Lock 10

Google Map Coordinates: 38.97263,-77.16899

Summary Rating

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<th>Pressure</th>
<th>Yellow</th>
<th>Canoe/Kayak Launch</th>
<th>Yellow</th>
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<td>Wading</td>
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<td>Scenery</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<td>Yellow</td>
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Special Regulations

None.

Getting to the Stream

North: From the I-495 Beltway, take either the Cabin John or Clara Barton Parkway south. The Cabin John joins the Clara Barton Parkway. At that junction, swing right to enter the parking lot at 38.97263,-77.16899. You will not have much room to execute the maneuver and need to watch for fast-moving traffic approaching from the right.

South: The parking area at Lock 10 is not accessible from the south. Approaching from the south, follow the George Washington Parkway to where it intersects I-495 and take the exit towards Maryland. From I-495, turn at the Clara Barton exit towards Glen Echo (exit 41) and follow the Clara Barton Parkway south as described above.

The parking area at Lock 10 is fairly large, but fills up quickly on weekends.
Access to the towpath is obvious and easy with no steep hills to negotiate.

The best places to reach the river are a short walk up or downstream.

**Environment and Fish**

Lock 10 is a good place to fish with either spin or fly gear. In general, the shoreline is easy to navigate, accessible and provides opportunities to move out on ledges to keep your backcast with out of the trees. The main terrain feature is a large, long and narrow island called Swainson Island. While it is covered with trees and vegetation, it's not thick to the point of being impenetrable and does not create a significant obstacle preventing you from reaching the river.
You have three basic choices, two are good and one is marginal:

- You can walk downstream a quarter-mile to great-looking water (good)
- You can start fishing near the parking lot (marginal)
- You can walk up to the I-495 bridge near Lock 12 (good)

This is a true angler’s dilemma! So much water, so little time.

**Lower Area**

A quick quarter-mile walk on the towpath puts you at the southern end of Swainson Island. Instead of bushwhacking through the thick vegetation searching for a place to cross over to the island, walk down to 38.97171,-77.16443 where it's easy to cross the muddy flats created when the backwater dries up at the height of summer. The towpath is next to the river and a quick slide down a gentle bank provides direct access to the river via Wades Island. You can fish up or downstream from here -- it's all good since you are in the middle of a rocky area with plenty of ridges surrounding deeper holes.

This is the view of the area that becomes a muddy flat at low water in the summer and allows easy access to the ridge of islands that extend downstream from Lock 10.

From these islands, it's easy to move out into the rock ridges that stretch towards Virginia.

Looking straight out from 38.97171,-77.16443, the main channel is visible beyond Wades Island in the foreground of the picture.

There is a plethora of good rocks to fish in this area.

The Point of Rocks gage was at 1.75 ft and the Little Falls gage as at 3.29 ft when this picture was taken.
You can work out on the various rock ridges in this section and pepper the water for 360°.

Lock 10 is close to the American Legion Bridge. This is a great place to come for afternoon fishing while you wait for the traffic to die down.

At the height of summer, daylight lingers and the bass are active -- a perfect combination for a great end to a tough workday.

This is the view to the southwest towards the eastern tip of Swainson Island (38.97171, -77.16443).

The area immediately downstream of Swainson Island forms a large, shallow backwater lake. Wades Island is to the immediate left of this picture.

The Point of Rocks gage was at 1.51 ft when this picture was taken.

Looking to the left down the southern shoreline of Wades Island, there are numerous rock ridges that provide easy access to the river.

The best place to fish is where the water is moving. Sunfish guard the still pools, but the bass prefer moving water. So, follow the current through the breaks between the rocks and fish the seams.
This picture looks across the river towards Virginia and provides a good view of the Virginia shoreline 0.5 miles upstream of Turkey Run Park.

This is a wider view looking downstream from Wades Island. The river is dotted with good structure comprised of rocky outcroppings connected by underwater ledges.

There are some deep holes here so you should wear a PFD and be careful.

**Middle – Across the Bridge**

Take the trail that joins the towpath near the bridge. Your walk ends at the intersection of several stretches of backwater that retain depth even in the summer. To get to the river, the best approach is to follow the channel to your left until you find a place to cross. Swainson Island has steep sides that require crawling hand over foot up an aggressive pitch if you pick the wrong place. Once on the other side, the broad sweep of the river lies to the front; populated with plenty of rocks peeking up above the surface protected by deep holes and a swirling current.

But, the farther south you walk, the closer you get to the lower area already discussed. It's much easier to walk the quarter-mile to the lower access point on the towpath than beat your way along the backwater behind Swainson Island. However, there are plenty of people who are content to perch on the edge of the backwater or walk over to Swainson Island to fish the deep water on the other side.
When you reach the river from the trail near the bridge across the towpath, this is what you will see at 38.97142, -77.16851.

This is the side channel on the near side of Swainson island. The main river is on the other side of the stand of trees in the distance.

There are a lot of people who fish from the shore in this location.

The backwater area is to the left and remains deep and stagnant until it dries in the summer heat.

Instead of working down the shoreline to the left to dodge around the small extension of the island on the right, stick to the towpath and walk directly to the lower area.

**Lock 12 / I-495 Bridge**

A good option for deep water is to walk 0.6 miles west on the towpath to reach Lock 12 at the I-495 bridge. There is a faint path on the left side of the bridge that leads under the roadway and down to the shore. The area underneath the bridge is open; covered with small rocks with the minimum amount of brush.

The river is particularly deep at this location. If fly fishing, there is room on the rock ledges that extend into the river that allow for an unobstructed backcast. You need a sinking line to get your lure down as far you need to. If using spin gear, employ the full range of lures -- bring a few deep runners that you can fling out into the middle of the river.

From underneath the bridge looking west, you can see the rock outcroppings in the Carderock area another half mile upstream. It's not worth walking from here to there when you realize you have to walk all the way back to Lock 10 when you are ready to go home. It's much easier to park at Carderock and fish the rock outcropping from there. Besides, the shoreline is densely packed with vegetation making travel difficult.
The view downstream is formidable. The dominant structure is a stark cliff that cuts off shoreline access unless you approach from inland. Therefore, walk away from the river to move around the rock cliffs. Locate the ditch (Rocky Run Culvert -- you can see it on the Google satellite view - 38.970946,-77.177753) that joins the river on the eastern side of the bridge. At low flow, the culvert holds stagnant water and shallows out next to the river. The junction is the easiest place to cross without getting your feet wet.

Follow the culvert back towards the towpath to avoid the massive rock structures near the shore to discover the valleys between the rocks that allow you to crawl to the top and then out on the rock ledges. There is plenty of poison ivy, not only here but everywhere along the towpath, and, by itself, is a good reason to stick to the paths where you can.

Once on the ledge, you can gaze down into the depths of a very deep section that is a productive spot to fish. To continue to fish from the shore as you move back towards Lock 10, dodge around the second outcropping and move back to the river. The shoreline thins out and it's fairly easy walking. Use spin gear anywhere downstream given the closeness of the vegetation on the shore.

If you like fishing here, you may conclude that you can shortcut the walk by parking on the shoulder of the Clara Barton next to Lock 12. At that point, the shoulders are wide and grassy with only a shallow ditch separating it from Lock 12 and the towpath. Unfortunately, parking on the shoulder is illegal and if you do that, expect to get a ticket.

This is the view up to Carderock.

At the back of the picture is the key fishing location adjacent to the Billy Goat Trail.

To the left are the bluffs associated with the Scots Run Nature Preserve on the Virginia shoreline.

The Little Falls gage was 3.28 ft.
This is the downstream view from the first rocky protrusion east of the bridge at 38.969219,-77.177989.

The best way to fish this section is from a canoe or kayak given the depth of the water and the lack of easily accessible shoreline structure.

There are two good rock ledges that allow you to fish the deeper water.

This is the perspective looking upstream from the second major rocky outcropping.

The rock ledges are clearly visible in the satellite view on Google maps. Enter 38.969219,-77.177989 and zoom in.

**Bottom line**

This is the best accessible deep water near the towpath. Since the river compresses to squeeze through the narrow channel between Virginia and Maryland underneath the bridge span, the depth allows the large volume of water to push through. Not only does that flow create a hazard for the unwary, it carves out an extremely deep cut that requires plenty of weight on your lure to fish properly.