

GO NOW



Ever spent a weekend on the Upper Delaware? JASON COCHRAN says it's high time you headed north

Twin beauties: Stay high at Ecce in Barryville, or go a little country at the Roebling Inn on the Delaware (left).

# Going up the river

**D**ON'T know where, exactly, the Upper Delaware River Valley is? Join the club. Though just an hour and a half from N.Y.C., the area is cloaked mostly in anonymity — which makes it an exceptionally great spot for a quick getaway.

The valley, which straddles New York and Pennsylvania roughly from Port Jervis north to Hancock (on the New York side), is essentially a bucolic blindspot. You can drive all afternoon and never hit a stoplight, sit on a rocky river beach and see no buildings, and meet people who wear trucker hats without irony.

Every 15 minutes or so during a two-hour drive north of shabby Port Jervis another clapboard village materializes. Largely populated by people who are just scraping by, these towns have yet to be tricked out with twee stores and cafes. However, the area has seen a recent influx of weekend-home shoppers. Actor Mark Ruffalo has a spread in Sullivan County, fashion designer Daryl K recently bought here, and a vanguard of Martha Stewart staffers have infiltrated the market.

The area may have started with coal, but it's turning to diamonds.

## TWIN TOWNS

There's little reason to stay long in down-at-the-heels **Port Jervis**. Instead, head north along **Route 97**, which quickly ascends into the treacherous **Hawk's Nest** stretch, where the road barely cuts a two-lane path across a cliff face high above the river. North from there, a series of small towns is scratched into the hills on either side of the Delaware. Each organizes itself around an antique bridge that heads over the water, and thus out of state.

Up and down the river, in fact, across the state border. The New York side is the one flirting with gentrification; chic general stores serve fancy sandwiches, and updated greasy spoons and pastel-painted inns dot the streets. Things tend to be more appealing (at least from a scenic standpoint) across the river in Pennsylvania, where everything is still pretty much agrarian. Here outfits sell live quails and guinea hens, general stores keep short hours and you'll even see people building barns. The unpretentiousness begins with the quiet pair of **Barryville, N.Y.**, and **Shohola, Pa.** Five miles on, as the road peels briefly away from the river and winds through thick woods, **Minisink Ford, N.Y.**, and **Lackawaxen, Pa.**, linked by a still-operational bridge built in 1848 by John Roebling (of Brooklyn Bridge fame), are steeped in Revolutionary War lore.

Ten more miles bring you to an especially beautiful part of the valley and the deepest part of the river, as well as twin towns named **Narrowsburg**. In winter, the New York town, named for its location at a narrow point in the river, hosts **EagleFest**, honoring the American bald eagle, which is commonly sighted in the area ([narrowsburg.org](http://narrowsburg.org)). From there, cross to the Pennsylvania side, where narrow, tree-sheltered lanes over riverbank hills lead north to a few casual settlements, including **Milanville** and **Damascus**, and some calming green countryside stretching away from the river, worth a detour before crossing the river in **Callicoon, Pa.**, for its New York counterpart.

**Callicoon, N.Y.**, with its cafes and flea markets, is the more prosperous and welcoming of the "twin" cities. From here, the road twists through trees to navigate a rockier terrain, and it's best to

stopping, perhaps, in spooky **Lordville**. Its waterfront is lined with haunted-looking houses, one an abandoned Victorian and another inhabited by a local who keeps mannequins dressed as Russian soldiers in his front yard.

On the Pennsylvania bank of the Delaware, where the local Gulf station posts prices with upside-down 2s when it runs out of 5s and summer campers scamper, **Equinunk**, which features an old sawmill, is groomed and dignified. This is the part where "I could live here" fantasies set in.

The drive's endpoint is **Hancock, N.Y.**, another prototypical village — one very excited about its new fire station. It's famous for its bluestone, and formerly for making Louisville Slugger bats.

## EATS

Grab an ale and nachos on a riverfront veranda at **Cedar Rapids**, an airy beer hall built by a German craftsman in the 1960s on Route 97 in Barryville. Cedar Rapids also rents rafts, canoes and home-designed kayaks (\$27; [845] 557-6158, [cedarrapidsrafting.com](http://cedarrapidsrafting.com)). For a sturdy lunch (8-ounce burgers, pecan-crust catfish), there's **Dave's Big Eddy Diner**, the nucleus of Narrowsburg, N.Y. (40 Main St.).

At **Dianna's Place**, a roadside diner just west of Damascus, Pa., on Route 371, the counter is lined with so many golden, sugar-dusted, home-baked pies (strawberry rhubarb, peach, blueberry), that it's like something out of Norman Rockwell. Take home a whole pie for just \$10. You can imagine how cheap a meal is.

For dinner, head to Callicoon, N.Y., to **Matthew's on Main**, which serves a nice hodgepodge of bistro-styled food. Its bar is where local sports teams decamp after the game (19 Lower Main St.,

## WHERE TO STAY

"Ecce" is Latin for "behold," and the **Ecce B&B** in Barryville suits its name — it's on 60 acres of rocky bluff 300 feet above a gorgeous bend in the Delaware. Be sure to behold the breakfast (from \$125 a night; 19 Silverfish Road, [845] 557-8562, [eccebedandbreakfast.com](http://eccebedandbreakfast.com)).

## 5 COOL THINGS TO DO

- Go rafting.** The Delaware's mild rapids, gentle current and sparse development makes for some of the best tubing and rafting in the Northeast. One of the long-running rental players is Lander's River Trips in Narrowsburg, N.Y., which rents kayaks for \$38 and tubes for \$20 — the prices include a shuttle back upstream — and \$29/day for a bike (Seasonal only, [800] 252-3925, [landersrivertrips.com](http://landersrivertrips.com)).
- Go back in time.** Also in Narrowsburg is the **Fort Delaware Museum of Colonial History**, which recreates a 1700s wilderness fort complete with wooden stockades, costumed docents and livestock. Its \$4 admission price makes it one of the cheapest "living museums" around (6615 Route 97, [845] 252-6660).
- Go bowling.** Ask to see where Charles Lindbergh signed the guest book at **Rohman's Inn**, open since 1849 in Shohola. This is an atmospheric place for a drink or dinner (and the 50-foot wooden bar is hand-carved). Even better, though, is the inn's 1940s-era bowling alley, one of the last remaining that requires players to re-set their own pins (Rohman Road, [570] 559-7479).
- See a flick.** The single-screen **Callicoon Theater** (on the New York side), operating since 1948, is a Deco movie palace with a giant screen, old-fashioned deep-cushioned seating and a sound system you can hear from outside (\$6; 70 Upper Main St., [845] 887-4460).
- Visit Zane.** The **Zane Grey Museum**, in tiny Lackawaxen, is where the prolific writer, who popularized the mass-market Western, lived for 13 years. "Riders of the Purple Sage" was penned here, and Grey is interred in the cemetery within sight of the house (free; usually closed after Labor Day, [570] 685-4871, [nps.gov](http://nps.gov)).

J.C.