



Clarion River Water Trail Middle Section

Irwin Run to Mill Creek

Map & Guide

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



Photo: Chris Fisher

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 prepared for river hazards
- Carry proper equipment



THE CLARION RIVER

The Clarion River meanders through more than 115 miles of narrow serpentine valleys and hardwood forests. Located in northwestern Pennsylvania, 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). This guide covers the Middle Section, from Irwin Run (river mile 76) to Mill Creek (river mile 37).

Over the last two hundred years of European settlement, the history of the Clarion River has been a compelling story of resource exploitation, degradation, resilience, and recovery. The lumber industry was the focal point on the Clarion River during the latter part of the 19th century and into the 20th century. Timber cut along the Clarion River was floated down the 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 along the Clarion River.



Photo: Clark Fisher

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 51.7-mile 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 a bright future, boasting some of the finest outdoor recreation opportunities in Pennsylvania. 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, making it a desirable river for paddlers of all abilities. On a scale of I-VI, Class I denotes fast-moving water with riffles and small waves; few or no obstructions, all obvious and easily missed with little training; risk to swimmer is slight; and self-rescue is normally easy. Keep in mind that these classifications may change with high water levels.

The best time to float the Clarion River is in the spring and early summer. The normal summer flow accommodates small, shallow-draft watercraft such as canoes and kayaks. In late summer, the river becomes shallower at times and boat bottoms can drag on the streambed. Plan accordingly. Your float time will vary according to the season and weather. Generally, assume four to five miles-per-hour during spring run-off, and two to three miles-per-hour at low water levels.

RECOMMENDED RIVER LEVELS

Stream flow can change rapidly creating potential unsafe conditions. Check available resources such as weather, precipitation, USGS gauges, and local outfitters to plan accordingly. Do a search for 'Ridgway USGS Gauge' and 'Cooksburg USGS Gauge' on the internet. The lower limit from Ridgway to Clarington on the Ridgway USGS gauge is 2.5 feet with optimal paddling being in the 4-5 feet range. The lower limit from Clarington to Cooksburg on the Cooksburg USGS gauge is 2 feet with optimal paddling being in the 2.5-4.5 feet range. The lower limit from Cooksburg to Mill Creek on the Cooksburg USGS gauge is 2.5 feet with optimal paddling being in the 3-5 feet range. Liveries will not rent canoes at levels above 6 feet.



Photo: Ted Ehlhardt

NATIONAL WILD & SCENIC RIVER

In 1996, 51.7 miles of the Clarion River were designated a component of the Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers System by Congress. This designation recognizes outstanding examples of the nation's free-flowing rivers in the hope of raising public awareness of the importance of America's river resources. Rivers are further classified as wild, scenic or recreational based on the number of impoundments, accessibility and development along its shoreline. The sections from Portland Mills to Irwin Run, and from Cooksburg to the Piney Dam backwaters, carry a "scenic" designation (sections of rivers that are free of impoundments with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads). The remaining 34.7 miles are designated as "recreational" (sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad that may have some development along their shorelines).

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 (Clarion River Mouth).

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.

Mile 92.5 to 71.4 (RL) State Game Lands 44: This game lands borders the Clarion River downstream of Ridgway. For more information, call (570) 398-4744, or visit www.pgc.state.pa.us

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. For more information, call (814) 723-5150, or visit: www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/allegheny

Mile 75.3 to 74 (RR) State Game Lands 28: This game lands is bordered by the Allegheny National Forest near Hallton. For more information, call (570) 398-4744, or visit www.pgc.state.pa.us



Historic Hallton

Photo: Elk County Historical Society

Mile 74 (RR) Hallton was once the site of several large industries including a major sawmill and a wood chemical plant. Some permanent residents dwell here but only foundations of the industries remain.

Mile 71.4 to 68.4 (RL) State Game Lands 54: This game lands borders the Clarion River upstream of Clear Creek State Park. For more information, call (814) 432-3188, or visit www.pgc.state.pa.us

Mile 67 (RL) Heath Station and Trout Nursery: The trout nursery is a cooperative effort between the PA Fish & Boat Commission and the Heath Township Sportsmen's Club. It is located across the road from the Heath Canoe Launch.

Mile 66 Reynolds Dam Remnants: A wave created by the ruins of the Reynolds Dam offers a bit of excitement for kayakers.

Mile 64 (RL) Beartown Rocks: Located in Clear Creek State Forest, this rock city offers a beautiful overlook view of the forest. Leave extra time to explore the interesting rock formations. Some stair climbing is required to reach the overlook. A scenic hiking trail connects Clear Creek State Park with Beartown Rocks.

Mile 63 (RR) Loleta Recreation Area was built in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps on the site where, just 20 years earlier, a bustling logging town of 600 inhabitants stood. The Allegheny National Forest operates the recreation area, which offers tent and RV camping, restrooms, showers, picnic pavilions, swimming and hiking.



Cabin at Clear Creek State Park

Photo: Brenda Adams-Morgan

Mile 62.6 to 59.3 (RL) Clear Creek State Park offers developed camping, cabins, hiking trails, canoe access, swimming pool, hunting and trout fishing. Clear Creek has the only riverside developed campsites along the Clarion River, a few of which are held aside for canoe campers only. For more information, call (814) 752-2368, or visit www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks. For reservations, call (888) PA-PARKS.

Mile 59 (RR) Clarington: This community along the Clarion River was founded in 1828 by William Armstrong and was once a bustling community with lumber mills, hotels, general merchandise and grocery stores and taverns. The community has a pizza, ice cream & hoagie shop with access from the river.

Mile 58.8 to 48 Cook Forest State Park offers developed camping, cabins, hiking trails, canoe access, swimming pool, hunting, trout fishing and the Seneca Point Overlook. For more information, call (814) 744-8407, or visit www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks. For reservations, call (888) PA-PARKS.

Mile 50.5 to 50 Cooksburg: Originally a lumber town where rafts were built to float lumber to markets in Pittsburgh and sometimes New Orleans, this town is now a haven for vacationers and recreationists. The area offers many attractions including a number of gift, antique and retail stores, several restaurants, recreational equipment rentals, cabins, and amusements. Cooksburg is the heaviest used take-out point for paddlers along the Clarion River.



Forest Cathedral NA

Photo: Brenda Adams-Morgan

Mile 50 (RR) The Forest Cathedral Natural Area is a registered National Natural Landmark. The Forest Cathedral contains approximately 717 acres of old growth forest heavily dominated by eastern hemlock and eastern white pine, which commonly surpass 250 years of age, with some as old as 450 years.



View from Fire Tower

Photo: D. Lutzinger

Mile 49 (RR) Cook Forest Fire Tower and Seneca Point Overlook: The 87-foot #9 Fire Tower, built in 1929, gave firefighters a 15-20 mile view of the area. A superb view of many of the old growth forests at Cook Forest State Park can be observed from this location. Seneca Point offers a scenic view of the Clarion River.

Mile 49 to 38 Proposed DCNR Lands: This area borders both sides of the Clarion River downstream of Cooksburg to State Game Lands 74 near Mill Creek. For more information, call (814) 744-8407.

Mile 48 (RR) Sawmill Center for the Arts: Traditional crafts are on display in the historic sawmill and classes are available throughout the summer and fall for children and adults. The Verna Leith Sawmill Theater holds plays, musicals and other entertainment throughout the summer.

Mile 47 (RR) Hemlock Island: Upstream from the ghost town of Gravel Lick, log rafts and boats were once built here in the mid to late 1800's. On the river right side of the island, a waterfall is visible on Henry Run that is created by a historic dam that used to serve a sawmill in this location.

Mile 46 (RR) North Country Trail: A trailhead is located in Gravel Lick near the bridge that crosses the Clarion River. The North Country National Scenic Trail is a premier footpath that stretches for about 4,600 miles linking communities, forests, and prairies across seven northern states.

Mile 41 (RR) Helen Furnace: Built in 1845, this cold-blast furnace was in operation until 1857. The furnace produced iron from local ore and charcoal.

Mile 40 (RL) Blyson's Run Cut Stone Raft Historic Site: In the past, timber was floated on rafts down the Clarion River to market. Rivermen used to tie up at Blyson's Run Cut Stone. You can still see the pole where they tied their rafts.

Mile 38 to 36.4 (RL) State Game Lands 74: This game lands borders the Clarion River at the Mill Creek confluence in Clarion County. For more information, call (814) 432-3188, or visit www.pgc.state.pa.us



Photo: Ted Ehlhardt

BOAT RENTALS - LIVERIES - FLY FISHING

Clarion River Adventures: Fly fishing guide and instruction. (814) 772-6217 www.clarionriveradventures.com
Love's Canoe Rentals and Sales: River mile 94 (see Upper Section). Boat rental and livery. (814) 776-6285 www.ncentral.com/~dlove/
Pale Whale Canoe Rental: River mile 50.1. Boat rental, livery and cabins. (814) 744-8300 www.cookriverside.com
Cook Forest Canoe Rental: River mile 50. Boat rental and livery. (814) 744-8094 www.cookforestcanoe.com
Pine Crest Canoe Rental: Boat rental, livery and cabins. (814) 752-2200 <http://users.penn.com/~pinecrest/PC-canoe.html>
Clarion River Rambler: River mile 29.5. Pontoon boat tours on Piney Reservoir. (814) 226-4679. <http://www.clarionriver Rambler.com>

FISHING, CAMPING, HUNTING AND ATVS

FISHING

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission rules and regulations apply.

- Clarion River between Ridgway and Cook Forest: Brook trout can be found near the mouths of the stocked tributaries. Excellent smallmouth bass fishing. Cook Forest State Park has a special fishing pond near the park office available for use by children 12 and younger, and people with disabilities.
- Clarion River between Cook Forest and Piney Reservoir: This is a warmwater fishery with smallmouth bass and walleye.
- Piney Reservoir: Stocked with walleye and tiger muskellunge. Good catches of smallmouth bass.

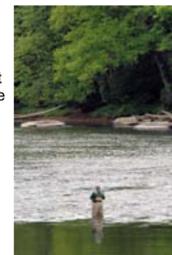


Photo: Ted Ehlhardt

CAMPING

Camping is permitted only in designated sites. The Allegheny National Forest has numerous primitive campsites on river right between Irwin Run and Millstone Creek. Clear Creek State Park offers developed campsites on river left, a few of which are held aside for canoe campers only. Cook Forest State Park offers a primitive camping area on river right just downstream of the Gravel Lick Launch. Permits must be obtained for camping on state park lands and a fee is assessed. Alcohol is not permitted on state park lands. For state park campsite reservations please call 814-744-8407. Camping is not permitted on State Game Lands. Rangers patrol areas not open to camping, so be aware of your location.

HUNTING

Be aware that hunting occurs on public and private lands all along the river primarily September through February and late April through May. River users should wear blaze orange so they are visible to any hunters in the area. Visit the PA Game Commission website for more information: www.pgc.state.pa.us

ALL TERRAIN VEHICLES

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are only permitted on designated trails on Allegheny National Forest lands. Respect other recreationists and nature. Stay on designated trails.

RESPECT THE PRIVACY & RIGHTS OF LANDOWNERS

Although the access points highlighted in this guide are open for public use, 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 that sound carries across water much further than it carries on land. Many landowners enjoy the river's peace and solitude from their decks and living rooms. Share the same courtesy that you would want. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is always welcome.

STEWARDSHIP

Help care for the land, water and cultural resources along the Clarion River by respecting wildlife, nature and other recreationists. It is important to wash footwear, boats and vehicles to minimize the spread of invasive species from one place to another. "Leave No Trace," a national outdoor ethics program, provides some guidelines to minimize your impact. For more information about Leave No Trace, visit www.LNT.org. Leave no trace principles for camping and day use:

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. Minimize campfire impacts
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other visitors



Photo: Chris Fisher

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

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

NEARBY HOSPITALS

- Ridgway, Elk Regional Health Center: 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 S. Main Street. (814) 849-2312
- Clarion Hospital: Located behind the Clarion Mall near the junction of I-80 and PA 68. (814) 226-9500

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Clarion River Water Trail map project is a joint effort by the residents of the area, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service - Allegheny National Forest, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, and the Clarion River Municipal Partnership. The update of this guide was made possible by a grant from the Lumber Heritage Region of Pennsylvania.

Great effort was expended collecting and verifying the information in this publication. However, we realize that conditions change on the waterways, and that some of this information may not be accurate. We welcome your comments on errors and omissions. Questions, comments or errors should be directed to: Clarion River Municipal Partnership - c/o Millstone Twp - 2329 Route 3001 - Sigel, PA 15860



VISITOR / MORE INFORMATION

Northwest Pennsylvania's Great Outdoors Visitors Bureau: (800) 348-9393. www.pagreatoutdoors.com
Cook Forest Vacation Bureau: (814) 328-2857. www.cookforest.org
Cook Forest Online: www.cookforest.com
Ridgway Welcome Center: 300 Main Street Ridgway, (814) 776-1424