



# Clarion River Water Trail Upper Section

## Headwaters to Irwin Run



## 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: Brenda Adams-Weyant

### 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 alert 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 the Pennsylvania Wilds in the northwestern corner of the state, its headwaters break the surface in McKean County and join with the Allegheny River in Clarion County. The Clarion River's Water Trails 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—Still in development).

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.

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 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 an outstanding destination for outdoor recreation. 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 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 shallow at times and boat bottoms can drag on the streambed. 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.



Photo: Ted Eshenkov

Streamflows can change rapidly creating potentially unsafe conditions. Check available resources such as weather, precipitation, USGS gauges, and local outfitters to plan accordingly. Do a search for 'Ridgway USGS Gauge' on the internet.

Ridgway USGS Gauge	Lower Limit	Optimal
Upstream of Ridgway	2 feet	3 - 4 feet
Ridgway to Clarington	2.5 feet	4 - 5 feet

At river levels above 6 feet, liveries will not rent canoes and state parks close their launches.

## POTENTIAL HAZARDS ON THE RIVER

- **Dams:** Water going over a dam creates an undertow that can pull a boat into the turbulence and capsize it. This hydraulic can often trap and hold a person or a boat. The areas above and below the dam can be hazardous. Always carry your boat around dams.
- **Strainers:** Trees are typical strainers that can trap and flood boats. Strainers can pin victims underwater.
- **Current:** Never underestimate the power of moving water. Boaters who are not sure that their boat or their ability is up to the prevailing conditions should stay off the water.
- **Cold water:** Sudden immersion in cold water can lead to cardiac arrest or can cause a person to inhale water. If you fall into cold water, immediately cover your mouth and nose with your hands. Dress properly for the cold by wearing a hat, several layers of clothing and warm boots.
- **Hypothermia:** Hypothermia is the lowering of the body's core temperature and can be fatal if not treated. It begins with shivering. Judgment then becomes clouded and unconsciousness sets in. Remove a hypothermic person from the water and replace wet clothes with warm, dry clothing and/or a blanket. Do not massage the extremities or give the victim alcohol or caffeine.

## PENNSYLVANIA BOATING REGULATIONS

- A U.S. Coast Guard-approved wearable personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) is required for each person on board. In addition, one throwable device (seat cushion or ring buoy) is required on boats 16 feet in length or longer. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.
- From November 1 through April 30, boaters must wear a life jacket on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe or kayak during these cold weather months.
- Life jackets must be the appropriate size for the person intended and must be in good, serviceable condition.
- Life jackets must be worn by all children 12 years old and younger on all boats 20 feet or less in length while under way, and on all canoes and kayaks. Others are strongly encouraged to wear a PFD at all times on the water.
- On East Branch Clarion River Lake, wearing a PFD is mandatory on boats under 16ft and in all canoes and kayaks.



- All boats must display an anchor light (a white light visible 360 degrees) when at anchor between sunset and sunrise. Boats can use a lantern or clip-on battery-powered unit to meet this requirement.
- Unpowered boats must carry a white light, either hand-held or installed, to be displayed in time to avoid a collision between sunset and sunrise and during restricted visibility.
- All powered boats must show running lights between sunset and sunrise. All boats are required to carry a sound-producing device. Motorboats less than 40 feet in length must carry some mechanical means of making a sound signal. This device may be hand-, mouth- or power-operated. An athletic coach's whistle is an acceptable device. Operators of unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats, paddleboards) are required to carry a device capable of sounding a prolonged blast for 4-6 seconds that can be heard by another boat operator in time to avoid a collision. An athletic coach's whistle is acceptable.

- All motorboats must be registered, regardless of where they launch.
- Unpowered boats (canoes, kayaks, rowboats) using Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, State Park or State Forest access areas must either be registered OR display a valid launch permit. Launch permits can be purchased through the Commission's website at [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com) (Click the "Outdoor Shop" icon) or at many state park offices.
- Operating watercraft, including canoes and kayaks, under the influence of alcohol or drugs is illegal. This law is strongly enforced for user safety.
- For further information on boating regulations, contact the PA Fish & Boat Commission at [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com).

## PADDLING SAFETY TIPS

- **Wear your life jacket.** Some 80 percent of all recreational boating fatalities happen to people who are not wearing a life jacket.
- **Expect to get wet.** Even the best paddlers sometimes capsize or swamp their boats. Bring extra clothing in a waterproof bag.
- **Be prepared to swim.** If the water looks too hazardous to swim in, don't go paddling.
- **If you capsize,** hold onto your boat, unless it presents a life-threatening situation. If floating in current, position yourself on the upstream side of the capsized boat.
- **Scout ahead whenever possible.** Know the river. Avoid surprises.
- **Be prepared for the weather.** Get the forecast before you go. Sudden winds and rain are common and can turn a pleasant trip into a risky, unpleasant venture.
- **Wear wading shoes** or tennis shoes with wool, polypropylene, pile or neoprene socks.
- **Never take your boat over a low-head dam.**
- **Portage** (carry) your boat around any section of water about which you feel uncertain.
- **Never boat alone.** Boating safety increases with numbers.
- **Keep painter lines** (ropes tied to the bow) and any other ropes coiled and secured.
- **Never tie a rope to yourself** or to another paddler, especially a child. And never tie two boats together.
- **Kneel to increase your stability** before entering rougher water, like a rapid.
- **If you collide with an obstruction, lean toward it.** This will usually prevent you capsizing or flooding the boat.
- **File a float plan** with a reliable person, indicating where you are going and when you will return. Remember to contact the person when you have returned safely.



## 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.

The river miles for the East and West Branches continue the mileage from the main stem with "E" added for the East Branch and "W" added for the West Branch.

**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.

### EAST BRANCH CLARION RIVER

**Mile 116 E to 111 E Elk State Park:** Surrounding East Branch Lake, this park offers boating, fishing, hunting and picnicking. For more information: [www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks)

**Mile 116 E to 110.7 E East Branch Lake:** The dam on the East Branch Clarion River was built in 1952 to control flooding. The Army Corps of Engineers lake is a popular destination for boaters and anglers. Water levels in the lake have been lowered while repairs to the dam are underway. During construction the picnic area and campground will be closed, but launches remain open. Repairs should be completed in 2018. Call before visiting to get current closure status: (814) 965-2065. For more information: [www.lrp.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/Lakes/EastBranchClarionRiverLake.aspx](http://www.lrp.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/Lakes/EastBranchClarionRiverLake.aspx)

**Mile 111.9 E to 106 E State Game Lands 25:** This game lands borders the East Branch Lake and East Branch Clarion River. For more information: [www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us)

**Mile 110.6 E to 109.4 E Special Regulation Fishing Waters:** Delayed harvest artificial lures only.

**Mile 108 E Glen Hazel:** Several fish structures in this area could be hazardous to float over at low water levels.

**Mile 108 E to 106.3 E (RL) Bendigo State Park:** (photo at right) This scenic park along the East Branch Clarion River offers picnicking, pavilions, and a swimming pool. For more information:

[www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks)



**Mile 103 E Domtar Mill at Johnsonburg:** **WARNING!** Public use is not permitted where the East Branch flows through the mill. There is a low head dam in this section that presents a serious safety hazard to paddlers. Fishing is prohibited by the PA Fish and Boat Commission since it is designated as trout nursery waters. Paddlers are advised to take-out at Bendigo State Park because there is no public access to the East Branch in Johnsonburg.

### WEST BRANCH CLARION RIVER

**Mile 109 W Wilcox** boasts the Winery at Wilcox and is close to the Twin Lakes Recreation Area, and Bendigo and Elk State Parks.

**Mile 107 W to 106.4 W Special Regulation Fishing Waters:** Catch and release fly-fishing only.

**Mile 103 W to 102 Johnsonburg:** Where the East and West Branches of the Clarion River meet. This town is dominated by a large paper mill located adjacent to the river. The mill once had a negative impact on the river's water quality until Willamette Industries made extensive renovations during the mill's modernization. A Cooperative Fish Nursery at the mill raises 12,000 brook and rainbow trout that are stocked in area streams and rivers annually.

### CLARION RIVER MAIN STEM

**Mile 102.6 to 94 Special Regulation Fishing Waters:** Catch and release all tackle.



**Mile 95 to 93 Ridgway:** Built in the late 1800s, the buildings and homes in Ridgway display the grandeur of the Victorian Era. Throughout the years, this little town of about 5,000 people has maintained its friendly small-town atmosphere. The area is graced with unique specialty shops, quaint restaurants, and charming bed and breakfasts inns.

**Mile 94 (RL) Elk County Historical Society:** The Elk County Historical Society is housed in an 1882 Victorian home at 109 Center Street, Ridgway. For more information: [www.elkcountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.elkcountyhistoricalsociety.org).

**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: [www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/allegheny](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/allegheny)

**Mile 92.5 to 71.4 (RL) State Game Lands 44:** This game lands borders the Clarion River downstream of Ridgway. For more information: [www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us)

**Mile 91 (RL) Island Run Trout Nursery:** This trout nursery is located off of PA 949 south of Ridgway and is a partnership between the Island Run Sportsmen and the PA Fish & Boat Commission.

**Mile 84 (RL) Portland Mills:** Five sawmills were located in Portland Mills between 1856 and 1907. The rocky islands in the river here are the remnants of man-made cribs that anchored log booms used to corral logs into the mill. A leather tannery was in operation from 1891 to 1923, until the supply of local hemlock bark was exhausted.

**Mile 80 (RR) Beech Bottom Island:** In the 1840s, this island was created when a mill race was dug to serve a sawmill. The complex also included a large dam built across the Clarion River. Traces of these historic features are still visible.

### Arroyo in the mid-1800's



Photo: Elk Co. Historical Society

**Mile 79 (RR) Arroyo:** This mill town was founded in the 1830s. A tannery and sawmill were opened and serviced by the Clarion River Railroad until the resources were exhausted. The town declined and was vacated in the 1930s. Today, tours of the ghost town are available. For more information, contact the Elk County Historical Society at (814) 776-1032.

**Mile 78-77 X Y Z Rapids:** These rapids were formed in 1871 by the removal of a natural waterfall called Old Falls Rock by the Clarion River Navigation Company.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## BOAT RENTALS, GUIDES AND LIVERIES

- **Country Squirrel Outfitters:** Rivermile 94. Guided tours, outdoor gear, equipment rentals, livery. (814) 776-6285, [www.countrysquirreloutfitters.com](http://www.countrysquirreloutfitters.com)
- **Lazy River Rentals:** Rivermile 94. Equipment rentals, livery, tent campsites. (814) 389-2732, [www.lazyrivercanoe.com](http://www.lazyrivercanoe.com)
- **Pale Whale Canoe Rental:** Rivermile 50.1. Boat rentals/livery, cabins. (814) 744-8300, [www.cookriverside.com](http://www.cookriverside.com)
- **Cook Forest Canoe Rental:** Rivermile 50. Boat rentals/livery. (814) 744-8094, [www.cookforestcanoe.com](http://www.cookforestcanoe.com)
- **Pine Crest Canoe Rentals:** Boat rentals/livery, cabins. (814) 752-2200, <http://cooksforest.com/pinecrest-frt2.html>

## RESPECT THE PRIVACY AND 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, sound carries across water much further than it carries on land. Many landowners enjoy the river's peace and solitude so display the same amount of courtesy that you would expect in return. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is always welcome.

## FISHING, CAMPING, HUNTING AND ATVS

### Fishing

- Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission rules & regulations apply.
- **East Branch Lake:** Reservoir contains walleye, smallmouth bass, tiger muskellunge and lake trout. Ice fishing is popular.
  - **East Branch Clarion River:** Stocked with trout. Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only section from dam downstream 1.2 miles. Bendigo State Park provides good trout fishing into summer.
  - **West Branch Clarion River:** Stocked with trout. Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only area upstream of the Tamine Road.
  - **Clarion River between Johnsonburg and Ridgway:** This section is designated Catch and Release All-Tackle and has excellent brown trout fishing. There is no public access, so landowner permission is necessary before crossing private property.
  - **Clarion River between Ridgway and Cook Forest:** Brook trout can be found near the mouths of the stocked tributaries. Excellent smallmouth bass fishing.

### Camping

There are limited opportunities to camp along the upper stretch of the Clarion River. The Corps of Engineers operates a full service campground at the East Branch Dam Recreation Area (closed until 2018). Lazy River Rentals in Ridgway offers tent campsites. Most campsites on the upper stretch are on the Allegheny National Forest, downstream of Ridgway on river right. Upstream of Irwin Run, campers are permitted to camp anywhere on National Forest land except in Arroyo, where camping and campfires are not permitted between the bridge and Crow Run on river right. Please choose established campsites rather than creating a new site. Alcohol is not permitted on state park managed lands. Camping is not permitted on State Game Lands.

### Hunting

Be aware that hunting occurs on public and private lands all along the river from September through February and late April through May. River users should wear blaze orange so they are visible to any hunters in the area. For more information: [www.pgc.state.pa.us](http://www.pgc.state.pa.us)

### All Terrain Vehicles

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are only permitted on designated trails on Allegheny National Forest lands. Respect our good nature - **Stay on designated trails.**

## NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

In 1996, 51.7 miles of the Clarion River were designated a National Wild and Scenic River. 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.

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 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).

## STEWARDSHIP

Help care for the land, water and cultural resources along the Clarion River by respecting wildlife, nature and other recreationists. Washing footwear, boats and vehicles minimizes the spread of invasive species from one place to another. "Leave No Trace," a national outdoor ethics program, provides guidelines for minimizing your impact. Visit [www.LNT.org](http://www.LNT.org) for more information.



Prevent the transport of nuisance species. Clean all recreational equipment. [www.ProtectFourWaters.com](http://www.ProtectFourWaters.com)

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

## EMERGENCY INFORMATION

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

### Nearby Hospitals

- **St. Marys,** Elk Regional Health Center: follow PA 255 north from St. Marys toward Johnsonburg, (814) 788-8000
- **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

## VISITOR INFORMATION

- **Pennsylvania Wilds:** <http://pawilds.com/>
- **Pennsylvania Great Outdoors Visitors Bureau:** (800) 348-9393, [www.pagreatoutdoors.com](http://www.pagreatoutdoors.com)
- **Ridgway Welcome Center:** 300 Main Street, Ridgway, (814) 776-1424

## Clarion River Public Access Sites—Upper Section

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. "River Left" and "River Right" are used to indicate which side of the river a site is on. Orient yourself looking downstream to determine left and right. River miles for the East and West Branches continue from the mileage on the main stem with "E" added for the East Branch and "W" added for the West Branch.

Launch Permits: PFBC (PA Fish & Boat Commission) and DCNR (PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources) launches require boat registration (other states accepted) or a launch permit from a state park office or PFBC. Corps (US Army Corps of Engineers), ANF (Allegheny National Forest) and PGC (Pennsylvania Game Commission) do not require launch permits.

115 E River Right	<b>Instanter Boat Launch</b> DCNR	Lat 41 36 21 Lon -78 33 34	Located in Elk State Park on the north end of the East Branch Lake, this launch provides access for motorboats and paddlers. The no-wake zones along the Fivemile and East Branch Clarion forks are popular with paddlers. Facilities include ample parking, picnic area, and restrooms.
111 E River Right	<b>East Branch Boat Launch</b> Corps	Lat 41 33 49 Lon -78 35 37	Located on USACE land near the East Branch Dam, this launch provides access for motorboats and paddlers. Facilities include phone and restrooms. Parking can be congested on summer weekends. Launch fee waived during dam construction.
110 E River Right	<b>Kilgus Road Canoe Launch</b> Corps	Lat 41 33 15 Lon -78 35 46	Located on Corps of Engineers land below the East Branch Dam, this hand-carry launch provides access for paddlers. The access road can be rough in wet weather. There is room to park 3-5 cars.
107 E River Left	<b>Bendigo State Park Take-out</b> DCNR	Lat 41 31 42 Lon -78 37 46	This hand-carry launch is located at Bendigo State Park. Facilities include picnic areas, swimming pool, drinking water, restrooms and public phone. This is the last take-out on the East Branch because public use is not permitted where the river flows through the mill at Johnsonburg.
110 W River Right	<b>Wilcox Canoe Launch</b> Jones Township	Lat 41 34 45 Lon -78 41 21	This hand-carry launch is located next to the township garage on Old Kane Road. This site provides ample parking, but be careful not to block access to the garage or equipment. Adequate river flow for paddling is present in the spring and after a heavy rainfall.
94 River Left	<b>Country Squirrel Outfitters</b> Private	Lat 41 25 16 Lon -78 44 02	Located in Ridgway on the east bank of the Clarion River where the river crosses PA Route 948. The launch is privately owned, however, the public may get permission from Country Squirrel Outfitters to use the launch. Parking can be limited during peak paddling season.
85 River Left	<b>Portland Mills Canoe Launch</b> PGC	Lat 41 22 07 Lon -78 49 42	This hand-carry launch is located on SGL 44 just upstream of the town of Portland Mills. There is parking for 8-10 cars which can be congested during peak paddling season.
80 River Left	<b>Arroyo Canoe Launch</b> PGC	Lat 41 23 22 Lon -78 52 52	Located on SGL 44 across the river from the town of Arroyo, this hand-carry launch can accommodate about 10-15 cars.
76 River Right	<b>Irwin Run Canoe Launch</b> ANF	Lat 41 24 00 Lon -78 54 20	Located on the Allegheny National Forest upstream of Hallton, this hand-carry launch provides access to paddlers. There is parking for 7-10 cars. This site can be very congested on spring and summer weekends. A restroom is located onsite. Walk-in camping is permitted upstream of the parking lot.
74 River Right	<b>Hallton Canoe Launch</b> PGC	Lat 41 24 04 Lon -78 55 57	This hand-carry launch is located on SGL 28 in the town of Hallton where Spring Creek empties into the Clarion River. There is parking for 10-12 cars.

### Caution Information

The East and West Branches of the Clarion River are more susceptible to stream-wide strainers and have limited access. The East Branch has swift water. Motorboat traffic can be heavy on the East Branch Lake during the summer months. On the main stem of the Clarion River, there are four class I to II rapids that can be navigated by scouting ahead. In-stream hazards are listed below. Be prepared.

- **River mile 108.7E:** Low bridge clearance at Glen Hazel Road.
- **River mile 104.5E:** Stream-wide low hanging cable.
- **River mile 103E to 102.5E (confluence):** RIVER CLOSED to public use where it flows through the Domtar Mill in Johnsonburg. No portage available. Paddlers should take out at Bendigo State Park due to no public access on the East Branch in Johnsonburg.
- **River mile 107.8W:** Stream-wide low hanging cable.
- **River mile 88.6:** Railroad trestle bridge abutments with possible STRAINERS caused by trees wrapped around the piers.

