

Cedar River Paddling Trips
Otranto, through Charles City, to Janesville
Canoes, Kayaks, and SUPs
Charles City Chamber of Commerce

Paddle the Cedar

In addition to the whitewater course in Charles City, the Cedar River consistently provides good flat-water paddling in the area. Striking scenery in some stretches, frequent wildlife sightings, great fishing opportunities, and interesting water offer wonderful days on the river. Because the Cedar is one of the largest rivers in the area, even in dry weather, water levels are often more acceptable than on smaller streams.

The first name of the river was Red Cedar (Moshkwahwakwah), given by the Sauk and Fox Indians because of the large number of red cedar trees in the area. Even today, a variety of tree species line the banks in many places.

Gradient of the river is nearly six feet per mile in the upper section and about three feet per mile in the lower reaches. Depending on your experience level and equipment, water level, your interest in paddling hard or barely paddling, weather, and other factors, it is reasonable to plan two to four or more miles per hour for your trip.

Fishing in this area of the river is excellent. Small mouth bass, rock bass, walleye and northern pike are found in the upper region. Channel catfish are found closer to Charles City. Many of the access points have good shore fishing spots, and the whitewater kayak course improvements in Charles City have greatly enhanced the fishing in that vicinity.

Four dams impound the river from the Minnesota border to Mitchell, but the river flows freely from Mitchell to Charles City. Below Charles City, the only dams are at Nashua and Waverly. The clear water of the Cedar follows along wooded bluffs and limestone outcroppings in some areas and through serene countryside in others. The streambed is sand, limestone or gravel. Many springs and small tributaries bring in more fresh water.

Water levels and weather

The United States Geological Survey website provides flow rates in cubic feet per second (cfs) and water levels for Charles City at waterdata.usgs.gov/ia/nwis/uv?site_no=05457700. This site has links to the upstream gauge at Osage and downstream gauges at Waverly and Janesville, as well as a link to river forecast information from the National Weather Service.

A minimum of 200 cfs is preferable for adequate water levels, with 400 - 600 a better range.

Weather forecasts specific to the area can be found at forecast.weather.gov by keying in the zip code for Charles City, 50616.

Accesses and Mileages

The following information and associated maps cover about 50 miles both upstream and downstream from Charles City. References at the end contain additional information useful for planning a river trip. The first access, at Otranto Park, is only a few miles south of the border with Minnesota.

Otranto Park (6.6 miles to Acorn Park)

E edge Otranto

1233 480th St, St. Ansgar, IA, 50472

Mitchell County

(portage dam on left)

GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.458242,-92.97915

Put in at Otranto on the east bank below the dam. Just below the County Road 105 bridge, Deer Creek enters the river from the right and Turtle Creek from the left. The dam is about two miles below the bridge and can be portaged on the left bank.

The Acorn Park Dam is actually a broken dam, and experienced paddlers may be able to paddle through by following the river around the dam on the right, then cutting back to the left and shooting through. This is a fast water area, so it is advised to stop on the upriver side and take a look over the top of the broken dam at the water conditions before paddling through. There is little margin for error here. There is a 100-year-old dumpsite in the river just before the point where you would cut back to the left. Normally the metal is underwater, but low water levels bring a lot of it above the surface. This may be the most fun and dangerous part of the river!

Acorn Park (2.8 miles to Halvorson Park)

1 mi NW St. Ansgar

1426 Hwy 105 St Ansgar, IA 50472

Mitchell County

(portage dam on right)

GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.388574,-92.938811

The unusual name of St Ansgar, which means "God's Spear," honors the French Saint who brought Christianity to the Scandinavian countries.

It is necessary to carry around the St. Ansgar dam. The best portage is on the right bank about 50 yards above the dam.

Halvorson Park (4.7 miles to Interstate Park)

1 mi S St. Ansgar

40801 Foothill Ave., St. Ansgar, IA 50472

Mitchell County

(portage dam on left)

GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.356685,-92.925215

Halvorson County Park has camping, a boat ramp and swimming facilities. The Interstate Power dam at Mitchell impounds the river for the next section to Mitchell. The portage around the dam, about 100 yards, is on the left bank, starting close to the power house and ending just above the Mitchell Bridge.

The fish habitat becomes more lake-like in this vicinity and anglers will find largemouth bass, crappie and northern pike.

Interstate Park (1 mile to Bennett Access)

W edge Mitchell

650 West Commercial, Mitchell, IA 50461
Mitchell County
(portage dam on left)
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.319134,-92.879648

The powerhouse at the dam is on the site of an early flour mill built in 1856. The millstone from this old mill has been built into the powerhouse wall, and the keystone of the power house is from the old Paragon Woolen Mill built around 1865. The area is now a county conservation area with camping and picnic tables available.

Bennett Access (2.7 miles to Highway 9 Bridge)
1 mi SE Mitchell
3791 River Road, Osage, IA 50461
Mitchell County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.30228,-92.871666

About a mile below the access is Iron Springs, located on the left at the base of a heavily timbered bluff. At the Falk Wildlife Area on the right, a scenic bluff rises, wooded with limestone cliffs. The river has a lot of riffles until the Highway 9 access.

Highway 9 Bridge (1.9 miles to Osage Spring Park)
1 mi W Osage on Hwy 9
Mitchell County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.28395372212963,-92.85249710083008

More small cliffs appear in this section with limestone outcroppings in some areas. There is a fish riffle across the river just before the takeout at Osage Spring Park that can be crossed at the extreme right bank.

Osage Spring Park (2.9 miles to Road T38 Access)
1 mi W 1/2 mi S Osage
3540 Spring Park Rd, Osage, IA 50461
Mitchell County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.275409,-92.849622

At the beginning of this section, the river is shallow and rock riffles are frequent. At the Sunny Brae Country Club, a low pontoon footbridge crosses the river and may require a short carry, depending on water level. Caution is advised because it is a sweeper hazard. Below this is a scenic stretch of the river, with deeper water and faster current. The shoreline is heavily timbered.

Road T38 Access (10.1 miles to Idlewild Park Access)
1 mi S Osage
3358 Lance Ave., Osage, IA 50461
Mitchell County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.253006,-92.811759

The river deepens and picks up speed below the Road T38 access. Spring Creek joins the river on the left and Rock Creek on the right before the next bridge.

Idlewild Park Access (5.6 miles to Rotary Park Access)

2 mi N Floyd

1374 Quarry Rd, Floyd, IA 50471

Floyd County

GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.1633388,-92.75409209999998

For the next 3.5 miles downstream to the Highway 218 bridge at Floyd, there is good fishing water and the river scenery is picturesque. The character of the river changes about two miles below Floyd as it leaves limestone rock country and enters wide flood plain. Deer are a common sight along the banks.

Rotary Park Access (6.6 miles to Charles City Dock)

2 mi E 1 mi S , 1 mi W Floyd

Off Rotary Park Road, Charles City, IA 50616

Floyd County

GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.116428915878465,-92.70654201507568

This is an especially good area to see wildlife activity, with several eagles, beaver, green and blue herons, and other species living near the river. The take-out is on the right above the Main Street Dam in Charles City. The dam can be portaged on the right, putting in just across Main Street and going through the whitewater course or carrying about a quarter of a mile down.

Charles City Dock (.1 mile to Charles City WhiteWater)

Downtown Charles City, upriver from dam and whitewater course, near courthouse

S Jackson St. Charles City, IA 50616

Floyd County

GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.06631693141129,-92.6811146736145

This landing is next to a large concrete parking lot and within easy walking distance of restaurants (one with a deck overlooking the river), a coffee shop, convenience store, and other shops. A grocery store is not far away, within walking distance. The whitewater course is just downriver, with Riverfront Park along river left. Riverfront Park includes a disc golf course, amphitheater, play area, labyrinth (all free). Nearby are the Mooney Art Collection at the public library with works by Rembrandt, Picasso, Grant Wood, Salvador Dali and others (no admission fee), outstanding museum with displays tracing history of gasoline powered tractors and replication of a drug store, art center in Carnegie Library building, girlhood home of suffragette Carrie Chapman Catt, art deco Charles Theatre (\$2 admission, \$1 children and seniors) and a public art walking tour.

Charles City WhiteWater (10 miles to Howard Woods Recreation Area)

End of whitewater course

Downtown Charles City, IA 50616

Floyd County

GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 43.03.902,-92.40.676. (If you are entering the course location into a GPS by address, the best location to put in is 700 Riverside Drive, Charles City, IA 50616.)

In addition to kayaks, canoes and SUPs (stand-up paddle boards), the whitewater course is popular with tubers and swimmers. Use of the course is free. A fish passageway along river left offers quieter

water that flat-water paddlers may be interested in using. Scouting of the course is highly recommended before planning to paddle through it.

Below Charles City, the Cedar winds its way to Cedar Lake, a 200-acre impoundment created by the dam at Nashua. The first access below Charles City is the Howard Woods Recreation Area located on the east bank of the Nashua impoundment.

Howard Woods Recreation Area (2.5 miles to Nashua Access)

2 mi NW Nashua
2555 Addison Ave., Nashua, IA 50658
Chickasaw County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 42.983259,-92.56122

Howard Woods is a 20 acre area with hiking, river fishing, primitive camping, shelter and woodland.

Nashua Access (6.1 miles to Pearl Rock)

E edge Nashua
Cedar Lake Park, Nashua, IA 50658
Chickasaw County
(portage dam on left)
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 42.95638,-92.535427

Take out above the dam on river left and carry across the street and down to the river. Some amenities are within walking distance.

Pearl Rock (6.5 miles to North Cedar Park)

2.5 miles SE of Nashua
1072 305th St, Nashua IA 50658, off Highway 218
Chickasaw County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 42.910715,-92.543001

Small parking lot will accommodate only a couple of vehicles.

North Cedar Park (8.3 miles to Cedar Bend Park)

1 mi E Plainfield
1163 140th St, Plainfield, IA 50666
Bremer County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 42.849516,-92.522648

With 130 acres of land, the park has a campground, well for drinking water, flush toilets, pit latrine, showers, more than two miles of trails that wind throughout the park, a picnic and playground area, sand volleyball court, horseshoe pit and shelter with electricity. A recycling shed is available to reduce items that go to the landfill.

North Cedar Wildlife Area (98 acres) borders North Cedar Park on the west side. The area includes timber and old river oxbows. It is open to hunting, fishing, hiking.

Cedar Bend Park (4.2 miles to Three Rivers Park)

1.5 mi NW Waverly
Cedar Bend Drive off 205th St., Waverly, IA 50677
Bremer County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 42.760425,-92.493585

Cedar Bend Park, the largest park in Bremer County, consisting of 180 acres, more than four miles of trails through forests, fields, and along the river's edge, as well as three picnic and playground areas, three sand volleyball courts and horseshoe pits. Two shelters with electricity, flush toilets, and shower facilities are also available. A recycling shed is also available to reduce items going to the landfill.

Three Rivers Park (1.3 miles to Kohlman Park)
N edge Waverly
1000 Adams Parkway NW, Waverly, IA 50677
Bremer County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 42.73722,-92.469794

Three Rivers Park has a double boat ramp and a boat dock. It is adjacent to the Waverly Light and Power Duck Pond area, which is popular for hiking and fishing.

Kohlmann Park (1.1 miles to Brookwood Park)
101 1st St. NW, Waverly, IA 50677
Bremer County
(portage dam on right)
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 42.726601,-92.47203

Although this park does not have an official access, it is the most commonly-used takeout to portage the dam. The park is fouthwo blocks long along the Cedar River. It has a play unit, swings, recreational trail, 2 small shelters, modern restroom, and some of the best fishing and views of the inflatable dam. This park, as well as Brookwood Park, are in the heart of the downtown area and close to many amenities including an outfitter, Crowdaddy Outdoors, at 207 East Bremer Avenue (crowdaddyoutdoors.com).

Brookwood Park (10.1 miles to Janesville City Park)
415 6th Ave. SE, Waverly, IA 50677
Bremer County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 42.720963,-92.464754

Brookwood Park is a large area along the river south of the Green Bridge, and it includes a disc golf course, mature trees, open space and an undeveloped area with walking trails to the east along the river.

Below Waverly, the river is rocky in nature with a short stretch of sandy bottom before it reaches Janesville where it again becomes rocky.

Janesville City Park
Near the intersection of Main St and 2nd St, Janesville, IA 50647
Bremer County
GPS coordinates, latitude, longitude: 42.6460934,-92.4629637

Takeout will be on river left. A few miles downstream, the West Fork and Shell Rock rivers flow into the Cedar. In earlier times, Native Americans gathered at the confluence called Turkey Foot Forks, where the three rivers meet.

References

Iowa Conservation Commission, *Iowa Canoe Trips*, undated and out of print

Iowa Department of Natural Resources, *Iowa Canoe Guide*, undated and out of print

Nate Hoogeveen, *Paddling Iowa, 96 Great Trips by Canoe and Kayak*, 2004

Nate Hoogeveen, *Paddling Iowa, 128 Outstanding Journeys by Canoe and Kayak*, Way Revised, 2012

ccwhitewater.com -- Charles City course, river and event info

charlescitychamber.com -- Community info, business listings

charlescity365.com -- Community info and movie listings

iowadnr.gov -- information about river accesses on an interactive map

mapmyrun.com -- site designed for runners that may give useful information for river trips

mycountyparks.com -- information on county parks listed by county with maps and directions

waverlyia.com/leisureservices/parks/information -- information on Brookwood Park and Three Rivers Park in Waverly