

Gordon River – Middle Gordon

Vitals

Locale: Port Renfrew, British Columbia

What It's Like: Good pool-drop whitewater with big ledges and clean rapids.

Class: IV-V

Scouting/Portaging: Usually easy - one of the longer rapids is hard/impossible to walk.

Level: Online gauge: Harris Creek is the only nearby gauge:

http://www.wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/graph/graph_e.html?stn=08HA070 - it can be used to approximate flows. Otherwise visual.

Time: 2-3 hours.

When To Go: Rain fed in the fall and winter.

Info From: March 2011.

Other Beta: None.

Description

The Gordon River is an extensive river system on the southern tip of Vancouver Island that contains multiple sections of high quality whitewater. The middle section of the river, usually just referred to as the Middle Gordon, is certainly the most challenging stretch of the whole river, and it is perhaps one of the most high quality class IV-V runs in the whole southern island zone. Typified by big granite ledges and clear, vibrant green water the Middle Gordon is one of the runs that makes Vancouver Island such a good kayak destination.

The Gordon is a rain-fed river that runs in the fall and winter, when Vancouver Island is continuously pounded by rainstorms. Like all other runs in the area, it tends to flash up quickly after rain, but unlike other runs in the area the Middle Gordon often holds water for a week after a good sized rain event. Generally speaking the Gordon is a lower-water run and while the true level is visual only, look for 2-6 cms on the Harris Creek gauge as a rough guide for whether it is running, or try and get some beta from an Island local. The Gordon usually doesn't have a snowmelt season.

Use a Backroads Mapbook to find your way around the Middle Gordon. The river is paralleled by the Gordon River FSR that is accessible from both Port Renfrew and Lake Cowichan. It's usually quicker to come in from Lake Cowichan. The put in is at the confluence with Loup Creek - you can start on Loup Creek or you can find a trail about 100 meters downstream from the bridge that gives quick access to the river. The take out is at Bugaboo Creek. There is a trail cut on the river left side of Bugaboo Creek that leads to the Gordon, and is marked from the water by Bugaboo Creek pouring into the Gordon over a 30 foot waterfall and by a large fixed rope on the shore to help paddlers climb out of the canyon. Unless the water is very low it's almost as fast to quickly paddle the Lower Gordon (class III+), which has easy take out access.

On the water, the Middle Gordon presents itself as pool-drop whitewater with reasonable scouting opportunities and almost always the possibility of portaging. The first rapid is a waterfall run down the middle with a tricky entrance and serious consequences on both sides. Good boulder rapids interspersed with big bedrock ledges follow. One rapid called Minefield is not really walkable, but it is not the hardest rapid on the run. It is unusual for the run to be completed with no portages - amongst the classic ledges are some sieves and one monster rapid. Enjoy visiting the Middle Gordon, it's a true Vancouver Island classic.

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