

The Lower Croton River

by Ralph J. Ferrusi

Friday, June 7, 2019, we canoed the Lower Croton River. Over the years, we visited it about once a year or so: it was on the outer limits of our “bang for the buck” canoeing from mid-Dutchess County: how much river time we’d get compared to how much driving time it took us to get there. We weren’t aware of this at the time, but this trip up the Croton River just could—and possibly would—be our last time out on the Hudson and Beyond for quite a while, because Thursday, June 27, 2019, we moved, lock, stock, barrels, and, canoes, to Maryland... We may bring a boat north with us sometime in the future, but, a twelve hour round-trip to boat the Lower Croton??? Let’s talk about this “possibly special” day on the Croton River:

The beginning of the Lower Croton River is at the bottom of the huge spillway of the New

Croton Dam, and it ends about three miles downstream where it dumps into the Hudson underneath the Metro North railroad bridge. The visible section of water just below the dam is rocky and often turbulent. From what I’ve been able to see from Route 129 this is often the case along a lot of this stretch of river all the way to the top of the long, intimidating rapid we paddle up to from the launch out past the Metro North station. And, there’s at least one low, very dangerous looking dam that would have to be dealt with. I’ve heard of people boating this stretch, but I’ve never had any desire to tackle it.

Along this line, just out of curiosity I Googled “Lower Hudson River”, and was shocked to come across a 2017 Iohud article by Chris Eberhart: “The Croton River: Beautiful but deadly”, stating it was “...where at least 12 drownings and

near drownings have occurred since 1999” “... making it one of the deadliest marine areas in Westchester County.”!!! “Deadly”!!! Whoa!!! BUT: after reading the article and looking at an accompanying map,

NONE of the drownings occurred in the stretch of river we always canoe. All of the problems occurred in “the heart of the river”, in the stretch below the dam along 129, that I’ve (wisely) never had any desire to tackle, or, at the mouth, where the Croton meets the Hudson. This made me realize that the section of river we’ve paddled is, indeed, the LOWER Lower Croton River. Keep this distinction in mind as you read on.

Small boat access to the (Lower) Lower Croton River where it enters the Hudson is a small put-in all the way south down the end of the road through the huge Croton-Harmon commuter parking lot: do all these people really commute

to Manhattan every single work day, year-round??? Better them than me...

When we pulled in there was an “official-looking” young woman sitting in the shade by the put-in. She came over to us and said she had to inspect our boat to make sure we weren’t bringing loads of invasives into the river. My first silly thought at the time was that we might be bringing loads of invasives out of the river, into some pristine nearby lake or pond. I assured her that we wiped down our boats, inside and out (we do) every time we take them out of the water, and that they had plenty of time to thoroughly dry out between uses. It looked pretty much brand-new and well-cared-for, and she inspected and approved it.

We launched, and could soon see the tide was very very high, and the water was almost touching the bottom of the Metro North railroad bridge: there was no way we were going to get out on the Hudson. On the other hand, we had plenty of water in the Croton. We scootched south into the bay along the railroad tracks, then swung back upriver, underneath the Route 9 bridge. The wide area just beyond the bridge can be very shallow at most tides, but today we just cruised across it.

Soon the river splits, and we “traditionally” go river right, up to a small, short rapid, that we sometimes have to get out and drag the boat over. With the super high tide and the shear volume of water flowing down the Croton the rapid had “washed out” and we cruised right over, hardly noticing it.

After a few twists and turns we entered “The Gorge”, with “That Awesome, One-Of-A-Kind Spectacular House” perched on top of the cliff on river left. We always gawk at it. Just upstream the river splits again, with a long impassible semi-raging rapid on the right and an impassible rocky “bone yard” on the left. This is the navigable end of the Lower Lower Croton River.

As always, we beached here, and, as always, walked up the path to the far end, where the imposing rapids continue upriver far out of sight. Today the rapid was raging: I dare say you’d have to be nuts to deal with them even in a kayak, or a raft. We gawked at it, and took pictures, then walked back down the island, launched,

and headed back down river, “traditionally” going along the other side of the island from our upriver journey. With the high water, we explored the side channel by Van Cortlandt Manor and scootched around the marsh a bit before taking out.

All in all, this had been a fine “sentimental journey” on the Hudson’s waters and Beyond, as we dig in for a new life, ummmm, below the Mason-Dixon line, “Y’all”.....

But before I head for a Maryland Eastern Shore Atlantic Ocean beach, here’s a few words about the Upper Croton River. According to my trusty 2011 New York DeLorme Atlas & Gazetteer, it meanders pretty much north through about a dozen reservoirs and lakes, and splits into East and West branches (there’s also a Middle Branch somewhere) at the Croton Falls Reservoir. The furthest north I could trace the West Branch was, astoundingly, Sagamore Lake just off Route 301 just below the Putnam/Dutchess County border. The East Branch, also astoundingly, appears to originate in Putnam Lake, on the New York/Connecticut border. Who would have thought!!! To the best of my knowledge, the entire Croton River is “officially” 33 miles long.

Stand by: I intend to elaborate, in a future issue, about the two Croton Dams: NEW, and, OLD...

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