

Anatomy of the River



A map of the River drawn in 1758 captures the sweep of its course while illustrating the deployment of British and French forces at the Battle of Carillon. Collections of Fort Ticonderoga.



Construction of the railroad in 1874 drastically altered the LaChute outlet. A causeway confined the River's flow to a narrow channel, hastening the formation of a marsh in the broad estuary where LaChute River meets Lake Champlain. Photograph by Virginia Westbrook.

The LaChute is a river with both a short course and a short history. It cut its way through Ticonderoga only 12,000 years ago, when the waters of the newly-formed Lake George first spilled over a ridge between Mount Defiance and Cook's Mountain. Glaciers had revised the local landscape, blocking off two watercourses that flowed north and south out of that valley, leaving a lake basin in need of an outlet. The waters found a fast, steep route into glacial Lake Champlain.

The River exhibits all the features of a riverine environment condensed into just three and a half miles. It drops over tall waterfalls and runs along shallow rapids; it slows to riffles in a few places and pauses in pools. It even wraps itself into a

whirlpool at the sharp turn just downstream from here. Once it reaches the level of Lake Champlain below the lower falls, the River spreads out into waterlogged bottomlands.

A river transports solid material as well as water. LaChute River blends water from two sources—Lake George and the Trout Brook Valley. Lake George water carries very little sediment into the River because it drains a confined watershed made up mostly of rock. By contrast, Trout Brook brings in suspended clay gathered from the broad valley southwest of Ticonderoga.

The stretch of river that once carried boats to and from Lake Champlain has now reverted to a natural state, creating a haven for wildlife just a few yards from civilization. Photograph by Robert C. Stevens.