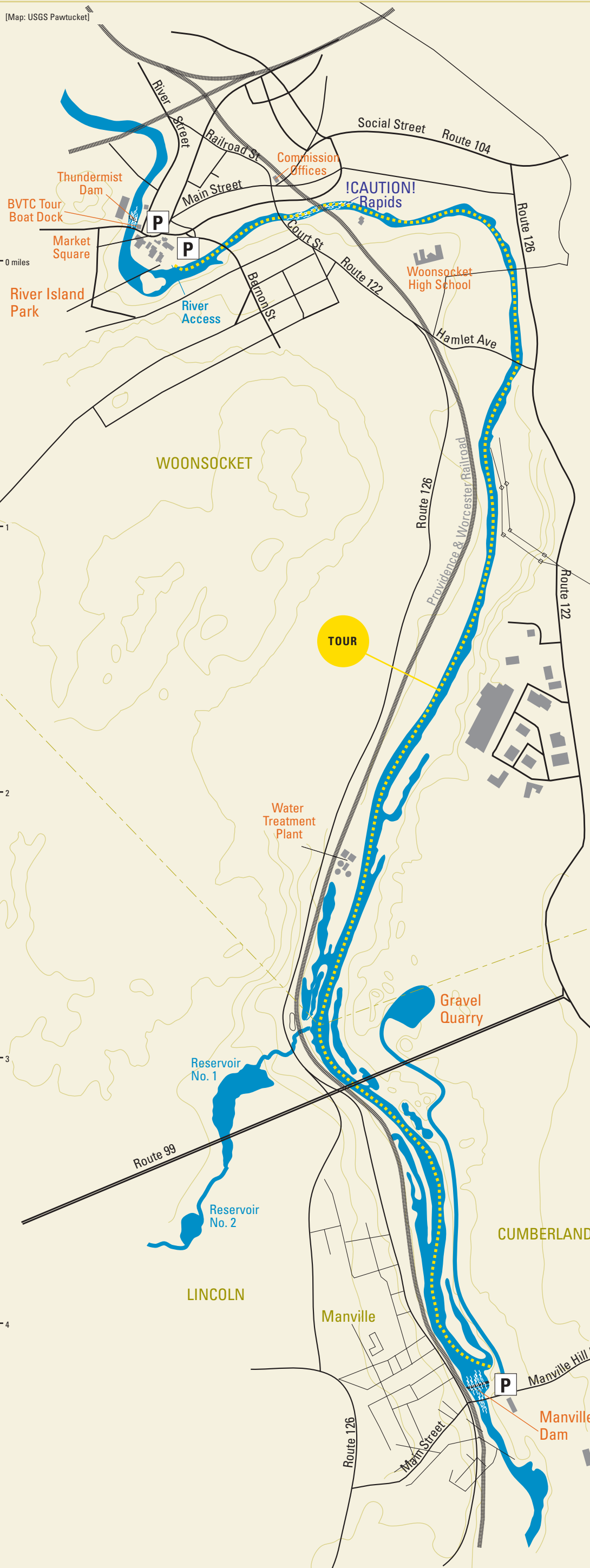


# BLACKSTONE RIVER & CANAL GUIDE

## River Island Park to Manville Dam – *Beginner Tour, Rhode Island*

[Map: USGS Pawtucket]



Level . . . . . Beginner

Start . . . . . River Island Park, Woonsocket, RI

End . . . . . Manville Dam, Cumberland, RI

River Miles . 4.2 one way

Time . . . . . 1-2 hours

Description. Flatwater, Class I-II rapids

Scenery. . . . Urban, Forested

Portages . . . None

### A trip past historic mills and wooded banks.

This is probably the most challenging of our beginner tours.

This segment travels through the heart of downtown Woonsocket in the first half, and then through forested city-owned land in the western part of the city. After putting in at River Island Park, go under the Bernon Street Bridge and you enter a section of the river lined with historic mills on both sides. On the right just after the bridge is the Bernon Mills complex. The oldest building in the complex, the 1827 stone mill in the center, is the earliest known example of slow-burning mill construction in America that used noncombustible walls, heavy timber posts and beams and double plank floors to resist burning if it caught fire.

Starting before the Court Street truss bridge (1895) is a stretch of about 1000 feet of Class I and II rapids, with plenty of rocks that require skillful maneuvering. The Blackstone River drops sharply through the City of Woonsocket and water levels play an important part in determining how to navigate this section of the river. The river moves quite swiftly through the first mile of this section of the river during high water. In high water, most of the ledges and the rocky river bottom is covered. Care is needed to avoid these obstacles. During low water, it is quite easy to get stuck on a rock or ledge. Read the river carefully to pick your way through this rock garden.

Once below the Fire Station high on river-left, the river gets lazy and takes its time getting to Manville. This is actually one of the sections of the river that is held back by a large dam creating a wide millpond effect.

The next 3/4 mile section has been significantly altered over the years by the Army Corps of Engineers for flood control. After going under the Hamlet Avenue bridge, the river becomes broad and placid. The 2½ mile stretch between Hamlet Avenue and Manville features mostly forested banks that are a strong contrast to the earlier urbanized part of this segment. A short distance below the bridge on river right you will see a long section of the riverbank that is the redevelopment of a former landfill into athletic fields and the Blackstone River Bikeway. Another interruption of the natural setting is the large tanks of the Woonsocket drinking water treatment plant on the right bank about 2 miles down from the Hamlet Bridge.

Just before the Manville Dam (1868) is a large wetland on the left bank; it's a great place to spot waterfowl. Paddle into the wetland area and you will see the canoe ramp, just past the granite wall along the side the dam. The Manville Dam has an 18 foot drop, one of the highest on the river. This overlook area for Manville Dam is a good place for a picnic. It is being improved into Manville Landing – a small riverside park that will have docks and interpretive signs about the history of the area.

For more information about this part of the Blackstone River, pick up a [Woonsocket Walking Tour brochure](#) at the Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket, RI.

### To River Island Park / Woonsocket:

From Route 146 North or South:

- Take exit for Route 104 to Woonsocket. There are brown & white highway signs for the Museum of Work and Culture along 146 at this exit.
- Turn LEFT onto Route 104/Greenville Road, which turns into Providence Road as you enter Woonsocket.
- Go Straight through traffic light at intersection with Smithfield Road.
- Continue to the stop sign at the end of Providence Road.
- Turn RIGHT onto South Main Street.
- Continue straight through the first traffic light to the second light.
- Turn RIGHT at this light onto Bernon Street.
- Turn RIGHT into River Island Park before crossing bridge.

### From River Island Park to Manville:

- Turn RIGHT out of lot onto Bernon Street
- Turn LEFT at first light to the end where there is a flashing light
- Turn RIGHT at flashing light onto Hamlet Street
- Follow Hamlet straight through one light to next traffic light
- At light, bear to the right (not the full right turn) to go on 126 South
- Go several miles on 126 to LEFT onto Railroad St, just before the large highway overpass.
- Continue to Light in Manville.
- Turn Left at light over bridge.
- Turn Left immediately over bridge into Manville Quarry

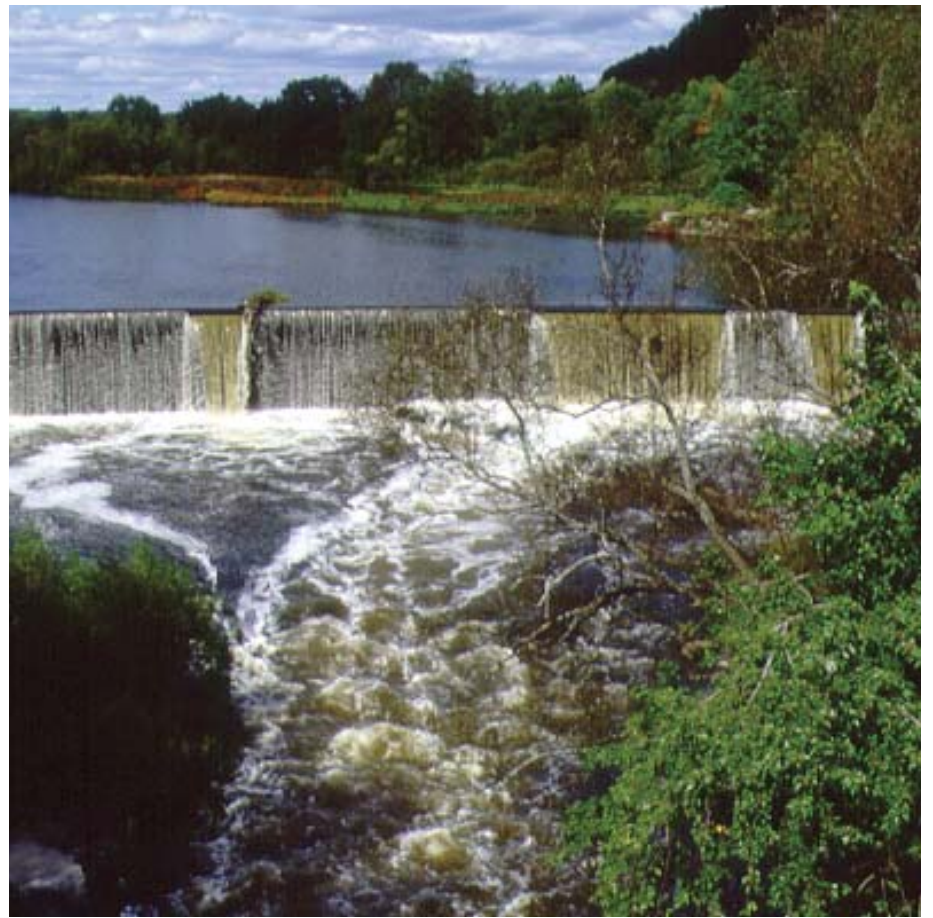


photo of Manville Dam by Jim McElholm

## 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.

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"!



### 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 18 dams along the River and most tours involve a portage.

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 information about 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](http://www.nps.gov/blac/home.htm)  
[www.zaptheblackstone.org](http://www.zaptheblackstone.org)

### In Rhode Island:

Rhode Island Canoe and Kayak Association, [www.ricka.org](http://www.ricka.org)

Blackstone Valley Tourism Council  
401.724.2200, [www.tourblackstone.com](http://www.tourblackstone.com)

John H. Chafee

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

National Heritage Corridor Commission

