The Colorado River

Canoeing from Blythe to Imperial Dam

The 1974 Recreational Trails Act recognized the need to provide for increased recreational boating opportunities on California’s rivers by designating specific rivers for study as boating trails. The California Department of Boating and Waterways has published this Boating Trail Guide, with the cooperation of other agencies, to provide basic information which will assist you in planning a safe and enjoyable trip.

Lands along the shoreline are owned and managed by various entities, public and private. When facing downstream, usually the land to the river-right is in California, while Arizona is at river-left. However, due to levee work and the river’s tendency to change course, some portions of Arizona are now on both sides of the river.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services manages the Cibola and Imperial National Wildlife Refuges, primarily for migratory waterfowl. Overnight camping is prohibited on these refuges. The remainder of federal property is managed by BLM’s Yuma District Office for a variety of land uses. Picacho State Recreation Area, which is also adjacent to the river, is managed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is responsible for controlling water flows. For information regarding expected flows, contact the bureau in Yuma or Boulder City (see back cover for contact information).

Fishing is very good on the river and in some backwater areas. Regulations and information are available from the California Department of Fish and Game, (909) 597-9823, and the Arizona Department of Game and Fish, (602) 942-3000.

Safe Boating and River Hints

River Canoeing... Since the river current is swift and therefore potentially dangerous, river travel should be a team effort involving at least three boats. Never boat alone. For more information on canoeing safety, see the Department of Boating and Waterways pamphlet Safe Boating Hints for Paddle Craft, viewable on our web site at www.dbw.ca.gov.

Life Jackets... U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets are required by federal and state law to be carried for each person aboard a canoe, kayak, inflatable raft or other type of watercraft. Non-swimmers and children should wear a life jacket at all times. By law, children under the age of 12 must wear a life jacket on a vessel of 26 feet or less, while under way.

Hazards... Be alert for submerged hazards such as sandbars, rocks, snags, and other river debris. Visibility of hazards varies with water level.
fluctuations.

Powerboats... Canoeists will be sharing the river with numerous powerboats. The wakes created by powerboats can be quite large. To prevent possible swamping, canoeists should enter these wakes at a slight angle to the wave.

Water... Dehydration is a danger. Potable water, available at only a few locations, should be carried, at least a gallon per person per day. To make river water potable, boil it for 10-20 minutes, or use halizone tablets.

Caution... Late Spring, summer and early fall air temperatures usually exceed 100°F. Boaters should plan their trips carefully to guard against exposure to extreme temperatures. Between November and June, the desert is cold at night, with drops in temperature of 30-40 degrees.

Parking... Boaters should check with the managers of marinas or camping areas for preferable parking locations.

Boat Ramps... Do not block access to boat ramps. Canoes should be beached at either the upstream or downstream side of the boat ramps to permit launching and retrieval without congestion.

Pitch In... The beauty of this river can best be preserved by its users. Pitch in and do your part to keep it clean. Take waterproof trashbags along and boat out what you boat in.

Lights... After sunset, a light which shines 360 degrees and is visible for two miles must be displayed by manually propelled craft. Powerboats must display all lights required by state and federal law. (See the Department pamphlet The ABCs of California Boating Law.)

Float Plan... Boaters should leave word with a responsible person regarding their route and expected date of return.

Guide Maps

From Blythe to Imperial Dam, the river flows approximately 76 miles. Although the run does not have any whitewater rapids, the current is fast moving and averages 5 mph. Boat trips longer than 76 miles may be planned by entering the river upstream from Blythe or by continuing downstream from Imperial Dam. However, shorter trips are also possible. The following maps will illustrate some of the launch areas and take-out points, as well as some of the navigable side channels. The river mileage indicated on the guide maps is from the I-10 Bridge.
MAYFLOWER COUNTY PARK

Many canoeists start their trip at this park. A shaded picnic area overlooks the river.

RIVIERA BLYTHE MARINA

This privately operated campground is located south of and adjacent to the I-10 freeway on the California side of the river. There is a $7 per boat fee to launch.

A-7 BLM Land

Primitive boat launching ramp.
A well-developed site with potable water, supplies and canoe rental available. (Riverside County)

The three jetties at this mouth provide campsites. A national historic landmark, the Ripley intaglios are large drawings made by aboriginal inhabitants. They are located on the bluffs.
GUIDE MAP 3

TAYLOR FERRY
Old, disused cable ferry still crosses river.

GOULD WASH
A popular day use area.

CIBOLA FARMERS BRIDGE
Private land. First vehicle crossing south of Blythe.
PALO VERDE OXBOW OUTLET

Located just below the Oxbow Bridge. A portage is necessary to return to the river. Many canoe and float parties begin their trips at this point. Restrooms and R.V. camping are available.

PALO VERDE OXBOW INLET

A portage may be made over the levee into Oxbow Lake. Palo Verde Park (Imperial County) is located on the lake shore. Restrooms are available. The fishing is reported to be good. This area is closed to water skiing.

OLD RIVER CHANNEL

Managed as a wildlife refuge, the unmarked, very difficult and long portage requires extreme caution. The shallow, 11-mile channel has no current and portions are clogged with cattails. Camping is not permitted so allow sufficient daylight to reach the next camping area. (See continuation of channel on map 5, page 9.)
WALTER’S CAMP

A privately owned concession on public (BLM) lands. Located near the lower end of the old river channel. To reach Walter’s Camp via the new channel requires entering the outlet of the old channel and paddling upstream about one mile. This is a good take-out point for those wanting a short trip from Blythe. Supplies are available.
The south end of the Cibola NWR is the Northern boundary of the Imperial NWR. Overnight camping is prohibited within the refuge between Walker Lake and Picacho State Recreation Area. Trips should be planned accordingly. (It is approximately 10 miles to the north end of the Picacho State Recreation Area boundary and approximately 8 miles further to the main camp site. See number 17, map 8.)
Camping is available at the park's main campsite with restrooms and shower (use fees charged). There is also a group campsite for up to 90 persons. Camping is permitted at three boat-in sites — Carrizo Boat-in Campground, Paddle Wheeler, and Taylor Lake (use fees charged). Water skiing is allowed in this area. The Imperial NWR continues on the Arizona side to Martinez Lake.

**ISLAND LAKE**
Small backwater lake accessible from the river.

**IMPERIAL NWR**
Resumes on the California side of the river.
ENDS ON THE CALIFORNIA SIDE OF THE RIVER. CAMPING IS PERMITTED IN CALIFORNIA BEYOND THIS POINT.

FERGUSON LAKE
Heavily used day-use area, popular for fishing. Dispersed camping only.

BACKWATER

MARTINEZ LAKE RESORT
Many trips end at this well-developed private marina. Supplies, canoe rentals, and restrooms are available.

FISHER’S LANDING
A popular take-out point. Restrooms and supplies are available.

ARIZONA CHANNEL
To avoid water skiers, many canoeists take the channel for about 4 miles.
NOTE: During periods of high water, all boating use is prohibited in main river channel below Squaw Lake to Imperial Dam.

SQUAW LAKE RECREATION SITE
Heavily used take-out point on the California side of the river. Restrooms are available. (BLM) Showers; tent camping. Popular area for PWC and water skiing. DBW-funded cartop boat ramp.

PHIL SWING PARK
A small grassy area with restrooms and trees — located at the west end of Imperial Dam. All boating is discouraged in this area because of treacherous currents near the dam.

HIDDEN SHORES R.V. VILLAGE
A privately operated concession on public land. It is the last take-out area. Supplies are available. Access during high water by side channel only. (See note, above.)
CALIFORNIA

Department of Fish & Game
14700 South Broadway
Blythe, CA 92225
(760) 922-6508

Department of Parks & Recreation
Picacho State Recreation Area

Field Office
P.O. Box 848
Winterhaven, CA 92283
(760) 996-2963

Headquarters
(760) 393-3059

Imperial County Sheriff's Substation
513 2nd Ave.
Winterhaven, CA 92283
(760) 572-0229

Parks Department
County of Riverside
39000 Main St.
Riverside, CA 92522
(909) 826-2000

Riverside Sheriff's Substation Blythe
Patrol Boat
280 N. Spring St.
Blythe, CA 92225
(760) 921-7900

ARIZONA

Game & Fish Department
9140 E. 28th St.
Yuma AZ, 85365
(928) 342-0091

La Paz County Sheriff's Office
P.O. Box BF
Parker AZ, 85344
(928) 669-2281

Yuma County Sheriff's Office
41 S. Third Ave.
Yuma AZ, 85364
(928) 783-4427

FEDERAL AGENCIES

Bureau of Land Management
Yuma Field Office
2555 Gila Ridge Rd.
Yuma, AZ 85365
(928) 317-3200

Bureau of Reclamation
Lower Colorado Regional Office
P.O. Box 427
Boulder City, NV 89005
(702) 293-8557

Bureau of Reclamation
Yuma Area Office
7301 Calle Aqua Salada
Yuma, AZ 85364
(928) 343-8133

Fish & Wildlife Service
Imperial National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 72217
Martinez Lake, AZ 85365
(928) 783-3371

PRIVATE

Fisher's Landing
Star Route 4, Box 45
Yuma, AZ 85365
(928) 782-7049

Hidden Shores R.V. Park
Star Route 4, Box 40
Yuma, AZ 85365
(928) 783-1448

Martinez Lake Marina
Star Route 4, Box 41
Martinez Lake, AZ 85365
(928) 783-9589

McIntyre Park
8750 East 26th Ave.
Blythe, CA 92225
(760) 922-8205

Riviera-Blythe Marina
14100 Riviera Dr.
Blythe, CA 92225
(760) 922-5350

Walter's Camp
P.O. Box 31
Palo Verde, CA 92266
(760) 854-3322

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Published by:
California Department of Boating and Waterways
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www.dbw.ca.gov