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The Ausable River

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Ausable River (Village of Ausable Forks to Jay)
Anika Craig, Kristine McKinley, and Alex Putnam

- ❖ 12,000 years ago, tribes of hunter-gatherer natives fished and hunted upon the shores of the Ausable River
- ❖ **1614**-Native tribes cleared small areas of forest near, what is now known as, the village of Ausable Forks. Pine and Hemlock dominated this area, so there was timber of pines and hemlock.
- ❖ **1749**-White pine abundant in the area
- ❖ **1763**-The Iroquois claims to the land between the St. Lawrence River and Lake Champlain were finally recognized
- ❖ **1765**-William Gilliland explored the Ausable River from its mouth to the Ausable Chasm
- ❖ **1767**-William Gilliland surveyed what is now the village of Ausable Forks
- ❖ **1787**-Quaker farmers established permanent settlement on the border of the village of Ausable Forks and Peru
- ❖ **1801**-White pine cut along Lake Champlain shores (Ausable beach)
- ❖ **1804**-legislature passed a law in New York state that anyone who was caught stealing log/timber floating in the river would be fined
- ❖ **1806**-first law passed declaring that any river in the state was to be considered a public highway
- ❖ **1806-1857**- Iron was found on Arnold Hill. Directly south from Arnold Hill there was two forges that were built on the Ausable River. By 1855, 150 people occupied this area but in 1857 a flood destroyed this settlement and it was never able to reestablish.

- ❖ **1820's**-John, James, and Thomas Rogers bought into an iron mining company with Dr. Palmer. The location of the company was on, what is now known as, Palmer Hill, which was several miles from the village of Ausable Forks.
- ❖ Iron mining has led to erosion, formation of sinkholes, loss of biodiversity, and contamination of soil, groundwater, surface water by the chemicals from mining processes. Chemicals include Cyanide, Sulfuric Acid, Nitric Acid, Ammonium Nitrate, Mercury, Uranium, Lead, Gasoline, Diesel Fuel, and Acetylene which can become harmful to workers consuming high amounts, the water that it is carried to, and the biodiversity within these polluted waters.
- ❖ **1825**-Village of Ausable Forks was formed
- ❖ **1829**- John, James, and Thomas Rogers established the J & J Rodgers Company in the Village of Ausable Forks.
- ❖ **1837**-purchase of Ausable Iron Company, also bought the Purmont Iron Interest at lower Jay
- ❖ **1839**-Town of Ausable was formed
- ❖ **1870**-Company was established and business started booming
- ❖ **1870**- J&J Rogers Company acquired new mines, bought 75,000 acres of woodland, the water was dammed and diverted, plank roads were built between mines and forges
- ❖ **1870-1890**-Company reached its peak, then began to decline. There was an introduction of pig iron and the Bessemer process which conducted the mass production of steel from pig iron to the heart furnace by removing impurities from the iron.
- ❖ **1889**-The J&J Rogers Company shut down all of its iron operations

- ❖ **1889**-total cut logs in the Adirondack forests ->544,234,207 ft. The Ausable River helped to transport these logs.
- ❖ **1890-1900**-Mr. James Rogers established a pulp mill in the village. Water power systems, from the Ausable River, provided energy to run mill. Around this time, J & J Rogers pulp company had a 7-mile-long water slide that carried logs to the Ausable River. The Ausable River was really allowing the town of Ausable and village of Ausable Forks to expand. The river helped to bring revenue to the town and helped it succeed.
- ❖ **1892**- Adirondack State Park was established which allowed public access to this land in Ausable.
- ❖ **1991**- Small streams were widened in order for logs to flow through. This means that swamps, low meadows, and banks would become blocked off from these widened streams.
- ❖ **1903**-the J&J Rogers Company's operation was expanded with the addition of a paper mill, where the system consisted of 3 paper making machines
- ❖ **1950s**- wood sources declined
- ❖ **1955**-Mr. Michaels bought the company until 1971 when the doors of the company closed
- ❖ **1960's**- water quality index was 85.9 on average at the mouth of the Ausable River which means that it is closer to having better water quality
- ❖ **1900's-1971**- Whatever color paper the paper mill was making, the residents of Ausable or people passing through saw that color flowing through the river. If they were making green paper, the river was then green, because the waste from the mill discharged into

the river. Robert Craig, a former resident of Ausable Forks, states that he “remembers the water being a number of colors when the mill was in operation, when they were making different colored paper products.”

- ❖ **1971-** J&J Rogers shut down permanently
- ❖ **January of 1976-** Big flood in Ausable Forks, dam broke
- ❖ **1982-** Experiments were done on rats, mice, and chickens that showed the groups receiving the chloride dioxide, chlorite, and chlorate had alterations in erythrocyte morphology and osmotic fragility. The groups that were subjected to higher dosages even experienced hemolytic anemia.
- ❖ **1994-**Ausable River Association formed (AsRA) (formed as a result of the first watershed-wide scientific study of the Ausable River)
- ❖ **1994-1998-**Association works to conserve the resources of the Ausable watershed
- ❖ **1989-1999-**The river was tested to be non-impacted by BAP, PMA, HPI, EPT, and SPP. In the samples tested from this time, Mayflies, Stoneflies, and Caddisflies were found to be abundant
- ❖ **September of 2005-**Chlorine dioxide and chlorite, which are used for pulp bleaching and water treatment, are labeled as “moderately” toxic to fish. Since the river served as a “waste bucket” to the mill, the fish in the river could have been affected by these chemicals
- ❖ **2009-** the AsRA created the river steward program. This program was used to educate the public about threats of aquatic invasive species. The program also serves to rid invasive hitchhikers on incoming and outgoing boats

- ❖ **May of 2009**- Town of Ausable formed a comprehensive plan for the town and River
- ❖ **June of 2011** - Tropical Storm Irene → 245 ft. wide sediment chocked channel, post Tropical Storm Irene, before restoration
- ❖ **November of 2012**- the AsRa lead stream restoration projects that would help the river rebound more efficiently if there were to be another storm. After restoration, stream narrowed to 90 ft. wide, 3 months and 3 floods post construction
- ❖ **April 1 – October 15 season for catching Trout**- Fishing regulations for outside-catch and release only of Trout on the river are daily limit of 5 and any size may be taken
- ❖ **Regulations for trout on the West Branch inside of the Catch and Release sections**- open all year, catch and release only, and artificial lures only

At first, the Ausable River served as somewhere for people to settle because it had the appropriate resources needed for the native people to survive. After the river was settled by Quaker farmers, it was used for logging and distribution of goods with incoming and outgoing ships. With success of the river with Quaker farmers, it allowed for expansion, for example, it allowed for the creation of the paper mill in Ausable Forks. Since logging was such a huge industry in Ausable, rivers were widened which cut off access to the river from small streams, swamps, and banks. This helped the area around the Ausable river to thrive by providing job opportunities and new ways to use the river for further transportation of logs for the J&J Rogers Paper Mill acting as a highway to bring the logs from their cutting position to their ending destination. The river also helped the logging companies with bringing revenue into the village. In 1903 the mining company of J&J Rogers put in an addition to their company by

adding a paper mill. This again created more job opportunities for the village. Although the J&J Rogers Company benefited Ausable, it also caused negative environmental impacts. The chemicals and toxins from the mill polluted the river where the aquatic biodiversity was exposed along with people who consumed water from the river. These effects were sometimes even visible, for example, if the paper mill was creating purple or red wallpapers that day, the residents would note on seeing the same colors running through the Ausable River. The J&J Rogers company shut down in 1971 which caused layoffs throughout Ausable Forks. The river then served as a place for water activities, where when frozen, it was used for ice skating. Now the river also serves as a recreational fishing spot, a place for water sports and activities, a place for the Ausable River Association to provide the public with stewardship programs that helped the river, along with providing information to the public about aquatic invasive species and the issues they cause, along with further educational programs for the public when advertised, and is still important to the hydroelectric power sources in Ausable Forks.

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