

## Elaho River – Fear Canyon

### Vitals

Locale: Squamish Valley, British Columbia

What It's Like: A big river with many faces. Best known as a class IV-V big water run.

Class: Level dependent. III-IV at low getting harder as the water rises.

Scouting/Portaging: Scouting is ok. One of the biggest rapids is a must-run.

Level: Online gauge at [http://www.wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/graph/graph\\_e.html?stn=08GA071](http://www.wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/graph/graph_e.html?stn=08GA071)

Time: 1-2 hours.

When To Go: Year round (often snowed in during winter).

Info From: Many visits.

Other Beta: None.

### Description

Fear Canyon is an ominous name for a river. For this section of the Elaho at high levels it surely holds true - the run is a gauntlet of crashing waves and towering holes. It is a classic big water river. However, at low levels don't let the name get to your head - things get progressively easier as levels fall, and amazingly it remains runnable - *and quality* - even at minimum winter flows.

As alluded to above, Fear Canyon is runnable over a huge range of water levels. Accordingly, the river changes drastically at all the levels at which it is run. At the lowest levels of 20-40 cms (it doesn't get much lower) it is a fun class III-IV jaunt amongst the boulders that form enormous holes at higher levels - everything is easily managed at water level. The remarkable thing is even at these rock bottom flows the majority of the rapids are clean and well channelized.

Once things get up to 80-100 cms this run is starting to feel like a big river and the biggest rapids are certainly IV+. At 150 cms the river is pushy big water class IV-V - it is classic kayaking at these levels. Anything over 200 cms is generally described as terrifying in a few spots, but still doable for strong boaters. Make your own mind up about whether boating Fear Canyon at these or higher levels is worth it for you. Rumor says it's been done successfully at 350 cms - but that's just a rumor.

Access to Fear Canyon is along well travelled and well maintained dirt logging roads. Expect about a 1 hour drive from town to the river. From Squamish drive up the Squamish River - pass the Ashlu turn off and keep driving. You will eventually reach the Elaho-Squamish confluence. Stay left to head up the Elaho. The take out is at the first bridge that crosses the river - there is easy access just downstream of the bridge at the put in for the Elaho-Squamish raft run (near the gauge station). Drive upstream on river left - you can put in near where a small waterfall (it's obvious) goes under the road or you can continue up to the next bridge, though this usually means a portage around 2 rapids just above the small waterfall.

From the upper put in the river is relatively open - it is worth it if you don't mind the portaging. The two portage rapids are the 2 drops with house-sized boulders in the middle of the river - you can sometimes sneak them, but be sure to scout carefully from the road beforehand. Below the lower put in the river quickly rounds a corner and drops into the canyon.

Things start off quickly with a ramp into a big pool. Everything can be inspected easily below here, and it is worthwhile at higher levels as some of the holes are huge. When you pass through a rapid with a big boulder in the middle at the bottom, eddy out on the left to scout. This is the crux rapid of the trip, and if you want to walk it you might as well just walk out to the road. One more major rapid is left - it's just a stout as the must-run, but it has an easy portage. Enjoy the boogie down to the take out, and keep your eyes opened for a couple of good surf waves that come and go - a good way to calm down from the fear of Fear Canyon.

Updated Sept 23, 2010