

South Branch Grass River – Twin Falls

Vitals

Locale: Degrasse, New York

What It's Like: Fun pool drop whitewater with a couple of big cascades and even some good boogie.

Class: IV-IV+ (V) at medium levels.

Scouting/Portaging: Easy.

Level: The West Oswegatchie - <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv?04262500> - is the nearest gauge.

Time: 2-4 hours.

When To Go: Spring snowmelt, or after rain.

Info From: Many visits.

Other Beta: None.

Description

This is "the" Grass - the Twin Falls of the South Branch is one of several in the Grass system, and it is by far the best of the bunch. Indeed, the Twin Falls section is arguably the best stretch of pool-drop whitewater in northern New York; it is certainly an equal of other classics such as the Moose. The drops are all big and fun, you can run it from really low to very high, and there are even some high quality sections of boogie water. It's also a great river for a mixed group as everything is easily inspected and easy to carry around. Although there is notable flat water, it is generally overshadowed by the whitewater.

The closest major center to the Grass is Canton, a nice college town situated just south of the Canadian border between Brockville and Cornwall. Once you get to Canton, you need head south on route 27 to get to the take out of the river. The town you're looking for is Degrasse - the take out bridge is in the town. It's not much of a town, so if you need anything, get it somewhere else. The put in is 10 km up Tooley Pond Road (found about 50 meters from the take out on river right). There is a small parking lot with concrete blocks along the ditch, and a trail down to the water. About half way along the run is a bridge over the river, easily recognized from the shuttle, that can be used for alternative access.

While the online gauge will give a rough estimate of flows (ie if there will be water), the exact flow can only be confirmed visually. When the internet gauge reads 800 cfs and rising, there will be water. Dropping levels are a little harder to predict, but 1000 and dropping is usually ok. 2000 and up is high water. In times of desperation you can try it lower than 800 - the rapids are fine, but some of the boogie gets very tedious. Also, the gauge is more accurate in the spring during snow melt.

The visual gauge is located downstream of the takeout bridge on the flat sloping rocks on river right, in the runout of the last rapid. It is a spray painted outline of a heart - the level is commonly referenced to how much of this heart is under water. When the water is at the bottom point of the heart, the level is low and it usually corresponds to about 800 cfs on the internet gauge. Half the heart underwater is a medium level and it usually corresponds to about 1200-1400 cfs on the gauge. When the heart is just underwater, the gauge is usually about 2000 cfs and the water is high. Like many rivers in New York the amount of scraping down wide bedrock rapids decreases and hole size increases with higher levels. Due to the pool-drop nature of the run, it does not get too high.

From the put in the river is flat, then there are some easy warm up rapids. Very quickly, the river narrows and gets steep as it drops into a mini-gorge containing the entry rapid called Large Marge. No matter how you slice it, this is a big and burly rapid to start the day off. You can't miss the roar and the horizon line above it, so make sure you eddy out on either side to scout or portage.

Large Marge is a rocky 30 foot cascade that gets smoother but more consequential as levels increase. There isn't much after the drop; easy water, then the river drops into a fun class III micro-gorge that is easy to boat scout. After you pop out

of this short section the river will get really wide, and unless there is a lot of water it is usually bumpy. After a couple of minutes, the river turns from easy riffles back into fun class III boogie, a few defined drops and finally a hole.

Below here the river turns to pool drop, with big rapids interspersed with long flat sections. The highlight is Twin Falls, a 40+ foot cascade that looks bumpy but does occasionally give up smooth lines. At high levels several of the rapids have dangerously sticky holes, but everything is good to go and easy to scout/portage. Keep your eyes peeled for some classic boofs in some of the rapids.

All in all the Grass is one of the best rivers around - take the time to explore different lines and run all of the rapids a few times. It can even be quite beautiful in there, especially when all the leaves are green on the trees when it runs sometimes in the summer!

Updated March 11, 2009