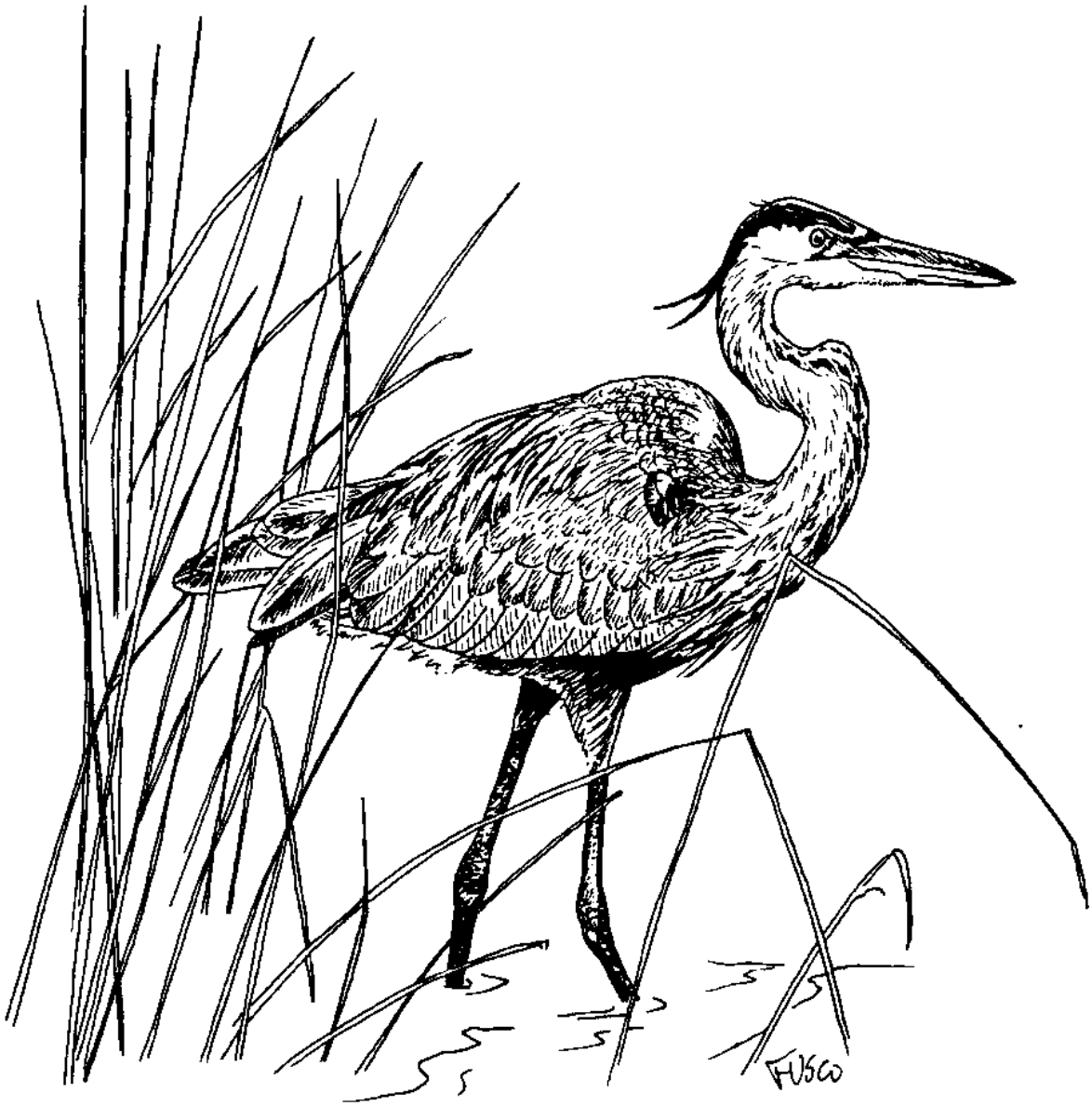
Upper Quinnipiac River Canoeable Trail Guide



Written by Peter M. Picone

Quinnipiac River Watershed Association

Quinnipiac River Canoeable

Trail Guide

Written and produced by
Peter M. Picone

The author has lived in the Quinnipiac River watershed his entire life and has enjoyed the many recreational opportunities that the Quinnipiac River offers. He has canoed, fished, hunted, and hiked throughout the river and its associated habitats. He wants to help people become aware the river's natural resources and to conserve them for future generations.

Revised May 1999
Revised October 2001

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Preface by Mike Roberts

"It's just an old river"... And maybe, that's the impression a person might get - - IF- - they were newcomers to the outdoors, or perhaps newcomers to the Quinnipiac River.

But, "just an old river"? Not the Quinnipiac- - not by a long shot! I've spent the last fifty years on the Quinnipiac River, and I'm still learning about it, the habitat it provides and the wildlife that uses it. In those fifty years, I have seen the river go from a prime piece of fishing water in the early forties, fifties, and sixties, to a body of water simply starving for enough oxygen to keep its aquatic creatures alive.

And now the Quinnipiac River is back - - BIG TIME. This resurgence is due to a great extent to the dedicated efforts of the folks at the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association (QRWA).

Peter Picone, a talented wildlife biologist and QRWA board member, has been a driving force in presenting the Quinnipiac River, its habitat and its wildlife to the public. He has done a masterful job writing and producing this canoeable trail guide. He takes you on a numbered tour of the Quinnipiac River, pointing out interesting aspects of the river and its habitats. He deserves credit in opening up a whole new world to those that like to canoe beautiful rivers like the Quinnipiac.

NOTE: Mike Roberts is a South Meriden resident, QRWA Board member emeritus, avid outdoorsman, and an award winning outdoor writer.

Rivers are valuable natural resources. Many of Connecticut's earliest settlements occurred next to rivers for the transportation and utilization of its natural resources. With the advent of the gas-powered engine, rivers lost their importance for transportation. The era of the industrial revolution brought many changes to the river and its associated habitats because of filling, altering of channels, and discharges of untreated wastes. Today, with the enactment of various federal and state environmental protection laws and citizen concern, rivers are making a comeback. The return of various fish and wildlife resources to rivers provides testimony that things are getting better; however there are still many negative influences that are impacting the river's systems. Non-point source pollution (eg. runoff of excess lawn fertilizers or illegally dumped motor oil) and illegal wetland filling are modern problems that need to be addressed. Although some rivers are getting cleaner improvements are still needed. The Quinnipiac river is one of the more urbanized rivers of the State and there is a need to educate those individuals who knowingly or unknowingly pollute the river. The Quinnipiac river and its associated habitats are home to a wide variety of wildlife. This inland portion of the river provides an excellent opportunity to see wildlife while canoeing. Viewing some of the more secretive wildlife requires being as quiet as possible and early morning hours may be better for veiwing. Collectively, through education, each and every citizen can have a positive influence on our rivers and heal the wounds that ignorance caused in the past. It is hoped that this canoeable trail and guide will help educate citizens and help make a positive contribution to the conservation of our natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

Safety Comes First

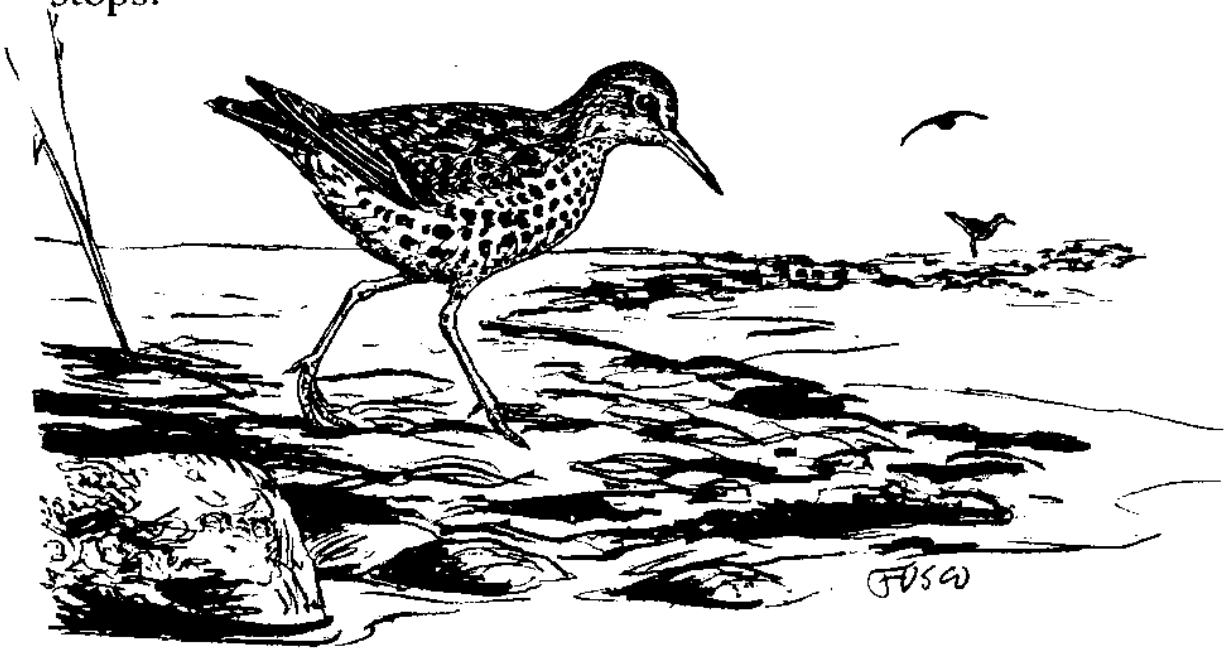
1 - Every passenger in the canoe needs to wear an approved Personal Floatation Device(PFD) that fits correctly.
2 - Do not overload the canoe. Read the manufacturer's suggested weight capacity and stay under the recommended weight maximum.
3 - Check and secure all your equipment.
4 - Be familiar with the route you are taking. Scout the area before undertaking a canoe trip.
5 - Bring first aid supplies, insect repellents, and other appropriate gear.
6 - Do not canoe alone.
7 - Fasten all ropes so they cannot get entangled with vegetation or people.
8 - Travel at safe speeds and always be alert.
9 - Beware of overhanging trees, log jams, rocks, and other obstructions in the river channel.
10 - Do not stand up in your canoe. This may cause the canoe to tip over.
11 - Dress appropriately for the weather conditions and always prepare yourself for inclement weather. Get out of the water before a storm hits.
12 - Do not trespass on private property.
13 - Please be quiet. Do not disturb wildlife whenever feasible.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR STOPS

-- Stops are marked with yellow paint and numbers along river.
-- Map of trail in on back page of thisguide.
-- Familiarize yourself with the take-out options.

Stop 1 The Canoe Launch Site

Before launching your canoe, look at the river. The Quinnipiac originates in New Britain and ends in New Haven. It is 38 miles long and its drainage basin is 170 square miles. You may live within those 170 square miles and what you do, even in your own backyard, may eventually end up in the river. In 1914, fish life in the river was almost non-existent because of pollution. Today, with environmental pollution controls, the fish and wildlife are making a comeback. Typical wildlife you may encounter along this inland stretch of the river are: mallards, wood ducks, kingfishers, spotted sandpipers, and a variety of songbirds that use the wetlands and edge vegetation of the river. If you are a keen observer you will see the signs of more secretive wildlife such as river otter, deer, muskrats, green-backed herons and great blue herons. Look for yellow trail markers for the trail stops.



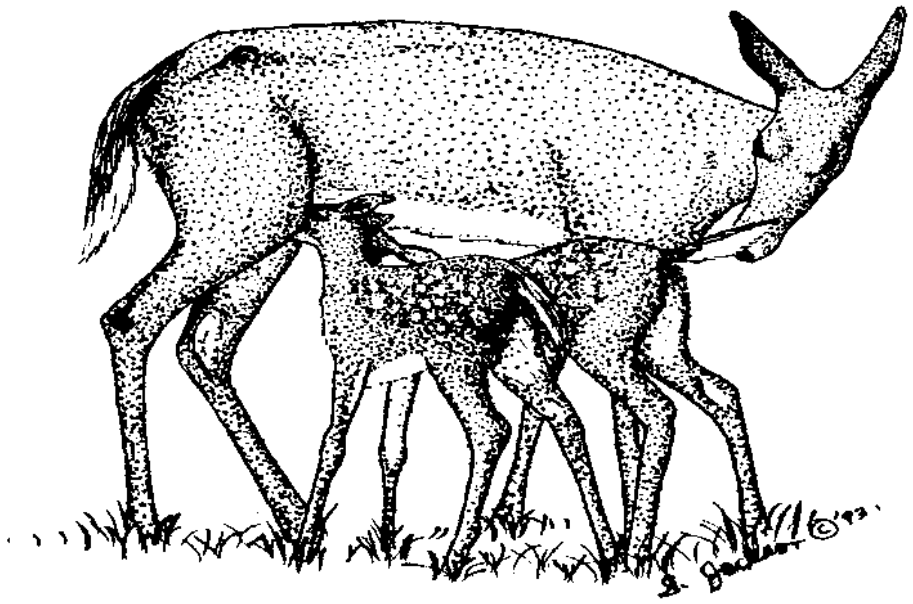
Spotted sandpipers can be seen along banks of the river.

Stop 2 Misery Brook Intersection

Misery Brook is one of the many tributaries of the Quinnipiac River. All the brooks and streams flow into the Quinnipiac are important to its health. Many of these brooks flow through suburban backyards and will carry pollutants from those areas. Misery brook has been impacted north of here from the filling of its wetlands. Wetlands help remove pollutants and maintain a steady source of water for the river.

Stop 3 River Dynamics

Rivers are very dynamic and changing. They are constantly eroding their banks and depositing new sediment. Here you can observe how the east banks are being eroded and the west side is receiving deposition. Note the vegetation and how the roots of the trees help stabilize the river's banks. The eroded undercuts and the sand deposits are places that the spotted sandpiper and other wildlife will look for insects. The undercuts are sometimes used for shelter or predator avoidance by wood ducks and other wildlife.



White-tailed deer utilize the habitats adjoining the Quinnipiac River. They also regularly cross the river in some locations. Look for their tracks.

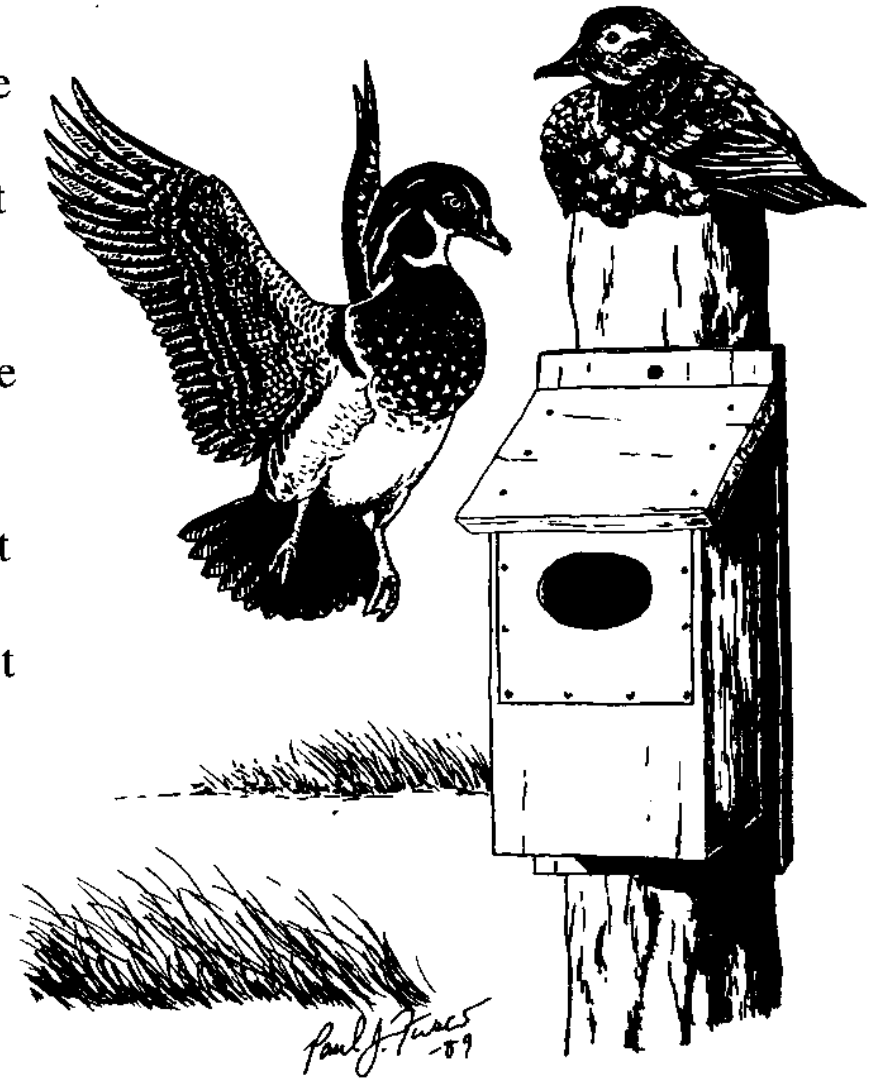
Stop 4 Sedimentation Basin

You are looking at the outfall of a sedimentation basin that is used to help take out sediments from the I-691highway. Runoff from the highway is collected in the basin and discharged at an engineered rate to allow the suspended sediments such as road sand to settle out. This helps prevent the sediments from flowing directly into the river. Although there is natural sediment in the river, unnatural sediment from runoff can cause problems for fish and other organisms. Also, many pollutants travel by "hitching a ride" onto road sediment particles.

Stop 5 Wood Duck Nest Box

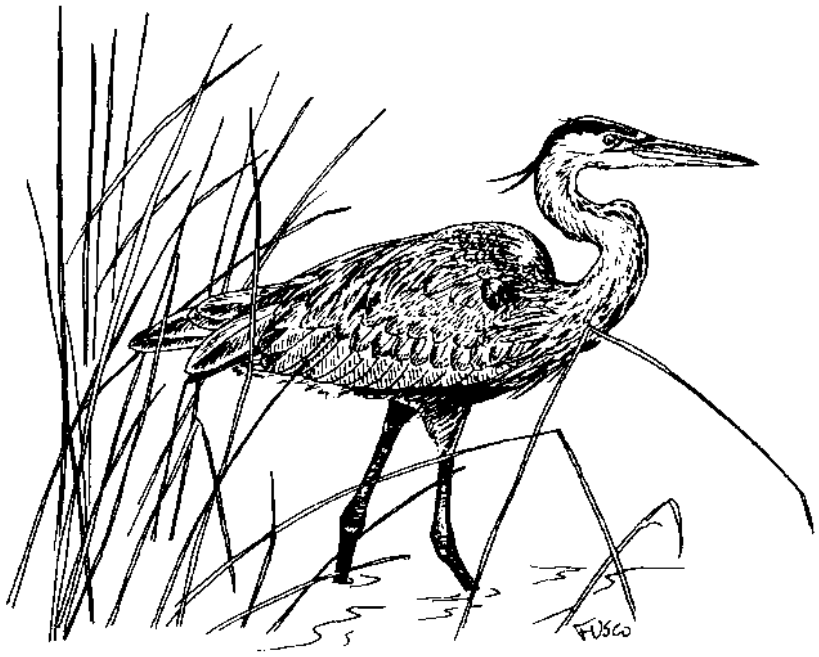
Wood ducks are one of the most colorful ducks found in Connecticut. They are unique because they are cavity-nesters. They nest in tree cavities. Most other dabbling ducks nest on the ground. Artificial nest boxes mimic natural cavities. These boxes have helped restore populations of cavity-nesters like the wood duck. This particular box successfully hatched out a family of wood ducks in 1992. It has also been used for shelter by screech owls and gray squirrels.

Other nest boxes were placed throughout the river area. Contact the DEP Wildlife Division at 675-8130 for the nest box plans.



Stop 6 River Channelization

This is an example of channelization and straightening of the river's course. It was necessary, in this case, because of the need for a highway bridge crossing. In the past, channelization and altering of a river's course was done by people in the attempt to control its path and direction. This only made things worse down stream because of the increase in velocity of the water. Flood waters need to over-flow the river's banks, which helps to slow the water down and recharge adjoining aquifers. Destruction of floodplain in one location can make things worse downstream. There are many examples of attempts at taming the river, especially as you enter more developed areas. Channelization may also remove habitat along the banks for wildlife and damage river bed habitat for fish.



Stop 7 Upland Hardwood Forest

Forests adjoining the river provide habitat for a variety of wildlife. The forests also provide a needed buffer for the river which helps filter out pollutants and maintain water quality. Forests help maintain a stable source of clean water which the aquatic organisms need to survive. This particular property is owned and managed by the Quinnipiac Valley Audubon Association.

Shagbark Hickory

Stop 8 Riffles for Fish

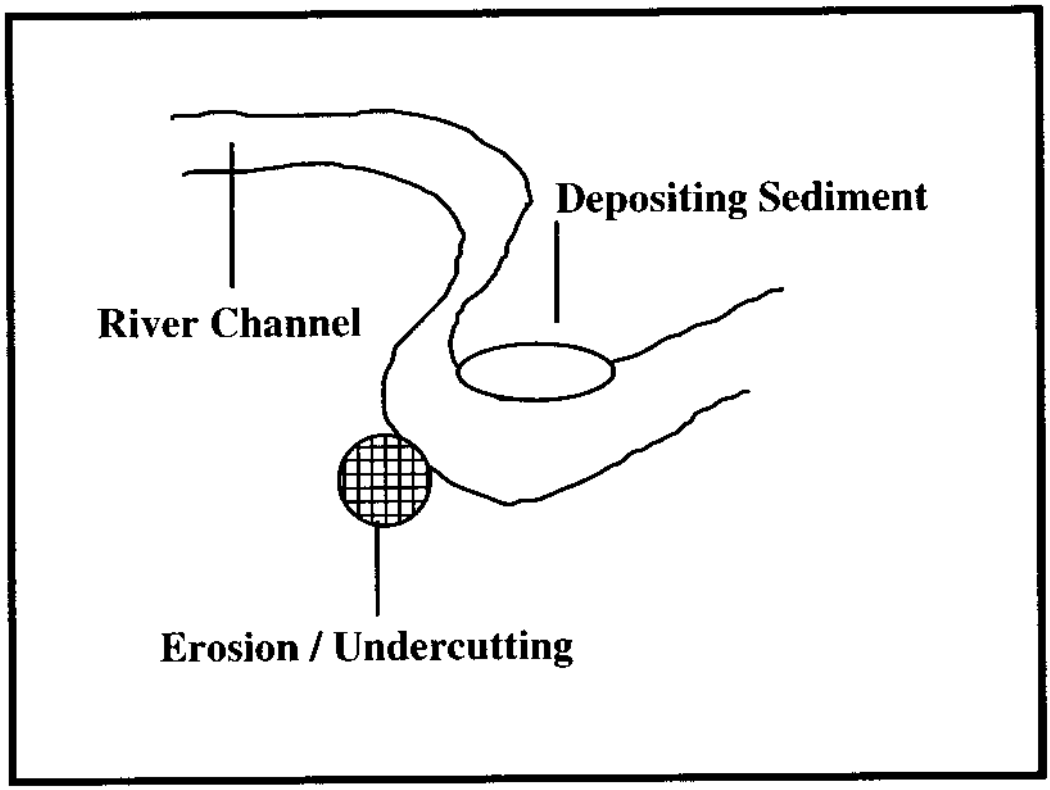
Riffles in a stream help oxygenate the water through the tumbling effect. This section of the river was improved by fisherman over twenty years ago. Rocks were moved in a fashion to enhance the riffles and improve this site for trout and other fish.

Stop 9 Red Maple Floodplain

This area is known as a river floodplain. The river periodically overflows its banks here and the water fans out over many adjacent acres. The floodplain serves as a "sponge" and is an important part of the river system. These seasonally wet areas also function as habitat for wildlife. These forested floodplains provide diverse habitats as well as help improve water quality and settle out sediments from the flood waters. These areas are also known to contain temporary water bodies called vernal pools. Vernal pools collect snow melt and other runoff to provide breeding habitat for amphibians. Amphibians lay their eggs in vernal pools. They spend a portion of their life cycle in the water and then disperse on land. Vernal pools should be protected from unnecessary alteration such as vegetation removal or filling.

Stop 10 Meandering Curves

This section of the river is an excellent example of how the river meanders and has some sharp bends. The river changes direction at a slow, but steady pace over time. Occassionally, rivers will cut new channels and the abandoned channels become small ponds or lakes called "oxbows". If you look at an aerial photo of this area, it is more apparent how the river has cut new channels over time.



Note the deposition of new sediment on one side and the erosion and undercutting of the river bank on the opposite side.

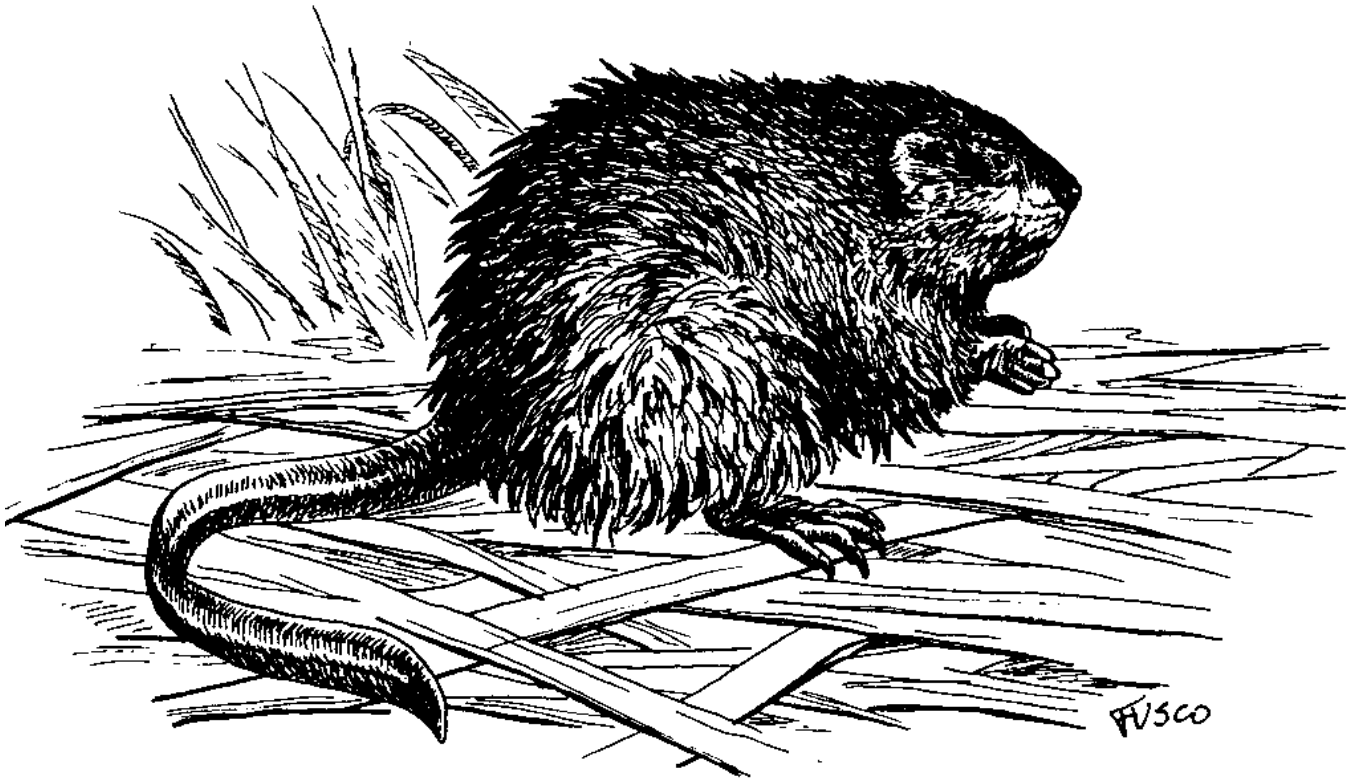
Stop 11 River Bank Vegetation

Take a look at the vegetation growing on the banks of the river. The shrub growing here is named Silky Dogwood. It does well in moist sites and is able to spread and overhang the banks of the river. It produces valuable purple berries for birds in the fall and provides cover for ducks and other wildlife. The vegetation helps stabilize the banks of the river. Overhanging branches also function as cover for fish and other wildlife foraging in the river. It is also important for shading the river and maintaining cooler water temperatures which holds more oxygen and prevents algal blooms.

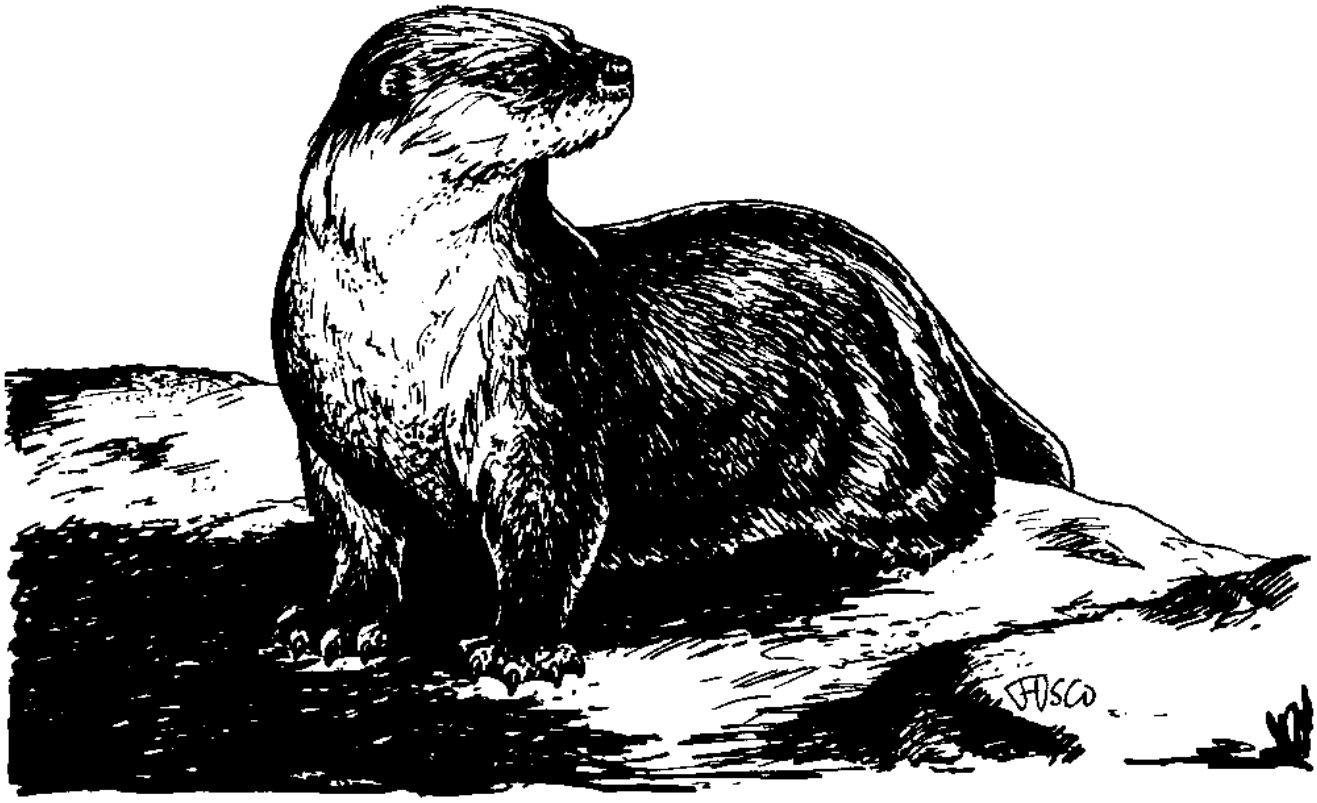
The green-backed heron hunts for fish and other aquatic organisms along streamside vegetation.

Stop 12 Flood Plain Grassland

Look on the east side of the river. You should notice the area made up mostly of herbaceous plants with few woody plants. This area is used by muskrats. If you look along the banks you may find muskrat dens and see tracks in the mud. Deer also use this area for grazing. The vegetation on these types of floodplains are influenced by the seasonal water fluctuations.



Muskrats have a naked black tail and brownish black fur.



River otter feed primarily on fish, frogs, and crayfish.

Stop 13 River Otter Sign

River otter activity occurs throughout the course of the Quinnipiac. The author has found that this stretch of the river has traditionally been good at revealing traces of their presence. River otter leave droppings that contain fish bones and scales. Keep an eye out for the droppings or "scats" on horizontal logs or on the banks of the river. In the winter, also look for slides and tracks in the snow. The scats are usually concentrated in one area rather than randomly. Otters are fairly secretive.

Stop 14 Wildlife Den Tree (Snag)

It is important to recognize the value of trees with cavities. There are wildlife that depend on decaying trees for shelter, feeding or nesting. Wood ducks, bluebirds, screech owls, woodpeckers, and many small mammals utilize these trees called "snags". Dead wood functions as a component of habitat. Never touch or lean on snags because they may snap off and injure you or bystanders.

This is your last stop. The canoe take-out location is jut past the Cheshire Street bridge on the east side of the river. Please take extra care when exiting the canoe and transporting it onto shore.

Information Sources

River Conservation
Quinnipiac River Watershed Association
99 Colony Street
Meriden, CT 06451 tel. 203-237-2237

Local Municipalities
Southington Conservation Commission
Town of Southington
75 Main Street
Southington, CT 06489 tel. 860-276-6248

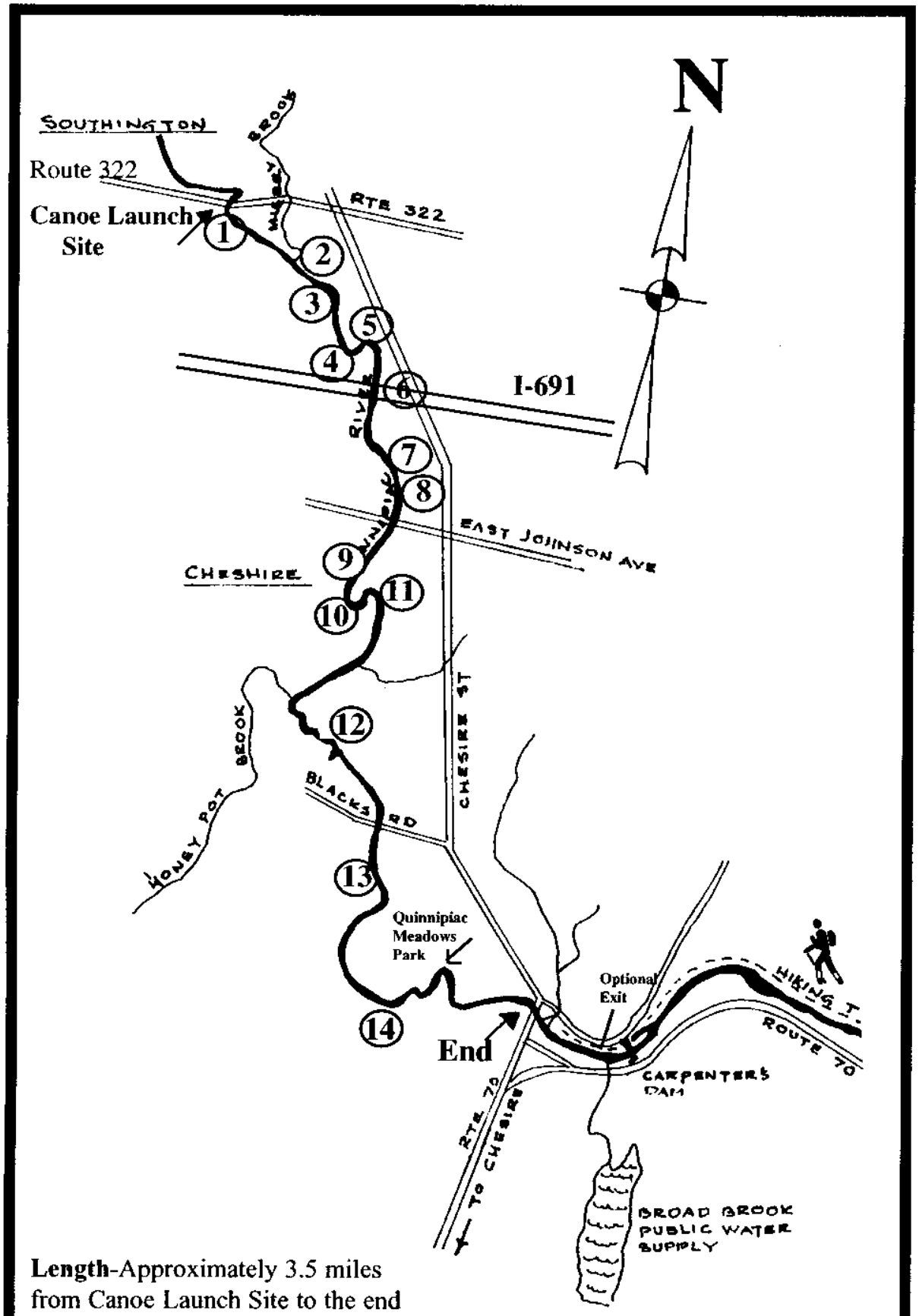
Cheshire Inland Wetlands Commission
Town of Cheshire
84 South Main Street
Cheshire, CT 06410 tel. 203-271-6670

Meriden Conservation Commission
City of Meriden
City Hall
Meriden, CT 06450 tel. 203-630-4081

State
Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
Inland Water Resources Division
79 Elm Street
Hartford, CT 06106-5127 tel. 860-424-3706

DEP Wildlife Division: tel. 860-675-8130
Peter M. Picone, Wildlife Biologist
email: peter.picone@po.state.ct.us

Quinnipiac River Canoeable Trail Map



Length-Approximately 3.5 miles from Canoe Launch Site to the end at Route 70.

Time-Approximately 2 Hours.