

Royal River

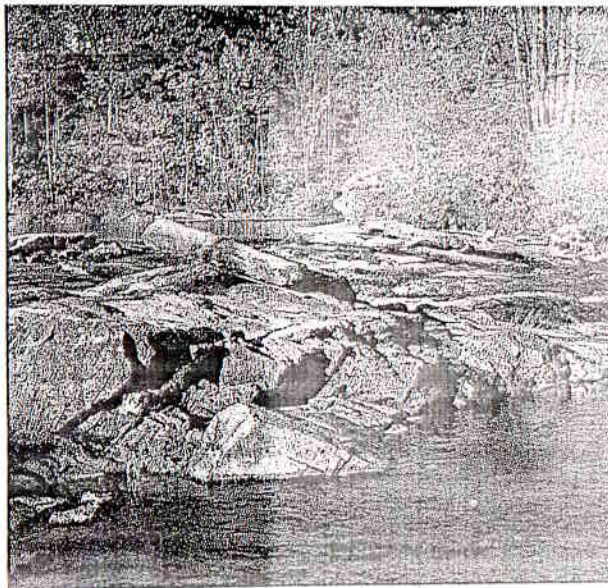
Some of Maine's finest pine was cut in the Royal River valley or just north of it near the Little Androscoggin River. This "King's Pine" was one of a handful of reasons the Royal River played a vital role in the history and development of the area. The river became a highway from the coast to the inland region. Rafts went up the river from Upper (Gooch's) Falls. Timber came down the river.

Today this stretch of river will take you through a surprisingly rural setting considering that it courses through one of the most heavily populated parts of the state. The river from the Route 9 bridge near Dunn's Corner to Gooch's Falls (at the Yarmouth Waterworks), 5½ miles, can be paddled any time of year as long as the river is free of ice. The trip is completely flatwater.

To double the length of your excursion make it a round trip, thereby avoiding a car shuttle. The river threads it way through rural farmland. The grayish green hue of the water is the result of the abundance of clay soil and loam in the valley. To the paddler's advantage, the river no longer plays the vital economic role here that it once did. Enjoy the peace and quiet. The solitude can be refreshing.

By 1665 this region had become known for its abundance of oak, pine, chestnut, and walnut trees. Nine years later a sawmill was erected at Pungustuck (Lower) Falls near tidewater. The water power supplied by the Royal River played an important role in the economic development of Yarmouth. William Royall, a cooper and cleaver, had settled here around the 1640s and set the stage for the shipbuilding industry that was to develop here. Royall's River, as it was then called, played an important role in establishing Maine's shipbuilding reputation and in the economic development of Yarmouth.

Put in at the Route 9 bridge, called *Dunn's Crossing*, just west of Dunn's Corner. Imagine the gorgeous trees that must have



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grown here long ago. Many of them were hewn into ship's timbers and spars, all to support the flourishing coastal trade that was the lifeblood of Yarmouth. The section of road at this bridge was first laid out in 1796. Head downstream on the flat water. In pre-refrigerator days, this twisting part of the river supported an ice cutting industry.

Notice how peaceful the river is. On windless days, it's a perfect mirror, reflecting everything that grows on its banks. Not far below Route 9 is a fine view of Riverside Farm, which Captain Levi Marston bought in 1864. Marston had spent a life at sea and typical of many captains, retired to a farm. Many farmers kept skiff on the river bank, so they could cross the river without traveling to the nearest bridge.

Continue down the winding river past the many trees that have fallen victim to Dutch Elm disease.

Not far below you'll cross the town line between North Yarmouth and Yarmouth. The towns separated in 1849 because of disagreement over a "Hand tub," predecessor to the modern fire engine! The people of Yarmouth wanted better fire protection for their shipbuilding yards while those of North Yarmouth thought their demands were sheer idiocy. Unable to resolve the differences otherwise, they separated.

Paddle beneath two railroad bridges that are close together, and take out on the right bank at the Yarmouth Waterworks. When the railroad came to town in 1849 it heralded a bright economic future for the area.

At the take-out point the Royal River becomes particularly interesting. A walk to tidewater reveals some lovely waterfalls, many hints of Yarmouth's industrial past, and a taste of the wild country that the Indians must have known here.

The area around the lower Royal River is being developed into a park. After you take a look at Gooch's Falls, where J. Gooch once had a large sawmill on the north bank of the river, walk the paved path downstream. Where the parking lot is today there was once a large machine shop, which produced leather-working machinery and water wheels. There was also an iron foundry

nearby. Iron ore was transported down the Royal River to foundry in flat-bottomed boats. The fishway at the dam is a cent addition, used primarily by alewives. The small canal known as the Shoe Shop Canal, was probably first built in 1717.

Continue down the path to Baker's Falls where Jeremiah Baker once operated a grist mill on the north side of the river. Here you can see the extensive remains of the Forest Paper Company. Brick and stone lying around may remind you of ancient Rome. The mill closed in 1923 and it was destroyed by fire in 1929. Baker's Falls is a sloping ledge waterfall that drops between eight and 10 feet.

The next dam downstream is at Cotton Mill Falls. Cotton was processed at this site for many years. Finally, at Pungustuck Falls the Royal River reaches tidewater. "Pungustuck" is an Indian word meaning "falls-goes-out-place," an appropriate name for where the river tumbles over several ledges before spilling to the harbor. Saw and grist mills, a tannery, and foundry operated at this site. The earliest mills date from the 1670s.

Today it's hard to imagine Yarmouth as the major manufacturing and shipping port it once was. But the following annual report of activities in Yarmouth Harbor will give you an idea of the scope of the operations here. The summary dates back to the 1870s.

4,000 tons of vessels yearly, some of which are ships of 1,800 tons each; one of this size now being built.

50 boats being built per year.

3,000 tons of clay shipped per year.

2,000,000 bricks shipped per year.

2,000 tons granite shipped per year.

6,000 bushels potatoes shipped per year.

300,000 cans corn shipped per year.

300 barrels clams shipped per year.

1,000,000 feet southern pine received per year.

250 tons iron and spikes received per year.

2,500 tons coal received per year.

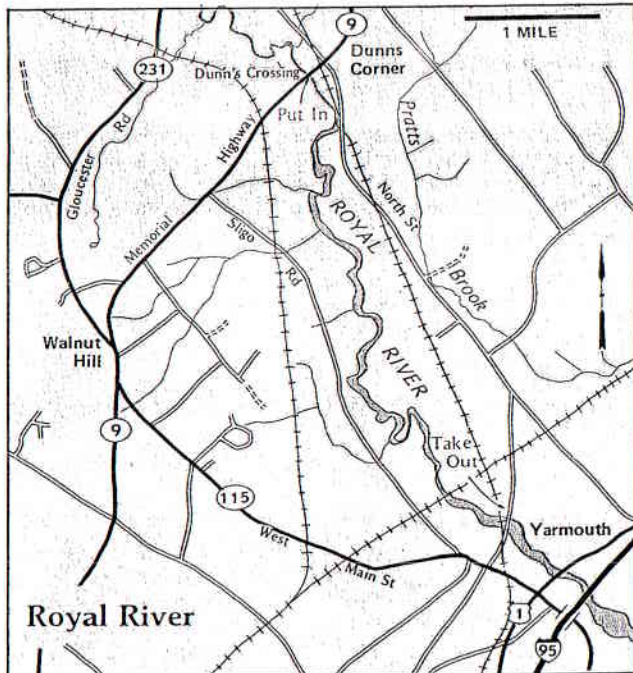
300,000 bushels grain received per year.

500 tons plaster received per year.

2,400 tons paper-stock received, and the product in paper sent to other markets.

1,200 bales cotton consumed in the manufacture of bags, yarn, etc., and the same sent to other markets.

Times have changed since the days when long strings of oxen hauled pine around the falls of the lower Royal River.



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