



Clarion River Water Trail Upper Section

Headwaters to Irwin Run



Map & Guide

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



Photo: Brenda Adams-Weyant

2019 Edition

THE CLARION RIVER

The Clarion River meanders through more than 115 miles of narrow serpentine valleys and hardwood forests. Located in the Pennsylvania Wilds in the northwestern corner of the state, its headwaters break the surface in McKean County and join with the Allegheny River in Clarion County. The Clarion River's water trail guides are divided into three sections: the Upper (Headwaters to Irwin Run), the Middle (Irwin Run to Mill Creek), and the Lower (Mill Creek to the Allegheny River—Still in development).

Over the last two hundred years, the history of the Clarion River has been a compelling story of resource exploitation, degradation, resilience, and recovery. From the 1830's to the 1920's, timber cut along the Clarion River was floated down river to Pittsburgh and sometimes as far as New Orleans. At the same time, industries such as coal mining, leather tanning and wood chemical manufacturing were also present.

Today, the Clarion River is a popular paddling and fishing destination. Wildlife, intermittent riffles and rock outcrops provide a picturesque backdrop for outdoor recreation. Outstanding features include a nationally recognized old growth white pine and hemlock forest, and a federally designated stretch of Wild & Scenic River. Adjacent public lands provide abundant opportunities for camping, hunting, hiking, bicycling, wildlife watching, picnicking or just enjoying the scenery.

The Clarion River is now recognized as a true natural treasure with a rich industrial history and an outstanding destination for outdoor recreation. Once declared the most polluted river in the state, the river's water quality has experienced a tremendous recovery, thanks to the work of devoted citizens from local industry, government and non-profit organizations.

FLOATING THE RIVER

The Clarion River is considered a Class I river. On a scale of I-VI, a Class I stream is characterized by easy moving water with a few riffles and small waves, suitable for a beginner. Keep in mind that the skill level will increase with high water levels.

The best time to float the Clarion River is in the spring and early summer. The river accommodates small, shallow-draft watercraft such as canoes and kayaks. In late summer, the river becomes shallow and boat bottoms can drag on the streambed.

Your float time will vary according to the season and weather. Generally, assume four to five miles-per-hour in the spring, and two to three miles-per-hour at lower water levels.

Streamflows can change rapidly creating potentially unsafe conditions. Check available resources such as weather, precipitation, USGS gages, and local outfitters to plan accordingly. Search online for 'Ridgway USGS Gage' for current conditions.

| Ridgway USGS Gage | Lower Limit | Optimal |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|
| Upstream of Ridgway | 2 feet | 3 - 4 feet |
| Ridgway to Clarington | 2.5 feet | 4 - 5 feet |

If water levels are above or below the recommended flow range, please postpone your trip until conditions are suitable.

You are ultimately responsible for your own safety.

POTENTIAL HAZARDS ON THE RIVER

- Dams:** Water going over a dam creates an undertow that can pull a boat into the turbulence and capsize it. This hydraulic can often trap and hold a person or a boat. The areas above and below the dam can be hazardous. Always carry your boat around dams.
- Strainers:** Trees are typical strainers that can trap and flood boats. Strainers can pin victims underwater.
- Current:** Never underestimate the power of moving water. Boaters who are not sure that their boat or their ability is up to the prevailing conditions should stay off the water.
- Cold water:** Sudden immersion in cold water can lead to cardiac arrest or can cause a person to inhale water. If you fall into cold water, immediately cover your mouth and nose with your hands. Dress properly for the cold by wearing a hat, several layers of clothing and warm boots.
- Hypothermia:** Hypothermia is the lowering of the body's core temperature and can be fatal if not treated. It begins with shivering. Judgment then becomes clouded and unconsciousness sets in. Remove a hypothermic person from the water and replace wet clothes with warm, dry clothing and/or a blanket. Do not massage the extremities or give the victim alcohol or caffeine.

For your safety and enjoyment:

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

PENNSYLVANIA BOATING REGULATIONS

- A U.S. Coast Guard-approved wearable personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) is required for each person on board. In addition, one throwable device (seat cushion or ring buoy) is required on boats 16 feet in length or longer. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.
- From November 1 through April 30, boaters must wear a life jacket on boats less than 16 feet in length, or any canoe or kayak during these cold weather months.
- Life jackets must be the appropriate size for the person intended and must be in good, serviceable condition.
- 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.
- On East Branch Clarion River Lake, wearing a life jacket is mandatory on boats under 16 feet and in all canoes and kayaks.



to carry a sound-producing device. Motorboats less than 65 feet in length must carry some mechanical means of making a sound signal. This device may be hand, mouth or power-operated. An athletic coach's whistle is acceptable. Operators of unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) are required to carry a device capable of sounding a prolonged blast for 4-6 seconds that can be heard by another boat operator in time to avoid a collision. An athletic coach's whistle is acceptable.

- All motorboats must be registered, regardless of where they launch.
- Unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats) using Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, State Park or State Forest access areas must either be registered OR display a valid launch permit. Launch permits can be purchased through the Commission's website at www.fishandboat.com (Click the "Outdoor Shop" icon) or at many state park offices.
- Operating watercraft, including canoes and kayaks, under the influence of alcohol or drugs is illegal. This law is strongly enforced for user safety.
- For further information on boating regulations, contact the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission at www.fishandboat.com.

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 and dress properly.** 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 onto 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 the forecast before you go.
- Wear wading shoes** or tennis shoes with wool, pile, polypropylene, 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 you 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.



ALONG THE WAY

River Miles are used to identify the locations of various sites along the river. River Mile 0 is at the confluence of the Clarion River and the Allegheny River. **Lettered items** identify the locations of Points of Interest that are not adjacent to the river.

The river miles for the East and West Branches continue the mileage from the main stem with "E" added for the East Branch and "W" added for the West Branch.

River Left (RL) and **River Right (RR)** are used to indicate which side of the river a site is on. Orient yourself looking downstream to determine left and right.

EAST BRANCH CLARION RIVER

Mile 116 E to 111 E Elk State Park: Surrounding East Branch Lake, this park offers boating, fishing, and picnicking.

Mile 116 E to 110.7 E East Branch Lake: The dam on the East Branch Clarion River was built in 1952 to control flooding. The Army Corps of Engineers lake is a popular destination for boaters and anglers. Water levels in the lake have been lowered while repairs to the dam are underway. During construction the picnic area and campground will be closed, but launches remain open for paddlers. Repairs should be completed by 2021. Call before visiting to get current closure status: (814) 965-2065.

Mile 111.9 E to 106 E State Game Lands 25: This game lands borders the East Branch Lake and East Branch Clarion River.

Mile 110.6 E to 109.4 E Special Regulation Fishing Waters: Delayed harvest artificial lures only.

Mile 108 E Glen Hazel: Several fish structures in this area could be hazardous to float over at low water levels.

Mile 108 E to 106.3 E (RL) Bendigo State Park: This scenic park offers picnicking, pavilions, restrooms, and a swimming pool.



Photo: Brenda Adams-Weyant

Mile 103 E Domtar Mill at Johnsonburg: **WARNING!** Public use is not permitted where the East Branch flows through the mill. There is a low head dam in this section that presents a serious safety hazard. Paddlers are advised to take-out at Bendigo State Park because there is no public access to the East Branch in Johnsonburg. This area is designated as trout nursery waters and fishing is prohibited.

WEST BRANCH CLARION RIVER

Mile 109 W Wilcox boasts the Winery at Wilcox and is close to the Twin Lakes Recreation Area, and Bendigo and Elk State Parks.

Mile 107 W to 106.4 W Special Regulation Fishing Waters: Catch and release fly-fishing only.

Mile 103 W to 102 Johnsonburg: Where the East and West Branches of the Clarion River meet. This town is dominated by a paper mill located adjacent to the river. The mill once had a negative impact on the river's water quality until Willamette Industries made extensive renovations during the mill's modernization. A Cooperative Fish Nursery at the mill raises 12,000 brook and rainbow trout that are stocked in area streams.

CLARION RIVER MAIN STEM

Mile 102.6 to 94 Special Regulation Fishing Waters: Catch and release all tackle.

Mile 95 to 93 Ridgway: Built in the late 1800s, the buildings and homes in Ridgway display the grandeur of the Victorian Era. Throughout the years, this little town of about 5,000



Photo: Ted Evans

people has maintained its friendly small-town atmosphere. The area is graced with specialty shops, restaurants, and bed and breakfasts inns.

Point A Elk County Historical Society: The Elk County Historical Society is housed in an 1882 Victorian home at 109 Center Street, Ridgway. www.elkcountyhistoricalsociety.org

Mile 94 to 85.5 (RL) Clarion-Little Toby Rail Trail: This 18 mile rail-trail follows the Clarion River from Ridgway to the ghost town of Carman, and Little Toby Creek from Carman to Brockway. Trailheads are located at Ridgway, Carman and Brockway.

Mile 92.5 to 63 (RR) Allegheny National Forest: The only national forest in Pennsylvania is open to hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, paddling and other outdoor recreation activities.

Mile 92.5 to 71.4 (RL) State Game Lands 44: This game lands borders the Clarion River downstream of Ridgway.

Mile 84 (RL) Portland Mills: Five sawmills were located in Portland Mills between 1856 and 1907. The rocky islands in the river here are the remnants of man-made cribs that anchored log booms used to corral logs into the mill. A leather tannery was in operation from 1891 to 1923, until the local supply of hemlock bark was exhausted.

Mile 80 (RR) Beech Bottom Island: In the 1840s, this island was created when a mill race was dug to serve a sawmill. The complex also included a large dam built across the Clarion River. Traces of these historic features are still visible.

Mile 79 (RR) Arroyo: This mill town was founded in the 1830s. A tannery and sawmill were opened and serviced by the

Arroyo's tannery in the early 1900's



Photo: Elk Co. Historical Society

Clarion River Railroad. When the tannery closed in 1925, many of the residents left to find work elsewhere.

Mile 78-77 X Y Z Rapids: These rapids were formed in 1871 by the removal of a natural waterfall called Old Falls Rock by the Clarion River Navigation Company.

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BOAT RENTALS, GUIDES AND LIVERIES

Lazy River Rentals: River mile 94. Guided tours, Bike and boat rentals, sales and service, livery, tent campsites.

(814) 389-2732, www.lazyrivercanoe.com

Pale Whale Canoe Rental: River mile 50.1. Canoe, kayak, and tube rentals with cafe and cabins. (814) 744-8300, PaleWhaleCanoeFleet.com

Cook Forest Canoe Rentals: River mile 59 and 50. Boat rentals, livery. (814) 744-8094, www.cookforestcanoe.com

RESPECT PRIVATE PROPERTY

Some of the shoreline along the water trail is privately owned. Respect the privacy and rights of landowners by keeping off their property unless you receive permission. Unless you are otherwise certain, assume the land is private property.

Avoid making noise and boisterous behavior. Remember, sound carries across water much further than it carries on land. Many landowners enjoy the river's peace and solitude so display the same amount of courtesy that you would expect in return. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is always welcome.

FISHING, CAMPING, HUNTING AND ATVS

Fishing

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission rules and regulations apply.

- East Branch Lake:** Reservoir contains walleye, smallmouth bass, tiger muskellunge and lake trout. Ice fishing is popular.

- East Branch Clarion River:** Stocked with trout. Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only section from dam downstream 1.2 miles. Bendigo State Park provides good trout fishing into summer.

- West Branch Clarion River:** Stocked with trout. Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only area upstream of the Tambine Road.

- Clarion River between Johnsonburg and Ridgway:** This section is designated Catch and Release All-Tackle and has excellent brown trout fishing. There is no public access, so landowner permission is necessary before crossing private property.

- Clarion River between Ridgway and Cook Forest:** Brook trout can be found near the mouths of the stocked tributaries. Excellent smallmouth bass fishing.

Camping

Camping opportunities are limited along the upper stretch of the Clarion River. The Corps of Engineers operates a full service campground at the East Branch Dam Recreation Area (to reopen in 2021). Lazy River Rentals in Ridgway offers tent campsites. Most campsites on the upper stretch are on the Allegheny National Forest, downstream of Ridgway on river right. Upstream of Irwin Run, campers are permitted to camp anywhere on National Forest land except in Arroyo, where camping and campfires are not permitted between the bridge and Crow Run on river right. Please choose established campsites rather than creating a new site. Alcohol is not permitted on state park managed lands. Camping is not permitted on State Game Lands.

Hunting

Be aware that hunting occurs on public and private lands all along the river from September through February and late April through May. River users should wear blaze orange so they are visible to any hunters in the area. For more information: www.pgc.pa.gov.

All Terrain Vehicles

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are only permitted on designated trails on Allegheny National Forest lands. Respect our good nature - **Stay on designated trails.**

NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

In 1996, 51.7 miles of the Clarion River were designated a National Wild and Scenic River. This designation recognizes remarkable examples of the nation's free-flowing rivers that have outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values.

The river sections from Portland Mills to Irwin Run, and Cooksburg to the Piney Dam flatwater, carry a "scenic" designation (free of impoundments, landscape largely primitive, shorelines largely undeveloped, accessible in places by roads). The sections from Ridgway to Portland Mills and Irwin Run to Cooksburg are designated as "recreational" (readily accessible by road or railroad that may have some development along their shorelines).

STEWARDSHIP

Help care for the land, water and cultural resources along the Clarion River by respecting wildlife, nature and other recreationists. Washing footwear, boats and vehicles minimizes the spread of invasive species from one place to another. "Leave No Trace," a national outdoor ethics program, provides guidelines for minimizing your impact. Visit <https://lnt.org> to learn more.



Prevent the transport of nuisance species. Clean all recreational equipment. www.ProtectYourWaters.net

- Plan and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimize campfires
- Respect wildlife
- Be considerate of other visitors

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

Emergency: 911 Cell service is unreliable in the most of the Clarion River valley. Public phones are marked on the map.

Nearby Hospitals

- St. Marys Hospital:** follow PA 255 north from St. Marys toward Johnsonburg, (814) 788-8000
- Ridgway, Penn Highlands QCare:** From Main Street (PA 948) turn on South Mill Street, then right on South Street, then left on Euclid Street. (814) 788-5555
- Brookville Hospital:** follow PA 28 south of US 322 in Brookville, then left on South Main Street. (814) 849-2312

VISITOR INFORMATION

- Pennsylvania Wilds:** <http://pawilds.com>
- Pennsylvania Great Outdoors Visitors Bureau:** (814) 849-5197, <https://visitpago.com>
- Ridgway Welcome Center:** 300 Main Street, Ridgway, (814) 776-1424, www.ridgwaychamber.com
- Cook Forest Vacation Bureau:** www.cookforest.org
- Allegheny National Forest:** www.fs.usda.gov/allegheny
- Pennsylvania State Parks:** www.dcnr.pa.gov/stateparks
- Pennsylvania Game Lands:** www.pgc.pa.gov
- East Branch Dam:** www.lrp.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/Lakes/East-Branch-Clarion-River-Lake/

Clarion River Access Sites—Upper Section

River miles are used to identify the locations of various sites along the river. River mile 0 is at the confluence of the Clarion River and the Allegheny River. "River Left" and "River Right" are used to indicate which side of the river a site is on. Orient yourself looking downstream to determine left and right. River miles for the East and West Branches continue from the mileage on the main stem with "E" added for the East Branch and "W" added for the West Branch.

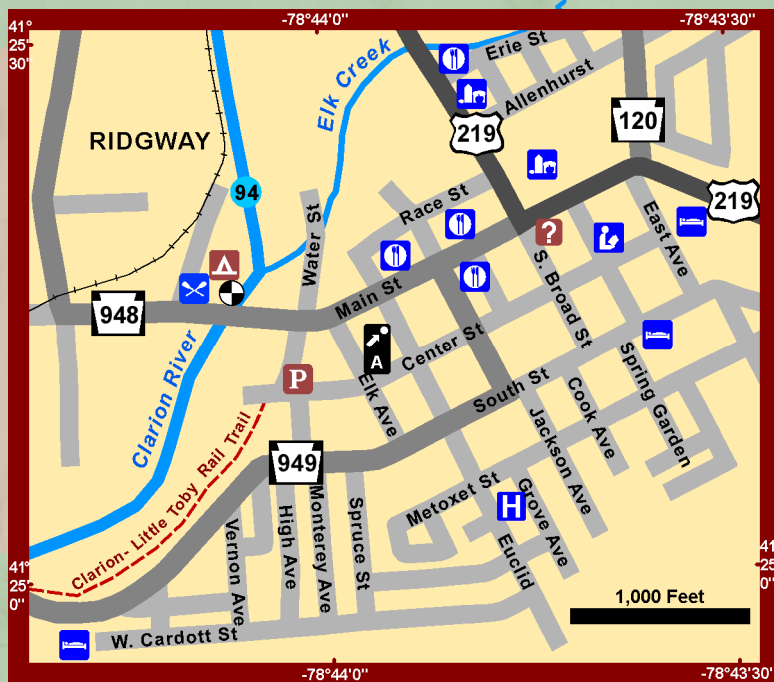
Launch Permits: Corps (US Army Corps of Engineers), ANF (Allegheny National Forest) and PGC (Pennsylvania Game Commission) do not require launch permits. PFBC (PA Fish & Boat Commission) and DCNR (PA Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources) launches require boat registration or a launch permit from a state park office or PFBC.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|---|------------|-----------------------|--|
| 115 E River Right | Instanter Boat Launch DCNR | Lat Lon | 41 36 21 -78 33 34 | Located on the north end of the East Branch Lake, this launch provides access for motorboats and paddlers. The no-wake zones along the Fivemile and East Branch Clarion forks are popular with paddlers. Facilities include ample parking, picnic area, and restrooms. |
| 111 E River Right | East Branch Boat Launch Corps | Lat Lon | 41 33 49 -78 35 37 | Located near the East Branch Dam, this launch provides access for motorboats and paddlers. Facilities include phone and restrooms. Parking can be congested on summer weekends. Launch fee waived during dam reconstruction. |
| 110 E River Right | Kilgus Road Canoe Launch Corps | Lat Lon | 41 33 15 -78 35 46 | Located below the East Branch Dam, this hand-carry launch provides access for paddlers. The access road can be rough in wet weather. There is room to park 3-5 cars. |
| 107 E River Left | Bendigo State Park Take-out DCNR | Lat Lon | 41 31 42 -78 37 46 | This hand-carry launch is located at Bendigo State Park. Facilities include picnic areas, swimming pool, drinking water, restrooms and public phone. This is the last take-out on the East Branch because public use is not permitted where the river flows through the mill at Johnsonburg. |
| 110 W River Right | Wilcox Canoe Launch Jones Township | Lat Lon | 41 34 45 -78 41 21 | This hand-carry launch is located next to the township garage on Old Kane Road. This site provides ample parking, but be careful not to block access to the garage or equipment. Adequate river flow for paddling is present in the spring and after a heavy rainfall. |
| 103 W River Right | Johnsonburg Canoe Launch Johnsonburg Borough | Lat Lon | 41 29 55 -78 40 54 | This hand-carry launch is located next to the borough office on Main Street. This site provides ample parking. Adequate river flow for paddling is present in the spring and after a heavy rainfall. |
| 85 River Left | Portland Mills Canoe Launch PGC | Lat Lon | 41 22 07 -78 49 42 | This hand-carry launch is located upstream of the town of Portland Mills. There is parking for 8-10 cars. This site can be very congested on warm weather weekends. |
| 80 River Left | Arroyo Canoe Launch PGC | Lat Lon | 41 23 24 -78 52 52 | Located just downstream of the Arroyo Bridge, this hand-carry launch can accommodate about 10-15 cars. |
| 76 River Right | Irwin Run Canoe Launch ANF | Lat Lon | 41 24 00 -78 54 20 | Located along River Road, this hand-carry launch provides parking for 10-15 cars. This site can be very congested on warm weather weekends. A restroom is located onsite. Walk-in camping is permitted upstream of the parking lot. |
| 74 River Right | Hallton Canoe Launch PGC | Lat Lon | 41 24 04 -78 55 57 | This hand-carry launch is located along River Road in the town of Hallton. There is parking for 10-12 cars. |

Caution Information

Motorboat traffic can be heavy on the East Branch Lake during the summer months. The East and West Branches of the Clarion River are more susceptible to stream-wide strainers and have limited access. The East Branch has swift water. On the main stem of the Clarion River, there are four class I to I+ rapids that can be navigated by scouting ahead. Be prepared.

- **River mile 108.7 E:** Low bridge clearance at Glen Hazel Road.
- **River mile 103 E to 102.5 E (confluence):** RIVER CLOSED to public use where it flows through the Domtar Mill in Johnsonburg. No portage available. Paddlers should take out at Bendigo State Park because there is no public access on the East Branch in Johnsonburg.
- **River mile 107.8 W:** Stream-wide low hanging cable.
- **River mile 88.6:** Railroad trestle bridge abutments with possible STRAINERS caused by trees wrapped around the piers.



Riverside Camping

Camping opportunities are limited along the upper section of the Clarion River, especially upstream of Ridgway. See other side of brochure for more detail.

- Boat Launch (number is approximate river mile)
- Canoe Launch (number is approximate river mile)
- Mileage from Mouth of Clarion River
- River-wide Dam - Must Portage
- Caution
- Rapids (number is approximate river mile)
- USGS Stream Flow Gage Station
- Canoe Livery / Outfitter (Contact for Access)
- Public Phone
- Hospital
- Visitor Information Center
- Restroom
- Campsites
- Trailhead
- Public Library
- Lodging
- Grocery/Convenience Store
- Restaurant
- Point of Interest
- Trail
- Active Railroad
- Nat'l Wild & Scenic River - Recreational Designation
- Nat'l Wild & Scenic River - Scenic Designation
- County Boundary
- Municipality
- Corps of Engineers
- Allegheny National Forest
- State Parks
- State Forest
- State Game Lands

0 0.5 1 2 Miles