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Famous the world over for trout fishing, it rises in the Green Mountains, flows through some of the most beautiful countryside in southern Vermont, nourishes the farmland, provides recreation to hundreds and passes under four covered bridges on its way to the Hudson River.

There has been much disagreement about the origin of the river's name. Some historians say that the name Batten Kill was in use in the 1700s when the area was first settled. It's not hard to find out that "kill" is the Dutch word for river, but it's "Batten" that has everyone else scrambling for explanations. Was it someone's name?

Esther Swift wrote a book in 1977 called: *Vermont Place Names*. In it she maintains there was an early settler named Bart, who lived near the Battenkill's Hudson River junction. Bart's Kill evolved into Battenkill.

A nineteenth-century historian presented his view from the dictionaries of archaic English that Batten means to fertilize or enrich.

Other historians have claimed that Batten was someone's family name but have not been able to identify the family.

In his book, "The Battenkill", John Merwin's answer to the question came to him from researchers at the New Netherlands Project at Albany, New York. In 1992, research was in progress in the translation of manuscripts written in archaic Dutch, located in the Hudson River territory. It was observed that batten was similar in origin to the word batavia which refers to the people of the western-European lowlands that today is Holland. As well as there being a Batavia, New York, there is also a Batavia Kill. The deduction follows that Battenkill literally translated is "river of the Dutch."



Over the years reference has been made to the Battenkill, the BattenKill and the Batten Kill. Current usage prefers Batten Kill, but again, it's hard to find agreement over how the one or two words are spelled.

There have been Indian names as well, and the most commonly cited is Ondawa, which is Iroquoian. One writer has given this to mean "white stream," but "country of rounded hills" is probably more accurate. Ondawa was frequently used by romantic nineteenth-century angling writers, and several widely separated valley farms are called Ondawa Farm.



THE BATTENKILL VALLEY THROUGH WEST ARLINGTON. This circa 1900 view looks northwest from above the Benedict Farm (lower left); Benedict Crossing Road intersects the present Route 313 near the center.

A favorite Indian name is a little-used tongue-twister: "Tyetilegogtakook," which is a Mahican name meaning "country around the river of toads." Thousands of common toads migrate to the river's many quiet backwaters for mating and egg-laying in early spring, where the noise of their trilling and chirping often drowns the noise of the river itself. The Mahicans were the Battenkill's native people, and of the river's many names, theirs was the most descriptive. The river begins in the swamp on the Beebe Farm in East Dorset and flows south, fed by its tributaries Bromley Brook, Bourne Brook, and Lye Brook coming off the East Mountain. The West Branch rises in the Big Ethan Allen Spring just south of Dorset and fed by many springs, flows into Manchester Center, then joins the Batten Kill at Manchester Depot. From there it flows south and west through Sunderland and Arlington and into New York State where it eventually empties into the Hudson.

A look at the East Mountain in spring when the snow and ice begin to melt offers a clue to the multiplicity of brooks and streams that feed the river. Flowing down Mt. Equinox no less than nine named brooks empty into the Kill in Manchester alone.

Used as a source of power, especially at the West Branch dam at Manchester Center, it ran the first grist mill in the new settlement of Manchester and earned Timothy Mead an extra "right" of a hundred acres to add to his land holdings. Mead owned nearly all the land in that part of town, called in those early years Mead's Mills and later referred to as Factory Point. That name is indicative of the plethora of manufacturing activity going on in that part of town, all of it powered initially by the water that flowed past.

Sawmills, a woolen mill, marble mills, a tannery, a chair factory, and others were scattered along the banks of the river. Each contributed its dross to the sediment accumulating in the stream and along its banks.

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As early as 1861, it was noted by anglers that fish were no longer as plentiful as they had been in the Batten Kill. Charles Orvis had noticed a marked deterioration in the condition of his favorite trout stream, and his brother, Franklin, had constructed Equinox Pond at the foot of the Mt. Equinox and stocked it with trout so that his hotel guests could enjoy fly fishing with good results.

About 1864 the conservation movement really got under way with the publication of Vermonter George Perkin Marsh's "Man and Nature". Charles Orvis was an ardent participant in this movement and experimented with fish culture himself for over thirty years.

Battenkill Valley Outdoors offers unique opportunities to experience the river and surrounding environment. Canoes, kayaks, inflatable kayaks, and rafts are available. Each trip is a custom tailored trip. We help you plan from one hour to multiple days. All equipment and shuttle from and back to our base is included. Get to know the Battenkill on intimate terms-its deep clear pools, rippling fast water, inspiring vistas and tighter passages through an archway of trees. Quietly look for wildlife, picnic, swim and admire the covered bridges. Free your mind and use your body.

Boating is not all we do at Battenkill Valley Outdoors. Comfortable hybrid bicycles are available for rent. This is a wonderful way to explore at your own pace the country gravel roads and scenic highways of the Battenkill Valley. Biking is great in the spring, the summer, but especially in the fall with the crisp air and the colorful explosion of autumn leaves.


Experience snow shoeing in the winter with Battenkill Valley Outdoors. Snowshoes are available to rent or purchase.

Trails of all difficulty levels emanate from the base ranging from mellow walks along the river to the mountainous challenges of the adjacent Battenkill State Forest.

(Continued on other side)



COVERED BRIDGE AT WEST ARLINGTON GREEN. The only surviving covered (or cover-truss) bridge in Arlington crosses the Battenkill at the Green. Constructed in 1852.



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(Continued from the other side)

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By 1900, another use of the water power in the river had been found in the generation of electricity. Rueben Colvin, owner of the grist mill at the Center, built a turbine and generated electricity as early as 1896. Some street lights were installed in the Center and a few houses were wired for electricity. One of the stipulations of the contracts to buy power was that only occupied rooms would be lighted - obviously, a flat rate was agreed to. By way of the "Manchester Journal", Colvin notified customers that he would enforce that provision and had noticed a certain house where he knew there to be only one occupant and had noted that two rooms were lighted. Electricity was also generated about 1900 at the dam near the foot of Union Street where a marble mill had operated for some twenty or thirty years. And on Bourne Brook, a fall of some 600 feet could be used to generate power when the brook was running full, thereby decreasing the cost of generating electric power.

Histories of Vermont tell us that when settlers arrived, one of the attractions in Manchester was a river teeming with fish. This source of food helped keep the larders supplied and was a welcome change from venison and pork, the dietary staples of the early years.

Recreational fishing had supplanted utility fishing by the mid 1800s. Every youngster fished as a matter of right and one of those youngsters, Charles Orvis, made a living and earned a world-wide reputation manufacturing fishing equipment. The original land grants purchased by the first settlers in Vermont entitled owners of those grants to fish and hunt on their own land and on "public waters and enclosed lands". This provision was a revolt against the English law where



STEAMBOAT LAUNCHING ON THE BATTENKILL. This rather implausible scene of the only steamboat ever known to have plied the Battenkill is not dated. William McAuley built the steamboat for taking guests at his Mountain View Villa for excursions on the river. The crowd was undoubtedly entertained by the launch upstream of the Rochester Bridge.

the crown owned all fish and game. Thus, Vermonters considered hunting and fishing their right.

In spite of this conviction, sufficient pressure had been applied to the Legislature to bring about the enactment of Fish and Game laws in 1874. In Manchester, Charles F. Orvis was president of the Fish and Game Club founded in April 1874 - the law was passed in March of that year.

Orvis had been one of the first local people to express concern for the quality of the Batten Kill and for the quality of the fishing. He had begun campaigning for fish and game laws and provision for protective management of streams and restocking of trout in about 1880. The proliferation of anglers using his beloved Batten Kill and the resultant overfishing was a great worry to him. Conditions were so bad, in spite of the new law and enforcement by the game clubs that, in 1877, the Batten Kill was posted and fishing was prohibited entirely in an attempt to allow the fish to regenerate. It was about this time that Mr. Orvis became interested in fish culture and began propagation of fish. By 1890, he had built a series of ponds along the winding road leading from the West Road through the farm he owned (now the Southern Vermont Art Center property).

The river was deeper then than now, although it is still excellent for tubing, canoeing and boating.

In his book "The Battenkill", John Merwin says that the river is in better condition now than at any time in two hundred years. Less agriculture, modern sewage treatment methods, environmental protection, the banning of DDT and other chemicals are among the reasons he gives for this condition.

The water on the Batten Kill is lively and crystal clear. Beginners float easily in the quiet water, while experienced canoeists can enjoy other sections of quickwater and play in the eddies.

The Batten Kill Valley was christened "The Valley of Vermont" by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Arlington's best known writer and novelist. In spring and summer the hills laugh with delight. There's a feeling of perfect solitude off the roads, where one can peacefully reflect on the rich beauty of life.

From the bow of a canoe, the charm of the Valley quietly reveals itself on its own terms. The rising slopes of Mount Equinox come gradually into view through the trees lining the riverbank. We float past shrouded country lanes, peaceful meadows, deep woods and high mountainsides bathed in the sun. This is a world apart, a valley to treasure. (Special thanks to Mary Bort and John Merwin.)

If you would like to adventure out on the river by canoe for two hours or two days or more, come and visit us at the Battenkill Canoe Ltd. There are quiet sections for beginners and quickwater for the experienced. Your adventure begins at our shop located midway between Arlington and Manchester on the Historic Route 7A in southern Vermont. We'll give you a map and go over your route to point out the particularly interesting places to swim, picnic, as well as the difficult spots.

Then you're off on your own to enjoy crystal-clear water that alternately tumbles, sparkles and flows as the river wends along its way.

The Batten Kill is famed for its fishing and you may encounter many people who are doing just that. Be aware they have established position long before you, and it is your responsibility to avoid them. When approaching, attempt to float quietly behind so as not to disturb the area being fished. If that is not possible, wait until their line is in and pass by quietly.

To promote and maintain cooperation between people fishing and floaters, and to reduce potential conflicts, our rental hours are between 9:30 am and 5:30 pm. Your cooperation and kind behavior is appreciated by all river users.

The secret for all those who wish to enjoy the Batten Kill boils down to just a few things: communicate, be flexible, be reasonable, and use common sense. We are all caretakers of this river for future generations, so take care of it like it's your own home.... Then everyone is enriched.



Text edited from: Mary Bort, John Merwin, Battenkill Canoe. Photographs from: Arlington Along the Battenkill, Its Pictured Past. By Hugh Henry. And photographs from the Battenkill Valley Outdoors. Special thanks to all.

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