

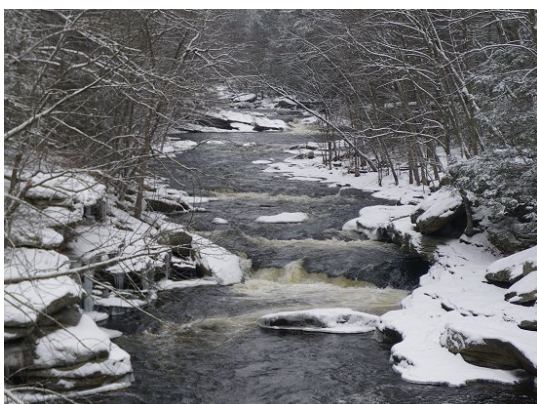
A New Year's Run on the Farmington

Text and Photos by Erik Eckilson

A fresh coat of snow covered the ground and icicles hung from the trees as I drove down Route 44 in Connecticut. It gave the whole area a "winter-wonderland" kind of look. It was New Year's Day and I was on my way out the Farmington River to paddle with Jeff, Andy and Steve. At 8:30 in the morning, I pretty much had the road to myself.

I was making good time, so I decided to take a little detour to check out the Natchaug River along the way. The upper section of the Natchaug is the site of a spring poling clinic that I hope to attend this year. A little further downstream is Diana's Pool - a series of class III/IV drops that is a popular run for local kayakers.

I pulled into the Diana's Pool Fishing Area and followed a fresh set of footprints down to the river - maybe someone would be running this section today. The river flowed over rocks and ledges through a hemlock forest that was covered with snow. It was absolutely beautiful, but I don't think I'll be running this section anytime soon.



Diana's Pool on the Natchaug River

I arrived at the put-in on the Farmington River at around 10:00 and was surprised to see a long line of cars. For the past couple of years, a small group of RICKA paddlers had been running the Branch River on New Year's Day. This year the Branch was iced up, so we decided to paddle the Farmington with a group from the Northeast Paddlers Message Board (www.npmb.com). It wouldn't be a small group today - 16 paddlers in 3 canoes and 13 kayaks.

Jeff, Andy and Steve were already at the put-in by the time I arrived. We got dressed, carried our boats and gear down to the river, and ran the shuttle with the rest of the group. By the time we got on the river, it was around 11:00.

There are several good whitewater runs on the Farmington River. Downstream is the T-ville

(Tariffville Gorge) section (class II/III). Upstream, just over the border in Massachusetts, is the New Boston section (class III/IV). We would be paddling the section from Collinsville to Route 4 in Farmington known alternatively as the Crystal or Punch Brook section. It's an easy class II with plenty of eddies and easy surf waves.



Andy surfing the Crystal Rapid

We put-in with the group and began working our way downstream. The scenery was pretty with a new coat of snow on the ground, but it was colder than I expected. There are actually four sets of rapids on the upper section of this run, each becoming more difficult as you move downstream. The longest is a nice class II known as the Crystal Rapid for which this section of the river gets its name. The Crystal Rapid has the best surf waves, so it is a popular place to practice and socialize. After an hour of playing in the waves, we decided that it was time to move downstream.



Jeff approaching the Boateater Rapid

After a short section of flatwater and a couple of playful ledges we came to the final rapid on this section of the river - the Boateater Rapid. While the name is overly dramatic (I've never seen a boat get eaten), Boateater is a fun class II rapid with a long run of 2 to 3 foot standing waves.

We pulled off the river at around 2:30 and packed up for home looking forward to lots of fun trips in 2010.