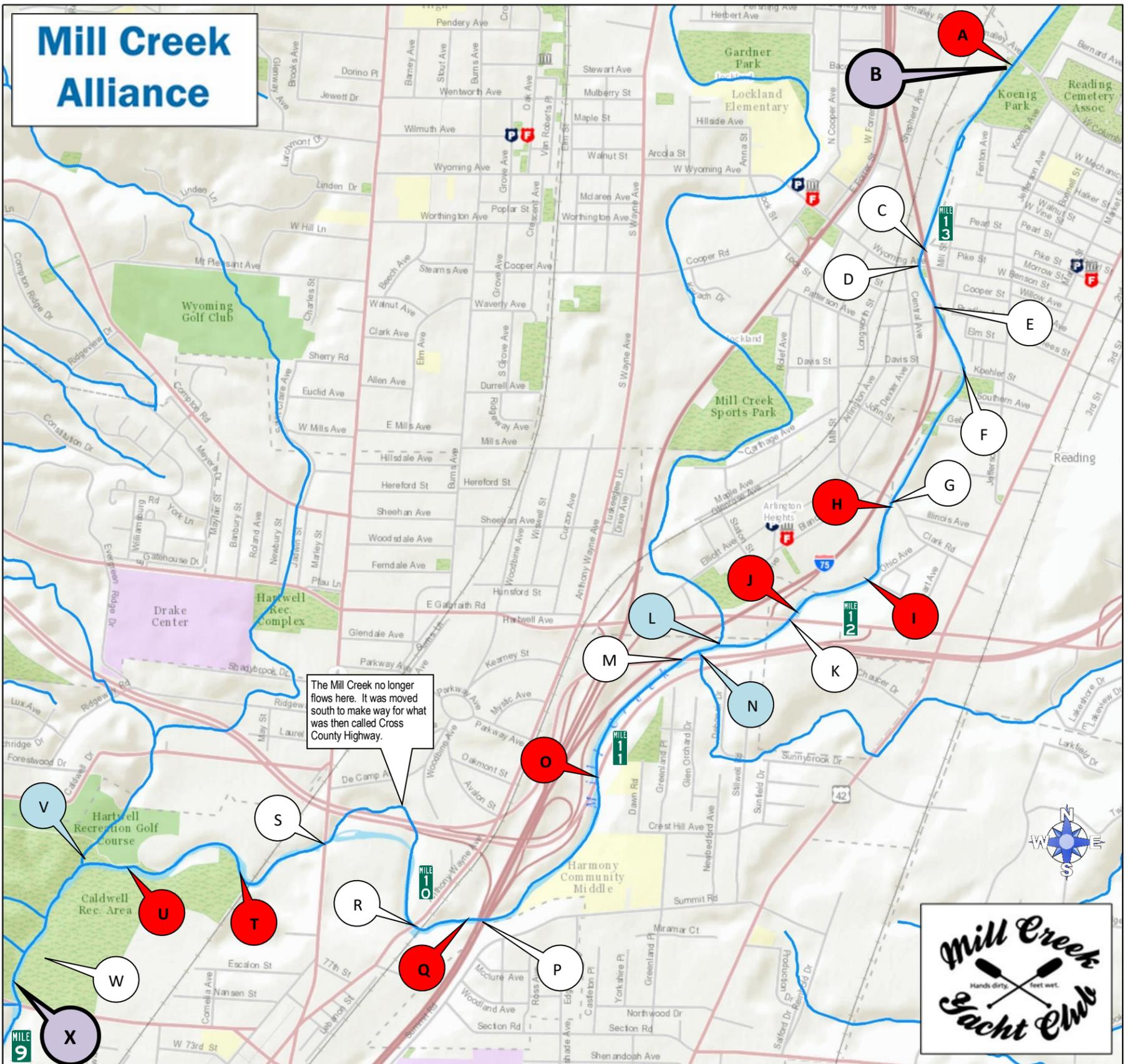


Paddling the Mill Creek from Reading to Carthage



POINTS OF INTEREST

- A:** Low-head dam that spans the Mill Creek at an angle
- B:** Access point for paddlers; about 90 yards south of Columbia Avenue; off Koenig Park walking trail
- C:** 1-75 overpass, northbound lanes, over the Mill Creek
- D:** Historic "Concrete Rainbow Bridge" between Reading and Lockland
- E:** I-75 overpass, northbound lanes, over the Mill Creek
- F:** Koehler Avenue/Davis Street bridge just west of Vorhees Park, connecting Reading and Lockland
- G:** Clark Road bridge over the Mill Creek, connecting Reading and Arlington Heights
- H:** Low-head dam with a considerable drop, just downstream of Clark Road bridge
- I:** Low-head dam with a drop of about 3 feet, a metal lip and funneled flow; portaging is urged
- J:** Wide low-head dam
- K:** Galbraith Road bridge over the Mill Creek, connecting Reading and Arlington Heights
- L:** West Fork Mill Creek confluence with the Mill Creek
- M:** Ronald Reagan (Cross County) Highway (SR 126) ramp over the Mill Creek
- N:** Amberley Creek confluence with the Mill Creek
- O:** Ronald Reagan (Cross County) Highway (SR 126) ramp over the Mill Creek. A pier for this ramp often has a logjam that causes a strong cross-current shifting from the right bank to the left bank. The current pushes canoes and kayaks towards the logjam.
- P:** 1-75 (northbound and southbound) overpasses and ramp over the Mill Creek
- Q:** Low-head dam, just upstream of a narrow access road bridge
- R:** Anthony Wayne Avenue bridge over the Mill Creek
- S:** Springfield Pike (SR 4) bridge over the Mill Creek
- T:** Double-tier low-head dam that also has a metal lip in places
- U:** Low-head dam that is navigable for some in higher waters
- V:** Congress Run confluence with the Mill Creek
- W:** Trailhead for Mill Creek greenway
- X:** Access point for canoes and kayaks at Caldwell Playground Park

Put-In: Koenig Park at Columbia and Koenig avenues in Reading, 45215, on the downstream (south) side of the Columbia Avenue Bridge, east bank of Mill Creek, by the walking trail

Take-Out: Caldwell Playground, 316 W. North Bend Road, Cincinnati, 45216, east bank of Mill Creek, just upstream (north) of North Bend Road bridge

Distance: about 4½ miles

Time: about 3¾ hours

Challenges:

- jagged and sharp objects in stream substrate where you may be portaging your canoe or kayak
- low-head dams that can be hard to navigate, especially by Clark Road (marked by )
- slow current and shallow waters during dry spells
- strainers – overhanging branches where water current and depth are navigable
- combined sewer overflows, which occur as far north as Columbia Avenue in Reading
- rocky riffles that are difficult to paddle or portage

River Mile (from the Ohio River) marked 

This Mill Creek Access Map is intended to help users discover the many faces of the Mill Creek in Southwestern Ohio. The Mill Creek can offer beauty, solitude and opportunities for recreation. The resurgent urban stream is making a comeback from two centuries of abuse and neglect. Paddling the Mill Creek is the most effective way of experiencing stream improvements accomplished by the Mill Creek Alliance, The Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati, local governments and many other stakeholders in the Mill Creek Watershed.

This Access Map was prepared by volunteers from publicly available information and personal knowledge. Nonetheless, some of the information here is incomplete, inaccurate, or misleading. You use this information and engage in any activities on the Mill Creek entirely at your own risk.

Paddling is a dangerous activity and the information provided here is not a substitute for actual knowledge and skill. Conditions on the Mill Creek can change rapidly. The Mill Creek Yacht Club, the Mill Creek Alliance, and their respective members, officers, employees, agents, and trustees are not liable for any injuries or damages related in any way to your use of this Access Map or the Mill Creek. You are responsible for your own actions on or around the Mill Creek, and assume total responsibility for yourself and any others with you.

Safety Tips

WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET! Most boating fatalities occur because a person wasn't wearing a life vest. A properly fitted life jacket or personal flotation device ("PFD") can save your life, but it only works if you wear it! The Mill Creek is shallow in spots, and deep in others. Drowning can occur in shallow water, especially if you have lost consciousness. Ohio law requires that every canoe or kayak carry a PFD for each person on board. We recommend that you wear your PFD.

DON'T BOAT ALONE! Paddle with a group, not by yourself. It's more fun that way, anyway. Leave a "float plan" for your trip with a friend or relative.

DON'T PADDLE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRUGS/ALCOHOL! It's illegal and un-safe.

PADDLE SAFELY! Know your skill and fitness levels. Stay within them.

BE PREPARED! Planning your trip will help you avoid hazards and have more fun.

- Know the location of all dams and other hazards. Scout conditions when you are uncertain. Be prepared to portage (carry around) hazards. If in doubt, get out and scout!
- Dress appropriately. Be prepared for weather and water conditions. Consider the temperature of the water as well as the air temperature. Dress for the colder of the two. Wear footwear that protect you from sharp objects.
- Be prepared to swim. If the water looks too hazardous to swim, don't boat on it!
- Check creek levels. Stream gauge information is available on the United States Geological Survey's web site at <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/oh/nwis/rt>.
- Assess the risk of flash flooding. Consider the impact of current or predicted rainfall, snowmelt, and dam releases, including those upstream of you. Conditions on the Mill Creek can change rapidly.

Hazards Found on the Mill Creek

In order to have a safe canoe or kayak trip, a boater must be aware of possible hazards on the Mill Creek. Scout the creek before you use it, and plan your trip to avoid any hazards. Use care when wading or portaging. Potential safety hazards include sudden drop-offs, hidden holes, slippery algae, submerged obstacles and jagged objects.

POLLUTION: The Ohio EPA recommends no contact with waters of the Mill Creek because it can have high levels of fecal coliform bacteria and other pathogens from time to time, especially within 72 hours of a rainstorm heavy enough to cause combined sewer overflows. Individuals with open cuts or weakened immune systems should not use the Mill Creek.

FLASH FLOODS AND SWIFT WATER: The Mill Creek is especially prone to flash floods. Water levels in the creek can rise rapidly and unpredictably. High water causes hazards such as low-head dams to become even more dangerous. Unseen obstacles such as floating logs or submerged trees may also threaten a boater. Swift currents are more likely to overcome a paddler's ability to avoid hazards or reach shore once in the water.

LOW-HEAD DAMS: Know the locations of all low-head dams on the creek. The Mill Creek has many. Scout the creek before you use it, and plan your trip to avoid paddling over any dams or other drops. To spot a dam. Look for a smooth line connecting creek banks. It may indicate the top of a dam or drop.

Never try to boat over a dam or waterfall. Small dams can look harmless, particularly in swollen streams, but are very dangerous because of the circulating turbulence often created at the base of a dam. Boats as well as people can become entrapped in this turbulence. Circulating currents at the base of a dam or waterfall can be powerful; backwash currents can suck you in if you approach too closely from downstream. Portage around the hazard and launch at a safe distance downstream.

STRAINERS: River obstructions that allow water to flow through them, but which block or "strain" people and boats, are known as "strainers". They are frequently found in the form of overhanging branches and limbs, log jams and flooded islands. Because water flows through strainers, the current may carry you and your boat right into a strainer. The current's pressure against the side of your boat may cause it to tip. Should you fall into the water, the current will push you against the strainer and can hold you in place with tremendous force. The force of the current may pull you underwater. All strainers should be avoided, especially in swift water.

COLD WATER IMMERSION & HYPOTHERMIA: Sudden immersion in cold water can be deadly. The initial shock can induce gasping, hyperventilation, panic and vertigo – all of which lead to drowning. It also can cause sudden changes in blood pressure, heart rate and heart rhythm that may result in death. The longer you are immersed in cold water, the harder it is to control your body. Manual dexterity and coordination deteriorate, and hypothermia (the cooling of the body's core temperature) can set in rapidly. Loss of consciousness and death with or without drowning can result.

Though hypothermia is commonly caused by cold water, it may also be caused by chilling winds, rain or perspiration. When air and water temperatures combined do not exceed 120 degrees Fahrenheit, hypothermia becomes a hazard. Boaters should be prepared for cold air and water by dressing properly (wetsuits, dry-suits, or dressing in layers using materials that wick moisture away and retain heat, such as silk, polypropylene, fleece or wool). Every boater should be aware of the symptoms of hypothermia and be knowledgeable of its treatment.

FOOT ENTRAPMENTS: If your boat capsizes, do not try to stand or walk if you are in swift-moving water. You may slip and pin a foot between submerged rocks. Once pinned, the force of the current can push the boater's body under the water and hold it there. Always keep your feet up, pointed downstream, and swim to calm water before standing.

Other Tips

Be courteous

- Display courtesy and respect to landowners, other paddlers, and fishermen.
- The access points highlighted in this guide are located on public property, but most of the shoreline – and creek bottom – are privately owned. Don't trespass.
- Many landowners enjoy the stream's peace and solitude. Be courteous.

Don't Litter

- Dispose of waste properly. Always pack out your trash.
- Plastics are dangerous to wildlife. They float on the water. Always pack out plastics!
- Leave the creek cleaner than you found it!
- Avoid introducing non-native species, including live bait, by cleaning equipment between trips.

Report Spills

- Report spills, abandoned drums, and other environmental emergencies 24 hours a day to the Ohio EPA at 1-800-282-9378, to the Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati at 513-352-4900, and to the Mill Creek Alliance at 513-563-8800.

More Information on Flash Floods, Stormwater Issues, and CSOs

The Mill Creek flows 28 miles south from its headwaters in Butler County to its mouth at the Ohio River. Draining a watershed of 166 square miles, it flows through the geographic heart of Hamilton County and the City of Cincinnati. The watershed includes all or part of 37 political jurisdictions.

When it rains, some rainfall percolates slowly through the ground, gradually reaching the Mill Creek and its tributaries. However, rain that falls on impervious surfaces like roofs, driveways, road, and parking lots pours directly into our sewer system. Storm sewers serve newer portions of the region, and funnel stormwater quickly into local creeks. This causes creek levels to rise rapidly.

Sewers built in the older portions of our community carry both sewage and storm water in the same pipe. Known as combined sewers, they comprise about 40% of our local sewer system. During rainstorms, combined sewers are often filled beyond their capacity. In some parts of Hamilton County, just a quarter inch of rainfall can fill combined sewers. To relieve pressure on the sewer line and prevent widespread flooding and sewage backups into buildings, combined sewers were designed to overflow directly into local streams and rivers through outfall structures known as combined sewer overflows (CSOs).

When CSOs overflow, they dump untreated sewage and rainwater directly into waterways. CSOs cause offensive odors and may leave toilet paper and other unsightly debris behind. Habitat for fish and other aquatic organisms in the creek is degraded by CSOs. Worse yet, CSOs also pose a public health hazard. CSOs are a main source of bacteria in local water. If you swallow water with high levels of E. coli, you can become ill.

Raw sewage can also contaminate water with viruses and other pathogens. After heavy rains, many Hamilton County streams, including the Mill Creek, do not meet Ohio state standards for recreational activities such as wading or swimming. For more information about CSOs visit www.projectgroundwork.org, which is a website offered by the Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati (MSD).

Ways you can help reduce stormwater runoff, which in turn reduces flooding and CSOs:

- Install rainbarrels, a cistern, or a stormwater harvesting system.
- Install a green roof, rain garden, or rain barrels to help capture storm water runoff.
- Use pervious pavement.
- Ensure downspouts & sump pumps are NOT connected to the sanitary sewer system.
- Reduce impervious surfaces (roofs, blacktop, concrete, etc.) on your property where possible, or replace impervious surfaces with pervious surfaces.
- Reduce water use, especially during rainy weather.
- Avoid planting trees or shrubs near the sewer lines. Roots can enter, block, & damage sewers.
- Keep storm drains clear of debris, dirt or other waste.

Precautions for paddling this segment of the Mill Creek

This segment of the Mill Creek has lowhead dams at the following map locations: **B, H, I, J, Q, T** and **U**. The two dams downstream of Clark Road at map locations **H** and **I** have 2- to 3-foot drops, so canoeists should be extra careful not to get caught in the current near the lip of the dams. While portaging over lowhead dams, follow the lead of Yacht Club veterans. Watch out for wet, algae-covered concrete and rocks. They are quite slippery. This segment may also have logjams, strainers and barely submerged obstacles, which can flip a passing canoe. As you go under bridges, you will probably encounter rip rap boulders or chunks of concrete. Some concrete chunks have protruding re-bar. Be careful not to fall amid the slippery obstacles or to entrap your foot in a narrow space. Ankle protection is advisable. Do not hesitate to use your paddle as a walking stick. Crouch low so your hands can quickly stop a fall. Many of the boulders are tippy, so you should test their stability before stepping on them. Be mindful of the water depth in the long pools upstream of lowhead dams. Powerful currents can develop in parts of this trip. If you are unsure, do not hesitate to portage where others may feel compelled to take the risk of "shooting the rapids." At map location **O**, a highway ramp pier often has a logjam that causes a strong cross-current shifting from the right bank to the left bank. The current pushes canoes and kayaks towards the logjam.

Here are 14 important safety tips for paddling on the Mill Creek:

1. Life jackets must be worn and zipped, tied or buckled.
2. Pair up with an experienced paddler if possible.
3. Stay together. Don't pass the Leader (in the front) or get behind the Sweeper (in the back).
4. Most accidents occur while getting in and out of a canoe. Use three points of contact, step towards the center, and keep a low center of gravity.
5. Embark and disembark with the canoe parallel to shore. Don't "bridge" the canoe between objects. That may tip you out or damage the boat.
6. When portaging, follow experience and instructions. Ropes and most paddles are useful for pulling canoes or easing them over lowhead dams.
7. Don't drink the water. Don't rub your eyes or put fingers to your mouth. Protect any open cuts or scrapes. (Hand sanitizer, waterproof gloves and some boots are available).
8. On the banks watch for poison ivy, unstable or slippery ground, holes, loose rocks, broken glass, sharp objects, fishing lines and hooks, and more.
9. Stay alert. Look for obstacles in the stream, especially rocks, metal and re-bar.
10. If you tip or fall in water deeper than knee-high, stay with the canoe.
11. In fast water, if possible, stay upstream of your canoe and keep your feet pointing downstream in case you hit something.
12. Review particular concerns for "today's" outing, such as lowhead dams, combined sewer overflows, put-in/take-out conditions, weather, sun, water level, strong currents, rugged rip rap, slippery surfaces, etc.
13. During cleanups, don't get hurt or put yourself in dangerous situations trying to pull stuff out. Junk removal is satisfying, but not worth an injury.
14. Note the route taken by experienced paddlers in front of you and feel free to ask for their help at any time. The Mill Creek Yacht Club thrives on mutual aid.

