



Len Handler

Len Handler has fished the Upper Delaware River for over fifty years. Now retired, he makes weekly trips to the river to fish during the season. The photos in this book were taken over the span of Len's time spent on the river. These days he spends as much time photographically recording the river's wonderful nuances as he does fishing. Although he fishes all three branches regularly, his personal favorite is the East Branch, which he considers the jewel of the system. He cherishes his friendships made on the river and the many seasonal moods of the Catskills. Len is still in awe of this amazing fishery and ecosystem, and his love affair with the river grows more passionate every year.



The Upper Delaware River

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About this book

I first travelled to the Upper Delaware River in 1967 on a fishing trip to the Main Stem in Lordville, New York with three lifelong fishing buddies. I was astounded by the beauty and scope of the river, the amazing quality of the fish and the wildlife that was abundant in the area. Now, fifty years later, I still travel frequently to float the river's three lovely branches and I am still in awe of this amazing wild fishery and ecosystem.

The photographs in this book represent fifty years of exploring the diverse river branches, and wading the many gorgeous riffles, flats and runs that make these waters so fascinating and exciting. At first these trips and photographs were all about the fish - but eventually as I came to love these waters a broader appreciation developed which lead to the photographs in this book. Most of these pictures were taken with my longtime guide, friend and fishing mentor, Ben Rinker - Delaware River Guru. Ben increased my understanding of the ecology, entomology and fragility of this wonderful ecosystem (not to mention working miracles with my errant casting). For that I thank him.

I hope that all of you at sometime get to experience the exquisite beauty of the Catskills. 'Till we meet on the river,

Len Handler
(Norwalk, CT, October 25, 2017)

The Upper Delaware River

A Portfolio
Leonard Handler



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A photo-essay taken from 50 years of days spent on the river.

The Delaware River is named in honor of Thomas West, 3rd Baron De La Warr (1577-1618), an English nobleman and Virginia colony's first royal governor. Rising in two branches in the Catskill Mountains, the Delaware flows 419 miles into Delaware Bay where its waters enter the Atlantic Ocean. With no dams or impediments on the river's Main Stem, the Delaware is one of the few remaining large free-flowing rivers in the United States.

There are 216 tributary streams and creeks - an estimated 14,057 miles - in the watershed, and encompasses five U.S. states - New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware. Its bodies of water provide drinking water to 17 million people - roughly 6% of the population of the United States.

In the early 1960's, the West Branch of the river was impounded in Stilesville by the Cannonsville Dam, and the East Branch in Downsville by the Pepacton Dam. Both of these dams respectively created a tailwater fishery on the East Branch, West Branch and Main Stem - ensuring that the waters remain cold and creating a superb cold water trout habitat. The two branches meet in Hancock, New York to form the Main Stem. The influence of the cold tailwater releases is felt as far downstream as Calicoon.

But the Upper Delaware is a fragile ecosystem which has been, from time to time, threatened by bitter disputes between New Jersey and New York City over water availability, and how much water should be released into the river for both the fishery, and for the downstream states. Fortunately, a new agreement was reached in October, 2017 by all the decree parties which hopefully will insure sufficient cold water release. This benefits not only the ecosystem, but as a result, tourism which is a leading revenue generator in the region. A 2014 report valued the impact of the river's fishing, boating and second-home market on the regional economy at \$414 million.

In addition to trout, there are tremendously healthy spawning runs of American Shad and American Eels, as well as Smallmouth Bass, Largemouth Bass, Musky, Perch, Sunfish, Carp, catfish and other species. In recent years, Striped Bass have moved further and further upriver and into the East and West branches as well - an occurrence which is being studied as to the impact on the wild trout and other gamefish populations. Both birders and nature lovers alike hike thousands of miles yearly on the river trails and campsites to view the magnificent birds and wildlife that inhabit the area.



The Main Stem at Buckingham, October, 2013
Looking downstream from the boat launch

© Leonard Handler

Delaware West Branch
The bridge at Hale Eddy, obscured by fog
Looking downstream on a summer evening

© Leonard Handler





Delaware East Branch
The riff behind Ray Turner's Smokehouse
Ben and I sought refuge in the knotweed on a rainy June
afternoon.

© Leonard Handler



The East Branch at Cadosia

An early November sunset. I fished that day with David Nelson. No trout, but I did catch this photo!

© Leonard Handler

Golden Stonefly, Perlidae, East Branch

June 1, 2013

© Leonard Handler



Brown Trout, East Branch

A dry-fly bank sipper goes back into the water

© Leonard Handler



Fly Rock, Main Stem

Photo by Ben Rinker, July 2012

© Leonard Handler





Long Eddy, Main Stem

Taken July, 2013 during a float from Buckingham to
Long Eddy

© Leonard Handler



East Branch: Frank Corrente
Looking downstream from Fireman's Park, Hancock, NY

© Leonard Handler



Double Rainbow, West Branch at Dreamcatcher
Ben and I were chased all the way through the flat by an
angry beaver!

© Leonard Handler

Fog, lower West Branch

Beautiful to look at, but the mist obscures rises.

© Leonard Handler



Sunset, Alice's Way

One of my favorite places on the East Branch

© Leonard Handler





David Nelson plays an East Branch Brownie

Ben Rinker handles the oars

© Leonard Handler

Lordville and the Lordville Bridge

Three bridges span 147 years

Lordville used to be a station on the Erie Railroad, one mile below Equinunk. It received its name from John Lord III, an old honored settler of the area. John had owned a great deal of property in the area and sometime in the 1830's he gave the right-of-way to his land along the river to the Erie Railroad. Eventually, his grandson Alvah took over as town supervisor. Richard Lord, a brother of John, for a long time occupied and owned the farm opposite the upper end of Equinunk Island, and succeeded Josiah Russ. The Lordville Presbyterian Church, founded in 1896, still stands today and hosts summer and fall services., When we first began to fish the Main Stem at Lordville, Alvah Lord's huge victorian house stood across from the railroad tracks and just down from the remains of the old Erie water tower that used to replenish the steam locomotives. As we would get out of our car, Alva would glance up from his woodpile, wave a "hello," and stroll across the tracks to shoot the breeze. That beautiful house is all but gone today, but back then, when we'd return to our car chilled and stiff after twelve hours in the water, the house stood square and strong, windows ablaze with light, the aroma of fruit-wood smoke drifting from one of the many chimneys. It was a familiar and comforting silhouette in those deep blue moments just before darkness.

The original Lordville-Delaware River bridge was built in 1870 and destroyed in the flood of 1903. It was designed and engineered by the famed Roebling firm (builders of the Brooklyn Bridge and other notable bridges across the country and abroad).

The second bridge was built by the Oswego Bridge Company and opened in 1904. In February, 1984, the eighty-year old span tilted and partially collapsed and was immediately closed.

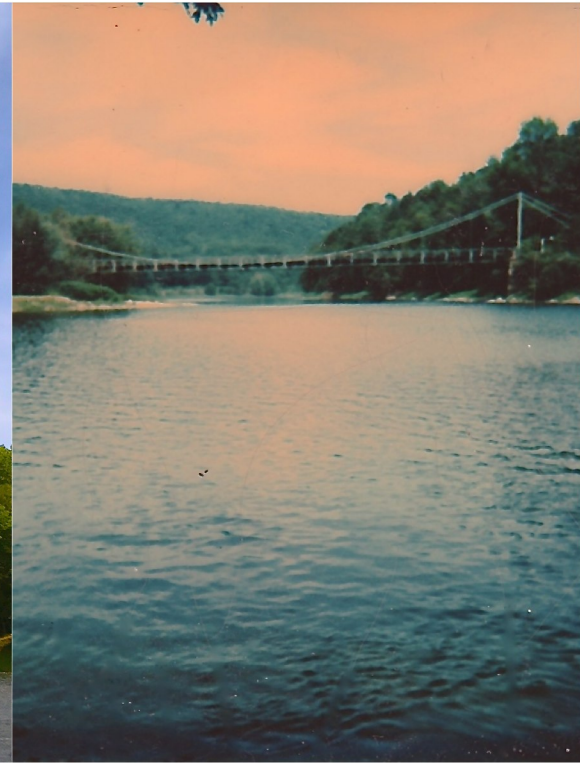
The current bridge, built by the firm of BB&L, was completed in 1992.



The third Lordville bridge

Completed in 1992

© Leonard Handler



The second Lordville bridge

Opened in 1904; Demolished in 1984

© Leonard Handler

The remains of Alva Lord's house

This grand old house is now just a ghost

© Leonard Handler



“Downtown” Lordville

The Erie Railroad used to stop here.

© Leonard Handler





The riff at Lordville
A little slice of heaven.

Adult Stonefly: Perlidae

Tied by Len Handler

© Leonard Handler



A Stonefly splits it's shuck

Tied by Len Handler

© Leonard Handler





The East Branch at Cadosia
October, 2013

© Leonard Handler



East Branch above RT 97 Bridge, Hancock , NY
Taken ten minutes before the heavens opened up.



A Mainstem Brown is returned to the water.

In a fragile ecosystem, wild trout are a precious commodity.

© Leonard Handler

A Bald Eagle approaches it's nest

We spotted this magnificent bird on a side channel of the Main Stem near Dreamcatcher

© Leonard Handler



Bald Eagles and the Delaware River

Thanks to recent cooperative efforts to improve environmental conditions, after nearly disappearing from most of the US decades ago, the Bald Eagle is now flourishing across the nation and no longer needs the protection of the Endangered Species Act. Key to this was the elimination of DDT spraying in farms, gardens, orchards and other agricultural areas.

The Upper Delaware River has played an important role in their population growth.

Just decades ago, these great raptors were almost eliminated from their breeding grounds and migration routes along the Delaware river. Now, on any given day, whether you are hiking along the trails or floating along the river, you're sure to spot numerous adult and young Eagles soaring above the river and nestled within the thick foliage that lines the river.

In 2017, more than 170 pairs of breeding eagles nest in New York State. Many of these reside along the Upper Delaware.



Reflections at Russell's Riff

Trying to follow a floating fly in the afternoon glare is one of the key challenges of the Main Stem

© Leonard Handler



Barking Dog, West Branch
Site of many boat launches

© Leonard Handler



The Eel trap at Ray Turner's
The trap is in a partially disassembled state.

© Leonard Handler

The West Branch below Deposit
Cold water, just out of Cannonsville Dam

© Leonard Handler



Methodist Pool, West Branch
Early November, 2014; Low water.

© Leonard Handler





Main Stem at Stockport

October, 2017

© Leonard Handler



Lower Junction Pool, Main Stem

October 23, 2017

Upper East Branch at Terry's

The Upper East Branch runs icy-cold, infused
by the Pepacton Reservoir

© Leonard Handler



Approaching storm, Main Stem

This chased us for a mile until it finally
caught us!

© Leonard Handler





Hendrickson dun, East Branch
June, 2015

© Leonard Handler



Green Drake, West Branch
October, 2016; This drake was way out of synch!

© Leonard Handler



Ben Rinker's Barn

October, 2010

© Leonard Handler



Deer crossing East Branch ; the golden light of dusk

The riff above Ben Rinker's house



Ben Rinker on the East Branch below Beaver Del
One of this river's finest stewards

The Main Stem at Tower Road
Looking towards the boat launch

© Leonard Handler



The East Branch above Oxbow
And a grand riff it is!

© Leonard Handler





West Branch Sign

The Upper Delaware system is home to a fully wild fish population.

© Leonard Handler



Rainbow Trout Parr; Main Stem, Delaware River

We brag about the big fish, but the small fish indicate a healthy river and future generations of trout.

© Leonard Handler



Low cloud bank, East Branch
The East Branch behind Ben Rinker's house.



West Branch Brownie

Doesn't get much prettier

Ray Turner

Ray Turner owns the Smoke House which offers exquisite smoked food products including eels, salmon, trout, shrimp, cheese and other products. Years ago he built his house and shop along the East Branch of the Delaware River and re-built an old, existing eel weir downstream from Peas Eddy. Each year, he begins assembling the weir in June and completes it before the eels begin their downstream migration to the Sargasso Sea in September/October. Like his exquisite smoked products, Ray has preserved the history and tradition of eel weirs, and maintains the last operating weir along the Upper Delaware River.



Ray Turner in a canoe; East Branch

Ray is on his way up to his Eel weir to disassemble it for the winter.

© Leonard Handler

Knight's Riff; Main Stem

This photo was taken in the summer of 2010.

© Leonard Handler



The East Branch; Fishs Eddy

April, 2016

© Leonard Handler





The Main Stem below Bouchyville

We had floated from Buckingham, and were finishing the day in this lovely riff above Long Eddy.

© Leonard Handler



Chased by thunder and lightning
Ben Rinker on the Main Stem

© Leonard Handler



The Cave: Waiting out the storm
One of Ben's safe havens along the Main Stem - a nice way to watch the river (and storm) go by.

© Leonard Handler



Main Stem Rainbow

This colored Main Stem 'bow was released just below Kellam's Bridge.

© Leonard Handler



West Branch, above Shehawken

The end of a long float

© Leonard Handler



East Branch, below Beaver Dell

May, 2018

© Leonard Handler

Wunderbug tied by Ben Rinker

One of the deadliest Delaware flies ever!

© Leonard Handler



Golden Stonefly Nymph

Tied by Len Handler

© Leonard Handler



Spinner imitations tied by Jonny King

One of the most innovative fly tiers today, Jonny's flies are "go-to's" along the Big "D"

© Jonny King



Streamers tied by David Nelson

This creative and exquisite tier has made huge contributions to Delaware patterns

© David Nelson



Fish Tagging on the Delaware River

In November of 2016 the DEC began a three-year tagging program using PIT (passive integrated transponder) tags. These tags carry a unique number for each tag allowing the identification of individual fish (much like the chip they use for pets). After tagging, they place a small antenna array in a few choice tributaries in hopes a tagged fish will encounter the antenna as they come in to spawn or seek out a thermal refuge. They originally planned to focus solely on the West Branch, but Ben Rinker suggested that they consider training him and a few other guides to tag fish in the field from other branches and parts of the system. This has now been practiced for the last year. Hand-held scanners are used by approved guides to scan fish as they are landed to ascertain if they carry a tag. The tag number and location of the fish are recorded by taking a picture on their phone. This iconic, wild fishery is a fragile ecosystem, and the more we understand how these wild fish respond and adapt to changing conditions the more we can be good stewards of the river.



Ben Rinker tagging a Brown Trout

The “tag” is injected into the lower cavity without damage to the fish

© Leonard Handler



Completing the tagging operation

Size of fish and location caught are recorded and will be available should the fish show up in the future.

© Leonard Handler



Bald Eagle in flight

The Eagle population along the Upper Delaware has soared in the past decade.

© Leonard Handler



Evening Mist on the West Branch

Both beautiful and a pain-in-the-neck

© Leonard Handler



The East Branch below Harvard

After this shot, I fished for a rising trout just beyond the boat for an hour. The trout won.

© Leonard Handler



Hancock, New York

Where the East Branch meets the West Branch to form
the Delaware Main Stem.

© Leonard Handler

Autumn on the East Branch

The East Branch in early November, 2009

© Leonard Handler

East Branch Brownie

These wild fish are special and a precious commodity.

© Leonard Handler



Shehawken; West Branch Delaware
Looking upstream from the boat launch

© Leonard Handler



Cadosia road on the way to Ray Turner's
It becomes gravel, then dirt, as it winds
through the woods to the Smoke House.

© Leonard Handler





Sunshower on the West Branch
Rainbows in the air and the water

Friends of the Upper Delaware River (FUDR)

“To protect, preserve and enhance the cold-water ecosystem of the Upper Delaware River watershed and to address any environmental threats to our area for the benefit of local communities, residents and visitors to the region.”

Friends of the Upper Delaware River was incorporated in 2004 and is based in Hancock, New York, where the East Branch of the Delaware meets the West Branch to form the Main Stem. As stated in the mission statement above, the organization’s primary focus is on improving NYC Delaware River Basin reservoir water releases and tributary protection and restoration. In addition, FUDR functions as advocates for river protection at local, state and national levels.

FUDR’s approach and goals have been to connect river health with economic vitality, build and lead diverse coalitions to strengthen their advocacy voice, and to cultivate the next generation of river stewards.

In addition, FUDR partners with the Bill Canfield Fly Fishing School - creating a summer camp program for kids (ages 12-17) that teaches fly fishing and the importance of river conservation. FUDR’s Executive Director is Jeff Skelding.

FUDR has been a tremendous force in fighting for and securing protections for this amazing, wild river, and to ensure that future generations of anglers, local residents and visitors will continue to enjoy the exquisite beauty and the resulting economic prosperity generated from the good stewardship of the Upper Delaware River system.



Photo courtesy of Sharon Solarek

FUDR Storefront, Hancock, NY

Pictured: Jeff Skelding and Sherri Resti Thomas



“Ready for the next morning”

Waders hanging at East Branch Outfitters, Hancock, NY