Juniata River Water Trail-Raystown Branch

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.

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 JUNIATA RIVER

The Juniata River’s headwaters originate on the eastern slopes of the Allegheny Front, part of the eastern Continental Divide, at an elevation of ~3,000 feet above sea level. From there the waters cut through the Ridge and Valley Province for more than 150 miles, dropping to 340 feet above sea level at its confluence with the Susquehanna River. The Juniata Watershed is comprised of more than 6,500 miles of streams, together draining 3,400 square miles of land in southcentral Pennsylvania. The river’s three main tributaries are the Little Juniata, the Frankstown Branch, and the Raystown Branch.

This region reflects the orientation of the underlying bedrock is characterized by northeast-southwest trending long, narrow ridges and broad to narrow valleys with relief of several hundred feet. Tuscarora Sandstone (lowermost Silurian) is the major ridge former in the higher mountains. Lower ridges can be formed by Bald Eagle Formation sandstones (Upper Ordovician), Ridgeley Sandstone (Lower Devonian), and other more resistant rock formations. The valley bottoms of this region are limestone, soft siltstone, and shale.

FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

The entire Raystown Branch is an excellent fishery, with a host of sport fish throughout. Smallmouth bass are the principal sport fish in the Raystown. Locally known as a “bronzeback,” smallmouth bass can be found between the low-head dams in Bedford (river mile 90) to Raystown Lake. Experts recommend using hellgrammites, crayfish, and minnows for bait or similar artificial lures. Summertime “popper” fishing can elicit vicious strikes and make for great top-water action.

Trout are also present in many of the streams that flow into the Raystown Branch. The mainstem is a trout fishery from the Allegheny Front in western Bedford County into the town of Bedford (river mile 91). Bob’s Creek (a tributary of Dunning Creek at river mile 90) and Yellow Creek (river mile 48.7) are also excellent trout fisheries in the basin. Bait, small spinners, and flies are the primary methods of taking trout in the drainage.

Panfish are abundant in the Raystown Branch with rock bass and river sunnies as the predominant fish that occupy many an angler’s focus. There are also large carp throughout the river. Also known as “freshwater bonefish,” these are not fished heavily in the Raystown. Muskies are also present in the longer, deeper holes.

Raystown Lake starting at river mile 30 is a large impoundment that has all the fish species found in the river plus largemouth bass, walleye, and the highly prized striped bass. Most fish caught in the lake are in the 20- to 30-pound range, but the largest caught was the state-record 53-pound, 12-ounce striped bass. The 451-acre Shawnee Lake in Shawnee State Park, located in the Upper Raystown Branch above river mile 101, is also an excellent fishing spot stocked with warmwater sport fish. Common fish are smallmouth and largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, pickerel, catfish, crappie, yellow perch, bluegill, sunfish, sucker, bullhead catfish, and carp. Check the current fishing regulations and seasons before fishing the watershed. Review this year’s fishing summary from the Fish & Boat Commission at: www.fish.state.pa.us.

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 that sound carries across water much more clearly than on land. Use the same courtesy that you would want. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is always welcome.

FISHING OPPORTUNITIES CONTINUED

The Raystown Branch of the Juniata River is a good novice and family canoe and kayak river. Please note that the upper section from Herline Bridge mile 99 to Old Bedford Village mile 92 is for experienced paddlers only. There are several dangerous features in that stretch. Float speed on the Raystown Branch is approximately 2 to 3 miles per hour with leisurely paddling. Remember to boat only at water levels appropriate for your capabilities and never when the river is high or flooded. The USGS stream flow gauge for the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River at Saxton (gauge number 1562000) should be over 2.0 feet for the stretch above Bedford (river mile 91), and over 1.7 feet for the stretch below Bedford. The latest information can be found at www.erh.noaa.gov/er/marfc/juniata.htm. Planning a paddle is essential on the Raystown Branch. Accesses and shuttles should be planned ahead as the stretch from Everett (river mile 81) to Saxton (river mile 39.5) is remote. Some of the access points (including Juniata Crossing mile 73, Ritchey Bridge mile 60, Cypher Roller Rink mile 54, and Cypher Bridge mile 53) are primitive, and more suitable for canoes, kayaks, and car-top boats to be carried to the water from a parking area.

STEWARDSHIP

Help care for the land, water and cultural resources along the Juniata 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 about “Leave No Trace” outdoor ethics, 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.

FLOATING THE RIVER

The Juniata River Water Trail-Raystown Branch
This river corridor is rich in history. As you paddle down the river, you’re paddling through history! “Juniata” is Native American for “standing stone” or “people of the standing stone,” “Raystown” is derived from Robert MacRay, a settler who established a trading post in 1750 at present-day Bedford. Prior to this, the valley was inhabited by many peoples.

While many are familiar with the Native Americans who resided in the valley, including the Shawnee, Tuscarora, Delaware (Lenape), and the valley’s namesake – the Juniata (Ona Jutta Hage), earlier prehistoric peoples inhabited the area over 10,000 years ago. Decades ago, a site known as Sheep Rock Shelter was discovered in Huntingdon County and is classified as one of the oldest human habitation sites in eastern North America. Local archaeologist Paul Heberling excavated this site many years ago and helped bring to light these paleo-peoples. Unfortunately, one cannot visit this important site, as it is 80 feet under the waters of Raystown Lake. So as one paddles the trail, one is paddling through history from some of the earliest known human habitation in North America right through important events that have shaped our nation. The Native American paths gave way to early settler routes and paths. These evolved into roads and America’s first super highway. A 27-mile stretch of the Raystown Branch, from Shawnee Lake down to the US Route 30 Bridge (at river mile 73) reflects America’s birth as a nation.

**Mile 2, Suspension Bridge (river left)** - This was the first Juniata Crossings bridge location built in 1811 and is believed to be where the Historic Forbes Road previously forded the river. The river right stone pier still exists. Wagon wheel ruts in stone are visible on river right descending toward the river.

**Mile 3, Höy Bridge (1837)** - Two abutments and a central stone and concrete pier support the two spans of the Pratt through-truss bridge. Each span measures about 120 feet in length. The bridge was built in 1937, replacing a span that was damaged in the 1936 flood.

**Mile 4, Woy Bridge Crossings Lodge and Bridge Piers (river left)** - The stone lodge built in 1812, about one mile east of present-day Breezewood on river left, is on the National Register of Historic Sites. Overnight guests included Abraham Lincoln and Zachary Taylor. Nearby stone piers once supported a two-lane covered bridge built in 1816 (the second Juniata Crossings historic bridge location) and was destroyed in the flood of 1936. A concrete bridge (the third Juniata Crossings bridge location is still in use) was then built about 300 yards downstream from the old covered bridge, which relocated the present-day Lincoln Highway. Food, lodging, and Fat Jimmy’s Outfitters are located in Breezewood.

**Mile 6, Fort Bedford Museum and Historic Bedford (1750s – river right)** - Seasonal amenities include: Restrooms, telephone, showers, and snacks. Camping, canoe and kayak rentals, river trips, sales, and a camp store are available. [www.bedford.net/canoe](http://www.bedford.net/canoe).

**Mile 10, Fort Bedford Museum and Historic Bedford (1750s – river left)** - This historic mill was the first Juniata River Crossing. The site was established in 1750 as a repair shop for the Huntingdon and Broad Top Mountain Railroad. In later years the foundry produced various castings and manufactured and repaired mining equipment used in the Broad Top coalfields. The foundry and pattern shop are remarkably intact. These structures and the equipment constitute one of the best preserved early foundries in Pennsylvania. When approaching Hopewell, go through the first ripple at the edge of town at mile 49.5 and pull over river-right along PA Rte 915 and walk upstream to the foundry. Hours of operation are June through September, Saturdays and Sundays 1-4 p.m. For more information call 814-928-5322. [www.saxtononline.com](http://www.saxtononline.com).

**Mile 14, Saxton (river right)** - Amenities include: Restrooms, telephone, and drinking water. The 349-acre Saxton State Park lies near the famous path used by the Iroquois in raids and wars with the Cherokees and other Native Americans in southern Pennsylvania. No overnight camping allowed at this time.

**Mile 37, Weavers Falls (river left)** - Amenities include: Restrooms, showers, drinking water, telephone, and food. Located at the southern end of Raystown Lake, the resort’s guests can enjoy swimming in the pool, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, hiking, bird-watching, horseshoes, shuffleboard, and volleyball. Please call ahead for reservations. 814-635-3386. [www.heritagelake.com](http://www.heritagelake.com).

**Mile 33, Claysburg (river right)** - Amenities include: Restrooms, picnic shelter, and a playground. Owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, this site is the southernmost launch on Raystown Lake. http://raystown.mbl.usace.army.mil.
**TOPOGRAPHY/GEOLOGY**

The headwaters of the Raystown Branch originate along the Allegheny Front (elevations 2,500+ feet) and from Blue Knob (elevation 3,146 feet). The course of the river drops to 795 feet at the Saxton USGS monitoring well. The river’s drop of approximately five feet per mile makes for a nice paddle. The entire length of the Raystown Branch resides in the Ridge and Valley province. Long, parallel ridges and valleys of folded Paleozoic sedimentary rock that eroded give the landscape its unique beauty. This province extends 900 miles (1500km) from New York to Alabama. The Raystown Branch flows into the Juniata River, on into the Susquehanna River, and ultimately into the Chesapeake Bay.

**WILDLIFE**

Given the diversity of the fishery and landscape, it is no surprise that there are exceptional plant and animal species in this watershed. Paddlers will notice that the heavily forested slopes contain black cherry, oak, maple, hemlock, and sycamore trees. Animals common to the river are black bears, whitetail deer, muskrats, chipmunks, fox, and gray squirrels. River otters (*Lutra canadensis*) that were once throughout Pennsylvania have returned to the Raystown Branch. Over 30 otters were released in 2002 and 2003 along the Raystown Branch and in the lake. These nocturnal animals are hard to see, but an observant paddler may see footprints in muddy areas and along the shores. The hearty paddler who stays out on a day of drizzle may also stand a chance of seeing this 3- to- 4-foot long and 15- to 25-pound play-ful hunter. Four-footed residents are not the only inhabitants along the Raystown; the feathered inhabitants can be just as amazing. Blue herons, mallards, and Canada geese are along and on the water. They complement the grouse, woodcock, and migrating warblers (primarily in May) on the slopes. Two species, however, draw the most attention—the bald eagle at 30- to-37-inches tall with a wingspan between 72 to 90 inches, and the osprey at 21 to 25 inches tall and wingspans around 54 inches. They are both impressive raptors. The lake has supported as many as 12 wintering bald eagles that are dispersed throughout the lake and the length of the river from December through February. With some assistance, the ospreys are trying to make a comeback. Juniata College and the Pennsylvania Game Commission are working to bring back this magnificent fish-eating bird of prey. For more information, check: [http://services.juniata.edu/station/osprey.html](http://services.juniata.edu/station/osprey.html).

**VISITOR INFORMATION**

Each of these bureaus will have different river guides and outdoor activities information for the region:

- **Bedford Visitors Bureau**
  1-800-765-3331, [www.bedfordcounty.net](http://www.bedfordcounty.net)
- **Huntingdon County Visitors Bureau**
  1-888-RAYSTOWN, [www.raystown.org](http://www.raystown.org)
- **Allegheny Mountains Convention and Visitors Bureau**
  1-800-ALTOONA, [www.amcvb.com](http://www.amcvb.com)

*In case of emergency, call 911 or* 1-814-623-6162 or 1-814-652-2111

**PA River Sojourns**

Check out sojourns for this trail and others at: [www.pawatersheds.org](http://www.pawatersheds.org).

**PADDOCKING SAFETY TIPS**

- **Wear your life jacket.** Some 80 percent of all recreational boating fatalities happen to people who are not wearing a life jacket.
- **Expect to get wet.** Even the best paddlers sometimes capsize or swamp their boats. Bring extra clothing in a waterproof bag.
- **Be prepared to swim.** If the water looks too hazardous to swim in, don’t go paddling.
- **If you capsize,** hold on to your boat, unless it presents a life-threatening situation. If floating in current, position yourself on the upstream side of the capsized boat.
- **Scout ahead whenever possible.** Know the river. Avoid surprises.
- **Be prepared for the weather.** Get a forecast before you go. Sudden winds and rain are common and can turn a pleasant trip into a risky, unpleasant venture.
- **Wear wading shoes** or tennis shoes with wool, polypropylene, pile or neoprene socks.
- **Never take your boat over a low-head dam.**
- **Portage** (carry) your boat around any section of water about which you feel uncertain.
- **Never boat alone.** Boating safety increases with numbers.
- **Keep painter lines** (ropes tied to the bow) and any other ropes coiled and secured.
- **Never tie a rope to yourself** or to another paddler, especially a child.
- **Kneel to increase your stability** before entering rougher water, like a rapid.
- **If you collide with an obstruction, lean toward it.** This will usually prevent your capsizing or flooding the boat.
- **File a float plan** with a reliable person, indicating where you are going and when you will return. Remember to contact the person when you have returned safely.

**PENNSYLVANIA BOATING REGULATIONS**

- **One wearable, Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) in serviceable condition and of the appropriate size** is required for each person in your boat. If your boat is 16 feet or longer, one throwable device (seat cushion or ring buoy) is required. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.
- **Life jackets must be worn by all children 12 years old and younger on all boats 20 feet or less in length while under way, and on all canoes and kayaks.** Others are strongly encouraged to wear a PFD at all times on the water.
- **All boats must display an anchor light (a white light visible 360 degrees) when at anchor between sunset and sunrise.** Boats can use a lantern or clip-on battery-powered unit to meet this requirement.
- **All powered boats must show running lights between sunset and sunrise.** Between sunset and sunrise, unpowered boats must carry a running light (a white light visible 360 degrees) and a white anchor light (a white light visible 360 degrees) on a white square 360 degrees.
- **All motorboats are required to carry a sound-producing mechanical device audible for a half-mile.** Athletic whistles meet this requirement.
- **All motorboats must be registered, regardless of where they launch.**
- **Unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, rafts)** using Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission access areas must either be registered OR display a valid launch permit. Launch permits can be purchased on the web at [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us). Click the “Outdoor Shop” icon.
- **Operating watercraft, including canoes, kayaks, and rafts, under the influence of alcohol or drugs is illegal.** The law is strongly enforced for user safety. For further information on boating regulations, contact the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission at [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us).

**PA River Sojourns**

Check out sojourns for this trail and others at: [www.pawatersheds.org](http://www.pawatersheds.org).
Acknowledgements
This guide was prepared as a joint effort by the following organizations:
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, www.fish.state.pa.us
Pennsylvania Environmental Council, www.pecpa.org
PA Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources, www.dcnr.state.pa.us
Juniiata Clean Water Partnership, www.jcp.org
Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, www.baygateways.net
Westsylvania Heritage Corporation, www.westsylvania.org

Your Chesapeake Connection
The Raystown Branch of the Juniata River is one of many water trails and other special places in the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network. Gateways connect you with the authentic heritage of the Chesapeake and its rivers. Plan your next paddling adventure on the Juniata, the Susquehanna or the Bay itself. Find detailed water trail information, and order a free Gateways Network Map & Guide at www.baygateways.net. The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network is coordinated by the National Park Service.

Raystown Branch Juniata River Access Site:
99 Herline Bridge (Roadside Parking) Primitive Lat
1 mile east of Mann's Choice on PA Rt. 31, turn left on SR4007
93 Friendship Village Campground Gravel Ramp Lat
2 miles west of Bedford on US Rt. 30. Access is at lower parking
92 Old Bedford Village (Limited Parking) Primitive Lat
2 miles north of Bedford on Bus Rt. 220. Exit 146 PA Turnpike,
91 Fort Bedford Museum Gravel Ramp Lat
In Bedford from North Pitt St. turn onto Juliana St. Drive past
85 Juniata Woolen Mill (Limited Parking) Primitive Lat
US Rt. 30 E from Bedford to south on SR2019 (Lutzius Rd.) A
81 Everett Flood Control Levee Primitive Gravel
500 yds downstream of Weicht Bridge near center of Everett, Fri
Juniata St. and go to levee. Drive over levee to unloading Parking
80 Everett Ball Fields Primitive Lat
1/3 mile downstream of Rt. 26 bridge. From Old Rt. 30 turn on
73 Juniata Crossing (Limited Parking) Gravel Ramp Lat
1 mile west of Breezewood on US Rt. 30 west. Before bridge tu
67 Way Bridge Campground Gravel Ramp Lat
2 miles east of Everett, turn north off US Rt. 30 at the Graceville onto SR1010. Go 2 miles and turn left on Whetstone Rd.
60 Ritchey Bridge (No Parking) Primitive Lat
4 miles north of Everett on PA Rt. 26, turn right on Tatesville Rd
54 Cypher Roller Rink (Limited Parking) Primitive Lat
1/2 mile south of Cypher Bridge. Take one-way turn into cottage
53 Cypher Bridge (No Parking) Primitive Lat
From PA Rt. 26 south of Hopewell. Take one-way turn into cottage
42 Warriors Path State Park Paved Ramp Lat
Park is accessible via Saxton. From PA Rt. 913, turn on 8th St.
38 Saxton VFW Park (Limited Parking) Primitive Lat