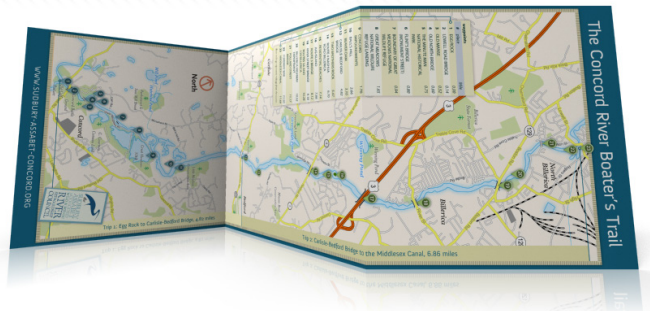




COMMENTARY GUIDE



Visit www.sudbury-assabet-concord.org for more information or to request a Boater's Trail Guide.

THE CONCORD RIVER BOATER'S TRAIL

From Egg Rock at the beginning of the Concord River in Concord to the Middlesex Canal in Billerica runs approximately 11 miles. It consists of 2 segments:

Trip 1: Egg Rock to Carlisle-Bedford Bridge

Trip 2: Carlisle-Bedford Bridge to the Middlesex Canal

TRIP 1: EGG ROCK TO CARLISLE-BEDFORD BRIDGE

The Trail begins at the confluence of the Sudbury and Assabet Rivers, at Egg Rock, where they join to become the Concord River. The river is fairly slow moving and easy to paddle in this section, so you can appreciate the rich natural and cultural sites along the way. Pass by the Old Manse, home of Emerson and Hawthorne, and paddle under the famous Old North Bridge, a part of Minute Man National Historical Park. The River enters the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, and you can land your boat to explore the impoundments, home to a diversity of waterfowl. From here, the river continues to slowly meander through rich greenery until you reach Route 225.

TRIP 2: CARLISLE-BEDFORD BRIDGE TO THE MIDDLESEX CANAL

The River becomes quite wide in this section and is popular for boating, birding and fishing. Great Blue Heron can be seen along the shores as they stalk their prey, while painted turtles sun on exposed logs. This is a peaceful section of the river. As you enter Billerica there will be a bit more development, and even a chance to stop for a meal at a riverside restaurant. After taking your boat off the river, be sure to visit the Middlesex Canal Museum to learn about the early industrial history of the area, and get a look at the old dam.

TRIP 1. EGG ROCK TO CARLISLE-BEDFORD BRIDGE

1. EGG ROCK

The Concord River begins at Egg Rock where the Sudbury and Assabet Rivers join to become the Concord River. If the current permits, be sure to paddle your way up to Egg Rock to read its inscription. This is also the beginning of the Wild and Scenic section of the Concord. A wealth of history as well as noteworthy current events take place on this river.

This river junction provided perfect conditions for Native Americans to thrive off the influx of shad, eels, and alewives (also known as river herring). In the late 19th century it provided the ideal location for large holiday breakfasts, daily picnics, and camping parties for European settlers. If you carefully observe the natural beauty around this junction, you may be lucky enough to spot an osprey nest. In the words of Henry David Thoreau: "Concord River is remarkable for the gentleness of its current, which is scarcely perceptible... it appears to have been properly named Musketaquid, or Meadow River, by the Indians."

2. OLD CALF PASTURE AT LOWELL ROAD BRIDGE

Access point: There is a boat ramp and parking at the Old Calf Pasture Conservation Area off Lowell Road just upstream of the Lowell Road Bridge.

As your boat swiftly glides under the Lowell Road Bridge, try to imagine the cave made of thick stone slabs that once stood erect under this very bridge. As George Bartlett tells us, just inside the stone cave walls resided pigs owned by some of the oldest European settlers on the river.

3. THE OLD MANSE

There is a dock at the boathouse of the Old Manse on the right side of the river where you can tie up your boat if you want to disembark for a short visit.

When Ralph Waldo Emerson's grandfather, the Reverend William Emerson, built this home with his own hands in 1770, he had no idea how many historically significant events would happen here. Ralph Waldo Emerson conceived his famous 1836 work *Nature* at the Old Manse. Nathaniel Hawthorne and Sophia Peabody began their marriage here in 1842, and George Bartlett initiated his "floats," water sports, and river outings and wrote various guidebooks and articles about the Concord River. Even William Brewster, the first president of the Massachusetts Audubon Society (the first Audubon Society of the United States) called a portion of the Old Manse his home when he first arrived in Concord.

If you visit the home, be sure to notice the poems that Hawthorne and Peabody inscribed on the window panes for each other, as well as the vegetable garden that Henry David Thoreau planted for the newlyweds. From there it is a short walk to the Old North Bridge.

4. OLD NORTH BRIDGE

The Old North Bridge marks the first battle fought in the Revolutionary War, the Battle of Concord. On April 19, 1775, the first bullets were shot, and the Revolutionary War began. Dock your boat and visit the Minute Man Historical Park Visitor's Center to learn more.

According to legend, there once existed a stone wall barrier built below the waterline under the Old North Bridge. John Buttrick, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Edmund Hosmer were said to have constructed the wall in order to inhibit large boats from damaging the natural beauty of the river. Just as we hope today to keep our rivers clean and free of oil contaminants, unsafe speeds and conservation destruction, so did many others two hundred years ago.

5. THE MINUTE MAN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

People come from all over the world to visit this very place. If you have time to explore the park, be sure to start at the Minute Man National Historical Park Visitor's Center. You will also notice Hawthorne's inscription on the Daniel Chester French Minuteman Statue:

By the rude bridge that arched the floor,

Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,

Here once the embattled farmers stood,

And fired the shot heard around the world.

The Park Service's North Bridge Visitor's Center, which was built in 1911, is on the left of the river, past the bridge.

6. FLINT'S BRIDGE (MONUMENT STREET)

People come from all over the world to visit this historic place. If you have time to explore the park, be sure to start at the Minute Man National Historical Park Visitor's Center. The Center, built in 1911, is on the left of the river, past the bridge.



7. BOUNDARY OF GREAT MEADOWS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Just 1.2 miles from Egg Rock, your boat will enter the large conservation land known as the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. This land has been carefully protected since it was first purchased in 1928 by Samuel Hoar and later generously donated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1944. Hoar worked extensively to preserve the natural habitat. He constructed dikes throughout the marshes to protect the waterfowl's habitat, a goal that we are still working on today. Thanks to Hoar's and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's work, you may spot or hear several waterfowl species throughout the Great Meadows portion of the Concord River. These native birds are especially prevalent throughout the spring and fall.

8. GREAT MEADOWS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE LANDING

Half a mile from the boundary of the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, you will spy a landing next to a small beach with a Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge sign. Hidden on the other side of dense vegetation is a breathtaking view of the Great Meadows. There are 2.5 miles of trails through the meadows and woods which can be a nice addition to paddling the river.

Thoreau took advantage of the wonder of the Great Meadows, where he enjoyed picking the pickerelweed and cardinal flowers.

9. CONCORD IMPOUNDMENTS

The Concord Impoundments are home to many species of wildlife, including river otters, mink, muskrats, and white tailed deer. The two impoundments are each enclosed with a man-made dike in order to control the water level. The impoundments are similar to lakes, but are drained into the Concord River in the summertime to allow the growth of vegetation that will provide food in the fall for migrating waterfowl. The drawdown of the impoundments provides ideal feeding grounds for shorebirds. These species make the impoundments a popular spot for bird watchers. The Northern Harrier uses the impoundments as hunting ground. Blanding's turtles live most of the year in the impoundments and nest in nearby lands. Waterfowl, including mallards and wood ducks, nest here. Several species of marshbirds, including rails and bitterns, are found in the cattails within the impoundments. Many species of amphibians and reptiles are active during the warmer months.

Visitors to the impoundments in July might see the invasive purple loosestrife plant or water chestnut. These plants are detrimental to the river's wildlife habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working to decrease the growth of these plants.

10. BALL'S HILL

Ball's Hill will soon approach on your left, half a mile downstream from the Great Meadows landing. William Brewster purchased this land in 1891 and built a cabin on the southeast slope. When Benjamin Ball left this hill to fight in the Battle of Bunker Hill, he lost his life in the battle and never returned.

Additionally, this hill held importance for the Nipmuck Native Americans. Thousands of the Nipmuck's stone weapons were discovered here, as well as at other sites along the river banks. The high elevation of the hill allowed the Nipmucks to avoid much of the spring flooding.

11. BEAVER DAM

As your boat continues to gently glide through the calm current of this river portion, be sure to look for beaver dams. If you are lucky, you may see a heron perched atop the dam or Painted turtles resting around the sides. Beavers live all along the river, but they are spotted more frequently closer to the Great Meadows Lake.

12. CARLISLE-BEDFORD BRIDGE (END)

Access Point: The Bedford Boat Ramp is just downstream of the bridge on the right bank, with ample parking and vehicle access to Rte. 225. The Carlisle Road Bridge (Route 225) has been reconstructed many times since Thoreau's era when the bridge was held up by wooden piers. The bridge marks the boundary between Carlisle and Bedford — the original bridge was built from the left by the Town of Carlisle and from the right by the Town of Bedford.

Just beyond the Carlisle-Bedford Bridge, the Concord River opens out to what seems like a whole new river. This part of the river is very popular for boating and fishing. Because the river is a bit wider, motorized boats and sometimes jet skis use the river. Speed limit for all boats is 10 miles per hour so they should not be disruptive to any wildlife or paddlers.

Waterfowl hunting is allowed within Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge from this point north to the Carlisle-Billerica town line during certain weeks in the fall. Buoys in the river mark the boundaries for hunting.



TRIP 2. ROUTE 225 TO FAULKNER DAM IN BILLERICA

The River becomes quite wide in this section and is popular for boating, birding and fishing. Great Blue Heron can be seen along the shores as they stalk their prey, while painted turtles sun on exposed logs. This is a peaceful section of the river. As you enter Billerica there will be a bit more development, and even a chance to stop for a meal at a riverside restaurant. After taking your boat off the river, be sure to visit the Middlesex canal Museum to learn about the early industrial history of the area, and get a look at the old dam.

12. CARLISLE-BEDFORD BRIDGE (START)

Access Point: The Bedford Boat Ramp is just downstream of the bridge on the right bank, with ample parking and vehicle access to Rte. 225. The Carlisle Road Bridge (Route 225) has been reconstructed many times since Thoreau's era when the bridge was held up by wooden piers. The bridge marks the boundary between Carlisle and Bedford — the original bridge was built from the left by the Town of Carlisle and from the right by the Town of Bedford.

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13. TWO BROTHERS ROCK

Just after the bridge, you can paddle up to the famous Two Brothers Rock on the right shore. Governor John Winthrop and Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley used these stones to mark their property boundaries in 1638. The men had many differing views but always worked hard to find a common ground. Thus, to many, the rocks represent a place of genuine collaboration between adversaries. Two Brothers Rock is located on the Great Meadows NWR and is now part of an historic district.

14. ROUTE 4 NASHUA ROAD BILLERICA

Access Point: On the left side just upstream of the bridge, you'll find the Billerica Motorsports and Marine's boat ramp and dock. It is possible to launch a boat here for a small fee. Just next door is a restaurant which is a fun spot for a quick meal along the way. On the opposite (east) side of the river, Great Meadows NWR has a small parking area. Plans are underway to create another small access area at the sewer pump station just across the street.

The Route 4 Bridge marks a slightly more urbanized section of the Concord River.

15. RESIDENTIAL BEACHES

This portion of the Concord River is characterized by residential homes and many man-made beaches on both banks. Between the Route 4 and Route 3 bridges is a small island of Andover granite bedrock, which was once the northernmost part of an ancient lake formed by glacial ice that dammed the valley.

16. ROUTE 3 BRIDGE

The Route 3 Bridge ends the portion of the Concord, Assabet and Sudbury rivers protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. This Act protects designated segments of the three rivers and their "outstanding resources." The Route 3 Bridge was built near the Old Middlesex Turnpike Bridge, which has since been demolished. You'll notice the old stone bridge abutments just after the Route 3 Bridge.

There is also a small trail into the woods near the bridge, which provides a relaxing walk.

17. JUG ISLAND

Thoreau named this island "Jug Island" and also "Grape Island" at one point because of its abundant grapes vines. He documented the island in his journals and characterized it as a "fine densely wooded island surrounded by deep water and overrun by grapevines, which looked like a mass of verdure and of flowers cast upon the waves." The island is now owned by Sudbury Valley Trustees and is permanently protected.

18. RIVER STREET BRIDGE

The reconstruction of the River Street Bridge was completed in August of 2006. You may spot some bur-reed or bulrush reeds here, although these plants are often out competed by the invasive purple loosestrife. Thoreau wrote, "Now we coasted along some shallow shore by the edge of a dense palisade of bulrushes, which straightly bounded the water as if a clipt by art..."



19. ROUTES 3A AND 129 BILLERICA

Access Point: The Route 3A Bridge in Billerica has a convenient boat access on the right bank downstream of the bridge at Contribution Park, a popular spot for fishing.

With only 1.3 miles left before the Middlesex Canal and Faulkner Dam, make sure to take advantage of your time on the river and notice the power that the gentle flow of the Concord has in bringing a sense of relaxation. If you have at least one more boat next to you, you can recreate Bartlett's "floats." Simply store your paddles inside your boats, tie or hold your boats together, and lie back as you let the water drift your canoes and let your mind drift your thoughts.

20. BILLERICA HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

Just before a bend in the river, you'll notice a structure left over from the Billerica Water Filtration Plant, now owned by the Highway and Recreation departments. A new plant has been built across from the Billerica Prison. The town of Billerica draws its public drinking water supply from the Concord River.

21. POLLARD STREET BRIDGE

You'll notice the water gaining speed as you move under the Pollard Street Bridge. Enjoy this unusual current, but be careful as you carve through the granodiorite igneous rocks scattered about just beyond the bridge.

22. FORDWAY BAR

As your boat cruises around the rocks, you'll soon come to a larger island in the middle of the river called Fordway Bar.

Back in 1902 the State legislature voted down a bill to authorize the Harbor and Land Commissioners to spend \$25,000 to cut out and remove the Fordway Bar. As you can see, the bar is still intact today.

23. MIDDLESEX CANAL (END)

Access Point: There are commercial parking lots bordering the river on both sides off Faulkner Street, just before the Middlesex Canal. The lots on your left are the easier place to take your boat out of the river. As your boat nears the Canal you will see a bay to your right blanketed with water chestnut plants. These invasive aquatic weeds degrade the ecology of the river and efforts are underway to control them.

The 27-mile Middlesex Canal connecting the Merrimack River with Boston crossed the Concord River in Billerica. It opened to barges in 1802 and closed completely in 1860. The Middlesex Canal Museum Visitor's Center is just across the street from the canal, open every Saturday and Sunday from 12:00 to 4:00pm (www.middlesexcanal.org). This is the last stop on the Boater's Trail!

