

BLACKSTONE RIVER & CANAL GUIDE

River Bend Farm to Blackstone Gorge – *Intermediate Tour, Massachusetts*



Level Intermediate
 Start River Bend Farm Uxbridge, MA
 End Blackstone Gorge, Blackstone, MA
 Time 2-3 hours
 Miles Approx. 9 miles
 Description. Flatwater, Quickwater, Short section of Rapids
 Scenery. Forested, Rural, Canal Lock
 Portages One (optional) portage in Millville, MA

The river twists and meanders past canal remnants through rural Uxbridge and the heart of Millville to the scenic Blackstone Gorge.

Put-in is at the River Bend Visitor Center in the Blackstone River & Canal Heritage State Park in Uxbridge, MA. Paddle south down the canal and portage over to the River. Stanley Woolen Mill (1853) will be on river right. A few hundred feet down the river just past the Route 16 bridge are some rapids. Once through the rapids, the river will twist and turn for the next mile.

Two major tributaries join the Blackstone River within this segment. Approximately 1/4 mile downriver look for the confluence with the Mumford River on river right. A little further on the left is the confluence with the pristine West River. Take a minute to paddle up the West River and observe the striking line between the dark clear water of the West River and the water of the Blackstone. These tributaries of the Blackstone have maintained a better water quality that someday we will enjoy in the mainstem thanks to the efforts of several partners working to make the Blackstone fishable and swimmable.

After going under the Route 122 bridge look for several canal era artifacts on the river, including another set of locks (the Skull Rock Lock c.1826 area) and a section of the canal itself. Conditions are easy and scenic from here to the Town of Millville.

Just before the Central Street bridge in Millville is a 2 1/2 acre island that serves as a bridge support and divides the river. The island was the site of a succession of mills – a grist mill (1732), a sawmill (1753), and the first woolen mill (1814) in the Blackstone Valley, among others. The remains of the Stone Mill (1825), which burned in 1874, is the most visible part of the factory complex which grew up on the west bank of the river.

Either side of the island can be run in higher water, the left being more challenging Class II-III rapids and the right consisting of Class I-II rapids. It is advised that paddlers take out and scout the rapids which can vary in difficulty depending on the water levels. Paddlers can also portage around the rapids along the shore of the island. Portaging is best done by carrying along the left bank of the right channel and putting in at the end of the island below the rapids.

Put in on the upstream side of the Central Street bridge to paddle the rapids under the bridge. The river turns quickly to flatwater, caused by the dam at the takeout. Two interesting historic remnants can be seen from the river along this segment.

About 1/2 mile down from the rapids look carefully on river right for the Millville Lock (1828) at the end of Hope Street in Millville. For the best view of the lock, pull out on river right and walk the 10 yards from the river bank to the lock. This is the best preserved lock on the Blackstone Canal. This is one of four remaining locks along the Blackstone River. From 1828 to 1848 a series of 48 canal locks helped boats ascend and descend the elevation changes between Worcester and Providence.

Further on, the river passes under the Triad Bridge, where three railroad lines were to cross the river at the same point. The massive abutments for the never completed Grand Trunk Railway bridge tower above the river. Stay river right when the river divides above the Rolling Dam area. The river is flat and wide for the remainder of this segment to the take out just above the Rolling Dam at the entrance to the Blackstone Gorge in Blackstone, MA. Take out is on river left just above the dam. Use caution when approaching the dam.

For more information about this part of the Blackstone River, pick up a *Blackstone Canal, Millville, or Blackstone Walking Tour brochure* at River Bend Farm Visitor Center.

Related River Tours: *Plummer's Landing to River Bend Farm (Intermediate) and River Bend Farm (Beginner).*

Directions to River Bend Farm

Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, Oak Street, Uxbridge, 508-278-7604

From Route 146 North or South:

- Take the exit for Route 16.
- From 146 North, turn RIGHT onto Rt. 16 East. From 146 South, turn LEFT onto Rt. 16 East.
- Continue to the traffic light in Uxbridge Center
- Turn LEFT at light onto Main Street/Route 122 North.
- Continue over a mile to the next traffic light at Hartford Ave.
- Turn RIGHT onto Hartford Avenue.
- Continue straight through 4-way stop intersection at Granite St.
- As you're coming down the next hill, take a sharp RIGHT turn onto Oak Street at the Medical Center.
- Continue less than 1/4 mile to River Bend Farm Visitor Center on your left.

To drop off a vehicle at the Blackstone Gorge

- Follow Route 122 south through Millville to Blackstone and look for the rust-colored signs on the right to the Blackstone Gorge.
- Turn right at County Street

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"!



photo of River Bend Farm 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 currently 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 about paddling 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
www.zaptheblackstone.org

Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, 508.278.7604,
www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/central/blst.htm

Great Canadian Canoe Co., 508.865-0010 or 800.98-CANOE, www.greatcanadian.com

Wild Bird Gardens, 508.234.0111, www.wildbirdgardens.com

John H. Chafee

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

National Heritage Corridor Commission

