

Black Creek???

Where's Black Creek???

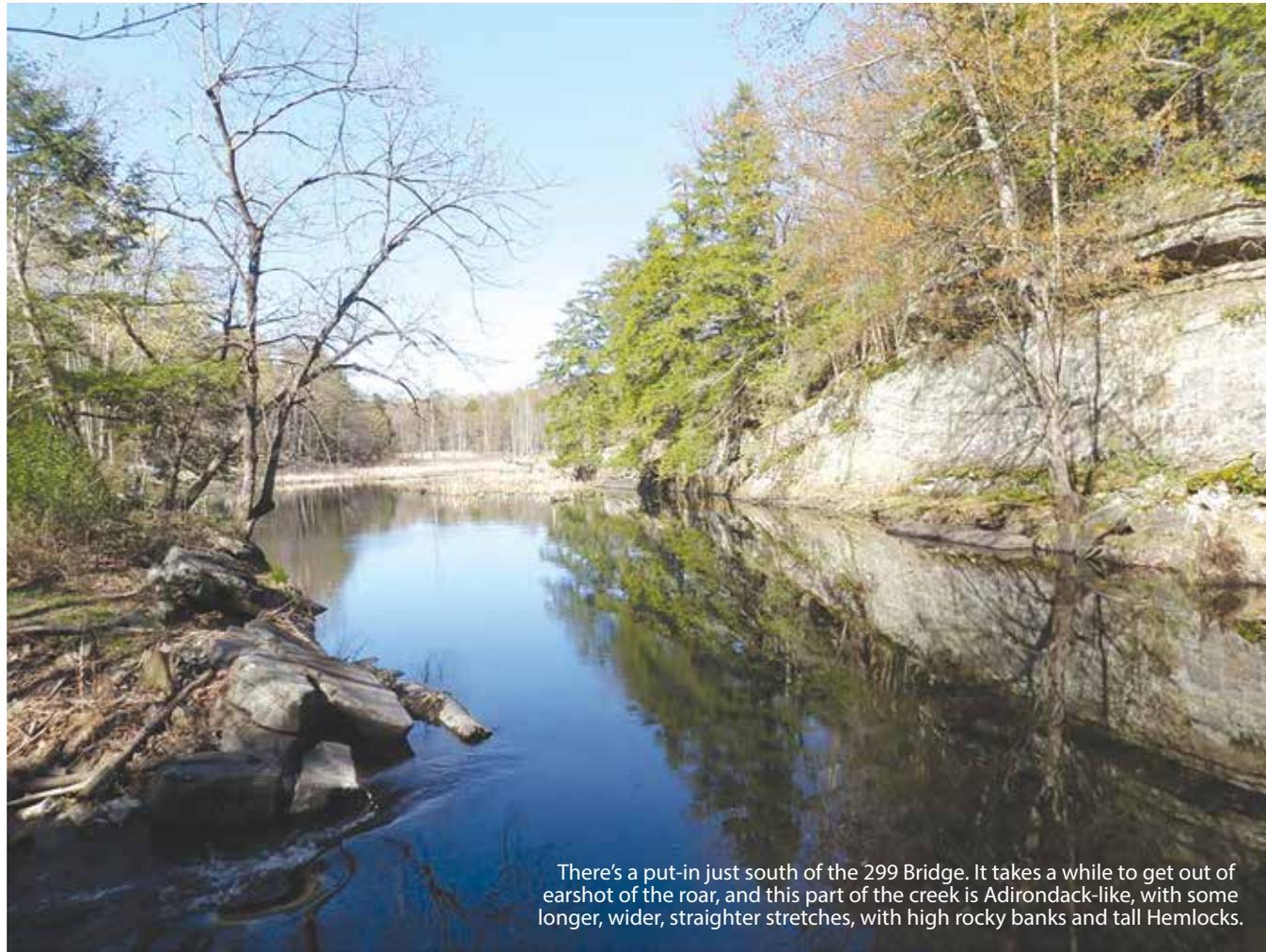


by **Ralph J. Ferrusi**

As a life-long resident of the mid-Hudson Valley, I've spent a lot of time Boating on the Hudson (and Beyond...), hiking, biking, canoeing, skiing, cross-country skiing, working, tour-guiding, wine-tasting; you get the picture.

I've always been aware of the Hudson's many creeks—the Wappingers and Fishkill Creeks have become my "home creeks"—but to me the Esopus and the Rondout have always been the Big Guns, each starting high up in the Catskills, fattening out to reservoirs, and ultimately making a grand entrance into the Hudson.

Winnisook Lake, in a 2,660 foot saddle west of 4,180-foot Slide Mountain, the highest peak in the Catskills, is the source of the 65.4-mile-long Esopus. First heading north, then swinging around to the southeast, it becomes the Ashokan Reservoir. It then heads east and scootches around Kingston, where it turns due north to Saugerties, crosses under 9W/32,



There's a put-in just south of the 299 Bridge. It takes a while to get out of earshot of the roar, and this part of the creek is Adirondack-like, with some longer, wider, straighter stretches, with high rocky banks and tall Hemlocks.

and drops dramatically over a dam before heading out to the Saugerties Lighthouse (Boating On the Hudson & Beyond, June 2015) and The River.

The source of the 63.3-mile Rondout is, interestingly, only about 3 1/2 miles southeast of the source of the Esopus, at an elevation of 2,980 feet, between 3,508-foot Rocky and 3,623-foot Balsam Cap. The Rondout initially heads south to Peekamoose, then swings southwest down to the Rondout Reservoir, then southeast to the Napanoch/Warwarsing area before a long trek northeast, finally dropping over a low, wide dam, and meandering out to the Hudson between Kingston and Port Ewen (Boating On the Hudson & Beyond, June 2016).

We've spent a lot of time lately canoeing on the Hudson's creeks, marshes, and small rivers. To me, the real beauty of these waters—besides the scenery, solitude, and silence—is that they are virtually unreachable by any means except small "human-powered" craft: many of the places we've reached, and the route we've used to get there, are impossible to reach by any other means—walking, hiking, car, ATV, motor boat, whatever, except maybe by helicopter. But that would be a LOT noisier, and, expensive...

In our experience, every creek or small river we've paddled on that empties into the Hudson eventually reaches a "No More Mr. Nice Guy" point where it plunges/plummets dramatically, and you'd have to be a fool, have a Death Wish, or be really really



A popular spot for turtles to haul out and bask in the sun.

stupid to attempt to deal with it. Many of these are natural obstacles, tipped off by deep, narrow gorges, and many are dams. Some dams are relatively low: for example, the Rondout Creek dam is not very tall, but broad. Others are pretty big, even huge: the Fishkill Creek has several big dams, the dam in Wappingers Falls is big, and, hmmm, think about Croton Dam, upriver from the Croton River Gorge. I've never seen the dam across the Esopus in Saugerties from below, but it sure looks scary crossing the 9W bridge, particularly since there seems to be no orange warning "buoys" above it: yikes....

There are a few creeks/small rivers that we've paddled that are blessedly "un-dammed". Generally, when we explore these we paddle until the waterway is no wider than the boat and the canoe is jammed into the growth on both sides, and we simply can't go any further. We then back out until we can find a spot wide enough to turn the boat around. These, to me, are places that very few people—except people as nutty as us: like-minded natural-born explorers—have ever been to before.

One day, while taking the New Paltz Road short cut from 9W to New Paltz, we saw a sign: BLACK CREEK Watershed; Hudson River Estuary. We're always looking for new places to paddle/explore, and soon brought a boat over and paddled north and south as far as we could. Whadda find!!! The Black Creek is basically a small, easy-flowing, meandering (many many "ox bows"/"S turns") creek that can be paddled back and forth from several put-ins. It flows north, and we've never canoed to its source, but

on a map it looks to be somewhere in a wetland south of New Paltz Road, east of Pancake Hollow Road, and west of Illinois Mountain Park (got that???)

We typically put in at New Paltz Road, and head north, with the fairly mild current. South, the creek is soon blocked (in a twisty half-mile or so) by what we call The Big Beaver Dam. We wrestled the boat over it once, and went a ways further, but it's a much bigger Bang For the Buck to simply head north, where you can get in a couple of hours round-trip paddle. The Black, as many small creeks, has many many "ox bows": often it'll take something like a mile of paddling to cover a quarter-mile by the way the crow flies.

The first landmark you'll hit will be the high stone archway under the Hudson Valley Rail Trail. Then, after about a thousand S-turns, you'll hear the roar of traffic on 299 heading to clog up New Paltz. There's a put-in just south of the 299 Bridge. It takes a while to get out of earshot of the roar, and this part of the creek is Adirondack-like, with some longer, wider, straighter stretches, with high rocky banks and tall Hemlocks.

You eventually reach a point where the creek takes a pretty abrupt left turn and narrows dramatically, dropping under a wooden walking bridge. We once dealt with this short, nasty little boat-bottom scratcher, but there's an unnavigable waterfall a short ways beyond, and it's not worth the energy and effort for us to deal with this; this is where we now typically turn back to the New Paltz Road; ummmm, FYI you'll



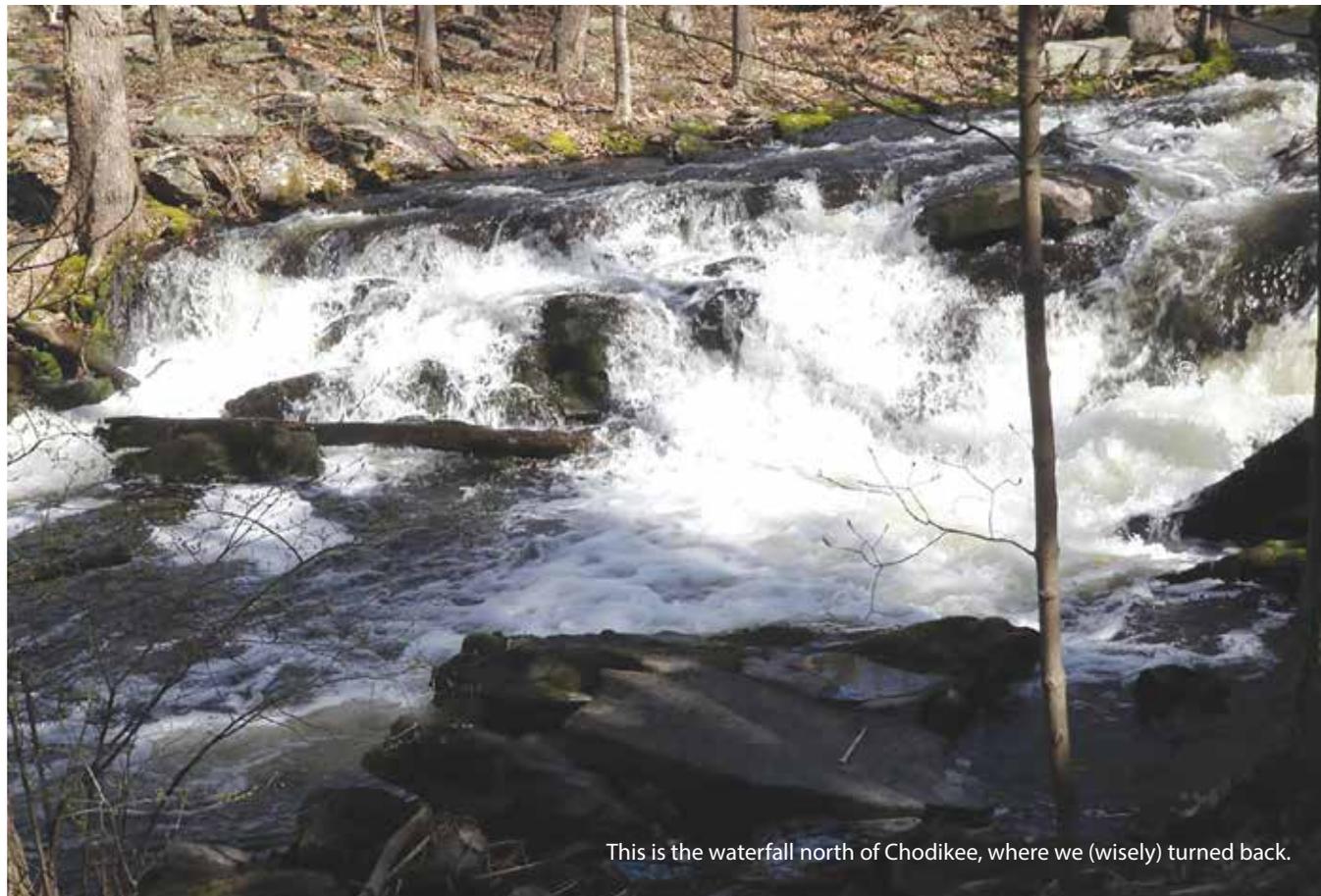
A beautiful spot virtually unreachable by any means except small "human-powered" craft.



The first landmark you'll hit will be the high stone archway under the Hudson Valley Rail Trail.



We paddle until the waterway is no wider than the boat.



This is the waterfall north of Chodikee, where we (wisely) turned back.

be heading upstream now, and though the current isn't really all that strong, be warned there are places that require a fair bit of strength, coordination, and skill/experience to deal with it.

On this particular mid-April day we did a "double header". After lunch at a cafe in Highland, we drove north of our earlier turnaround spot, and put in at the Chodikee Lake DEC fishing access, and headed north again on the creek. After a short lake paddle, we S-turned through some classic wetlands, past dozens of beaver lodges. Finally, we became aware of an increasingly

loud roar up ahead, and soon reached an abrupt narrow 90-degree right-hand turn where the creek plunged dramatically over some serious waterfalls. Time to call it a day.

Ahead, the creek continues through Black Creek State Forest, the John Burrough's Nature Sanctuary, crosses 9W (DEC Fishing Access), and runs through Scenic Hudson's Black Creek Preserve, to it's mouth on the mighty Hudson.

Get in touch with Ralph at: rjferusi@frontiernet.net

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