

Annsville Creek to Popolopen Creek



by Ralph J. Ferrusi

We put in at the Pataki place on Annsville Circle.

This Spring/early Summer has been one of the best starts to our canoeing season in a long time. We've visited a lot of creeks that dump into the Hudson: the Rondout, Wappingers, Fishkill, and, Stony Creek that dumps into Tivoli Bays. Most have been featured, or mentioned, in this magazine.

A while ago John suggested we visit Popolopen Creek and its waterfall. We hadn't been up to the Popolopen since, hmmm, about the 1800's. Weeks later: "Kath, whaddayah say we put in at the Pataki place on Annsville Circle and paddle up to the Popolopen Creek waterfall???" If the tide's good, we can paddle up to the end of Annsville after we get back."

Most of this year's canoe trips have been around two hours or so, and we knew this one would be longer—the Popolopen was

a fair ways upriver from Annsville, and the wind and tide would be factors—but we decided, in the Good Old American Way, to Go For It.

It was a fine day for paddling—lotsa blue sky, some puffy white clouds—and the tide was near perfect: incoming, but with plenty of water. On the other hand, the wind was coming right up the reach from Peekskill Bay to beyond the Bear Mountain Bridge. The tide, and the wind, would be with us on the way north, but, we'd be bucking them both on the way back.



We Come Close to "Biting Off More Than We Can Chew"



The big black plastic dock/put-in is terrific.



We glided across smooth Annsville “Bay” and went under the Metro North bridge in the center section, heeding the warnings signs not to use either end, as there are “navigational hazards” hidden below their surfaces.

The parking lot at the “Pataki Place” (any New York State Governor who votes to create places like this is My Kinda Guy) was pretty much jam-packed, but Kath found a place to park the Subaru in the shade out by 9D. And, the grounds were pretty much jam-packed with kayaks and kayakers: not a canoe in sight.

I digress: didn’t the Native Americans (we called them “Indians”) in this area use canoes—birch bark or dugouts—to get around on the rivers and lakes??? And weren’t kayaks pretty much a frozen north Eskimo phenomenon??? So how come the Hudson has, of late, become pretty much filled, shore to shore, with kayaks, and, from our river experiences, canoes are rarer than the proverbial hen’s teeth???

Some thoughts: You can kayak solo: you don’t need a partner. And, kayaks are inherently more stable than canoes: your backside is below the water line, whereas in a canoe it’s a foot or so above the waterline. And, with a double-bladed

paddle it’s much easier to keep a kayak going in pretty much a straight line than it is to keep a solo canoe going straight with a single-bladed paddle.

My first human-powered boat was a 13-foot Montgomery Ward “Sea King” aluminum canoe (it’s still on saw horses up behind the shed) and I’ve owned several more modern/refined canoes since. I’ve tried kayaks, and done pretty well in them, but, I just about always feel cramped/confined, and my legs always seem to eventually cramp up.

Back to Annsville: as usual, it took forever to get all the crap—umm, “gear”—all sorted out and loaded up. The big black plastic dock/put-in was a joy, particularly compared to the more typical mud-/rock-infested put-ins we usually deal with. We glided across smooth Annsville “Bay” and went under the Metro North bridge in the center section, heeding the warnings signs not to use either end, as there were “navigational hazards” hidden below their surfaces.

Sure enough, the river was kicking up a bit, but we’d seen worse: a LOT worse. There was a lot more power boat traffic than we’d seen in April and May: I’d become more used to “having the river to ourselves” than I thought I had... And, Iona Island looked pretty far away. We had to cross over to the west shore, and when we were finally pretty close to the south end of Iona, Kath asked if we should scootch cross. We both carefully checked up and down the river and there was a big gap in the power boat traffic, so we dug in and before very long we were just off a rocky “beach” on the south end of Iona.

There were no signs saying we couldn’t do this, that, or the other thing, so we landed and walked up to a high bluff above the beach. The rugged topography of this island is unique, and interesting. We came to a good view downriver towards Peekskill Bay and Dunderberg. The view upriver towards Bear Mountain Bridge and Anthony’s Nose wasn’t as clear, but all



The view upriver towards Bear Mountain Bridge.

in all it was a worthwhile short hike.

Iona Island seemed much much longer while canoeing up its eastern shoreline than, say, driving by it on Route 9W. It took a while to reach its northern tip, and “Bear Mountain Bay” also looked much broader than it does, say, from the bridge.

Checking my watch, we’d been on the river over two hours, and still hadn’t reached Popolopen...

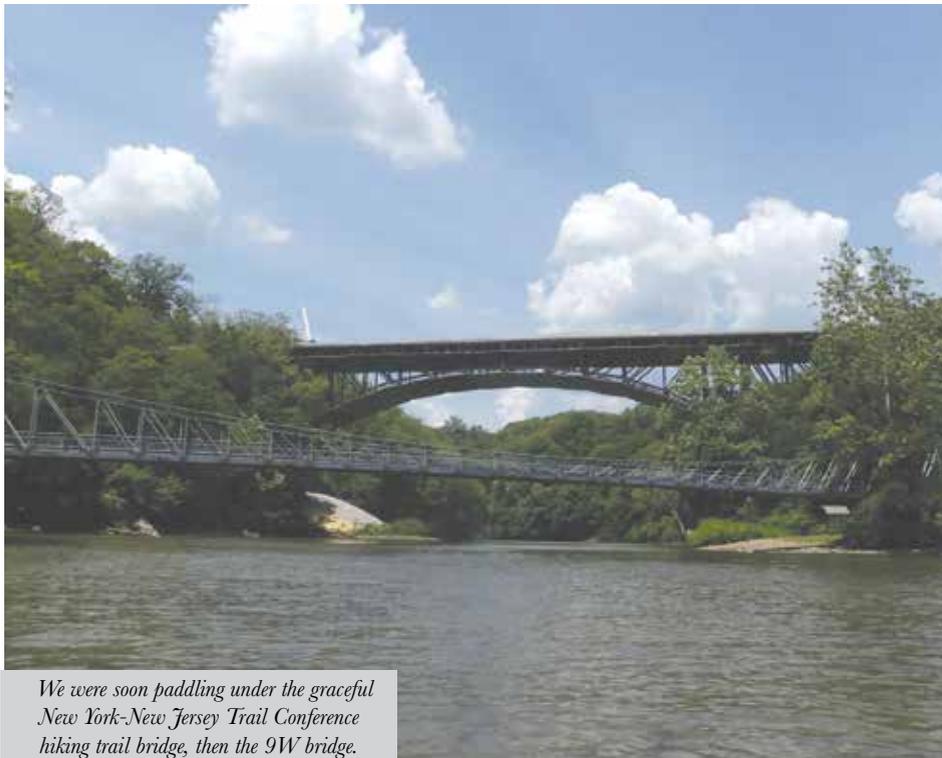
Be VERY CAREFUL going underneath the railroad bridge at the mouth of the creek. It appeared that every single opening had underwater piling hidden in the

middle. We hugged the left-hand side of the center opening; nasty pilings were looming just below the surface of the water to our right.

We were soon paddling under the graceful New York-New Jersey Trail Conference hiking trail bridge, then



Before very long we were just off a rocky “beach” on the south end of Iona.



We were soon paddling under the graceful New York-New Jersey Trail Conference hiking trail bridge, then the 9W bridge.

the 9W bridge high above, and pretty much next thing we knew the creek narrowed down to a field of BIG boulders, with the (not that impressive now since it hasn't rained in months) waterfall just beyond.

There were four teenage boys jumping off the 20-30-foot cliff into the deep (I hoped) pool below the falls—I used to do this back in the day, but I am not tempted any more—it was good to see young boys being young boys. We sat down and enjoyed a picnic lunch, then it was time to bite the bullet and head south. We were very careful going back under the railroad bridge, knowing what we now knew about the pilings.

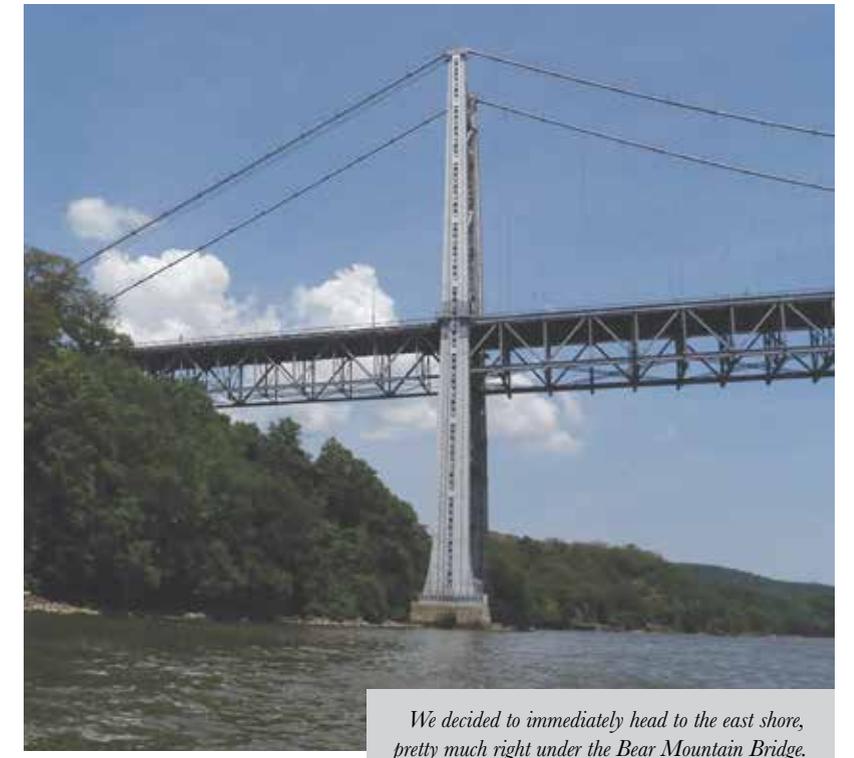
And, the river was REALLY kicking up now. We decided to immediately head to the east shore, pretty much right under the Bear Mountain Bridge. The wind was now so strong that as hard as we paddled, we were being blown upriver. It was going to

be a long trip back: had we bitten off more than we could chew???

Finally, close to the eastern shore, we put our heads down and dug in, keeping close to shore the whole way back. There were even more power boats on the river than before: it was like The Good Old Days of Powerboating on the Hudson. This did exacerbate our situation, as a lot of the boats were ripping along like they did in The Good Old Days, and sometimes, between the strong headwind, and criss-crossing wakes, things got, shall we say, a bit dicey, and our Class II/III whitewater skills came in really handy. I was really impressed how our 17-foot Sundowner handled all this, bobbing along like a cork, confirming its inherent seaworthiness.

It seemed to take forever to get back to the Metro North bridge at the head of Annsville: it almost seemed like the bridge was moving away from us. Finally under the bridge, out of the wind and away from the big wakes, four hours and forty-five minutes after setting out, I was tempted to ask Kath is she still wanted to head up Annsville Creek, playing “dodge the kayaks”, but for once in my life I kept my big mouth shut.

All in all, a longggg, but, as always, fine day on The River.....



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