

Chemainus River – Copper Canyon

Vitals

Locale: Chemainus, British Columbia

What It's Like: Good moderate difficulty whitewater with some beautiful canyons.

Class: III-IV+ at medium levels.

Scouting/Portaging: Varies. Some difficult portage options in spots; the hardest rapids have desperate portage options.

Level: Online gauge: http://www.wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/graph/graph_e.html?stn=08HA001

Time: 3 hours.

When To Go: Winter rainy season.

Info From: March 2011 at 22 cms.

Other Beta: None.

Description

The Copper Canyon of the Chemainus is a fun, moderately difficult whitewater run flowing off the southeastern side of Vancouver Island. While much of the river is canyonized and there is great whitewater throughout, the second half of the river boasts the most dramatic scenery and a handful of really high quality rapids, making it a run well worth putting high up on the hit list.

Like many rivers on Vancouver Island, the Chemainus often flows at levels that are much, much too high to consider kayaking during the winter months when the island is pounded by moisture-laden Pacific storms. Appropriate flows are at relatively low levels, so this river can hold water for days as it slowly drops after a big peak. Minimum levels are around 16 cms. Low to mid 20's are perfect medium. The highest known attempt was at 35 cms where the river was reported to be pushy class V through the crux rapids.

The Copper Canyon is located about half way between Duncan and Ladysmith and it has a lengthy shuttle. To reach the take out look for Mt. Sicker Road off of Highway 1. Follow the road to a T-intersection and go right onto Cranko Road. At the "end of public road" sign turn left and drive down the dirt road until you are underneath a transmission line. This is the take out parking - a gated road goes down to the water.

To reach the put in, head back south on Highway 1 and then west towards Lake Cowichan on Highway 18. After about 8 km turn right onto Hillcrest/Hill 60 road and follow it along the obvious main branch until you can see the river close to the road on the left. At this point you will be in the unassuming Chemainus River Park where there are some parking spaces and trails down to the water.

Copper Canyon starts out as splashy class II. There is one notable rapid before the first canyon. The first canyon is straightforward, with one challenging rapid called Powerhouse. The scenery is particularly impressive. After an obvious break, the second canyon starts where a 300 foot tall wall appears on the right. As you paddle directly underneath the wall eddy out on the right for an easy portage around a nasty slot. The section below here is the best and most challenging section on the river. Come prepared to run this part as portage options are difficult. After the rapids subside take out on river right where the powerline/gas pipe crosses the river and walk up the short hill to where you parked. If you are fired up you can even hike up to run the falls that comes in on river left at the take out if the great whitewater upstream didn't satisfy your appetite.

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