



Kiski - Conemaugh Water Trail

Lower Section

Blairsville-to-Freeport

River Miles: 48

Map & Guide

Water trails are recreational corridors 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 resources stewardship. Explore this unique Pennsylvania water trail. This section of a two-map guide focuses on the river from Blairsville to Freeport.

For your safety and enjoyment:

- Always wear a life jacket.
- Obtain proper instruction in boating skills.
- Know fishing and boating regulations.
- Be prepared for river hazards.
- Carry proper equipment.



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES



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FLOATING THE KISKI-CONEMAUGH RIVER

The ability to paddle the Kiski-Conemaugh varies throughout the year. Peak water flow occurs from February through May. In July and August, the river may be below desired levels and some sections may be quite rocky. Float speed is approximately 2 to 3 miles per hour – but a good rain will affect float speed and the ability to paddle any section.

This section of the river features several dramatic character changes. The Conemaugh River Lake provides 8,954 acres of flatwater. Use caution when planning trips, as the Conemaugh Dam is not portagable. The lake twists under century-old stone arch railroad bridges that now bear the West Penn

Trail. Below the Dam, the Tunnelview Historic Site access takes paddlers to Saltsburg on relatively flat water. The Kiskiminetas begins where the Loyalhanna Creek joins the Conemaugh. Deep pools just past Avonmore give way to riffles and waves as the gorge narrows closer to Apollo.

Stream flow can change rapidly creating potentially unsafe conditions. Check weather, precipitation, and local outfitters to plan accordingly. For current water levels, do a search for "Tunnelton USGS Gauge" or "Vandergrift USGS Gauge" on the internet. The suggested minimum at both Tunnelton and Vandergrift is 640 cfs or 3 feet.

The Kiski-Conemaugh Rivers are an important part of the Pittsburgh-to-Harrisburg Main Line Canal Greenway™, a 320 mile corridor of heritage sites, hub communities and outdoor recreation opportunities that is "Making New Connections Between Old Neighbors™." The Greenway follows the route of the historic canal system, and you will find remnants of this little-known transportation corridor during your float.



RIVER, CANAL, AND RAIL TOWNS

This Kiskiminetas Valley is punctuated by several river towns on both sides of the river, with stretches of open space and wooded hillsides in between. These towns flourished during the Main Line Canal-era, and from the industrial development associated with the Pennsylvania Railroad-era that followed. Here's a snapshot of the tales the towns can tell:

Saltsburg (River Miles 28-27)

The town of Saltsburg grew as a result of - and was named for - its role in the salt industry from 1798 to as late as the 1890s. The town is now a hub for the West Penn and Westmoreland Heritage trails and features a Canal Park walkway interpreting the role of the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal in the town's development.

Apollo (River Miles 14-13)

Apollo was originally known as Warren, or "Warren's Sleeping Place", for 1730s Native American trader Edward Warren, although local legend credits the name to a mythical Native American chief allegedly buried there. Canal remnants and coal mining artifacts can be found along the mountain biking, hiking, and rail trails of the nearby Roaring Run Recreation Area.

Vandergrift (River Miles 12-9)

Visit Vandergrift and experience the different look and feel of this Frederick Law Olmsted model industrial town. Vandergrift founder George G. McMurdy wanted to create an industrial community that would be "something better than the best" and in so doing created the first worker owned community in America. The community is working to recapture its original eco-friendly, sustainable plan.

Leechburg (River Miles 6-5)

Young engineer David Leech established his namesake community in 1827 when he secured a contract to construct a dam and lock on the canal. Leech went on to build four homes, the first school, and a grist mill. Between Leechburg's Riverfront Park and boat launch, you'll find an alley way, houses, and buildings reminiscent of an 1800's river town commerce area.

Freeport (River Mile 0)

Although originally known as Todds-town, Freeport got its current name when founding brothers William and David Todd declared that no dockage fee would be required of rafts, boats and other rivercraft landing here. This jewel of a town now enjoys a Riverfront Park and boat launch for larger craft to access the Allegheny.



OUTFITTERS AND VISITOR INFORMATION

Camping opportunities in this corridor are currently minimal, but developing. Several outfitters are available to help plan and implement your trip according to paddling experience, water levels and equipment needs.

Saltsburg River and Trail	(724) 639-1314	www.rivtrail.com
Northwest Kayak and Canoe Rentals	(724) 697-5280	www.northwestkayakandcanoe.com
The River's Edge	(724) 845-9501	www.the-rivers-edge.com

For additional visitor services information, including bed and breakfasts and other lodging options in the corridor:

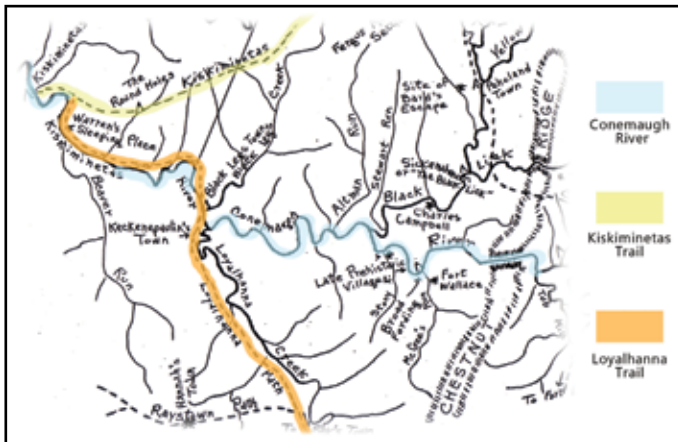
Indiana County Tourist Bureau	(724) 463-7505	www.visitindianacountypa.org
Armstrong County Tourist Bureau	(724) 543-4003	www.armstrongcounty.com
Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau	(724) 238-5661	www.laurelhighlands.org
Visit Pittsburgh	(412) 281-7711	www.visitpittsburgh.com

NATURAL AND HISTORIC FEATURES

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Native heritage is reflected in several place names: Conemaugh – derived from conunmoch, meaning “otter”; Kiskiminitas – from geischgumanito, has been interpreted as “make daylight” from gischgu (“day”) and ma-nit-toon (“to make”) or, from kee-ak-kshee-man-nit-toos, “cut spirit,” from gischkschummen (“cut with a knife”), and manitto (“spirit”).

The Monongahela were pre-historic people known to the area, particularly around Blairsville. Later, the Senecas, Delaware, and Shawnee were prominent. An extensive network of trails, paths, and villages paralleled and crossed the rivers. The Kuskusky Path, or Loyalhanna Trail, crossed what is now Westmoreland County and then traveled north to join the Kiskiminitas Trail near Apollo. Then it was on to the Kittanning Trail, the major thoroughfare.



The Main Line Canal figured prominently in community development along this corridor. Although visible remnants are rare, river and trail users can find remnants on river right:

Mile 26	Blacklegs Creek Aqueduct	West Penn Trail
Mile 19	Revetment wall & Flat Run towpath bridge	Roaring Run Trail
Mile 16	Guard Lock #2	Roaring Run Trail



Photo: Dan Cappo

FLORA AND FAUNA

Biodiversity has rebounded with river restoration, including the return of some species many conservationists thought they'd never again see.

Canada geese, mallard and wood ducks, and Baltimore and orchard orioles are abundant in the river system, along with songbirds like the Louisiana waterthrush and woodthrush. Eastern kingbirds like to nest in the trees near the Avonmore canoe launch. Occasionally, paddlers can see green or great blue heron and osprey. Bald eagle sightings are increasing in the Kiski Valley.

Paw-Paw, oak, maple, hemlock, and sycamore trees are found in the Valley, along with mountain laurel and rhododendron. Springtime blooms are best seen in April and early May. Along some of its trails, the Roaring Run Recreation Area boasts an amazing trillium display.

Fish the Conemaugh River Lake to land largemouth bass, pan fish and the occasional musky or northern pike. Below the dam, catch walleye, perch, trout, carp, catfish, pan fish, and several bass species. A smallmouth bass habitat exists in the deep pools near Avonmore.

SUPPORT THE WORK OF ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERS!

As you enjoy the scenic and recreational amenities of the Kiski and Conemaugh Rivers, keep in mind that decades of work by environmental conservationists made that possible. Once among the Commonwealth's most polluted, some paddlers may remember when not that long ago, these rivers literally ran red.

The rivers have improved. Thanks to the work of the **Kiski-Conemaugh Stream Team**, we know how much. The Stream Team monitors water quality at sites throughout the entire Kiski-Conemaugh Basin. Hundreds of volunteers gather samples that are analyzed by the Department of Environmental Protection and used to document the effectiveness of abandoned mine drainage treatment systems and other river improvement efforts. **Natural Biodiversity** works to restore a healthy riparian buffer by tackling invasive plant species like Japanese Knotweed, multiflora rose, and garlic mustard.

To learn more about watershed associations, conservation districts and other conservation groups, visit www.conemaughvalleyconservancy.org

BOATING AND PADDLING SAFETY TIPS

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY: DIAL 911

- 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 boating.
- If you capsize, hold on to 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 a forecast before you go. Sudden winds and rain 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 waterway section 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 secure.
- Never tie a rope to yourself or to another boater, especially a child.
- If you collide with an obstruction in a kayak, lean toward it. This will usually prevent 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.

PRIVATE LAND

Plan and make stops on shorelines open to the public. Respect the privacy and rights of landowners by obtaining permission before entering any privately owned land. Avoid loud behavior and making loud noises. Remember that sound carries across water much more clearly than on land. Share the same courtesy that you would want others to provide. A friendly wave or quiet greeting is always welcome.



Photo: Melissa Reckner



PA BOATING REGULATIONS

- One wearable, Coast Guard-approved life jacket (personal flotation device or PFD) in serviceable condition and of the appropriate size is required for each person in your boat. If your boat is 16 feet or longer, one throwable device (seat cushion or ring buoy) is required. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.
- 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.
- All boats must display an anchor light (a white light visible for 360°) when at anchor between sunset and sunrise. Boats can use a lantern or clip-on battery-powered unit to meet this requirement.
- All powered boats must show running lights between sunset and sunrise. Between sunset and sunrise, unpowered boats must carry a white light (visible for 360°), installed or portable, ready to be displayed in time to avoid a collision.
- All motorboats are required to carry a sound-producing mechanical device audible for a half-mile. Athletic whistles meet this requirement.
- All motorboats must be registered, regardless of where they launch.
- Unpowered boats using Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission access areas must either be registered OR display a valid launch permit. Launch permits can be purchased on the web at www.fishandboat.com. Click on "Permits & Forms" and then "Boat Registration."
- Operating watercraft, including canoes, kayaks and rafts, under the influence of alcohol or drugs is illegal. The law is strongly enforced for user safety. For further information on boating regulations, contact the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission at www.fishandboat.com.

STEWARDSHIP

Help care for the land, water and cultural resources along the Kiski-Conemaugh Water Trail by respecting wildlife, nature and other people. "Leave No Trace," a national outdoor ethics program, provides some guidelines to minimize your impact. For more information about "Leave No Trace" outdoor ethics, visit www.lnt.org.

Leave no trace for camping and day use:

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.