



Kiski - Conemaugh Water Trail

Lower Section
Blairsville-to-Freeport
River Miles: 48

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. The Kiski-Conemaugh is located in southwestern Pennsylvania, and flows along the borders of Somerset, Cambria, Westmoreland, Indiana, and Armstrong Counties into the Allegheny River north of Pittsburgh. 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.



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Pittsburgh-To-Harrisburg Main Line Canal
GREENWAY™

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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 portable. 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



The Kiskiminetas 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.

AVONMORE (RIVER MILES 24-20)

You may recognize Avonmore from the 2012 movie, Promised Land. It was the main setting for the film’s rural town of “McKinley.” Hollywood aside, Avonmore history dates back to before the Revolutionary War. The area’s first European settler, Stephen Rinebolt, settled here around 1732, eventually drawing more families from his native Holland to this “plain by the river.”

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. McMurty, 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:

Pasternak Primitive Campground	(724) 388-2123	Avonmore, PA
The River’s Edge Canoe and Kayak	(724) 845-9501	www.the-rivers-edge.com
Saltsburg Kayak and Canoe Outfitters	(724) 252-8520	www.saltsburgkayak.com
Two Dam Kayak Rentals	(724) 541-7447	www.twodamkayakrentals.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
Experience Armstrong	(724) 543-4003	www.armstrongcounty.com
GO Laurel Highlands	(724) 238-5661	www.golaurelhighlands.com
Visit Pittsburgh	(412) 281-7711	www.visitpittsburgh.com

SUPPORT THE WORK OF ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERS!

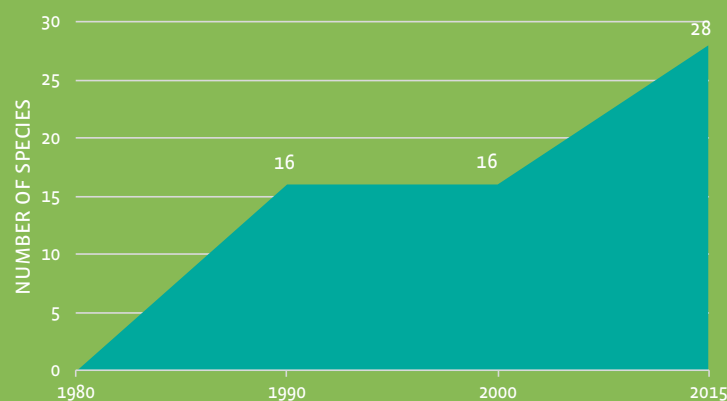
YOU CAN BE PART OF A SUCCESS STORY

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.

COMMUNITY SHIFT

In 2017, the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy published a State of the Kiski-Conemaugh Watershed Report that summarized exactly how much these rivers have progressed since the 1999 River Conservation Plan. In 1980, when the PA Department of Environmental Resources (now DEP) surveyed fish in the Kiski, they found no fish, just one frog. When that survey was repeated in 2015 by the PA Fish and Boat Commission, 386 individuals of 28 species were collected, including pollution-sensitive species like mooneye and brook silverside!

KISKIMINETAS RIVER SPECIES COLLECTED

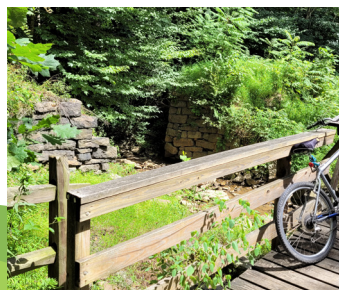


Meanwhile watershed associations – true heroes of western PA – struggle to attract volunteers and leaders. Often with 30+ year legacies, these and other conservation groups are STILL doing fantastic work to enhancing our quality of life. Find them. Celebrate them. Support them.

To learn more about stewardship organizations and find Community Shift: The State of the Kiski-Conemaugh Watershed Report, visit: conemaughvalleyconservancy.org

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

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



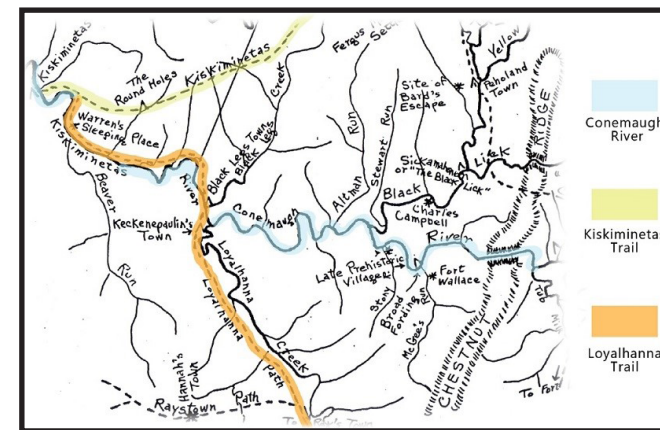
Canal remnants along the Roaring Run Trail

NATURAL AND HISTORIC FEATURES

Native heritage is reflected in several place names: Conemaugh – derived from conunmoch, meaning “otter”; Kiskiminetas – from geischgumanito, has been interpreted as “make daylight” from gisch-gu (“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 Kiskiminetas Trail near Apollo. Then it was on to the Kittanning Trail, the major thoroughfare.

NATIVE AMERICAN TRAIL MAP



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, along with songbirds like the Louisiana waterthrush and woodthrush. Green or great blue heron, osprey are present, and bald eagle sightings are increasing.
- Paw-Paw, oak, maple, hemlock, and sycamore trees are found in the Valley, along with mountain laurel and rhododendron. Roaring Run Recreation Area boasts an amazing trillium display.
- Largemouth bass, pan fish are common, as well as the occasional musky or northern pike. Below the Conemaugh Dam, catch walleye, perch, trout, carp, catfish, pan fish, and several bass species. A smallmouth bass habitat exists in the deep pools near Avonmore.

SAFETY AND STEWARDSHIP

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.

RECREATION

For more on recreation and heritage in the corridor, see our Kiski-Conemaugh Water Trail Interactive Web Maps at: <http://mainlinecanalgreenway.org/experiencing-the-greenway/traveling-by-boat/>

For more on the area's regional bike trail system go to: <http://www.transalleghenytrails.com/>

PA BOATING REGULATIONS

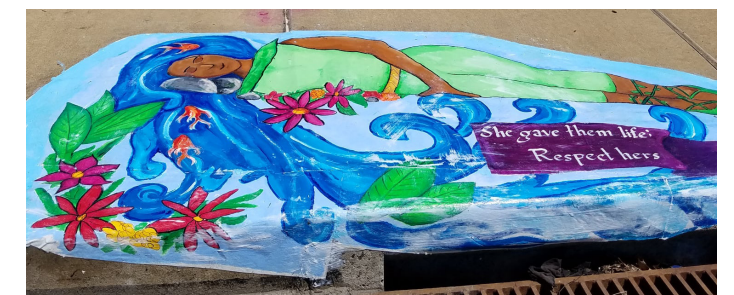
- One wearable, Coast Guard-approved life jacket (personal flotation device or PFD) in serviceable condition and of the appropriate size is required for each person in your boat.
- Life jackets must be worn by all children 12 years old and younger on all boats 20 feet or less in length while under way, and on all canoes and kayaks. Others are strongly encouraged to wear a PFD at all times on the water.
- 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.
- 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

Care for the resources along the Kiski-Conemaugh Water Trail by respecting wildlife, nature and other people. “Leave No Trace,” a national outdoor ethics program, provides guidelines to minimize your impact. Visit www.lnt.org.

Leave no trace for camping and day use:

- Plan and prepare.
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
- Dispose of waste properly.
- Leave what you find.
- Minimize campfires.
- Respect wildlife.
- Be considerate of other visitors.



Storm drain art, cr: Apollo Ridge Education Foundation



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