



# Lower James River Tour

*Allow 3 Hours*

This driving tour of the lower James River takes you past historic sites, high bluffs, scenic valley overlooks and caves and springs. It explores the roughly southern half of the James River Watershed, which includes some of the region's most beautiful country. The tour is about 80 miles and takes about 3 hours' drive time. Much of it is on narrow blacktop or gravel roads, with frequent blind turns and steep hills. Go slow on the backroads. All of the roads on this tour are passable in passenger vehicles during most weather conditions. However, there are also many low water crossings on this tour. If you go on the tour shortly after a rain, there will probably be water over the road. Remember the old adage: "Turn around, don't drown." It takes very little water going over a low water crossing to sweep off a car.

Consider taking the tour at different times of the year. Some falls, the colors are brilliant. In winter, you can see for many miles from the ridgetops. In the spring, the creeks and springs are flowing strong and clear, and in the summer the fish are biting and roadsides are carpeted with brightly colored wildflowers. A lot of what you will see is determined by the area's unique geology. The James River flows in a limestone "karst" area, meaning the rocks are often porous. That's why there are so many springs and caves here. But also look for those other hallmarks of karst terrain—sinkholes.

Keep your eyes out for wildlife in forests, glades and pastures. Deer and wild turkey are very common, but you'll occasionally see coyotes or even bobcats. You'll see many kinds of birds—great blue herons and green herons stalking the streams; red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, bald eagles, osprey, and vultures wheeling overhead. In the spring and summer, you'll see indigo buntings, bluebirds, kingbirds, swallows, goldfinch and scissor-tailed flycatchers. You may hear the "kuk kuk" of a pileated woodpecker in the dark woods, or see it in its looping flight. In the streams, you'll see lots of fish, including suckers, minnows, darters and smallmouth bass. What you won't see is the Ozark Cavefish, which lives underground in caves streams. It's found nowhere else in the world. Contact the Missouri Department of Conservation for local field guides, if you don't have them, to help identify what you see. Just remember to take your binoculars.

This tour begins and ends in the city of Nixa, about 10 miles south of Springfield. Remember that your odometer could vary a little from the mileage markers shown here. We urge you to report any errors we might have made in laying out the tour. We hope you'll enjoy it!

0.0 Start tour at **intersection of Highways 160 and 14** in Nixa; **go west** on Highway 14

1.3 At the stoplight at **Highway M** turn **left**

5.1 Pass the road on right to the Shelvin Rock James River Access. This access, maintained by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), is about 3 miles down this road. The James River is a very popular canoeing and kayaking stream. Shelvin Rock is a 6.5-mile float from the next access upstream, Delaware Town Access on Highway 14 west of Nixa. From Shelvin' Rock, it's 6.2 miles downstream to the next MDC access at Hootentown. These are both very nice day floats, and the fishing is often excellent.

6.6 Riverfork Ranch Subdivision is on left. This high ridge is where explorer Henry Schoolcraft stood on January 4, 1819 on his trek from

Potosi to examine the lead deposits along the James River. He called the ridgetline above the junction of the "Findley" (now spelled Finley) River with the James a "high, rich point of land" and "an eligible spot for a town, and the erection of a new county out of this part of the unincorporated wilderness of Arkansas."

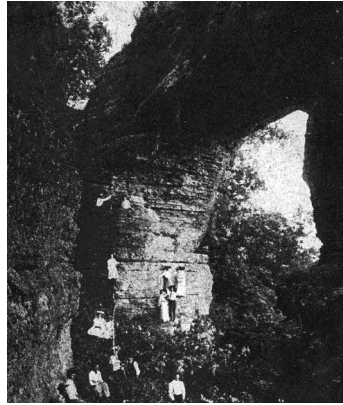
7.5 Cross the James River at "Jamesville," once a town. The Finley Creek enters the James River to the left, just downstream of the bridge. The Finley is also a floatable stream, at least in the spring and early summer when there is enough water. However, there are very few public accesses the stream.

8.3 At the **junction on U Highway**, continue **straight ahead on U Hwy**.

9.6 Cross Silver Lake Branch. Later on this tour, you'll see the remains of a mill on this spring-fed creek.

9.7 At **Hootentown Road** turn **left**.

10.2 Hootentown Access, down the drive on the left, is maintained by the Missouri Department of Conservation. Go straight ahead on Hootentown Road. Just across the road from the access is Hootentown outfitters, canoe rental and camping, a very busy place in the summertime. Hootentown Natural Arch is on a high bluff along the river just south of here, and can be seen from the river in winter time, but there is no public access from the top. There is a Hootentown access, and road, and arch, but no real Hooten Town!



11.1 Steep, switch-back hill

11.3 At the **Y-junction**, stay **left**

11.4 At the **stop sign**, go **straight** ahead.

11.6 At **Old Stillhouse Hollow Road**, turn **right** onto the gravel road.

13.2 At stop sign and **State Highway AA**, turn **right**.

13.8 At **Twilight Drive**, turn **left**.

13.9 At the **road junction**, stay **to the left**.

14.2 At the **road junction**, stay **to the right** and immediately cross Dry Crane Creek.



14.8 At **Hayes Spring Road**, turn **left**.

14.9 Cross Dry Crane Creek.

15.4 Cross Dry Crane Creek again. Hayes Spring Conservation Area is on the left just after a low-water bridge. If you have time, park here and take the 20-30-minute round walking trip to Hayes Spring, following the mowed trail. Hayes Spring is beautiful, spilling from a small cave, and is home to the Ozark Cavefish, a subterranean endangered species. These fish are blind, white, and about 2-3 inches long. Cavefish are

considered the “canary in the coal mine” for the springs and caves of the Ozarks. If they are wiped out, the water is probably too polluted for humans, too. Pollution can come from pesticide and fertilizer applications and septic tank seepage



15.8 Cross Dry Crane Creek on slab. There is almost always flow here, below the outlet of Hayes Spring, and the concrete gets very slick with diatoms (plant-like creatures that build their shells from silica, so are “slick as glass.”) That’s why you have to be very careful walking on stream bottoms or crossing low-water bridges, especially if the water is high. Remember, it only takes a foot of water to wash a car off the bridge. Turn around, don’t drown!

16.5 At the junction with **AA**, turn **right**.

16.9 At **Warner Road**, turn **left**. The curve on AA is bad here, and sight distance short, so be very careful making this left-hand turn.

18.1 Attractive, spring-fed pond on right

18.5 At the junction with Inman School Road, stay right on Warner Road.

19.0 At the junction with **McCall Bridge Road**, turn **right**.

19.1 Cross the James River on McCall Bridge. There are great views of the river both upstream and downstream. McCall Bridge is about 32 river miles below the dam at Lake Springfield.

19.8 In this area, you can see the high bluffs along the James River to the right, especially in winter

20.3 At the road junction, stay to the right.

20.4 The road goes close to the James River on the right.

21.1 At the Y-Junction, stay to the left.

21.2 At the stop sign, **merge left onto V Highway**

23.9 Ponce de Leon city limit sign.

24.0 At **Medical Springs Road**, turn **right** to enter town of Ponce de Leon

or “Poncie.” This little town boomed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a Springfield businessman had a “healing” experience here. He washed an infected cut in one of the springs nearby and the wound was miraculously “healed.” Before long, people were building houses and camping in tents nearby to drink and bathe in the medicinal waters. Ponce de Leon was said to be the largest city in Stone County in 1900, with 3,000 people! The boom ended shortly after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now, the town has less than fifty people.



24.1 At **Ponce Road**, turn **left**.

24.3 At **Goff Creek Road**, turn **right**.

24.8 Ponce de Leon Cemetery is on the left. Look for the gravestone about 20 feet south of the little concrete block building. Buried here is Fountain T. Welch, the man with the lyrical (and appropriate) name who started the medical water craze at Ponce de Leon. Welch was a streetcar operator in Springfield. Turn around at the “maintenance ends” sign and head back toward Ponce de Leon.

25.4 At the road junction, turn **left** on **Ponce Road**.

25.6 At the road junction, go **left** on **Medical Springs Road**.

25.7 Ponce de Leon Post Office is on the left. To the right are several homes at the base of the bluff. Several small springs come out of the limestone ledges behind these houses. No one seems to know for sure which one was that “magical” spring discovered by Fountain T. Welch in the 1880s.

26.3 There is an attractive spring on the left that comes from a cave in the bluff. Pull off on the small turnout to see it.

27.4 Watch for camels on the left.

28.4 At the stop sign, turn **left** onto **Pleasant Valley Drive**.

28.5 At the stop sign, turn **right** onto **Highway 176**.

32.3 Pass the road to Kerr Access on right. This road reaches the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Access located at the mouth of

Horse Creek in about 3 miles. The high bluffs on the river just downstream of the access are very scenic. From this access, a float to Galena is about 5 miles. This access is about 17 miles below the Hootentown Access (seen earlier on the tour), the next MDC access upriver.

35.3 At the junction with 413 Highway, continue **straight onto 248/176**.

35.4 Cross the James River. There are good views upstream from here. Look for the rock weirs jutting out from the east bank. These are called “Bendway” weirs, and are designed to deflect current towards the middle of the river to prevent streambank erosion on this sweeping turn in the river.

35.6 Turn **left** on **Highway 248**. Notice the Galena wastewater treatment plant on the left. This plant was upgraded recently and does a good job of treating wastewater before it is discharged into Pine Run, which flows immediately into the James River. All cities in the James River Basin must have treatment plants for municipal sewage, and all must now have phosphorus removal. This nutrient can cause excessive growth of slimy green algae in rivers and lakes.

35.7 Cross Pine Run Creek.

35.7 Turn **left** onto **Y-Bridge Road**.

35.9 James River Outfitters is on left. This outfitter and camping area is in the floodplain of the James River, and has been flooded many times in the past. With the recent numbers of big floods on the James River, probably related to climate change, this problem will only get worse.

36.0 At the parking area for Y-bridge, take the time for a brief walk out on the bridge, which is now open for pedestrians only. There are great views downstream from this point. The Y-bridge, completed in 1927, was one of only two of these unique bridges at the time. The “Y” approach on the east end was necessary because of the nearness to the bluff. In 1932, Bonnie and Clyde drove a green 1932 Chevrolet across this bridge while being pursued by Stone County lawmen. The bridge is now on the National Registry of Historic Landmarks. On the bridge is a United States Geological Survey streamflow gage. This gage has been in operation since 1921. All five of the largest floods ever recorded on the James River here have been since 1993.

36.1 Go **right** (west) on **4<sup>th</sup> Street** across railroad tracks.

36.1 At the **yield sign** at the corner of the Galena Square, go **straight ahead**. Notice the handsome Stone County courthouse on the left. Galena, home of Congressman Dewey Short and Vance Randolph, was named for the lead ore “galena,” now Missouri’s state mineral. There has been some lead ore mined in the James River Basin, especially in the area around Pearson Creek southeast of Springfield. But this area has much less galena than the Tri-State Mining District of Missouri, Oklahoma and Kansas west of here.

36.2 Turn **right** at the **N.W. corner of square**.

36.2 At the **stop sign**, go **straight**.

36.5 Arrive back at 413/248. Go **straight across main highway onto Camp Clark Hill Road**.

37.0 There are good views of the James River valley on the right.

37.8 At the road junction, stay **left** at Y onto **Camp Clark Hill Road**.

39.0 At the **Y-junction**, stay **right on Camp Clark Hill Road**.

39.2 At the stop sign at the junction of **AA Highway**, turn **right**.

40.8 Cross Wheeler Branch bridge, then immediately turn **left on Wheeler Branch Road**.

42.3 At **Cave Spring Road**, turn **left**.

42.4 There is a big cave opening on the left, off the road behind the house. At one time, ponds here were used to raise trout, using the cold water from Cave Spring. Spring water in the James River Basin, at about a year-round 59 degrees, is perfect for raising trout, a cold-water species. However, trout are not native to the Ozarks.

42.9 At the road junction, turn **right** onto **Mural Road**.

43.4 At the 3-way road junction, take the **far right** onto **Quail Spur Road**.

44.3 At the road junction, go **straight across on Quail Spur Road**.

45.6 At the road junction, turn **left** onto **Swinging Bridge Road**.

46.4 At the road junction, turn **right** onto **Swinging Bridge Road**.

47.6 There is a hard left turn.

48.3 At **Grisham Ford Road**, turn **right**.



48.4 Cross Crane Creek. Wire Road Conservation Area, a fishermen’s access, is on the right. Crane Creek is a unique fishing stream. Here, fishermen angle for the “McCloud” strain of red-band rainbow trout, first released into Crane Creek from the federal hatchery in Neosho in the 1890s. The trout sub-species was originally brought to Missouri from the McCloud River hatchery in northern California. The McCloud population in Crane Creek is now self-sustaining, meaning that they are successfully breeding and raising young in the wild. This is one of only eight small creeks in Missouri where this is happening. These “wild” trout are very wary when compared with hatchery-raised fish, so are highly prized by anglers. Crane Creek is also home to a healthy population of poisonous “water moccasins,” or cottonmouth snakes, so be careful if you decide to walk along the banks or fish here. However, it is illegal to kill any snake in Missouri unless it is near a house or populated area.

49.1 At the stop sign, **turn left** on **BB Highway**.

49.7 Crane city limit sign

49.8 There is a hard left on BB Highway.

50.6 At the stop sign for junction **413/265**, turn **left**.

50.8 Turn **right into Crane City Park**. This park is very handsome and nicely maintained, with Crane Creek running through the middle of it. On the right is the large building that once hosted the “Crane Broiler Festival,” featuring locally raised chickens. The poultry industry is thriving in the James River Basin, but now most birds are raised in

houses in the watershed of Flat Creek, a James River Tributary farther to the west. There are scores of big houses near Cassville on Flat Creek. Many houses are also in the Shoal Creek watershed, just to the west of the James River Basin divide. The application of poultry litter (the bedding materials and wastes from chickens) to the land has in some cases created water quality problems when runoff has washed it into the stream. Today, there are better rules in place to properly manage this waste. Turn around and go back to the park entrance and **turn left onto the highway**, back into Crane.

51.0 **At sharp left turn on 413, go straight up the hill on Commerce St.**

51.4 Turn **left** at **Iris Street**.

51.6 At the stop sign at **Mockingbird Street**, turn **left**.

51.7 At the stop sign at **Marble Road**, turn **right** to head out of Crane.

52.1 At **Billy Joe Road**, turn **right**.

53.0 Cross the McCord Branch on a low-water bridge (there is no sign).

53.7 At the T-junction with **Blackjack School Road**, turn **left**.

54.2 At the junction with **Ozark Road**, turn **left**.

54.4 At the stop sign at **A Highway**, turn **right**.

56.9 There is a bridge over the creek in downtown Hurley and scenic falls on Spring Creek to the left. A mill was once located here. A few miles upstream is Brown Spring, where a small dam once impounded the spring water. The town hosted a prominent resort with trout fishing before a flood took out the buildings.

58.6 There is a hard left turn on the highway.

59.1 At the junction with Highway K, turn **right, to stay on A Highway**.

60.0 Cross Dry Crane Creek.

61.4 At the junction with AA Highway, continue **straight on A Highway**.



61.9 At **Winfree Road**, turn **left**.

62.7 At the stop sign at T-junction with **Kimberlin Mill Road**, turn **right**.

64.0 There are the ruins of a mill dam and Kimberlin Mill on the left. The mill pond is fed by several springs upstream. Mills were often constructed along spring branches. Springs had certain advantages for millers. Spring flows, compared to rivers, were fairly consistent. Also, with their constant temperatures, springs did not freeze up in wintertime as rivers often did.

64.1 At **Silver Lake Road**, turn **left**.

64.2 There is a Spring house on the right. Spring houses are commonly seen in the Ozarks. These served to protect the family's source of drinking water, but were also food storage facilities and family refrigerators. Spring houses were usually made of rock, brick or concrete, but in the early days many were made of wood.

64.8 Cross Silver Lake Branch on the slab.

65.3 At the junction with Union Ridge Road, go straight ahead. Beautiful Silver Lake, a spring-fed pond, is on the right.

66.4 At the stop sign at **Possum Trot Road**, turn **right**.

67.4 At the stop sign at **M Highway**, turn **right**.

67.9 At the junction with **N Highway**, turn **left**.

73.0 At the stop sign at the junction with **14 Highway**, turn **right**.

73.6 Cross the James River on high bridge.

73.9 Delaware Town Access, reached from road on left, is maintained by Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). From about 1806 to the 1820s, Delaware Indians lived along the river here. This large, temporary Indian village ran for about a mile along the James River. By 1829, the Delaware Tribe had ceded all of their lands in Missouri and moved further west. This access is about 15 miles below the dam at Lake Springfield. From Delaware Town Access, it is a 6.5-mile float to Shelvin' Rock, the next MDC access downriver

76.4 There is a large array of solar panels on the right.

78.6 Return to Highway 160 in Nixa. End tour.

