The other day as my wife and I, along with our dogs, walked River Road near Riparius on the Hudson River, my wife said to me in a folksy manner “just think all this water here, is on its way to New York City.”

It’s true the Hudson River has flowed out of the Adirondack Mountains for millennia, southward towards the Atlantic Ocean. And for the last two centuries or so there have been plans to dam the upper Hudson River for one reason or another and most of those plans have dealt with using the water resources for some down state endeavor.

In Verplanck Colvin’s Report on the Topographical Survey on the Adirondack Wilderness of New York (1873) he suggests that a dam be constructed on the Hudson above its junction with the Schroon River. The purpose for this dam was to provide pure water to the cities along the lower Hudson River. In view of the fact that the Hudson River by the 1870’s was already polluted with industrial waste from factories all the way from Warrensburg to New York City, Verplank Colvin proposed that a 150-mile Adirondack aqueduct be constructed to deliver pure water to cities from Albany to New York.
Colvin argued his proposal in 1872 at several meetings of the Albany Institute. Although the city of Albany was interested in an aqueduct to provide pure water from the Adirondacks other cities along the proposed aqueduct route were not. Another obstacle was noted by Colvin himself, the recent (1871) construction of the Adirondack Rail Road along the Hudson River valley from Saratoga to North Creek by Thomas Durant. Much of the railroad would have to be relocated if the proposed aqueduct were to be constructed.

At about the same time (1874) Ferrand Benedict proposed that a dam be built at the north end or outlet (Raquette River) of Long Lake and that a canal be built to link the upper Raquette River waters (Blue Mountain Lake, Raquette Lake, Forked Lake, Long Lake) to the Upper Hudson River. This would have diverted the waters of the Upper Raquette watershed into the Upper Hudson Watershed. (Although he had proposed the idea of damming Long Lake and constructing a canal to the Hudson watershed as early as the 1840s.)

In his 1874 proposal the inflow of water to the Upper Hudson River watershed was designed to promote logging (more logs to Glens Falls saw mills), and to increase the flow of the Hudson River during all seasons of the year. Additional water could then enter the Champlain Canal system by way of the Glens Falls Feeder Canal. We often forget that transporting goods by canal was an inexpensive way to get bulky goods (especially mine ore from the Adirondacks) to market. The New York State Legislature rejected Benedict’s plan when several Raquette River loggers saw that logs bound for mills along the Raquette River would ultimately end-up at mills along the Hudson in Glens Falls or Hudson Falls.

**Why Hudson River Dams?**
In the 1880’s and 1890’s the State of New York became very interested in constructing containment dams to regulate rivers for flood control, and to feed waters into the State’s canal system. In the Annual Report of the State Engineer and Survivor of the State of New York, 1895, a considerable amount of time is spent in dealing with proposed dams on the upper Hudson River and its main tributaries (Indian River, Cedar River, Sacandaga River, and the Schroon River). This report is often referred to as the Rafter Report (named after the author and Engineer-in-charge George W. Rafter).

Among several dam sites Rafter proposed was one on the upper Hudson at Hadley. The proposed Hadley Reservoir was to be built at Rockwell Falls and the impounded waters would flow back upstream to Thurman Station, just below the village of Warrensburg. The Rafter survey makes provisions for continued use of the Hudson River for the “river driving” (floating logs) and for eventual waterpower development. He also recognized a very great problem with the Hadley site, one that would continually reappear:

"An apparent objection to the Hadley reservoir it may be mentioned [is] that its construction would necessitate the relocation of several miles of the Adirondack Railway which now follows the windings of the river not far above the high-water mark. . . . the original location of this railway was an error of judgment, difficult to account for on any other supposition than that the company constructing it had no really clear conception of just what the road is for. In 1870-1872, when the road was built, the region penetrated was, as it is
today, entirely underdeveloped, and no railway could hope to be successful there unless it in some way could give an impetus towards the development of business for the road. . . . Unfortunately, the economy-of-the-moment view prevailed, and, with slight exception the whole line from Stony Creek Station to North Creek, a distance of about thirty miles, was finally laid near the water’s edge.”

Ultimately, the proposed dam at Hadley was not constructed due to the need to re-locate the tracks of the Adirondack Railway.

However the idea of a proposed reservoir at Hadley on the upper Hudson did not just go away. The New York State Water Supply Commission revisited the idea in its, 1908, 1909, and 1911 reports, as did the 1911 New York State Conservation Commission report. These latter two reports went on to include additional dams. Dams were proposed not only at Hadley, but Millington Brook, the Glen, Gage Mountain, Huckleberry Mountain, North River, Kettle Mountain, and the Gooley Steps at the juncture of the Indian River. These plans not only included site descriptions and photographs, but maps and river profiles. Some of the dam sites also included proposed, “power tunnels” (aqueducts or penstocks) from an upper level dam to the next lower level dam. Their purpose was to assist in controlling down river flooding; to feed the State’s canal system; and to produce, the then “new” hydroelectric power.

Beyond Rafter’s proposals, other sites in the Hudson River Watershed had been considered; one constructed on the Indian River in 1898, at Indian Lake, and another planned but ultimately not constructed was at Tumblehead Falls on the Schroon River. By the mid-1920’s several alternative flood control and power generating sites were also being considered along the Sacandaga River Valley.

During World War I few dams were considered for construction, but in 1922, New York State issued a report Water Power and Storage Possibilities of the Hudson River, which outlined proposed plans for the Upper Hudson in the area of Newcomb; the Boreas River Valley, again along the Sacandaga River, and yet again the Schroon Lake area. Engineers in New York State from the 1920’s through the 1960’s were looking at almost all of the river-ways as additional hydropower potential. In 1930 The Great Sacandaga Reservoir was completed at Conklingville, and in 1952 the Stewart’s Bridge Dam.

The quest to harness rivers slowed during the great depression, at least in New York State, and ground to a halt during World War II, but every river system was studied for potential use.

After World War II many ambitious power dam project were constructed along the Raquette River, but the upper Hudson was left untamed. However in the early 1960’s the entire North East was hit with a severe drought and the large urban centers from Boston to Washington, D.C. began to look for ways to provide water to their citizenry. New York City looked north to the Adirondacks
to solve its water shortage problems. A commission was again established to study the possibilities of building dams on the Upper Hudson River to store water and to provide hydroelectric power to New York City. Plans were developed for four dams to be constructed in the Upper Hudson River Valley. Two dams were to be constructed in the Indian Lake area, (Gooley Dam and Kettle Mountain Dam), and two dams near Hadley-Luzern and Warrensburg, (Big Hadley and The Glen).

The Big Hadley and Glen Dams

A map of the proposed Glen Reservoir (c.1965): courtesy Rick Rosen

Big Hadley was to be built in the same location as the other proposed dams at Rockwell Falls. It was to be 50 ft high with a flow line at 610 feet above sea level, essentially the same dam proposed back in 1895, by George W. Rafter. The Big Hadley dam would have flowed water 15 miles back to Thurman Station (Warrensburg). The Niagara Mohawk Power Company owned the riparian rights, but again the dam would have flooded major sections of the railroad track then owned by the Delaware and Hudson Railroad (D&H).

Another dam was sited farther north, up-stream, near a small creek called Millington Brook. This was to have been a 100 ft dam to be known as The Glen Dam. This impoundment would have been about five miles long, with a flow line at 740 ft above sea level. The Glen had been one of the locations mentioned in the Conservation Commission and the Water Supply Commission Reports of 1911. Definitely not a new location for a dam, but the proposed
1960’s dam was substantially larger. The 1912 River Profile showed three smaller dams in relatively the same location.

So, what happened? Why were these dams not constructed? Initially there was support for the dams from business and civic leaders in the metropolitan New York City area, in Albany, as well as local support in Glens Fall, Lake George, and in Warrensburg. New York City and Westchester County lobbied for an increase of fresh water, and local towns saw a benefit in construction and tourism.

All four dams planned for the upper Hudson River watershed were in violation of the New York State Constitution’s “Forever Wild Clause”, (Article VII, Section 7) according to the Adirondack Hudson River Association. Paul Schaefer of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks and the newly formed Adirondack Hudson River Association started a movement to prevent the construction of the Gooley Dam, Kettle Mountain Dam, Hadley Dam and The Glen Dam, all within the Adirondack Blue Line.

Paul Schaefer had the unique ability to gain support for opposing the dams from many diverse interests groups. With many public meetings; convincing writing; and the legal precedent of having waged a similar battle in opposition to the Higley and Panther Mountain Dams, on the Moose River (1945-1955) Shafer and his supporters were able to sway public opinion to oppose the dams. Political pressure became so intense that the New York State Legislature passed the Smith-Lane Act in 1969 (State Senator Bernard C. Smith and State Assemblyman Clarence Lane) and governor Nelson Rockefeller signed the bill. No dams would be built on the upper Hudson River from the village of Hadley north.

It is Paul Schaefer’s legacy and the work of many anti-dam supporters that we can still say that the Upper Hudson River flows unimpeded out of the Adirondack Park towards New York City. The recreation potential of the Upper Hudson River is boundless; whitewater paddling, flatwater paddling, camping, fishing, hunting, and hiking are all part of the recreational package found along the shores of the Hudson River within the Adirondack Park.

**Paddling The ‘Big Hadley’ Area**

The paddle trip from the Warren County Canoe Access (Thurman Station / Warrensburg) to Hadley is of special note. This is a delightful, moderate, one-way paddle of about 14 miles. Be advised that consulting a good paddle guide describing the route is of the utmost importance. Note also that although the river is relatively slow and wide there is a slight current, some riffles, possibly (depending on water levels) a class I rapids, and some gravel bars. Paddlers should wear their PFDs and exercise caution in several locations. River conditions change daily with winds, water levels, air and water temperatures, etc. Be prepared, carry a dry bag with extra clothing, first aid kit, and food and water, be safe, it’s a long day.
This section of the Hudson River is a pleasant surprise. It is far different than the whitewater rafting area of the Hudson Gorge (Class IV and V). While this is a flatwater section some paddling skills are necessary to avoid strainers and sleepers, and to stay out of the headwind should it be blowing from the south. It is also a relatively long paddle. So plan on five to seven hours, scout your take-out before your paddle and make arrangements for a car shuttle.

After entering the water at the Warren County Canoe Access, Thurman Station Bridge it is a short paddle to the old railroad bridge, the current pulls you along nicely. On river right closely paralleling the river will be the tracks of the Upper Hudson River Railroad (Saratoga North Creek RR, the old D&H or Adirondack Railway). Soon you will find a number of bridled, low-lying islands. The river way between the islands can become a little “scratchy”, depending on water levels. In mid to late summer to avoid shallow water, stay river left. After paddling past the islands you will come to a golf course on river right. At approximately 4.5 miles also river right is the private beach owned by the Thousand Acres Ranch and Resort. This is only a takeout for a prearranged shuttle service provided by Beaver Brook Outfitters; all other paddlers are expected to continue paddling on down the river.

Beginning at about the 6-mile mark designated campsites begin to appear on river left. This is the Hudson River Recreation Area (HRRA). Limited free camping is offered on a first-come, first-serve basis, with a maximum stay of three days. The next 8 miles, river left, is more of the HRRA lands. This area is more of the surprise; the river is wider and for the most part slower and shallow. The day we paddled it we saw an eagle soaring high above the river and many mergansers swimming along the shore. Sunken logs from the river driving days are often seen underwater, lying on the riverbed as you paddle along. This is also an area of solitude, there are few buildings on river right and of course none on river left. Further down river there may be some day-use canoeist, kayakers, and tube floaters, but for the most part it is a drift along passage. Stony Creek enters the river on the right and a few residences can be seen.

As you approach the take-out you will be able to hear the falls (Rockwell Falls). Yes, the area where the dam(s) (c.1895, 1909, 1911, 1922, c.1965) were to be constructed. When you see the sign “Attention: Caution! Waterfalls Ahead” it is time to depart the river. These are very dangerous falls, someone almost every year, is badly hurt or dies at these falls. The take-out river left comes up first (Luzerne side), and the next, and last take-out, is on river right (Hadley side).

*Illustrations: Above, Mike Prescott paddling; middle, a map of the proposed Hadley Reservoir (c.1965); and below, the proposed Glen Reservoir (c.1965) (both maps courtesy Rick Rosen).*