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D'Arbonne Country

Water Trails: Creeks • Bayous • Rivers



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- Quapaw Canoe Co.
- Trail exploration and narrative by Braxton Barden, Mark "River" Peoples, Stephanie Antley Herman and John Ruskey
- Photography by Braxton Barden

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Northeast Louisiana: Outdoor Series

Lake D'Arbonne State Park

Piney forests, rolling hills, five fishing piers and a beautiful lake draw visitors to this quiet, majestic state park. Designed to keep the focus on nature, park facilities blend with the natural landscape to enhance the outdoor experience of this park.

Fishing piers and boat docks attract visitors to Lake D'Arbonne, the marvelous 15,250-acre centerpiece of the park. Recreation on Lake D'Arbonne is tremendously popular among locals and visitors, and record freshwater catches of bass, crappie, catfish and bream make Lake D'Arbonne a fishing haven. Wide open areas of the lake, about seven miles from the park, appeal to water skiers and pleasure boaters. The boat launch at the park opens up all of these opportunities to outdoorsmen.

Tree stands in the lake captivate photographers, as do the towering pines on land and the rich diversity of wildlife and birds that make the park their home. Bring your binoculars and camera to capture the wonders of the natural world from our beautiful nature trails.

Cyclists will enjoy the challenge of the rolling hills of the park as a starting point for biking excursions into the steep inclines and scenic beauty of North Louisiana. Lighted tennis courts add to the activity options available for all visitors. Return for a picnic under the canopy of pine trees and celebrate the magnificence of nature preserved.

Canoe Rentals

Lester's on the Lake
9606 Louisiana 2
Farmerville, LA 71241
(318) 368-8097

Lake D'Arbonne State Park
3628 Evergreen Road
Farmerville, LA 7124
(888) 677-5200



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Corney Creek Trail

(4 Miles Round Trip)

Google Map of Trail:
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zB40pQ-9S9xc.k4lqhp0604m0>

LA 550 Bridge Out and Back Paddle

Getting There:

From Bernice, LA, travel Highway 2 East; turn left onto Highway 550 to Corney Creek Bridge. Launch site under the bridge.

What to Expect:

Corney Creek is a peaceful paddle into the heart of Louisiana's Sportsman's Paradise region. With a couple of strokes of the paddle, paddlers gets a sense of what it must have felt like for the area's first explorers. This route takes you under the cypress and tupelo canopy past beaver lodges and seemingly endless bottomland forests. Be on the lookout for great blue herons, wood ducks, pileated woodpeckers, deer, feral hogs, Louisiana Black Bear and maybe even an ivory bill woodpecker.

This four mile out and back route offers flat water paddling where you can spend all day or just a few hours. During the warmer months prepare for mosquitos and possibly ticks. Avoid contact with gators, snakes and poison ivy.

LBD = Left Bank Descending
RBD = Right Bank Descending



Water Trail Description:

★ Put-In: LA 550 Boat ramp (LBD Upriver from LA 550)
N32.856155
W92.573635

Corney Creek above LA 550 is the most isolated section with the biggest trees and the most abundant wildlife. This section can be paddled most of the year except during extreme drought conditions. Park and launch at the LA 550 boat ramp. Carry or drag your vessel down a gentle slope with easy access from the top of the river bank. Pack and board your canoe amongst young trees and cypress knees and set off. Unless there has been local heavy rain, the creek flow is negligible. Immediately upstream you will enter a primordial paradise surrounded by cypress and tupelo trees. The calm water of the creek provides a resplendent image of the big trees and sky.

Six hundred yards northwest of the boat ramp, you will pass the Buzzard Beach, remains of a cypress tree frequented by buzzards.

★ Buzzard Beach (RBD 600 yds)
N32.861675
W92.574758

Above the boat ramp you will encounter the remains of a cypress that is frequented by Turkey Vultures and other large birds that prefer an open perch.

★ Eye of the Needle Cypress (LBD Mile 0.9)
N32.865784
W92.576089

One particularly awesome cypress is flush with the sides of the creek and it grows right out of the river worth the paddle to see.

Warnings: Don't go during Hunting Season or low water. Before embarking, be sure to consult river gage. Low water levels might impede travel.

★ River Gage: "Bayou D'Arbonne at Lake D'Arbonne"

For this section of Corney Creek, you can get an approximate idea of the water level using the NWS River Gage at Lake D'Arbonne: <http://www.water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph.php?wfo=shv&gage=ldbl1>

80.0 to 82.1: Ideal. Possible portages
82.2 to 85.9: Fast Water. Some Caution Required
Above 86: Dangerous. Advanced paddlers only.
Beware snags and strainers.

Reading water levels at Corney Creek: Low water (Too Shallow)
There is no historical low water data from the gage at Lake D'Arbonne, however, water could possibly be too low during extreme drought conditions. Ideal level: 80.0-82.1 on the Lake D'Arbonne Gage. Above 82.1 on the Lake D'Arbonne Gage the current will be swift and extra caution is needed to maneuver through snags, sawyers, and possible strainers as river rushes through the thick terrain. Above 83.0 all of the bankside forest will be underwater, and above 86 (flood stage) there won't be any dry land to be found, boat ramps & parking lots will be completely submerged.

Historic Levels: Looking at historical data for Corney Creek from the past ten years, high water is occurs during the late spring and early summer typically.

Local Perspective:

From local paddler, Stephanie Antley Herrmann:

"Corney Creek is a very rustic trail that has a lush ecosystem. Corney Creek is a feeder of Lake D'Arbonne from Corney Lake in neighboring parish. It's a special place. I can't explain it - I just feel it."



D'Arbonne Country Water Trails: Creek • Bayou • River

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D'Arbonne Bayou Trail

(3 Miles Round Trip)

Google Map of Trail:
<http://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zB40pQ-9S9xc.kWagjw68ePg>

Holland's Bluff Boat Ramp Out and Back Paddle

Getting There:

Holland's Bluff Boat Ramp is located inside the D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge. Take highway 143 from either Farmerville or West Monroe; turn off highway 143 onto Holland's Bluff Road and follow signs to boat ramp.

What to Expect:

Paddlers begin their journey from the Holland's Bluff boat ramp in the D'Arbonne National Wildlife Refuge. Bayou D'Arbonne supports cypress swamps, bottomland hardwoods, and provides wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl. As you paddle through this magnificent bayou, keep your eyes open for alligators, bald eagles, alligator gar, belted kingfisher, the little known Rafinesque's big-eared bat, and the near endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.

Flat water paddling where you can spend all day or just a few hours. Numerous run-outs, sloughs, and tributaries offer an escape from the boat traffic encountered on the main channel and provide the best opportunity for spotting wildlife.

LBD = Left Bank Descending
RBD = Right Bank Descending



★ Sandbar Picnic (LBD 1.5 Mile)
N32.640063, W92.222835

Small forested sandbar that during low water provides an ideal spot to stretch out your legs and have a snack.

Warnings: Wear orange during hunting season. Before embarking, be sure to consult river gage. Low water levels might impede travel.

River Gage: "Bayou D'Arbonne at Lake D'Arbonne"
(Appx 18 miles upstream)

For this section of Bayou D'Arbonne, you can get an approximate idea of the water level using the NWS River Gage at Lake D'Arbonne: <http://www.water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph.php?wfo=shv&gage=ldbl1>

80.0 to 82.1: Ideal. Possible portages 82.2 to 85.9: Fast water. Some caution required above 86: Dangerous. Advanced paddlers only. Beware snags and strainers.

Reading water levels for D'Arbonne Bayou: Low water (too shallow) There is no historical low water data from the gage at Lake D'Arbonne, however, water could possibly be too low during extreme drought conditions. Ideal level: 80.0-82.1 on the Lake

D'Arbonne Gage. Above 82.1 on the Lake D'Arbonne Gage the current will be swift and extra caution is needed to maneuver through snags, sawyers, and possible strainers as river rushes through the thick

terrain. Above 83.0 all of the bankside forest will be underwater, and above 86 (flood stage) there won't be any dry land to be found, boat ramps and parking lots will be completely submerged.

Historic Levels: Looking at historical data for Bayou D'Arbonne from the past ten years, high water typically occurs during late spring and early summer.

Note: Keep in mind that if the Ouachita River is flooding, water can be pushed back into the bayou with an effect on water levels and speed.

Recent Real-Life Experience:

As related by local paddler, Stephanie Antley Herrmann:

"D'Arbonne Refuge is a complicated maze of trees with no clear channel at places and is very hard to meander through without a good GPS, but it's rich and I enjoy putting in and just exploring without any real trail. This spring we spotted a bird which I photographed. I later learned from an ornithologist the bird was a Willet (and first time one was spotted this far North). D'Arbonne Refuge is also home to roosting birds in the late evening."



3

Ouachita River & Mollicy Bayou Trail

(9 Miles Round Trip)

Google Map of Trail:
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zB40pQ-9S9xc.kivU3y76SEm8>

Finch Bayou Recreation - Day Round Trip Paddle

Getting There:

The trail begins at Finch Recreational Area which is located on the west side of the Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge. From Marion take highway 827; turn right onto Dean Church Road, turn left onto Alabama Landing Road, and make a final right onto Parish Road 2991; follow signs to Finch Recreation Area. A small fee is assessed by the refuge; look for a payment box in the area.

What to Expect:

Paddlers begin their journey from the Finch Bayou Recreation Area Boat Ramp in the Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge. The Ouachita River supports bottomland hardwoods and provides scenic habitats for migratory waterfowl. Due to the open bottomland areas, this area is a favorite for tens of thousands of ducks and geese during the winter. As you paddle, keep your eyes open for alligators, deer, turkeys, bald eagles, beavers, belted kingfisher and the near endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. This nine mile roundtrip route offers flat water paddling. The Ouachita River can run high and strong after heavy rainfall. Numerous run-outs, sloughs, and tributaries offer an escape from the boat traffic encountered on the main channel and provide the best opportunity for spotting wildlife.

LBD = Left Bank Descending
RBD = Right Bank Descending



Water Trail Description:

★ Put-In: Finch Bayou Recreation Area Boat Ramp (RBD)
N32.866062
W92.079963

The recreation area at Finch Bayou provides an amenity filled starting point for this day trip. Picnic tables, a couple of camping spots with fire rings and pit toilets make this an ideal spot to setup a base camp for your exploration of this area of the Ouachita. This section of the Ouachita River is wide so expect boat traffic and the occasional towboat. This section can be paddled throughout the year except during flood conditions. In years of normal or above rainfall, the river's bottomland hardwood forest flood and provide endless exploration possibilities. High water levels usually occur between January and May.

Park and launch at the Finch Bayou Boat Ramp. Carry or drag your vessel down a gentle slope with easy access from the top of the river bank. Pack and board your canoe amongst young trees and cypress knees and set off. Immediately upstream you will pass Alabama Landing.

★ Alabama Landing (RBD 700 yds)
N32.873382, W92.083827

Alabama Landing is a small community that first received its name in the early 1800's when the first settlers were moving into Union Parish. Alabama Landing was the first crossable sandbar on the Ouachita.

★ Rise and Fall Floating House (RBD 1.0 Mile)
N32.881931, W92.085151

One of the biggest and most interesting floating houses is along this stretch of river. Even at low water, this floating house provides a good visual about how much the water level can vary.

★ Navigation Tree (RBD 1.1 Miles)
N32.881185, W92.085127

Just upriver from the floating house, is a hapless cypress that is supporting navigation signs for the tows that ply the river.

★ Backchannel Bliss (RBD 1.4 Miles)
N32.883551, W92.084783

Tired of the main channel? Here is a great opportunity to escape and explore. There is approximately two miles of channel to explore right in the heart of the Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge. If you go during hunting season, make sure you are wearing plenty of orange.

★ Mud Lake (LBD 2.1 Miles)
N32.895425, W92.077552

Want to get off the main channel, but not quite ready for the challenges of paddling a narrow backchannel? Swing on over to Mud Lake to explore the swamps.

★ Mollicy Bayou Entrance (LBD 2.4 Miles)
N32.898992, W92.080213

The crown jewel of the paddle trail. Here you can observe a wetland coming back to life. During the 1960's approximately 20,000 acres of floodplain was cut off from the river by a 30 foot earthen levee in an attempt to use the area for agriculture. Fast forward 40 years and the river is back. This project is believed to be the largest floodplain reconnection project in North America. Wetlands provide fish and wildlife habitat, water pollution control, sediment control, erosion control, prevent flooding and make a great place to paddle. During your paddle through Mollicy Bayou you can expect to see birds, beavers, otters, alligators and raccoons.

★ Hole in the Levee (3.14 Miles)
N32.904793, W92.070085

Even in high water this location is a wonderful place for a picnic and boasts a panoramic view of the bayou. This spot is what makes this trail extra special. A climb to the top of the levee not only is a great spot for birding, it gives you a bird's eye view of the bayou.

★ Four Seasons Beaver Lodge (3.5 Miles)
N32.908780, W92.072028

Located here is a majestic old willow that beavers have made into a year round residency. If you are in this area in the early morning or late afternoon, be on the lookout for beavers.

★ End of the Trail (4.7 Miles)
N32.925559, W92.071052

Between September 1st and February 28th, this is the end of the trail. This is so the migratory birds have a safe place. This is one of the reasons for this wetlands restoration project. If it is outside of this timeframe, you can continue to the second hole in the levee to return to the main channel.

Warnings: Wear plenty of orange during hunting season. Before embarking, be sure to consult river gage. Low water levels might impede travel.

River Gage: "Ouachita River at Felsenthal Lock and Dam (Lower)"
(Appx 19 miles upstream)

For this section of the Ouachita River, you can get an approximate idea of the water level using the RiverGages.com reading below the Felsenthal Lock and Dam: <http://www2.mrr.usace.army.mil/WaterControl/shdgraph-wotem2.cfm?hd=CE593D7D&id=78&ds>

51-60: Low Water: Low water means slow water. Good paddling, but more maneuvering around submerged stumps and possible portages to get into backwater areas off main channel.
60-65: Medium Water: Ideal Paddling level. Slightly faster water flow in main channel of river, but more room to maneuver in and explore natural bank side features and adjoining back channels and wetlands.
65-70: High Water: Faster water. Moderate to advanced paddlers only. Beware snags and strainers.
70+: Flood Stage: Not recommended for paddlers.

Reading River levels at Felsenthal: Ideal water level: 60-65 on the Felsenthal Gage. Slightly faster water flow in main channel of river, but more room to maneuver in and explore bank side, back channels and wetlands. In low water, 51-60, the current is sluggish and shallow areas. Above 70 (Flood Stage) on the Felsenthal Gage the current will be swift and extra caution is needed to maneuver. Above 75 all of the bankside forests will be underwater, and above 81 (moderate flood stage) there won't be any dry land to be found, boat ramps & parking lots will be completely submerged.

Historic Levels: Looking at historical data for the Felsenthal from the past ten years, the Ouachita River has peaked at 86.4 feet and dropped to as low as 51, but stays mostly within the 50-60 foot range.