Route Description of the Cloquet River

NOTE: (R) and (L) represent right and left banks of the river when facing downstream.

The Cloquet River flows from Katherine Lake in central Lake County to its confluence with the St. Louis River. The apparent 32 miles (from Katherine Lake to Indian Lake) are not regarded as canoeable because it is steep, dangerous, and rarely has enough flow for feasible paddling.

The first good access to the river is at Indian Lake. From there the river flows southwest through remote area.

Indian Lake to Island Lake

Character: A variety of rapids make the paddling in this remote stretch interesting.

Length: The 35-mile trip includes 1.5 miles across Island Lake to the take-out.

Average run time: Two days.

Class: Approximately 10 Class I-II rapids.

Optimal Flow: Above 1.4 at US 53.

Skill Level: Intermediate to Expert. Beginners should portage some rapids.

Hazards: A watertight exit at the entrance to Indian Lake.during low water. Paddl... Access: North on CR 44 from Rollins to access on Island Lake.

RIVER MILE 7.1

7.1 Entrance to upper river at Indian Lake: water access, rest area, 25 site campground and drinking water.

7.1 (L) Railroad trestle.

7.9 Carry in access, limited parking, no facilities, minimum maintenance road.

65.6 (L) Sharp right turn and a plunge down Camp G Rapids, a Class II drop. Run it toward the left or choose the 330 yd. portage on the left.

61.7 (R) Watercraft campsite.

61.8 (L) Bear Lake Road water access and watercraft campsite.

56.9 (L) Bear Ryan Rapids, a Class I. Avoid the left bank, left eddy, portage on left.

56.6 (R) Dry Fox Ryan’s Rapids, a Class II rapids. Portage 40 yds. on right.

Bridge.

56.5 (L) Watercraft campsite.

66.6 (L) Duna’s Rapids, a steep, bouldery, Class II rapids. Portage 200 yds. on left.

Dr. Barney’s Rapids, Class II, a long series of boulders. Portage 1,080 yds. on left or right.

48.3 (R) Cloquet River I water access and watercraft campsite.

48.2 (L) Homestead Kelly watercraft campsite.

49.2 Confluence with the Little Cloquet River.

Cedar Rapids, Class II, run the ledge on the far right. Many boulder portage left, 200 yds.

42.5 Enter Alden Lake. Paddle south, west, and north again to enter river again.

42.4 (L) Class I rapids, no established portage.

48.1 (L) Dirty Nose watercraft campsite.

36.6-34.4 McNee’s Rapids, Class II. Portage left 300 yds. Rapids consist of three ledges, each about two feet high with chutes between. Large whitewater.

37.3 The historic Vermin Trail, the first road to the Iron Range, cross the river here.

37.0 (R) White Sludge Rapids, a difficult Class II. Steep and long, it has stunning waves and breaks. Portage right 240 yds.

35.6 (R) Carry in access.

34.0 Island Lake Dam, portage left. Rest area.

At the end of Wagon Sludge Rapids, the Cloquet River enters Island Lake Reservoir. A 15-foot cascade forms at the river mouth when the lake level is low. Scout carefully.

From the mouth of the river, paddle 1.5 miles across Island Lake to the Minnesota Power Hide-away boat landing on the north shore, or continue west across lake, passing under CR 4 to dam. Portage around dam.

31.5 Rest area.

Island Lake Dam to Highway 53

Character: Scenic country with good fishing for walleye, smallmouth bass, and some brown trout.

Length: 5 miles.

Average run time: 10-15 hours.

Class: Class I.

Optimal Flow: Above 1.4 at US 53.

Skill Level: Beginner to Intermediate.

Access: North on CR 4 from Duluth, then west on CR 48 to narrow road that leads to Island Lake Dam.

RIVER MILE 31.4 (L) Water access, Island Lake Reservoir.

31.8 (R) Island Road (L) access to 31.3-32.2. Several watercraft campsites.

30.1-31.3 Island Dam, portage left. Rest area and carry in access. Portage 50 yds.

29.8 (R) Island Dam Portage (L) access to 28.8 (L) Island Dam Dam, portage left. Rest area and carry in access. Portage 50 yds.

28.4 (L) CR 4 bridge.

26.3 (L) Hayward watercraft campsite.

25.7 (L) Salt Lake watercraft campsite.

23.6 (R) White Bear River (L) access to 22.6 (R) Twin Pines watercraft campsite.

21.4 (R) Island Dam Portage (L) access to 20.6 (L) Island Dam Dam, portage left. Rest area and carry in access.

19.7 County Road 15 bridge.

18.5 (R) M.C. watercraft campsite.

18.0 (R) Confluence with the Cloquet River.

16.9 (L) Class I rapids. No established portage.

17.0 Abandoned railroad bridge.

17.3 (L) Old Mule watercraft campsite.

16.6 (R) Three Island watercraft campsite.

15.9-15.3 Class I rapids.

15.4 Power line crossing.

14.9 (R) Confluence with Chicken Creek.

14.7 Power line crossing.

14.0 (R) Confluence with Baldy Creek.

12.2 (R) US Highway 53 bridge. A rest area with a table on river right, between bridges.

10.2 (R) Carry in access.

Highway 53 to St. Louis River

Character: Also a scenic stretch with good fishing. Class I-II rapids become numerous above the St. Louis River.

Length: 11 miles.

Average run time: 5 hours.

Class: Class I-II stretch near the St. Louis River.

Optimal Flow: Above 1.4 at US 53.

Skill Level: Beginner to Intermediate.

Access: North on US 53 from Duluth, parking in Rest Area at the intersection of US 53 and MN 53.

RIVER MILE 90

90.0 Class I rapids.

57.9 Class I rapids.

48.3 (L) Confluence with Chauvin Creek.

52.4 (L) Confluence with Beartrap Creek.

4.8 CR 7 bridge and carry in access (L).

3.2 (R) Class I rapids.

4.2 Railroad trestle, CR 694 bridge.

5.2 Power line crossing.

14.6 (R) Class II rapids. River falls 20 feet in final mile to its confluence with the St. Louis River. The nearest takeout is below the Highway 2 bridge one mile from the mouth of the Cloquet, on river left. Class I-II rapids just downstream from mouth of Cloquet.
The Cloquet River is a major tributary in the St. Louis River watershed. It is wonderfully solid, with nearly unbroken forests of red and white pines, firs, spruce, aspen and birch make up the forests of the Cloquet Valley. Most of the river has been designated as primitive/remote. The Upper Cloquet above Island Lake Reservoir is managed to maintain and protect the semi-primitive recreation experience currently available there.

History
The streams and rivers of northern Minnesota are the result of glacial activity thousands of years ago. Because northern Minnesota rivers flow through bog areas, the water is often coffee-colored. This comes from the tannic acid in the bog plants.

During the past century, human activities such as logging and farming have caused changes to our waterways. Other human impacts are population growth, habitat alteration, introduced non-native species, commercial and industrial use, and air and water pollution—all of which endanger native species.

Because the river system has an excellent fish population, it is necessary to know the health hazards of eating these fish. Mercury contamination is a problem for the entire watershed. Keep the smaller fish for eating and release the larger, older fish that may contain a higher concentration of contamination. Women of child-bearing age and children should strictly adhere to guidelines set by the Minnesota Department of Health. Complete information is available by calling 651-253-5800.

Wildlife
The Cloquet River watershed is home to three species of turtles: painted, snapping and the rare wood turtle. Crucial for the survival of turtles is a safe nesting place. These species require a sandy, sun-warmed bank or sand bar elevated above water level where the nests can be buried. If the nests are trampled on, these species require a sandy, sun-warmed bank or sand bar elevated above water level where the nests can be buried. If the nests are trampled on.

Although these areas appear ideal for picnics, damage could occur to the eggs and hatchlings if the nests are trampled on. The most important thing to remember about turtles, and other wildlife, is to leave them alone in their natural habitat.

St. Louis River Management Plan
The Cloquet River is part of the St. Louis River Management Plan. The plan is a citizen-led initiative of cooperation among local governments and agencies with the goal to protect the river system's natural beauty, environment and cleanliness by managing the area's development, land management, and recreation. The plan calls for a healthy forest composed of diverse, native plants. Preferred are forests of long-lived conifers and hardwoods. The plan does not allow motorized trails on the riverbank, nor structures in the riparian zone (an area 200 feet inland from the riverbank).

This is a minimal impact zone. Livestock are not allowed in the river.

Fishing
The Cloquet River has a diverse and excellent fish population. Northern pike, walleye and brook trout are abundant between Indian Lake and Island Lake. Smallmouth bass are plentiful below Island Lake. The DNR and the Fond du Lac Band are also working to reinstatement the once-dwindling sturgeon population in the St. Louis watershed. If you catch one of these ancient fish, you are required to return it to the water immediately.

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Rating White Water
Rivers and rapids are rated according to the International Scale of River Difficulty. Ratings are estimates based on observations at low or moderate water levels or on secondhand reports. The following three classes are found on the Cloquet River:

CLASS I: Easy rapids with small waves and few obstructions.
CLASS II: Rapids with waves up to three feet high.
CLASS III: Difficult rapids with high, irregular waves capable of swamping an open canoe. Narrow chutes may require extensive maneuvering. Usually considered the limit for an experienced paddler in an open canoe.

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