

# Winona 2018 Trip Report

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By Peggy O'Neal

We had another pair of lovely paddles this year in Winona. Rebecca Hoye joined me in leading the trip, and on Saturday we had Sharell, Sue L and Tom Q and Steve L. in the group. Steve's family was down there as well. They spent Saturday biking and joined us for dinner at the Jefferson Pub and Grill, which was followed by ice cream. On Sunday, Steve and family had to head back early, but Mary L joined us.

Winona is a river town on the Mississippi, located about 120 miles southeast of the cities. Close enough to drive down Saturday morning and home Sunday afternoon, but far enough to feel like you've gotten away from the urban setting. Bluffs, sloughs, wildlife and boat traffic create a distinctly different environment than anywhere we paddle here in the cities.

We camped Saturday night at the Prairie Island campground. The campground is under new management and has added outdoor evening movies oriented towards families. When our group of adult kayakers showed up, they asked if we'd be interested in seeing a movie about John A. Latsch. The obvious question was "Who's John Latsch?" Turns out that he took over a successful grocery business from his father in 1909 and became one of the richest men in Winona. Wanting to give back to his community, Latsch donated land and money to create and support parks and institutions. The Prairie Island Campground is located on land he donated, as is the John A. Latsch State Park, much of Whitewater State Park as well as other parks.

But we had gone there to paddle, not just to eat, sleep and watch movies. On Saturday we put in at Verchota Landing and paddled up through Crooked Slough, Burleigh Slough, and Strait Slough, then popped out onto the river just above Island 55. There was a power boat pulled up on our usual lunch spot, but we found another sunny spot on Island 55 itself. After lunch, we paddled up to the Bass Camp just below Lock and Dam 5. After that we retraced our path back to the put in. Along the way we saw bald eagles, kingfishers, a big flock of redwing blackbirds, and herons. And turtles. I think the birders in the group probably spotted a few more birds than I did.





Sunday morning we had breakfast at the Winona Family Restaurant, then put in at McNally Landing. After paying our annual visit to Turtle and Paddlefish Islands, we headed out to the river. In keeping with our tradition of exploring somewhere new each year, we headed up into Fountain City Bay and had lunch at Merrick State Park. We used our group teamwork skills to launch off of a very muddy shore before returning in time to get home at a reasonable hour.



We had good weather, an excellent location, and a great group. The only thing we missed was seeing pelicans kettling, but there's always next year!