

Middle Fork of the Kaweah River, Hospital Rock

Vitals

Locale: Near Three Rivers, California in Sequoia National Park.

What It's Like: High quality granite and boulder rapid day trip.

Class: IV+ to V

Scouting/Portaging: Moderate - there is a lot of poison oak.

Level: Online gauge: <http://www.dreamflows.com/graphs/day.103.php>

Time: 4 or 5 hours your first time, you'll need to scout a lot without a guide.

When To Go: Early summer.

Info From: Several runs from 700-1200 cfs.

Other Beta: Bill Pooley's Kaweah River page: <http://www.c2.com/kaweah/>

Description

The Hospital Rock section of the Middle Kaweah is a representative example of the fine whitewater California has on offer: smooth boulders, slick bedrock drops and even a polished granite canyon are just some of the treats you'll find in there. The run contains challenging class IV-IV+ boulder piles and some stout but manageable class V that'll keep you coming back for more. It's a good intro to Cali boating, and is probably a shade easier than another run of this caliber, Bald Rock Canyon on the Middle Feather.

I have limited experience on which to base flow information for Hospital Rock. Our experience was that peaking flows on the Three Rivers gauge between 1000 and 1200 cfs gave a solid medium level where everything is runnable. A 650 cfs peak the day prior corresponded to a low but acceptable flow. Ask for local beta about what flows are high/too high. This is normally a summer run but it does flow after rain in the off season.

The Hospital Rock section is in Sequoia National Park. From the town of Three Rivers, take the only road that heads into the National Park - you'll have to buy a pass. There is only one road traversing the park from this entrance - the takeout is just after you pass over the Marble Fork of the Kaweah at the Potwisha Campground - park in the lot on the other side of the road from the campsite. Continuing upriver, there are some teaser views of the river canyon. The put-in is at the Hospital Rock picnic area where there are several trails heading to the river above and below the first couple of rapids - pick if you want to run some big ones straight up at the start, or if you'd like a more casual start to the day by using the downstream paths. There are other start points further upstream as well.

Taking the main trail to the river from the parking provides instant excitement. The first two drops - V-Drive and Little Niagara - aren't much of a warm-up. Little Niagara is a small waterfall with a tricky entrance. If portaging is on your mind, you might want to think about taking one of the lower put-in trails as the woods, like everywhere on this run, is nothing but a tangle of poison oak.

Below Little Niagara are some great bedrock drops which abruptly change into a series of fun boulder rapids. The rock colors at some of the bedrock drops are simply amazing. These rapids continue until the entrance of the 420 Gorge, the awesome and relatively easy polished granite corridor of Hospital Rock. The toughest part of this one is running the entrance rapid - a sievey boulder pile at a sharp left bend in the river.

The excellent whitewater continues downstream. After a dam/water diversion structure is the marquee drop of the run, Zero to Sixty. This rapid necessitates a strong move to the left to avoid a cave at the bottom. It has an easy portage. After a few more drops the river starts to ease off as you approach the take out where the cars and cold beer awaits. Enjoy the Kaweah valley - the Hospital Rock is class V training at its best.

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