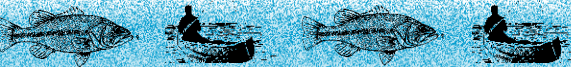


Wapsipinicon River Water Trail

Buchanan County, Iowa



The Wapsipinicon River

A Natural Resource Gem

The Wapsipinicon River is a natural resource gem in the rural landscape of Eastern Iowa, and is affectionately known locally as “the Wapsi”. The river corridor in Buchanan County is famous for its quality backwater wetlands and associated woodland habitat, and as such is listed as a Protected Water Area (PWA). The wooded corridor provides the bulk of wildlife habitat and quality fishing for Buchanan and several other Northeast Iowa counties. In addressing qualities for designating the Wapsi as a Protected Water Area, the Iowa DNR stated, "The Wapsipinicon River has the longest continuous stretch of natural and scenic river corridor in [the area], and quite possibly in the entire state." The Wapsi is the prominent natural feature in Buchanan County, with many public areas. Call 319-636-2617 for more information about public lands along the Wapsi.

Wapsi Folklore

There are several stories about how the Wapsipinicon got its name. A common story has the young Indian maiden named *Wapsi* and the son of an Indian chief named *Pinicon* canoeing on the river on the eve of their wedding day. The jealous *Fleet Foot* sneaks along the shoreline, and shoots Pinicon through the heart. As Wapsi jumps to the aid of Pinicon, the canoe overturns, and the two lovers drown in the swift current. To commemorate the sad event, the Indians combined the names and called the river Wapsipinicon. Other stories portray a more Romeo and Juliet theme, and in some stories Wapsi is the man and Pinicon is the woman.

The actual name of the river probably has nothing to do with Native American folklore. The literal translation of the Indian name is *White Potato River* or *Swan Apple River*, referring to the Jerusalem artichoke plants that grow along the river bank.



Jerusalem artichoke

River Routes

(for access amenities, see map on back)

Cutshall Area to Independence

You will begin your float among publicly protected lands in the wooded corridor of the river. For the first river mile, all the land on your left, and most the land on your right, are public property - watch for signs.

Be prepared to portage around a logjam or two. If a portage is necessary, watch for poison ivy and nettles along the riverbank.

The section of river from **Cutshall** to Littleton is less traveled, and your trip should be both peaceful and beautiful. Water levels are lower than the stretches downstream, and you may need to get out and walk your canoe during dryer times. You will see warning signs as you approach the **Littleton Dam**. **You must portage!** The portage is on the left side of the river, and is signed.

Cabins around Littleton soon give way to the wooded corridor. The confluence of the Little Wapsi makes for a wider stretch of river, and less likelihood of logjams or low water.

People looking for a shorter trip may want to put in at **Otterville** – about a two-hour canoe trip to Independence, dependent on water conditions. The trip from Otterville includes an increasing number of cabins, homes, and boats.

If you wish to take out at **Wapsi Access**, you need to turn sharply left as you enter the suddenly wide reservoir above Independence. Paddle toward the road and homes that are visible far to the east. The Wapsi Access boat ramp is on the left. If you wish to proceed to the **Bathing Beach**, make your way southeast, past the railroad bridge, and look for the boat ramp on your left. You may encounter power boats and jet skis – be careful.

There is no portage around the Independence Dams. You will need to take

out and arrange a shuttle to proceed. Consider spending some time in Independence. The town has many parks, restaurants, shops, museums, a movie theatre, and more. Call 319-334-7178 for information on things to do in Independence. Camping is available in Independence (319-334-6711) or in nearby county parks (319-636-2617).

Independence to Quasqueton

You can choose to begin your trip from Independence at either **Knott's Landing** or **Three Elms Area**. The trip to Quasqueton is the most popular canoeing stretch of the river.

As you leave Independence, the landscape is flat, and dominated by silver maple and basswood. Oak-covered hillsides increasingly border the river as you proceed, and reach their peak downstream from the **Iron Bridge Access**. In fall, the colors are spectacular.

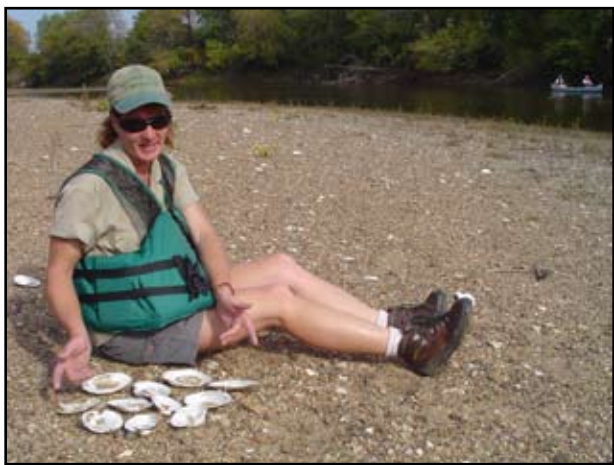
Plan for a good day-long trip from Independence to Quasqueton. Take time to rest on the numerous sand bars, and to explore the many areas of fine fishing. Shorter trip options are available by making the Iron Bridge Access a put-in or take-out point.

About half-way between the Iron Bridge Access and the Quasqueton Campground you will see a sign for **Boies Bend Area**. Beach the boats and take a walk up the steps to the picnic ground and latrine. A little more than a mile down from Boies Bend is the Frank Lloyd Wright House (Walter Home) at **Cedar Rock**. Look left for the boat house on the river. The historic home can be seen through the trees. Tours can be arranged by calling Cedar Rock in advance of your trip (319-934-3572). There are no picnic or restroom facilities at Cedar Rock.



Walter Boat House at Cedar Rock

From Cedar Rock, it is a short paddle to the **Quasqueton Campground**. Homes and cabins line the right side of the river ahead of the boat ramp and campground. You must take out at the campground. To continue down river, plan to carry your canoe and gear about 300 yards to the put-in under the Highway W35 Bridge. Quasqueton offers opportunities to eat, purchase goods, and camp. The Cedar Rock Visitors Center is two miles northwest of Quasqueton.



Clam shells, fossils, and interesting rocks can be found on most of the river's many sandbars.

Quasqueton to Troy Mills Access

You will begin your trip from Quasqueton at the city access under the Highway 35 Bridge. This stretch of river is wide. There are no portages, and the chance of logjams is almost zero. You will not encounter any bridges to gauge your trip, and there are no shorter trip options. Near the beginning of the float, and again about halfway down river, you will encounter electric highlines crossing the river.

This is the least traveled section of the Water Trail, and is often a very peaceful trip. There are many sandbars. Public lands border the river as you near the end of the float. The Water Trail ends at the Troy Mills Access. Between the two sections of this county-managed public area are two privately owned cabins. As you pass these cabins, there is a fork in the river. Paddle through the larger channel on the left. The shoreline has riprap leading to the Troy Mills Access boat ramp on the left riverbank.

Minnesota

Wisconsin



Map of Northeast Iowa

Buchanan County is located in the heart of Northeast Iowa, and contains a large stretch of the Wapsipinicon River. In addition to Buchanan County (shown in green), Bremer and Black Hawk Counties (yellow) also provide information on the Wapsipinicon River Water Trail. For more information on these stretches, call 319-266-6813 (Black Hawk) or 319-882-4742 (Bremer).

Wapsipinicon River Water Trail

Buchanan County, Iowa

Made possible through the efforts of the following agencies and organizations

- Iowa DNR Water Trails Access Program
- Buchanan County Four Season Trails Association
- Buchanan County Conservation Board
- Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development, Inc., www.northeastiowarcd.org

Contact Information

County Areas and Accesses

- Buchanan County Conservation Board
- 319-636-2617, bccbdan@iowatelecom.net

State Areas and Accesses

- Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- Conservation Officer, 563-920-0566
- Cedar Rock, 319-934-3572

City Areas, Accesses, and Tourism

- Independence Parks and Recreation, 319-334-6711
- City of Quasqueton, 319-934-3340
- Independence Chamber of Commerce
- 319-334-7178, www.indycommerce.com
- Buchanan County Tourism
- 319-334-3439, www.growbuchanan.com
- Northeast Iowa Tourism, www.visitiowa.org





Photo courtesy of Kip Ladage

Safety on the River

Safety is a key part of an enjoyable trip on the river. Although the Wapsi is generally a safe and easy river to navigate, there are some things to know.

Be sure to **wear life jackets**. Accidents happen, even in shallow water. Other safety apparel includes: **footwear** to guard against walking on sharp rocks and other objects; **clothing** that will protect against rain, sun, or cold weather; **sunscreen**; **sunglasses** and/or a **hat**. Pack a **first aid kit** – just in case.

Dams present hazards which should not be ignored. Locations of dams are shown on the water trail map. When you see a sign for a dam, be ready to get off the river. In the rare case that a sign is missing, keep a watchful eye for a portage path or take-out point upstream from a dam. **Circulating current** immediately downstream from a dam presents a potentially deadly hazard. Keep your distance.

Following periods of heavy rain or snowmelt, the **Wapsi gets wild**. Do not attempt to canoe the river when it is quickly rising, or is at or near flood stage.

While navigating the river in a canoe, watch for rocks and logs just below the surface. The safe path through these obstacles often can be found by looking for a “V”- shaped current that marks the best water flow between objects.

Pay attention to the riverbank. Most stretches of river have a “cutbank” side where the current is eroding the riverbank, and a “deposition” side where sand and silt are being deposited. You may want to keep to the cutbank side where there is less of a chance of getting stuck on the sand or mud. However, you should be careful not to take the cutbank route if the current is moving quickly into a fallen tree, logjam, or rock pile. In these cases, **walk or carry** the canoe safely along the shallows or sandbars.

If you happen to tip a canoe and become swamped, stay on the upstream side of the canoe and walk it to shore or calm shallows before getting back in. Never position yourself in the water between a canoe and a downstream obstacle. **A canoe can exert a lot of force** as it is swept into an object.



Fish and Wildlife

The Wapsipinicon River as it flows through Buchanan County provides some of the best fishing in Iowa. Some of the more sought after fish include walleye, northern pike, smallmouth and largemouth bass, crappie, bluegill, and channel catfish. The length limit on all bass is 12 inches.



A Wapsi walleye

Willows occupy areas around the sandbars, and oaks are more common on the higher hills and bluffs. October is a great time for a fall colors trip.

Watchable wildlife abound in and along the river. Bird life is spectacular. Great blue herons and kingfishers often usher paddlers as they float downstream. Bald eagles also use the river. They can be seen perched as they watch the water for fish, or soaring over the treeline. At least two confirmed eagle nests exist along the Wapsi in Buchanan County. In 2007, the north half of the Wapsi corridor in Buchanan County was designated a Bird Conservation Area, noting the diversity of bird species.

On sunny days, turtles and other reptiles are commonly seen basking on logs and boulders. Most common are painted turtles, but softshell and snapping turtles also are likely to be seen. Frogs and toads also can be seen along the shoreline, and can be heard singing from wetlands in the river corridor.

Beaver, muskrat, and an occasional river otter are among the mammals found swimming in the Wapsi. Deer, groundhogs, mink, raccoon, and other mammals may be spotted along the shoreline. Look for tracks during sandbar rest stops.

Hundreds of species make the Wapsi their home. To the right is a fun checklist of some notable animals. How many can you see?

Forests and forested wetlands border the vast majority of the river corridor. Dozens of tree species thrive in these forests. Silver maple is the dominant tree along the river bottomland.

Buchanan County Wapsipinicon River Water Trail Checklist

Mammals

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White-tailed deer | <input type="checkbox"/> Woodchuck |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beaver | <input type="checkbox"/> Muskrat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Raccoon (track) | <input type="checkbox"/> Bats |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fox squirrel | <input type="checkbox"/> River otter |

Birds

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bald eagle | <input type="checkbox"/> Kingfisher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Great blue heron | <input type="checkbox"/> Goldfinch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Green heron | <input type="checkbox"/> Killdeer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bank swallow | <input type="checkbox"/> Canada goose |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pileated woodpecker | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood duck |

Reptiles and Amphibians

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Painted turtle | <input type="checkbox"/> Tadpoles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water snake | <input type="checkbox"/> Frog or toad |

Fish

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bass | <input type="checkbox"/> Minnows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crappie or bluegill | <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Pike |

Insects/invertebrates

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mosquito | <input type="checkbox"/> Water beetle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dragonfly | <input type="checkbox"/> Butterfly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spider web | <input type="checkbox"/> Leech |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clam (alive) | <input type="checkbox"/> Crayfish |

Other

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frog songs | <input type="checkbox"/> Rain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fog or mist | <input type="checkbox"/> People fishing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animal tracks | <input type="checkbox"/> A wet person |

Photo courtesy of Kip Ladage



Wapsipinicon River Water Trail - Buchanan County

