



Wild and Scenic Rivers: *History, Culture, and Paleontology*

Cultural, historic, and paleontological resources found along certain Wild and Scenic Rivers tell stories about our human and Earth's evolutionary past. While over 31% of Wild and Scenic Rivers have outstanding cultural resources, paleontological features are much rarer.

Our Human Past

We can learn a lot about the people that lived along rivers based on what they left behind. These cultural resources are important to understanding the different uses of rivers. Some examples of cultural and historic resources include structures, artifacts, and evidence of important historic events and past land use.

Rivers with Outstanding Cultural Values



Rio Icacos, Puerto Rico

Pre-1490 petroglyphs as well as ceramic shards from the time of Spanish occupation have been found along the Rio Icacos. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps built trails, bridges, and other structures around the river.

Photo: Tim Palmer



St. Croix River, MN & WI

People have lived along the St. Croix River for more than 12,000 years. Native Americans harvested wild rice and fish from the river, and later settlers used the St. Croix to transport timber, furs, and other goods. Starting in the 1800s, river recreation increased in popularity. Conservation efforts started in the 1890s when nearby state parks were created.

Photo: National Park Service
Riegel Collection



Upper Delaware River, PA & NY

The Roebling Bridge opened in 1849 as an aqueduct for canal boats to cross the Delaware River. Later, the bridge was restored for vehicles and pedestrians. Today, the Roebling Bridge remains one of the oldest surviving suspension bridges. It was designed by John Roebling who is best known for his design of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Photo: National Park Service



Noatak River, AK

Arrowheads, tools, and carvings came from the people that crossed into North America from Asia thousands of years ago. Groups living in the area fished for salmon and used other resources of the river valley. Today, Native Alaskan tribes still use salmon from the Noatak as a primary food source.

Photo: Freshwaters Illustrated



Wilson Creek, NC

Historic settlements built along Wilson Creek were part of the logging industry. In the 1930s and 1940s, the town of Mortimore hosted the Camp Grandfather Mountain Civilian Conservation Corps.

Photo: Tim Palmer

Photo by Craig Blacklock



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Verde River, AZ

Over time, humans changed the way they used the Verde River floodplains. The oldest sites were used by hunter-gatherer societies thousands of years ago. Other sites show evidence of groups that raised and drove livestock through the area.

Photo: Tim Palmer



Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers, MA

The Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers are important in American history and literature. The first battle of the Revolutionary War took place on the Old North Bridge in Concord. In the 1800s, the three rivers were featured in the works of famous authors including Hawthorne, Emerson, and Thoreau.

Photo: OARS



Owyhee River, ID & OR

Canyons surrounding the Owyhee River gave shelter to the Shoshone and Paiute tribes. Petroglyphs and shrines give insights into their uses of the river. Members of these tribes still use the area for hunting, fishing, praying, and ceremonies.

Photo: Bureau of Land Management

Earth's Evolutionary Past

Paleontology is the study of fossilized plants and animals. Fossils help us understand the history of life on Earth. A few Wild and Scenic Rivers have remarkable fossils that tell the story about life millions of years ago.

Rivers with Outstanding Paleontology



John Day River, OR

The rocks around the John Day River are a chronology of life over the last 44 million years. This area is rich with plant and animal fossils including the remains of palm and banana trees as well as crocodiles, early horses, and rodents. Many fossils are on display at the Thomas Condon Paleontology Center.

Photo: Bureau of Land Management



Niobrara River, NE

Fossils around the Niobrara River that are between 2 million and 23 million years old help scientists understand the history of the Great Plains. Mastodons and North American rhinos (fossil shown above) are just two amazing species whose fossils are found here.

Photo: National Park Service