The largest river on the East Coast of the United States, the Susquehanna flows at an average speed of 20 miles per day.

Contributing an extraordinary 19 million gallons of water per minute, the Susquehanna River is the only indispensable tributary of the Chesapeake Bay, the nation’s largest estuary.

Not only does the river provide a deep trench forming the bay’s primary shipping channel, it also delivers half of the freshwater the bay requires to maintain its ecological balance.

The 316-mile-long North Branch and the 228-mile West Branch join at Northumberland-Sunbury, Pennsylvania, to form the 128-mile Lower Susquehanna, or Main Stem.

The river drains an eighth of New York, nearly half of Pennsylvania, and a fragment of Maryland.

More than 31,000 miles of streams such as the Juniata, the Chenango, and the Chemung feed the river along its 444-mile journey.

The nation’s 16th longest river is unusually shallow and rocky. Over geologic time, the Susquehanna has substantially altered its drainage pattern and continues to cut channels while erasing and creating islands.

Thousands of islands dot the relatively shallow Susquehanna. Great Island, just downstream from Lock Haven, is 367 acres in size and shared by nearly a dozen owners.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Susquehanna defined the American frontier. The Iroquois and the Susquehannocks reluctantly yielded the river to white settlers.
The river’s most unusual monument is a simple granite obelisk topped by a weather vane, marking Canoe Place and the site of the landmark black cherry tree indicating the boundary of land that William Penn’s heirs purchased from the Iroquois.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, coal mining, lumbering, and hydroelectric and nuclear energy production polluted the water and nearly ruined the landscape beyond hope.

Anthracite coal mining ended in Pennsylvania’s Wyoming Valley on January 22, 1959, when the floor of the Susquehanna collapsed and icy river water poured into the mines beneath. Twelve miners drowned in the accident.

On March 28, 1979, the worst commercial nuclear accident in U.S. history, a near-meltdown ruined an almost new reactor on Three Mile Island in the Susquehanna River ten miles south of Harrisburg. Only the Mississippi River takes more heat from nuclear plants than the Susquehanna.

The construction of the Columbia Dam and other canal structures in the early nineteenth century blocked the spawning run of the American shad, once the premier fish of the Susquehanna.

Conowingo Dam is the largest gravity-rooted hydro structure on earth, relying on its own enormous mass to hold it steady. Conowingo’s fish elevator is the largest fish lift in North America, transporting tens of thousands of shad over the dam each spring.

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons, baptized his first convert in the Susquehanna at Harmony.

The river is the course for the longest single-day flat-water race in the world, held annually on Memorial Day. Canoeists participate in the General Clinton Canoe Regatta, a 70-mile paddle from Lake Otsego, Cooperstown, NY, down the Susquehanna to Bainbridge, NY.

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