

Maine Whitewater Championships

Lower Dead River

July 3, 2010

The race will start at an alternate put-in called the Gravel Pit (about 5 ¾ miles by river from the Spencer put-in) which provides paddlers the option of running only the lower more difficult rapids and eliminates about half of the shuttle drive.

To find this access look for a road that branches to the left about 9.5 miles from RT 201, follow it about 1.6 miles to a parking area. You will see a trail leading into the woods; a 150 yd. carry down a steep bank to the river.

The course will start with mixed class II/II+ rapids and quickwater continue for 1 ¼ miles after the 'Gravel Pit', where Enchanted Streams (a popular lunch spot) enters the river on the left. Here the gradient increases again and the current speeds up as you approach Elephant Rock rapid.

Elephant Rock (1.5 miles) 400 yds class II-IV. The rapid begins with shallow water on the left below Enchanted Stream and a hefty ledge drop right of center. Paddle right to left here to miss the ledge drop and holes then maneuver down the middle or the right over three or four more drops that form the approach to Elephant Rock. The rapid is named for a room-sized rock that resembles an elephant lying on its side in the river about 25 feet off the right shore. There is an exciting three-foot wide chute that drops 3+ feet on the right side of the rock, and a popular play hole just below the left side of the rock. The preferred line here though is on the left, or left of center. Be careful: there are many waves, holes and rocks waiting here.

The river deepens and slows for several hundred yards then the current begins to pick up as you enter yet another stretch of 100-300 yd class II+ rocky rapids mixed with quick water. A mile and a half of this brings you to Mile Long Rapid 2.9 miles; look for a big pine tree standing by itself on the right bank at the top of the rapid. The river acquires a gorge-like feel here that continues to Salmon Stream below Poplar Hill Falls with the banks rising steeply on both sides of the river.

Mile Long Rapid (2.9 miles) 1 mile class II-IV. This rapid begins with the river narrowing from the right bank and the current crowding toward the left bank as it flows over a series of boulders and ledges for the first 200 yd. There are slots in the ledges on the right, you can run the big water down the middle by skirting the waves and holes, or the left bank is an option. Whatever route you choose in this rapid be always looking downriver at least 50 yd. There are many reasonable routes but all require constant maneuvering. The left bank route eventually gets shallow and rocky so you must work your way out toward the center after the first 300-400 yd. There is mostly easy but technical class II water on the right bank for the first 600-700 yd. but the last 300-yd. on the right requires lightning quick turning and reactions to avoid running into pourovers and large boulders. The final alternative is to stay generally in the center of the rapid all the way down, stay alert, look ahead and don't paddle straight into large boulders – now is that so hard? By the way, be warned that at the bottom of this rapid the river tumbles over two ledges in quick succession: avoid the middle half of the river here as it is

decidedly unfriendly to open boats. Plan to run the last 100 yd. within 50-60 feet of either shore. You want your boat to be fairly dry here as quick maneuvering and stability is the key to success.

After successfully negotiating Mile Long rapid you are about 3.5 miles and six rapids from the finish. The gradient diminishes after Mile Long rapid for 300 yd. as you approach the first of four rapids that precede Upper and Lower Poplar Hill Falls. The names are less well established than some of the earlier rapids; let's call them Pre-Poplar 1-4.

Pre-Poplar 1 is a 150 yd class II+ ledge rapid. There is a chute about 20 ft off the left bank that you cannot see until you are 25 ft. away. The middle 2/3 of the river is quite obstructed by boulders. The right side offers several reasonable routes.

Pre-Poplar 2 & 3 are longer and more difficult II-III. Like Upper & Lower Poplar further downriver the current slows as it approaches a turn where the gradient increases abruptly. As always there are numerous routes to choose from; avoid getting too far to the right on both of these rapids as it becomes shallow and choked with rocks. The best current is down the middle third where all of the big waves and holes await. There is a narrow but runnable line along the left shore.

Pre-Poplar 4 is 400 yd. class II. This rapid starts with the river turning to the left, and ends the same way. Stay left or left of center, as the right half is bony. After making the sharp left turn at the bottom of this rapid you will see another 100 yd. of class II leading to the Upper Poplar put-in on river left. Look for a clearing in the pines, and a three foot rock with a one foot orange triangle painted on it. You have 300 yd. of rocky quick water in which to bail and gather your courage.

Upper-Poplar (4.6 miles) is 200 yd. of fast and furious class III-IV. The gradient here is as steep as any part of the river and very rocky. Open boats should avoid the middle 2/3 of the river. There is a rocky, technical class II route on the left. Another route starts right of center and proceeds diagonally to the right across and above the meatiest part of the rapid ending with large waves on the left, very fast water underneath and rocks and eddies on the right.

Lower Poplar (5.4 miles) is $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of class II-IV depending on route selection. Make no mistake; to get through this rapid quickly one must get into the thick of it. It is possible to run nearly the entire length on the extreme right, but it is very easy to get caught in one of three shallow, rocky dead ends. A deeper fastwater route exists along the left shore but large rocks in several critical spots in the upper steep third of the rapid force a detour out near the mayhem of the middle. Once past the first 200 yd. the left side offers fast big water through most of the rest of the rapid - beware of several ledges and numerous rocks and holes. Expert river reading and strong paddling skills are a necessity for this route. The most common approach is to proceed from the top, to the right of the big water in the center channel, with excursions to the right to miss the big drops and holes then returning back toward the center as soon as the obstructions are passed on the left. If you linger too long on the right you will find your boat sitting on rocks. After the first 200 yd. of big water the intensity diminishes, but it will be too late for many; if you take on water in the upper third the easier lower two thirds can thrash you. The rapid ends with an abrupt left turn just above the old bridge abutment 6.3 miles.

Continue downstream for 1.4 miles of easy class II to the finish line at the public take out on the left shore below Magic Falls Outfitters. Look for white canvas wall tents on the left after you pass a motel/lodge. The take out will appear as an opening in the brush in the shallow water. Stay on the left shore after the Dead River Lodge and you can't miss it. The next public take out is at Crusher Hole, a rafting take-out 2.5 miles down river on the left side of the Kennebec, just above an island.