

Ripple Effect #12

Canoeing the Red River of the North

The dog days of summer are upon us and there is still plenty of time to get out and enjoy the beauty of our region. There are many rivers in the valley to drop your canoe in, and the Red River is a great one to enjoy an outdoor adventure.

The Red River of the North, or the "Riviere Rouge du Nord" as early French Canadian explorers christened it, was probably so-named because of its clay soils, muddy banks, and reddish-brown silt-filled waters.

The Red River meanders northward about 550 miles from its source in Breckenridge, Minnesota, to Lake Winnipeg in Canada. The average slope of the Red is one-half foot per mile, making the Red a slow-moving, easily navigable river in good weather conditions. Channel widths vary from less than 100 feet to more than 500 feet at its northern reaches; average depths at bank full conditions vary from 10 to 30 feet.

Spring and summer floods or drought conditions can cause flows to be widely fluctuating. The United States Geologic Survey monitors streamflows on the Red River; before you set out on your trip check the river level at: <http://nd.water.usgs.gov/canoeing/red/flow.html>. There are no rapids except at some of the dams.

Because of the predominately clay soils, the muddy banks may make access difficult. But once you're on the river, beautiful tree-covered banks and abundant wildlife make it an enjoyable adventure. The clay soils give the river a dark appearance; it is not pollution making it look that way. In the summer, visibility into the water is usually less than 2". This low visibility will sometimes make it difficult to see underwater obstructions which can be a problem for boaters, especially during low water conditions.

To plan a safe river trip, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has offered the following tips:

- Travel with a companion or group.
- Don't overestimate your capabilities. Most people paddle two to three river miles per hour.
- Wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal floatation device (PFD), which most state laws require to be on board.
- Check weather forecasts and flow rates.
- Use a map, know your route, and tell someone of your plans.
- Bring a first-aid kit and drinking water.
- Be prepared for very limited sanitary facilities.
- Dams may not be marked. DNR offers maps at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/canoeing/redriver/index.html>
- Access sites and camping areas are limited. They may be too far apart for certain trip lengths.

- Respect private property. There are limited public lands along the Red River. Do not trespass.
- Some camping areas do not have drinking water.
- Pack out all trash.

Remember these tips and you'll have a great time exploring the Red River or one of the many fine canoeing rivers found in the region.

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at www.redriverbasincommission.org.