

St. Croix River: A Unique Water Trail Journey

Our Journey on the St. Croix River Water Trail starts at the headwaters lake, includes a gentle river section flowing south with a unique animal and plant community, passes briefly through a transportation corridor, and then crosses a large impounded section of the river. Note: Prevailing winds come from the southwest, so paddles in the “upstream” direction take less time than paddles in the “downstream” direction on windy days.

Palmer Landing is the local name for the St. Croix Lake Landing at the northeast corner of Upper St. Croix Lake. This landing is immediately adjacent to the North Country Trail, which is a 4,600 mile hiking path from North Dakota to New York. This point is also near the southern end of the historic Brule-St. Croix Portage Trail. The Portage Trail and our water trail are part of one of the most important historic routes between Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. Ojibwe (Chippewa) people used this route starting in the late 1500's. It was likely used for thousands of years by other indigenous peoples, preceding the French explorers and trappers who followed this route in 1680, the English in 1766, and the Americans in 1832.

Upper St. Croix Lake is an 875-acre lake fed by springs and cold-water tributary streams. St. Croix Creek at the north end of the lake is the true headwaters of the St. Croix River. In this lake there is good fishing for northern pike, bass, panfish, and walleye. This area was formed in the most recent glacial era by a southern outlet from Lake Duluth (precursor to Lake Superior). Alternative launch sites are shown on the map.

The Village of Solon Springs is on the west side of the lake. This community, first called White Birch, was renamed after Thomas F. Solon started a spring water bottling operation about 1895, and prospered given the town's proximity to a railroad line. Lucius Woods County Park is a 38-acre park on the west side of the lake with unique stands of white and Norway pine.

Crownhart Island in the southern part of the lake was once an Ojibwe village and is described in the diaries of early explorers.

Cut-Away Bridge was once the site of an old logging dam. It now is part of a winter trail system. Put-in and take-out is best accomplished from the downstream side of this bridge. The historical map at the right was drawn by U.S. Army Lt. James Allen as he followed Henry Schoolcraft upstream in 1832.



Ox Hole marks a historic browsing place for oxen and well-known fishing spot. When Lt. Allen came northward to Ox Hole in 1832 he went straight into Lower Ox Creek instead of “turning left,” and feared his group was lost and would starve to death. Fortunately, he retraced his route and found the true path of the river.

Gordon, on the south side of the river, was historically on an Ojibwe travel route called the “St. Croix Trail” and was later a stop on a stage coach line. In modern times the community was a stop on the railroad line and prospered as tourists discovered the Gordon - Wascott - Eau Claire Lakes area.

The stretch from the railroad bridge to the Old Highway 53 bridge includes the confluence of the Eau Claire River, more rapidly moving water as the river is somewhat restricted. The bridge is low to the water – be careful – watch your head!

Gordon Ranger Station on the south side is a convenient put-in/take-out point and is a good rest area.

St. Croix Flowage at Gordon is locally called the Gordon Flowage. The river flows along the south side of this flowage and this is the suggested canoe route. The flowage is a 1900-acre impoundment created in the mid-1930's as a tourist area when a modern dam was erected. It was the site of a historic Ojibwe village, the home of Chief Kabamappa, and a place where moose, elk, bear, deer, and bison thrived. A natural river obstruction at the dam site was called Namai Kowagon “Sturgeon Fish Dam” by the Ojibwe. Early explorers called this area Whitefish Lake. The flowage offers good fishing for northern pike, largemouth bass, and panfish.

Gordon Dam County Park is adjacent to the Gordon Dam on the south side of the flowage and marks the beginning of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. It is an excellent put-in/take-out point and includes a campground.