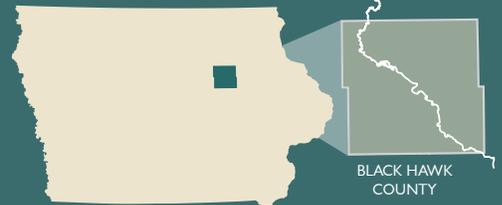


CEDAR RIVER WATER TRAIL



BLACK HAWK COUNTY

Since the 1800's, Iowa rivers have been designated as either meandered or non-meandered. Much of the Cedar River Water Trail is lined with public lands and classified as meandered, meaning that paddlers may access not only the river itself but also the river bottom and banks along its course. However, north of Washington Park, the river is classified as non-meandered, meaning that the river bed and surrounding land are owned by the adjacent landowners and paddlers should respect their property rights.



THE CEDAR RIVER - WILDNESS AND CIVILIZATION

The Cedar River Water Trail offers a unique paddling experience amongst Iowa's designated water trails. A journey down the 47 miles of the trail features dramatically contrasting settings, with the wildness of forested bottomlands rich with diverse plant, wildlife, and bird species giving way to historic urban environments. Paddlers are offered an opportunity to explore the downtowns of two major Iowa cities before returning again to the river's pastoral setting. Traversing the county's widest stream, its landscape, and lore may feel like time travel at times. From prehistoric times into the present, the Cedar River valley continues to beckon to paddlers to explore its natural beauty and cultural treasures.



Silver maples shade a peaceful backwater of the Cedar River

These trees, typical of bottomland hardwood forest, often grow right up to the water's edge. Quiet back channels are "nurseries" for aquatic wildlife and isolated nesting areas for birds and wildlife.



Red-spotted purple butterfly



Bank swallow nest holes



Cedar waxwing gathering nest material



Turkey Foot Forks Photo: Library of Congress

Named “Turkey Foot Forks” by Native Americans due to its resemblance to the footprint of a wild turkey, the confluence area of the Cedar, West Fork Cedar, and Shell Rock Rivers has long attracted humans to its rich resources. An 1887 map of Black Hawk County shows the many claims made to the area by later Euro-American settlers.



John C. Hartman

John C. Hartman succeeded his father as editor of the Waterloo Daily Courier in 1895. In his spare time, he was an avocational archaeologist and documented a number of prehistoric sites in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo area, many before they vanished. Hartman Reserve Nature Center is named in his honor.

The Cedar River bisects Black Hawk County diagonally as it continues to erode the landform region called the lowan Surface. This relatively recently-formed landscape is primarily composed of glacial drift deposited during the retreat of the Des Moines Lobe of the Wisconsin glacier about 14,000 years ago.

The river was originally named the Red Cedar River by the Meskwaki and Sauk due to the vast quantity of red cedar trees growing along it. Indigenous peoples used the lower reaches of falls and rapids formed by the river flowing over bedrock ledges on the river bottom as prime places for a safe crossing. Two of these fords were first known in historical times as Prairie Rapids (Waterloo) and Sturgis Falls (Cedar Falls).

Prior to the cultivation of the landscape along the river banks, the Cedar River was crystal clear through much of the year. Fish in the river abounded, and the woodland river banks were heavily vegetated and provided habitat and food for animals and humans.

After the region opened to Euro-American explorers in the 1830s, the Meskwaki and Fox lost their hold on the area following the Black Hawk War of 1832. Settlements were established in the mid-1840s along waterways, including the Cedar River and Black Hawk Creek, attractive for their timber and other natural resources. In December 1845, the first newspaper was published – the Iowa State Register and Waterloo Herald.

The first bridge over the Cedar River was built in Waterloo at Fourth Street in 1859. Prior to that, settlers crossed the river by fording it and, later in the 1850s, by ferry. The first dam in Black Hawk County, built of brush and logs, was built at Cedar Falls in 1848. The second dam was completed in 1854 in Waterloo. A sawmill was constructed at the same time. These developments on the river launched the progressive growth of two of Iowa’s main urban centers, seven miles apart on the Cedar.



Artifacts excavated at the Black Medicine Site at Hartman Reserve Nature Center Photo: Claudia Gaff

Projectile points and pottery fragments recovered from recent excavations at the Black Medicine site on the bluff at Hartman Reserve; this prehistoric campsite is over 1,000 years old and one of several known to be located along the river in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo metro area.



Birdseye view of Waterloo, Iowa in 1907

Photo: Library of Congress

CEDAR RIVER WATER TRAIL



There are notable hazards to be aware of along the Cedar River Water Trail. Two dams, one each in the downtown areas of Cedar Falls and Waterloo, and the portages around them, require the paddlers' attention. Follow the signage on the river and on shore that direct trail users to the portages and safe passage.

There are also two wing dams – which, unlike a conventional dam, extend only partway into the river: one immediately downstream of the Park Avenue Dam in Waterloo, and one approximately 2.4 miles upstream near Sans Souci Island.

The wing dam near Sans Souci Island should be avoided altogether. The dam creates narrow rapids that collect debris, and while it may not create the dangerous recirculating currents of a low-head dam, the unpredictable currents and trapped woody debris can be quite hazardous. River users can bypass this dam easily by keeping left and paddling or tubing around the other side of Sans Souci Island.

Traversing the wing dam downstream of the Waterloo Dam is not recommended for any user.

Aside from the dams, reported hazards along the Cedar River Water Trail are minimal. Riffles which could impact paddlers at low water levels were noted just downstream of the Janesville access and rapids at a breached dam below the Cedar Falls Dam. The rapids in Cedar Falls are occasionally used for whitewater activities when the river reaches an ideal height. For most users, however, avoiding this area entirely is recommended.

Stream Reach: Janesville City Park Access to Washington Union Access (4 miles)

Plain pocketbook mussel

The number and types of mussels in a river are an important indicator of its health. Recent Cedar River surveys have identified fourteen species of living mussels and the shells of two others.

The Cedar River Water Trail begins at the Janesville City Park access. Just below the put-in, a small riffle may be challenging for beginning paddlers, especially at lower water levels. Two bridges, a railroad and a highway, are also downstream from there in Janesville. Paddlers are advised to avoid the bridge abutments. If paddlers wish to avoid these hazards altogether, they may put in at a small city park on the south end of Janesville.

There are several beaches along this stretch of the river and mussel shells are common on them, as are turtles, killdeer, and other beach birds. Some tree and bank swallows may be found foraging over the river.

The middle ½ mile of this reach is nicely wooded with bottomland hardwoods. Bald eagles, herons, red-tailed hawks, turkey vultures, barred owls and even a few wood pewees are seen along the entire four mile stretch.

Vegetation varies widely in this section. In much of the upper half of the stretch, there is typical lowland hardwood woodland, with silver maple, cottonwoods, willow and some boxelder, with elms next to the water and walnut, some ash, hackberry, and oaks on benches farther above the water.

The lower half of this section has been and still is grazed heavily by cattle. While a few large swamp white oaks, silver maple, hackberry, and cottonwoods tell what the forest along here used to look like, it is now dominated by small and large honey locust trees, thistles and other inedible species in the understory.

The Shell Rock River joins the West Fork Cedar River about 1.5 miles above Washington Union Access, increasing the river's water volume and vitality as it proceeds. As travel on this stretch concludes, the paddler approaches Washington Union Access, located at the confluence of the Cedar River and the West Fork Cedar River.

Recommended Experience Classification: **Beginner**



An alternate channel along the Cedar

Periodic flooding and allowing the river to make its own way have led to the creation of alternate channels in several locations, leaving islands both large and small. Turtles, great blue and green herons, deer, raccoons, and other wildlife make use of these small backwaters, making exploration exciting.

Stream Reach: Washington Union Access to Black Hawk Park Access (5.1 miles)

After passing the Washington Union Access, the river passes beneath the W. Cedar Wapsi Road bridge and the landscape changes dramatically. The vast majority of this stretch of river is surrounded by public land, owned and operated by the Black Hawk County Conservation Board. It has a wildness that is rivaled only by the stretch from North Cedar Park to Cedar Bend in Bremer County to the north of the water trail proper. It contains a broad floodplain of bottomland hardwood forest, beaches on the insides of numerous river meanders, and abundant wildlife.

A wide variety of songbirds make use of the woodlands along this stretch, including warblers, vireos, grosbeaks, orioles, wrens, catbirds, flycatchers, and many other species. Similarly, beaches occur on the inside bends of turns in the river and mussel shells, shorebirds and an abundance of turtles—especially soft shelled—make use of them.

Be aware that a shooting range is near the access at Black Hawk Park. It can be heard up to one mile upriver. Be assured it is a safe and well-maintained range isolated from the river.

This entire stretch of river is typical bottomland hardwood forest, with silver maple dominating near the water, allowing some cottonwoods, box elder, elms, and willows to pop through. It is vegetated to the water's edge and, where sunlight is sufficient, riverbank grapes and poison ivy vines drape nearly into the water. On shoreline benches 4-6 feet above the water, walnuts, hackberry, ash, swamp white oaks, and a few Kentucky coffee trees are found. Elderberry and gray dogwood are common in openings. While a few honey locusts can also be found in this location, they are common only in small areas.

Recommended Experience Classification: **Beginner**



Blue flag iris

Blue flag iris flowers from May through June and favor wetlands and waterways.

Stream Reach: Black Hawk Park Access to Island Park Access (4.8 miles)

This section is one of transition, changing from the wildness of the river in Black Hawk Park to the urban river of Cedar Falls and Waterloo. Approximately half of this section is in each of the two zones.

The access at Black Hawk Park offers water, picnic tables, a picnic shelter, vault toilets, and garbage cans. The camping area of the park is not far from this access. There is ample parking. Around the first bend of the river, paddlers will find the Black Hawk Park campground on the left side of the river. It is possible, with some careful footwork, to put in or take out there as well. Many quiet backwaters, alternate channels, and islands continue to be features of this portion of the river.

Cabins appear as soon as the park land ends along the left side of the river soon followed by homes as paddlers approach closer to Cedar Falls. This section of the river is popular with anglers—in johnboats and on the shoreline—and with other water recreationists on jet-skis, pontoon boats, and speedboats in the mile just above the dam. If paddlers stay close to the right shore, they can avoid much of the traffic and still see wildlife and wild land on that side of the river. In fact, about ¼ mile above the Island Park Access, paddlers can duck into the shallow backwaters of an island on river right and share it with geese, bachelor mallards, cedar waxwings, orioles, blue flag iris, blooming dogwoods, butterflies, dragonflies, bees and turtles. It is a fitting end to an exploration of a beautiful stretch of river.

However, paddlers must be certain to get out of the river at Island Park on river left to avoid the dangerous dam at Cedar Falls just below that point. Take out and portage at Island Park are necessary. There are two boat ramps, but if they are busy, paddlers can take out at the beach just below the ramps.

Vegetation along the first half of this stretch is the same bottomland hardwood forest found in the previous stretch. When cabins and private land occurs along the river, of course, it changes to rip-rapped shoreline—some of it using rock rather than cement waste—with scattered trees and mowed lawns.

Recommended Experience Classification: **Beginner**

Stream Reach: Island Park portage to Gateway Park Access to Washington Park Access to George Wyth Park Access to Sherwood Park (.5 to 1 mile portage, then 4 miles to Sherwood Park)

While it is possible to put in at Tourist Park, which is closer to Island Park, the put-in below the dam requires portaging a boat through a narrow woodland trail, lined with poison ivy, that leads to a small sand inlet. Tourist Park does have parking and a small picnic shelter, but is also the site of a disk golf course and appeals to a lively, younger crowd.

An alternative portage for paddlers who have access to a vehicle to transport paddlecraft is to put in at Gateway Park, a bit farther downstream. Gateway has parking, restrooms, and a ramp to enable put-in. However, the hazards in the water below the Gateway Park Access are considerable and should only be undertaken by experienced paddlers. The disadvantage here is that immediately below the put-in, there is a breached dam that creates some challenging rapids, and the dam wall on the left makes it difficult to exit the river. Whitewater paddlers use this area to hone their skills, so it's pretty common to see them surfing and performing maneuvers in the standing waves. A section off to the right of this breached dam creates recirculating currents that can be deadly. If your skills are not advanced, or you are unfamiliar with this area, it's best to avoid it. (Note: putting in at Tourist Park would not avoid these rapids, either, but rather would add some more upstream.)

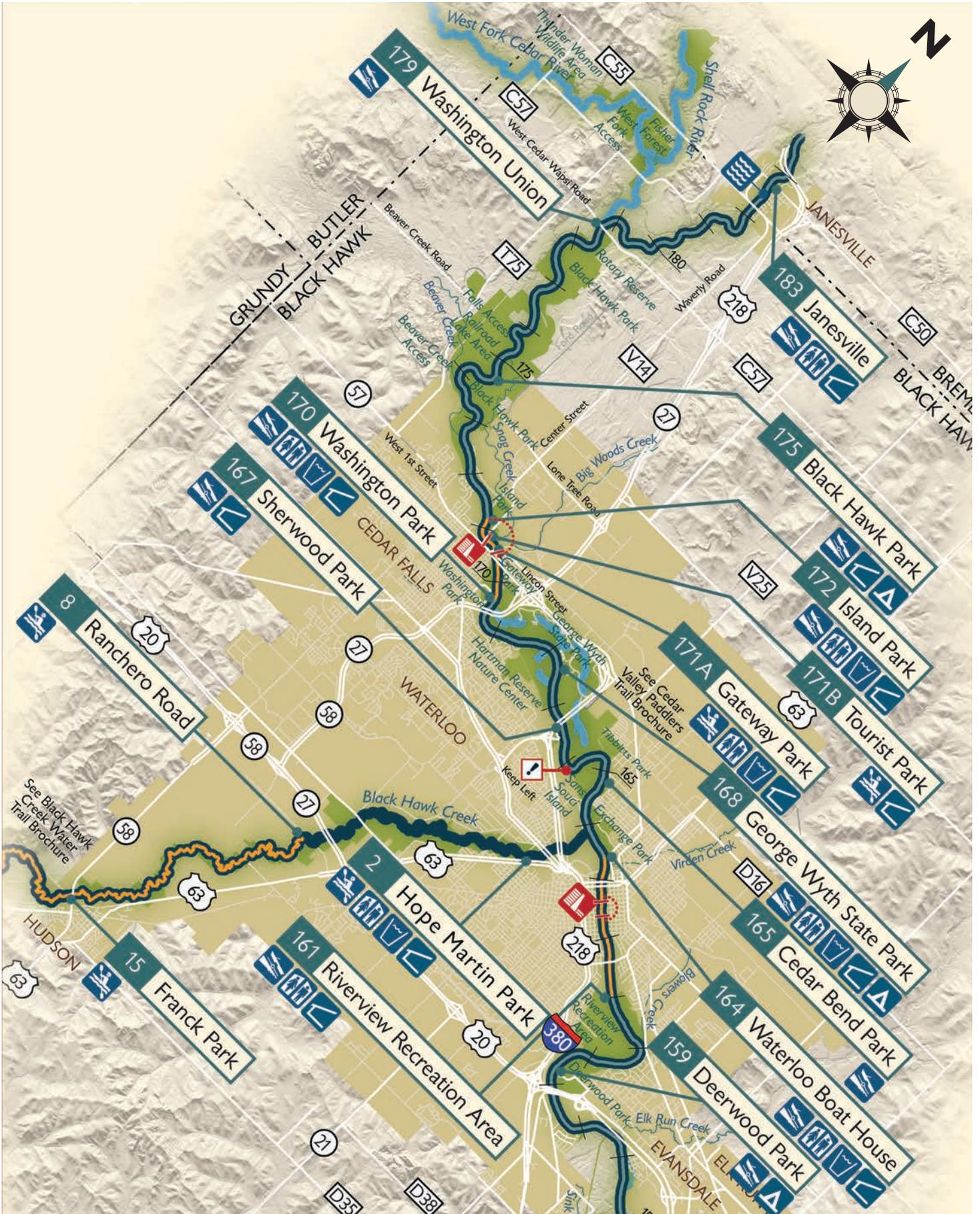
River travelers wishing to bypass this area altogether could put in farther downstream at Washington Park on river right. Since most will not portage on foot anyway, this option is recommended as a better access for most paddlers. There is an existing boat ramp there



The dam at Cedar Falls Photo: Library of Congress

The Cedar River drops about six feet during its half-mile course from Center Street to the Iowa Highway 57 Bridge in Cedar Falls. This geological fact gives that city the “falls” of its name. Built in 1886, this dam is one of a succession of dams that contributed greatly to economic development in the metro area.

CEDAR RIVER WATER TRAIL





A snapping turtle basks on a log

Other turtle species found in the Cedar River include softshell turtles, painted, and map turtles.

and the park is owned and managed by the City of Cedar Falls and the slopes are gentle providing a safer and more usable option. If an expedition into downtown Cedar Falls is on your itinerary, this may not be a bad staging area.

Once the paddler departs Washington Park Access and passes under the busy Hwy 58 bridge and the bike/pedestrian bridge just below it, the city is quickly left behind. Cliff swallow nests decorate the undersides of both bridges. The wooded slopes of Cedar Falls and the expanded woodlands of George Wyth State Park and Hartman Reserve Nature Center quickly turn this urban paddle into a pleasant paddle through Iowa wildness. The bottomland hardwood forest holds a variety of birds and other wildlife. Spotted sandpipers and killdeer occupy the beaches, while turtles bask on the logs. Orioles, wrens, wood pewees, and other woodland birds call from the woods along the shoreline. The public land means that the riparian zone is wide, allowing deep woodland birds like scarlet tanagers and red-eyed vireos and other wildlife to be common, despite the urban location. Deer, foxes, squirrels and woodchucks are all common.

Bike trails are found along both sides of the river. Interpretive signage may be found near Hartman Reserve. At George Wyth State Park look for an old, now abandoned, boat ramp along the bike trail at the “Pickles Place” gazebo.

The inside bend of the river is Hartman Reserve with a beach area used by both humans and wildlife. Mussel shells on the beach reveal their presence in the river, and crows, geese, mallards, blackbirds, killdeer and sandpipers make use of the sand area. Spiny softshells, snappers, and other turtles enjoy this beach, too. Typical bottomland forest of silver maple, cottonwoods, and willow dominates near the water, while on upland slopes walnuts, basswoods, and oaks punctuate the canopy.

Recommended Experience Classification: **Advanced to Washington Park, Beginner as the trail continues to Sherwood Park.**

Stream Reach: Sherwood Park to Cedar Bend Park (BH Co.) to Waterloo Boathouse - last take-out in downtown Waterloo) (3.7 miles)

The access at Sherwood Park is in an urban setting, right next to busy Hwy 218. This short stretch is an interesting urban/rural combination. However, the noise of the highway quickly fades as trees absorb the din as paddlers move downriver and into the bend of Cedar Bend. Much of the shoreline is rip-rapped with concrete. Remnant stairs, private ramps, etc. are all that remain of cabins and houses that once stood along the river, destroyed in flooding of recent years. The Waterloo levee system begins about .4 mile southeast of the Hartman Reserve access, directly south of where the river takes the large horseshoe bend to the north.

A wing dam juts northeast into the river at that point also, seemingly directing the river—and paddlers—to take the bend north. Keep left!

The Cedar Bend area of the river is heavily forested with bottomland forest. Deer, great blue herons, green herons, belted kingfishers, great crested flycatchers, woodpeckers, swallows, and other river fauna are all seen easily in this area.

As paddlers approach the northernmost bend in the river, the Waterloo levee on the northwest side of the city is visible from the river. At first just appearing as a rip-rapped area beyond the bottomland trees, the trees disappear and the levee (with the bike trail on top) comes into full view along the eastern side of Cedar Bend. Cedar Bend Park and its access are evident on the east (left) side of the river. On the Cedar Bend island, a slough reaches back into the center of the island, beginning about halfway down the eastern side of the island. A paddle back into this quiet backwater may yield a rewarding experience in discovering the wildlife of this area.



Cedar Bend Park Access

As the river turns back to the east and into downtown Waterloo, on river right is an area with stone docks and steps and patios that once serviced several expensive riverfront homes on Sans Souci Island. They are gone now but for the stone waterfront remains. Opposite, on river left, is an active neighborhood of modest homes on the river side of the



The Waterloo Boat House

levee, most with boat docks in front along the river. Evidence of the flooding of recent years is not hard to find.

As the river bends to the east and towards downtown Waterloo, it becomes fully an urban river. The noise from industry to the south is constant, traffic over the nearby roads and bridges is constant, and the flood walls that line the river through downtown Waterloo are visible in the distance. Yet the land along the river is still wild on the left, the non-manicured portion of Exchange Park. Scan the dense willows along the river for beaver homes. Kingfishers also rattle along the river here, finding fish to eat and apparently oblivious to the clamor of the city.

The treed portions of this stretch are silver maple dominated bottomland hardwoods. Some cottonwoods, willow, boxelder and elms are included in this mix. Because most of the land is only 1-3 feet above the water level, only trees capable of having wet roots survive here. A patch of healthy swamp white oak graces a backwater on the eastern side of the Cedar Bend island. A few walnuts and basswoods on higher benches are also found. Reeds canary grass, sedges, curly dock, dogwoods, and riverbank grapes are common throughout the stretch.

The last access in Waterloo before the downtown is on river left at Exchange Park, just after the red-roofed Waterloo Boat House on the waterfront. (Black Hawk Creek enters the Cedar River just across from Exchange Park on river right.) The access is a boat ramp and has docks to which to tie up if so desired. The parking lot is ample and there are restrooms nearby.

Paddlers that continue down the river may only go a short distance and must exit the water on river left to portage around the Park Avenue and Sixth Street dams in downtown Waterloo. This short stretch of river is classified Advanced for this reason. Be aware there is a steep staircase at the end of the portage.

After completing the portage and putting back in, another short distance of river travel brings paddlers to the Riverview Recreation Area Access on river right.

Recommended Experience Classification: **Beginner, Advanced from Waterloo Boat House to portage take-out**

Stream Reach: Riverview Recreation Area Access to Deerwood Park to Cedar Terrace Park Access to Gilbertville Park Access (10.5 miles)

The Riverview Recreation Area Access has a parking area and a vault toilet at the ORV grounds. However, it is isolated and may not be the best place to leave a car overnight. An alternate access downriver is Deerwood Park with a campgrounds, restroom, parking, and picnic area.

The left side of the river in the first part of this section has a large levee that stretches down to Hwy 20/I-380 approximately 3 miles downriver. It protects the southeast Waterloo area (and Evansdale) from flooding. Accordingly, the levee is covered with rip-rap, not providing the paddler with much to look at. The right side of the river is partially leveed down to Hwy 20/I-380 and also contains old cement rip-rap along some of the shoreline. However, part of the right shoreline is treed with bottomland hardwood forest, dominated by silver maple. This is typical along most of this whole length to Gilbertville, with walnut, swamp white oaks, and some cottonwoods, hackberry, honey locust, and box elder.

Demonstrating how tolerant of humans they have become, a bald eagle nest has been observed in the first mile on the first and most heavily wooded bend in the river, despite the industrial area behind it. Song sparrows, orioles, robins, Canada geese, turkey vultures, mallards, great blue herons, red-winged blackbirds, cardinals, rough-winged swallows, barred owls, and turtles are also common along this stretch. True to an urban area, fresh rains sometimes flush out the contents of storm sewers into the river.

Frequent flooding in recent decades has created alternate channels and islands in the Cedar, including some throughout the Deerwood Park area and below. The isolated back channels,



Take-out by Park Avenue Bridge

Exit on river left before the bridge to begin a portage around the dams in downtown Waterloo.



Adult bald eagle near Gilbertville



Gilbertville Park Access

After passing under the East Washburn Road Bridge at Gilbertville, find the access at a small park on the left, on the southwest end of Gilbertville. This access features a boat ramp, picnic tables, and a parking area.



Cedar River Natural Resource Area Access

as in the rest of the river, create valuable nursery areas for aquatic wildlife and isolated nesting areas for birds and wildlife. Though floods occasionally tear through them, these now quiet backwaters are critical for wildlife, especially in these urban areas.

From Deerwood Park to Gilbertville, the river bends several times in its current floodplain and it is evident that it spills out onto its floodplain frequently. Some rip-rapping is present but most of the remaining six miles is wooded along the riparian area and wildlife is easy to find. Rock and sand beaches are common in the inside bends and softshelled turtles are found in abundance. Painted turtles, map, and snapping turtles make use of basking logs along the way and a wide variety of birds use the forests along the shoreline. Where higher land is found on the outside bends, upland oak forests are found. Portions of the river floodplain are labeled as part of a WRP easement: the Wetland Reserve Program in the Federal Farm Bill that has made permanent easements of much bottomland along Iowa rivers.

The Cedar Valley Nature Trail and the Cedar River Water Trail meet at a bend in the river about a mile above Gilbertville. Paddlers may want to consider a unique bike shuttle option that this intersection suggests—leaving a bicycle somewhere downstream to ride back up the trail to retrieve a vehicle at a float's starting point.

Below that area, the land on the west side of the river is grazed. Honey locusts dominate the trees in this area. Homes line the bluff on the east above the river as it rounds the bend towards Gilbertville.

Bottomland forest is most common along this stretch, dominated by silver maple, with cottonwoods interspersed and mulberry and boxelder in the understory. Willows dominate on the inside bends where sand and gravel beaches are found, grading back into large willows and cottonwoods. On benches above the bottomland forest find walnuts, ash, elm, and some swamp white oaks and white oaks. Basswoods and some sugar maples are found in uplands well above the floodplain. Where enough light exists, Reeds canary grass, elderberry, and dogwood grow along the shoreline, with overhanging vines of riverbank grape and poison ivy common. Nettles, jewelweed and dock are herbaceous plants commonly found in the understory and river edge, as well.

Recommended Experience Classification: **Beginner**

Stream Reach: Gilbertville Park Access to Cedar River Natural Resource Area Access to McFarlane/Cedar River Accesses (9 miles)

This section of river is a highly channelized portion of the Cedar. But because of public ownership along much of its length, it makes for an interesting paddle. Prior to channelization, the river meandered over a broad floodplain. Today, much of that floodplain is farmed, obvious by the scarcity of trees on the west, and cattle grazing degrading the bank in the first mile below Gilbertville. However, the east side is dominated by bottomland hardwoods in that same mile.

The Cedar River Natural Resource Area (CRNRA) is public land, owned and managed for hunting and wildlife by Black Hawk County Conservation. In the second mile of this stretch, paddlers should be aware that the CRNRA has a shooting range so they are not caught off guard by the sound of nearby gunfire.

A gravel road runs along a drainage ditch that drains farmland to the west and ends on the north side of where that ditch enters the river. During sufficient water levels, a paddle up that ditch a few hundred yards reveals the interior of the silver maple bottomland forest and its inhabitants to the paddler.

The remaining six miles of this section is more meandering than the initial two miles, although it does not occupy all of the twists and turns it once did. The inside bends of turns in the river are usually sand and gravel bars and are used by killdeer and spotted sandpipers for nesting, by bachelor mallards and Canada geese for loafing, and by turtles for basking. Dense willows that inhabit the inner parts of these bars hide deer, beaver, coyotes, and others coming to the river for a drink or a snack. Outside bends, if steep, hold colonies of



Elderberry in bloom

In June, elderberry shrubs are blooming in the understory along sunny banks. They attract a number of pollinators to their fragrant flowers, and the berries they form will treat August paddlers to snacks and to views of many fruit-eating bird species.



Bicycle trail bridge over the Cedar River

About a mile south of McFarlane Park, the Cedar Valley Nature Trail and the Cedar River Water Trail cross paths again.



Limestone outcrop above Winegar Park Access

A limestone outcrop ridge also appears along this stretch, betraying the existence of a reef many millions of years ago in this location.

bank swallows and the more hidden nest holes of rough-winged swallows. Belted kingfisher nest holes may be found there, as well. In wooded stretches, oriole nests overhang the water from silver maple branches; wrens, wood ducks, and woodpeckers use tree cavities for nesting; while bluejays, great crested flycatchers, and great blue herons perch in tree tops.

A mile-long island is found in the river about halfway between the CRNRA and the Brandon Road Bridge. Its island status and dense bottomland forest make it ideal wildlife habitat.

Silver maples dominate the hardwoods along this stretch, with mulberry, boxelder, and elm in the understory and some willows and cottonwoods. Riverbank grape and poison ivy vines are common along the bank. So too is Siberian elm, a woody invasive that can quickly ruin a native woodland. A good stand of it is growing along the shoreline on the northeast end of the Cedar River Natural Resource Area.

Also along this stretch are notable Kentucky coffee trees, a tree with a seed that must be scarified to sprout. Scarification is defined as the weakening, opening, or altering the coat of a seed to encourage germination. It is not common along any of the Cedar but, rather, is found here and there. Paddlers should look for its huge doubly pinnately compound leaves and curved exterior bark.

On the interior of the few bends on this stretch, sand and rock bars are found and are usually grown up with a “willow wedge” – that is, young, sprouting willows nearest the water grading up to large willow saplings or trees at the innermost part of the sandbar. Where mudflats exist and sun is sufficient, large stands of giant ragweed may be found. Where uplands exist, white and bur oaks, ash, basswoods, hickories and other upland species dominate.

Recommended Experience Classification: **Beginner**

Stream Reach: Cedar River Access/McFarlane Park Access to Winegar Park Access (7.1 miles)

From the Brandon Road Bridge to the Winegar Access, these remaining seven river miles are a pleasant completion to this water trail. Having started in a wild stretch at Janesville, the river has traversed an urban, highly channelized section of Waterloo and comes out on the lower end. A few miles south of Waterloo, the water trail becomes rural again, continuing to surprise the paddler with contrasting sections of wildness and civilization. This final seven mile stretch is mostly wild again.

Both the Cedar River Access and the McFarlane Park Access work well for paddlers. The latter also has a campground, water, toilets, showers, and picnic areas, and both have parking at the accesses. Also along that portion, several homes with docks are along the hill on the left side of the river. Cliff swallows also make their homes on the underside of the bike trail bridge.

If severe weather threatens, there is a FEMA 361 Safe Room at McFarlane Park in the campground.

Some islands in the river and backwater sloughs add diversity to this paddle. Fruiting mulberries hang over the water, offering sustenance to birds, fish, and paddlers. Beaches exist on the inside bends of the river, where killdeer families entertain and spotted sandpipers do their dipping dance. A limestone outcrop ridge also appears along this stretch, betraying the existence of a reef many millions of years ago in this location. An oak savanna enhances this ridge, with large old red and bur oaks. Like earlier stretches of this river, eagles, herons, catbirds, orioles, and many other songbirds are found along the way. Deer are seen along the river and squirrels, raccoons, and other small mammals make the adjacent woodland their home. The presence of pileated woodpeckers in this stretch is a testament to its wildness.

Winegar Park access is at the conclusion of the Cedar River Water Trail and offers the opportunity to enjoy nearly two miles of spectacular Cedar River shoreline. Large silver maples dominate the area nearest the river and large cottonwoods take up the higher



Great blue heron high atop a snag

canopy. Some walnuts, elms, hackberry, swamp white oaks and basswood grow with them on the bench above. Mulberries and boxelder overhang the water, interspersed among the other bottomland trees. On banks with sufficient sunlight, Reeds canary grass fills the bank. On hills above the floodplain, basswood and red and white oak predominate, and sugar



Mallard hen with brood of ducklings

BE SAFE OUT THERE!

Follow these safety TIPS to keep your trip enjoyable:

- g Pack only essentials and keep them in waterproof bags.
- g Check the river water levels and currents before each trip.
- g Know the weather forecast, including areas upstream, and stay aware of the weather on your trip.
- g Make sure someone knows your planned entry and exit points and estimated times.
- g Always wear a properly-sized life jacket.
- g Expect overhanging trees, logjams, and other obstacles, such as bridge abutments or big rocks. If paddling around them is not possible, get out and portage around them. Grabbing onto tree branches may capsize your paddlecraft.
- g Always portage around lowhead dams. Surface appearance can be deceiving. Undercurrents can be strong enough for drowning.
- g If you capsize, remain on the upstream side of your boat to prevent being pinned.
- g Dress appropriately for weather conditions (including air and water temperatures), and avoid weather and water conditions beyond your skill level.

KNOW YOUR SKILL LEVEL!

- **BEGINNER:** Segments are generally less than six miles. Hazards are few and easy to avoid in normally slow-moving currents. Users can easily access these segments from parking areas, and will not need to portage, except to walk a boat around some shallow riffles or to make going around an obstacle easier.
- **INTERMEDIATE:** Segments are generally less than nine miles. Users should be able to recognize and avoid hazards in moderate river flow. The need to portage is rare, but users should be able and willing to carry boats and gear a short distance. Access to the river may involve a short portage, and the launch or take-out may be a bit difficult.
- **ADVANCED:** Segments may exceed nine miles. Hazards are likely and often occur in fast-moving water. The need to portage may be frequent or may involve carrying boats and gear a long distance. Access to the river may involve a portage, and the launch or take-out may be from steeper banks or faster moving water.

BEHAVE AS A GUEST!

- g Respect private property. Only use public lands and access points.
- g Be considerate of others in your group and on the banks.
- g Give anglers a wide berth.
- g Never change clothes in public view.
- g Never litter. Always pack out trash.
- g Do not disturb wildlife.

Other Resources:

IA DNR Interactive Paddling Map:
www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/Where-to-Paddle

IA DNR Paddler Safety Information:

www.iowadnr.gov/Things-to-Do/Canoeing-Kayaking/How-to-Paddle

Cedar Valley Water Trails
www.cedarvalleywatertrails.com

Black Hawk County Conservation
www.mycountyparks.com/County/Black-Hawk.aspx

Iowa Whitewater
<https://www.iowawhitewater.org/lhd/LHDDrivers.html>

Cedar Falls, Waterloo Tourism
www.cedarfallstourism.org/experiencewaterloo.com/

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