

Middle Branch Oswegatchie River – Sluice Falls

Vitals

Locale: Harrisville, New York

What It's Like: Lake. Rapid. Lake. Rapid.

Class: III-IV+ (V) pool-drop.

Scouting/Portaging: Easy.

Level: USGS West Branch Oswegatchie: <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv?04262500>

Time: 2-3 hours.

When To Go: Spring snowmelt or after rain at a wide range of levels.

Info From: Many visits.

Other Beta: None.

Description

This is the last section of whitewater on the Middle Branch of the Oswegatchie River, one of the bigger New York river systems that flows into the St. Lawrence. Of the three branches of this river, the Middle Branch is arguably the best. Unfortunately, like all the other branches this one has no shortage of flat water. Don't let that scare you away though, the whitewater is worth the trip, and there are two large drops and many small rapids to deal with between the put in bridge and the end of the run, and it's all good to go.

The aging New York guidebook suggests this run is V-V+. This is not true. The river is mostly class III-IV+ ledges with one juicy class V sprinkled in. Of course, like everything in NY, the holes will be massive if it gets really high, so just pick a moderate level your first time. Acceptable flows are above 800 cfs on the gauge. There is no upper limit, but it will get burly at high flows. If combined with the Bryants Bridge section above, the flow should be at least 1400 cfs to make it worthwhile.

To get to the river, drive to Harrisville, which is on route 3 east of Watertown. Once in Harrisville there is a bridge over the Oswegatchie - you can't miss it. Turn onto the road immediately east of the river and drive up this road through the town. This road ends at a sharp right turn on to South Creek Road. Follow until you get to a T-junction with Middle Branch Road, and turn left to go upstream. Several minutes after you make the turn there will be a road exiting to the right called Jerden Falls Road - the takeout bridge is just down this road. To reach the put in, continue up Middle Branch Road for 6 km and park at the bridge over the river.

The whitewater doesn't look impressive from the start - there is a short section of moving water then a small lake before you get to the first rapid. Expect to encounter small to medium sized bedrock rapids similar to the first one over the length of the run. Scouting/portaging options are obvious. About half way through the run is a tree-top horizon line; this is a large slide best run straight down the middle. The main event, Sluice Falls, comes near the end of the run. It is an intimidating 2 part drop that as the name suggests is very narrow.

After Sluice Falls are one or two more straightforward rapids and a long flat section down to the take out bridge. Consider that all of the appealing take outs above the bridge are on private property.

Updated Nov 10, 2008