



Photo by Kevin Perzynski

# Paddling the Carp River

## A Wild and Scenic River

The Carp River is a designated Wild and Scenic River passing through the Mackinac Wilderness of the Hiawatha National Forest. Although too challenging for beginners, the Carp River is generally a deep and slow-moving river. Flowing east to Lake Huron, the river passes through a variety of vegetation, including pine, aspen, maple, and paper birch. You will notice many dying ash trees due to the spread of Emerald Ash Borer.

Little of the river is fed by groundwater, so flow is highly dependent on precipitation. Water temperature is rarely above 60°F. In the spring, snowmelt makes the Carp a faster river with a couple rapids. Good maneuvering skills are important at this time of year because the river is narrow (30-45ft), winding, and cluttered with downed trees and logjams—particularly in the unmaintained Wilderness. As the water level drops throughout the summer, the current slows. This time is better for less-experienced paddlers; although, they may have to portage around logjams more. When the water level gets too low in mid-summer or a drought year, obstacles increase, and stretches of river become too shallow to float.

The Carp River Campground, a developed campground with pit toilets and water pumps, is located two miles from the river’s mouth, Lake Huron.

Although no developed sites are available on the canoe route, rustic camping is permitted. Campers should limit their stay to 14 days and follow the “pack in, pack out” policy.

The Carp River is designated a trout stream by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources — type 4, mainstream. Anglers may catch brook or brown trout in the summertime. Steelhead and smelt may be caught near the river’s mouth in spring; salmon may be caught on the fall.

What’s in a name? The river was named so before the Asian Carp was introduced in the mid-1800s. Early Europeans likely saw native buffalo fish and suckers and dubbed it the Carp River.

## Canoe/Kayak Safety:

- ◆ Wear a life jacket.
- ◆ Carry a map and compass; know how to use them.
- ◆ If your canoe capsizes, stay with it and hang on.
- ◆ Pack food, bedding, clothing, etc., in waterproof bags and tie them to the canoe.
- ◆ Don’t bring glass— broken pieces are hazardous for bare feet and inflatable boats.
- ◆ Weather changes quickly in the Upper Peninsula, so be sure to pack warm clothing.
- ◆ Leave a trip plan with a friend describing your route, destination, and approximate arrival time.
- ◆ Be a courteous, considerate paddler.



**A: Below Rock Rapids**

Although vessels could be launched from the Rd 3332 bridge, it is best to launch downstream from Rock Rapids. These rapids are dangerous even during high water and are hidden by a blind corner. Park your vehicle and launch from one of the primitive campsites 0.5mi downstream. Note – this is a sand/dirt road. The river from here to Point B is narrow and brushy.

**B: Rd 3458 Bridge**

Park at the primitive campsite just south of the Rd 3458 bridge. The Carp River here is deep, but narrow and brushy. This area is lightly maintained, so downed trees may have to be portaged around. The river is very windy from all the way from State HWY 123.



On the Carp River, be prepared for adventure!  
Photo by Kevin Perzynski

**C: State HWY 123 (Mackinac Wilderness)**

Park on the shoulder of the highway. Be considerate of the private land here. You are now entering the Mackinac Wilderness Area. This is NOT an area for beginners. This area is largely unmaintained and has only footpaths entering and leaving it. Half of your time here will be crossing/portaging around log jams. This can be exhausting and increase your chance of capsizing. Be prepared for a long day. After the confluence of the North Branch of the Carp River, there is a section of rapids.

**D: Rd 3119, East Lake Rd**

This is an excellent launching location on a well-traveled road. The parking lot is just upstream from the bridge and is large enough to hold 6-7 vehicles. The first 2.5miles are windy, but not as narrow as upstream. There are a few logs jams that should be passable at high water. The last mile before the take-out is MacDonalds Rapids. The river is wide and straight here with

large boulders. This stretch is a navigation challenge even during high water. If the route is too difficult or too shallow, there are fishermen-footpaths on both sides of the river to portage along. The Rd 3308 take-out comes up quickly on the left.

**E: Rd 3308, MacDonalds Rapids**

This road just north of the Carp River Campground may be harder to find, but has a large parking area and numerous launch points. From here the river is very deep, straight, and easy-going— excellent for beginners. Take-out upstream from the Campground bridge as it is regularly log-jammed and impassable.

**F: HNF Carp River Campground**

From the campground, there are a number of places to launch a boat; a few hundred feet west of the bridge is a nice parking area to launch from. The river here winds slowly along some private property before crossing under Interstate Highway 75. Take-out on the right by the big hill before the rapids begin.

**G: Next to I-75 Overpass**

Turn off H63/Mackinac Trail as if going to the fishing pier; keep left to the road's dead end. Park here are follow the trail over the small hill. The river is calm at the launch before turning into rapids for the 0.5miles. Whenever the river forks, keep left. Only experienced paddlers should attempt these rapids as they get very shallow.

**H: Carp River Fishing Pier**

This is the end of the river and beginning of Lake Huron. The parking lot is large and has a concrete fishing pier on the southern side. This area is popular with fishermen and there are many little footpaths along the river. There are restrooms at this location.

**Hiawatha National Forest**

**Headquarters**

820 Rains Drive  
Gladstone, MI 49837  
(906) 428-5800

**St Ignace Ranger District**

W 1900 W US 2  
St Ignace, MI 49781  
(906) 643-7900

**Online:**

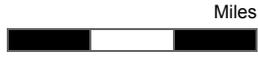
Web: [fs.usda.gov/hiawatha](http://fs.usda.gov/hiawatha)  
Facebook: HiawathaNF



# Paddling the Upper Carp

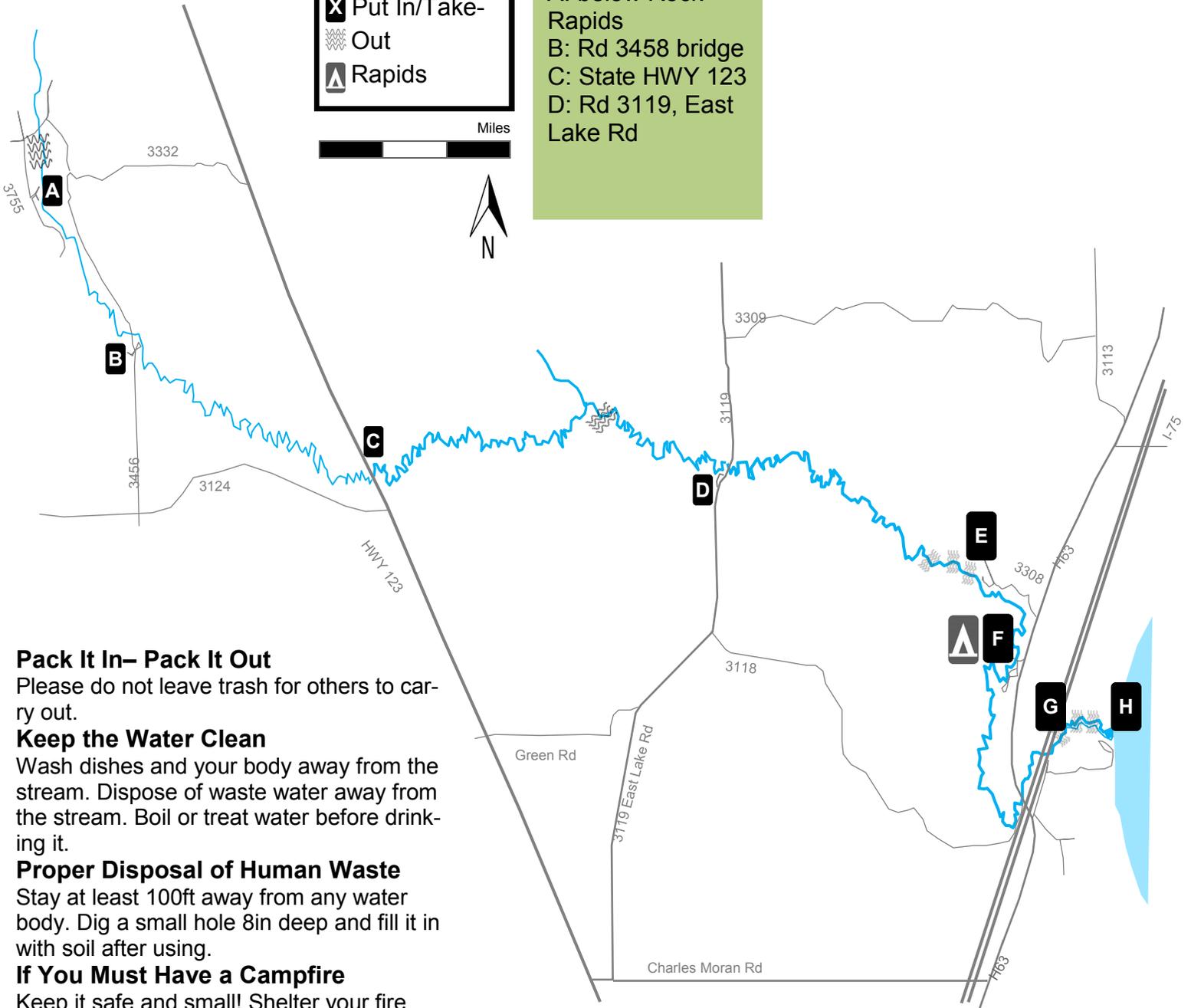
**Key**

- Put In/Take-Out
- Out
- Rapids



**Launch/Take-Out Points**

- A: below Rock Rapids
- B: Rd 3458 bridge
- C: State HWY 123
- D: Rd 3119, East Lake Rd



**Pack It In– Pack It Out**

Please do not leave trash for others to carry out.

**Keep the Water Clean**

Wash dishes and your body away from the stream. Dispose of waste water away from the stream. Boil or treat water before drinking it.

**Proper Disposal of Human Waste**

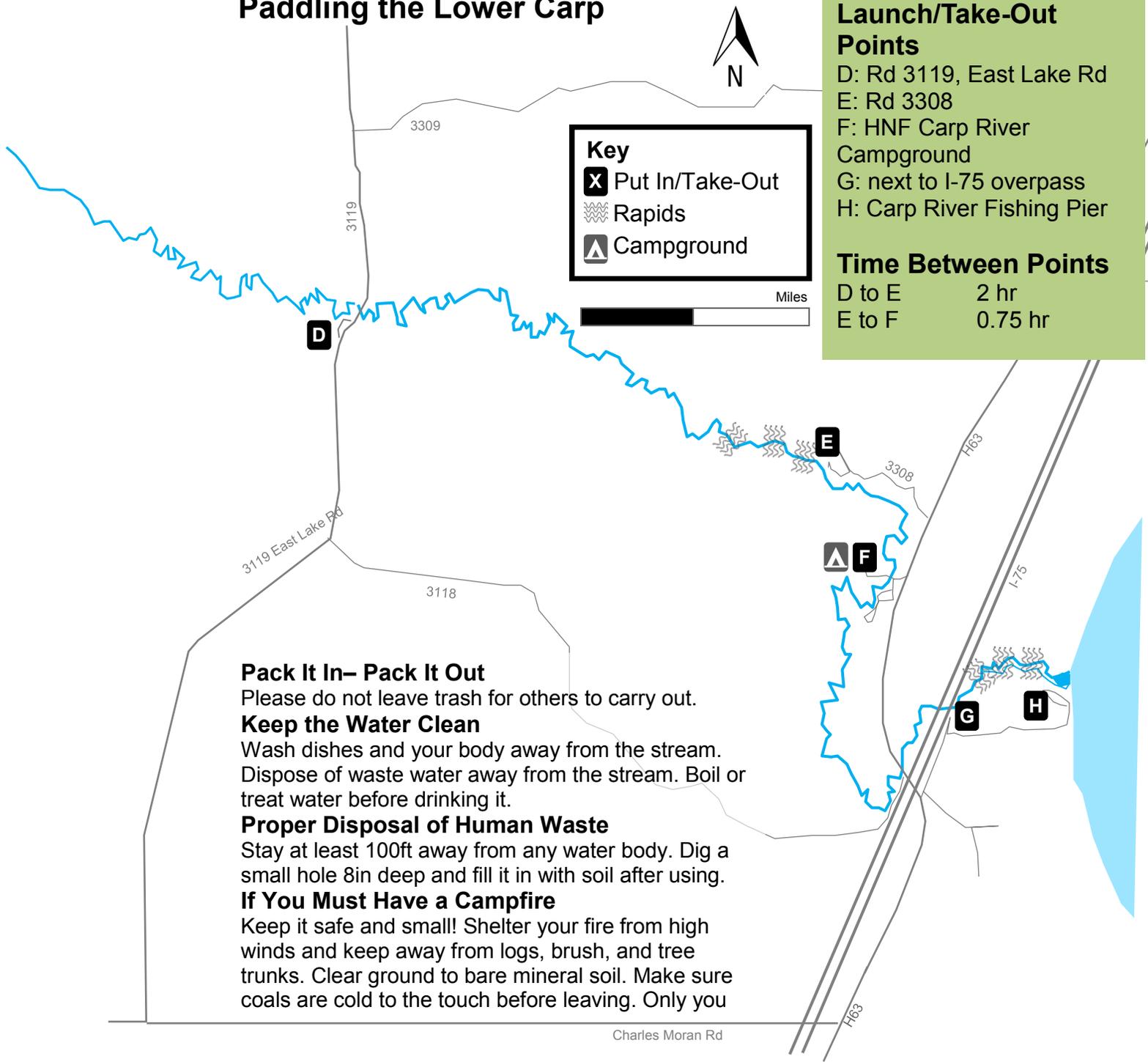
Stay at least 100ft away from any water body. Dig a small hole 8in deep and fill it in with soil after using.

**If You Must Have a Campfire**

Keep it safe and small! Shelter your fire



# Paddling the Lower Carp



### Pack It In– Pack It Out

Please do not leave trash for others to carry out.

### Keep the Water Clean

Wash dishes and your body away from the stream. Dispose of waste water away from the stream. Boil or treat water before drinking it.

### Proper Disposal of Human Waste

Stay at least 100ft away from any water body. Dig a small hole 8in deep and fill it in with soil after using.

### If You Must Have a Campfire

Keep it safe and small! Shelter your fire from high winds and keep away from logs, brush, and tree trunks. Clear ground to bare mineral soil. Make sure coals are cold to the touch before leaving. Only you

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Forest Service  
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