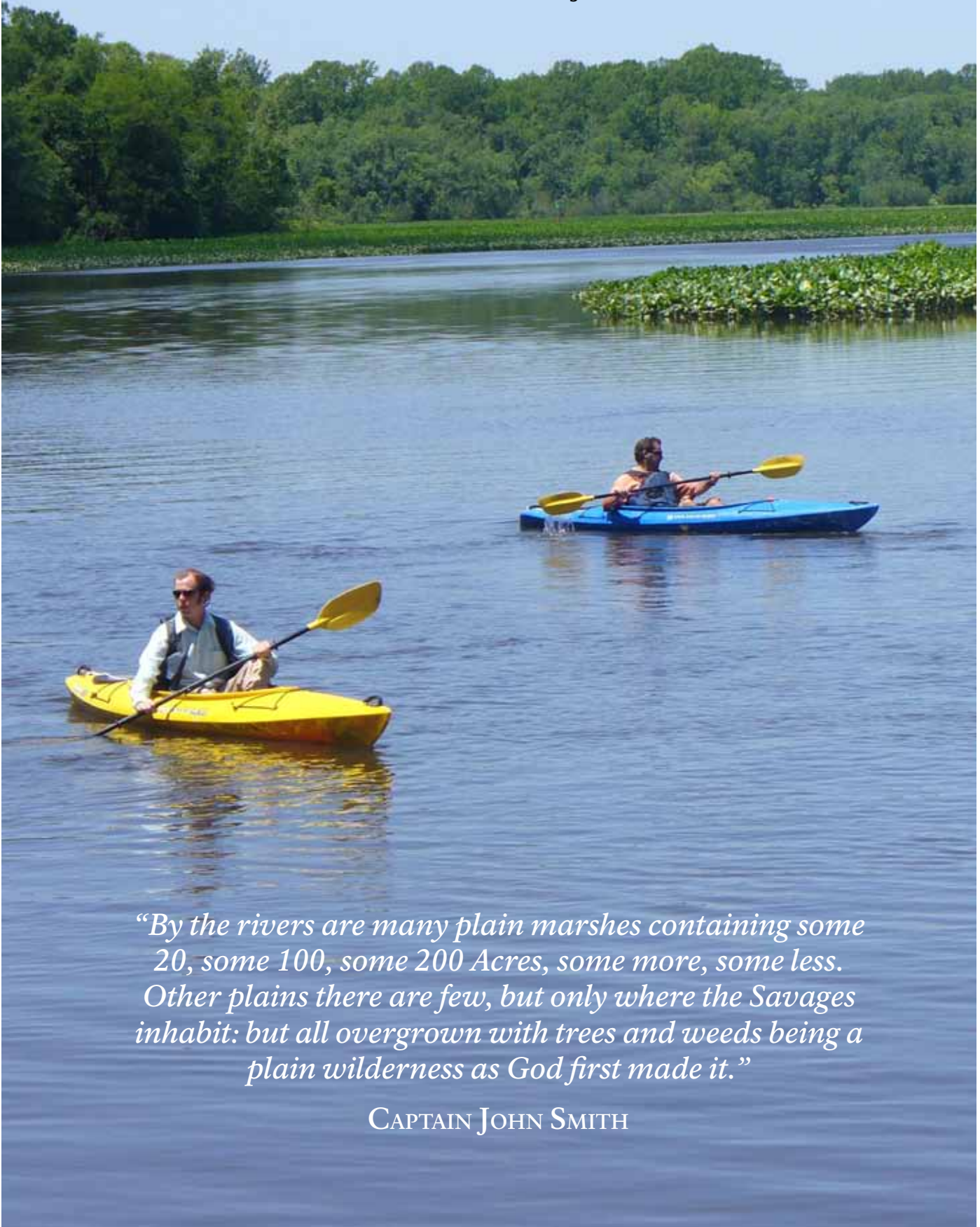


Paddlers entering Broad Creek on the Nanticoke River Water Trail.



“By the rivers are many plain marshes containing some 20, some 100, some 200 Acres, some more, some less. Other plains there are few, but only where the Savages inhabit: but all overgrown with trees and weeds being a plain wilderness as God first made it.”

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

Woods, Marshes, and Live Waters

EXPLORING THE NANTICOKE FROM ITS MOUTH TO SEAFORD, DELAWARE

The Nanticoke River may be the most scenic waterway on the Delmarva Peninsula. Its deep channels, shallow flats, wooded banks, broad marshes, and forested wetlands have supported fish, birds, and mammals for centuries. Today, it's a magnet for bird-watchers, anglers, history buffs, and boaters in all sorts of watercraft, from canoes and kayaks to large cruising trawlers.

SMITH ON THE NANTICOKE

The Nanticoke is arguably the least-known of the Chesapeake Bay's tributaries, but it may be the loveliest. The navigable portion of the river winds 41 miles from Hooper Strait at the head of Tangier Sound to Seaford, Delaware. The historic river town of Vienna, Maryland, lies 24 miles above the mouth, or approximately halfway up.

On June 8 and 9, 1608, Captain John Smith and his crew rowed and sailed their *Discovery Barge* up the Nanticoke. The Indians who lived at the present-day site of Wetipquin, on the east side of the river, shot arrows at Smith and his crew. Those living on the west bank befriended them after the crew left small gifts. This must have been a welcome relief to Smith and his men who had been living on short rations of food and water through two serious thunder squalls and clouds of biting insects on their way up Tangier Sound.

Smith's account of the rest of his time on the Nanticoke is sketchy, but his 1612 map of the river is still correct today. The uncanny accuracy of his map combined with his writings allow us to deduce much of how he spent his short time exploring the Nanticoke. Smith listed and identified several towns, wrote that the people were willing to ferry him wherever he wished to go, and showed how far he explored by the placement of the cross on his map. So it seems reasonable that he was taken as far as the cross by Indian paddlers, who could move a canoe much faster than the shallop could be rowed.

It appears Smith was taken to the chief's town of Kuskarawaok on Chicone Creek, just above the present-day site of Vienna. He was told about a powerful tribe to the north called Massawomeck, a probable source of the high quality furs the Nanticoke had. Such information would have made Smith wonder if the Massawomeck lived on the Northwest Passage. He had been instructed by the Virginia Company to find this elusive route to the Pacific Ocean.

Smith clearly traveled as far up the main stem of the Nanticoke as the mouth of Broad Creek. His map shows that he left a brass cross on the west bank just below the creek's mouth. He also noted a deep channel in the river. The next morning, he and his crew turned the *Discovery Barge* west, heading through Hooper Strait, then turning north to look for the Massawomeck.

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 Nanticoke River, learn more about important Chesapeake connections at the following Gateway sites and attractions.

CHESAPEAKE GATEWAYS ALONG THE NANTICOKE RIVER

Emperor's Landing at Vienna Waterfront Park • Vienna, MD

Seaford Museum • Seaford, DE

Nanticoke River Water Trail



PHOTO © MICHAEL C. WOOTTON

The Nanticoke is perhaps the least-known but one of the loveliest Chesapeake tributaries.



The town of Vienna, MD, welcomes visiting boaters to its newly developed waterfront, Emperor's Landing.

RESOURCES & CONTACTS

NANTICOKE RIVER WATER TRAIL
www.paddletheNanticoke.com

**DELAWARE DIVISION OF
 PARKS AND RECREATION**
 302-739-9220

For online information and maps:
<http://shop.delaware.gov>

**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL
 RESOURCES**

For free map brochure "The Nanticoke River: Explorers Welcome" featuring public access and historical information about John Smith's travels on the Nanticoke River in 1608:
www.dnr.state.md.us/boating/mdwatertrails (Navigate to Lower Eastern Shore section.)

SUGGESTED READING

The Nanticoke: Portrait of a Chesapeake River
 by David W. Harp and Tom Horton
 The Johns Hopkins University Press (2008)

EXPLORING THE NANTICOKE RIVER TODAY

Today, the deep channel in the Nanticoke is well-marked for tugboats that push barges of fuel oil, sand, and gravel up to Seaford, where DuPont established its first nylon plant in the late 1930s. The plant is now shuttered.

Much of the Nanticoke looks the way it did when Smith visited. Broad salt and brackish marshes flank looping meander bends on the lower river. Careful skippers will quickly learn the pattern—deep water on the outsides of the bends, mud shoals on the inside. Vienna marks a transition to tidal fresh marshes full of wild rice, backed by wooded swamps. The town is on the outside of a curve, where depths run to 40 feet deep. Vienna was an important 18th- and 19th-century center for commerce and shipbuilding.

For visiting boaters, Vienna has built an attractive marina that offers a free launch ramp for paddle craft and trailered boats, slips on floating docks for boats up to 25 feet, and a bulkhead for self-sufficient vessels up to 60 feet.

Vienna is working its way through an enlightened, community-based master plan that has established a greenbelt around its limits to allow it to grow within while retaining its historic small-town flavor. Food and conveniences are within walking distance of the docks, with more to come.

Above Vienna's bridge (50-foot clearance) on the north side, Chicone Creek winds back into marsh and swamp. These wetlands provided the Nanticoke people with edible plants, muskrats, and waterfowl. It's no surprise they established the town of Kuskarawaok up this creek. It's a good one to explore by canoe, kayak, dinghy, or outboard skiff.

On the Nanticoke's main stem, look for bald eagles which frequent this part of the river. You'll come to the village of Riverton on the south bank. Just beyond it to the north is Marshyhope Creek, a lovely and navigable small river. It has been suggested that Captain Smith and his Nanticoke guides turned into the Marshyhope, but most scholars think they continued on the main stem of the river. Another mile up on the south bank is Sharptown, a town with a long history of building schooners up to 200 feet, as well as rigging boats built at yards on other parts of the Nanticoke River. Cherry Beach Park offers a launch ramp and a picnic pavilion in a pretty setting.

Another couple of miles bring the transition to Delaware and the mouth of Broad Creek. There you'll find Phillips Landing, a small park managed by the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC). It offers picnic tables under tall pines, a launch ramp, restrooms, and a plaque commemorating the brass cross Captain Smith placed across the river in 1608.

Broad Creek runs eight miles up to Laurel. Halfway up is the old village of Bethel, where a boatyard built 36 Chesapeake rams (90- to 120-foot three-masted lumber schooners) between 1870 and 1923. The only surviving Bethel ram is *Victory Chimes*, a member of the Maine windjammer fleet.

Delaware and Maryland have developed water trail maps for the Nanticoke. The Seaford Historical Society is also a great resource. Its museum is located in the old post office building on High Street in Seaford, an easy walk from the Nanticoke River Marina. The marina is located across the river in Blades. For paddle craft, the closest landing is the Seaford Riverwalk.

Good Vessels for Exploring



PADDLE CRAFT (CANOES AND KAYAKS)

The creeks of the Nanticoke are well suited 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, explore all or part of the area you want, but exercise caution and stay safe.

If you're a novice or intermediate paddler, keep to shorter trips in side creeks like Wetipquin and Chicone. There's plenty to explore that will delight you, especially if you are interested in the Nanticoke Indian features of the trail.



SKIFFS AND RUNABOUTS

Skiffs and runabouts are good choices for day trips on the Nanticoke and its large tributaries, Marshyhope and Broad creeks. They'll also serve well in side creeks like Chicone and the upper portion of Broad Creek, 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 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 can reveal beautiful, fascinating places along the Nanticoke.



CRUISING POWERBOATS AND TRAWLERS

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

For these vessels, the biggest issues are bridge clearance (50 feet at Vienna) 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, looping meander bends. The bulkheads along Vienna's waterfront make a great stop for overnight tie-ups on the way to Seaford. The Nanticoke River Marina at Blades, Delaware, is fully equipped with fuel, electric, water, and waste pumpout facilities, but the town of Vienna is not. Boats staying at Vienna must be self-sufficient.



CRUISING SAILBOATS

A narrow, winding river like the Nanticoke can make anyone in a modern cruising sailboat marvel at how the schooner and bugeye captains of old negotiated these waters. Winds are fluky, and the currents can be treacherous. There are better rivers to explore under sail.

For Cruising Boats TRAVELING THE NANTICOKE

Skiffs and runabouts can cover much of the water described here for paddle craft. Just remember to be cautious when on the Nanticoke River. All of the trailheads listed are appropriate places to launch, though the Wetipquin ramp is tight for anything more than 18 feet. Chicone Creek, Big Creek, Marshyhope Creek, and Broad Creek are all great waterways to explore in these vessels.

Except for tie-ups at Vienna, Maryland, and Seaford, Delaware, the main channel is the place to stay in a cruising powerboat. Don't let your boat insulate you from the river, though. At seven knots there is a lot to see, including bald eagles. If you carry a dinghy or kayak, be sure to use it to explore the Nanticoke and its lovely creeks.



Nanticoke shorelines offer diverse views of wooded banks, broad marshes, and forested wetlands.

TRAILHEADS ON THE NANTICOKE

Cedar Hill Park, Bivalve, MD
38° 18' 38" N, 75° 53' 21" W
410-548-4900



www.dnr.state.md.us/boatingboatramps.asp (Search Wicomico County) (ramp fee)

Wetipquin Creek Landing, MD
38° 19' 36" N, 75° 52' 01" W



www.dnr.state.md.us/boatingboatramps.asp (Search Wetipquin Creek)

Emperor's Landing, Vienna, MD
38° 29' 00" N, 75° 49' 23" W



410-376-3442, www.viennamd.org/commun.html
(Call ahead for information on docking.)

Cherry Beach Park/Launch Ramp, Sharptown, MD
38° 32' 44" N, 75° 43' 03" W



www.dnr.state.md.us/boatingboatramps.asp (Search for Cherry Creek)

Phillips Landing

38° 33' 51" N, 75° 40' 20" W



(Delaware requires a \$35 launch ramp sticker for non-Delaware residents. Visit www.dnrec.state.de.us/fw/rampcer.htm for more information.)

Seaford Boat Ramp

38° 38' 00" N, 75° 37' 05" W



(Delaware requires a \$35 launch ramp sticker for non-Delaware residents. Visit www.dnrec.state.de.us/fw/rampcer.htm for more information.)

Nanticoke River Marina, Blades/Seaford, DE

38° 38' 15" N, 75° 36' 42" W



302-628-8600

<http://nanticokerivermarina.net/area.html>

(free public ramp for skiffs and runabouts and for launching paddle craft)

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.



One of the markers indicating an official site on the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

Trip Itineraries

WETIPQUIN CREEK

TWO-WAY, 1–4 MILES



The public landing by the bridge on Wetipquin Road offers good no-fee access to Wetipquin and Tyaskin creeks, as well as the Nanticoke shoreline at Wetipquin's mouth. This is a great place to see salt marshes up close. This section of the river was valuable to the Nanticoke people for harvesting fish, crabs, and oysters. Adjust your itinerary to fit your skills and the weather conditions.

VIENNA AREA

TWO-WAY, 2–4 MILES



Launch at Emperor's Landing at the town's waterfront. About a mile upriver on the Vienna side, just beyond the Route 50 bridge, lies the mouth of Chicone Creek. If paddling, be careful through this stretch, especially if there's a tug with barge in the vicinity. Once into Chicone Creek, follow it up into a deep wooded swamp fringed with rich tidal freshwater marsh. The land you see through the trees was part of the chief's town that Captain John Smith mapped as Kuskarawaok when he visited. The combination of forested wetlands, tidal fresh marsh, and fertile soils for growing corn, beans, and squash was especially valuable for the way of life of the 17th-century Nanticoke.

SHARPTOWN AREA

TWO-WAY, 6–10 MILES



Sharptown lies more or less halfway between the mouths of the Nanticoke's two major tributaries, Marshyhope Creek to the west (downriver) and Broad Creek, just over the Delaware state line to the east (upriver). The Marshyhope is a deep, powerful river in its own right, with a long history of schooner and steamboat traffic through the 1930s. It is still a beautiful waterway. If you're up for an extended paddle from Sharptown, explore Big Creek, just inside the mouth of the Marshyhope on the west side. Broad Creek extends about 10 miles up to Laurel. If you paddle up to Broad Creek, note the beautiful wild rice marsh on the upriver side as you enter. On the south side is Phillips Landing, another trailhead and a great shady park where you can rest and enjoy a picnic. The west side of the Nanticoke opposite the mouth of Broad Creek marks the area where Captain John Smith planted this river's cross.

Nanticoke River

SECTION MAP



- ⬡ TRAILHEAD (PUBLIC)
- ⬡ TRAILHEAD (PRIVATE)
- ★ TRIP ITINERARY

LINKS TO ONLINE MAPS	CLICK SOURCE ▼
Cedar Hill Park	GOOGLE NOAA
Cherry Beach Park Launch	GOOGLE NOAA
Emperor's Landing	GOOGLE NOAA
Nanticoke River Marina	GOOGLE NOAA
Phillips Landing	GOOGLE NOAA
Seaford Boat Ramp	GOOGLE NOAA
Wetipquin Creek Landing	GOOGLE NOAA