



Conewango Creek Waterway— Two Faces

by Mike Bleech photos by the author

If you float Conewango Creek, starting at the point where it enters Pennsylvania from New York and continue to its mouth at Warren, where it flows into the Allegheny River, you will see a creek with two distinctly different natures. One has scenery that is unusual in Pennsylvania, more like the Deep South. The other is a typical Appalachian waterway. Along the way, you may find fishing that has not gotten much attention.

Float fishing is the only way to fish all but short pieces of the creek, because it is mostly bordered by private land.

This is a creek with fascinating history. In 1749, Pierre Joseph Celoron de Blainville led a French force into the Ohio Valley, claiming the area for France.

Celoron's voyage began June 15 at Montreal. Their course took them along Lake Erie to the mouth of Chautauqua Creek, at present day Westfield, New York. From there, they cut the French Portage Road, over which they carried their boats and canoes to Chautauqua Lake. There they again took up a water route down the Chadakoin River to its mouth at Conewango Creek.

Along the way, the force left markers to verify their claim. One of these was a lead plate, which was buried at the mouth of Conewango Creek in present day Warren. It has never been found. It may have been dug up by Native Americans. The exact location where the lead plate was buried is in question since the course of the creek has changed through time.

Conewango Creek flows southward into Pennsylvania near Akeley in Warren County. Here, the creek is not close to any roads and is buffered from the sounds and sights of civilization by dense bottom land vegetation. The valley is very broad. It is easy to imagine that you are with Celoron, and Native eyes watch from the forest as you pass. Current moves very slowly. Banks are mud and clay. Large trees overhang the water. Numerous trees lie just under the surface of the creek.

Fishing pressure is very light. Pike are the most common gamefish in the slow, meandering part of the creek. Pike spawn in Akeley Swamp, on State Game Lands No. 282, along the east side of the creek. The swamp connects with the Conewango Creek by a few small creeks.

There is one particular place where the creek narrows and the current picks up speed. Walleyes are sometimes caught. Bullheads may also be caught in this slow moving stretch. There are occasional muskellunge, largemouth bass and smallmouth bass.

Water depth above Akeley is mysterious. Very few serious anglers go there in boats equipped with sonar. Rumors claim that in some places the bottom drops below 30 feet. At one place, not far into New York, the creek is deeper than it is wide.

Nearing Akeley, the Conewango Creek comes within view of U.S. Route 62. Then, it passes beneath the Akeley Bridge. Increasingly, more camps and homes are seen on the creek banks.

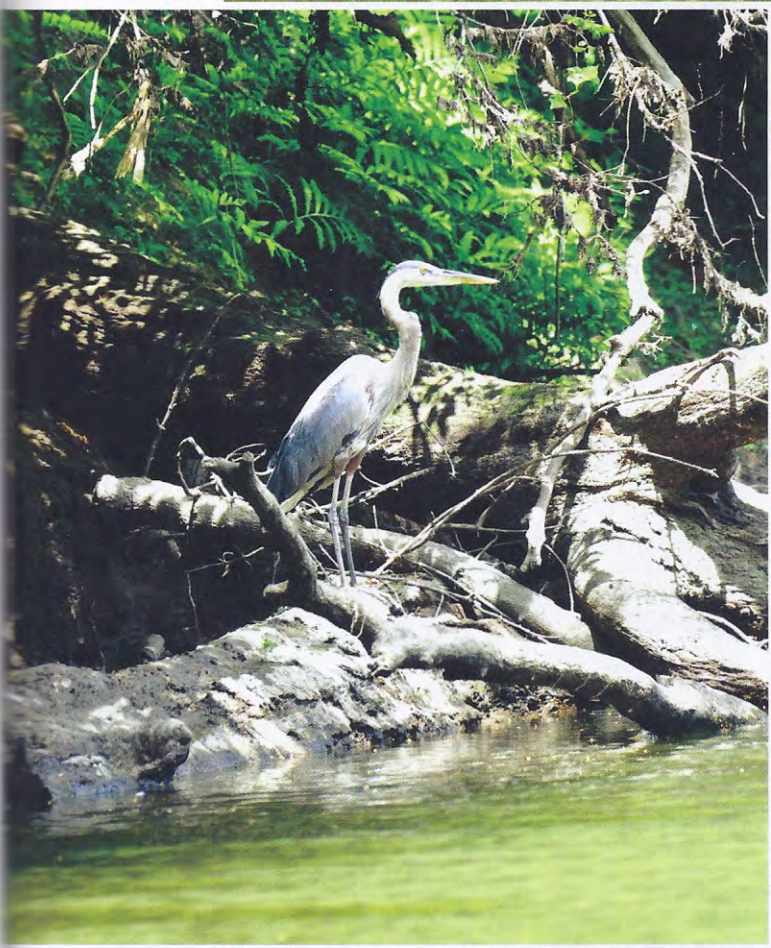
A few miles farther downstream at Russell, the Conewango Creek abruptly changes. Steep hills crowd the waterway. Current picks up speed over a rocky bottom and the gradient steepens.

At this point, the Conewango Creek is good smallmouth bass water, and walleyes become more common. There are even pools holding large trout.

Once you get to the gravel bottom section, keep at least two rods rigged. Tie a shallow-diving stickbait on one rod and a surface lure on the other rod just for fun. There is not much deep water below Russell.

Limited access makes it necessary to float specific stretches. A serious float of the entire Pennsylvania portion of Conewango Creek must start in New York, unless you start at Akeley.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has designated Conewango Creek as part of the





On Conewango Creek, jonboats can be used upstream from Russell. Boats must be operated at no-wake speed due to the width of the stream.

Marden E. Cobb Waterway Trail, also called the Cassadaga-Conewango Waterway. The lower New York access is right at the New York/Pennsylvania border. It is marked with a sign but may be difficult to see as there are other, larger signs at the border. Another access is farther upstream, where Route 62 crosses the creek just before Frewsburg.

Conewango Creek can easily be floated from Akeley to the mouth in a day. Since there is virtually no public land on the creek, camping is out of the question. Even spots to pause for shore lunch must be chosen prudently.

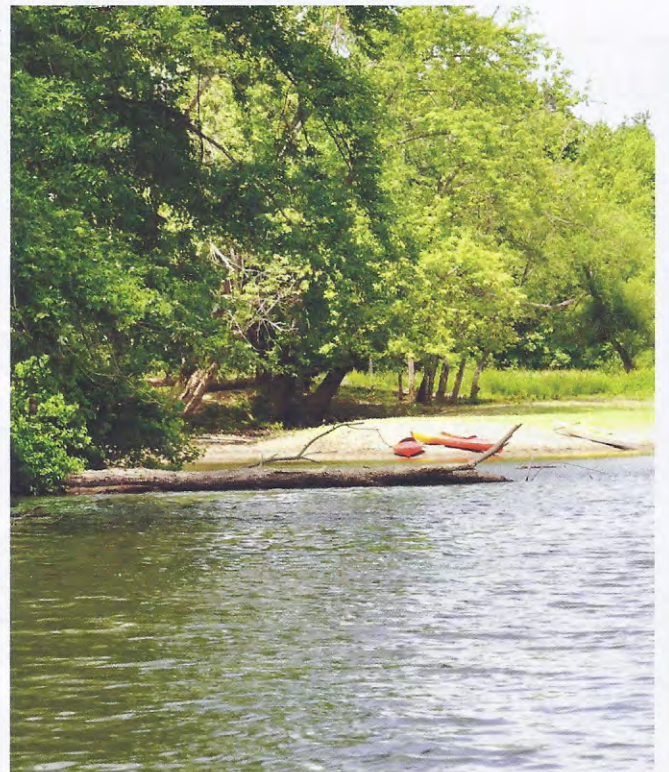
When heading downstream from the state line, the first Pennsylvania access is a private canoe livery off Route 62 near Akeley. It is 0.9 miles north from the turn to the Akeley Bridge, which is plainly visible from Route 62. A township access is also on the west bank, off Route 62, just 0.4 miles north from the turn to the Akeley Bridge.

There is no other access until North Warren, one which is not recommended.

The next marginally good access is at Warren, close to the mouth, in Point Park. This is suitable only for hand launching. The nearest access with a launch ramp is adjacent to Warren General Hospital, on the south side of the river.

Conewango Creek is suitable for floating by canoe or kayak. Jonboats are fine upstream from Russell. Some people use gas motors in this area, but boats must be operated at no-wake speed due to the width of the creek. Underwater logs, especially upstream from the Akeley Bridge, are lower unit eaters. Mostly duck hunters boat this section.

Downstream from Russell, the Conewango Creek can be classed among the better smallmouth bass fisheries in Pennsylvania. It looks like an overgrown trout stream, a



series of pools of various sizes separated by mild to moderate riffles. In fact, trout fishing is good enough for a few anglers to target them.

Except during high water periods, when no one should be on the Conewango Creek, riffles are no more severe than Class I. However, several of the riffles get very shallow, some so shallow that you must get out of your canoe or kayak.

Be it for fishing, hunting or a boating adventure, Conewango Creek is an overlooked treasure. ☐