



*This stretch of river requires special attention to safety. Paddling conditions vary according to weather and season, so always exercise caution and always wear a life jacket. With good judgment and proper equipment including a helmet in whitewater, risks can be reduced. Respect the natural world and the rights of landowners, and be considerate of other outdoor enthusiasts. Paddlers should seek to avoid causing erosion, trampling vegetation, disturbing wildlife, and harming water quality.*

**Overview:** The character of the Royal River from its origin in New Gloucester all the way to Elm Street, the first road bridge in Yarmouth, is flat water or slow current paddling. Below East Elm Street, the Royal expresses its exciting side before dropping into its tidal waters at the Route 88 bridge, just upstream of I-295. Alternating between ledge drop falls, short rapids and the flat water and moving water stretches that link them, the lower river requires portaging for paddlers not prepared for negotiating whitewater. No portages are formally marked, but how to recognize where to portage is described here. For whitewater paddlers however, this section of the Royal is a unique resource and a quality playground at a variety of water flows.

Beginning in 1674, the Royal's waters have been harnessed for powering industry. Today, the only remaining hydro facility is at the Sparhawk Mill at Bridge Street. Nearly all traces of the mills and factories that dominated the Royal have been removed, except of course for the dams at Second and Fourth Falls. Remarkably, except for a piece of steel reinforcement pin in Fourth Falls and one in the rapid at Sparhawk Mill, there are no apparent in-stream hazards remaining from this era.

There are four distinct falls and one rapid in this stretch of the Royal. Seemingly ironically, the first falls encountered, a mandatory portage at East Elm Street, is called Fourth Falls, where the countdown of falls begins. However, it is clear that back in the day, the falls were counted beginning at the tide waters and proceeding upstream.

**Take-Out: East Elm Street, Yarmouth History Center, Royal River Park:** Approaching the Town of Yarmouth from upriver, paddlers pass beneath a train trestle. A short distance below the



trestle is a boat launch and the Yarmouth Historical Society's parking lot on river right. Paddlers should park on the opposite side of East Elm Street in the Royal River Park lot but can load and unload boats and gear at the launch.

**The Portaging Plan:** If you are not ending your paddle at East Elm Street and are continuing your paddle downstream, this is the place to begin your first portage. If you are NOT running the whitewater sections, put back in on the right, just off of the paved path below Third Falls. The flat water stretch between Fourth Falls and Third Falls is short and sets you up for a difficult portage around Third Falls. It is best to simply skip that stretch and put in below Third Falls.

Paddling downstream, under the Beth Condon Pathway foot bridge and the Route One bridge, your second portage take out is on river right at Second Falls, marked by the Bridge Street Dam above Sparhawk Mill and the road bridge at Bridge Street. Having taken out on the right at the dam, walk down the paved path, turn left and carry across the bridge, then right at the end of the bridge down into the far end of the Sparhawk Mill parking lot.

Put in at the end of the rapid, adjacent to the parking lot, and paddle a couple hundred yards down to Grist Mill Park on the left and take out. Don't miss this take-out. You take out on the left in the outside of a gentle right-hand turn in the river. It then the river takes a sharp left and goes over first falls. Unless you planned for whitewater, you don't want to do that. This drop can be difficult and powerful depending upon river flows and stages of the tide. Grist Mill Park is the last practical take-out on the river because there is no good portage around First Falls to then put in again in the tidal water below the falls.

**The Whitewater Plan:** Water flow is variable on the Royal River. This is essentially a natural flow river, meaning that the flow in the river is determined by rainfall and runoff. Sections of the river are runnable and offer a variety of whitewater experiences over a broad range of flows. This is the beauty of the last mile of the Royal River for whitewater paddlers, before the river continues as an estuary into Casco Bay.



**Fourth Falls (East Elm Street Dam) – Portage:** Fourth Falls is immediately below the East Elm Street bridge. It consists of a dam structure built on top of the granite ledge. This is a pretty gnarly run for whitewater boats, and is portaged. Whitewater paddlers note: There is a steel reinforcement pin interfering with an apparent “clean” route on the right.

**Third Falls (Middle Falls) - Class III to V+ Depending Upon Flows:** Third Falls is a channelized ledge drop runnable at extremely low water levels by experienced paddlers. At higher flows, these rapids develop large powerful holes and are fast and pushy.

If you're going to run just Third Falls, park at the tennis court parking by Yarmouth's William H. Rowe School on School Street. There's a portable toilet next to the courts. Shoulder your boat to the put-in above the falls and below the maintenance facility described below. You can run the falls repeatedly and then shoulder your boat back to your car.

Third Falls is the site of Forest Paper Company's mill 1874 – 1923. It spanned the river and signage at the overlook has images and more information. The overlook at Third Falls on river left off of the paved path. This is a good vantage point for scouting the approach to the rapid and the first half of the falls. The second half is more difficult to view from shore and may require a bit of wading and hiking up the narrow island separating the main channel from the river right shoreline. The meat of the drop is a steep smooth ledge approximately eight-feet high into the hole below. There is another smaller drop downstream, and after that is a long flatwater stretch. So if there is a capsize and swimming situation, things settle out in a relatively short distance.

To run Third Falls, put in on river right downstream of the maintenance facility in Royal River Park off of the paved trail. It's a bit of a bushwhack to a suitable launch site in the woods. There are numerous playboating features throughout this rapid, depending upon water levels. At lowest boatable flows, the rapid is a shallow with clear channels. The crux of the rapid is the center drop and is run right of center. At virtually all but the higher water levels, there is a bubble line leading over the drop, guiding you to about the right spot to run the ledge cleanly.



There is a left line as well, but it is more technical with a piece of ledge jutting out from the left shoreline at the bottom that sports a reactionary wave and pillow.

Note to everyone... Midway down the rapid is the steep part of the ledge. There is a line right of center and far left at most flows. There is an old abutment remnant from the old mill right-of-right-of-center. DO NOT ATTEMPT the far right channel. It is riddled with steel reinforcement bars and is to be avoided at all cost!

Take out at the gravel and rock beach by the paved trail on river right below the whitewater. My favorite day on the Royal River at low to medium-high flows is to do this loop repeatedly, running different lines and surfing waves and playing holes. At those flows it ranges from easy Class III to big and pushy Class III+ approaching Class IV. Here is a GoPro unedited video at a relatively low flow level: <http://youtu.be/gIoBI1YIEYA>

**Second Falls (Bridge Street Dam) - Class II to IV Depending on Flows:** If you are going to run just the Bridge Street rapid, park at the Sparhawk Mill parking lot and shoulder your boat upstream to put in as described below. You can take-out at the end of the rapid for easy access to your car or for hiking up for another run.

The Bridge Street Dam that sits on top of the granite ledge creating Second Falls is not runnable. However below the dam, the rapid at Bridge Street has numerous playboating features. A nice surfing wave develops under the bridge itself, at medium to high water levels and a nearly river-wide wave and hole develop toward the end of the rapid at high water. This rapid is wide and not particularly channelized so requires a decent amount of water to be navigated and even more to develop playboating features. To run this rapid, put in below the dam and just upstream of the Bridge Street bridge on river right. Continue downstream as far as you want to go. Playboaters typically park at Sparhawk Mill. You can take-out there, at the end of the rapid. This is a very good park-and-play spot. Run this section as often as you'd like. It's an easy walk back up.



At higher flows, this section of the Royal is my favorite. When Third Falls starts getting pushy, gnarly and consequential at the higher flows, I like focusing on the Second Falls section with its playboating wave and hole features. Note to whitewater paddlers: There is a friendly, smiley-faced hole right-of-center across from the parking lot at Sparhawk Mill. It has a steel reinforcement pin embedded in the ledge and is a rude awakening for anyone attempting spins in the hole.

**First Falls (Lower Falls) – Class II+ to Class IV+ Depending on Flows:** First Falls is also a channelized ledge drop runnable at extremely low water levels by experienced paddlers. At higher flows, these rapids develop large powerful holes and are fast and pushy. Difficulty ranges from Class III- to Class V+ depending upon flows

First Falls is the rapid seen from both the Route 88 and Route 295 bridges. The lower half of the rapid is greatly affected by the tides. At high tide, the bottom half of the rapid is inundated. At low tide, there are twice the number of ledge features and holes.

Depending upon flows and tides, the holes in the lower half of the river can range from “no consequence” to “OMG!” The entire rapid is easily scouted from the Grist Mill Park on river left. If you look at it and think, “OMG!” Don’t do it.

There are a couple of lines for running this rapid. At low to medium flows, a line is, right-of-right-of-center where there’s a sharply dropping ledge of about three or four feet. From there, the channel makes a hard left toward center and then right of center to the bottom of the rapid. Another approach at most flows is to run it all pretty much straight down the middle.

Note: At higher flows, this rapid is pushy, the holes are powerful and the hole at the bottom at lower tides with lots of water coming down the river can be huge and difficult to avoid.

If you run this rapid, the best take-out is at the Yarmouth Public Boat Launch on Old Shipyard Road, a short distance downstream on river left.