

Rideau River – Hog's Back Falls

Vitals

Locale: Ottawa, Ontario

What It's Like: Fun waterfalls into a short gorge. Lots of innocent bystanders with cameras. An excellent intro to waterfalls.

Class: IV-IV+ at low to medium levels. Flows are often much too high in the spring and after big fall rains.

Scouting/Portaging: Very easy.

Level: Visual.

Time: 10 to 15 minutes per lap, plus scouting time.

When To Go: Spring after high water subsides. Most often run in the fall during and after the canal drawdown.

Info From: Many visits.

Other Beta: None.

Description

Contributed by Philip Kompass.

Welcome to the wonders of Ottawa, one of Canada's premiere kayaking destinations. Hog's Back Falls - more accurately Prince of Wales Falls - is yet another wonderful side benefit to the Rideau Canal. The falls didn't exist until 1831, and were created as a diversion channel to control the level of Mooney's Bay thereby providing a navigable depth of water and a means for boats to continue down to the canal. Thankfully, common sense prevailed in the 1830s and this diversion channel really looks and feels like a naturally occurring river rapid as the engineers wisely used an existing ravine to channel the water.

Hog's Back runs when the Rideau is high enough to spill over the dam at Mooney's Bay or when the National Capital Commission (essentially the Parks Service for Ottawa/Gatineau) begins to drain the Bay, blocking flow into the canal system (in order to create the Rideau Skateway). When they drain the lake, the water spills over a dam and into the ravine. Voila... Hog's Back Falls.

That dam is the only fly in the ointment with this set of rapids. Early in the fall, when the lake level remains high and none of the dam timbers have been removed the drop from the lake to the concrete bottom of the dam spilling into Hog's Back is a real pain in the arse - literally. There are a few channels and some have rebar - scout very carefully.

Once through the dam, there is a short moving pool. You'll have to decide which line - either the Double Drop or the Spout - you wish to run. The Spout is a very clean 15 foot drop with a rolling lip that spills into a shale canyon. If you miss the actual Spout it's not the end of the world. At high flows a beefy hole forms just above where the Double Drop spills in. The Double Drop is to the right of the spout - it's very fun but it isn't good if the water is low.

Take out in the pool below. Get out on the river left shoreline, and hike up to do it again. You could run down the river if you wanted too. The class 2/3 continues for about a kilometer.

Addendum - Note on Access

Access at Hog's Back has forever been a contentious issue. It is a manmade diversion channel. Don't kid yourself by arguing otherwise. It is public property and is managed by the National Capitol Commission (NCC). They have - like any other business or organization - an obligation to manage the risk to the general public at the properties they manage. Kayaking off waterfalls will always be considered a reckless undertaking, and therefore the NCC frowns on this sort of behavior, and makes a conscious effort to discourage kayaking at places such as Hog's Back or Rideau Falls.

However, it is possible to kayak at Hog's Back without being fined by the NCC. In fact, it is very easy. **Do not cross the fences or handrails.** If you enter the water in Mooney's Bay and take out in the pool below the Falls without crossing the fences/railings you haven't broken any bylaws and therefore should be free of any penalty the NCC may wish to inflict upon you.

Also note, try to limit nudity in the parking areas, don't piss on the shrubbery, litter or otherwise set a bad example for other paddlers. Sure, legally the NCC can't stop you from running the Falls, but why aggravate that relationship? Be a good ambassador for the sport. If we can demonstrate that we manage our own risks, and are responsible and safe, perhaps we won't have to worry about this stuff anymore.

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