

The Hoosic River

The Hoosic is a three-state river. It forms in the Green Mountains of Vermont, the Taconics of New York, and the sides of Mount Greylock – the highest mountain in Massachusetts. The river runs seventy miles from its headwaters south of the Cheshire Reservoir in Massachusetts to the community of Stillwater, NY, on the Hudson River. Its watershed covers 720 square miles. Major tributaries include the North Branch, the Green River, the Little Hoosic, the Walloomsac, the Owl Kill, and the Tomhannok.

The Taconic range on the west and the Hoosac Range (in Massachusetts) and the Green Mountains (in Vermont) on the east constitute the high headwaters areas of the watershed. In general, the Taconics and the Mt. Greylock massif are high-limestone mountains. The plant communities they support are unusually rich, and include some species at the northern limits of their ranges. The Green Mountains are generally granitic. Plant communities there are relatively less diverse.

The twenty-nine Massachusetts miles have been adopted by the six communities through which they run as state-designated Local Scenic Rivers. Two tributaries, Hopper and Money Brooks on the west side of Mt. Greylock, are state-designated Natural Scenic Rivers. The Tomhannock Reservoir and much of its watershed is also protected; it is the water supply for the city of Troy, NY.

Floating

One of the best ways to see the river is from a canoe, kayak, or raft.

Depending on water level, the Hoosic presents exciting and scenic canoeing, kayaking or rafting. Because the Hoosic is a fast-draining system, best boating is likely to be in the spring or during the autumn rainy season, but any significant rainfall will have an effect on water levels.

It is illegal and dangerous to enter the flood-control chutes in Adams, North Adams and Hoosick Falls. Power-company dams in the New York section should be given wide berth. **Obstructions are marked on the maps with caution signs.**

Cheshire Reservoir, Adams, MA

Access: Roadside rest area on State Rt. 8 (#1)

Paddle the reservoir from the roadside rest area at the north end of the lake. The shallow, weedy water body is privately owned. By heading south and crossing the causeway, you can explore some 500 acres. Paddling the river just below the dam at the north end (the "jungle") is not recommended because it is narrow, shallow, and obstructed by branches.

North Adams, MA (#2) to Lauren's Launch, Williamstown, MA (#3) 3.4 miles

#4 Access: The Ashton Avenue access area is just east of the Williamstown/North Adams line, off MA Rt. 2. Signs on Route 2 indicate access area to the north.

Highlights of this stretch include occasionally deep and swift water, the Green River entering on the left one mile from Ashton Avenue, and great views over one's shoulder of Mount Greylock and the Green Mountains. Shortly after passing under the

US Route 7 bridge in Williamstown, look for an informal landing (Lauren's Launch, named after HooRWA founding member Lauren Stevens), developed by HooRWA.

Lauren's Launch, Williamstown, MA (#3) to Clayton Park, Pownal, VT (#4) 4.8 miles
#3 Access: From the south, go 1.2 miles from the Routes 2/7 rotary in Williamstown to an unnamed road on the left with signs including "Williamstown D.P.S." and "Hoosic River Access." From the VT/MA state line, go south on Rt. 7 1.1 miles to the unnamed road. Take the unnamed road 0.2 miles, across railroad tracks, to a sign for Lauren's Launch. Park in the pull-off opposite the entrance to the transfer station.

The river receives treated wastewater from a treatment plant, then swings north through a hemlock glade. As the river gains strength, the water becomes more challenging. Depending upon flow, **tricky rips** await at the landfill; at the Vermont line just above a deep swimming hole; and just before the Main Street bridge in Pownal. The Clayton Park takeout is a few hundred yards below the bridge, on the right (#4).

Clayton Park, Pownal, VT (#4) to Tannery Dam, North Pownal, VT (#5) 2.6 miles
#4 Access: from intersection of US Rt. 7 and VT Rt. 346; 0.8 miles west on VT Rt. 346 to Lincoln St. Go left on Lincoln St. 0.1 miles to parking area (simply pull to side of road) and old sign post. Be careful crossing the ungated railroad tracks. The access area is not signed.

Farm fields, wetlands, and the wooded slopes of the Taconics on your left are typical of this stretch of river. Backwater and a close approach to the Boston and Maine railroad tracks on your right indicate the approach to the tannery **dam**. Take out on the right as the rails enter a shallow then deep road cut, and carry your craft along the tracks about 0.3 miles around the dam. **Trains use the tracks several times a day**. The take out is not signed.

Strobridge Recreation Complex, North Pownal, VT (#6) to County Rt. 95 bridge, Petersburg, NY (#7), 5.3 miles

#6 Access: This put-in is on the downstream side of the Tannery Dam. From the south, at intersection of US Rt. 7 and VT Rt. 346, take VT Rt. 346 west 3.0 miles to an unnamed road leading to a bridge over the Hoosic in the hamlet of North Pownal. From the north, the road is 1.6 miles from the NY/VT state line. A floaters ramp is located across the railroad tracks, on the left, at the downstream end of old concrete pad. The access area is not signed.

The Hoosic holds close to the wooded slopes of the Taconics to the state line (at the Rt. 346 bridge), then begins to bend back and forth on a sinuous route through farm fields. After executing a U-bend and returning to flow near the railroad tracks, floaters should watch for waves ahead. These signal a Class II rapid, caused by a ledge and a three-foot drop. Paddle through the center of the wave and hole, and then bear far left to avoid a smaller rapid. Treat this challenging section with respect! One can take out just before the County Rt. 95 bridge, on the right (#7).

County Route 95 bridge (#7), Petersburg, NY to Rock Cut, Hoosick, NY (#8), 3.5 miles.
#7 Access: From the west, at the intersection of NY Rts. 22 and 346, take NY Rt. 346 0.5 miles east to County Rd. 95. From the east, at the NY/VT state line, travel west on NY

Rt. 346 about 2.1 miles to County Rt. 95. Go north on County Rt. 95 about 0.2 miles to the bridge across the Hoosic. The access area is not signed.

The Little Hoosick enters, quickly, on the left, beyond the railroad bridge. Downstream, watch out for old stone piers, remnants of a Rutland railroad bridge. Placid water is the rule to the Rock Cut.

Rock Cut, Hoosick, NY (#8)

#8 Access: The Rock Cut is on NY Rt. 22, about 0.2 miles north of the intersection of NY Rt. 7 and NY Rt. 22, on the east side of the highway. This popular fishing, swimming, and picnicking area belongs to the Hoosac School and is maintained by the Town of Hoosick. The access area is informally signed.

Though floating is pleasant downstream of the Rock Cut, there are at present no publicly accessible take-out sites between it and the Hoosick Falls flood chutes. (HooRWA is working on a Hoosick Falls Greenway project on a stretch of abandoned rail line along the river which would include floating access sites in the Village.) **Under no circumstances should floaters enter the flood chutes!** (Dangerous by themselves, they also lead to a nearly non-navigable series of ledges.)

Kockley Avenue, Hoosick Falls, NY #9

#9 Access: This hard-to-find boat launch provides access downstream of the Hoosick Falls power station dam, on the west side of the dam. It offers little advantage over and perhaps greater challenge in low water than Access site #10, on the east side of the dam. From the Church Street bridge over the Hoosic River in Hoosick Falls, take Mechanic Street past the dead end sign to Kockley Avenue on the right. Follow Kockley to its end in a residential area. The parking area is signed.

Treatment Plant, Hoosick Falls, NY (#11) to Buskirk, NY (#s 11 and 12), 6.6 miles

#11 Access: From the Rock Cut, take NY Rt. 22 north through the Village center about 5 miles to Treatment Plant Road on the left. From the intersection of NY Rts. 22 and 67 in North Hoosick, Treatment Plant Road is on the right, about 1.2 miles south on NY Rt. 22. Take Treatment Plant Road down the steep hill, across the ungated but frequently used railroad tracks, past an electric substation then, bearing right, to a dam and power plant. The access road is on the right side of the power plant. It is signed.

This stretch of river is delightfully undeveloped – although it has long been used for agriculture and railroading. A 3-span Boston and Maine trestle at 0.8 miles downstream may be piled with debris at its bases. Use the center span. At about 1.4 miles, the Walloomsac River, a major tributary draining the Green Mountains east of Bennington, VT, enters on the right. Some distance further, as the view on the left bank opens up and the river begins to bend left, prepare to traverse a Class II rapid at a railroad trestle that once carried the Delaware and Hudson Line. Many large rocks are piled around the piers.

After passing beneath the NY Rt. 67 bridge (the Eagle Bridge), the Hoosic begins to flatten and slow, as water backs up behind the Johnsonville dam. The red Buskirk Covered Bridge signals two access areas, a NYS DEC site (#11) on the south side of the bridge, and a Reliant Power site (#12) just downstream of a barn complex below the bridge.

Buskirk, NY (#s 11 and 12) to Johnsonville Dam, Johnsonville, NY (#13) 5.1 miles
#11 and #12 Access: From the intersection of NY Rts. 67 and 22, in Eagle Bridge, take NY Rt. 67 3.1 miles west to County Route 103. Turn north on Rt. 103. The #11 access site will be just before the Buskirk Covered Bridge, on the left. It is signed. For #12, continue across the bridge, turn left, and travel 0.2 miles west on Rt. 59A, to a signed access area.

This stretch of water resembles a lake with many bays. A heron rookery is located on river right as the hills begin to close in on that side. Waterfowl make heavy use of the quiet backwaters. The river here still moves, but slowly.

Take out just above the Johnsonville dam, on the left (#13). **Under no circumstances should floaters go beyond this point!** The parking area there serves both the upstream take-out and the downstream put-in sites.

Johnsonville Dam, Johnsonville, NY (#14) to James Thompson Hydroelectric Project, Valley Falls, NY (#15) 4.2 miles

#14 Access: From the east, at the intersection of NY Rt. 22 and NY Rt. 67, travel Rt. 67 west about 8.3 miles to Johnsonville Road/County Rt. 112. From the west, at the Valley Falls bridge over the Hoosic River, travel east on NY Rt. 67 about 2.8 miles to Johnsonville Road. Go north on Johnsonville Road to River Road less than 0.1 miles on the right. Take River Road northeast to the parking area along the river. The put-in is about 100 yards down a mostly informal path to a small cove below the dam. The parking area is signed.

Just beyond the Johnsonville Dam, floaters pass under a historic 1891 mesh-floor iron bridge, and then past the piers of an old Greenwich and Johnsonville Railroad trestle. (A historic G&J railroad car is on display at the Washington County Fairgrounds in Greenwich, NY.) This section of river contains some big rocks, and is hard to float in low water. Further downstream, water becomes backed up by the dam at Valley Falls. As the dam and the adjacent abandoned factory buildings become apparent, and above the sign reading "Caution, Dam Ahead," pull to the right and look for a grassy ramp to the river and the take-out site (#15). **Under no circumstances should floaters go beyond this point!**

#15 Access (for spotting a vehicle, or for paddling on the Valley Falls backwater): Just west of the NY Rt. 67 Valley Falls bridge over the Hoosic, turn on Schaghticoke Road to its end at Bunker Hill Road. Go right on Bunker Hill Road to a signed parking area on the right, in grass. This site has room for only 3 or 4 vehicles.

The stretch of river between the Valley Falls dam and the next impoundment downstream is, except for a very short stretch, are only safely paddled by expert floaters. Remnant dams, rapids, and large rocks are the rule in this section.

Schaghticoke Dam impoundment, Fisherman's Lane #16 This site provides access only to a backwater, which in summer is choked with water chestnut.

#16 access: From the north, from Rts. 67 and 40 at the Schaghticoke Fairgrounds, go south on NY Rt. 40 about 1.1 miles to Fisherman's Lane on the left (nearly opposite

Holy Trinity Church). From the south, where Rt. 67 heads west toward Mechanicville, take Rt. 40 about 0.5 miles north to Fisherman's Lane on the right. Take Fisherman's Lane to a boater's access and handicapped fishing dock at the bottom of the hill. Parking here is very limited. Areas are signed.

The stretch of river below the Schaghticoke dam and through the Schaghticoke Gorge **should be attempted only by experienced white-water kayakers, and only if conditions are right.** For information on annual whitewater releases at the "Great Falls" in Schaghticoke, see www.americanwhitewater.org.

Powerstation Road, Schaghticoke, NY (#17) to Hudson River Lock 4, Stillwater, NY (#18) 5.4 miles

#17 Access: From the north, Rts. 67 and 40 and the Schaghticoke Fairgrounds, go south on NY Rt. 40 about 1.1 miles to Chestnut Street on the right. From the south, where NY Route 67 leaves NY Rt. 40 at the traffic light, go north about one-half mile to Chestnut Street on the left. Access signs are on that corner. Take Chestnut Street west, and bear left on Powerhouse Road. Stay on Powerhouse (it will become dirt, and cross a beautiful bridge) to its end at the signed parking area at the Brookfield Power substation. Limited parking, 3-4 vehicles.

Riffles, high banks, and impressive scenery reward floaters early on this reach. Downstream of Tomhannock Creek, the river slows its course, flowing through open farm fields and winding between gravel bars. The Hoosic becomes wide and shallow here, and may be hard to navigate in low water.

Floaters can end their journey in one of two places. The waters of the Champlain Canal's Lock Four join those of the Hoosic at an easily seen shale-y point on river right (#17), the terminus of a path leading from Lock Four State Park to the river. The path is the most frequently used take-out route here. (After a short haul uphill from the river, it levels out for an easy ten-minute carry to the parking area. The oak woods on this point shelter a variety of native woodland plants, some of them uncommon.)

When water levels are appropriate (they fluctuate according to the needs of a utility downstream), floaters can bear right around the point and into the lock itself. The ride upstream through the lock is free.

#18 Access: Lock Four State Park is located just south of the Stillwater bridge over the lock and the Hudson. Be aware that the Park is open seasonally, and that the park gate is locked at 4:30 pm. The path to the point begins where the park road bears west toward the lock structures.

Hiking

There are innumerable hiking trails in the watershed's high hills, including three major long-distance trails.

The Appalachian Trail, the 2,000-mile footpath from Georgia to Maine, runs through much of the eastern portion of the watershed, climbing up and down in the Hoosac Range and the Green Mountains. (The Long Trail, which runs through Vermont from Massachusetts to Canada, shares the route of the AT in this section.) The trails cross MA Rt. 8 in Cheshire, MA Rt. 2 in North Adams, and VT Rt. 9 in Woodford. Several

trail shelters along the way make a walk through the watershed on the AT/LT a comfortable two- to four-day backpack. Streams and ponds are plentiful. Views are extraordinary, especially from Mt. Greylock, Pine Cobble, and Harwood Hill. The recently restored Glastenbury Mountain fire tower is just beyond the watershed divide on the northeast.

The Taconic Crest Trail begins off Madden Road in Hancock, MA and ends on NY Rt. 436 in Petersburg, NY. The mostly ridge-line trail traverses a total distance of about 29 miles, with an “up” of 7,827 feet and a “down” of 9,470 feet. A trail beginning in Hopkins Forest, a Williams College research facility west of Williamstown, and a trail beginning on Prosser Hollow Rd. in Petersburg provide alternative access to the ridge. Other alternative access paths begin in the Berlin (NY) State Forest, and Mattison Hollow Road off NY Rt. 22 in Cherry Plain.

Special features of the trail include an old ski area, great views from the high points near Rt. 2, and something called the “snow hole” – a very cool, mossy cleft that, it is said, has held snow even in August. The Taconic Hiking Club sponsors an End-to-End hike along the trail every two even-numbered years. Early pre-registration is required and the number of hikers is limited.

Shorter hiking possibilities are present in a number of federal, state, municipal, or private open spaces.

The Mt. Greylock State Reservation contains many miles of trails. Favorites include Bellows Pipe Trail, Hopper Trail, and Money Brook Trail.

In the Green Mountain National Forest, the trail to the Dome in Pownal, the trails around Woodford Lake in Woodford State Park, and the trail to White Rocks on Bald Mtn. in Bennington are popular.

The Mile-around Woods, owned by the Fund for North Bennington, sits adjacent to the historic Park McCullough House in North Bennington, VT. The site is renowned for its spring wildflowers.

In New York state, Mt. Tom State Forest in White Creek offers extraordinary views southward to Mt. Greylock, unusually rich assemblages of spring wildflowers and ferns, and painfully large historic stone walls. Right on the watershed divide, in the Batten Kill State Forest in Jackson, Peaked Rock provides views north to the Adirondacks.

Tibbets State Forest in the Town of Hoosick permits ATV use by handicapped riders with a permit. Large trees and an ancient road are highlights on this property.

Biking

The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, which connects Lanesborough, MA to downtown Adams, MA, is the watershed’s premier biking resource. Eleven miles long, the trail follows the route of a Boston and Maine Railroad line abandoned in 1990. The ten foot-wide paved trail is universally accessible.

Elsewhere, most roads along the Hoosic also offer excellent and effortless biking. In general, these roads are also paved and are suitable for road bikes. The exceptions include the short Fisherman’s Lane in Schaghticoke, which provides access to an impoundment behind the Great Falls dam, and Knickerbocker Rd., which winds through farm and forestland just east of the Hudson River.

In recent years, a “metric century” route sponsored by HooRWA has become popular with experienced bikers. The route begins in Williamstown, MA, climbs up and over Petersburg Pass on MA/NY Rt. 2, follows County Routes 103, 109, and Longmeadow Rd. through the towns of Hoosick and Pittstown, crosses two historic bridges over the Hoosic in the hamlets of Johnsonville (on Rt. 112) and Buskirk (on Rt. 103), passes through the historic villages of Hoosick Falls (on County Rt. 103) and North Pownal, VT (on VT Rt. 346), and ends in Williamstown, on MA Rt. 7, again.

Other popular paved road rides include those between North Bennington, VT and Cambridge, NY; a covered bridge tour in Bennington, VT; and for a short challenge – the climb up Woodford Mountain on VT Rt. 9 to the watershed divide.

Unpaved country roads and unmaintained higher elevation town roads such as Old Military Road between Pownal, VT and Williamstown, MA provide exciting mountain bike opportunities for riders of all skill levels.