

Upper North Fork Kaweah River

By: Jef Levin

Rating: 3-C2 V *****

Time: 1.5 - 2 days

Season: Low summer flows. After early-August most years

Number of Raps: 9 or 10 plus 10 jumps

Longest Rap: ~85ft

Gear: 3x 100ft rope, 130ft webbing, 10 rapides, wetsuit, neoprene gloves, technical canyoneering gear

Rubber: At least 4mm/3mm.

Hazards: This is a remote canyon, rescue would not be easy. Some raps in waterfalls, natural anchors. Going in there with more than low summer flows would not be advisable.

Vehicle: Carefully driven passenger car or high clearance 2WD

Car Shuttle: About 23mi

Approach: 3.5mi

Exit: 3/4mi + 800 vertical feet

Good Eats: Bring your own, basic supplies can be had at Stony Creek Village.

Camping: Eshom Camp (see directions below) makes a good starting point for setting up a shuttle, or if you do the shuttle the night before, you could camp at Dorst or Stony Creek camps.

Topo Maps: General Grant Grove, Muir Grove, Shadequarter Mountain, Giant Forest

Introduction:

The North Fork Kaweah is formed by the confluence of Stony and Dorst Creeks in Sequoia National Park. From Stony Creek, it is about 2 miles downstream to the confluence, and from Dorst Creek it is about 3 1/2 miles. Either can be used as an approach, but Dorst Creek is the recommended route. Stony Creek has more brush, downclimbs, and a 140' rappel just before the confluence. From the Stony/Dorst confluence it is another 3 1/2 miles down to Cherry Flat, with an elevation loss of about 1800' (5400' to 3600').

Although it is possible to escape the canyon at numerous points, doing so would involve much bushwacking and elevation gain. Much of the canyon involves enjoyable boulder hopping and streambed walking in between the technical sections. Entering the canyon at anything other than low summer flows of a few cfs would prove difficult at several spots. In a low water year, the canyon should be doable probably by early August or so.

A strong party can do the canyon in 1 1/2 days with an early start or by completing the shuttle the night before, or with a very early start could it could even be done in a day. However, it might be best to allow 2 full days to get to Cherry Flat, and a 3rd day to hike out, pick up the car, and drive home.

All of the jumps can optionally be set up as rappels.

As the Cherry Flat road is not always maintained, it may be advisable especially in the early season to bring a saw, machete, and rope in case of downed trees. On rare occasions, the locals have been known to lock the gate on the road, even though it is a public road.

Driving Directions:

From hwy 99 in Fresno, take hwy 180 towards Kings Canyon. Shortly after the Big Stump entrance station, the road splits with the left fork going toward Kings Canyon and the right fork going into Sequoia. Take the right fork (Generals Highway) for about 4 miles to Quail Flat, and head to the right down a dirt road that crosses Redwood Canyon. At the first junction, stay right (there will be a third road up to a building on the right).

Stay right at the next junction (road on left with gate) (basically just stay on main road). You will pass some cabins (Whittaker Forest research station), and a little further, when you get to a Y, just to the left is Eshom Camp, which is a good place to camp the night before, although the single car sites are \$17, and the doubles \$34. Eshom Camp is roughly 8 miles from where you turned off Generals Highway.

From Eshom Camp to Cherry Flat (where you will leave a car near the end of the canyon), then back to Generals Highway and Lost Grove trailhead (start of hike) takes about 3 hours time.

Back at the Y, go right and continue past Hartland (the left junction past Eshom Camp is dirt, so not as good, but it would otherwise bypass Hartland and ends just before the Forest Service Road.

About a mile past Hartland, take a gentle left going onto Pierce Valley Drive (there is a sign that says not a through street - ignore this as it is only there to try to fool you)

After about 1 1/4 miles there will be another dirt road coming in on the left (this is the dirt road from Eshom



SIERRA CANYONS

This route description is licensed under a Creative Commons license, some rights reserved. (See www.sierracanyons.org for more information)

Camp) - keep straight. From here it is maybe about 5 miles to Cherry Flat.

Soon, there is a confusion of roads, but you are looking for Forest Service road #15S01 (should be signed), which takes off to the left from a large cleared area. If you get to a sign that says Matlock, that's the wrong road.

You will come to another junction with a green Forest Service metal gate a short ways down the road to the right - take this road and continue to a narrow road leading off to the left (the main road doesn't go much further). A very short ways down this road is the parking area at Cherry Flat. GPS: 0330216/405143 (UTM NAD 27). Leave a car here, and then drive back to Generals Highway.

There is decent primitive camping at Cherry Flat at several places. Do not leave any food in the car because of bears.

Note: the alternate route through Orosi and Badger is very windy and not better.

After dropping off a car and heading back to Generals Highway, turn right and continue another 7 or 8 miles to Lost Grove (a grove of large redwoods), where the hike starts.

Paul Martzen offers and alternative approach:

"From the south, you can take highway 245, or take Dry Creek road which some people feel is a bit less windy. Either way there will be signs directing you towards Hartland as you get close. Going up Dry Creek road you will turn off towards Hartland before you get to 245. If you came up 245, turn off on Dry Creek road and go downhill about 2 miles to this same turnoff.

If you live in Dinuba like I used to, go through Orosi and up Boyd Grade to get the local experience.

From Fresno, I go up 180, then turn off on Dunlap Road through Miramonte, to highway 245. Turn downhill to Badger, where you turn left onto Whitaker Forest Road. At Sierra Glen, turn right onto Eshom Valley Road which will take you to Hartland and the Eshom Point turnoff.

Now, I have never actually found the final way to Cherry Flat in my one time of looking, so past Eshom Point, I can't help ya."

Approach:

Hike down the trail a short distance to where it splits and take the trail to the left. After about 3/4 of a mile, the trail will start getting close to and paralleling Dorst Creek (and heading upstream). Head off the trail and down to the creek and follow it down another mile or so to the confluence. It will probably take a few hours to get to the confluence, and there are several places where you will probably want a handline or need to do a short rappel. There is a 25' rappel into a pool just before the confluence.

Canyon:

NOTE: *Some of the bolts (esp. rap #6) are subjected to heavy flow during high water, so it is wise to carry an 11/16" wrench to tighten loose nuts. Extra hangers or even an emergency bolt kit would not be a bad idea in case the anchors get destroyed.*

Jump 1: At a boulder blockage, climb down slope on the right (LDC), then jump 10'.

There is a good sandy bivy spot on river left somewhere in the next hour.

Rap 1: Climb down a short chimney to a ledge then rap 35' from a boulder pinch down a sloping waterfall to a floating disconnect.

Jump 2: Jump 8' into deep pothole or climb down ramp on the right and jump

Jump 3: 15' jump just to the right of a waterfall. This is a decent bivy spot and is about 2 1/2 hours from the confluence.
Next series of rappels is 20 minutes further downstream.

Rap 2: 85' from wedged log among huge boulders. This rappel is the longest in the canyon, and the bottom half is free hanging, ending in a shallow pool.

Rap 3: 25' from a small cedar tree into a pool.
Possible to bivy on flat rocks here

The next 3 rappels are one after another and there is not much standing space, so it is best to sequence people through here (from the top of the first rappel you can see the next 2 rap stations, so it is easy to signal people).

Rap 4: 50' from 3 pitons on top of a boulder into a deep pool.

Rap 5: 12' from 2 bolts above a large boulder. There is a sloping rock under water here to stand on, but it's



not good for more than 2 people. Stay on rappel until reaching the next set of bolts.

There is a bolt between raps 5 and 6 to use as a deviation under higher flow conditions.

Rap 6: 38' from 2 bolts to a long swim. This rappel intersects a waterfall partway down.

Rap 7: On the right side (LDC) of the watercourse, downclimb 15', then rap 15' from a slung boulder. If early in season, this rap will probably be in a small waterfall.

Jump 4: 10' to the right of a small falls.

Rap 8: About 45' from a single bolt on the left. The rope should be pulled from downstream, or it may stick.

Next is a very short waterfall drop, which may require a partner assist or handline. Depending on how high the water is, the boulder that your landing on might be out of view due to the water, but it is only about 4 1/2 feet down - a hand from above should get you there.

Great bivy spot on sand shortly after on the right (LDC). It is about 4 hours from here to the river below Cherry Flat.

Just around the corner as the canyon bends left and narrows again, the next fun section begins. It is possible to walk slabs on the right side to view most of this section.

Jump 5: 15' jump to the right of a waterfall into a shallow sandy bottom pool.

Jump 6: 5' jump immediately afterward.

Jump/slide 7: A smooth slide launches you 15' off the edge into a deep pool. Optional rappel bolts to the right.

Jump 8: short jump to swim.

Climb down the long water slot to a shallow pothole and then a short slide at the end.

Rap 9: Short nuisance drop - if water is low enough, you can crawl under where the water goes (stay to the left to come out under the large boulder)

Jump 9: Climb down on right side of a set of waterfalls (easier than it looks), then jump into the deep pool.

Rap 10: 25' from long sling around boulder on left.

Jump 10: 12' from top of boulder

Exit:

At the final waterfall, which is 80-120 ft. high, downclimb to the left. Shortly after you'll pass an obvious fisherman's camp. The trail up to Cherry Flat starts in about 1/4 mile and the start of it can be a bit hard to find - after crossing the creek, it is probably to your left, depending on where you cross. If you get to a 12' jump into a deep pool, you've gone a bit too far. Once you have found the trail, follow it up to Cherry Flat and your car spot.



