Kark's Canoeing and Kayaking Guide to 309 Wisconsin Streams

By Richard Kark

May 2015

Rivers and Streams of North Central Wisconsin
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
April 2015
Foreword

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

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

“*I brake for bridges.*”

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

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

Rick was not after setting some Guinness record or scoring bragging rights for how many streams he’d “vanquished.” This was not a contest or a race. It was a three-plus decade odyssey rooted in the sheer joy of paddling and a deep appreciation for rivers.
There are some truly obscure streams Rick writes up that may not have seen a single paddler on them since he dipped his paddle into them in the early 1990s. But there are no doubt many of them that will tempt and beckon you. (Do take note, though, that conditions will have changed on many of the rivers Rick describes here.) The count – roughly 306 – is a count of the number of discretely different streams Rick has paddled on since he began this adventure in the late 1970s. It does not count the multiple trips on scores of rivers that would no doubt take Rick’s count into the thousands.

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

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

Denny Caneff
Madison, Wisconsin
May 2015
North Central Wisconsin Rivers
This section includes 48 rivers and streams that either originate or are mostly confined to these north central Wisconsin counties: Ashland, Iron, Price, Oneida and Vilas counties.

- Bad River
- Bearskin Creek
- Boot Creek
- Butternut Creek
- Eagle River
- Flambeau River (North Fork)
- Gilmore Creek
- Indian Creek
- Johnson Creek
- Jump River (South Fork)
- Long Lake Creek
- Marengo River
- Montreal River (West Branch)
- Ontonagon River
- Pelican River (North Branch)
- Pioneer Creek
- Rice Creek (So. Oneida County)
- Rice Creek (Vilas County/Round Lake)
- Spirit River (North Fork)
- Squirrel River
- Tomahawk River
- Turtle River
- Whiskey Creek

- Bear River
- Blackjack Creek
- Brunsweiler River
- Deerskin River
- Elk River
- Flambeau River (South Fork)
- Gresham Creek
- Jennie Weber Creek
- Jump River (North Fork)
- Kakagon River
- Manitowish River
- Montreal River
- Nixon Creek
- Pelican River
- Pine Creek
- Potato River
- Rice Creek (Vilas County/Rice Lake)
- Spirit River
- Squaw Creek
- Stevenson Creek
- Trout River
- Tyler Forks
- White Sand Creek
Bad River

Location
Ashland County.

Natural Features
Most of the Bad River headwater branches arise high in the moraines and lakes of the Chequamegon National Forest. These coalesce into a stream which cuts a gap through the Penokee Range. Then the Bad carves a narrow gorge along a fault through the Gabbro Range at Copper Falls State Park just north of Mellen. Finally it slows dramatically as it slices through the red clays of the Lake Superior Lowland. These deposits originally settled under Glacial Lake Duluth.

The Bad exposes a fascinating array of bedrock types. Upstream of Mellen granite is the sole representative. Then, at Copper Falls State Park, volcanic basalt forms the walls of the canyons and the waterfalls. The runout gorge below the falls exposes Lake Superior sandstone. The river corridor is mostly wild and lined by an attractive mix of conifer and northern hardwood trees. The fresh water estuary at the river’s mouth has been called “Wisconsin’s Everglades.” Here the 16,000 acre Kakagon Bad River Slough has been called the “most pristine coastal marsh complex in the Upper Great Lakes,” according to The Nature Conservancy. That organization lists the site as one of just five “Last Great Places” in Wisconsin.

The water quality of the Boad is usually excellent because of lack of agriculture and sparse population. Red clays of the lower river are easily eroded leading to increase in suspended sediments following rains.

Human History and Influence
The major non-Native American influence has been and continues to be logging and wood products. Copper mining was attempted with little success near the present day Park in the late 1800’s. Native American influence continues as the lower river lies within the Bad River Indian Reservation. The Ojibwa Indians here are partially sustained by productive wild rice beds and other natural gifts of this valuable wetland complex.

Navigability and Difficulty
The river above Copper Falls State Park is for skilled whitewater boaters only. They are often thwarted by low water. Internet sites listed below should be helpful in determining the adequacy of flow. Water levels with runnability recommendations are available on the American Whitewater website. Most of the lower river is potentially suitable for lesser skilled paddlers but permission is needed from the Tribe and likely will be denied.
**Trip Ideas: My experience**

To date I have been on the Bad a total of six times. On four occasions I tackled the raging waters upstream of Mellen with whitewater buddies. We always put in at Cayuga 6 miles south of Mellen just off State Hwy 13-77. Each time our take-out has been a difficult place to find -- about 2 miles west of that same town. There is no marked landing here so we tie something bright to a shoreline bush before we start the trip so we can identify the spot from the water. At the Cayuga put-in we know we are in for a rollicking good time if the water is medium high. Very high water would be downright dangerous so we have avoided such conditions.

This section of the Bad is one of my very favorite whitewater runs in all of Wisconsin. Between the put-in and the Conley Road bridge there are three solid class 3 drops which we have scouted at times. After that bridge, an easy class 3 immediately precedes the third railroad trestle. Very soon after that trestle it is definitely time to get out and scout because quickly encountered is a class 3 which leads into a very challenging and complicated class 4 drop called Rocket Railroad Rapids. My friends and I have had several misadventures here.

One required hauling a canoe up a cliff with a rope. Others have involved scary swims and close calls with dangerous hydraulics. This cascade begins with a sheer falls of perhaps 7 feet and is followed by a very technical and turbulent finish requiring strong moves, balance and luck. I have seen some fairly successful runs here, but not many. Only advanced or expert paddlers should attempt to run this rapid. It can be portaged on the right or just enjoyed from the shore after hiking down the railroad tracks from the Conley Road bridge. Just walk the railroad to the third trestle and then venture downstream along the river left shore.

After Rocket Railroad Falls is an immediate class 2 run out which requires attention and skill. The rest of the run includes some minor rapids plus another solid class 3 and what I would rate a class 3+. Moving down the river there is a 6.2 mile section just upstream of Copper Falls State Park which I ran with several others back in April of 1985. This section features attractive Class I and II rapids. It also features Class IV Red Granite Falls. I honestly cannot recall whether we ran this drop or portaged around it. Read more about it below.

In 1997 I joined a Nature Conservancy work outing charged with removing invasive purple loosestrife plants from the shores of the lower Marengo River and into the Bad River down to Elm Hoist Road. The leader had gotten permission to be on the river from the Bad River Band. We put in on the Marengo at the Government Road bridge. I recall fast gravelly riffles but no real whitewater. When we reached the Bad River confluence, it was noticeable that the Bad's water quality was definitely the better of the two streams. Soon, though, the Bad became less clear as it eroded naked red clay banks

**Experiences of Others**

The out-of-print *Whitewater Quietwater* by Bob and Judy Palzer describes the 19 mile section between Elm Hoist Rd. and the community of Odanah. It is a wild and wooded section which is mostly quiet except for two rapids. The first one they rated a class 2. They advised portaging the
second one called Bad River Falls. Again, those not members of the Tribe must obtain permission to paddle on Reservation lands. This is very difficult to obtain.

The American Whitewater Website includes several sections of the Bad including the 6.2 miles from Hwy 169 to Devils Gate footbridge in Copper Falls State Park. Here is what it says about the big drop it contains. “Red Granite Falls consists of boulder bed interspersed with high angle slides.” They rate it a Class IV at low water and a class V at high water.

Frank Piraino also explored the Bad River and wrote about it in his Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin. He put in at the city park at Mellen and took out just before the main Copper Falls in the state park. Along the way he enjoyed several Class I and II rapids. He portaged around Red Granite Falls on the right side. His estimate of the portage length was a quarter of a mile.

Further Ideas
At higher flows there should be interesting and navigable water upstream of Cayuga. Likely it contains minor rapids.

Conclusion
With enough water and the requisite skills, the Cayuga section is a supreme whitewater run. Why do I call it one of my favorites? First, its wild Northwoods beauty. Second, it’s intimate small size. Third, the sheer number of delightful Class III rapids. There are not that many Wisconsin streams with this many Class III’s. The lower river and the Bad River Kakagon Slough are attractive canoeing options but are off limits to most.

Bad River tribal member Aurora Conley peruses the Bad River sloughs near the river’s mouth at Lake Michigan. (River Alliance of Wisconsin photo)
**Bear River**

**Location**
Vilas and Iron counties.

**Natural Features**
The Bear River begins in lakes near the Ojibwa village of Lac du Flambeau. It exits Flambeau Lake and then flows through an extensive marsh on reservation land from Vilas into Iron County. Then it leaves reservation land and eventually meets the Manitowish River to form the North Fork of the Flambeau River. This is one of the longest totally undeveloped stretches I have ever paddled in Wisconsin. Marsh vegetation covers a predominantly flat landscape. Periodically, though, glacially deposited hills approach the streamside offering a woody break from the wild rice beds and pickerel weeds. The current is slow and rocks are few until after the Hwy. 182 bridge. Starting there and extending downstream there is a section which features a garden of glacial erratic boulders.

**Human History and Influence**
Reservation status was conferred in 1854 but a tragic decision was later made which allowed non-Native interests to log off the land. As a result, in 1914, the Ojibwa were left with totally denuded land. The forest and the Tribe have since recovered fairly well though there were many difficult years. Indian culture and history are alive and can be studied at the museum in Lac du Flambeau. This area was also a hotbed of controversy back in 1980s when the Indians were fighting for spear fishing rights in the so-called ceded territories (off-reservation land). It was a battle which they won but not without great resistance and resentment from area whites.

The day I paddled the Bear, my fellow paddlers and I immediately noticed a dismaying amount of suspended sediment as we canoed upstream from the Hwy. 182 bridge. We soon discovered the source to be the Little Bear River. Upstream of that confluence the Bear cleared very nicely. Along our shuttle I noticed new road construction near the Little Bear, which I suspect was the cause of the contamination. Hopefully, that problem has since disappeared.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Though the water can be somewhat low during times of drought, it should usually be possible to get through. Water levels can be monitored by checking the USGS website. Deadfall is not a problem. Rapids are non-existent. This is a nice trip for beginners. Getting permission from the Tribe at Lac du Flambeau is a good idea.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
On several occasions I have paddled down the Manitowish and up the Bear a mile or so to the landing near the Hwy. 182 bridge. My one longer trip was an organized affair in the summer of 2000. In those days, Wayne Nasi was leading yearly trips which retraced the route of the ancient Flambeau Trail which Native Americans would follow from Madeline Island in Lake Superior to Lac du Flambeau. Paddling up the Bear River was the final part of this journey which included
paddling across Chequamegon Bay of Lake Superior, long portages past roaring rapids, and some downstream paddling before the upstream finale.

It took 8 ½ hours for us to paddle up the Bear River, and across most of Flambeau Lake to the village of Lac du Flambeau. Though the current was weak, it obviously would have been easier had we gone downstream instead of up. My partner Ron Rosner had a long pole with him. Several times he stood and used his poling skill to our great advantage. Most canoeists will, for the sake of ease, choose to travel in the opposite direction on the Bear River. They will likely skip the lake paddling part by putting in from the South River Rd. bridge just north of the river’s outlet at the north end of the lake. The entire trip is lovely and paddler-friendly. The logical take out place is the landing just downstream of the Hwy. 182 bridge.

**Experiences of Others**

Frank Piraino writes about the above section in his *Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin*. He suggests, for a shorter trip, that paddlers put in at the East River Rd. bridge and paddle downstream.

**Further Ideas**

Possibly a multi-day trip down the Manitowish and up the Bear. There did appear to be several suitable camping spots at scattered upland sites along the latter river’s shores. Again, permission to camp should first be obtained from the Tribe.

**Conclusion**

Beautiful wilderness stream suitable for most paddlers and with quite reliable water levels. There should be no problem getting permission to paddle it from the Tribe.
Bearskin Creek

**Location**
Oneida County

**Natural Features**
Tributary of the Tomahawk River which it joins after fewer than 10 miles from its headwaters in Bearskin Lake. It’s a small, pretty stream lined by wetlands and a mixed Northern hardwood-conifer forest.

**Human History and Influence**
Bearskin Creek follows the old railroad bed formerly occupied by the Hiawatha Streamliner. This train, in days past, would carry vacationers to Wisconsin’s Lake Country from the Chicago area. Now the bed is occupied by the Bearskin State Trail which carries bicycles rather than trains. Bikers encounter many bridges along the way because the trail crosses the creek 9 times.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Crosses a fairly level section of Wisconsin’s Northern Highland Geographic Province, so the gradient is low with no rapids. Tree-related obstructions will be encountered, but getting out of a canoe to portage should usually be easy since the water will usually be shallow (and clean and clear) and the creek bottom is mostly non-muddy.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
In my old Ladybug solo freestyle canoe I canoed a short section of Bearskin Creek in August of 1990. I put-in at the Cty. K bridge and paddled down to the Tomahawk River where I paddled upstream for a short distance. Then I turned around and took out near the confluence. Finally I jogged back to my car which was less than 2 miles away. Attractive forested uplands lined the winding, narrow and clear stream. Despite its narrowness I only had to pull over one fallen tree. It was a very pleasant, though brief experience.

**Further Ideas**
I have ridden the entire 18 mile Bearskin Trail on my bicycle so I have viewed the creek from all of those 9 bridges. Each time, it looked appealing and surprisingly clear of obstructions but I know there must be some of these which are hidden from view. I would like to explore Bearskin Creek between Harshaw and County K and maybe even further upstream. Then I would like to utilize the trail for my shuttle. This trail and the area, in general, are so popular with silent sports enthusiasts that some enterprising local group might wish to keep this creekway clear with some chain saw work.

**Conclusion**
I enjoyed my outing but it was too brief. Longer trips seem possible on this very scenic small Northwoods stream. Bikers can experience the Bearskin Trail whether they paddle the creek or not.
Blackjack Creek

Location
Southwestern Vilas County.

Natural Features
Blackjack Creek originates from Blackjack Springs which is part of a designated "Wilderness Area" in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Barely more than two miles away, as the crow flies, it flows into the Deerskin River. That stream eventually joins the Eagle River Chain of Lakes and then the Wisconsin River. In its brief life, Blackjack Creek flows through a pristine bog ringed by tamarack trees. Beyond the bog edges arise forested moraines dominated by pine, hemlocks, aspens and birches. Visible rocks are rare along Blackjack Creek.

Human History and Influence
My friend Ron Rosner and other Sierra Club activists were instrumental in getting this unique and pristine spot designated as a state "Wilderness Area" back in the late 1960s.

Navigability and Difficulty
Beaver dams impede travel near the springs. Expect one or two fallen trees. Shallow at times but should always be able to get through. Very slow current allows easy up and downstream travel.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Twice I have ascended Blackjack Creek from its mouth at the Deerskin River. The first time Ron Rosner and I were in solo canoes. The second time he and I used my tandem canoe. In 1999 we found a good shortcut by starting on the Deerskin just downstream of the confluence. Here is how to find that access spot:

Two miles east of the Little Deerskin River Bridge on Forest Rd., 2199, FR 2199B deviates to the south. This road, which may require a 4-wheel drive, leads to a small parking lot where a small boardwalk leads to the Deerskin River. From there we paddled a few hundred yards up to the confluence and turned right up slow-moving Blackjack Creek. Within a half hour we stopped to climb a hill on river right where we enjoyed a marvelous view of the stream as it wound through a treeless bog. Then we hiked back down and continued to paddle up the narrowing creek.

After lunging over and dragging our canoes over several beaver dams, we stopped to explore the headwater springs area on foot. Eventually, we turned back downstream to the Deerskin and nearly missed the boardwalk where we had put in. We should have tied a bright cloth to an alder to mark this location. The total outing had lasted 4 and half hours.

In 2006, Ron and I returned to Blackjack Creek by paddling my tandem canoe down Deerskin Creek to the confluence. Both of us had previously paddled this stretch of the Deerskin. On those occasions it had been rather easy to descend despite its narrow width. So, expecting
another easy trip, we put in on the Deerskin at the Forest Rd. 2178 bridge about three miles north of Anvil Lake. This time the stream course was extremely clogged by falling alder branches. I think they had just aged to the point where they were dying and collapsing under their own weight. After pulling the canoe under too many limbs to count, we finally reached Blackjack Creek which fortunately was wider and lacked the falling alders. It was easy to paddle upstream through the bog. We again stopped to climb that hill with the wonderful view. Then we resumed our trip upstream as far as we could go before we turned around. Back on Deerskin Creek we located the same take-out we had used before and ended our journey. We had left a vehicle in the nearby parking lot.

**Experiences of Others**
Numerous Sierra Club paddlers have seen Blackjack Creek during River Touring Section outings. I believe Ron told me they used the lookout hill as a campsite.

**Further Ideas**
Here is a longer day trip idea: Find the boardwalk I mentioned above which is located just downstream of the Blackjack-Deerskin confluence. Put in there on the Deerskin and paddle up and then back down Blackjack Creek. Once back on Deerskin Creek, continue downstream to the Range Line Rd. Bridge. See my separate account of Deerskin Creek.

**Conclusion**
If you can get to it, Blackjack Creek is a pristine wilderness waterway which is fun to explore.
Boot Creek

**Location**
Vilas County

**Natural Features**

**Human History and Influence**
Quite pristine along the immediate creekway. Just a couple of bridges. Cabins dot the lakeshores.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Tight turns could be a challenge in longer craft. One low footbridge to pull around. Cattails, floating mats and wild rice beds were thick at times. At times I was grabbing vegetation and pulling myself through. This made the route difficult to find. Most would not enjoy these challenges but I did. Navigation would be easier earlier in the year when the vegetation is sparser.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
In the summer of 2002 I spent two hours exploring Rice Creek into Boot Creek. I paddled my Bell Wildfire upstream from the Vilas County G bridge. It was easy to paddle the quarter mile up Rice Creek to Rice Lake. More difficult was finding my way through the cattails across the southeastern corner of Rice Lake. Also not easy was locating the inflow of Boot Creek which was hidden by cattails and wild rice. Boot Creek itself was initially unobstructed and lovely. Its upper half, however, became water-lily choked and more difficult to ascend. Near the outflow of Boot Lake the waterway narrowed and cattails again blocked the way. When I reached open water I was welcomed by the call of a loon.

**Further Ideas**
Most would probably choose to do my trip in reverse. This would mean starting on Boot Lake. Such a trip could be extended down Rice Creek to the Watersmeet Lake flowage of the Wisconsin River. I once paddled from the County G bridge into this body of water. See my Rice Creek write up.

**Conclusion**
Vilas County provides many lake to lake paddling options via wetland creeks. This one was scenic and interesting but it was challenging to find the way.
Brunsweiler River

Location
Entirely within Ashland County, west of Mellen.

Natural Features
Its headwaters are located in the Chequamegon National Forest high country just north of Clam Lake. From there the Brunsweiler flows northward and breaks through the ancient Penokee Range exposing Precambrian bedrock. Looking more like a mountain stream than any other Wisconsin stream I know of, this stream descends to its rendezvous with the Marengo River which soon merges with the Bad River on its way to Lake Superior. The river corridor is consistently wild, north woody and very attractive.

Human History and Influence
There are no towns on the Brunsweiler’s banks. Agriculture does impact the river in its final few miles after it enters the clay soils of the Lake Superior Lowland. A man-made dam forms Beaver Dam Lake at the site of what I suspect was once a real beaver dam. This is the site of the Martin Hanson compound, built by the late conservationist and political activist Martin Hanson, who entertained political dignitaries like Dave Obey and Gaylord Nelson. At his death, much of the Hanson property was deeded to the U.S. Forest Service. The cabins and lodges that he built and are still visible near the dam site where the river leaves Beaver Dam Lake, are now in decay.

At Hanson’s behest, and in his honor, the Brunsweiler, along with the Totogatic River, achieved a designation in 2009 that no other stream in the state had earned since 1965. The Legislature added these streams to the Wisconsin’s Wild River system. With that designation the Brunsweiler will hopefully enjoy special protection.

Navigability and Difficulty
This stream is for advanced and expert boaters only. Usually, it is only runnable during the April snow melt. Fallen trees and log jams are potential hazards. It contains numerous class III and IV drops. Viewing the river from the Mineral Lake Road bridge is good place to judge the adequacy of flow. The American Whitewater website contains water level information and runnability advice.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
My first experience on the Brunsweiler was the only “non-hair raising” one. I was poking around the area in 1989 with my Whitesell Piranha perched atop my Isuzu Trooper. A local resident saw my boat and flagged me down saying he would like to run a section of the Brunsweiler. He had an old Blue Hole OCA which he used as a solo canoe. Together we paddled the river from the Eade Ford to the County C bridge. It was a brief but fun constant class I-II run down a narrow channel which, somehow, was not blocked by any logjams or fallen trees. A series of islands made the channels even narrower.
Sometime in the early 1990s Bob Diggelman, Pat Brennaman and I wanted to explore this stream but Mineral Lake was still iced over. Our friend Dave Wehnes had regaled us with harrowing tales about running the Brunsweiler with some of his kayaking buddies. A couple of years later Bob, Pat and I returned to Mineral Lake again in early April. This time we found it to be ice-free, so we set out to explore it from there to Spring Brook Rd.

We put in at the boat landing at the west end of Mineral Lake. At its outlet we plunged down a quick and narrow class III chute into a narrow stream. We were on our way and had no clue of what lie ahead. Fast water alternated with quiet pools down to Mineral Lake Road and on to Beaver Dam Lake. So far we had paddled around 5 miles in less than 2 hours. It had been a fast and scenic ride but not terribly difficult. We paddled across Beaver Dam Lake. Then about a quarter of a mile after we portaged around the Beaver Lake dam we encountered a narrow gorge with obvious big whitewater ahead. So we hiked along its right rim to take a look. Several scary-looking drops caused us to portage around the right side until we found a place to lower our boats back down to the water. We wanted to experience at least some of the whitewater at the end of this gorge. A couple of us were flipped by a grabby, diagonal hole. Back on the water our Spring Brook Rd. take-out was just a handful of easy rapids away.

The best section of the Brunsweiler is the following: from Spring Brook Rd. to Eade Ford or onward to County C. Roger Hammer, Bruce Bradshaw, Susan Watson, Scott Watson, Bob Diggelman and I ran this section on April 28 of 2001. Bruce had run it before and was very helpful in guiding us down its four challenging class III-IV broken ledges. Our runs were mostly successful. We scouted each drop, set up rescue ropes and ran them one at a time. Easier rapids kept us entertained between the big ones. I recall no obstructing logjams or fallen trees but there were logs which compounded the challenge of running at least one of those big ledges.

Pat Brennaman and I returned and ran this same stretch in early May of 2013. The American Whitewater Website indicated there would be enough water at about 150 cfs. That doesn’t sound like much but we found the water to be quite high and pushy. We were impressed again by the beauty and wildness of the Brunsweiler. Logs and fallen trees kept us busy but did not require us to exit our boats. The Class II-III whitewater was nearly continuous. Those four big drops looked daunting and dangerous. To me they looked like solid Class IV's. Reluctantly we ended up portaging the first three. Pat did run most of the fourth drop by following a "sneak" route on far river right. His plan went well until he ran out of route options and got stuck on a rock. Out of his canoe he was unable hold on to it. After my portage I had stationed myself downstream along the shore. Fortunately I was able to grab his canoe as it floated by.

Experiences of Others
The late Jim Rada described the Brunsweiler in his book about Lake Superior streams. He describes one spot in that gorge below Beaver Dam Lake as a “very technical 7 foot drop.” The American Whitewater website also describes the drops in that gorge which we portaged on our trip in the early 1990s. First comes an “interesting small vertical falls (about 6-8 feet)” where the run out “tends to collect wood.” Then the river “deflects off a cliff face” and “heads into another
cascading drop of about 8 feet.” That same website includes the .5 mile run from Mineral Lake to Mineral Lake Rd. and the 10.2 mile run from Beaver Dam Lake Rd. to Hwy. 13.

**Further Ideas**

It should be possible to run the entire Brunsweiler from Mineral Lake to Eade Ford in one day.

**Conclusion**

The American Whitewater website says, “Though difficult to “catch, the Brunsweiler is truly one of the gems of Wisconsin’s South Shore rivers.” I agree but it certainly is for advanced and expert paddlers who are willing to paddle frigid waters in April. Scout all the big drops and consider a few portages.

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In April 2009, Governor Jim Doyle signed into law the designation of the Brunsweiler River as Wisconsin’s fifth state Wild River. He’s holding a picture of Martin Hanson, a property owner whose land contained the Brunsweiler and who advocated for the river’s designation. Second from the right in this picture is Dave Martin, former state representative and “father” of the 1965 Wild Rivers law. (River Alliance of Wisconsin photo.)
Butternut Creek

Location
Ashland and Price counties.

Natural Features
Butternut Creek arises in the sparsely populated forests of southeastern Ashland County. It flows in a southwesterly direction, passes under State Hwy. 13 at Butternut. Soon it enters and then exits Butternut Lake. Then it proceeds in the same direction to its confluence with the North Fork of the Flambeau River. Most of the way it flows briskly among ground moraine rocks deposited by the Wisconsin Glacier. I encountered no real rapids. Water quality is good but tannin-stained.

Navigability and Difficulty
Challenges are created by fallen trees which partially or completely block travel. Quite a few pull-overs and pull-arounds were needed during my trip but the number was not great enough to frustrate me. These were easy portages because the water was not deep and the stream floor was solid. I imagine that the water level fairly frequently gets too low for easy navigation.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
This is one of those gems which is probably paddled rarely. On May 9th of 1986 I locked and hid my bike near the Hwy 70 bridge over the North Fork of the Flambeau River. I put in at the County E bridge in my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe which I loaded with gear for an overnight stay. Soon I drifted under the bridge which carries the Tuscobia-Park Falls State Trail. The creek’s narrow corridor was attractively forested and it teemed with wildlife. Many mergansers, buffleheads and mallards exploded from the water when I disturbed them.

Because it started raining I quickly chose a marginal spot to camp among some alder trees. If I had been in less of a hurry to erect my tent I would have chosen one of numerous nicer sites on higher banks under big white pine trees. Soon it stopped raining so I was able to enjoy my campfire time which included listening to a beaver repeatedly slap its tail. The next day I was privileged to watch two hawks perform an elaborate mating dance in the sky. Once I hit the North Fork I still had about 7 miles to go and they were a pleasure to travel. The winds were light, the scenery was excellent, and the spring day weather was perfect. When I reached my bike, one tire was flat so I stuck my thumb out and hitched a ride back to my car.

Further Ideas
It might be possible to put in a bridge or two upstream of where I did. With a mountain bike it should be possible to use the Tuscobia Park Falls State Trail for part of the shuttle.
**Conclusion**
This is a very attractive and wild and Northwoods canoe trail for those who like to experience small, seldom paddled streams and don’t mind getting their feel wet pulling their boats over and around a few fallen trees.
Deerskin River

Location
Vilas County.

Natural Features
This small trout stream originates in Sand Lake near the Michigan border and meanders slowly through the Nicolet National Forest land. It eventually reaches the Eagle River Chain of Lakes which empties into the Wisconsin River. This clear stream flows through marshes, past prominent uplands, and through alder-lined lowlands. Cedar trees, white pines, and spruces are commonly observed conifers. The stream floor is usually sandy but becomes muddy in the marshes. Large glacial erratic boulders dot sections of the lower river but the gradient is too low to create rapids.

Human History and Influence
Military Road (FR 2178) crosses the Deerskin a couple of miles north of Anvil Lake. Built between 1863 and 1872, it forged an important link between Ft. Howard at Green Bay and Ft. Wilkens on Lake Superior. Man-made engineering projects along the stream include a dam (removed in 2001) and bank stabilization projects to improve trout habitat. Despite these influences the river’s corridor is mostly wild and undeveloped. A few cabins can be seen along river left before the Range Rd. bridge. The aforementioned earthen dam removal was controversial but should result in better trout fishing and other benefits.

Navigability and Difficulty
Water levels are generally adequate and rapids are lacking. The river’s very narrow size, however, does create vegetation obstruction problems. These problems were minimal until sometime in the early 2000s. Prior to that time paddlers could easily squeeze through the alder-lined corridor of the upper river. By 2006 it seems those alders had aged to the point that they had collapsed in huge numbers making this section of the river difficult to navigate. Until these are swept away, the upper river should be avoided. This will likely take a few years.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I first paddled the Deerskin by myself in 1989. In my solo-freestyle Ladybug I explored the 6 mile stretch between FR 2178 and Range Line Road. I was struck by the clarity and overall beauty of this delightful little stream. Despite the extreme narrowness of the upper river, getting through was not difficult in my 13 foot canoe.

Difficulties were also minimal in 1999 when I returned to the Deerskin with Ron Rosner. It was fun running it in my 16 foot Mad River Explorer. That day we also turned up Blackjack Creek and explored that pristine waterway. Back on the Deerskin we paddled across the shallow flowage created by the nine-foot earthen dam. Here we scared up wave after wave of blue wing teals. Ron and I revisited the Deerskin in 2002. We wanted to see what was growing in the mud flats of the emptied flowage. We were also looking forward to descending the upper river and returning
to Black jack Creek. To our dismay we found the upper river to be totally obstructed by aging alders which had collapsed across the stream. We spent more time out of the canoe than in it as we dragged the canoe over countless branches and small trunks. Finally, we reached the Blackjack confluence and ascended that little stream. Fortunately it was essentially obstruction free as well as most of the lower Deerskin. We reached the site of the former flowage and found it to be returning nicely to its natural state. Finally we paddled among the boulders and past the attractive cedars of the lower river before our trip ended at the Range Line Rd.

**Experiences of Others**
The long tradition of Sierra Club River Touring Section trips down the Deerskin seems to have ended, but there were many good years.

**Further Ideas**
There is a put-in alternative worth finding which skips the obstructed upper Deerskin. After driving along FR 2199, turn southward on FR 2199B which is two tenths of a mile east of the Little Deerskin River bridge. After a while this road leads to a small parking lot which is used mostly by trout fishermen. A path leads from the parking lot to a small dock on the Deerskin. Its location is just a short distance downstream from the Blackjack Creek confluence. Here is my advice for a 4-5 hour day trip: Put in from this dock and paddle upstream to the Blackjack Creek confluence. Turn up that creek and explore it as far as you wish. (Read my account of Blackjack Creek). Then turn back down the Blackjack and paddle the Deerskin to the Range Line Rd. bridge.

**Conclusion**
The Deerskin River is a lovely quiet water experience. Consider the trip I suggested immediately above.
Eagle River

Location
Oneida and Vilas counties.

Natural Features
Begins in marshes near the Oneida-Forest County line about 8 miles southeast of Three Lakes. It enters the famous chain of 28 lakes which extends between the communities of Three Lakes and Eagle River. There it joins the Wisconsin River. The river’s first few miles flow through wild Northwoods surroundings but the wildness soon disappears as the river merges into those highly settled lakes.

Human History and Influence
Eagle River was founded as a logging town in the late 1800s. Tourism became the major industry early in the 20th century. Dwellings and other types of development surround the lakes. The narrow channel which once linked the last lake in the chain with the Wisconsin River has been flooded by the flowage waters of Watersmeet Lake which formed after a dam was constructed across the Wisconsin River.

Navigability and Difficulty
Low water will never be a problem and with virtually no current there is no whitewater. It is wide enough to never be obstructed by fallen trees. Inconsiderate power boaters constitute the only hazards.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In July of 2005, I floated the Eagle River channel between Yellow Birch Lake and into Watersmeet Lake. First I left my bicycle at a landing on a bay of the latter lake. It was located just south of the Hwy 77 bridge. Then I drove to the landing located at the south shore of Yellow Birch Lake’s outlet. Despite the “No Wake” signs, numerous power boats sped by me and rocked my Wildfire canoe. Because of this hazard, I clung to the north shore and entertained myself by observing the variety of docked boats and houses along the shore. The water was green from algae and weed choked. It surprised me to see a loon fishing in front of a busy marina. I reached the take out after one hour and 20 minutes of wind-aided time on the water.

Conclusion
This “river” is probably best left to the power boaters.
Elk River

Location
Price County.

Natural Features
Several headwater branches begin in the Chequamegon National Forest south of State Hwy 70. They and the main Elk flow past wild Northern conifer-hardwood forests through many pre-Cambrian boulder fields. Flowing southwesterly and westerly, the Elk eventually merges with the South Fork of the Flambeau River.

Human History and Influence
Four dams interrupt the flow of the Elk. It also nudges the north end of Phillips, the county seat of Price County. One of those dams is located on the headwater tributary known as Popple Creek. Agricultural influences are minimal, but the river suffers degradation from development around the flowages and from human influences in Phillips.

Navigability and Difficulty
Bouldery stretches are frequently too low for comfortable paddling. I know of no bridge gauges and the Elk is not on the USGS site. Thus, bridge scouting will be necessary to determine adequacy of flow. None of the rapids are difficult. Most stretches of the river below the Musser Dam are wide enough to minimize deadfall problems.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I paddled the Elk in 1986 and in 2002. My first experience was a 2 hour trip alone in my whitewater canoe from just below Musser Dam to the Big Elk Road bridge. The water was moderately high on this early April day. Most of the trip featured attractive, wooded shores and many rock gardens which I enjoyed maneuvering through. None of the rapids were more than class I. Under a rising full moon, I jogged back to my car along Hwy H.
With my fishing buddy, Carter Leslie I floated the Elk in 2002 from the landing near the Rapids Road bridge to the landing on Lake Sault Dore. The river was at a low summer level so there were many rocks to dodge. We avoided most of them in my Mad River Explorer and caught quite a few small mouth bass.

Experiences of Others
The DNR published a pamphlet in the 1960s entitled Wisconsin Water Trails. It included a trip from Musser Dam to the South Fork of the Flambeau River. It contained a map which depicted numerous rapids but it described only one: Fleming Rapids is located just upstream of the Fleming Rapids Rd. bridge. Carter and I viewed it from that bridge. It too only deserves a Class I rating.

Frank Piraino explored a section of the Elk River and described it in his Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin. He explored an upstream stretch from FR. 136 to FR. 131 in the
National Forest. He called it a lovely stretch except for one “bad deadfall snag” followed by a “fast, difficult, dense boulder garden” in the middle of the trip. The property owner was watching and gave Frank permission to portage in front of his cabin around the “snag.”

**Further Ideas**
At high water it would be fun to explore the whole Elk River to the County S bridge from the FR 136 bridge in one trip. There would be three flowages to cross and three dams to portage around. It should not be difficult to find places to canoe-camp. Another idea would be to plan a trip down the South Fork of the Flambeau by starting on the Elk. One could put in at the County S bridge a mile above the confluence and ride a rocky stretch to the larger river. I scouted from this bridge on one occasion. It looked very rocky and would require moderately high water for easy navigation.

**Conclusion**
Were it not for the dams this river would be an excellent river to explore at medium to high water times. The dams make shorter day trips more appealing than longer outings. It is an attractive, small, Northwoods stream.
Flambeau River (North Fork)

Location
Iron, Price and Sawyer counties.

Natural Features
The North Fork is born when the Manitowish and Bear Rivers merge in Iron County. Numerous rapids develop as the river descends from the heights of the Northern Highland on a river bed which is dotted with Precambrian glacial erratic rocks and boulders. Occasionally ancient bedrock is exposed along the banks which also support a variety of northern conifers and hardwoods. Just before the Rusk County line the North Fork merges with the South Fork to form the main Flambeau River which eventually joins the Chippewa River.

Human History and Influence
Early explorers and Native Americans used the Flambeau as a major highway. In the 19th century the area was logged and the river was used to run logs. In 1926 the Turtle-Flambeau dam flooded 16 natural lakes to form the state’s 5th largest “lake.” Today, much of this flowage’s shoreline is undeveloped and is protected by the state of Wisconsin.

The Park Falls area eventually saw the construction of 4 dams, all of which still exist. There has been a paper mill in that town for many years. Its negative influence on the river has lessened through time due to mandated pollution controls. The Nature Conservancy has been involved in protecting sections of the corridor downstream of the Turtle-Flambeau Dam. Further downstream the river enters the Flambeau River State Forest.

Navigability and Difficulty
There is generally enough water in the North Fork though low water times require good water reading skills to keep from hanging up on rocks or sand bars. Mike Svob recommends calling one of the two following DNR offices for water level information: (715)332-5271 or (715) 762-3204. No rapids on the North Fork rate higher than Class II+, but intermediate whitewater skills are necessary. High water times can be dangerous.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
My second trip on the North Fork was in 1981 on a Joe Weigel-led Sierra Club trip from the Turtle-Flambeau Dam to Agenda Landing. I also took this same trip with my wife, Pat, in 1990. It is a gorgeous piece of water which features several easy rapids. I have seen otters at play here and many other wildlife species. During the 1980s I paddled down Butternut Creek into the North Fork and took out at Dix-Dox Landing near Hwy. 70. Then in 1987 I enjoyed a unique adventure which included canoeing and mountain biking. I enjoyed paddling the mostly slow but scenic stretch between Hwy. 70 and County W but the best part was getting back to my car. Under a fall color canopy of sugar maples I got there by mountain biking the Oxbo and Flambeau cross country ski trails.
My very first trip down the North Fork was in the late 1970s when my whitewater experience was nil. Somehow my friends and I made it down the rapids of the lower North Fork into the main Flambeau River. We camped next to Cedar Rapids. In those days there was no take-out at Beaver Dam Rapids so we continued down the main Flambeau to Big Falls Flowage and took out at Flambeau Lodge. One memory of this trip is seeing the devastation left by the straight line wind storm of 1977. See my write-up on the main Flambeau for more details on the rapids of this section.

Twice in the early new millennium I put in at Camp 41 and paddled the North Fork to just past the South Fork confluence. Both times I was fishing for smallmouth bass with my friend, Carter Leslie. We took turns controlling the canoe through rapids while the other fished. Our fishing luck was pretty good.

Carter and I also fished the North Fork between the last two of the 4 dams near Park Falls. We put in below Pixley Dam and took out at Dead Man’s Slough where there is an unimproved access along Hwy. 70. We enjoyed successful fishing and also the great scenery which was especially good along the upper two thirds of this 6 mile stretch of river. At one point we noticed commotion ahead in the water which we couldn’t figure out. It turned out to be two large snapping turtles engaging in a courtship dance. They ignored us as we passed by and continued to rotate together in the water.

I think it was in 2005 when several buddies and I made an extended canoe-camp trip down the North Fork and into the mainstem Flambeau to the Beaver Dam take-out. The first day we paddled from the Turtle-Flambeau Dam to the Agenda Landing a few miles upstream of Park Falls. Then we reshuttled our cars the rest of the way so that we could skip the dams and flowages and spend our time on moving water. We spent the next three days and two nights canoeing and camping together. It was a great trip which featured peaking fall colors.

**Experiences of Others**
Many magazine articles and several guidebooks have extolled the many virtues of this classic canoeing river. These days the “Bible” is Mike Svob’s *Paddling Northern Wisconsin*. The American Whitewater Website also includes two sections on the North Fork in its narrative.

**Conclusion**
The North Fork of the Flambeau River is considered a classic for several reasons. First it usually has enough water. Second, it is a very attractive riverway. And third, it features whitewater which most boaters with experience can handle. It is also one of Wisconsin’s best canoe-camping rivers. The write up for the main Flambeau River can be found in the Northwest Region.
Flambeau River (South Fork)

**Location**
Price, Sawyer and Rusk counties.

**Natural Features**
The South Fork of the Flambeau originates at the outflow of Round Lake in far northeastern Price County. That lake receives water from creeks originating in three other counties including Iron, Vilas and Oneida. From Round Lake the South Fork flows in a southwesterly direction for 66 miles before it merges with the North Fork to form the mainstem Flambeau River. That stream eventually merges with the Chippewa River.

Right from its beginning the South Fork is wide and often shallow. At times it flows slowly past bottomland trees and marshy shorelines. Then it speeds past uplands and exposed granite as it flows through boulder fields on its descent from the heights of the Northern Highland. Picturesque rapids are framed by attractive conifers and hardwoods representative of Wisconsin’s “Northwoods.”. Human development is sparse in its watershed so the water quality is quite good.

**Human History and Influence**
The South Fork’s first 25 miles lie within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. At the Sawyer County line the river enters the Flambeau River State Forest. A DNR parking lot is located about 8 miles North of Hawkins along Rusk County M. A short hike from it leads to scenic views of Slough Gundy Rapids and Little Falls. There are no towns of significant size along the banks of the South Fork, but Fifield was once a bustling logging town.

In the out of print guidebook known as Wisconsin's North Central Canoe Trails, Glen Lowry writes about this town’s colorful history. In 1890 Fifield had 1,600 residents, 5 hotels and 28 saloons. At least 20 logging camps depended on Fifield businesses for supplies. The remains of several logging era dams are still in evidence along the river today. A replica of an original dam has been reconstructed at the Round Lake outlet. Considering the watershed’s low population density I was surprised to see numerous vacation-type homes along the shores of the South Fork between Fifield and County W. Agricultural influences are minimal.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The South Fork often gets too low for comfortable paddling. The out of print Whitewater-Quietwater guidebook contains a graph which estimates just nine canoeable days in July and also in August. Mike Svob suggests calling the Flambeau State Forest Headquarters for water level information. The South Fork contains numerous Class I and II rapids. Little Falls is a solid Class III.
Trip Ideas: My experiences

Around the year 2000 I explored the first 12 miles of the South Fork from Round Lake to Cedar Rapids (FR 149 Bridge). My canoe was my Bell Wildfire and my shuttle vehicle was my bicycle. Much of this section is slow enough and deep enough to paddle if the water is low but only if one is willing to walk and drag through some shallow reaches. The water level was ideal for running the rapids when I paddled it in early June.

I put in on Round Lake at the boat landing on the western shore. At the outlet I portaged around the restored logging dam and stopped to admire it. The river started off surprisingly wide. The water was clear enough for me to follow the movements of a northern pike. Much of the upper river was marshy and slow but several minor rapids were fun to run in my Wildfire. At Smith Rapids I paddled under the covered bridge replica which spans the river there. It was a good wildlife day. I saw many whitetail deer and nearly as many common mergansers. About 10 miles into the trip I reached the bedrock outcrop which forms a Class I drop known as Natural Dam Rapid. The other rapids were boulder gardens. At the end of Cedar Rapids my trip was over. The river’s next 19 miles to Fifield will be mentioned below under “experiences of others.”

On July 3 of 2002, I returned to the South Fork with my Bell Wildfire and my 49cc Yamaha motorcycle. I left that shuttle vehicle by the Price County W bridge and drove to the wayside at the south edge of Fifield. There I began a long day of 7½ hours and 22 miles on the river. Quiet water ruled during my first hour on the water. I might have been bored had I not been entertained by four playful otters. The calls of white-throated sparrows filled the air. I could hear Boars Rapids at mile 7½ long before I reached it. Mile 11 presented the greatest challenge for my non-whitewater canoe. Rocky Carry Rapids was three lengthy pitches of boulders and broken bedrock. Here there were a surprising number of streamside cabins nearby including one which was perched on a slab of granite.

Just upstream of Lugerville I encountered a series of islands. I turned left into a man made channel which led to the remains of an old logging dam. Avoiding it required me to make a very quick and sharp right turn. The remaining 9 miles to County W contained several easy rapids and a dandy looking undeveloped campsite by Rock Ledge Rapids at mile 16. The day was warm and sunny and the river looked inviting. So, twice I stopped for swims. Automobile traffic along Hwy. 13 made my ride back to Fifield a frightening experience. The cars and trucks which passed me on my slow cycle were too close for comfort.

I have been on the South Fork between Price County W and Sawyer County on three separate occasions. This section contains several Class I rapids and two Class II’s. My last trip was in 1996 with a group of seven friends in solo whitewater canoes. Mark Mehlos, Roger Hammer, Bob Diggelman, Doug Kress, Phil Johnsrud, Scott Watson, Susan Watson and I rode big waves generated by a full April flood. In no time we reached the Co. M bridge and proceeded down to the bigger rapids ahead. It is slightly more than six miles from County M to the North Fork confluence, but the most difficult rapids are contained in the first mile and a quarter. Slough Gundy is usually a Class II in three pitches. On this day it was a rollicking continuous Class III. We ran it well but were concerned about getting swept over Little Falls. So as soon as we could we
paddled aggressively to the left bank where we climbed out of our canoes to take a look. The island in the middle is usually high and dry. On this day it was completely submerged by pulsing water. Little Falls was probably a IV instead of a III. A flip would have been followed by a harrowing swim. So we all wisely chose to portage. Back on the water we successfully rode Scratch and Otter Slide Rapids down to Hervas Landing on the Flambeau’s Main Fork.

When the South Fork is not in flood, this is a beautiful spot featuring granite outcrops and Slough Gundy rates only a Class II. Little Falls is a more difficult III which can be scouted from the island in the middle and run on either side. I remember the first time I ran Little Falls. It was 1981 on a Joe Weigel-led Sierra Club trip. It was thrilling to run the right side in my Blue Hole OCA. A few years later, Doug Kress and I ran the right side in a tandem canoe. We stayed upright but ended up with a boat full of water. The left side of the island is tighter more technical run. I went this way once but it required a couple of quick maneuvers. Whichever side you choose, scout Little Falls from the island before you proceed. After Little Falls, Scratch Rapids and Otter Slide Rapids are solid Class II’s. There is a landing just upstream of the latter drop which I have never used. Instead I have always paddled another 5 miles to Hervas Landing on the main Flambeau River.

Experiences of Others
The Flambeau and its two forks are well known rivers which have been the subjects of numerous magazine articles through the years. This river system is also covered well in the guidebooks I mentioned above. Today’s authoritative guidebook source is Mike Svob’s Paddling Northern Wisconsin. The only section of the South Fork I have not paddled or discussed is the section immediately above Fifield. Those who have access to the old guidebook, Wisconsin’s North Central Canoe Trails will find a description of the 19 miles between Cedar Rapids and Fifield. About a mile into the trip, paddlers will encounter Sugar Bush Pond Dam. The author advises taking the center slot over this quick pitch he rates a “high hazard Class III.” I suspect that by today's standards it would rate a II.

Then, after several very slow miles comes Class I-II Sugar Bush Rapids. Another two miles downstream Bockhouse Dam Rapids drops “7 feet in about 30 yards.” This is another likely Class II by today’s standards. Evidently there is a real dam another 4 miles downstream called Divine Rapids Rock Dam. A portage here may be necessary. Immediately following is Divine Rapids which is a long Class II. The final two miles to Fifield are uneventful. The American Whitewater Website describes 5 different sections of the river.
Further Ideas
When the water is high enough I can imagine a canoe-camp trip from Round Lake to Slough Gundy and, perhaps, beyond.

Conclusion
The South Fork of the Flambeau River is lovely and filled with rapids. Paddlers with intermediate skill and experience will enjoy this river when it has enough water. The write up for the main Flambeau River can be found in the Northwest Region.
Gilmore Creek

Location
Northern Oneida County.

Natural Features
Plum, St. Germaine and Lost Lakes in southern Vilas County are inter-linked by creeks. Their slow moving waters eventually reach Gilmore Creek which finds its way to the Wisconsin River. Gilmore Creek seems surprisingly wide as it passes marshes and uplands. This is typical Northwoods country. The stream floor ranges from sandy to rocky. I was disappointed by the water quality which was green from algae blooms on the upstream lakes.

Human History and Influence
Many of the lakes in this drainage system are ringed by homes. The shores of the stream itself were mostly undeveloped. The Rainbow Flowage of the Wisconsin River and its long dike are close by on river left.

Navigability and Difficulty
Because of its generous width (60-80 feet) and because of chainsaw work this stream was mostly unobstructed. There were scattered glacial erratic boulders to dodge but no real rapids. I think the water level should stay adequate through all seasons. There was plenty of water when ran it in August. I noticed a gauge nearby County E bridge near the confluence with the Wisconsin River. It read 2.7.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Bill Jaeger from Rhinelander had never run Gilmore Creek but he suggested that I check it out. I did so and was rewarded with a fine 45 minute outing in August of 2006. In my Bell Wildfire I began the trip just upstream County E bridge. After about 25 minutes I encountered a couple of fast riffles which led to treeless left bank where I glanced left. Above me was a grassy dike which helped to contain the Wisconsin River’s Rainbow Flowage.

Soon I portaged around the only log jam I encountered on the trip. Back on the water I could see two culverts coming into view. I could have taken out before these culverts on river left but decided to aim my canoe through the culvert on the right. It flushed me rapidly through and dropped me into a sizeable hole. Fortunately it spit me out in an upright position. Within a few yards I reached the Wisconsin River and a small beach on the left where I took out. A short path led to a parking area. Instead of jogging the 1.7 miles back to my car I took a leisurely stroll.

Further Ideas
It could be fun to explore upstream sections of this drainage system. Perhaps a trip could begin on Plum Creek and include St. Germain Lake, the St. Germain River, Dog Lake, Gilmore Lake and, finally, Gilmore Creek.
Conclusion
My brief outing on Gilmore Creek was fun, easy, scenic and accessible. It should always have enough water.
Gresham Creek

**Location**
Vilas County.

**Natural Features**
Upper, Middle and Lower Gresham Lakes are located just west of Trout Lake. They are linked by Gresham Creek which joins the Trout River soon after it exits Lower Gresham Lake. A few miles later the Trout River merges with the Manitowish River. This is typical Wisconsin Lake Country which features wetlands and conifer-hardwood uplands.

**Human History and Influence**
Roads, culverts and cabins are noticeable man-made structures.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
Ron Rosner and I had a pleasurable experience on Gresham Creek in August of 2006. It required some planning and ingenuity. First we left a car at the junction of Hwy 51 and County H. We were hoping we could reach Upper Gresham Lake but were not sure we could get that far. We thought it was equally possible that we would be forced to turn around and return to our starting point. In our solo canoes we started at the County H bridge over the Trout River. It was easy to work upstream against the weak current of that marshy river. Not wanting to miss the junction of Gresham Creek we watched the right bank closely. After about a mile and a half we located this junction and turned up into Gresham Creek. It was narrow stream with many lily pads.

After about a half mile we reached County H and its culvert. We climbed out of our boats and ducked our heads as we walked them through the shallow water of the culvert. From there we ascended the next stretch of Gresham Creek to Lower Gresham Lake. Again it was easy to paddle upstream. From reading the map beforehand we remembered that Gresham Creek’s inlet was at the northeast end of the lake. From that point the water quality was much improved because of fewer algae. Tamarack trees added to the beauty of the waterway.

Quite wide initially, the stream narrowed considerably as we approached Middle Gresham Lake. This was a lovely body of water with only one cabin. Next we located the inflow from Upper Gresham Lake along its northern shore. We paddled upstream and through the culvert under Hwy 51. Soon we reached Upper Gresham Lake and paddled across it to the landing on its northeast shore. We hid our canoes and gear and headed back to Ron’s car. We got there by walking the snowmobile trail which parallels Hwy 51. The stroll was less than a mile long.

**Further Ideas**
It would be somewhat easier to do this trip in reverse because it would be a downstream run. At the Trout River junction such an outing could follow the Trout River upstream to Wild Rice Lake. It could also turn downstream and proceed as far as desired on the Trout River.
Conclusion
A Gresham Creek outing offers combined lake and creek paddling in scenic Vilas County.
Indian Creek

Location
Oneida County. Gazetteer page 89.

Natural Features
Indian Creek is a tiny stream which drains a small area of lake-filled northern Oneida County. It begins about 8 miles straight north of Rhinelander. Its total length is only about 5 miles. After linking three small lakes it merges with Sugar Camp Creek which itself links more lakes on its way to the Wisconsin River’s Rainbow Flowage. The creekway is scenic and pristine with marshy grasses lining the banks and with black spruces typically arising in the distance.

Human History and Influence
Those three headwater lakes are mostly undeveloped and the creek’s corridor is too marshy for cabins or agriculture. It’s a nice contrast with other bodies of water in the area which are highly developed.

Navigability and Difficulty
The water should always be deep enough. However, this extremely narrow creek presents other difficulties which will cause most to shy away. My 13 ½ foot canoe was able to make the tight corners but 17 ft. standard canoes would have some trouble. There were logs to pull over, one low bridge to portage around and several beaver dams to bull over.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I loved Indian Creek. At its culvert under Stone Lake Road it appeared impossibly small. But I had read somewhere that paddling it was possible. So I trusted this source and planned my outing. First I locked my mountain bike to a tree near the boat landing on the south shore of Stone Lake. Then I returned to the culvert and launched my Ladybug canoe. Initially, the creek was only about 6 foot wide. I enjoyed navigating the multiple tight turns. Grasses with dew drops and distant spruce trees were perfectly mirrored in the water. During the first 45 minutes I pulled my canoe over three logs and a snowmobile bridge. I powered my way over about 5 small beaver dams without needing to exit my canoe. Midway through the trip it was fun to observe the activities of an otter family. Several sand hill cranes flew overhead. A dam backs water into Sugar Camp Creek and Stone Lake. I reached that current less creek and soon entered Stone Lake. My trip ended on a high note when a loon serenaded me with a tremolo call.

Conclusion
There are scores of opportunities to explore interlinking creeks among the lakes of Oneida and Vilas Counties. Many of these are special but Indian Creek is hard to beat.
Jennie Weber Creek

**Location**
Oneida County.

**Natural Features**
This is one of the many small streams which flow among the lakes of Wisconsin’s famous Lake Country. It features boggy streamside vegetation and northern conifer hardwoods which arise beyond the immediate corridor. Jennie Weber Creek and Gudegast Creeks are headwater streams of the North Fork of the Pelican River.

**Human History and Influence**
Both of the above creeks run through wild and undeveloped lands. The source of Jennie Weber Creek is a lake with the same name. It has a boat landing and some dwellings on its shores. A dam across the North Fork of the Pelican River backs up a series of 5 small lakes including the highest one which is known as Moen Lake. That lake, in turn, backs into Jennie Weber. As a result the lower reaches of the creek are unnaturally deep and slow.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The dam causes a steady water level on lower Jennie Weber Creek. Here the only obstacles will be water lilies and other types of surface vegetation.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
My Rhinelander friend Scott Watson made me aware of Jennie Weber Creek though he had never explored it himself. Of course I had to investigate it so I traveled there in July of 2005. At the Shepard Rd. bridge I hopped into my Bell Wildfire and directed it northward. Initially the stream was about 100 feet wide and nearly currentless because it was impounded. After about 45 minutes it broke up into a series of narrow channels. I nearly aborted my trip because they all seemed so narrow, shallow, and choked with vegetation. Then I spotted a likelier looking opening. It was narrow but appeared to have more current than the others. It opened up as I followed it but then it shrank again to a width of about seven feet. I am not sure if I was on Jennie Weber Creek or on Gudegast Creek during this part of my journey. These two streams come together about a mile above the Shepard Road bridge. Eventually I reached a sizeable beaver dam and decided to turn around. My trip ended back where it had begun.

**Experiences of Others**
I did scout Jennie Weber Creek from the Cross Country Rd. bridge. It appeared impossibly narrow here. I suspect the same would be true for upstream sections of Gudegast Creek. I can imagine spending more time on these creeks from the same Shepard Rd. bridge access. I challenge other paddlers to explore the lower reaches of these two creeks and to determine
exactly where they come together. This should be an easier task earlier in the year when the water plants are not so overgrown.

**Conclusion**
One of many wetland stream exploration opportunities in Vilas and Oneida Counties.
Johnson Creek

**Location**
Vilas County.

**Natural Features**
Johnson Creek is a headwaters creek of the Flambeau River. High in the Lake Country of the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest three creeks merge to form Johnson Creek. That stream becomes the Manitowish which becomes the North Fork of the Flambeau which eventually becomes the Flambeau. Those three smaller headwater creeks are named Garland, Siphon and Salsich. Johnson Creek exists for only about three miles. It becomes the Manitowish River after Wide Creek merges from the right. The shoreline is mostly boggy and features a variety of wetland plants.

**Human History and Influence**
Nearby lakes are ringed by homes. The flowage portion of Johnson Creek also has homes on its higher banks. A small dam on the Manitowish backs water up into Johnson Creek. As a result the lower creek has no current.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
No shallow water or deadfall problems.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
My day on Johnson Creek was with a Sierra Club group led by Al and Julie Hillery. It was a September trip sometime in the early 1990s. We started on Johnson Creek and paddled down the Manitowish to Boulder Junction. Our put-in was a challenge to find. From the northeast end of High Lake along County B we turned south onto High Lake Rd. After 2.1 miles we turned left onto a gravel road. Then after half a mile we again turned left onto a seldom used dirt road which we followed about half a mile until we could drive no farther. From there we carried our canoes about 100 yards to Johnson Creek. These roads are all marked on the Gazetteer.

Once on the water we decided to first explore in the upstream direction. It was easy to ascend the crystal clear creek against a gentle current. Some of the turns were a bit challenging for the longer canoes because it was so narrow. Several of us made a wrong right turn into what I later determined to be Siphon Creek. We soon discovered our mistake, then turned around and caught up with the rest of the group. Just downstream of Johnson Lake we hauled our canoes over a beaver dam. When we reached that lovely lake we paddled around it for a while before we headed back downstream. Johnson Creek officially begins at the outlet of this lake. We passed our starting point and soon the creek widened and the current stopped because of the downstream dam.

Wide Creek merged from the right and we were now on the Manitowish River. We had been on the water about 5 hours when we reached the County M bridge on the north edge of Boulder.
Junction. See my description of the Manitowish River for a description of that latter part of this trip.

**Further Ideas**
Start where we did or start at the landing on High Lake. Explore High Lake, Fishtrap Lake, Wide Creek and Johnson Creek in that order or in reverse. A shuttle could be set up or this could be a round trip.

**Conclusion**
This is a beautiful little Vilas County stream. Consider using it to begin a trip down the Manitowish River. Other options are what we did or my “further idea.”
Jump River (South Fork)

Location
Price County.

Natural Features
Several headwaters creeks join to form the South Fork a few miles northeast of Prentice. This is a marshy area where the water moves slowly. After Prentice the South Fork descends more deliberately from the heights of the Northern Highland. The current is often fast and rapids develop along its frequent rocky stretches. Just before the North Fork merges, the South Fork makes a precipitous plunge through a narrow gorge lined by granite walls. Big Falls is indeed an impressive cascade. Here and elsewhere this river’s shores are lined by an attractive mix of hardwoods and northern conifers including some nice hemlocks. The water quality is good as is the fishing.

Human History and Influence
This river has a long and rich logging history. The only community along its banks is Prentice. There is a dam there and another one further upstream. Farms are few and far between.

Navigability and Difficulty
Low water will frequently be a problem. There is a gauge down river on the main Jump River which can be monitored on the USGS website. The American Whitewater website uses their flow numbers to make runnability recommendations. Mike Svob suggests calling the DNR ranger station at Medford (715-748-4955) for water level information. Scouting from bridges is always an option. Deadfall will be an infrequent problem.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I have paddled the South Fork on three occasions: The first was in 1982 with three other friends in solo canoes. All of us did well except for the least experienced of us. Alone in his 17 foot aluminum canoe he was not ready for Little Falls. We had put in at the unimproved landing on river right along County I about 10 miles west of Hwy 13. After about 7 miles of frequently riffly water we reached Class II Little Falls. Its waves were big that day because the water was so high. After he capsized our friend made it to shore on his own but it took a major effort by the rest of us to rescue his badly damaged canoe. One problem was the total lack of flotation in his canoe.

In 1996 I returned to this same stretch for some fishing with Carter Leslie. We put in at the same spot and took out somewhere east of County N along Big Falls Rd. It was mid-August and the water was typically low but we were able to dodge the countless boulders successfully in my Mad River Explorer. Our fishing luck was very good as we landed many small mouth bass, one walleye and even a small muskie. I glanced away from the river long enough to notice scattered granite bedrock exposures and one especially lovely hemlock grove on river left. Little Falls was reasonably easy to run at this low level but it did require considerable maneuvering.
I had heard harrowing tales of Big Falls including few deaths. So of course my friend Pat Brenneman and I had to run it. We showed up one day in about 1993 with our Daggar Genesis solo whitewater canoes. The water looked to be a good level so we scouted the entire gorge and saw 4 or 5 challenging class III pitches. Stringing them together successfully would not be easy. Pat was up to the challenge but I tipped over on the second pitch. Luckily, I gathered myself and my boat together and was able to complete the run.

The last time I saw Big Falls was in April of 1996. It was a fearsome sight! In flood it looked like a Class V maelstrom with monster holes and waves. Not one of our group of seven was tempted to try it.

**Experiences of Others**

Greg Marr interviewed a Prentice area man for his 1986 Silent Sports article on Price County. This man, named Ed Monessen, told Greg that he enjoyed paddling an easy 2-hour section between Mayo Route Rd. and Prentice. The out-of-print guidebook *Wisconsin’s North Central Canoe Trails* describes the 14 miles from Prentice to a landing on river left along County M. Featured are minor rapids, riffles and wooded shores. The following section starts fast but then slows into a “great looping maze of bottomland meanders” (quote from the above guidebook). Then at Oxbow the South Fork speeds up again along high banks and boulder fields which typify most of its corridor.

The 9.2 miles of river from the landing here to Big Falls is described by Mike Svob in *Paddling Northern Wisconsin*. He calls Little Falls a “200 yard Class II boulder garden. Big Falls is a “400 yard dells” which makes an S-curve and “falls dramatically over several big drops”. Most will skip the paddling at Big Falls County Park and confine their visit to hiking along this beautiful cascade. Less than two miles remain of the South Fork before it merges with the North Fork to form the main Jump River. The first half of this two mile stretch is a continuous Class I-II boulder garden.

**Further Ideas**

With enough water this stream should be suitable for a fun and scenic canoe-camp trip from Prentice down to Big Falls. Intermediate whitewater skills are advised. I have never paddled the boulder garden just downstream of Big Falls. Perhaps I will someday put in below the Falls and start a trip past the confluence to the main Jump from there.
**Conclusion**
The South Fork of the Jump River is a high quality stream which is well worth canoeing. Most experienced paddlers will be up to the task, but Little Falls can be a challenge and Big Falls will be a portage for most. My write-up for the mainstem of the Jump can be found in the West Central section of this Guide.

*Big Falls, South Fork of the Jump River.*
Jump River (North Fork)

Location
Price County.

Natural Features
Cranberry Lake, located midway between Phillips and Prentice, is the source of the Jump River’s North Fork. At first it meanders rather slowly through North Country wetlands. Near US Hwy. 8 it begins to descend more rapidly from the heights of the Northern Highland. Glacially deposited Precambrian boulders obstruct its path creating a series of minor rapids. Alders typically line the stream and give way to a higher canopy of conifer hardwood trees. In far southwestern Price County it merges with the South Fork to form the main Jump River which eventually joins the Chippewa River.

Human History and Influence
The Ojibwa People arrived first followed by explorers, loggers and then farmers. Scattered farms remain but forests predominate and the human population is currently quite sparse. There are now no towns on the North Fork, but there was one settlement in the early 1900s. Glen Lowry (see below) describes the former site of a mill along the river near Hwy. 86. All but three buildings were destroyed by a forest fire in 1909. A commercial cranberry bog does impact the river near its source. North of Hwy 8 there is a dam which creates a small impoundment.

Navigability and Difficulty
Downstream of Hwy 8 there should be minimal problems with deadfall. Shallow water will often be a problem. There is a USGS gauge downstream on the main Jump. Water levels can be monitored on their website. Scouting from a bridge like the County I bridge may be necessary to determine if there is enough water.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In April of 1983 Pat Christopherson and I put onto the North Fork at the County N bridge. I recall an unobstructed fast ride down a narrow, forested path in our tandem canoe. The water was high but there were no rapids. We took out about two miles downstream of the North Fork confluence.

I returned to this river with another tandem partner in April of 2001. My desire was to resolve two conflicting accounts about the river upstream of County N. One source minimized while a second one maximized the difficulty of the rapids downstream of County I. In three hours my tandem partner and I explored the river between County I and County N. We found two legitimate class II rapids and several Class I’s. Though there was a farm near our put-in, the high water soon whisked us into an attractive, alder-lined near wilderness. Spruces and pines arose majestically in the near distance. We had a rollicking good time despite a raw wind and cool temperatures.
**Experiences of Others**
Glen Lowry included the North Fork of the Jump in the out-of-print *Wisconsin’s North Central Canoe Trails*. He states that it contains “no rated” rapids but this is contradicted by my experience, by the markings in the Wisconsin Gazetteer and by Norman Runnhim who was interviewed by Greg Marr in a 1986 Silent Sports article. Mr. Runnhim warned of “very dangerous” rapids below County I. The Gazetteer marks two sets of rapids and that publication seems to only mark rapids which rate II or higher. I stand by the description I made above. Mr. Lowry also describes the 8.5 miles from Hwy 8 to Cty I. He mentions minor rapids among mostly “meadow-like” sections of quiet water.

**Further Ideas**
A good day trip would start at the County I bridge and end after about 12 miles at a landing on the main Jump River. That landing is marked in the Gazetteer on river right in far southeastern Rusk County.

**Conclusion**
This is a fine intermediate whitewater run for those who catch it with enough water. Non-whitewater boaters should find a safe and enjoyable stream if they avoid the section between County I and County N. My write-up for the mainstem of the Jump can be found in the West Central section of this Guide.
Kakagon River

Location
Ashland County and the Bad River Chippewa Reservation.

Natural Features
The vast wetland complex at the Lake Superior mouth of the Kakagon and Bad Rivers has been called “Wisconsin’s Everglades.” It is a freshwater estuary complex which The Nature Conservancy has described as a “diverse mix of wetlands, dunes, beaches and open water that provides spawning areas for fish like lake sturgeon and nesting and stop-over habitats for waterfowl, trumpeter swans and rare birds like the piping plover.” This delicate and unique ecosystem is positively influenced by freshwater tides known as seiches (pronounced “sayshes”).

The Kakagon and its two small tributaries feed the western side of this complex. Immediately to the east the complex is fed by the much more voluminous Bad and White Rivers. The Kakagon begins only a handful of miles southwest of Odanah. It drains flat lands of red clay soils which were deposited by Glacial Lake Duluth. Rocks are rare. The banks along its upper stretches hold remnants of an original boreal forest. Closer to Lake Superior the spruces and firs are replaced by water loving black ashes. Finally the marsh opens up into vast areas of wild rice.

Human History and Influence
This important freshwater estuary is maintained by the Bad River Band with help from organizations like the DNR and The Nature Conservancy. Wild rice is harvested as it has been for ages by the local Ojibwa Indians. Approximately 1800 Native Americans currently reside in Wisconsin’s largest Indian Reservation.

Navigability and Difficulty
Access can be difficult, but the open waters of the Kakagon River will always be easy to navigate unless the wind is too strong.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I wanted to experience “Wisconsin’s Everglades” and so I drove up there and hatched a plan. I would either put in at the Goslin Rd. bridge over Bear Trap Creek (near its confluence with the Kakagon) or at another access point I found along Odanah Rd. next to a fish hatchery. Then I would paddle down the river and return the same way back to where I started. But I figured I should first get permission from the Tribe.

At the Odanah headquarters I was denied this permission because I was not a Native American or a member of the Tribe. Someone there did inform me that I could legally enter if I put in outside of the Reservation Boundary at the Lake Superior landing at the end of Reykdahl Rd. On the Gazetteer map I could see that this would necessitate my paddling about 2 miles along the Chequamagon Bay of Lake Superior shore before I reached the mouth of the Kakagon River. I chose that route and prepared to launch. Fortunately the surf was gentle as I paddled along the
beach in my Bell Wildfire. Then I turned right and entered the gradually narrowing waterway of the Kakagon River portion of the estuary.

Pure stands of golden wild rice surrounded me on all sides as I paddled across currentless water. After a half mile or so the monotony of the wild rice monoculture was broken by patches of yellow water lilies, pickerel weed and flowering arrowheads. Eventually I was paddling against a perceptible current. It was a hot day so I stopped to take a swim from an island shore shaded by green ash trees. The water was cool, clean and relatively clear. Though I was curious to see how the vegetation would change if I continued upstream, it was getting late and I turned around. On the way back to where I had started I stopped for another swim. Usually frigid Lake Superior was actually pretty warm on that August 2001 afternoon.

Further Ideas
If permission can be gained there are the access points I mentioned above along Goslin Rd. and Odanah Rd. Round trips are possible from those points. Or an outing could begin at one of those access points and finish at the off-reservation landing I used.

Conclusion
The Kakagon River is one of “Wisconsin’s Last Great Places.” It is well worth exploring from the water. Our feathered friends must have been on strike the day I was there, but this is usually a great spot for birding.
Long Lake Creek

**Location**
See Turtle River in this section.
Manitowish River

Location
Vilas and Iron counties.

Natural Features
The Manitowish drains “pitted outwash” terrain on a high plateau in far northern Wisconsin. After the Wisconsin Glacier melted and left those “pits” behind, they filled with water and resulted in a region with one of the highest concentrations of lakes in the world. The Manitowish and its tributaries link many of these lakes as their waters flow slowly to the west and south. Eventually it joins the Bear River to form the North Fork of the Flambeau River. Most consider the river’s headwaters to be at High Lake but an equally valid claim can be made for Siphon Springs where Siphon Creek originates. Siphon Creek joins two others to form Johnson Creek. Wide Creek forms at the outlet of High Lake and flows south. The Manitowish River begins where Wide and Johnson Creeks meet.

Rapids on the Manitowish are rare and minor as its waters flow over sandy soils and past occasional glacial erratic boulders. Marshy and swampy areas are common with vegetation which includes wild rice beds, black ash groves and white cedar stands. A marvelous book which discusses the flora along the Manitowish and other topics is River Life by John Bates.

Human History and Influence
Native Americans used the Manitowish and its interconnecting lakes as their main mode of travel. They and the Voyageurs canoed the Manitowish as part of the Flambeau Trail. This water and portage route linked the mouth of the Montreal River on Lake Superior to the Indian village at Lac du Flambeau. Logging days followed and pilings can still be seen in several places. Logging dam remains are still visible at the outlet of Boulder Lake. Next to arrive were dam builders, merchants and tourists. Nowadays the numerous lakes along the Manitowish and some sections of the river itself are lined by homes and tourist-related businesses. Boulder Junction is the only town of any size on its banks. A dam at the outlet of Rest Lake keeps several lakes in the chain at constant level, but its corrupt management starves the river of water in the spring and causes it to flood in the fall – all for the convenience of selfish lake property owners on the Rest Lake chain. Further upstream another dam called Fishtrap creates another impoundment.

Navigability and Difficulty
Most of the Manitowish is navigable most of the time. Low water conditions can make travel between Boulder Lake and Island Lake difficult. Gauge readings at two sites on the river can be monitored at the USGS website. The river, though occasionally quite narrow, is largely free of obstructing deadfall. The gradient is very low so there are no real rapids and only a few riffles.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I have been on the lower Manitowish numerous times but on the upper river only twice. My uppermost Manitowish experience came in 1999 on an Al and Julie Hillery-led Sierra Club trip.
Consult my Johnson Creek entry for an account of how that outing began. It ended at Boulder Junction. Many years later I entered the Manitowish upstream of Boulder Junction after descending White Sand Creek. Consult that stream’s entry for a description of that trip.

On three occasions I have paddled what could be called the “Middle Manitowish.” This is the approximately 7 mile section from the Hwy K bridge at the outlet of Boulder Lake to the landing at the head of Island Lake. In many ways this is the most interesting piece of the Manitowish because of its variety. It even features some narrow, riffly stretches. It includes stretches covered with pines and a black ash swamp. The trip finishes in beds of wild rice. This outing is well suited for a bicycle shuttle along Island Lake Rd., Old 51, County H and County K.

My first trip down the lower Manitowish came in 1988 when I showed up alone with my old Ladybug solo freestyle canoe. First I hid and locked my bicycle near the Hwy 182 bridge over the Bear River. This pre-dated the formal landing which is now in place there. Next I drove to my put-in at the Hwy 47 bridge and paddled down to a campsite I found on river left about a mile downstream. There I set up camp before I paddled back upstream to the put-in and walked to a nearby supper club at Manitowish Waters for a steak and a beer.

Afterwards on the river again I was serenaded by a chorus of green frogs as I paddled in the gathering darkness. Before I reached my campsite I was startled by the loud “thwack” of a beaver’s tail. The next day I completed the 10 mile trip down the Manitowish and 2 miles up the Bear to my awaiting bicycle. Then as on later trips I enjoyed this narrow and winding stream’s scenic corridor with its alternating marshes, tamarack bogs and uplands covered with pines and other northern trees. The final upstream portion on the Bear River is more difficult if the water is high causing a stronger current. It also can be challenging at low water times when shallow sections containing large boulders are difficult to navigate.

In June of 2003 Ron Rosner and I paddled parts of this same stretch of the Manitowish in our solo canoes. We put in about three miles upstream of the Hwy 47 bridge at the Wayside Landing along Hwy. 51. Instead of finishing on the Bear River, we continued downstream another 5 miles to Murray’s Landing on Turtle-Flambeau Flowage. After the confluence we had been on the North Fork of the Flambeau River. Those last few miles were rather tedious, so I decided ending the trip by traveling two miles up the Bear River was preferable. So that is how I ended two subsequent trips. One of those was in the company of River Life author John Bates, on a River Alliance of Wisconsin-sponsored trip.

Experiences of Others
I own an old DNR pamphlet entitled Wisconsin Water Trails which dates from the 1970s. It describes the lower river and also a 50 mile trip from High Lake to Hwy 51 just downstream of the Rest Lake Dam. Much of this trip is on lakes. Maps contained in the pamphlet showed the sites of campsites on the impounded sections of the river. The locations of campsites still in use are shown in River Life (the book sited above) and probably in DNR publications. River Life can also serve as a mile by mile guide to the entire Manitowish River.
In March of 1987, Kurt Sroka wrote an article for Silent Sports Magazine entitled “Manitowish River Water Route.” It describes the same 50 mile trip from High Lake to Rest Lake that I site above. What I found interesting were the tributary trips he described away from the main river. He writes that White Sand Creek (which I have paddled from the other direction) “can be followed (from its Manitowish confluence) to its source, White Sand Lake. From there the canoeist can portage to Lost Canoe Lake, portage to Pallette Lake, then canoe Stevenson Creek (carrying over the beaver dams) to Trout Lake. The Trout River exits this lake towards the southwest and takes the canoeist back to the Manitowish River on the chain of lakes.” Here is how he describes another side trip: “Follow the right shoreline of Island Lake and you will discover the mouth of Rice Creek. Pursue that route for a challenging paddle and portage to Presque Isle.”

Mike Svob writes about two sections of the Manitowish River in his Paddling Northern Wisconsin. He divides the 20 miles from Hwy 51 to Murray’s Landing on the Turtle Flambeau Flowage into two sections. The first four miles include a small lake named Benson which must be paddled across. Svob’s map of the river marks seven developed campsites along the 20 mile stretch. The Manitowish is a river which features many canoe-camping opportunities.

Further Ideas
I hope someday to canoe the entire river from High Lake to Murray’s Landing or to Hwy 182 on the Bear River. My plan is to use the book, River Life, as my guide and source of naturalist knowledge about the river.

Conclusion
The Manitowish is one of Wisconsin’s classic canoeing rivers. It can be enjoyed by paddlers of all abilities. Many will find it to be a delightful river for canoe-camping.
The highly controversial Rest Lake dam, which controls the flow of the Manitowish River, is managed to the benefit of upstream lakeshore property owners, at great detriment to the dam. After a 12-year struggle, river defenders lost the fight to protect the Manitowish when the state’s legislature passed a law that prohibits the Dept. of Natural Resources from regulating flows at the dam.
Marengo River

Location
Bayfield County.

Natural Features
Much of the Marengo flows through the forests of the Chequamegon National Forest. It cuts through glacial end moraines and into bedrock of the Penokee Range where its erosive powers have revealed ancient igneous rocks and metamorphosed sedimentary rocks like quartzite and slate. In Wisconsin’s Foundations, Gwen Schultz has written that small outcrops of marble can be seen along this river. Significant rapids form as the river drops from the Northern Highland to the Lake Superior Lowland. Then it slows markedly as it meanders through red clay deposits which once lay under the waters of Glacial Lake Duluth. In this region it flows mainly eastward until its waters join those of the Bad River which flows northward to Lake Superior.

Human History and Influence
Much of the surrounding forest has grown back since logging days. Settlement along the upper Marengo is very sparse. In the more level, red clay lowland agriculture becomes more common. Here the river turns red from sediments carried in by erosion. The river skirts the Hwy. 63 community of Marengo before it joins the Bad River and flows through the Bad River Indian Reservation.

Navigability and Difficulty
The upper river contains Class II and III whitewater as it tumbles downward. Whitewater paddlers sometimes tackle this section but only rarely find enough water. Deadfall problems add to the challenge. The lower river will usually have enough water but deadfall problems will again be a concern except through alder-lined stretches where tall trees are lacking. Flow levels and runnability advice can be found on the American Whitewater Website. The upper Marengo will only contain enough water immediately after the snow melts and after heavy rains.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In 1985 I paddled several miles of the Marengo along County E west of Hwy 13. A steady current swept me along this alder-lined stretch which also featured exposed banks of mud, sand and gravel. Rocks were lacking as were logjams and fallen trees. The trip was unmemorable except for an encounter with a clumsy beaver which somehow ended up on its backside after it had slapped its tail. It took a second or two of desperate flailing before it was able to flip back.

In 1997 I was back on the Marengo with a group from The Nature Conservancy. Our charge was to kill purple loosestrife. We found quite a few of those invasive plants which we clipped and sprayed with herbicide. Our put-in was at the Government Rd. bridge about two miles north of Highbridge. We took out on the Bad River at Elm Hoist bridge after covering 4.5 miles on the
Marengo and about 6 miles on the Bad. Our leader had gotten permission from the Bad River Band Office in Odanah to take out on Reservation land. We dealt with a manageable number of deadfall obstructions. When we reached the Bad River confluence it was interesting to note the superior water clarity of that stream compared to the Marengo. There had been some minor rocky riffles early in the trip and they appeared again near this confluence.

In early May of 2012 Pat Brennaman and I were looking for a unique adventure and we found one on the Marengo. We consulted the American Whitewater website and decided we wanted to see the rarely viewed Marengo Falls. The night before we camped at an old quarry site depicted in the Gazetteer. To reach this spot we followed a small road southward from Wisco Rd. about 200 yards east of its bridge over the Marengo River. This campsite also served as our take-out spot. Our put-in was a mistake because we accidently started from Whiskey Creek bridge instead of the Marengo bridge. Both of these bridges are along Snake Trail Road. (See the Whiskey Creek write up for that part of our adventure.)

Whiskey Creek joins the Marengo just downstream of where we should have put in. At that confluence the river widened to a manageable width. Upstream from here the Marengo is reported to be extremely narrow and alder choked. Downstream of the confluence we wound for nearly an hour through an attractive wetland before we encountered several minor rapids. Soon it was obvious we were approaching a major waterfall. So we pulled over to take a look at the impressive 40 to 50 foot cascade. Signs of recent human activity were scarce but there was an interesting ruin of a long abandoned hydro plant below the falls.

We ventured into the broken down building where we found rusty turbines and other abandoned equipment. Nearby the old millrace channel was still identifiable. We found no portage trail, so the portage around the falls was difficult. Back on the water we soon entered an attractive gorge with Class II whitewater and many fallen trees which blocked our way. The water was uncomfortably low. The American Whitewater website suggests the presence of Class III whitewater on this stretch but it seemed less difficult than that. It took us a total of about three hours to reach the quarry site where we had camped the night before. The trip would have been shorter had we not started on Whiskey Creek. It totaled 3.9 miles instead of 5.9 miles.

**Experiences of Others**
The out of print, *Whitewater, Quietwater* guidebook included the same trip down the Marengo into the Bad that I paddled with The Nature Conservancy in 1997. Of possible significance is the authors’ statement about water levels. The Palzers write that this section of the Marengo is likely to be runnable all summer but that the Bad River section will often get too low. This was not a problem on my trip.

Frank Piraino described a different section of the Marengo in his *Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin*. He paddled from River Rd. bridge a couple of miles west of the town of Marengo to the Government Rd. bridge. He found this section to be a pretty, forested, sandy bottomed stretch of water which was shallow but navigable. He found the occasional brief portages around fallen trees to be only minor inconveniences. The American Whitewater website
describes the 6.6 mile section from Snake Trail Rd. to Marengo Lake Rd. That’s basically the trip that Pat and I took. This trip can be shortened to 3.9 miles by taking out at the Wisco Rd. (FR 198) bridge. The action described below occurs upstream of that bridge. The website description has the difficulty increasing to class II and then to class III prior to the 40-50 feet plunge over Marengo Falls. The web writer calls this “perhaps the largest unknown waterfall in Wisconsin.” Some expert kayakers have evidently run at least part of this waterfall. From its base the river continues at a “fairly steady class II pace with parts pushing towards Class III.” Again the difficulty seemed less to Pat and me but, perhaps the water was too low for us to judge.

Further Ideas
I have long wanted to explore the following middle section of the Marengo. With enough water, Class II-III skills and the ability to quickly pull over to the side when logjams loom, it should be possible to paddle the river between Marengo River Rd. and Four Corner Store Rd. I once did view the river along this section when I hiked the North Country Trail to its footbridge over the river. It looked swift and narrow with minor rapids. In 2013 I read an article in that year’s April/May edition of the American Whitewater periodical. The author was very critical of the proposed iron mine in the Penokee Hills (a plan since abandoned). He described the Marengo as a paddler’s destination. Kennedy Rupert-Nason rated the ten miles starting at the Four Corner Store Rd. as a class I-II run suitable for beginning whitewater paddlers. I caught the end of this run back in 1997 (see above).

Conclusion
The Marengo is not commonly paddled for several reasons including inaccessibility, low water and difficulty. Yet, the upper Marengo should attract semi-wilderness whitewater adventurers. The lower river is easier but also interesting. Marengo Falls is well worth seeing for those with the requisite skills to get there.
Montreal River

Location
Iron County.

Natural Features
The Montreal River drops many feet on its journey from the Northern Highland to the Lake Superior Lowland. It exposes a great variety of geologic features as it cuts its path. From its source near Pine Lake just east of Hwy 51 it first cuts though the gravel and boulders of a terminal moraine. The underlying bedrock here is granite. Then it cuts through the Gogebic-Penokee Range at Hurley. Here the bedrock is a complicated mix including the iron ore which was mined here for many years. Then the Montreal plunges over basalt ledges which form several high waterfalls.

Next the river cuts a spectacular canyon through conglomerate rock. Rapids dot the corridor here as they do throughout. Finally, the Montreal cascades over sandstone ledges and falls before it finally empties into Lake Superior. Its shores are forested by a mix of conifers and northern hardwoods. This stream serves as a boundary between Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula for most of its length. For many years this line was disputed by Michigan which coveted the valuable iron resources just to the west. That state claimed that the West Branch of the Montreal should be the proper boundary. Legal wrangling continued until the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court which ruled in Wisconsin’s favor in 1926.

Human History and Influence
Native Americans were, of course, here first. In 1680, Daniel Greysolon Sieur Du Luth paddled along the southern shore of Lake Superior and was reputedly the first white traveler to the see the Montreal. An American Fur Company trading post operated at the mouth of the Montreal in the first half of the 19th century. Iron mining made Hurley a large and important town in the 1800s. It gained a national reputation for its drinking, gambling, prostitution and general lawlessness. Mining then declined until the last mine closed in 1965. Logging commenced in the 1880s. Driving the logs became easier and safer after the perpendicular walls of Superior Falls were dynamited. Power dams were eventually constructed just upstream of both Saxon Falls and Superior Falls. The former falls drops 75 feet and the latter drops 90 feet. Another falls back upstream is Peterson Falls which drops 35 feet.

Navigability and Difficulty
Intermediate to expert whitewater skills are needed depending on which section is paddled and the water levels. Often the water is too low. Water level information may be obtained by calling the Northern States Power canoe/kayak line at (715) 893-2213. There is no gauge reading available on the Internet.
**Trip Ideas: My experiences**

I have paddled the Montreal Canyon with the Sierra Club on numerous occasions through the years. Those 146 steps are always a challenging way to start the day’s adventure. This put-in site is located at the northern terminus of Hwy B north of Hurley. The canyon section features many class II drops which become more challenging and continuous when the water is high. I recall my first time here in the late 1970s when the water was high. There were several “swimmers” that day but my tandem partner and I managed to stay in our canoe.

The Montreal Canyon features good “play waves” at most water levels. This 3.2 mile run ends next to the Hwy 122 bridge at the end of a small flowage. Boaters should appreciate how beautiful this place is. The conglomerate canyon walls look like they were built by skilled masons using boulders and mortar.

Far too few paddlers ever see the upper Montreal River. So far I have paddled it on two occasions. Sometime in the 1980s Dave Wehnes and I put in at the outskirts of Hurley. The water was too low for me but Dave kept going in his kayak after I aborted my trip and dragged my canoe through woods and over a field to a nearby road. Then I walked back to my car where we left it at the put-in. Dave did fine by himself.

My next Montreal River experience came in April of 2002. Earlier in the day, Bob Diggelman, Bruce Bradshaw, Scott Watson and I had experienced a hair raising ride down the challenging parts of the West Branch of the Montreal. Evidently, our river appetites had not been satiated. The others opted for a run down the Montreal Canyon but I wanted to explore some new water. They agreed to help me. They would pick me at the landing on the Saxon Flowage. So they dropped me off at the Hwy 2 bridge over the West Branch. From that point I rode continuous Class I and II water down to the main branch of the Montreal. Though I was watching for it, I failed to recognize the confluence. It might have been hidden by a logjam. In the area of the confluence, I entered a bottomland section which kept me busy dodging and pulling over fallen trees.

Soon I emerged from the bottomland and began to notice high sandy banks which later were replaced by exposed clay banks. A variety of trees including cedars and hemlocks covered the undeveloped shores. Many ducks exploded from the river surface. A pair of otters slid from a bank into the water when they saw me approaching. When I reached the Saxon Flowage Bob, Scott and Bruce were waiting for me as planned.

**Experiences of Others**

Both Mike Svob’s *Paddling Northern Wisconsin* and the out-of-print *Whitewater-Quietwater* are good guides to the Montreal Canyon section of the river. The American Whitewater website includes the canyon and also describes two upstream sections. Their first section starts at the Hwy 2 bridge at the Wisconsin Welcome Center and ends at Erickson Rd. According to this website paddlers will encounter continuous easy rapids with many strainers and two significant falls. Peterson Falls (35 feet) is a hazardous class IV rocky slide which is often portaged. Interstate Falls (25 feet) is rated a V and possibly runnable but usually portaged. American
Whitewater’s Section II is 16.7 miles of easy Class I and II water. The put-in is Erikson Rd. and the take-out is the same one I used on the Saxon Flowage.

The late Jim Rada wrote a book on Lake Superior drainage streams which was published after he died. His description of the Montreal between Hwy 2 at the Visitors Center and Erikson Rd. makes it sound more exciting than the American Whitewater website does. He portaged both falls but found continuous Class III rapids above Interstate Falls which he writes would push towards Class IV’s with high water. Below Interstate Falls he rates the river as a Class II which pushes III at high water.

Further Ideas
At high water it might be possible to explore the river upstream of Hurley. Here the whitewater should be easy and limited.

Conclusion
The Montreal Canyon is one of Wisconsin’s most beautiful and unique whitewater runs. Fortunately, the run is not too difficult for those with intermediate whitewater skills if the water is not too high. The rest of the Montreal River features an easier whitewater section and a more difficult one.
Montreal River (West Branch)

Location
Iron County.

Natural Features
This stream begins high in the remote north woods of central Iron County. The area’s geology is varied and fascinating. The Montreal gathers waters which drain the wetlands and lakes of a terminal moraine left behind by the receding Wisconsin Glacier. It then flows north to Lake Superior, dropping several hundred feet during this descent. Significant rapids are present because of a high gradient and the boulders and bedrock it slices over and past along the way. In the vicinity of the city of Montreal the stream cuts through a complicated mix of ancient bedrock including a vein which contains iron ore. Approximately ten miles upstream from Lake Superior the West Branch merges with the main branch of the Montreal River.

Human History and Influence
Loggers and miners arrived after the eras of Native Americans and French fur traders. The city of Montreal was once the site of the world’s deepest open pit iron mine. It was the only completely planned and platted company town in Wisconsin. Today much of the city is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The West Branch is about the same size as the main branch of the Montreal River which forms the border between Michigan and Wisconsin. For many years Michigan claimed that the boundary should have been the West Branch. If this were the boundary the rich iron ore vein to the east of that branch would have belonged to Michigan. In 1926 The U.S. Supreme Court settled this case in Wisconsin’s favor. A dam was constructed at Montreal and creates the Gile Flowage. It’s been many years but internationally sanctioned whitewater races have been held at Railroad Rapids.

Navigability and Difficulty
The West Branch is only for advanced and expert boaters. It includes one of the longest and most difficult Class III-IV rapids in the state. Though fallen trees are uncommon, logs have been known to lodge in hazardous places. Sufficient water is rare and is determined by the releases from the Gile Flowage. Even when the snow is melting the Montreal may be too low because in early spring the reservoir is refilled after the previous fall’s draw down. There is a Northern States Power hotline at 715-893-2213 which records discharge information from the Gile Flowage. The minimum level is around 200 cfs.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I had no business being on the West Branch in early spring of 1982. Not only was I relatively inexperienced, but I was also in a tandem canoe with a partner I had never paddled with. That partner happened to be the Milwaukee Journal Outdoor reporter Ron Ley, who was planning to write an article about our whitewater adventure. With a group of Sierra Club paddlers we put in at the Boundary Road bridge. The group included Mike Backus, Roxy and Larry Burton, Bill Beverly, M. Schultz and Paul Kromholz. After 1.6 miles of calm water all hell broke loose.
Without scouting we were swept into Railroad Rapids (also known as Rock Cut Falls). This is a beautiful mini-dells but no one was enjoying the scenery. Amazingly, most of us survived the complicated run down to the railroad bridge. Ron and I managed to eddy out under the bridge on river right where we bailed out many gallons of water. On June 6, 1982 he wrote this in the Milwaukee Journal Sports/Outdoor section:

“As we looked back up the rapids we had just run, Kark, a calm, confident young doctor from Eau Claire, uttered a word I had not expected him to say.” I wonder what that word was.

After we caught our breaths we peeled out into continuous Class II water for perhaps a half mile before we saw a horizon line ahead. We climbed out on river right and inspected a frightening looking double ledge. We decided to portage as did the others. This drop looked like a solid Class IV. The next drop I remember was the one at Kimball Town Park. This where our trip ended but we all ran the falls first. Some call it Kimball Falls while others call it Maple Sap Falls. Most ran it successfully, but Ron and I finally ran out of luck. Our canoe swung around backwards, hit a diagonal wave, and quickly flipped.

In April 18 of 2001 I returned to the West Branch with Bob Diggelman, Roger Hammer, Bruce Bradshaw and Scott Watson. We put-in at the Boundary Rd. bridge and, again, no one scouted Railroad Rapid. Doing so might have been helpful. The water was high so this canyon run presented a difficult combination of steep pitches, waves and holes. Two boaters flipped and needed to be rescued. Back on the river we floated another half mile to the Class IV drop we had portaged in 1982. This time we found a “sneak” route over a shallow break in the ledge on river right which most of us chose to run and did so successfully. At Kimball Town Park we climbed out, scouted the falls and ran it one at a time. Everyone ran this tricky Class III successfully but me. The diagonal wave downstream of the bridge grabbed and flipped me.

My final experience on the West Branch came in 2001 when I ran the river from the U.S. Hwy 2 Bridge to the main Montreal River down to Saxon Flowage. See my write up on the Montreal River for that description. It was an easy Class I and II ride.

**Experiences of Others**

The out-of-print guidebook, *Whitewater, Quiet Water*, describes the West Branch but is not very helpful. In bold print it emphasizes that “this whole stretch (Railroad Rapid) must be run once started. There is no way out in case of a capsize. The left shore is a 60 foot wall.”

The late Jim Rada wrote about the West Branch of the Montreal. He mentioned the possibility of starting at the Gile Flowage where boaters “will be treated to a short, narrow mini-canyon holding one drop with a powerful recirculating reversal.” He describes Railroad Rapid as a 200 yard long class IV. Here, “several sharp narrow drops in quick succession make the paddler churn his way through some hefty holes—wildwater indeed!”

The American Whitewater website also includes the West Fork of the Montreal River. It briefly mentions a 3.76 mile run upstream of the Gile Flowage which ends at Spring Camp Road. They
rate it II+ except for Class V Spring Camp Falls which obviously deserves a long look and probably a portage.

For those running the mini-canyon just downstream of the Gile Flowage the writer has this advice: “At most boatable flows you will be best advised to avoid the reversal that forms here by skirting as far left as possible”. At Railroad Rapid the writer strongly advises scouting because of a tendency of this area to collect snags. He describes this drop as a great series of almost unavoidable holes in a relatively narrow boulder-lined channel. The writer advises sneaking the next drop on the right to avoid a nasty hole. That’s the broken double ledge we portaged in 1982 and “snuck” ourselves in 2001. Kimball Falls for this writer was a cascade which “twisted and contorted into wrapping diagonal waves funneling into a final wicked-looking hole.” That’s the one that flipped me in 2001.

**Conclusion**

When it runs the West Branch of the Montreal is one of Wisconsin’s most exciting and challenging experiences for advanced and expert whitewater boaters. It is also isolated and gorgeous.
Nixon Creek

Location
Vilas County.

Natural Features
Nixon Creek is one of numerous tiny creeks which link the multiple lakes of Vilas County. It starts just upstream of Nixon Lake at the confluence of McGinnis and Partridge Creeks. From there it flows through Nixon Lake and onward to an impounded section of the Manitowish River known as the Fishtrap Flowage. In his book River Life John Bates writes about Nixon Lake and Nixon Creek. Their shores include large expanses of tussock-sedge meadow with “sweet gale, bog rosemary, cattails, (and) leather leaf.” The nearby forest is dominated by tamarack and black spruce.

Human History and Influence
The shorelines of Nixon Lake and Nixon Creek are totally undeveloped. Fishtrap dam on the Manitowish floods the final half mile of the creek.

Navigability and Difficulty
There are no snags because shoreline trees are non-existent. With the exception of one brief shallow and rocky stretch, low water should never be a problem.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
My outing on Nixon Creek was a round trip affair. I accessed this delightfully clear creek at the Nixon Rd. bridge. It took me about an hour to paddle downstream to the Fishtrap Flowage and a tad more time to return. Initially wild rice grew along both sides of the 30-60 foot wide creek. The rice soon disappeared and the creek narrowed and followed a tortuous course across a vast wetland. In the distance I could see a moraine I knew the creek would breach at some point. Where it did, I entered a shallow rock garden. I made it through without dragging my Wildfire but it was not an easy task. Soon I reached the impounded waters of Fishtrap Lake and turned around. Nixon Creek was easy to ascend because of the weak current. Back at the Nixon Rd. bridge I decided to paddle upstream into Nixon Lake. Along its southeastern shore I located the inflow of Nixon Creek but decided not to proceed upstream. Instead I canoed back to my car.

Experiences of Others
One author in Silent Sports magazine claimed it is possible to paddle up Nixon Creek into Partridge Creek and all the way to Partridge Lake. It could be fun to try this route.

Further Ideas
A trip down the Manitowish or up that river to High Lake could start with a run down Nixon Creek.
Conclusion
Paddling Nixon Creek is a great way to experience a pristine Northern Wisconsin wetland. It could also be an interesting way to access to the Manitowish River.
Ontonagon River

Location
Vilas County.

Natural Features
This stream links several lakes in the conifer-hardwood forests of northern Vilas County. Its headwaters flow from wetlands about 3 miles south of the Michigan border. Soon it flows slowly into and out of Palmer Lake. Then it enters Tenderfoot Lake which straddles the Wisconsin-Michigan border. After it exits that lake on the Michigan side its name changes to Tenderfoot Creek. After two more name changes this stream is again called the Ontonagon River. Eventually it empties into Lake Superior.

Human History and Influence
There are a few dwellings along lake shore sections of the watershed. See below for the influence of The Nature Conservancy.

Navigability and Difficulty
Past Palmer Lake there should always be enough water in the Wisconsin portion of this watershed. Woody obstructions are not a factor.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
On September 22, 2007 I joined an outing sponsored by The Nature Conservancy. Our guide was the well known author and river naturalist, John Bates. He led us to the Guido Rahr Sr. Tenderfoot Forest Reserve. No roads lead to this new reserve. To get there we canoed the Ontonagon River and across two lakes. We put in at the boat landing on Palmer Lake at its northeastern end. About 20 of us paddled across it and found the Ontonagon River outlet at the northeastern end. From there we followed a mile long stretch of slowly moving water which was lined by lily pads. In the near distance were cedars, tamaracks and a conifer-hardwood forest. It was a lovely corridor. Next we paddled across Tenderfoot Lake to the 971 acre reserve which had recently been purchased by The Nature Conservancy. On shore we hiked past stately hemlocks and the largest yellow birch trees I had ever seen. Sugar maples were showing their fall color splendor. After the hike was over we boarded our canoes and returned by the same route.

Further Ideas
This trip could easily be expanded to a canoe-camping experience. The fishing is reportedly excellent. There are several maintained campsites around Palmer Lake.

Conclusion
My experience here was a wonderful combination of river paddling, lake paddling and hiking in the woods.
Pelican River

Location
Oneida County.

Natural Features
The headwaters of the Pelican River arise in bogs west of Pelican Lake. Enterprise Creek, Pine Needle Creek and the outlet from Pelican Lake join to form the main Pelican River. The river descends steeply at times over Precambrian bedrock outcrops and glacially deposited boulder fields. Rapids are the result. It flows through Northern conifer-hardwood forests on its way to the Wisconsin River at Rhinelander.

Human History and Influence
The region was heavily logged in the late 1800s. Rhinelander’s first saw mill was built in 1857. 1923 saw the last log drive down the Pelican River. Because of the proximity to Rhinelander there are scattered homes and cabins on the shores of the Pelican. Yet much of the river’s corridor is wild and scenic.

Navigability and Difficulty
There is one Class III rapid. Several others deserve Class I and II ratings. The water is often too low for a good runs. Bridge scouting might be necessary to determine adequacy of flow. My friend Scott Watson uses a gauge on the River Bend bridge. A minimum level is 5 inches while a moderate level is 10 inches. Some upstream sections are susceptible to deadfall obstructions.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I ran the Pelican in April of 1983 in my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe. I am quite sure I used the same put-in that Frank Piraino describes below. I took out at the River Bend Rd. bridge where my shuttle bicycle was waiting. On the river I was able to run some easy rapids in my Ladybug but then I saw a horizon line ahead. So I headed to the left bank and scrambled out to take a look. The water was crashing over a bedrock shelf creating a Class III plunge. I knew my non-whitewater canoe would not handle it well. So I portaged and continued downstream where I found more rapids suitable for my Ladybug.

Experiences of Others
Frank Piraino described the Pelican River in his Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin. His put-in was probably the same one I used. He found a dirt road on the south side of Hwy 8 across from Haymeadow Rd. He followed it until it got too muddy for his vehicle. Then he carried his canoe about a fifth of a mile to the river. He described two potential take-out locations. First was the dead-end of Berquist Rd. Second was the access I used at the River Bend bridge. He portaged the same Class III I did. This is probably the place marked “rapids” in the Wisconsin Gazetteer. He also mentions a half dozen beaver dams and a couple of log jams which slowed him down.
My friend Scott Watson lives near Rhinelander and has paddled the Pelican River. He remembers the above Class III and agrees with that rating. On one occasion he entered the river from Neptune Creek which he accessed from its Hwy 8 bridge. He characterized the one mile run down Neptune Creek to the Pelican as “sweet.” Scott emailed me about a common run on the Pelican. It starts where a tributary from Lake George flows under Hwy 8. This bridge is 6.8 miles east of Hwy 17.

The final 5 miles of the Pelican to the Wisconsin River lack significant whitewater and probably do not require as much water.

**Further Ideas**
One could start a trip down the Pelican by starting on the North Fork of the Pelican. See my description of that river.

**Conclusion**
The Pelican is a pretty Northwoods stream which is often too shallow. Upstream sections require intermediate whitewater skills.
Pelican River (North Branch)

Location
Oneida County.

Natural Features
Several small creeks feed into Moen Lake about 5 miles northeast of Rhinelander. One of those is Gudegast Creek which I have paddled and written about. Moen Lake and a chain of lakes known as 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Lakes are artificially raised by a small dam at the outlet of 5th Lake. The outlet creek is called the North Branch of the Pelican River. It flows freely for about 3 miles to the main Pelican River. About half of this stretch is occupied by a natural widening called Fish Lake. Non-lake sections contain some mild whitewater.

Human History and Influence
Shoreline cabins surround Fish Lake. The river begins below a dam.

Navigability and Difficulty
I recall no deadfall problems. Shallow sections may be impassable when the water is low. Consider scouting the river from the Haymeadow Creek bridge. The minor rapids here are located just upstream.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I paddled the short section from the outlet dam to Hwy 8 sometime in the 1990s. My recollections of the trip are poor and I have lost my notes on that outing. I vaguely remember it as being attractive with minimal difficulties.

Experiences of Others
A 1960s-era DNR guidebook called Wisconsin Water Trails described a “day trip” from the landing on Moen Lake through the chain of lakes, a portage past the dam and then a three mile run down the North Branch to Hwy 8.

Further Ideas
Start a trip on the mainstem of the Pelican River on its North Branch.

Conclusion
The North Branch of the Pelican River is only three miles long. It could be an interesting way to begin a trip down the Pelican River.
Pine Creek

Location
Ashland and Price counties.

Natural Features
Pine Creek is a very small stream which begins in southern Ashland County and flows southward into Price County where it joins the North Fork of the Flambeau River. It drains a sparsely populated region of the Northwoods so its water quality is excellent. Glacially deposited sands, gravels and small rocks constitute the stream floor.

Human History and Influence
Logging was and is a significant factor impacting this small stream. Agriculture and human settlements are absent. Tourists are also scarce because lakes are rare in this region. The Tuscobia State Trail crosses the creek.

Navigability and Difficulty
Low water will be a frequent problem as will obstructing deadfall. I encountered no rapids.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I explored Pine Creek in May of 1988. It was marshy where I slid my solo-freestyle Ladybug canoe into the water at the Pine Creek Rd. bridge about 2 miles north of Price County Hwy. E. Soon tag alders replaced wetland grassy vegetation. The stream was so narrow that their branches touched each other from opposite sides. I was able to squeeze through for a while until I encountered a series of downed trees which required pullovers. At least the footing was solid on the gravelly stream floor. I was admiring the blooming marsh marigolds and the spires of handsome spruce trees but was increasingly frustrated by the sheer number of obstructions. After about 2 miles on the river, I spotted the Tuscobia State Trail bridge and decided to abort my trip. I left my canoe there and jogged the Trail eastward to Pine Creek Rd. which I followed back to my car. When I returned with my Isuzu Trooper I decided to drive it on the Tuscobia Trail. It was about a mile to my canoe and gear. Fortunately, no one caught me committing this illegal act!

Conclusion
I cannot recommend Pine Creek as a paddling destination but perhaps someone else will want to try it.
Pioneer Creek

Location
Vilas County.

Natural Features
Pioneer Creek is a typical stream of the lake country. It interlinks several lakes before joining the Wisconsin River. The gradient is low and so the current is slow as it winds through wetlands and northern forests. Much of its water originates as Military Creek whose headwaters originate along the Michigan border near Phelps, WI. That creek’s name changes as it flows through and between North and South Twin Lakes. It enters Pioneer Lake as the Twin River. Finally it becomes Pioneer Creek at its exit from the latter lake. From there it flows north and then east. It passes the U.S. Hwy. 45 community of Conover just before it joins the Wisconsin River.

Human History and Influence
Though its headwater creeks and lakes lie within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Pioneer Creek itself flows through private lands. Homes dot the lakeshores and some of the creek shores. The only town which impacts the drainage area is Phelps which lies at the eastern end of North Twin Lake.

Navigability and Difficulty
The section I paddled was relatively free of obstructions which is not the case for all sections. There are no rapids and this creek should always have sufficient water.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Ron Rosner and I spent about 2 hours exploring Pioneer Creek in late September of 2007. First we left our bicycles at the Church Rd. bridge and then we drove to the boat landing at the southern end of Pioneer Lake. We paddled across a windy stretch of the lake and entered the outlet which was wide and deep. There were numerous dwellings and docks on both sides until we reached a very low rock dam which we easily portaged around. After that it was a much wilder and narrower stream. The water was delightfully clear.

We floated under Church Rd. through a small culvert and immediately entered a much wider waterway. It was attractively lined by alders and leatherleaf plants. There were no signs of humanity until we spotted a small house and footbridge which we were able to duck under. After traveling a few hundred more yards we decided to turn around to face the current and the headwind. Feeling lazy we took out at the footbridge and found a place to hide our canoes and gear near the above-mentioned home. Then we walked the town road out to the Church Rd. Bridge where we had left our bicycles. These carried us back to our vehicle at the put-in.

Further Ideas
Ron and I scouted Pioneer Creek from two more bridges downstream of where we took out. It appeared the lower creek was seriously obstructed by deadfall. We also explored a very short
stretch of the Twin River from Monheim Rd. toward Pioneer Lake and found it to be open and easy to paddle. We concluded it might be possible to paddle from the boat landing on South Twin Lake to its outlet and then down the Twin River to Pioneer Lake. From that point boaters could paddle the route Ron and I followed.

**Conclusion**
This is one of the many lovely Vilas County streams which are fun to explore.
Potato River

Location
Iron County.

Natural Features
The Potato River pierces two “mountain ranges” and then drops into the Lake Superior Lowland on its way to the Bad River and Lake Superior. Several creeks descend and cut through the Penokee-Gogebic Range south of Upson on Hwy 77. Soon the river drops over the volcanic bedrock of 15-foot Upson Falls. Then it slices a sandstone vein before it cuts through volcanic bedrock for a second time. Here, in the Gabbro Range, rapids and falls again are the result. Foster Falls drops 30 feet in three quick stages. Eventually, the Potato River descends to the Lake Superior Lowland but not before one final 70 foot cascade. Potato River Falls is a series of three waterfalls which are each 20-30 feet high. Finally, the river cuts through red clay deposits which once lay beneath Glacial Lake Duluth. In this section it slows and joins the Bad River on its way to Lake Superior. The banks of the Potato are thickly forested with Northern conifers and hardwoods.

Human History and Influence
The Native American influence has been and remains strong because the lower Potato River flows through the Bad River Indian Reservation. The Penokee-Gogebic Range has been mined for iron ore in the past. A major new open pit mine was recently proposed (then abandoned) and, if ever developed, represents a major new threat to the health of the river and the surrounding ecosystem.

Navigability and Difficulty
Much of the river is deadfall-free but it needs extra water and the whitewater is difficult. There are several waterfalls which most boaters will portage. The American Whitewater website describes the whitewater and gives runnability advice guided by USGS gauge readings.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Bob Diggelman, Pat Brennaman and I had quite an adventure on the Potato. It was an early April day in the mid-1990s. We knew very little about the river except that there might be a waterfall or two. We slid our solo whitewater canoes into the water at the Apple Creek Rd. bridge about two miles south of Upson. Around six hours and about 12 miles later we pulled off the river at the Hwy 169 bridge. The journey to Upson was fast over a narrow but obstruction-free streambed.

Less than a mile after we passed under Hwy 77 we encountered our first horizon line and quickly headed for the right shore. It was obviously a mandatory portage but we could see no portage trail. With considerable difficulty we wrestled our canoes and gear over the rocks and through the thick woods. Back at the water’s edge below Upson Falls we looked upstream to admire this beautiful cascade before we headed downstream. A fast and wavy ride through the
woods culminated in a solid class III plunge which we ran successfully without scouting.

Over the next several miles, the Potato’s character changed several times. At one point there was no clear channel as the river wound through an alder swamp. We each chose different routes through this complicated maze. I remember at one point wading in waste deep water struggling to pull my canoe through it. Next we encountered a series of waterfalls. I thought I remembered three of them but there may have been only two. One of them was Foster Falls and another was Split Drop Falls. Both were solid Class IV’s bordering on V’s.

The river would turn a corner and we would see a horizon line and the tops of trees beyond. It was time to very quickly hit the shore! We scouted each one and decided to portage around them. In Wisconsin Waterfalls, Patrick Lisi describes Foster Falls as a series of 3 eight footers on one side which join a 30 foot sheer drop on the other side. There were other Class II’s and III’s plus a wonderfully long, one mile Class II ride through an especially lovely forest. At the end of the day we visited and admired the impressive cascades of Potato Falls.

Experiences of Others
Three sections of the Potato are described at the American Whitewater website. Anyone contemplating a run should view this website first. All the falls have evidently been run by expert kayakers. The website includes an exciting YouTube video.

Further Ideas
There are more than ten miles of river before the Potato meets the Bad. Potato River Rd. is the only bridge along this stretch. One could explore the river from the base of Potato River Falls to that bridge. An exploration of the river downstream of that bridge would require permission from the Bad River Band because the next take-out is on their land along the Bad River.

Conclusion
The Potato River is not for everyone because of its waterfalls, its other difficult whitewater, and its remoteness. For Bob, Pat, and I it was a grand adventure because we never knew what challenges lie ahead.
Rice Creek

Location
Southern Oneida County.

Natural Features
This is a typical lake country stream which flows through marshes and links several lakes. Goodyear Springs and a wetland drain into Goodyear Lake. Rice Creek flows west and then southward from that lake. It passes under Co. Road K and soon flows through Oneida and Hancock Lakes. Inexplicably, the stream’s name is then demoted to “Little Rice Creek” as it flows towards a series of flowages north of Tomahawk. Before long its waters merge with those of the Wisconsin River.

Human History and Influence
Cabins ring the lakes along this watercourse but are lacking along the creek itself. Otherwise, human influences are minimal and the water quality is good.

Navigability and Difficulty
The marshy section I paddled should always have sufficient water. Shoreline trees are absent so there are no deadfall problems.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In 2001 I was in the area but was not planning to paddle Rice Creek. Driving along I impulsively stopped at the County K bridge for a look. My solo-freestyle Bell Wildfire was conveniently tied to the top of my vehicle. I had some time on my hands and could not resist exploring the lovely wetland stream I was admiring from the bridge. It took only one hour to paddle down to Oneida Lake and back but it was time well spent.

The bog I traversed was pristine and beautiful. I identified leather leafs and admired a variety of other plants. The current was so slow the clearly visible sub-surface aquatic plants were bending only slightly downstream. Tamarack trees towered behind the immediate corridor of low vegetation. I might have explored the shores of Oneida Lake had I not spotted a loon I chose not to disturb. She was nesting on an island so small I could see no land under the nest. It looked like one big wave generated by a power boat or a storm could easily destroy it. I hope that never happened. Because of a steady tailwind the trip upstream back to my car was easier than the downstream portion had been. In each direction I climbed out once to pull my canoe over a beaver dam. Green frogs were croaking and a catbird meowed as my canoe neared County K on the trip back.

Further Ideas
One could conceivably paddle across Oneida and Hancock Lakes and then descend Little Rice Creek. I wonder if that section of this waterway is as pretty and easy to paddle as the section I explored. Little Rice Creek flows through one more small lake before it flows under Hwy 51 and
enters the chain of lakes which eventually join Lake Nokomis. One of several boat landings on those lakes could be used as a take-out.

**Conclusion**
I very much enjoyed my outing on this lovely little wetland stream.
Rice Creek (from Rice Lake)

Location
Three miles west of Eagle River in Vilas County. (There is another Rice Creek in Vilas Co. which is also included in my inventory.)

Natural Features
This Rice Creek is the terminal stream of an interlinking system of creeks and lakes. It ends at Watersmeet Lake, an impoundment of the Wisconsin River.

Human History and Influence
The tourist town of Eagle River is nearby.

Navigability and Difficulty
Downstream of County G this stream should always have enough water. Deadfall should not be a problem.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I lost my notes for this trip but remember where I accessed the creek. My put-in was by the County G bridge and my take-out was at the public boat landing near Hwy 17 on the Mud Creek arm of Watersmeet Lake. I remember the trip was enjoyable and easy, but it required paddling across the lake.

Further Ideas
Once I did explore this drainage system further upstream. Read about it under my Boot Creek entry in this section. My put-in was the Boot Lake boat landing and I took out at the County G bridge. A nice day trip would combine Boot Creek and Rice Creek. It could begin at Boot Lake and end at Watersmeet Lake. Here is an idea which does not require a shuttle: Take a round trip to Watersmeet Lake and back starting from the County G bridge. The upstream return should be easy because the current is weak.

Conclusion
This one of many delightful small stream paddling options in Vilas County.
Rice Creek (from Round Lake)

Location
Vilas County. This is one of two Rice Creeks I have explored in Vilas County. (See previous entry in this section for the other one.) It is located about 5 mile northwest of Bounder Junction.

Natural Features
Among the many creeks linking lakes in Vilas County this Rice Creek stands out as unusually beautiful and pristine. Wildcat Lake is located close to County B in Vilas County. It is the source of the waters which eventually become Rice Creek. Several other lakes join this chain of waterways. Rice Creek flows through a conifer swamp which contains white cedar, black spruce, and tamarack trees. Several old growth hemlock stands tower above the waterway. A variety of native aquatic plants and wetland species grow under the surface and along the edges. Rare species like showy lady slippers and swamp pinks are represented in the vegetation mix. Rice Creek eventually merges with the Manitowish River which becomes the Flambeau River.

Human History and Influence
John Bates has written about the Manitowish River and its tributaries. His book, River Life, gives Rice Creek very high praise for its natural wonders and its pristine state. The Wisconsin Bureau of Endangered Resources has proposed a strong protective designation for the 2 mile stretch between Round Lake and Big Lake.

Navigability and Difficulty
The water should always be deep enough and woody obstructions will not be a problem. The main challenges are thick beds of wild rice.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In our solo canoes, Ron Rosner and I explored Rice Creek in the summer of 2000. We did not know where to take out so first we did some scouting. At the County K bridge the creek looked too narrow and choked with fallen trees. So we decided against taking out there and followed Keego Road along the northeastern shore of Big Lake. There are no public landings but we found a suitable take-out place. We left my moped there and drove to the public boat landing on Round Lake where we put in.

After a short paddle along the lake’s southwestern shore we were faced by a thick bed of wild rice which blocked the Rice Creek outlet. We plowed our way through and soon reached open water. Initially the creek was lined by dead cedar trees. They were soon replaced by pure stands of tamaracks which reached all the way to the water’s edge. Next the shoreline was crowded by white cedars and black spruces. The clear water allowed a perfect view of attractive aquatic plants under the surface. Several flocks of blue-winged teals took to the skies as we paddled onward. Before we reached Big Lake there were two rice-choked ponds to negotiate. We were able to find narrow breaks in the maze which made the going easier. By the time we reached my
moped we had spent about 2 hours on the water. The shuttle back to my car was only about two miles long.

**Further Ideas**
There is a boat landing on Rice Creek by the County K bridge. From there it is a short distance and presumably an easy paddle downstream to Island Lake. I wonder how badly obstructed the creek way is between Big Lake and the County K bridge. Perhaps it is more navigable than it looked from the County K bridge. I suspect that most who paddle Rice Creek do it as a round trip. They likely begin and end their trips at the Round Lake Boat Landing.

**Conclusion**
Rice Creek’s two miles between Round Lake and Big Lake are very special and should be seen by paddlers.
**Spirit River**

**Location**
Taylor, Price and Lincoln counties.

**Natural Features**
The North Fork of the Spirit begins on the east slopes of Wisconsin’s highest point. Timm’s Hill does not look very impressive but it tops out at 1952 feet. A few miles to the south the Spirit’s main branch begins in a kettle lake left behind by the melting Wisconsin Glacier. From their origins both branches gather side streams and flow eastward to the Wisconsin River. They drain a wild section of Wisconsin’s North Woods. The Spirit River includes some mild whitewater and one, short Class II-III section.

**Human History and Influence**
The area was logged back in the late 1880s. A logging train carried logs from the community of Spirit Lake to Tomahawk. The Spirit Reservoir dam near the Wisconsin River confluence creates a long and narrow impoundment. I suspect this flowage buries some good whitewater.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The Spirit is a small river whose water will usually be too shallow for good boating. Deadfall problems were less than I expected. Bridge scouting may be needed but there is a USGS gauge at Spirit Falls where flows can be monitored.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
In mid May of 1982 I spent some time on the Spirit River. In those days my solo whitewater canoe was a 15 ft. 9 inch Blue Hole OCA which was designed to be a tandem boat. I slid this craft into the North Fork of the Spirit at the County Y bridge just north of Hwy. 86. The North Fork was very narrow so, of course, there were a few downed trees and log jams to pull over and around. But I enjoyed guiding my canoe down this riffly small stream. The water level was moderately high which was perfect.

Two miles into the trip I reached the considerably wider mainstem of the Spirit River. Its river corridor was attractive and featured alternately marshy and upland wooded banks. The streambed was rocky at times and sometimes sandy. When I reached the Bridge Rd. bridge just west of Spirit Falls I climbed up to the road and stuck out my thumb hoping to hitch hike back to my car. Soon I was riding with a local who told me I simply must run Spirit Falls. How could I resist that challenge? So after I retrieved my car, I paddled the half mile stretch from Bridge Rd. to the falls. I scouted it first and then ran the Class III plunge. Of course running Class III’s alone is not generally a good idea. But this one looked pretty straightforward and safe. I followed my chosen route very well. The result was thrilling and successful. After the falls I paddled the remaining distance to the Hwy 86 bridge and jogged back to my car.

**Experiences of Others**
Frank Piraino paddled the lower Spirit River into the Spirit River Flowage and down to County O. I read his account in *Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin*. He also rates Spirit Falls a Class III which he wrote is “suitable only for advanced paddlers.” Also he mentions some “very rocky” Class II rapids immediately above and below the falls which I had forgotten about.

**Further Ideas**

Because the river was plenty wide at the confluence of the North Fork and the Spirit, I wonder what the Spirit is like upstream of that point. The Meier Rd. bridge should be a suitable put in point for an exploration of this stretch.

**Conclusion**

At high water times, the Spirit River is a pleasant and scenic North woods stream which, with the exception of Spirit Falls area, has no significant whitewater.
Spirit River (North Fork)

Location
See Spirit River entry in this section.
Squaw Creek

Location
Vilas, Oneida and Price counties.

Natural Features
Squaw Creek is a headwater stream of the South Fork of the Flambeau River. Two separate lakes feed two smaller creeks which flow into Squaw Lake. Squaw Creek emerges from that lake. This drainage system flows through two more lakes before the South Fork is born at the outlet of Round Lake. All these waterways and the surrounding marshes lie on the “pitted outwash” of the Northern Highland geographic province of Wisconsin. Those “pits” which are now lakes were formed where chunks of ice were left behind by the melting Wisconsin Glacier. The flora of this region is classic “Northwoods.” Wetland vegetation is well represented too. The floor of Squaw Creek varies considerably but the water quality is consistently good. Paddlers will encounter sandy, rocky and mucky sections.

Human History and Influence
Much of Squaw Creek now lies within the borders of the Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation. I wonder if there have been any initiatives to change the name of this stream. Most Native Americans consider this term to be insulting. The bulk of Squaw Creek’s drainage area lies within the boundaries of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Vacation homes line the shores of the lakes and some of the creek’s shorelines.

Navigability and Difficulty
Most of Squaw Creek should be easy to paddle during all open water seasons. There are no rapids and deadfall problems are few.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I explored Squaw Creek in late September of 2004. The craft I used was my trusty Bell Wildfire canoe. First I deposited my bicycle at the Forest Rd. 143 bridge. Then I set off to find a boat landing on Squaw Lake’s western shore. Two are marked in the Gazetteer and I chose the southernmost of the two. From that put-in a friendly tailwind pushed me along the lakeshore to the mouth of Squaw Creek. Here the creek way is a narrow bay of the impounded lake.

I followed it to a small dam which holds the lake at a constant level. It was easy to step out onto the dam, pull my canoe across the top and slide it two feet down the other side. From there the stream had a definite current which aided my short ride to the Hwy 70 bridge. Just past that bridge it narrowed to about 15 feet. Then it widened though a wetland section and slowed briefly behind a beaver dam. As is sometimes possible, I was able to stay in my canoe and “lurch” over this one. Soon the creek widened to about 60 feet and entered a diverse northern forest. Though the water was shallow I believe Squaw Creek should remain navigable through most dry spells.
At one point the creek narrowed through a garden of boulders. The final leg of my journey took me through a treeless marsh. It was breathtaking to paddle past blooming pickerel weeds and lily pads. My breath was also taken away by hard work because a very stiff headwind had developed. Fortunately I was able to duck behind several pine-clad “islands” where I found temporary relief from the incessant wind. If they ever want suggestions for a more politically correct name for this creek, I propose “Windy Creek.” After the three hour trip I rode my bike back to the put-in. The wind was my friend once more because it pushed me along from behind.

**Experiences of Others**
Frank Piraino took the same trip I did and wrote about it in his *Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin*. He appreciated the variety of trees and documented their presence by mentioning a good stand of hemlocks just past Hwy 70 and several steep banks of spruce, pine and cedar.

**Further Ideas**
This trip could be extended by paddling another half mile to Pike Lake. The nearest boat landing is then about a mile away on Round Lake which is the next lake in the chain.

**Conclusion**
Scenic Squaw Creek is easy to paddle and fun to explore.
Squirrel River

Location
Northwestern Onieda County.

Natural Features
Several lake-creek systems feed into 1,317-acre Squirrel Lake in far northwestern Oneida County. The Squirrel River emerges from the lake’s southern end and flows eastward for about 5 miles (as the crow flies) before it merges into the Tomahawk River. It flows through the heart of Wisconsin’s lake country with its many lakes and interconnecting streams. Because human influences are minimal its water quality is quite good.

Human History and Influence
The area’s lakes are ringed by seasonal and all year homes. The Squirrel River flows through a corner of Winter Park which is a very popular xc-ski area. I have kicked and glided its trails many times. Most of the section I paddled is part of a DNR-designated State Natural Area known as the Squirrel River Pines. It features a narrow, sandy peninsula which holds a northern dry, mesic forest dominated by large red pine trees. The immediate stream corridor is predominately a wetland.

Navigability and Difficulty
The only problems are beaver dams and tree snags but these can be major nuisances. These obstructions were tolerable on the section I paddled. Water levels will usually be sufficient. There are no rapids.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
One summer in the 1990s I spent two delightful hours on the Squirrel. I paddled a handy loop which began at one Scotsman Lake Rd. bridge and ended at the next one to the east. My jog back at the end of the day was only about a mile long. The loop took me far from the road and other human influences. I was continuously surrounded by the sights and sounds of various critters. Birds sang and frogs croaked. A pre-occupied muskrat never saw me and swam so close I could have clubbed it with my paddle blade.

But none of those encounters matched the one which began with an eerie howling sound. The source became obvious when I rounded a corner and spotted an otter pair copulating on a small sand beach. Did I wreck their day! In a flash they disengaged and disappeared into the water. I doubt many have witnessed such a site. OK, I did pull over eight beaver dams that day but it seemed a small price to pay for such a unique experience.

Further Ideas
Conceivably one could travel all the way into the Tomahawk River if there aren’t too many beaver dams. Travelers who are descending the Tomahawk River can turn up the Squirrel River.
Ron Rosner and I did this once but we only went about a 100 yards before we turned around and resumed our trip down the Tomahawk.

**Conclusion**
I recommend doing exactly what I did in order to experience a delightful, wilderness wetland stream with an easy shuttle. There is no guarantee you will see a copulating otter pair.
Stevenson Creek

Location
Vilas County.

Natural Features
Stevenson Creek enters Trout Lake from the east. It must be heavily spring-fed because it attains a surprisingly large volume during its brief three mile existence. The outlet from Trout Lake eventually leads to the Manitowish River.

Human History and Influence
Early Ojibwas paddled this creek on their waterway-portage trail from Flambeau Lake to Lac Vieux Desert, the source of the Wisconsin River. A dam near the creek’s source creates an impoundment known as the Stevenson Flowage. One unimproved road leads to this body of water so it likely has at least one lakeside cabin.

Navigability and Difficulty
Despite an ongoing drought my tandem partner and I were able to explore a sizeable chunk of Stevenson Creek. We encountered no fallen trees but there were other challenges. They included beaver dams, shallow water and thick lily pads. Water levels can be monitored on the Internet because of the USGS gauge near the Hwy M bridge. We checked it ourselves the day we explored Stevenson Creek. The reading was 8.9, which was barely enough.

Trip Ideas: My experience
An old Silent Sports article had mentioned Stevenson Creek as a Vilas County paddling possibility so I had it on my radar. In September of 2006 Ron Rosner and I were in the area with our canoes and bicycles. We biked along the bike trail south of Boulder Junction to scout this creek. It looked almost impossibly small. Nevertheless we decided to check it out the next day. It turned out to be more navigable than we thought it would be.

We slid our solo freestyle canoes into the waters of Trout Lake at the boat landing just north of the creek’s mouth. It was initially easy to follow the narrow creek which was lined by sweet gale and other bog plants. The depth remained generous and the head current was weak but the paddling got tougher because of thick mats of lily pads. We passed under the Hwy M bridge and thought we might end our trip here to avoid them on the trip back. Soon the lilies disappeared and we made good progress paddling upstream through a lovely bog. The mucky stream floor was gradually replaced by sand which was a good thing. Solid footing allowed us to exit our canoes so we could walk a couple of shallow sections and pull our canoes over two beaver dams.

Finally we reached an older and higher beaver dam which backed up a large pond. It looked pristine and gorgeous so we paddled around it before we turned around and returned as we had come. I am not sure how close we had come to the dam which creates the Stevenson
Flowage. The downstream float back to the County M bridge was noticeably easier. We did take out there to avoid the lily pads. Our car was a short stroll away.

**Further Ideas**
I wish Ron and I would have paddled further upstream to see if it was possible to reach Stevenson Flowage. Perhaps a one-way trip is possible from that impoundment if a suitable put-in exists.

**Conclusion**
Ron and I liked our trip on lovely little Stevenson Creek. Our short solo canoes were able to round its many tight corners. 17 feet canoes should probably stay away.
Tomahawk River

Location
Oneida and Vilas counties.

Natural Features
The Tomahawk River drains a sizeable section of Wisconsin's most concentrated lake region. The elevation of its drainage area is relatively high but the land is quite level. Hundreds of lakes have filled the “pits” which formed after chunks of ice melted at the end of the Wisconsin Ice Age. These lakes are interlinked and drained by a series of streams. The commercial settlement of Minocqua is situated on a chain of lakes which is drained by the Tomahawk River. That stream originates at the outlet of Kawaguesaga Lake. It flows through a variety of northern forests, marshes and lowlands on its way to the Wisconsin River. The river is alternately slow and fast. Significant rapids form in its final third as it drops towards the Wisconsin River Valley. The biggest of these is Cedar Falls which is just upstream of the Willow Flowage.

Human History and Influence
The area was logged in the late 1880s but the trees are back. With all of its lovely lakes, the Minocqua-Woodruff area has long been a prime destination for fishermen and other vacationers. Resorts still exist but many have been replaced by private lake homes. The Minocqua Chain of Lakes is ringed with homes and cabins. Human developments are polluting the lakes and the Tomahawk River. The Willow Dam was constructed in 1926. The flowage it creates is artificial but lovely. Much of its wild shoreline has been protected since 1997 when the State purchased 8,700 acres. The final section of the Tomahawk is impounded behind a Wisconsin River dam.

Navigability and Difficulty
Much of the upper Tomahawk is slow and relatively deep so it can usually be paddled. The rapids downstream of the Willow dam are too shallow at times depending on releases from that dam. Water level information can be obtained by calling the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company at 715-848-2936 or the Woodruff DNR office at 715-356-5211. Deadfall problems along narrow upstream sections are present but infrequent. The rapids of the lower river require intermediate whitewater skills.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In June of 2003 Ron Rosner and I explored this stream from Blue Lake Rd. to Cedar Falls Road in our solo canoes. Right away we encountered some fast water with a few boulders to dodge. That was the extent of riffles or rapids for the day. The rest of the river flowed slowly past marshes and uplands. Higher ground was typically covered with tall white pines. At one point two of them had fallen across the river. This obstruction was our only portage. When we spotted the Squirrel River merging from the right I paddled a short distance up this tributary and back. Its water was noticeably clearer than the Tomahawk’s. An hour into the trip we passed
under the Camp 9 Rd. bridge. After that the stream corridor became more interesting and attractive. The river’s width and speed were more variable. A line of spruces and pines beyond the immediate marshy corridor looked lovely in the distance. We spotted several potential campsites along this stretch which should always have enough water. Our take-out was a rough spot along Cedar Falls Rd. about an eighth of a mile upstream of its bridge over the Tomahawk. We could have paddled a little farther to a user-friendly commercial landing near the bridge. But we would have been charged a fee to use it. Ron and I have cheapskate tendencies.

In May of 1988 I paddled about 3.5 miles by myself from Willow Dam to County Y. My memories of this section are nil and I took no notes. See Experiences of Others below for a description of that section. The County Y to Swamp Lake Road section is about 8 miles long. In 2000, Tom Watkins, Ron Rosner and I explored this stretch in our solo canoes. Before we hit the water we hiked in to scout Half Breed Rapids. We wanted to see if there was enough water for a good run and there was. Half Breed was the biggest challenge of the day for our non-whitewater canoes. The 100 yard Class II run came in three quick pitches.

In the summer of 2005 I was back by myself on the Tomahawk. This time I explored the eight miles from Swamp Lake bridge to the Prairie Rapids Rd. bridge. Most of this stretch was scenic and easy to paddle. The immediate corridor was marshy but tall trees on higher ground were not far away. By this time the Tomahawk River is quite wide. With no rocks or woody obstructions to dodge, I was getting a little bored. Then I heard rapids ahead. My interest picked up as the scenery improved and there was whitewater to run. Prairie Rapids was a long Class II with bounders in the stream and Precambrian bedrock on the shore. The final leg of my outing was a bike ride back to my car.

**Experiences of Others**

Al Hillery is a Sierra Clubber who lives near Boulder Junction. He told me the upper Tomahawk is navigable from its outlet source at Kawaguesaga Lake. This must be true because I have a 1960s era DNR “Water Trails” booklet which describes a trip beginning there.

Mike Svob includes two sections of the Tomahawk in his *Paddling Northern Wisconsin* guidebook. The first is the 11.5 miles from Willow Flowage Dam to Swamp Lk. Rd. I described all but the first 3.5 miles of this section above. Svob mentions no rapids before the County Y bridge. He describes Halfbreed Rapids as a “solid” class II which should be avoided by novices. The second section described in his guidebook is the 8.2 miles from Swamp Lk. Rd. to Prairie Rapids Rd. Svob rates Prairie Rapids a solid Class II with two pitches. The first is straightforward but the second contains a tricky S-curve and higher waves.

**Further Ideas**

It should be possible to canoe-camp the entire Tomahawk River from Kawaguesaga Lake to the Cedar Falls Rd. just upstream from the Willow Flowage. Also, a longer side trip up the Squirrel River and back could be fun unless there are too many beaver dams.
Conclusion
The Tomahawk River is a very attractive Northwoods stream which has something for all kinds of paddlers. Unlike many other streams it usually has enough water for a good run.
Trout River

Location
Vilas County.

Natural Features
The Trout River is the outlet from Trout Lake, one of Wisconsin’s largest natural lakes. At 1,614 feet, it is situated high in the Northern Highland Geographical Province. This lake is fed by several small creeks and by groundwater seepage. It widens into several natural lakes before it empties into the Manitowish River. Rapids are lacking as the Trout winds past a variety of Northwoods plant species.

Human History and Influence
The Trout River was one section of a water route which was canoed by early Native Americans. This historic trail included many lakes and portages between the Manitowish River and Lac Vieux Desert, the source of the Wisconsin River. Trout Lake hosts its share of cottages and resorts. For many years it has been home to a research station of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School for Limnology. The lake and the river are reasonably clear and free of pollution.

Navigability and Difficulty
There are no rapids and the river is usually deep enough for canoeing or kayaking. Deadfall problems are minimal. Water levels can be monitored on the USGS website.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe I explored a section of the Trout River in July of 1988. It took me about 2.5 hours to explore the stretch from Hwy 51 to Highway H. From that take-out I biked back to my car. This was a delightful and easy trip on a clear water stream lined by a lovely variety of plants. Wetland banks held white cedars, tamaracks and black spruces, while upland banks were covered by white pines. Only twice was I forced to climb out of my canoe. The first was to pull over a beaver dam and the other was to pull over a log. There were three wide sections where the current virtually stopped. In the final mile the river narrowed and the current quickened.

Experiences of Others
Frank Piraino explored the Trout and wrote about it in his Small River Canoeing Adventures of Wisconsin. He rejected my put-in spot as not being user-friendly. Instead he found a DNR landing at the end of Pope’s Road via Gresham Road. His five hour trip ended at the boat landing on Wild Rice Lake.

Further Ideas
Al Hillery and Joan Redman both told me about another outing which started for them on the Trout River. They paddled downstream from the County H bridge to the mouth of Gresham Creek. Both described this junction on river right as easy to miss. They ascended that creek to
Lower Gresham Lake and then to Middle Gresham Lake. I once paddled Gresham Creek myself from another access. See my Gresham Creek description in this section.

**Conclusion**
The Trout River is a Northwoods gem which is easy to paddle and reliably navigable.
Turtle River

**Location**
Iron County.

**Natural Features**
The Turtle River drainage system includes many lakes and streams in Northern Wisconsin’s lake country. It originates in No Man’s Lake near Michigan’s Upper Peninsula border and then flows south. Downstream of several other headwater lakes it is joined by a major tributary known as Long Lake Creek. Eventually, after flowing through several more lakes, it joins the North Fork of the Flambeau River. The Turtle contains several minor rapids except for one Class III which pours over an outcrop of broken granite bedrock just downstream of Lake of the Falls.

**Human History and Influence**
Chippewa Indians canoed this stream and established villages along its shores. The historic Flambeau Trail linked the Lac du Flambeau settlement with La Pointe on Madeline Island in Lake Superior’s Chequamagon Bay. This trail included lakes, streams and a long 30 mile portage from the mouth of the Montreal River to the north end of Long Lake which is the source of the Turtle River’s Long Lake Creek tributary. The area was logged around the turn of the 20th century. Logs were driven down the Turtle River to the North Fork of the Flambeau River and eventually to a sawmill in Park Falls. In 1926 the confluence of these two rivers was flooded by the Turtle Flambeau Flowage. Far back upstream is the Turtle’s other dam named Shea. Tourism became and remains the main economic engine of the region.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Some of the minor rapids become “scratchy” when the water is low. It should not be difficult to walk canoes across the shallows when this happens. The water was plenty high during my August trip. Deadfall problems are minimal. I know nothing about the Class III drop between Lake of the Falls and the Turtle Flambeau Flowage.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
For several years Hurley’s Wayne Nasi organized and led outings which followed the route of the original Flambeau Trail. One summer day, Ron Rosner and I joined him and his group on the Turtle River leg of their annual trek. Many of the participants were teenagers from the Lac du Flambeau Chippewa Indian Band. That August day in 2000 we spent 8 hours paddling from Long Lake to a landing on Lake of the Falls. After a priest blessed our trip at Thunder Head Lodge on Long Lake we paddled southward to its outlet and then enjoyed an easy two mile float on Long Lake Creek to the Turtle River confluence. The creek was a quiet and beautiful little stream which was lined by blooming white water lilies.

We paddled across Oxbow Lake knowing that the Turtle River had joined us from another inlet. At the end of the lake we encountered some minor whitewater. The rest of the two miles to Echo Lake was rapids-free. We paddled across that lake to the town of Mercer on its
northwestern shore. There we beached our canoes and walked to the Mercer Lions Club's annual chicken barbeque. Stomachs full, we re-boarded our boats and paddled across Echo Lake again to its outlet where we there was another set of minor rapids to run. Less than a mile downstream we reached Rice Lake which was immediately followed by another stretch of easy whitewater. We paddled under Hwy 51 and entered Pike Lake. From its outlet we floated two more miles of moving water to Lake of the Falls and its landing where we took out.

**Experiences of Others**
Gerald Lowry wrote the out of print guidebook entitled *Wisconsin's North Central Canoe Trails* in 1973. In it he described a 14 mile canoe trail from Shea Dam on the Turtle River to Lake of the Falls. His map depicts two minor rapids upstream of Spider Lake and another one between that lake and Oxbow Lake where my description (see above) picks up. His recommended take-out was the County FF Bridge “above the falls.”

**Further Ideas**
There are probably suitable campsites along the Turtle so canoe camp trips should be possible. Whitewater boaters who like Class III drops could probably find a way to run the one just downstream of the County FF bridge.

**Conclusion**
This is an attractive and historic canoe trail which includes free flowing river and lake sections. It is suitable for beginning paddlers.
Tyler Forks

Location
Iron County.

Natural Features
This stream originates in far southwestern Iron County. It flows north and then west until it joins the Bad River which eventually flows into Lake Superior. The Tyler Forks headwaters gather slowly in deep forests and bogs. Gathering speed the stream cuts over steep cascades through a gap in the Gogebic-Penokee Range. After it crosses lowland occupied by Highway 77 and a railroad line, it flows north until it hits a second bedrock barrier known as the Gabbro Range. There it crashes over Wren Falls and soon makes a sharp turn to the southwest. In Copper Falls State Park it flows over a series of basaltic lava ledges culminating in 30 foot Brownstone Falls. Then a few feet downstream Tyler Forks joins the Bad River which “flows through a gorge with 60 to 125 foot high walls of sandstone, conglomerate, shale and sandstone,” according to Patrick Lisi in his Wisconsin Waterfalls: A Touring Guide.

Human History and Influence
Since the Indians left and the logging era ended most of the forests in Tyler Forks drainage area have grown back. The area is sparsely populated but Copper Falls State Park is a popular tourist destination. The Park features Brownstone Falls on Tyler Forks and Copper Falls on the Bad River.

Navigability and Difficulty
This stream is hard to catch with enough water and is too challenging for most paddlers. It features Class III and IV whitewater. There is a USGS gauge reading and runnability advice available at the American Whitewater website.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In April of 1989 I sampled a short section of Tyler Forks from the Hwy. 169 bridge to the Will Road bridge. This two mile section was narrow and scenic but lacked whitewater. In 2001, several of us drove to Moore’s Park at the terminus of Moore Rd. We found this spot by driving east 8 miles from Mellen on Highway 77 and turning left. From the parking lot we walked along the Dells and admired the scenery but decided the rapids were too difficult for us. At least we avoided the long boat carry along the river to the put-in.

Experiences of Others
Here is the American Whitewater website’s description of the above-mentioned Dells.

“It drops 40+ feet rapidly through a sequence which begins with a fast Class III feeding into a stepped ledge of 8-10 feet and finishing with a fun drop through a small rock wall canyon.” They give this section a Class III+ rating. Continuing downstream, Class II-III whitewater and an alder swamp precede Class IV Wren Falls, a sheer drop of 10-12 feet. It reportedly needs to be run
with sufficient speed to punch the hole at the bottom. The website features a nice photo of Wren Falls. Vogues Rd. bridge is the take-out for the 7.6 mile trip which begins at Moore's Park. At Copper Falls State Park Brownstone Falls has been run successfully, but one unfortunate kayaker was severely injured there in the year 2000. Reportedly he got hung up briefly on rock at the lip. His kayak then plunged straight down onto rocks at the base of the falls.

Further Ideas
I wonder what the 6 miles between Vogues Rd. and Will Rd. are like. Perhaps I will explore that section one day.

Conclusion
Tyler Forks is a beautiful Northwoods stream which runs rarely and features difficult whitewater. There are some calmer sections which are accessible to paddlers.

A group from the River Alliance of Wisconsin studies Tyler Forks in 2012, at a time when the creek was threatened with destruction by a huge open-pit iron mine in the nearby Penokee Hills. The project has since been suspended. (River Alliance of Wisconsin photo.)
Whiskey Creek

Location
Bayfield County.

Natural Features
This stream is a tributary of the Marengo River. Its drainage area is very small. It originates in Tea Lake and joins the larger stream about two miles to the west.

Human History and Influence
Whiskey Creek drains Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest land. It flows through Coffee Lake which has a handful of lake homes along its shores.

Navigability and Difficulty
The stream is so narrow that alders from opposing banks often are touching. We were grabbing branches and pulling ourselves along at times. Downstream of Coffee Lake there are several Class I rapids which will often be too shallow to paddle with ease.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In early May of 2013, Pat Brennaman and I were driving along Snake Tail Rd. from the north. We reached a bridge and figured this was the Marengo River access we were looking for. Later we realized it was actually Whiskey Creek. Blissfully ignorant, we put in and paddled downstream. We had some doubts but kept going. After pulling our way through alders for a third of a mile we reached a lake. There was not supposed to be a lake on this section of the Marengo River! Later we identified it as Coffee Lake. Now we were pretty sure we had made a mistake but we paddled onward thinking this waterway must eventually reach the Marengo River. At the end of the lake we found the outlet and continued our journey. At least the alders were now less of a problem. We encountered a few small rapids which had enough water and were fun to paddle. An hour had passed since we started when we reached a slightly larger stream merging from the left. We continued downstream and were now pretty sure we were on the Marengo River. See the Marengo River for an account of the rest of this river trip.

Conclusion
I doubt anyone will ever paddle Whiskey Creek again----at least not by mistake. Pat and I love this kind of adventure.
### White Sand Creek

#### Location
Vilas County.

#### Natural Features
Vilas County’s hundreds of lakes are often interlinked by small streams. White Sand Creek is part of a waterway which connects the communities of Star Lake and Boulder Junction. Several lakes near Star Lake drain westward into White Birch Creek which eventually widens into White Sand Lake. This 734 acre Lake is 71 feet deep and very clear. Its outlet is White Sand Creek which exits the lake’s northwest corner and then meanders two to three miles to the Manitowish River. That stream soon passes Boulder Junction before it widens into Boulder Lake.

#### Human History and Influence
White Sand Lake is developed but is relatively unspoiled. White Sand Creek is even more pristine. Only one small bridge spans the creek. It carries bicyclists and hikers following the Lumberjack Trail. This creek’s entire drainage area falls within the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest. The region’s lakes support a highly developed tourism industry.

#### Navigability and Difficulty
Logjams are rare along this wetland stream. The water was deep enough for me even though I canoed it during a drought. Some upstream reaches were very shallow but I glided over them in my Wildfire solo canoe. A loaded tandem canoe would have bottomed out multiple times.

#### Trip Ideas: My experience
Area rains were rare in the summer of 2004. On September 19th of that year I gazed at White Sand Creek from the Concora Rd. bridge just downstream of the White Sand Lake outlet. The tiny waterway looked almost impossibly narrow and shallow. But I decided to give it a try and was rewarded for my effort. The creek’s clarity made it look shallower than it really was. And I was able to negotiate the tight turns with relative ease. It helped that my canoe was only a shade over 13 feet long.

I was fortunate to discover a lovely wetland stream which was bordered by sedges and leather leaf plants. Tamaracks stood beyond this border. The wilderness scenery was spoiled by one pole barn on river left. As I neared the Manitowish River the mix of wetland plants was replaced by extensive fields of wild rice. On the wider river I began to pass riverside dwellings and docks. When I reached the County M bridge on the northern edge of Boulder Junction I left my gear behind and hit the road. I had spent 2 hours on the river and another 27 minutes jogging back.

#### Conclusion
White Sand Creek is a nice option for paddlers who appreciate pristine wetland streams. It is a short trip, however. Low water may be a problem at times.