Kark's Canoeing and Kayaking Guide to 309 Wisconsin Streams

By Richard Kark

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A Badger Stream Love Affair

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

In the late 1970s I was preoccupied by my medical studies in Milwaukee but did find the time to explore some rivers. I recall canoeing the Oconto, Chippewa, Kickapoo, “Illinois Fox,” and West Twin Rivers during those years. Several of us traveled to the Peshtigo River and rafted “Roaring Rapids” with a commercial company. At the time I could not imagine riding this torrent in a canoe. We also rafted Piers Gorge on the Menomonee River. Our guide failed to avoid Volkswagen Rock over Mishicott 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
**Rivers and Streams of Northwestern Wisconsin**

This section includes 61 rivers and streams that either originate or are mostly confined to these northwestern Wisconsin counties: Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Polk, Rusk, Sawyer and Washburn.

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Amnicon River

Location
Douglas County.

Natural Features
Several branches originating in the woodlands and wetlands of central Douglas County converge as the Amnicon River which descends from the Northern Highland to the Lake Superior Lowland and Lake Superior. On its 30-mile journey it drops 350 feet off the Precambrian lava rock of the Douglas Escarpment including 180 feet within the confines of the Amnicon River State Park. The park's first two major waterfalls are off lava before the river drops off an equally dramatic sandstone falls into a sandstone gorge and finally through the red clay soils of the Lowland.

Human History and Influence
The river stays clean because agricultural influences are minimal and human communities are lacking. Bridges and trails in the park provide access and good views of the park's impressive rapids and waterfalls.

Navigability and Difficulty
The river is a class II with one III upstream of the park boundary. The water is often too low for a good run but it is included at the American whitewater website which uses a gauge on the Nemadji River for its runnability recommendations. The run through the park is described at this website. Its waterfalls rate up to Class V and are obviously for experts only. Downstream of the park the rapids are easy and the water levels are more reliable.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In September of 1981 I paddled a short section just downstream of the park and ran the shuttle on foot. My brief jaunt took me from County U to Hwy. 13. There was still enough broken-down sandstone and gradient to create several interesting Class I-II rapids along the narrow clay-lined valley. Despite recent dry conditions there was plenty of water and, thankfully, the stretch was dead fall-free.

Four years later, on another September day I experienced a different section of the Amnicon. I paddled from Anderson Rd. to Hwy 2 with Pat Brenneman and his son Nate. The younger was in his kayak while Pat and I paddled our solo whitewater canoes. Higher water would have been much more fun as we scraped over many Class II boulder gardens. There was one Class III drop which we portaged because of insufficient water. This must have been Wentley Falls which kayaker and author Jim Rada described in his book about Lake Superior drainage rivers.

Experiences of Others
Besides the Rada book, experts can consult the American Whitewater website. Within the Park several hundred yard of Class III-III+ proceed the three big waterfalls. The first two of those are very difficult 4-5's whereas the final one is a tad easier at 8-10 feet with a clearer route to follow.
Further Ideas
The river between Hwy 13 and Lake Superior should be interesting with easy whitewater and reliable water levels. This looks to be about a 4 mile run with an additional mile of westward paddling required along Lake Superior to a boat landing on its shore reachable from Moccasin Mike Rd.

Conclusion
This is a gorgeous stream with fun whitewater upstream of Amnicon Falls State Park for intermediate paddlers. The falls in the Park are for experts only. The easiest rapids are downstream of the Park.
Apple River

Location
Polk and St. Croix counties.

Natural Features
Drains the sandy terrain and lakes of eastern Polk County via numerous headwater tributaries. Then the Apple enters the hilly end moraine country of northwestern St. Croix County. Picking up speed over a few rapids featuring dolomite rocks, it descends to the St. Croix River. Plant communities passed through include first a conifer-hardwood forest, and then a southern hardwood forest. For a few miles it flows through an original prairie. Water quality seems quite good despite many farms nearby.

Human History and Influence
Communities along the Apple’s banks include Amery and Somerset. Numerous dams south of U.S. Hwy. 2 markedly interfere with the natural flow and the beauty. For many decades, thousands of warm weather “tubers” have floated the last few miles of river into Somerset. Inner tube liveries are big businesses in town. Luckily, nets set along the way catch most of the beer cans but the urine content of the water increases markedly in the summer. In the past “hard boat” races with gates have been held on those rapids at Somerset.

Navigability and Difficulty
Most of the river below Amery is navigable throughout the year, but those dams really get in the way! Only paddlers with intermediate or better whitewater skills belong on the river between the Blackbrook Flowage and the 150th St. Bridge. Downed trees may be an occasional problem.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Because I like whitewater I twice paddled the section between Blackbrook Flowage and the 150th St. Bridge. In 1982 I launched my fragile Lady Bug canoe just below the dam. After running a Class I-II drop I wound through some farm land. Then the terrain became wilder with high-wooded banks, boulders and rapids. Two of these bordered on Class II’s making portage necessary for me since I was not in my whitewater canoe.

Several years later I returned with 3 others to guide our tandem whitewater canoes through those significant drops made up of boulders and bedrock dolomite. We all did just fine, but we did scout them first. Further downstream, we enjoyed negotiating the watery mazes created by a series of islands. I do admit to joining the throngs of beer drinking tubers a couple of times in the early ‘70’s.

Experiences of Others
I am surprised the Apple has not been written up in any guidebooks. It is mentioned on the americanwhitewater.org website. Many articles have been written about the thousands of revelers who ride inner tubes into Somerset.

Frank Piraino has written about two sections of the Apple in his Small River Adventures of Wisconsin. He too enjoyed the rapids which he had not been expecting. He put in downstream of where I did at the Cty. C bridge in Little Falls. He traveled farther than I did by taking out at the State Hwy. 65 bridge. His description mentions no whitewater between the 150th St. bridge and Hwy 65. Especially
appealing to him was his second section from the above take-out to the Star Prairie bridge (Cty. M) in the Star Prairie City Park.

The American Whitewater website describes two separate sections of the Apple.

**Further Ideas**

Of considerable interest to me is the St. Croix Islands State Wildlife area at the Apple’s junction with the St. Croix. I wish it were possible to reach this area by paddling the final gorge from Cty. I. However, access at that bridge is blocked by the fences erected by the power company which operates the nearby power dam. Therefore these islands must be explored by entering the Wildlife Area from the St. Croix. Finally, boaters with intermediate whitewater skills may wish to try the rapids at Somerset, preferably on a day when the tubers are not around.

**Conclusion**

The Apple would be a great canoeing stream except for the dams. Most will just join the tubers, but brief paddling excursions like those above are viable options.
Balsam Branch

Location
Polk County.

Natural Features
Flows between and among glacial lakes and sandy to rocky glacial outwash through conifer hardwood forests and scattered agricultural areas. Begins in the Polk County community of Balsam Lake at the outflow of a lake with the same name. Then heads southward into Wapogasset Lake where its name changes to the Wapogasset Branch for its final miles into the Apple River.

Human History and Influence
Balsam Lake is the county seat of Polk County even though both Amery and St. Croix Falls have more people. There is at least one dam. One was in view just upstream of where I put in.

Navigability and Difficulty
Class I rapids and rock gardens just upstream of County C where low water is potentially a problem. Scout by walking upstream from the bridge. Deadfall where I paddled was surprisingly sparse. Someone had done some chainsaw clearing. Water quality was very clear the day I paddled this Branch.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I spent one hour exploring this delightful small stream one day when the water was higher than the usual flow. I put in just downstream of the Kennedy Mill bridge in the Kennedy Environmental Park. The water moved with moderate speed over shallow gravel bars along attractively wooded banks. I spotted several smallmouth bass easily through the clear water. After about 25 minutes of paddling through flat terrain the banks steepened as the river entered a V-shaped gorge and the current speed quickened. The water then flowed through a series of swiftly flowing rock gardens which required maneuvering skills but were not very steep. My take-out point was the County C bridge.

Further Ideas
I am not sure about upstream sections. One idea is to continue paddling into and across Wapogasset Lake and then down the Wapogasset Branch and possibly into the Apple River and beyond.

Conclusion
My trip was short but very sweet. Make sure to scout the final stretch to see if there is enough water.
Bean Brook

Location
Washburn County.

Natural Features
Gorgeous brook lined by conifers and northern hardwoods. Winds through sandy soils from its headwaters southwest of Hayward near the Sawyer County line to its confluence with the Namekagon midway between the U.S. Hwy. 63 communities of Earl and Springbrook. Jack pine barrens add to the conifer mix of white pines, red pines and spruce trees. As described below, I saw lots of wildlife. Water quality was excellent with impressive clarity.

Human History and Influence
Seems quite untouched though the surrounding forest is not first growth. I suppose they ran logs down it during the logging era. An upstream section is a State Fishery Area.

Navigability and Difficulty
There was enough water for me even during a drought. No rapids. I pulled over only one fallen tree and one beaver dam.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I am occasionally rewarded by my habit of slowing down over bridges. July 28, 1998 was one of these times when I slowed my vehicle to glance at Bean Brook. I happened to be driving along Washburn County Road E after having canoed a section of the Namekagon River. Feeling adventuresome, I put in there not knowing how navigable it would be or if the first downstream bridge depicted in the Gazetteer (on an unlabeled road) would be a viable take out point. It turned out to be a fabulous impulse ride. The stream was tiny but amazingly unobstructed. A pleasing variety of plants lined the shores with alders being the most common. Stream floor aquatic plants were shoved into waving motions by the steady current and were clearly visible though the clear water. There was a plethora of wildlife including ducks, herons, deer, and several raccoons. A beaver swam by very close to my canoe. The late day lighting was magical.

I was not ready to be done when I reached the take-out bridge in about one hour’s time. It had been such a lovely ride! I felt so mellow that I walked rather than ran the two miles back to my car.

Further Ideas
I wonder what those last 2 or three miles down to the Namekagon would be like? I suspect it would contain more woody obstructions than I encountered during my outing.

Conclusion
This was a beautiful and wonderful surprise for me. I would do it again and do recommend it to others who are looking for a short trip or an alternative access to the Namekagon (and are willing to risk the deadfall potential). It features an intimate small size, attractive scenery, great water clarity, and the potential for great wildlife viewing.
Bear Creek

Location
Washburn and Barron counties.

Natural Features
Small drainage area along U.S. Hwy. 53 north of Rice Lake. It passes farms and forests as a headwater tributary of the Red Cedar River. It joins that river’s water in Rice Lake at the eastern edge of the city of the same name. The creek is very narrow and slow moving with a bottom of sand, gravel and scattered rocks.

Human History and Influence
Intermittent farm fields. One dam creates a large flowage called Bear Lake at the village of Haugen. With more than 8,000 people, Rice Lake is a regional commercial center and the most populous town in Barron County and surrounding counties.

Navigability and Difficulty
Too many fallen trees and beaver dams.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
One of my worst days on a Wisconsin stream. There was not enough water and there were an obnoxious number of fallen trees and beaver dams. Several fences blocked my way and I was under constant attack by marauding deer flies. It was pretty awful.

Further Ideas
Maybe a local should consider exploring the last several miles of Bear Creek into Stump Lake which empties into Rice Lake at its north end.

Conclusion
Forget Bear Creek with the possible exception the idea expressed immediately above.
Big Sioux River

Location
Bayfield County.

Natural Features
Very small drainage area off the eastern side of Mt. Valhalla and several other relatively lofty glacial moraines. Along with 4 Mile Creek and the Little Sioux River, its tributaries to the north, the Big Sioux drops quickly to the flat lake basin of former Glacial Lake Duluth before it drains into Lake Superior midway between the tourist communities of Bayfield and Washburn. Upland Northwoods trees transition into wetland species as the elevation drops. Rapids near the Cty. C bridge result from the gradient and exposed sandstone boulders in the stream bed. This is the same older sandstone of the Keweenawan Group which was quarried to erect buildings such as the historic “brownstone” former bank building in Washburn which now houses the Washburn Historical and Cultural Center. It also is exposed beautifully along the coasts of the nearby Apostle Islands.

Human History and Influence
Native Americans were here first, of course. The Ojibwa Tribe currently occupies the Red Cliff Reservation north of Bayfield. Fur traders and loggers of European descent came later. Lake Superior commercial fishing was important for a long time. These days sport fishermen visit the Big Sioux, most of which has been designated a State Fishery Area. In recent decades, tourism related businesses have employed most of Bayfield County’s residents.

Navigability and Difficulty
This stream is too small for practical navigation. Water levels will usually be too low except in the estuary at the end.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
One summer day in the early 1990s I locked my bicycle to a tree near the Hwy. 13 bridge and drove to a small boat landing on the Little Sioux River along Friendly Valley Rd. Here I hopped aboard my solo freestyle canoe and paddled the final few yards into the Big Sioux. Later I learned there had been a recent wind storm which had knocked down thousands of trees in the area. A fair number must have fallen over the Big Sioux because the going was extremely rough. After numerous “mini-portages” I finally reached the much easier to navigate estuary marsh. Earlier that day I did walk the shore downstream starting at the Cty.C bridge where there are some rapids. This stretch would have been fun to paddle with more water. A few years later I did look at the Big Sioux again from the next bridge upstream where it looked almost impossibly small.

Experiences of Others
I read somewhere that groups have paddled more of this tiny stream. There is even a boat landing marked in the Atlas Gazetteer just upstream of the County C bridge. So, perhaps portions of this stream are at least semi-navigable when the water is high. Traveling it under such conditions would likely be hazardous due to fast current, rapids and woody obstructions. Perhaps I will try it someday under the right circumstances and with the right people.
Further Ideas
For a brief outing, it should be very possible to put in at the Hwy. 13 bridge, paddle upstream as far as desired and then turn around to return through the same attractive marsh.

Conclusion
Most should only consider paddling in the waters of the Big Sioux’s estuary.
Big Wiergor Creek

Location
Sawyer and Rusk counties.

Natural Features
The Blue Hills are a prominent feature of southern Sawyer and northern Rusk counties. They have persisted because the underlying bedrock is a very hard metamorphic rock known as quartzite. Much of the range attains even greater heights because of end moraine materials deposited by the Wisconsin glacier. Late melting chunks of ice resulted in kettle lakes. Several of these lakes, a series of springs, and precipitation runoff from the east side of the Blue Hills all feed into the Big Weigor Creek drainage system. Eventually this stream drops into the valley of the Chippewa River with which it merges. Where Big Weirgor is navigable the current is quick with riffles but no significant whitewater. It drains a conifer-hardwood forest. The stream bed is comprised of sand and gravel laced with Precambrian rock boulders of various sizes.

Human History and Influence
As it has for decades, logging continues to impact this stream system. It receives small amounts of tainted runoff from scattered farms near Exeland and along Hwy. 40. Little Weirgor Creek is a major tributary which has been partially protected since the 1950s as a state wildlife area. Tributaries flow through the small communities of Weirgor and Exeland. Near its headwaters, Big Weirgor Creek has been dammed to form Deer Lake, which has some dwellings on its shores.

Navigability and Difficulty
When I paddled this stream long ago, it was surprisingly clear of deadfall. There were riffles but no real rapids. Big Weirgor is only navigable during the spring runoff and after significant rains. There are no gauges.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I have not been on Big Weirgor Creek since the early 1980s. Then I explored it on two separate occasions. Considering all of my “solo” adventures it is mildly surprising that both times I was in a tandem canoe with other people. Both trips began at the Hwy 40 bridge and ended at the County D bridge over the Chippewa River. The total distance was about 6 miles including about 3 miles on each stream.

I remember it an attractive narrow and winding stream. There were a few riffles to navigate and a few boulders to avoid. On one of the trips we admired blooming marsh marigolds. Coyotes are plentiful in Wisconsin, but in my experience anyway they are rarely seen along rivers. On the second trip, my partner and I surprised one and got a great view of it before it fled into the woods. The Chippewa River portion of the trip is scenic and easy to paddle.

Further Ideas
Perhaps upstream sections are big enough to paddle when the water is high. Paddlers could also continue down the Chippewa River from the County D bridge. This is my favorite section of that river.
Conclusion
With enough water, Big Weirgor Creek is a viable option for paddling adventurers who like small streams. Consider using it as a way to enter a very nice section of the Chippewa River.
Black River

**Location**
Douglas County.

**Natural Features**
Begins in the very remote, high, and marshy country of northeastern Pine County in Minnesota. The Black flows eastward into equally remote conifer-hardwood forests in Wisconsin’s Douglas County. Then it turns northward through moraine hills into an increasingly boreal forest where spruce trees are more commonly seen. These moraines were deposited by the Wisconsin Glacier on top of a high ridge composed of volcanic basalt. At Pattison State Park, this small stream plunges over two basalt cascades named Little and Big Manitou Falls. At 165 feet the latter waterfall is Wisconsin’s highest and the fourth highest east of the Mississippi River. Below Big Manitou the Black has cut a narrow gorge through exposed Keweenawan sandstone as it drops towards the Lake Superior Lowland. In that region it exposes red clays which derive from Glacial Lake Duluth sediments. Soon it joins the Nemadji River which traverses the same clay soils and flows northward into Lake Superior.

**Human History and Influence**
Copper Culture Indian groups gathered near the waterfalls as far back as 5,000 years ago. Pattison State Park features the two waterfalls, hiking trails and a small flowage called Interfalls Lake. In the late 1800s, lumbermen constructed a dam to prevent logs from being damaged by Big Manitou Falls. The current dam was constructed just upstream from the Falls in 1928.

In the Wisconsin Handbook, Thomas Huhti has reported on a local effort to contain Lake Superior’s destructive sea lamprey population. Evidently, the Wisconsin DNR regularly dumps lampricidic chemicals into the river just above Big Manitou Falls.

Water quality is good though clarity is compromised by suspended clays in the lower river. There are no towns and virtually no farms drained by the Black River.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Often too low for a good run upstream of Little Manitou Falls. The half mile between this falls and Interfalls Lake will often be too low. It can easily be scouted from a hiking trail in Pattison State Park. Water levels below Big Manitou Falls should be somewhat more reliable. It is possible to monitor local water levels by checking the Nemadji River gauge on the USGS website or the American Whitewater website. Most rapids are Class I and II but there are two III’s.

**Trip Ideas:** My experiences
My day on the Black was a cold one in early May of 1991. I left my bike alongside a parking lot near Little Manitou Falls and drove to my chosen put-in at the Milchesky Bridge. There I slid my solo-freestyle Ladybug canoe into medium high waters which carried me swiftly down a very attractive stream corridor. Steeple-shaped spruce trees were draped by patches of fog. I weaved my way down a rocky stream course through a series of easy rapids. Only twice was I required to exit my canoe to pull it around fallen trees. An hour or so after putting in I rode down a delightfully long stretch of Class I-II whitewater. But, by then my feet had become uncomfortably cold. So I paddled faster to my take-out on river left just above 31 foot Little Manitou Falls. Because of foggy poor visibility and the narrow shoulder of Hwy. 35
my bike ride back was terrifying. No cars struck me but my body temperature was dropping fast. It was fortunate that Milchesky Road was too muddy for my bike. Running the final mile back to my car managed to warm me up.

**Experiences of Others**
The American Whitewater website briefly describes the 3.5 miles between Little Manitou Falls and a railroad trestle take-out point along Station Rd. The late Jim Rada covered the same section in his self-published manuscript about Lake Superior Drainage Rivers. He mentions Class I’s and II’s plus a Class III “ledge” in the half mile section upstream of Interfalls Lake. After paddling across this small flowage, the portage around Big Manitou Falls is on river left. Immediately below the falls is a brief Class I followed by several II’s and I’s before the whitewater ends. He described this short stretch as “not a primo whitewater run, but a cute little river...” The American Whitewater website describes the 4.8 miles between Little Manitou Falls and the railroad bridge off Station Road.

**Further Ideas**
It might be worth exploring upstream of Milchesky Bridge when the water is high. I might someday paddle from Little Manitou Falls to Station Rd. and then extend the trip down into the Nemadji though I realize this extension will likely contain no whitewater.

**Conclusion**
The Black is a pretty little stream which offers several paddling opportunities for those possessing at least intermediate whitewater skills. There will not always be enough water for a good run.
Bois Brule River

Location
Douglas County.

Natural Features
The Bois Brule is an exceptionally beautiful stream with an interesting geologic past. Its source is near Solon Springs just north of Upper St. Croix Lake. Several springs feed the headwaters which gather into East and West Branches. After they merge the Bois Brule flows northward into Lake Superior. Back when the Wisconsin Glacier was melting, Glacial Lake Duluth drained into the current valley of the Bois Brule but the water was flowing in the opposite direction. It flowed southward into today’s St. Croix River and then onward to the Mississippi River. Glacial Lake Duluth’s original outlet is situated three miles south of the U.S. Hwy. 2 community of Brule at a place called Winneboujou. At that time the rapids and the steep valley seen today north of Hwy.2 were buried under sediments at the bottom of the big Glacial Lake.

The upper Bois Brule is a clear stream which winds slowly through bogs and small lakes past cedar swamps, alders and tamarack trees. A handful of minor rapids interrupts the river’s generally slow pace. A few miles downstream of Hwy. 2 the character of the Bois Brule changes dramatically as it cuts through a ridge of volcanic rock known as the Douglas Copper Range. From there it drops 328 ft. as it plunges down to Lake Superior. In one stretch it drops 110 feet in three miles. Of course, this means rapids. They feature igneous boulders and also sandstone ledges where the river cuts into Lake Superior Sandstone.

The lower valley is narrow and V-shaped because it is relatively new in geologic time having formed when glacial meltwaters reversed direction. A new valley through red clay deposits was cut by this process. As the river flows north, the surrounding woods become more “boreal” in character. Consequently, there are more white spruce trees.

Human History and Influence
For both Native Americans and French fur traders, The Bois Brule-St. Croix water trail constituted a major travel route. They could canoe back and forth but doing so required a portage between the headwaters of these streams. Today there is a sign along Cty. A near the north end of Upper St. Croix Lake which marks this historic portage trail. The nationally designated North Country Trail also includes a two mile segment of the same path which was followed by Indians, voyageurs, traders and missionaries of long ago. 1680 was the year that Grey Solon Dulut became the first white man to make this portage after he and his men paddled up the Bois Brule. Then they descended the St. Croix to the Mississippi and beyond.

After it served as a traveling and trading route, the Bois Brule became a logging river. Later it attracted several U.S. presidents who enjoyed fishing for trout. Grant, Cleveland, Coolidge, Hoover and Eisenhower all tried their luck here.

For many decades various individuals and groups have worked hard to preserve the unique qualities of this beautiful river and its corridor. Through a combination of public and private efforts the Brule is reasonably well protected. Inner tubes were banned during the 1970s which was very helpful. Cabin owners and other property owners along the river have agreed to strict conservation measures. The Brule River State Forest encompasses much of the drainage area.
Water quality: Upstream sections are clear and unpolluted. Clarity decreases downstream especially after rains due to eroding red clay banks.

**Navigability and Difficulty**

Many whitewater boaters have learned and honed their skills on the Bois Brule. There are many rapids downstream of the Copper Range Campground but they rate only Class I and Class II. Several of the II's can be quite challenging, especially at high water, so whitewater skills and experience are recommended. Scouting is often a good idea for those running the “Ledges” (see below). The upper river between Stones Bridge and Winneboujou is much easier but there are several Class I rapids which have caused many canoes to tip over through the years.

Water levels are quite reliable because the river is spring fed. Yet, the lower river has many shallow sections with rocks which will hang up many canoes whose skippers lack good river-reading skills. Fast water can easily carry unskilled boaters into potentially dangerous tree limbs on outside turns.

The American Whitewater website can be consulted for flow and runnability information.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**

These descriptions will be cursory because so many writers and guidebook authors have already described the Bois Brule. In the 1970s and 80s I paddled the river several times with the Sierra Club. Since then I have typically paddled with smaller groups of friends. Usually we have sampled the whitewater between the Pine Tree Landing and the Hwy. 13 bridge. I have enjoyed the beautiful and serene 12 mile section from Stones Bridge to Winneboujou on at least three occasions. One lovely day it seemed every streamside log was draped with blue forget-me-nots. I always enjoy canoeing past the rustic buildings of the Cedar Estates where three presidents stayed and fished for trout. I'd rather be viewing the cedar swamps and other natural wonders but I do admire the many charming old cabins, docks and boathouses which dot the shore along this stretch. In the latter half of this trip there are two small natural lakes separated by a Class I rapid.

The 8 miles between Pine Tree Landing and Hwy. 13 are a blast to paddle for those with the requisite skills. Numerous rapids ensue and the current stays fast. The four Lenroot Ledges before Cty. F and the four May's Ledges which follow this bridge require special attention and should be scouted by most paddlers.

On May 25, 2008 I finally paddled the nearly 12 miles between Cty. B and Pine Tree Landing. The rapids upstream of Hwy. 2 including Little Joe were fun to negotiate in my Bell Wildfire canoe. Many blooming marsh marigolds hugged the shoreline. Migrating warblers and mergansers were a common site. A medium current carried me through the winding Meadows section downstream of Hwy. 2. I enjoyed this stretch though I understand that many boaters anxious to hit whitewater find it to be boring.

The final 8 miles of river from Hwy. 13 to Lake Superior are well worth seeing. I finally explored this section in the summer of 1998. The scenery is equal to upstream sections and the current stays fast. There is even some Class I whitewater to keep things interesting. Two miles into my trip I portaged around the dam which was erected to keep destructive lamprey eels from swimming upstream to spawn. In its final mile, the river widened and slowed. I jogged and walked the 7 miles back to my car at the put-in under a blazing August sun.
Experiences of Others

Paddling Northern Wisconsin and the out of print Whitewater-Quietwater both describe the Bois Brule as do several other out of date publications. An old guidebook called Canoeing the Rivers of Northwestern Wisconsin is the only one I own which describes the river upstream of Stone’s Bridge. It recommends putting in on the West Branch where it flows under Cty. P. From here to Stone’s Bridge on Cty. S paddlers encounter nine miles of a twisting narrow waterway containing “beaver dams, submerged logs, and overhanging brush”.

The American Whitewater website also includes descriptions of the Bois Brule.

Further Ideas

There are two campgrounds along the Bois Brule. The first, located between Cty. B and Hwy. 2, is called Bois Brule Campground. The second, called Copper Range Campground is located 7 miles north of Hwy. 2. I can imagine devising a canoe-camp outing utilizing these campsites.

Conclusion

This is a world famous canoe stream for good reasons. It offers beauty and excitement and a variety of trip opportunities.

The Bois Brule’s headwaters originate in a large marshy area. Early travelers traversed this marsh to get from the Lake Superior basin into the Mississippi River basin, via the St. Croix River.
Brill River

**Location**
Washburn County.

**Natural Features**
Source is Slim Lake in Washburn County located 2 miles south of Stone Lake. Slim Creek flows into Long Lake which is raised several feet by a small dam. There the stream becomes the Brill River which soon enters Barron County where it exists for another 8 miles before it joins the Red Cedar River. The Brill flows through level glacial outwash terrain which is partially farmed. Much of the streamside is grassy or alder lined with low banks. Stream floor is sandy to gravelly. Water quality is quite good.

**Human History and Influence**
Cabins on Long Lake and nearby agriculture.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Upper stretches can be shallow. No rapids. Despite its small size I encountered no obstructions because sizeable streamside trees were few. The stream was mainly lined by grasses and alders.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
In July of 1990 I paddled my solo freestyle canoe from the Cty. D. bridge at the Long Lake outlet down to the 27 and a Half Ave. bridge. The water was higher than average due to recent rains. Consequently it was easy to float over shallow sections. This will not always be the case. After the Bridge Rd. bridge the water was consistently deeper and should generally be adequate for navigation. The trip was pleasant because of the clear water, undeveloped shores, narrow width, numerous deer sightings, and several green herons.

**Further Ideas**
Continue down to the Red Cedar River and then down that navigable stream.

**Conclusion**
Good option for paddlers in the area but not worth a long drive.
Brunet River

Location
Sawyer County.

Natural Features
This river begins in the Chequamagon National Forest in northeastern Sawyer County. It flows in a southwesterly direction towards its confluence with the Chippewa River a few miles south of Radisson. Lined by Northwoods flora, this small stream pours over glacial erratics boulders and Precambrian bedrock ledges. Its gradient is steep enough to form whitewater as it drops from the Northern Highland towards the Central Plain.

Human History and Influence
I am sure that the Brunet saw logging runs. Today there are no towns. Agriculture impacts the river to a moderate degree. Just east of Winter there is a dam which creates Lake Winter. Most of the river corridor is undeveloped and wild. The water quality is quite good.

Navigability and Difficulty
Each time I paddled the Brunet I was surprised by the lack of obstructing deadfall. The river does need extra water for comfortable navigability. Riffles and easy rapids are frequent and there is one significant rapid which will be mentioned below.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I have paddled the Brunet on several occasions. Twice in the 1980s I began day trips down my favorite section of the Chippewa River by starting on the Brunet. I would put in at the Pasanen bridge located less than two miles from the Chippewa confluence. This section was fun the first time when the water was high enough. The second time was another story. Unfortunately I was leading Sierra Club paddlers that day and the low water was frustrating. With adequate water this is a great way to start a trip down the Chippewa River past Hwy D and towards Bruce. With enough water it flows rapidly with minor riffles and class I drops through an attractive corridor with a persistently high left bank.

In 1982, I floated alone in my Ladybug from the Hwy. 27 bridge down to the Pasanen bridge. It was a brief but enjoyable trip covering only about three miles. I enjoyed a narrow but largely unobstructed stream which flowed past forests and lovely spring ephemerals wildflowers.

My big adventure on the Brunet came in early April of 1989. The Chippewa River was still frozen at Bruce but I was confident that the Brunet would be running and it was. The water was high because of the recent snow melt. The temperature was hovering around 32 degrees F. but I had heard nothing about snow in the forecast. So I left my mountain bike under the Hwy. 27 bridge and drove up to the Old J Bridge about 5 miles upstream. Soon I was happily slaloming through a lively Class II rapid in my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe. Then I spotted a horizon line and the crashing water sounds of a major drop. So I quickly headed to the left bank and hopped out to take a look. What I saw was a complicated
and tumultuous five foot drop over a broken bedrock ledge. With my whitewater canoe I would have run this solid Class III but not in my fragile little Ladybug. So I portaged around that left side and continued down this pretty little stream. After that slow wide sections alternated with fast narrow channels among islands. A porcupine in a tree peered down at me from its lofty perch.

I was having a great time but then it started to snow. By the time I reached my bike the ground was white and my bike was heavily coated with wet snow. The 8 mile ride back along Hw. 27 and Old Hwy. 70 was a miserable and frightening experience. I faced car traffic on snow-covered Hwy. 27. On Old 70 there were no cars but the road was very muddy and slick. Navigation was difficult but the worst part was facing the biting, snow-driven headwind.

**Experiences of Others**
Each time I paddled the Brunet I was surprised by the lack of obstructing deadfall. The river does need extra water for comfortable navigability. Riffles and easy rapids are frequent and there is one significant rapid which will be mentioned below.

**Further Ideas**
With high water it would be fun to paddle all the way from the Winter Dam to the Hwy. D bridge over the Chippewa near Exeland. This approximately 13 mile stretch could be run in about 5 hours under the right conditions. I would probably do it with others and bring my solo whitewater canoe so I could run that solid class III drop.

**Conclusion**
The Brunet is a nice Northwoods small stream option for experienced paddlers when the water is high. The rapids are easy except for that one Class III drop.

*The Brunet beckons on a Wisconsin autumn day.*
Chetek River

Location
Barron County.

Natural Features
Several small streams feed the “Chetek Chain of Lakes” which are raised to a constant level by a small dam in the city of Chetek. The outlet stream is called the Chetek River. It has a short life of only 5 miles before it empties into the Red Cedar River. Surprisingly wide, it meanders very slowly across a flat glacial outwash plain. Its shores are mostly marshy and the water quality if often poor due to algae blooms on the Chetek Lakes.

Human History and Influence
Chetek grew up as a lumbering town in the late 1800s. Logs were driven down the Chetek River. These days, the town’s main industry is tourism. The lakes and the river are polluted by livestock manure and agricultural chemicals.

Navigability and Difficulty
Wide enough and marshy enough to negate potential deadfall problems. Slow current means no rapids and low water should never be a problem.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I spent a couple of hour’s solo canoeing the Chetek River in July of 1981. I put in on river right somewhere on the outskirts of Chetek. Then I paddled down to the first bridge over the Red Cedar which is County. A. The paddling was slow and easy. There was not much to observe except the scores of ducks I frightened into the sky. I also watched the wakes created by scores of carp, but never saw their bodies because the water was so murky. It was also an easy ride on my bike back to Chetek.

Further Ideas
Continue further down the Red Cedar River.

Conclusion
This stream mainly has value for local paddlers looking for a brief outing or for those looking for a unique way to start a trip down the Red Cedar River. The current is weak enough to obviate the need for a shuttle if one makes a round trip by starting and ending at the same place.
Chippewa River (East Fork)

Location
Ashland and Sawyer counties.

Natural Features
Several headwater streams coalesce near Glidden to form the East Fork of the Chippewa River. From there it flows in a southwesterly direction into the Chequamegon National Forest. It remains in this forest all the way to the Chippewa Flowage where its waters blend with those of the West Fork. Along its wild, “Northwoodsy” way it often slows into quiet pools and natural lakes but it also narrows into fast and narrow rocky stretches through boulder fields comprised of Precambrian rocks.

Human History and Influence
The area was extensively logged and vestiges of logging days such as dams and camps can still be found. Upstream of the National Forest boundary there are few farms plus the tiny settlements of Glidden and Shannagolden. These human influences impact the river very little. Two dams do affect the East Fork. Winter Dam was constructed in 1923 and still generates power. It backs up the water of both forks into the Lake Chippewa Flowage. A second power generating dam sits by Snaptail Rapids about six miles upstream of Lake Chippewa. Good news about that dam came to paddlers and spawning sturgeon in early 2008. According to a River Alliance of Wisconsin newsletter, North American Hydro agreed to build a bypass to allow sturgeon and other fish to pass around the dam and to re-water a quarter mile of the river below the dam that was left high and dry when the river was diverted to the turbines. The dam is now owned by Renewable World Energies and, unlike NAH, not very committed to river conservation. For many years prior to this agreement, Snaptail Rapids was totally dry except during high water times.

Navigability and Difficulty
The East Fork is often too low for comfortable boating. The Cty. D bridge at Shannagolden spans some shallow rapids and should be a good place to judge the water level. It is located about three miles west of the Hwy. 13 community of Glidden. Intermediate whitewater skills are needed for safety and ease. Deadfall will not be a significant problem. The American Whitewater Website includes flow information and runnability advice on its website but the section from Blaisdell Lake to the Winter Dam is the only one covered.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I have paddled the East Fork twice and hope to return. In May of 1983 I was on my way to another river but took time to explore the 3 miles between Clover Rd. and FR. 1661. Rocky riffles alternated with quiet pools. As usual there was no water flowing left through the original channel, so I followed the diversion canal to the right until I reached the dam where my trip ended. In 1991, my wife, Pat and I canoed the 6 miles from Stock Farm Bridge to the FR 162 Bridge. Recent summer rains made it possible for us to enjoy the minor rapids and the wild scenery.

Experiences of Others
Gerald Lowry wrote the narrative descriptions for Wisconsin’s North Central Canoe Trails which was copyrighted in 1973. William Jipson drew the river maps for that out-of-print guidebook. They divided the 47 miles from Glidden and Winter Dam into three sections. Jipson’s maps depict seven named Class I
and II rapids in the 20 mile stretch between Glidden and Stockfarm Bridge and also two stretches which widen into lakes. In the 15 mile section from Stockbridge Farm Bridge to Blaisdell Lake he marks around a dozen minor rapids and also the widening known as Bear Lake. Balisdell Lake and two more lakes interrupt the river during its final 12 miles. Also included in this stretch is Snaptail Rapids. Lowry rates that rapids and the one called Goose Eye as Class III’s which are rated higher than the others. The latter drop is just downstream of Cty. B. Today’s ratings would probably classify them as II’s. The American Whitewater website includes descriptions of three sections of the East Fork.

**Further Ideas**
Over a three day stretch I think it would be fun to canoe-camp the entire 47 miles of the East Fork. As a whitewater paddler I would like to try my hand at the more challenging Snaptail and Goose Eye Rapids.

**Conclusion**
Most of the East Fork is a beautiful wilderness stream punctuated by rapids and lakes. Sufficient water to run the rapids is a relatively rare occurrence but, with water this stream presents day trip and canoe-camping opportunities for paddlers with intermediate whitewater skills.

*From this swampy lowland northeast of Glidden emerges the headwaters of the East Fork of the Chippewa.*
Chippewa River (West Fork)

Location
Sawyer, Bayfield, Ashland counties.

Natural Features
The West Fork begins in Chippewa Lake just east of the Clam Lake community. This stream flows southward entirely within the Chequamegon National Forest to its East Fork confluence which is buried under the flowage waters of Lake Chippewa behind the Winter Dam. The river winds among several upstream lakes before it settles into a pattern of alternating “widespread” pools and rapids which are narrow, fast and boulder-strewn. Most banks are fairly high and forested with upland “Northwoods” trees like white pines, aspens and birches.

Human History and Influence
The Mound Builders were followed by the Dakotas who were eventually forced out by the Ojibwa People. In 1872, the Lac Courte Oreilles Indian Reservation was established along the banks of the West Fork. The completion of the Winter Dam in 1923 was a tragedy for the Ojibwa Tribe because so much of their land, and so many of their dwellings and gravesites were inundated. Logging denuded much of the land along the West Fork and the river was used for logging runs. Tiny Clam Lake is the only municipality which remotely affects the river. There are many cabins on upstream lakeshores and along Highways 77 and Cty. S. These roads closely parallel the river. There are several dams including a sizeable one which creates Moose Lake.

Navigability and Difficulty
Fallen trees and logjams are not problems. Slow, deeper sections will always be navigable, but rapids become too shallow when the water is low. The rapids just downstream of the Moose Lake Dam or the rapids just downstream of Moose Lake Road’s Orange Bridge are probably good places to check the water level. Moose Lake is drawn down 7 feet in October. Consequently, for three weeks there is plenty of water.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In the early 1980s I twice paddled the lower West Fork from the Moose Lake Dam to County B. I was on the West Fork again in 2002 when I entered it from its tributary, the Torch River. (See my Torch River description.) My first trip was in a tandem canoe with a friend during the October Moose Lake draw down. A few years later I was back with another friend in early spring. That year the water was still high from melting snow. Both times the Class I and II rapids produced rollicking good fun. In 2002 I was further upstream on the West Fork. After coming in from the Torch River I encountered the remains of two “rock dams” and Fish Trap Rapids. All were easy to negotiate. When I reached Meadow Lake it was surrounded by thick patches of pickerel weed. Finding the main channel across this natural pool was not immediately obvious. But I located it and soon reached the next pool called Partridge Lake. My Belsky Bridge take out was now less than a mile away.

Experiences of Others
Glen Lowry provided the narrative and William Jipson drew the maps for the 1973 guidebook called Wisconsin’s North Central Canoe Trails. It broke the 24 miles from Upper Clam Lake to County B into two
trips. First was the nine miles from Upper Clam Lake to Belsky Bridge. This trip starts just downstream of the Hwy. 77 bridge and the stone dam at the lake’s outlet. It includes a paddle across Lower Clam Lake, a portage past its dam, several minor rapids, and several small, natural lakes. Lowry’s second trip is the 15 mile section from Belsky Bridge to County B. Those who paddle it will have to paddle across part of Moose Lake and portage around its dam. Before they reach the lake they will encounter some minor rapids, several small pools and at least two wild rice beds. The latter half of this trip is the one I did twice in the 1980s. Midway through are three sets of rapids which Lowry rates as Class II’s.

The American Whitewater website mentions the 7.4 miles from the Moose Lake Dam to the West Fork Bridge (County B). They include no details but rate it Class I-II.

**Further Ideas**
See my Torch River Trip which finished on the West Fork.

**Conclusion**
With enough water the Chippewa River’s West Fork is delightful northern stream. The entire 24 miles could be canoe-camped but lake paddling and portaging would be required. The best day trip option is the 7.4 mile section from Moose Lake Dam to Cty. B. Advanced beginner to intermediate whitewater skills are needed throughout.
Clam River

Location
Polk and Burnett counties.

Natural Features
The Clam River either begins in southern Burnett County where the North and South Forks meet, or in northeastern Polk County. Why the uncertainty? Because there seems to be some disagreement about whether the more southerly branch should be called the main Clam River or its South Fork. Whichever it is this southern branch flows northward through a northern conifer-hardwood forest dotted with many natural lakes. A few miles into Burnett County the North Fork merges and the land transitions into a Pine Barrens where jack pines and wide fields of sweet ferns are common. The Clam then traverses these Barrens all the way to the St. Croix River. Lakes abound in this region where glacial melt water filled the “pits” of the “pitted outwash” left behind by the melting Wisconsin Glacier.

Human History and Influence
Native Americans canoed the river and harvested wild rice along its quieter shores. Glen Lowry (see guidebook reference below) notes several historic logging era sites along the Clam. Upper and Lower Clam lakes are natural bodies of water but are now kept artificially high by an outlet dam. In logging days, Lowry writes that a steamboat named Lady Bernice pushed rafts of logs across these lakes. The Clam is dammed again in two other places: Upstream in Polk County one of these creates the Clam Falls Flowage. Downstream near the St. Croix River confluence another dam creates the Clam Flowage. The tiny community of Clam Falls sits next to the former dam and is the only town along the river. Because of this and minimal agriculture the Clam River’s water quality is very good.

Navigability and Difficulty
There are no rapids on the Clam but the sandy soil does not hold tree roots very well. Consequently, fallen trees across the river are common in some areas. Low water will seldom be a problem.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In the 1980s, I paddled my solo freestyle Ladybug canoe from the county park below Clam Dam to Meenon Park on Hwy. 35. It was a lovely 5 mile trip which I followed with a 3.5 mile jog back to my car. Clear water carried me down an attractive corridor which offered viewings of several wood ducks, a bald eagle and a gaggle of Canada geese. To my surprise, it included no deadfall portages.

Experiences of Others
The Clam River was one of the canoe trips described by Glen Lowry in the out-of-print Canoeing the Wild Rivers of Northwestern Wisconsin. His description begins on the South Fork (or is it the main Clam?) at the Soderberg Rd. bridge just south of Cty. B. From there it is 6 miles to the Lynch Rd. bridge. He writes that portages around logs and fallen trees will be necessary in this stretch. From that point he describes consecutive 13-and 20-mile trips down the river, across the lakes and over one flowage to the St. Croix River.
Further Ideas
Reading Lowry’s description of the lower Clam, I conclude that the stretch from Meenon Park on Hwy. 35 to the Ice House Road bridge should offer a pleasant 8 or 9 miles of canoeing. Hopefully the deadfall obstructions will not be too plentiful. He writes that they are more likely to be problematic downstream of the Ice House Road bridge. So why venture beyond that point when it will lead to the dead water of the Clam Flowage anyway?

Personally, I am tempted to try the first 6 miles described by Lowry because I am drawn to small rivers and I tolerate fallen trees better than most.

Conclusion
Those 6 miles I paddled between Lower Clam Lake and Hwy. 35 were nice enough to recommend to anyone. Other sections? I am not so sure because of the deadfall potential and the dams.
Clam River (North Fork)

Location
Southern Burnett County.

Natural Features
Headwaters arise a mile east of the Washburn County community of Shell Lake. The North Fork flows in a westerly direction before joining up with the South Fork to form the main Clam River which continues westward to the St. Croix River. Its corridor is largely undeveloped as the stream flows through marshes, bottomland forests and uplands typical of the “North woods.” Water quality is good and rapids are lacking.

Human History and Influence
Of course, the river’s corridor was logged but no permanent communities were left behind. Nearby farms are few but there is a commercial cranberry bog operation located along the river about 2 miles north of the Cty. B bridge.

Navigability and Difficulty
This is a small and narrow stream making it prone to deadfall obstructions. Low water is generally not a problem in navigable sections and there are no rapids. Bridge scouting should be suitable for judging water levels.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Pat was my wife at the time. She and I ventured onto the North Fork in July of 1985. We slipped my Mad River Explorer into the water at the Cty. B bridge and paddled downstream through a beautiful wetland blessed by blossoming white water lilies and arrowweeds. The cranberry bog was not evident to us, but we were not looking for it. Our delight with this stream and its clear water ended abruptly after about an hour and a half when the open marshy section came to an end. Then we encountered many fallen trees and logjams which we had to portage over and around. The sheer number of these obstructions became very frustrating. But we eventually made it to the Malone Road Bridge where I had left my bicycle for the shuttle.

Experiences of Others
Glen Lowry wrote up the North Fork of the Clam in his now out of print *Canoeing the Wild Rivers of Northwestern Wisconsin*. The “Canoe Trail” he described began the same place Pat and I started but his continued down to the Lynch Bridge and into Clam Lake. He mentioned only an occasional need for “small portages.” The South Fork joins in from river left about a mile upstream of the Lynch Road bridge so a trip ending at this bridge ends on the main Clam River.

Further Ideas
I think a couple of hours spent on the North Fork would be a very good experience if executed the following way: Put in at the Cty. B bridge and complete a round trip outing back to the same place. Paddle downstream through the wetland portion and turn around when the going gets rough. You may even want to explore upstream of the bridge for a ways before turning around.
**Conclusion**
This is a very nice little stream with sections where deadfall problems are significant. Consider the outing described immediately above.
Couderay River

Location
Sawyer County.

Natural Features
The Couderay River is only about 15 miles long but it carries a significant amount of water. The reason is that it drains a series of large lakes south of Hayward which are themselves fed by a series of small creeks. It flows with slow to moderate current over a streambed of sandy and rocky glacial deposits. The stream floor is easy to view through clear water. There are some rocky riffles and a few minor rapids. Streamside alders are backed by larger representatives of the Northern conifer-hardwood forest.

Human History and Influence
The Couderay was a link along a very important water route for Native Americans, and also for early white explorers and fur traders. In 1660, the French explorers, Pierre Raddisson and Medard Groseillers were the first whites to travel this river which linked the Chippewa River with the Namekagon River. Today, an historic marker along Hwy. 27 marks the portage trail they and others used to cross the land between the headwater lakes and the Namekagon River.

By the late 1800s, the Couderay River had become important to the logging industry. There were many sawmills along the river including 4 in the town of Couderay, which at one time was home to 2000 people. Now it population barely reaches 100. Couderay, by the way, is the phonetic spelling of the French “Courte Oreilles” (meaning, roughly, “short ears”) which happens to be the name of the Ojibwa Indian Reservation which borders some of the river.

A small dam forms the Billy Boy Flowage just north of Hwy. 70 and only a couple of miles south of the river’s source at the outlet of Little Lac Courte Oreilles. A second dam at the village of Radisson was removed in 2002. Though the village considered repairing it, the town fathers became convinced by the River Alliance of Wisconsin and others that the benefits of a small flowage did not justify its monetary and environmental costs.

The river is closely followed on river left by Hwys. 27/70. Consequently, numerous homes and cabins will be seen along the left bank.

Navigability and Difficulty
The Couderay usually has enough water for a good run though the minor rapids can get a bit scratchy. Inexperienced paddles might get hung it in these stretches but should pose no real danger. Fallen trees should not be a significant problem.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In 1982, I ran a three mile section of the Couderay with a friend in a tandem canoe. We paddled from the Cty. C bridge and took out at the bridge on the east end of the village of Couderay. That September
day we were treated to the site of many migrating songbirds and also a green heron. I wish we would have taken the time to explore more of the river.

**Experiences of Others**
Glen Lowry wrote about Couderay in the out-of-print *Wisconsin’s North Central Canoe Trails*. His first “trail” was a 12 mile, mostly lake paddling section which began at Windigo Lake and ended at the Billy Boy Dam. Then he described a second section of either 13 or 16 miles starting at that dam and ending at either Radisson or the Chippewa River. Just upstream of County C he describes a “weir” dam which he says can easily be run in the center. I wonder if this man-made obstruction is still there.

**Further Ideas**
A trip down the Chippewa River could certainly begin on the Couderay.

**Conclusion**
The Couderay River is an attractive, clear river which is small but easy to paddle. A day trip from the Billy Boy Dam to Radisson is one that paddlers should consider.
Deertrail Creek

Location
Rusk County.

Natural Features
Deertail Creek is a minor stream which begins a few miles north of Glen Flora on U.S. Hwy. 8. It flows with a moderate current through a northern conifer hardwood forest and is punctuated by rocky riffles and minor rapids. Rocks in the streambed were dropped there by the Wisconsin Glacier (making them "glacial erratics"). All are ancient (Pre-Cambrian) and most are igneous in origin. Deertail Creek flows into Lake Holcombe, an impoundment of the Chippewa River.

Human History and Influence
Deertail Creek flows past the village of Tony but near no other communities. Its upper stretches are impacted by agriculture but there are fewer farms along the lower river.

Navigability and Difficulty
Often too shallow during dry periods. Bridge scouting is recommended to determine whether there is enough water. Fallen trees will be encountered but should not be too numerous. Riffles and minor rapids are minor challenges with adequate water but will require canoe dragging at low water times.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I paddled Deertail Creek alone once in the 1980s. There was plenty of water for me on that late April day as I guided my Ladybug around the narrow stream’s many bends. Only a couple of portages around downed trees were required. Mostly it was wild and pretty but I did have a close encounter with some Holstein cows. It took only about an hour to paddle from the Hwy. 27 bridge to my take out at the end of Daley Rd. Then I jogged back to my car.

Experiences of Others
Michael Duncanson writes briefly about the Deertail Creek in his out-of-print Wisconsin’s North Central Canoe Trails. His put-in was the Hwy. 27 bridge and his take-out was the Cty. D bridge just before the Chippewa River confluence. His description mentions “difficult shallows” during low water times, the need to “scramble over a few fallen trees,” and his map marks three “especially good fishing holes.”

Further Ideas
Here is an idea for a brief round trip: Start at the County D Bridge and explore the Deertail Creek arm of Lake Holcomb.
Eau Claire River

Location
Douglas and Bayfield counties.

Natural Features
A couple of small creeks and lakes feed into Upper Eau Claire Lake in Bayfield County. Water flows slowly westward through Middle and Lower Eau Claire Lakes. At the latter’s outlet, the Eau Claire River emerges over a small dam and flows for 14 miles down to the St. Croix River at Gordon. Bedrock sandstone to the north was ground up by glaciation, carried by melt waters and deposited as sandy “pitted” outwash. The “pits” remain water-filled accounting for the region’s many lakes.

The very sandy soil supports the grasses, shrubs, and scattered trees of a true pine savanna. Scattered among the sweet ferns and other low vegetation species are jack pines and red pines. The land is relatively flat, so the river has a fairly low gradient though it moves steadily downward into the valley of the St. Croix River. A series of riffles and Class I rapids form as the clear water makes this descent over gravel beds and over scattered glacial erratic boulders.

Human History and Influence
The Eau Claire Chain of Lakes was an important center of logging in the 1890s. Logs were cut in nearby pineries and gathered in the lakes. Then with the spring melt they were driven down the Eau Claire River to the St. Croix and beyond. The outlet of Lower Eau Claire Lake was once the site of a logging dam. Mooney Dam, which regulates the water level of Lower Eau Claire Lake, has taken its place. 3.1 miles downstream of this dam, paddlers need to maneuver around the remains of the old timber foundations of a mostly destroyed old logging dam. There is a second modern dam which spans the river just upstream of Gordon.

Area soils are too sandy for profitable agriculture. The clear Eau Claire Chain of Lakes have long been popular with fishermen, cabin dwellers and power boating tourists.

Navigability and Difficulty
This “user friendly” stream tends to hold enough water to stay navigable through the summer. It is also not deadfall prone because sizeable streamside trees are rare. Typically the water course is lined with tag alders. None of the rapids rate greater then Class I, but care must be taken around the remains of the old logging dam I mentioned above.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I was down this river twice in the late seventies and again in 1981. Each time I tandem paddled the 11.5 miles from Mooney Dam into the flowage just upstream of Gordon. There I took out on river left at the landing depicted off Cty. G. in the Wisconsin Gazetteer. Each trip was delightful making me wonder why I have not returned.

Experiences of Others
This same trip is described in two out of date guidebooks: Whitewater, Quietwater and Canoeing the Wild Waters of Northwestern Wisconsin. Both attest to the river’s wild character, easy canoeability and
its clear water. They both mention the possibility of extending the trip another three miles down onto the St. Croix River where there is a Ranger Station take out on river right.

**Conclusion**
This is a beautiful, clear, and wild stream which is suitable for most canoeists and kayakers. It is a perfect day trip possibility for a hot summer day because swimming opportunities abound.
Fish Creek

Location
Bayfield County.

Natural Features
Most of Fish Creek is an estuary or “slough” which empties into Chequamegon Bay of Lake Superior on the western outskirts of Ashland. The watershed is drained by North Fish Creek and South Fish Creek which merge to form Fish Creek about a half mile from Lake Superior. The entire watershed lies in lowland which once was inundated by Glacial lake Duluth. Red clay sediments were left behind when that lake receded. Sand and peat deposits are also found along Fish Creek. Rocks are generally lacking. A variety of conifer-hardwoods and bottomland trees line the upper branches whereas emergent marshes, shrub swamps and hardwood swamps are the norm near Lake Superior. The slough is subject to the tide-like movements of water known as “seiches.” This phenomenon and other factors make this wetland an ideal environment for birds. It is also an important spawning ground for fish.

Human History and Influence
Agriculture and the proximity to Ashland have long challenged the health of Fish Creek and its tributaries. That community has a rich history as a port on Lake Superior. There are no other human communities which impact the watershed. Some sections of Fish Creek and North Fish Creek have been designated as State Fishery areas. The DNR reports that efforts to reduce extensive stands of invasive purple loosestrife stands have met with limited success.

Navigability and Difficulty
I tried and failed to explore the Fish Creek branches. I spent a short time on North Branch before I encountered major logjams and turned around. My put-in spot for that aborted trip was the landing by the U.S. Hwy 2 bridge. Then I bridge-scouted the South Branch from the Hwy. 137 bridge and decided that this stream was not navigable either. The trip I describe below should always be easy to accomplish.

Trip Ideas: My experience
I drove to the landing next to the second Hwy. 2 bridge west of Ashland. There I entered the Fish Creek estuary in my Bell Wildfire canoe. Initially I followed a quarter mile blind alley into the marsh. After back tracking I found a channel with a slight current and headed upstream. I passed purple loosestrife, joe-pye weed, turtleheads, angelica, bulrushes, sedges and burr reed. Soon I turned right into a channel I felt pretty sure was the North Branch. Tag alders began to appear and within a few more minutes I was in a black ash-dominated swamp. Fallen trees soon forced me to turn around. So, I headed back to the South Branch confluence and turned to ascend that branch. A green heron led me as far upstream as I could go. After about 15 minutes on the South Branch, woody obstructions forced me to turn around and I paddled back to my car.

Conclusion
This was a very enjoyable round trip outing which did not require a shuttle. I encourage others to explore the diverse vegetation and birdlife of this lovely Lake Superior estuary.
Flambeau River (Mainstem)

**Location**
Tributaries of the Flambeau River’s North and South Forks both originate in Vilas County. The forks merge in far southeastern Sawyer County. The main Flambeau then flows southward into Rusk County where it joins the Chippewa River near the Chippewa County line.

**Natural Features**
Like its forks, the Flambeau River descends towards the Central Sand Plain from the Northern Highland. At times the gradient is steep enough to form rapids, especially where Precambrian boulders or granite bedrock block the river’s path. The Flambeau travels through northern conifer-hardwood forests. At its confluence with the Chippewa River, the Flambeau is more voluminous than the Chippewa, but the latter river wins out and keeps its name.

**Human History and Influence**
The Flambeau-Chippewa system was heavily used as a transportation route by Native Americans and later by European fur traders. In the 1800s it was used to transport and store logs. Today it still reveals many relics of the logging era. The Flambeau River is impacted by 4 dams which is one less than there used to be. Many rapids and falls are buried beneath its impounded waters. Ladysmith is the only town on the river. Agriculture impacts the river near Ladysmith and points downstream. The river receives polluted effluent from its North Fork because of a paper mill at Park Falls. For several years in the 1990s a copper mine operated near the Flambeau’s banks a few miles south of Ladysmith. I carried a protest sign and marched with others to oppose the digging of this mine. It eventually came to fruition and then it closed when all the useful ore had been extracted. The abandoned mine is being closely monitored. To my knowledge it has not yet caused damage to the river.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
The first five miles of the Flambeau include a series of rapids which require intermediate whitewater skills. After that there are no significant rapids. There is always enough water for a good run.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
In the late 1970s I paddled the North Fork into the Main Flambeau with friends in tandem aluminum canoes. We camped at the Cedar Rapids Campsite. The next day we paddled down to the Flambeau Lodge on the Big Falls Flowage. Despite our inexperience we managed to stay upright when we ran Cedar Rapids and Beaver Dam Rapids which are both significant class II’s.

In 2005 and with many years of experience under our belts, Bill Read and I somehow managed to flip our tandem canoe in Cedar Rapids. Never get too smug about your abilities. We were very careful when we reached Beaver Dam Rapids and managed to stay upright. Minutes later we reached our take-out landing on river right. In the 1970s we paddled one more rapids and then reached the Big Falls Flowage on our way to Flambeau Lodge. After that there are two dams before Ladysmith so here is not much flowing water to paddle.

On two occasions I have accessed the Flambeau on river left just downstream of the Hwy. 27 bridge in Ladysmith. Each time Carter Leslie and I fished the river from that access to the old Port Arthur dam site.
When the old dam was removed in 1969, rock cribs which long ago anchored booms by an old pulp mill became visible again. Carter and I had good smallmouth bass fishing luck on both of those trips and took out on river right along 101 Trail near the old dam site.

Sometime in the late 1990s I explored the final 8 miles of the Flambeau from the Hansen Rd. Bridge to Flater’s Resort at the Chippewa confluence. It was a wide, easy and somewhat monotonous stretch of river. It certainly qualifies as “family friendly.” County E follows the river and provides a handy bike shuttle route. My tandem partner and I used this mode of travel to retrieve our vehicle at the put in.

**Experiences of Others**
Mike Svob includes several sections of the Flambeau in his *Paddling Northern Wisconsin*. The American Whitewater website includes a description of the 4.9 mile stretch from Hervas Landing through Beaver Dam Rapids.

**Further Ideas**
The Flambeau has long been a famous river for canoe-camping. I did this once in the 1970s and again in 2005. Someday I would like to paddle the entire Manitowish River to where it becomes the North Fork of the Flambeau. Then I would like to ride the North Fork to the main Flambeau and paddle it all the way to the Chippewa River. There would be lots of flat water impoundments and dams to portage but it would be an interesting trip.

**Conclusion**
The Flambeau River and its upstream forks are deservedly famous. They present many excellent paddling opportunities. Write-ups for the North and South Forks can be found in the North Central section of this Guide.
One of the many fun rapids paddlers will encounter (this one on the North Fork) of the Flambeau River.
Iron River

Location
Bayfield County.

Natural Features
The Iron River is one of a series of streams which flows from the heights of the Douglas Range to Lake Superior. Its main branch begins in Iron Lake just to the southwest of the village of of Iron River. The river cuts through igneous rock, then sandstone and finally red clay as it flows north. Rapids form but are less challenging than those on the Bois Brule or the Amnicon. The East Branch of the Iron River begins to the north and east of Iron River. The two branches merge about 3 miles from the Lake Superior mouth. This region was originally forested by boreal trees including spruces and balsam firs. Today these species mix with birches, aspens and white pines.

Human History and Influence
Commercial logging came late to this region of Wisconsin. By this time railroads moved the logs instead of rivers. The settlement of Iron River was served by a rail line and became a logging boom town around the turn of the 20th century. These days it is a tourist town which services the users of area lakes in the warm months and snowmobilers in the winter. There are a few dairy farms north of town near the river. A dam near the river’s mouth created the Orienta Flowage in 1947. After it was severely damaged by a 1985 flood it was never rebuilt. Finally, in 2001 all vestiges of the old dam were removed. A low-head barrier was constructed to stop sea lampreys and migratory fish from moving upstream. The barrier is controversial because some wish to remove it to facilitate fish migration.

Navigability and Difficulty
Fallen trees will be encountered but not in great numbers. The rapids are mostly class Is but there may be some II’s. Orienta Falls must be tougher because it drops 15-20 feet in 200 yards. Extra water will be needed for a good run. Bridge scouting may be required. Monitoring the nearby Bois Brule River on the USGS website might be helpful in determining runnability.

Trip Ideas: My experience
In the summer of 1996 I drove south on Falls Rd. to the site of the Orienta Dam. The flowage had been drained but I could not see the falls. Perhaps at that time it was buried under sediment or perhaps it was still hidden by the remains of the old dam. Just below the dam I found a place to put in on river right. On the water I immediately passed a high sandstone bluff on that same side. After about a half hour the river widened and the current stopped because I had entered the estuary waters of Lake Superior. I paddled on to the Hwy. 13 bridge and walked from there back to my car.

Experiences of Others
My old paddling friend, Pat Brennaman told me he had canoed most of the river sometime in the 1980s. He enjoyed the trip and recalled minor rapids but no details.
Further Ideas
I would like to explore more of this river. Perhaps I will put-in near U.S. Hwy. 2 or at the County Bridge. I would like to see what the old flowage basin looks like after some vegetation regrowth. With the sediment presumably washed away I would also like to see Orienta Falls and the rest of the newly revealed sandstone gorge. Perhaps I will decide to paddle the falls.
Loon Creek

Location
Burnett County.

Natural Features
Loon Creek links several lakes in the Pine Barrens region of northwestern Wisconsin. It joins the Yellow River a short distance before that river merges with the St. Croix River at Danbury. The glacial outwash soils of this region are very sandy so the predominant trees are scrub oaks and jack pines. Blueberry bushes and sweet ferns are common in the understory. After winding slowly among the lakes Loon Creek drops precipitously to the St. Croix in its last several miles exposing Precambrian boulders along the way.

Human History and Influence
Cabins ring the chain of lakes which are linked by Loon Creek. Several of them are raised several feet by a dam situated at the outlet of Minerva Lake. The confluence of Loon Creek and the Yellow River was historically a gathering place for Native Americans. According to Glen Lowry (see below), “Henry Schoolcraft came here as an Indian agent about 1830 and gave smallpox vaccinations to Indians.”

Navigability and Difficulty
There are two very different sections of Loon Creek. The upper sections are slow and generally will have enough water. Occasional deadfall may present problems. The final two miles feature constant Class II rapids. Fallen trees may cause obstructions here and the water will often be too low for a good run. The gauge by the river left side of the dam at Minerva Lake was 3.70 the day I ran it. This level is an absolute minimum. A higher level would be better but a very high reading could increase the difficulty to Class III.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I came to Loon Creek with my non-whitewater Bell Wildfire canoe. My put-in was just below the Minerva Lake Dam. To get there I followed Minerva Rd. south from Danbury and then turned left on Flowage Rd. Earlier I had left my bicycle locked to a tree by the Yellow River-St. Croix River confluence. For a while after I put in there was ample time to appreciate its crystal clear beauty. I saw many minnows, some clams and several smallmouth bass. Stately oaks covered the high ground on the left while a tamarack bog dominated the right shoreline.

After about 10 minutes the lazy stream underwent a personality change. It narrowed, picked up steam and never slowed down. It marched noticeably downhill through a rocky gorge all the way to the Yellow River. Since there was barely enough water I stayed very busy maneuvering between multiple rocks and logs. It was all my Wildfire could handle. I made it through OK and was actually thankful for the low water. Then, as suddenly as the whitewater had begun, it ended at the Yellow River confluence. Ten minutes later I reached the take-out and rode my bike back to the put-in.

That first Loon Creek experience of mine must have been in about 2003. In late May of 2005 I came back to taste a quietwater section of this creek. First I drove along Eagle Lake Rd. to its bridge over Loon Creek. The sky looked threatening but the little stream looked irresistible. So, I unloaded my canoe from the car and began to paddle downstream with the idea of taking out at Briggs Lake Rd. and then running back to my car. Unfortunately, it soon was raining hard, so I turned around after about 5 minutes on the water. In this brief time I had experienced a narrow but navigable waterway which was piercing an attractive wetland. So I was sorry I had to abort the trip.
After the rain stopped I decided to try a round trip starting upstream from the Briggs Rd. bridge. I put in and paddled against a lazy current for a half an hour. Late day lighting intensified the soft greens of early spring. Blooming marsh marigolds graced the shores. I heard the whirring call of a veery and then the drumming of a ruffed grouse. The stream narrowed and a low beaver dam loomed ahead. I was able to lunge my canoe over it without climbing out. Then I reached a very narrow spot where there were some rocks and a low, human-erected dam. Ahead I could see the marsh I had briefly entered early in the day but I chose to turn around a paddle back to the Briggs Rd. bridge.

**Experiences of Others**
In the out-of-print *Canoeing the Wild Rivers of Northwestern Wisconsin*, Glen Lowry briefly mentioned Loon Creek under his narrative on the Yellow River. He wrote, “Loon Creek can be used as a canoe trip in itself. The creek provides access to the Loon Creek chain and Lake Twenty Six. More than twenty lakes can be reached with only a few portages. Water levels are acceptable for canoeing during much of the season.”

**Further Ideas**
With plenty of water I would like to run the whitewater stretch in a whitewater canoe.

**Conclusion**
With enough water Loon Creek offers a short whitewater run. Further upstream the creek links a series of lakes. Those who paddle between the lakes will find both woodsy and wetland sections. Its small size means that obstructions will be encountered.
Lower Ox Creek

**Location**
Douglas County.

**Natural Features**
Its name changes three times as this creek drains a small area of the sandy pine barrens of southeastern Douglas County. Mud Creek becomes Upper Ox Creek which flows into Upper Ox Lake. The outflow of this lake is named Lower Ox Creek which keeps this name all the way to the St. Croix River. Along the way, Lower Ox Creek flows in and out of Lower Ox Lake. From that lake’s outlet it flows for less than a mile before it reaches the St. Croix. The valley here was once a huge spillway which drained Glacial Lake Duluth in a southerly direction. The final half mile of Lower Ox Creek is part of the wetland which now occupies this valley. Between Lower Ox Lake and this marsh the creek drops several feet through a Precambrian boulder field creating some minor rapids. The vegetation is “northwoodsy” and features many attractive cedar trees.

**Human History and Influence**
The region is sparsely populated and there are no nearby communities. The lakes are small and mostly undeveloped.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Upstream of Lower Ox Lake the creek is very narrow with low volume. It may be possible to travel downstream from Flat Lake Rd. when the water is high even though the creek here is very narrow. Obstructing fallen trees are likely to be rare because it appears to be lined by alders rather than by large trees. Obstructions were minimal on my trip described below, but low water may make navigation difficult. There is no easy way to scout this section of the creek. Its rapids rate no greater than Class I.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
One spring day in the late 1990s I decided to explore this small stream. First I left my bicycle at the terminus of Cut Away Rd. on the west side of the St. Croix River about two miles upstream of the confluence of Lower Ox Creek and the St. Croix River. I knew I could easily paddle upstream to reach this point because of the weak current. Next I drove to Lower Ox Lane which led to Lower Ox Lake where I found a landing not marked in the Gazetteer. I paddled my Bell Wildfire across this pretty lake which was surprisingly undeveloped. The current picked up quickly from the outlet as its shallow and clear water flowed among dozens of boulders. Though my Wildfire sustained a few scrapes I was able to navigate this maze. Cedar trees arose from the shorelines with yellow marsh marigolds at their feet. The creekway widened when I reached the marsh and numerous islands appeared. The wind was strong and the resultant waves made it difficult to determine which way the current was going. It took me at least 10 minutes to realize I was heading down the St. Croix instead of up. Aided by a strong tailwind I turned around and found the correct route heading upstream to the north. After an easy, wind aided upstream paddle of about 2 miles I could see where the wide riverway constricted radically. This was the site of the old Cut Away Dam and my take out point. There I began a 12 mile bike shuttle back to my car. All this for just three river miles but well worth it. Coincidentally, the canoe trip and the bike ride each took about an hour and 20 minutes to complete.
**Experiences of Others**
Glen Lowry described this creek in his out-of-print *Canoeing the Wild Rivers of Northwestern Wisconsin*. I was surprised that his narrative gave names to two of the creek’s low grade rapids. The first was Hennessy Rips and the second was Heffelfinger Rapids.

**Further Ideas**
Upon reaching the St. Croix River, I could have turned downstream instead of up and traveled 4-5 miles to the take-out at the public landing at the Gordon ranger station. As I mentioned above it may be possible during high water times to start a trip further upstream at the Flat Lake Rd. bridge.

**Conclusion**
Lower Ox Creek is a viable and scenic small stream option. This is also one way to enter and explore a slow and marshy section of the St. Croix River.
Marengo River

Location
Southeastern 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 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 accidentally 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 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. 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.
McDermott Creek

**Location**
Rusk County.

**Natural Features**
This creek drains a small area of southwestern Rusk County. It arises south of Weyerhauser and flows southward to Potato Lake. That lake is drained by Potato Creek which eventually joins the Chippewa River.

This is farm-to-Northwoods transition country. It is situated between a terminal moraine to the west and pitted outwash to the east. Small lakes dot the area. Much of the creek’s immediate corridor is marshy.

**Human History and Influence**
Farms but no villages influence this stream. The Gazetteer depicts a small flowage just north of the County F bridge, but the dam which created this impoundment has been removed.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
There are no rapids but downed trees will present themselves in some sections. Water levels should generally be adequate.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
Why did I explore this tiny creek? Because it was close to Pine Lake where I owned a home for many years. In mid June of 1990 I launched my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe from the Buck Lake Rd. bridge and paddled northward against a very slow current into an attractive wetland. Deadfall was lacking, so I was able to ascend the narrow stream for about a half mile before I encountered a beaver dam and decided to turn around. After I passed under my put-in bridge I entered the drained flowage portion of this creekway. A short distance upstream of the County F bridge I could identify the old dam site.

Downstream of that bridge I soon entered a flooded hardwood forest. After about a half mile of paddling through a currentless maze, I discovered why this swamp existed. A giant beaver dam was backing up a huge head of water. I was tempted to portage this dam to see if I could reach Potato Lake. Instead, I turned around and returned to my put-in bridge. I suspect that woody obstructions would have made reaching that lake a difficult task.

**Further Ideas**
Perhaps it is possible to reach all the way to Potato Lake by paddling down McDermott Creek. Or one could find its inlet to Potato Lake and paddle upstream.

**Conclusion**
I wonder if anyone has paddled this obscure creek besides me. Someone else should try it.
Middle River

Location
Douglas County.

Natural Features
The Middle River’s headwaters are located in high boggy forests of north central Douglas County. It flows northward and empties into Lake Superior. Its streambed features many boulders dropped by the Wisconsin Glacier. It cuts through the volcanic bedrock of the Douglas Range and then through Lake Superior sandstone before finally cutting a swath through the red clays of the Lake Superior lowland. These clays were deposited at the bottom of Glacial Lake Duluth. Because it descends steeply downhill through many rocks, the Middle does include numerous rapids. It drains a boreal forest which means there are more spruces and balsam firs than in more southerly portions of Wisconsin’s Northwoods.

Human History and Influence
Native Americans and early white explorers would have used the Middle though it was not part of a major water highway. The Middle River’s drainage area was logged and then efforts were made to farm the better soils. Dairy farms are found these days but most of the region is sparsely populated. No towns or villages populate its shores. Consequently, the water quality is quite good. There are a couple of small dams.

Navigability and Difficulty
The Middle River’s small size, significant gradient, and ubiquitous rocks make it a seldom paddled river. Whitewater skills are needed and the water will usually be too low. Class II rapids are present and there may be some Class III’s when the water is high. Though it is narrow, deadfall problems will be uncommon. Bridge scouting may be necessary to determine if the water is high enough. The American Whitewater website contains flow information and runnability advice.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I paddled the Middle River in 1985. September rains had raised it to a boatable level. Pat Brennaman and I used our solo whitewater canoes and his teenage son, Nate, used his kayak. We spent about 3.5 hours exploring the river between Middle River Road and Moonshine Road. Much of this stretch was a fast continuous Class I boulder garden. Early on we ran a small dam which had a runnable chute. We had expected more challenging whitewater. I see in the Gazetteer that we would have crossed a topo line had we extended our trip north of Moonshine Rd. If we had done so, I suspect we would have encountered some class II and possibly Class III water. The American Whitewater Website does include a description of the 9 miles from Lackson Rd. to Sleepy Valley Loop. The latter is located just north of Hwy 13. They rate this section Class I-II. A dam just upstream of the Hwy. 13 requires a portage.
Further Ideas
Pat and I have talked of someday exploring the rest of the Middle down to Lake Superior where there is a boat landing.

Conclusion
The Middle River is a picturesque whitewater run. At high water times it can be run instead of or in addition to the nearby Amnicon and Bois Brule rivers.
Moose Ear Creek

Location
Barron County.

Natural Features
The headwaters of Moose Ear Creek emerge from the southern slopes of the Blue Hills. The creek flows south and eventually enters the waters of Lake Chetek. That lake, in turn, is drained by the Chetek River which joins the Red Cedar River.

Human History and Influence
North of U.S. Hwy. 8 this creek’s corridor is forested and relatively unspoiled. South of Hwy. 8 it enters farm country and is subject to polluted runoff. I am quite sure there was a chain of lakes next to the city of Chetek before the dam was built at the outlet of Lake Chetek. Now the chain’s lakes are maintained at a constant level which is higher than their original natural levels.

Navigability and Difficulty
The short stretch I paddled should always have enough water and deadfall problems should be minimal. The current is slow and there are no rapids.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I never would have paddled Moose Ear Creek had it not been so close to my northern Chippewa County lake home. In June of 1987 I did explore it. I slid my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe into this narrow stream at the County D bridge just east of Chetek. The muddy water looked unappealing and I expected a gauntlet of fallen trees would confront me. To my surprise, the water cleared somewhat and most of the creekway was unobstructed. I jumped out twice to pull my canoe over fallen trees. Before long I found myself winding through a treeless marsh.

After rounding one bend I found myself face to face with a very tame young fawn which seemed unfazed by my presence. The creek’s current gradually slowed to a halt as I entered the green, algae-filled waters of Lake Chetek. I followed the right shoreline and was hailed by a friendly cabin owner who offered to watch my canoe while I ran back to my vehicle. He even told me about a short cut back which I had been unaware of. The entire outing had lasted less than 2 hours. Three public landings would have been available to me had I paddled further along the right shore.

Further Ideas
Paddlers may wish to start from the lake and paddle as far as they can up Moose Creek before turning around for a round trip.

Conclusion
Moose Ear Creek is a brief outing option for paddlers who visit the Chetek area.
Moose River

**Location**
Ashland and Sawyer counties.

**Natural Features**
The Moose River is a tributary of the Chippewa River's West Fork. It begins in the swamps and forests of southwestern Ashland County. Much of the river’s immediate corridor consists of alders and marshy vegetation. Black spruces often grow just beyond the corridor of shorter plants. The receding Wisconsin Glacier dropped rocks of various sizes along the stream course and granite bedrock is revealed at least once. Not much elevation is lost so the current is medium to slow.

**Human History and Influence**
The Moose drains a very sparsely populated region of the Chequamegon National Forest. Much of the forest has regrown since the logging era. There are no farms and roads are few. For these reasons, water quality is very good. The hand of man is evident where the Moose River meets the West Branch of the Chippewa River. The confluence is buried beneath a flowage called Moose Lake which floods the final four miles of the Moose River.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Because much of the Moose River is slow and marshy it tends to stay navigable through most seasons. One rocky stretch mentioned below will certainly be difficult to float when the water is low. The rocky riffles at the Forest Rd. 174 bridge should be a good place to judge the water level. The only rapid is a brief squeeze through a granite outcrop which I mention below. Much of the corridor is lined by low vegetation so there is a paucity of fallen trees and logjams.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
I explored the Moose alone in my solo freestyle canoe one late June day in the year 2000. My inspiration was Frank Piraino’s account in *Small River Adventures of Wisconsin*. He put in at the Forest Rd. 173 bridge and so did I.

Recent rains had raised the river to a higher than average level for this early summer day. I wound slowly down the narrow stream course over water which was clear but deeply stained by natural tannins. Grassy vegetation and tag alders covered the low banks. Beyond the immediate corridor I could see spruces and aspens. Blue flag flowers brought intermittent splashes of color to the water’s edge. Blue-winged teals and common mergansers took wing when I disturbed them. The water was so high I could bull my way over several beaver dams. I skirted one high bank on river right which was topped by towering white pines. Its level crest looked like an ideal camping spot.

After I had been on the water for about an hour and a half, the river changed. I was approaching a granite outcrop and a forest of tall trees. The river narrowed into a couple of channels between granite outcrops. Unfortunately both were blocked by logjams so I portaged around the Class I plunge. Then I negotiated a rock garden through the forest. This stretch likely becomes too low to paddle under most conditions. Rocky riffles continued all the way to the Forest Rd. 174 bridge where my 50cc Yamaha motorcycle was waiting. The creek way was too lovely to quit so I paddled onward. After 45 minutes I reached Moose Lake and followed its right shore until I located a grassy beach at the public campground.
By this time I had spent 3.5 hours on the river. Then I jogged the two miles back to my motorcycle which I rode back to the put-in.

**Experiences of Others**

Piraino (see above) also ended his trip at the Moose Lake campground. He pulled over several beaver dams and was forced to walk his canoe through some shallow, rocky sections. The water must have been lower when Frank ran the Moose River.

**Further Ideas**

Most sections of the Moose River are slow moving stretches through marshy country where tall trees do not line the immediate shore. Obstructions should be rare. So it should be possible to paddle upstream and downstream from the County GG bridge or from the Forest Rd. 173. Round trips could start and end at those bridges.

**Conclusion**

Most sections of the Moose River are slow moving stretches through marshy country where tall trees do not line the immediate shore. Obstructions should be rare. So it should be possible to paddle upstream and downstream from the County GG bridge or from the Forest Rd. 173. Round trips could start and end at those bridges.
Namekagon River

Location
Bayfield, Sawyer, Washburn and Burnett counties.

Natural Features
There are several short headwater creeks which feed into Lake Namekagon. From the outlet of that lake the Namekagon River embarks on a 98-mile journey from the heights of the Northern Highland to the St. Croix River. Along the way it cuts through several types of glacial deposits. As a result some sections are rocky and some are sandy. The river also courses through a vegetation zone known as the Pine Barrens. Its sandy soils support many jack pines. Grassy meadows and sweet ferns typically cover the ground. Minor rapids are found where the river’s current flows swiftly over rocks.

Human History and Influence
The Namekagon is an important river historically. Native Americans and European explorers used the river as a major highway. From this waterway they could paddle and portage their way to Lake Superior and to other destinations. From it they could reach the St. Croix, Chippewa, Bois Brule and several other basins. The area was logged extensively in the late 1800s. Logs were driven down the river to Hayward or Trego. Anthony Hayward built a large mill by the town that took his name in 1883. By the early 1900s the region looked like a sea of stumps. The landscape looked terrible so thousands of trees were planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. Eventually the forest grew back and the natural beauty of the area was restored. Now the lakes and rivers of the region attract tourists by the thousands.

Cable, Hayward, Trego and other communities along the river have come to depend on tourism. In 1969 Federal legislation created a national system of wild and scenic rivers. The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway was on the original list of eight rivers. Much of the Namekagon River was included in this riverway. Canoes can be rented in several places and there are numerous maintained campsites along the river. Due to the existence of five dams, the Namekagon is not free-flowing

Navigability and Difficulty
Water levels are nearly always sufficient downstream of Hayward. Woody obstructions are rare on all sections of the river. Information including water levels can be obtained by calling the Namekagon Information Center at Trego (715-635-8346). I am not sure if they will know what the gauge reads at the outlet of Namekagon Lake. It is important to know that level before attempting to paddle sections upstream of Hayward. Roughly one foot is needed to run the upper river from Namekagon Lake to the County M bridge near Cable. The above gauge should read .6 or greater for a comfortable float from Cable to Hayward. Flow information and runnability advice for the 15.4 mile section between the Hayward River campground near Hayward and the Springbrook landing are available on the American Whitewater Website.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
On May 28 of 2000 I explored the uppermost Namekagon in my Mad River Explorer with Kate Mulvaney. We were disappointed when we read the gauge downstream of the Lake Namekagon outlet dam. A nearby sign warned us that one foot was required for a good run and the gauge barely registered .8 feet. We decided to proceed anyway and were glad we did. Though it was scratchy at times we experienced a wild and beautiful riverway with an abundance of wildlife. We spotted one otter, many common
mergansers and a solitary bald eagle. The narrow but deadfall-free stream was never boring. It would speed up through narrow Class I boulder gardens and then slow down through wetlands lined by alders and ash trees. Steeple-like spruces were scattered throughout. We saw only a couple of cabins along the way. Though we never needed to portage around deadfall obstructions there were several beaver dams to negotiate. We bulled our way over a couple of them and stepped out to pull the canoe over the highest one. After 2 hours and 10 minutes on the river we reached the County M bridge where I had left my bicycle for the shuttle.

In July of 1998 I explored 24 miles of the Namekagon alone in my Bell Wildfire canoe. It was a long day! The previous evening I had locked my bike to a tree at the landing in Earl. After camping nearby I went to the Ranger Station Landing just south of Hayward where I put in. Through clear water I could appreciate an attractive stream floor comprised of rocks, gravel and waving water plants. The stream’s width and current changed frequently as it twisted through forests and wetlands. I was enjoying the sights and sounds of birdlife. Then the noise from a nearby wood products plant spoiled the ambiance for a while.

At Stinnet Landing I encountered my first human beings of the day. They were a bunch of beer-drinking tubers. A while later I maneuvered my Bell through the trickiest Class I rapids of the day. These were at the Brinkman Lake Rd. bridge near Groat Landing. After Bean Brook entered from the left the river took a long and lazy oxbow meander to the north. The monotony of this slow stretch was broken twice by wildlife sightings. I watched a mink drinking at the water’s edge and a fawn wading in shallow water. After 7.5 hours on the water I reached the Earl Landing. Then I biked 18 miles back to my car and figured I had had enough exercise for the day.

Because the Namekagon is so famous everybody and his brother has canoed the lower Namekagon. And why shouldn’t they? It’s beautiful, easy and there are plenty of maintained campsites. Plus it is easy to rent a canoe and arrange a shuttle. Personally I have twice canoed the 25 miles from the County K bridge near Trego to Riverside on the St. Croix River. Both of these trips were in the 1970s. I cannot recall who I traveled with the first time but the second time I was with Mary Jo Martin, my sister, Sylvia and my old friend, David Idso. Both times we camped two nights along the river.

**Experiences of Others**

This “wild and scenic” river has been described by many who have paddled it. Numerous magazine articles and Internet writers have trumpeted its virtues. Google it to find plenty of outing ideas. Mike Svob’s *Paddling Northern Wisconsin* includes four separate sections beginning at Hayward and proceeding downstream. Though Svob alludes to upstream sections he does not describe them in detail.

**Further Ideas**

It would be fun to canoe-camp the Namekagon’s entire 98 miles. Doing so would require higher than average water levels on the upper river. Dams would need to be portaged. Camp sites upstream of Hayward are harder to find. One reportedly nice upstream section I have never paddled is the 6 mile stretch between County M near Cable and the landing on river right about 1.5 miles upstream from Pacwawong Lake. I got this idea after reviewing my copy of the out of print guidebook *Whitewater-Quietwater*.

**Conclusion**
The Namekagon deserves to be a National Wild and Scenic River. Single day trips or several day canoe-camp outings can be arranged. Water levels are usually adequate and novices will be comfortable on most sections.
Nemadji River

**Location**
Carlton County, Minnesota and Douglas County, Wisconsin.

**Natural Features**
Numerous headwater streams join in Minnesota’s eastern Carlton County to form the Nemadji River. In Minnesota these headwaters feature cascades where the water cuts over and through ancient volcanic bedrock and glacially deposited rocks. After the stream enters Wisconsin it drops into the Lake Superior Lowland before it enters Lake Superior. This lowland with its red clay deposits once lay beneath the waters of Glacial Lake Duluth. Much of the valley of the Nemadji is narrow with steep walls of clay which are subject to erosion. Consequently the lower river often carries a heavy load of sediment. The forest here was of the boreal type before most of it was logged off. After the original spruces, balsam firs and pines were gone the second growth forest became mostly deciduous. The Wisconsin DNR, however, has concluded that the succession trend seems to again favor conifers.

**Human History and Influence**
The area was logged in the late 1880s and early 1900s. Agriculture was attempted in some places but was mostly unsuccessful. Human population density is low until the river nears the City of Superior. Once Wisconsin’s second most populous city it no longer even cracks the top 20. It has been the smaller of the “Twin Ports” since both it and Duluth, Minnesota long ago became industrial and iron ore exporting cities. The Nemadji became a polluted stream. 1992 was an especially bad year for the river after a train derailed and spilled a large bolus of chemicals directly into the river. More than 20,000 people were temporarily evacuated from the area as a result.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
I suspect that sizeable sections of the Nemadji are navigable but I am not sure. There is a USGS gauge at Superior meaning that water levels can be monitored on their website. I doubt the existence of significant rapids in Wisconsin but they are present in Minnesota.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
In 1981 I spent an hour or two on the Nemadji in the immediate vicinity of Superior. I do not remember much about the day. The water was murky and the banks were muddy. I ran my shuttle on city streets but cannot recall the access points I used.

**Further Ideas**
I am sure that nicer outings are possible further upstream on the Nemadji. Paddling Minnesota includes a 13 mile trip from Hwy. 23 in Minnesota to the County W bridge in Douglas County. It starts on the North Fork and joins the South Fork about a mile upstream of this take-out. The whitewater is reportedly only Class I.

**Conclusion**
My experience on the Nemadji was forgettable but there are scenic, navigable sections upstream from Superior.
Pokegama Creek

Location
Barron County.

Natural Features
The headwaters of Pokegama Creek plunge off the southwestern edge of the Blue Hills a few miles east of Rice Lake. This drainage system starts near the edge of the terminal moraine left behind at the furthest advance of Wisconsin Glacier’s Chippewa Lobe. When that glacier was melting the water flowed to the southwest and deposited outwash plains. The outwash channel steadily shrunk into this tiny stream. Eventually, Pokegama Creek flows into the chain of lakes by Chetek. Its waters eventually enter the Red Cedar River.

Human History and Influence
Agriculture impacts this creek to a heavy degree.

Navigability and Difficulty
Most of this stream is snagged with fallen trees.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In July of 1987 I eased my vehicle onto the shoulder of U.S. Hwy 8 just west of Cameron. Within a few minutes I was paddling my Ladybug down Pokegama Creek. It was not long before I reached the first of many fallen trees which forced me out of my canoe. Soon it was evident that a natural disaster had recently occurred. Hundreds of dead carp and suckers were floating on the water and lying along the shores. Something had caused a major fish kill. My struggle over fallen trees and past dead fish thankfully ended at the 12 ½ Ave. bridge where I took out and jogged the two miles back to my car.

Further Ideas
Pokegama Creek flows into Mud Lake which is part of the Chetek Chain of Lakes. I can imagine paddling up the creek as far as possible from Mud Lake.

Conclusion
The latter Pokegama Creek paddling idea is the only one I would recommend.
**Location**

Douglas County.

**Natural Features**

This small river originates near the Wisconsin-Minnesota border. It flows past red clay cut banks through extensive marshes to a bay of Lake Superior. This stream slowly drains lowlands which once were inundated by Glacial Lake Duluth. Red clay deposits were left behind when that lake drained away. Rocks in the river bed are rare. According to the city of Superior website this river is an important spawning area for several fish species. Eroding clay soil sediments threaten the quality of the spawning area. Rare plants exist in wetland sections of the river but the dominant species include bur-reed, cattail, bulrushes, wild rice and arrowheads. The surrounding forest is classified as boreal which means that balsam firs and spruces predominate. The above website lists Virginia rail, sora and marsh wrens as common avian residents of the marsh.

**Human History and Influence**

The original boreal forest was logged but has largely grown back. Pollution from sources at Duluth and Superior adversely affect the river’s estuary area which empties into Pokegama Bay. The state of Wisconsin has attached State Natural Area and Lake Superior Priority Site designations to parts of the surrounding marsh.

**Navigability and Difficulty**

I am not sure how far south of the Hwy. 105 bridge one could paddle before the river becomes too small for practical navigation. Paddling northward from that point should always be easy, but choosing a take-out point might not be as easy (see below). Because this is a marsh the current is slow to non-existent.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**

The biggest challenge of my outing on the Pokegama River was figuring out where to take out. The Wisconsin Gazetteer depicts a road called McClure’s Landing Road. My plan was to use the landing it presumably led to. Little did I know that this road has been closed off and now is exclusively used by hikers and mountain bikers. Ignorant of this fact I shoved off in my Bell Wildfire and paddled northward from the Hwy 105 bridge. The first thing I noticed was that the current which should have been with me was against me. One of those Lake Superior tides known as “seiches” must have been coming in. I paddled past a few black ash trees and entered an open marsh. The corridor gradually widened as cattails and bulrushes gave way to a monoculture sea of wild rice. The water widened into a bay.

Soon I rounded a peninsula of high ground on my left expecting to find a developed boat landing. There was only a small patch of matted green grass, so I did not stop but kept paddling west. After about 15 minutes I approached two pleasure boats anchored near a dock. The people on board suggested I should have taken out at or near the matted grass I had spotted earlier. So I returned to that spot and I hiked up the hill to look around. I discovered that an old gravel road dead-ended here. Tire tracks were lacking so I suspected I would not be able to drive on this road to pick up my canoe and gear. Now what should I do? I decided to jog the two miles to Hwy 105. There I found a locked gate which confirmed that I could not use this road (McClure’s Landing Rd.) to retrieve my stuff. My choices now were two: First to jog back to my canoe and to carry it and my gear over the two miles of road back out to Hwy. 105. This would
require two trips. Second, I could jog the two miles back to my canoe and then paddle it back to where I had started the day. When I reached my canoe I was tired from all that jogging and it was getting late. Taking the water route seemed like the better option and it turned out to be a great choice. The late day lighting was beautiful and the river’s surface was as smooth as glass. Birds and other critters called out to me from their hiding places in the marsh. It was a great time to be on the water.

Further Ideas
It would be interesting to explore the Pokegama southward from the 105 bridge for as far as possible before turning around.

Conclusion
For those who like to explore wetlands the Pokegama River is not a bad choice. The best strategy is probably to explore northward and possibly southward from the Hwy 105 bridge. Because of the lack of current a round trip should be easy.
Poplar River

Location
Douglas County.

Natural Features
Along U.S. Hwy. 53 about 8 miles north of Solon Springs there is a wetland and a small spring which constitute the headwaters of the Poplar River. From there this stream gradually gathers tributaries as it pours over the volcanic bedrock and glacial erratic boulders of the Douglas Range. Then it descends through and exposes Keweenawan Sandstone before it drops down to the red clays of the Lake Superior Lowland and on to the big lake itself. The Poplar’s banks are covered with spruces and balsam firs and other trees typical of the Northwoods. Water clarity is excellent until the river reaches the area of easily erodible red clay banks. From that point the river is murkier, especially after it rains. The gradient is fairly steep resulting in some Class II whitewater. The rapids are easier than those on the nearby Bois Brule and Amnicon Rivers.

Human History and Influence
South of U.S. Hwy 2, farms near the river are rare. Agriculture is more prevalent north of Hwy. 2 but most of the drainage area is forested. The town of Poplar (pop. 520) straddles the river’s banks at Hwy 2. That town’s most famous native is the late fighter pilot Richard Bong who was dubbed the “ace of aces” for his 40 kills during WW II.

Navigability and Difficulty
On the section I paddled there were no rapids which rated higher than II. There may be more difficult drops to the south. Occasional fallen trees may be encountered, but they were only a minor problem on the section I paddled. The water will often be too low for a good run. There are no gauges so bridge scouting may be needed to make decisions about runnability.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I love adventures like the one I had the day I explored the Poplar River. What made it interesting were all the logistical decisions I had to make. First was where to leave my shuttle bicycle. I had decided my journey would begin at the Moonshine Rd. bridge about 6 miles from the river’s mouth at Lake Superior. But I had not decided where my trip would end. I decided to leave my bicycle at the junction of Hwy 13 and Poplar River Rd. Why there? Because I knew my road bike’s skinny tires could not handle the gravel surface of Poplar River Rd. I figured I could jog from my take-out back to this point. If I had problems on the upper river I could abort the trip at the Hwy. 13 bridge and my bike would be nearby. I knew where I would put in but not where I would take out. Would it be the Hwy 13 Bridge, the Halkett Rd. Bridge or somewhere along the Lake Superior shore?

Choosing the latter could be a problem because the Gazetteer depicted no boat landings. It was also hard to tell how far the northern terminus of Poplar Rd. would be from the Lake Superior shore. With all this uncertainty I should have scouted this potential take-out site beforehand but chose not to.

The date was May 1, 2001 and the water was at a generously high springtime level. From my put-in at the Moonshine Rd. bridge it was easy to navigate the numerous riffles and Class I rapids in my whitewater canoe which was a Daggar Ovation at the time. Even though the river was quite narrow there were only
two deadfall obstructions before the Hwy. 13 bridge. At that point the river valley began to widen. Lake Creek soon added a big dose of muddy water from river right. I began to notice more sandstone bedrock outcrops. They had calved enough rocks to create Class II rapids at several locations. The river's speed was steadily brisk. Nearing the Halkett Rd. bridge the river slowed temporarily into a winding bottomland. Predictably, I was forced to pull over and around a few fallen trees.

When I reached that bridge I made the decision not to take out there. My idea was to reach Lake Superior even though I had no idea of where I would take out when I got there. I had faith I could find the end of Poplar River Rd. and jog it back to my bike. Again, had I been wise, I would have scouted this area along the Lake Superior shore before I started the trip. Truth is I sometimes like to be “unwise” in situations like this because I like the added challenge and risk. Anyway, after the final mile of the Poplar River I found myself paddling westward along the Lake Superior shore. For several hundred yards all I could see was an unbroken line of trees at the top of the high, grassy bank. At one point I spotted a subtle break in the trees. Following a hunch, I beached my canoe and climbed up the steep bank towards this feature. Sure enough, I found a dirt road there which led shortly to the northern terminus of Poplar Rd. Then I hauled my canoe and gear up that slope, jogged back to my bike, and peddled it back to my car. The final step was to return for my gear.

**Further Ideas**

With enough water one could probably add the river miles between the town of Poplar and Moonshine Rd. I wonder what kind of whitewater that section holds.

**Conclusion**

This Poplar River is almost as pretty as the nearby Bois Brule, but it is smaller and harder to catch with enough water. It is easier to paddle than that famous stream but Class II whitewater skills are still required. It would be easier to take out at the Halkett Rd. bridge than to take out where I did. If you choose to take out where I did, you should identify and mark the Lake Superior shoreline spot before you start down the river.
Potato Creek

Location
Barron County.

Natural Features
Potato Creek drains a small area of extreme southwestern Barron County. Here kettle lakes sit atop the Chippewa terminal moraine which was deposited by the Wisconsin Glacier. McDermott Creek feeds Potato Lake from the north. The outflow stream from that lake flows eastward through glacial outwash for a handful of miles to the Chippewa River. This short stream is known as Potato Creek. The flora of the area includes wetlands and conifer-hardwood forests.

Human History and Influence
Farms and lake homes influence this creek. There is a low dam at the outflow of Potato Lake. This small stream pierces the Potato Creek State Wildlife area for a couple of miles.

Navigability and Difficulty
The gradient is low enough that water depth is usually sufficient. Considering the creek’s narrowness, the section I paddled was surprisingly deadfall free. Had I paddled further I may have encountered numerous snags.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I may never have explored this stream had it not been so close to my lake home in northern Chippewa County. I do not regret doing so. First I located the landing at the east end of Potato Lake. My plan was to jog back to my car when I reached the Right of Way Rd. bridge. I put in just downstream of the low dam and entered a wide, slow waterway. It was late summer of 1984, and duckweed was thick on the creek’s surface. Successive flocks of blue-wing teal took to the air when I approached. Initially very murky, the creek’s clarity improved noticeably as I paddled along. Wetlands can exert a powerful cleansing effect. Where the creek suddenly narrowed it became obvious why the waterway had looked so much like a small lake. A sizeable beaver dam was holding back the water. I bulled my canoe over the dam and caused some damage. Peeved beavers probably needed to do some repair work that night. Downstream of marsh and this beaver dam, Potato Creek changed markedly. It became very narrow and was lined by trees. I ducked under several but none of them totally blocked my way. While jogging back to my car I was planning to follow Right of Way Rd. all the way to County D. However, I spotted a dirt road heading west which looked promising. I followed it and it turned out to be a short cut back to where I had left my car.

Further Ideas
I wonder what Potato Creek is like downstream of where I took out. Because of its smallness and narrowness I suspect it is choked with deadfall.

Conclusion
Only a paddler living nearby or visiting the area would consider exploring the wetlands of Potato Creek.
Rice Creek

Location
Rusk County.

Natural Features
A group of lakes known as the Blue Diamond Lakes are located in northern Chippewa and southern Rusk County. They formed as “kettle” lakes which filled the pits in the “pitted outwash” after the Wisconsin Glacier melted about 10,000 years ago. These lakes are linked by creeks and the whole system eventually empties into the Chippewa River. Rice Creek is the final link in this chain. The elevation of the last lake called Fireside Lake is only a few inches higher than the Chippewa River. So when that river floods, its waters back up along Rice Creek all the way to Fireside Lake.

Human History and Influence
Today the lakes of this chain are all ringed by resorts and private homes. Fireside Lake residents face flooded docks when the Chippewa River floods. In the logging era, logs were driven down this chain of creeks and lakes to the Chippewa River. Eventually the logs reached mills in Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire.

Navigability and Difficulty
Water levels should always be sufficient. The current is very slow. Fallen trees are a big problem near the Chippewa River confluence.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
My wife at the time, Pat, and I explored Rice Creek in May of 1987. It was a short drive from our seasonal home on Pine Lake. Most of the creek was wide but shallow. Despite this shallowness we were able to stay in our canoe except to portage past two beaver dams. We had accessed the creek at the public boat landing on Fireside Lake’s southern shore. From there we paddled across the lake to the outlet on the northern shore. Rice Creek’s water was clearer than we expected. After about a mile we neared the Chippewa River where our path was suddenly blocked by fallen trees. Staying on the creek would have been a huge chore. I sensed the big river was not far away to our left, so we landed on that side. Then we dragged our canoe about 50 yards to the big river. Once on the Chippewa we paddled downstream a mile or so to a riverside house on County D. It looked like no one was home so we took out there. Pat waited while I jogged back to our car. Of course we should have paddled another mile to the formal boat landing on river right.

Further Ideas
A better way to explore Rice Creek is a round trip beginning and ending at the boat landing on Fireside Lake.

Conclusion
Rice Creek is not particularly scenic or interesting. Only local residents or visitors will choose to explore it.
Skinner Creek

Location
Rusk and Price counties.

Natural Features
Both Skinner Creek and its North Fork originate in the swampy forests of far eastern Price County. They drain gently undulating ground moraines which were deposited by the melting Wisconsin Glacier. The creek runs clear and unpolluted over an alternately rocky, gravelly and sandy stream floor. Its gradient picks up along the last mile to the South Fork Flambeau River confluence. Some minor rapids are the likely result.

Human History and Influence
The original forest was logged in the late 1800s. Farming was not very successful because of poor soils. Human settlements are lacking in the watershed. Because of these two factors the water quality of Skinner Creek is excellent.

Navigability and Difficulty
Only rarely will Skinner Creek have enough water for boating. Bridge scouting will be necessary to judge adequacy of flow. I was surprised by the lack of deadfall obstructions on the section I explored. Rocky riffles were the only fast water stretches I experienced but there may be a legitimate Class I rapid or even a Class II in the final descent to the South Fork of the Flambeau River.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
1985 saw some significant fall rains in this part of the state. I had noticed Skinner Creek on prior trips to the South Fork of the Flambeau and decided this was a good opportunity to explore it. My put-in was at the end of a dirt road which led west from County M near the creek. On the water I initially found myself in a broad marsh. When it ended the stream picked up speed over rocky riffles through a forested corridor. This alternating pattern between forest and wetland repeated itself several times. I was delighted by the scenery and enjoyed winding down this narrow creek. Surprisingly there were no deadfall problems. High water swept me along rapidly, so I reached the Skinner Creek Road bridge in about an hour. I ran along that gravel road to County M where I had secured my bicycle. Its two wheels carried me back to the dirt road turn off. The final shuttle leg was a short jog back to my vehicle.

Further Ideas
Here is an idea for whitewater boaters when the water is high: Paddle the final half mile of Skinner Creek from the Skinner Creek Road bridge. It should have some rapids. Finish the trip with a 5 mile whitewater run down to the Hervas Camp Landing on the left bank of the Flambeau River’s South Fork.

Conclusion
Skinner Creek is wild and pretty little stream. It can serve as a short quiet water run or as an entry point for a whitewater run down the South Fork of the Flambeau River.
Soft Maple Creek

**Location**
Rusk and Chippewa counties.

**Natural Features**
Soft Maple Creek and Little Soft Maple Creek both originate on southern slopes of the Blue Hills. This prominent bedrock quartzite range was raised even more at the end of the Ice Age when end moraines were deposited on top of the hills. The two branches descend southward and merge within glacial outwash deposits on their way to the Chippewa River. The region’s flora includes northern conifers and hardwoods and also bottomland species including, of course, “soft” silver maples. Downstream navigable sections of the river are not steep so they contain no rapids.

**Human History and Influence**
Soft Maple Creek flows past the community of Weyerhaeuser on U.S. Hwy 8. The town’s namesake was Frederick Weyerhaeuser who fathered the giant forest products company which still bears his name. That firm is presently headquartered in the Pacific Northwest but it got its start logging the forests of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Lower sections of this stream flow past forests and farmlands but no more towns. The water quality is reasonably good.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
I have paddled two sections of Soft Maple Creek. The upper section needs high water and features numerous snags. The lower section needs less water and deadfall problems are fewer. Not totally lacking, however. Soft Maple Creek was frozen solid one winter day in the 1990s. From the Hwy. 40 bridge I walked east carrying my chainsaw. Along the way I cleared some deadfall I had encountered the previous summer. Deadfall problems increase again through the final bottomland to the Chippewa River. Read on to learn how these obstructions can be avoided.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
I paddled Soft Maple Creek several times because of its proximity to the lake home I owned for many years. My routine was to put in at the Hwy. 40 bridge, paddle downstream and eventually turn around for a round trip. The current was always weak enough to accomplish this with relative ease. Once, in the 1980s I did this with my wife Pat. Early on we wound through a lightly wooded area. After a while the creek way became an open marsh where the stream narrowed and followed a more crooked path. We eventually reached the remains of an old bridge and a small hill which rose above the surrounding marsh. Our plan was to camp that night and this seemed to be a good location.

After we settled in we found a spot to watch the sunset. Soon we heard a croaking sound and wondered what it was. The source was a single sand hill crane which was winging across the marsh and was perfectly silhouetted by a lovely sunset. On another Soft Maple Creek excursion Pat and I paddled all the way to the Chippewa River which was so high that it flooded the mouth of the creek. This was the only time I ever reached the Chippewa River from Soft Maple Creek. The entire bottomland forest was flooded so we had great difficulty finding the main channel. Locating it might be easier when the water is low but then other problems may arise like deadfall obstructions and very shallow water.
Anyway, in the maze of flooded trees Pat and I strayed so far from the main channel that we decided to try our luck on land. We landed and dragged our canoe about 50 yards in direction we thought would lead to the Chippewa River. Our direction hunch was correct so we arrived and launched onto the big river. About a half mile downstream we spotted a couple of small homes on river right. No one was home, so we landed and pulled our canoe and gear across a lawn to a dead end road which I knew would lead to Hwy. 40. Pat waited while I jogged the three miles back to our car.

On an early April day in 1985 I decided to explore Soft Maple Creek further upstream. With my solo freestyle Ladybug canoe on top, I drove north on Hwy. 40 and turned left on Amacoy Lake Rd. After a mile and a half I stopped at the bridge over the creek. I was worried about deadfall but put in there anyway. Most paddlers would not like the way I spent the next two hours. Despite its problems I really enjoyed this twisty stream which was running high from snowmelt. Attractive wetland sections alternated with upland banks which held many spruce trees. Wood ducks, mergansers, and buffleheads were out in force and I was fortunate to surprise one curious river otter. The problem was the need to pull over or around about a dozen fallen trees. That’s the part that would discourage most paddlers. Once I reached Hwy. 40 my bike was where I had left it so I rode it back to my car at the put in.

**Further Ideas**
I should paddle all the way from Hwy. 40 to the Chippewa River again. It would be interesting to find out if there is a navigable channel through the bottomland at the end when the water is lower. If I do this I should avoid taking out on private property like it did the first time. There is a boat landing on the Chippewa’s right bank about 1.5 miles past where Pat and I took out.

**Conclusion**
Soft Maple Creek is an interesting small stream which offers several paddling opportunities. The most viable of these is a round trip from the Hwy. 40 bridge.
St. Croix River

Location
Several northwestern Wisconsin counties.

Natural Features
The St. Croix is one of the rare rivers which begins in a lake and ends in a lake. Its source is Upper St. Croix Lake in Douglas County. 164 miles downstream it ends in Lake St. Croix. The latter is a natural widening of the river caused by the damming effect of the Mississippi at the St. Croix's mouth. The uppermost part of river drains a region of sandy “pine barrens.” Downstream sections drain original hardwood forests and oak savanna lands. When the last glaciers were melting the St. Croix was the main outlet which drained Glacial Lake Duluth. The first section of this outlet is currently occupied by the Bois Brule River which now flows north into Lake Superior. It ran the opposite way when Glacial Lake Duluth was draining. Today’s St. Croix gorge exposes two different kinds of bedrock. Sandstone predominates except near St. Croix Falls. When Glacial Lake Duluth was draining it released huge torrents of water which cut a new river channel which exposed the St. Croix Dalles. The lava-based bedrock walls of this canyon rise to 100 feet above the water's surface. Far upstream sections of the St. Croix feature boulder-strewn rapids. Lower sections are generally quieter with the exception of a Class II-III rapid at St. Croix Falls.

Human History and Influence
Dakota Sioux were the region’s original inhabitants. They were driven away to the west by the Ojibwa in the early 1800s. The first white to explore this river was Daniel Grey Solon Sieur du Lut in 1680. He was also the first white to use the famous portage which links the upper St. Croix with the Bois Brule River. The latter river connects the St. Croix with Lake Superior. During the early 1800s the French fur trading era was replaced by the logging era. In 1839 the first sawmill on the St. Croix was built at Marine-at-St. Croix. Soon other mills were built at other towns like St. Croix Falls, Stillwater, Osceola, and Hudson. Since the late 1880s, agriculture has dominated the lower St. Croix River Valley. Currently, the ever-expanding Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area threatens the pristine nature of the lower valley. Several state parks on both the Minnesota and Wisconsin sides help to preserve some of the special places. A unit of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve is located within the Wisconsin portion of Interstate State Park. This designation helps it to preserve glacial features like the large pot holes which formed on the bluffs when the river was at least 100 feet higher. These large bowl-like holes were ground into the bedrock by sediment and stones which were swirling in eddies when the river was carving the new gorge. In 1968 the Upper St. Croix and the lower part of its Namekagon tributary were among the rivers included in the original National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. A few years later the entire lower river was added. These designations have slowed but not stopped new developments like the new bridge being built at Stillwater. There are two remaining dams on the St. Croix. The remains of several old logging dams are still in evidence.

Navigability and Difficulty
The bouldery upper stretches of the river are sometimes too shallow for good canoeing. There is a USGS gauge at Danbury used by the American Whitewater website to estimate the runnability of the St. Croix between Nelson's Landing and Soderbeck Landing. This website does not describe the uppermost section of the St. Croix, so knowing if there is enough water is not an easy matter. A call to the Trego
Visitor Information Center at Trego might be helpful in this regard. Its phone number is (715) 635-8346. The American Whitewater site uses the USGS gauge reading at Stillwater to make recommendations about running the big waves below the St. Croix Falls dam. Downstream of the Soderbeck Landing at the Snake River confluence there should always be enough water. Deadfall should not be a significant problem anywhere along the river. Water level advice can also be obtained by calling the Marshland Visitor Center of the St. Croix National Scenic River way (320 629-2148).

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**

The St. Croix is a much paddled stream which has been written about extensively. There is little need for more descriptions so mine will be brief. I will start near the headwaters and work downstream from there. I have not personally paddled all sections of this river.

In June of 2001 I paddled my Wildfire down Lower Ox Creek into the St. Croix. Then I turned upstream against a weak current and paddled about three miles to the site of the former Cut-Away Dam. This section is between Gordon and Upper St. Croix Lake. Both shorelines were populated by low-lying, wetland plant species. When finished I rode my bicycle back to Lower Ox Lake where my outing had begun.

It is surprising to me that I have only once paddled the easy whitewater section between Gordon Dam and County Line Road. This is a wild and beautiful section I would like to see again someday. In the summer of 1980 I was one of four people who ran it in Grumman aluminum canoes. My brother Ken paddled with his new wife Cindy. My tandem partner was Mary Jo Martin. I remember some minor rapids and some lovely scenery but not much else.

Twice I have canoed the two miles between the Namekagon confluence and the community of Riverside. Both times it was the final stretch of trips down the Namekagon River.

In late May of 2005 I explored the 8 mile stretch from Nelson’s Landing to Soderbeck Landing. The latter sits at the end of Ferry Rd. off Soderbeck Rd. a few miles northwest of Grantsburg. After shoving off I soon reached the many islands which comprise the “Kettle River Slough” section of the river. This maze surrounds the confluence of that river where it comes in from the Minnesota side. Paddling through it I bore right at every opportunity so I could experience the fast water and intimacy of the narrowest channels. I passed bottomlands and uplands. Bedrock cliffs arose periodically. One amazing sight was a large flat rock which barely cleared the water’s surface. About 15 turtles and one female merganser blanketed its entire surface. One by one the turtles slid off as I passed by, but the merganser held her ground. There was a steady stiff headwind which made it tough to progress. I was able to keep going by hopping between the leeward sides of islands.

In May of 1991 I explored another short stretch of the St. Croix. This time I floated into the river after a trip down the Trade River. After three quiet and monotonous miles I reached the site of the old Nevers Dam which is a relic from logging days. Four midstream piles of rock were placed long ago for a specific purpose. According to Mike Svob (see below) they “once served to impede and break up massive ice floes so they wouldn’t crush the dam”.

On several occasions I have explored the quiet but lovely section of the river downstream of St. Croix Falls.
Once, a few years ago I took a short trip through the Dalles at St. Croix Falls. From a landing at Wisconsin’s Interstate Park I paddled my solo canoe upstream along the base of the cliffs on the Wisconsin side. This was not difficult because the head current was weak. After I had seen most of the cliffs I turned around and returned following the equally impressive Minnesota side.

NEWS FLASH!! Some readers may know that in 2007 I canoed my 300th Wisconsin river. That quest began in 1969 when I paddled my very first one. It was the St. Croix River from St. Croix Falls to Stillwater. My tandem partner was my college sweetheart Peggy Wood. We made it a two-day trip and camped along the river. Our transistor radio blasted “Sweet Caroline” by Neil Diamond. Peggy probably didn’t join me but I know I was singing right along with Neil. About three years later I duplicated this trip with my hometown friend Cherry Young. She and I had grown up together and graduated from Osage, Iowa Community High School in 1965. On three other occasions I have canoed with a variety of friends in tandem canoes from Osceola to the William O’Brien State Park on the Minnesota side which is a nine mile trip. One of those trips was an educational one led by glacial geologist Adam Cahow, an emeritus professor of geography at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

Experiences of Others
The American Whitewater website includes two whitewater sections of the St. Croix. One is between Nelson’s Landing and Soderbeck Landing. The other is the short Class II-III rapid at St. Croix Falls. National Park service publications and other websites include more river experiences. That government agency is involved because this is a National Scenic Riverway. The best guidebook is Mike Svob’s Paddling Northern Wisconsin.

It divides the river into eight day trip sections between Gordon Dam and William O’ Brien State Park. He found the 11.7 miles between Gordon Dam and Minnesota’s Schoen Park to be very attractive. Its minor rapids were also to his liking. But Svob is most enthusiastic about the 14.5 mile section between Norway Point and Hwy. 70. It includes the Nelson Landing to Soderbeck Landing section I described above. He notes its many attractive campsites and the fun but easy whitewater. The St. Croix is, by the way, a world famous canoe-camping river. Mike notes that most paddlers take the main channel to the left downstream of Nelson’s Landing. But he describes the right channels I took as being a more fun succession of Class I and II rapids. Scraping may happen and walking may be necessary if those channels are followed at low water times.

Further Ideas
It would be fun to canoe-camp the entire river from Gordon Dam to O’Brien State Park. In fact, why not paddle all the way to the Mississippi?

Conclusion
The St. Croix River is famous for its beauty and its canoe-camping opportunities. Paddlers of all abilities can enjoy it.
St. Louis River

Location
Forms part of the border between Minnesota and Wisconsin, at Duluth-Superior.

Natural Features
The St. Louis is one of six rivers which help form the borders of Wisconsin. It separates Wisconsin from Minnesota for about 10 miles in the Duluth-Superior vicinity. It is the most voluminous U.S. contributor to the waters of Lake Superior. Its drainage area is nearly all in Minnesota. It begins about 13 miles east of Hoyt Lakes. Big rapids form downstream of Cloquet where the river cuts a gorge through igneous rock. The current stops abruptly around the Minnesota-Wisconsin border. There the river widens into an estuary called St. Louis Bay which is the river’s “drowned mouth.” In their book, Roadside Geology of Wisconsin Bob Dott and John Attig explain the geologic significance of this bay. They explain it as an example of “differential rebound” of the earth's crust after the heavy glacial ice melted.

“The outlet of Lake Superior at its eastern end is rising more rapidly than the western end of the basin, so the water level is slowly rising in the Superior area.” Evidently the water is being tipped in that direction.

Human History and Influence
The upper St. Louis is relatively pristine. Near Cloquet, however, various industrial effluents have long been discharged into the river. The federal Clean Water Act was passed in the early 1970s. Problems persist but the river’s health has improved considerably since then. A series of power dams also impact the lower river. The estuary section has long felt the impacts of the shipping industry in the Duluth-Superior harbor.

Navigability and Difficulty
Upstream in Minnesota the St. Louis is a major whitewater river. Along the Wisconsin border it is very quiet and it gradually loses all of its current. Eventually the river looks more like a lake with bays and backwaters. Powerboats can be a problem for canoes and kayaks.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Sometime in the 1990s I decided to explore a small section of the St. Louis River’s estuary. I paddled along the Minnesota shore from Fond du Lac Park to a point about three miles to the west. Then I jogged back to my car. Some years later I was on the Pokegama Bay section of the St. Louis Bay estuary. This was the day I explored the lower Pokegama River. I have also paddled St. Louis River whitewater in Minnesota. There was one particularly hair-raising day which ended at Jay Cooke State Park. But that was not a Wisconsin stream experience so I will not elaborate.

Further Ideas
There must be many ways to explore the St. Louis River estuary. Some sections are relatively wild while others very urban. It seems like a good place for a sea kayak.

Conclusion
Most river-loving paddlers will stay in Minnesota when they explore the St. Louis River.
Spruce River

**Location**
Douglas County.

**Natural Features**
The extensive white pine-hardwood forests of Douglas County are interspersed with wide wetland swaths. One of them is the Belden Swamp which is located west of Hwy. 35 about 20 miles south of Superior. The Spruce River originates in this wetland and gathers water as it flows south. In its final few miles it drops more steeply as it approaches the Upper Tamarack River. At one point it even cuts a narrow gorge through igneous rock. The Upper Tamarack flows into Minnesota where it merges with the St. Croix River.

**Human History and Influence**
Since the logging days the Spruce River has been minimally impacted by humans. Its drainage area includes few homes, few farms and no towns.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
It may be possible to paddle wetland sections at normal water levels. The last stretch to the Upper Tamarack River requires high water. It contains a Class III “dells” section. I faced no deadfall problems during my trip.

**Trip Ideas: My experience**
I had no idea what to expect when I arrived at the Town Rd. bridge over the Spruce River in early May of 1991. Whitewater was not on my agenda so I had brought my freestyle Ladybug canoe. Minutes earlier I had left my 49cc moped by the County T bridge over the Upper Tamarack River. I shoved off into the Spruce River and immediately found myself winding through a treeless marsh. At times the main channel was difficult to follow because the flooding stream was spilling over its banks. Soon I heard the sound of roaring water in the distance. I thought it might have been caused by a beaver dam. Why would there be rapids in the middle of a marsh? However, I did see a tree line in the distance and realized the noise was probably coming from the forest.

My journey across the marsh was slow because of the river’s tortuous course. Finally I approached that tree line and could see white waves jumping ominously across a horizon line. This was obviously the top of a significant rapid! Wisely I pulled over to the left shore above the drop. Then I enjoyed a walking tour of a long and beautiful gorge. Later I read somewhere that the bedrock I was admiring was a “basaltic to rhyolytic lava flow.” Running this Class III cascade alone in my non-whitewater canoe was not an option. So I portaged around it and found a suitable place to re-enter the stream. I was delighted to float Class I-II whitewater through a lovely forest down to the Upper Tamarack River. That river’s flow was slower but included a few more speedy riffles before I reached my take out at the County T bridge. My 2 ½ hours on this river had been exhilarating even though I couldn’t run the big rapids.
Further Ideas
With high water it should be possible to add a couple of upriver miles by putting in at the Kingsdale bridge. A day trip starting on the Spruce River could easily be extended by continuing down the Upper Tamarack River.

Conclusion
The Spruce River is a delightful high water option for those who like to explore small, wild rivers in Northern Wisconsin. I would love to paddle its “dells” someday in a whitewater canoe.
Straight River

**Location**
Polk County.

**Natural Features**
This is a short river which begins with small headwater branches which feed Straight Lake. From there it flows through “the finest example of a glacial tunnel in the Midwest” to the southeast before it empties into Big Round Lake. From that lake’s outlet the Straight River soon merges into Fox Creek which joins the Apple River a few miles later. The drainage area contains large blocks of northern hardwood forest as well as oak stands and pines. Kettle lakes and a terminal moraine are other nearby examples of glacial geology.

**Human History and Influence**
In the 1990s the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation began constructing a segment of its nationally designated trail to highlight the above-mentioned glacial tunnel. A tunnel channel is a special type of valley that was carved by a fast-flowing river underneath a melting glacier. In 2002 an area around Straight Lake was designated the Straight Lake State Park. It adjoins a State Wildlife Area.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
This is a very low volume stream. I know of no whitewater. Navigability is hampered by narrowness, shallow water and fallen trees.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
It was sometime in the mid-nineties when Pat Christopherson and I viewed the Straight River from the 250th Ave. bridge. That day we were also trying to find the nearby Ice Age Trail. Here the stream looked impossibly small and potentially choked with logs and fallen trees. Had I been alone with a smaller and more maneuverable canoe, I might have put in there. But I did not want to subject Pat to one of my log-choked paddling fiascos.

So instead we drove to the northwestern shore of Big Round Lake and found the public boat landing near the Straight River inlet. We were rewarded by an easy trip up an attractive marshy stream. Clusters of blooming blue flags decorated the shoreline as we gradually worked our way upstream against a gentle current. After about 45 minutes, shallow water, some logs and a strengthening head current forced us to turn around and we returned the way we had come.

**Further Ideas**
I suspect the Ice Age Trail is now easier to find. Hiking it and also visiting the new Straight Lake State Park could be combined with canoeing the Straight River. The river might be navigable between Hwy. 48 and the 250th Ave. Bridge. Satellite views available on the Internet show wider river sections in this stretch. I suspect a small dam near the 250th Ave. bridge raises the water along this stretch. Round trips might be possible from the Hwy. 48 bridge and the 250th Ave. bridge.
Conclusion
The Straight River offers some intriguing paddling possibilities including the trip we took. It is an attractive small stream with some unique glacial geology.
Swift Creek

Location
Rusk County.

Natural Features
Swift Creek is part of a lake and stream system which eventually flows into the Chippewa River. These are kettle lakes which filled the pits left behind when blocks of ice melted at the end of the last Ice Age. Long Lake is the headwater lake of this system. It is fed by Cedar Creek which also exits the lake. (See my separate write-up on that stream). Cedar Creek soon enters Chain Lake which is followed by McCann and Island lakes. Swift Creek begins as the outlet to the latter lake. It flows about two miles to upper Fireside Lake which is also known as Mud Lake. The final watery link in this chain is a stream called Rice Creek which I have also explored and written about. It exits Lower Fireside Lake and empties into the Chippewa River.

Human History and Influence
Swift Creek is part of a lake and stream system which eventually flows into the Chippewa River. These are kettle lakes which filled the pits left behind when blocks of ice melted at the end of the last Ice Age. Long Lake is the headwater lake of this system. It is fed by Cedar Creek which also exits the lake. (See my separate write-up on that stream). Cedar Creek soon enters Chain Lake which is followed by McCann and Island lakes. Swift Creek begins as the outlet to the latter lake. It flows about two miles to upper Fireside Lake which is also known as Mud Lake. The final watery link in this chain is a stream called Rice Creek which I have also explored and written about. It exits Lower Fireside Lake and empties into the Chippewa River.

Navigability and Difficulty
This narrow stream is likely choked with deadfall. The only practical way to see some of it is to paddle upstream from Upper Fireside (Mud) Lake.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In mid-July of 1991 I explored a small portion of Swift Creek with my wife Pat and another couple, Wayne and Sandy Seefeldt own a cabin on Lower Fireside Lake. We all departed from their cabin and paddled across the lake to Mud Lake. After crossing that body of water we located the marshy inlet of Swift Creek and paddled as far upstream as we could before logs across the creek forced us to turn around. The further we got up the creek the better it looked. It became more pristine and the water quality improved.

Further Ideas
It might be possible to paddle from Long Lake all the way to the Chippewa River on this chain of lakes and creeks. Swift Creek would be the most challenging link because of deadfall.

Conclusion
Local paddlers may wish to duplicate my trip on Swift Creek.
Teal River

Location
Sawyer County.

Natural Features
The Teal River is only about four miles long but its flow is not insignificant. This stream drains a lake-creek system in far northwestern Sawyer County. Glacial features in its drainage area include kettle lakes left behind in “pitted outwash” and several terminal moraines. Lost Land Lake has three inflow creeks. It is connected to Teal Lake by a nearly mile long natural channel which flows eastward. Teal Lake also receives inflow from Lynch Creek from the north. The Teal River is the outflow stream from that lake. It empties into the West Fork of the Chippewa River. This short-lived river crosses a topo line (depicted in the Gazetteer) as it descends which means there is a significant gradient and some rapids. The region’s flora is typical “Northwoods”.

Human History and Influence
The entire drainage system falls within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Farms are absent but at least one resort and numerous dwellings populate the shores of both lakes in the system. Logs were likely driven down the Teal River during the logging era.

Navigability and Difficulty
Undoubtedly the rapids are frequently too shallow for easy navigation. The water was plentiful when I paddled it in early spring. To my pleasant surprise there were no deadfall obstructions. It should be easy to judge the adequacy of flow by a quick bridge scout from the County S bridge.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
At some point in late 1982 I started to wonder how many Wisconsin streams I had paddled. I counted them up and was surprised to find I had paddled nearly 100. That was when I started to keep track of new rivers and to take notes on my experiences. The Teal River turned out to be number 100! It was a brief outing which started at the boat landing which is located at the end of a short dirt road along County S. I took out at the County S bridge. It was the spring of 1983 and the water was still high from snow melt. I was paddling my Ladybug solo freestyle canoe. For the first quarter of a mile Teal Creek was a nearly currentless outlet channel of Teal Lake. Suddenly it narrowed into a fast and rocky, Class I ride which went on for about one mile. It was wonderful way to experience a beautiful forest. The water was delightfully clear. At the end of the trip I must not have felt the usual need to exercise my legs. The trip back to my car was a stroll instead of a jog.

Further Ideas
This trip could be lengthened in a couple of ways. One way would be to putin at another boat landing depicted in the Gazetteer along Larson Rd. a few hundred yards north of Hwy. 77. Boaters who start here will experience more of the narrow outlet channel of Teal Lake. Another lengthening option is to paddle the final quarter mile of the Teal River into the West Fork of the Chippewa River and down to the County B bridge. (See my write-up about the West Fork of the Chippewa River).
Conclusion
This pretty little stream will appeal only to paddlers who happen to be in the area. It is a short ride even when it includes a section of the West Fork of the Chippewa River. Intermediate whitewater skills are required.
Ten Mile Creek

Location
Far southwestern Rusk County and eastern Barron County.

Natural Features
Ten Mile Creek first drains the hills of terminal moraines which were deposited at the farthest advance of the Wisconsin Glacier. Then it flows across a level outwash plain to the Chetek River which soon joins the Red Cedar River. Marshy sections alternate with rocky sections. Trees of the Northwoods and wetland species populate its banks. Small kettle lakes dot the drainage area. The creek widens into a small lake in the middle of a marsh.

Human History and Influence
Woods alternate with farms in this land use “transition” region of the state. There are no nearby towns. A marshy section of the creek way is part of the Ten Mile Creek State Wildlife Area. The creek skirts the edge of Ten Mile Lake which is part of the Chetek Chain of Lakes. That chain is kept artificially high by low dam at the Chetek River outflow point. If the Gazetteer is to be believed, a section of Ten Mile Creek is inundated by the aforementioned lake. Then it reemerges from the lake and finds its way to the Chetek River. If the map is accurate this is an unusual situation because flowages usually have just one outflow and Ten Mile Creek would make it two from the Chetek Chain of Lakes. I suspect there is a low dam at the site of Ten Mile Creek’s outflow from Ten Mile Lake.

Navigability and Difficulty
Marshy sections will usually be navigable. This small stream is undoubtedly deadfall prone in forested sections.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Had this creek not been so close to my lake home on Pine Lake I never would have ventured onto it. The year was 2002 and the month was June. First I talked to a local who advised I check out the unimproved boat landing located a mile north of County D and accessible from 30th St. (also known as County Line Rd.). Finding that road was too muddy I instead drove to the County D bridge and put in there. In my Wildfire I paddled upstream in a northerly direction against a very weak current. Initially it was easy to paddle on the tannin-stained but clear waters through a marshy corridor. The shoreline featured an attractive mix of river rushes, cattails and other wetland vegetation. After a while finding the best routes became more challenging as the creek broke into multiple small channels. When I reached the small lake depicted in the Gazetteer I found it to be totally choked with pond weed and other vegetation. It was too thick to proceed so I turned around and returned the way I had come.

Further Ideas
Perhaps, in the spring, the above lake is not so vegetation-choked. The unimproved boat landing I mentioned above is located just north of the lake along the creek. From this landing it should be possible to paddle for a ways in both directions. Paddling Ten Mile Creek downstream from County D would likely be difficult because of deadfall obstructions. An easier and more practical idea is the following: Put in at the Gazetteer-marked boat landing on the eastern shore of Ten Mile Lake. From there find the Ten Mile Creek inlet and paddle upstream as far as desired. Then turn around for a round trip. If I
ever do this I will find and inspect the creek’s outlet site from Ten Mile Lake. Here is one final idea: It might be possible to paddle from the Ten Mile Lake outlet to the Chetek River.

**Conclusion**
Ten Mile Creek is not a bad option for those who like to explore wetland creeks.
Thornapple River

Location
Sawyer and Rusk counties.

Natural Features
The Thornapple is a sizeable tributary of the Chippewa River. It flows across ground moraines left behind by the Wisconsin Glacier. As a result the streambed is often rocky. Rapids exist because the river’s gradient is steep at times. Lakes in the Thornapple’s drainage area are fewer in number than most areas of northern Wisconsin. The river drains a northern hardwood-hemlock forest whose indicator tree species are hemlocks, sugar maples, yellow birches and basswoods. Its source is near Hwy. 70 two miles northeast of Draper.

Human History and Influence
I am sure that both Native Americans and Voyageurs used the Thornapple as a canoe trail. The logging era brought logging runs to this river. Upstream sections are characterized by a lack of farms and human settlements. Tourism is undeveloped because the lakes are so few. Agriculture is practiced to a greater degree along downstream sections. The Thornapple River itself lacks dams but there is a dam and resultant flowage on its Little Thornapple River tributary.

Navigability and Difficulty
Much of the Thornapple is navigable when the water is high enough. Often, however, it is too shallow. Trips should only be undertaken with knowledge of recent precipitation and after scouting from bridges. Some sections are deadfall-prone.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
In May of 1985 I solo-paddled my Ladybug canoe from the County J bridge to Hwy. 27. The trip took three hours and was followed by a bike ride back to the County J junction. That road was too rough for my bicycle so I jogged the final three miles back to my car. The stretch I paddled that day is probably the least interesting part of the Thornapple. Rapids were lacking and the shoreline was mostly a monotonous line of silver maple trees. Farm fields occasionally came into view. At least fallen trees were not a problem. I thought this stretch would likely be navigable for much of the year and would be suitable for novice paddlers.

Downstream of Hwy 27 the Thornapple requires whitewater skills and it requires higher water. In the spring of 1982 I tandem paddled from the Hwy 27 bridge to Thornapple Rd. with Pat Rosenbrook. An ideal medium water level carried us through a series of attractive rapids prior to the County A bridge. One rapid featured large boulders and a high bedrock cliff on river left. This one was a Class II but I the others were just Class I’s. At one point we surprised a beaver. In its haste to flee it somehow flipped onto its back and had trouble righting itself.

In 1993 I returned to the Thornapple with another tandem partner, Bob Green. We started at the same place and then paddled all the way to the Chippewa River bridge at the east end of Bruce. It was an enjoyable run until we encountered a number logjams and fallen trees. I think this happened about a mile upstream of the Thornapple Bridge where the Gazetteer depicts a large island. We took the right
channel where we encountered most of the obstructions. The river might have been more open had we taken the left channel.

**Experiences of Others**
Frank Piraino explored an upstream section of the Thornapple. He put in at the Thornapple Grade Rd. in Sawyer County and took out at the Winter Rd. bridge. Mr. Piraino wrote about his trip in *Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin*. He described the section as beautiful and remote. The rapids were frequent but were all easy Class I’s. Frank portaged a series of difficult log jams in the final mile before the Winter Rd. bridge.

**Further Ideas**
I can imagine spending two days on the Thornapple and finding a place to camp along the river. My idea would be to put in at the County J Bridge and take out at Bruce.

**Conclusion**
The Thornapple is a lovely Northwoods stream which deserves more attention. Whitewater skills are required along many sections and the water is often too shallow.

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*The lower section of the Thornapple is characterized by lowland maple forest.*
Torch River

Location
Ashland and Sawyer counties.

Natural Features
The Torch River is a tributary of the West Fork of the Chippewa River. It drains forests east and south of Clam Lake in Ashland County. Much of it flows through marshes but it also passes uplands. Its pristine waters flow over alternating floors of sand, gravel, glacial erratic boulders, and muck. The Torch’s streamside vegetation includes wetland species and upland trees like pines and spruces.

Human History and Influence
The entire drainage area of the Torch River lies within the boundaries of the Chequamegon Nicolet National Forest. Human influences are minimal in this sparsely populated region. Agriculture is not a factor. Once upon a time the Torch River was probably used for logging runs.

Navigability and Difficulty
The Torch’s gradient is low. Much of it runs slowly through wetlands. I did encounter one Class I rapid followed by a long reach of shallow riffles. This particular stretch would require some canoe dragging at low water times. Shallow water should not be a problem on the rest of the river. I encountered no deadfall problems, but was forced to deal with several beaver dams. How to decide if the water is high enough? I made my decision after viewing the river from the Ashland Co. GG bridge.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I know of no one else who has paddled the Torch, but I am certainly glad I did. First I left my mountain bike by the Belsky Bridge on the West Fork of the Chippewa River. I knew what to expect on that river by reading my out of print guidebook, Wisconsin’s North Central Canoe Trails. Then I drove to the County GG bridge over the Torch and prepared to put in there. The date was June 21, 2002 and I had my Bell Wildfire solo freestyle canoe. Beyond two small cabins near the put-in I entered a pristine-looking wilderness. The water ran clear and tannin-stained over a mostly sandy but occasionally boulder strewn riverbed. It was easy to paddle this wetland stream which was mostly narrow but widened to 60 feet at times. Alders and marshy vegetation lined an obstruction-free channel. Blooming blue flags, Canada anenomes and bunchberries graced the banks. Cedars, spruces and tamaracks arose in the near distance.

Several beaver dams blocked my path but there were no deadfall obstructions. By speeding up and then thrusting forward I was able to force my way over all the beaver dams without exiting my canoe. At one point I heard a peeping sound overhead and looked up to see an osprey. Several kingfishers were chasing dragonflies. But these wildlife sightings paled in comparison to what followed. Ahead on a treeless sloping bank I spotted a creature most people have never seen in the wild. It was a badger! This critter could have disappeared into his den but instead stood its ground next to the entrance. I paddled to the bank and where we stared at each for about a minute. He wasn’t going to move so I grudgingly ended our stalemate by turning away and heading downstream.

About a mile and a half into the trip I spotted a footbridge ahead and heard the sound of rapids. It was a tight little Class I plunge which required a quick maneuver on my part. This was followed by a fast 100 yard boulder garden run past forested upland banks. This was the section I mentioned above which is
probably too shallow to run when the water is low. After a total of about two and a half hours I reached the West Fork of the Chippewa and turned left. (See my West Fork write up to learn the details about the rest of my voyage.) Briefly, I encountered a few minor rapids along the way. The West Fork widens into two natural lakes towards the end of the run. By the time I reached the Belsky Bridge I had spent about 4 hours on the water. On my mountain bike I followed Forest Rd. 176 back to County GG. From that junction my car was only a quarter of a mile away.

**Conclusion**
The Torch River is a wonderful little Northwoods stream. Paddling it into the West Fork of the Chippewa River is the best way to see it. A badger sighting is not guaranteed.
Totogatic River

Location
Bayfield, Douglas, Sawyer, Washburn and Burnett counties.

Natural Features
Two small creeks in far southern Bayfield County flow into Totagatic Lake which is a natural body of water. The East Fork of the Totogatic River emerges from this lake and soon merges with two other headwater branches to form the Totogatic River. Then the river flows generally eastward for about 65 miles before it joins the Namekagon River. It flows through a pine-hardwood forest until it reaches a sandy Pine Barrens region. Bottomland trees line portions of the lower river. Slow, marshy stretches alternate with fast, rocky runs. Midway through its journey the Totogatic cascades over three bedrock basaltic waterfalls within a 4 mile stretch.

Human History and Influence
I am sure that Native Americans canoed the Totogatic but this stream was never an important canoeing route for them or for the voyageurs. It did see its share of logging runs. Eventually four dams were erected. Nelson Lake, Totogatic Flowage, Colton Flowage and Minong Flowage were the result. In 2009 this “Outstanding Resource Water” was added to the Wisconsin Wild Rivers system along with the Brunswieier River. These two streams were the first to be added since the original three (Pine, Popple and Pike, in Florence and Marinette counties) were designated in 1965. Now nearly 70 miles of the Totogatic (excluding flowages) are at least partially protected.

How well protected? Denny Canef, the executive director of the River Alliance of Wisconsin, emailed me with his opinion: “…the state of Wisconsin and the Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Association worked feverishly to protect land along the Totogatic from development. Those actions are probably more important than the Wild River designation which only addresses water quality…”

Navigability and Difficulty
Water levels are often two low except on the farthest downstream stretches. There are no gauges so scouting may be necessary to decide whether water levels are adequate. Class III-IV whitewater skills are necessary between Totogatic and Colton Flowages. According to the guidebook author sited below this section needs to have 6-12 inches of water covering the rocks immediately downstream of Duck Dam. Many sections of the Totogatic are deadfall prone.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Twice I have paddled the Totogatic River with Pat Brennaman and his sons. The first time was in late October of 1986 when son #1, Nate, was only 13 years old but already a skilled kayaker. Pat and I brought our solo whitewater canoes. Our trip was on the wild and beautiful 9 mile section between the Totogatic and Colton Flowages. We found the put-in by driving south on Duck Pond Rd. from Hwy. 27 to Duck Dam. Minor rapids started almost immediately as the narrow but generally unobstructed stream flowed through a deep forest. Two miles into the trip a horizon line loomed ahead and we heard the roar of a waterfall. High Falls is a 20 foot cascade which deserves a Class IV rating. That day we considered running it but decided there was not enough water, so we all portaged.
Next we ran a series of minor rapids in the next 1.5 miles before we heard the noise of another cascade called Small Falls. This one was an easier Class II+ and we ran it without scouting. Minor rapids ensued before the river slowed and widened through a marsh. The calm ended abruptly when another horizon line came into view. The 15 foot sloping ledge called Buck Falls looked challenging but doable despite the low water. At that level it probably was a Class III+. All three of us enjoyed successful runs.

The rest of the trip to Colton Flowage was easy except for one thing. We were all freezing! Minnesotan Pat says he may never have been colder in his entire life. The weather was much warmer when we returned in 1999. When Pat’s second son Gabe was with us this time. The six year old rode with his dad in the Mad River ME canoe. Nate was now 26 and using the same kayak he had in 1986. Gabe watched from the shore as we all ran High Falls successfully. We scouted it first and concluded that a strong left-to-right diagonal route was the best way. At Buck Falls, Pat decided his 15ft. 6 inch ME was too long to make the required technical moves. So he and Gabe portaged around the falls and then watched Nate and me. He and I both made the right moves and had good runs. It helped that my Dagger Ovation was only 12 feet long and that Nate’s kayak was even shorter. When we reached Colton Flowage we paddled across it and took out near the left side of the dam. Cold weather was not a problem this time. Our difficulty on this warm July day was the car shuttle along Frog Creek Rd. Recent rains had left this dirt road muddy and very slippery. Both of us nearly slid into the ditch several times. Our high clearance, 4 wheel drive SUV’s were much appreciated.

Experiences of Others
The out of print guidebook Canoeing the Wild Rivers of Northwestern Wisconsin was written by Gerald Lowry. In it he wrote that the 15 miles from Colton Dam to U.S. Hwy 53 are seldom paddled because of downed trees and logjams. The 16 miles from Hwy. 53 to Lake Nancy Road are also less than ideal. Most paddlers won’t take that trip because it requires lake paddling across the Minong Flowage. An additional difficulty is the presence of frequent fallen trees in the first several miles downstream of Hwy. 53. Lowry writes that some paddlers take a shorter trip within this section from the boat landing on Gilmore Lake to Smith Rd. bridge. Evidently Gilmore Creek is an easy link to the Totogatic from Gilmore Lake. Lowry also describes the river’s final 16 miles from Lake Nancy Road to the Namekagon confluence. He writes that water levels along this stretch fluctuate greatly depending on releases from the Minong Flowage. The section is “extremely wild and secluded” with abundant wildlife. Dismal Swamp constitutes the Totogatic’s final two miles before the Namekagon confluence. Many low islands and fallen trees create a complicated maze. However, Pat Brennaman and Denny Caneff both reported little difficulty getting through the swamp.

Further Ideas
I wonder if there are sections along the lower river which are suitable for canoe-camping. Despite woody obstructions and the Minong Flowage it should be possible to paddle the 46 miles from Colton Flowage to the Namekagon River. From that confluence it is only a mile to the Namekagon Trail Bridge.

Conclusion
The Totogatic is a wild and beautiful stream where it runs free. Advanced whitewater boaters may want to experience the challenging section between the Totogatic and Colton Flowages. Other sections are free of whitewater but can be deadfall prone. This river has too many dams to be a great canoeing river.
Trade River

Location
Polk and Burnett counties.

Natural Features
The Trade River drains a diverse landscape. Whitewater is lacking as the river flows slowly across a section of the Central Sandstone Plain. The river and its tributaries link numerous kettle lakes which filled the “pits” left behind when the Wisconsin Glacier melted. Irregular hills called moraines were also deposited at the time. The Trade’s corridor features bottomland trees like silver maples and upland species like basswoods, sugar maples and a few pine trees. In far western Burnett County tributaries of this stream drain a vast wetland complex. Here the Wisconsin DNR is preserving the Fish Lake State Wildlife Area because it includes relatively unspoiled areas of “tall grass prairie, oak savanna, pine barrens and southern mesic hardwoods.” Eventually, the Trade finds its way to the St. Croix River.

Human History and Influence
The area was logged and some of the gray loam topsoil was discovered to be quite fertile. As a result this region is now a “farm to forest transition area” of Wisconsin. Many of the lakes are good for fishing and are surrounded by lake homes. The towns of Luck and Frederick along Hwy. 35 are located near the river’s headwaters. A unit of the Governor Knowles State Forest includes both banks of the Trade along its final four miles to the St. Croix River.

Navigability and Difficulty
There are no rapids. Deadfall problems will occur but were not a problem where I paddled. The water level was adequate that day but I am sure it gets too low at times.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I came to the Trade River in May of 1991 with my solo-freestyle Ladybug canoe. First I left my 50cc Yamaha motorcycle at the St. Croix River boat landing near stream the community of Wolf Creek. Then I drove to the Evergreen Ave. bridge where I put in. The banks were wild but monotonously covered by silver maple trees. After about three miles on the Trade I reached the St. Croix River confluence where that river was immediately wide and windswept. It was a battle to paddle the three miles to the Wolf Creek Landing on river left.

Further Ideas
Perhaps upstream sections of the Trade River are navigable and more interesting. One could start a St. Croix River trip on the Trade River.

Conclusion
The Trade River is not high on my list of recommended rivers. It was wild, however, and easy to paddle. It could be an interesting way to start a trip down the St. Croix.
Turtle Creek

Location
Barron County.

Natural Features
Turtle Creek drains parts of southwestern Barron County before it joins the Hay River near the community of Prairie Farm. It originates in Upper Turtle Lake just east of the U.S. Hwy. 8 town of Turtle Lake. Soon it flows through Lower Turtle Lake. Then it flows freely to the Hay River. Along the way it exposes sandstone cliffs.

Human History and Influence
There are no towns along Turtle Creek but farms are never far away.

Navigability and Difficulty
I encountered fences and beaver dams but no fallen trees. Some sections are likely to be deadfall prone. Shallow water will be a problem at times. This stream has some riffles but no significant whitewater.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I explored Turtle Creek on May 3 of 1991. Alone I paddled my solo freestyle Lady bug from County D to County A in 2.5 hours. My shuttle vehicle was a 50cc. moped. It was a good outing despite several fences and beaver dams which blocked my path. The water was shallow enough to scrape bottom several times. The trip’s middle third took me the furthest from roads and farms and was by far the nicest. There I passed sandstone cliffs which reminded of the Kickapoo River. They were topped by tall white pine trees.

Further Ideas
Perhaps upstream sections of Turtle Creek are navigable when the water is high. Another option is to start on Turtle Creek and continue down the Hay River.

Conclusion
Turtle Creek is an option for those who like to explore small streams.
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 the Michigan 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 rapids which are minor 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 a dam that created 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 village 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 U.S. 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.
Upper Tamarack River

**Location**
Douglas County, Wisconsin and Pine County, Minnesota.

**Natural Features**
The Upper Tamarack River’s headwaters gather in the swamps and conifer-hardwood forests of western Douglas County. They coalesce into a stream which flows downward to the St. Croix River. The river flows over ancient igneous rock which it exposes along boulder gardens and rapids. The waters of the Upper Tamarack are tannin-stained and usually clear.

**Human History and Influence**
The area was logged but farming never took hold because of the thick forests, swamps and poor soils. Human dwellings and communities are few. Tourism is not important here because lakes are few and far between. One dam on the upper river creates an artificial lake known as the Radigan Flowage. The drainage area remains wild on the Minnesota side too. The Minnesota-Wisconsin boundary creates a unique situation: The Upper Tamarack River is the only navigable stream which begins in Wisconsin and ends in Minnesota.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
This river is often too shallow. The sections I paddled were surprisingly deadfall free. Rapids are of the Class I-II variety, although, according to the American Whitewater website, there is at least one rapid which approaches a III when the water is high. How to judge if there is enough water? The American Whitewater website includes some advice on this question. My advice is included below.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
In 1991 I paddled a short stretch of the Upper Tamarack after I entered it from the Spruce River. (See my write-up for this outing which ended at County T on the Upper Tamarack.) In late May of 2005 I was back to explore more of the Upper Tamarack River. First I left my bike at Markville, Minnesota next to the Minnesota Hwy 25 bridge. Then I drove to the Douglas Co. T bridge and prepared to launch my solo whitewater canoe. Initially the river was wide and slow. The forest had a “cutover” look. Fortunately the stream corridor soon became more attractive. I began to encounter a series of speedy narrows through Class I rock gardens. The water was pleasantly clear. I saw many whitetail deer but no people. The one beaver dam I encountered was easy to blast over because its builders had not yet finished their spring repairs.

As the rapids became more challenging and the shoreline scenery improved I wondered if I was in Minnesota yet. The shores were brimming with blooming bishop’s caps, purple violets and other spring ephemerals. Several rapids were Class II’s and were challenging to run because the water was so shallow. Twice I nearly tipped over after getting turned broadside against rocks. The seven mile trip was over after 2 ½ hours. At the take-out bridge I made some observations about the water level. My lightly loaded light canoe barely made it through the rocky section under the bridge. Don’t run this section of the Upper Tamarack unless you think you can avoid getting hung up on these rocks. After making this assessment I mounted my bike for a pleasant ride back to my car at the put-in.
Experiences of Others
The American Whitewater website includes the Upper Tamarack. “Comments” are lacking but it does include gradient information. This website gives the river as a Class II-III rating. It lists three consecutive sections: First is the three miles from Radigan Dam to Swedish Highway which drops 19 feet per mile. Second is the section from that bridge to Stateline Rd. which drops 11.2 feet per mile. Third is the section from Stateline Rd. to MN Hwy. 25 which drops 21.5 feet per mile.

Further Ideas
With plenty of water it should be fun for intermediate whitewater paddlers to run the entire 13.3 miles from Radigan Dam to MN 25 in a single day trip. It should also be possible to explore the final three miles from the MN 25 Bridge at Markville to the St. Croix River. There is a landing at the confluence of these two streams which is marked in the Wisconsin Gazetteer. This access looks to be reachable from Pansy Landing Rd. on the Wisconsin side. The Marksville-to-confluence stretch may be a bottomland section prone to deadfall problems. If this final stretch is reasonably open it should also be possible to begin a St. Croix River trip by starting on the Upper Tamarack River.

Conclusion
This is a small and pretty Northwoods stream which drains very wild country. With enough water it is an option for intermediate whitewater adventurers who like to explore seldom paddled rivers.
Wapagasset River

Location
Polk County.

Natural Features
This stream is the final link in a sizeable Polk County drainage system which includes several streams and lakes. Only the system’s final few miles from Wapagasset Lake to the Apple River are dubbed the Wapagasset River. The headwaters of this system are several creeks which feed Balsam Lake in central Polk County. From that lake to Wapagasset Lake the stream is known as the Balsam Branch. The system drains moraines and pitted outwash deposits which formed at the end of the Wisconsin Ice Age. The region’s many lakes filled those “pits.” This is a border region between northern conifer-hardwoods and southern hardwoods. The streambed is often rocky but the gradient is too low to form rapids. The underlying bedrock here is sandstone but the visible rocks and gravel are remnants of older Precambrian rocks which the Glacier carried down from points north.

Human History and Influence
This is farm to forest transition country. The stream is also impacted by the Polk County seat of Balsam Lake and cottages which ring the lakes of the drainage system. Several low dams cross the river including one at the outlet of Wapagasset Lake where the Wapagasset River begins.

Navigability and Difficulty
Except for one big log jam the stretch I paddled was deadfall free. Rocky riffles were common but there were no significant rapids. Though the stream is shallow it should have a fairly long canoeing season. Scout it from at least one vantage point because it will not always be runnable.

Trip Ideas: My experience
One warm and humid day in the early 2000s I locked my bicycle next to the 150 St. bridge on the Apple River. Then I drove to the 140th St. bridge over the Wapagasset where I put in just downstream of a small dam which was under the bridge. My expectations were low so I was delighted to discover the many charms of this little stream. It ran clear over an often rocky streambed. Medium current carried me steadily past magnificent trees growing from consistently high banks. Even though 140th St. was persistently near, the stream’s immediate corridor was undeveloped and wild.

Beyond the County K bridge the river way became even more attractive as the stream strayed further from the road. The current became surprisingly swift for this part of the state. The narrow “V-shaped” river valley could almost be called a “gorge.” There was plenty to keep me busy and happy in my solo Wildfire. I maneuvered through narrow chutes, over rocky riffles and around fast corners. Fallen trees reached out but never stopped me until I encountered one huge log jam which required a long portage. There were also numerous footbridges to duck under and one electric fence I evaded in the nick of time. Schools of suckers darted in every direction on the rocky riffles. Little blue flowers draped rotting logs at the water’s edge. I recognized them as forget-me-nots. Phoebes called from branches along the shore. Several bald eagles soared high above the river. When I reached the Apple River my journey was nearly over. The final mile was very different because this river was wider and slower. Its stream floor was sandy. Silver maples and ashes lined the shores instead of pines and birches. After 1 ½ hours on these two rivers I reached my take-out and biked back to my car.
Further Ideas
It should be possible to lengthen the trip by putting in at the County F bridge next to Wapaggaset Lake. This extra mile would include paddling across tiny Mud Lake. The trip could also be extended by taking out farther downstream on the Apple River.

Conclusion
My Wapagasset River outing was too brief but very enjoyable. This stream is not for everybody because of the log jam, the foot bridges and the fences. But those with good boat control skills and a sense of adventure will enjoy this stream when it has enough water. It can be a fun way to start a trip down the Apple River.
White River

Location
Bayfield and Ashland counties.

Natural Features
The White River drainage system is large and important. This stream undergoes several dramatic character changes. Initially it gathers many branches from the heights of the Northern Highland. The outlets from numerous kettle lakes drain toward it. The upper river flows through a massive swamp known as the Bibon Marsh. Then the White begins a steep downstream march to the Lake Superior Lowland. Streambed Precambrian boulders create nearly continuous rapids. Clay banks are exposed as the stream cuts through Glacial Lake Duluth deposits. Lake Superior sandstone is revealed in a rapids-filled gorge. Then the river slows markedly in its final miles to Lake Superior. It merges with the Bad River which flows through another massive wetland complex. The corridor of the White River reveals an impressive variety of Northwoods wetland, upland and bottomland plants.

The water quality of the White is generally excellent though lower stretches are stained red by eroding clay banks. Much of the upper river sustains a healthy brown trout population.

Human History and Influence
Early Native Americans and the French voyageurs used the White River as part of a canoe-portage route which included the Namekagon River. Later the loggers came and floated their logs down the river. Farmers arrived but never in large numbers. Agriculture and roads have degraded the river to a mild degree. The only human community to develop along the White River’s banks was Mason which, at 69 residents, has the distinction of being the smallest incorporated village in Wisconsin.

Upper reaches of the river lie within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. A downstream section is controlled by the Bad River Indian Reservation. The White River Flowage is located behind a dam near the Hwy. 112 bridge. Whitewater appears just downstream of this dam but the steepest cascade is covered by the water except when the flowage is emptied during drawdowns. The following “Caution” was printed in the now out-of-print Whitewater-Quietwater guidebook: “Make certain the reservoir at the take-out is holding water before making this run. At certain times, especially in the late fall, the dam is opened and the flowage drained. What once was a quiet flowage becomes a raging torrent of continuous standing waves through a narrow channel that ends in a grade VI-plus drop. To escape the potential disaster, it would be necessary to slog out through foot-deep mud flats, a rather unpleasant alternative.”

Navigability and Difficulty
The upper river is usually deep enough to paddle though there may be occasional fallen trees to dodge or portage around. I paddled the entire Bibon Marsh without having to exit my canoe. Downstream of Mason the White requires intermediate whitewater skills. The river usually has enough water here for an enjoyable run. At times the water can be dangerously high. Consult the American Whitewater website for runnability advice. Mike Svob (see below) advises calling the White River Tavern (715-765-4760) for a general idea about water levels. See the “Caution” mentioned in the previous paragraph. I am not sure what the White looks like downstream of the Hwy. 112 bridge. No one should paddle beyond the Hwy. 13 bridge without permission from the Bad River Indian Band. This is very difficult to attain.
Trip Ideas: My experience
I have explored both the Bibon Marsh and the whitewater section of the White River. It was August of 2001 when I canoed alone through Bibon Marsh. It was among my favorite all-time wetland paddling experiences. First I left my 60cc Yamaha motorcycle at the Bibon Rd. boat landing. Then I drove to the boat landing on Town Line Rd. There I deposited a dollar in the box which requested 50 cents from boaters or fishermen who use the small parking lot. What followed was 5 hours of paddling bliss! Tannin-stained but clear water filled a narrow but generally deep channel which pierced the heart of Bibon Marsh. I paddled past pond weed, turtle heads, forget-me-nots, and monkey flowers. These booming flowers were framed by bulrushes, sedges, grasses and other wetland species. Beyond the corridor of low plants arose cedars, black spruces and tamaracks. I passed several forested upland hills and also canoed through a black ash swamp. Had the day been hot I would have stopped for a swim and enjoyed the clean water and sandy stream floor.

Near the end of the trip I noticed an even clearer tributary merging from my right. This was the Long Lake Branch. I had explored this branch in 1991 with my wife Pat in a tandem canoe. We had put-in at the Bibon Rd. landing and reached the branch by paddling upstream on the main White River. Then we turned left and ascended this tributary. The ascent began in a black ash swamp but the trees soon dwindled into an open marsh. After about an hour and a half of paddling against a gentle current we turned around and returned to where we had started. We had retraced part of the historic water route used by Native Americans and French Voyageurs on their way to Lake Owen. My friend, Carter Leslie has fished the Long Branch of the White River. He told me we would have eventually encountered a gauntlet of fallen trees which now obstruct this branch but we never got that far. About the time we turned around, Pat and I were mesmerized by the activities of an American bittern. The trip back to the main White was an easy float. From that confluence the Bibon Rd. landing was less than a mile away.

Most paddlers who float the White River are interested in the rapids-filled 13 mile stretch between Maple Ridge Rd. and the White River Flowage. I have paddled this lovely and exciting stretch on several occasions. I believe my first trip was a late 1970s Sierra Club outing led by Bob Mulder. Then as always the Class I and II rapids were easy but fun and the scenery was excellent. Spruce trees rose like steeples from high, exposed clay banks. Signs of civilization were few.

Experiences of Others
Far upstream sections of the White are reportedly boatable. Three headwater branches originate in lakes and merge near the community of Delta. The Sierra Club’s Joan Redman has explored at least one of these branches. My fishing buddy Carter Leslie has floated at least one of these branches with his fly rod in hand. For him, the pleasures of paddling pale in comparison to the thrill of landing a sizeable brown trout.

Frank Piraino also has explored the upper White River. He wrote about it in his Small River Canoe Adventures of Wisconsin. He spent about three hours paddling from the Pike River Rd. bridge to Town Line bridge. To him this was a narrow but unobstructed section of clear, gently flowing water past “brushy vegetation.” On another day Piraino explored and thoroughly enjoyed the Bibon Marsh.

Mike Svob covers the 13 mile whitewater section of the White River in his guidebook, Paddling Northern Wisconsin. He was impressed with its sheer number of Class I and Class II rapids. A Miles Paddled
website writer also describes this whitewater section. I especially enjoyed viewing its attached photos. They reminded me of the high clay banks and the lovely streamside trees.

**Further Ideas**
There are few upland sites which should be suitable for camping in the Bibon Marsh. Canoe camping is also an option along the 13 mile whitewater stretch. The American Whitewater website mentions a .8 mile Class II-III whitewater run which begins immediately below the White River Dam. I have no idea what the river has in store from that point to the Hwy. 13 bridge, but it might be fun to find out. It likely contains little to no whitewater and it may be snag-prone. Again paddling the Reservation lands beyond Hwy 13 is not allowed.

**Conclusion**
The White River is a fabulous canoe stream which is under appreciated. The whitewater section is shunned by those who seek a greater challenge. Yet this stretch is beautiful and fun to paddle for those with intermediate whitewater skills. The Bibon Marsh is an unspoiled wetland treasure which I hope to paddle again.
White River (Long Lake Branch)

See entry for White River
Wood River

Location
Burnett County.

Natural Features
The Wood River drains several kettle lakes which were formed at the end of the Ice Age when chunks of ice melted and left water-filled “pits” behind. It also drains a huge wetland complex known as the Crex Meadows. This vast marsh once lay under Glacial Lake Grantsburg. The entire drainage area consists of sandy Pine Barrens where jack pines commonly grow. After its westward journey the Wood River merges with the St. Croix River.

Human History and Influence
Grantsburg developed as a mill town and a railroad town. Now it is known as the gateway to Crex Meadows. That wetland complex became Wisconsin’s second largest state-owned wildlife area. Its 30,000 acres are intensely managed with a series of dikes, dams, and flowages. It is an important staging area for numerous bird species. Brush prairies and rare sedge marshes are among the ecosystems being managed. I will always remember a visit my wife and I made to the area. The sharp-tailed grouse mating dance we witnessed was hilarious.

Navigability and Difficulty
This river lacks whitewater and is often blocked by fallen trees and log jams. Water levels will usually be adequate.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
On May 9th of 1987 I came to the Wood River with my solo freestyle Ladybug Canoe. I am glad I planned only a short trip followed by a “jog back” shuttle. I never saw so many jack pines along a Wisconsin stream. Unfortunately, these and other trees were not well anchored by the sandy soil. Many of them had fallen across the river. I spent too much time pulling my canoe over and around these obstructions. At least the river corridor looked attractive when I was not preoccupied by this activity.

Conclusion
If Grantsburg area paddlers would grab their chainsaws and clear this river way the Wood River would be a nice canoe stream.
Yellow River (Barron County)

**Location**
Washburn and Barron counties.

**Natural Features**
This Yellow River begins in Washburn County near the Barron County line. It drains three types of glacial deposit areas on its journey to the Chippewa River. Near its source this stream drains pitted outwash. Lakes filled these “pits” at the end of the Ice Age. Then the Yellow breaks through a terminal moraine where many rocks and boulders are exposed. These materials persist as the Yellow cuts through ground moraines overlain by grayish and sandy loams. These soils are fertile enough to support farms. The Yellow’s upland banks hold northern hardwoods and pines.

**Human History and Influence**
Native American history was followed by logging era. In 1860, representative of the Knapp and Stout Logging Company arrived at the site where the city of Barron was founded. The river was dammed for hydropower to run saw mills, a flour mill and a woolen mill. Eventually a second dam was added a few miles upstream. Both dams still exist. The Yellow River State Fishery Area has been established along an upstream corridor. Some of the farms around Barron raise turkeys for a large processing plant in that town. They contribute polluted runoff to the river.

**Navigability and Difficulty**
Downstream of Barron the Yellow is shallow but usually deep enough for lightly loaded canoes. Bridge scouting and knowledge of recent precipitation patterns will be needed to judge runnability.

**Trip Ideas: My experiences**
This river was located close to my Chippewa County lake home of many years. Consequently I traveled it on four or five separate occasions. Pat Christopherson and I explored the stretch from Barron to County O in 1993. We put in just downstream of the dam in Barron. It was late summer and the aquatic plants had grown thick enough to slow our progress. Otherwise the narrow river was surprisingly obstruction-free. Between the weed beds we could easily see the gravel stream floor through clear water. Several snapping turtles slipped from their log perches into the water. An osprey flew overhead but never dived for a fish. A tailwind pushed us along but failed to clear away swarms of pesky deerflies. Forested upland shores predominated but a few marshy bottomlands were also in the mix.

I have paddled the Yellow from County O to the Red Cedar’s County OO bridge on several occasions alone and with others. Typically I ran the three mile shuttle back to the put-in. Beyond an initial farm field this section is mostly lined by wooded uplands. On its final descent to the Red Cedar the river passes some especially attractive higher slopes. I recall shallow riffles but never the need to exit my canoe.

**Further Ideas**
Both of the above outings are relatively short. A Barron to County O trip would only take 3 to 4 hours. A Yellow River trip could also be extended further down the Red Cedar River.
Conclusion
Barron County’s Yellow River deserves more attention from paddlers. Those who like small, seldom paddled streams should try it. The Yellow is easy to paddle, obstruction-free and reasonably scenic. Heavy canoes will experience hang-ups at low water times.
Location
Taylor and Chippewa counties.

Natural Features
The North and South Forks of the Yellow River originate in the forests of north central Taylor County. They drain two types of glacial deposits. The North Fork drains mostly ground moraines while the South Fork drains terminal moraines. The latter features kettle lakes whereas the former does not. After the forks merge the Yellow River flows southwesterly to Lake Wissota, an impoundment of the Chippewa River. Its gradient is steep at times as it flows downhill from the Northern Highland to the Central Plain. Sporadically it cuts through granite bedrock revealing attractive outcrops. Much of the river is boulder strewn with “glacial erratics.” Rapids are frequent but not fearsome. The Yellow drains a variety of Northern hardwood and conifer forests. The only marshy sections are near the headwaters.

Human History and Influence
The French fur trader, Michel Cadotte came to the current site of Cadott in about 1787 where he established a trading post. The river's first logging drive came in 1861. The city of Cadott (pop. 1437) brags of being situated “half way between the Equator and the North Pole.” Gilman was founded as a logging center and later became a railroad town. The Yellow’s upper reaches are heavily forested and fall within the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Here the water quality is generally excellent. Dairy farms become increasingly common as the river nears the Chippewa County border. Consequently, the river becomes polluted by agricultural runoff. A dam in the National Forest forms an impoundment known as the Chequamegon Waters Flowage. From there the river flows wild and free for many miles until it reaches the next dam at Cadott. The confluence of the Yellow and Chippewa Rivers is buried beneath the waters of Lake Wissota.

Navigability and Difficulty
Most of the river is unobstructed by deadfall. The river is long but much of it is often too shallow. Mike Svob (see below) recommends calling the Medford DNR Ranger Station (715-748-4955) for information about the upper river. Most sections upstream of Cadott will need snow melt conditions or recent rains for good canoeing. This is especially true for the whitewater sections. Intermediate whitewater skills are required for some sections. Rapids are minor or non-existent in the National Forest and downstream of Cadott.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
I have paddled most sections of this lovely stream. As usual I will begin upstream and work down. On October 27, 1995 I paddled the final mile of the South Fork to the North Fork confluence and then down the main Yellow River. My put-in was the FR.112 bridge and my take-out was the FR 1476 bridge. First I paddled upstream for a few hundred yards on the South Fork. After I pulled over two beaver dams I decided to turn around. The rain swollen stream whisked me around numerous tight turns through a pristine wetland. Golden-needled tamaracks arose in the distance beyond low banks of grass and sand willows. Carter Leslie and his son fished this same stretch from their canoe on a low-water day the previous summer. This tells me that high water is not needed to paddle this section. After my short trip was finished I strolled the two miles back to my car.
In the summer of 1994, Carter and I paddled and fished the next section of the Yellow. We put-in at the FR 1476 bridge and took out at the FR 575 bridge. We were busy fishing but did glance around to appreciate the lovely surroundings. The clear water was shallow but we were able to dodge all the rocks without getting hung up. Two rapids are marked in the Gazetteer. Carter and I rated them both Class I’s. It was a good fishing day as small mouth bass were hitting our artificial lures with regularity.

It was October day in 2002 when I explored the next section of the Yellow. I took advantage of recent rains and paddled the entire 15 miles from Miller Dam to Hwy H. First I left my bicycle near the Hwy H bridge and then I drove to the above dam which creates the Chequamegon Waters Flowage. Fall colors were beginning to show on this sunny but chilly morning. I was impressed by the wildness of the river’s corridor between the dam and Hwy. 73. It showcased an attractive mixture of yellow birches, hemlocks, sugar maples and red oaks. More typically southern species like basswoods and scattered bur oaks were also represented. Fallen trees never blocked my way as the river sped over narrow rocky shoals alternating with wider slow stretches. The banks were consistently high.

At Gilman the river’s pace quickened and I began to encounter rapids. I was hoping my non-whitewater Bell Wildfire Canoe would be up to the task. At Gilman there was a bedrock ledge to run. Then I faced the long and rocky “Oxbow Rapids.” Mike Svob (see below) gives Oxbow Rapids a Class I-II rating. During my 2002 run it was closer to a Class I. I think the water was higher in 1981 so the whitewater was more challenging. That year I paddled alone from Gilman to Hwy. H. It was the first time I had ever paddled significant whitewater without companions. It helped that I was paddling a whitewater canoe instead of one designed for quiet water. During both of those trips I appreciated the many attractive features of this river between Gilman and County H. Low granite cliffs topped by hemlock trees were especially memorable.

One day in the 1990s I had planned to paddle the following 10 mile section of the Yellow River. First I left my bicycle by the County S bridge. I wasn’t having much fun so I aborted the trip at the County G bridge after about 4 miles on the water. Then I ran back to my car. Why was I so unimpressed? It may have been the lack of rapids, the monotony of the shores or perhaps I had something pressing back home. Anyway, I am easily pleased by rivers, so this was a very unusual turn of events for me.

I was very pleased by the following 15 mile section from County S to Cadott. Dick Boyum and I traveled it in my Mad River Explorer on May 17 of 2003. The water was high so it took only three hours. We bounced through numerous Class I boulder gardens. It was fun to weave among the many islands. The quickly changing high banks were attractive. We especially liked the granite outcrops, the cedars and the hemlocks. There was one small sandstone outcrop which seemed out of place. Best of all there were the “trillions of trillium.” That was how Dick described the carpeting of the forest floor.

About a quarter of a mile downstream of the River Road bridge our concentration was focused on a bigger drop. We worked hard to line up for the best route over this granite ledge which probably rated a Class II because the water was so high. Our take-out was river left on a small impoundment just past the Hwy. 27 bridge at the edge of Cadott. My 60 cc. Yamaha motorcycle was waiting there to shuttle me back.

I have never paddled the 4 miles from Cadott to the County XX bridge. In 1993 I did paddle the river’s final 4 miles to the County K bridge where it crosses a narrow arm of Lake Wissota. Recent rains had
raised the river to a medium-high level. What I liked best about this stretch were its many islands. About 15 minutes into the trip a large island loomed ahead. I took the right channel because the left one appeared to be choked by fallen trees. It was fun to follow narrow channels between the smaller islands. Bottomlands alternated with upland banks. One was a high sandy cut bank. As I neared Lake Wissota I was surprised and delighted to observe a granite cliff on my left. Prior to that point I thought I had reached exclusive bedrock sandstone country. A minor rapid fronted the outcrop. After another minor rapid I entered Lake Wissota. Then it was just a quarter mile to the County K bridge.

**Experiences of Others**

Glen Lowry wrote *Wisconsin’s North Central Canoe Trails* which was copyrighted in 1973. This guidebook is long out of print but I love referring to my aging copy. In it he described three consecutive “canoe trails” from FR 108 on the North Fork of the Yellow to the Hwy H bridge. These 33 miles also included the 4 flatwater miles on the Chequamegon Waters Flowage. Of great interest to me was how he described the whitewater section from Gilman to Hwy H. Here is what he wrote:

“Canoeing is not advised on (this section) because of the many large boulders, narrow channels, and extremely fast water. Canoeing is almost impossible during low flows and seriously hazardous during high flows.” This assessment seems dated because rivers are now rated so differently. This stretch of the Yellow barely rates a Class II (at high water) by today’s standards. Anyone with intermediate whitewater skills has no reason to shun the rapids of the Yellow River.

Mike Svob includes one section of the Yellow in his *Paddling Northern Wisconsin*. This is the 16 miles from Miller Dam to County H. Even though he rates nothing higher than Class I-II Oxbow Rapids he does warn that the Yellow can be dangerous when the water is high.

**Further Ideas**

I regret never having paddled the North Fork section Lowry recommended in his guidebook. He started his North Fork run at the Forest Service Rd. 108 bridge. His take-out for this 11 mile section was the Forest Service Rd. 575 bridge over the main Yellow River. With enough water I am sure this piece of river is navigable and lovely. Even though most of the Yellow is bordered by private lands, I can imagine canoe-camping long sections of this river.

**Conclusion**

This Yellow River is arguably the best of Wisconsin’s four Yellow Rivers for canoeing. Much of its corridor is very scenic. With enough water it contains sections for every taste and every skill level.
Yellow River (Washburn County)

Location
Washburn and Burnett counties.

Natural Features
This Yellow River is a North Woods stream which drains pitted outwash deposited by the Wisconsin Glacier. The outwash here is often sandy “because of the sandstone bedrock of the Lake Superior Lowland over which the ice passed.” That is how Gwen Schultz explains the presence of the sand in Wisconsin’s Foundations. The “pits” were depressions caused by separated chunks of ice. They eventually became kettle lakes. The Yellow begins a few miles east of Spooner and flows west to the St. Croix River. Along the way it flows through several lakes and marshes. It passes uplands covered with pines and northern hardwoods. This stream also drains a very sandy “Pine Barrens” region where jack pines and red pines predominate. The river’s gradient is low so significant rapids are lacking.

Human History and Influence
The region’s original inhabitants were Ojibwa Indians. The St. Croix Band still occupies a small community near Danbury. Native Americans established portage routes which were later used by French fur traders. An old French trading post was discovered near the outlet of Little Yellow Lake. This important historic site has been unearthed and restored by the Burnett Historical Society. In the late 1800s the Yellow River was used to run logs. The remains of several logging dams are still in evidence. After its founding, the city of Spooner grew to become a major railroading center. Nowadays this town is home to the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum. The community of Shell Lake is located a few miles south of Spooner. Its lake does not naturally drain to the Yellow River but the two bodies of water were linked in 2002. An outlet drainage ditch was dug that year to alleviate chronically high lake levels. There are two dams on the Yellow River. One is at Spooner and the other is near Danbury.

Navigability and Difficulty
The Yellow River holds enough water for canoeing through most of the year. Deadfall problems are minimal to non-existent. Aquatic plants become thick enough by the midsummer to slow canoeing progress. Rocky riffles are shallow enough to cause hang-ups at times. Long trips on the Yellow will require lake paddling.

Trip Ideas: My experiences
Sometime in the 1980s I explored the Yellow River from Spooner to the Highway 70 bridge. I put-in just below the dam and paddled the 8 mile stretch alone. My bicycle carried me back to the put-in after I finished. I remember clear water and waving aquatic plants which were thick enough to slow me down.

I have never paddled the next 10 miles of the river to County H. According to Glenn Lowry in Canoeing the Wild Rivers of Northwestern Wisconsin, this section includes some rocky riffles and numerous sandbars. The banks are high until they reach a wetland near Rice Lake. Wild rice beds reportedly line the shores of this lake. From its outlet the Yellow flows another mile before it passes under County H.

I have enjoyed the Yellow River’s next 20 miles on several occasions. Around 1985 my wife Pat and I canoed from County H to Emerson Rd. Though much of the stretch was marshy we were able to find an
excellent upland spot to camp overnight. We awoke early enough to marvel at a beautiful mist which hovered over the river.

On each of three subsequent trips I took out next to a tavern parking lot along Highway 35 just north of Webster. Once I arrived there alone after a trip which started at the Emerson Rd. bridge. On two other occasions I arrived with tandem partners after trips which began at the Keyser bridge on Gaslyn Creek Rd. All three of these trips were very enjoyable. Each time I appreciated the clear water and the varied scenery. Wetlands transitioned into high sandy banks topped by tall pines. Birds like bald eagles, great blue herons, and green herons soared overhead. If the weather was hot my partners and I would stop for a refreshing swim.

**Experiences of Others**
I have mentioned Glen Lowry’s out-of-print guidebook before. In it he covered the entire Yellow River from just downstream of Spooner to Danbury. His consecutive “trails” of 16, 20 and 25 miles included stretches across lakes. At 2300 acres, Big Yellow Lake is the largest of the lakes. *Canoeing the Wild Rivers of Northwestern Wisconsin* is fun to own because it marks the sites of logging dam remains, ancient portages, “old Indian villages” and other historic sites.

**Further Ideas**
Though it would involve lake paddling, a canoe-camp trip from Spooner to Danbury is a reasonable option. It would take three or four days to cover the 61 miles. Water levels are generally high enough. The scenery is good and the fishing can be excellent.

**Conclusion**
The Yellow River is a nice stream which is easy to paddle. A variety of day trips and canoe-camp trips can be planned.