

Lens Creek

Vitals

Locale: Port Renfrew, British Columbia

What It's Like: A local favorite on southern Vancouver Island. An adventurous day of rapids, shuttling and portaging.

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

Scouting/Portaging: Moderate to difficult. Some must-run whitewater and a complex near-mandatory portage.

Level: The Harris Creek gauge: http://www.wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/graph/graph_e.html?stn=08HA070 Can be used to approximate flows. Otherwise visual at the put in.

Time: 4-6 hours.

When To Go: Fall through spring after rain. Runs when most other things are low.

Info From: April 2012.

Other Beta: None.

Description

Lens Creek is one of the local favorites on southern Vancouver Island. Unlike many runs in the area the Lens needs a few days after a rain for it to drop down to low enough levels to be run. Containing some tight canyons, a standout class V rapid, classic Island mank and an exciting portage, this run should be on your list when you're in the south when the water is low. Not a river that can easily be lapped, the Lens is a full day of adventure kayaking.

It will be virtually impossible to find the Lens without a Backroads Map Book, or local knowledge. The take out is easy enough - it is at the southern end of the Lens Creek Main near where it joins the Harris Creek Road (the paved road from Port Renfrew to Lake Cowichan). A large bridge crosses the river here. The put in is at the next bridge approximately 7-8 km upstream. The shortest shuttle is run along the river left logging road, however as of April 2012 that road is in rough shape and may not be passable without serious 4x4.

The other, much longer option is to drive the Harris Creek Road around to the north end of the Lens Main. This is a major turn off about 8-9 km south of Mesachie Lake. Follow the Lens Main south to reach the put in bridge, generally favoring the east side of the river. To complicate things the road may be washed out in places and the north end of the Lens Main is sometimes gated. From put in to take out using the Harris Creek road is at least 1 hour each way.

The water level on the Lens is visual only, although the Harris Creek gauge can be used to get a good idea of what's going on in the area. BC-WW suggests a range of 2.5-4.5 cms. We suggest 3.5 cms as a low but tolerable level. If the rapid above the put in bridge looks healthy you are in for a spicy day. Generally speaking it should look low - the canyon is much, much narrower than at the bridge. High levels are largely untested, and keep in mind that the Harris gauge might not always correlate to what's happening in the Lens drainage.

From the put in, the Lens meanders along and quickly enters a low slung, narrow canyon with perhaps 10 class IV-IV+ rapids. Nothing is particularly memorable except for the scenery. The initial canyon subsides to some pleasant floating with amazing old growth forest on the banks. Boulder rapids build as the river slowly drops in to the second canyon of the run. The head of the second canyon contains several congested boulder rapids that are easily inspected or portaged. The rapid in the heart of the second canyon that is far larger than anything encountered so far is called Stairway to Hell. A challenging class V rapid, it is the highlight of the run and only the top can be easily portaged.

Below Stairway is a manky mandatory rapid, a small ledge and a clean boof into a wood-filled room. Below this boof it is critical to get out on the left. Up next is a burly waterfall with a difficult entrance. Despite having been run, it is not appealing and most people will portage. The portage involves jumping into the impact zone of the falls, swimming to shore and roping boats and paddles to those who jumped first. One more fun rapid and then the action is over - all that's left is the long cruise to the take out bridge.

Updated April 27, 2012