



# THE *Bluewater Trails* SERIES FLOATING THE GREEN RIVER

Experience superb fishing in a pristine setting • Lee McClellan

DAVID BAKER PHOTO

THE FLOWING EMERALD waters of the upper Green River drew human life for thousands of years. Ancient hunter and gatherer cultures lived along its banks; the Cherokee and Shawnee hunted there.

The Long Hunters, the vanguard of settlers to follow, established a camp in 1770 on a branch of Caney Fork of Russell Creek near Lemon Bend. It is the first major bend downstream of present-day Green River Lake Dam. When the Long Hunters first came to this area, one of their leaders, Gasper Mansker, heard an eerie sound. He followed it to the source, only to find Daniel Boone sprawled out on a deerskin, singing a hymn at the top of his lungs.

Paddlers on the 19-mile section from Green River Lake Dam to Russell Ford float on pristine water that is home to some of the rarest animals on Earth, including a few that only live in that drainage. Rising near Halls Gap in Lincoln County, Green

River holds more than 150 species of fish along with 71 species of mussels, making it one of the most biologically diverse rivers in the United States.

This section of the Green is one of the better summer paddles in Kentucky, featuring sparkling green pools, islands, riffles and great fishing for smallmouth bass, rock bass, muskellunge and sunfish. The releases from Green River Lake Dam usually settle down in summer, making the paddling perfect at moderate flows for families and beginners.

The best flow levels for summer fishing and gentle floating range from 100 to 300 cfs (cubic feet a second). Good paddling can be had up to 500 cfs, but the river gets hairy beyond 750 cfs. Anglers can check current flow levels by visiting the webpage of the Louisville District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at [www.lrl.usace.army.mil](http://www.lrl.usace.army.mil). Click on the "Water Information" tab then the "Daily Lake Report" tab for Green River Lake dam.

The tailwater from the dam to Greensburg offers one of the better stream smallmouth fisheries in Kentucky. "We have a really good size structure with fish up to 22 inches," said David Baker, stream fisheries biologist for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. "We consistently get smallmouth bass over 20 inches when we sample the population. The number of 16-inch and longer smallmouth bass this year was phenomenal. It is pretty impressive for a river in Kentucky."

Anglers should not overlook fishing opportunities for the other black bass species. "We also see largemouth bass up to 6 pounds, they are a bonus fish," Baker said. "The river has a decent population of spotted bass as well."

This stretch also holds huge muskellunge. "We sampled a 44-inch muskellunge just upstream of Roachville Ford before the big island," Baker noted. "It isn't anything to see 30 or 40 of them in our sampling."

The sheer number and quality of the rock bass in Green River is impressive. Rock bass make excellent table fare as do the crappie that live in the woody cover in the deeper holes with less current.

Fish spawns in the river grew stronger when the Corps changed releases from Green River Lake Dam. The outflow now better mimics the natural flows. "The Corps releases water from the appropriate depths for the time of year," Baker said. "This really helped that system be really productive. It also is great for the mussels, too."

### DAM TO ROACHVILLE FORD

The first float begins at the Tailwater Recreation Area just below Green River Lake Dam, located off KY 55 south of Campbellsville. It ends 12½ miles later at Roachville Ford.

Anglers shuttling from the dam should go north on KY 55, turn left onto KY 1701, then right onto Roachville Road. A small gravel road to the ford is on the left, in the middle of a sharp right hand turn. Miller Chapel is past the turn-off.

This is a serious float. Paddlers must put in early and take out late during the

long days of summer if they plan to fish. When the flow from Green River Lake Dam falls below 200 cfs, this is a non-stop, 8-hour paddle in a kayak. Anglers should stick to the most productive spots and paddle hard through lesser areas to get out by dark.

The Green offers good fishing for bass.



CORY WOOSLEY PHOTO

This stretch holds walleye and sauger from winter through spring. It provides excellent smallmouth bass fishing all summer. There's an opportunity to catch the wolves of the river as well. "There are times where we see a large muskellunge in every deep hole from the dam to Roachville in our population sampling," Baker said.

After flowing underneath the KY 55 bridge, the Green gently bends to the right and collects the waters of Pinch Creek before flowing under an old iron bridge. This bridge was a key strategic objective during the Civil War Battle of Tebbs Bend, fought on Independence Day in 1863. A force of 250 Union soldiers from the 25th Michigan Infantry positioned themselves along the ridge above the bluffs of Tebbs Bend to ward off eight attacks from 800 to 1,000 Confederates under the command of Gen. John Hunt Morgan.

The Green River Lake Visitor's Center, located off KY 55 at Green River Lake Dam, offers information about a driving tour of the Battle of Tebbs Bend. This tour is a worthy side trip for paddlers enjoying the area.



Former "Kentucky Afield" TV Host Tim Farmer picked up this smallie with a fly rod

LEE MCCLELLAN PHOTO

The river flows over several gravel bars just downstream of the historic bridge. These are good spots to throw green pumpkin finesse worms rigged on 1/8-ounce jigs for smallmouth bass.

After rounding Tebbs Bend to the left, the Green straightens then proceeds into Lemon Bend. This section features incredibly scenic bluffs.

Paddlers should take the main channel to the left when they reach the island at Lemon Bend. The section downstream of the island offers views of some of the highest bluffs on the Green River.

The river flows straight for a good ways before it cuts right, into the second section of Lemon Bend. The woody cover in the deep holes of this stretch holds muskellunge. Anglers should cast large, gold safety pin-style spinnerbaits designed for largemouth bass to target these fish. The spinnerbait doesn't get hung in the woody cover as much as the large in-line spinners dressed in bucktail often cast for river muskellunge.

Crappie also lurk along the woody cover in the deeper holes of the upper Green. A 2 1/2-inch white or chartreuse curly-tailed grub will draw strikes from hungry fish.

After flowing hard right through Lemon Bend, the Green doubles back on itself as it flows hard left around Penitentiary Bend. This area features many gravel bars. Anglers should cast above and below these bars to catch smallmouth bass. A good lure to use is a 4-inch, skirted double-tailed grub. Try motor oil color and rig it on a 3/16-ounce Shakey head jig.

The deep holes of Penitentiary Bend hold largemouth and spotted bass. A 3-inch, curly-tailed grub rigged on a 1/8-ounce jig produces fish. This lure also attracts rock bass.

After bending back to the right, the Green flows beside an island with a deep hole. Cast for muskie here.

The take-out is on the right at Roachville Ford. It is a good idea to get on the right side of the river after paddling past the island. Anglers who drift past the road on the left have gone too far.

### ROACHVILLE FORD TO RUSSELL ISLAND

The next float begins at Roachville Ford and concludes at Russell Island. This 6 1/2-mile stretch is one of the best floats for smallmouth bass in the entire Green River.



DAVID BAKER PHOTO

**Cory Woosley stocks sauger fingerlings into the river as part of its management plan.**

the jerkbait just downstream from a riffle.”

The action starts out quickly on this float as the good smallmouth water begins at the head of the deep hole just downstream of Roachville. Probe this water with a chugger-style topwater in the firetiger color early and late or on overcast days.

Fly rod anglers may catch smallmouth bass all day long by throwing a yellow and black popper near shoreline cover. This presentation

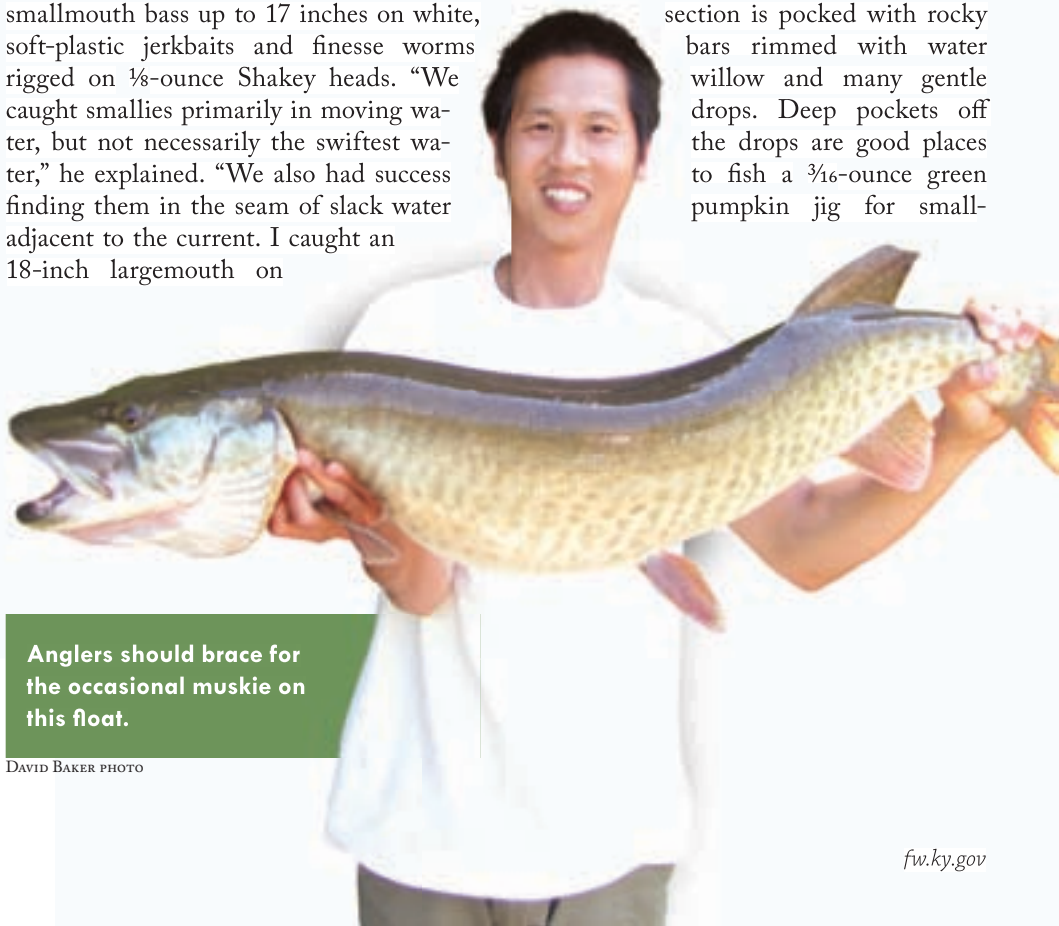
“The first time I floated this section of the Green, I was immediately impressed with the depth of the river,” said Tim Dunham, a charter member of Bluegrass Yakmasters, a central Kentucky kayak fishing club. “There are stretches with very good depth leading up and through the riffles. Deep moving water equals big smallmouths.”

On a late May float, Dunham caught smallmouth bass up to 17 inches on white, soft-plastic jerkbaits and finesse worms rigged on 1/8-ounce Shakey heads. “We caught smallies primarily in moving water, but not necessarily the swiftest water,” he explained. “We also had success finding them in the seam of slack water adjacent to the current. I caught an 18-inch largemouth on

also produces longear sunfish, rock bass and largemouth bass.

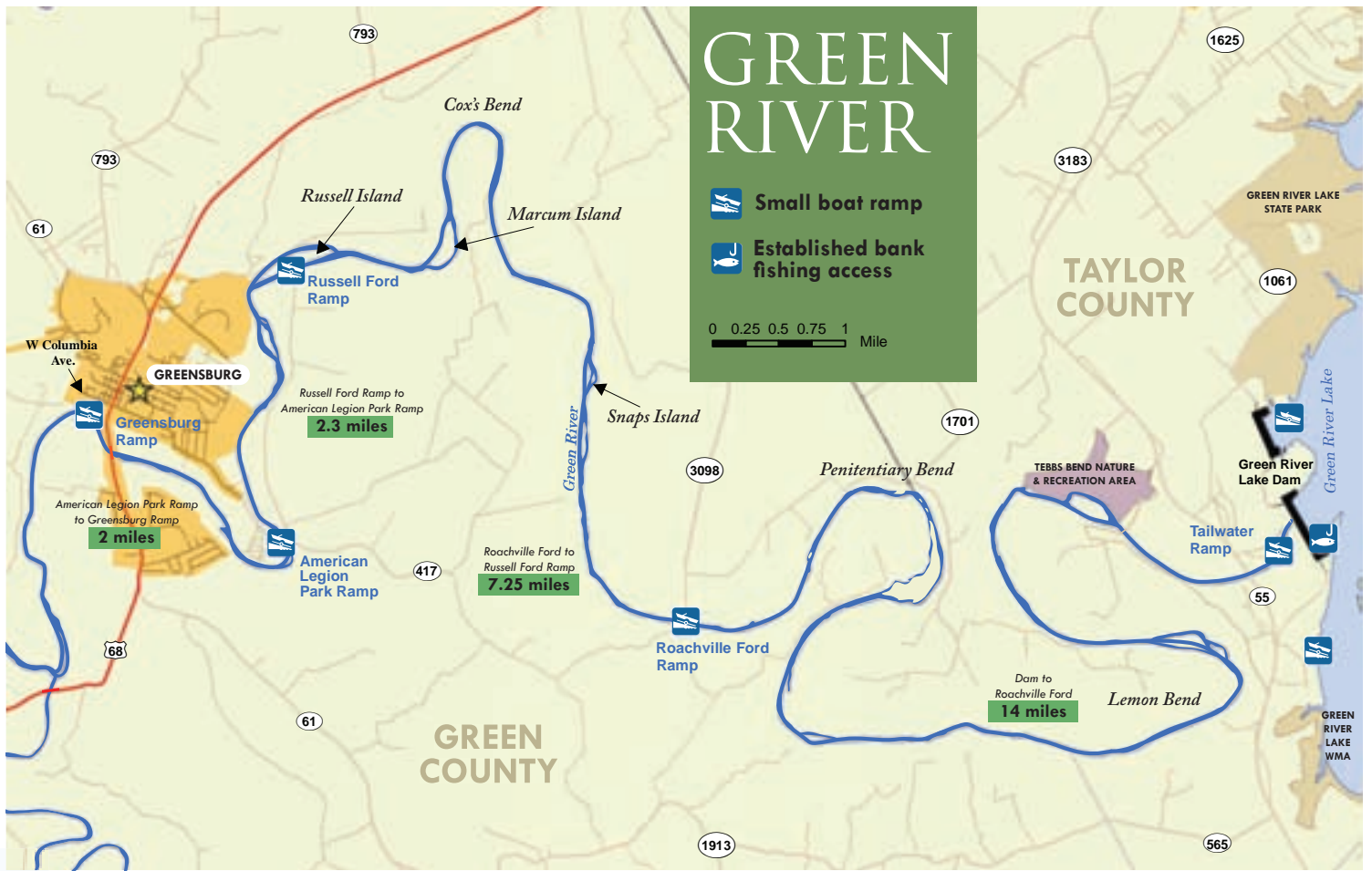
Rocky banks, whether natural or chunk rock placed by landowners, hold fat smallmouth bass in the first part of this float. A 4-inch finesse worm or white jerkbait worked in these areas produce strikes.

The river soon bends to the right then enters a long straight stretch. This section is pocked with rocky bars rimmed with water willow and many gentle drops. Deep pockets off the drops are good places to fish a 3/16-ounce green pumpkin jig for small-



**Anglers should brace for the occasional muskie on this float.**

DAVID BAKER PHOTO



TAMBRJE JOHNSON MAP/OBIE WILLIAMS ILLUSTRATION

mouth, especially when the bait is matched with a small plastic crawfish trailer. This rig also works for largemouth bass when fished beside woody cover in the deep, slow flowing holes.

The Green next braids through Snaps Island and empties into the White Springs Hole. The woody cover in the deeper sections of this hole holds largemouth bass.

In this stretch, the river flows through rocky bars thick with water willow. From water level, it appears that you are floating into a low green wall. After going through another braided section, the river bends left and eventually flows against bedrock. Small bluffs appear on the left.

This is the beginning of the best fishing water on this float. Deep water at the base of the bluffs holds sizable smallmouth bass. The river flows straight and deep before gently bending right.

Just after a flowing shoal, the river again deepens and the rocky bar signifying the mouth of Meadow Creek comes into view.

“We encountered muskies in the stretch from Meadow Creek downstream for ap-

proximately 200 yards,” Dunham said. “We even had one muskie jump partly into my buddy’s kayak, chasing a lure he was lifting out of the water.”

Soon the towering ochre and grey bluffs of Cox’s Bend come into view. The river flowing into this cliff line carved a deep hole through the millennia, creating excellent habitat for muskellunge and largemouth bass. Patiently work the woody cover for these species.

As the river winds around the bend, paddlers arrive at the long abandoned sawmill community of Bluff Boom. In the 1880s, the Whitney brothers built a large sawmill for preparing timber cut in the headwaters of the Green. A log and chain boom directed the timber to the nearby sawmill, hence the name Bluff Boom.

From Bluff Boom to the take-out at Russell Ford, many chutes and flowing shoals with good depth hold excellent smallmouth bass. Pumpkinseed-colored double-tailed skirted grubs, finesse worms in hues of green and brown, or small watermelon-colored crawfish imitations all draw strikes.

This stretch is top-notch smallmouth bass water.

The Green seems to disappear into a tangle of water willow just before the take-out at Russell Ford. Look for a power line running across the river, as the take-out is immediately downstream on the left.

Anglers shuttling from Roachville Ford should take KY 3098 north, then a left onto Black Gnat Road, also known as White-wood Road. Follow this road until it meets an old loop of U.S. 68/70. Take a left and travel a short distance until you take a left on to U.S. 68/70. Travel this road south into Greensburg. Take a left on KY 417, cross the Green River bridge and then take an immediate left on Ralph Vaughn Road. Follow this road until it ends at the Russell Ford take-out.

Canoe and kayak rentals are available for these floats. Go online to [www.greensburgonline.com](http://www.greensburgonline.com) for more information.

This section of the Green is one of Kentucky’s overlooked resources, an ecological treasure with incredible fishing. It should be on the bucket list of every Kentuckian. ■