

## BEGINNING OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY - A JOURNEY TO COOPERSTOWN

I've been fortunate to have spent a great deal of time on the waters of the Susquehanna River in the last several miles above where it becomes the Chesapeake Bay and receives a tidal influence. I have traced its course along maps for years and wondered what this mighty river, and the incredible bay that it formed, was like at its very source. Most of us think of the National Baseball Hall of Fame when we hear about Cooperstown in New York state, but it is here that the main stem of the Susquehanna begins its journey south towards the Atlantic Ocean.

In the fall of 2019, I finally made it to Otsego Lake, the headwaters of the Susquehanna that is cradled between two ridges. I arrived after dark, but unable to wait, I walked to its lapping shore and took in the lay of the land. Under the moonlight I could see the silhouette of rolling hills to the east and immediately sensed the powerful tranquility that is found in the presence of large, calm bodies of water. I eagerly waited for the iconic mountain lake soundtrack that I often fantasize about when feeling distant from wilderness – the eerie cry of the common loon. While I did not hear a loon, I couldn't stop smiling as the distant howling of a group of eastern coyotes soon echoed down through the valley. Even after a long day on the road, it was difficult to fall asleep with the excitement of what would come the next morning.



Shortly after daybreak I rushed down to the almost eight-mile-long lake and made a proper introduction. I stood next to a boat dock and took a few photographs of a raft of lily pads as the fog began to drift off of the adjacent ridge. From where I stood I could see the opposite bank and ridgeline of [Glimmerglass State Park](#) and all of the amenities for scenic recreation such as camping, hiking, fishing and a swimming beach that it offers its guests. I was quickly falling in

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love with this beautiful lake landscape but knew that what I had come to see was to be found just a short drive to the south.



As I drove, I couldn't help but note the quaint, mainstreet-community feel of Cooperstown and all of the wonderful small businesses, restaurants, and tourism opportunities for visitors of all kinds. Unfortunately, I couldn't stay long enough to enjoy it properly so I kept my eyes on the special waterway that I had come to make my acquaintance with. I parked and walked down to a small waterfront park named after a noted geological feature, Council Rock. I walked to the shore of the lake where a large, painted arrow points to true north and gazed out at the nine-foot-wide Council Rock boulder which breaks above the flat lake waters. This historic spot is reported to have been a meeting place for the Iroquois Indians prior to colonization by Europeans.



As I walked along the shore to the east, I finally saw what I came for, the outflow of the lake. Why is this place special? This small creek is the very beginning of the main stem of the Susquehanna River that ends up being nearly a mile wide in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. It is here that a seemingly insignificant flow will travel some 444 miles south, growing in width, depth and velocity, joining with hundreds of tributaries – to eventually feed into the Chesapeake Bay. The Bay's largest tributary, the Susquehanna River contributes about half of the Bay's fresh water (19 million gallons per minute).

After standing in meditation to absorb the moment, I listened to a pair of mallard ducks splashing around while feeding in the shallows, wondering about all of the other visitors who may have stood in the same place and what it meant to them. As for me, I felt I owed a debt of gratitude for this magnificent river and the joy, adventure, friendship, wonder, and connection with nature it has provided me. Seeing its humble beginnings seemed akin to learning about one's mentor's youth or reflecting back on your own life path and where it led you. I see us all as being a lot like the mighty Susquehanna. Sometimes we drift downstream with ease, without caring or knowing where we might end up. Other times we forge new paths against many obstacles to carve out a new direction. As we build momentum on our journey, we continuously make connections and grow into something that unknowingly blossoms into a force far bigger than our humble beginnings. There is much to learn from a river, if you are willing to listen. The Susquehanna in particular has many lessons and stories to tell.