

## A Spring Day on the Upper Millers

Text and Photos by Erik Eckilson

It started off like many RICKA Whitewater trips with an early morning stop at the McDonald's off Route 146 in Uxbridge. I wanted to get a sausage biscuit, but settled for milk to go with the cereal that I brought from home – a little healthier start to a busy day.

I was one of six RICKA boaters that were meeting at the McDonald's before heading up to the Millers River in north central Massachusetts. The Millers arises in southern New Hampshire and flows southward, and then westward through Massachusetts before emptying into the Connecticut River.

There are two sections of the Millers that are popular for whitewater boating – the upper section from South Royalston to Athol (class II - III), and the lower section from Erving to Millers Falls (class II - IV). On this day, RICKA had groups running both sections. I was in the group paddling the upper section.

Mike, Jeff, Eric and I arrived at the put in on the upper section of the Millers around 10:00 to find Andy, Steve and the two Tommy's waiting for us. After a few quick hellos, we unloaded our boats and ran the shuttle. Everyone knew that there would be plenty of time to get acquainted (or re-acquainted) on the river.



The Upper Millers is a beautiful section of river that alternates between rock gardens and long wave trains. With the exception of a couple of railroad bridges, there is nothing to break the wilderness feeling of the river. The day started off overcast and windy, but the sun came out as we moved downstream.

We put in around 10:30 and the fun began immediately with a long class III rapid. I followed Mike into the rapid and bobbed through the 2 to 3 foot waves. About half way through the rapid I pulled into an eddy to get some pictures of the others coming downstream.

As I turned, I could see Andy approaching a nasty pour-over on river right. He paddled hard to avoid it, but didn't quite make it and got sucked back into the hydraulic. He side-surfed for a while, but eventually flipped. I saw him set up for a roll, but go back over again. There wasn't a second attempt. Within a few seconds, Andy was out of his boat and working his way to shore with the help of Tommy and Steve. He was quickly reunited with his gear and we heading back downstream.



We continued riding the waves and playing in the rock gardens for another couple of miles when we decided it was time for a break. We found a spot with a beach large enough to pull all the boats on shore and decided to have our lunch. As we were eating, a group from the RiverRunners Yahoo group pulled up to share our spot. Soon we were all talking and sharing paddling stories.

After lunch, we loaded up the boats and continued our trip downstream. Occasional sections of quickwater were interspersed with long wave trains and fun rock gardens. By the time we reached the take out in Athol, we were all pretty tired. Unfortunately, it was a long carry up a steep hill to get back to our cars. Everyone pitched in to get the gear up the hill, and then we pitched in to help the RiverRunners group that pulled in behind us.

I got home in time for dinner – tired, but excited about a great trip, and looking forward to the next.