

Padding Options

The Millers River flows from Winchendon towards Birch Hill Dam and is met by the north flowing Otter River. The river segments included in this Guide are generally suitable for paddlers of all skill levels, but can vary in the level of exertion required due to the presence of naturally-caused obstructions, portaging may be required around or over beaver dams, downed trees or debris. The various Upper Millers and Otter River segments included in this guide are generally suitable for paddlers of all ages and skill levels, but do vary in the level of exertion required, for example; portaging may be required around downed trees, debris, and beaver dams.

Trail segments can be enjoyed in various combinations and directions to create multiple routes.
Some suggestions (distances/times approximate):

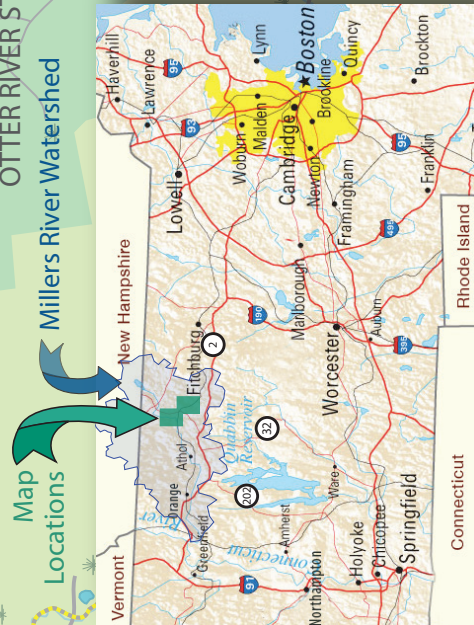
Baldwinville to Birch Hill Dam
5.5 miles, 2 hours. This trip down the Otter River to its confluence with the Miller River runs through a peaceful marsh like area. Good birding with a number of meanders. It is possible a few beaver dams may be encountered near the Millers.

River Street to New Boston Road
6.5 miles, 2.5 hours. This paddle runs through a very wooded area offering a sense of being in the wilderness.

Priest Brook above Burgess Road
Venture upstream when water levels are high enough.

New Boston Road to Birch Hill Dam
3 miles, 1 hour.

Baldwinville to New Boston Road
5 miles, 2 hours



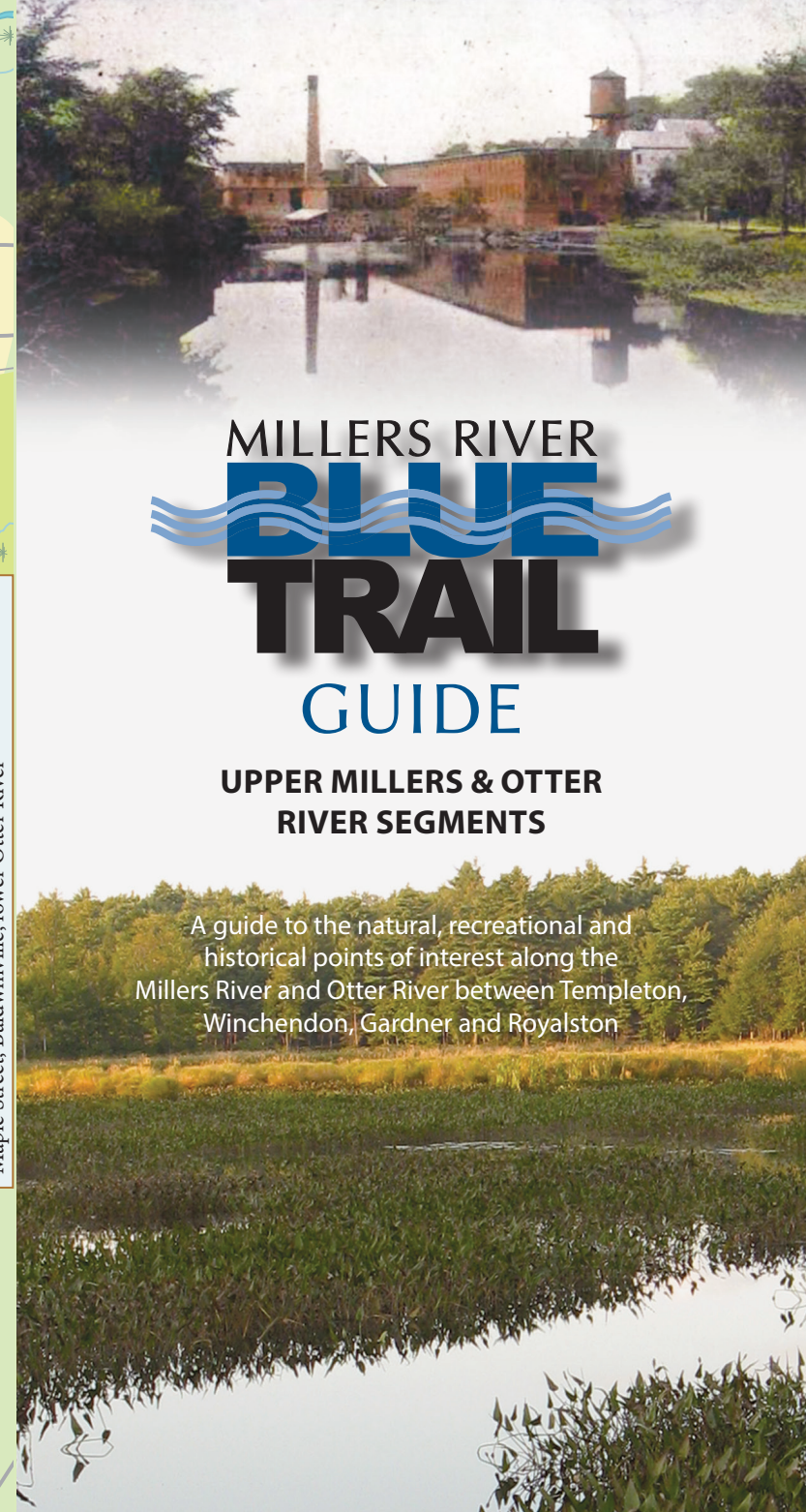
Upper Millers River Blue Trail Access Sites

- River Road, Winchendon
- New Boston Road in Otter River State Forest, ORSF
- End of Goodnow Road, near Birch Hill Dam, ORSF
- Burgess Road off New Boston Road, ORSF; Priest Brook Access
- Maple Street, Baldwinville, lower Otter River

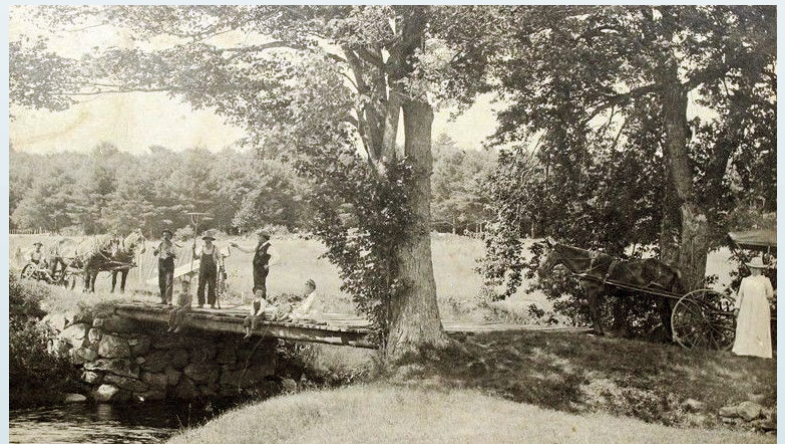
MILLERS RIVER
BLUE
TRAIL
GUIDE

UPPER MILLERS & OTTER RIVER SEGMENTS

A guide to the natural, recreational and historical points of interest along the Millers River and Otter River between Templeton, Winchendon, Gardner and Royalston



King Phillip's Rock



Sibley Farm Bridge




Otter River Paddle



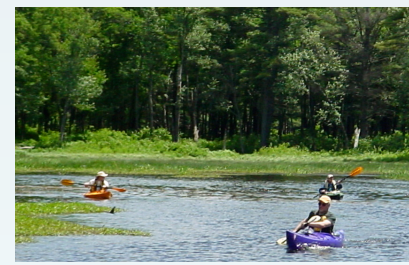
Paddling Options

Plant Road to Otter River Conservation Area
The Otter River flows north out of the large ponded Otter River Recreation Area (ORCA) by Gardner Airport. This 1.5 mile one-way trip wanders downstream through a grassy marsh area that is good for wildlife viewing and escaping the city. Paddlers will pass through tunnels below the Route 2, 2A and 101 overpasses, and should be prepared to carry over or around a beaver dam or two. A return trip is possible. Make a slight portage into the ORCA to explore unspoiled wildlife habitat.

Otter River Conservation Area (ORCA), Gardner
This large ponded area, near the Gardner airport, is a great place to view waterfowl and other birds and wildlife. Explore up to the old Whitney Street crossing or beyond, then return to the airport access area.

Plant Road to Cummings Conservation Area
This winding 3.25 mile section brings boaters to a paddle stop, 2 miles, look for a sign  on the right. The pull out for this segment is on the right, about 100 yards past a large rock, well upstream of the old Shotty Mill dam. The carry out trail to Bridge Street and parking is about a 1/4 mile, follow the trail markers.

NOTE: For this stretch, the river can be very shallow downstream of the CCA's paddle stop at flows below 17 cfs. Check Otter River flow gauge readings at the website listed on bottom left of this page beforehand.



Approaching Birch Hill Dam



Route 2 Tunnels



1 Millers River. The main stem of the Millers River flows out of Whitney Pond, a few miles to the east near downtown Winchendon, where a main branch from southern New Hampshire joins a main branch draining several large lakes in Ashburnham. Roughly 80 percent of the Millers River Watershed's 400 square miles lies in Massachusetts, the remainder in New Hampshire. From here the Millers River flows south and west for a few dozen miles before entering the Connecticut River, which drains into the Atlantic Ocean at Long Island Sound.

2 Old Farmstead. One of the oldest farmsteads in the area, dating back to before 1780, is thought to have been located near this section of the Millers River.

3 King Phillips Rock. Lore has it that King Phillip (Metacomet) held tribal councils here during King Phillip's War, which raged between colonists and native tribes between 1675-76.

4 Trolley Bridge. Used from the mid 1800s till 1940, the bridge was part of the trolley/railroad system operating in the New Boston Area.

5 Birch Hill Dam. Operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and completed in 1941 in response to the devastating floods of 1936 and 1938, the dam's reservoir lands hold up to 16.3 billion gallons of flood water.

6 Waite Chair & Bishop/Streeter Mfg. Co. Located on opposite sides of the Otter River in Baldwinville, these companies made furniture, toys, desks, and matches. Part of the area may have supported a mill as early as 1754.

7 Thompson Chair Co. This mill complex in the village of Baldwinville in Templeton operated from the mid 1800s till the 1940s. Furniture was the primary product.

8 Boston & Maine RR Bridge. Moved when BHD was constructed in 1941, the bridge stood over 60 feet above the Otter River. The new bridge is upstream.

9 Priest Brook Area. A significant local tributary with limited water-power supported a small sawmill and cider mill; founded by a Baptist community in the early 1800s.



Priest Brook

To support the Millers River and Otter River Blue Trails and other MRWC Projects, please contact us at:
100 Main Street, Athol, MA 01331 • 978-248-9491 • council@millersriver.net
Visit our website: www.millerswatershed.org

| Legend | |
|--------|--|
| | Town Centers |
| | State Land |
| | Federal Land |
| | Flood Control Land USACE |
| | Municipal Land |
| | River and Ponds |
| | Streams |
| | Wetlands |
| | Power Lines |
| | Town Lines |
| | Direction of Flow |
| | Canoe/Kayak Access Point & Parking |
| | Paddle Stops |
| | Dam |
| | Broken Dam |
| | Camp Ground |
| | Parking |
| | Gate |
| | State Highway |
| | Major Road |
| | Secondary Road |
| | Controlled Access Road |
| | Railroad Tracks |
| | Points of Interest – see reverse side of guide |



Otter River Blue Trail Access Sites
 • Maple Street, Baldwinville, lower Otter River
 • Bridge Street, CCA take out, Gardner
 • Plant Road off Route 101, Templeton
 • Airport Road, off Route 2A by Gardner Airport, ORCA

About This River Guide

The Upper Millers-Lower Otter River Blue Trail runs through the flood control area of the USACoE's Birch Hill Dam project and forms a wild area rich in wetlands and wildlife. This area is great for paddlers who like to get away and explore.

The Upper Otter River Blue Trail runs from the Otter River Conservation Area to the Cummings Conservation Area and is anchored by the Plant Road paddle access. This area is a pleasant and quiet paddle through marsh and woods along the river border between Gardner and Templeton.


On both rivers, be prepared to carry your boat around, and possibly over, a beaver dam or downed tree here and there. Be prepared to see wildlife.

USGS Flow Gauges

Otter River: http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ma/nwis/uv?site_no=01163200
 Millers River, Winchendon: http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ma/nwis/uv?site_no=01162000

River Safety & Etiquette

The Millers and Otter Rivers flow relatively smoothly through the designated Blue Trail areas. In late Summer and Fall, some areas may experience low water that could make paddling difficult. Conversely, Spring rains may flood behind Birch Hill Dam and may limit access to launch areas. Checking local flow gauges can provide useful information. Paddlers should always be on the lookout for downed trees, rocks, and other obstacles that can pose serious hazards. Paddlers should also be prepared to portage around, or over, these obstacles and beaver dams. Wearing a PFD -- a life jacket -- is always recommended, and is required -- October through May.

Paddle stops  may be used for brief pullouts. These stops are marked by Blue Trail signs. Be mindful of the environment and "leave no trace" of your visit. Enjoy wildlife quietly and from a safe distance.

Be aware that during October through December, hunting season is in place along the lower Otter and Upper Millers trail sections.

Useful Resources

- Peak North America, LLC: www.peak.na.com for boat rentals, guided trips and more
- Athol Bird & Nature Club: www.millersriver.net/abnc for nature programs and events calendar
- Birch Hill Dam: <http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/visitors/projects.cfm?id=E601560>
- DCR ORSF: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/masssparks/region-central/otter-river-state-forest.html>
- Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce: <http://www.gardnerma.com> for local business listings
- Miller River Trout Unlimited: www.millersriver-tu.org for fishing and habitat protection
- Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust: www.mountgrace.org for regional land protection
- North County Land Trust: www.northcountylandtrust.org for regional land protection
- North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce: www.northquabbinchamber.com for local business listings
- North Quabbin Trails Association: <http://nqta.org>

The Millers River and Otter River Blue Trails and this Map Guide are projects of the Millers River Watershed Council, in collaboration with various organizations and individuals. MRWC wishes to especially thank the following: Athol Bird and Nature Club, Americorps/MassLIFT, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, US Army Corps of Engineers-Birch Hill Dam, Keith Davies, Barbara Stowell and Rebecca Landry.

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Millers River Watershed Council, Inc.

The Millers River Watershed Council, Inc. was founded to protect the health of the Millers River and its watershed. MRWC remains focused on providing volunteer water monitoring, as well as recreational and educational activities for watershed residents. MRWC also serves as an advocate for local concerns and works collaboratively with towns, government agencies and community members to provide effective long-term environmental protection.

Underwriters: MRWC is grateful to the following for supporting the printing of this Map Guide: Connecticut River Watershed Council, Peak North America, LLC.

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