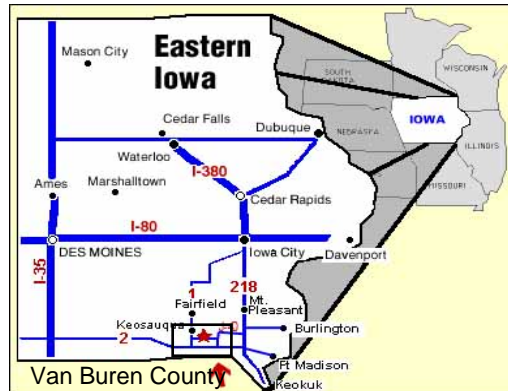


The Van Buren County Water Trail traverses forty one miles of the Des Moines River Valley thru the Villages of Van Buren from Selma to Farmington. Rest stops and access points vary from five to eight miles. This stretch of the river is a nature lovers paradise. The average drop thru the length of the trail is three and a half feet per mile resulting in a gentle flow with no major rapids except at the Village of Bonaparte over the old dam. If you are canoeing or kayaking, it is a possible one day trip, however, a much more leisurely trip is two days with a stopover for rest overnight at the village of Keosauqua or Bentonsport. During the typical summer day the flow rate is three to four miles per hour. History lovers will enjoy the many historic locations along the Trail. Check the kiosk at each Village for detailed information on the history of the Villages, overnight accommodations, sources for food, groceries, and other supplies. Overnight camping facilities are available at several locations.

Water levels on the river can vary dramatically throughout the season. Spring and early summer water levels can sometimes be at flood level or higher. During these periods the river carries dangerous amounts of driftwood and debris. Large snags imbedded in the stream bed can create hazards to boaters of all types. During these periods of flooding even highly experienced boaters should stay off the river. During the late summer and fall season the water levels can be extremely low. You may find areas where it is necessary to wade and drag your boat for short distances. Use common sense and good judgment in your decision to use the river.

The Trail in Wintertime offers opportunities for cross country skiing, snowmobiling, hiking, and ice skating. Bird watching is also a favorite pastime. During cold weather, large groups of bald eagles congregate along certain stretches of the river. Canada geese and several species of gulls use the river as a food source. The woodlands along the river are home to many species of winter birds. Use extreme caution crossing long stretches of ice. Be certain that the ice thickness is adequate for the activity you are anticipating. If in doubt, stay on the bank!

The Van Buren County Water Trail is part of the 400 mile long Des Moines River Water Trail that runs from Estherville to the Mississippi River. For more visuals and a complete list of access points, see www.desmoinesriver.org.



Access points, parks, and campgrounds along the Water Trail are provided and maintained by the Van Buren County Conservation Board, The Van Buren County Trails Assoc, and the individual villages.

Funds for the construction of this Water Trail were provided in part by the Iowa Department of Transportation thru the Federal Recreational Trails Program of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.

Explore the Lower Des Moines



A GUIDE TO THE VAN BUREN COUNTY WATER TRAIL



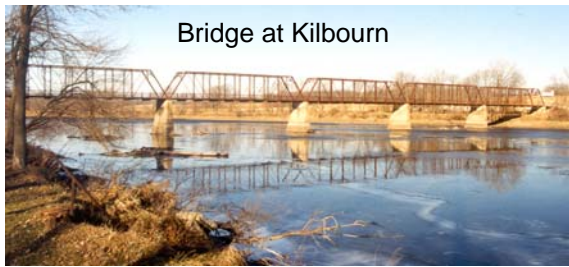


- Selma:** Shidepoke Boat Access, Kiosk, Restroom
- Leando-Douds:** Boat Access, Kiosk, Water, Food
- Austin Park:** Boat Access, Camping, Restroom, Water, Kiosk, Shelter
- Keosauqua:** Boat Access, Restroom, Water, Food, Kiosk, Camping, Hotel/ B&B, Cabins
- Bentonsport:** Boat Access, Restroom, Water, Food, Kiosk, Camping, B&Bs, Shelter
- Bonaparte:** Boat Access, Restroom, Water, Food, Kiosk, B&B
- Farmington:** Boat Access, Restroom, Water, Food, Kiosk, Camping, Cabins, Shelter

PLEASE! RESPECT PRIVATE PROPERTY.
MUCH OF THE RIVER BANK ABOVE THE HIGH WATER MARK IS PRIVATE PROPERTY. PUBLIC PROPERTY ALONG THE WATER IS USUALLY CLEARLY MARKED, i.e.; ACCESS AREAS, CAMPGROUNDS, AND PARKS.
HELP PROTECT OUR RIVER. WHAT YOU CARRY IN – CARRY OUT.
DON'T BE A LITTERBUG. PLEASE USE THE PROVIDED SANITARY FACILITIES.

From Ralph Arnold's River Narration:

We will put our canoes in the water at the Shidepoke boat ramp on the right bank of the river a few feet above the Selma bridge. Van Buren County stretches a little over a mile upstream to the Davis County line. We'll float for about four miles before we come to the twin cities of Douds/Leando. Douds is on the left, and the larger of the two. It was once the coal mining capital of the county and is now home to the largest underground limestone mine in the State of Iowa. The oldest Bank in the county is here. On the right side is Leando, who's only claim to fame was once being called Portland, and Portland, Oregon was named after it. We will pass the opening to the Douds Stone Quarry, and you can see the operation of the above ground business with pile after pile of crushed rock. We will travel about five miles more through farm land with fishermen cabins along the rivers edge, until we come to the cluster of houses called Kilbourn. Kilbourn, first named Philadelphia, before the railroad came along, was once the post office for Birmingham. In 1858, the village was renamed after an important railroad man. It was a bustling thriving village long ago.



There were all kinds of businesses here, even a tanning yard. It's here that Lick Creek joins the Des Moines on the left bank. The river's back waters in the creek is a fisherman's dream. We will float under a condemned bridge, and slowly enter the curve of the

Big Bend. We'll pass Austin Park on the right, a place to camp and fish. Also here is the "Church Tree" where the first church service west of the Des Moines was held in 1835, with the congregation sitting on the ground.

Shortly, we come upon the town of Pittsburg on the right bank. The large red brick house facing the river above the bridge is the house Phil Stong (the author of "State Fair") was born in. The other brick house along the highway is the oldest house in town.

Maybe a mile below the bridge, is a place where the river falls two feet in a short stretch. It is known as the rapids in the Des Moines, not the Des Moines Rapids. They are in the Mississippi River.

On the right bank of the river is a sign proclaiming this site as Ely's Ford and Mormon's Crossing. A few Mormons did ford the river here, but most of them crossed the river at Pittsburg where the bottom is bedrock.

As we begin to make the curve of the Big Bend we will float by the line of Indian burial mounds known as the Mounds of the Monks. Some people think the Des Moines River was named after them.



In a short while we will be in Keosauqua (which is an Indian word for "big bend in the river") where we can find food, drink, and lodging. This is the County Seat and the Courthouse, built in 1840, is the second oldest continuously used original Courthouse in the nation.

As we head down river, we pass a rock wall that was once a part of a dam here, and also a pile of rubble that is left from the grist mill that exploded. We will float over the foundation logs of two dams here. We can only see them if the water is low.

After about 7 miles, we come to the charming villages of Vernon and Bentonsport. Here you will find restrooms, water, camping, and lodging.



Bentonsport is on the left. Dock your canoe at the ramp and get ready for an interesting hour or two. Here you will find a beautiful Rose Garden, the historic Mason House Inn, a blacksmith and pottery shop, and other quaint and unique shops and museums. This is the only community in Van Buren County with two useable bridges – one for cars and one for walking.

All too soon we will have to leave to float on down the river. After 5 miles, you can tie up your canoe at Bonaparte and explore the village that is a "Main Street U.S.A.". Here you will find food and drink and many unique shops. In the river, near the city park, you will notice rippled water and maybe a rock rapids (depending on the depth of the river). This is caused by the rock dams that once stood here.



7 miles to go and the end of our journey is in site. On the left is Farmington. We can take our canoes out of the water on the left. You can find food, drink, and camping here.



800-868-7822 www.villagesofvanburen.com

The Villages of Van Buren consists of Birmingham, Bentonsport, Bonaparte, Cantril, Douds, Farmington, Keosauqua, Milton, Mt. Sterling, Selma and Stockport.... all historical communities located within Van Buren County in Southeast Iowa. visitors say that life here moves at a slightly different pace. Visitors and locals alike enjoy taking a relaxing drive or walk through our beautiful woodland areas, or having a quiet picnic in one of our many parks. We have no fast food restaurants and no stoplights to alter the ambience that our county prides itself on. The peace and tranquility of small town life offers you the opportunity to enjoy the seasons to the fullest. We invite you to come experience the Villages of Van Buren.....a world left untouched by time.



Van Buren County Parks along the River:

Shidepoke Access – West of Selma. Boat Access.

Austin Park – 2 miles NE of Pittsburg, on river. Camping, electricity, shelter, water, primitive toilets, boat access.

Lacey-Keosauqua – 1 mile SW of Keosauqua. Camping, electricity, water, showers, restrooms, hiking, trails, lodge, cabins, shelters, lake, boat access in Keosauqua.

Bentonsport – Camping E of Bentonsport, on river. Electricity, picnic table & fire ring on each site. Water and restrooms nearby. Boat access on W side of town. Public hunting & hiking.

Des Moines River Access – 4 miles SE of Bonaparte (south side). Primitive camping, boat ramp.

Canoeing the Des Moines

River Mileage: Total 41 miles

Selma to Douds: 6 Miles

Douds to Austin Park: 8 Miles

Austin Park to Keosauqua: 8 Miles

Keosauqua to Bentonsport: 7 Miles

Bentonsport to Bonaparte: 5 Miles

Bonaparte to Des Moines River Access:
4 Miles

Des Moines River Access to Farmington:
3 Miles



Boating at Bentonsport in 1910

Fishing along the Water Trail:

During certain periods of the season, the Des Moines River can offer excellent opportunities for fishing. Channel cat, bass, carp, perch, and other species are frequently taken. During the spring, on raising water levels, spoonbill are taken by snagging, particularly along the South bank opposite the Village of Bonaparte. The fall season also offers good catches of walleye.



BE BOAT SMART!



IOWA BOATING LAWS REQUIRE:

- Proper Registration for the vessel
 - Carrying the registration with you
 - Life Jackets or other approved PFD
- TO CHECK THIS AND OTHER REGULATIONS FOR YOUR SAFETY, OBTAIN A COPY OF THE BROCHURE "IOWA BOATING REGULATIONS"
- KNOW HOW TO SWIM
 - KNOW YOUR ABILITY
 - WEAR PROPER CLOTHING
 - KNOW THE RIVER
 - RESPECT THE RIVER
 - LEAVE A PLAN OF TRIP WITH SOMEONE
 - APPROACH ALL DOCKS, PIERS, LOGS, ETC. FROM DOWNSTREAM, NEVER APPROACH WITH THE CURRENT

•River depth and flow speed varies depending on discharge rate from Red Rock Dam.