

Elk River – Middle

Vitals

Locale: Elko, British Columbia

What It's Like: Great moderate whitewater in a classic Rockies canyon.

Class: IV

Scouting/Portaging: Moderate.

Level: Online gauge: Elk River near Fernie: http://wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/report/report_e.html?type=realTime&stn=08NK002
Visual gauge located at the bast of the powerhouse at the put in.

Time: 2 hours.

When To Go: Spring through fall - runs in the winter in mild years.

Info From: May 2016.

Other Beta: Paddling ABC: [http://paddlingabc.com/riverwiki/rivers/elk - canyon_aka_upper_lower](http://paddlingabc.com/riverwiki/rivers/elk_-_canyon_aka_upper_lower)

Description

The Elk River is a medium sized drainage in the very southeast corner of BC that flows into the Kootenay River north of the US border. There are several interesting sections of whitewater on this run that are draped in classic Canadian Rockies scenery. The Middle Elk, a short section of significant canyon with interesting rapids and a beautiful waterfall to start makes a great combination with other reaches of the Elk, or as a place to visit as a destination by itself.

The closest town to the Middle Elk is Elko, which is a small town about an hour west of Fernie on highway 3. The river essentially flows behind the large sawmill in town. The put in is located just north of the lumber yard at a dirt pullout. Walk across the field to look at Leap of Faith. Slightly upstream, next to the obvious class 6 crack, is a way to climb down to the river above the falls. If you're not running the falls there is a steep rail track that descends to the pool below Leap of Faith, and the powerhouse fed by the water diverted from the Upper Elk. Climbing down this track is probably the scariest part of the whole run.

To reach the take out drive to the south end of the sawmill. When the road crosses a pipeline right-of-way, turn left and follow it until it goes up a steep hill. After the hill keep following the road a short ways until it ends at a beautiful overlook of the river. This is a fantastic camping spot. There is a steep trail that goes down to the river from here.

The Middle Elk is runnable over a wide range of flows. On the Elk River at Fernie gauge, 20-30 cms is low, 30-50 cms is medium and 50-100 cms is high. Keep in mind the gauge is far upstream and its accuracy may vary. There is also a visual staff gauge attached to the powerhouse below the falls. 0.3-0.6 is low, 0.6-0.9 is medium and anything above 1.0 meters is high. The highest run people know of was at 2.6 meters.

Leap of Faith, the sweet waterfall at the start of the run, is optional. Accessing it requires a decent seal launch into an eddy that gets trickier as the level rises. It's only really feasible when the water is on the lower side for the canyon below. There will be less water at the falls than in the canyon as some water diverted for power from the Upper Elk re-enters the river below Leap of Faith. In normal flow range, the canyon is made up of mainly class IV rapids, and it is very scenic. The first rapid is called Rocket Eddy. The other rapid of note is called Corner Pocket, about half way down. The take out is located on river right at a large gravel bar when the river turns right and the canyon opens up. The trail up to the cars is steep and it will get you sweating.

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