

Nebraska Outdoor Canoeing & Hiking Adventures

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Here is a list of many of the outdoor trips I have found enjoyable in Nebraska. Nebraska has one of the most diverse geography and plant life variations of any place in the world. It has over six distinctive plant zones, from the Missouri River basin of Eastern Nebraska, to the Sandhills of Southwest Nebraska, to the Grasslands of Northwest Nebraska. All the following are phone numbers and internet links for local canoeing, fishing or camping destinations. Like the famous Chinese saying, "It is best to explore your backyard, instead of traveling thousands of miles." Nebraska has more than enough breathtaking wildlife destinations to explore. There is no need to spend thousands of dollars traveling to other states for nature destinations.

These websites are not an endorsement. They are based on my travels and experience harvesting herbal medicines and kayaking throughout the state. After so many patients were excited to learn about great canoeing trips, I decided to make a section on our website. Canoeing in Nebraska is a great family outing and very cheap. With Nature Deficit Disorder being recognized as a real health concern for children, this is cheap medicine and healing for the whole family. A family can canoe for an entire day for less than \$30 in most places. Being in nature itself is healing to body and mind.

Little known factoid: Nebraska has more miles of rivers than any state in the US. Why are you not enjoying time on them? Do you know how healing it can feel to swim in a spring fed clear river?

Canoeing and Fishing the Calamus River

Calamus Outfitters

Burwell, Nebraska

308-345-4697

www.calamusoutfitters.com

Whenever we are in the Burwell area, we stay at Calamus Lodge (only a short distance from Calamus Outfitters). They can be reached at 308-346-4331. They have an on-site restaurant and nice little hotel rooms. It is also close to Calamus Lake.

Description: How can you not mention a river named after one of the most legendary herbs of the plains tribes, calamus root (*Acorus calamus*)?! Adventurers will find this herb everywhere along the shores of the river, somewhat resembling cattails. It is a major ceremonial smoking herb of the plains Native Americans. Today it is used as a bitter stimulant for digestive weakness, sinus congestion, mild psychiatric conditions, a

stimulant for mental clarity and in liver cleansing formulas. Despite common misconceptions, the local Nebraska calamus is not a poisonous plant.

The Calamus River is part of a group of unique central Nebraska rivers. They are renowned for their lack of tourism, have no commercial developments and the land surrounding them is rangeland. This means you will see no people, no thousands of acres of cornfields, just native prairie and land like it was thousands of years ago. This also means no commercial agriculture chemical run off, so you can actually eat the fish without concerns of chemical residues. Do you ever wonder what Nebraska looked like hundreds of years ago when the Plains Indians ruled this area just canoe down these amazing rivers to find out!

The Calamus River is spring fed, so it is very clear and maintains a constant water level. Most of us city slickers are use to the muddy Missouri and the low summer water levels of the Platte. My recent trips to the Calamus in the summer of 2005 showed that it has one of the most abundant supplies of native medicinal prairie plants. I am amazed at the number of blue vervain and boneset plants growing along the river edge. I have also spotted large soft-shelled turtles each canoeing venture in 2005. Environmentalist say Calamus River is one of the cleanest in the entire state.

I kayak the Calamus River at least once every year. There is great family swimming and sandy beaches at Calamus Reservoir too. Check out the Burwell Chamber of Commerce. There are some very cheap houses, cabins and lodges you can rent out for the entire family. This is truly the closest and most cost effective nature trip for those living in Omaha or Lincoln. Plus, you have to truly love the historic downtown. Not to mention the cowboy culture. Just do not go during the rodeo . . . it is Nebraska's biggest party.

Canoeing and Fishing the Dismal River

Glidden Canoe Rental

Mullen, Nebraska

888-278-6167

www.gliddencanoerental.com

The Dismal River is considered by many archeologists to be the origins of the plains civilizations. Some of the earliest record pre-historic peoples, The Dismal River Culture, are recorded to have lived here over ten thousand years ago! One of Nebraska's many spring fed rivers, it is the same level and temperature year round. It is crystal clear and very clean, so there is no excuse to not go!

There is something very sacred and special about central Nebraska. In fact, many plains Indians considered it sacred and many of the early pioneers were afraid to travel through it. Instead, they traveled more south along the common pioneer wagon trails. The sky almost seems majestic here. It seems surreal at times, like you are looking at a painting.

Having been to the Mullen, Nebraska area and the Dismal River many times, I can say this area has a unique energy and feeling. I personally feel the entire river area is sacred

and majestic. If you can kayak with Glidden Rentals, make sure you stop at the sacred spring on the one day trip. It is one of the most amazing natural phenomenon I have ever seen or experienced. It looks like a four inch circular pool on the side of the river. As you walk in, you start to sink. When you get out a ways, you float up! There is a current coming directly up from the underground aquifer. You can jump off the bank on the side, and it shoots you up. There is a real special feeling around the spring too, very healing.

Many canoeing and kayaking magazines have rated the Dismal River one of the “Ten Best Rivers in America”. It is the only river in Nebraska to have true rapids and requires some previous canoeing skills. The Dismal is the least developed canoeing river in Nebraska, mostly because local ranchers don’t want people around their property. The river is not deep, but there are constant switchbacks and trees in the way. The first 2/3 is very challenging. I tipped my kayak three times, which is very rare. All getting hung up around trees.

Sandhills Motel is Mitch’s place, the same people who own Glidden Canoe Rental. You can stay at the hotel with him or camp on his property. Be aware, there are little to no restaurants or food in the small town of Mullen. If you take a family, bring a cooler full of food.

The Dismal River is by far my favorite place to be in the entire world, truly. The entire area is mostly all untouched. The only thing you see are some cows and an occasional ranch house. This is real the real Nebraska that city people need to see.

Canoeing and Fishing the Middle Loup River

Glidden Canoe Rental

Mullen, Nebraska

888-278-6167

www.gliddencanoerental.com

The Middle Loup River is located close to the Dismal River. It is the same outfitter – Glidden Canoe and the Sandhills Motel. These are great people with great stories. The Middle Loup is a much slower and easier river to canoe. It is very pretty and also completely undisturbed. No houses, no commercialism, no pollution and little farming. Just bluffs and prairies and cows on your trip. Try warming up on this river before you tackle the Dismal. If you are taking your kids or wife out for that first canoeing trip, try this river first. Trust me, as I have made that mistake before!

Canoeing and Fishing the Niobrara River

Valentine/Cherry County Tourism Association

Valentine, Nebraska

800-658-4024

www.heartcity.com

There are too many outfitters to list, over 20, so it is best to call the tourist association. This is Nebraska's most popular river for canoeing, attracting thousands of people each year. Sometimes called the "aluminum river", because of the high number of people partying on the weekends. If you love nature, this is a beautiful area of Nebraska, but only go during the weekday.

The Niobrara River is the simplest and easy of all Nebraska rivers to kayak. It is spring fed, very clear and very pretty. There are some beautiful bluffs and scenery. There are two waterfalls and two springs you can hike to off the river. Ask your local kayak company where they are at. They are all quite beautiful. People feel like they are in Minnesota.

There are many places to stay here. Valentine Chamber of Commerce has a list of most hotels and cabins for rent. You can camp at many places too. Because I take the family, I usually opt to stay at the Comfort Inn. Unlike most small towns you can kayak at, Valentine actually has three or four nice restaurants you can eat at.

When in the area, go see the Valentine Refuge Lakes. This is the bird capital of the world. It is an amazing simple, yet profoundly beautiful landscape. Best of all, no people except for a few bass fishermen. There are many hiking trails around Valentine that are fun to explore, many of them are in the park service area. For those who like off grid hiking with no people, the Nebraska National Forest to the South of Valentine is great. Thousands of acres of prairie and forest mix with no people. The closest place within a six hour radius of Omaha to go truly off grid for a week and backpack.

South of Valentine, on the way to Merrit Reservoir is Snake Falls on the Snake River. Yes, another river most Nebraskans have never heard about! Nebraska actually has more miles of river than any other state! Snake Falls is the most powerful waterfall in Nebraska. It is fun to hike down to and has great trout fishing in the area.

On an interesting herbal medicine note, the official red lobelia (cardinal flower) occurs in a small patch of land on the Niobrara River. Historians have researched this patch, which is very isolated and a not locally common, to a Ponca medicine man. This medicine man utilized lobelia herb for curing patients and in pipe ceremonies. Today we still see the labor of his love with this powerful medicinal growing through this small stretch of the river.

Canoeing and Fishing the Cedar River

Broken Arrow Wilderness

Fullerton, Nebraska

308-536-2441

www.brokenarrowwilderness.com

The Cedar River has, as you would guess, a great number of native cedar trees along its banks. The cedar tree is considered one of the two most sacred trees by plains Native Americans. Only the local cottonwood tree, called the "talking tree" by Nebraska tribes,

is held in such high esteem as the cedar. Cedar branches are still used in Native American ceremonies today, especially by burning the thin needle-like leaves in sweat lodge ceremonies. Many types of native cedars are still used in herbal medicine today, mostly for upper respiratory viral infections, coughs and prostate inflammation in men. If you are out camping, put a bunch of cedar branches in your campfire. The smell is ancient and mesmerizing on dark night on the river.

The Cedar River is one of the easiest rivers to canoe in Nebraska. It is only about knee deep in most places, fairly clear and very easy to navigate. There is a fair amount of farming in the area, so it is harder to locate prairie wildflowers and medicinal herbs. The land itself is more converted in farmland.

Broken Arrow Wilderness is one of my favorite vacationing spots in Nebraska. It is a privately owned wilderness with rental cabins, camping, four wheeler trails, turkey hunting, miles of hiking trails, canoe rentals and much more. If you go on the right weekend, they even have outdoor concerts occasionally. Their park encompassed "Lover's Leap", which is a major Pawnee Native American sites. The Pawnees were renowned for their earth mound lodges and agricultural advancement. You can also see the large cliffs they ran the buffalo herds off of during hunts. It is operated Doug and Darla Russell, who are very knowledgeable in everything outdoors and are full service outfitters. Heck, you can ever get married here, as they have an old fashioned cedar chapel!

For those who like to fish, the Cedar River is one of the few small mouth bass fishing rivers in the state. You can also canoe the Loup River while staying at Broken Arrow Wilderness. For those who like the modern luxury of hotels, there is a beautiful hotel in Fullerton. There is also an outfitter in Burwell, Nebraska that can put you on a kayak on the Cedar.

Canoeing and Fishing the Republican River

Kayak Jack Outfitters
Benkelman, Nebraska
<http://www.kayakjak.com>
308-423-2478

Kayak Jack (aka Marty Hughes) has quite the guide service. The only drawback is its distance away from Omaha. Of all the kayaking adventures, it is the furthest away. There are also not many places to stay. McCook has the closest hotels. There are many of places to camp though.

Kayak Jack is a great guy and very excited about nature. He can put you in a tube or kayak on the Republican River or he can do guided kayak fishing trips. Just tell him what you want, and he will do it. I told him I wanted to go hiking in a remote area. He took us to some great super remote fishing and hiking areas. Remote enough there were no signs on the sand roads! His fishing knowledge is quite vast. You can kayak many of the lakes around the area too, which there are many.

The Republican River is the most narrow of all the Nebraska rivers. It is only about 4-6 foot wide in most places around Benkelman. It widens out later down the river. This is a very easy kayak ride with no skill needed. The scenery here is not so breathtaking as Mullen or Valentine, because the flat land and tall grasses on the river bank. You feel very remote and isolate though. The river is only about one or two feet deep in most places.

The Republican River in the Benkelman area is upstream of any dams. It is both spring fed and has mountain run off. Other kayaking areas downstream by Harlan County Reservoir depend on how much water is in the reservoirs. Be sure to go in late spring or early summer, because irrigation use by farmers will lower the water levels.

This is the sacred area and buffalo hunt areas for most all the plains tribes. Every fall and spring tribes would migrate to this area to hunt the massive herds of buffalo. There is quite a history here with many tribes, especially the Sioux (Lakota), Pawnee and Arikara tribes. For the most part, because of cattle farming, the land looks about the same.

Canoeing and Fishing the Blue River

Coming Soon

Canoeing and Fishing the Upper Loup River

Coming Soon

Canoeing and Fishing the Lower Loup River

Coming Soon

Canoeing and Fishing the Snake River

Coming Soon

Canoeing and Fishing Long Pine Creek

Coming Soon

Canoeing and Fishing the Missouri River

Coming Soon

Canoeing and Fishing the White River

Coming Soon

Canoeing and Fishing Verdigre Creek

Coming Soon