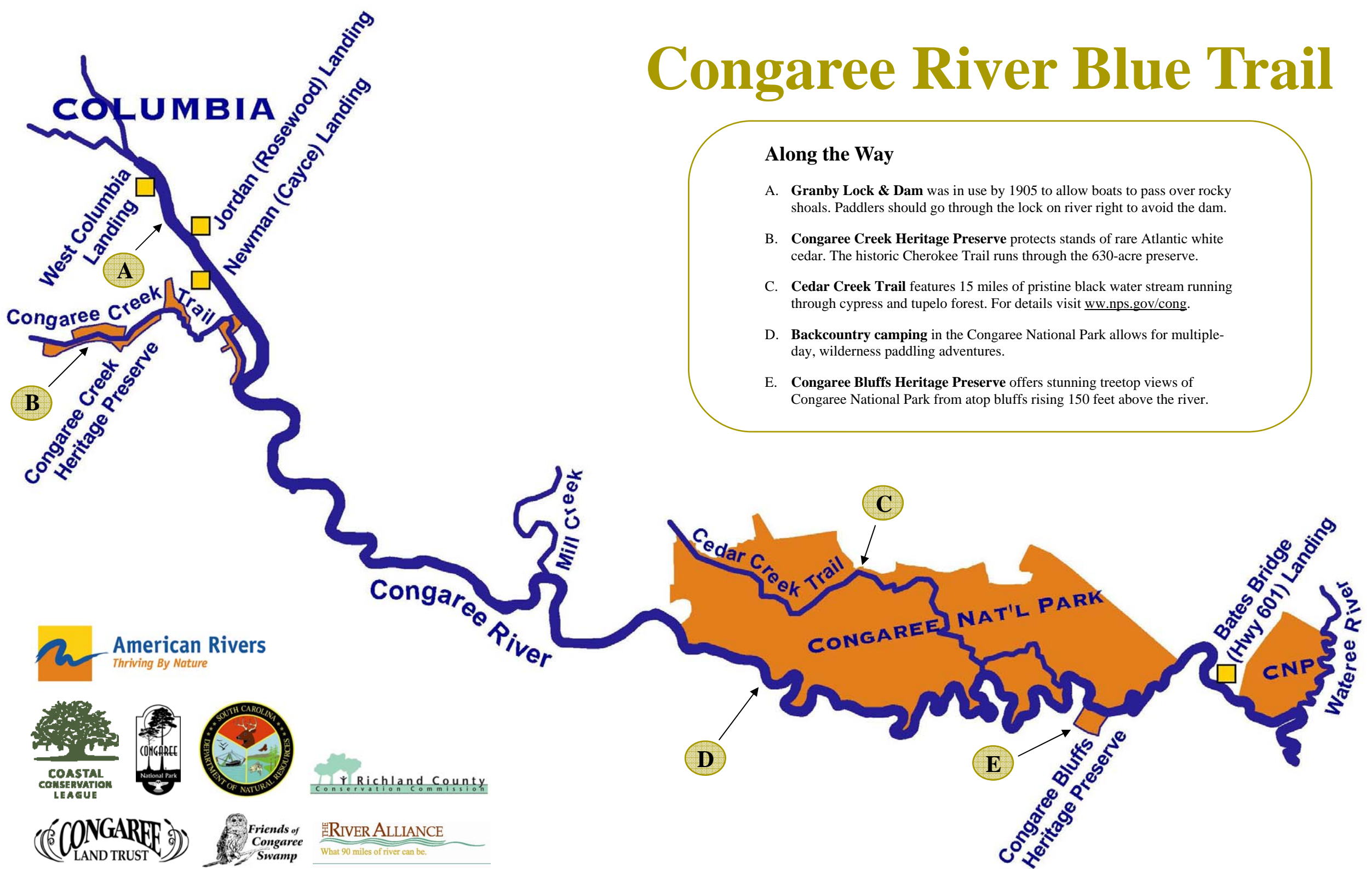


Congaree River Blue Trail



Along the Way

- A. **Granby Lock & Dam** was in use by 1905 to allow boats to pass over rocky shoals. Paddlers should go through the lock on river right to avoid the dam.
- B. **Congaree Creek Heritage Preserve** protects stands of rare Atlantic white cedar. The historic Cherokee Trail runs through the 630-acre preserve.
- C. **Cedar Creek Trail** features 15 miles of pristine black water stream running through cypress and tupelo forest. For details visit www.nps.gov/cong.
- D. **Backcountry camping** in the Congaree National Park allows for multiple-day, wilderness paddling adventures.
- E. **Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserve** offers stunning treetop views of Congaree National Park from atop bluffs rising 150 feet above the river.



History

With human settlements dating back almost 12,000 years, the Congaree has a rich history. Native Americans lived near the river, most notably at what is now Congaree Creek Heritage Preserve. The river provided food, transportation, and commerce.

These values also attracted European settlers. Hernando DeSoto explored the area in the 1540s and by the mid-1700s, tracts were allocated under land grants from the English king. Roads and ferries were established, and cotton planters farmed fertile floodplain soils. In the late 1800s, large tracts of land adjacent to the river were logged, and by 1915 most of the old-growth cypress trees were gone.

By 1830, a canal and lock system was constructed to improve navigation and trade. Water power was used to generate electricity. The first electrified textile mill was in operation by the 1890's adjacent to the river in the building that now houses the State Museum.



Photo by Eddée Daniel

Welcome to the Congaree River Blue Trail

The Congaree River Blue Trail is the nation's first under American Rivers' Blue Trail Initiative. Blue trails, the aquatic equivalent to hiking trails, are corridors established to facilitate recreation in and along rivers and other water bodies.

The Congaree River Blue Trail begins its 50-mile course near Columbia, offering paddlers an urban adventure with opportunities to learn about the historic significance of the area. Continuing downstream, paddlers cross the fall line and enter the Coastal Plain known for its countless sandbars, high bluffs, and extensive floodplain habitats. The highlight of the trail is the section along the Congaree National Park, which boasts 90 tree species, roughly half the number found in Europe. Plans to expand this blue trail to include the Wateree River are underway.



Congaree National Park

Designated South Carolina's first national park in 2003, the Congaree National Park is home to 15,000 acres of wilderness and the largest tract of old growth bottomland hardwood forest in the U.S. Paddlers and hikers can enjoy 20-miles of trails within the park as well as camping, fishing, watching bird, and studying nature. Guided walks and canoe trips are offered free of charge.

Stop at the Harry Hampton Visitor Center for a trail map and guide, camping and fishing regulations, free camping permit, and up-to-date information on trail and weather conditions or call (803) 776-4396 or visit www.nds.gov/cong.

Safety

1. Always wear a life jacket (PFD).
 2. Plan ahead. Know your route, carry proper equipment and clothing, know the limitations & skills of your group, notify someone of when you intend to return, allow adequate time for finding a campsite, have a float plan including put-in and take-out sites, & avoid boating alone.
 3. Read important safety information & park rules prior to your trip.
 4. Bring water & safety equipment (first aid kit, sunscreen, rain gear, extra flashing line, flashlight, bright flag, & dry bags).
 5. Stay away from rivers hazards such as downed trees or branches, low-head dams, & bridge piers.
 6. Be aware of other boaters. Carry a sound-producing signal device such as a whistle to alert others of your position or intentions.
 7. Dress appropriately & be prepared for inclement weather.
 8. Know river conditions prior to your trip & avoid dangerous situations.
 9. Water levels can change significantly due to operations of upstream dams even if there hasn't been any precipitation. Find out flow information before your trip by visiting www.usgs.gov.
 10. Carry a cellular telephone and emergency phone numbers.
- For more tips visit www.AmericanCanoe.org.

Conservation

American Rivers' Blue Trails Initiative inspires and educates people, helping them embrace their hometown river by experiencing it first-hand.

Blue trails protect rivers by building a constituency that speaks out for healthy rivers and by directly protecting rivers from harm. The Congaree River Blue Trail is re-connecting communities to their river, and inspiring residents to protect this treasure in their own backyard. The river not only provides recreation activities, it enhances the local economy, community pride, and helps foster the spirit of conservation in everyone.

Protecting riverfront land in South Carolina enhances water quality and habitat for many species that depend on the river, and protects scenic vistas that are essential to quality recreation. The Congaree Wateree Santee Basin Initiative actively promotes land conservation along the Congaree River. For more information, please visit www.AmericanRivers.org.

Wildlife

The Congaree River is a vibrant corridor for wildlife and provides excellent opportunities for view common and not so common wildlife anywhere along the river. This includes deer, raccoons, snakes, wild pigs, turtles, and more. It is home to several endangered species including the shortnose sturgeon, a fish that migrates from coastal waters to spawn in the Congaree near Columbia. Other migratory fish include striped bass,

American shad, and blueback herring. Bald eagles often visit the river, especially near Columbia. The American swallowtail kite is a rare, but welcome sight near the Congaree National Park.

Geology

The Congaree is an ancient river with a geologic history dating back at least 510 million years. It flows through the fall line near Columbia where it transitions from Piedmont to Coastal Plain. Upstream the river is rocky and straight, with abundant rapids; below the river bends gently back and forth along bluffs and floodplains of the Coastal Plain.

The Congaree River floodplain includes old river courses that formed at a time when the river was not a single channel but a network of braided channels. Oxbow lakes have formed when meanders are cut off from the river and are refilled during floods.