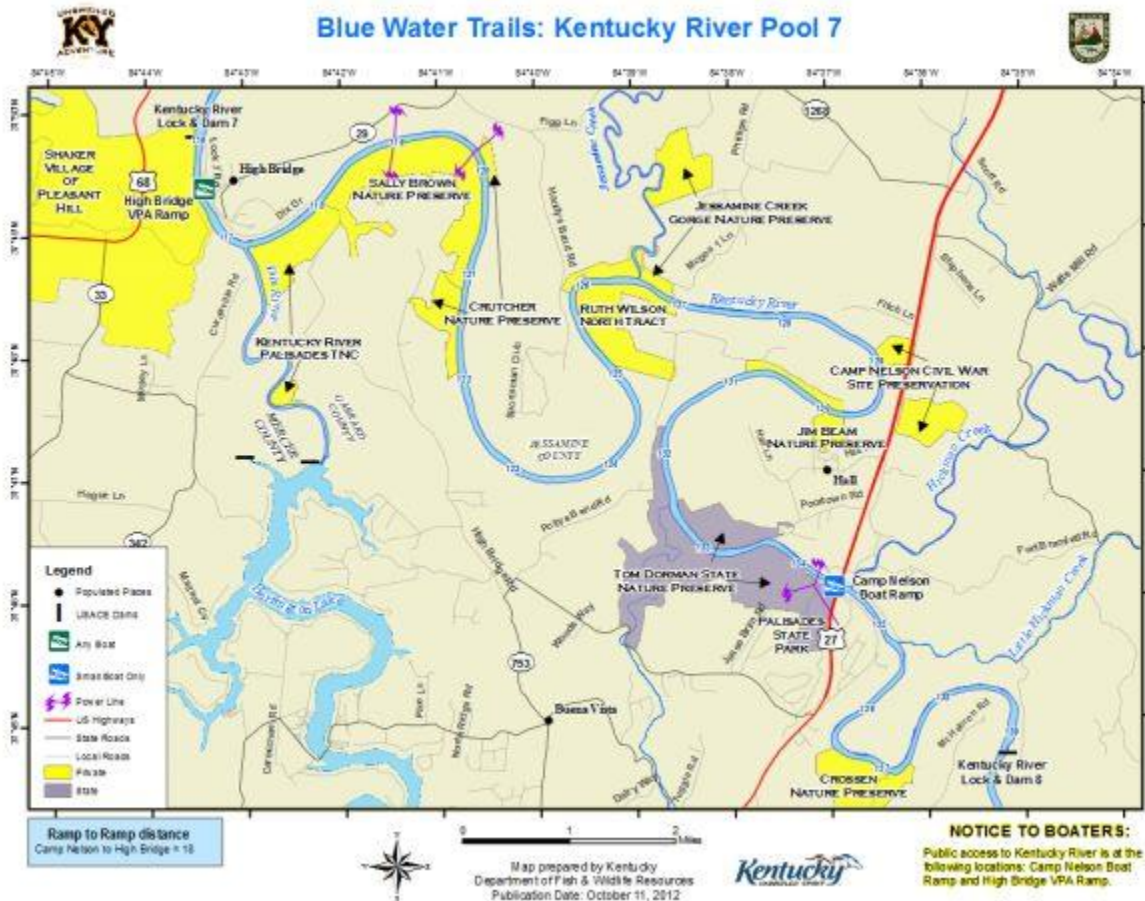


Kentucky River, Pool 7

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The mouth of Hickman Creek in Jessamine County is one of central Kentucky's most historic places. The waters of the creek pushed rock into the Kentucky River here for millennia. This created a natural shallow fording spot passable by foot or wagon for much of the year before the coming of the locks and dams on the river. A branch of the Wilderness Road crossed the Kentucky here and was the site of the second ferry established in Kentucky in 1785.

The low bank at the mouth of Hickman created an ideal spot for a river landing. Many shipments of tobacco bound for New Orleans left from here as did the first steamboat built in Kentucky. Showboats stopped at the landing to provide area dwellers with some rare live entertainment. Citizens called this spot Fitchport until the Civil War, but became Camp Nelson.

Flowing water through the ages created one of the few breaks in the formidable Kentucky River Palisades for many miles in either direction. This break proved beneficial for pioneers who needed to cross the river going south from Lexington to Danville, Lancaster and points beyond. Daniel Boone considered this spot one of his favorites in Kentucky.

Modern Kentuckians may use this historic crossing as the put-in for paddling through the most scenic stretch of the Kentucky River in Pool 7. The geologic uplift known as the Cincinnati Arch crests in the Jessamine Dome formation at Camp Nelson, creating the deepest area of the Palisades.

Paddling through Pool 7 gives one the feeling of floating through a remote canyon away from the world, the Palisades towering above the boat on both sides. Few places in Kentucky make a paddler feel so overpowered by the forces of Nature.

Anglers may enliven the floating by catching all three species of black bass, largemouth, smallmouth and spotted, plus sunfish such as bluegill and crappie in Pool 7. The put-in is on the Garrard County side on old U.S. 27 at the base of the new U.S. 27 bridge, reached by taking a left at the Rocky Top store (coming from Nicholasville) just after crossing the river. This ramp charges \$5 for boats and \$3 for canoes and kayaks.

Paddlers face a choice when paddling pool 7. They may paddle the entire 18-mile stretch from the put-in at U.S. 27 to the take-out at High Bridge. This float is only for boaters in good physical shape with strong paddling speed in a touring kayak or those with the same skills paddling tandem in a canoe. The river should be flowing at least 800 cubic feet per second (cfs) on the "Kentucky River at Lock 7" gauge at the U.S. Geological Survey's website at www.waterdata.usgs.gov.

For most, the best plan is paddling up or downstream from the put-in and returning or using a motorboat. Lock and Dam 8 is five miles upstream with the gorgeous Crossen Nature Preserve on the right in the bend known as the Devil's Elbow. Anglers should probe Hickman Bar, just across river from the mouth of Hickman Creek, for smallmouth bass with a 4-inch green pumpkin curly-tailed grub rigged on a 3/16-ounce leadhead. This former ford usually possesses some current, even at low water.

The most interesting paddling occurs downstream of the put-in at U.S. 27 Bridge.

One of the first things a paddler sees going downstream are the old stone abutments for the Camp Nelson Covered Bridge, also known as the Wernag Bridge. Louis Wernag designed the 241-foot span, credited as the longest cantilever wooden bridge in America, as a single arch to enhance river navigation.

After 90 years of service, a heavily loaded truck bound from Lexington broke through floor timbers weakened by a leaky roof in 1926. The state removed the bridge in 1933. The northern façade of the old bridge remains.

The cliffs soaring several hundred feet above the river appear golden in the afternoon sun as the paddler floats into the Tom Dorman State Nature Preserve.

Anglers should try for black bass by running a medium-running crankbait along White Oak Bar, across the river from White Oak Creek on the right (looking downstream). After bending around an unusually high cliff to the right, Chimney Rock comes into view. This rock, also known as

Candlestick Rock, looks like a chimney growing from the cliff face and served as an important navigation marker for steamboat pilots.

As the river flows to the left around Polly's Bend, paddlers will see Swallow Rock and the unique rock formation known as Golden Gate above them on the right. This makes a good turnaround spot for those paddling downstream and returning to the ramp under U.S. 27, making a 10-mile paddle.

The Halfway House rock formation is on the left in the straight section just after making the sharp left turn of Polly's Bend. The rocky outside bends in this stretch hold an occasional smallmouth and spotted bass.

Tree tops often fall into the river during summer storms. The unusually low water conditions on the river this year mean many of those tree tops stayed where they fell, providing good habitat for sunfish such as bluegill and white crappie. Toss a small 1/16- or 1/32-ounce safety-pin style spinnerbait and grub combination into this cover for these fish. Tree tops and branches often accumulate in sharp bends in the river such as Polly's Bend as well.

Toward the end of a relatively long straight stretch after Polly's Bend, Jessamine Creek enters the river on the right. This is roughly the halfway mark of this float. Paddlers should gauge their time accordingly.

The river takes a sharp left around Ox Bow Bend and then around Handy's Bend, also known as 7 Mile Bottom, to the right. The Palisades are particularly beautiful through this stretch with much of it protected by the Nature Conservancy.

Just after bending back to the left around Bowman's Bend, look for a blue heron rookery that holds roughly 200 birds. The river turns right again into Shaker Bend and one of the great marvels on the river comes into view: High Bridge.

At 275 feet above water, High Bridge was the highest in North America and the highest railroad bridge in the world in 1877, the year it opened to rail traffic. The bridge also spanned 1,125 feet across the Kentucky River gorge and still carries about 40 trains a day.

Once the paddler clears High Bridge, the take-out lies at the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources' High Bridge Voluntary Public Access (VPA) site on right. Make sure to work toward the right bank after floating under High Bridge as the ramp lies just upstream of the dangerous low head dam at Lock and Dam 7.

Another floating option is to put in at the High Bridge VPA and paddle under High Bridge, past Shaker Landing and up the Dix River Gorge to Dix Dam. This makes a float of about 7 miles. The Dix River Gorge is one of central Kentucky's relatively unknown places of incredible beauty and gives the paddler an idea of what lies under the waters of Herrington Lake. Boating in is the only way for the public to view it.

The two mile stretch of the river from Dix Dam downstream holds rainbow and brown trout. Anglers may only use artificial lures for these fish. The river also holds some rugged hybrid striped bass at times who hit shad-colored suspended jerkbaits with abandon.

Paddlers on Pool 7 can combine a weekend of paddling with a visit to the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, one of central Kentucky's treasures and a model of historic preservation. Another side trip would be a visit to the Camp Nelson Civil War Heritage Park on U.S. 27 south of Nicholasville. Camp Nelson provided over 10,000 African- American soldiers to the Union Army and served as an important base of operations for the Union Army. The park offers an interpretive center, hiking trails and even a ghost hunt in late October. Camp Nelson National Cemetery, where over 2,200 Civil War dead from several Kentucky battlefields lie in eternal peace, is adjacent to the Camp Nelson Heritage Park. Veterans' burials continue at the cemetery to this day.

Brad Johnson at Dix River Adventures offers guided fishing trips on Pool 7 and Renny Gautier at Palisades Adventures rents canoes and kayaks from his facility at High Bridge. Make sure and print a copy of the Kentucky River Guide Book available at www.kentuckyriverblueway.com. Historical sites in the guidebook correspond with numbers placed along the riverbank.