

The Shiawassee River Canoe/Kayak Guide

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Friends of the Shiawassee River

For Its Course Principally through Shiawassee County, Michigan



General Information. The Shiawassee River corridor has been called a “country scenic” valley with farm fields and forested flood plains and embankments forming the landscape. With a few exceptions, the Shiawassee River’s course in Shiawassee County is great for beginners with some interesting riffles and obstructions in the way of rocks and tree falls that provide a challenge for some. Frequent changes in the river height from storms or spring melt raise the navigation conditions to intermediate and advanced status and these high water periods are not recommended for beginners. There are five impoundments/dams along the way: Parshallburg (partially dismantled) the Byron Mill Pond Dam, and the three low-head impoundments (“weirs”) in Owosso. Only the Owosso weirs and Parshallburg impoundments are navigable and are recommended for canoeists with some experience. All the impoundment structures may be portaged.. Another obstruction, a concrete/culvert causeway, is located upstream from Corunna at the brick factory site and requires a sweep to the south embankment to navigate or portage (in low flow season) through a properly sized culvert.

Except for flood stage or high water, the boating season is year-round for the hardiest. The ‘ordinary person’ season extends from mid-April to late October with a pre-trip check advised on low flow conditions that can occur anytime. Low flow in July and August especially from Corunna to Parshallburg may be accompanied by a weed problem that may hamper paddles and is less of a recreational experience. Deer flies may show-up in early July, but are rarely overwhelming; some get by well enough with head nets and long-sleeved shirts. The Shiawassee County Health Department advises that the river is for partial body contact only and care should be taken to not ingest water or swim there. Washing of hands prior to snacks and meals taken along the way is advised.

The passage from Byron to Parshallburg is picturesque with plenty of wildlife together with welcoming mature forest stands. The river is noted on a Midwest scale for its small mouth bass fishing. Some commonly-sited birds that leave an impression include the blue heron, cedar waxwing, osprey, bald eagle and kingfisher. These birds tend to lead one downstream landing and flying away until they eventually circle back to their territory and nests. The land cover includes the pre-settlement forest types of oak-hickory and beech-maple. The willows, oaks, sycamores and cottonwoods are everywhere, and a few escaped the lumber era to provide glimpses of virgin timber specimens. The flowering weeds include joe-pye weed and others that are excellent bank stabilization species that provide natural beauty. Invasive plants are visible, especially purple loosestrife at specific locations.

Although this guide shows sections averaging a little over two hours, any trip length can be planned with the convenient number of drop off/landing locations. There are structural improvements underway for many of these spots, but are all manageable at this time. The descriptions below provide detail on their relative condition and relative ease of entrance and exiting. A more convenient tri-fold publication with a map is available on-line at the Friends of the Shiawassee River or at outlets such as the Owosso-Corunna Chamber of Commerce.

Because nearly all of the launches are at public parks, rest areas with porta-johns and picnic sites are of great benefit. A private campground northwest of Byron established as a launch in this guide has a swimming lake and many amenities for a visitor pass fee.

Historical sites abound in this river valley. These areas are reflected in the Section descriptions that follow the introduction. The entire guide strives for compatibility with the recent State and National Water Trail designation from Holly to Chesaning through the State of Michigan and National Park Service respectively.

All-in-all the Shiawassee River is a superb natural, cultural and recreational resource. So much enjoyment gained from Mother Nature’s free energy meaning the current of the river—as one glides downstream in an impressive flora and fauna corridor. Take a moment to stand in the river at hip depth to feel this force and appreciate its unyielding influence.

Section 1 – Byron High School Ball Fields to Walnut Hills Camp & Canoe.

Length: 5 river miles Time: 2 Hours Grade: 1.7 ft/mi

a) Starting Point: This section of the river begins at the Byron High School ball diamonds on Bath Road—south side—just west of the bridge in the Village.



Byron High School Ballfields Launch—Village of Byron

Upon entering the driveway to the ball diamonds a two-track veers to the left about 50 yards into the grounds. There is a parking lot, a gravel walk approach and a new concrete panel ramp. These school grounds are open to the public but users should be aware that the entrance gate could lock-in a vehicle if they are closed at night. There is no charge for the use of this facility. It is a frequent starting point for organizational outings. A detailed river guide map is posted at the entrance.

There are less favorable options to move upstream from this location to the bridge on Byron Road south of the Village or to the east impound outlet from the Bryon Mill Pond. There are services in this quaint Village—post office, pizzeria, store and fuel. Other out-of-county upstream bridge crossings exist (Meier Road, and Duffield Road on the Main Branch and Lillie Road Bridge on the South Branch) but are not evaluated in this Guide. Those who have tried these stretches described numerous tree falls, and the Byron Mill Pond requires an awkward portage on the main branch at a makeshift landing on cemetery grounds.

b) End Point: The end point of this section is a small gravelly shoreline at a private campground (Walnut Hills) immediately past the Lehring Road Bridge on the right. There is a camp store there for convenience items and restrooms. The cost for a visitor pass to park a vehicle in in process with a new owner. Pay this before leaving the site on an excursion because a visitor pass must lie on the dashboard of the vehicle window while parked. To learn more about the Walnut Hills facilities and arrangements call 989-634-9782. The privately operated canoe/kayak livery is temporarily closed.

c) River Description: Except for the Village of Byron in the first ½ mile of the trip, there is very little development along the course. The woods are deep and the second growth forest is quite mature. It is possible to paddle in the shade for nearly the entire trip. This is an easily managed ride on this slow moving stream section with no riffles or rapids.

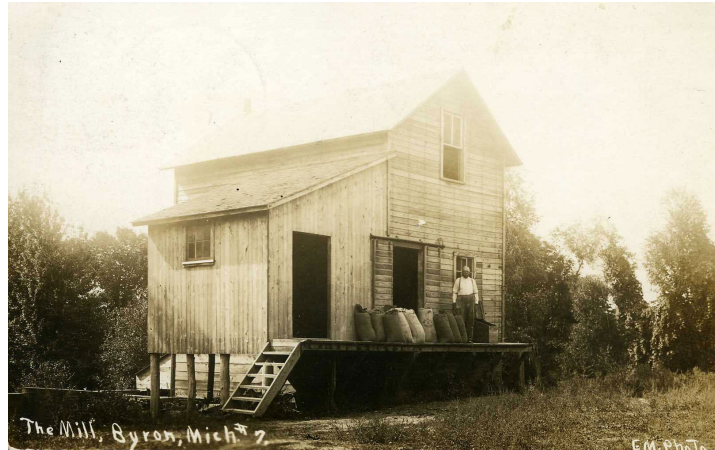


1920's Post Card of autumn river view near Byron

Although the current is slow, many preserved tree falls with openings make the maneuvering interesting, and these provide regularly used perches for birds, snakes, and turtles. There will be common sitings of kingfisher and blue herons.

Geologically this section of river north to Bancroft was part of the present-day Looking Glass River in glacial times when the glacial advance of the Saginaw ice lobe stagnated and forced that westerly course. Historically Byron Village had a hotel, lumber mill, flour mill, furniture factory and all the trappings of a late 19th century urban place that

condensed gradually to a variety of paddler friendly service and convenience businesses.



Byron Mill Post Card

History abounds in the Byron area. A description from historical resources relates...When a traveler, not familiar to this wilderness, asked for directions when leaving Detroit or Toledo, he was told, “You must go through the woods to the north or northwest till you come to the seventh river.” “How will I know when I come to the river?” “Why, the Shiawassee makes more noise than all the rivers in that country.” From A History of Byron, Michigan
With respect to multi-day excursions, Walnut Hills is the only riverside campground in the County. At the end of the water trail in south Saginaw County (Chesaning), a fine campground is available. There are city and county parks along the way and except for the lack of support services for campers (other than well pumps and porta-johns), there is no known prohibition setting up a tent for the night at various places with porta-johns. Long distance/multi-day paddlers are advised to call in advance for permission at a public park.

Section 2 – Walnut Hills Campground to Geeck Road County Park.

Length: 6.7 river miles Time: 2 Hours Grade: 2.3 ft/mi

Starting Point: See the End Point description in Section 1 above. This is a nice gravelly launch with a short walk from your parked vehicle.



Walnut Hills Canoe & Camp Launch Site at Lehring Road.

b) End Point: A scenic six-acre riverside park, Geeck Road County Park, has a parking area a recently installed launch with picnic grounds, pavilion and porta-john (sometimes). The park is at the intersection of Geeck Road (pronounced Gēck) and Exchange Road. The landing is north of the parking lot and is indicated with a sign.

c) River Description: This section of river runs a little faster but is still deemed a beginner's stream in normal flows. The curving course of the river, islands, swifter current and tree falls after the Cole Road Bridge (no take-out here, but it is being examined for a spot on the west side just past the bridge) offer some interest and are easily managed. This section is more developed agriculturally, but there are very few homes during this stretch. The river widens in three or four places where a July or August trip may require a canoeist to "take an in-river hike" for a short spell. As with Section 1, the course is well-shaded for most of its length.



River view on the route to Geeck Road County Park

The trees are mature and the heron/kingfisher/turtle sightings very frequent.

The Cole Road Bridge marks the first Caucasian settlement in Shiawassee County, circa 1817. The area commonly referred to as Knaggs Bridge included an Indian reservation, a trading post, dam and the bridge. Henry Bolieu traveled here from Saginaw Bay in 1816 when local Indians gave him directions to this area through the "river that runs straight" with their name for that directive translated as the "Shiawassee" [River] (the Flint River, the Cass River and the Tittabawassee River all enter the Shiawassee River from an approximate east-west angle). The Williams Brothers met Chief Wasso of the Chippewa Tribe here and hiked the Indian

trail to present-day Owosso where they viewed the rapids in Owosso for a future mill site and a town that they platted in 1836.



Knaggs Bridge Historic Marker



Knaggs Bridge—1856 structure with earthen impoundment

The Native American Indian trails leading to Owosso from Oakland County and onward also to Grand Rapids intersected here (Grand River Road overlays sections of the west bound

trail). The Chippewa Indians were newcomers to this area and settled here in the early 1700's to take advantage of the trading goods available to the southeast. At the trading post ("the Exchange"), furs, lumber and furniture (from Bancroft) were sold; Indians traded nuts, deer hides, and even maple syrup. The Exchange was a meeting ground of frontier settlers and Native Americans.



The Old Exchange – Knaggs Bridge area near Bancroft

Section 3 – Geeck Road County Park to Shiatown Dam County Park.

Length: 6 river miles Time: 1 hr 45 min Grade: 2.5 ft/mi

a) Starting Point: See the end point description in Section 2 above.



Launch Ramp at Geeck Road Park

b) End Point: With the removal of the Shiatown hydro dam in 2019 A parking lot is now conveniently adjacent to an improved landing on the right side of the river.



New Reforestation at *Shiatown County Park--Approach to the New Landing*

c) River Description: For the first three miles the river is much like the predecessor sections—curving, moderate flow, forested, shady and sparsely settled. The YMCA property is here and except for a mowed trail access for canoe outings and river use, their property is maintained in a natural state—it’s a beautiful run through here. The high embankment on the river is at the end of the YMCA property along Exchange Road. After this point, some farm fields and meadow are seen. Three bridges and a few islands are encountered. None of the bridges are take out points at this time, nor do they need to be unless paddlers must disembark for some reason. The last ½ mile or so is the fast moving current where the reservoir was drawn down in 2012. Evidence exists of a five-foot high siltation history since 1904 when the present dam was built. The river has found its original course and the site is re-vegetated and stabilized.

There is a noticeable increase in kingfishers upstream from the old reservoir that cackle away while sweeping the shoreline, then perching, and then sweeping again. All in all this is a very pleasurable paddling section but relatively short in the larger context of the river experience in Shiawassee County.

The Geeck Road Park to Shiatown Park stretch is a shorter run that may be extended with another section of river to lengthen the outing. That desired option is the new (2018) landing/launch in Vernon Village 45 minutes downstream from Shiatown to experience that excellent recreational section of river full of riffles, curves, glacial boulder deposits, swifter current and bird life. The Vernon facility also shortens the Lytle Road destination for novice paddlers and “floaters” who do not want to stay on water too long.

Section 4 – Shiatown Dam to Vernont then Lytle Road County Park.

Length: 7.6 river miles Time: 2 hrs 45 min Grade: 4.6 ft/mi

Starting Point: Below the dam there is a nice gravel parking area south of Bennington Road and east of the bridge. The starting point is a picturesque, newly constructed concrete panel

ramp. This is a lively river section launch. The current is very nice here and a great start to a paddle. This County Park offers a new pit toilet as well as a picnic area.



Shiatown County Park Launch and a popular fishing hole.

The current is very nice here and a great start to a paddle.

Intermediate Point: Vernon Village has the river’s newest facility (Fall, 2018) that will offer Paddleboat lockers to permit a short walk to the adjacent Village park with porta-john and a Village downtown with a variety of services including an ice cream parlor.

c) End Point: There is a newly upgraded County roadside park at Lytle Road and Kerby Road just east of the Lytle Road Bridge. This small scaled space is what is commonly called a “pocket park”. There is a new pit toilet here along with a parking area, barbecue spit, picnic table and nice shading. The park is primarily set to provide river access and a nice roadside rest area. The landing is well-signed for paddlers that includes an upstream approach sign to relieve anxious paddlers who have been on a long run from either Shiatown County Park or the Vernon Village landing.



Lytle Road Park Access Facility

d) River and Vicinity Description: The Shiawassee Town area is one of the most historic areas of Shiawassee County. In the 1840's a city was platted here at an advantageous drop in the river where the Dam now lies. Shiawassee Town was the capital of the State of Michigan for one day. There are side streets that are remnants of the intended city on a landscape that is rolling and scenic. One can imagine the possibilities of a fine urban place as the early settlers did. Today there is a variety of park installations for picnicking and play. Porta-johns and an impending potable water pump well are on-site across the river to the west side park area for a short walk. A new footbridge is proposed to connect the west and east side parks.

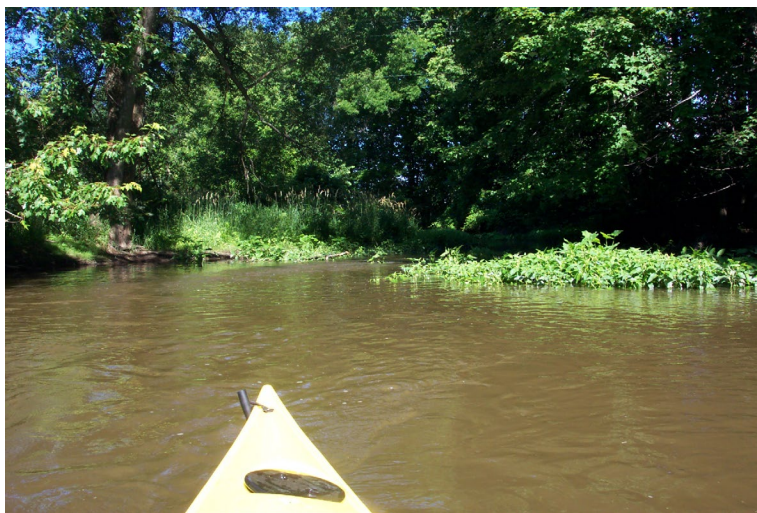
After Shiatown, the river trip is entertaining with several riffles while navigating about the rocks, river bends, and occasional tree falls. The grade of the river between Shiatown and the Vernon landing is 7.5 feet per mile that reflects itself in a lively current together with many river bends. The river narrows in places, splits around islands that can be passed on either side, and widens in a few sections where it is shallow with frequent boosts over boulders called "glacial erratics". The landscapes vary from tree-lined farm fields and deep forest in floodplain with the option to stay in the shade for most of the trip. Cedar waxwings (seasonally), blue heron and flycatchers are the most commonly seen birds. Perching turtles (painted and snappers)—bumps on a log—are frequently seen. There is evidence of beaver activity with tree falls along the shorelines.



2018 Access Facility at Vernon Village

The Vernon landing raises the notion of “trail towns”. On the section of river described in this guide there are five trail towns (in succession, Byron, Vernon, Corunna, Owosso and Chesaning). The walkability from the launch sites offers convenience services, lodging in Owosso, recreational outlets with parks and museums, intersection with land trails at Owosso and Corunna, dining options and a host of other commercial outlets. The other trail town trait is the hosting of special events with a river theme. Owosso’s Curwood Festival in the first weekend of June is the most extensive tourist attraction. With the pending “crowning” of the river as a state and nationally recognized water trail, the trail towns, including Vernon, will expand hosting services and events.

A geologic phenomenon creates an interesting tale of the river’s meandering course--that is the Maple River Drain that enters about 5 minutes downstream from the Shiatown Dam. This Drain is in the glacial outwash plain where the glacial Lake Maumee



Maple Drain Entry to Shiawassee River-see text on geology

(Predecessor to Lake Erie) melt waters drained westerly in a mile wide valley (leaving the boulders and rich gravel deposits) to the Wabash River in Indiana and onto the Mississippi River. Today a short segment of this Drain, an under-fit stream for this scoured valley) is said to reverse course in very high waters and actually create a flow westerly over the Lake Huron drainage divide into the Lake Michigan drainage basin via the Maple River and Grand River. A short hike up the drain (not recommended) gets to the drainage divide where the Maple River source begins.

Finally the other point of interest is the Martin Road riffle upstream from the Lytle Road landing. The riffles here are the most vigorous in the County (aside from Owosso's navigable dam sluiceways) and offer a few passage way alternatives for paddling fun.



Martin Road Riffle—leftover strewn about boulders from a prior dam

All-in-all the Shiatown Dam to Vernon/Lytle Road section is a great place to enjoy the Shiawassee River and competes admirably with most excursions elsewhere in the State with its unique mix of recreational paddling, history, deeply forested stretches and nature enjoyment.

Section 5: Lytle Road Park to the Brady Street Landing or McCurdy Park in Corunna.

Length: 3.2 river miles Time: 50-60 min Grade: 2 ft/mi

a) Starting Point: For details see the End Point at Lytle Road Park in Section 4 above.

b) End Point: There are two possibilities: 1) Brady Street Landing, one of the better landings in the County, or; 2) With the recent dam removal paddling on a short distance to McCurdy Park is the favored option.



Replica of Corunna's new barrier free launch/landing at McCurdy Park

c) River Section Description: The length of the Lytle Road-to-Corunna section does not offer a sufficient outing on its own for most except when part of a recreational addition to some other purpose, principally fishing. Upon dam removal since 2019, an outing could be nicely continued downstream to Owosso as many do after a rewarding respite in Corunna's well-furnished park and accommodating downtown.

At Lytle Road, the trip starts well with a generous current within wooded streamside. There is an interesting island encounter with a narrow passage to the right. At the halfway point a causeway obstruction at the Brick Plant requires a left bank approach to a narrow bridge opening that is easily navigated but not visible on the approach. Most miss this narrow bridge option and are forced to tackle the awkward portage at the causeway. In higher waters one may paddle right over the causeway. Be aware that the bridge opening is often clogged with woody debris and usually requires the causeway portage at low flows.

Just after the Brady Street landing and around the bend at the former dam site is the office of the Friends of the Shiawassee River, a local non-profit with the mission to "care, share and enjoy" the resource that is our river.



Corunna Brick Plant Causeway Bridge opening-south bank

There are shoreline viewings of the mine tailings from the brick plant, pontoon boats with docks (likely removed after the dam removal, and the reservoir is completely drawn down), and a decent variety of birds. Keen eyes will note the only exposure of bedrock in Shiawassee County—shale and sandstone sedimentary rock layers. There is very little shade in the second half of the trip. The former Corunna Dam area has a nice vest-pocket park—“Heritage Park”—for a rest area and nice fishing. There are no facilities here but downtown Corunna, a full service commercial district is a few blocks south and McCurdy Park’s landing a few minutes of paddling downstream from Brady Street offers full public park services.

The Brady Street Landing just above the footbridge is the most accommodating take-out along the entire stretch of the river’s passage through Shiawassee County. The barrier free accessibility facility, available in 2019, offers persons with disabilities the opportunity to experience a safe and scenic section of the River. Paddlers are advised that there is no like facility downstream as of yet.

Corunna is the County Seat for Shiawassee County. The dam, now a partially drawn-down impoundment reservoir area, provided a head of water power for a grist mill and woolen mill. An historic village at McCurdy Park includes many restored historic buildings relocated from several places in the County to create a step-back-in-time. This restoration exhibit area is well-worth a stop along the way. At McCurdy Park a Riverwalk/Bikeway trail begins and traverses westerly to Owosso’s downtown. From Owosso that trail connects to the Ionia to Owosso rails-to-trails bikeway.



Post Card of Corunna Grist Mill and Dam

Section 6: Brady Street Landing or McCurdy Park to Harmon Patridge Park Landing.

Length: 6.2 river miles

Time: 1 hr 45 min

Grade: 3.4 ft/mi

a) Starting Point: There are three options for starting points in Corunna, all on public land. The first, and the more easily managed start is Brady Street. The second is Heritage Park on N. Shiawassee Street—nice rocky/gravelly river bed for a clean entry and new parking lot.



Base of now removed Corunna Dam Launch Site—fishing excursion underway

The third launch is at McCurdy Park just upstream from the footbridge at the barrier free structure launch (in repair but to be reinstalled). McCurdy Park is on State Highway M-71 east of Downtown Corunna and at the end of Norton Street. This exceptional park has a full slate of services for park users, a historic village and many recreational diversions. Downtown Corunna has restaurants and services useful to river voyagers.

b) End Point: There are a few other end points in the Owosso area despite the bias of this recommended section's end point at Harmon Patridge Park (aka "Green Meadows"). The accommodating Harmon Patridge Park launch is specifically built for canoe landings and starts. It can be found north of VG's Grocery Store/Citizen's Bank at Chippewa Trail off State Highway M-52. One can take Chippewa Trail past the Wastewater Treatment Plant where a small parking area is located on the right with the launch on the left. This launch is well-signed. Except for a short hike to VG's grocery, there are few services here.

An alternative nice take-out is at the Voight Family Loop Park just past the wrought iron bridge in Owosso. This is a City Park, and the new landing avoids the first low head dam in Owosso (that is navigable for enthusiasts) and the possible location for another accessibility landing structure to coordinate with Corunna's new barrier free structure. The landing is fully developed and signed 200 feet past the Oakwood Bridge. A second take-out alternative is at the Middle School (east side) below the first (of three) Owosso low-head dam where a new landing will be constructed in fall, 2022. Parking convenience is somewhat of a chore at the Water Street lot.



Middle School Landing-Downtown Owosso on the Amphitheater Grounds

This is a popular landing for special events on the river. Curwood Castle, across from the Middle School, has an interesting boat dock stairway. That stairway served the row boats that benefited from a reservoir created by the Chipman Street weir. The broken Chipman Street low head dam doesn't pond water here any longer to meet the steps at the proper river level. The Middle School take out avoids the two low-head dams downstream at the Chipman Street bend and Memorial Health Care/Hospital respectively.

c) River Description: This section is urban with some natural areas along the airport and James Miner Bikeway. It is an interesting paddle to see how riparian owners treat their shorelines—there are far too many examples of mowed lawns to the water’s edge.



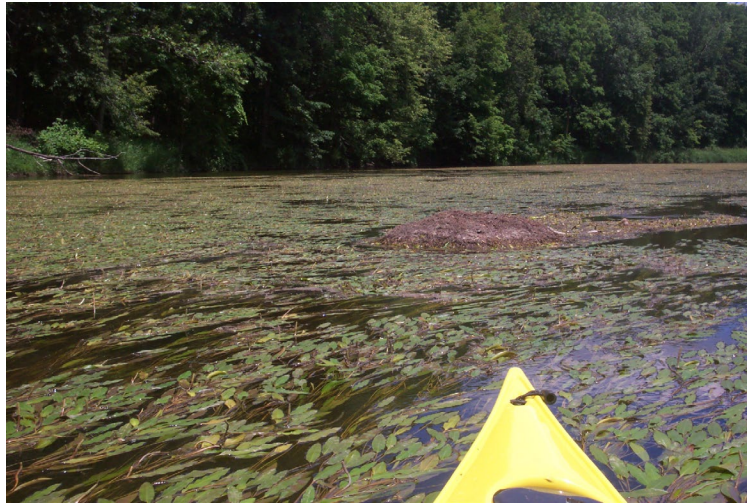
Private footbridge to an island in Owosso past M-52 Bridge

Educational and promotional programs are underway to increase shading of the shoreline and natural vegetation buffers between lawns and the river’s edge. Avoidance of phosphates in lawn and garden fertilizers is also encouraged together with lower application rates.



Streambank Erosion Conditions: Grass-to-Shore Example

In low flow conditions later in the season (starting in early July), the invasive river vegetation dominates and is, in part, a reflection of over-fertilization from non-point source runoff—lawns and farms. Additionally the river is very wide in many sections making it shallower



August weed growth east of M-52 Bridge near Henderson

and supportive of sun seeking plants. It is recommended to check the river gauge to determine if navigation will be enjoyable or not. That phone number is 989-725-6800 and a recorded message is available. The internet source with up-to-date gauge readings is:

www.waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?site_no=04144500.

We found a tolerable river level in low flow late summer conditions to be just under 2.5 feet. Below that level the weeds and keel-rubbing gravel beds are periodically bothersome. At other times of the year and for some upstream locations without much weed growth, flow levels slightly below 2.5 feet are okay. Others like to refer to the cubic flow per second measure also on the USGS web page noted above and state that conditions aren't good at least in Sections 6, to 8 when the flow is below 100 cubic feet per second. This recommendation does not always apply to some upstream sections where there are narrower channels.

There are three impoundments in this route, all in Owosso, with options for portage (unimproved) or paddle-throughs. Navigating these is possible for many (but only through sluiceways of the dams) but less passable in low flow for the two smaller weirs at Chipman Street and the Hospital. Expect a thump for your watercraft at low flows.



Weir at Owosso Memorial Hospital

Ordinary caution is advised in high waters, but that is true for the entire stretch of the river. The sluiceways for the dams are not easily identified, especially in a low-lying kayak, so paddlers are advised to approach the openings slowly to assure a straight-on approach.

Keeping the craft oriented parallel with the stream flow and applying ‘power’ paddling strokes while staying aligned are helpful practices through the sluiceways of the dams.

The portage options for the first dam in downtown Owosso at Main Street is to take out at the walkway at the south side of the Main Street Bridge—a little awkward but doable—and then a short walk downstream from the dam to the put-in point behind the former Middle School. The portage options for the two downstream weirs are on rocky shorelines to the left (the west bank). These are private property so the portage—legally permissible--should be brief, close to the shoreline, and only for the purpose of immediate take-out and put-in.

Points of interest abound in this section and there are adequate bird sitings despite the urbanization. There is not much shade here with many long straight courses. Some of the highlights along the way include:

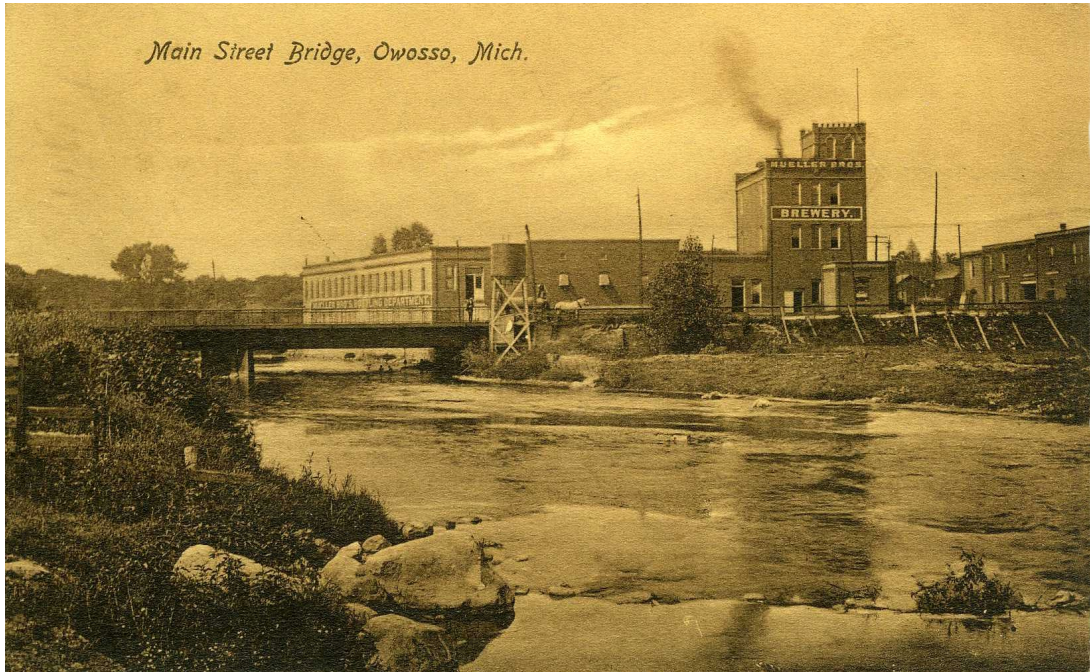
- Downtown Corunna and Corunna’s McCurdy Park with an historic village
- The Oakwood Avenue wrought iron bridge in Owosso—an 1876 bridge fully restored in 2009.



Oakwood Avenue 1876 Iron Bridge, Voight Loop Trail in Owosso

- Willman Field—Owosso’s CCC/WPA-built classic football and soccer stadium in a traditional neighborhood environment.
- The James Miner Bikeway from Corunna to Owosso—plenty of friendly recreational outings and greetings ashore.

Here the Shiawassee was “pirated” tens of thousands of years ago after the last glacial period from its course westerly to the Grand River to its new course northerly to the Saginaw River. The course takes a sweeping 90-degree turn (Native Americans called it “the Big Bend”) with faster moving water (prior to the three dams) that became the reason Owosso was settled in order to power the flour and lumber mills. There’s more on this geological history in this Guide. A brewery had an advantageous spot here.

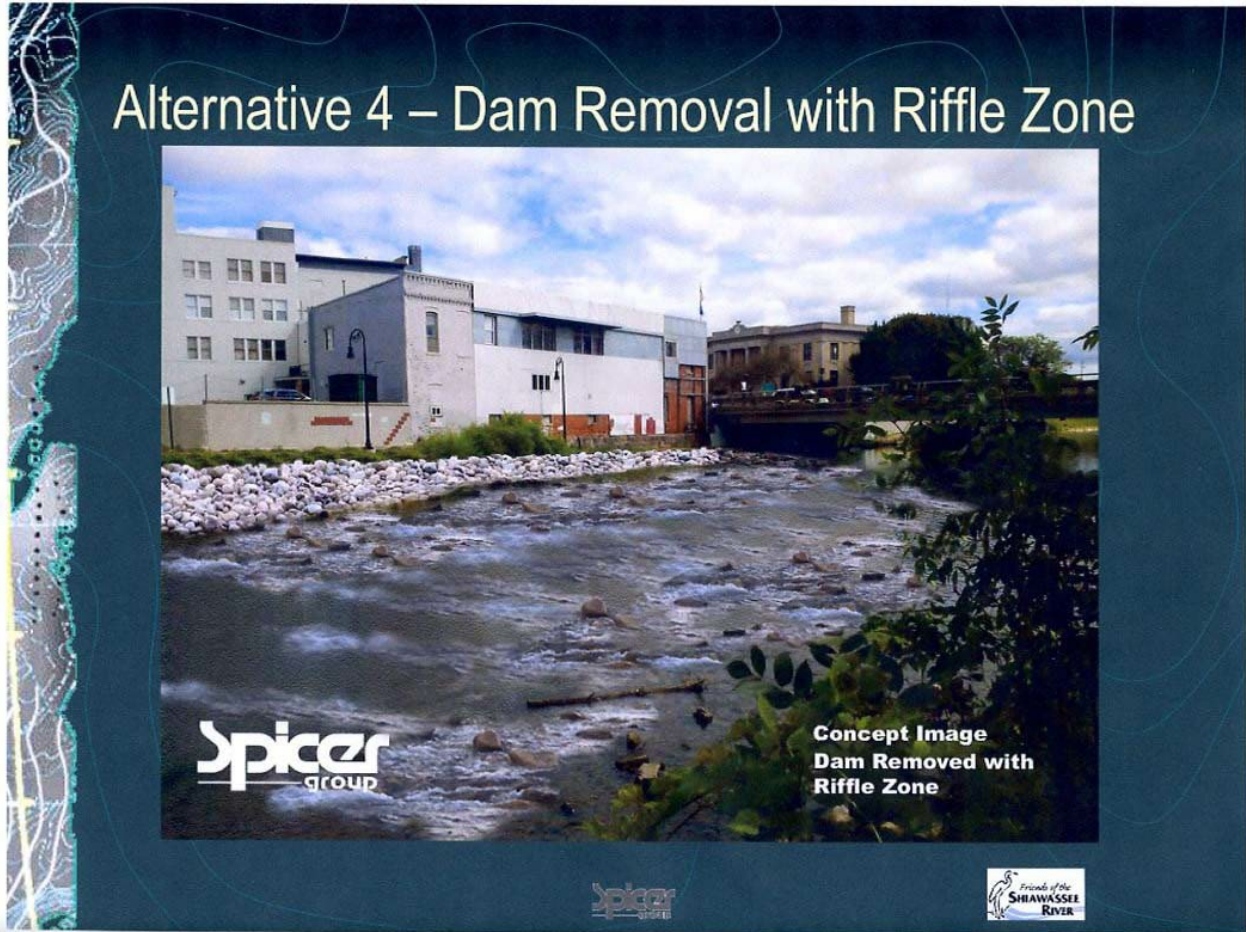


Mueller's Brewery Post Card and the undammed Owosso rapids

- The stately homes past the M-52 bridge where many of Owosso’s early industrial families built grand residences. The towering home seen at the island west of M-52 was built by Congressman/Industrialist Alvin Bentley and has a footbridge to an island. Take the course of the river to the right of the island to see this. Other homes in Owosso from Curwood Castle to Harmon Patridge Park show examples of the elaborate rear-yard viewing decks where Owosso residents enjoy the view of their river and the briskly moving water with its seasonally changing character.
- Walking tours of Owosso’s historic neighborhoods adjoining the river begin at the Chamber of Commerce (in front of the Armory/Middle School landing area) where a helpful tri-fold walking guide can be obtained for another interesting break from the paddle excursion. For newcomers to the area, a stop at the Castle Park area in downtown Owosso is strongly advised for an outstanding enrichment experience to the recreational outing.

This river section offers an opportunity to comment on the presence of impoundments in the river. While important to those who wish to preserve a consistent shoreline and volume of flow adjoining their properties, river ecology benefits much more from free flow of the stream. The Owosso low head dam at Main Street (constructed for pre-sewer interceptor

sewage management) would be a good first example of conversion to riffle flow where a fast running river section existed prior to its construction—the area’s Native Americans called Owosso “Big Rapids”. The other two low-head dams were also constructed in 1932 for sewage management and Depression-era infrastructure jobs that constituted two weeks of work per dam. They are now obstructions for walleye fish passage and represent a water quality degradation influence from many perspectives. An unimpeded river would be very active at these impoundment sites when the Owosso rapids are reestablished.



Owosso Dam at Main Street showing a whitewater alternative with walleye consequent migration passage.

Section 7: Harmon Patridge Park Landing to Henderson Road County Park.

Length: 7.6 river miles Time: 2 hrs 15 min Grade: 8 ft/mi

a) Starting Point: See the End Point description for Section 6 above. This is an outstanding launch facility and offers a design standard for difficult stream bank settings.



Harmon Patridge Park Launch (at very low flow)



Harmon Park Directional Launch Sign

b) End Point: Henderson County Park is a fine stopping point with supportive park services (porta-johns, barbecues, picnic facilities, and well-water pump). The park location is on Henderson Road 1 miles west of the State Highway M-52 intersection. There is a new launch in Henderson Park on the east end. Paddlers are advised to be patient as the park's start where the Henderson Road Bridge is passed through because the landing on the east park is a few thousand feet distant from this false sense of arrival.



Henderson Park Bluff View of Paddlers

This west side landing is a gravelly surface and easily managed but is a multi-use area that is often congested with non-paddler uses. The second is 2000 feet downstream at the east end of the park that is new and very convenient. The site is signed and accessed from Henderson Park's first driveway (or second when the gate is locked)—straight back to the launch and parking area and visible from the road unlike the west side river terrace site.



Henderson Park East Side Launch

c) River and Vicinity Description: The River heads north from Owosso with a number of turns and plenty of riffles. It is entertaining to look upstream after many of these riffles and see the slight fall in the river elevation. There is shade in the early morning and later afternoons on this stretch but plenty of sun otherwise. Despite urbanization, the river trip in this section leaves the impression of being mostly forested or at least tree-lined.



Owosso to Henderson River View

The steep embankments are everywhere and provide another indication of the geologic-age river piracy (described later in this section) when the course of the “new” river cut an incised valley on its way to the glacial Lake Huron lacustrine plain in the Chesaning region.

Many of the embankments have housing with varying degrees of sensitivity to preservation of the river’s edge and top-of-bank areas. Accountability is not the point here; these dwellings precede contemporary views of river corridor preservation. The effort today is to encourage deep rooted plantings at least 25 to 50 feet deep from the top of bank or shoreline with benefit to: prevention of shoreline erosion and soil slumping; the fish habitats in the cooling shade of trees and shrubs; stormwater filtering, and natural beauty for both riparian river owners and paddlers.

With its accessibility to a larger population along with the riffles, turns, fishing “holes”, faster current, sufficient length, large islands with alternate routes, and steep embankments, the trail’s Owosso-to-Henderson run constitutes the favorite river section for most paddlers. It is not as active as the Byron to Shiawassee Park Sections owing to the presence of a private livery service (temporarily closed) in that vicinity.

Some points of interest include:

- the Owosso Country Club—private property and no trespassing, please, but unclaimed golf balls occasionally available on the river bottom;
- Harmon Patridge City Park with a mink family siting possible; the park offers a walking path with interpretive signs for trees, playground, picnic areas and porta-johns;
- Frequent sitings of bald eagles in this section and the next section; osprey are viewed from time to time.

- The Shiawassee Conservation Club where James Oliver Curwood and others founded the Michigan United Conservation Club (“MUCC”). The clay pigeon shotgun fire is frequent on the weekends but directed away from the river!
- The DeVries Nature Center, with a new 2013 landing, is an interesting visit for paddlers. There is particular attention paid to maintaining native vegetation along the extensive littoral (river’s edge) of this parcel. The site includes examples of soil conserving farming practices, leg-stretching hiking trails and a horse-drawn carriage and sleigh museum and environmental programs. Reference their web page at: www.DeVriesNature.org.
- The Goss Bridge remnant abutment represents a small settlement/schoolhouse at the Juddville Road Bridge area



Goss Bridge Post Card Image (now Juddville Road Bridge south of this photo)

The geologic stories continue in this stretch with nature’s act of river piracy. To add to the prior mention on the phenomenon, the river’s two prior courses through today’s Looking Glass River in the south of the County and the Maple River in the center of the county were sequentially re-routed to the lower outlet of the glacial lake Arkona (Saginaw Bay/Lake Huron). The historical river—the northerly section of the Shiawassee River—cutting a head wall from Saginaw to Owosso, eventually cut into the Maple River course of the Shiawassee and ‘pirated’ the stream. Another influence on the northerly course is the isostatic readjustment of the earth after the glaciers receded. There was a corresponding rise in the land as the earth’s mantle readjusted. Comparable to the Shiatown-to-Vernon run, this is the steepest fall of the river in the County. A large underground storm drain outlet on the former river bed coursing to SW Owosso, and many steep embankments in this section are indicators of the geologic history. The Owosso rapids (now Main Street dam) and site of the flour and lumber mills—the foundation industries of the City—acknowledge this geological past. The latest glacial epoch and glacial retreat makes this river section much less than 20,000 years old. Ponder a contrast with the Delaware River course that is 160 million years old!

Section 8: Henderson Road County Park to Parshallburg-Ditch Rd.

Length: 8.4 river miles Time: 2 hrs 50 min Grade: 1 ft/mi

a) Starting Point: See the Henderson End Point description in Section 7 above.

b) End Point: Unless one disembarks at the Six Mile Creek Road a short way from Henderson Park, the End Point at the unincorporated place called Parshallburg (aka “Havanna”) is another “thump” for paddlers coursing over the partially dismantled dam.



Parshallburg’s failed but not entirely dismantled “Dam”

Immediately after running the old dam and fast waters that follow, a dock at the right provides a very good landing. There is a stairway to the parking lot. A canoe sluice is available for



Parshallburg Landing—a Saginaw County Park facility

raising or lowering paddlecraft to and from the elevated parking lot (with porta-john). There is a viewing deck over this historic settlement area. The original iron bridge (since destroyed by ice flows) was relocated to Chesaning a few years ago with a new bridge taking its place.

This end point of the Guide can be reached from State Highway M-52 in Oakley at Sharon Road. Take Sharon Road east to Ditch Road that leads a mile or so later to the landing where Niver Road intersects.

c) River and Vicinity Description: This longest section in the Byron-to-Parshallburg extent of this guide provides the user broad expanses of riverscapes. There is a slower current for the most part in its very wide courses, but imposing views of steep embankments before the Shiawassee River enters the lake plains of the Chesaning area. Man-made erosion scars are indicators of past and impending property damage, even a threat to roadways.



Erosion Scar north of 6 Mile Creek Bridge

There are many long straight runs (sunny-little shade). With the river level gauge on July 14, 2008, showing 2.8 feet, and with the influence of weeds, most paddlers would not like to venture out at levels much lower than that. There were places where a patch of river (versus a patch of vegetation) was welcome relief from paddling through the “sedges”. It was still manageable for a kayak to enjoy an outing in those conditions as navigating waterway openings is part of the entertainment gained from gliding over this river.

The Six Mile Creek area (30 minutes from Henderson Park) includes a wrought iron bridge, popular fishing holes, a railroad dock and a very historic place where coal mining and furniture manufacturing was active up-through the early twentieth century.



6 Mile Creek Road Iron Bridge—arrival image at West Haven

Some paddlers exit here on the east side of the river just past the bridge, but this is not a public launch site and there is poor street-side parking, though legal. After Six Mile Creek an interesting land holding includes a grass river walk for the length of the farm river frontage (at least ½ mile).



Spike Farm's evidence of the former barge hauling terrace system

This trail raises images of the walking path for horse teams to drag 1840-1860 river barges from Owosso to a Saginaw area landing to transport flour and goods. An 1856 railway to Owosso closed that business.

Pine Grove County Park at the Shiawassee County line is a little over an hour from Henderson Park but cannot be accessed easily because there is no developed landing area at this time, nor is there a convenient place to develop one. The parking lot is a difficult hill climb and another 250 foot walk to the parking area. A forested glen, private campground upstream of the Johnstone Road Bridge should not be mistaken as a public park.

The guide crosses into Saginaw County in order to reach the landing site at Parshallburg. From Parshallburg, paddlers venture for a little over an hour onto Chesaning Village's Showboat Park and/or the rock ramp downtown to another park landing (see photos on next page). Intrepid paddlers leave Chesaning and venture on to the Shiawassee National Wildlife Preserve from there. Many entering waterways and flood control lakes make navigation orientation very challenging. The nice landing at Wickes Park on the Saginaw River is the take-out point for this ambitious water trail experience.

Upstream from Byron exists the Shiawassee River water trail section that begins in Holly and proceeds through Fenton, Linden and Argentine on route to Byron. It is a well-organized trail section with many events. Visit the www.shiawasseeiverwatertrail.org website for an in-depth description and well-done paddling segment maps.

This Byron to Chesaning guide ends at this point with the favorable message from this 1909 post card sent by a paddler to a relative in New York:



Chesaning's well-appointed Showboat Park Access Facility



Chesaning's downtown rock ramp with landing on the right-downstream from this in-river ramp at Cole Park.