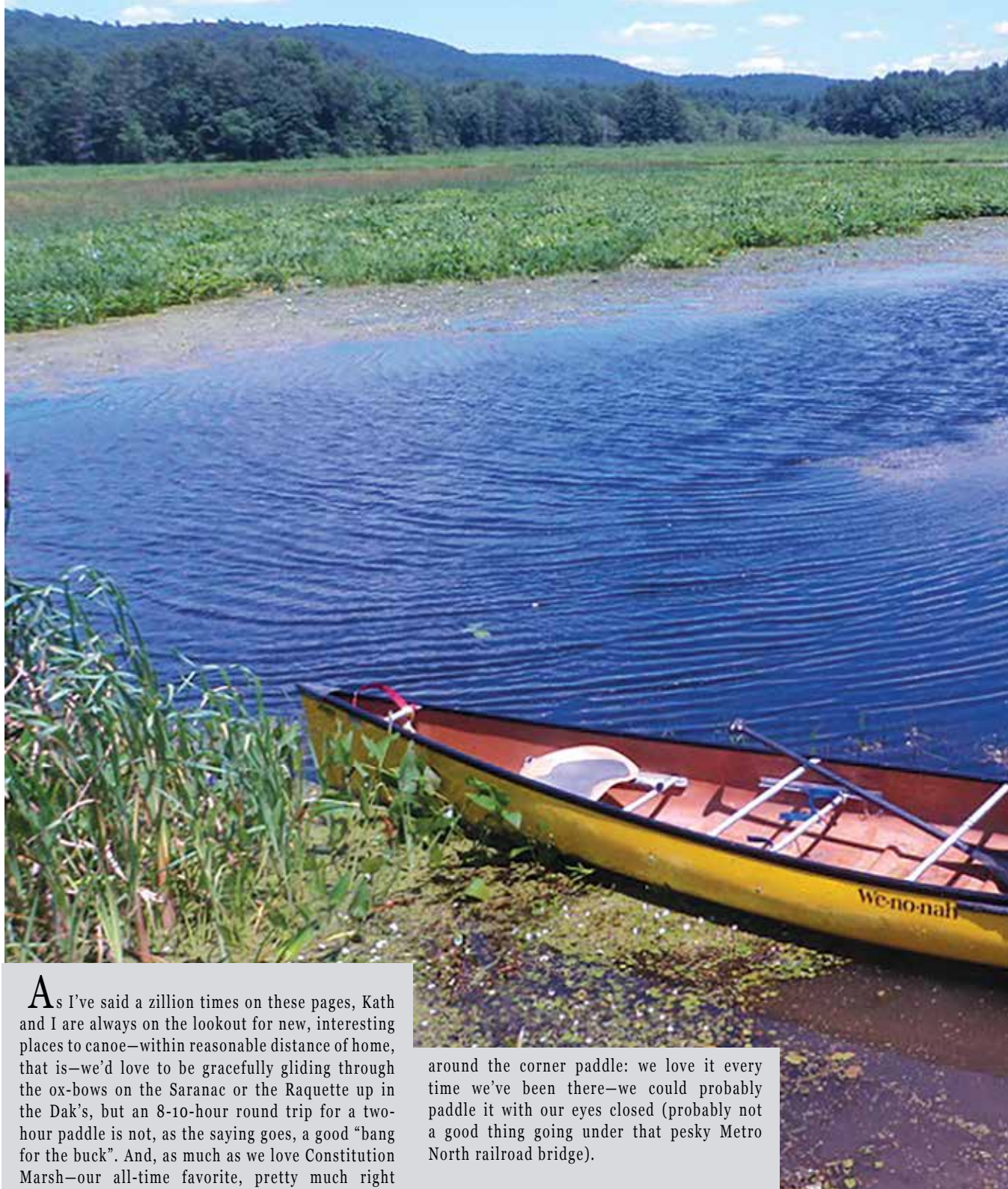


“Ox-Bow Heaven”

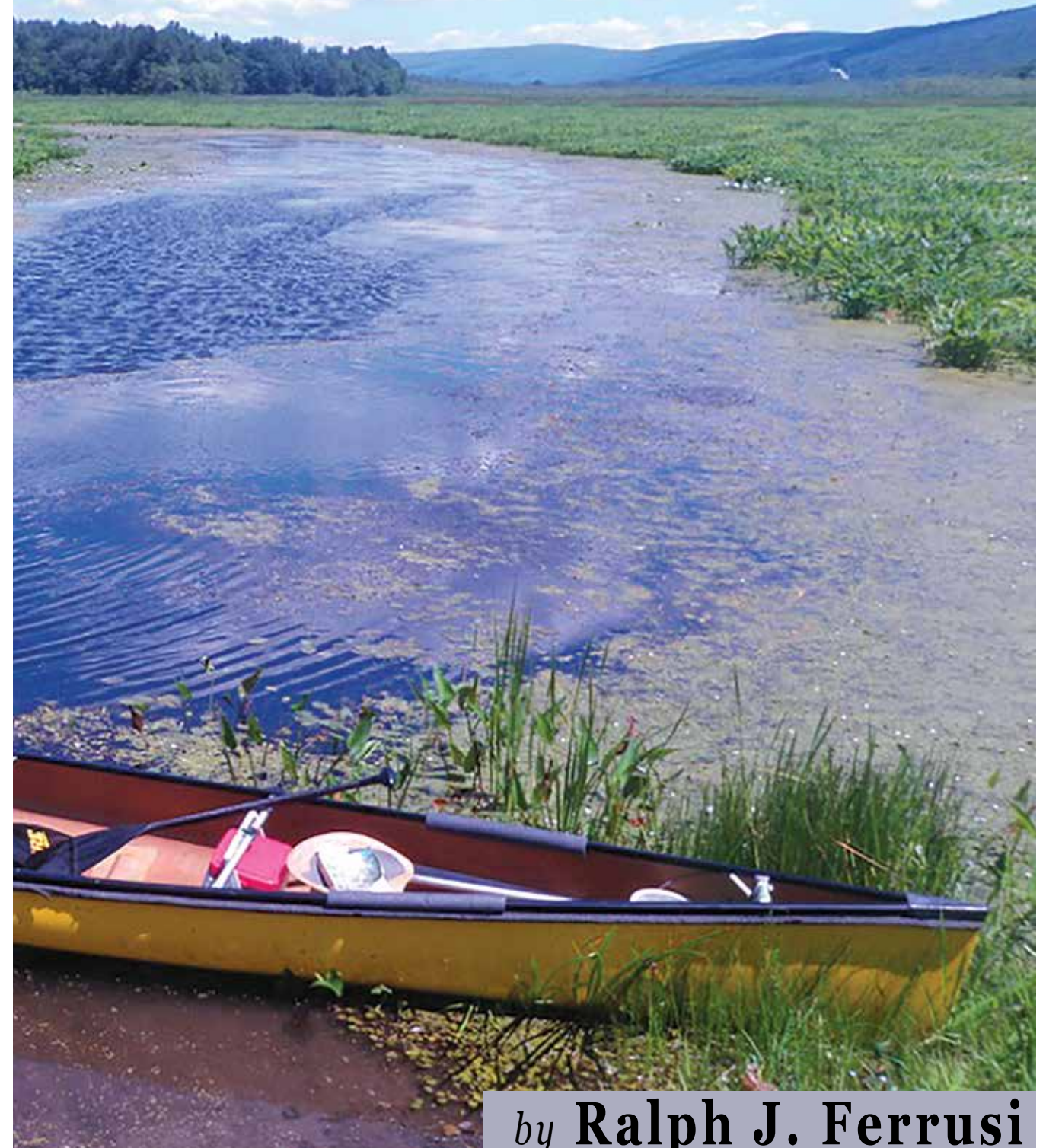


As I've said a zillion times on these pages, Kath and I are always on the lookout for new, interesting places to canoe—within reasonable distance of home, that is—we'd love to be gracefully gliding through the ox-bows on the Saranac or the Raquette up in the Dak's, but an 8-10-hour round trip for a two-hour paddle is not, as the saying goes, a good “bang for the buck”. And, as much as we love Constitution Marsh—our all-time favorite, pretty much right

around the corner paddle: we love it every time we've been there—we could probably paddle it with our eyes closed (probably not a good thing going under that pesky Metro North railroad bridge).

The Basher Kill

Just Beyond the Hudson near Mamakating, New York



by **Ralph J. Ferrusi**



So, Kath came across the Basher Kill—"the largest freshwater wetland in southeastern New York"—on Page 64 of "John Hayes and Alex Wilson's Appalachian Mountain Club Quiet Water Canoe Guide, New York: Best Paddling Lakes and Ponds for Canoe and Kayak". It was apparently a 1,333-acre wetland, about four miles long, in the 2,175-acre Bashakill Wildlife Management Area, near Mamakating (huh???), in Sullivan County. It sounded really promising, but first we had to get out our trusty "DeLorme New York Atlas & Gazetteer" to see where the heck it really was, and, how practical it would be to get there.

Mamakating Park was on Page 101, D-10, and on the very bottom corner of the page, right off Route 17 where it dips down to Wurtsboro, was the Basher Kill and the Bashakill WMA! OK, it looked like, basically, I-84 to the 17K "shortcut" through Montgomery, then straight ahead on 171 where the Route 17 Exit 116 is, then through Bloomsburg down to a left turn on 209 in Wurtsboro. Wurtsboro is about 45 minutes away, and a pretty straightforward drive. And, by the way, the DEC doesn't allow motors in the WMA, just human-powered craft. Let's do it!

According to the article (and map) there were four places to launch. The northernmost was on the left "1.1 miles from Route 17... down a short gravel road". We missed it the first time, and drove back and bumped along the "short gravel road" to a big parking area. There were several local old-timers there, sitting on folding chairs and "smoking big cigars???", gazing at the Basher Kill and the Shawangunks rising to the east: whadda place, whadda view: WOW!!!

It was a blue sky, puffy white clouds day, and there was a good amount of water with a mild north-to-south current. We talked a bit to the locals, and launched our pretty yellow Kevlar 18-foot WeNoNah Jensen down a decent-width waterway, and soon encountered the first few, quite gentle, ox-bows.

An Important Notice here: the map in the book (and in the Atlas) shows the Basher Kill as a wide, open lake-like, four-mile-long waterway. It isn't: the wetland is densely overgrown with reeds, like all the Hudson River marshes we've been in, that are impossible to crash through. And, like the Hudson River marshes, there is mostly a clearly defined channel through it, that was often lined with what I thought was the invasive water chestnut, that's clogging up a lot of small bays and inlets all along the Hudson. But looking at the pictures, I'd say it's pretty much good ole water lilies. Finally, a Big But: the channel meanders through endless, back-and-forth ox-bows.



The wetland eventually widened out, and we could eventually make out, in the distance, the telephone poles on Haven Road, that crossed it about a half-mile south of our put-in. It took a surprisingly long time to get there (straight line distance, if through open water, was about a half-mile: ox-bow distance seemed like three miles!!!). Thinking back about it, as the wetland widened, the ox-bows, short and gentle S-turns at first, gradually became longer and longer.

We debated going under the low bridge, but wisely decided to take out and carry the boat across the road. When we launched, our initial goal was another launch site that seemed to be about two miles south on South Road, on the east side of the wetland. If it was a straight shot, it was a very reasonable goal. We've encountered a lot of ox-bows in our years of paddling, but now they seemed to be zig-zagging back and forth almost the full width—now about a half-mile—of the now-very-broad, open wetland. After about an hour of paddling, slowly inching south through the ox-bows, two steps

forward, four steps back, for what seemed like about 10 miles, we (wisely) decided maybe we'd come back some other time (in the Fall???) and head north from the South Road launch to the place we'd turned around (at ox-bow #3,745???)

Paddling back, I was surprised at how the "gentle current" that we had paddled WITH on the way down, had become so strong as we paddled against it (Thinking about it, this is just about always the case!) Considering this, all in all I'm very glad we turned around when we did, so we had strength enough to get our 54-pound Jensen back on the roof rack of the Subaru.

Ox-bows notwithstanding, all in all it was another great day on the water, in a superb canoeing area: the pictures of the very inviting channel with the puffy white clouds in the clear blue sky above tell the story.

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