Schuylkill River Water Trail – Lower Section

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.

NATIONAL RECREATION TRAIL

National Recreation Trails (NRT) provide for numerous outdoor recreation activities in a variety of urban, rural and remote areas. By 2000, over 800 trails in all 50 states, available for public use and ranging from less than a mile to 485 miles in length, have been designated as NRTs on federal, state, municipal and privately owned lands.

The Schuylkill River Water Trail, designated a National Recreational Trail, runs the 147-mile length of the Schuylkill River to the confluence of the Schuylkill with the main stem of the Delaware River in the city of Philadelphia. Along the water trail, there are several places where landings for the water trail overlap with trailheads for the Schuylkill River Trail, the 135-mile regional land trail. The Schuylkill River Water Trail Guide was printed and available to the public in May 2002 from the Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area, (484) 945-0200. The annual Schuylkill River Sojourn utilizes the Schuylkill River Water Trail for an exciting 7-day paddle from Schuylkill Haven to Philadelphia. And now communities all along the river are beginning to recognize the Schuylkill River Water Trail as both a recreational asset and opportunity.

RESPECT THE PRIVACY & RIGHTS OF LANDOWNERS

Please respect the privacy and rights of landowners along the Schuylkill River Water 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. Some of the landowners enjoy the peace and solitude overlooking the river from their back yards. Use the same courtesy that you would want. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is always welcome.

STEWARDSHIP

Help care for the land, water and cultural resources along the Schuylkill 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.

THE SCHUYLKILL RIVER WATER TRAIL

Three and a half centuries ago, Dutch explorers named it the “Schuylkill”- the “hidden river.”

It’s an equally exciting discovery today: a 147-mile river corridor rich with historical and natural treasures. The river valley’s five counties-Berks, Chester, Montgomery, Philadelphia, and Schuylkillare inhabited by some 3.2 million people. The valley boasts abundant cultural, natural, and recreational resources; landmark sites of national significance; and historic communities and landscapes with uncounted stories to tell of the region’s heritage.

The Schuylkill River played an important role in the development of this nation’s history as a transportation route for goods to and from the Philadelphia market at its confluence with the Delaware River. In the 19th and early 20th century these waters ran thick with the coal silt and acid mine drainage that were byproducts of the coal industry to the north. Since cleanup operations in the mid-1900s, the Schuylkill has once again regained its health and is being reclaimed as a vital commons for the diverse cities, towns, villages, hamlets, and neighborhoods that line its banks. Today the Schuylkill River is being rediscovered as a recreational destination for boaters of all experience levels. There are serene stretches suitable for the beginner and challenging rapids for the more advanced boater. Please use the information contained in this guide to plan your discovery of “the hidden river.”

FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

The Schuylkill River supports a diverse fishery that includes trout, smallmouth bass, striped bass, catfish and American shad. A trout fishery exists from the river’s headwaters to Port Clinton. The river is a popular smallmouth bass and channel catfish fishery from Hamburg to Philadelphia. The lowest section of the river below the Fairmont dam offers striped bass and American shad in addition to other fishes. Check out the current fishing regulations, seasons, and consumption advisories before fishing the river. www.fish.state.pa.us

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.
**PADDLING 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.

**PENNSYLVANIA BOATING REGULATIONS**

- One wearable, Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) in serviceable condition and of the appropriate sizes 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 white light (visible 360 degrees), installed or portable, ready to be displayed in time to avoid a collision.
- 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).

**FLOATING THE RIVER**

The Schuylkill River is considered a Class I-II+ river. On a scale of I-VI, Class I denotes moving water with a few ripples and small waves and few or no obstructions. Class II denotes easy rapids with small waves and clear channels that are obvious without scouting. Some maneuvering might be required.

The best time to run the Schuylkill is early summer. The normal summer flow of the Schuylkill River accommodates small, shallow-draft powered and non-powered watercraft. Motorized watercrafts are used in areas where deeper water exists, including above Flat Rock & Black Rock dams, Norristown and Port Indian. In late summer, the river becomes shallow at times and boat bottoms can drag on the streambed, especially in the upper reaches. Your float time will vary depending season, weather and Blue Marsh Lake releases. Contact the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for updated information about river conditions. For more information about the Schuylkill River’s current conditions, visit the USGS real-time streamflow web site: [http://waterdata.usgs.gov/pa/nwis/current?type=flow](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/pa/nwis/current?type=flow)

Remember, when it’s hot, wear light clothing, sunglasses, and a hat. Apply sunscreen and drink plenty of fluids. Dehydration can contribute to impaired judgment.

**WILDLIFE ALONG THE RIVER**

One of the most significant raptor migration routes in North America crosses the Schuylkill River at Port Clinton. Because the birds don’t remain just on the ridge top as they move through, one can also see these impressive creatures in the valleys and riparian corridors. During the paddling season, one can see osprey, great blue heron, little green heron, merganser, wood duck, belted kingfisher, many kinds of warbler, and more. Black bear and beaver, mink and rattlesnakes can be found in the upper reaches of the river; deer, fox and muskrat can be found in many places along its entire length.

Avoid cotton clothing on the river, which does not dry as quickly as wool, pile, or polypropylene. Never attempt to paddle over or near a dam and avoid strainers (trees in the river). Give strainers as much room as possible. Keep a safe distance between other boats when approaching rapids. Do not exceed the capacity of your boat and keep weight centered and as low as possible at all times.

Be courteous to other river users—move to the other side of the river when encountering anglers and wildlife. Be considerate of others—at busy put-ins and take-outs, clear out of the way for other boats as quickly as possible. Use only small, downed dead wood for campfires. Use existing fire rings or camp stoves. Respect wildlife. Clean and wash away from the river. Leave what you find and pack out what you pack in.

For more information on events and activities within the watershed of the Schuylkill River, visit the web site for the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area: [www.schuylkillriver.org](http://www.schuylkillriver.org) More detailed water trail guides can be purchased online from this web site, or in person at the Heritage Area offices at 140 College Drive, Pottstown, PA.
Agencies and organizations
Schuylkill River Water Trail: PFBC web site: www.fish.state.pa.us; and Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area web site: www.schuylkillriver.org.
Fishing Licenses, boat registrations, and boating regulations, stocked streams and related matters, call the PFBC at (814) 337-0444, order online at www.fish.state.pa.us.
DCNR state parks and state forests: call (888) PAPARKS
Chester County History: call the Chester County Historical Society: (610) 692-4800, www.chesternhistic.org.
Berks County History: call the Historical Society of Berks County: (610) 375-4375.
Schuylkill County History: call the Historical Society of Schuylkill County: (570) 622-7540.

Recreational Information
Canoe Rentals
Appalachian Outfitters: call (610) 562-9343

Emergency Numbers
Emergency: 911
Hospitals:
- Thomas Jefferson Unv. Hospital, Philadelphia (215) 955-6000
- Univ. of Penn Hospital, Philadelphia 1-800-789-PENN
- Phoenixville Medical Center, Phoenixville (215) 983-1000
- Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, Pottstown (610) 327-7000
- Reading Hospital, Reading (610) 988-8000
- St. Joseph’s Hospital, Reading (610) 378-2000
- Pottsville Hospital & Warne Clinic, Pottsville (570) 621-5000
- Good Samaritan Regional Med. Center, Pottsville (570) 621-4000

Please be aware that in some remote locations of the trail, signal access for cell phones may be limited.
Access Points
18. READING (KERPER'S) LANDING AT RIVERFRONT PARK (river left) - Parking is available along the street. A picnic shelter...
is available in the park. The Pagoda, a Reading landmark, is visible from the river (KL) atop Mount Penn. A variety of restaurants and lodging are available in both Reading and West Reading. For more information contact: Reading & Berks County Visitor's Bureau (R&BCVB), 610-375-4085; www.readingberks.com. Lat: N40 19.817 Long: W75 56.277

19. POTTS TOWN RIVERFRONT PARK (river left) - Parking for 25+ cars at Schuylkill River Center of Pottstown, first left on College Drive from Hanover Street. Visit Pottsgrove Manor (610-326-4014), historic home of John Potts, iron master, run by Montgomery County Parks and Recreation. Food and lodging is available in downtown Pottstown and along Route 100. For more information contact: VFC&VB or CCTB. Lat: N40 14.510 Long: W75 39.243

20. HANOVER STREET BOAT RAMP (river right) - Parking is available. Boat ramp. Lat: N40 14.498 Long: W75 39.075

21. TOWPATH PARK BOAT RAMP (river right) - Parking and camping are available w/ permission from East Coventry Township, (610) 495-5443. Picnic shelter and toilet facilities at western end of park. Hiking trail along old tow path at eastern end of park. Food is available along Route 724. More information from VFC&VB or CCTB. Lat: N40 13.443 Long: W75 36.952

22. LINFIELD FIREMAN'S PARK (river left) - Parking is available in upper lot. Picnic shelter and seasonal toilet facilities available. For restaurant and lodging information contact: VFC&VB or CCTB. Lat: N40 12.576 Long: W75 33.625

23. SPRING CITY (river right) - Small parking lot with launch ramp available.

24. PHOENIXVILLE FFBC ACCESS (river right) - Parking is available for 25+ cars. Toilet facilities available. Lat: N40 09.528 Long: W75 30.623

25. UPPER SCHUYLKILL VALLEY PARK (river left) - Parking available for 10+ cars. Picnic area w/ grills and toilet facilities available. Lat: N40 09.643 Long: W75 30.508

26. MONT CLARE, canoes only (river left) - Parking and toilet facilities available. Hiking trails on both sides of the river. RR: Chester County, along reclaimed desilting basin, being developed for environmental education. RL: Montgomery County, between Upper Schuylkill Valley Park and Lock 60 in Mont Clare. Restaurants available in downtown Phoenixville or call VFC&VB or CCTB. Lat: N40 08.605 Long: W75 30.565

27. BETZWOOD POWER & NON-POWER BOAT RAMP (river left) - Parking is available for 100+ cars. Boat ramp, picnic area, toilet facilities, water fountain available. Access to Schuylkill River Trail. For restaurant and lodging Information: VFC&VB or CCTB. Lat: N40 06.508 Long: 75 25.332


29. UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP BOATHOUSE (river right) - Parking and picnic facilities are available at this access point. Food available in downtown Norristown. Lat: N40 06.563 Long: W75 21.109

30. FLAT ROCK PARK (river right) - Parking is available for 25+ cars. Boat ramp, picnic area, and toilet facilities available. For restaurant and lodging contact: Valley Forge Convention & Visitors Bureau (VFC&VB), (888)-VISITVF, www.valleyforge.org, or Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau. Lat: N40 02.661 Long: W75 15.194

31. KELLY DRIVE-FAIRMOUNT PARK (river left) - Parking available for 15+ cars. For restaurant and lodging contact: Philadelphia Convention And Visitors Bureau, (215) 636-1666 or 800-537-7676, www.pcvb.org

Lat: N39 59.637 Long: W75 11.586

S. CAUTION: Very dangerous area. Current sweeps boats into the bridge abutments if approached from river right. All boats should stay along river left riverbank under the bridge.

T. VINCENT DAM - CAUTION: Dam partially breached. Portage river left.

U. BLACK ROCK DAM - CAUTION: Low-head dam. Portage river right unless otherwise signed. Lock 60 of the Oakes Reach of the Schuylkill Navigational Canal System, and the associated locktender's house have been restored and can be accessed via the canal .6 miles downstream from the dam.

**ALONG THE WAY—**
**SCHUYLKILL RIVER WATER TRAIL—Lower Section**

**Q CAUTION:** Remnants of Reading Dam, easily run at center, or portage at river left at access. Can also be run close to river left shore.

**R. TITUS STATION WING DAM—CAUTION:** Low-head wing dam. Diverts water into an intake at river left. Under normal water conditions, run dam on left or portage river right. When high water conditions exist, avoid river left.
V. NORRISTOWN DAM- Sculling teams practice in this area. The Upper Merion Township Boathouse provides parking for 25.

W. PLYMOUTH DAM- CAUTION: Severely breached rock and crib dam. Portage river right. Remaining timbers are a major hazard.

X. FLAT ROCK DAM- CAUTION: Below Flat Rock Dam features a natural course of rocks & rapids. Depending on water level, rapids are rated Class I, II, or III. Portage RR. The Manayunk Canal was completed in 1819 along with Flat Rock Dam (since Manayunk at the time was called “Flat Rock”). Flat Rock Dam facilitated a difficult section of the river where “Rummell’s Falls” was and had previously only been navigable when waters were high.

Y. FAIRMOUNT DAM- CAUTION: Look out for sculling, portage is difficult. It is recommended boats exit the river at this point. This dam was built in conjunction with the Philadelphia Water Works. The dam diverted water into pumps that fed a water reservoir at the top of the hill where the Philadelphia Museum of Art sits today. For nearly a century the Water Works supplied early Philadelphia with drinking water. It was the heart of America’s first major urban water supply system, and is now a National Historic Landmark.