Sacramento River Boating Information
Balls Ferry to Red Bluff

Character: The Sacramento River cuts deep into lava flows through Chinese Rapid and scenic Iron Canyon.
Location: Between Redding, CA and Red Bluff, CA
Craft: Canoes, kayaks, dories, rafts, and shallow draft power boats
Length: 33 miles
Average run time: 9-12 hours, often done over two days
Class: I and II
Skill Level: Advanced Beginner
Average gradient: 3 feet per mile
Optimum flow: 6,000-12,000 cubic feet per second
Water Source: Lake Shasta and the Trinity River Diversion
Maps: USGS 7.5" maps - Balls Ferry, Bend, and Red Bluff East and BLM map - Red Bluff, CA

Hazards: This section of the Sacramento River has strong currents through bedrock and water temperature can be extremely cold (always below 58°) - swimming is not advised. Beware of jet skis and water skiers on Lake Red Bluff.

Overview: The deceptively calm surface cloaks the river's strength. The BLM manages 7 miles of land between Balls Ferry and Red Bluff. Permitted activities include hiking, picnicking, camping, and wildlife watching. The Sacramento is famous for great salmon, steelhead and trout fishing. Other local wildlife includes river otters, ringtail cats, black tail deer, red-tailed hawks, osprey, and bobcats.
The mouth of Inks Creek and three-quarters of a mile above and below the mouth are closed to camping. From mid-May to mid September, the closed gates of Red Bluff Diversion Dam form Lake Red Bluff.

Paddling: Fifty yards below the Balls Ferry boat ramp, a riffle stretches across the channel stranding logs at the center. Beyond, the Sacramento River continues its fast flow in the wide tree lined channel. Two miles downstream, where the channel narrows a little, Reading Island historical site occupies the terrace along a cut right bank. This BLM site provides day use facilities and group camping by permit. Hundreds of oaks have been planted to restore the once dense riparian habitat. The best landing spot is at the downstream confluence with little Anderson Creek.

The BLM manages the land along the right bank of the Sacramento River upstream of Anderson Creek, known as Reading Island. A group camp site is available via a BLM permit at Reading Island. Additionally, a large gravel bar sits opposite the mouth of Cottonwood Creek. Enjoy the view upstream where snow capped 14, 450-foot Mt. Shasta gleams 70 miles to the north. Below Cottonwood Creek, the lava beds intermittently emerge to obscure the view. Two miles farther, Battle Creek joins the Sacramento from the slopes of Mt. Lassen. In 1998, Battle Creek gained the distinction of having diversion dams removed.

Directions: Balls Ferry-from I-5 Cottonwood Exit (Gas point road), go east 0.9 miles on 4th Street to Balls Ferry Road, then take Balls Ferry Road left (parallel to the railroad tracks) 3.5 miles to the intersection with Ash Creek Road. Follow Ash Creek Road 1.2 miles across the bridge to the access and boat ramp downstream of the bridge. Alternatively, from Anderson take the I-5 exit to Balls Ferry Road east, or the Deschutes Road exit east 2.0 miles where it intersects Balls Ferry Road and then turns southeast. Follow Balls Ferry Road 3.0 miles to Ash Creek Road and the bridge.

Historical Reading Island is 5.4 miles east of Cottonwood at the end of Adobe Road. Adobe Road meets Balls Ferry Road 0.1east of the point where the road and railroad separate, and 1.4 miles west of the Ash Creek Road junction. The concrete boat ramp is unusable to all but the most determined paddler due to dense aquatic vegetation and shallow water in the slough leading to the river. The downstream tip of the island offers a fair landing site, but is 0.5 mile from the parking area.

Barge Hole Fishing Access is an unimproved unmarked road and large gravel bar suitable for hand launching and camping. From Jelly's Ferry bridge continue another 2.4 miles along Jelly's Ferry Road up and down the hill until the road comes close to the river. Look for a dirt road toward the river. Expect to walk or use four wheel drive on the gravel bars.

Jelly's Ferry Road can be reached from the south by continuing 4.5 miles on Jelly's Ferry Road past the Bend Ferry Road junction. This BLM day use area provides access for hand launch water craft.

Bend Bridge can be reached from I-5 north of Red Bluff by exiting at Jelly's Ferry Road. Follow Jelly's Ferry Road northeast 2.7 miles to Bend Ferry Road then 0.3 miles to the bridge and the launching ramp.

Information and Camping: For information regarding BLM lands including camping, contact the BLM Redding Field Office at 530-224-2100 or look online at http://www.ca.blm.gov/redding.

Sacramento River Boating Information
Red Bluff to Woodson Bridge

Character: Swift currents and wide horizons make this an attractive float trip
Location: South of Red Bluff, CA
Craft: Canoes, kayaks, dories, rafts, and shallow draft power boats
Length: 25 miles
Average run time: About 6-8 hours
Class: I
Skill Level: Beginner
Average gradient: 3 feet per mile
Optimum flow: 5,000-12,000 cubic feet per second at Woodson Bridge
Water Source: Lake Shasta and the Trinity River Diversion
Maps: USGS 7.5" maps - Red Bluff East, Gerber, Los Molinos, and Vina and BLM map - Red Bluff, CA

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Hazards: The summer current is strong. Beware of outboard motor boats that frequently travel the deeper channels. Each year new snags and shifting shoals remake the river channel. Avoid winter flood flows as they often contain floating trees and other debris.

Overview: Wide channels and low banks allow expansive views of Mt. Shasta, the Trinity Alps and Mt. Lassen. Winter flows from the Sacramento's many tributaries move the channel frequently, creating new oxbows and cutoffs. A float channel one year may be a sandbar the next year.

Several units of the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge protect and restore 9 miles of waterfowl and fish habitats along the west bank between Craig Creek and the mouth of Elder Creek. Easy to see summer species include osprey, turkey vultures, red tail hawks, and some bald eagles. Woodson Bridge State Recreation Area is a 142 acre oak woodland park nestled along the Sacramento River. Kopta Slough provides access to boat-in campsites. Adjacent the park is a 328 acre jungle-like riparian forest preserve. Car camp on the east side of the river, 0.5 mile from the Tehama County River park launch ramp.

Paddling: Normal summer flows exceed 10,000 cubic feet per second and give a fast ride of 4 miles per hour. Riffles add some excitement at the bottom end of many gravel bars, particularly near Blackberry Island, Craig Creek, and Sacramento Bar. Todd Island is a very large gravel bar on the left side five miles below Red Bluff. A cutoff from the old river channel, the BLM manages the land. Todd Island is approximately the center of the 9 miles of the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge along this river reach. More big gravel bars are found downstream at the mouth of Butler Slough and at Sacramento Bar.

Directions: Lake Red Bluff Recreation Area is adjacent the Red Bluff Diversion Dam. From I-5, take the Red Bluff exit for CA 36. Go east on CA 36, then turn right onto Sale Lane by the stop light and fast food places. Follow Sale Lane south 2 miles to the Lake Red Bluff launching ramp and parking. Go another 0.5 miles to the launch ramp below the Salmon Plaza and diversion dam. From mid-September through mid-May the gates are open to allow fish migration. When the gates are completely open, the dam is navigable, other conditions permitting.

Mill Creek access is 0.2 miles upstream of the Tehama Bridge. Aramayo Way connects the bridge to CA 99. Go north on CA 99 for 0.2 miles to the Tehama and Vina Road. Turn west on Tehama and Vina Road for 1.8 miles. Immediately past the ballpark, turn right to Mill Creek Park. If you go too far, the Tehama and Vina Road will reconnect with Aramayo Way.

Tehama County River Park and Woodson Bridge State Recreation Area are 6 miles east of I-5 from the South Avenue exit (first exit south of Corning). Follow South Ave. and the signs to Woodson Bridge State Park. At the east end of the bridge, the county park with the launch ramp, is immediately downstream of Tehama County Road A9. Woodson Bridge State Recreation Area car camping is on the north side of A9 opposite the County Park. The bridge is 3.5 miles west of CA 99.

Camping: To arrange use of boat-in campsites at Woodson Bridge State Recreation Area call 530-839-2112. For camping information at the Red Bluff Diversion dam, call the USFS Area Manager at 530-527-2813.