

Big Niangua River Trail

The Indigenous Osage People named this river the Niangua which translates to Big Winding Stream of Many Springs.

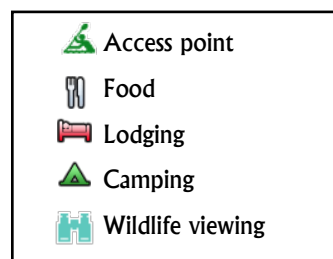



The project was jointly sponsored by Lake of the Ozarks Watershed Alliance (LOWA), the Lake of the Ozarks chapter of the Missouri Master Naturalist Program with advisors from the Missouri Department of Conservation, and Ameren Missouri; in partnership with Missouri State Parks, a division of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.



The Big Niangua River Trail starts at Ha Ha Tonka State Park. The first four miles are lake and require paddling. For a river float try an upriver access.




- Distances
 - Whistle Bridge to Ha Ha Tonka 13.3 miles
 - Mother Nature’s Family Side to Ha Ha Tonka 11.7 miles
 - Mother Nature’s Wild Side to Ha Ha Tonka 9.5 miles
 - Casa de Loco to Ha Ha Tonka 6.2 miles
- The Lake of the Ozarks and Niangua River are public waterways available for fishing and boating. However, the shoreline and stream bank above the high waterline is privately owned. Trespass laws do apply. Be considerate of the property rights of others.
- Public access points are marked on the map. Commercial access points may charge fees for boat rentals or the use of ramps; contact them for details.
- Missouri law prohibits glass containers and styrofoam coolers in canoes and kayaks.
- Don’t forget your fishing pole and permit. Fishing regulations on Lake of the Ozarks vary somewhat from those on the Niangua River. For complete fishing regulations, go to mdc.mo.gov/fishing.
- Be safe not sorry. Know the river conditions before floating. Even the flat water portion of this trail can be hazardous in times of flood. Wear proper flotation devices. Use caution around low water crossings and downed trees. River level and flow conditions for this section of the Niangua River are available at: waterdata.usgs.gov/mo/nwis/uv?site_no=06923940
- The terms “north bank” and “south bank” of the river refer to those banks of the river that border the areas north and south of the Big Niangua River, regardless of the compass direction of the bank at that point in the river.



A. Ha Ha Tonka State Park kayak steps (0.0 South bank)  The kayak steps and launch rail provide a safe and convenient way to access the Big Niangua River Trail and the Lake while protecting the shoreline from erosion. At the upper end of the cove Missouri’s 12th largest spring flows into the lake. Ha Ha Tonka Spring has an average output of 48 million gallons of water a day. On the south side of the cove, all that remains of a grist mill is the stone raceway and an old mill stone. Take State Highway D to Tonka Spring Road; turn left from the spring parking lot at the Lakeside Picnic Shelter to reach the kayak steps.

B. Spencer Creek and Bank Branch (0.6 South bank) Spencer Creek and Bank Branch join with the Niangua River in this area. These two spring-fed creeks can be navigated a short distance. Between 1830 and 1835, a gang of counterfeiters operated in this area using the steep terrain and local caves to hide their operations. Spencer Creek is named for one of those settlers and the other creek was called the Bank Branch because this is where they “deposited” their counterfeit money aboard barges for the trip east.

Propeller driven boats will find it difficult to navigate upstream from this point because of areas of shallow water and the possibility of submerged logs.

C. Sugarloaf Vineyard (1.3 North bank)    Sugarloaf Vineyard offers an outdoor venue with wine tasting, food, music, and more. The vineyard is just upstream from Ha Ha Tonka State Park on the calm waters of the Big Niangua where visitors can paddle and enjoy wildlife viewing. Sugarloaf offers kayak and paddleboard rentals as well as two vacation home rentals. End your paddle with a taste of 8 types of Missouri wines and the house pairings; either at the unique pavilion, or the waterfront picnic grounds. No outside food or drink is allowed in the park. 66 Feline Lane, Camdenton, MO 65020, 573-873-2020, www.sugarloafwinery.com.

D. Onyx Cave (2.0 North bank) Onyx mining in Missouri caves was tried as an industry in the late 20th century. Many caves were mined in anticipation of using the cave onyx in buildings at the 1904 St Louis World’s fair. In 1897 John Bradford carved huge chunks of onyx from a large formation in Onyx Cave called the “Liberty Bell”. The chamber where this formation was mined is now inundated by the Lake of the Ozarks. Today boaters can float a short distance into the cave.

E. Wetland Area (2.1)



At the Lake and along the Niangua, wetlands are characterized by specialized plants like horsetail rush and water willow. Watch for herons, osprey, ducks and geese as well as other aquatic life such as turtles, carp, and gar.

F. Woodlands Park landscape (3.5 South bank)



Ha Ha Tonka State Park has three primary natural communities that work together to form a harmonious mosaic that stretches over 3,700 acres. These natural communities - dry chert woodland, dolomite glade, and upland flatwoods - represent some of the best remaining examples of these environments in Missouri. Managed with prescribed fire and relatively free of non-native species, the park's oak woodlands and glades host a variety of plants and animals that offer park visitors a glimpse of Missouri's pre-settlement landscape.

G. Roofener Tie Chute (4.3 South bank)

The steep hillside on the south bank is Roofener Bluff tie chute, a natural site where cut logs were slid down the hill into the river. The woods were heavily cut in the late 19th century for railroad ties. Photos from the area in the early 20th century showed few trees. Joe Roofener was an early tie-cutter and this bluff bears his family name.

H. Boundary LOZ and BNR (4.8)

This is the accepted boundary between Lake of the Ozarks and the Big Niangua River. From the standpoint of fishing, harvest regulations differ above and below this point. In general, lake regulations are more restrictive than stream regulations. See the Missouri Wildlife Code for complete regulations at mdc.mo.gov/fishing.

I. Slough Area (5.1 North bank)



A slough (pronounced "slew") is a smaller, alternate channel for the river to follow, often formed during flood times as the river cuts new paths. There are many sloughs along this stretch of the Big Niangua which are fun to explore. Sloughs are generally found in areas of islands and are often narrow, providing good fishing and opportunities for wildlife watching.

J. Rodger Ford (6.0)

Before modern bridges were built, early settlers looked for wide, shallow sections to cross or "ford" to the other side of the river. The Rodger family settled this area in the 1840's giving this area their name.

K. Casa de Loco Winery (6.2 North bank)



Ready for a break? Hike up the bluff to the restored remains of a fishing and hunting retreat built in 1930 by industrialist Hugo Urbauer and his wife Ina. Later named the Mozark Club, it was used in much the same way until the 1970's when it became Mozark Health Care Facility, which treated elderly and mentally disabled patients. You can now enjoy wining, dining and overnight accommodations in an updated but still unique setting. Kayaks and canoe rental/shuttle service are available. Shuttle and parking fees may apply for personal kayaks/canoes. 442 Riverbird Lane, Camdenton MO 65020, 573-317-9695, casadelocowinery.com

L. Tie Bank and wetland area (6.5 North bank)

In the 1800s-1900s settlers cut lumber for railroad ties. At this site, cut ties were launched into the river on their way to market. As many as 50,000 ties were stacked at one time and sent down the river in rafts of up to 2,500 ties.

This fast moving shallow "riffle" is caused by a rapid descent in elevation. Clean, clear water and the gravel bottom of the river are important to the aquatic eco-system. It is the nursery for aquatic insects such as mayflies and riffle beetles; also, home to small darters and minnows as well as crayfish. The pools that form as the river levels out become feeding grounds for larger game fish.

M. Left or Right? (6.8 North bank)

When floating down the river, take a minute to look ahead for logjams at this fork in the river. At times, the far left channel at this split in the river provides a short, narrow, fast-flowing, and tricky chute. At other times the far right side may be impassible due to logjams.

N. Gauge House (8.4 South bank)

This old gauge tower was decommissioned in 1969. It was used to gauge the height of the river.

O. Power House (8.7 South bank)

Approach this section of the river with caution staying on the north bank. Constructed in 1929 by Sho-Me Power Electric Cooperative, Tunnel Dam powerhouse is located approximately 6.5 miles downstream from Tunnel Dam and Lake Niangua. Water from Lake Niangua (which is on the other side of the ridge) arrives at the powerhouse through an 800 foot long tunnel constructed through the ridge using manual labor. There is a 40 foot drop in elevation from the surface of the lake (711.5 feet m.s.l.) to the powerhouse which contains two hydro-turbines capable of producing 3 megawatts of electricity.

P. Mother Nature's Riverfront Retreat – Wild Side Access (9.5 South bank)



Mother Nature's "wild side" (located a little over 2 miles from her beach on the "family side") is the takeout for Mother Nature's float trips (site S). They offer safe parking and shuttles for a fee, canoe/kayak rental and camping reservations should be made in advance. The park gates are locked at dusk so plan your trips accordingly.

Q. Flat Rock Hole (10.6 North bank)

One of the many good fishing spots along the Niangua River. Large dolomite outcroppings can be found along the river. They form eddies downstream which make good places to find bass and the occasional walleye. If the fish are not biting catch a short respite as you float this deep, lazy stretch of the river.

R. Nettle Hole (11.4 South bank)

This is another one of those deep, slow pools that might just be the home of a lunker bass, catfish, or walleye.

S. Mother Nature's Riverfront Retreat – Family Side Access (11.7 South bank)

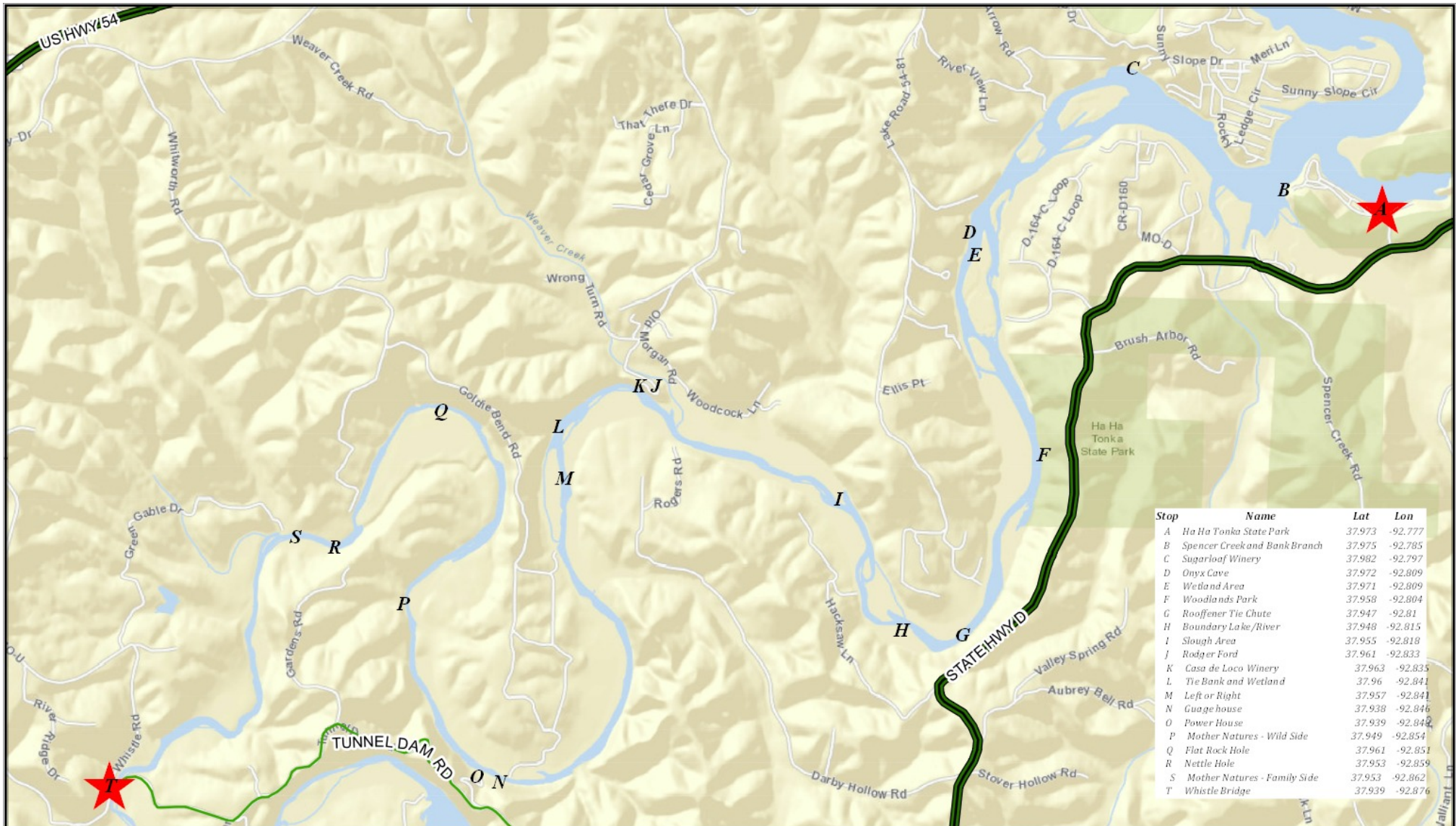


Located 2 miles down-river from the Whistle Bridge, Mother Nature's "family side" at the Tunnel Dam Gardens, offers a boat ramp, a beach for family style picnics, floating, fishing, and camping. They have a convenience store, canoe and kayak rental, shuttle service, shower house, and lodging. Ask about monthly events, family reunions, wedding floats, and retreats. Beach pass fees may apply. Safely park your vehicle/trailer for a fee. Tunnel Dam Gardens 878 Gardens Rd, Macks Creek, MO 65786, (573) 363-5408 www.mothernaturesriverfrontretreat.com.

T. Whistle Bridge (13.3)



Use caution at this low water crossing, commonly referred to as the "Whistle Bridge". This is an access point, but there is no public parking. The Whistle Bridge is located at the junction of Whistle Road and Tunnel Dam Road near Edith, MO off of State Road U which meets Hwy 54 between Camdenton and Macks Creek.



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