

PADDLER

World's No. 1 Canoeing, Kayaking and Rafting Magazine

Maine Canoeing Classics

Canoeing the St. Croix

by Thomas V. Ress



photo by Martin Brown

The St. Croix: a crowdless version of the Allagash.

Mention Maine rivers and most canoeists immediately think of the Allagash, one of the most popular canoeing destinations in New England. I'll let you in on a secret: the lesser known Saint Croix River, a few hours east of the Allagash, rivals the Allagash's beauty and excitement...without the crowds.

The Saint Croix flows out of Spednick Lake in far Eastern Maine and defines the border between the United States and Canada, eventually dumping into Passamaquoddy Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Camp on the left side of the river and you're in New Brunswick, camp on the right side and you're in Maine. This is an ideal waterway for leisurely, extended wilderness paddling trips. There are two trip options, depending on the time you have available and your paddling preferences. A six-day trip from Forest City on Spednick Lake to

the Grand Falls Flowage provides two days of flatwater lake canoeing followed by four days of river paddling. You can also put in at the town of Vanceboro, where Spednick Lake flows over the Vanceboro dam into the Saint Croix River, and skip the lake portion. Either trip will take you through sparsely settled northern woodlands heavily populated with wildlife including moose, bald eagle and osprey. Be sure to take spincast or flyfishing gear; the Saint Croix offers excellent smallmouth bass fishing.

The six day trip offers two contrasting canoeing experiences. The Spednick Lake portion provides flatwater paddling among islands, and the lake is surrounded by red spruce, white pine, quaking aspen, paper birch and sugar maple which explode into color every fall. In the spring and summer, the lake is surrounded by a sea of lush green trees. The



photo by Martin Brown

Paddling through the heart of Maine's northwoods.

nature of the trip changes dramatically as you reach Vanceboro Dam at the end of the lake. Below the 100-yard portage around the dam, the Saint Croix provides numerous Class I-II rapids strewn with boulders; a watchful eye is needed to save the bottom of your canoe. Continuous rapids such as Canoe Rips, Dog Falls, Albee Rips, Haycock Rips and Split Rock Rips keep your attention, but are separated by pools of gently rippling water that allow plenty of time to sit back and admire the northwoods. Secluded campsites are liberally situated both on the Canadian and U.S. sides of the river and Spednick Lake has a number of shoreline and island campsites. Some of the riverside campsites have roads leading into them, although it is rare to see vehicles. Take your time while camping to hike the surrounding forests and check out the wildflowers and blueberry bushes.

Further down the river, the terrain becomes more marshy, with long open meadows stretching back from the riverbanks. These wet meadows are prime moose habitat, so keep your eyes open. There are also numerous small bays on



destinations



photo by Maria Brown

The St. Croix's many bays offer prime fishing as well as floating.

the lower part of the river that hide landlock salmon and smallmouth bass. It is worth your time to explore these bays and try your luck at catching supper. The Saint Croix slows down as you approach three miles of flatwater at Loon Bay and the open water of Grand Falls Flowage. The take-out, which requires paddling between a floating log boom, is in a finger of water just south of the main dam on the flowage.

ST. CROIX FACT FILE

Directions: Take Highway 9 East out of Bangor to Highway 1 just before the Canadian border near Calais. Highway 1

North will take you to the Grand Falls Flowage road. The Vanceboro access point is further north on Highway 1 to Highway 6, which heads east into Vanceboro. The Spednick Lake access point is near Forest City, north of Vanceboro on Highway 1.

Trip length: The trip from Spednick Lake to Grand Falls Flowage is about 50 miles. The river portion from Vanceboro to the flowage is about 40 miles.

Seasonal Data: The Saint Croix is runnable year round. Weather in Maine can be unpredictable in the spring and fall. The best canoeing times are in the fall, when the foliage is in its autumnal

splendor. Spring and summer are also enjoyable, however mosquitoes and black flies can be maddening from about mid-May to mid-June. Winter can produce brutally freezing temperatures.

Additional information: Fishing licenses can be purchased locally. Campsites on the U.S. side require a fire permit, available at no cost. Canadian campsites do not require a permit. Some rapids, particularly Canoose Rips and Haycock Rips, should be scouted.

Contacts: Maps, brochures and additional information may be obtained from the Bureau of Parks and Recreation, Maine Department of Conservation, State House Station 22, Augusta, ME 04333. Your best bet for a guided trip is Sunrise County Canoe Expeditions, Cathance Lake, Grove Post Office, Maine 04638; (207)454-7708. Sunrise can also shuttle you to the put-in or take-out, and can provide invaluable information on river conditions, campsites and fishing. Detailed maps are advisable, especially for the Spednick Lake and Grand Falls Flowage areas since the islands and bays can be confusing.



1-800-RIVER-30

www.SunriseExpeditions.com