



## Lehigh River Paddling Guide

*Gary Gentile*

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EXCITEMENT! . . . is the only word that describes paddling through the Lehigh Gorge, whether it be in a raft, kayak, canoe, or any other type of boat - even on an inner tube or inflatable pool furniture. Paddling down the Lehigh River is not only a thrilling whitewater adventure, it is also a scenic tour through backwoods territory on a watercourse whose tree-lined banks have hardly changed since the time of Columbus. Visible signs of civilization are sparse above the metropolitan areas near the confluence with the Delaware River. You don't even have to be on the river to feel the exhilaration in the air. During whitewater releases, you only have to visit the access points, or hike or bike along the Lehigh Gorge Trail, and you're sure to hear the screams and laughter of paddlers on the water: an incomparable vicarious experience that might encourage you to contact a raft outfitter and sign up for a trip that you'll never forget. The present volume is laid out like a spinal column: sections of the Lehigh River are stitched together to form the supporting structure, while the tributaries extend to either side like ribs. Each stretch of river is described in detail so that paddlers and anglers will know what to expect. Each runnable tributary is treated in similar fashion. This way there won't be any untoward surprises that might bring a boater to grief. Some streams are covered primarily because of their fishing potential. The focal point of the Lehigh River watershed is the Lehigh Gorge: a canyon that stretches approximately 25 miles as it carves a twisting path between mountains that tower nearly a thousand feet on either side. The vista alone is worth the effort to see it. But to paddle along the bottom of the canyon, and stare upward at the thickly forested slopes and sheer cliff faces, adds a fillip that enhances the experience a quantum leap above the extraordinary. In addition to the Gorge there exists a number of paddling and fishing opportunities that are often overlooked. Narrow upstream sections meander idly through wilderness tracts that few paddlers or anglers ever think about, much less appreciate. The lazy current in downstream sections, where the river is broad, provides easy-going paddling for families with small children who will enjoy a layback day on the water, and a quick swim in the shallows to escape the summer heat. The Great Falls of the Lehigh is a spectacular 20-foot drop in the riverbed. Then there are the major tributaries: Aquashicola Creek, Bear Creek, Black Creek (2), Buckwha Creek, Coplay Creek, Hazle Creek, Hokendauqua Creek, Indian Creek, Jordan Creek, Little Lehigh Creek, Lizard Creek, Mahoning Creek, Monocacy Creek, Mauch Chunk Creek, Mud Run, Nesquehoning Creek, Pohopoco Creek, Quakake Creek, Sandy Run, Saucon Creek, Sawmill Run, Shadys Creek, Stony Creek, Tenmile Run, Tobyhanna Creek, Trout Creek (2), Tunkhannock Creek, and Upper Tunkhannock Creek. The Great Falls of the Mud is a combination of two waterfalls followed by a boulder-filled cataract that stretches for a hundred yards. These shallow streams become runnable after large rainfalls. Some of them are slow-moving and placid: perfect for a quiet day's outing. Others consist of wild rapids and steep gradients that rival the mighty Lehigh. And let's not forget the canals that were constructed in antebellum days. Some of these are flooded and are easily accessible to anglers, and to paddlers who want to cruise still waters that don't run deep. The Lehigh Valley watershed has it all.

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