

Erie Canalway Paddle Trip Log

By Paul Comstock

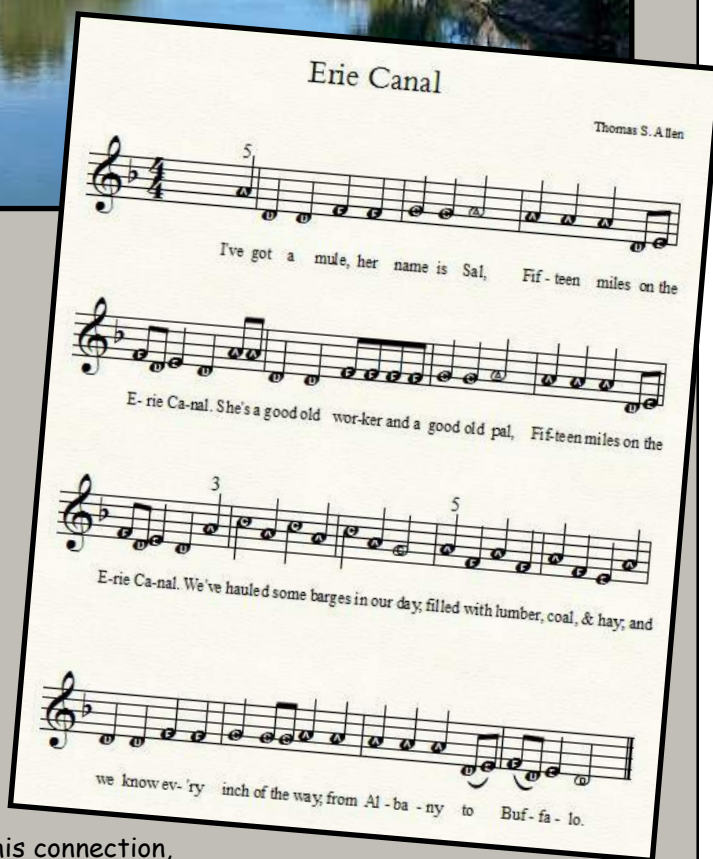
BACKGROUND: Paul Comstock has deep roots in the Finger Lakes region. He's chair of the Development Committee of the Erie Canal Heritage Fund, and proposed this trip for the enjoyment of RMSKC paddlers and to help illustrate to the Heritage Fund board that the canal should be marketed to people beyond just the northeastern states.

Paul was put in touch with Clark Strickland four or five years ago by Marshall Seddon, the well-known kayak instructor and owner of The River Connection shop in the Mid-Hudson Valley. Paul lives in Houston and because of this connection, RMSKC paddlers have done several joint paddles with HASK over the past several years.

Paul organized the paddle plans, history and geology lessons, local dining, and brought a huge trailer of boats to lend to the participants who flew to the area.

Clark Strickland did the trip logistics, reserved the VRBO in Geneva, New York, and schlepped boats and gear from Colorado.

PARTICIPANTS: Dan Bell, Sandy Carlsen and Harold Christopher, Paul Comstock, Marsha Dougherty, Brookie Gallagher and Lindsay Meeks, Gregg Goodrich and Anna Troth, Sue Hughes, Jud Hurd, Matt Lutkus, George Ottenhoff, Patrick Reardon, Leslie Taylor, Clark and Marty Strickland, and local experts Ray Andrews and George Palansky.



DAY 1, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21: We arrived at Abby Park, located just west of Lock 29 in Lyons. It is where Mud Creek runs into the canal. As we unloaded the boats and gear we were in the shadows of one pier of the old aqueduct that was used during the 2nd expansion of the Erie Canal to float barges above and across this North/South creek.

Prior to our actual launch, we were treated to a synopsis of the canal's role in the development of Lyons by local retired teacher and Erie Canal expert, Robert Stopper. We learned of the world-famous Peppermint Oil produced in Lyons and shipped to New York via the canal.



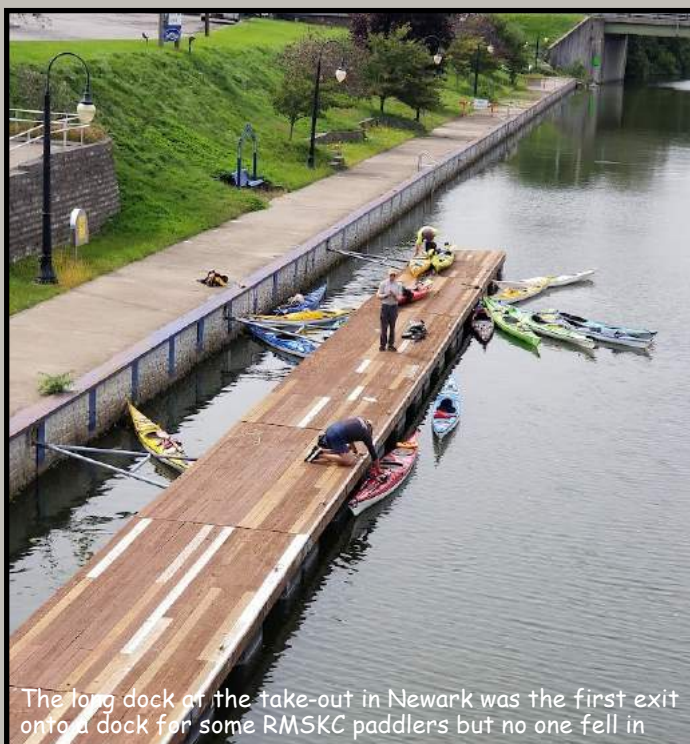
First day as people found the boats that Paul had brought for them, got pegs adjusted and loaded up



We launched at about 10:00 and headed west towards Newark. Soon we found ourselves "locking through" our first lock. We had received instructions on what to do when approaching, entering and leaving the lock during our pre-launch debriefing.

The lock was set, doors opened and we proceeded in. We hung on the lines coming down the sides of the lock to keep the boats stable as the water was let into the lock to raise us up to the next level going west.

After leaving the lock we passed by a working dry dock site on the right and then the original locks at the Poor House Grocery house.

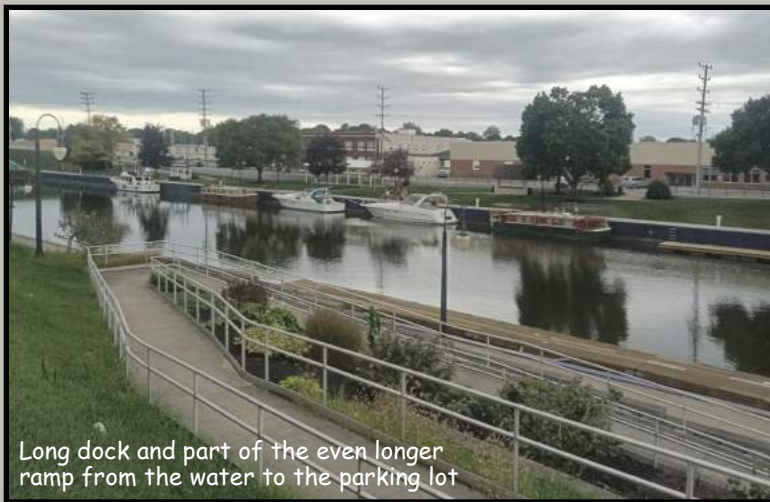


The long dock at the take-out in Newark was the first exit onto a dock for some RMSKC paddlers but no one fell in

Our takeout was at the Port of Newark site on a dock opposite the welcome center. We secured the boats and walked across the bridge to the center's restrooms and picnic tables.

There we were greeted by the executive director of the Newark Historical Museum and a reporter from the *Finger Lakes Times*. A history of Newark as a true canal town was provided, followed by a walk to the museum with a tour. Many also went across the street from the museum to the Newark Public Library where they toured their clock collection.

We carried the boats up the ramp to the parking lot and traveled to Geneva for a reception hosted by the Erie Canal Heritage Fund at the iconic Belhurst Castle, located overlooking beautiful Seneca Lake.



Long dock and part of the even longer ramp from the water to the parking lot

We were part of a presentation on the status of the efforts to promote the recreational use of the canal; they seemed excited to see us even if we were still in our paddling clothes.

Then we headed into town for dinner at the Deluxe Grill, one of Geneva's famous Italian restaurants.

DAY 2, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22:

We gathered early to head out to our launch site at May's Point, north of Seneca Falls. We put in at Rivers Crossing Campground and Marina, a private facility that hosted our group on a complimentary basis.

We sent two cars to two pull-outs, one at the Montezuma public boat ramp (about 6.5 miles) and one in Seneca Falls (about 13 miles). The weather was cloudy with gusting winds from the west.



Sue, Marty and Paul, with Clark who's talking about kayaking on the canal



Paddling into the lock



Heading out

When we arrived at the May's point lock, the attendant and his partner were painting one of the gates. They asked if we would wait for the whole group to enter before they put us through (descending). The shuttle cars were running longer to get back than anticipated so while we waited in the lock, the attendant gave us a history of the area and the power station that is no longer in service.

Once through the lock we paddled east on the Clyde River and passed where the Clyde ran into the Seneca River. Not far past that river intersection we came to the historic Montezuma site of the Richmond Aqueduct and an original Erie Canal lock.



Supports for the aqueduct that carried canal water, boats and mules over the river



Early photo of mules pulling a barge on the aqueduct to cross over the river

We landed just west of the towering aqueduct supports and hiked the trail up to the site where the Second Expansion of the canal led to the river.

There we saw the support structures that were the eastern base of the wooden trough that would be filled with water allowing the barges to pass over the river. We walked on the tow-path where the mules and horses walked as they towed the boats across.

The rains came with gusts of wind that felled two trees ahead of us. We continued down the path to an original Erie Canal lock. While all the supports were pretty much missing the width of the canal and towpath were evident. It was a true trip back in time.

We got back in our boats and paddled directly into the wind, which was gusting in the double digits mph, and headed close to shore for the lee side of the Seneca River heading south to the Montezuma boat ramp. We arrived after 2:30 and pulled out to have lunch, in rainy conditions off and on.



At the end of lunch we had about 6.5 miles to go to reach the take-out in Seneca Falls. An "Alamo" vote was called: those who wanted to end the paddle for the day were asked to move to one side of an imaginary designated line. Those who wanted to go to Seneca Falls stayed on the other side. There were only three or four who would go on, but when they realized it would put them there right about dark, the whole group decided to head for home.

DAY 3, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22: The decision to end the second day's paddle at the Montezuma boat ramp caused a change in plans for Day Three. We would now paddle from Seneca Falls east on the Cayuga/Seneca Canal, ending at the boat ramp in Montezuma again, a trip of about 6.5 miles. It was cold and raining as we launched on the west side of Seneca Falls just far enough to let us paddle under the famous bridge in the Frank Capra movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*. We called it Clarence's bridge after the guardian angel.



Famous bridge in Seneca Falls

We were fortunate that our club trip leader, Clark Strickland and his wife Marty have personal connections with Seneca Falls. Marty grew up there and her father's office "fronted" on the canal. They shared the history of the community and the impact the canal had on its economic prosperity in the 1950s and early 1960s.

The community was preparing for the Women's Hall of Fame Induction Ceremonies the next day. We saw them loading a barge with fireworks to be taken out on the lake we would paddle heading toward the first of a double lock.

We headed to the lock with the wind at our side coming out of the north. We entered the double Locks Two and Three of the Cayuga/Seneca Canal. We exited Lock Two and continued our paddle on the Seneca River until we came to the headwaters of Cayuga Lake. A 90 degree turn north found us entering Lock One. When we exited Lock One, our waterway joined that of the river that had been taken over by a controlled dam.

and experienced a total drop in elevation of 51 feet. We exited Lock Two and continued our paddle on the Seneca River until we came to the headwaters of Cayuga Lake. A 90 degree turn north found us entering Lock One. When we exited Lock One, our waterway joined that of the river that had been taken over by a controlled dam.



Jud, Dan Bell, Lindsay, Brookie

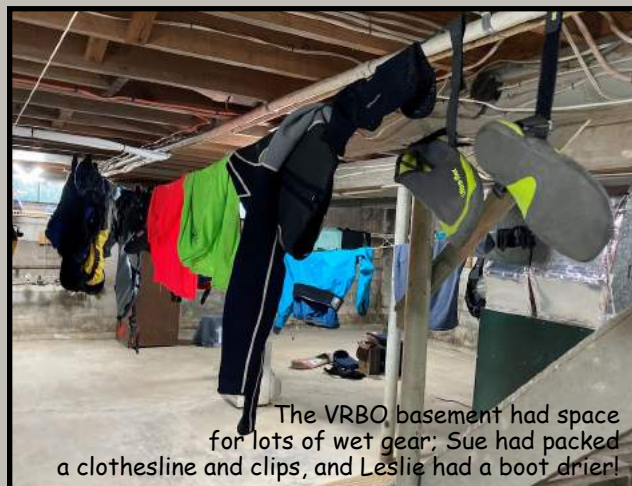
Not long after heading north out of the lock we came to the Montezuma boat ramp. What a pleasant surprise: we were greeted by Jud and his surprise of Dunkin' donuts and hot coffee. What a treat, and what a nice paddle.



Harold pouring for Sue



Anna



The VRBO basement had space for lots of wet gear; Sue had packed a clothesline and clips, and Leslie had a boot drier!

DAY 4, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24: We traveled to Fairport where we were met by Kevin Schoonover, a former city council member and current member of the Finger Lakes Erie Canal Experience Council. We had met him at the open house on Tuesday. He and his wife not only gave us information about Fairport and its history as a canal town but also the background of the most historic bridge on the canal, the Main Street lift bridge spanning the canal on a sloping angle.

They took pictures of our group from the bridge as we assembled to paddle under it and then as we came through heading to Macedon, our pull-out for the day, a trip of about seven miles.

It was a sunny, pretty day for a beautiful paddle through the countryside.

See the photos on the next page of Fairfield's municipal setup to help boaters who needed help launching.

While we waited to get underway we saw a woman move from her wheelchair to her boat and into the water so smoothly!



From the bridge at Fairfield



Gregg, trying out the kayak launch at Fairfield

When we arrived in Macedon we exited the main canal channel and entered that of the Second Expansion and the original Erie Canal waterway. Our pull-out at the boat ramp came in time for lunch. After lunch, several decided to go on to Palmyra via the canal while others chose to drive there and experience the Canal Day celebration going on.

Those of us who went on to Palmyra via the canal experienced going through Lock 29. Shortly after exiting the lock we pulled over and into Mud Creek (a common name for the small waterways that flowed north and south and were used to help flood the "ditch" as the canal had been referred to earlier). We pulled out and saw the wonderful park sites of Whipple Change Bridge and the Aqueduct pillars where the wooden trough holding water to transport the barges passed over head.

DAY 5, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25: The day weather forecast was for heavy rain, cold temperatures and a southern wind of around 10 mph. Only a few elected to go on this paddle; the hearty ones showed up at our put-in at the public launch for small boats in Minetto. We set out in the rain north towards Oswego, on Lake Ontario.

Immediately after launching we asked permission to lock-through. The operator informed us that there was a boat coming toward us that he would lock-through first before letting us in; for us it was a rising lock. We left the lock and turned back to see the incredible dam with massive water flowing over it. The water was covered with foam. It was raining to boot.

We continued north and went through two more locks.

The last one put us in an aqueduct canal well above the Oswego River rapids below, it was an interesting experience.



The dam, the foam and the rain



Paddling in the canal, with water overflowing its top side to the river below

When we left the last lock, before entering Lake Ontario, we paddled as the river and the canalway merged.

The current was strong and moved us easily out toward the historic lighthouse guarding the harbor entrance. We paddled past Fort Oswego on our left which has been at the entrance to the lake since early in the eighteenth century.



Paul Comstock



George, Patrick, Clark, Marsha, George Palansky, Matt, Gregg and Dan

At the light house, and in the rain and southern winds, we gathered on the Lake Ontario side of the jetty for a group picture.

We made our way back, heading into and across the wind, and quickly arrived at the public boat ramp. We were happy to get out of wet gear and head to a local restaurant for a leisurely lunch.

DAY 6, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26: On our final day on the Erie Canal we paddled from Palmyra east to just west of downtown Newark where we had paddled to on our first day, planning to take out at the park west of town at a place on the canal called "the wide waters". It was a pretty day, better than the weather forecast of rain and winds; the sun was on us most of the paddle and the winds were favorable to our travel. The fall colors were trying to come out but were not quite there yet. There were many people fishing along the way. It was a nice easy paddle and a very pleasant conclusion to our trip.

When we arrived at the take-out there was a thoughtful woman waiting for us in her car. "If you're the folks from Colorado, I saw you coming across and came down to give you this article about your group from the *Finger Lakes Times*." What a nice writeup submitted by Bob Stopper, our good friend from Lyons.



The only red tree



"Colorado Kayaking Club Paddling Canals Around Region"



Happy paddlers who hadn't let the weather forecast keep them home: Sue, Clark, Lindsay, Brookie, Harold, and Anna and Gregg; photo taken by Paul



Most of the group, the day that Jud brought donuts: Sue, Anna, Lindsay, Patrick, Marsha, Dan, Marty, Jud, Clark, Brookie, George, Harold, Gregg. Not pictured, Sandy, Leslie, Matt and Paul, the photographer

GREGG ADDED: Six days of paddling on the NY Waterways including the Erie Canal, Cayuga-Seneca Canal and Oswego Canal with the RMSKC was great fun, with good birding. Most of the birds on my list were from our VBRO on the east shore of Seneca Lake. One birding highlight for me was on the second day as we headed to the Montezuma Aqueduct Ruins on the Erie Canal: we had a small group of Sandhill Cranes fly over and call.

The second highlight was finally seeing a Green Heron on the sixth day of paddling on the section of the canal that went from Macedon to Palmyra. Many others in our group had seen Green Herons on several sections of the canal. I didn't get skunked on that species after all. Here's Gregg's list:

Canada Goose
Mallard
Common Merganser
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Sandhill Crane
Ring-billed Gull
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron

Great Egret
Green Heron
Turkey Vulture
Cooper's Hawk
Bald Eagle
Red-tailed Hawk
Belted Kingfisher
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker
Blue Jay
American Crow
Red-breasted Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch
Carolina Wren
European Starling
Gray Catbird
American Robin

Cedar Waxwing
House Sparrow
House Finch
American Goldfinch
Chipping Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Red-winged Blackbird
Northern Cardinal

POST PADDLE BITS: Dan Bell took the long way home through the Maritime Provinces of Canada; many others explored Ithaca, visiting Cornell, its Ornithology Department, and other attractions. Brookie and Lindsay went to the famous Moosewood Café, home of a series of popular vegetarian cookbooks, which has been in business for 50 years. One more thing: "fifteen miles" on the Erie Canal fits the beat of the music, but it's misleading; the mules really only pulled the barges about six miles a day. That Sal must have been a heck of a mule!

THANK YOU, PAUL: RMSKC, and especially Clark Strickland, thank Paul Comstock. He did a spectacular job of planning the trip, shepherding us to launch sites, arranging for speakers at several locations, lending and transporting his fleet of boats from Michigan, coordinating our locking by VHF at several locks, pointing out dining spots, bringing along several of his pals to join us, keeping an eye on safety, and just being a wonderful companion on the water and off. Paul completely redesigned the paddle itinerary on the fly when it became apparent that Clark had overestimated the stamina of the group and thought that longer days were doable. Given the wind and weather on several days, routes were shortened and redesigned to allow for more paddling downwind, and as a result we had a much better week on the wonderful Canalway system. Paul did all of this with the utmost graciousness, enthusiasm and generosity.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Thank you, too, to Lindsay, who set up the Google Photo Share site. Everyone posted to it, which was wonderful, and the site made the huge collection of pictures so easy to review and download.



Paul Comstock, trip planner and recorder