

Surf's Up!

My buddy Mike and I went down to the river to play last weekend. Mike is still getting used to his Fast Tippy Boat, and I wanted to paddle 'big water' in the Freedom. So we put in at I-94 and paddled down to the State Park and back on the St Croix. Beautiful day, 80s, and a south wind at around 10-12mph all day. We started early enough to have pretty good paddling down - a few big boats, not too many Personal Watercraft, and not a single paddlepowered boat the whole day!

We spent a lot of time zig zagging out to the channel markers, catching the biggest powerboat wave we could and running to the beach on it as long as possible. Not only is it a good workout, it's pretty reasonable practice for paddling on bigger water as well. The trick is to let a couple of wakes go by, speed up on one, and then paddle like heck on the next one. If you do it right, it's a real rush. If you screw up, well... mostly you just wallow around or have to make a quick brace to save it. No big deal.

The most fun sets were on the way back. We had a couple of BIG powerboats go by at a fairly good clip - maybe 20-25knots. Which for a big boat is big speed. And it makes a big wave. We lined up well, and were rewarded by waves that were 3-4' high and far enough apart to actually ride a bit. As they got nearer the shore, there was actually a curl to some of them, which made for a real audio rush if not a better ride. They were indeed fun - 9-10mph surfing on them, and some fairly exciting rides.

I'm just amazed nobody paddles the St Croix. Or Lake Pepin. Another area that gets good waves, lots of scenery, and within an hour of the metro. Instead, folks must sit around and wait until they can afford the time to drive 3+hours to the North Shore or Bayfield and freeze their tootsies in Superior.

Another favorite spot of mine is Long Lake in New Brighton. Not a huge lake, but one that takes 45-60 minutes to paddle a lap. Also happens to be 5 min from my house. Long Lake is a powerboat haven, usually with several 'pro' wakeboard and ski boats. (plus the usual smattering of jetskis, knuckleheads and fishing boats). I've gotten to know several of the wakeboarders to the point that they know if I'm coming out toward them and waiting, they know I'm looking for their wake (and they won't make a big detour around). A couple of the guys have tried my kayaks, and a couple have offered me rides or to go ski. It's a nice mutual respect thing. These guys can throw down some amazing tricks, too.

Bottom line - get your butt out in a boat. Waiting for a perfect day, or that perfect trip to the North Shore means you haven't been putting in the hours that will make that perfect Superior trip, well, perfect. It's a lot more fun up there if you aren't exhausted.