

Saturday, September 16, 2017:

Another Great Day On The River



by **Ralph J. Ferrusi**

As I've said before, probably many times, we are always looking for new and interesting places to canoe, or, returning to places we haven't been to in a while. "How's about putting in at the Norrie Point Yacht Basin and heading south down to Bard Rock on the Vanderbilt property? We haven't been on

this reach since we did it with the Carleton, 'way back in the 80's or so." Ahhh, the Carleton: a 16- or 17-foot dark green polyethylene Old Town, the second canoe I ever owned, after the venerable 13-foot aluminum Montgomery Ward "Sea King" that I co-owned (that's a whole other story!).

To put September 16th in perspective, let's talk about the Carleton a bit. Back in those days, your choice of canoes was aluminum, aluminum, or aluminum. And, pretty much Grumman. The Carleton was, at that time, "State of the Art" for an affordable "plastic" boat. It was a handsome boat, made even more eye-catching by the name "THUMPER III" I had white 10-inch instant-lettered along both sides. We were on Cloud Nine, and raced it on several local creeks.

Looking back, the Carleton was not by any means a swift, efficient boat. Multi-layer Royalex had been invented, but Royalex canoes may not have been, and, similarly, Kevlar was the material of choice for bullet-proof vests, not canoes. The thick polyethylene simply could not be shaped into a narrow, slice-through-the-water bow: the bow of our current fastest, most efficient boat, an 18-foot Kevlar We No Nah Jensen is about a half-inch wide; the Carleton's snub nose was about four inches wide. And, the hull was designed more for stability than efficiency. Finally,



it weighed in at about 100 pounds—maybe more. The Jensen weighs 53 pounds, and it's sleek hull glides effortlessly through the water. Looking back, by comparison the Carleton plowed through the water, pretty much as if we were paddling a very heavy, old-fashioned, cast-iron lion-clawed bathtub!

OK, fast-forward to 2017, as we wrestle our dark green, swift, efficient, 17-foot Royalex Sundowner off the roof of the Subaru at the Norrie boat launch. A guy with a dark green official-looking shirt walks over to us and says "Didn't you bring an Old Town Carleton here about 30 years ago???" Just kidding: he really said "It costs three dollars to launch your boat in a State

Park on weekends." Crap: it is Saturday: why didn't we come up here yesterday???" We grumbled a bit—shooting the messenger—then grudgingly peeled off three singles, and eventually launched on the nifty KAYAK launch, and headed out past the dozens and dozens of fancy boats, sitting there, moored on this



fine, fine September Saturday: we were going out on The River.

We swung south around the breakwater, out into the gleaming, calm, empty Hudson: we saw about two or three other boats in the whole two hours we were on the river. On a day like today, in the Old Days there would have been dozens of boats out there. C'est la vie...

There were several men fishing from the shore just past the breakwater. We're always careful of fishing lines, and swing around them, giving them a wide berth. We waved: nobody waved back. I just have to say this: fisherman rarely nod or acknowledge us; it's pretty much as if we are some kind of pests. OK, I said it, and I'm glad.

Beyond the fisherman, we paddled past a docked sturdy-looking "working boat", the John E. Flynn(?), with PILOT in big red letters on its cabin, then, around the bend, in an ideal location, what appeared to be a restaurant, with a broad deck, facing down the reach.

There were some people fishing off the deck, but to me there was absolutely no sign of life inside the building (It's the Environmental Center).

Next we paddled down towards the PYC—Poughkeepsie Yacht Club—and the bay below the "restaurant" was filled 'way out with that ubiquitous green "seaweed"—probably some kind of invasive—that we now see all over the place along the shore of the river. When we reached the Yacht Club, a guy was standing on one of the docks sweeping away debris piled up against it. We talked to him, and it turned out he flew Douglas A-26 Invaders in Vietnam!!! Wow, I had never talked to an A-26 pilot. Let's talk about the A-26 a little bit:

The A-26 Invader was a fast, nifty twin-engined light bomber/ground attack (thus the "A" designation) aircraft built by the Douglas Aircraft Company late in World War II. It also served in both Korea and Vietnam, and as a civilian forest fire fighter aircraft (as in the movie Always). In 1948 the Air Force



re-designated it the B-26, leading to some confusion with the Martin B-26 Marauder, infamously nicknamed "The Widow Maker", as it was a difficult plane to learn to fly, but once "mastered", had a very admirable combat record, noted for bringing its crews home.

Back to 2017: I thanked the A-26 pilot for his service, and, as I do for all Vietnam vets, welcomed him home. Just below the PYC we came across what appeared to be a trillion-dollar house: all swoops, curves, glass, decks, patios, and yard sculptures. It was so striking it was intimidating: people actually live in places like this??? Further south, there was a tall older house, with more solar panels than I've ever seen on a building, with a trillion-dollar view down the reach.

Beyond the house I thought I spotted Bard Rock, about a half-mile away. We had just about maxed out our outbound energy: "Should we go for it???" "OK, another 10-15 minutes." Soon, the boat was grounded, the only thing separating us from landfall on Vanderbilt/Bard Rock was about a hundred feet of good old Hudson River low

tide MUCK: very ugly. We really didn't want to deal with it, but we were sooooo close: we slogged through it. I smiled (sort of) at the NO SWIMMING sign on shore: anyone who would be compelled to "swim" in this acres of mud and murky shallow water hadda be dumber than someone who just walked across it!

We clambered up on The Rock, then checked out the groomed, wooded, park-like broad area south of it. There were a couple of small "beaches", picnic tables, and benches. It was very appealing: peaceful, quiet. We shared it with a half-dozen other people; half of them had dogs. I couldn't help but think of the thousands and thousands of people milling around malls up and down the valley—indoors—on this picture-perfect late-summer's day. Go figure...

We slogged through the muck back to the boat, and decided to save an exploration of Esopus Island for another day: a weekday!!! All in all, another Great Day On The River, and, three bucks well spent..

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