



# MINNEOPA

# MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 33, April 2006

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## RON BOLDUAN – PHOTOS OF GNEISS OUTCROPPINGS, ‘NATURE MOMENTS’ AT SPRING MEETING

The spring meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, April 20, 2006**, at **7 p.m.** in the Community Meeting Room below North Mankato City Hall, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato. **Please note** that this is across the parking lot from the usual Police Annex meeting room. In his program called “Nature Moments,” Ron Bolduan, the noted nature photographer and speaker from New Ulm, will show a new cycle of slides made last year at the Gneiss Outcropping Scientific and Natural Area in the Minnesota River valley near Granite Falls. By focusing intensely on one place Ron captures the beauty and fascination of the wildlife, plant world, and landforms that we see up and down the valley.

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

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***“Come to the falls  
Come to the falls  
Shadows lie down there  
The cool river calls.”***

***(Opening lines of the poem “Minneopa”  
by Richard Robbins, 2002).***

## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

By Tim Pulis, President of the Friends

This is my first message as president of the Friends of Minneopa. Let me introduce myself. I’m 54 years old and a lifetime resident of Mankato. I’m a graduate of Minnesota State (1975) with degrees in biology, anthropology and earth science. Local history is an interest to me, along with Minneopa State Park.

When I went to my first Friends quarterly meeting three years ago, I was hooked. My friend Tom Weigt signed on as treasurer and got me to become a member at large. The next year the office of president-elect came open and I said yes. As president elect I anticipated slowly learning the ropes. **WRONG!** Both Gordon and Merrill became ill and I became the point man in preparing for the centennial birthday celebration of the park.

Last year was an exciting and rewarding time. The questions of would the weather cooperate, would people come, the band, the cake, the root beer, the speaker system, enough chairs, adequate parking, kid’s games, etc. needed answers. Everything came together. 1,400 people came to celebrate on a perfect cloudless, bug-free  
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**[President Message, cont.]** day as the band played under the historic pavilion and the falls looked fabulous sparkling in the dappled sunlight.

I'm looking forward to serving on the board along with a great group of people. Three of these have been the heart and soul of the Friends of Minneopa. Brand Frentz is the founder of Friends and edits the newsletter. I knew Brand was special when he hauled hundreds of pounds of dead carp up the stone stairway from beneath the falls. He cares. Gordon Herbst grew up near the park. He's finishing up a book on the history of the park. I've taken a few long walks through Minneopa with Gordon and sensed a true love affair with all the park offers. He cares. Merrill Frydendal is a retired biology prof from the college. He is Mr. Birdman of the area and has maintained the 50 bluebird houses in the park for over 20 years. Being on a nature hike with Merrill is a great learning experience. He cares. Minneopa Park is fortunate to have these three individuals involved in the future of the park. As President I hope to build on their enthusiasm and vision.

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**Serious, Long-Term Parks Funding Could Be Secured This Year!**

For some years now it has been sad to observe the state of the state parks: budgets going down while cost of living goes up, prices going up while services go down, staff declining, campgrounds closed... And really, it is mostly because there has been an overriding goal, especially with Governors Ventura and Pawlenty, of lowering Minnesotans' taxes and making state services "pay for themselves." This policy has been hard on the parks, and on state support for other outdoor resources too.

This year the Minnesota Legislature is working on a proposal that would provide

solid funding for the parks and trails and several other major areas by dedicating a small part of the state sales tax (1/4 of 1%) to these purposes. (The other recipients are fish and wildlife, clean water, and the arts.) The planned procedure is for the Legislature to prepare a Constitutional Amendment to this effect which would be submitted to the voters in the fall of 2006. If passed the parks would have a greatly improved budget.

But this will not happen unless the idea is approved twice, by the legislators and then by the voters. At this point, April 11, the Senate has passed a satisfactory (for the parks) bill, but the House has not. It is not clear if the House will pass this bill; even if they do, what it will say is uncertain and reconciliation with the Senate will almost surely be necessary. One difference is that the Senate adds the 1/4% to the present 6.5% sales tax, while the House takes it out of the 6.5%. At this point the Governor has stayed out of the picture.

If the Legislature can pass a bill and it becomes an issue in the fall election, the voters' feelings about it are unpredictable. For odd reasons, both Twin Cities newspapers oppose the idea of dedicating the sales tax. Some pollsters say that the anti-tax forces are still strong and if this bill contains a new tax it will lose. Others believe that Minnesotans are ready to pay for the services they want, and good outdoor resources are treasured and will be supported. It is too early to know what to expect.

But right now a political supporter of the parks could contact House members and urge them to pass a bill that is as close as possible to the Senate bill. If there is a Constitutional amendment on the fall ballot, friends of the parks will do what they can to support it.

## Park Manager's Corner

Only a few piles of snow remain now and warm days are bringing many visitors excited about getting out of doors after a long winter. We experienced another disappointing cross-country ski season due to lack of snow. Notices recalling senior staff have gone out and our first seasonal employee is scheduled to return to work on April 3rd. Park roads this spring have become badly rutted and getting them bladed into shape will be one of our first priorities. Camping reservations have been coming in steadily and there have been many inquiries about holding weddings at Minneopa this summer.

As always, a number of operational changes are pending for this summer and I will try to summarize those as follows. First, there is pending legislation to reduce the cost of a daily permit from \$7.00 to \$5.00. When the daily permit was initially increased to \$7.00 it was done as an attempt to increase the number of annual permits sold by decreasing the difference in price between the daily and annual permits. It was found that this resulted in only a slight increase in annual permits sold and for the past couple of years those numbers have remained flat. The decrease in daily permit cost is an attempt to increase daily permit sales across the system. The reduction in price of the daily permit will have a negative revenue impact on Minneopa, given that the majority of our business continues to be day use.

The second change is an attempt by the Minnesota State Parks Marketing Committee to increase overnight use in underutilized campgrounds and will also impact Minneopa. Under this plan campers would earn a free night camping certificate for a "Discovery Park" (Minneopa and 16 others) by staying two consecutive nights in a "Non-Discovery" (exactly what to call these has not yet been determined) park. It is my

personal opinion that this will also have a negative revenue impact on Minneopa (refunds of prepayments) but the Division feels differently and only time will tell. As you all know, the Minnesota Legislature has handed down a mandate that state parks generate increased operating revenue and become less dependent on state general fund dollars. The changes described above are an attempt to comply with that directive.

I also have some good news to report. It appears that the Minneopa trailer dump station project has moved towards the top of the Division development list and funding within the next two years is virtually assured. That is welcome news as we continue to experience frustrated customers when told this facility does not exist. We are also on schedule to complete the new ADA-compliant sidewalk to the falls prior to June 30 this year and so far what we are seeing looks good. We hope to see you all this spring and I thank you for your continued support.

Howard Ward, Minneopa manager

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## Corporate Ads in the National Parks?

What if the next time you went to a National Park, their brochure featured a big corporate logo, Coca Cola or Wal-Mart? Would it feel right to put up your tent in the Texaco Campground along the Firehole River?

The times are changing, as they always will. And like all other parks, the National Parks are desperately short of money. Congress seems to want them to "pay their own way."

And now the US Department of the Interior is preparing rule changes to allow some corporate advertising in the National Parks, for money, of course. This would only add insult to injury (the already impoverished parks). Perhaps the people will not allow it.

## FRIENDS OF MINNEOPA ACTIVITIES

**Wildflower Census.** (from President Tim Pulis) The Friends have had a bird count in June for several years. Gordon Herbst has done an inventory of the tree species. My thought is – why not do a wildflower census? Minneopa has a large number of different varieties of wild-growing flowers.

A census is more difficult because the flowers go from the spring ephemerals in April to late summer blooms in August. What I propose is that the entire Friends group be involved. As people spot flowers, they would keep track and send reports to me: what flowers, in what stage, where were they seen, and so on. This would be flowers found within the boundaries of the park. At the end of the season I can put together a list which will be a baseline to add to in future years.

Send your flower reports to Tim Pulis; either e-mail at [tpulis@hickorytech.net](mailto:tpulis@hickorytech.net) or mail to 404 Oak Knoll Blvd., Mankato.

**Annual Bird Count:** This will be the eighth year that the Friends have conducted a bird count in the park on the first Saturday in June, which is the 3rd this year. The count is done from 7-11 am by small groups that spread out to cover all the park's areas. Each group has a bird expert to help with identification. Everyone is welcome. This is a good opportunity to see a lot of birds at the park and enjoy a morning outdoors. We will meet at 7 am on Saturday, June 3 at the prairie side parking area. For more information call Brand Frentz, 947-3268.

**State Park Open House:** The annual open house will take place on Sunday, June 4. The Friends of Minneopa traditionally have an information booth in the pavilion and sponsored hikes, lectures, and other events for the public. If you want to help or have an idea we might use, contact a Friends officer.

## A Bird Book To Enjoy

The title of this book, How To Be a Bad Birdwatcher, is a little odd. That is just to catch your attention and set an irreverent tone. What the author, Simon Barnes of the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, really wants to tell us is that looking at birds should be fun. Period. Oh, you can make more of it, and enjoy that too, but the bottom line, he insists, is to enjoy it. Birds are the clearest and closest way to be in touch with the natural world around us – their color, their music, their activities (they can fly!) – and it is all readily available if you keep a watch for them.

So, how could he make a whole book up to present this simple message? First with his own happy story of growing up in England, loving birds and watching them. But then too, he draws lessons from bird watching. After telling us about warbler species that you really can't tell apart in the field guide, he asks, "So how can we tell them apart flitting from branch to branch in the elm tree?" His answer is that we can't and we shouldn't bother. It isn't fun. But we can marvel at the fact that the birds can tell themselves apart and do not interbreed, which gives us a peek into the wonder of biodiversity.

There is much more to this little book, but not much more space on the page. Let me just suggest that you might find it enjoyable to read How To Be a Bad Birdwatcher, by Simon Barnes, Pantheon Books, 2004.

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*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.*