Welcome to the Quad Cities Water Trails

Experience the Mississippi River as it was first discovered, a half-century ago!

The Quad Cities area is rich with water. Paddling conditions on the Mississippi and Rock Rivers are perfect for multi-day excursions with camping access, afternoon urban getaways, and getting in touch with nature for all levels of paddler. The 45 miles of Quad Cities Water Trails also ties directly into 73 miles of recreational trails for exceptional cycling and hiking. The Mississippi River is arguably the most important waterway in the United States. Throughout its history, whether for Native Americans, explorers, or modern commerce, the Mississippi has always been a major navigation route through the center of North America. It is 2,320 miles long and has the third largest catchment basin in the world collecting water from 1.25 million square miles. The 285-mile long Rock River flows through southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois before emptying into the Mississippi River in Rock Island. The Rock is a long-time source of paddle recreation, pleasure boating, and fishing. It supports hundreds of species of wildlife vital to the Midwest ecosystem.

As the mighty Mississippi River cuts its way toward the Gulf of Mexico, it carries within it a sense of great adventure, mystique and respect. Paddling the Mississippi and Rock Rivers can be a challenging, rewarding and awe-inspiring experience. It demands your full attention at all times. Watch for a towboat with a tow of barges navigate the river as it is an exciting experience, especially from the seat of a kayak or canoe. You’re sure to treasure the time you spend on the Quad Cities Water Trails.

Driving Directions
For detailed maps of any of the launch sites go to: http://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/NIC2/QuadCity/WaterTrails/WaterTrailsMap.htm

River Wildlife
Quad Cities and Rock Rivers support over 400 different species of wildlife. The river ecosystem features approximately 40 percent of North America’s migratory waterfowl and about 20 percent of the nation’s duck population. The many types of migratory birds include: Black, Wood, Mallard, Teal, Widgeon, Pintail and Ring-necked ducks, Canada Goose, swans, American White Pelicans and many others. We are also home to one of the most magnificent birds in the world, the great bald eagle. The eagles are very plentiful along the shores of the upper Mississippi. The river also provides a home to many different fish and other types of animals. Over 100 different species of freshwater fish can be found in the Mississippi including catfish, walleyes, bass, northern, sunfish, and crappies. The many different types of fish found in the great river allow for some of the best fishing in the entire world. The Mississippi River can be fished year round, which allows one to enjoy the sport and all of the magnificence that each season in the upper valley has to offer. Canoe or kayak fishing can be a great way to catch dinner or a fun recreational activity. Iowa or Illinois fishing licenses can be used by hook-and-line anglers on the Mississippi River. For more info go to the Iowa or Illinois Department of Natural Resources website sites.

River Traffic
At first sight, a tow heading in your direction is usually two or three miles away. At that distance, you still have 20 to 30 minutes to relocate to a more comfortable location on the river. Being aware of traffic on the river is always important, but it should never prevent you from safely paddling the Mississippi. Always steer clear of the main channel and industrial areas.

Up and Downstream Connections
Paddlers who want an extended trip should look into the Ippecoscope River Trail, which meets the Mississippi River three miles north of Princeton, IA, and Osceola/Water Trail, 30 miles south of Buffalo, IA on the Mississippi. Careful planning is needed when traveling downstream of the Quad Cities as paddlers will encounter Lock & Dam 16 at Muscatine, IA.

Water Safety
Safety is critical when paddling the Mississippi or Rock Rivers. Be sure to monitor water conditions before starting your trip. Go to www.riverrauges.com and click on “Rock Island District” for current conditions at Locks & Dams 14 and 15. Be aware of:
• High water and floods – high water travels swiftly and carries much debris
• Cold water – Mississippi waters are the first to cool off and last to warm up
• River traffic – Stay out of the main channel (designated by green and red buoys) and be aware of traffic when crossing the river
• Dams – Stay well clear of dams and utilize designated portage areas

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Navigation Charts are online at: http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/NIC2/mrcharts.cfm

Hunting Seasons
Water trail users need to be aware of their surroundings for not only barge traffic, but hunting seasons as well. Duck blinds, structures covered with vegetation cuttings and located in the river, are used for waterfowl hunting. Some temporary blinds may be used on a daily basis. Refer to state regulations for additional information.

Bike Trails
There are 45 miles of scenic trails along the Mississippi River in the Quad Cities region and many more along the Rock River. Canoe traffic can be accessed from most of the water trail launch sites. Bike the trails back upstream in lieu of driving separate pick up vehicles or for solo paddle excursions. Trail maps available at www.riverrauges.com. For a real adventure, check out the off-road trails on Sylvan Island in Moline and Sunderbruch Park in Davenport. These rugged single-track mountain bike trails offer a fantastic workout and outdoor fun.

‘Taming of the Slough’
River Action hosts the Taming of the Slough Adventure Race every September, consisting of a paddle section (2 miles), mountain biking (8 miles), and run/nuit road bike (2 miles). The race is geared for all levels of participation. Compete as an individual, two-person team, or three-person relay. More info is available at www.riverrauges.org.

Locking Rules for Advanced Paddlers
There is no fee for locking through
• Stay out of postdedicated restricted areas
• Keep in your boat when locking through
• Inform lockmaster that you want to lock through by ringing the small boat signal chain located at the end of the wall or call lock on marine radio (Channel 14)
• Enter the lock when the gates are fully open and you receive the green signal light to enter

All vessels are required to hold a line (hanging from the lock wall or tie off on the side of the vessel, holding on to the line
• One short signal blast designates that lockage is complete, and you may exit the lock

Common Sense Paddling Safety Tips
• Wear your life jacket
• Be prepared to swim
• Never boat alone
• Be prepared with an obstruction, lean toward it
• File a float plan with a relative or friend
• Paddle within your experience and fitness levels
• Confine your first outings to calm backwater areas
• Consider taking a paddling safety course
• Be familiar with capsize recovery techniques
• Always check weather forecasts and river conditions before setting out
• Paddle in groups whenever possible and know the experience levels of those in the group

Adhere to ‘Leave No Trace’ Pledge
• Plan ahead and prepare
• Dispose of waste properly
• Deposit solid human waste in catholes 5 to 8 inches deep at least 200 feet from water, camp, and trails
• Cover and disguise the cathole when finished
• Rock out toilet paper and hygiene products
• Carry-in, carry-out
• Respect wildlife
• Be considerate of other visitors
• For more information on ‘Leave no trace’, go to: www.lnt.org

Learn to Paddle
A variety of paddling classes are available year-round for all abilities. Classes are taught by licensed instructors and address water safety, technique, and skills. For a full listing go to: www.riverrauges.com.

Kayak/Canoes Rental
Kays or canoes can be rented from Princeton Outdoor Adventures, Princeton, IA (online at: www.princetonoutdooradventures.com, or call: 563-289-5445) and Flah Adventures, Moline, IL. (online at: www.flah-adventures.com, or call: 563-539-2440).

Trips for Beginners
• Sylvan Slough – Sylvan Slough is a wonderful backwater of the Mississippi River. The urban environment gives way to natural surroundings including fly paths and numerous water fowl. The current is slow and allows for a relaxing round trip paddle. Put-in: Sylvan Slough Dock (12); Take-out: Saunemin Dam (3), Distance – 2 miles, Paddle time – about 1-1/2 hours.
• Middle Rock River Trail – This area of water is a safe place to practice your canoe or kayak paddling. The scenery is generally urban with many cabins along either side of the river. Pleasure boaters and jet skiers alike to use the Rock River Trail for low speed, fun paddles. Put-in: Green Valley Public Access (21); Take-out: Hamlin Landing (23), Distance – 2 miles, Paddle time – about 1 hours.

Trips for Intermediates
• Upper Mississippi River Trail – Casual upriver trip along the shoreline of the Mississippi River has moderate current. Exceptional views of River to Park in Princeton Beach where paddlers can stop for a picnic and views. Rentals available at Princeton Outdoor Adventures. Put-in: Princeton Boat Ramp (1) Take-out: Saunemin Dam (3), Distance – 3 miles, Paddle time – about 2 hours.
• Middle Mississippi River Trail – Travel the Iowa shoreline from Lock and Dam 14 to Buck Ramp to the Eagles Landing Ramp. This paddling offers great views of the Iowa and Illinois shorelines. Stop at Papen Creek Park for a picnic and hike and picnic. Put-in: Lock 6 Dam & Buck Ramp (1) Take-out: Eagles Landing (8), Distance – 2.5 miles, Paddle time – about 1 hours.
• Lower Rock River Trail – Paddle a short distance along the Mississippi River. The current up the river is generally low to minimal. Those who desire a leisurely paddle in the suburban area of their choice may put in at Sunset Park (13), Take-out: Eagles Landing (8), Distance – 0.5 miles, Paddle time – 3 to 4 hours

Trips for Advanced
• Upper Mississippi River Trail – (River crossing required) – strong current possible) Travel the Iowa shoreline from Lock and Dam 14 briefly before crossing to Illinois at DeCoster briefly before crossing to Illinois to portage at Fishermen’s Corner (Pt 1). Start at Lock and Dam 14 to Buck Ramp to the Eagles Landing Ramp in Iowa or lock to the Illinois shorelines at DeCoster. This paddle offers great views of the Iowa and Illinois valleys particularly during the fall with the changing color of leaves. Put-in: Lock 6 Dam & Buck Ramp (1) Take-out: Eagles Landing (8), Distance – 6 miles, Paddle time – about 3 hours.
• Middle Mississippi River Trail – (River crossing required) – strong current possible) Urban paddling at its best, put in at Eagles Landing and cross to follow Campbell’s Island to the Illinois shorelines. Travel downstream along the Ben Butterworth Parkway to Sylvan Slough. Great mix of natural and urban landscapes. Put-in: Eagles Landing (12); Take-out: Sylvan Slough (12); Distance – 5 miles; Paddle time – about 3 hours.
• Lower Mississippi River Trail – (River crossing required) – strong current possible) Check out the great views of the Mississippi on this trip. After putting in at Credit Island, you’ll need to travel to a crossing in the Illinois shoreline. Enjoy the beautiful bays of the Antibes Slough. Continue the trip to Louisa Thunder Change Marina by using Credit Island (16) Take-out: Antibes Slough (17), Distance – 5 miles, Paddle time – 4 to 6 hours.

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