



## Ruins of a Forgotten Highway

### What's This?

On a busy Fourth of July in 2007, National Park Rangers Linda Krings and Dale Cox were paddling between the Interstate State Parks and Osceola Landing, interacting with visitors enjoying the holiday and the river. The water level was unseasonably low. Water flow on the river just upstream at the St. Croix Falls gauge was only about 3,700 cfs (cubic feet per second) compared to the daily average of 4,600 cfs for that date.



### Something New

As Ranger Dale recalled: “Just north of an island we call ‘Little Big Island,’ I noticed a long, low area of land above water, stretching around 500 feet in a straight line at an angle from near the Minnesota shoreline downstream toward the north end of the island. It was in the same area I had noted a straight line of what appeared to be deadheads barely above the surface the previous October. I stopped to investigate and discovered it was a well-constructed man-made structure, evidently a large wing dam of some kind which I previously was unaware of.”

Dale proceeded to take pictures of the curious structure and later shared them with Jean Schaeppi-Anderson, the cultural resource specialist for the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

Both Dale and Jean agreed that the rock and log structure was a bit more sophisticated than the usual wing dams created by lumberjacks during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing on her knowledge of the history of the river and the region, Jean concluded that the structure was most likely built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which had been very active in the rivers of the Upper Midwest since the 1860s.

Taking advantage of the low water conditions, Jean paddled the river to discover and document other Army Corps structures. Locating several more in a relatively short section of river, Jean believed that the wing dams were worthy of further investigation as significant physical remnants from an earlier time.



*Structures seen on the St. Croix River in low water conditions.*

NPS/Cox

### Definitions

**Deadhead:** a sunken or partially sunken log.

**Wing dam:** a structure for diverting the current of a stream or river.

**Cultural resources:** the collective evidence of people's past activities, including prehistoric and historic archaeological sites, museum objects, historic structures, cultural landscapes, and ethnographic resources.