Welcome to the Upper Delaware

A SPECIAL KIND OF RIVER

The Upper Delaware is a very special river, not only because of the beauty and purity of its free flowing stream but also because of the cultural and environmental flavor of the land around it and the unique management plan designed to protect it. When Congress passed the law creating the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, a new kind of area — one based on co-operation rather than federal ownership — was envisioned. Most of the land would continue to be privately owned. Management of the valley was to be the joint responsibility of local, state, regional and federal agencies.

Although the plan now calls for the National Park Service (N.P.S.) to own minimal acreage within the approximately 79,000 acre corridor, the N.P.S. does provide services beyond the limits of its own property lines. Park rangers enforce the law on the river and cooperate with local authorities on the land adjacent to the river. They respond to visitors in distress providing help ranging from first aid to search and rescue.

Park rangers are also stationed at information kiosks located at public boating access sites on both the Pennsylvania and New York shores to answer questions and distribute information to the public. They are on duty at the N.P.S. Information Center/Bookstore, a facility operated in cooperation with Eastern National Two-Sister Associates, in the Arts Center Building on Main Street in Narrowsburg. The rangers present programs at public boating access sites, at campgrounds, on the river and at other local sites. These programs are free of charge and open to the public (sometimes reservations are required). They include canoeing skills and fishing clinics, walking tours of historic areas, guided canoe trips, safety lectures and audiovisual presentations.

In addition, the N.P.S. on the Upper Delaware is involved in such diverse activities as the river ice monitoring program, training sessions for local emergency response agencies and the sponsorship of traveling art exhibitions.

N.P.S. OFFICES

National Park Service Headquarters
P.O. Box C, Narrowsburg, NY 12764 .......... 717-729-7135

N.P.S. North District Office
Cochecton, NY .......... 914-932-8218

N.P.S. South District Office
Shohola, PA .......... 717-559-7227

N.P.S. Information Center
Narrowsburg, NY .......... 914-252-3947

WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW

Main Street Business

All the settled areas in the valley are rural in character, most too small to be legally classified as villages. Nearly all of them have post office, gas station and general store facilities. Hancock, Callicoon and Narrowsburg have the most commercially developed Main Street areas. Port Jervis, Monticello and Honesdale are the nearest population centers. Visitors to the area should note that some businesses, including gas stations, are closed after 5:00 p.m. daily, and all day on Sundays and holidays.

Accommodations

All campgrounds, hotels, motels and restaurants in the river valley are privately owned. For detailed information, visitors should contact local chambers of commerce.

Transportation

Aside from limited, seasonal bus service into Narrowsburg, there is no public transportation in the valley. Most visitors arrive by car. From Hancock at the north to Port Jervis at the south, New York Route 97 follows the river valley. New York Route 17 (known locally as the Quickway) passes through Hancock as it cuts across southern New York State. For connection with the central part of the valley, leave Route 17 at Monticello and take 17B west to Callicoon. Route 191, linking New England with Pennsylvania, passes through Port Jervis just to the south. Southern and western visitors may leave 191 at Scranton and take Pennsylvania Route 6 to Honesdale. From Honesdale, either Pennsylvania Routes 191 or 652 lead to the valley.

Bridges

Within the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, nine highway bridges cross between New York and Pennsylvania. They are located at Hancock, Lordville, Stalker (Kellams Bridge), Callicoon, Cochecton/Damascus, Skinners Falls, Narrowsburg, Berryville/Shohola and Pond Eddy. The Delaware Aqueduct — known locally as the Roebling Bridge — at Minisink Ford/Lackawaxen is currently open to pedestrian traffic only.

National Park Service summer programs on the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River include cultural and natural history walks, canoeing demonstrations and guided canoe tours. All programs are free and open to the public. Some require advance reservations. For information, call (914) 252-3947.

TAKE TO THE ROAD

Although the best way to see the Upper Delaware is from a boat on the river, there are a number of land routes available for those who prefer four wheels to two paddles.

Route 97, on the New York side of the Delaware, is a well maintained two-lane highway, which passes through the river towns of Hancock, Long Eddy, Hancock, Callicoon/Cochetton, Narrowsburg, Berryville, Pond Eddy, Sparrow Bush and Port Jervis. Coping with such engineering challenges as the rock cut south of Narrowsburg and the valley spans over the Callicoon and Basket Creeks, its opening seemed a long awaited dream come true to local people.

But it was never intended purely for commercial use of local residents. The Souvenir Program for Opening Day, August 30, 1939, made it clear that the road was designed with river watchers in mind: "The greater portion of the highway is built on new ground, very little of the road traversing old roads. The river for the most part is in full view of the motorist and at those sections where the river is not visible it was impossible to construct the road to keep it in full view."

On the Pennsylvania side, river roads are harder to find. No single route parallels the Delaware River. However, several sections of Pennsylvania road do offer intriguing glimpses of the river. The southern portion of Route 191 from Hancock via Stockport to Equinunk is a smooth two-lane highway along the western shore of the river. Unlike the New York route, which reaches the shore only at Port Jervis, Route 191 offers a more intimate closeup look, often only a few feet above the shoreline. Below Equinunk, the route turns inland crossing the hills to Honesdale, Pennsylvania, beyond. Pennsylvania Legislative Route 427, from Lookout, connects 191 to the interstate bridge over the Delaware at Callicoon.

For the more adventurous river watcher, there is also the road south from Damascus, Pennsylvania, ending just across the river from Narrowsburg, New York. Alternately hanging precariously over the river and winding past the charming old hamlets of Damascus and Milroyville, it is a treat for the wanderer with time to spare.

EDDIES AND Rifts

Eddies and rifts are two terms uniquely connected with the Upper Delaware River. You may have identified a rift with a rock fissure or an eddy with a whirlpool. But, here along the Upper Delaware, there are other definitions:

Eddy: a long quiet section of the river between areas of rocky riffles or white water.

Rift: a shallow area of the river often characterized by rough water.
First, there was the river. Then the canal. Then the railroad.

The Delaware Water Gap is a natural gateway for commerce and transportation of goods and people. Long before any of the famous bridges were built, traders, settlers, and warriors crossed the gap in search of new land and resources. The Delaware River was the lifeblood of the region, providing transportation for goods and people alike. The gap was a natural barrier that few dared to cross, but those who did found a rich and varied landscape.

The Delaware Aqueduct

The Delaware Aqueduct was built in 1828 to carry water from the Delaware River to Philadelphia. It was a marvel of engineering for its time. The aqueduct used a combination of tunnels, bridges, and locks to transport water over the gap. It was a testament to the ingenuity of those who built it and the demand for water in Philadelphia.

The Fish Story

The Delaware River is home to a variety of fish, including the American eel. The eels spawn in the river in May and June, and the young eels, or elvers, make their way downriver to the coast. The elvers are then gathered and used as bait for fishing.

VIPS

Volunteers In Parks (VIPs) is a program of the National Park Service. Volunteers help with a variety of tasks, from cleaning up the river to aiding in research. The VIPs are often photographed and featured in the news.

Rafting the River

The Delaware River is a popular destination for rafting and canoeing. The river is home to a variety of species, including the black bear, which is often seen on the riverbanks.

EDIBLES

Upper Delaware woodlands and fields have a bounty of native edibles, including blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries. They can be picked and eaten in season.

Beware of snakes

If you don’t know what they are, stay out of their way. Their bite can be deadly, so if you are unsure, it’s better to avoid them altogether.

River Conditions Number

Before you venture out on the river, find out about the conditions. The Delaware is a bustling river with many tributaries and side channels. It is important to know the water level, temperature, and flow before you set out.

Canoes, canalboats, and trains

The Delaware River was a hub of transportation in the 19th century. Canoes and canalboats were used to transport goods and people along the river. The Delaware Aqueduct and the Delaware and Hudson Canal were also important transportation routes. The railroad came to the Upper Delaware in the 1870s, changing the landscape of the region once again.

The clear water of the Delaware River is home to a variety of aquatic life, including common water snake, black snake, and garter snake. They are found most frequently in the river entrance of the canal, where the water is calm and the temperature is mild.

A Clear, Free-Flowing River

The main stream of the Delaware River is free-flowing from Hancock to the Atlantic Ocean. Of the 3,422 square miles the Upper Delaware drains, 2,144 are under federal ownership and managed by the Corps of Engineers.

The river’s four major tributaries — the West Branch, the East Branch, the Lackawaxen River, and the Morpain River — are all quite as unrestricted. The Lackawaxen is the most downstream segment of the region it drains, the Cannonsville Reservoir on the East Branch. A series of reservoirs have been built on the Delaware and the Lackawaxen to act as an important part of the water resource system for hydroelectric power generation. Lake Wallenpaupack, operated by Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware River and Light Company for hydroelectric power, discharges into the Lackawaxen below.

Although a commitment to preserving the river’s natural beauty has been a driving force in the development of the Upper Delaware region, the area also supports a variety of industries. These include river transport of goods, hydroelectric power generation, and tourism. The Upper Delaware region is home to a variety of recreational activities, including fishing, kayaking, canoeing, and hiking. The river is also home to a variety of wildlife, including a variety of fish and birds.
Settlers Along the Delaware

Joseph Skinner and Moses Thomas, leaders of the Delaware Company, knew something about Upper Delaware country before they came to live at the place called Cushehunk. According to legend, both Skinner and Thomas had hunted and trapped and traded with the Indians of the valley during the 1750s. They knew that vegetation was lush, that the river provided a natural highway, and that the resident Indians were friendly.

Encouraging the New York Yankees to join the new Delaware Company settlement to the west, they may have omitted mention of the isolation—40 miles of wilderness between them and the nearest sizeable settlement—and the conflicting land claims.

They no doubt did mention that the land was wild, beautiful and waiting to be settled. For those first families—Tylor, Thomas, Skinner, Tracy, Adams, Cochetcon, New Jersey?

Charles II May have been a charming monarch but he was a terrible geographer. With cavalier disregard for latitude and longitude, he managed to grant overlapping land titles to Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. New Jersey claimed lands as far upriver as Station Rock at Cochetcon, lands also claimed by New York. Connecticut claimed lands west of the Delaware also claimed by Pennsylvania.

To add insult to injury, two separate Indian tribes—the Iroquois and the Lenape—claimed the right to sell and to make treaties concerning the same lands.

At first, the frontiersmen paid the colony and its traders for their furs, and didn’t worry about counterclaims. But, as civilization and the Pennsylvania Dutch moved in, many bewildered settlers found themselves paying for their lands a second and third time before gaining clear title.

Battleground

A park, with picnic areas and historic markers, has been established on the site of the Battle of Minisink. The battle, fought in July of 1779, resulted in overwhelming victory for Joseph Brant’s Indian and Tory forces over the militiamen and volunteers of the area. Historic markers along Route 97 and information at the battleground offer details of the encounter.

Safari Along the Delaware

Yes, it is possible. That big grayish-brown cat you saw could have been a wildcat. But it isn’t likely. Though native to Upper Delaware country, the wildcat is an extremely rare beast—on the endangered species list. Even the most experienced saw could have been a wildcat. But it isn’t likely.

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Fort Delaware

Fort Delaware, a replica of the stockaded Cushehunk settlement of the Delaware Company, is operated by Sullivan County as a living museum of colonial history. Staff people demonstrate such frontier skills as candlemaking and use of flintlock muskets. The Fort is located on Route 97 at Narrowsburg, New York, and is open every weekend in June and daily from July through Labor Day. Check with the Fort for the schedule of special events and crafts demonstrations.

The Gentle Lenape

Here along the Upper Delaware, the peaceful Lenape got along well with the white farmers who settled on their hunting grounds. The land swindle known as the 1737 Walking Purchase led to a brief outbreak of Indian raids, but friendship was more common than hostility.

Deprived of their lands by treaty and chicanery, their numbers depleted by white man’s diseases, most of the Lenape who survived moved west by the mid-1700s. By the time the Revolution came, the Lenape settlements arrived at Cushehunk in the 1750s, the white men found only a small band of mixed clans under the chieftain Minatto.

During the Revolution, the new settlers were terrorized by Indian raiders who sided with the British. But these were Mohawks from the north. By this time, the Lenape nation had decided to go on to Canada to join the British, some joining Americans in the fight for independence.

By the time the wandering Lenape came near the British colonies, the British colonies were found on the other side of the Atlantic. From there, they crossed a glassy sea (Bering Strait) to North America, passing through the Rockies (the Rockies) before stopping for a time in the land of Buffalo (Great Plains). On the move again, they found their settlement of the Delaware Company, Is offered every weekend.

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There were three clans of Lenape. The northernmost, Munsee (wolf) formed a buffer between their Unami (turtle) and Unalachtogi (turkey) brothers to the south and the warring Mohawks to the north.

If you are really lucky, you may encounter an opossum or a fox. Chipmunks, gray squirrels and white-tail deer are the most common of the big game. Though by no means tame, they can frequent smaller cousins, the wood turtle and painted turtle, going on to Canada to join the British, some joining Americans in the fight for independence.

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