Kentucky River
Blue Water Trail Guide

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River Mile 170.6 to 190.8

Introduction

Rising from headwaters in the Appalachian mountains, three separate branches—the North Fork, Middle Fork and South Fork—come together near Beattyville to form the Kentucky River. Here the river begins a journey of over 250 miles to its confluence with the Ohio River at Carrollton. During the settlement period, the river brought pioneers into the fertile central Kentucky area and soon after became an important transportation artery for the region’s produce. Every spring, flatboats filled with goods—tobacco, whiskey, flour, hams, etc.—lined the river banks awaiting the spring flood, or “tides.” The Kentucky-Ohio-Mississippi River corridor was the state’s major route to markets until the Civil War. After the war, massive rafts of timber logs were floated downstream to riverside sawmills, which gave rise to a burgeoning lumber industry.

Visionaries in the 19th century believed a slackwater system of 14 locks and dams would make Kentucky’s natural resources—particularly coal and timber—competitive on a national scale. Completed by the U.S. Corps of Engineers in 1917, the system proved economically unsustainable. After years of sporadic operation, the Corps began turning the locks and dams over to the state in the 1990s. Today, most of the locks are closed and the dams serve primarily as impoundments for municipal water supplies.

A resurgence of interest in the Kentucky River’s recreational, educational, ecological and tourism potential has led to creation of a series of Blue Water Trails. Kentucky River pools 9 and 10 contain some of the state’s most important historic places. This guide lists historic sites, notable landmarks and important facilities on both sides of the river in Clark and Madison Counties, beginning at Boone Creek and traveling upstream to the mouth of Red River. It is intended to assist boaters, bicyclists and sightseers—whether local residents or tourists—learn more about the river from prehistoric times to the present.

Abbreviations Used:

(C), Clark County side; (M), Madison County side; (RM), river mile, being the distance from the Ohio River; \( K \), a stream suitable for kayaking or rafting according to American Whitewater (www.americanwhitewater.org/).

Cover illustrations: Front cover, top, aerial view of the Kentucky River at the mouth of Lower Howard’s Creek, Ramsey Flynn, and bottom, Ky. 627 bridge over Kentucky River, Harry G. Enoch; inside cover maps, Stephen Berry, Clark County GIS, Winchester, KY.

Printed with funds from The Greater Clark Foundation.
A series of 14 locks and dams converted the Kentucky River from a free-flowing stream to a series of slack water impoundments stretching from Carrollton to Beattyville. Pool 9 is formed by lock and dam No. 9 at Valley View. This 19-mile-long pool at one time was among the busiest recreational areas on the river. There were numerous launching points for boats, and the banks were lined with docks, as well as restaurants and taverns.

1. **Boone Creek (C) (RM 170.6)**
   Boone Creek was named for the legendary explorer, Daniel Boone. The lower reaches form the boundary between Fayette County and Clark County. In its last few miles, the creek is lined with towering cliffs on both sides. Boone Creek spawned a number of water-powered manufacturing enterprises beginning in the 1790s. The entire scenic watershed is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

2. **Berkley Spring Branch (C) (RM 170.8)**
   In the 1820s, Daniel Berkley owned a large farm overlooking the river. His spring branch, though less than a mile long, forms a beautiful gorge with picturesque waterfalls where it cuts through the palisades before emptying into the river.

3. **Shot Factory (C) (RM 170.9)**
   This early factory made lead shot by dropping molten metal through a sieve at the top of the cliff. As it fell, the molten lead formed into round balls whose diameter varied with the size of the sieve openings. Shot was collected and cooled in a vat of water at the bottom of the cliff. John G. Stuart visiting in 1806 wrote, “We also went up to view the old shot manufactory built on the edge of precipice 2 or 300 feet high.”

4. **Hieronymus Warehouse & Ferry (C) (RM 173)**
   This warehouse for the inspection of flour, tobacco and hemp was established in 1808 by an act of the General Assembly. Located a little downstream from Jouett Creek, the warehouse stood on the land of Henry Hieronymus, who also operated a ferry here. Warehouses were established by the Kentucky General Assembly in order to inspect goods destined for shipment by flatboat downriver to markets in New Orleans.

5. **Jouett Creek (C) (RM 173.4)**
   This creek was named for Matthew Jouett who made an improvement here in 1775 and then died during the Revolutionary War. His brother and heir, Jack Jouett, claimed the land and sued John Holder who held an overlapping claim. The suit dragged on for 37 years before being decided in favor of Holder’s heirs. Jack Jouett achieved fame during the Revolution for his midnight ride to warn Thomas Jefferson and the legislature that the British were coming.
The creek gorge is a scenic area profusely decorated with native wildflowers in the spring.

6. Combs Ferry (C) (RM 173.8)
Samuel R. Combs took over the ferry and warehouse at Holder’s Landing (#8) after his father-in-law John Holder died in 1799. In 1833, Combs was murdered—throat cut from ear to ear on the steps of the Clark County Courthouse—by James and Lamentation Bush. In 1858, James T. Woodward and Daniel Bentley moved Combs Ferry about three-quarters of a mile downstream near the end of present day Amster Grove Road. The old turnpike highway from Paris to Richmond crossed the river at this ferry.

Martin’s Gristmill & Sawmill (C)
In about 1861, Henry Calmes Jr. and Lewis Adams erected a steam-powered gristmill and sawmill. Three years later, John W. Martin purchased the mill and ran it until at least 1880. In 1870, the mill sold $5,000 worth of lumber and $225 of cornmeal. The mill was part of a small community around the ferry, which also included a store, schoolhouse and several residences.

7. The Brooklyn (C) (RM 174.5)
This sunken wreck near the Clark County shore was a sternwheeler towboat known as the Brooklyn, originally built at Jeffersonville, Indiana in 1930 as the Helen H. This diesel-powered boat worked under various names on the Mississippi, Ohio and Cumberland Rivers. In 1960, Capt. John Donaldson of Nicholasville purchased the boat and renamed her the Brooklyn. He later sold it to Linville Puckett who used her for a marina and beer depot near Boonesborough. The boat sank in 1977; an effort to refloat the vessel in 1986 failed.
8. **Lower Howard’s Creek (C) (RM 174.6)**

The creek was named for John Howard, who built a cabin here in 1775 that entitled him to a land claim of 1,000 acres. A buffalo trace followed the creek upstream and Native Americans used their path. After Boonesborough was settled, the pioneers used the path, which they called the Salt Spring Trace, to travel from the fort to Lower Blue Licks where they made salt.

**Holder’s Station & Holder’s Landing (C)**

John Holder came to Boonesborough during the Revolutionary War. He served there during the great siege in 1778 and later commanded the fort. In 1781, he established a pioneer fort, Holder’s Station, on the bluff above. He married Fannie Callaway, daughter of Col. Richard Callaway. She and her sister Betsy along with Jemima Boone were captured by the Shawnee not far from here and were rescued two days later by Daniel Boone’s party. Holder was a business entrepreneur whose enterprises at the mouth of the creek included an inspection warehouse, boatyard, ferry, tavern and mill. This was the beginning of one of the earliest industrial centers in Kentucky.

**Blackfish Ford (C-M)**

Before the locks and dams were built, there was a rocky shoal here that allowed crossing the river at times of low flow. The ford was named for the Shawnee chief, Blackfish, who led more than 400 warriors to the siege of Fort Boonesborough in September 1778. The war party camped near the present Winchester Reservoir then traveled down Lower Howard’s Creek,
crossing the river at the mouth. The Indians besieged the fort, unsuccessfully, from September 7 – 18 and killed only two at the fort.

**Hall’s Restaurant (C) 859-527-6620**

Hall’s on the River has been a landmark for more than four decades. The first restaurant here was run by legendary riverman, Johnny Allman. He opened the Driftwood Inn in the late 1930s where he served the first beer cheese and fried banana peppers on the river. Allman moved the restaurant to the present site of Hall’s in the early 1940s and a few years later sold it to Carl Johnson. Some years later, Allman came back and opened a new place, Fishermans Inn, which burned in 1978. Hall’s Restaurant opened in 1966. In 1965, Carl Johnson was shot to death in his restaurant, and the Hall family bought it shortly after.

**Lower Howard’s Creek Nature & Heritage Preserve (C)**

This 350-acre sanctuary features rare-endangered plants and historical-archaeological sites along a scenic limestone gorge. There are more than 400 species of plants. Mammalian species living in or passing through the Preserve include river otter, beaver, deer, coyote, wildcat, black bear, gray bat and evening bat. The historic Salt Spring Trace passes through the Preserve. A public hiking area (John Holder Trail) may be accessed from Hall’s Restaurant parking lot.
9. **Athens-Boonesboro Road Quarry (C) (RM 174.8)**
   This abandoned rock quarry was operated in the 1930s and 40s by J. A. Fries & Co. of Knoxville, Tennessee, and Caldwell Stone Co. of Danville. Allen-Codell Co. of Clark County operated the quarry until the 1950s.

![Athens-Boonesboro Road Quarry](image)

**Lisletown (C)**
Lisletown was an African-American community located on the hilltop before you get to Hall’s Restaurant. Lisletown named for Fielding Lisle, a former slave, who purchased an unimproved tract of land on the plateau above in 1874. During the Civil War, Fielding and his brother John enlisted in the Union Army. Their regiment, the 114th U.S. Colored Infantry, served at the siege of Petersburg, Virginia, and in the Appomattox Campaign that ended the war. This black community survived until the last residents moved away in the 1960s.

10. **Ventilation Shaft (M) (RM 174.9)**
On hot summer days, a blanket of fog is often visible at this point on the river. The fog is formed by cool moist air emanating from a ventilation shaft in the Boonesboro Quarry. Boaters appreciate the noticeable drop in temperature on hot days.

11. **Coffee Springs Branch (C) (RM 175)**
This small tributary begins at a spring on the plateau above and flows a quarter of a mile to the river, passing over a series of picturesque cascades along the way. It forms the largest waterfalls on the north side of Athens-Boonesboro Road. The spring served for many years as the water source for Lisletown. Possibly named for Ambrose Coffee, the Boonesborough pioneer who lived in the Bush Settlement in about 1785. Capt. Billy Bush’s land claims from Lower Howard’s Creek to Twomile became a dispersed community known as the “Bush Settlement.”

12. **Three Trees Canoe–Kayak Rental (C) (RM 175.2) 859-749-3227**
Jeff Cress operates the only canoe-kayak rental and shuttle service in Pool 9. Private boaters may put in and take out at the dock at no charge. Cress also operates an RV park here.
Kentucky River Palisades (M)
This limestone cliff across the river from Three Trees marks the beginning of the Kentucky River Palisades. For the next 100 miles downstream, stretching from here to Frankfort, the river has eroded a meandering trench through the Bluegrass region, where cliffs on either side tower 400 to 500 feet over the water. At the base of these palisades, one can find the oldest exposed rocks in Kentucky, formed in the Ordovician Period about 450 million years ago. Over millions of years, the Kentucky River

Kidnapping of the Boone and Callaway Girls (C)
On July 14, 1776, one of the signal events on the Western Frontier occurred here. That Sunday afternoon, Betsy and Fanny Callaway and Jemima Boone went canoeing on the river. When the canoe drifted close to the north bank, the girls were captured by five Indians who immediately started on their journey back to Ohio. Daniel Boone led a rescue party that came upon the Indians’ camp on Tuesday. They fired on the captors, mortally wounding two, and rescued the girls. The precise location of their capture is not known.
Stevens’ Sawmill (C)
Mercer B. Berry and George Howard built a steam-powered sawmill, which Robert Elkin & Co. operated in 1860 sawing 2,300 logs and producing 780,000 board feet of lumber with only four employees. John Stevens purchased the mill in 1861. It was later operated by his sons Valentine and Hubbard, and finally by Hubbard’s son James “Buzz” Stevens.

Riverview Marina and the Boathouse (C)
Riverview was one of the last large marinas operated in this pool. The owner, Fernando Cress, also had a floating restaurant here called the Boathouse. The restaurant burned in April 2010 and the marina was wrecked in a flood the following month.

Sandpiper Restaurant (C)
Charlie Hubbard turned an old tugboat into a floating restaurant called the “Sandpiper,” which sank here in the 1970s. The boat lies beneath the water near where the Boathouse was located.
13. Waterfront Restaurant and Lounge (C) (RM 175.4)  859-527-9910
This restaurant is a popular gathering place for bikers on Thursday nights. Bike Night on the River has been attracting motorcycle riders for over 40 years. In the past it was not unusual to see more than 1,000 bikes on this two-mile stretch of the river.

Boonesboro Quarry (M)
Boonesboro Quarry, opened in 1939, is operated by the Allen Company. It produces limestone from the Camp Nelson formation. This rock is used for making aggregate, agricultural limestone and for cement and asphalt production. Kentucky is one of the top ten limestone producers in the country.

14. Boonesboro Bridge (C-M) (RM 175.5)
The Fort Boonesborough Memorial Bridge was erected in 1931 (toll 30 cents). This was the first bridge over the Kentucky River in Clark County. The narrow, curved span—the cause of many traffic accidents—was replaced in 1994. The new concrete span, renamed the Ewart W. Johnson Bridge, is over double the width of the old bridge.

Daniel Boone Inn and Boone Statue (C)
Daniel Boone Inn, a roadside tavern known locally as the DBI, stood here until razed for the new Boonesboro Bridge (1994). A statue of Daniel Boone, carved by A. D. Fisher, stood beside the road in front of the DBI. The statue is now at College Park in Winchester.

Boonesborough Fault (C-M)
This geological feature, part of the Kentucky River Fault System, is where a fracture in the rock caused vertical displacement of the limestone layers. The layers on the south (or down thrust) side of the fault lie more than 100 feet below the corresponding layers on the north side. The fault is clearly visible at the intersection of Boonesboro Road (KY 627) and Ford Road. (KY 1924).

15. Boonesborough Ferry Landing (C) (RM 175.8)
In 1779, Richard Callaway received permission to operate a ferry at Boonesborough, the first one chartered in Kentucky. The following year, while building a boat, Callaway and Pemberton Rawlings were attacked and
killed by Indians. The family sold the ferry rights to John Sidebottom. The ferry operated under a succession of owners until the highway bridge was built in 1931.

Barr’s Tanyard (C)
James and Thomas Barr had a tanyard at the Boonesborough Ferry landing. In 1814, the brothers offered to “pay cash or leather for raw hides. Will tan hides for half.” The small stream here was first called the “Ferry Branch” then “Tanyard Branch” and “Barr’s Branch.”

16. Fort Boonesborough (M) (RM 175.9)
The fort was named for Daniel Boone, who led a party of settlers here for the Transylvania Company. The original fort site is marked by a stone enclosure surrounding the DAR monument. In 1974, a replica of the historic fort was dedicated. The fort, located on higher ground to protect from flooding, was reconstructed as a living history museum complete with cabins, blockhouses and furnishings. First-person Daniel Boone interpretations along with 18th century life skills and period craft demonstrations give visitors a sense of what life was like for Kentucky pioneers.
Fort Boonesborough State Park (M) (RM 175.8-176.4)  859-527-3131
This was the site of Fort Boonesborough, Kentucky’s second permanent settlement in 1775. The need to honor this historic site came to fruition in 1963 when Fort Boonesborough State Park opened on 153 acres. The park has a swimming pool and a campground with showers, laundry and grocery. The adjacent public beach was a long time attraction for swimmers and boaters and was an important steamboat landing. Steamboats were once common on the Kentucky River.

In 1846, the Blue Wing took advantage of a rise in the river level to steam all the way to Irvine. From that time until about the turn of the century, numerous steamboats operated in the waters of Pool 9 and 10. This list includes a few of those identified so far: Favorite, Thealka, Greyhound, Blue Wing, Blue Wing II, Ocean, Gen. O. M. Poe, Billy Parsons, Longfellow, Dora, Ingomar, Kentucky, Daniel Boone, Gazette, John Armstrong, and Falls City.

The 145-foot U.S. towboat, General O. M. Poe

Boonesborough Boat Ramp (M) (RM 175.9)
Public access point for boaters.

Pool 10

Pool 10 is formed by lock and dam No. 10 at Boonesborough and stretches nearly 25 miles upstream. After the Ford area, this scenic river valley remains almost entirely rural and undeveloped.

17. Lock & Dam No. 10 (C-M) (RM 176.4)
This concrete dam was built by Mason and Hoge Company (later became Mason & Hanger) for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. When nearing completion in March 1905, the river froze then thawed, releasing a flood of ice and saw logs that washed out the bank around the lock. This required construction of an auxiliary dam to close the gap. The Corps turned the lock and dam over to the state in 1996. The lock has been closed since 2000.
Lock gates at No. 10

Kentucky River Museum (M)  859-527-3131
The Kentucky River Museum, which includes two restored lock keeper houses, explores the development of commerce on the river and tells the story of the Walters family who lived here and worked the lock through much of its history.

18. WMU Water Intake (C) (RM 176.5)
Winchester Municipal Utilities supplies water for Winchester and most of Clark County. Raw water is piped to their treatment plant at the Winchester Reservoir. Winchester is the only municipality taking water from Pool 10.

19. Civil War Fort at Boonesboro (C) (RM 176.9)
After three major Confederate raids crossed the Kentucky River in 1862 and 1863, plans were made to erect small defensive works at the most important fords and ferries south and east of Lexington. Fort Boonesboro was constructed as an earthwork, surrounded by an abatis and enclosing a blockhouse. There is a small park here with a hiking trail to the fort remains on the hilltop. A series of murals depicting historic river scenes line the wall of the parking lot.
20. **Otter Creek (M) (RM 177.2)**

In March 1775, Daniel Boone’s party of twenty axmen blazed a trail from Long Island of the Holston through Cumberland Gap and on to Otter Creek in now Madison County. They followed the creek to the mouth on the Kentucky River. Col. Richard Henderson’s party followed a few weeks later and commenced building Fort Boonesborough. Otter Creek was used for water power beginning in 1795 with erection of John Halley’s gristmill and sawmill.

**Chalybeate Springs (C)**

This mineral springs was a landmark during the 19th century but is lost today. It was reported to be in Clark County directly opposite the mouth of Otter Creek. Chalybeate waters containing salts of iron were once sought out for their health-giving properties.

21. **Ford (C) (RM 177.5)**

This town, named for Thomas M. Ford, was made possible by the railroad which reached this point in 1883. A number of immense sawmills followed, including the Burt & Brabb Lumber Co. with a capacity to produce 15,000,000 board feet of lumber per year. By 1900, Ford had a population over 700 (2,883 in Ford Precinct). The mills slowed after the lock and dams required logs to be tied together in rafts and began closing after the railroad came to towns further upriver.

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**Postcard view of the lumber mills at Ford**

**William C. Dale Power Station (C) (RM 177.4)**

On July 7, 1941, thirteen of Kentucky’s rural electric co-ops formed East Kentucky Power Cooperative to relieve the electric power shortage common in rural areas. EKPC’s coal-fired power plant, William C. Dale Station, began generating electricity in 1954. This was the first rural electric generating plant in Kentucky.
L & N (CSX) Railroad Bridge (C-M)
A bridge and tunnel was built here by the Kentucky Central Railroad in 1883. It was the first bridge to span the Kentucky River in Clark County.

22. **Ford Ferry (C-M) (RM 178.1)**
James C. Richards operated a small ferry here in the early 20th century. There is still a Ford Road in Madison County ending at the river. There were thirteen ferries on the Kentucky River from Boone Creek to Red River. The only ferry still operating on the river is at Valley View.

23. **Old Habits Boat Dock (C) (RM 179.4) 859-527-7888**
There has been a boat dock and marina at this location since the 1970s. The boat ramp is open to the public.

24. **Twomile Creek (C)**
This small creek begins just south of Winchester. The name dates from before 1779 and refers to the approximate distance from the mouth of the creek to Boonesborough.

25. **Fourmile Creek (C) (RM 180.4) K**
This early name also refers to the approximate distance from Boonesborough. The first ferry near the mouth of Fourmile was established by Robert Clark Sr. in 1793. Sometimes called the Fourmile Ferry, it operated through the 1870s. A state inspection warehouse was established in 1799 for the heirs of Nathaniel Hart, who was killed by Indians, and was later operated by Achilles Eubank and Thomas W. Shepherd.

26. **Indian Creek (C) (RM 184)**
This small creek in Clark County may have been named for the Indian graves nearby, once a landmark for early pioneers. Native Americans of the Late Woodland period (A.D. 500-1,000) often marked isolated graves away from villages with large piles of stone.
26. **Muddy Creek (M) (RM 184.9)**
   Muddy Creek in Madison County flows generally north and is approximately 30 miles long. There were a number of 19th century gristmills on this stream, the best known of which was Weddle’s Mill.

27. **Jackson’s Ferry & Warehouse (C) (RM 185)**
   Revolutionary War veteran, Josiah Jackson, began one of Clark County’s early ferries opposite the mouth of Muddy Creek in 1795. His son Francis had an inspection warehouse commissioned in 1822. The ferry landing is reached from Winchester by way of Muddy Creek Road. Contrary to what one might think, however, there is no Muddy Creek in Clark County.

   **Jackson Ferry Boat Ramp (C)**
   Public access point for boaters at the old ferry landing at the end of Jackson Ferry Road.

28. **Upper Howard’s Creek (C) (RM 187.1)**
   This is one of two creeks in Clark County named for John Howard. The other is Lower Howard’s Creek, so called because it lies downstream from Upper Howard’s Creek. Virginia-native Howard settled in Fayette County on what later became Gainesway Farm, world-famous for thoroughbred breeding. In 1805, the state established an inspection warehouse here. Tobacco, flour and hemp were brought to these warehouses for state inspectors to examine before allowing the goods to be shipped down the river on flatboats. At that time, New Orleans was the largest market for Kentucky’s produce. Clark County Court issued a ferry license in 1805 to John Howard’s son Benjamin.

29. **Bull Run (C) (RM 188.4)**
   Several prehistoric archaeological sites lie along this 3.5 mile long stream. The best known of these are the Goolman and DeVary sites, which were Late Fort Ancient winter encampments dating from A.D. 1400-1645.

   ![Mural depicting prehistoric hunters](image)
30. **Red River Ferry (C-M) (RM 190.8)**
William Tuttle was granted ferry privileges here in 1816. The Merritt family later operated the ferry which survived into the 20th century.

![Red River Ferry](image1)

**Red River Boat Ramp (C)**
A public boat ramp at the old ferry landing accessed via Ferry Road by way of Red River Road.

**Red River (C)**
Red River serves as the boundary between Clark County and Estill County. William Thomas and Azariah Martin operated sawmills at the mouth of the river in the 1840s. Booms on shore caught saw logs coming down Red River. The mills were on the south bank of the river in what is now Estill County. Henry Merritt ran the sawmills in the 1890s and also operated a distillery on the Clark County side.

![Log raft on Kentucky River](image2)

**College Hill Boat Ramp (M)**
Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources’ public boat ramp for boaters. Access from KY 977.
Not so long ago the Kentucky River was considered a prime recreation area. In the 1960s, the beach at Boonesborough was so crowded on weekends one could hardly find a place to lay a towel. The river teemed with fishing boats, water skiers and pleasure craft; the riverbanks were lined with boat docks. Today the beach is mostly deserted, the boats and boat docks mostly gone. The Kentucky River Water Trail Alliance is trying to change that.

The Alliance—an association of the Kentucky Riverkeeper, the National Park Service, the Kentucky River Authority, Kentucky Adventure Tourism and numerous other organizations—want to “put the Kentucky River back on the map.” They are trying to raise awareness of the recreational, educational, ecological and tourism value of the river. The Alliance has proposed a series of recreational Blue Water Trails along the Kentucky River.

This guide lists historic sites, notable landmarks and important facilities on both sides of the river in Clark and Madison Counties, beginning at Boone Creek and traveling upstream to the mouth of Red River. All access points for boaters are identified. While each of these places can be viewed from the river, some are more challenging to reach by land. Fortunately, the Ford-Boonesborough-Lower Howard’s Creek area, which has the most sites, is accessible by local roads on the Clark or Madison side of the river.