



# MINNEOPA

# MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park

No. 35, October 2006

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## ASSISTANT MANAGER STEVE ROSE WILL SPEAK AT FALL GENERAL MEETING

The fall meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be held on **Thursday, October 19, 2006, at 7 p.m.** in the Police Annex Community Meeting Room at 1004 Belgrade Avenue in North Mankato. This is the usual meeting room for the Friends over the years.

Assistant Minneopa Manager **Steve Rose** will present a program about Minneopa, its present condition and plans and hopes for the future. It should be an interesting conversation. Refreshments will be served as usual. We hope to see you there!

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## Manager's Corner

By Park Manager Howard Ward

We have begun layoff of seasonal staff and by the end of September will have only two employees left. Overall it has been a very smooth summer and this is in large part a reflection of the quality and professionalism of our employees. We received many compliments this year regarding the appearance of the park and the service our staff provided.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation has announced a fall two-for-one camping promotion that began Sept. 15 and will run through Nov. 9. During this time customers who camp one night, Sunday through Wednesday, at participating state parks will get the next night free. To date Minneopa has had very few visitors taking advantage of this offer.

Over Labor Day weekend Minneopa **[Cont., p. 2]**

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Tim Pulis, President of the Friends

I was recently at my parents' house going through a box of old photos and putting names of people on the back. Two photos I had never seen before caught my attention. Both were taken down in the gorge at Minneopa State Park with the lower falls as the backdrop. One was of my mother holding me as a baby and the other was of my father holding me. I was born in the fall of 1951. The family picnic occurred the summer of 1952. For over a half century I've been visiting the park. Every visit is a good one, but some have been especially memorable.

Going out to "check the falls" is a common outing for my wife and me, especially after a good rain. The double waterfall is the most visited spot in the park because it is never the same – beautiful in an infinite variety of ways. This is due to seasonal changes from spring runoff to frozen winter icicles and daily changes as morning sunlight directly on the falls evolves to late afternoon sun framing the falls. My most memorable falls visits were in times of extremes – in the drought year, 1988, it was bone dry. My August 1993 visit was the day after a 9 inch rain. While walking across the bridge separating the two falls you could sense the power of nature. The upper falls wasn't a falls as water filled the entire upper creek bed and roared under your feet, saturating the air with mist. The water going over the lower falls was flying straight out as if shot from a cannon.

Cross country skiing is a real iffy proposition at Minneopa as there is rarely enough snow to groom the trails. Some years have been very good. I enjoyed starting the 3 mile loop in late afternoon as daylight was fading. It was a beautiful **[Cont., p. 2]**

[President, from p 1] experience. I began at the group camp parking lot and descended the steep hill down to the river. The trail wound its way around large cottonwoods and silver maples and over wooden bridges, always with the frozen Minnesota River below you. Just as I started to feel a little chilled, I reached the uphill to get to the bluff trail. By now it was getting dark, but the snow made enough light to get me back to the car. I really miss this loop along the river.

One of the best hikes I've had at Minneopa occurred on a cold February night. The snow was deep and Minneopa Creek was frozen solid. Seven of us drove to the falls parking lot. Donning headlamps, gaiters and warm clothes, we headed down the stone stairway to the creek bed below and walked downstream. The silence of the gorge with the stars shining brightly overhead gave one a feeling of timelessness. This was what the pioneers and the Native Americans saw and felt. We continued to the old train tunnel and slowly worked our way through on the frozen ice while admiring the craftsmanship of the 134 year old ceiling. After the tunnel it was up the steep hillside to the railroad tracks and back to our vehicle to complete the loop. The hot chocolate and port wine tasted especially good that night.

Briefly, some other good memories of the park include walking inside the old Seppman mill (maybe again some day?), watching the progression of wild flowers from the pink hepatica covering the hillsides in the early spring to the yellow goldenrod blanketing the late summer prairie, viewing the woodcock's spring mating flight on a cool spring evening, staying overnight by myself at the camper cabin midwinter with thoughts of Thoreau on my mind and finally putting together a historical slide show of the park thus gaining insight into how important the park has been to the Mankato area. As I write this letter I also realize how important Minneopa Park has been to me for 54 years.

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**Minneopa History: the 1960s, a Critical Time**

Minneopa State Park was established in 1905 in a small area around the waterfalls and served the public well for years with just over 100 acres of land. But in the 1960s the Parks Director felt this was too small for a State Park. He said that Minneopa should either be enlarged or turned over to the country. Local people favored enlargement and a campaign was mounted. In 1967 the Legislature approved land acquisition that soon added 1,000 acres of Seppman land north of Highway 68 to the park. There were real Friends of Minneopa in those days too.

[Manager, from p 1] again hosted the Minnesota Parks and Trails council annual bicycle ride. There were over 40 riders participating. Many expressed how pleased they were with our facilities and how beautiful the falls were. I would like to thank those Friends members who volunteered time to help make this event a success.

Readers may be interested in knowing that we have a number of operational changes pending within Minnesota State parks, which will take effect Jan. 1, 2007. We have two companies still competing for the Division of Parks new reservation system contract, those being Reserve American and Info. Spherix. Both systems will provide real-time web-based connectivity. This means the provider will be able to see which sites we have occupied and we will be able to see reservations at the instant they are made. This should eliminate the need for a reservation window. Currently no reservations can be accepted less than two days prior to arrival. Beginning Jan. 1 the daily vehicle permit will be reduced from \$7 to \$5. This is being implemented to bolster sagging daily permit sales. Beginning in 2007 there will also be an annual motorcycle permit. The cost of this new permit is \$20. Horse riders over the age of 16 will also discover the need for a riding permit on all state trails beginning with the New Year. The Minnesota Horse Council and the Minnesota Trail Riders Association supported this legislation. Fees are to be used for enforcement and maintenance, development and improvement of horse trails and facilities.

Each season in nature offers its own form of beauty, but in many ways my favorite is autumn. I would encourage you to take in the fall colors of the prairie and check out our new wetlands interpretive sign located on the loop trail adjacent to the campground. We think you will like it.

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**Other State Parks within an hour's drive?** The closest State Parks to Minneopa are Flandrau in New Ulm and Sakata Lake in Waterville. A little farther are Rice Lake east of Owatonna and Fort Ridgely near Fairfax. Kilen Woods near Jackson and Myre-Big Island in Albert Lea are also "neighbors." Each park has special features – e.g., the swimming pool at Flandrau, the Des Moines River at Kilen Woods – and is about an hour's drive or less from Mankato.

*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.*