

Harris Creek - Canyon

Vitals

Locale: Port Renfrew, British Columbia

What It's Like: A short run in a small canyon on the southern end of Vancouver Island. Nice class IV-V boating.

Class: IV-V at low to medium
V at medium to high

Scouting/Portaging: Moderate.

Level: Online gauge: Harris Creek - http://www.wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/graph/graph_e.html?stn=08HA070

Time: 2-3 hours your first time.

When To Go: Rain fed, fall through spring.

Info From: March 2012 at 4.5 cms.

Other Beta: None.

Description

Harris Creek is one of the multitudes of rivers found in the Port Renfrew zone on southern Vancouver Island. Like many runs in the area it is quite short, however if you've never run it before it will take a few hours to sort out all the rapids packed into the canyon. Expect to encounter good quality, steep boulder pile rapids that generally build in difficulty as the run progresses. It is a great river to run multiple laps of, or to combine with something else nearby like the Gordon.

The Harris has an accurate online gauge. Low water is about 3 cms. A good medium level, appropriate for a first visit, is around 4.5-5 cms. It can certainly be paddled at high water, but we can only recommend running the creek over 7-8 cms if you have previous experience on the run. This run beefs up quickly at high levels. The rapids you can see from the take out bridge and along the shuttle road are a good indication of the character of the run.

Access to this river is along paved roads that are kept plowed in the winter when the region gets snow. Other roads in the area are often left to melt out naturally. A backroads map book is a useful tool as always. To reach the Harris it is usually quickest to approach from Lake Cowichan, even when coming from Victoria. Follow the main road from Lake Cowichan to Port Renfrew. This road parallels the Harris from its headwaters all the way to the ocean. The take out is at a bridge over the river on the Port Renfrew end of the road. The canyon upstream is obvious. The put in is 2 or 3 km upstream at the first point the river is right next to the road.

At the put in the river is class II. There are several short class IV rapids that lead to the first drop that will require a proper scout. Once you reach this point the rapids will typically come in quick succession with no real pools between them. There are decent amounts of slack water and/or class II to regroup after the big ones. The end of the run approaches after you paddle a long bedrock hallway rapid called Stairway to Heaven. This rapid has a sticky hole and a large pool at the bottom. The next rapid (which is the furthest upstream rapid you can see from the bridge) is the crux of the run and it deserves a good look. If it's not to your liking you can walk to the take out on the left, or you can figure out a way to portage the bits you don't like. Once below the corner rapid enjoy the last few drops and take out on river right just below the bridge.

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