The good, the bad, and the unusual:
What makes a boating access work (or not)?

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Harpham Flat, Deschutes River, OR
Contents

This slide show is a companion to “The good, the bad, and the unusual” report and database. Most photos were submitted by the coders who completed the data for that site. Click the links below to skip to a particular section.

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Alberton Gorge,
Clark Fork River, MT
Most launches do not have formal staging areas (34%), and 28% have no rigging or staging areas. About 67% have informal parking areas used for this purpose.

Among launches with short-term parking areas designated for staging, most are smaller (1-2 spaces) rather than medium (3-5 spaces) or larger (over 5 spaces).
These designated lanes provide large on-land staging areas and help separate outfitted trips.

On-land staging

Sheep Gulch Boat Launch, Snake River through Jackson Hole, WY
Staging areas are not formally designated on this beach/gravel bar put-in for the Grand Canyon, although outfitted trips are separated by a simple sign. It becomes congested with six launches per day, group sizes that can exceed 30 people, and gear for trips up to three weeks that sometimes arrives in semi-trucks.
On-land staging
Awendaw Creek Canoe Launch, SC

This purpose-built kayak ramp provides staging room for several boats, leaving the small dock (with launch assist mechanism) free for active launches.
On-land staging

Ohiopyle Launch, Lower Youghiogheny, PA

This high-use launch includes a large On-land staging staging area for commercial outfitters to unload quickly, freeing the drop-off zone for other rigs.
On-land staging
Tanner Launch, Snoqualmie River, WA

This trail-based launch with no defined staging area is also used by the community access for non-boating access to the water. This may work if use is low or kayaking occurs at different times than community use, but otherwise might create user conflicts.
This eddy below the slide put-in (shown in the background) provides a large in-water staging area that commonly holds 20-30 boats. The developed trail and adjacent beach keep the slide free for active launches and improve safety.
In-water staging
Falls Trailhead, Wailua State Park, Kawaii, HI

The largest staging areas in the database are natural beaches; these can be effective and inexpensive staging areas if they are well-located and erosion is not a concern.
Natural beach staging area provides an excellent launch for hand-carried craft and minimizes development on a multi-use property that includes a school.
Boulders keep vehicles out of the staging area, reduce conflicts, and limit vehicle contributions to bank erosion.
This undeveloped parking serves hikers, anglers, and boaters at a trailhead in Nantahala National Forest. This works for the few kayakers boating this Class V segment, generally at higher flows when hikers and anglers are not present. Parking varies consistently across Access Opportunity Spectrum (AOS) categories; developed launches tend to have paved lots and/or designated spaces, while primitive launches generally have gravel lots or road side turnouts. Parking quantity is independent of AOS categories; the size of lots is related to average use levels and the length of time vehicles are parked.
Parking
Howard Miller Park, Skagit River, WA

Multi-use facilities can serve boaters when properly organized to avoid conflicts in space or time. Note snow on the ground, this is an example where boating season occurs during low use times for other park visitors.
The small gravel lot at Sang Run SP is supplemented by a large, multi-use field used for overflow staging on high use days. The large parking lots at Sheep Gulch near Jackson Hole, with designated areas for autos, trailers, and buses, were designed for consistently high commercial use during the summer.
Put-in for the Wild section of the Rogue River. Parking is limited near the ramp (especially for vehicles with trailers), with no overnight parking allowed. Overflow parking is up a hill and on the other side of the bridge.
This launch has good parking and a turnaround area to reduce congestion, but still requires boaters to carry their craft (mostly tubes and SUPS) from parking to the river.
This small parking area primarily serves a trail system, but is also the takeout for Meadow Camp, the most popular summer kayaking run in Bend. The lot commonly fills on busy days, sometimes with double-parking. Conflicts with neighborhood residents sometimes occur over noise, drinking, or overflow parking on the roadway. Access points with extensive parking are about a half-mile downstream (see Riverbend photo), but whitewater boaters use this take-out because it avoids some flatwater and reduces shuttle lengths.
Undeveloped parking
Dirty Devil, Colorado River, UT

This less-developed ramp surface contains reservoir sediments and is very steep and often muddy; even a 4x4 can be sketchy. This probably reduces use, although the location avoids miles of flat water across Lake Powell.
Riverbend Park is a good example of a fully-developed access area: wide ramp, parking for hundreds of vehicles, a dog park with fenced shoreline, and several other facilities. It is Bend’s most popular tubing put-in, but is rarely used by whitewater boaters (see Meadow Camp).
Another example of a full-service launch, with several restrooms, four launch lanes, and short-term docks for rigging and staging. Many users have motorized boats that are typically launched via trailers. The parking lot also serves a multi-use path, soccer field, playground, dog park, several tennis courts, and beaches.
Users often tolerate a long distance between parking and water's edge, especially if they can reduce “schlepping distance” by dropping boats and gear at the ramp. The average distance between parking and ramp was 200-500 ft., although this distance is greater than 500 ft for 15% of launches.
This launch has adjacent docks for boat tie-ups while boaters drop-off or retrieve their trailers. Bull rails along the dock offer an inexpensive alternative to a series of cleats.
Floating docks on this high use salmon fishing river handle flow and tidal fluctuations, and include hand rails to help users with balance during frequent boat wakes.
Purpose-made for trailer launches: two separated lanes and a floating short-term dock. This would benefit from a small swale/culvert to divert oil and gas from cars in the parking lot away from the ramp.
Kayak launch
East Howell Landing, Namekagon River, WI

This carry-in access has both ramp and stair-step launches. Separations between different types of use prevent conflicts and are generally safer than mixed launches. Camping is also available at this site.
Kayak launch
Brew City Kayak Launch, Milwaukee River, WI

This launch has a custom near-water surface for kayaks.
Multiple dock heights and grab bar help get boats in the water and people into boats. The floating dock automatically adjusts to different water levels.
Poured concrete ramp for trailer launches. Ramp ends several feet from water’s edge, possibly impairing use of float-on trailers.
This dual-purpose ramp has a pre-fabricated concrete trailer launch with grooves for traction/drainage and a separated carry-in launch with smoother walking surface.
Ramps

Lookout Boat Launch and Campground, Blue River, OR

Two-lane poured concrete ramp with separated and raised carry-in dock. Both are designed to work at a variety of reservoir levels.
This poured concrete ramp facilitates trailer launches. It extends into the water at controlled summer flows, so a short ramp will suffice. Signs of bank erosion at the carry-in launch just upstream.
Not every access has the space or budget for a wide, poured concrete ramp like this one, which allows for several launches at a time and float-on trailers.
Poured concrete ramp with rocks to prevent erosion; bigger rocks are needed for swifter currents. Ramp extends into water to allow float-on trailers.
Ramps

Hartland Dam, Ottauquechee River, VT

Controlled water levels allow for this short ramp and a turn-around close to the water.
Ramps that don’t reach the water can be difficult to use and possibly unsafe.
Pre-fabricated concrete blocks are placed and then tethered with cables.
Porous, pre-fabricated pavers allow trailer launches, prevent erosion, and allow vegetation to grow through and preserve a natural ambiance. No cables, pavers are held in place by soil and vegetation.
Ramps
Franklin High School, Winnipesaukee River, NH

A simple asphalt road transitions to dirt near the water, an inexpensive solution if the parking lot is already going to be repaved.
Ramps
Westwater Canyon Put-in, Colorado River, UT

Natural/gravel surface boat ramp at this high-use put-in. Rip-rap prevents erosion and defines staging areas.
The most extensive stair access in the database. Boaters carry kayaks/rafts down 600 stairs and hundreds of vertical feet. No swimming allowed at the put-in, and a gate controls entry to the launch deck. Despite difficult access, infrequent flow releases attract up to 250 boaters to this scenic gorge with spectacular whitewater.
An informal access was significantly improved by this staircase, which is wide enough for raft launches.
Stone steps prevent erosion, make the trail safer, and preserve a natural ambiance.
This carry-in launch provides convenient access for multiple boats, with steps to prevent erosion and allow seating for boaters, and ample staging areas on the lawn.
Stairs
Redlock Launch, Cuyahoga River, OH

A natural-appearing staircase with launch platform provides convenient access and minimizes erosion.
Hundreds of visitors per day use this popular launch in Yosemite Valley. The natural surface doesn’t withstand concentrated foot traffic, which is eroding the deep gulley and retreating shoreline. Trampling impacts tree health and understory vegetation by exposing roots and compacting soils.
Boaters may tolerate a poorly developed trail if scenic, whitewater, or other values are worth the effort. The ROS shows how such experiences fit in a range or “portfolio” of opportunities, and explicitly considers the acceptability of biophysical impacts. This type of access essentially eliminates heavier equipment such as rafts with frames or trailer launches.
This put-in trail is well signed but is challenging to use by rafts because it is narrow. Signage orients boaters, provides safety information, and prevents trespassing on private property.
Trails

Meadow Camp Put-in (River Rim Park), Deschutes River, OR

This park and developed trail serve Bend’s most popular summer kayak run (class IV). It is also a trail network access and local hangout.
Extensive multi-use trails at the McKenzie and Willamette River confluence, near downtown Eugene and University of Oregon Campus. Kayakers paddle their shuttle for the Willamette River play run using the canal on the left.
A stair launch with a slide/grab rail, designed for carry-in users.
Boat slides can efficiently move large boats laden with gear down steep slopes. This sweep boat was launched directly from a trailer.
Boat slides
Hole in the Wall, Clackamas River, OR

The two sets of rails provide flexibility for inflatable launches.
Skilled kayakers “seal launch” on this synthetic wood ramp, but most boaters lower craft to the water with ropes.
This slide allows flatwater boaters to bypass the dam controlling the water level and tidal currents upstream in Siltcoos Lake. Downstream of the dam, tidal levels vary several feet and currents change direction.
This boat slide includes adjacent stairs and a friction device, primarily for launching drift boats during the fishing season. The rope was stolen several times, so now users bring their own.
A slide designed for launching drift boats from trailers.

Boat slides

Wilson River, Siskeyville, OR
Put-in for a fly-only fishing section. Wide stairs adjacent to slide also work for carry-in craft.
A boat slide doesn’t need to be complicated or expensive; these simple stairs and wood rails improve access and prevent erosion.
Kayaks, rafts, or skateboards? The rails at this put-in slide boats as boaters walk along side. The curve discourages the “hold my beer and watch this” approach. The more traditional commercial put-in (on private property just across the river) is shown in the inset.
Combinations of ramps and slides can improve difficult launches. Here a steep concrete ramp ends at this slide, which gets users down the bank to the water.
Most launches in the database have 2 bathrooms, although some on the more developed end of the spectrum have 4.
Bathrooms

Trout Creek Boat Ramp and Campground, Deschutes River, OR

In addition to vault toilets, this campground and boat ramp has a wastewater sump for grey water.
This full-service launch has separated swimming and launching areas.
The Boathouse District in Oklahoma City is at the developed end of the spectrum; it includes a whitewater park and launches for a variety of craft (kayaks, SUPs, rowing sculls, trailer launched motorboats, etc.).
Amenities include restaurants, shopping, rentals, water park, high rope course, zip lines, and skateboard and BMX tracks.
Signs
Meadow day use area, Deschutes River, Bend, OR
Signs

Ohiopyle safety kiosk, Lower Youghiogheny River, PA
Signs

Boscawen River Road, Merrimack River, NH

More than 10,000 years ago, a great ice sheet retreated from the stretch of land we call the Merrimack Valley, which extends from Franklin, NH to Lowell, MA. The glacial lake resulting from the ice melt filled with vast deposits of sand and gravel, and over time a long, narrow waterway was created.

The Merrimack River played a significant role in the early settlement and development of the region. Archaeological surveys along the River have identified 8,000 year-old sites of Native American settlements. The River Valley was inhabited by peoples of the Passamaquoddy Confederacy, which consisted of 13 unified tribes connected to the Ahasiak. They obtained fish and migratory birds from the River and its banks and used the Merrimack as a primary transportation route. Later, Europeans used the river as a source of irrigation for crops, food, and commerce.

The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century brought factories needing waterpower. The River became an invaluable source of hydropower and, increasingly, a dumping ground for pollution of all kinds from chemical waste to raw sewage. The River was listed as one of the 10 most polluted rivers in the United States for over 150 years.

Today, the Merrimack is a healthy Class B River, suitable for fishing, swimming, boating, and even drinking after proper treatment. It has evolved from a dumping ground to a scenic destination for paddlers, fishermen, swimmers, hikers, campers and wildlife enthusiasts.

In 1804 Major Enoch Gerrish built the first bridge this site. Floodwater washed it away in 1819. The bridge met similar fates in 1824, 1839, and 1844. 1857 Horace and Enoch Childs built a covered bridge over the site. That structure was replaced with an iron truss bridge in 1907. The iron truss was closed to traffic in 1965.

During 1846 and 1847, the Northern Railroad was built west of this site carrying freight and passengers to Lebanon. The Boston & Maine Railroad acquired that line in 1887. Passenger service was discontinued in 1965 and freight service was discontinued in the early 1970’s. The line was purchased by the State of New Hampshire in 1996 to be converted into a multi-use recreation trail.

The River’s ecosystem provides habitat for a wide variety of species, including fish, birds, and reptiles. Other species (non threatened and endangered) include waterfowl, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles. Some species are migratory, and some are residents. The River corridor is a vital part of the natural ecosystem.

The principle cause of the River’s transformation was the 1972 Clean Water Act. It required that all municipal and industrial discharges to surface waters be treated sufficiently before discharge, providing incentive for the state of New Hampshire to begin the vital clean up of the Merrimack.
Signs
Raymond Elementary/Carroll Beach, Lamprey River, NH
Signs

Raymond Elementary/Carroll Beach, Lamprey River, NH
Signs

Raymond Elementary/Carroll Beach, Lamprey River, NH
Signs

Millenium Park, Charles River, MA
**Signs**

Pack Saddle Park,
North Fork Santiam River, OR
Signs
Still Landing, Wambaw River, SC
BE CAREFUL!

SWIM, TUBE AND RETURN
AT YOUR OWN RISK
WE CANNOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR SAFETY.
NORTH HARTLAND DAM

OTTAUQUECHEE RIVER

COMPLETED 1961 LENGTH 1620 FT.

COST $7,120,000 HEIGHT 185 FT.

CAPACITY 23.3 BILLION GAL.

BROCHURE AVAILABLE
Signs
Amherst Canoeport, Souhegan River, NH
Signs

Gates of Lodore, Green River, CO
This is an example of an organic-based bank rehabilitation project near a formerly eroded site next to a boat ramp. After a couple of years, the bank is fully vegetated and the thick willows discourage user-created trails down the steep bank.
A minimally developed access may be suitable for a low use area. Skilled and determined users sometimes tolerate long and difficult carries. Some users value difficult access because it creates an environment of remoteness, solitude, and adventure. However, long carries are not suitable for casual users or multi-day launches.
Challenge level

Dillon Falls Day Use, Deschutes River, OR

Kayakers and some rafters “park and huck” at Dillon falls (IV+) or combine with Lava Falls (V) downstream. Flatwater users from upstream can take out above the falls, although a fatality occurred when a canoe missed the ramp. This scenic area is also frequented by hikers, bikers, and sightseers.
Hazard signage at Dillon Falls Boat Ramp
Unusual
Ward’s Ferry, Tuolumne River, CA

One of the most unique accesses in the database. Outfitters use a truck-mounted crane to lift rafts onto the bridge, while other boaters carry up a long, steep trail.
Trash
Sherwood Horine, Watauga River, NC