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TWO RIVERS JOURNAL



SUMMER

St. Croix National Scenic Riverway

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Happy Birthday Riverways!!!

Imagine sitting on the bank of the St. Croix or Namekagon river. The day is warm, the sun bright, a gentle breeze drifts upstream, and the soft gurgle of the river lulls you into a reverie. After a few moments you completely forget where you are. For all you know you could be somewhere on the Yukon, Buffalo, New, or Kern rivers. Although these rivers are very different in character they have much in common for they are just six of the seventy-seven rivers in this country which have been preserved for future generations as a part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. A group of rivers which this year are celebrating their 20th birthday.

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System became public law through Congressional action in October of 1968. The original bill preserved portions of eight rivers including the Namekagon and St. Croix in Wisconsin and Minnesota, the Middle Fork of the Clearwater in Idaho, the Eleven Point in Missouri, the Feather in California, the Rio Grande in New Mexico, the Rogue in Oregon, the Middle Fork of the Salmon in Idaho, and the Wolf in Wisconsin. Subsequent laws have designated National Rivers across the entire

nation including the Missouri, the Chattooga, the Flathead, and the Au Sable. Alaska boasts the most protected rivers with twenty-five, and the longest, the Forty Mile at 392 miles, while North Carolina's Horsepasture River is the shortest National River at 4.2 miles long.

Collectively these rivers represent an incredible diversity of riparian treasures, features which are of national significance. From the raging whitewater of the Merced in California to the lazy backwaters of the Saline Bayou in Louisiana, each river segment has been reserved as an example of the variety of river ecosystems, floral and faunal aggregations, and recreational opportunities this continent offers. Each represents the best examples of what is left of the original rivers heritage of our nation. Protection of these remaining resources is most important because like someone said "they just aren't making any more rivers".

The St. Croix and Namekagon rivers are good examples of the concept of national significance, and in this 20th Anniversary year we should, more than ever, recognize their value to present and future generations. Nestled along the border country of Wisconsin and

Minnesota these rivers flow through a relatively wild and untamed land which has largely escaped the ravages of humankind. Though the lumberjacks of the 19th century cleared the virgin white pines and sent them downstream to become the lumber which built major midwestern cities, the scars have healed, giving the traveller the illusion of wildness and solitude. This feeling is supported by stories in the wind of Woodland, Anishinabe, and Dakota inhabitants who called this land home for thousands of years; by the tall tales of river guides and fishermen who spin yarns about the lunker smallmouth, muskie, and trout which inhabit portions of the river. The sands of time continue to travel downstream as well, conveying the rich geologic history of this region, the glacial lakes, moraines, and kettles; the basalt, sandstone, and limestone rock of the lower river. The diversity of plant and animal communities is the hallmark of the Riverway since it lies in an area known as the "tension zone", where the ranges of many northern and southern plant and animal species overlap. Because of this diversity, many migrating birds use the valley as a nesting area and as a flyway

back and forth from their summer and winter ranges. The riverway is also home for several rare and endangered species. Wood Turtle, Bald Eagle, and Osprey, and Higgins Eye Mussel are just a few of the protected species which thrive along this river. The river itself is an incredibly rich resource ranging from a small cobble bottomed trout stream in the headwaters, to a large sand and mud bottomed wind blown lake near its junction with the Mississippi. This variety of river habitats is home to a rich array of plant life, fish, mussels, insects, and other invertebrates. What is most amazing is that all of this exists within a days drive of several million people including a large Twin Cities population which lies adjacent to the lower river.

And so as we lounge on the banks of this river we are actually experiencing many rivers. Each of the seventy-seven protected rivers, though unique in their own right, all contain priceless riparian treasures. As the breeze intensified and thunder booms downriver we wonder, is this the Namekagon, the Nowitna, or the Cache la Poudre? No matter where we are, we wish them all a happy 20th birthday!

Smith and the Clark brothers the mill folded. The sawmill was not successful

daily projects

COURTESY OF MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Ferry Tales

During the fur trade era the river served as a water highway for the voyageurs and Indians to paddle up and down. Later, as settlers and lumberjacks streamed into the valley it became an obstacle for them to cross. Few bridges were built in the early days and even today the St. Croix is spanned in relatively few places. Crossing the river in the old days was made possible by a series of ferry boats that were scattered along the miles of river banks.

A typical St. Croix ferry was built using a method similar to john boat construction, but on a larger scale. It was from 30 to 32 feet in length and about 16 feet wide. The only other additional features were the ramps added at either end to allow boarding and unloading. The ferry would be attached to a cable stretched across the river by chains with hooks. It was powered by tilting one end into the current which would pull it across. This simple original design generally proved the best. Empty oil barrels were tried for extra flotation, but they rusted through too often to be practical. A few other innovations were also tried, but most, like the oil barrels, failed.

Despite this uniformity of design, the ferries served a variety of purposes. At first, they transported supplies, men, and equipment across the river for the logging camps of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The logging industry brought many people into this previously isolated country, creating boom towns and a large demand for supplies on both sides of the river. At least two of these logging companies operated ferries on the St.

Croix. The Knapp-Stout Lumber Company had a ferry at Norway Point, also called Panser's Ferry, and Walker, Judd, and Veazie operated a ferry at the site of present day St. John's Landing, named after Ed St. John, the logger who managed the camp.

The heyday of the ferries did not end with the logging industry on the St. Croix. In fact, it had not even begun. The settlement of the newly cleared lands provided many new purposes for the ferries. The lumber companies sold their lands and platted new towns like Pansy and Nashua. Although these towns never amounted to much, the initial flow of settlers and their goods provided the business for ferries. Pansy had a post office, store, livery barn, and

saloon, as well as the ferry, and was a supply center for the area north of Danbury. Nashua amounted to even less, but its ferry was kept running by the town of Sunrise, just across the river.

This brings up the next purpose of the ferries, to carry the steady flow of commerce between the viable towns on both sides of the river. The busiest of these areas lay in between Pine City, Rush City, and Grantsburg. Three ferries operated in this less than fifteen mile stretch of river. The Deering Ferry, located at what is now the Rush City Ferry Landing, linked Rush City and Grantsburg. It was broken up by ice at least twice, and until it was replaced, passengers had to be ferried across by bateaux. The ferry that replaced it the

second time had been removed from the site of the present highway 70 bridge when it was put in; in 1928. John Ettel, the former operator of the ferry, had lobbied hard to have the highway run through his land, and he became the toll collector on the bridge. The toll was \$.50, the same price as the ferry. The third of these commerce ferries was the Riverdale Ferry, between Pine City and Grantsburg. Built by M.A. Soderbeck in 1922, it ran until 1943, the last of the St. Croix ferries to close. In the later years of its operation, it even had a motor to help it along.

These commerce ferries ran 24 hours a day, 7 days a week throughout the summer, carrying 25-30 passengers per day, on the average. Each winter, however, the ferries would have to be pulled up on the banks to prevent damage by the ice. In the case of the Riverdale Ferry, a sign was posted asking customers to sound their horn 1/2 mile away to allow time to prepare for whatever customer would appear, whether it was a circus, a bank robber (at least one crossed at the highway 70 ferry in 1926), or an area resident headed back home, across the river.

The river is no longer such an obstacle. In fact, it is on its way to becoming a highway again, though for quite a different purpose. It is still valuable, however, to remember the times when people talked contentedly, or waited impatiently as the ferry slowly made its way across the river to take them to their favorite blueberry picking spot, to their place of business, or home.



Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society