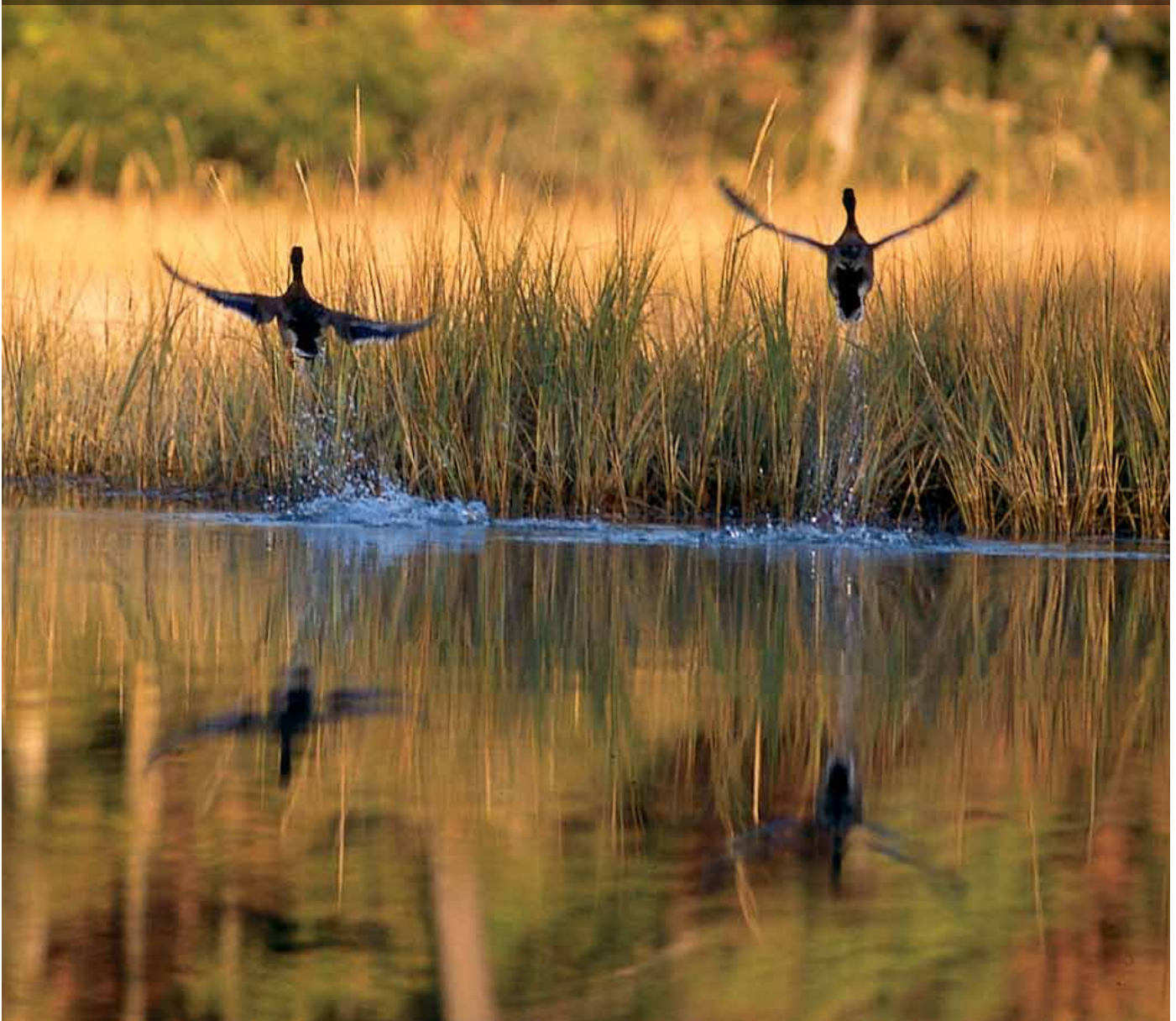


“Of birds, the Eagle is the greatest devourer. Hawks there be of diverse sorts as our Falconers called them, Sparrow hawks. . .Gross hawks, Falcons and Ospreys. . . In winter there are great plenty of Swans, Cranes gray and white with black wings, Herons, Geese, Duck. . .Parrots, and Pigeons. Of all those sorts great abundance, and some other strange kinds to us unknown by name.”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH



Beauty, Wildlife, and History

THE RAPPAHANNOCK FROM STINGRAY POINT TO FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

The Rappahannock drains a large watershed beginning on the eastern slopes of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, home to several American Indian tribes before the establishment of the Jamestown colony. The Rappahannock and its major tributary, the Rapidan, flow through rolling Piedmont land and join a few miles west of Fredericksburg, the city that grew where the riverbed reaches sea level.

The Rappahannock's tidal section, some 80 miles long, flows past old port towns like Port Royal, Leedstown, Tappahannock, and Urbanna on its way to the Bay. This is one of the Chesapeake's most scenic rivers, with lovely creeks, tall sandstone bluffs, and broad marshes. It's an important spawning river for fish, such as striped bass (rockfish) and American shad, and valuable habitat for migratory waterfowl, great blue herons, ospreys, and bald eagles.

The section between Tappahannock and Fredericksburg is one of the most important roosting and nesting areas for bald eagles on the entire Atlantic coast of the United States. Significant lands along this part of the river are now protected by the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH ON THE RAPPAHANNOCK

Captain John Smith saw this beautiful river for the first time in the winter of 1607–08, while a captive of Opechancanough, war chief of the Powhatan. Smith tried to return to the Rappahannock on his way south on the first 1608 voyage. At the river's mouth, however, he had his famous encounter with a stingray and decided to return to Jamestown.

Smith and his crew returned to the mouth of the Rappahannock in mid-August on their way south after meeting the Susquehannock people at the head of the Bay. Despite the August heat, he and his crew sailed and rowed their *Discovery Barge* up to the river's head of navigation (the present-day site of Fredericksburg) and back down, surviving multiple adventures along the way. Somehow he found time to write enough notes to produce an extraordinarily accurate picture of the river in his 1612 map. That map attracted English colonists who settled along the banks of the Rappahannock 40 years later.



PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

Sections of the Rappahannock River are among the most important roosting and nesting areas for bald eagles in the eastern United States.

PREVIOUS PAGE

Broad marshes and abundant wildlife still characterize the Rappahannock River.

PHOTO BY STARKE JETT

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION *Chesapeake Bay Gateways*

The Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail is part of a much larger story of the Chesapeake Bay—a story with rich historical, natural, and environmental chapters for your discovery and enjoyment. Throughout the Bay watershed a variety of parks, wildlife refuges, maritime museums, historic sites, and trails tell their part of the Chesapeake story. These special places are part of the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network. Visit them to experience the authentic Chesapeake.

Many of these Gateways to the Chesapeake are located along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Those with boating access to the water trail are noted throughout this Boater's Guide. Others await your exploration by land. You can make virtual visits via the Gateway Network's website at www.baygateways.net where you can find sites by name, location, activities, or themes. As you travel the Rappahannock River, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER

Deltaville Maritime Museum & Holly Point Nature Park • Deltaville, VA

Steamboat Era Museum • Irvington, VA

James Mills Scottish Factor Store • Urbanna, VA

Belle Isle State Park • Lancaster, VA

Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge • Warsaw, VA

George Washington's Ferry Farm • Fredericksburg, VA

Rappahannock River Water Trail • Fredericksburg, VA

EXPLORING THE RAPPAHANNOCK TODAY

The Rappahannock flows through farm country, with sweeping pastoral views. Two sets of 100- to 150-foot-high sandstone bluffs—Fones Cliffs between Tappahannock and Leedstown, and Horsehead Bluffs, between Leedstown and Port Royal—serve as habitat for the river's bald eagles. For modern-day explorers following in Captain John Smith's wake, the Rappahannock offers plenty of unspoiled views, especially above Tappahannock, where the river narrows. This area offers some of the best scenery on the Chesapeake Bay.

The channel is quite deep; the currents are swift; and marina facilities are non-existent above Tappahannock. There are currently two places on the upper river where one or two self-sufficient cruising boats can tie up securely overnight. Clearance under the bridges at Tappahannock (Route 360) and Port Royal (Route 301) is 50 feet (for the tugboats that still push barges of fuel oil up to Fredericksburg and more barges of sand and gravel back down). The river's entire channel is well-marked.

Over the centuries, the tidal Rappahannock attracted farming families to till large tracts of land. The river served as the highway for local, regional, and even international shipping, with farm landings on the outsides of curves all the way up to Fredericksburg. During colonial times this was a major shipping artery for tobacco, iron ore, and grain. There were customs houses in Urbanna, Tappahannock, Port Royal, and Fredericksburg to serve as ports of entry for European goods.

From the 1850s until the 1930s, steamboats and sailing vessels, especially schooners, rams, pungies, and bugeyes, connected the river communities to Baltimore and Norfolk. Commercial fishing became another vital part of the region's economy. As roadways increased after World War II, water traffic declined, but farming and fishing continued. A growing number of summer visitors built cottages along the river, especially below Tappahannock.



PHOTO BY BILL PORTLOCK

Wild geese near Fones Cliffs add to the beauty of one of the most scenic sections of the Chesapeake Bay.

Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

The creeks of the Rappahannock are great for exploring in self-propelled vessels. The river itself is large and powerful, with regular tug/barge traffic and strong currents. If you're an experienced and physically fit sea kayaker, you'll be comfortable exploring the whole river, but exercise precautions to stay safe.

If you're a novice or intermediate paddler, keep to shorter trips in side creeks like Mount Landing and Goat Island. There's plenty to explore, especially if you are interested in the American Indian aspects of the trail.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Skiffs and runabouts are particularly well suited for day trips on the Rappahannock and its large tributaries, such as Cat Point Creek. They'll also serve well in side creeks, provided they're equipped to deal with mud flats and submerged logs. Remember, there aren't many people to call if you get stuck, break down, or run out of fuel.

Some of the main river's long, straight reaches, like the channel from Tappahannock up to Fones Cliffs, can get surprisingly choppy if the banks are funneling wind one way while the current is running the other. It pays to be prepared and to keep your itinerary within your skills. Even short trips here will reveal beautiful, fascinating places.



CRUISING POWERBOATS AND TRAWLERS

Cruising powerboats, like trawlers and cruisers with Chesapeake or Downeast workboat hulls, are excellent choices for exploring the Rappahannock, especially if they are equipped with seaworthy dinghies and canoes or kayaks. Seven knots is an excellent cruising speed to see this river, with a low wake to protect sensitive shorelines.

For these vessels, the biggest issues are bridge clearance (50 feet at Port Royal and Tappahannock) and the skipper's ability to integrate information from charts, GPS, and visual cues about where the channel is located as the river winds through its deep meander bends. The river is wide enough for overnight anchoring upstream as far as Tappahannock. Above there, the channel is too narrow to allow a boat to swing safely with the changing currents and still avoid tug-and-barge traffic.

The docks at the Westmoreland Berry Farm and Hicks Landing offer secure and peaceful overnight tie-ups for self-sufficient boats. No hookups to water or electricity, nor fuel or waste pumpout are available.



CRUISING SAILBOATS

Modern sailors might marvel at how the schooner captains of old negotiated the winding Rappahannock, especially the river's upper reaches. The winds can change suddenly, and the currents can be treacherous. Sailing isn't recommended.



Creeks of the Rappahannock beckon exploration by paddlers.
PHOTO BY BILL PORTLOCK

For Cruising Boats

TRAVELING THE RAPPAHANNOCK

Boaters traveling in vessels over 30 feet tend to know the lower Rappahannock better than the upper section. A sailing friend, speaking about the river above Urbanna, once remarked, “Well, the wind dies there. Why would anyone want to go further?” But for boaters interested in maritime history, wildlife, and beautiful scenery, there are lots of reasons to venture further.

There are plenty of marinas and services for cruising boats of all sorts in Deltaville, Irvington, Weems, and Urbanna. Above Urbanna, the only facility with slips for larger transient boats is Greenvale Creek Marina, on the Northern Neck side a few miles upstream.

Tappahannock has no dockage for deep-draft boats, but there is plenty of space and good holding ground to anchor on the channel shoulder opposite the town. June Parker Marina, just above the bridge on the south bank, allows dinghies to tie up for a small fee. The walk to the center of town is about a quarter-mile. Ask locals about good seafood restaurants in the area.

Fredericksburg is about 60 river miles above Tappahannock. The best place to tie up halfway between is the Westmoreland Berry Farm on the north bank. Call ahead to make sure there is room at the dock. It can accommodate one boat up to 60 feet

in length, and a second if properly rafted to the first. The Westmoreland Berry Farm offers pick-your-own fruits and vegetables in season and a snack bar.

The last upriver option for tie-up is the dock at Hicks Landing (no services), several miles above the Route 301 bridge at Port Royal. Just across the river (a short paddle or dinghy ride) is Goat Island, a combined tidal fresh marsh and wooded swamp that is home to plenty of wildlife, especially bald eagles.

Fredericksburg, at the head of navigation, is a charming city, although facilities for cruisers are currently limited. Explore up to the city dock, but don't try to spend the night there. There is a good launch ramp for canoes, kayaks, skiffs, and runabouts to explore this section of the Rappahannock. Be very careful, though—The currents are fast, and the channel is treacherous above the city dock.

Captain John Smith gave a detailed record of his travels on the Rappahannock in both his map and his writings. Today, the river offers a great array of “Captain John Smith views.” Although facilities are sparse for cruisers and you'll have to do some homework and exercise prudent seamanship as it applies to your chosen vessel, your efforts will reap rich rewards on the Rappahannock River.

RESOURCES & CONTACTS

HICKS LANDING

804-742-5210

Dock frequently available for tie up, but call ahead.

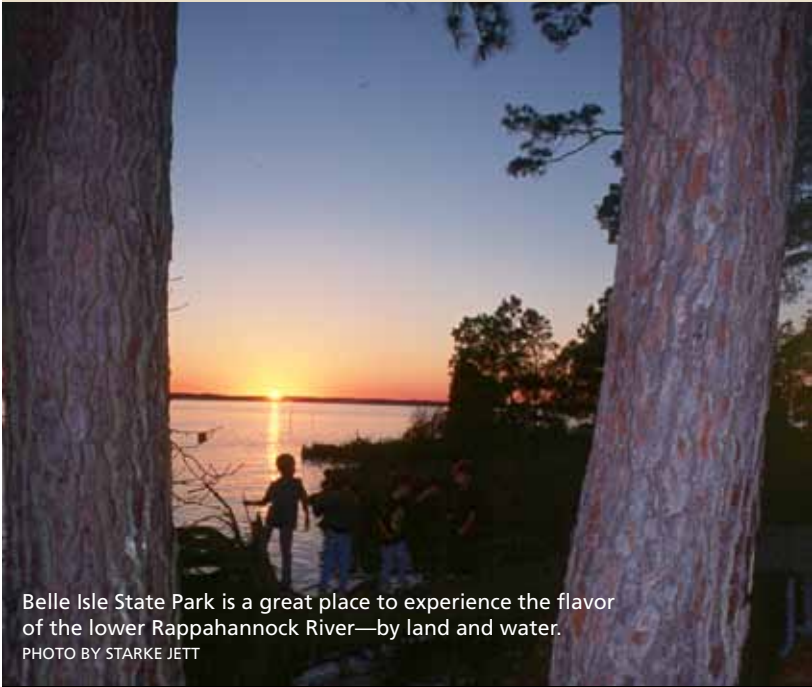
JUNE PARKER MARINA

804-443-2131, www.co.essex.va.us/marina.htm
(shallow entrance channel)

WESTMORELAND BERRY FARM

804-224-9171, www.westmorelandberryfarm.com

Below Tappahannock there are many full-service marinas on both sides of the Rappahannock. An online search will lead to the best of them.



Belle Isle State Park is a great place to experience the flavor of the lower Rappahannock River—by land and water.

PHOTO BY STARKE JETT



Trip Itineraries

The Rappahannock River is divided into lower and upper sections for the purpose of this Boater's Guide. The area around Tappahannock shows on both maps where the sections overlap.

BELLE ISLE STATE PARK/MORATTICO TWO-WAY, 6 MILES



For trail explorers in small boats and for cruisers in larger boats with dinghies, Belle Isle State Park is a great place to experience the flavor of the lower Rappahannock River. It's a lovely 733-acre former family farm with extensive forests, fields, and marshes, plus 7½ miles of shoreline. Guided canoe trips, boat rentals, and a launch ramp are available at the park.

The park welcomes visitors arriving by water. Be aware that the Rappahannock is wide here, and Belle Isle is exposed to winds from the south and west. Plan your boating accordingly.

If you want to explore Belle Isle's shoreline by canoe, kayak, or skiff/runabout, consider visiting the village of Morattico, located roughly in the area where Captain John Smith and his crew stayed with the Moraughtacund people in August, 1608. Morattico has a long history as a commercial fishing town, to which a number of watermen and their families relocated from Tangier Island in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

If you want to learn more of the history and culture of the area, be sure to visit the Morattico Waterfront Museum, housed in the old general store. Contact the museum for information on where to land and tie up.

A concrete ramp at Simonson Landing provides another access point for trailerable boats to visit Morattico.

CAT POINT CREEK TWO-WAY, 12-14 MILES



Cat Point Creek, on the north bank just west of Tappahannock, is the Rappahannock's most powerful tributary, with three holes deeper than 35 feet (including one under the center span of the Route 634 bridge at its mouth). The east bank is the Tayloe Tract of the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

This creek is best explored by skiff or runabout. Launch at June Parker Marina or Hoskins Creek Landing. Be careful of the shallow bar between the Rappahannock's channel and the bridge. Once in the creek, be aware that the deep channel is rimmed by very shallow shoulders. Cat Point is arguably the best place on the river to see more than 10 eagles in the air at once. Like Mount Landing, it is lovely and full of life, including primitive-looking longnose garfish that roll on the surface in the channels in summer, gulping air.



PHOTO © MIDDLETON EVANS

Have your camera ready. As in Smith's time, the Rappahannock is home to osprey and other wildlife.

RESOURCES & CONTACTS

BELLE ISLE STATE PARK
www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/bel.shtml

MORATTICO WATERFRONT MUSEUM
www.morattico.org
information@moratticowaterfrontmuseum.org


RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
www.fws.gov/northeast/rappahannock




FRIENDS OF THE RAPPAHANNOCK
540-373-3448
www.riverfriends.org







TRAILHEADS ON THE LOWER RAPPAHANNOCK





LOWER RIVER (TAPPAHANNOCK AND POINTS SOUTH)

Mount Landing Creek
Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge 
37° 56' 48" N, 76° 53' 25" W
804-333-1470, www.fws.gov/northeast/rappahannock
Hutchinson Tract canoe/kayak landing built and maintained by the wildlife refuge.



June Parker Marina, Tappahannock, VA   
37° 56' 04" N, 76° 51' 44" W
804-443-2131, www.co.essex.va.us/marina.htm
(launch fee; shallow entrance channel)

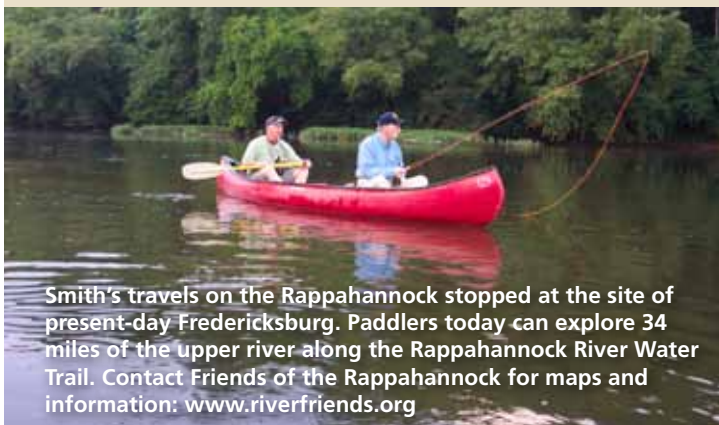
Hoskins Creek Landing, Tappahannock, VA  
37° 55' 12" N, 76° 51' 25" W
www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Totuskey Creek Landing, Warsaw, VA  
37° 55' 25" N, 76° 43' 17" W
www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Urbanna Town Marina, Urbanna, VA    
37° 38' 14" N, 76° 34' 14" W
410-758-5440
(launch fee)

Simonson Landing 
37° 48' 25" N, 76° 38' 01" W
www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Belle Isle State Park, Lancaster, VA  
37° 46' 26" N, 76° 35' 02" W
804-462-5030, www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/bel.shtml
(launch fee)



Smith's travels on the Rappahannock stopped at the site of present-day Fredericksburg. Paddlers today can explore 34 miles of the upper river along the Rappahannock River Water Trail. Contact Friends of the Rappahannock for maps and information: www.riverfriends.org

NOTE: Trailheads indicate access points for the suggested itineraries. River maps indicate trailheads as either private or public. All launch sites are open to the public. Those listed as private are part of privately owned businesses. Public trailheads are located on local, state, or federally managed properties. Fees may be charged at any of the launch sites and are subject to change. Contact the site directly for the latest information.

MOUNT LANDING CREEK TWO-WAY, 2-6 MILES



The Hutchinson Tract in the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge provides a new canoe/kayak landing on Mount Landing Creek, just east of Tappahannock off Route 17. Mount Landing is representative of several powerful, deep creeks on both sides of the Rappahannock that drain large watersheds of rolling farm and forest land.

The creek's meandering channel, with those outside bends as deep as 20 feet, passes broad brackish and tidal fresh marshes that would have been valuable hunting/trapping grounds and sources for grains for the Rappahannock people in Smith's time. Look for herons, eagles, ospreys, and migratory waterfowl. Carry a light spinning rod (license required) to cast small spoons, spinners, and grub jigs for white perch, yellow perch, and largemouth bass.

FONES CLIFFS TWO-WAY, 2-4 MILES



Fones Cliffs is a spectacular four-mile-long series of sandstone bluffs between Tappahannock and the old port village of Leedstown. In the early 17th century, there were three Rappahannock towns on these cliffs, named Pisacack, Matchopeak, and Wecuppom.

The Rappahannock had previous negative experiences with European visitors. They had already attacked Smith and his crew earlier in the vicinity of Piscataway Creek, and they devised another attack here. They stationed archers at Wecuppom, where the river narrows. The arrows drove Smith to steer close to the opposite bank, where a strong Rappahannock force was positioned to attack. Smith and crew defended themselves with shields arranged along the gunwales of the *Discovery Barge*. The English kept rowing and the Indian arrows bounced off the shields, while the Rappahannock warriors shouted after them. Smith and his crew found a more pleasant reception several miles upriver at the chief's town of Pissaseck, which became Leedstown later that century. Today, a thoughtful boater can explore this 400-year-old battlefield and figure out within about 50 yards where the skirmish occurred.

Carter's Wharf, a public launch ramp maintained by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, lies at the upper end of Fones Cliffs, between Matchopeak and Wecuppom. This is the place to launch a canoe, kayak, skiff, or runabout to explore the battlefield, but do not attempt to land and climb the cliffs. They are both dangerous and private property. Also, be mindful of wind and current here.

Lower Rappahannock

SECTION MAP



LINKS TO ONLINE MAPS

- Belle Isle State Park
- Hoskins Creek Landing
- June Parker Marina
- Mount Landing Creek
- Simonson Landing
- Totuskey Creek Landing
- Urbanna Town Marina

CLICK SOURCE ▼

- GOOGLE NOAA
- GOOGLE NOAA
- GOOGLE NOAA
- GOOGLE NOAA
- GOOGLE NOAA
- GOOGLE NOAA
- GOOGLE NOAA

- TRAILHEAD (PUBLIC)
- TRAILHEAD (PRIVATE)
- TRIP ITINERARY
- CBIBS (NOAA BUOY)
BUOY NAME






NOT FOR NAVIGATION
NOT TO SCALE




TRAILHEADS



ON THE UPPER RAPPAHANNOCK



UPPER RIVER (TAPPAHANNOCK AND POINTS NORTH)



Fredericksburg City Dock  
38° 17' 47" N, 77° 27' 11" W
(located at the foot of Sophia Street)



Old Mill Park, Fredericksburg 
38° 19' 01" N, 77° 28' 04" W
540-372-1086
www.fredericksburgva.gov/Departments/recreation
(Use the "search this site" feature.)



Hicks Landing   
38° 11' 06" N, 77° 14' 23" W
804-742-5210
Pay launch fee at Betty's Inn General Store, Rt. 17 at Hicks Landing Road, Rappahannock Academy, VA 22538. Dock frequently available for tie-up, but phone ahead to reserve space.


Hopyard Landing  
38° 14' 39" N, 77° 13' 33" W
www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Wilmot Wharf  
38° 09' 18" N, 77° 04' 16" W
www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Westmoreland Berry Farm  
38° 07' 56" N, 77° 02' 59" W
804-224-9171, www.westmorelandberryfarm.com
Overnight tie-up available, but call first.

Leedstown Campground  
38° 06' 37" N, 77° 00' 18" W
804-224-7445
Pay launch fee in box by Leedstown Campground launch ramp.

Carters Wharf Landing  
38° 04' 17" N, 76° 55' 26" W
www.dgif.virginia.gov (Use the "search this site" feature.)

Mount Landing Creek 
Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge
37° 56' 48" N, 76° 53' 25" W
804-333-1470, www.fws.gov/northeast/rappahannock
Hutchinson Tract canoe/kayak landing built and maintained by the wildlife refuge.

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FONES CLIFFS/HORSEHEAD BLUFFS

TWO-WAY, 35 MILES



If you're traveling in a skiff or a runabout, launch at Wilmot Wharf, Leedstown Campground, or Carter's Wharf and travel the river between Horsehead Bluffs (the hairpin turn just above the Westmoreland Berry Farm) and Fones Cliffs. This makes a good day trip, traveling at 13–17 knots (15–20 mph) and stopping to admire spectacular views, take photographs, or watch eagles soar.

You may be able to tie up at the wharf at Westmoreland Berry Farm; call ahead to inquire. The owner of the farm has donated Horsehead Bluffs to The Nature Conservancy (www.nature.org), which will protect this spectacular section of the river permanently as the Vorhees Nature Preserve). Note that Horsehead Bluffs on the Rappahannock are not the same as Horsehead Cliffs that lie along the Potomac River as spectacular features of Westmoreland State Park.

If you're on the Rappahannock in late October, try to end your day running downriver toward Fones Cliffs in late afternoon. The glowing colors of the riverside maple, sycamore, gum, and ash trees will be spectacular with the afternoon light behind you in the long reach from Laytons Landing down to Fones Cliffs, amplified by sunlight reflecting off the exposed patches of sandstone on the cliffs.

GOAT ISLAND

TWO-WAY, 2–3 MILES



Whether you're paddling or skiffing, launch at Hicks Landing and head a third of a mile upriver to the entrance to Goat Island. This large marsh and wooded swamp lies on the inside of a big meander bend, where the current naturally slows down, causing sediment to collect year after year, century after century. Admire the tidal plants that would have formed a breadbasket of grains for the local Indians who foraged, trapped, and hunted here. This is a great spot to look for bald eagles.

Upper Rappahannock

SECTION MAP



LINKS TO ONLINE MAPS	CLICK SOURCE ▼
Carter's Wharf Landing	GOOGLE NOAA
Fredericksburg City Dock	GOOGLE NOAA
Hicks Landing	GOOGLE NOAA
Hoskins Creek Landing	GOOGLE NOAA
Hopyard Landing	GOOGLE NOAA
Leedstown Campground Launch	GOOGLE NOAA
Mount Landing Creek	GOOGLE NOAA
Old Mill Park	GOOGLE NOAA
Wilmot Wharf	GOOGLE NOAA
Westmoreland Berry Farm	GOOGLE NOAA