



Connecticut River Quest

Thetford, Vermont

Physical Difficulty: Moderate

Special Features: Natural, River

Accessibility: Water/Boat

Duration: 1:50

Bring: Canoe, Compass

To get there: Take I-91 North to Exit 14. Turn right off the ramp onto Rte 113 and drive down hill to East Thetford Village. Turn left onto Route 5 and drive north about two miles to North Thetford Village. At the sharp ninety-degree turn in Rte 5, turn right onto Bridge Street and follow it over the railroad tracks a short distance to the boat ramp. This will be where you will put-in and take-out.

Quest Site Overview:

The Connecticut River is the largest river ecosystem in New England. Running from the Canadian border to Long Island Sound, this massive river is 410 miles long and its water shed encompasses over 11,000 acres. In the Upper Valley, the Connecticut River acts as the border between Vermont and New Hampshire and plays an important role in many of our lives; it is a major location of recreation, a source of waterpower and a natural habitat. In addition to farms and villages, this section of river cuts through northern hardwood and softwood forest, which is rich with numerous species of songbirds, amphibians, and small mammals. And it is important to note that land surrounding the Connecticut River is some of the finest agricultural land in the U.S. – it's an important place to grow food locally. Spending time exploring the Connecticut is a great way of learning more about this natural resource and how to care for it. It was designated an American Heritage River by President Clinton in 1998.

Clues:

On the shore of North Thetford, look across to see:

The Granite State, where people "live free."

Place your canoe in the wide river, moving slowly,

And stroke, pointing north the nose of your boat.

Just ahead: the stony skeleton of a covered bridge.
Til '36 it stretched the river's width,
Then a flood came and stripped it to bone,
Now only its old abutments stand nakedly alone.

Look up! What do you see before you?
Silhouette of an eroded mountain chain.
The Greens with their gentle curves overlapping—
The result of glaciers and continents colliding.

Lining the river is a myriad of scenes—
Forests to private yards to agricultural fields.
To your right, beyond that line of sumac trees,
A field of corn grows, waving in the breeze.

In the quiet of this slow river paddle,
Life is humming and moving all around you.
You must be attentive and use your senses,
Notice what takes place in the periphery of your lenses.

In air and on banks live a distinguished class—
Aves if you will, or "birds" in laymen's terms.
They can be identified by physical features—
Size, color, call and diet define these creatures.

For example, the spotted sandpiper or "teeter-tail"
Bobs and plucks bugs with a long thin beak.
If startled he'll burst into an odd flight—
Rapid wing beats followed by smooth glides.

Another shorebird to watch for is the killdeer,
Best identified by its call: *kill-deee, kill-deee*.
This bird likes the open space of a field,
But scours bank life—flies and crayfish—for meals.

If you will, consider why the river barely resists
Your efforts to paddle upstream, counter-current.
Below the Wilder Dam stands, holding water behind it,
Thus burying the Connecticut's natural gradient.

Take a closer look at the water's glassy skin,
Do you see an insect zigzagging by?
This common water strider never stops moving fast,

So he won't become prey to pike, trout or bass.

Now turn your attention to the ever-changing shore,
On your left, after a dock, you will see gravel banks.
This has been in the past a way of preventing erosion,
Which occurs from the water's to and fro motion.

Adding color and beauty to the river scene,
Goldenrod and Black-eyed Susans grow abundantly.
Susans have yellow flowers with brownish-purple centers
And bloom in large clumps from June to October.

As your canoe curves with this river of green-blue,
Look ahead to see yet another bend coming towards you.
There stands a tall white pine on your left hand side,
Followed by a beaver lodge and the beaver's feed pile.

Beavers, once called "little people" by the natives,
Share some interesting traits with us humans.
They, like us, alter their habitat to suit their needs,
Building riverside lodges and dams, by felling trees.

After all that grinding and chewing of hardwoods,
You would think a beaver's teeth would wear down.
But this rodent's teeth will grow his whole life,
Allowing him to do what he must to survive.

As you approach the wetlands, breathe deeply,
A thick scent of decaying matter greets you.
This habitat holds different plants and animals,
Including cattails, lily pads, and tadpoles.

Did you know that the cattail has many uses?
Not only is it the muse of nature artists,
American Indians did grind its starchy root,
And pluck its tender leaves for food.

You should know: wetlands are quite valuable.
They play a vital role in the health of this river.
By absorbing pollutants as water flows through,
They make the river cleaner for everyone's use.

Look off to the east; you should be able to see
A large white house and a grove of birch trees.
This is the sign you are coming to the end,

But it certainly doesn't mean you can't come again.

On the west side of the Connecticut,
A small stream with a big name trickles out.
You've officially reached Roaring Brook—
Now glance back and take one last look.

At the campsite, you'll discover a book in a box.
There, jot down your findings and thoughts.
When you are done with your treasure,
Return to your boat and paddle back to the dock in good measure.

What did you see?

The Green Mountains
Sweet Corn
Stag horn Sumac
Spotted Sandpiper
Killdeer
Common Water Strider
Northern Pike
Brook Trout
Small mouth Bass
Goldenrod
Black-eyed Susan
Beaver
Beaver Lodge
Beaver Feed Pile
Cattail
Lily Pad
Northern Leopard Frog Tadpole
White Pine
Birch Tree