



61. Eagle River

Beginning in the Chugach Mountains of Chugach State Park, Eagle River emerges from Eagle Glacier as a cold, turbid, swift glacial stream. In its upper reaches, it is most known to those who traverse from Eagle River Valley over Crow Pass to Girdwood. This icy, knee- to waist-high crossing is forbidding to some but is only a minor inconvenience to the people who run the 28-mile Crow Pass Marathon. This section of the river is not generally accessible to boaters.

To launch from the Eagle River Visitor Center, portage boats about a mile to the river by trail and then paddle through the sloughlike tributary that leads to the main river from the canoe landing. This area is often shallow and rocky and the portage is arduous, so most people choose to begin floating farther downriver at the North Fork Access. You'll float through a forested valley, with sweepers, and minimal maneuvering is required.

The best take-out for beginners and families is at the Eagle River Briggs bridge day-use area off Eagle River Loop Road, on the left side of the river just a few miles above Eagle River Campground. If you choose to paddle another mile farther to the gauging station, which is 1 mile above the campground, scout the take-out before you run this section. There is a mile of Class II rapids just upriver of the take-out and Class III rapids just downstream of the take-out.

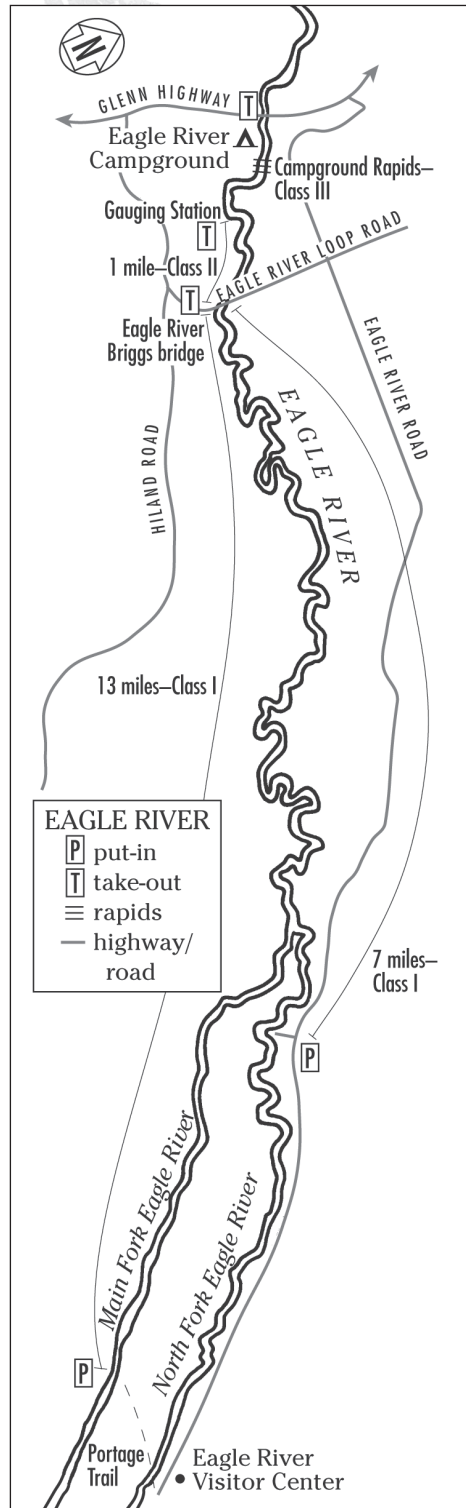
The Bridge to Bridge section of Eagle River (from Briggs to the Glenn Highway) is the Class III run of choice on summer evenings for many local Anchorage paddlers, for its quick accessibility, short length, and challenge. It is a great place to hone your whitewater-paddling skills, but mishap can result in significant consequences in the frigid waters.

From the put-in at the Eagle River Loop Road Bridge, the river swings left, then back to the right. At low flows, a small wave forms in the middle of the first drop. The river then swings left. At low water, this is a rock garden; at high water, it is mostly washed out. The river then swings right through a Class II rock garden with a pool below. On river right is a bank known locally as Clay Ledges; the name refers to the bank and the rapids. A hole forms here at low to medium water. Trees or logjams tend to accumulate on river right downstream of Clay Ledges. Below this, the river curves left and right through Class II rock gardens. A warning sign for Campground Rapids looms ahead. Take out to scout on river left just below the portage sign. A trail through the woods leads to a series of overlooks. Campground Rapids consists of a near river-wide set of ledges and large rock on river right that becomes a pour-over at higher flows. The Pass is the first ledge on the left center; at normal flows, this is a series of waves. The second ledge is

more serious, and best passed on the far right. Logs are often caught on this ledge. The rocks here are nasty and dangerous—sharp, with an upstream angle. If you cannot go right, a left side sneak is possible but requires catching the left eddy to avoid being swept into the bottom ledge. A portage may be prudent. Below the rapids, paddle another couple hundred yards to the take-out at the campground on river left.

Below the Parks Highway bridge, the river is swift Class II to IV, depending upon water level. The river flows through the U.S. Army base of Fort Richardson. The area is used for artillery practice, and permission is required to paddle this 5.8-mile section or to paddle to the Knik River. Call (907) 384-0823 or (907) 384-0828. The first drop past the railroad bridge (3.3 miles down) has a dangerous undercut that has claimed two lives. Rescue in this area is extremely difficult. Below the take-out on Ft. Richardson, there are no other take-outs before the river reaches Knik Arm. The Arm has dangerous mudflats with quicksand and bore tides and is not recommended for paddling.

In early explorations, Captain Edwin F. Glenn's Army expedition in Southcentral Alaska in 1898 successfully crossed from Prince William Sound, near present-day Whittier, to Portage and Turnagain Arm. Later, Luther Kelly, a guide for Glenn, took a party up the Twentymile River and climbed over Crow Pass, then down Crow and Raven creeks and the Eagle River. They found scattered Indian



camp, large numbers of Dall sheep, and innumerable mosquitoes, and they described the valley as a “miniature Yosemite.” This route was surveyed by the U.S. Army’s Alaska Road Commission in 1910 and became part of the Iditarod Trail from Seward to Nome.

RATING: Class I–III, between Eagle River Visitor Center and the Glenn Highway bridge (just below Eagle River Campground). Starting at the visitor center, upper 13 miles is Class I; then 1 mile of Class II rapids just above gauging station take-out; then 2 miles of Class II–III before the Glenn Highway bridge. Recommend taking out at the gauging station above Class III rapids. (Below the Glenn Highway bridge are Class II–IV rapids.)

CAUTIONS: Class III rapids (Campground Rapids) just below the gauging station. Scout before running sweepers, logjams. Class III Campground Rapids is a river-wide ledge with several boulders in the middle of the river, requiring precise maneuvering.

TRIP LENGTH: 14 miles from Eagle River Visitor Center to gauging station above Eagle River Campground; allow 6–8 hours. Or about 8 miles from North Fork Access to gauging station; allow 2–4 hours.

SEASON: April–October.

WATERCRAFT: All.

ACCESS: In—Drive to Eagle River

and take Eagle River Road 12 miles to the Eagle River Visitor Center (Chugach State Park). Portage boats about a mile to the river by trail. An alternate put-in (and the easiest, particularly for families) is about 5 miles downriver at North Fork Access point off Eagle River Road (parking lot and rest rooms). Out—Take out at the Eagle River Briggs bridge day-use area, off Hiland Road and Eagle River Loop Road (right turn-off just before the bridge). Another take-out, for experienced whitewater paddlers, is at the gauging station a mile above the campground. To find this take-out, pass under the Briggs bridge and look for a cable running overhead to the gauging station. Some people use this location as a put-in for running Campground Rapids. Below Campground Rapids, take out on the left side at the campground. Paddlers who wish to continue downriver below the campground to run Lower Eagle River must obtain permission from Fort Richardson Army Reservation.

LAND MANAGER: Alaska Division of Parks (Chugach State Park); fee for parking; private. (Below Glenn Highway: Fort Richardson Army Reservation.) (See Land Managers section at back of book for address and phone information.)

MAPS: Anchorage A-7, B-6, B-7.

FISH: King and coho salmon. Alaska Department of Fish and Game stocks Eagle River with king salmon fry.

WILDLIFE: Moose, beaver, bald eagle.