

BLACKSTONE RIVER & CANAL GUIDE

Valley Falls to Pratt Dam – Beginner Tours, Rhode Island



Level Beginner

Start / End . . Central Falls, RI

River Miles . . Approx. 2 miles to Pratt Dam; 4 miles roundtrip

Time 1-2 hours

Description . Flatwater

Scenery . . . Marsh / Wetlands, Mills

Portages . . . None

Explore Rhode Island's Largest Freshwater Marsh

Put-in at Central Falls Landing on Madeira Ave. off of Broad St. in Central Falls, RI. Paddlers can travel all the way up to Pratt Dam (approximately 2 miles) or explore several little coves of Lonsdale Marsh. Park at Central Falls Landing for put-in and take out.

In 1812 Isaac Wilkinson built the Valley Falls Turnpike from Pawtucket to Lonsdale to ship goods from the mill in Valley Falls to market. This was the earliest bridge to cross the Blackstone in the area and made Valley Falls an important transportation center.

Across the bridge in Cumberland is the Valley Falls Heritage Park, built amid the ruins of the Valley Falls Company Mill complex. For over one hundred years a massive mill operated here but was demolished in 1934. In 1991, the Town of Cumberland and the Heritage Corridor transformed the property into an historical park to tell the story of the Valley Falls Company.

Just upriver from the Landing on river right is the Cadillac Textile Mill. This mill was in operation as a textile mill until 1985. Notice the saw-tooth design of the roof. They are fairly common in the Valley and are built oriented to the north. This provides a steady source of sunlight without glare, which is necessary for quality weaving.

The Lonsdale Marsh is the largest fresh-water marsh in Rhode Island and was created by the flooding caused by the Valley Falls Dam. The marsh is an important stopping point for migrating birds on one of the great northeast flyways, and each spring several breeds of waterfowl use the marsh for their nesting grounds. You can paddle around the Marsh or head upriver.

Once the Lonsdale Drive-In, a portion of the Lonsdale Marsh was recently restored through a partnership between state and federal agencies. The bikeway runs along the edge of the property, and the original Drive-In sign locates access, just off of John Street.

If you continue paddling upriver you will pass under Mendon Rd. and eventually reach the Pratt Dam where the Blackstone River Bikeway crosses the River between Lincoln and Cumberland, RI.

Return to Central Falls Landing to explore more Valley Falls history.

For more information about this part of the Blackstone River, pick up a *Valley Falls Walking Tour* or *Central Falls Driving Tour brochure* at the Visitor Center in Pawtucket, RI.

Related River Tours: *Blackstone River State Park to Pratt Dam Intermediate River Tour.*

Directions to Central Falls Landing:

From Route 295

- Take Exit 11 to Route 114.
- Follow Route 114 SOUTH to Valley Falls.
- Turn RIGHT onto Mill Street
- Turn RIGHT onto Broad Street.
- Just over the bridge take a RIGHT onto Madeira Avenue.
- Central Falls Landing is the first RIGHT turn.

From Route 95

- Take Exit 30 to East Street/Central Falls
- Follow signs along Roosevelt Avenue to Central Falls
- Turn RIGHT onto Charles Street.
- Turn RIGHT at Broad Street
- Proceed on Broad Street for approximately 1 mile
- Just before crossing over the bridge, turn LEFT onto Madeira Avenue.
- Central Falls Landing is the first RIGHT turn.

THE BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY GENERAL INFORMATION

Water in the Blackstone River drops 450 feet in its 46 mile journey from Worcester, MA to Pawtucket, RI, and eventually empties into the Narragansett Bay in Providence. It runs through urban areas, historic mill villages, past farmland and through forests, inviting paddlers to explore the physical remnants of its heritage including canal locks and mill structures. Dropping an average of ten feet per mile, it is interwoven with canal segments and flows over 18 dams. While noted for its industrial heritage, the river also offers many great recreational opportunities for flat water and quick water paddling.

The industrial history of the Blackstone Valley can be attributed to the power of the Blackstone River. While in most places the river is narrow and shallow, the power of its water flow should never be taken for granted. During times of heavy rain or major snow melt, the water level of the river will rise quickly, significantly increasing its speed and presenting new obstacles for paddlers. In high water, strainers or sweepers are common along the banks of the Blackstone and require the paddler's full attention. All levels of paddlers need to respect the power of the river and be aware that the water flow can fluctuate wildly over a short period of time, quickly creating challenging conditions. **Please wear a Personal Flotation Device (PFD) at all times when paddling the Blackstone River.** Paddlers should check the water level, weather, and river conditions prior to every trip. For more information on this see the "Contacts" section. Enjoy discovering why the Blackstone River was once called "America's Hardest Working River."



Blackstone River Tours

The Water Trail Tours are divided into different paddling skill levels and provide information to river users to help plan their trip on the Blackstone River. Tour information will allow you to determine the skill level required, the approximate amount of time needed to complete the trip, location of dams and other obstacles requiring portages, the location of facilities, and some information about the various natural and historic features. References in the text of the tours to "river right" and "river left" refer to the paddler's orientation facing downriver.

Portages

Portages are listed at the beginning of each tour. Required portages, such as dams, rapids and canal/river loops are noted on the map and in the accompanying text. Be aware: there are currently no warnings of approaching dams, and they are not always obvious from upstream. There are currently 18 dams along the River and most tours involve a portage.

Be prepared for a "wet portage". Rubber soled shoes that can get wet are a must for any paddling trip on the Blackstone River. Getting in and out of your boat in water and mud is part of every trip.

Assume that all land bordering the river is private property. Therefore, please be courteous and show respect for these lands. Portage quickly; do not loiter. Help foster a spirit of cooperation between riverfront landowners and recreational paddlers.

Trip Times

Many variables influence the amount of time required to paddle a mile of river. Water conditions exert the greatest influence, while wind, weather and the paddler's approach – athletic or leisurely – will all have an influence on the travel time. Most paddlers can expect to paddle approximately three miles per hour on a typical late spring day with minimal wind. Additional time is needed for portaging.

Contacts

For current water levels on the Blackstone River, go to the website: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ma/nwis/current/?type=flow>

At the Northbridge, MA gauge, any reading above 5 feet should be considered high water. At the Woonsocket, RI gauge, any reading above 2500 cfs should be considered high water.

For more information about the Blackstone River

John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor
One Depot Square, Woonsocket, RI 02895
401.762-0250
www.nps.gov/blac/home.htm
www.zaptheblackstone.org

In Rhode Island:

Rhode Island Canoe and Kayak Association
www.ricka.org

Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
401.724.2200, www.tourblackstone.com

John H. Chafee

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

National Heritage Corridor Commission

