetland. Though the river was very narrow the channel was unobstructed because there were no trees so none had fallen across the channel. Eventually, I did reach some fallen willows which
forced two brief portages. After that I approached a small herd of Holsteins standing in the water. It was interesting to see them there but I hated to think of what they were doing to the stream. Anyway they lumbered onto the shore and I could now see an illegal electric fence extending across the river. I falsely assumed it was not turned on so I tried to lift it and got quite a jolt. Shaken but OK, I got by this hazard and followed the river’s tortuous course through the wetland. In the final 15 minutes before my Valley Rd. take-out some higher ground appeared on river right which held walnut and oak trees. By that time I had scared up a few mallards and coots. The trip required 2 ½ hours of my time. Along the way I had noticed an easier looking landing for paddlers. Find this access spot at the end of Bobcat Lane just off of County G and Dairy Ridge Rd. It is within site of the Hwy 18-151 Bridge over the river.

The following section of the Sugar starting at the Valley Rd. bridge is nicer than the previous one. It is maintained by the Capital City Trails paddling group. Next to that bridge is a Capital City Trails sign which reads “No River Access.” Caroline Garber and I started our day trip there anyway. Our take-out was next to the bridge in downtown Paoli. The water was delightfully clear on that Fourth of July day in 2006. In my opinion, canoeing is a good way to celebrate our nation’s birthday. About 10 feet wide at the start, the river’s width varied considerably. Thanks to chainsaw work there were no obstructions, which helped make it a delightful outing. We were surprised to see some rocks in the river but no rapids resulted. Marshy sections alternated with silver maple bottomlands forests. We also passed several higher banks which held walnuts and oaks. A few farm bridges and barbed wire fences necessitated ducking but did not stop us.

Downstream of the Riverside Rd. Bridge we entered a treeless corridor lined by corn fields and pastures. Our surroundings became more interesting and wilder after the Hwy. 69 Bridge. We easily floated over some rocky riffles where wading and dragging might be necessary during lower water times. It took us three hours to finish the trip but we had stopped quite a while for wine and cheese.

On May 31 of 2015 I paddled from the Hwy 69 bridge two miles north of Paoli to Frenchtown Road. This time I was definitely not alone. 18 members and guests of the River Alliance of Wisconsin were with me. In fact, I was the guest of honor. My tandem canoe partner was Sarah Davis. The event was held to launch this organization’s website link to my Paddling Guide, which you are now using.

We all enjoyed floating about three hours in our tandem canoes and solo kayaks. Past Paoli this was a new section for me. Fortunately it had recently rained because this section’s rocky riffles are often too shallow. We did not mind pulling over a few logs and dodging three cattle gates. However, one obstruction resulted in a boat pile up which caused two kayaks to flip. Their riders recovered well and were soon back on the river. It was fun to run the Class I+ rapid at a former dam site. At times we were paddling through farm fields. At least there were adequate vegetation buffers which separated them from the river. Woodsy reaches featured walnut trees, black willows and shapely bur oaks.

The next section I will describe is one which I have done three or four times. I like it very much and the shuttle is an easy one to accomplish by bicycle. The first time I canoed it was in June of 2005 with Colette Sisco and Ron Rosner. First we left our bikes at the parking lot near the County EE bridge north of Albany. Then we drove to the parking lot by the County C Bridge just east of Attica. Ron paddled his solo craft while Colette and I tandem canoed my 17-foot Nova Craft. The water was muddy but there was much to like, including attractively wooded banks. Colette enjoyed the challenge of weaving around woody, partial obstructions. In the final 45 minutes we noticed a change in the river. It had become wider and increasingly open with more back sloughs. We took out after less than three hours on the river. Our bike ride back to our vehicle was an invigorating one along Norwegian Rd. and County X.
Preceding downstream my next Sugar River experience was the 6 mile stretch from Hwy. 11 to Avon. Beth Wentzel and I paddled it in September of 2005. After leaving our bicycles at the take out we drove to a roadside park by the Hwy. 11 Bridge just south of Brodhead. There we launched our solo canoes onto the slow moving, muddy water. It was a lovely day and the paddling was easy. The corridor was wooded with a nice variety of trees which included an especially large and lovely sycamore tree. We dodged a few limbs and enjoyed watching kingfishers and great blue herons. There was nary a rock to be seen among the muddy banks and occasional sandbars. At the County T Bridge we talked to a fisherman who proudly hoisted a big channel catfish for us to see. As we neared Avon we noticed the corridor was becoming swampier because we were entering the Avon Bottoms area. At the end of our journey, Beth and enjoyed riding our bikes back to my vehicle at the put-in.

Experiences of Others
Robert McGray wrote an article on the Sugar River in a 1996 Silent Sports magazine article. His put-in was by the Hwy. EE bridge just upstream of Albany Lake. His expectation was to spend about an hour and a half meandering towards the dam which backs up the lake. But his curiosity and several blind alleys lengthened his trip to more than three hours. Soon after he put-in he entered a confusing but intriguing maze of low islands and channels at the entrance to the lake. He explored this area and then turned up the Little Sugar River which he ascended quite a ways before he turned around. His take-out was the boat landing on the left near the Albany dam.

All serious Wisconsin stream explorers should own a copy of Mike Svob’s Paddling Southern Wisconsin. In it he describes two sections of the Sugar in detail and mentions others in passing. He covers none of the river upstream of Attica except to mention likely deadfall problems between Dayton and Attica. I was interested to read his description of the “millrace” leading into Brodhead. He writes that most paddlers follow this route instead of the main channel. Those who do follow the main channel will find a boat landing at the Hwy F Bridge at the west end of town. There are the other access options at Brodhead: Those who paddle across Decatur Lake can follow the millrace to the left. Or they can skip the millrace and portage around the dam on the left side. There are two put-in possibilities on the millrace itself. Furthest upstream is the access at Head Gates Park. Downstream within the city limits is a second millrace access option at the Putnam Park boat landing. At the end of the millrace paddlers are faced with a decision. They can either portage around the head gates or paddle through. Before attempting the latter it is important to pull out and to take a look. Run through these gates only if there are no obstructions and your boat handling skills are up to the task.

Svob does warn of probable deadfall problems on two particular sections of the Sugar. Evidently, major obstructions are common between Dayton and Attica and throughout the Avon Bottoms leading into Illinois.

Denny Caneff paddled from White Crossing Road, just west of Verona, winding along the perimeter of Epic Systems campus, to Valley Road. Other than two small obstructions, it was doable.

The Miles Paddled website covers virtually every inch of the Sugar River. Two entries describe trips near the headwaters. One of them describes the Valley Road to Paoli section as “not worth it” because of all the obstructions. The other was written a year or two later. This time the trip started at Riverside Rd. in Verona. By that time this headwater section was “much better” because many of the obstructions had been removed (by the Capital City Trails group, I presume). The writer was again negative about the Paoli to Belleville section. Evidently, it contains a “cattle gate” which is hazardous and difficult to portage around. In contrast, the Belleville to County X section was attractive and easy to paddle.
**Further Ideas**
Canoe-camping is possible on the Sugar. There are at least two developed campgrounds which can be used. It is legal to camp on sandbars. These are not numerous but some are suitable. Beth and I noticed a couple of good ones between Brodhead and Avon. I am curious to know what the river is like between Paoli and Belleville and also between Albany and Brodhead. Those who paddle between the latter two towns could use the Sugar River Trail for a bike shuttle.

**Conclusion**
The Sugar River is a good canoe stream. Several sections are attractive and easy to paddle. Water levels are pretty reliable.

*Here’s Rick on the banks of the Sugar River in May 2015 at a River Alliance-sponsored event in honor of his accomplishment of 309 Wisconsin rivers paddled, and the guidebook that resulted from that odyssey.*
Sugar River (West Branch)

Location
Dane County.

Natural Features
Several headwater branches arise near Mt. Horeb at the heights of the Prairie du Chien escarpment. They flow southward in narrow valleys known as “coulees” in this never-glaciated “Driftless Region” of Wisconsin. The main West Branch of the Sugar then enters glaciated terrain and flows across a plain which once lay under a glacial lake. It also flows across a glacial outwash plain before it merges with the main Sugar River just north of Belleville. Banks of mud and sand hold bottomland trees and higher banks hold the typical trees of an oak forest. Rocks are rarely seen in glaciated downstream sections.

Human History and Influence
There are no towns on the banks of the West Branch and there are no dams. Farm fields are never far away, so the stream is often muddy and contaminated with manure and chemicals from agricultural runoff.

Navigability and Difficulty
Fallen trees are the main challenges in sections wide enough and deep enough to possibly navigate.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I explored the West Branch in late September of 2005 with Beth Wentzel. We both paddled solo free style canoes. Our put-in point was the County PB Bridge. First we paddled upstream for 45 minutes and then we returned to the PB Bridge. Then we paddled downstream for the same amount of time and returned again to the same bridge. Going upstream the current was initially weak as it flowed over a shallow floor of sand and mud. The low banks were dominated by reed canary grass. After about a quarter of a mile the creek narrowed, became deeper and the scenery improved. The vegetation monotony was being broken by a variety of species such as sand willows and red osier dogwoods.

Larger trees like elms and bur oaks crept closer to the water’s edge. Navigation became difficult as the current strengthened and fallen trees started to appear. Back at the PB Bridge we paddled eastward among a greater variety of plant species and more birdlife. The current waned and lake-like widenings became more commonplace. We were entering the impoundment waters of Lake Belle View. We never saw the main Sugar River merging from the north but it must have been there. Before we reached the wide part of the lake we turned around. On the way back we noticed some clear water coming in from the left. We followed it up a narrow waterway for a brief time and concluded it must be originating from a spring because the water was so cold and clear.

Further Ideas
One could begin a Sugar River trip on its West Branch at the PB Bridge.

Conclusion
The only practical boating section of the West Branch begins at the PB Bridge. From there it worked fine to first paddle upstream a ways before heading for the Sugar River confluence and Lake Belle View.
Location
Dane County.

Natural Features
A publication of the Token Creek Watershed Association says that “Token Creek itself originates from some of the most productive springs in southern Wisconsin and provides more base flow to Lake Mendota than any of the lake’s other tributaries.” Its headwaters form among the rolling ground moraines of northeastern Dane County. The creek flows westward and drops gently into level and marshy terrain as it nears Lake Mendota. Before settlement this was a land of prairies and oak savannas. Bottomland species like silver maples, box elders and black willows now dominate its shores. Wetland species become more common as the creek nears the Yahara River and enters the Cherokee Marsh.

Human History and Influence
Token Creek’s watershed is markedly influenced by agriculture and urbanization. Token Creek Preserve Park and Token Creek County Park have both been developed along its banks. A low dam impounds water at the later park. Further upstream another dam impounds another small flowage called Token Creek Pond. The Token Creek Watershed Association works for the welfare of the creek. Trout habitat restoration has been a high priority for this group. The DNR and the Capitol Water Trails organization have included Token Creek in the Yahara Headwaters Trail system. Signs have been posted along the creek to guide those who paddle the Trail.

Navigability and Difficulty
The navigable portion of Token Creek should always have enough water. Were it not for the chainsaw work of Capitol Water Trails volunteers this narrow stream would not be navigable because of fallen trees.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In October of 2005 I read that the Mad City Paddlers group was planning an outing on Token Creek. I did not join them but decided to plan my own trip. No one had told me where to access the creek. One of my maps seemed to suggest that the Daentl Road bridge would be a logical put-in spot. I was not sure where I would take out but I hoped to reach the Yahara River and ascend that stream to the Hwy 19 Bridge. That was never to be.

I did put-in at the Daentl Road bridge and rode the creek’s slow current along its narrow course. The water was surprisingly clear. Many limbs had been sawed off to clear the way. It was fun to maneuver around the tight turns and tree trunks. Fortunately, it got quieter as I put distance between myself and noisy I-94/90. Red osier dogwoods were nice to see among the bottomland trees and wetland grasses. Invasive buckthorns were unfortunately well established. After about an hour I had left most of the trees behind. Before long I sensed that waters from the Yahara River were merging from the right. The exact confluence point was a tricky to identify among several islands. I turned right and began to ascend the Yahara.

For about 20 minutes this was an easy task, but then the river suddenly narrowed and broke into multiple channels. Soon I faced a gauntlet of fallen trees which seriously impeded my progress. After I portaged a series of difficult logjams I began to consider my options. Should I forge ahead where I would surely face more logjams? Should I go back the way I came? Should I paddle downstream past the Token Creek confluence and find another take out further downstream? To aid my decision I went ashore and climbed a small rise to look around. To the north I could see a commercial building about a half mile in the distance. It seemed likely this
structure was on or near Hwy 19. If this was correct I figured I could find my way back to Daentl Road and my car from there.

This seemed like my best option so I dragged my canoe in that direction across very difficult terrain. I fell down at least five times as I struggled across a hummocky, dried out marsh. That phase of my workout ended when I finally reached a junk yard behind the building I had initially seen in the distance. There I hid my gear and I started to jog eastward along the shoulder of Hwy 19. When I reached the Soo Line I turned right and followed it southward in the general direction of my car. Jogging from railroad tie to railroad tie is an interesting challenge. Somehow I eventually reached my car but am not sure exactly how I did it.

My next trip to Token Creek came about two weeks later. This time I had a solo canoeing companion named Beth Wentzel. For her sake and mine I planned this trip better than the previous one. First we left our bicycles at the Cherokee Marsh County Park-North Unit. Before we left the park we walked to a dock at the edge of the Marsh. This is not a formal landing but we planned to take out here and needed to recognize it when we got there. Then we drove to the same Daentl Road put-in I had used a couple of weeks before. Beth enjoyed the winding little creek as much as I did.

At the Yahara confluence we turned left this time instead of right. Within about a half hour we looked left and could see our take out across a watery expanse of the Marsh. Getting there was challenging because of shallow water and thick aquatic vegetation. From the dock it was about a quarter mile canoe-carry to the parking lot where we had locked our bicycles. The bike shuttle was challenging for two reasons: Initially the road was gravel which was difficult for Beth on her skinny-tired bike. Then we faced heavy traffic on narrow County CV. Despite these difficulties we both considered it to be a good outing. I was living in Madison at the time, so I repeated the above trip twice including once with Ron Rosner.

**Experiences of Others**

Google the Mad City Paddlers and Capitol Water Trails to find maps and access information. Token Creek part of the Yahara Headwaters Trail system.

This creek does offer at least one more paddling opportunity. Denny Caneff emailed me about his experience on Token Creek. Denny is the executive director of the River Alliance of Wisconsin. He put in at the Token Creek County Park and paddled upstream about 2 miles to the Hwy 19 Bridge before he turned around and returned to where he had started. No portages were required. Denny also considers the Daentl Road to be a good access point for a round trip. From there he paddles downstream and then back. The Miles Paddled Website includes three trips on Token Creek. They all begin at Token Creek County Park and end at the Cherokee Marsh-South Unit boat landing. The latter is surely a better access point than the North Unit dock I have used to take out. Using the formal landing, however, means more paddling across the wind-prone open waters of Cherokee Marsh. Miles Paddled includes a Google map which shows the location of this landing.

**Further Ideas**

Many Token Creek paddlers will choose to take out on the Yahara River. There are two landings on river right just past the Northport Road bridge.

**Conclusion**

Token Creek is a delightful option for Madison area paddlers who like small streams with reliable water.
Wingra Creek

Location
Dane County

Natural Features
There is not much which is “natural” about Wingra Creek. It was dug in the early 1900s to more efficiently drain water from Lake Wingra to Lake Monona. This project effectively eliminated a vast wetland which originally linked the two lakes. The new channel replaced a stream called Murphy’s Creek which had meandered through the marsh. Draining this wetland allowed more development on Madison’s south side. When the Wisconsin Glacier was melting this entire corridor was part of one big lake. Lake Wingra is fed by natural springs which can be seen from a trail in the University of Wisconsin Arboretum.

Human History and Influence
According to Mike Ivey in a June 6, 2006 Madison Capital Times article, Wingra Creek “has been a drainage ditch, a dumping ground, and industrial wasteland for decades, skirting past everything from traffic clogged Fish Hatchery Rd. to the Schmidt’s auto yard off Gilson Street.” Ivey’s article was about Madison’s plans to give the creek a “facelift.” Efforts have been made to stabilize the banks, build canoe landings and to add landscaping. A bike trail now follows the creek.

Navigability and Difficulty
It is now easy to paddle from Lake Wingra to Lake Monona. The depth should always be sufficient and the current is very gentle. Later in the summer there are sections which can be choked with water lilies.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
On April 25 of 2006 I showed up with my Wildfire canoe at the Lake Wingra outlet dam. After my trip I would jog the two miles back to my car on the Wingra Bike Trail. From the put-in to the Fish Hatchery Rd. bridge the creek was consistently about a hundred feet wide. It was springtime but the water’s color was already a sick looking yellow green. Among several items of junk I spotted a bicycle and a crutch in the water. Do you think someone was suddenly cured of their leg malady and joyfully pitched their crutch into the water?

Many moving vehicles were visible from the water as were a number of joggers. I was never bothered by deadfall, but I had to pull my canoe over some stones under a railroad bridge. Someone had piled them there to create a small dam. Hopefully this obstruction has since been cleared. I did see a few other living critters besides humans. Included were a muskrat, a coot, numerous mallards, Canada geese, a green heron and numerous small fish. Beaver work was also in evidence. I also chased a flock of cliff swallows from their nests under a bridge. It took me slightly less than an hour to reach Olin Park where I pulled out next to a parking lot before I reached the open lake. I hide my gear as best I could and ran back to my car.

Experiences of Others
Evidently several canoe landings have been developed along Wingra Creek. The current is weak enough that round trips in both directions are possible from any of these access points. Some may wish to circumnavigate Lake Wingra before proceeding down the creek. At the Lake Monona end, trips can be extended into the lake and on to any of its various boat landings.

Conclusion
Madison paddlers should explore Wingra Creek at least once.
Wisconsin River

Location
Bisects the entire state from the Michigan border to the Mississippi River.

Natural Features
At the lofty elevation of 1683 feet, Lac Vieux Desert straddles the Wisconsin-Upper Michigan border. The Wisconsin River exits its western shore and begins a 430 mile, 1070 foot descent to the Mississippi River. Before most were buried behind 26 dams there were 250 sets of rapids and waterfalls between Rhinelander and Nekoosa. They occurred because a steep gradient combined with Precambrian rock outcrops and piles of boulders which were dropped by the Wisconsin Glacier. The rapids end at Nekoosa where the river’s gradient soon drops to a very gradual 1.8 feet per mile for the duration of its journey.

Before the Ice Age, a long section of the Wisconsin River coursed further to the west. Devil’s Lake now occupies part of that original route. When the original river was blocked by a huge dam of ice and glacial debris it forged a new channel further to the east. The diverted torrent of water tore a new gorge through sandstone creating the Wisconsin Dells. Past Sauk City the river flows through Wisconsin’s Driftless Area for the rest of its journey to the Mississippi River.

This rugged land of hills and bluffs was never flattened by flows of ice because it somehow missed all four stages of the Ice Age. Rocks in the river are rare here and sandbars are ubiquitous except when the river is in flood. At Prairie du Sac the river valley is 4 miles wide, but it narrows to two miles at Muscoda and to a half mile at Bridgeport. Such downstream valley narrowing is highly unusual. Here is the reason for this rare phenomenon: Upstream the Wisconsin River runs through relatively soft sandstone allowing erosive forces to cut a wide swath. Downstream it encounters resistant dolomite which has markedly slowed the erosive process.

During its long journey the Wisconsin River drains a number of vegetation zones. From its source to the Wisconsin Dells area the flora is a Northwoods mix. Included are white pine-hardwood forests and northern hardwood-hemlock forests. A region of sandy pine barrens precedes the Wisconsin Dells. There the predominant conifers are jack pines and red pines. The sands were deposited under Glacial Lake Wisconsin which existed for many years at the end of the Ice Age.

Human History and Influence
The Wisconsin River is important historically for many reasons. Native Americans, early European explorers, fur traders, loggers, and industrialists all depended on it. For many generations Native Americans converged from distant points to the hallowed ground now preserved at Council Grounds State Park near Merrill. Further downstream Ice Age forces pushed the river so far east it almost touched the Fox River which was flowing in the other direction towards Green Bay. When Marquette was ascending the Wisconsin River in 1673 he learned about this unusual juxtaposition from members of the Ho-Chunk tribe. They guided him across the half mile gap between the rivers. Because of their help Marquette was able to reach Green Bay with relative ease by canoe. Years later this same gap was filled by the Portage Canal which was completed in 1868. Never a commercial success it finally closed in 1951.

The logging era of the mid to late 1880s brought many logging runs and hundreds of deaths to those engaged in this hazardous work. The Wisconsin River’s rapids presented a huge hydropower potential. Eventually 26 dams were built creating the “nation’s hardest working river” with more dams per mile than any other river in the world. Most of the rapids were buried under flowages behind the dams. Many mill towns grew up on the banks of the Wisconsin. The largest were Rhinelander, Tomahawk, Merrill, Wausau, Stevens Point and
Wisconsin Rapids. They all have their own unique and colorful histories. Riverside communities in southern Wisconsin are less industrial and smaller. They include Portage, Sauk City, Prairie du Sac, Spring Green, Muscoda Boscobel and many smaller communities.

By the 1950s the river’s many paper mills and other industries had severely polluted the river. Since the passage of the federal Clean Water Act was passed in 1972, these industries are discharging fewer pollutants and municipal sewage systems have vastly more efficient. The Wisconsin is now much cleaner and is more heavily used by recreationists including fisherman and boaters. Despite all the dams the upper river draws advanced boaters to certain sections including the fearsome whitewater run at Grandfather Falls near Merrill. Some of these same paddlers also use the partially man-made “whitewater parks” at Wausau and Rhinelander. Normally dry channels at both cities are allowed to fill periodically during “controlled releases” around dams. Wausau has hosted many international whitewater competitions. The lower Wisconsin River is the second most frequently canoed stream in the state. It trails only the Kickapoo River. In 1989 the Wisconsin’s final 93 mile section from Prairie du Sac to the Mississippi River was designated the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway. The state now owns thousands of acres outright and protects other areas through partnerships and agreements. This lovely river corridor should remain relatively unspoiled for the ages.

Navigability and Difficulty
Beaver dams span far upstream stretches. Low water will seldom be a problem. Except for Grandfather Falls the whitewater stretches which are not buried by flowages are suitable for paddlers with intermediate skills. The river’s final 93 miles are free of rapids and easy to paddle when the headwinds are not too strong.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I will start upstream and work down. On two consecutive days in July of 2005 I explored most of the uppermost Wisconsin River. The summer had been hot and dry but there was sufficient water for me in my Wildfire canoe. On the first day I spent 7 hours paddling the 13 miles from County K to County G. On day two I covered the 5-6 miles from Rummel Rd. to County K.

The first half of the upstream section was the prettiest. Here a diminutive Wisconsin River flowed past upland forests of giant conifers. It was followed by a long marshy section. There I noted blooming meadowsweet and Joe-Pye weed among grasses, reeds, rushes, alders, sandbar willows and red osier dogwoods. Cedar trees and tamaracks arose in the distance. On both days I heard and saw many birds. I spotted one 20 inch northern pike through the clear, tea-colored water. When I heard the calls of white-throated sparrows it felt like I was in Canada. The first day was a lengthy and hot so I stopped several times for swims from small sandbars. Except for occasional signs of human activity including the sounds of U.S. Hwy 45, the river way seemed wild. At one point I entered a silver maple bottomland which seemed out of character for a far north stream. After this bottomland a fallen white pine totally blocked my path necessitating a brief portage. After 7 hours of paddling on the first day I faced a 14 mile bike ride back to my car in the continued heat. My bike shuttle after my second trip was shorter and cooler but more stressful. That’s because I rode along the edge of busy Hwy 45 until I spotted a parallel “old 45” road which was safer and more fun to ride.

In August of 1990 I paddled my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe from the Vilas County D bridge to the McNaughton bridge. This 10.1 mile stretch was lovely and easy to paddle. Except for one Class I rapid the water was tranquil. It should always contain enough water but large boulders loom just under the water’s surface which can snag a canoe or kayak. The forested banks I passed were attractive and mostly undeveloped. I found a suitable campsite where I enjoyed a quiet evening. That was until a beaver began to slap its tail on the water just about the time I was falling asleep.
Proceeding downstream I once paddled part of the 12.7 mile stretch from Hat Rapids Dam to Lake Alice in 1999. I shortened this trip to about 8 miles by putting in at the end of Camp Ten Road where there is a formal access and by taking out along River Road where there is no formal access. The river was too wide to qualify as one of my favorites but I liked the scenery and enjoyed the minor rapids. I noticed several burr oak trees and wondered how these “prairie oaks” had established themselves so far north. The wooded islands and whitewater at Whirlpool Rapids were particularly attractive. Here there were granite outcrops, big boulders and several hemlock and pine covered islands. I beached my canoe on the largest island and walked to a flat clearing. This site has certainly been used by canoe-campers for many centuries. Father Menard would have been one of them in 1660. A large island several miles down stream is named after him.

The Class II rapids which separate the islands at Whirlpool Rapids would not have required scouting had I been in my whitewater canoe. But I scouted them carefully to identify the best route for my little Wildfire canoe. I found a fairly smooth line through the waves and rocks and followed it successfully. After Menard Island the water slowed as it approached Lake Alice. The water was perfectly still mirroring the reflections of puffy white clouds framed by blue skies. Bull frog and green frog calls echoed through the air. In time I reached the dock of the cabin I had visited earlier in the day. I trespassed across the absent cabin-owner’s yard, hid my canoe, found where I had hidden my bike and peddled the 9 miles back to my car. My river time had been 2 hours and 45 minutes and the bike ride was 45 minutes.

Next up is GRANDFATHER FALLS!! After hearing about it for years I finally paddled it with several whitewater buddies in early May of 2000. Most folks will want to view this maelstrom from the Ice Age Trail on river right rather than tackling it in a canoe or kayak. When the water channel is full this is an impressive sight! The river drops 90 feet in less than 1000 yards. Usually almost all the water bypasses Grandfather Falls because the power company diverts it through giant tubes. But when the water is high much of it follows the original channel. We estimated the flow that day to be 5000 cfs which is BIG WATER.

With trepidation, Scott and Susan Watson, Bob Diggelman, Pat Brennaman and I carried our boats from the parking lot off Hwy 107 to a “micro eddy” just downstream of the dam. The eddy was small and turbulent but it was the best access we could find. We boarded our canoes on pulsating water which made shoving off and lining up for the first drop a difficult and immediate challenge. All of us ran the main pitch of the first Class III successfully but Pat and I flipped on the high waves of the following wave train. Fortunately we both managed to self rescue before the next big drop. Class II water transitioned into a continuous Class III. We all “cheated” as close to the left shore as we could which was fortunate. Soon a clear horizon line heralded a steep pitch. Desperately we all crashed landed on the left bank and crawled out of our boats to scout. It was an 8-10 foot nearly vertical drop with a giant hole at the bottom. It likely would have swallowed our open canoes and resulted in long swims. The hole even looked like a potential “keeper.” Wisely we portaged left and ran the remaining Class II drops with no problems. We all worked hard to reach the right side of river where the remaining whitewater was easier. The total run was only a mile but we were tired and a bit relieved when we reached the take out on river left. (As of this writing in 2015, there are negotiations going on for the dam owner, Wisconsin Public Service Corp., to make “recreational releases” into Grandfather Falls a few times a year.)

Proceeding downstream, my next Wisconsin River paddling experience was the 3.5 miles from Granite Heights Road north of Brokaw to just past the former dam site next to the mill (now closed) in that paper company town. From the put-in I soon reached a very steep bluff on river left which was draped with a combination of pines, hemlocks and deciduous trees. The latter were exhibiting their fall colors. Busy and noisy U.S. Hwy. 51 was usually visible across the flood plain to my right. Beyond the WW Bridge at Brokaw I wondered if the old dam remains would be too difficult for my Wildfire. Running it was easy but would have been much harder had
the water been high. Finding a place to take out was more difficult than I expected. Boaters should consider paddling somewhere further downstream to a better access.

I wanted to take out in Brokaw but saw no possibilities along high fence which bordered the paper mill property. So I floated alongside it until it turned left 90 degrees. I made this turn and followed a man-made water channel. Eventually I came to the end of the fence but the bank there was high, steep and heavily wooded. With difficulty I dragged my canoe and gear to the top where I immediately encountered a railroad grade. Brokaw’s water tower was visible in the distance so I dragged my canoe in that direction. After about 200 yards I spotted a dirt road on the other side of the tracks. I hid my canoe and followed the dirt road to County WW. Then I jogged the remaining 4.8 miles back to my car.

The next downstream stop on my Wisconsin River odyssey is the **whitewater course at Wausau**. I have paddled its continuous Class II-III rapids on two occasions but have never entered any competitions at the Whitewater Park.

The next downstream stretch of canoe-friendly water is the free-flowing 14 miles between **Castle Rock Lake and Plainville**. In August of 2006, Caroline Garber and I spent 5 ½ hours exploring most of this section. It was an enjoyable day but we had trouble finding a suitable take out. In *Paddling Southern Wisconsin* Mike Svob recommends taking out at the Dell Prairie Boat Landing at Plainview. This landing is not marked in the Wisconsin Gazetteer and probably for good reason. We located it before our outing on the river but it looked to be unusable because of overgrown vegetation. A short distance south of town we found a trailer camp called Gurnee’s Catfish Bay where we paid $6 to leave a car and for the privilege of using their access at the end of the trip. Then we drove to the Castle Rock boat landing where we shelled out more cash to use their landing. Such expenditures are rarely needed to paddle rivers in Wisconsin. Anyway we launched and headed down the wide Wisconsin River. After an hour we stopped to eat our cheese and sip our merlot. Somewhat monotonous scenery improved after we passed under the Hwy. 82 Bridge. We liked weaving through a series of attractive islands. Then we saw a beautiful site just beyond the Lemonweir River confluence. On river left was a high sandstone cliff preview of the Wisconsin Dells. The late afternoon sun illuminated its rocky face and the bright red berries of a mountain ash tree.

On three occasions I have explored the impressive sandstone gorge known as the **Wisconsin Dells**. Most visitors see its rock formations from commercial “Duck Boats.” One day I explored the Upper Dells by myself when the commercial boats were still running. They had retired for the winter when Ron Rosner and I returned to the Upper Dells on an unusually warm November day. Without the motorboats this was a much nicer outing. Both trips began and ended at a landing on river left just north of downtown Wisconsin Dells. The current here is weak because of the dam just downstream. Ron and I paddled upstream and passed Blackhawk Island on river left. Then we proceeded up to the “Narrows” and made stops at Coldwater Canyon and Witches Gulch. No one was around to take our money so we walked along their boardwalk paths for free. Their shapely sandstone walls were topped by towering pines and hemlocks. It seems a shame that most people associate the Wisconsin Dells with waterslides rather than with the area’s natural beauty.

Caroline Garber and I explored the **Lower Dells** one day in my tandem canoe. First we located the boat landing marked in the Gazetteer near the junction of Sauk County Roads A and T. We left a car there and drove to the Fisherman’s Park parking lot in the City of Wisconsin Dells downstream of the Hwy 13 Bridge on river left. From the lot we carried my 17 ft. Nova Craft Prospector down to the water and set off on a 5.5 mile river journey. We encountered no tour boats but several fishing boats were anchored near sandstone cliffs. Soon after we left the sandstone formations behind, we encountered a strong headwind. Those final two miles were hard work.

I have spent very little time on the popular lower Wisconsin River. In fact my only trip was a Sierra Club-sanctioned canoe camp trip led by Bob and Carol Diggelman. My tandem partner and I joined them on their
annual outing one summer weekend in the late 1990s. I believe we put near Spring Green and took out 37 miles downstream at Boscobel. By evening we were experiencing ideal sandbar camping conditions. Earlier in the day, however, saw ominous black clouds in the near distance. Moments later we were drenched by a major thunderstorm but no one was struck by lightning.

**Experiences of Others**

Many articles and books have been written about Wisconsin River paddling experiences. I recommend both *Paddling Northern Wisconsin* and *Paddling Southern Wisconsin* by Mike Svob. In them he describes several boatable sections of the Wisconsin River. Svob also wrote an article for Silent Sports magazine in September of 2006. In it he alluded to “horror stories” about the furthest upstream section of the river. Several contacts warned him of too many beaver dams and hordes of mosquitoes. His article, however, was quite positive about the 17 miles from Lac Vieux Desert to County K and the 13 miles from County K to County G. I can vouch for the ease and beauty of the uppermost river except for the first ten miles from the river’s source at Lac Vieux Desert which I never paddled. That lake has two boat landings where trips down the Wisconsin River’s very first section can begin. Whitewater paddlers will want to consult the American Whitewater website which includes Grandfather Falls and several other sections. The Miles Paddled website contains descriptions of many Wisconsin River trips. Its Grandfather Falls entry includes links to videos and interesting information sources.

**Further Ideas**

Wisconsin River paddling possibilities are endless. Some ambitious paddlers have even paddled the entire river including its many impoundments and portages around dams. Personally, I hope to someday canoe the Lower Wisconsin Riverway’s 93 miles with friends. We will camp on sandbars and drink good beer around the campfires.

**Conclusion**

The Wisconsin River offers paddling options for every taste and desire.

---

*This is the strange tube (aka penstocks) through which most of the Wisconsin River’s flow passes at Grandfather Falls dam, northwest of Merrill.*
Yahara River

Location
Dane and Rock counties

Natural Features
The Yahara River begins north of Madison near De Forest. It flows south and meanders among the famous five lakes of Madison. Eventually it reaches the Rock River. Between the lakes it broadens into several open water marshes. In its final 10 miles the Yahara is narrower and more forested. Here bottomland trees alternate with upland trees like oaks and even a few white pines. Prior to glaciation the Yahara Valley did not exist. It is a creation of the Ice Age. According to Gwen Schultz in Wisconsin’s Foundations, glacial scouring, drift dams and stranded ice blocks created the valley and its lake basins.

Human History and Influence
The Yahara River, its lakes and its marshes have all been altered and influenced by human activity. Runoff from urban and agricultural sources has caused significant pollution. Algae blooms in the lakes become severe by mid to late summer. The region bears only a slight resemblance to the time when early Native Americans were building the mounds which dot the Madison isthmus. The Indians used canoes extensively for travel. Many dams were constructed along the Yahara. The two furthest downstream dams have been removed. 1993 was the year the Fulton Dam was dismantled. The Stebbinsville dam was removed in 2010. The Yahara between Lakes Mendota and Monona was dug into a straight canal many years ago.

Navigability and Difficulty
The Yahara will always have enough water. There is a USGS gauge at Fulton which can be checked on the Web. Deadfall problems exist only upstream of Cherokee Marsh. True whitewater is lacking but a few riffles develop in the final miles.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Once upon a time I paddled down Token Creek and then turned right up the Yahara River. That day my goal was to reach Hwy 19 but I never got that far. A gauntlet of fallen trees forced me into a Plan B. (See my Token Creek write-up for that “adventure.”)

Twice I have canoed on the Upper Mud Lake widening of the Yahara between Lake Monona and Lake Waubesa. The first time I put-in just downstream of where the Yahara exits Lake Monona. It was 1979 and I was living in a condo complex next to the outlet. My lady friend and I paddled my tandem Grumman to Lake Waubesa and back. Before the return leg we sipped a beer together at a supper club on the lake shore. In 2006 I entered Upper Mud Lake from Nine Springs Creek and then paddled to a boat landing on the western shore of Lake Waubesa.

Most of my Badfish Creek outings have ended with a half mile leg on the Yahara River. Those trips usually ended at the Hwy. 59 Bridge.

On a hot August day in 2005, Colette Sisco and I paddled my Nova Craft from Stebbinsville to Fulton. The green water looked terrible but at least the banks were attractive. They were mostly low and marshy but we did pass one pine-clad hill. We watched several kingfishers, one large owl, at least two great blue herons, and numerous swallows. Colette spotted a lovely, blooming Turks cap lily. Other wildflowers we saw included blue vervain. The river moved along with a steady medium current. Several rocky riffles demanded our attention and were shallow enough to cause momentary hang ups. It was difficult to see the rocks because the water was so cloudy.
My other Yahara River outing came in July of 2008. That day I led a Sierra Club trip which included both Badfish Creek and the Yahara River. We put-in on the Badfish at Cooksville and took out on the Rock River just downstream of the confluence. On the Yahara between Hwy. 59 and Fulton I was struck by how many black walnut trees there were. I had never seen so many along a Wisconsin stream. Fulton to the Rock was a new stretch for me. Initially the river moved very fast because it was in flood. It was narrow and there were trees to dodge. One large fallen tree necessitated a portage. The river slowed and nearly stopped during the final half mile because the flooding Rock River was backing up into the Yahara.

Experiences of Others
The *Best Canoe Trails of Southern Wisconsin* is an out-of-print guidebook written by Michael Duncanson. It describes a 12 mile trip from the Cherokee Marsh, through Lakes Mendota, Monona and Waubesa to the outlet dam of the latter lake. Obviously this trip is mostly on lakes but it is an option. There is no need to portage around the dam at the Lake Mendota outlet. Paddlers can use the lock which is operated by Dane County.

Mike Svob included the Yahara in his *Paddling Southern Wisconsin*. He thinks the 9 mile section from Stebbinsville to the Rock River is the best one and I agree. As I did with my Sierra Club group he took out at the river right landing about a half mile downstream of the confluence. Svob also mentions the 7 miles between Stoughton and Stebbinsville but warns about a “weedy” portage around the dam at Dunkirk.

Further Ideas
One could plan a trip on most of the Yahara system from Cherokee Marsh to the Rock River. Such an outing would involve much paddling across lakes and quite a few portages around dams.

Conclusion
The Yahara River features only one flowing section which is scenic, reliable and easy to paddle. That is the one between Stebbensville and the Rock River. Other trips are available but they usually entail paddling across lakes or wetlands.

There's nothing more satisfying than seeing a dam removed from a river. This is the remains of the Stebbinsville dam, on the Yahara River, in 2010.