

BLACKSTONE RIVER & CANAL GUIDE

Plummer's Landing to River Bend Farm – *Intermediate Tour, Massachusetts*



Level Intermediate

Start Plummer's Landing, Northbridge, MA

End River Bend Farm, Uxbridge, MA

Time 1-2 hours

Description. Quickwater, with S-curves, Flatwater

Scenery. Forested, Rural, Wetland, Canal

Portages One portage at Hartford Avenue

Miles 3 1/2 miles

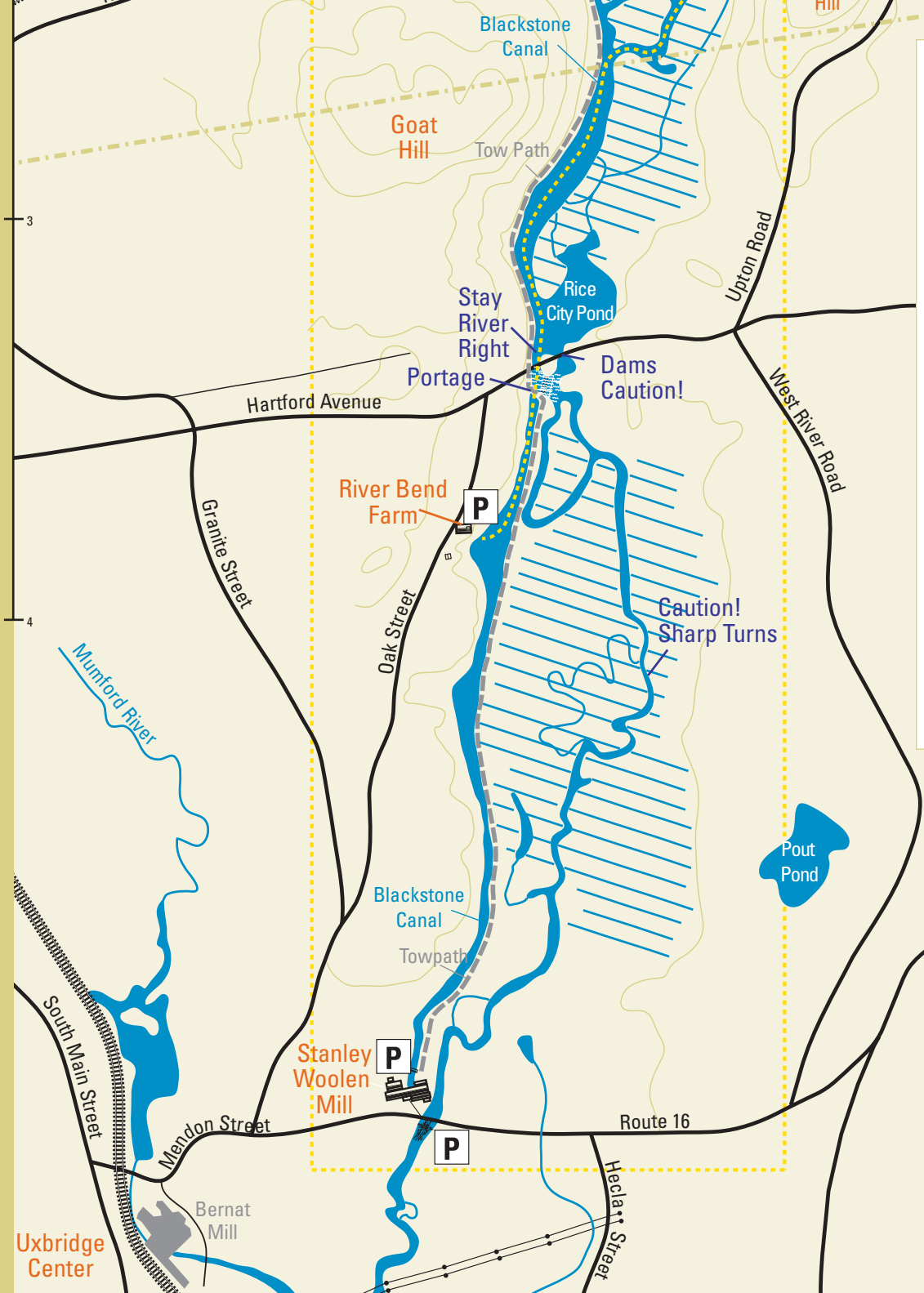
Meandering quickwater through the heart of the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park.

Park in the Church Street parking area for the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park and put in on river right just below the bridge. The area around the Church Street Bridge is called Plummer's Landing, named for a store and inn owner who catered to the canal trade along the Blackstone Canal. The bridge over the canal at Church Street is partially made of an old canal lock.

This section of the Blackstone River is in a considerable state of flux within its broad flood plain. The river is constantly eroding its banks and creating new channels. In some places, the river has breached the canal towpath embankment and it is possible to paddle within the canal for considerable distances.

Less than a mile downriver there is a breach in the riverbank – stay river left to continue down the river. This section of the river can require skillful paddling. With its many twists and turns, you must be able to maneuver around the strainers and through S-curves. The difficulty increases when the water is high.

Approximately two miles downriver is a section of flatwater through the Rice City Pond area. Much of the land abutting the pond, including a promontory on the left called "Lookout Rock" is owned and managed by the state and forms the nucleus of the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park. Lookout Rock is a short, challenging hike from the riverbank and provides an excellent view of the Blackstone River Valley.



Stay river right where the channel divides in this area. Immediately after the large stands of *Phragmites australis* (a tall thick-stemmed grass), take the right channel and look for a small backwater section that leads into a preserved canal-era artifact: the Goat Hill Lock (1827). You can paddle up the canal a short distance to explore the lock or continue down the canal.

Continuing on, paddlers can enjoy an abundance of wildlife and migrating birds within the pond. When approaching the Hartford Avenue stone arch bridge (1869), avoid the left side, under which is a 6 foot waterfall. Stay to the right and paddle under the bridge. Hartford Avenue is one of the oldest long distance highways in the state (c.1730).

Carry your boat over the towpath and put back into the canal on the other side. Paddle the Blackstone Canal to River Bend Farm (on the right, just after you pass under the foot bridge).

As an alternative to the canal route, you can continue downriver by carrying your boat to below the spillway on your left and putting in on river right. If water is pouring over the spillway, this section of the river will be more difficult than in low water. You can get information on this section of the river in the Water Trail Tour for River Bend Farm.

For more information on this part of the Blackstone River, pick up a *Blackstone Canal Walking Tour brochure* at the River Bend Farm Visitor Center.

Related River Tours: *River Bend Farm Paddle Tours (Beginner)* and *River Bend Farm to Blackstone Gorge (Intermediate)*.

Directions to Plummer's Landing

From Route 146 North or South:

- Take the exit for Route 16. A brown & white highway sign marks the exit.
- Follow orange "visitor center" signs. From 146 North, turn RIGHT onto Rt. 16 East. From 146 South, turn LEFT onto Rt. 16 East.
- Continue to the traffic light in Uxbridge Center,
- Turn LEFT at light onto Main Street/Route 122 North.
- Continue approximately 2 miles to the traffic light at intersection with Church Street in Northbridge, MA.
- Turn RIGHT onto Church Street.
- Continue straight for about one mile to just before Quaker Street intersection.
- The parking area for the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park is on the right just before the bridge.

THE BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY GENERAL INFORMATION

Water in the Blackstone River drops 450 feet in its 46 mile journey from Worcester, MA to Pawtucket, RI, and eventually empties into the Narragansett Bay in Providence. It runs through urban areas, historic mill villages, past farmland and through forests, inviting paddlers to explore the physical remnants of its heritage including canal locks and mill structures. Dropping an average of ten feet per mile, it is interwoven with canal segments and flows over 18 dams. While noted for its industrial heritage, the river also offers many great recreational opportunities for flat water and quick water paddling.

The industrial history of the Blackstone Valley can be attributed to the power of the Blackstone River. While in most places the river is narrow and shallow, the power of its water flow should never be taken for granted. During times of heavy rain or major snow melt, the water level of the river will rise quickly, significantly increasing its speed and presenting new obstacles for paddlers. In high water, strainers or sweepers are common along the banks of the Blackstone and require the paddler's full attention. All levels of paddlers need to respect the power of the river and be aware that the water flow can fluctuate wildly over a short period of time, quickly creating challenging conditions. **Please wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD) at all times when paddling the Blackstone River.** Paddlers should check the water level, weather, and river conditions prior to every trip. For more information on this see the "Contacts" section.



photo of view from Lookout Rock by Jim McElholm

Blackstone River Tours

The Water Trail Tours are divided into different paddling skill levels and provide information to river users to help plan their trip on the Blackstone River. Tour information will allow you to determine the skill level required, the approximate amount of time needed to complete the trip, location of dams and other obstacles requiring portages, the location of facilities, and some information about the various natural and historic features. References in the text of the tours to "river right" and "river left" refer to the paddler's orientation facing downriver.

Portages

Portages are listed at the beginning of each tour. Required portages, such as dams, rapids and canal/river loops are noted on the map and in the accompanying text. Be aware: there are currently no warnings of approaching dams, and they are not always obvious from upstream. There are currently 18 dams along the River and most tours involve a portage.

Flat water paddling is characterized as water with very little current and no major obstacles. Paddling on the many mill ponds created by the dams along the river and in the Blackstone Canal are good examples of flat water paddling. Quick water is characterized as either Class I or Class II based on the International Scale of River Difficulty. A Class I river has a current with a few riffles and small waves and paddlers run into few or no obstructions. A Class II river will have easy rapids with waves up to 3 feet high and wide clear channels. Some skills to safely maneuver your boat are required. Tours in the Water Trails Guide will be on portions of the river classified as either Class I or Class II. However, significant maneuvering is required through the flood plain of the Blackstone due to numerous horseshoe bends and S-curves that are prevalent throughout most of the Massachusetts section of the river. The river begins to get broader and flatter beginning in the South Uxbridge section of the river and through Rhode Island. This is a diverse yet intimate river full of surprises for paddlers. Enjoy your trip as you discover why the Blackstone River was once called “America’s Hardest Working River”!

Be prepared for a “wet portage”. Rubber soled shoes that can get wet are a must for any paddling trip on the Blackstone River. Getting in and out of your boat in water and mud is part of every trip.

Assume that all land bordering the river is private property. Therefore, please be courteous and show respect for these lands. Portage quickly; do not loiter. Help foster a spirit of cooperation between riverfront landowners and recreational paddlers.

Trip Times

Many variables influence the amount of time required to paddle a mile of river. Water conditions exert the greatest influence, while wind, weather and the paddler’s approach – athletic or leisurely – will all have an influence on the travel time. Most paddlers can expect to paddle approximately three miles per hour on a typical late spring day with minimal wind. Additional time is needed for portaging.

Facilities

Only a few formal sites with facilities have been developed along the river, although more are being planned. Trash cans, picnic sites and restrooms are few and far between so please plan your trip accordingly. It is each paddler’s responsibility to take out everything that is brought in. Please do not litter – pack it in / pack it out is the general rule for river trips. Better yet, your help in picking up trash you see will be most appreciated. Thanks to volunteers removing tons of debris from the Blackstone River over the last 30 years, it has become a popular recreational resource.

Contacts

For current water levels on the Blackstone River, go to the website: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ma/nwis/current/?type=flow>

At the Northbridge, MA gauge, any reading above 5 feet should be considered high water. At the Woonsocket, RI gauge, any reading above 2500 cfs should be considered high water.

For more about paddling the Blackstone River

John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor
One Depot Square, Woonsocket, RI 02895, 401.762-0250,
www.nps.gov/blac/home.htm
www.zaptheblackstone.org

Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, 508.278.7604,
www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/central/blst.htm

Great Canadian Canoe Co., 508.865-0010 or 800.98-CANOE, www.greatcanadian.com

Wild Bird Gardens, 508.234.0111, www.wildbirdgardens.com

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BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

National Heritage Corridor Commission

