

CEDAR VALLEY PADDLERS TRAIL



Vern Fish

BLACK HAWK COUNTY

PADDLING AND PORTAGING: LAKES, WETLANDS, AND RIVER

Getting ready for a wilderness canoe trip? You would be hard-pressed to find a better water trail in Iowa to brush up on the necessary skills.

The Cedar Valley Paddlers Trail (CVPT) is a 10-mile water and portage trail connecting the lakes of George Wyth State Park, the Hartman Reserve Nature Center, and the Cedar River. One main loop augmented by smaller offshoot sections offers options to lengthen or shorten your route. Paddlers can choose to park and put-in at most accesses. The CVPT includes open water lakes also used by motorboats, smaller electric-motor-only lakes, isolated portage-in lakes, vegetated wetlands, and a stretch of one of Iowa's major interior rivers.

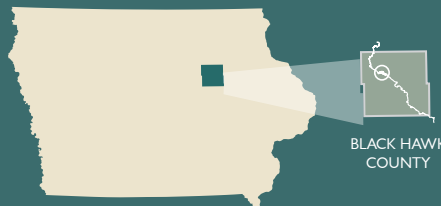


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Portage site at Alice Wyth Access

Portages on the CVPT are clearly marked by bright blue signage.

Be alert for hazards. Check water levels when planning your trip. The Cedar River is known for its history of flooding and may rise quickly after rains in the watershed. For most paddlers, water trail travel is recommended when the river flow is less than 7,500 CFS. River gauge readings may be accessed at <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/05463050/#parameterCode=00065&timeSeriesId=43973&period=P7D>.



BLACK HAWK COUNTY

The portion of the Cedar River that is included in the CVPT is lined with public lands and classified as meandered, meaning that paddlers may access not only the river itself but also the river bottom and banks along its course.



A beautiful summer day at Fisher Lake



Maxx Rentals and Paddlesports

Canoes and kayaks may be rented in George Wyth State Park at Maxx Rentals by the beach at George Wyth Lake.

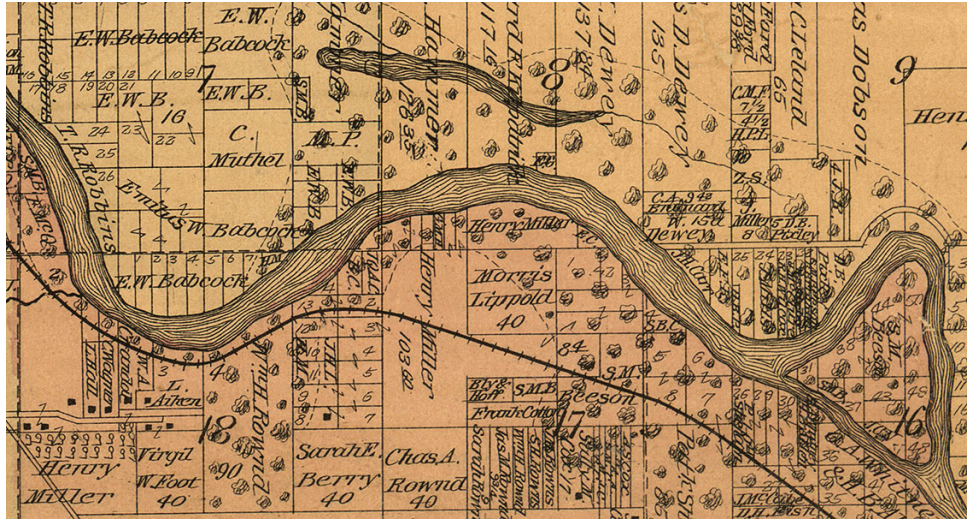


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Boundary Waters here we come!

The CVPT provides an excellent opportunity for scouts and other outdoor adventurers to practice paddling, portaging and navigation.

CEDAR VALLEY PADDLERS TRAIL



Sedgwick Brothers And Stilson. Map of Black Hawk County, Iowa. Philadelphia: E.W. Smith & Co., Map Publishers, 1887. Map. (Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division)



Vern Fish
A kayaker plies the Cedar River near the Highway 218 bridge.

The Cedar Valley Paddlers Trail is a loop trail that offers many options for outdoor recreation. Visitors may engage in paddling, portaging, wayfinding, fishing, nature observation, and camping on this unique Iowa water trail.

With no designated route, paddlers are free to create their own itinerary starting at any of the accesses. Parking lots are available with little or no portaging at Brinker Lake, George Wyth Lake, Fisher Lake, Hartman Reserve/Sherwood Park, and at the Cedar River Boat Ramp in George Wyth State Park.

Conveniently, Maxx Rentals and Paddlesports is a canoe and kayak rental concession located at the beach at George Wyth Lake. Inquire online at <https://maxx-rentals.business.site/> or call (319) 961-6232.

Some History

The following information was copied from <http://www.cedarnet.org/tour/sites/113-geowythpark.html>, courtesy of the Cedar Falls Historical Society.

“William Fisher and his wife, Nancy Bolton Fisher, came to Iowa in 1853 from their home in western Virginia. They settled on this site, purchasing 45 acres of land from the state. They built a log cabin by the lake, where they raised five daughters and four sons.

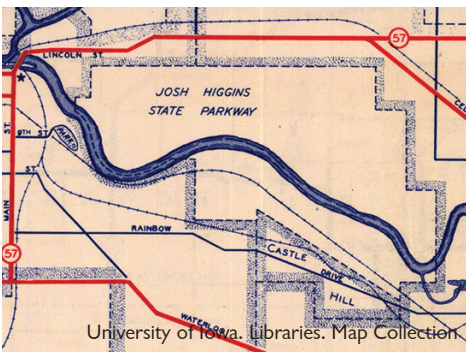


Cedar Falls Historical Society

Zimri Streeter, whose homestead was just north of here, purchased “Fisher Lake” and the surrounding land in 1891, after Fisher’s death.

This area was part of the “Josh Higgins Parkway,” a 175-acre tract of land set aside in 1940 for recreational purposes. The area eventually was increased in size to 419 acres under the management of the Iowa Conservation Commission.

In 1956 the name of the tract was changed to George Wyth Memorial Park in honor of the Cedar Falls founder and first president of Viking Pump Company. Wyth was also a strong supporter of state and local park programs. Wyth while not an outdoorsman himself, was an early promoter of establishing parks and outdoor recreation in the Waterloo/Cedar Falls area.



The 1956 Official Highway Map of Iowa indicates the area of Josh Higgins Parkway.

George Wyth State Park, now 460 acres in size, underwent an extensive redevelopment project in 1980-81 and is now a popular facility for boating, fishing, swimming, camping, hiking, bicycling, jogging and bird watching.”

A National Urban Wildlife Sanctuary

The Cedar Valley Paddlers Trail is situated in the broad Cedar River Corridor in the urban environment of the Waterloo/Cedar Falls metropolitan area. Its large expanse of woodland provides a scenic getaway from the city, and is noted for having abundant and diverse wildlife. Bird-watchers have observed more than 200 different species. George Wyth State Park is designated as a National Urban Wildlife Sanctuary.

A Crossroads of Recreational Trails

A number of national and local recreation trails come together in George Wyth State Park and Hartman Reserve, connected by a bridge across the Cedar River.

Approaching from the south, as described on their official web site, “The American Discovery Trail (ADT) continues on a paved trail through Hiawatha to the 52-mile-long Cedar Valley Nature Trail’s southernmost point, at the northern edge of that city. The Cedar Valley Nature Trail is one of our nation’s first rail-trail projects. This largely paved trail follows the Cedar River and is well-used by area residents, attracting many out-of-state trail users as well. Depots at Center Point and Gilbertville have been faithfully restored. The northern end of the Cedar Valley Nature Trail is across from Deerwood Park in Evansdale, preserving historical character. The Cedar Prairie Trail, a newly developing trail, will begin here and take the ADT into Waterloo, where the Cedar Valley Lakes Trail and trails in George Wyth Memorial State Park become the route. The trail in this park is marked as the northernmost point of the ADT,” to the east of the campground.

The park also hosts part of the Great American Rail-Trail.

Crossing a number of the CVPT’s portage trails are “soft path” trails maintained and signed by the Cedar Valley Association for Soft Trails (CVAST). These hiking and mountain biking trails expand the recreational offerings on both sides of the Cedar River.

The nexus of paddling and bicycling trails easily suggests the possibility of a pedal/paddle kind of excursion in which a bicycle is secured downstream and used to ride back to a vehicle at the starting point once the float is over.



Flooding is a Factor

The Cedar River watershed famously floods. In 2008, floods wreaked havoc through Cedar Falls and many other towns, devastating the city of Cedar Rapids further downstream, 62 miles downstream.

The ease with which the river rises after rain events is often surprising – each time an inch or two falls in the watershed, the river can swell drastically. Recent high-water lines, written in mud, may be seen on some of the vegetation along the shoreline.

A number of organizations banded together after the 2008 floods to form the Cedar River Watershed Alliance. The group has engaged in many educational, research, and project promotions to reduce flooding and flood impacts. In 2016, the Middle Cedar River Watershed Management Authority received a HUD grant to implement plans and practices in the Cedar River watershed. Much work has been done, but with grant funds exhausted more funding sources will be needed to continue the effort. With climate change predictions indicating more frequent large rain events, it will take a lot of land practice improvements to handle the extreme downpours to come.

Be sure to check water levels before embarking on your paddling route!

CEDAR VALLEY PADDLERS TRAIL



Paddlers of all ages and abilities may enjoy the Cedar Valley Paddlers Trail by tailoring their itinerary to individual needs. Unlike a river trip, paddlers are not committed to completing any one route and may choose a shorter or longer portion of the loop. Parking and put-in's are offered at most accesses. You may even consider traversing a loop within the loop by portaging and paddling the lakes of Hartman Reserve.

Starting at Alice Wyth Lake and ending at Fisher Lake, the following trail description details a popular route around the CVPT.

Trail Stretch: Alice Wyth Lake to Cedar River (Approximately 1 mile)

Alice Wyth Lake is at the far west end of the Wyth Road that extends through George Wyth State Park. The lake is popular for fishing and contains concrete boat ramps and fishing jetties. Motors are restricted to electric only. Game fish species include largemouth bass, bluegill, and crappie. In most places, the 48-acre lake has a depth of 10 feet or less, although there are a couple 12-foot holes and one small area on the far east end that is 18 feet deep. Although paddlers can enter the lake from the boat ramps and other areas along the lake shore, there is a signed water trail access on the far east side. It is a short portage across mowed lawn from the parking lot to the put-in. If portaging from Fisher Lake, the water trail access is at the end of the portage trail before the lawn and parking lot. The put-in is a carry-down launch, which is a bit steep at the lakeshore. Beware of poison ivy along the trail.

Paddlers will travel through open water, past the jetties and head southwest to the far end of the lake. There is a sandbar island about midway. Once past the island, Highway 58 and the Highway 58 bridge are visible. The takeout is just past the bridge.



Poison Ivy

Other than areas around the boat ramps and jetties, Alice Wyth Lake has a natural shoreline. Willows border much of the northern shoreline on the way to the takeout. Larger trees grow to the south where the forest extends to the Cedar River Corridor. Dragonflies are present – but nothing like the multitudes to be seen later on Fisher and George Wyth lakes. Watch for eagles flying up from perches on the far north shoreline over the stillness of the lake. Upon approaching the Highway 58 bridge, paddlers should look for a neat row of cliff swallow nests made of mud and the activity of adult birds tending to their young.

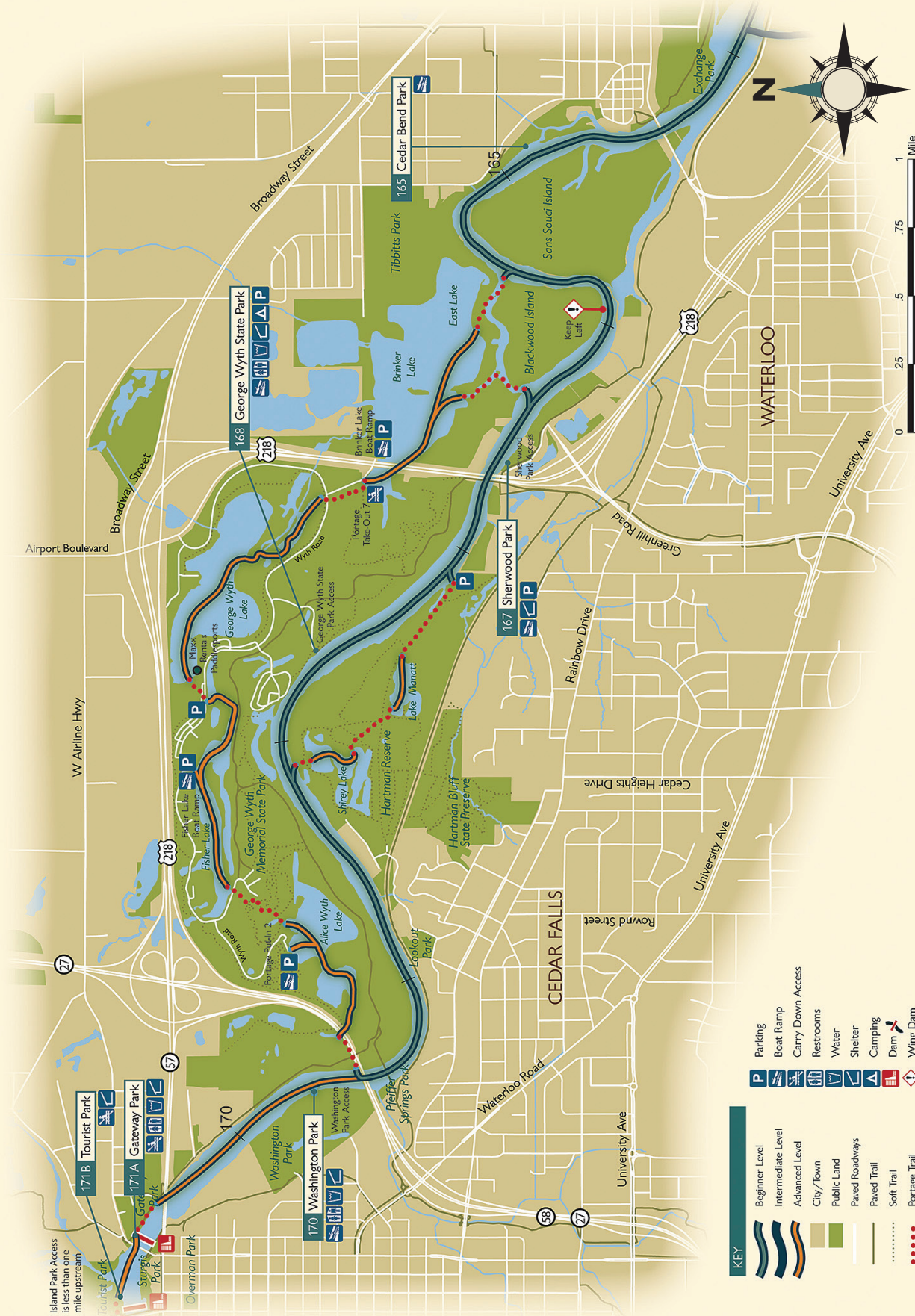
The takeout is located on the far west shoreline, just past the Highway 218 Bridge. It is an easy carryout path to firm ground covered with yellow crown vetch and brome grass, long used by the Iowa Department of Transportation to stabilize roadsides. A few prairie plants co-exist, with a patch of Monarda (bee balm) often in bloom.

Poison ivy and wood nettles grow lush along trails. Paddlers should be aware and educate themselves on identifying and avoiding these two plants.



Cliff Swallows tend their young

CEDAR VALLEY PADDLERS TRAIL



Island Park Access is less than one mile upstream

KEY

- Beginner Level
- Intermediate Level
- Advanced Level
- City/Town
- Public Land
- Paved Roadways
- Paved Trail
- Soft Trail
- Portage Trail
- Parking
- Boat Ramp
- Carry Down Access
- Restrooms
- Water
- Shelter
- Camping
- Dam
- Wing Dam



Monarda (Bee Balm)

The first two-thirds of the portage trail is on firm ground. A large Kentucky coffee tree on the right side of the trail indicates a point where the portage trail intersects with a mountain bike trail. These “soft path” trails are maintained and signed by the Cedar Valley Association for Soft Trails (CVAST) and are visible on other portage trails on this water trail. Just a bit past the mountain bike trail is a paved bicycle trail. There is no obvious trail after crossing the bike trail. The most obvious path to the Cedar River is to portage under the Highway 58 bridge but this can be a bit muddy. A better put-in may be found on the upstream side of the bridge – a nice v-shaped rocky spot to launch a canoe or kayak.

Trail users may choose to spend some time paddling, fishing, and watching wildlife on the peaceful lake. For paddlers staying on Alice Wyth Lake, its use is appropriate for people of all skill levels (although some may have difficulty using/traversing the steep bank at the water trail put-in). However, if taking the portage trail for a trip down the Cedar River, intermediate or advanced experience in both paddling and portaging are appropriate.

Recommended experience classification: **Advanced**

Stream Reach: Cedar River from put-in from Alice Wyth Lake portage (Highway 58 Bridge) to Brinker Lake (3 miles to inlet on west side of Brinker Lake; 3.5 miles including paddling rather than portaging through the inlet)

Once launched from the put-in under the Highway 58 bridge, paddlers will find themselves on a broad river, ranging from 200 to 300 feet wide. Sand bars are found in a couple of instances, near the Shirey portage (river right) and at the entrance to the inlet to Brinker Lake (river left). Otherwise, much of this section of river is bordered with boulders/riprap. Basswood and silver maple are by far the dominant tree species, with some pockets of honey locust and a few oaks, elms, and walnuts. There also are a few large cottonwoods, typical of bottomland forest in northeast Iowa.

Although the forest appears to loom large on both sides of the river, just beyond the greenery on river right are several homes within a half-mile. You may hear voices coming from the direction of Lookout Park. The right shoreline is more developed downstream, with several houses. The left shoreline vegetation extends well into the forest of George Wyth State Park, with the only developments being some campsites near the river and a boat ramp.

Birders may see rough-winged and tree swallows swoop along the water surface, and a variety of birds can be heard from the dense trees and shrubs – house wrens, cardinals, yellow-billed cuckoos, peewees, and catbirds. Kingfisher ply the river. The swift moving water doesn’t keep people in one place very long and the aural soundscape flows by synchronously.

About a mile downstream on the right shoreline is a small gathering of houses/cabins – each with its own dock. Residents may be observed fishing, but sightings of other paddlers can be rare. More likely are small motorboats that leave little wake. Less likely are large pleasure crafts, contributing to the peaceful ambiance and the popular pursuit of catching fish.

Whereas much of the river along the forested shoreline has some boulder riprap, the houses and cabins use broken concrete. One resident has even used many flat, cut limestone slabs to armor the shoreline.



Looking downstream at the George Wyth State Park boat ramp, river left



Adobe Stock

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)



Anglers with carp on Cedar River

CEDAR VALLEY PADDLERS TRAIL

The first half of the short trip on the Cedar is down a straight corridor, with little shoreline cut-bank or deposition evident at the current water level. This changes as the river bends to the right. A large pile of downed trees and a decent sandbar are evident along the right shoreline. During earlier trips, when water levels were down, the sandbar area was perhaps three times larger. The sandbar extends through the forest to Shirey Lake. Water trail users can choose to explore the lakes of Hartman Reserve on foot, or may embark on the optional water trail loop through the lakes of Hartman Reserve (see below). There are no marked water trail signs to indicate the exact spot of a portage, but anywhere along this sandbar will work. Consider taking a few minutes to scout the area for the best route to Shirey. Much of the sand between the river and Shirey Lake is vegetated with poison ivy and wood nettles, or has areas of logs and branches. With some reconnaissance you may find a path largely free of obstacles. However, if paddlers choose not to carry their boats through the Hartman lakes, they can very easily beach their boats, explore the woodland, grab a rod and fish the lakes from shore, picnic at Manatt Lake, and then return to the river.



Sandbar on river right indicates portage area to Shirey Lake at Hartman Reserve

Just past the sandbar is a gravel bar with a nice tailing eddy. The lighter sand and silt settled out upstream of where the heavier gravel/stone was deposited. This is because water slows most on the tighter bend closer to shore, while somewhat faster water carried the heavier sediment (gravel) farther downstream before settling out. A few mollusk shells may be found on the gravel bar (giant floater), although less abundant anywhere on this stretch. Along the left shoreline, two prominent rock piles are visible – seemingly placed there. This also is just upstream from a few campsites along the left shoreline – part of the George Wyth State Park Campground.



Campsites close to the Cedar on river left at George Wyth State Park

A well-established riprapped bank extends along the left shoreline to the main Cedar River boat ramp for the state park. There are two more boat ramps on the right shoreline. The first is within Hartman Reserve, and is the put-in off the portage trail leaving the Hartman Reserve lakes (from Lake Manatt). This ramp is only accessible by foot, and it is a rather long walk/carry from a parking lot (0.3 miles away). The second ramp is downstream of the Highway 218 bridge, with an adjacent parking lot. There is a DNR “Public Waterways” sign at this ramp. The ramp serves as another access point for the water trail loop.



After passing under the Highway 218 bridge, paddlers will want to watch the left shoreline for the inlet that leads to Brinker Lake. There are no signs. A large red and white house is the last permanent landmark prior to the sandbars that mark the inlet. At a river gauge reading of 10,000 cfs in Cedar Falls, paddling into the inlet is quite possible.

The entrance to the inlet may change appearance with shifting sands. Just pay attention and look for the gap. The narrow inlet contains some gravel bars along shore. A short distance down, paddlers will see a fork in the waterway. A water-trail sign high on a large, nearly dead silver maple growing on a sand beach can be seen pointing left toward the narrow channel. Current from Brinker Lake flows pretty well, and a downed tree trunk splits the channel. The beach at the base of the old maple is a good place to get out and then guide the canoe past the obstacle and into the left channel.



Large red and white house before inlet to Brinker Lake, river left

It can be fun navigating the narrow channel upstream around deadfalls (and one live-fall – a fallen white oak nearly closing the waterway). Paddlers will pass under a rust-colored steel/wood bike trail bridge where the channel widens and the opening into the big water of Brinker Lake comes into view. There still are some areas of shallow water to navigate so as not to get beached on sand, but that’s part of the fun. Although you may have to step out here and there you can probably pick your way through depending on your watercraft. If the river level falls below 5,000 cfs, however, it is likely boats will need to be carried through parts of this trail.

Recommended Experience Classification: **Beginner**

Stream Reach: Cedar River to Hartman Reserve Lakes – Shirey and Manatt – to Hartman Reserve Cedar River Boat Ramp (1.25 miles)

This optional route takes paddlers off the Cedar River to explore some of the more isolated, natural river corridor to be found in the City of Cedar Falls. When water levels are average or below average, the takeout from the Cedar is on a broad sand beach. As the river rises, the sandbar area is less noticeable.

Paddlers will need to portage over the river's sand beach a short distance through the woods to a sand beach put-in at Shirey Lake. The length of the portage may vary from 300 to 600 feet, depending on where paddlers beach and the level of the Cedar River. Also, depending on the route taken, there may be poison ivy and nettles, deadfalls, and deposited driftwood and debris to navigate around. Paddlers should scout around for the best path to Shirey.

There is a garbage can on the beach near the put-in at Shirey Lake, and the area appears to be a popular gathering spot. During a June trip via land to the portage area, the river was high and much of the ground was wet with saturated sand and mud, as well as pooled water. A green heron landed on the strewn logs – perhaps attracted by the possibility of frogs, small fish, or other potential prey in the shallow pools. Green herons often forage in water that is less than 4 inches deep, avoiding the deeper and more open areas frequented by longer-legged great blue herons. June is nesting season for green herons. Although a nest could not be found, it is likely there was one nearby. Unlike great blue herons, green herons do not nest in colonies. Their individual nests of loose sticks are found in trees along or near rivers and streams, ponds, or marshes.

The put-in for Shirey Lake may not be obvious. However, there is ample space along the sandy west end of Shirey to slip the boat into the water and head east along the lake. A bay extends to the south, but the most direct path to the takeout is to head east. The tall osprey hacking tower is a good point of reference. Shirey is a 15-acre backwater lake, directly linked to the Cedar River. The Iowa DNR began stocking largemouth bass in the lake in 1992, but during floods the Cedar River and Shirey Lake are connected and fish can pass in and out.

A key feature of the lake is the osprey hacking Tower built in 1998. The tower is located on the east end of Shirey (far end from the put-in, and is at the takeout). Black Hawk County Conservation Board maintains an interpretive kiosk explaining the hacking tower and osprey project. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources obtained osprey chicks through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The chicks were placed high on the tower to be raised until they could be successfully released. A total of 30 ospreys were released from 1998 to 2005 during the now concluded hacking program.

The takeout by the hacking tower is signed, but may be thick with vegetation (including poison ivy). The maintained walking trail is close to the shore, and once the boat is pulled out, paddlers have an easy portage of about 800 feet to Manatt Lake. The ground is strewn with river rock as the trail emerges from the woods at a trail intersection. One portage trail sign was seen on the trail, about midway to Manatt. In June you may find luscious patches of chanterelle mushrooms just before the trail intersection—they fry up nicely and taste great with pepper steak.

Black Hawk County Conservation Board maintains walking trails along Shirey – especially along the north side of the lake. Paddlers may opt to take a walk along the lake, and can even walk the trails to Manatt Lake and the full stretch of this segment of the water trail to the Cedar River. Mountain bike trails crisscross sections of the walking trails but sightings of actual bicyclists near Shirey or Manatt lakes are rare. Upon



Osprey

Adobe Stock



Green Heron



CEDAR VALLEY PADDLERS TRAIL



Basswood with flowers

reaching the walking trail intersection, straight ahead is a picnic shelter and mowed lawn that leads to the put-in for Manatt Lake.

The portage and other trails along Shirey contain an impressive canopy of eastern cottonwood trees, especially as the trail leads to Manatt Lake. Other prevalent tree species include American elm, honey locust, Kentucky coffee, black walnut, and boxelder. Young burr oaks are found growing where they have sunlight along the trail opening. Poison ivy and wood nettles grow lush along trails. Paddlers should be aware and educate themselves on identifying and avoiding these two plants.

On one section of the trail, tough, leathery seed pods were scattered on the ground below a tall Kentucky coffee tree. The unique, broad, almost woody pods are 6-9 inches long, and contain 3-9 seeds. Although the tree is not related to coffee plants, early settlers were known to use the seeds as a substitute for making coffee. They also used the strong, heavy, rot-resistant wood to make furniture and for fence posts. Kentucky coffee remains a valuable tree for its wood.

Cardinals, common yellowthroats, brown thrashers, blue jays, catbirds, robins, brown-headed cowbirds, and song sparrows provided most of the music along the trail on an early June walk. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg for birdwatching in the Cedar Valley. The forested river corridor and backwater wetlands that encompass this trail section, and the broader area of Hartman Reserve and George Wyth State Park, attract a great diversity of bird life. Birdwatchers have identified more than 200 species using the forest corridor.

There are many other species of interest making their homes among the forest and wetlands of these trails. Blue-spotted salamanders are a state endangered species known to exist in George Wyth State Park. Efforts have been made to trap and release these rare amphibians in compatible habitat at Hartman Reserve.

The put-in to Manatt Lake is well signed, and is an easy carry-down access. Note the old dock structure ten yards or so out from the access. The small 10 acre lake is quickly paddled. Again, the takeout may not be obvious. However, any of the openings made by foot traffic along the northeast end will be a short distance from the trail but may require carrying through a bit of vegetation. Once out, the walking trail is wide and maintained.

Manatt and Shirey Lake are used by fisherman but most people practice catch and release.

The lakes of Hartman Reserve are named to recognize that most of the more than 200 acres that make up the north parcel of Hartman Reserve, including Shirey Lake, Manatt Lake, and the land extending to the Cedar River, was made available to the Conservation Board in 1991 by Manatt's Inc. In fact, both Shirey and Manatt lakes were formed by the mining operations of the former C.W. Shirey concrete operation. Some of the old cement mixing equipment can still be seen along one of the nearby trails.



Blue-spotted salamander

Adobe Stock



Butterfly Meadow fritillary on anemone

The portage from Manatt Lake to the Hartman Reserve Cedar River Boat Ramp is rather long (0.3 miles or 100 rods), but broad and flat. It angles toward the river, with an area of prairie off the tail to the right. Just out from the takeout, you may see a large patch of Canada anemone in full bloom. Meadow fritillary butterflies feed on these flowers. Overhead, in some dead limbs, brown-headed cowbirds issue forth their song. Dragonflies, such as common whitetails, are numerous on early summer days, darting back and forth.

The trail leads to a narrow concrete boat access on the Cedar River, with no water trail sign. Once their boat is launched, paddlers are back on the Cedar River segment of the trail described in the previous section, heading across the river toward the inlet to Brinker Lake.

If starting the water trail loop from the Hartman Reserve Boat Ramp, there is ample parking at the South Riverside Trail lot, about 0.3 miles south on a maintained trail. There are no water trail signs for those driving to the parking lot, but there is a brown and white sign for Hartman Reserve South Parking on Rainbow Drive indicating where to turn.



Manatt Lake to North Hartman access trail

This portage from Manatt Lake to the Cedar River put-in is the longest portage on the entire water trail loop

Due to the length of portages and challenging navigation, this section of the water trail is not appropriate for beginners. It is best if users of this alternate route have at least intermediate experience in paddling and portaging.

Recommended experience classification: **Advanced**

Stream Reach: Brinker and George Wyth Lakes (1.25 miles)

Once out of the inlet from the Cedar River, paddlers enter the largest lake of the water trail loop, Brinker Lake. The 270-acre lake is the largest, deepest (up to 58 feet), and the most popular lake at George Wyth State Park for larger motor boats. On most summer weekends, the large parking area and ramps are packed, and motorized watercrafts of various types and sizes abound on the water. There is a no-wake limit before 9 a.m., but no limit after 9 a.m. There is a no-wake limit area marked by buoys for all times of day, which encompasses the motorboat access area as well as the water trail takeout access.

Expect heavy motorboat traffic on Brinker Lake. Depending on wind and boat traffic, paddlers may choose to head straight northwest across the lake or hug the shoreline.

The Highway 218 bridge separates the larger lake from a smaller bay on the far northwest corner, past the concrete boat ramps and parking lot. A line of buoys is placed ahead of the boat ramps and bridge, marking the no-wake zone for the rest of the lake. This is much appreciated, providing a safer and quieter paddle to the takeout.

It also is more inviting for fishing, and people fish from boats under the bridge and elsewhere in the no-wake zone. The lake contains a variety of fish, including crappie, bluegill, yellow bass, largemouth bass, walleye, and channel catfish.

If you float under the bridge and look back, active cliff swallow nests are seen plastered to the concrete underside. Adult birds fly back and forth, capturing insects on the wing to bring back and feed the chicks. With binoculars (or a powerful zoom camera lens) the yellow beaks can be seen at the entrance holes of the mud nests - great targets for returning mama birds.

The takeout is northwest of the bridge. It is marked with water trail signs, and is a good earthen takeout. With ample space in the main parking lot, paddlers may choose to begin and end the water trail loop from Brinker Lake.

The portage to George Wyth Lake is along the shoulder of the road, about 0.3 miles. It is a slight uphill carry on mowed lawn along the left side of the road. You are advised to stay off the paved road, as it is often busy with vehicles pulling large boats.

The road comes to a T-intersection at Wyth Road (the main park road). The put-in to George Wyth Lake is signed at a narrow opening in the brush on the north side of the road, just west of the T-intersection. The short trail through the vegetation is an easy carry-in to a backwater wetland that feeds into the more open lake. Again, watch for poison ivy near the put-in.

Upon departing the put-in, paddlers are surrounded by wetland plants and animals. Occasional clumps of algae, and duckweed float on the water surface. Tree swallows swoop around. A variety of dragonflies zip over the still water, catching mosquitos and other smaller insects on the fly. Occasionally a pair may be seen flying connected together - sex on the fly.

Dragonflies play out their metamorphic life cycles in the wetland ecosystem. The adults lay eggs in or near the water. A few weeks later, the eggs hatch into entirely aquatic nymphs, which live in the water, feeding on a variety of aquatic insects, worms, and



Buoys on Brinker Lake mark the no-wake zone

at times even small tadpoles. This is the longest stage in the dragonfly lifestyle, with some species remaining as nymphs for years. When the nymph is ready to transform into the adult dragonfly, they crawl up a plant stem. The terrestrial adult emerges from the skin of the nymph and flies off to catch prey on the wing.

There are lots of dead trees standing upright in the flooded wetland lake. Atop one of these trees, along the south shoreline, is an osprey nesting platform. Both Hartman Reserve and George Wyth State Park have been involved in osprey reintroduction programs. This includes raising fledging birds in hacking towers (such as the one earlier described at Shirey Lake) and also providing platforms in trees as inviting areas for ospreys to nest. Unfortunately, on this day no ospreys or nests were seen. Recent communications with George Wyth State Park Manager Lori Eberhard indicate the nesting platform has not been used.



Halloween Pennant dragonfly

The wetland slowly opens up, and soon the expanse of the 75-acre lake is in full view. A large, prominent fishing dock near a shelter is visible in the distance along the south (left) shoreline. A large house is seen in the distance along the north (right) shoreline. Absent the



Common Whitetail dragonfly

larger motor boats experienced on Brinker Lake, Wyth lake caters more to smaller boats with electric motors, canoes, kayaks, and other paddle craft. Fishing is popular, with bluegill, crappie, largemouth bass, yellow bass, channel catfish, and northern pike the sought-after species.

Beyond the fishing dock on the left is a crowded beach and concession area. A large banner indicates the concessionaire is Maxx Rentals. People can rent canoes, kayaks, paddleboats, and more. Kayaks and canoes can be rented for use on the larger water trail. Contact may be made through the linked web site on the first page of this brochure. The beach is popular with sunbathers and people splashing around in the designated swimming area. The takeout is located past the beach house. The portage sign can be seen just past the chain link fence that separates the beach house and concession area from the rest of the lake. It is an easy carry-out bank.

The portage is about 300 yards slightly uphill on some lawn and then sidewalk, toward Wyth Road. The portage sign for Fisher Lake can be seen from the road, across lawn, downhill and to the right. Although the trail is concrete and mowed lawn, paddlers should be aware they may encounter parked vehicles and people going to and from the beach house.

The put-in for Fisher Lake, when portaging from George Wyth Lake, is a narrow, somewhat steep, earthen carry-down. A second put-in to Fisher Lake, with its own parking area, exists another 0.3 miles west on Wyth Road. This is a more developed access with a ramp, dock, and parking. Although it makes for a long portage from Wyth Lake, it is a good option for starting and ending the water trail loop. There is also ample parking at George Wyth Lake, and paddlers can choose to begin and end a loop trail trip from the first Fisher Lake access (back around to end at Wyth Lake). Some paddlers may also choose to put-in and stay on George Wyth Lake – fishing, paddling, and exploring the wetland.

A somewhat long portage between Brinker and George Wyth Lakes requires some strength and experience at portaging. With motorboat use on Brinker Lake, those traveling this portion of the water trail should have at least an intermediate skill level. Paddlers of all skill levels, however, can enjoy the open waters and wetland of George Wyth Lake.

Recommended experience classification: **Advanced**



Female widow skimmer dragonfly



White Waterlily
(*Nymphaea odorata*)

Both food and medicine to Native Americans, parts of the lily plant were used it to treat colds, tuberculosis, bronchial complaints, and toothaches.



Button bush

Stream Reach: Fisher Lake (east water trail access) to Alice Lake (east water trail access) (1 mile)

Fisher Lake, the only naturally formed lake at George Wyth State Park, is a shallow wetland, rarely more than a canoe paddle deep. At nearly all water levels, the lake is almost entirely covered by floating-leaved plants. Under the water surface is a dense growth of coontail and other submerged plants, as well as the network of roots leading to lily pads. Dragonflies abound, bullfrogs bellow sonorously, and eastern kingbirds perch on dead limbs along the shoreline, creating a lively, active scene.

The put-in from George Wyth Lake is narrow and steep, but not too bad. As mentioned above, there is an option of starting a trip from the more developed put-in further west.

The paddle across Fisher Lake is slow through the vegetation. Look for narrow, open “tracks” from previous boats pushing through. Two plant species providing the most resistance are the showy white waterlily and coontail.

The large blooms of the waterlily, up to 6 inches in diameter, lay on the water surface, sometimes even slightly above the water. The yellow center of the flower is a colorful contrast to the white petals, which are larger around the outside, progressively getting smaller and more tightly spaced toward the middle. Once pollinated, the flowers turn downward so that the seeds can ripen and eventually disperse under water. The large, floating leaves may be a foot in diameter, with a single indentation. They are a beautiful dark green (lighter green on their undersides). They form the iconic lily pads of wetland lakes. Blooming flowers can be seen in a large patch of white waterlily plants from late June until frost. The tubers, seeds, and flower buds were eaten by Native Americans, and the seeds are eaten by waterfowl. Due to its structure and colonization of the water surface, this plant creates cover, surface areas, and other special habitat features for a variety of animals – fish, insects, frogs, snails, and more.

Other flowering plants may catch the eye. A few isolated yellow waterlily blossoms extend up just over the water surface. Also called spatterdock, these showy flowers are more ball-like, and smaller than white water lily. The floating tiny leaves of duckweed (photo), multiplied thousands of times, are scattered throughout the water. Along the shoreline, conspicuous golf ball-like flowers catch the eye – the spherical flower clusters of buttonbush. The flowers grow on a medium sized shrub with leaves similar to those of dogwoods, and are sometimes called “pond dogwood”, though they are not in the dogwood family. Numerous flowers protrude from the spherical heads – white, with tiny yellow tips. The flowers attract bees and butterflies, and hummingbirds can even be seen feeding from the flowers. They are more common in southeastern Iowa, but are seen growing in large numbers along Fisher Lake and to a lesser degree along George Wyth Lake.

As they push through the plant life and speeding dragonflies, paddlers may see people walking or bicycling along the left shoreline. A bench and paved bike trail come into view about a third of the way across the long, east-west paddle. Canada geese cluster on logs and stumps near the shore.

The takeout is along the left shoreline near the west end of the lake. There is a water trail sign just past an old bench. It is an easy carryout to a mowed space by the park road. A bit of prairie vegetation grows along the shore. A monarch butterfly perches and feeds on a butterfly milkweed plant.

There are two portage trail options to Alice Wyth Lake. The closest and most obvious trail entrance is across the road from the takeout. However, this trail is often flooded. The main wet area is right at the beginning, so paddlers will know immediately if they wish to use that trail. If flooded, people may choose to slish through the inundated trail or choose to take the high and dry trail located down the road and past a park shelter parking and turnaround. The first portage is a quarter-mile. The dry portage is about 0.3 miles.

The portage trail may have quite a few ripening black raspberry bushes accompanied by LOTS of mosquitoes. CVAST soft mountain bike trails criss-cross the trail, and people should stay straight on the trail. About 3/4ths down is a trail intersection and it is difficult to discern the correct path. Stay to the right and cross a small bridge. Soon after crossing

CEDAR VALLEY PADDLERS TRAIL



Black raspberry on portage from Fisher to Alice lakes

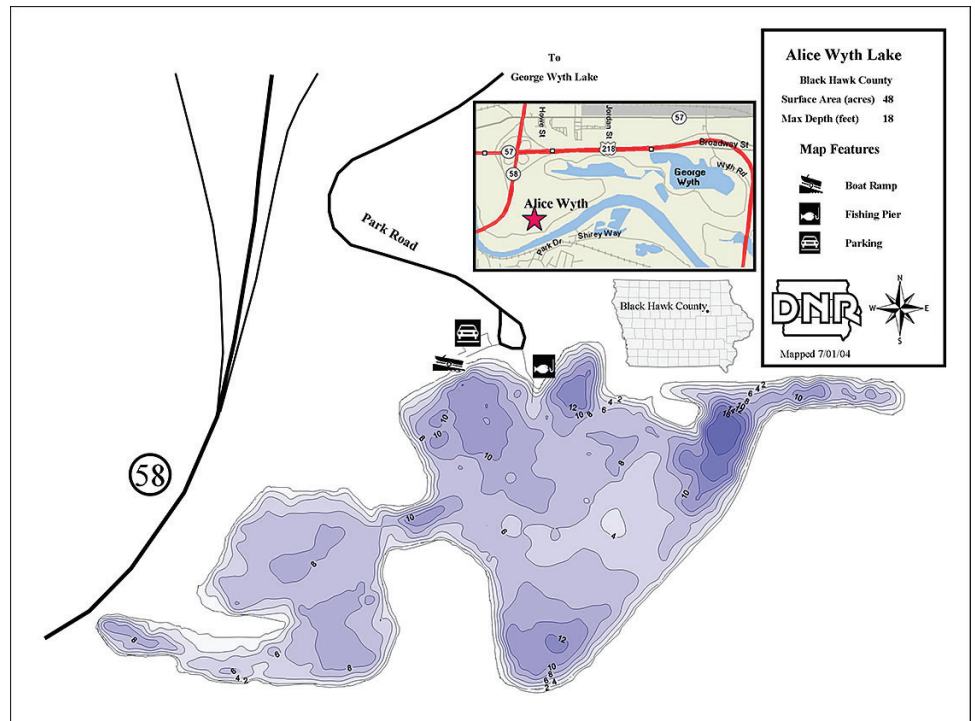
the bridge, the put-in to Alice Lake, mowed lawn, and the parking lot are all in view.

This is a relatively easy paddle through a wetland (unless in very low water levels). The put-in is a bit steep, but not too bad. The most difficult portion of this stretch is the portage. If taking the obvious portage trail, paddlers will find themselves likely slogging through a flooded section. If taking the alternate route, they will have a rather long portage. Therefore, this section is appropriate for beginning paddlers, but is recommended for people with at least intermediate portaging abilities.

Recommended experience classification: **Advanced**



Female widow skimmer dragonfly





Portage into Hartman Reserve Nature Center



Wild rose



View from Hartman Reserve Ramp put-in

BE SAFE OUT THERE!

Follow these safety TIPS to keep your trip enjoyable:

- Pack all essentials in waterproof bags.
- Check the river water levels and currents before each trip.
- Know the weather forecast, including areas upstream, and stay aware of the weather on your trip.
- Make sure someone knows your planned entry and exit points and estimated times.
- Always wear a properly-sized life jacket.
- Expect overhanging trees, logjams, and other obstacles, such as bridge abutments or big rocks. If paddling around them is not possible, get out and portage around them. Grabbing onto tree branches may capsize your paddlecraft.
- Always portage around lowhead dams. Surface appearance can be deceiving. Undercurrents can be strong enough for drowning.
- If you capsize, remain on the upstream side of your boat to prevent being pinned.
- Dress appropriately for weather conditions (including air and water temperatures), and avoid weather and water conditions beyond your skill level.

KNOW YOUR SKILL LEVEL!

- **BEGINNER:** Segments are generally less than six miles. Hazards are few and easy to avoid in normally slow-moving currents. Users can easily access these segments from parking areas, and will not need to portage, except to walk a boat around some shallow riffles or to make going around an obstacle easier.
- **INTERMEDIATE:** Segments are generally less than nine miles. Users should be able to recognize and avoid hazards in moderate river flow. The need to portage is rare, but users should be able and willing to carry boats and gear a short distance. Access to the river may involve a short portage, and the launch or take-out may be a bit difficult.
- **ADVANCED:** Segments may exceed nine miles. Hazards are likely and often occur in fast-moving water. The need to portage may be frequent or may involve carrying boats and gear a long distance. Access to the river may involve a portage, and the launch or take-out may be from steeper banks or faster moving water.

BEHAVE AS A GUEST!

- Respect private property. Only use public lands and access points.
- Be considerate of others in your group and on the banks.
- Give anglers a wide berth.
- Never change clothes in public view.
- Never litter. Always pack out trash.
- Do not disturb wildlife.

Other Resources:

IA DNR Interactive Paddling Map:

www.iowadnr.gov/paddlingmap

IA DNR Paddler Safety Info:

www.iowadnr.gov/paddlingsafety

Black Hawk County Conservation:

<http://www.blackhawkcountyparks.com>

Cedar Valley Water Trails

www.cedarvalleywatertrails.com

Cedar Valley Trails Partnership

<https://cedarvalleytrails.org/cedar-valley-trails/trail-info/water-trails/>

Maxx Rentals Paddlesports

<https://maxx-rentals.business.site/>

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