



Youghiogheny River Water Trail

Northern Section
Connellsville to McKeesport

Map & Guide

Water trails are recreational waterways on a lake, river, or ocean between specific points, containing access points and day-use and/or camping sites for the boating public. Water trails emphasize low-impact use and promote stewardship of the resources. Explore this unique Pennsylvania water trail.

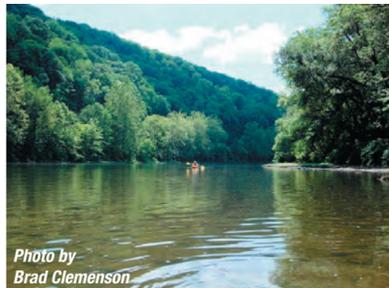


Photo by Brad Clemenson

For your safety and enjoyment:

- Always wear a life jacket
- Obtain proper instruction in boating skills
- Know fishing and boating regulations
- Be prepared for river hazards
- Carry proper equipment



THE HISTORIC YOUGH

The northern section of the Youghiogheny River is increasingly recognized for its rich history and vastly improved fishing opportunities as it flows north for 46 miles from Connellsville to the Monongahela River at McKeesport, near Pittsburgh.

The stream offers easy, flat-water paddling. The viewshed is mostly that of a natural river valley because the steep slopes limited where communities could build. Visible communities date from the heyday of America's greatest wealth-building era: the Pittsburgh Coal Seam is the most valuable mineral resource in U.S. history. The river banks are littered with old coke ovens and coal-refuse or "gob" piles, as well as two National Historic Districts and other historic communities.

Treatment of abandoned mine drainage and sewage has improved water quality and, with its sand and gravel bottom, the flat stream offers good fishing, especially where the water willow provides cover. Anglers seek bass, panfish, muskellunge, northern pike and walleye. The common presence of great blue heron and green herons and an occasional osprey are testament to the ample fish population.

YOUGHIOGHENY WATER TRAIL

The Youghiogheny River, known as the Yough or "Yawk," is unusual in that it flows north for 132 miles, including 74 miles in Pennsylvania. It flows from Maryland and West Virginia to the Monongahela River at McKeesport, south of Pittsburgh. "Youghiogheny" means "stream flowing in a contrary direction" or "in a roundabout course," likely referring to the "U" turn the river makes around Ferncliff Peninsula.

The southern section of the Yough in Pennsylvania flows 39 miles – 11 miles in Youghiogheny River Lake, an Army Corps of Engineers flood-control dam — and 28 miles that flow free through Ohio to South Connellsville, where a hazardous dam must be avoided. This section has historically been divided into the Middle Yough with Class I and II water that drops 11 feet per mile, and the Lower Yough, famous for Class III and IV whitewater with an average gradient of 25 feet per mile.

The northern Yough remains largely undeveloped but loses its wildness as it continues 46 miles, falling a more modest 5.5 feet per mile from Connellsville to West Newton and a mere 1 foot per mile as it approaches the Monongahela, which flows to the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and the Gulf of Mexico.

The entire water trail is rarely too low to navigate because of releases from Yough Dam.

STEWARDSHIP

Help care for the land, water and cultural resources along the Youghiogheny River by respecting wildlife, nature and other recreationists. It is important to wash footwear, boats and vehicles to minimize the spread of invasive species from one place to another. "Leave No Trace," a national outdoor ethics program, provides some guidelines to minimize your impact. For more information, visit www.Lnt.org.

Leave no trace for camping and day use:

1. Plan and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimize campfires
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other visitors

RESPECT THE PRIVACY & RIGHTS OF LANDOWNERS

Please respect the privacy and rights of landowners along this trail by obtaining permission before entering any privately owned land. Unless you are otherwise certain, assume the land is private property. In any case, avoid loud noises and boisterous behavior. Remember: sound carries across water more clearly than on land. Use the same courtesy you would want. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is always welcome.



Photo by Brad Clemenson



Photo by Dennis Tubbs

ALONG THE WAY-YOUGHIOGHENY RIVER NORTH

Mile 46-0 Pittsburgh Coal Seam: Called "the most important mineral resource in the history of the world," this seam fueled America's Industrial Age in the late 1800s and well into the 1900s. It generated far more wealth than the California Gold Rush or Comstock silver boom. Coal outcrops and remnants of mining industry remain up and down the corridor – including in the coal refuse or "gob" piles and the abandoned mine discharges that degrade water quality.

Mile 46 South Connellsville Dam is extremely hazardous. Put in below the dam to paddle this section.

Mile 44 Connellsville: The city grew as a transportation hub where Braddock's Road crossed the native Americans' Catawba Trail. It became a boat-building center by the mid-1700s and later was the financial center of the Connellsville Coke District. The city has four sites on the National Register of Historic Places and its downtown retains significant historic character. Yough River Park is a popular put-in and trailhead with basic food and WiFi for internet.

Mile 41 Broadford: The island has notable habitat and historically was the place to cross the river. Re-enactments of the famous crossing by General Braddock are done two miles upstream. The massive structure on river-right was Old Overholt Distillery, dating to 1853, where industrialist Henry Clay Frick worked in his formative youth.

Mile 40 *Adelaide:* The Adelaide Coke Works were named for Frick's wife and once employed 230 men. The Pittsburgh coal seam was especially valuable because it has excellent "coking" properties. Coal is burned in the absence of air to produce almost pure carbon, used in making steel. In the late 19th century, more than 40,000 beehive coke ovens operated in the region. The wooded hillsides above the trail just below Adelaide are among the best places to see remains of the ovens. The commercial campground here offers river access when it is open.



Mile 38 Dawson: This National Historic District is somewhat unique in that miners and mine owners lived side by side. The town features stunning Victorian-era residences and a beautiful old bank building and church.

Mile 34 Butterfly Rocks: A popular spot for a break along the river.

Mile 33 Round Bottom: The primitive campground here is accessible only by trail or river.

Mile 31 Layton: The road here from Perryopolis passes through a one-lane tunnel and bridge originally built for a railroad. The old Layton Fire Clay Mine provides critical bat habitat. Hewitt and other Islands just downstream have some of the most significant habitats in the river. The canoe rental business also has camping.

Mile 29 Whitsett: This in-tact coal patch town is a National Historic District featuring frame company-built row houses, which are still common throughout the Connellsville Coke District. Van Meter and Smithdale also are examples of coal patch towns built by companies to house workers.

Mile 27.1 Banning Trestle at 160 feet high is among the most dramatic of many railroad structures along the river. It was built in 1930 by the Pittsburgh & West Virginia Railroad.

Mile 27, 26, 20 Coal Refuse: The Banning mines — No. 1 mine at Mile 27, No. 3 at Mile 26 and No. 4 at Mile 20 — are among the most obvious large coal-refuse piles along the river. Commonly known as "Gob piles," they erode into the river and are a major source of pollution.

Mile 26.8 Jacobs Creek and Darr Mine Disaster: One of the Yough's largest feeder streams has improved water quality thanks to mine reclamation, sewage treatment and improved farm practices, though more remains to be done. The Darr mine disaster claimed 239 lives in two explosions on Dec. 19, 1907, one of the worst mining disasters in state history. Nearby, the Port Royal No. 2 mine disaster claimed 19 lives on June 10, 1901.

Mile 25 Stoney's Brewery: The big brick structure with smokestacks on river-right just above the Route 981 bridge is the old Stoney's Brewery, which is closed (the beer is now brewed in Pittsburgh).

Mile 23-21.5 Cedar Creek Park: Several geologic features in this county park can be accessed by hikes of about a mile in each direction. These are Cedar Creek Falls, the Port Royal Tufa (limestone dissolves, trickles down and solidifies, creating a continuously growing formation) and the Liesegang Structures (iron concentrates like rust, forming cells that gave this a nickname of "the Indian Post Office"). The park is operated by Westmoreland County and has camping and a food concession.

Mile 21 Reduction: The water outlet structure is the most obvious

remains of a plant that recycled Pittsburgh garbage. People used to search for old 19th century bottles that had washed into the river in a flood.

Mile 19 West Newton: Pioneers who used wagons to get over the Allegheny Mountains transferred supplies to canal boats here. The town was noted for manufacturing and now features an Environmental Education Center in the rebuilt train station. The borough has two

Boat Rentals-Liveries-Private Access		
Mile	(Some Charge for Public Access)	
40	River's Edge Camping and Cabins	www.campriversedge.com/
	Boat rentals, cabins, campground	724-628-4880
37	Phil's Nite Club-Pizzeria	no web site
	Food, steep steps to river	724-529-2011
31	Hazelbaker Recreational Services	www.hazelbakerscanoes.com/
	Boat rentals/livery	800-42-RIVER
18	Youghiogheny Canoe Outfitters	www.youghcanoe.com/
	Boat rentals/livery	877-79-YOUGH
8	Yough Sportspeople Association	yspa.net/
	Private / Surfaced Ramp / Gated	See web for officers/contacts
5	Peddler's Village	www.tedspeddlervillage.com/
	Boat rentals / Gravel	412-452-3330

access ramps, and the restaurant just above the bridge on river-left is a popular lunch stop but the dirt path is not good for carrying boats to the river.

Mile 17 *Sewickley Creek:* The largest tributary to the northern Yough flows from Greensburg; its quality has improved although mine

drainage is still a problem.

Mile 12 Buena Vista: The island was the site of Lock & Dam No. 2, built in 1850 as part of the canal system to Pittsburgh. A bitter coal strike took place here in 1876. A 1,061-foot tower beyond the town feeds the signal from WTAE-TV in Pittsburgh. Elizabeth Township maintains an excellent access area with lots of parking.

Mile 11 White Waterfall: Aluminum in this abandoned-mine discharge stains the rocks white. It is located along the trail and difficult to see through the trees from the river.

Mile 10 Dravo Cemetery: Mining started here in 1856. The small cemetery has graves of Civil War and War of 1812 veterans. The beach here is popular with locals. The primitive campground is free.

Mile 4 Boston: A fort was located here during the French and Indian War when the British fought to control the strategic Forks of the Ohio, now Pittsburgh. Boats for the Lewis and Clark expedition were built near here.

Mile 3 Dead Man's Hollow Wildlife Preserve: A 400-acre site has more than 2 miles of hiking trails owned by Allegheny Land Trust.

Mile 2-0 McKeesport: The confluence of the Youghiogheny and Monongahela Rivers made this a strategic location for mining, steel and other industry. By 1833, there were 10 mines nearby. U.S. Steel's National Works plant closed here in 1987.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Forested land along the Yough is home to a wide range of wildlife, including deer, bear, raccoon, pileated woodpecker, yellow warbler and several threatened or endangered species, including the eastern woodrat and timber rattlesnake.



Photo by Dennis Tubbs

With the revived fishery, great blue herons are common along the river, as are green herons and occasional osprey. Improved water quality also has enabled the return of soft shelled turtles, which eat fish, aquatic crustaceans, snails and amphibians. Waterfowl, kingfishers and song birds are common as well.

Several threatened or endangered plants and a few animals of special concern live in the corridor, with islands near

Connellsville and Layton and steep valleys of feeder streams among the more notable areas for biological diversity.

Sycamores are common, favoring wet soils along streams and pioneering disturbed lands such as old strip mines. Sycamores rise up to 100 feet tall and grow to a larger trunk diameter than any other native hardwood – the record was 15 feet in diameter. They are distinguished by the whitish, mottled bark that peels off to reveal patches of brown, green and gray.

Water willow, a native plant with small purple flowers June through October, is a common in-stream vegetation that provides shelter for fish and other aquatic life.

The invasive, non-native Japanese knotweed dominates many river banks, especially below Smithton. Native of eastern Asia, knotweed forms dense stands that out-compete native vegetation and is nearly impossible to eradicate. Erosion results because knotweed's shallow roots do not hold riverbank soils like native species and it does not grow to the water's edge. Breeding and other habitat for many species, especially fish, is lost as knotweed displaces native species that often arch over and shade the banks and shallow water.

THROUGH THE CORRIDOR

The Great Allegheny Passage is a 132-mile hiking and biking trail from McKeesport, PA, to Cumberland, MD, where it connects to the C&O Canal Towpath for a 316-mile off-road route from near Pittsburgh to Washington, DC. An international attraction, this near-level rail-trail parallels the Yough River and other streams. Lodging and other services near the trail and river are listed at <http://www.gaptrail.org/> or <http://www.trailtowns.org/>.

Most of the Yough River corridor is located in Pennsylvania's scenic Laurel Highlands, where the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources is supporting sustainable outdoor recreation, including development of this water trail. Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau provides a wealth of information about the area at <http://www.laurelhighlands.org/>.