

Trail Guide



Waterway Trail Notes

The Musconetcong River is described below in four segments beginning at the Lubbers Run confluence in Byram Township and ending at Bloomsbury. The river above the Lubbers Run confluence is not recommended for paddlers due to lack of public access, and there is just not enough water there to make it worthwhile. Similarly, the stretch of river from Bloomsbury to the Delaware River is not included in this guide due to lack of public access and the number of dams and difficult portages. The MWA and other organizations are exploring a long-term multiple dam removal project in this section of the river, check the MWA website for updates.

While it is not possible – within the limitations of a trail guide – to describe every rapid and bend found along the river, a detailed mile-by-mile description of the entire Musconetcong River may be obtained from the Musconetcong Watershed Association for a nominal fee.

Since there are many public access points along the Musconetcong, it is possible to plan a variety of shorter or longer river trips (figure about 3 miles per hour for normal paddling conditions).

International Scale of Difficulty

The following are general classifications adapted from the American Whitewater Affiliation's *International Scale of Difficulty*. Be aware that a specific river segment classification may change with different flow conditions and other factors. Under normal flow conditions the Musconetcong River is primarily Class I and II. However, discreet areas of Class III and Class III can be encountered, and there are areas of flatwater above most dams.

Class I: Fast moving water with riffles and small waves, and few or no obstructions – all obvious and easily missed. Self-rescue is easy.

Class II: Straightforward rapids with wide, clear channels that are obvious without scouting. Medium size waves and rocks are easily missed by trained paddlers. Group assistance for "swimmers", while helpful, is seldom needed.

Class III: Rapids with moderate, irregular waves, which may be difficult to avoid and are capable of swamping an open canoe. Complex maneuvers in fast current and narrow passages requiring good boat control frequently exist. Group assistance may be needed to avoid long swims.

Class IV-VI: Advanced whitewater classifications require advanced whitewater equipment and paddling skills, including reliable Eskimo roll, and experienced river rescue skills.

Please note that the terms "riverleft" and "river-right" assume a view of the river that faces downstream.

Waterway Trails

Brookside Park to Saxton Falls (6.67 miles)

Launch Site: Brookside Park (Byram Township) located at the Musconetcong River/Lubbers Run confluence next to Rt. 604 Bridge, about a 45 yard carry from parking lot to put-in. There is adequate parking here.
Take-out: Easy take-out on river right just above the Saxton Falls dam. Plentiful parking, pit toilets.
Degree of Difficulty: Flatwater up to Class II (+)

Highlights:

This uppermost stretch of the river begins with a mile of Class II rapids – including one particularly hazardous area – and ends in the long sluggish dam pool above Saxton Falls. Less experienced paddlers may launch at Brookside Park and paddle under the bridge and head upstream on Lubbers Run (which offers about one mile of pretty flatwater), or put-in at the International Road Bridge which is below the hazardous area. There are also access points to the flatwater dam pools above Waterloo Village and Saxton Falls.

Outstanding features along this stretch of river include Waterloo Village – a restored canal and mill village that is open to the public (entrance fee required). The dam pool above Waterloo Village offers a great view of Allamuchy Mountain. Both dam pools above Waterloo and Saxton Falls contain extensive wetlands and excellent birding opportunities. The Morris Canal merged with the river at Waterloo Village and a portion of the canal and the remains of an incline plane can be seen at the second dam portage. The terminal moraine of the Wisconsin Glacier crossed the river here. Glacial deposits of sand and gravel are mined at the enormous quarry complex that parallels the Morris County side of the river from just below Waterloo and Rt. 80 all the way to Saxton Falls.

Hazards:

About 0.82 miles downstream of the Brookside put-in is a steep drop across a series of rocky ledges. There is little chance to scout or portage at this point. Approach this at the center and then hard towards the right. Immediately after the ledges the river bends sharply to the right and flows under an abandoned bridge that has only a 2-foot clearance (extremely dangerous during high water). Paddle strongly to the right side where there is an eady pool that offers the opportunity to scout (there is a high likelihood for strainers at the bridge). This can be scouted by locating the easy to find trail off of the main road. There are two dams at Waterloo Village, but both are fairly easy to portage. Take out on river-left at the first dam, and river-right at the second dam at Waterloo Village. After passing under Rt. 80, be on the lookout for strainers along the sand and gravel quarry.

Saxton Falls to Hackettstown Fish & Wildlife Access (5.6 miles)

Launch Site: Just below Saxton Falls Dam, boats can be slid or carried down a steep bank.
Not the best put-in, but there are pit toilets and ample parking.
Take-out: Fish and Wildlife access below Schooleys Mountain Avenue bridge and 1/10 mile below overhead power line.
Degree of Difficulty: Class I and II(+)

Highlights:

Most of this stretch of river is suitable only for those paddlers who can comfortably negotiate Class II (+) rapids. There are steep drops of 2-3 feet, and areas of narrow rocky passages and swift currents. The upper portion of this river segment passes through Stevens State Park and offers splendid mountain scenery. There are toilets available and a restored lime kiln can be seen next to the park office (river left). A walking trail follows the river for some distance on river left. In contrast to the pretty scenery found along the first 3 miles of this section, the river scenery deteriorates as the river flows through Hackettstown. There is much residential and commercial development perched next to the river here.

Hazards:

The first half of this river segment features Class II (+) rapids with some narrow boulder-strewn channels (beware of strainers). Below Stevens State Park Bridge a series of steep drops must be approached with caution. There are two dams that require fairly easy portages, both on river-left. The East Avenue Bridge (second bridge after the second dam) has extremely low clearance even during low flows. Approach with care. A similar condition exists at the Mountain Ave. Bridge.

Beattystown to Hampton Borough Park (12.0 miles)

Launch Site: Immediately below the Kings Highway Road Bridge on river left, parking for 4 or 5 vehicles.
Take-out: Hampton Borough Park, portable toilet available, and ample parking.
Degree of Difficulty: Class I and II

Highlights:

This segment features a few brief stretch of Class II rapids (especially in Point Mountain Park and between Changelwater and Hampton) which require good boat handling skills to successfully navigate. Less skilled paddlers can avoid the Class II waters by launching at Point Mountain Road Bridge and taking out at the Fish & Wildlife access in Changelwater (just above the bridge on river right). This segment is jam-packed with historic structures and places, and outstanding scenery is found in several secluded natural areas. Three hamlets (Beattystown, New Hampton, and Inlaydale) are listed on the National Historic Register, as are the Stephensburg Stone Arch Bridge, the New Hampton Pony Truss Bridge, and the Miller Farmstead. Several other structures are deemed eligible for the National Register.

Hazards:

The Penwell Mill dam (the only intact dam in this river segment) requires portage (river right a few yards above the dam). However there are several broken down dams and fishing weirs that require careful scouting and navigation, especially between Changelwater and Hampton. A small partially submerged steel girder dam in Butler Park should be approached with care. Under normal flow conditions these dams can usually be safely navigated after careful scouting.

Hampton Borough Park to Bloomsbury (9 miles)

Launch Site: Hampton Borough Park (Ample parking and toilet facilities available)
Take-out: Bloomsbury, river-right above the Rt. 173 bridge and just below Rt. 78 overpass.
Degree of Difficulty: Class I

Highlights:

From Hampton Park to Asbury the river flows closer to the center of the valley, offering sweeping views of the mostly agricultural landscape. This is the most suitable river segment for those who have limited river-paddling experience because there are few rocky riffles to navigate. The river below Asbury is exceptionally scenic and secluded, with no roads and few buildings to be seen. Here the river is mostly bordered by private land (including private fishing and hunting clubs) so there are limited opportunities to get out of the boat without trespassing. The privately owned Musky Trout Hatchery is on river right.

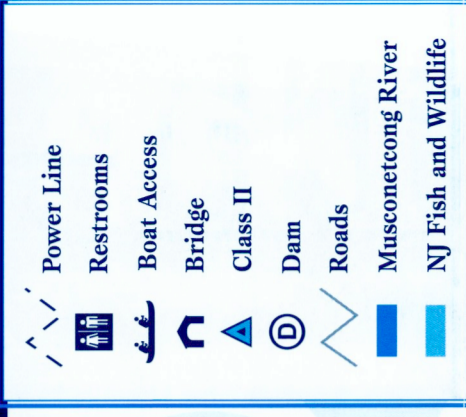
Hazards:

The Asbury dam requires a river-right portage on a steep grassy bank. Carry across the road and put-in just below the Asbury Grist Mill (also on river right). The mill is owned by the Musconetcong Watershed Association, as is the property immediately above the dam on river right. There are 5 fishing weirs (dams built by private fishing clubs) between the Wolverson Road Bridge and Bloomsbury. Some of these have a drop of 2-3 feet, but each has an open chute that can be navigated with relative ease. The openings in the fishing weirs tend to be near the center. Scout carefully before proceeding, making sure that a proper boat angle has been set.



The Waterway Trail Guide was produced by the Musconetcong Watershed Association (MWA), a non-profit citizens group based in Asbury, New Jersey. Funding was provided by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection – Office of Natural Lands Management through a Federal Recreational Trails Program Grant. The guide was produced by former MWA Executive Director John Brunner with assistance from volunteer paddlers Joe Pytko, Chris Nielsen and Linda Straus.

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- Power Line
- Restrooms
- Boat Access
- Bridge
- Class II
- Dam
- Roads
- Musconetcong River
- NJ Fish and Wildlife



Important Contact Information

- Musconetcong Watershed Association908-537-7060
www.musconetcong.org
- New Jersey Fish and Wildlife908-637-4125
www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw
- New Jersey DEP Pollution Hotline877-warn dep
www.state.nj.us/dep/warndep.htm
- New Jersey State Chapter of Trout Unlimited
www.njtu.org
- Delaware Valley Division – American Canoe Association
www.dvdata.org
- Mohawk Canoe Club
www.mohawkanoeclub.org
- Hunterdon County Canoe Club
www.hunterdoncountycanoecub.org
- Appalachian Mountain Club – Paddlers
www.paddlenow.com
- Delaware River Basin Commission
www.state.nj.us/drbc