

Catawba River Fun Facts

While great American rivers like the Mississippi hold a special place in our imagination, many of us have not yet discovered the story of our own Catawba River. You don't have to float off on a raft like Huck Finn to get to know our river better, just read on for fun facts and trivia.

What can run but never walks?

Has a mouth but never talks, Has a bed but never sleeps, Has a head but never weeps? Answer: A River.

How long is the Catawba River?

The Catawba River flows for 225 miles from the North Carolina Mountains to Lake Wateree in South Carolina. That's like driving back and forth between Rock Hill and Charlotte nine times! At Lake Wateree, the river changes its name, and its water travels another 200 miles or so before reaching the Atlantic Ocean.

Before there were bridges, how did people get across the Catawba River?

Long ago, there were two ways to cross the River — by ford or by ferry. A ford is a shallow place where people, animals and wagons can wade across the river. In bad weather, people might have to wait several days or even weeks until the water was low enough to cross. A ferry was a flat boat or barge which carried people, horses, wagons and later even cars, across the river.

Soldiers from three wars have fought along the Catawba's banks. Can you name the wars?

A Revolutionary War battle was fought at Biggers Ferry in 1780, a Civil War skirmish occurred at the Old Nation Ford Crossing in 1864, and World War II soldiers built a pontoon bridge across the river in 1941 and "fought" to control it as a training exercise. What do all these locations have in common? They are all places where people can cross the river.

Some people call the Catawba River a chain of lakes. How many lakes are part of the Catawba River, and how did they get there?

Eleven lakes are part of the Catawba River, including Lake Wylie, Lake Norman and Mountain Island Lake. People created these lakes by building dams. Dams block most of the water from flowing out of the lake, kind of like the stopper in your bathtub. Lake Norman, the largest lake made by the Catawba River, took three years to fill up after its dam was built. We use the lakes to create electricity, as a playground and as a place to store water for use in our homes and cities.

How much water do people take out of the Catawba River every day?

In 2006, before the drought and water restrictions, we used an average of 420 million gallons of Catawba River water per day. Can you imagine 323 gallon-sized milk jugs all lined up? That's how much water we used for each person in our region every day.

What are some ways you can help the Catawba River?

You can conserve water by taking shorter showers, turning the water off while brushing your teeth and putting up a rain barrel to catch water from your roof. You can plant a rain garden, which will help prevent pollution from washing into the river. Don't dump harmful liquids in the ground, where they will eventually wash into the river!