



River Guide 3: Berry Bridge to Brewer Bridge

River Mile: 12.4 to 19.2

Stream Gradient: 7.2 feet/mile

This popular stretch of river is a favorite of tubers on hot summer weekends. Refer to the Niobrara National Scenic River brochure and map to locate the sites below.

Berry Bridge to Allen Bridge



Canoers & kayakers are dwarfed by towering bluffs

Just downstream from Berry Bridge the river meanders through wooded bluffs and pastures where cattle graze. Scenic cliffs rise above the water in several places and offer good swimming holes. It's not uncommon to spy flocks of turkeys among the bottomland hardwoods, spot a turkey vulture riding thermal drafts overhead or glimpse a whitetail deer bounding into the woods.

The Niobrara is famous for its many historic bridges. **Allen Bridge** (1903) is also known as Bell Bridge. On river right is the **Niobrara River Ranch**, a private landing and campground.

Refreshments are available at the **Allen Bridge Float Stop**. Just beyond on river right is **Hardin Falls**, a beautiful cascade that plunges 25 feet through a narrow slot.



Allen Bridge in winter

Smith Falls State Park



A short distance ahead on river right is the landing and trail to **Smith Falls**.

Smith Falls State Park is home to Nebraska's tallest waterfall (63 feet). The park was named after Frederic Smith, an early homesteader who settled here in the 1890's. These falls were originally called Arikaree Falls. The trail leads to a boardwalk and is accessible for wheelchair use. Within this canyon are relict plant species from cooler climatic periods including a hybrid aspen, a cross between quaking and big-tooth aspen. It's not uncommon to feel a 15-degree temperature difference between the sunny river and the shady springbranch canyon! The **Jim**

McAllister Nature Trail (1.5 miles) offers an enjoyable hike through birch and basswood forests, ponderosa pine and prairie with distant views of the Sandhills and a high vista above the river.

The 160' long Smith Falls footbridge is a beautiful, restored iron truss bridge that originally spanned Verdigre Creek in eastern Nebraska and was moved to its current site in 1996. Downriver the state park campground, park office, restroom and showers are on river left with the **Nichols Landing** launch site at the eastern end of the campground.

Niobrara Valley Preserve

The river picks up its pace as it rounds the bend and flows through scenic country with numerous small waterfalls and seeps. For the next 25 miles The Nature Conservancy (TNC) owns land on river right. Its **Niobrara Valley Preserve** (60,000 acres) is one of the largest Conservancy preserves in the U.S. and a model for

grassland management utilizing bison, cattle, and prescribed fire. The preserve contains numerous spring branch canyons; ponderosa pine, eastern deciduous and Paper Birch woodlands; riparian wetlands, and upland prairie. Camping and fires are not permitted. Visitors can locate TNC headquarters downstream near the Norden Bridge.

Brewer Bridge



Tubers relax and cool off

As the river passes a large bluff on river right and bends to the northeast you'll paddle through a swift stretch (Class 1) where a large boulder lies in the river surrounded by numerous rocks that form choppy water. Around the bend a set of bluffs on river left lead

paddlers to another island. A narrow channel snakes its way through on river left with a wider, faster channel on river right. Just ahead are **Brewer Bridge** and the **Middle Niobrara Natural Resource District (NRD)** Landing.