



MINNEOPA

MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

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FALL GENERAL MEETING: TIM PULIS PRESENTS 'MINNEOPA THROUGH THE YEARS – A PHOTO JOURNEY'

The fall general meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, Oct. 20, 2005, at 7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room of the North Mankato Police Annex Building, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato. Tim Pulis, president-elect of the Friends, will present a series of pictures of the park that he has collected from various public and private sources (they go back as far as 1862!). The show should be especially interesting to old-timers and historians who will be able to add their own information and memories.

As usual, refreshments will be served. We hope to see you there!

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HAPPY CENTENNIAL, MINNEOPA STATE PARK!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Merrill Frydendall, Friends President

What's the value of Minneopa State Park? It doesn't attract large numbers of visitors, especially from this area, possibly because of the apparent lack of something specific to do. There is no swimming pool or playground; there is no lake for canoeing, fishing or swimming; there is no bike trail or horse trail; and it doesn't have any great geological or historical features, except the double waterfalls (for which the park was named) and an old grist mill, to draw in crowds. Outside of Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Labor Day weekends one can find many of the camp sites open. This is really too bad. I wonder why more people aren't excited about the scenic beauty of the area. Minneopa tends to be a quaint park where you can appreciate the wonders of nature, past and present, and clear your mind of daily concerns. I think these characteristics are great.

When you are visiting the waterfalls stop and think how in the past 8,000 to 9,000 years the water flowing down Minneopa Creek has eroded away the small soil particles and even the massive, very durable and well-cemented sandstone that forms the top of the falls. Throughout these years this erosion has moved the Falls from the bank of the Minnesota River [**Continued, p. 2**]

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along the course of the creek to where they are at the present time. Have you ever thought how great it would be to return in 5,000 years and see the future falls? Where in the landscape would they be? How high? Or would there even be a waterfall?

On the campground side of the park it is interesting to drive down the road towards the mill and see the many (small and large) glacial erratics scattered throughout the park. These are mainly granite boulders transported from Canada and the northern part of Minnesota by the last glacier. These rocks must have had a wonderful trip gliding within the glacier or bumping along, pushed by the glacier and the slurry of the River Warren. Some of them are 10 feet across and 6 feet high.

Today I enjoy going to the mill and looking northeast (and back in time) to the bluff across the Minnesota River. Bluff-to-bluff is how wide the Glacial River Warren was some 11,000 to 12,000 years ago. It carried a phenomenal amount of water from Glacial Lake Agassiz, which covered parts of Manitoba, Ontario, northwestern Minnesota and the eastern edge of North Dakota. Today we see a remnant, our current Minnesota River, flowing in the bottom of the Warren's riverbed.

Moving into the present, we can enjoy watching Minneopa's wonderful display of the annual cycle of nature. Spring brings the migration of birds returning to their breeding grounds; how many species can we see in the prairie, big woods and along the riparian stream edges in Minneopa? Are the falls flowing heavily with water rushing over the lip? Have we noticed the beauty of the shy spring ephemeral plants such as bloodroot, liverwort, dutchman's breeches, trillium, and many others flowering before the leaves cover the trees? Have the Eastern Bluebirds returned to build nests in the houses? In the

spring and amid the beams of the summer sun we can rest and relax at the campground, walk the trails or just make a day trip to the park and have a picnic. What has happened to the falls; is there just a trickle of water over the lip? Take a walk throughout the prairie and see what is happening to the vegetation. There should be some early flowers and you can see the prairie species of grass like little bluestem, big bluestem and Indian grass beginning to grow. These grasses will be much more noticeable (and flowering) during autumn, when the prairie displays its beauty in full force. The grasses are in full bloom, along with flowering plants: sunflowers, goldenrods, prairie conflowers, wild bergamot and many others. Later in the fall we watch the southward flight of the birds we welcomed in the spring and see some of the northern birds such as the Dark-eyed Junco, American Tree Sparrow, Brown Creeper, and Red-breasted Nuthatch returning to our area. Seeing these birds means winter is probably quite near. Plants are resting now. If the winter brings snow it is a great time to cross-country ski the trails or to put on our snowshoes and bound through the woods to see what wildlife is about. If there is no snow you can still wrap your scarf around your neck and take a walk on one of the trails. What has happened to the falls? Is there a layer of ice? Watch it closely to see when it begins to trickle water, a good sign that we are returning to spring.

These are some thoughts I have about our park. What are some of the things that draw you to the park? Think about these and invite a group of your friends to join you at Minneopa and enjoy, enJOY, ENJOY the great scenic beauty of our park .

PHOTO CONTEST!

Don't forget your entries for the 2005 Contest. 8 x 10 prints, no more than five per entrant, must be postmarked this year by October 31.

Park Manager's Corner

By Minneopa Park Manager Howard Ward

I wanted to delay writing this until after our pre-construction meeting with the contractor who has been awarded the bid to do the falls bridge accessibility work. [Editor's note – this is the long-awaited trail that will allow wheelchairs to cross the bridge.] I would then have had more details to pass on to our members. Unfortunately, forty-five minutes before the meeting was to begin the contractor called and cancelled. He also informed us that work would now not begin until spring. That's unfortunate because we will be much busier with weddings and other activity at the falls this spring and construction at that time is bound to be more disruptive. Project completion date is June 9, 2006.

As many of you know, the Minnesota Legislature has delivered a strong message to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks that we need to become more fiscally self sufficient and less dependent on general fund appropriations. In an effort to meet that mandate the division has taken a look at a number of operational choices. The strategic plan in which some members participated is a part of that review. We are well aware that additional infrastructure (such as additional electrical sites and camper cabins) will generate revenue. The problem is that these capital improvement projects are tied to bonding and are limited by the size of that appropriation.

The division is also looking at fee structure changes. Some of the possible changes include a proposal to reduce the daily vehicle permit fee from \$7.00 to \$5.00, the creation of an annual motorcycle permit that would sell for \$20.00 and differential pricing for campsites based on locational desirability. For example, campsites

adjacent to a lakeshore might command premium pricing.

This fall the Division of Parks is marketing a camping promotion. Termed BOGO (Buy One – Get One free), any camper staying in any Minnesota State Park on Sunday through Thursday nights gets a second night of the same site type free. You will be hearing more about this as the media campaign is released within the next few days.

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Robert S. Duncanson, landscape painter

Duncanson was born in 1821 in central New York to a free African American mother and a Scottish-Canadian father. He grew up in Cincinnati and had opportunities to travel in Europe as well as the United States. By the 1850s he was known as the first prominent black American painter and "the best landscape painter in the West."

In his program on Oct. 20 Tim Pulis will show a picture of Duncanson's painting titled "Minneopa Falls, Minnesota," reportedly done in the fall of 1862. It is an attractive portrayal in the Hudson River style – the falls are dark, beautiful, and mysterious.

So how did the famous painter find Minneopa? We don't know, but Miiner Porter's Minneopa Park Hotel was open in 1859. By 1862 the reputation of the falls and the park was sufficient to draw this illustrious visitor and resulted in the work that now hangs in the Cincinnati Art Museum.

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RAMBLING EDITOR – JAMMED PARKS?

I hesitate to bring this up because it is a very complicated situation and I can't throw much light on it. But I have always had a soft spot for our National Parks, especially the famous Western parks like Yellowstone and Glacier. And we have all heard about "loving them to death," the idea that crowds are getting so big that you wait hours just to get in the park, and so forth. The swarms of visitors could ruin the experience, they said. Maybe not...

Something else has been happening in recent years – a drop in visitors at the big-name parks. After steady growth in visitation for decades, Yellowstone hit a high of 3.13 million visits in 1995 and has declined since then, to 2.87 million last year. The picture is similar throughout the West, and in fact attendance for the entire NPS system would be down if the World War II Park in Washington DC had not opened in 2004 and drawn large, urban crowds.

It appears that visits to the famous National Parks are declining, and the question is why.

Hard practical facts like high gas prices and fear of travel after 9/11 are no doubt a factor. Another possible reason is a change in what Americans want for recreation – the younger generations may prefer fast-moving, exciting attractions (one ranger reported being asked if the campground had wireless Internet) and Baby Boomers enjoy Mesa Verde, but they may also expect a good restaurant meal, a warm bed at night, and a shower in the morning.

We who care about parks should be watching this situation closely.

(A quick consult with Minneopa Park Manager Howard Ward about this indicated that visitation at Minneopa has been steady in recent years and even appears to be up this year. Maybe people want to save gas and avoid long drives – in that case, welcome to Minneopa!)

The Minneopa Messenger, 20499 555 Lane, Mankato MN 56001, is edited by Brand Frentz, who is responsible for any unattributed material. If you have comments or questions or want to submit material, call Brand at 947-3268.