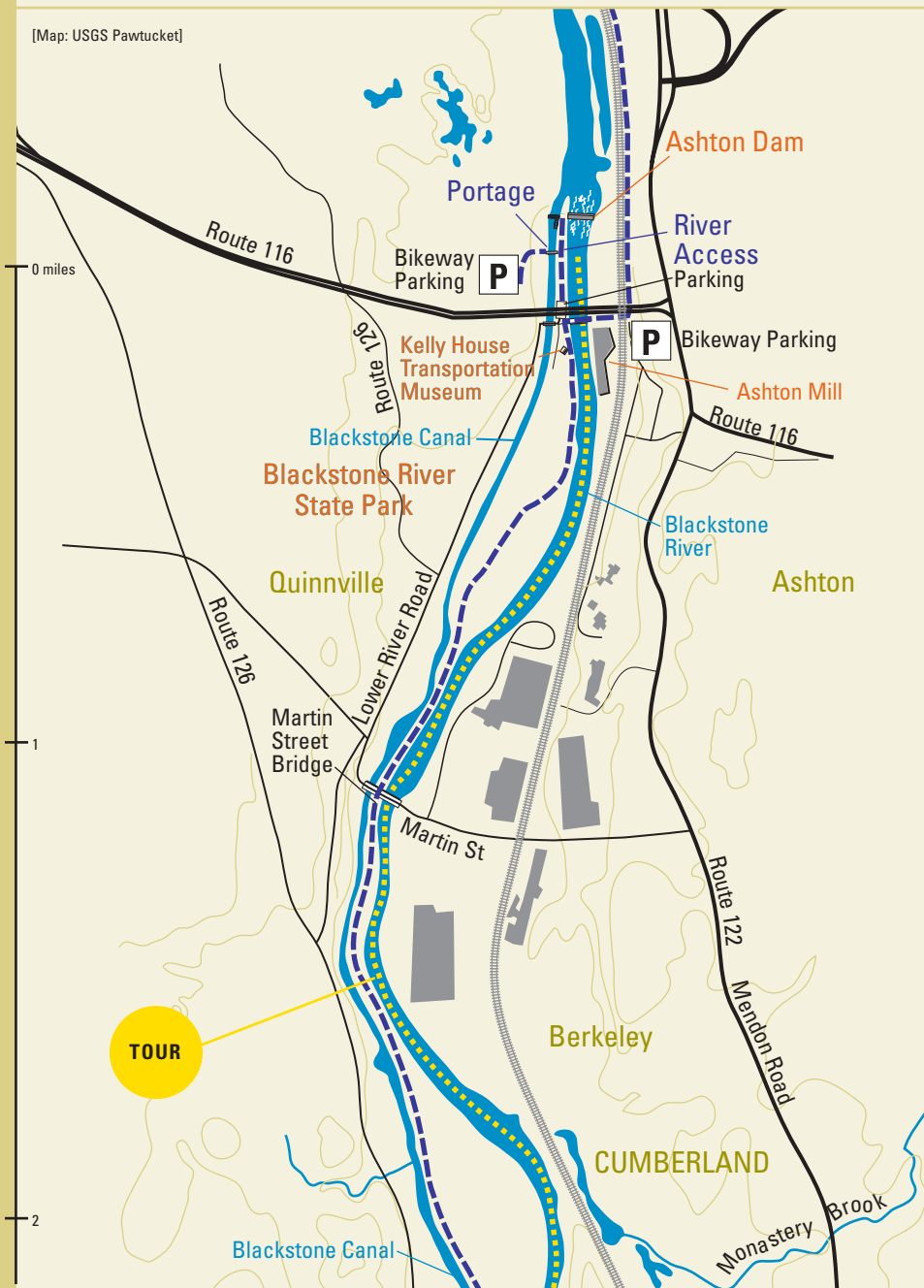


# BLACKSTONE RIVER & CANAL GUIDE

## Blackstone State Park to Pratt Dam – *Intermediate Tours, Rhode Island*



Level . . . . . Intermediate

Start . . . . . Ashton Dam / Lincoln

End . . . . . Lonsdale Village

River Miles Approx. 3 miles each way (6 mile loop)

Time . . . . . 1 hour / 2 hour loop

Description Quickwater, Class I-II (in river); II Flatwater (in canal)

Scenery . . . Towns, mills, wetlands

Portages . . . One portage from River to Canal for loop; portage over Pratt Dam to continue downriver or take out

**The heart of Rhode Island's Blackstone River State Park, with a choice between the river and canal or a river to canal trail "loop".**

This section can be navigated either in the river or in the canal. Paddlers can also make this a water trail loop by paddling down the Blackstone River and back up the Blackstone Canal to the Kelly House Canal Museum.

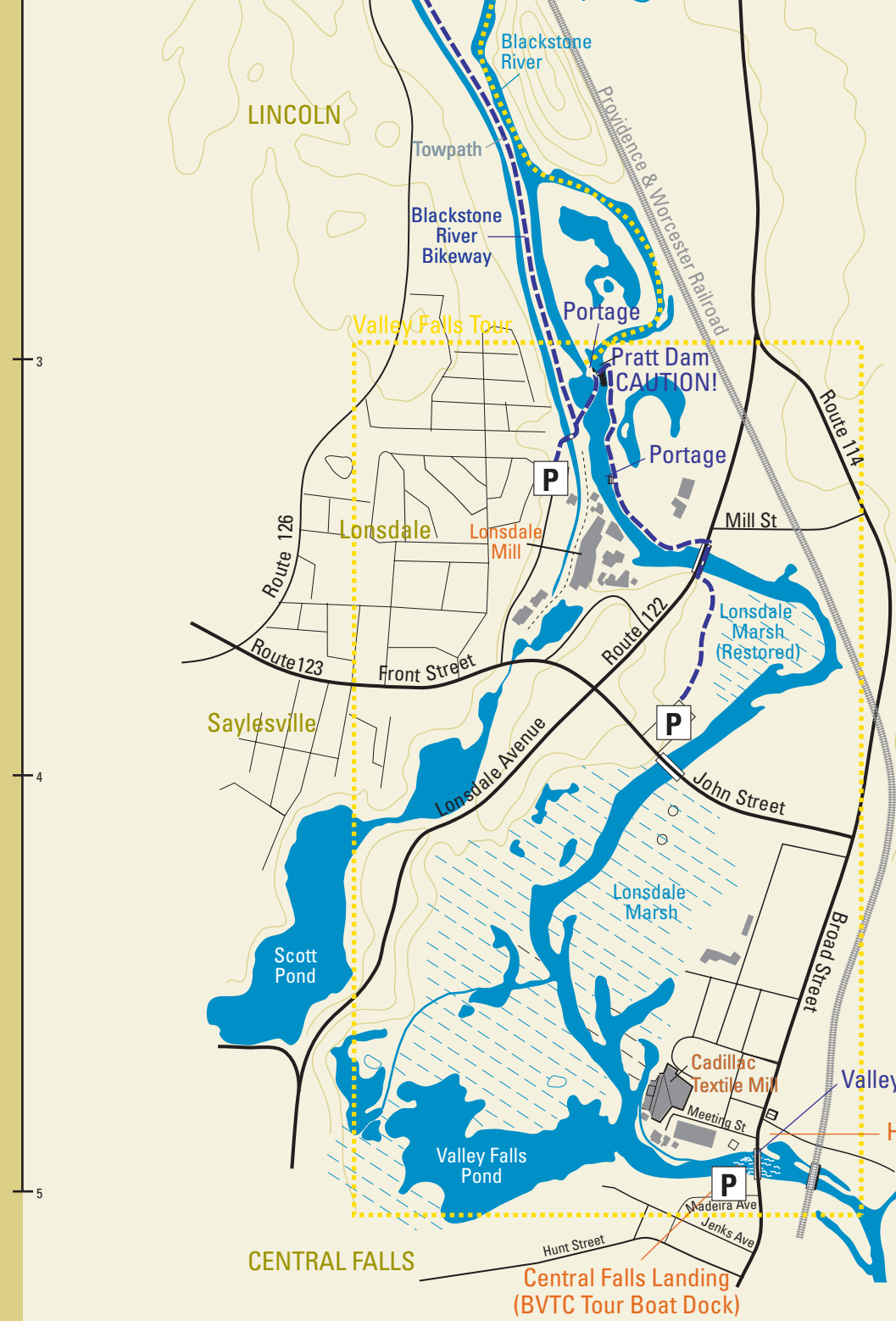
**NOTE: Currently (2005-06), construction at the Martin Street Bridge does not allow paddlers access through the canal. Check on the status of the construction before planning your trip.**

### **RIVER ROUTE / RIVER AND CANAL TRAIL LOOP**

To put-in the Blackstone River, carry up the road under the viaduct towards the dam where there is a portage trail to the right just past the pedestrian bridge or put-in just below the bikeway bridge behind the Blackstone River State Park's Kelly House Museum

The Wilbur Kelly House Museum describes the evolution of transportation in the Blackstone River Valley, from primitive trails through the canal, the railroad and on to modern highways. This evolution in transportation was responsible for the spread of the American Industrial Revolution from the Slater Mill in Pawtucket, RI northwards throughout the Valley.

The river is relatively wide and smooth flowing with areas of quickwater through this section. Paddlers pass four mill villages – Ashton (1867), Berkeley (1871), Lonsdale Old Village (1834) and Lonsdale New Village (1860) that were built and owned by one company – the Lonsdale Company.



**Portaging at the Pratt Dam:**

Paddlers can portage around the Pratt Dam by taking out on River Right and walking up to the bikeway that runs along the top of the dam. **To continue downriver**, turn to your left and carry your boat along the side of the bikeway downriver to the put-in at the steps that will be on your right. **To take out**, turn right and follow the bikeway across the Pratt Dam to the Front Street Parking area for the Blackstone River Bikeway.

**CAUTION: Do not attempt to paddle through the stone arches of Pratt Dam. Paddling through the arches is not recommended for anyone.**

**Return by the Blackstone Canal:**

Take out on river right just above the Pratt Dam and portage over the dam on the bikeway to the Blackstone Canal. Cross the bikeway bridge and put in the Canal at the steps to head back up the Canal for a return trip to the Canal Museum.

**CANAL ROUTE**

Built between 1824 and 1828, the Blackstone Canal is a great place for beginning paddlers. If starting a trip here, carry up the road under the viaduct towards the dam, putting into the canal just past the pedestrian bridge.

After a long straight section, the canal widens and goes under the Martin Street bridge. The Blackstone River Bikeway runs along the canal for most of its length - much of it was built along the original tow path. Take out at the steps to the right just before the pedestrian bridge near the Front Street parking area for the Blackstone River Bikeway or paddle back to the put-in.

**Related River Tours:** *Valley Falls Tour* (Beginner)  
**For more information** about this area of the Blackstone River Valley, pick up a *Great Road Driving Tour* or a *Valley Falls Walking Tour brochure* at the Kelly House Museum or the Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket, RI.

### Blackstone River State Park / Lower River Road, Lincoln

From Route 146 North or South:

- Take the exit for Route 116 East (George Washington Highway).
- Continue to Traffic light.
- Turn RIGHT at Light onto Old River Road. Old River Road goes to the left immediately after making the turn at the light.
- Turn LEFT onto Cullen Hill Road.
- At the end of Cullen Hill Road, turn LEFT onto Lower River Road.
- Go SLOW this is a narrow road. Continue to the end and cross over the bridge on right.

### Directions to Pratt Dam/ Front Street, Lincoln

From Route 146 North or South:

- Take exit for Breakneck Hill Road/Route 123. From 146 North, turn RIGHT onto 123. From 146 South, turn LEFT.
- Go East on 123, straight through intersections with Route 126.
- Turn LEFT into the Blackstone River Bikeway parking area marked with a blue RI DEM sign.

## 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.

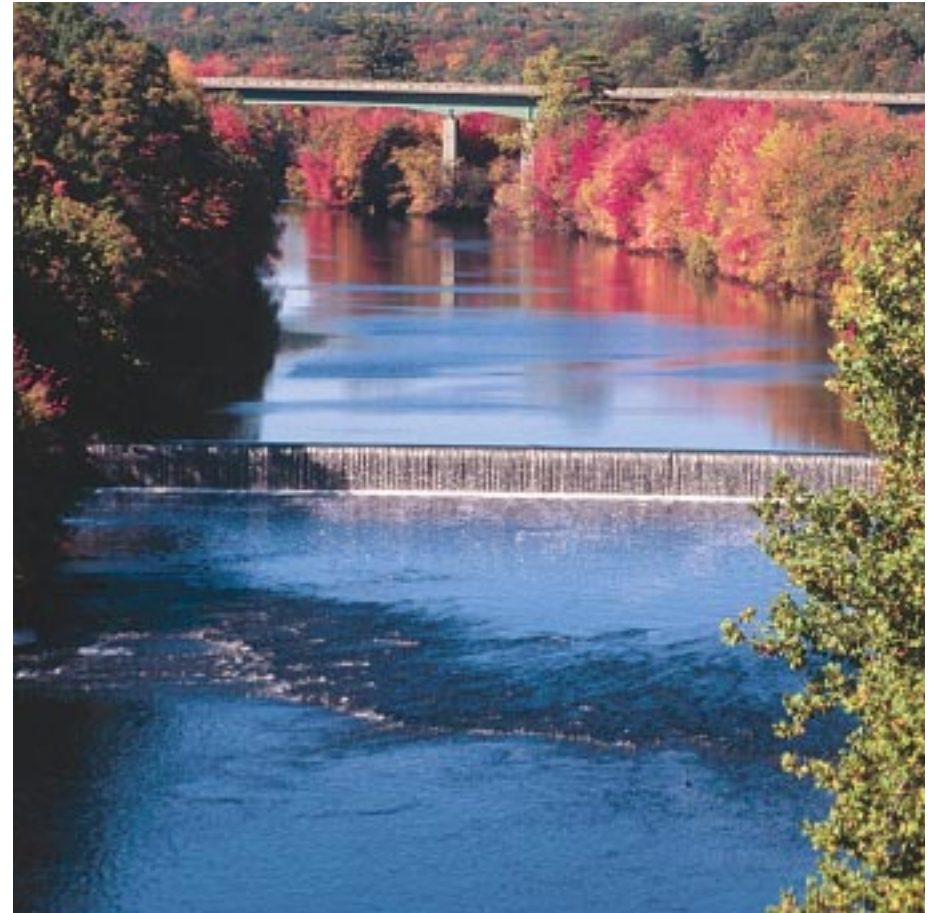


photo of Ashton Dam by Jim McElholm

### 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 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 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

