

TURKEY RIVER WATER TRAIL

MAP & GUIDE

WATER TRAIL

The 98-mile Turkey River Water Trail begins on the Little Turkey River at Gouldsburg Park in Fayette County, merges with the Turkey River near Eldorado, and flows southeast through Fayette & Clayton counties toward the Mississippi River. The water trail features beautiful scenery and numerous historic landmarks.

SAFETY

Safety is essential to enjoying the Turkey River. Each person must have a wearable life jacket in the boat. Children under age 13 are required to wear life jackets. Dress properly for the trip by wearing sunblock and sunglasses, comfortable fast drying clothing, a hat, and proper water shoes to guard your feet against rocks.

While on the river, be sure to look ahead and avoid downed trees or large rocks in the river. Three dams exist on the Turkey River Water Trail. Their locations are clearly marked on the map. **The circulating current immediately below each dam is extremely dangerous.** When you see a DAM sign be ready to take out your canoe; DO NOT attempt to go over any dam.

CULTURAL HISTORY

For generations the Turkey River, with its wooded bluffs, fertile lowlands and wild game populations has served as a cultural melting pot. Prehistoric archeological sites of the Archaic and Woodland Tribes exist in the Turkey River Valley; with the most notable being a group of woodland mounds at Turkey River Mounds State Preserve above the confluence of the Turkey and Mississippi Rivers. In the 1700s, the French Fur Trade brought many of the first Europeans to the area including people of Spanish and French descent. These settlers traded with the historic Native American tribes of the Ioway, Ho Chunk, Sauk and Meskwaki.

WILDLIFE

The Turkey River Valley provides habitat for diverse wildlife species. The valley is home to several raptor species including bald eagles and the less common red-shouldered hawks. During the summertime, be on the lookout for raptors soaring on warm air thermals above the river. Great blue herons and belted kingfishers are often heard and seen by paddlers. On limestone outcroppings, five-lined skinks can be found foraging for crickets. The surrounding forests contain deer, coyote and wild turkey, and beavers, muskrats and river otters can be seen swimming in the Turkey.

FISH

A total of 74 species of fish have been documented in the Turkey River watershed. Primary game fish include smallmouth bass, rock bass and walleye. Other game fish that are occasionally caught include northern pike, white bass and three species of trout. Nine different species of suckers and seven species of darters have been identified in the Turkey River. Several fish species such as channel catfish, flathead catfish and sauger only occur downstream of the dam at Elkader. This dam is high enough to block all upstream movement of fish.



Top to Bottom: Walleye, Smallmouth Bass, Rock Bass, Channel Catfish

UNDERSTANDING A RIVER

When you think about a tree you likely envision more than just the trunk or a single tree branch. You picture the entire tree. Maybe even the roots. To be a living, functioning tree, all parts must be connected, all parts must function as one, and no one part can function without the other. Now think about the tree as a metaphor for gaining a broader perspective and functional understanding of a river. All of the land and every tributary stream within the Turkey River Watershed has a vital connection to the river. Each delivers water and nutrients to the river and is as crucial to the function and health of the river as the branches, roots, and leaves are to a tree. While you are out fishing, swimming, paddling, or otherwise enjoying the Turkey River, keep in mind this broader perspective as an important and enlightened element of your river journey!

GEOLOGY

The scenic beauty of the Turkey River can be credited to the geological land form it flows through: the Paleozoic Plateau. This rugged landform contains four different rock formations ranging from 300-530 million years old. Along your route look for outcroppings of bedrock most frequently found in the sedimentary forms of limestone, dolomite, or sandstone. These rocks are responsible for forming the picturesque cliffs, ledges, and bluffs common along the Turkey.

CAMPING

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------|
| Backbone State Park | 563.924.2827 |
| Big Spring Trout Hatchery | 563.245.2446 |
| Bloody Run County Park | 563.245.1516 |
| Clayton Hills Campground | 563.964.2236 |
| D & D Campground | 563.928.6464 |
| Deer Ridge Campground | 563.774.2067 |
| Deer Run Resort | 563.245.3337 |
| Dutton's Cave Campground | 563.426.5740 |
| Echo Valley State Park - Jensen's Trail | 563.426.5740 |
| Elkader City Park Campground | 563.245.2098 |
| Frieden Park | 563.245.1516 |
| Gilbertson Conservation Education Area | 563.426.5740 |
| Goeken Park | 563.426.5740 |
| Gouldsburg Park | 563.426.5740 |
| Guttenberg RV Park | 319.334.3802 |
| J and J Hideaway | 563.633.6795 |
| Joy Springs County Park | 563.245.1516 |
| Klock's Island Park | 563.425.4316 |
| Lakeside RV Park & Campgrounds | 563.252.4151 |
| Little Bit of Country RV Park | 563.933.2081 |
| Littleport Campground | 563.245.2536 |
| Little Turkey Campground | 319.334.0135 |
| Maynard City Park & Campground | 563.637.2269 |
| Miner's Creek Cabins & Campground | 563.252.1838 |
| Motor Mill Access | 563.245.1516 |
| Oelwein City Park | 563.283.5440 |
| Osborne Park Campground | 563.245.1516 |
| Paradise Valley | 563.873.9632 |
| Pikes Peak State Park | 563.873.2342 |
| River Valley Campground | 563.379.3963 |
| Skip-A-Way Park & Campground | 800.728.1167 |
| Spook Cave & Campground | 563.873.2144 |
| Sweet Dreams Campground | 563.928.7290 |
| Twin Bridges County Park | 563.427.5740 |
| Valley View Resort | 319.393.4825 |
| Volga River State Recreation Area | 563.425.4161 |
| Volga U Campgrounds | 563.767.3511 |

MINNESOTA
WISCONSIN

Howard Winneshiak Allamakee
Chickasaw Fayette Clayton
Bremer
Black Hawk Buchanan Delaware Dubuque

www.turkeyriver.org

Designed in Northeast Iowa
Updated 2025

LEGEND

- Turkey River Water Trail
- Turkey River Water Trail Access
- Dam
- Camping
- Hiking, Biking, or Multi-use Trail
- Volga River Access Point
- Public Land
- Canoe/Kayak Rental
- River Mile (Distance to Mississippi) (see maps on reverse)

DISTANCE BETWEEN ACCESSES

| River Mile # | River Access Name | Distance to Next Access | Time |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 98 | Gouldsburg Park Access | 7.7 miles | 2 1/4 - 4 hrs |
| 90 | Auburn Canoe Access | 4.8 miles | 1 1/2 - 2 1/2 hrs |
| 86 | Eldorado Bridge Access | 6.4 miles | 2 - 3 hrs |
| 79 | Huntzinger Bridge Access | 8.2 miles | 2 1/2 - 4 hrs |
| 71 | Turkey River Canoe Access | 2.5 miles | 1 hr |
| 68 | Tessmer Canoe Access | 4.5 miles | 1 1/2 - 2 1/4 hrs |
| 64A | Clermont Park Takeout | DAM | |
| 64B | Clermont Canoe Access | 1.9 miles | 1/2 - 1 hr |
| 62 | Valley Bridge Access | 3.1 miles | 1 - 1 1/2 hrs |
| 59E/W | Gilbertson Park Access | 1.1 miles | 1/2 hr |
| 57 | Gilbertson Park Narrows | 10.8 miles | 3 1/2 - 5 1/2 hrs |
| 47 | Big Spring Trout Hatchery | 0.5 miles | 1/4 hr |
| 46 | Frieden Park Access | 7.1 miles | 2 1/4 - 3 1/2 hrs |
| 39A | Elkader Takeout | DAM | |
| 39B | Elkader Access | 0.9 miles | 1/2 hr |
| 38 | Turkey River Park Access | 5.6 miles | 1 1/4 - 3 hrs |
| 32 | Motor Mill Access | 12.4 miles | 4 - 6 hrs |
| 20 | Garber Access | 7.5 miles | 2 1/2 - 3 1/4 hrs |
| 12 | Osterdock Access | 7.5 miles | 2 1/2 - 3 1/4 hrs |
| 5 | Millville Access | 5.0 miles | 1 1/2 - 2 1/2 hrs |
| | Ferry Landing Canoe Takeout | END | |

VOLGA RIVER

The Volga River, the largest tributary to the Turkey River, winds through Northeast Iowa beginning near the town of Maynard, and emptying into the Turkey River just west of Garber, Iowa. It is noted for its scenic bluffs on the lower reaches from Littleport to Garber, and its outstanding smallmouth bass fishing along most of its length. The river has good velocity, dropping three feet in less than 1400 feet of distance in the town of Volga alone, making it a great tubing river. The Volga is also a good canoe and kayak river for most of the year, with put in and take out points along its length. Campgrounds located in several small towns along the Volga River, including the town of Volga, make the river a destination for adventurous explorers looking to discover more of the Turkey River Watershed.

MADE POSSIBLE BY:

- Iowa DNR River Programs
www.iowadnr.gov/riverprograms/
- Iowa DNR Fisheries
Big Spring Hatchery
- Clayton County Conservation Board
www.claytoncountyconservation.org
- Fayette County Conservation Board
www.fayettecountyconservation.org
- Larry A. Stone (Photography)
www.larrystonesiowa.com
- Turkey River Recreational Corridor
www.turkeyrivercorridor.com
- Upper Mississippi Gaming Corporation
<https://umcggrants.org/>
- Northeast Iowa RC&D
Brad Crawford (GIS, Planning, Publication)
www.northeastiowarc.org

Every reasonable effort has been made to assure the accuracy of the information in this publication. Northeast Iowa RC&D and its partners assume no liability or responsibility in the use, or misuse, of the map.
Please e-mail corrections to: turkeyrivercorridor@gmail.com

GOULDSBURG PARK (ACCESS #98) TO ELDERADO (ACCESS #86)

Gouldsburg Park (#98) is a multi-use recreational area marking the official put-in and beginning of your water trail journey down the Turkey River. Here, Crane Creek merges with the Little Turkey River and flows peacefully downstream for 12.2 miles before merging with the main stem of the Turkey River at Eldorado. A shorter 7.7 mile day trip can be made by taking out at the Auburn access (#90).

As you begin your voyage, large native oak trees sprawl over the left side of the river setting the tone for a diverse and unaltered tree lined river corridor. Shortly after drifting under the first concrete bridge

the river provides extraordinary scenery for several miles. Large limestone boulders covered in moss and ferns line the bank. Above you, hardwood forests claim the bluffs with the white bark of aspen trees lightly scattered in. Smallmouth bass and native sucker species can be seen darting upstream in the frequently crystal clear river. Surprisingly abundant freshwater mussel beds (clams) can also be seen in this stretch, an indicator of a healthy aquatic community. Past the Auburn access the valley starts to widen. After joining the waters of the Turkey River you pass under the Highway 150 bridge and an access can be found shortly after the bridge on the right. The 5.7 feet per mile gradient of this stretch provides frequent riffles.

ELDERADO (#86) TO CLERMONT (#64A)

Venture downstream from Eldorado on this particularly scenic stretch, and you will encounter pine-topped limestone bluffs on your way past Huntzinger Bridge Access (#79). Other access points include the Turkey River Canoe Access (#71) and the Tessmer Access (#68).

Just upstream from the City of Clermont, you will see warning signs as you approach the Clermont DAM. As you round the final bend before the dam, there will be a bluff on your right. You must portage, and takeout is on river-right at Clermont's River Park (#64A), where you will find nice restroom facilities, a picnic shelter, play area, and a universally accessible viewing deck.

CLERMONT (ACCESS #64B) TO ELGIN/GILBERTSON PARK (ACCESS #59A OR 59B)

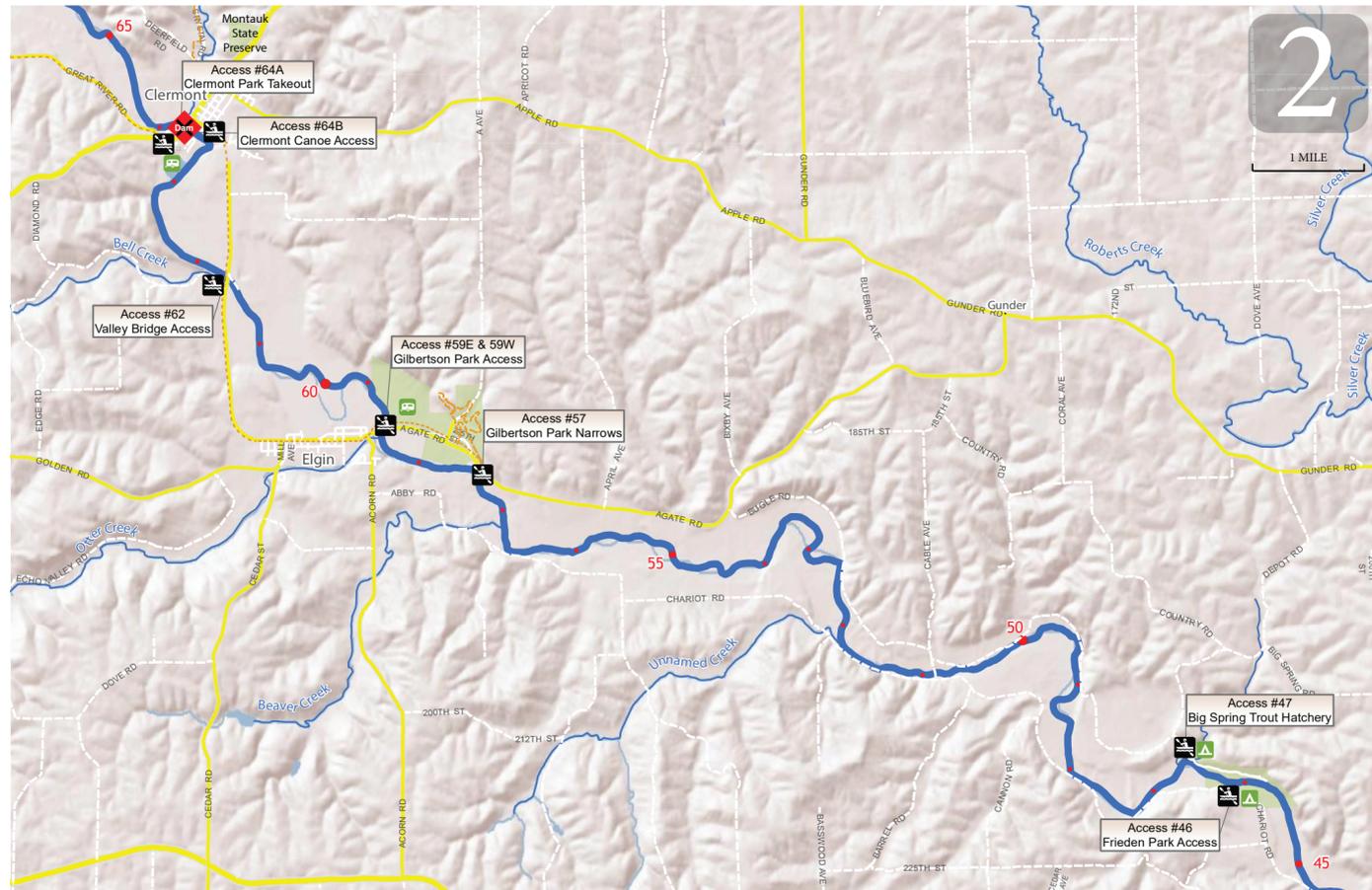
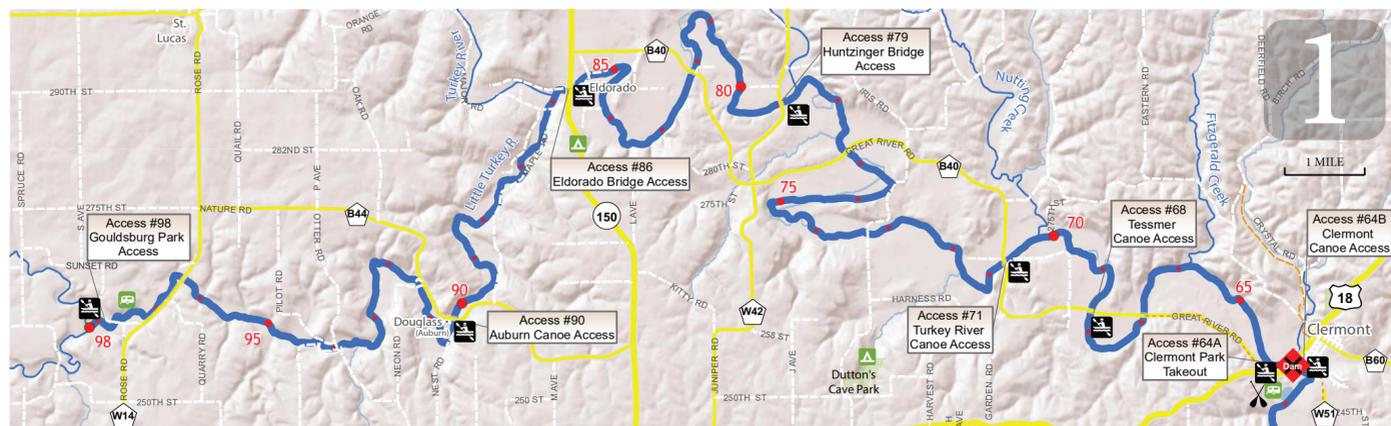
This five mile section of the Turkey River Water Trail meanders through one of the most popular segments of the river. Users will encounter some white water, unequalled scenery, and one of the best fisheries on the river. Clermont is known as "Brick City" and is the home of several historical sites, including the Montauk mansion. Those looking to camp can enjoy the Skip-Away Campground and Resort. This private entity sports an RV park, restaurant and lounge, as well as kayak and canoe rental. Clermont's business district provides restaurants, a convenience store, as well as antique, gift, and art shops.

Floating downstream from Clermont (#64B) you will come to the Valley Canoe Access (#62). This launch is in the center of an expansive valley known as the Shin Bone Valley, named as it is home to sacred burial grounds for many generations of Native Americans. From the Valley Canoe Access, continue downstream to Elgin, a town known as the "Little Switzerland of Iowa." There you will find the Gilbertson Conservation Education Area (#59E & 59W) which offers modern and primitive camping facilities, a variety of trails (universally accessible, equestrian, cross country skiing, and bicycle) along with the Gilbertson Nature Center, historical museums, a petting zoo, bird watching and a natural playscape with a dinosaur dig.

ELGIN/GILBERTSON PARK (#59) TO BIG SPRING TROUT HATCHERY (#47)

This section of the Turkey River Water Trail begins at Gilbertson Park (#59) and soon enters Clayton County. This float of 11.9 miles features a meandering river and a landscape of bluffs, timbered shorelines, and the serenity of nature. The visitor may encounter bald eagles, whitetail deer, and the occasional river otter. Exit on your left at Big Spring Trout Hatchery (#47), or continue 1/2 mile to exit right at Frieden Park (#46). Be aware that there is no bridge between the Big Spring Hatchery and Frieden park.

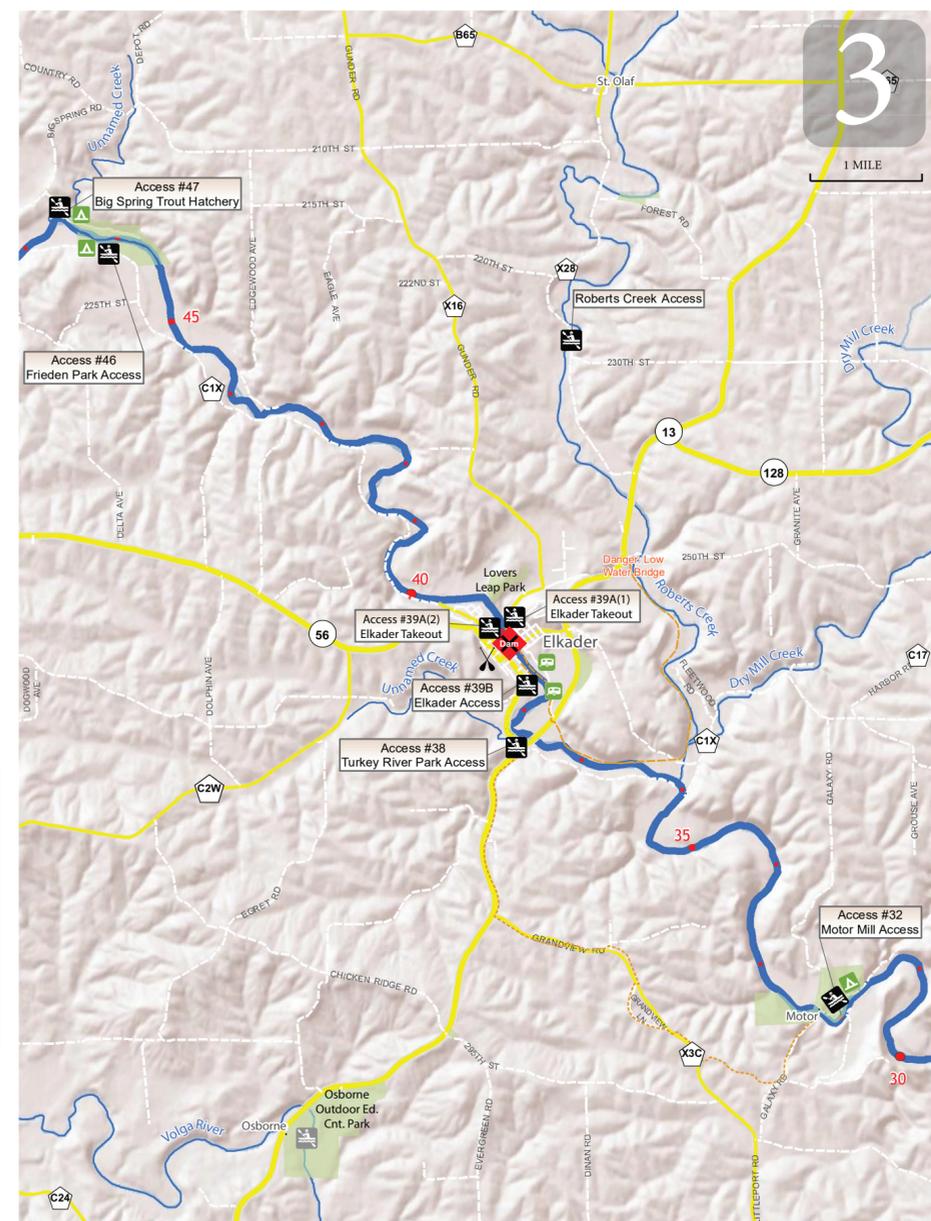
Gilbertson Park



BIG SPRING TROUT HATCHERY (#47) OR FRIEDEN PARK (#46) TO ELKADER (#39A)

You will begin your journey at the largest spring in Iowa: Big Spring. Here, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources rears trout to catchable size and stocks them into 19 Northeast Iowa fishable streams. From Big Spring (#47) it is an enjoyable 7.6 mile voyage down river to the Elkader Takeouts (#39A (1) and #39A(2)). About one mile downstream on the right bank, a large bald eagle nest may be seen at the top of a cottonwood tree. Eagles can be found soaring on thermals above the bluffs as you paddle this stretch.

Upon arriving in Elkader you will notice the large water tower, be prepared to portage on river-left or river-right. DO NOT pass the portages as the dam is located just downstream. River users will portage around a large dam and the historic Keystone Bridge. Gradient: 3.9 feet/mile



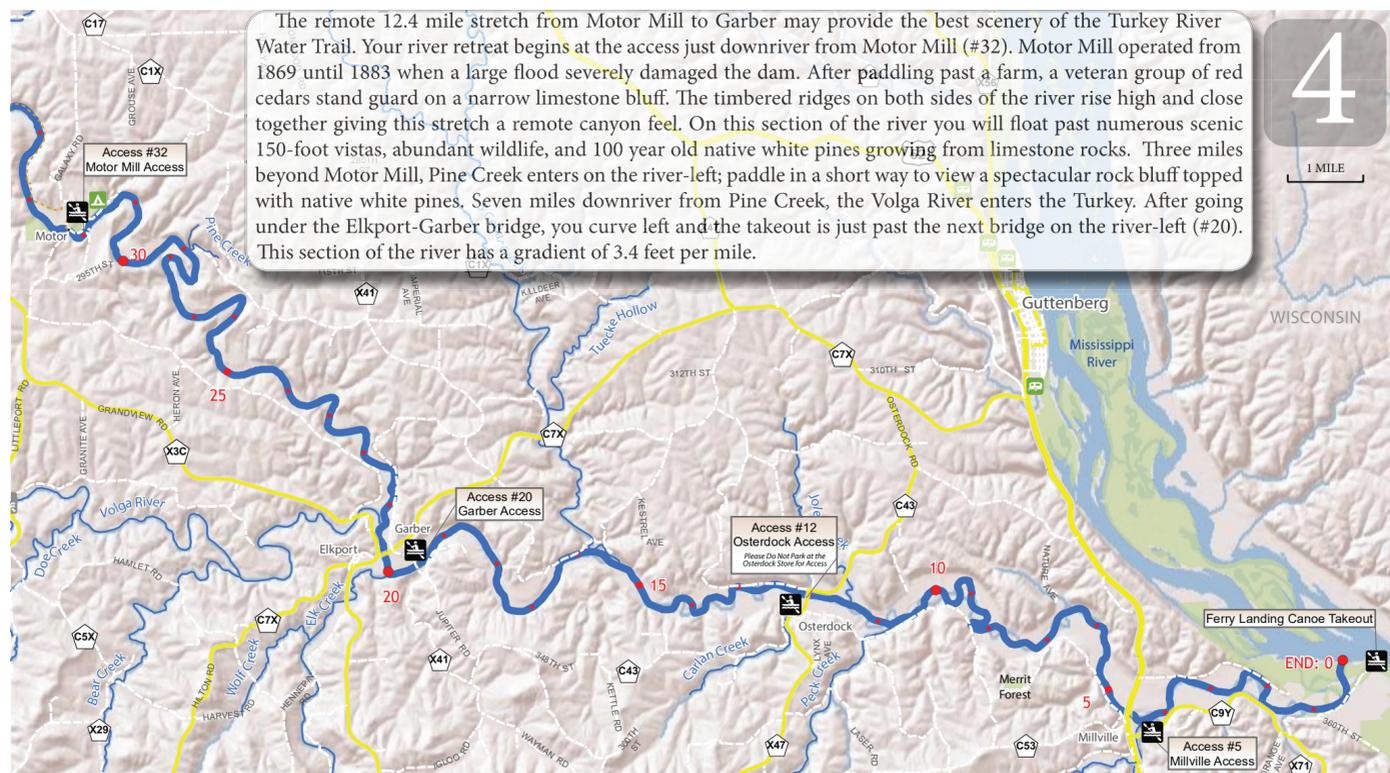
ELKADER (#39B) TO MOTOR MILL (#32)

This 6.5 mile scenic section of river is accessed from historic downtown Elkader (#39B). Elkader's eclectic shops and ethnic restaurants draw visitors from around the region. The Elkader Opera House hosts both local and national music and theatrical performances. Elkader boasts extensive public and private campground facilities, bed and breakfasts, and multi-use land trails for water trail visitors who want to spend more time in the area.

Cross under the Highway 13 bridge at Turkey River Park (#38), and all remnants of town are left behind. The river stays reasonably straight until you paddle past a large spring fed stream called Roberts Creek. Robert's Creek provides a vital habitat for many spawning species of fish including smallmouth bass and redbreast. From the creek, the river meanders through a narrow valley with wooded bluffs. After floating through a set of enjoyable riffles, historic Motor Mill can be seen down river on your left. Ride the riffles past the mill and through the leftward bend, where takeout will be on river-left (#32). Gradient: 3.4 feet/mile.

Motor Mill

MOTOR MILL (#32) TO GARBER (#20) & CONTINUING TO MISSISSIPPI RIVER (MILE #0)



The remote 12.4 mile stretch from Motor Mill to Garber may provide the best scenery of the Turkey River Water Trail. Your river retreat begins at the access just downriver from Motor Mill (#32). Motor Mill operated from 1869 until 1883 when a large flood severely damaged the dam. After paddling past a farm, a veteran group of red cedars stand guard on a narrow limestone bluff. The timbered ridges on both sides of the river rise high and close together giving this stretch a remote canyon feel. On this section of the river you will float past numerous scenic 150-foot vistas, abundant wildlife, and 100 year old native white pines growing from limestone rocks. Three miles beyond Motor Mill, Pine Creek enters on the river-left; paddle in a short way to view a spectacular rock bluff topped with native white pines. Seven miles downriver from Pine Creek, the Volga River enters the Turkey. After going under the Elkport-Garber bridge, you curve left and the takeout is just past the next bridge on the river-left (#20). This section of the river has a gradient of 3.4 feet per mile.

CANOE & KAYAK RENTAL

Turkey River Rentals (Elkader) 563.245.3802
Skip-A-Way Resort (Clermont) 563.423.7338