

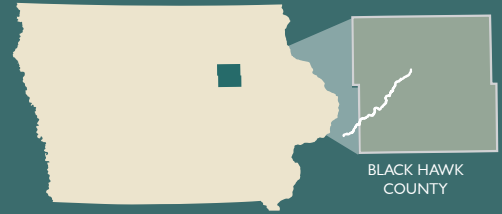
BLACK HAWK CREEK WATER TRAIL



BLACK HAWK
COUNTY

Black Hawk Creek is a navigable “non-meandered” stream in Iowa. That means that the State of Iowa owns the water flowing through it, but not the land adjacent to it or under it. Except at access sites and public areas marked on the map, the land adjacent to and underneath the creek is private. Please respect the owner and do not trespass.

Before paddling, check the current Black Hawk Creek discharge and gauge height reading from the USGS monitoring station at Hudson.



BLACK HAWK
COUNTY



Recommended flow readings for safe and enjoyable paddling are 100-500 cfs.

BLACK HAWK CREEK - WILD IN THE CITY

The Black Hawk Creek Water Trail, one of three designated trails in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo area, offers a unique and challenging paddle. A trip down the creek’s winding course presents a near wilderness experience in the midst of the metro area. As the stream twists and turns around tight bends, paddlers commonly encounter treefalls that sometimes span the narrow channel and create outright logjams. Be prepared to navigate strainers, sweepers, and two fords that behave like low-head dams at certain water levels. The need to portage is not uncommon at these locations. Nevertheless, those who venture are rewarded with a surprisingly quiet excursion through a shaded greenbelt featuring excellent birdwatching.



Silver maples form a canopy over the creek. Look ahead for fallen trees blocking the channel.



Paddling with a group is good safety practice



Sand deposited by flooding at portage



Be alert for strainers!

BLACK HAWK CREEK WATER TRAIL



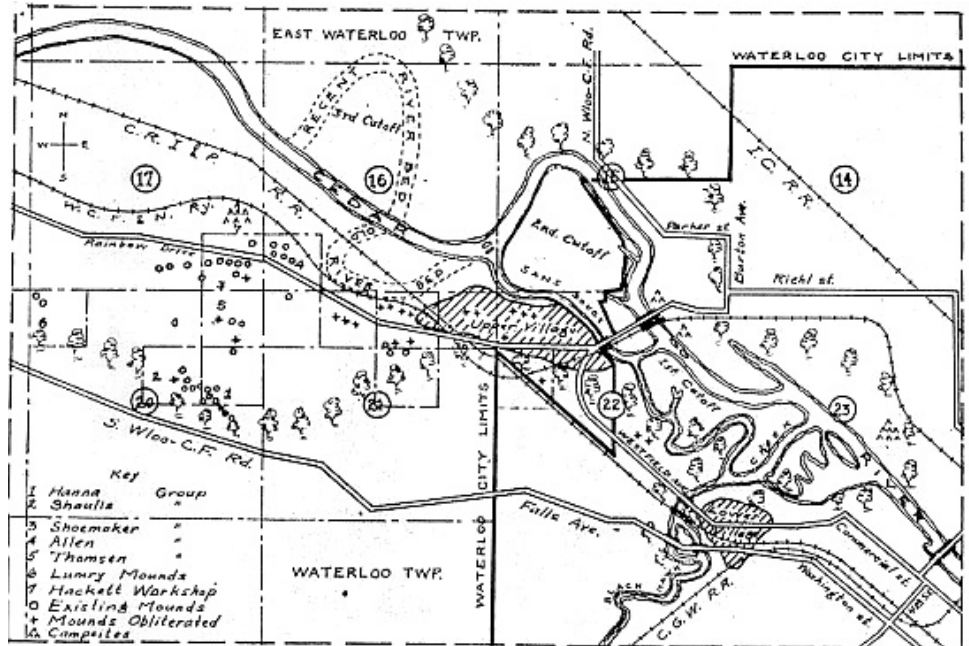
“Múk-a-tah-mish-o-káh-kaik, Black Hawk, Prominent Sac Chief,” George Catlin, 1832 (Smithsonian American Art Museum)

Black Hawk Creek and the county it flows through are named after the Sauk leader Black Hawk (1767–1838). While not a hereditary chief, his guidance of Sauk warriors in battle earned him the appellation. He mounted a fierce resistance to westward expansion across the Mississippi by Euro-American settlers. Military defeat of the chief and his followers during the Black Hawk War of 1832 marked the end of an era. The treaty known as the Black Hawk Purchase led to the opening of what is now the state of Iowa.

None of these events took place in what is now Black Hawk County. In one of the ironies of history, Black Hawk became something of a celebrity after his defeat when he was put on display with other Sauk leaders during a tour of major American cities. Audiences were impressed with his demeanor and he gained respect and admiration. As the years went by he became the namesake of a number of geographic places, government entities, and commercial businesses across the region.



John Hartman, editor and publisher of the Waterloo Courier (Hartman Reserve)



Map published by John Hartman showing prehistoric sites in the Waterloo area



Illustration from “Prehistoric Waterloo” of Native American artifacts found by Harman during his explorations.

John Hartman succeeded his father as editor of the Waterloo Courier upon the latter’s death in 1895. In addition to his illustrious career as a newspaperman, he was also an avid avocational archaeologist with a keen interest in the past Native American residents of the Cedar Falls/Waterloo area. Hartman located and recorded many sites including villages, camp sites, and groups of mounds before they were destroyed or obscured by urban development.

Hartman’s investigations were documented in articles in the Courier and in published pamphlets such as “Prehistoric Waterloo.” They contributed greatly to public awareness and appreciation of local Native American prehistory. One of his conclusions was that there were likely village sites that stretched along the Cedar River on either side of Black Hawk Creek that have been dated back more than 1,000 years.

An excellent paper by Donald Gaff and Sarah Caldwell, University of Northern Iowa, entitled “Traversing Field and Forest: John Hartman and Prehistoric Waterloo” explores Hartman’s contributions in this field in more depth. It may be found at academia.edu.

BLACK HAWK CREEK WATER TRAIL

The towns of Cedar Falls and Waterloo grew quickly as the area's population grew.

Among the first Euro-American settlers of the area were members of the Virden family from Illinois. William Virden and his wife, Rebecca, and two sons arrived in October 1845 and settled on Black Hawk Creek about three miles west of Waterloo. An 1887 land ownership map marks Virden's Grove on a bend in the creek and lists William's brother, Oscar, and son Charles, as owners of parcels there.

"When I came here one could look south over Orange and Eagle Townships with nothing to obstruct the view. There was not a tree or a shrub, only tall, waving grass. Sometimes in the summer-time, now, I stand on the same spot in which I stood fifty years ago and again look over that part of the country. So many trees have been planted that instead of the prairie I once saw I now see what appears a dense forest."

~ Oscar Virden reminiscing about changes in the landscape along Black Hawk Creek



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)

Another pioneer reminiscence, by James Virden, told of how he acquired a fine Winnebago dugout canoe. His friend, Charles Mullan, one of the first Euro-American to settle in the Waterloo area, also had a claim along Black Hawk Creek. One day, while visiting the piece of land, he discovered a group of Winnebago fashioning a canoe out of one of two large walnut trees they had just felled. Mullan ordered them to stop and they left. However, the next day a delegation from the natives' camp successfully negotiated an agreement with the landowner. They would use the canoes during the coming hunting season but would present Mullan with the boats when it was over.

James Virden happened upon one of the canoes overturned on the riverbank after the Winnebago departed the area and appropriated it for his own use, describing it as "splendidly built, strong, swift, and safe."

The example below is of Winnebago origin and now is in the possession of the Nebraska State Historical Society. According to the donation record, "This canoe was said to be used by the Winnebago when living in Wisconsin in the early 1800s. It remained in their possession when they were moved to Minnesota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. There it was obtained by a Euro-American man, who used it for a watering trough."



Winnebago Dugout Canoe, early 1800s (Courtesy History Nebraska)



Reminiscence of Hiram Luddington from *History of Black Hawk County Iowa and Its People*, John C. Hartman, Supervising Editor, Volume 1, The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915:

When we came here in 1852 there were buffalo in scattered herds and plenty of beaver, otter, mink, muskrat and other furbearing animals. I killed three buffaloes while we lived in Hudson in the winter of 1852 and 1853. It was early in December and I remember that the first snow was on the ground. My brother-in-law, a young man named John Lang, who lived with us, and I had gone out to hunt coons. We hunted along the Black Hawk to a point about three miles west of Hudson. At that place a little creek flows into the Black Hawk and at that point we saw a drove of buffaloes on the opposite side of the creek and at first we thought they were cattle, then it struck us that they might be bears. I said to my brother-in-law, "You hold the dogs and I will investigate and see what sort of animals they are."

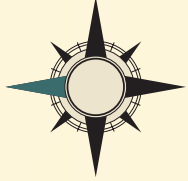
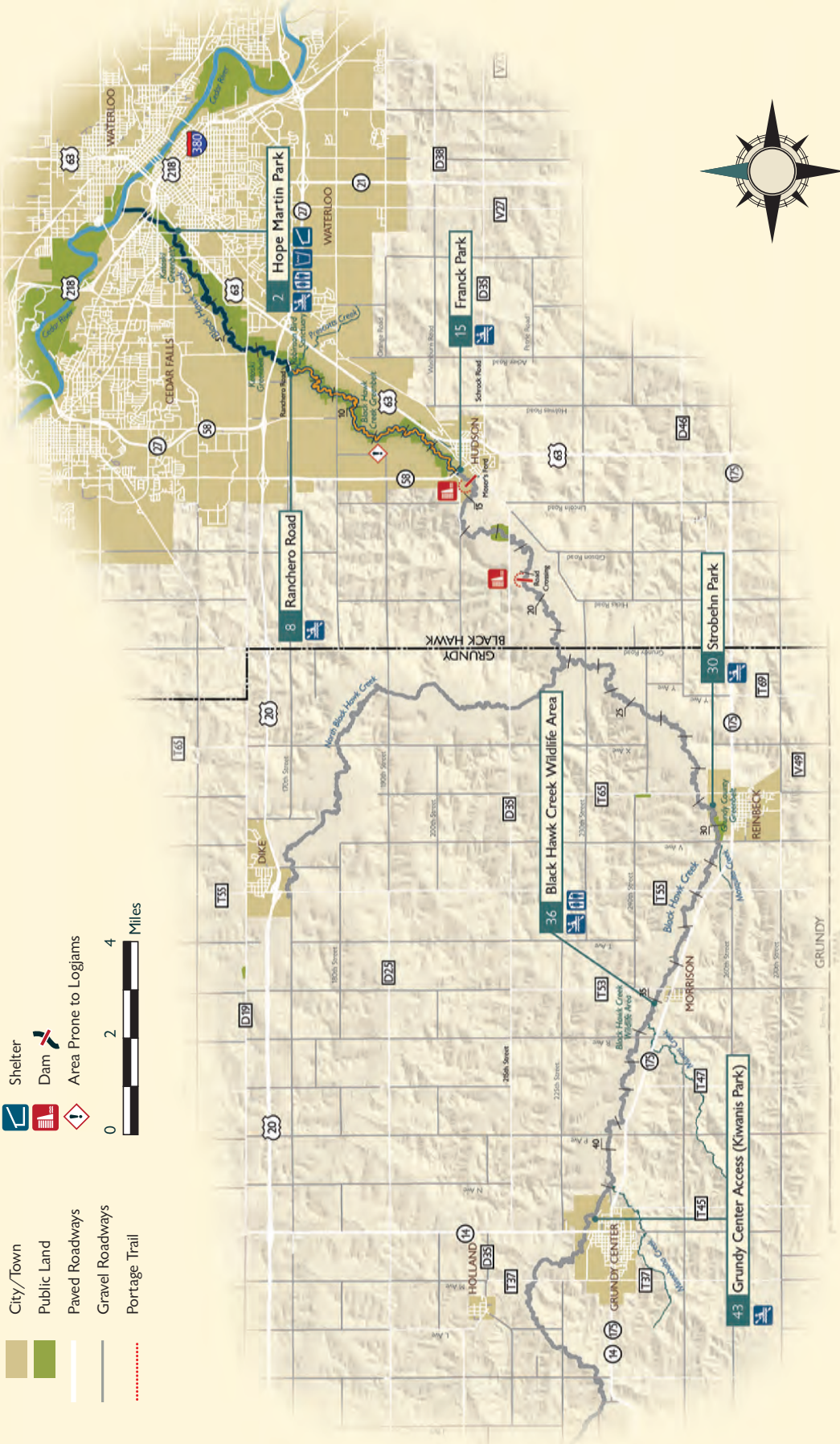
I went up on the ice to a place where I could crawl up on them and after I had worked myself along for some distance in the snow I raised up, but could see nothing. Finally, about ten feet away from where I was I saw a buffalo in a thicket of hazel brush. I got a shot at him and he fell. Then I loaded again as fast as I could, but the buffalo got up and finally managed to get away. By this time I got sight of a buffalo cow on a side hill and I shot her, the ball entering her eye. She fell over and rolled down onto the ice. I saw several other buffaloes about six or eight rods away and I fired at a large bull. He did not appear to pay much attention to the shot, so I loaded and gave it to him again, this time using two balls. He switched around as if he did not exactly like that dose and this time I saw that the herd was getting a trifle uneasy. Just then another one jumped up broadside towards me and I shot him through the heart. He fell and expired immediately. All this time I had failed to notice that I was directly in the trail that the buffaloes had taken to reach the spot where they were. I observed this fact, however, in a few moments when the whole herd came charging down where I stood. I saw a jack-oak tree a short distance from me and I made for it. I got there when the buffaloes were about a rod and a half away and, well, I climbed that tree and I was not very slow about it either. As they went past me I could not shoot any of them because there was no cap on my rifle. There were twenty-eight buffaloes in the herd and I got two of them. I found afterwards that the reason I did not get more of them was because I had been shooting too high to reach their vital parts. I had been accustomed to hunting deer and knew very little about killing buffaloes. I shot in all twenty-eight times or once for each member of the herd, though I did not shoot at all of them. Sometimes I used two balls in my rifle and sometimes three.

The next day a buffalo calf came to the place where I had killed the cow and I got that. The day after John Virden and I went up to the forks of the Black Hawk about five or six miles and we got another, but that was the last we saw of the herd and it is probable that was the last herd of buffaloes ever in this section.

BLACK HAWK CREEK WATER TRAIL

KEY

-  Intermediate Level
-  Advanced Level
-  Non Water Trail
-  City/Town
-  Public Land
-  Paved Roadways
-  Gravel Roadways
-  Portage Trail
-  Carry Down Access
-  Restrooms
-  Water
-  Shelter
-  Dam
-  Area Prone to Logjams



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BLACK HAWK CREEK WATER TRAIL



Bike trail bridge debris

An excursion on Black Hawk Creek may not be the best choice for the novice paddler. The challenging aspects of navigating this waterway can't be emphasized enough. Due to the narrow, winding, and sometimes shallow waters, deadfalls, and other obstacles, these stretches of the creek provide an element of danger, especially for novice paddlers. The need to frequently get out of the canoe, carry the canoe and gear through or over deadfalls, and occasionally bushwhack, can make for a very rigorous trip. Travel time can vary greatly depending on water level and number of deadfalls on a given day. Frequent portaging should be expected in some reaches.

Stream Reach: Franck Park (Access 15), Hudson to Ranchero Road (Access 8), Waterloo (7.5 miles)

The put-in access at Franck Park (Access 15) is located on the east side of Black Hawk Creek, on the southwest side of Highway 58, in the Black Hawk Creek Greenbelt. There is a park lane adjacent to a private driveway, and the lane is difficult to see. Although there is a sign and arrow on Highway 58, the lane entrance is not signed. The lane bends around to a small parking area. From the parking lot, it is about a 100-foot portage through some grassy vegetation to the put-in. The approach is rather steep, but the put-in is at the bridge, in shallow water and easy to launch from.

The creek is winding and almost entirely wooded on both banks. In a few places the bank opens up to a farm field or other development. The nature of the creek lends itself well to understanding the cutting and deposition actions of a meandering waterway. The creek bottom is mostly sand and gravel (more sand than in the stretch further downstream), and water clarity is such that a paddle can be seen at 1-2 feet depth. In the beginning of this stretch, the land is flatter and the cut-banks are less abrupt. In a few places, the cut-bank sides are rip-rapped, mostly with broken concrete. Some cut-banks are eroding. Cut-banks are dirt, with no rock outcrops.

The creek's width is largely uniform, ranging from approximately 40 to 60 feet (most commonly 45-55 feet). Nearly the entire creek corridor is wooded and shaded, with larger trees closing in on the banks being more common in the second half of the stretch.

As previously mentioned, deadfalls are common. However, in several areas it is apparent that someone has cut fallen trees with a chainsaw to allow canoe/kayak passage. Area resident and Black Hawk Creek Trail advocate, Al Donaldson, is responsible for initiating this effort with the help of volunteers. Without this activity, the creek would have been closed off to paddlers, requiring additional portages.

Along the reach, silver maples are dominant with other canopy trees present including locust, black walnut, white oak, and basswood. About two-thirds of the way downstream are occasional large white oaks, the landscape is slightly hillier, and trees are older and more diverse. Willows dominate on open areas and sandbars, especially during the first half of the stretch, but largely disappear as the corridor becomes more shaded.

The most notable hazards are fallen logs and log jams, often associated with current around river bends. Therefore the stretch may prove difficult for novice paddlers. The uprights for the bike trail bridge just prior to the take-out catch a lot of woody debris, and likely will be a perennial issue requiring portaging.

The lack of overhead bridges and power lines is notable along this stretch. None are encountered until the bike trail and Ranchero Road bridges just before the take-out. The Shaulis Road Bridge is dismantled, with the uprights and approaches still present. Other notable landmarks are the area near the City of Hudson's septic lagoon and an expanse of farmed crop land, both on the right side of the creek. The septic lagoon cannot be seen from the water, but an area that has been obviously kept free of trees and shrubs contains several tall posts. A chain-link fence that surrounds the lagoon can be seen in the distance. Downstream from the lagoon is a tile drainage outlet on the left bank – the only such outlet on the creek.



Al Donaldson

BLACK HAWK CREEK WATER TRAIL



Jaw bone on gravel bar

There are many messages to glean from the moving waters of Black Hawk Creek. They provide helpful guidance for watchful navigators. By watching the pattern of deposition and erosion, paddlers can “read” where the water is going, where deeper spots likely are to be found, and to know from a distance where to find gravel, sand, and mud. Swifter, deeper water carves into the cut-bank side of the creek, and often is associated with a corresponding deposition area (perhaps a sandbar) on the opposite bank. Fast water carries lots of material, from fine silt to gravel and rocks. As water velocity slows, heavier material is first to settle (rock and gravel), followed by less heavier material (sand), and then the lightest material (silt).

The water surface provides clues for navigation. “V’s” and “inverted “V’s” mark the locations of subsurface rocks, logs, and other hazards, and indicate the “safer” pathways of water that flow between the obstacles. When reading a river, paddlers listen for rapids and note changes in the water’s color (deeper water is usually darker than shallow water).



Ruins of the Shaulis Road Bridge

The narrow, wooded corridor makes this stretch great for birdwatching, providing better opportunities to stop and watch for wildlife. Birds of note, seen or heard, included belted kingfishers, great blue heron, Baltimore orioles, song sparrows, sandpipers, wild turkey, common yellowthroat, catbirds, and goldfinches. Just before reaching the Rancho Road Access you will pass the Robinson Bird Sanctuary with vibrant birdlife. When spring arrives, the woodland areas come to life with Virginia Bluebells, Spring Beauty, and Rue Anemone blanketing the forest floor.

The Hudson Breeding Bird Atlas study block located along Black Hawk Creek at Franck Park identified a total of 70 bird species from 1985-1990. Eleven of these are included on Iowa’s Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) List including the endangered red-shouldered hawk. This secretive bird prefers forested habitat and is more commonly heard than seen. It has been reported along the creek as recently as 2017.



Red-shouldered Hawk, *Buteo lineatus* (CC BY 2.0)

The take-out access (River Access 8) is in the Katoski Greenbelt Area on Rancho Road, and is signed from Highway 63 between Waterloo and Hudson. There is a short, easy portage from the creek to the parking lot (about 100 feet). A small drainage creek also enters near the take-out.

Recommended experience classification: **Advanced**



Rancho Road take-out

Stream Reach: Rancho Road, Waterloo (Access 8) to Hope Martin Park, Waterloo (Access 2) (6 miles)

The put-in for Access 8 is in the Katoski Greenbelt Area on Rancho Road, and is signed from Highway 63 between Waterloo and Hudson. There are two other parking areas prior to reaching the river access parking lot, which is located just over the bridge and along a bike trail. The parking area is rather small, and gets use from bicyclists. If the lot is full, paddlers should drop their watercraft and gear near the access, and then park in one of the other nearby lots. There is a short, easy portage from the parking lot to the creek (about 80 feet). A small drainage creek also enters near the portage. The trail and access is well signed, and the put-in is protected from the current and easy to use.

BLACK HAWK CREEK WATER TRAIL



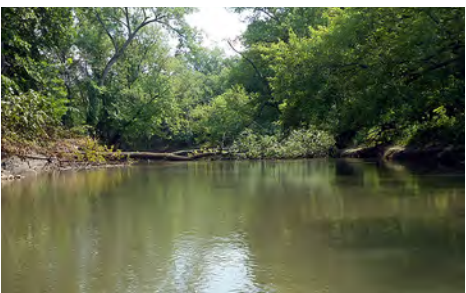
Straight channel with oaks



Riprap area



Cottonwood Stand



A deadfall across Black Hawk Creek

This section is extremely winding, with only one notable straight stretch of a couple hundred yards or more. Also along the stretch are several small drainages that enter the creek. The creek bottom is mostly sand and gravel, and water clarity is such that you can see a paddle at two-foot depth. About half of the cut-bank sides of the river have some sort of riprap (mostly a hodge-podge of rock, concrete and other materials). Clamshells and baitfish may be seen from time to time, and along with the areas of riprap and deadfalls, indicate potential for fishing.

The creek's width is largely uniform, ranging from approximately 30 to 60 feet (most commonly 40-50 feet). Nearly the entire creek corridor is wooded and shaded. In some stretches, the silver maple boughs form an overhead tunnel. The silver maples are dominant but other canopy trees include box elder, cottonwoods, locust, black walnut, willows, and basswood. Surprisingly, there are very few willows, even in open areas and sandbars. Large trees bordered nearly all the bank.

Again, the most notable hazards are the numerous fallen logs and log jams, often associated with current around river bends. Novice paddlers may find this stretch difficult.

The winding stream's narrow wooded corridor provides habitat and cover for animal and bird residents. Opportunities to surprise wildlife abound "around the next corner" and a welcome sense of wildness and seclusion may be found as the creek continues toward the Cedar River and downtown Waterloo. It is possible that you will encounter few other river users on this peaceful stretch. Besides a single drag track over a sandbar portage, there may be little sign of human use. Litter is minimal.

The only notable development along the creek is on the left bank downstream of the Ridgeway Ave. Bridge, and only consists of a few houses. A stand of large, straight cottonwoods exists just downstream from the bridge and houses, mostly on the right side. This stretch is close to what was known as Virden's Grove, along the north side of the creek as it turns to the east. Some of Waterloo's earliest Euro-American settlers, members of the Virden family from Illinois, lived here from the late 1840's. Other developments along the creek are three bridges (Highway 20, Ridgeway Ave, and Ansborough Ave) which can be heard (traffic) from a distance, and power lines that cross over the creek in one location.

Many species are well adapted to living among human population areas, and thrive in small areas of wild habitat, sometimes very close to where people work and play. The Black Hawk Creek Corridor is such a place. Many of these species are generalists in their habitat needs. Examples are raccoons, deer, snapping turtles, blue jays, barred owls, and many birds. Species such as wild turkey won't likely be seen around homes in the city, but are only a few minutes upstream in the wooded Black Hawk Creek Corridor. Other elements of wildness in this surprising place are the lack of urban noise (sounds of traffic were nearly absent); the lack of visible human developments (blocked by the wooded corridor); and the sensory sights, sounds, smells and feel of nature.

Enjoy the opportunity to see birds close up. As the landscape changes back and forth from agricultural to wooded, different species are seen. In open areas, killdeer are on the sandbars, song sparrows, and red-winged blackbirds are constantly heard, and goldfinches flutter from the willows. In the more wooded areas, orioles, robins, and cardinals sing, an occasional owl silently crosses the creek, and woodpecker holes dot the dead trees. In spring, the corridor likely draws many species of warblers and some migrating shore birds. The winding creek allows wildlife watchers to "sneak up" more quickly on birds. Great blue herons constantly get "chased" from bend to bend. Cliff swallow nests are on the underside of several of the bridges, and the swallows can be seen fluttering as paddlers get close. Other species observed in the corridor include common yellowthroats, brown thrashers, catbirds, chickadees, kingfishers, and spotted sandpipers.

The deposition along the creek includes gravel bars and sandbars, with little mud. One sandbar is notable as being the largest, and may require two portages around deadfalls.

The take-out access at Access 2 is located on the north side of Black Hawk Creek in Hope Martin Park, located on Fletcher Ave., and is signed off Highway 63. It is somewhat difficult to see from upstream due to tree limbs, but the park is obvious and the bridge is a good

BLACK HAWK CREEK WATER TRAIL



Hope Martin Park (Access 2) take-out from the water

landmark just downstream. There is a short, easy portage from the Hope Martin Park parking lot (50 feet), and the access is protected and easy to use. The area around the portage may be covered in sand, the result of occasional floods.

Recommended experience classification: Intermediate

BE SAFE OUT THERE!

Follow these safety TIPS to keep your trip enjoyable:

- g Pack all essentials and in waterproof bags.
- g Check the river water levels and currents before each trip.
- g Know the weather forecast, including areas upstream, and stay aware of the weather on your trip.
- g Make sure someone knows your planned entry and exit points and estimated times.
- g Always wear a properly-sized life jacket.
- g 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.
- g Always portage around lowhead dams. Surface appearance can be deceiving. Undercurrents can be strong enough for drowning.
- g If you capsize, remain on the upstream side of your boat to prevent being pinned.
- g 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!

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

Other Resources:

IA DNR Interactive Paddling Map:

www.iowadnr.gov/paddlingmap

IA DNR Paddler Safety Info:

www.iowadnr.gov/paddlingsafety

Cedar Valley Water Trails

www.cedarvalleywatertrails.com

Black Hawk County Conservation

<http://www.blackhawkcountyparks.com/> (319) 433-7275

Grundy County Conservation

<https://www.grundycountyiowa.gov/departments/conservation>

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