

DIVERSE & MAJESTIC



Joseph Brosk

by Dave Zembiec

*T*umbling out of the Adirondack foothills, meandering through a peaceful rural valley, and then thundering through a deep gorge, the Black River is a recreational jewel with a unique diversity of character.

“Often overshadowed by the nearby St. Lawrence, you tend to take the Black River for granted,” says Joseph Brosk, an avid canoeist. “But the Black is a magnificent river that offers a variety of wonderful recreational opportunities, no matter your abilities.”

Brosk is on to something. The Black River has much to offer those that make the trek, from fishing and canoeing, to whitewater rafting and kayaking. It truly is a beautiful destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

History

During the 1800s, the Black River and Canal was the main artery for shipping goods into and out of the North Country. The canal ran from Rome through Boonville before connecting with the river. There was even regular passenger service from Lyons Falls to the canal’s northern terminus in Carthage. Jetties, dams, and locks built along the river made it navigable for steamboats, even when water was low in the summer months. The remains of several of these structures are still visible.

Beginnings

The Black River originates in the central and western Adirondacks, following the divide between the Tug Hill Plateau and the Adirondack foothills and flowing northwest to Carthage. From there, it flows in a wide curve to Watertown and through a gorge to Lake Ontario. The river has sections of flatwater, whitewater, and riffles, and supports a wide range of recreational activities and fish habitat. Fishing opportunities along the river include angling for brook trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, smallmouth bass, chain pickerel, northern pike, rock bass, and walleye. Fish ladders at Dexter and Glen Park allow steelhead and chinook salmon to swim as far as the center of Watertown. The lower segment of the river offers some of the finest whitewater rafting in the east with a long season that extends from May into October.

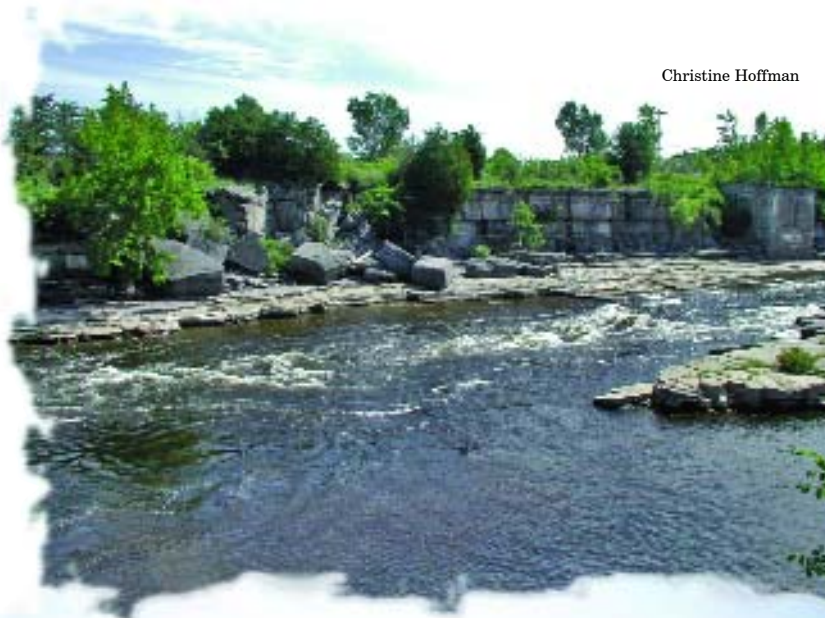
This river has an understated significance. Along its way, the Black River and its tributaries drain a large geographic portion of the Adirondack Mountains that

is likely one of the wildest areas in the Northeast. The Black itself originates in the Black River Wild Forest. Together, its major tributaries—the Moose, Independence, and Beaver Rivers—drain several remote forests. These include the Five Ponds, Pepperbox, Ha-de-ron-dah, Blue Ridge, Pigeon Lake, and West Canada Lake Wilderness Areas, the Independence River Wild Forest, and the Moose River Plains Wild Forest. In the Old Forge area, the Moose River also offers a month or so of early season white-water rafting. The Deer River, another tributary, has its origins in the remote core of the Tug Hill region.

From its Adirondack headwaters in Herkimer County into Oneida County, the Black River drops substantially. Once in Oneida County, the river passes through Kayuta Lake and the Forestport Reservoir.

From there into Lewis County (at Port Leyden) the upper segment of the river is fairly flat and fished heavily. Though canoeing is good in some stretches, it is not frequently used for such.

Christine Hoffman



Joseph Brosk

From whitewater kayaking to recreational canoeing and fishing, the Black River has it all. In the photo below, Eric Jackson (#88) navigates a rapid on the Black River during the U.S. Team Trials last summer. Jackson is the current reigning world freestyle kayaking champion.



Christine Hoffman



Sharon Buckingham

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Flatwater Central

The Lewis County segment of the river is primarily flatwater, dropping only 12 feet in the 41 miles from Lyons Falls to Carthage. This flatwater segment is popular for canoeing, motor boating, and fishing. The tree-lined banks of the river wind mostly through agricultural lands, complementing the peaceful ambiance of the river. There are five launch sites along this portion of the river at intervals of four to eleven miles, allowing canoeists to choose paddling distances appropriate to their skill and fitness level.

Whitewater

The lower segment of the river flows through Jefferson County, from the villages of Carthage and West Carthage out to Lake Ontario. This section of the river has distinct sections of whitewater and flatwater and is punctuated by several dams—some that are the remains of industrial properties (mostly paper mills) and some that have been updated by hydropower companies.

While the flatwater sections of the river are used for motor boating and fishing, the whitewater section through the City of Watertown is growing in popularity.

Four whitewater rafting companies are active on the Black River, providing group rafting trips from the City of Watertown to the mouth of the river at the Village of Dexter. For kayakers, the opening half mile features several Class II and III waves, with “Hole Brothers” and “Route 3 Wave” being the most popular play hole areas in the city for “park and play” whitewater rodeo activities. Further downstream, there are Class IV and V sections for experienced kayakers. The city will host the North American Kayaking Championships in 2005.

The Black River holds so much promise that to explore it fully, by canoe or otherwise, would take a lifetime. So why not get started today?

Dave Zembiec is director of administration and community projects with the New York State Tug Hill Commission.

Scenic views are common on the Black River. Returning this summer after a two-year hiatus is the Lewis County Riverfest. Contact the Lewis County Chamber of Commerce (number at left) for details.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Lewis County Black River Canoe Trail Guide—

The guide explains some of the river’s history as part of the state canal system, provides canoeing information, describes the flora and fauna that inhabit the river corridor, and identifies points of natural and historical interest on a fold-out map of the river. To get your copy, call the Lewis County Chamber of Commerce at (800)-724-0242.

A Black River Guide—Produced by the Thousand Islands International Tourism Council, this guide identifies opportunities for whitewater rafting and kayaking, flatwater canoeing and kayaking, fishing access, and recreation trails. To order the guide, call the council at (315)-482-2520.

Fishing and Canoeing the Black River in Jefferson, Lewis, and Oneida Counties—

Produced by DEC, this guide provides maps of river sections with information on canoe access and fish species.

You can also visit www.blackriverny.com or www.dec.state.ny.us for more information.

Sharon Buckingham

