

## Rutherford Creek

### Vitals

Locale: Whistler/Pemberton, British Columbia

What It's Like: Continuous boulder rapids studded with some classic bedrock drops.

Class: Continuous class IV-V, class V at higher levels.

Scouting/Portaging: Easy to moderate.

Level: Visual. There is [an online gauge](http://www.innergex.com/rutherford-creek-recreational-users) that is usually accurate. Look for a 20 cms difference between the total flow and diverted flow for a good medium level..

Time: 3-4 hours.

When To Go: Whistler high water season - quite a bit of water needs to go over the dam to give good flows.

Info From: Many visits.

Other Beta: None.

### Description

Rutherford Creek is a Sea To Sky classic that has unfortunately fallen from the limelight in recent years. Miles of continuous boulder rapids and a handful of quality bedrock drops including a perfect 20 footer make this a river not to be missed. It is a challenging run and it is very testing at high levels - part of its allure is the difficulty in finding it with a good flow - if you get there and it's running, put on and don't miss out.

The Rutherford has a tragic history. It was one of the first classic whitewater runs in Squamish-Whistler to become the victim of a run-of-river hydro project. A 9 km long diversion tunnel now drains the river of all its water for the majority of the year - it can now only be run at the height of the summer when the diversion is overwhelmed. In exchange for losing natural flow, the local kayak community negotiated the construction of an artificial whitewater course below the powerhouse. However, it is of little consolation as it seems to only get used by slalom boaters once or twice a year - far fewer days than the river was runnable prior to the dam.

The take out for the Rutherford is found where the river runs under the highway 99 bridge just west of Pemberton. You'll see the powerhouse for the hydro project and the artificial course on the downstream side of the road. The access road for the river is on the river left side, and it is well marked as the Rutherford Creek Forest Service Road. There is ample parking just as you turn onto the Forest Service road near the rail bridge.

The most commonly paddled sections of the Rutherford are found below the diversion dam. There are convenient km markers along the dirt road up the river - the access points are where the river runs close to the road. The first put in is at km 3 - this is the split between the upper and lower halves of the run. Starting at the 7 km road marker is ideal - all you have to do is bash through 50 meters of bushes to get to the water. The section from the dam to the upper put in is rarely paddled. Doing the whole thing is recommended - the half way access is a good bail out point if you want off the river.

Prior to the construction of the dam, the Rutherford ran at good levels for a long window during the summer months. Currently it is only possible to boat the Rutherford during times of peak snowmelt, which is often limited to the first hot weather of the summer in June when there is still a lot of snow in the mountains. There is a visual gauge at the take out, as shown in the picture below - levels where the water is even with the horizontal line on the rock is ideal medium. This rock is under the rail bridge at the take out on the downstream river right side. As noted above, there is also an [online gauge](http://www.innergex.com/rutherford-creek-recreational-users) provided by the power company (20 cms in the river below the dam is medium).

Once on the water, the river starts off with some class IV continuous boulder rapids. Much of the river can easily be boat scouted - get out and look where necessary. After passing the clean 20 footer carefully run the next short section and stop above a towering horizon line - there is no pool above this drop. This is a marginal 40 foot waterfall with another bad rapid below - both can be portaged with some bushwhacking on river right.

After the portage come several bedrock drops and a couple of steeper boulder sections, and all too quickly you'll arrive at the half-way access point. From here down it's almost exclusively continuous boulder rapids. The highlight of this stretch is a big triple drop - it's easy to recognize from the horizon line. The lower half is generally more challenging than the upper stretch.

Be on the lookout now for the second near mandatory portage - as with the first there isn't much slack above it - it has been run both intentionally and unintentionally. Portage this on the right as well. Not far below this last big drop the bridge will come into sight and you can celebrate having successfully descended the Rutherford!

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