

Spencer Creek

Vitals

Locale: Dundas, Ontario

What It's Like: Park and huck, steep continuous gorge, urban fun.

Class: III-IV+

Scouting/Portaging: Easy.

Level: 6.3 to 6.5 on this gauge: http://www.wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/graph/graph_e.html?stn=02HB007.

Time: 30 minutes to 6 hours, depending on the sections run and the wood situation.

When To Go: January through March after a thaw or after a heavy rain.

Info From: Many visits.

Other Beta: None.

Description

Contributed by Geoff Boyd.

Southern Ontario is rarely the first place that comes to mind when you hear the word "creeking". However, with a bit of digging, and the right water levels, there are a couple of gems coming down the Niagra Escarpment to be found. One of these gems, which has become the classic escarpment creek, is Spencer's Creek in Dundas Ontario. Located 15 minutes from my door in Burlington, and an hour away from Toronto, it is an ideal spot for us southern Ontario boaters to get our creeking fix and still be home in time for dinner.

The best time to catch Spencer's Creek is January-March whenever it gets warm enough to have a melt. It also runs after significant rains throughout the rest of the year. The water is controlled by a dam on Christie Lake, and this tends to let the water level drop gradually after it peaks, giving Spencer's a longer window of opportunity than some of the other local creeks. Spencer's can be divided into three separate sections: Crooks Hollow, The Gorge, and The Town. Each can be run individually or all can be done as one solid run.

Crooks Hollow Run

Crooks Hollow is not really a run, but more of two park and hucks separated by some current and woods. Parking can be found in the Crooks Hollow parking lot between the two drops. The put in is a sketchy little ledge directly below the Christie Lake Dam. It is quite a scenic area as the old Mill ruins are still standing and provide a neat backdrop. Immediately you will find yourself in a long shallow slide that ends with a fun 4 foot boof. The hole can be sticky and I have seen some unintentional party surfs. Following this you will find some class I-II boogie water through the woods before coming to the small lake above "The Giggle Dam". The giggle dam is a very straight forward drop ranging from 8-12 ft in height. Drop it, shoot through the wash, giggle, take out on the left and go do it again. From here you can walk back to the car or continue on down some 1km of class I-II boogie water to any of the must make eddies in the park above Webster's Falls, where the next section awaits.

Gorge Run

It is short, steep, continuous and one helluva good time. Just over a kilometer in length, it is action packed class IV-IV+ complete with plenty of gradient, great boofs, the odd sticky hole, wood, sieves, and many curious onlookers hiking the adjacent trail. Due to being in the gorge, it has a very remote feeling even though you are only minutes from Dundas. Park in the park adjacent to Webster's Falls and access the bottom of the gorge via the metal staircase beside the very scenic, but unrunnable waterfall. It is always a good idea to take a quick hike down to the bottom of the steepest section of the river to make sure there is no problem wood. Every time we have run it there has been something to be removed. Put in directly below the falls, and hold on to your hat as it doesn't let up until where Tew's Creek joins the river below "The Gauntlet". It is great read and run heads up boating as the creek bends around to the left in a wide arch. The eddys

are small and few throughout this section, so leave a bit of space between paddlers. When the river starts to bend back towards the right you will need to start to get ready to eddy out above "The Gauntlet". There is a great boof move off a center rock (dubbed "The Boof Tooth") which is the last move before a big eddy on the left. Get out here to set safety for "The Gauntlet". The Gauntlet is the steepest part of the creek, and is a series of 4-5 tricky little moves filled with sieves, slots, and usually a bit of wood. The few Spencer's creek regulars have witnessed and experienced many less-than-perfect attempts. After the Gauntlet, the creek eases up and it is a nice class II paddle down to the take out on the right roughly 100m upstream of the tunnel under the train bridge. Warning: you do NOT want to go under the train bridge. Walk up the hill and out to Highway 8 where you either left your car or will put back in to run The Town Section.

Town Run

The Town section of Spencer's Creek is a rare urban paddling opportunity. Solid class III (IV in high water), it is quite the unique run, as most of the whitewater is formed by concrete, and you are paddling right through the heart of Dundas. If you are coming from the gorge, put in on the river left side just downstream of the keeper hole at the end of the raceway crossing under highway 8. If you are only running the town section, park behind the Dundas Community pool and put in here, or walk up and run the small drop under the bridge. If it is your first time running the town, most of the serious sections of whitewater occur around the various bridges that cross the river. Do some drive bys to scope out these sections. Outside of the odd bit of wood (and other foreign objects) the run itself is fairly straightforward. In higher water some of the holes below the bridges can grow quite sticky (in particular, the bridge above the pool, and the Osler St. bridge). After the Osler St bridge, there is one more bridge and then keep your eyes out for the take out eddy on the left. You will emerge near the parking lot across from the Canadian Tire, and probably encounter some more bewildered pedestrians and townsfolk. Get changed and down the Main St. and find one of Dundas's many fine water holes for a well deserved pint or four (I recommend the Thirsty Cactus).

Updated August 18, 2010