



Paddling the Eno River

Canoeing and kayaking are great ways to explore the Eno River! Opportunities for both flatwater and whitewater paddling are available along the river. Since the Eno River State Park does not offer rental boats or shuttle service, paddlers must either provide their own boats and transportation or use the services of a private outfitter.

Flatwater Paddling

As long as there has not been a recent major downpour, the water in three sections of the Eno River is calm enough that paddling both downstream and upstream is easy, so shuttle transportation is not needed. Also, each of these sections has a publicly accessible launch area and maintains a high enough water level to support paddling during all seasons, even when other parts of the river are too shallow. These quiet stretches of river provide opportunities for gentle paddling, wildlife observation, and natural history meditation.

The three sections described here are all outside of the Eno River State Park and are not patrolled by park rangers. In case of emergencies in these areas, contact local law enforcement.

➤ **West Point on the Eno**

West Point is a Durham city park. At 5101 N. Roxboro Street, it is east of the State Park. More information about West Point, including a park map, is at <https://www.dprplaymore.org/Facilities/Facility/Details/West-Point-on-the-Eno-76>. Park at the north end of the traffic loop and walk about 100 yards to the launch area, which is just upstream from the mill dam. From there you can paddle 3/4 mile upstream to Sennett Hole.

For those who don't have their own boats, Frog Hollow Outdoors offers hourly rentals at West Point on summer weekends.

➤ **Kings Highway Park**

Kings Highway is a Hillsborough town park located at 1001 Ben Johnston Road. More information and a park map are at <https://assets.hillsboroughnc.gov/media/documents/public/kings-highway-park-master-plan.pdf>. The Eno River here is backed up by the dam that creates Lake Ben Johnston.

Put in at the Kings Highway Park canoe/kayak launch, which is a little over 100 yards from the parking lot via a flat gravel road. Stay left on the road when you leave the parking lot. Paddle upstream (right) under an old railroad trestle, continuing for about a mile until the water becomes too shallow. Some of the land you pass when paddling will be private property, so stay in your boat unless you know who owns the shore.

➤ **NC Wildlife Resources Commission's Eno River Boating Access Area**

This is in eastern Durham County at coordinates N 36° 05' 35" W 78° 49' 27". Some maps call the street Rodolphe Street; others call it Akzo Boulevard. Driving NE on Teknika Parkway, turn right just before you would otherwise dead end into the campus of a large biotech company. The launch is at the end of the road you turned right onto.

You can paddle two miles upstream (to the right) to the confluence with the Little River, and possibly farther. Or you can paddle about two miles downstream (to the left) to Falls Lake, passing the confluence of the Flat and Eno rivers on your way. In both directions the river is bordered by game lands.

Whitewater Paddling

Both within and downstream from the State Park, the Eno River provides opportunities for whitewater paddling when the water is high enough. Normally the river is low enough that paddlers must frequently get out and drag their boat across shallow, rocky areas. The best time to run the Eno is after heavy rains have raised the water level above normal. Good paddling conditions can occur any time during the year but are most common during the winter and spring.

Before beginning a paddling trip in the park, it is important to check the water level to ensure that the river is high enough for a good trip, yet not so high as to impose undue risk. The **U.S. Geological Survey operates gauges** that measure the Eno's depth in Hillsborough and at two points in Durham. The measurements are available online in near real time at the following websites:

Hillsborough gauge https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nc/nwis/uv/?site_no=02085000

Cole Mill Road gauge https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nc/nwis/uv/?site_no=02085039

Roxboro Road gauge https://waterdata.usgs.gov/nc/nwis/uv/?site_no=02085070

Park staff have established a rough correlation between the USGS gauge readings and paddling conditions: below 2.25 feet is poor, 2.25 to 2.5 feet is fair, 2.5 to 3 feet is good, 3 to 5 feet is excellent, and above 5 feet is dangerous.

When gauge readings exceed 5 feet, the river overflows its banks and moves with a force and speed that are beyond the capacity of most people to self-rescue after a spill. Also, at these levels the river can carry tree trunks and other large objects that could injure or kill a person.

At gauge readings below 3 feet, your experience will depend on whether you are in a kayak or a canoe (kayaks do better than canoes when the river is shallow), and on how many people are in the boat (a canoe with one light person can handle shallower water than a canoe with two or three large people).

Suggested Whitewater Trips

These trips are listed from west to east. They all involve following the river's current from an upstream launch site to a downstream take-out site. Paddling back upstream to the launch site is not possible.

Rapids described for these trips are present when the water level is above approximately 2.25 feet on the USGS gauges. Rapids in the Eno are short in duration, broken by stretches of quiet water.

Listed trip times are averages. Actual times vary substantially depending on water level, skill, and weight.

The launch sites and take-out sites for these trips are all in publicly-accessible places. However, private property borders the river in some places along the way, so please respect the rights of the property owners.

➤ U.S. 70 to Few's Ford

Launch: U.S. 70 at the Eno River bridge, east of Hillsborough. Park in the small grassy area that is bordered on the SE by the Eno River, on the NE by U.S. 70, and on the NW by Riverside Drive. You should see an Eno River State Park sign there. Rough steps lead down to the river.

Take-out: Few's Ford in Eno River State Park. You will need to carry or drag your boat 160 yards on a trail from the ford up to the Piper-Cox parking lot.

Distance: 5.4 miles **Time:** 2.5 hours **Elevation drop:** 73 ft. (14 feet/mile)

Notes: This section of the river, known as the Eno Wilderness and Little Egypt, is wild and scenic with little evidence of human influence. It has lots of Class I rapids, two Class II rapids, and one Class III rapid just before the take-out. This Class III rapid should be scouted before running. It is best to run it at the slick and stay to the left of the rock.

Historic points include ruins of Berry's Public Mill, Holden's Mill, and the Few's Mill site.

➤ **Few's Ford to Pleasant Green**

Launch: Few's Ford in Eno River State Park at the Piper-Cox parking lot. A 160-yard walk on a trail leads from the parking lot to the ford.

Take-out: Pleasant Green Access in Eno River State Park. Look for the old dam abutment. Pleasant Green Road bridge will be in view. Parking lot is 20 yards up the grassy slope.

Distance: 2.8 miles **Time:** 1.5 hours **Elevation drop:** 13 ft. (5 feet/mile)

Notes: This is a novice section with a few Class 1 rapids. At the historic Cabe Ford, the river passes an old weir. Stone's Creek enters from the west 300 yards upstream from the take-out. The creek is a scenic cascade, resembling a mountain stream.

➤ **Pleasant Green to Cole Mill**

Launch: Pleasant Green Access in Eno River State Park. Parking lot has easy access to the river.

Take-out: Cole Mill Access in the Eno River State Park. A small landing dock is provided on the left, and rough steps lead up a steep hill to the parking lot 60 yards away.

Distance: 3.5 miles **Time:** 1.5 hours **Elevation drop:** 50 ft. (14 feet/mile)

Notes: This is one of the most scenic sections of the Eno as it passes through Cabe Gorge and by several old mill sites. There are many short Class I and a few Class II rapids. Dropping into Bobbitt Hole is borderline Class II/III. Technical paddling is needed through the rocks in Cabe Gorge. Historic points of interest include the ruins of John Cabe's mill, the Alpha Woolen Mill site, and the McCown-Cole Mill site.

➤ **Cole Mill to West Point**

Launch: Cole Mill Access in the Eno River State Park. Rough steps from the lower parking lot lead down a steep hill to a small landing dock 60 yards away.

Take-out: West Point on the Eno, a Durham City Park. Take out on the right bank as you approach the mill dam. Use caution above the mill dam. It is a dangerous drop and a powerful hydraulic during high water. Park road and parking area are 100 yards from take-out.

Distance: 5.2 miles **Time:** 2 hours **Elevation drop:** 67 ft. (13 feet/mile)

Notes: Many short Class I and Class II rapids. You will pass by the old Pump Station, Guess Mill dam (broken through on the right side), and Sennett Hole. The West Point Mill is at the take-out.

➤ **West Point to Penny's Bend**

Launch: West Point on the Eno, a Durham City Park. Put in at the concrete spillway on the trail below the mill dam, about 100 yards from the parking area at the north end of the traffic loop.

Take-out: Penny's Bend Nature Preserve, owned by the Army Corps of Engineers and managed by the NC Botanical Garden. Take out on the left as you approach the Old Oxford Road bridge. It is a short walk from take-out to parking lot, which is on Snow Hill Road very near its intersection with Old Oxford Road.

Distance: 4.5 miles **Time:** 2 hours **Elevation drop:** 23 ft. (5 feet/mile)

Notes: Frequent short Class I riffles. The river slows down and becomes less rocky as it enters the Triassic Basin. More development is seen, especially near the beginning of this stretch, but the river is still scenic.

➤ **Penny's Bend to NCWRC Eno River Boating Access Area**

Launch: Penny's Bend Nature Preserve. Parking lot is on Snow Hill Road very near its intersection with Old Oxford Road. A short trail leads down to the river from the parking lot.

Take-out: Wildlife Resources Commission Boating Access Area at 36° 5' 34" N, 78° 49' 25" W. After passing under the Red Mill Road bridge, be on the lookout for a pier extending over the river from the left bank. See section *Flatwater Paddling* in this document for directions to parking lot.

Distance: 4.8 miles **Time:** 3 hours **Elevation drop:** 4 ft. (1 foot/mile)

Notes: This is not really a whitewater trip. There are few riffles after you get away from Penny's Bend, and if Falls Lake is at its normal level, you will reach the backwater of the lake about 1/3 of the way through your trip. Game lands are on both sides of the river for this trip.

Shortly after leaving Penny's Bend you pass under an old railroad trestle. Then there are two high bluffs on the right. The second bluff overlooks the confluence of the Little River and the Eno. After that the land becomes relatively flat, and the river meanders more than it did further upstream. An oxbow soon appears to your right. You can explore either arm of the oxbow, but you will probably not be able to paddle all the way through it. The Red Mill Road bridge is not far past the oxbow.

Safety

- A river in flood is very dangerous. Know the river and know your abilities.
- Carry a map and know where you are.
- Do not paddle alone. A buddy boat is a good idea.
- Wear appropriate wet or dry suits in cold weather. Hypothermia can kill.
- Always wear a life vest. (In NC, anyone younger than 13 is legally required to wear one.)
- Depending on conditions, consider also wearing a helmet.
- Bring drinking water, snacks, and an extra paddle. No alcohol.
- Expect to spill, and be prepared. The upstream side of your boat is safer than the downstream side.
- Consider leaving a trip plan either with the park office (if your trip is within the park) or on the dashboard of your vehicle.