

CATAWBA RIVER CANOE TRAIL



The Catawba River begins in the foothills of North Carolina and flows for more than 200 miles through the Piedmont of North Carolina. Beginning in 1904, a series of hydroelectric dams were constructed to harness the power of the river to provide electricity for the region. The 30 mile stretch of the Catawba River between Wylie Hydro and the upper end of Fishing Creek Lake is now the longest portion of the Catawba River that remains undammed. This does not mean, however, that the river is free-flowing. Flows in the river are directly related to releases from the Wylie Hydroelectric Dam. The amount of flow released will greatly affect a boating experience; you are strongly encouraged to consult Duke Energy’s website www.duke-energy.com to see what flow conditions are anticipated during your trip.

Despite its proximity to Charlotte, Rock Hill, and other developed areas, much of the land bordering this portion of the Catawba River remains wooded and natural. While access to the river has improved and will continue to do so, there are still many sections of the river that are remote and difficult to access. This characteristic makes the SC Catawba River a haven for wildlife of all sorts.

In addition to being rich in wildlife, the SC Catawba River is also rich in history. The river has provided for the people of the Catawba River Valley for more than 12,000 years. Beginning with the ancestors of the modern-day Catawba Indian Nation, through the first European explorers and early settlers, to those who continue to flock to the region today because of the quality of life, all have left their mark on the river. This canoe trail brochure provides a glimpse into this history.

Boaters should note that only those access points identified in this trail map brochure are public. Other access points that you may see from the river are privately owned.

1 WYLIE HYDRO

The first dam to be built at this site was the Old Catawba Dam. It was constructed in 1904 to power the Victoria Cotton Mill in nearby Rock Hill. Both the original dam and powerhouse were removed in 1924 when the current dam and powerhouse were constructed in the same location, but much larger than the Old Catawba Dam. This site is considered to be the birthplace of Duke Energy.

2 YORK COUNTY MUSEUM OF LIFE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Exhibits and interactive experiences in the nation’s first environmental history museum will focus on three central themes: the river, crossroads and sustainability. Visitors will learn how the 400-acre site, donated to the Culture & Heritage Foundation by Jane Spratt McColl, has been an intersection of people and place throughout history. Among the experiences will be a river walk, naturalist center, planetarium, auditorium and restaurant featuring local foods. A watershed exhibit will include aquariums and aquatic life dioramas with live otters, fish and turtles.

3 NATION FORD

As you float under the Southern Rail trestle, you are passing over Nation Ford, a crossing point of the river since ancient times. This point where the river flows over a shelf of granite provided a safe crossing point on foot, horseback, or wagon during times of normal water flow. Used originally by Native Americans, it was named Nation Ford for the Catawba Indian Nation, whose villages were located nearby. The ford served as a crossing point for early traders and for the many thousands of settlers coming south on the Great Wagon Road to settle the Piedmont of South Carolina. It was a strategic crossing point during both the American Revolution and the Civil War. The railroad bridge was constructed in 1851 and has been replaced using the original stone piers twice, once after being burned during a skirmish between Union forces and home guards in April 1865 and again after being swept away in the great flood of 1916.

The Nation Ford Fish Weir consists of a double “v” shaped fish trap or stone weir spanning the Catawba River channel. Stones placed across the river channel directed the water flow into these two narrow outlets, which contained the traps to catch the fish. In the southeastern United States, weirs constructed along the rivers were commonly built on existing shoals and in other naturally shallow areas. The importance of fish to southeastern Native American groups is well documented by archaeologists who have recovered evidence of prehistoric utilization of a great diversity of fish species dating back at least 5,000 years. Seasonal availability of fish in the Southeast is the least constrained of all areas on the Atlantic seaboard, providing not only the most diverse anadromous species, but also numerous freshwater and saltwater species.

4 CELANESE REDEVELOPMENT SITE

The old Celanese site, located on the right bank of the river downstream of the Hwy 21 Bridge is representative of history in the making. The Catawba River was once used to power a valuable industrial base that changed the face of the Catawba River Valley permanently. However, since the 1980’s, this industrial base has been eroding as more and more textile and other industrial facilities have closed their doors. That is exactly what happened at the Celanese site in Rock Hill in 2005. However, the site is in the process of being reborn as an industrial park, retail complex, and housing development.

5 CATAWBA STORY

The Catawba River is the life-blood of the Catawba people. It provided drinking water, habitat for fish, a place for purification, and it was a major transportation artery. It was also a gathering place for spiritual or social activities, as indicated by this story:

How the Ghosts were Heard Dancing: My mother told me that she and my father were standing outside the door one evening just after sunset. And from across the river, where there used to be an ancient Indian village, they could hear somebody drumming very hard (and people dancing and singing). But there was nobody over there, where all the noise came from.

— Susan Harris Owl quoted in “Catawba Texts,” Frank G. Speck,

6 GRIST MILLS

The many shoals along the Catawba River indicate a gradual drop in elevation as the river crosses the Piedmont. Grist mills were built along the river and its tributaries to take advantage of the power of falling water before the availability of steam or electrical power sources. These mills ground corn and other grains for the small-scale farmers in the immediate vicinity. The miller would often take a percentage of the product as payment. Remnants of grist mills include “sluices” or ditches to carry the water from the river to the mill site, stone foundations for the mill buildings, and in some cases, the grinding stones. A number of grist mill sites have been documented along the river and its tributaries, and several sites have been protected through public ownership.

7 CATAWBA RESERVATION & CULTURAL CENTER

The Catawba Indian Reservation near Rock Hill is home to the only federally recognized tribe in the state of South Carolina. Perhaps the Catawba Indian Nation’s greatest legacy is its pottery, made in a simple, elegant style that is instantly recognizable. Catawba’s have the distinction of being one of only a handful of Tribes that can boast of making pottery the same way their ancestors did thousands of years before European contact. Catawba pottery is distinct in that no pottery wheel is used. The Catawba potter uses favorite objects or just about whatever is handy to shape and smooth the clay. Rubbing stones are common, but many eclectic items find their way into the potter’s use; items such as an elk antler, seashell, or a corncob. Following a process that has been used for millennia, the Catawba work clay dug from ancestral clay holes located along the banks of the Catawba River. A theme of turtles, frogs, and sunflowers seems to run through the pottery. Glazes are not used; the clay is fired in a great pit fire, which causes the distinctive coloration of the pottery.

The Catawba Cultural Preservation Project on the Catawba Indian Reservation offers exhibits, tours, and pottery-making demonstrations. The Cultural Center gift shop offers Native American crafts, books, and pottery for sale.

8 HIGHWAY 5

Prior to the construction of bridges across the Catawba River, there were numerous fords and ferries. An 1879 map of the Catawba River identifies five ferries between what is now Wylie Hydro and Landsford Canal State Park. The ferry at Highway 5 was the site of the last state-operated inland ferry in South Carolina. It was closed in 1959 after the Highway 5 Bridge was constructed.

9 CURETON’S FERRY

Ferries were established across the Catawba River in the 1700’s with the last one continuing until the early 1900’s. Cureton’s Ferry is depicted in this location on the Corps of Engineers’ 1879 map of the Catawba River. Like many ferry crossing sites, there is no evidence remaining of the ferry’s existence other than the reference on a map.

10 LANDS FORD

Lord Cornwallis’ troops crossed Lands ford in his march from Charlotte to Winnsboro after the Battle of Kings Mountain during the Revolutionary War. During the American Civil War, General Thomas Sumter, the “Gamecock” used the area as a meeting place and campsite. General William Richardson Davie, who fought with Sumter, served as governor of North Carolina and later retired to a home overlooking the ford. Now, the site is Landsford Canal State Park with the remains of an early 19th century canal and 18th century log cabin.

A

FORT MILL ACCESS AREA

OPERATOR:

Duke Energy (800-443-5193)

B

RIVER PARK

OPERATOR:

City of Rock Hill Parks, Recreation, and Tourism (803-329-5620)

C

LCSP UPPER PUT-IN

D

LCSP LOWER ACCESS

OPERATOR:

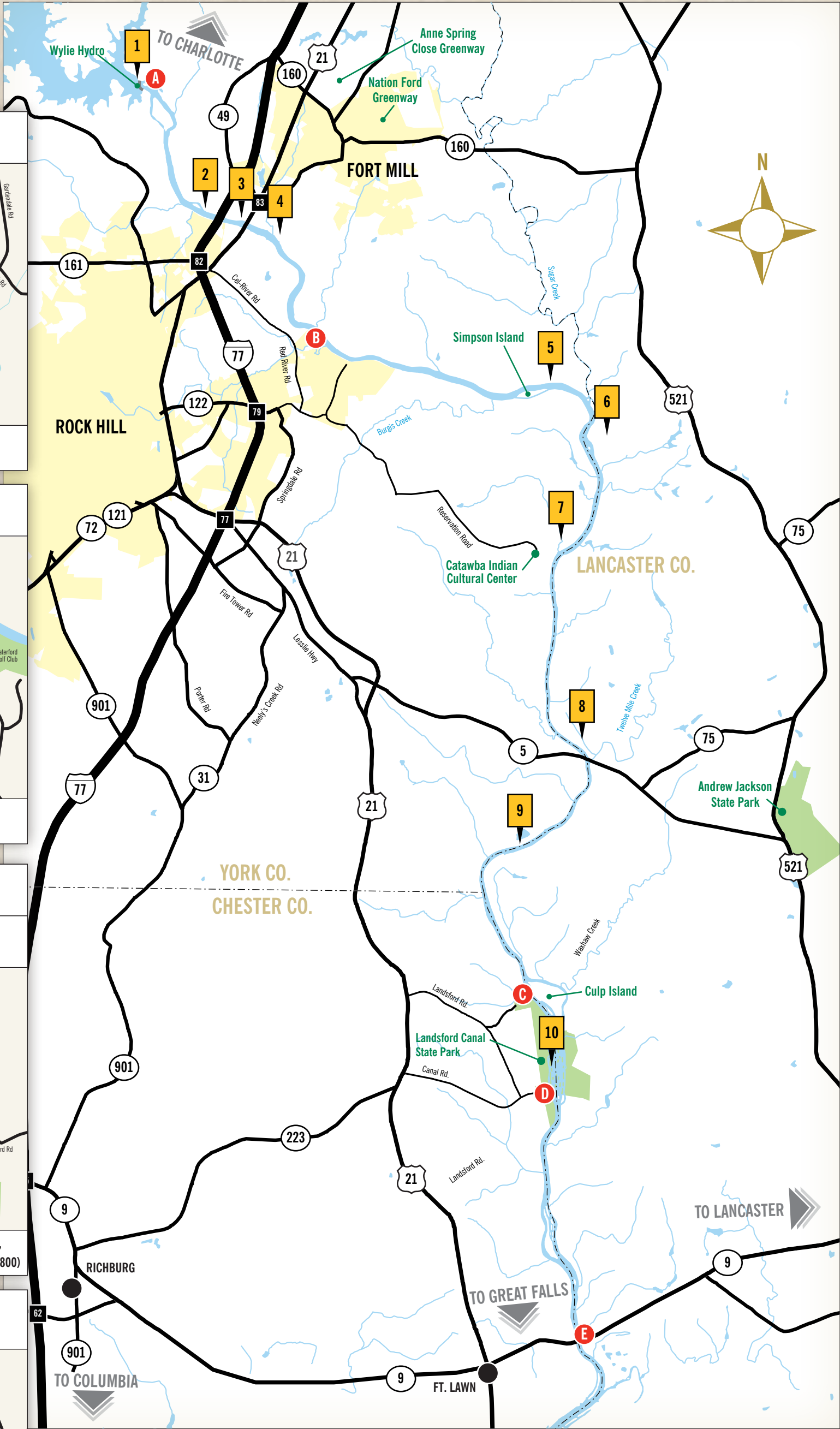
South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism (803-789-5800)

E

HIGHWAY 9 LANDING

OPERATOR:

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (803-734-4009)



MILEAGE CHART	
	Miles (approx)
Ft. Mill Access Area to I-77 Bridge	3.0
I-77 Bridge to River Park	3.4
River Park to Sugar Creek	4.9
Sugar Creek to the Highway 5 Bridge	6.9
Highway 5 Bridge to LCSP Upper Access	6.6
LCSP Upper Access to LCSP Lower Access	1.5
LCSP Lower Access to Highway 9 Landing	3.0

01234

Miles

MAP LEGEND

Point of Interest

Access Area

City

Interstate Highway

State Highway

State Road

Exit