

Red Rock Water Trail

Welcome to the Lake Red Rock Water Trail!

The Des Moines River basin begins in Minnesota and extends through Iowa and joins the Mississippi River at Keokuk, Iowa. Red Rock Dam, completed in 1969, controls the water flow of the Des Moines River that creates Lake Red Rock. The lake, a flood control reservoir, is 12.5 miles long, and with a water surface area of 15,250 acres, it is Iowa's largest lake. The normal pool elevation is 742 ft above sea level. As well as flood control and public recreation, Lake Red Rock also provides important natural wildlife habitat.

Wildlife Viewing

Paddling Lake Red Rock offers excellent opportunities to see some of Iowa's wildlife in their natural habitat. Numerous mammals, reptiles, amphibians, freshwater clams (mussels), and insects make their home in and along the lake. Bats are often seen in the evenings flying over the lake feeding on various insects. If you are lucky you may also see a mink, beaver, muskrat, or river otter swimming along the shoreline.

The oak hickory forests dotted throughout the area hold many species of birds including scarlet and summer tanagers, yellow-billed cuckoos, an array of warblers, and even an occasional pileated woodpecker. Wild turkey, belted kingfisher, and several species of gulls, swallows and terns are also commonly seen around the lake. Acadian flycatchers, red-headed woodpeckers, and Bell's vireo can be spotted along the shores of Elk Rock East where you will also find the Osprey Hack Tower. Lake Red Rock is part of a project to reintroduce osprey to Iowa and many osprey have been released from the tower. Other raptors at Lake Red Rock include bald eagles, northern harriers, barred owls, and short-eared owls. In the fall the lake is dotted with a white celebration of pelicans, snowy egrets, and great egrets as well as a multitude of other migrating water birds. Of course, the important turkey vulture can be found in the rocky outcroppings and small cave-like crevices around Lake Red Rock.

We hope you enjoy viewing the diverse wildlife at Lake Red Rock, but please do not harm any of the wildlife or disturb their nests or dens.

Fishing

There are numerous fish species found in Lake Red Rock. The most abundant game fish are the carp, catfish, crappie, bluegill, largemouth bass, walleye, and white and hybrid striped bass. Fishing can be a fun challenge because the changes in water depth cause fish to move as shorelines change and different structures have altered desirability. In addition, visibility through the water can be limited due to suspended sediment. Fishing at Lake Red Rock can be very good either from boats or shore.

Gladys Black Eagle Refuge

The Gladys Black Eagle Refuge, located just east of the Red Rock Dam, is a 38 acre refuge that holds historic Bald Eagle roosting trees along the Des Moines River. In addition to the eagles the area offers a diverse number of other bird species. The Refuge was dedicated in 2004 in honor of 'Iowa's Bird Lady', Gladys Black.

Cultural History

The Indians called the beautiful red sandstone outcrops along the Des Moines River "Painted Rocks." When the white settlers moved into the area, they called it "Red Rock". The last groups of Indians to occupy the land were the Sac and the Meskwaki tribes, although it is thought that earlier the Ioways inhabited this area.

In 1842 the Sac and Meskwaki Indian Tribes ceded 12 million acres in Iowa, including what is now most of Lake Red Rock, to the U.S. Government, thus creating the 'Red Rock Line' – a boundary separating Indian territory from the white settlers. The pioneer town of Red Rock was located along this western edge of 'civilization' and was once a boisterous frontier town.

Oral tradition supports that a giant sycamore tree, located near this line, was a trading area where Indians and white fur traders met to barter goods. The tree was 84 ft tall with a 40 ft circumference, and was estimated to be 400-500 years old; it was the second largest sycamore in the country. Often referred to as the 'Peace Tree', its stump can still be seen rising through the water west of the Mile-Long Bridge.

During its existence from 1843 – 1969 the town of Red Rock embraced a variety commercial enterprises including quarrying. The deposits of red sandstone that surrounded the town were thought to be some of the most beautiful stone in America. The rock, which gets its color from iron oxide, was quarried from the Painted Rocks area in the 1890s to be used for the State Capital that was to be built in Iowa City. The squared off box-like cuts presently seen in the Painted Rocks cliffs are left from those quarrying efforts. When it became evident that the red sandstone was too soft for most building purposes the quarries closed. Today the chiseled red bluffs are enjoyed as an area of beauty, color and history.

Historical Facts and Features

- ✦ Lake Red Rock was the first to receive river otters in 1985 marking the beginning of a statewide project to restore these otters to Iowa's waterways. Today river otter can be found throughout Iowa.
- ✦ Horn's Ferry Bridge, located below the Lake Red Rock Dam, was Marion County's first wagon bridge over the Des Moines River. Built in 1881 it was a pivotal link in the county's commercial and transportation network. Today what remains of the bridge serves as an observation point for viewing wintering bald eagles.
- ✦ The Cordova Tower, a 106' observation tower located in Cordova Park, can be seen across the lake and provides a point of reference for paddlers. The tower was originally used as a water tower and can be climbed for a panoramic view of the lake.
- ✦ The town of Red Rock had a reputation as "a bustling, lawless river frontier town in the 1840s." The town later became a significant commercial center on the Des Moines River with a population of about 250 by the 1870s. The famous deputy US Marshal Wyatt Earp spent his early childhood in nearby Pella, Iowa at the time of the Civil War and was reputed to have visited the town.

Agencies & Organizations



Made possible through the efforts of the following:

- ✦ U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
- ✦ Iowa DNR Water Trails Program
- ✦ Marion County Conservation Board
- ✦ Iowa National Heritage Foundation
- ✦ Red Rock Lake Association

Contact Information

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
515-281-5145
www.iowadnr.gov

U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (Lake Red Rock)
641-828-7522 Office (Non-Emergency)
641- 891-4869 Corps Lead Ranger on Duty (Non-Emergency)
<http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/visitors/projects.cfm?Id=B515070>

Red Rock Lake Association
www.redrocklakeassociation.org

Marion County Conservation Board
641-828-2213
<http://co.marion.ia.us/offices/conservation/index.htm>

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
<http://www.inhf.org/>

Central Iowa Paddlers
www.paddleiowa.org

To find the Daily Lake Levels and Dam Outflow:

641-828-7522
www.rivergages.com

Emergency

FIRE-MEDICAL-POLICE: 911
Marion County Sheriff (Non-emergency): 641-828-2220
Pella Regional Health Center/Hospital: 641-628-3150
Knoxville Hospitals and Clinics: 641-842-2151

Camping

For camping information concerning the following campsites contact:

Army Corps of Engineers (641-828-7522):

- ✦ Whitebreast Recreation Area
- ✦ Wallashuck Recreation Area
- ✦ North Overlook Recreation Area
- ✦ Howell Station Recreation Area
- ✦ Ivan's Recreation Area
- ✦ Hickory Ridge

Iowa DNR (641-842-6008)/www.iowadnr.gov:
Elk Rock State Park

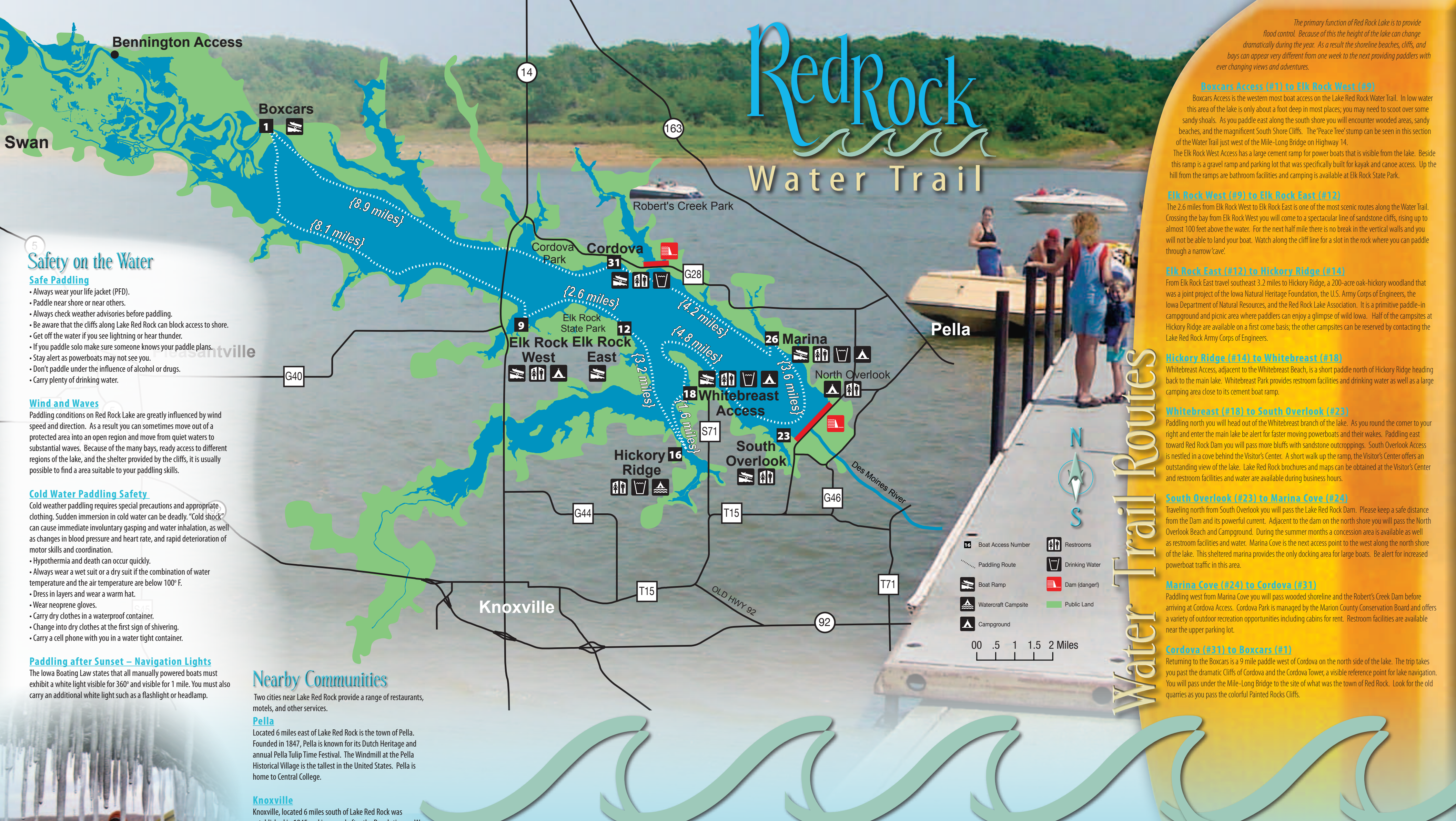
Cabins

Cordova Cabins (641-627-5935)/ cordova@dishmail.net
Horn's Ferry Hideaway (641-780-9440)/ www.hornsferryhideaway.com

Geology of Lake Red Rock

Sandstone cliffs around the lake formed from the stacking, burial and hardening of sandbars that formed along the courses of rivers that flowed across Iowa some 200 million years ago during the Pennsylvanian Period of earth history. Due to its hardness, the sandstone resisted geological erosion and now stands up on today's landscape as bluffs and cliffs. Gently sloping and low-lying areas between the sandstone bluffs are underlain by softer shale that accumulated as water-borne silt deposits in the floodplains associated with those ancient rivers. Pleistocene glaciers later advanced over the Pennsylvanian bedrock of sandstone and shale, covering it with a thin layer of clayey and pebbly till. Finally, as the glaciers melted, a thick layer of silt blown from distant river floodplains (called "loess") settled onto the glacial till to form the uppermost layer in today's Red Rock landscape. Watch for the layering of bedrock, till, and loess as you travel along the lakeshore.

Fossils can be spotted along the lakeshore by sharp-eyed visitors. Cylindrical tree trunks can occasionally be seen embedded in sandstone cliffs, representing logs that fell into the Pennsylvanian rivers and were buried under sandbars. Fossils of scale-trees, horsetail reeds, lycopods, and ferns can often be observed weathering out of low muddy banks of shale, representing the remains of plants that once grew in ancient floodplain forests. Collecting of fossils along the lakeshore is not permitted, so enjoy any you discover but leave them in place for the future visitors to appreciate!



Safety on the Water

Safe Paddling

- Always wear your life jacket (PFD).
- Paddle near shore or near others.
- Always check weather advisories before paddling.
- Be aware that the cliffs along Lake Red Rock can block access to shore.
- Get off the water if you see lightning or hear thunder.
- If you paddle solo make sure someone knows your paddle plans.
- Stay alert as powerboats may not see you.
- Don't paddle under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Carry plenty of drinking water.

Wind and Waves

Paddling conditions on Red Rock Lake are greatly influenced by wind speed and direction. As a result you can sometimes move out of a protected area into an open region and move from quiet waters to substantial waves. Because of the many bays, ready access to different regions of the lake, and the shelter provided by the cliffs, it is usually possible to find a area suitable to your paddling skills.

Cold Water Paddling Safety

- Cold weather paddling requires special precautions and appropriate clothing. Sudden immersion in cold water can be deadly. "Cold shock" can cause immediate involuntary gasping and water inhalation, as well as changes in blood pressure and heart rate, and rapid deterioration of motor skills and coordination.
- Hypothermia and death can occur quickly.
 - Always wear a wet suit or a dry suit if the combination of water temperature and the air temperature are below 100° F.
 - Dress in layers and wear a warm hat.
 - Wear neoprene gloves.
 - Carry dry clothes in a waterproof container.
 - Change into dry clothes at the first sign of shivering.
 - Carry a cell phone with you in a water tight container.

Paddling after Sunset – Navigation Lights

The Iowa Boating Law states that all manually powered boats must exhibit a white light visible for 360° and visible for 1 mile. You must also carry an additional white light such as a flashlight or headlamp.

Nearby Communities

Two cities near Lake Red Rock provide a range of restaurants, motels, and other services.

Pella

Located 6 miles east of Lake Red Rock is the town of Pella. Founded in 1847, Pella is known for its Dutch Heritage and annual Pella Tulip Time Festival. The Windmill at the Pella Historical Village is the tallest in the United States. Pella is home to Central College.

Knoxville

Knoxville, located 6 miles south of Lake Red Rock was established in 1845 and is named after the Revolutionary War hero General Knox. Knoxville is the home of the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame and Museum. This is the world's only museum dedicated to sprint car racing.

Help Keep the Lake Clean

Always carry a trash bag in your kayak or canoe while paddling the lake. Mesh bags work better than plastic bags in wet environments. Practice carry-in/carry-out with all of the items that you bring with you. In addition to your own items, it is encouraged that you practice a water-trail version of 'leave-no-trace' by picking up any litter that you see along your route. Plastic items like baggies, water bottles, and fishing line are especially dangerous to wildlife. Garbage cans are not always available at boat ramps so it is best to take the trash home for disposal or recycling.

Contact the Lake Red Rock Army Corps of Engineers to learn about opportunities to volunteer for clean-up events.

Access Point Summary

Access Name	Access Number	Mileage to Next Access	Camping	GPS Coordinates
Boxcars	#1	8.1	No	N41 27.967/W93 12.650
Elk Rock West	#9	2.6	Modern	N41 24.160/W93 06.132
Elk Rock East	#12	3.2	No	N41 24.061/W93 03.619
Hickory Ridge	#16	1.6	Primitive	N41 21.605/W93 02.027
Whitebreast	#18	4.8	Modern	N41 22.923/W93 01.915
South Overlook	#23	3.6	No	N41 21.918/W92 59.628
Marina	#26	4.2	No	N41 23.862/W93 00.042
Cordova	#31	8.9	Cabins	N41 25.320/W93 04.027

The primary function of Red Rock Lake is to provide flood control. Because of this the height of the lake can change dramatically during the year. As a result the shoreline beaches, cliffs, and bays can appear very different from one week to the next providing paddlers with ever changing views and adventures.

Boxcars Access (#1) to Elk Rock West (#9)

Boxcars Access is the western most boat access on the Lake Red Rock Water Trail. In low water this area of the lake is only about a foot deep in most places; you may need to scoot over some sandy shoals. As you paddle east along the south shore you will encounter wooded areas, sandy beaches, and the magnificent South Shore Cliffs. The 'Peace Tree' stump can be seen in this section of the Water Trail just west of the Mile-Long Bridge on Highway 14. The Elk Rock West Access has a large cement ramp for power boats that is visible from the lake. Beside this ramp is a gravel ramp and parking lot that was specifically built for kayak and canoe access. Up the hill from the ramps are bathroom facilities and camping is available at Elk Rock State Park.

Elk Rock West (#9) to Elk Rock East (#12)

The 2.6 miles from Elk Rock West to Elk Rock East is one of the most scenic routes along the Water Trail. Crossing the bay from Elk Rock West you will come to a spectacular line of sandstone cliffs, rising up to almost 100 feet above the water. For the next half mile there is no break in the vertical walls and you will not be able to land your boat. Watch along the cliff line for a slot in the rock where you can paddle through a narrow 'cave'.

Elk Rock East (#12) to Hickory Ridge (#16)

From Elk Rock East travel southeast 3.2 miles to Hickory Ridge, a 200-acre oak-hickory woodland that was a joint project of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and the Red Rock Lake Association. It is a primitive paddle-in campground and picnic area where paddlers can enjoy a glimpse of wild Iowa. Half of the campsites at Hickory Ridge are available on a first come basis; the other campsites can be reserved by contacting the Lake Red Rock Army Corps of Engineers.

Hickory Ridge (#16) to Whitebreast (#18)

Whitebreast Access, adjacent to the Whitebreast Beach, is a short paddle north of Hickory Ridge heading back to the main lake. Whitebreast Park provides restroom facilities and drinking water as well as a large camping area close to its cement boat ramp.

Whitebreast (#18) to South Overlook (#23)

Paddling north you will head out of the Whitebreast branch of the lake. As you round the corner to your right and enter the main lake be alert for faster moving powerboats and their wakes. Paddling east toward Red Rock Dam you will pass more bluffs with sandstone outcroppings. South Overlook Access is nestled in a cove behind the Visitor's Center. A short walk up the ramp, the Visitor's Center offers an outstanding view of the lake. Lake Red Rock brochures and maps can be obtained at the Visitor's Center and restroom facilities and water are available during business hours.

South Overlook (#23) to Marina Cove (#24)

Traveling north from South Overlook you will pass the Lake Red Rock Dam. Please keep a safe distance from the Dam and its powerful current. Adjacent to the dam on the north shore you will pass the North Overlook Beach and Campground. During the summer months a concession area is available as well as restroom facilities and water. Marina Cove is the next access point to the west along the north shore of the lake. This sheltered marina provides the only docking area for large boats. Be alert for increased powerboat traffic in this area.

Marina Cove (#24) to Cordova (#31)

Paddling west from Marina Cove you will pass wooded shoreline and the Robert's Creek Dam before arriving at Cordova Access. Cordova Park is managed by the Marion County Conservation Board and offers a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities including cabins for rent. Restroom facilities are available near the upper parking lot.

Cordova (#31) to Boxcars (#1)

Returning to the Boxcars is a 9 mile paddle west of Cordova on the north side of the lake. The trip takes you past the dramatic Cliffs of Cordova and the Cordova Tower, a visible reference point for lake navigation. You will pass under the Mile-Long Bridge to the site of what was the town of Red Rock. Look for the old quarries as you pass the colorful Painted Rocks Cliffs.

The beauty of our land is a natural resource. Its preservation is linked to the inner prosperity of the human spirit...Our land will be attractive tomorrow only if we organize for action and rebuild and reclaim the beauty we inherited.

—Lyndon Baines Johnson, *President of the United States*