

<http://www.threerivers.org/slip.html>

### Slippery Rock Creek

- \* Kennedy Mill to Rose Point min. + 3 in. II-III
- \* Rose Point to Eckert Bridge min. -9 in. III to 3 ft. III-IV 3 ft. & up
- \* Eckert Bridge to Harris Bridge min. -3 in. II to 3 ft. II+ 3 ft. & up

These levels are for the gauge at the mill which is not reported on the Internet. You can check the mill gauge by calling (412) 262-5290.

This is one of the rivers that TRPC uses for the Slippery Rock Clinic. Click here for details on the clinic.

TRPC often leads trips on the "Slip". Click here to see the club schedule to check for trips.

A lot of details are available in a review written by Larry Wentzel. This includes information on all of the put-in's and take-outs, and a nearly rock-by-rock description of the river.

#### Access

Rose Point to Eckart has several possible access points. Rose Point is easily accessible from US 422 on Old Butler Rd. The bridge over the river has been closed, and the put in is on the river right side of the bridge, so the east access is generally better, although a new Harley dealership on the corner may change this.

Another access point is down a trail behind the McConnells Mill State Park ranger station, which is down McConnells Mill Rd, which can be reached directly from US 422, or from US 19 via Johnson Rd.

A common meeting place is the Kildoo Picnic grounds at the corner of McConnells Mill Rd and Kildoo Rd. From here, a set of stairs leads down the the Mill, which a mandatory portage and another access point. The mill is also reachable by turning right on Kildoo Rd, and then staying right. However, there is very little parking at the mill itself.

Eckart Bridge has been closed by the state for a number of years. It is reachable from Cheeseman Rd (which runs out to US 19 near the US 488 interchange). Kildoo Rd also ends here at a recently built Amish barn, which is available for events. At the end of the road, there is a "road closed" sign, which you can bypass on the right. A road in very bad repair goes down an unstable bank to the bridge. There is currently an effort on from the locals to re-open this bridge, which will close it for parking. This will make access to this point both more difficult and more dangerous.

Harris bridge can be reached from US 19 by turning west down US 488, and then turning right onto Mountville Rd, which will lead to the bridge.

#### Shuttle

The shuttles are all fairly short, and entail going out to the major roads, and then back into the next access point. For example, from Rose Point back to 422, and from there west to McConnells Mill Rd, down to Kildoo Rd, staying left this time, until it ends at Cheeseman Rd, and from there go right and down to the river.

#### Lodging

There are a number of camping options in the area. There are 2 campgrounds near Rose Point. One is a christian / family camp and is not usually used by boaters. Another is Camper's Paradise, which is just on the river left side of the Rose Point access. A third is the campground at Cooper's Lake. There is another tent-only campground that has opened at the intersection of Kildoo and Cheeseman roads.

There isn't much in the way of Hotels / Motels in the area, but there are a couple west on US 422 from Rose Point.

[http://www.threerivers.org/Slippery\\_Rock\\_Creek.html#Kennedy](http://www.threerivers.org/Slippery_Rock_Creek.html#Kennedy)

### VIEW FROM AN OPEN CANOE A BOATER'S GUIDE TO SLIPPERY ROCK CREEK FROM KENNEDY MILL TO HARRIS BRIDGE

Larry E. Wentzel

Slippery Rock Creek is the whitewater classic of western Pennsylvania. Free flowing from its headwaters to the junction with the Connoquenessing Creek at Ellport, the main stem of the Slippery Rock flows some fifty miles. The watershed encompasses about 400 square miles. This description covers the whitewater sections beginning at Kennedy Mill and ending at Harris Bridge. The three sections discussed total eight river miles and cover more than sixteen class II and class III rapids. Descriptions are based on normal water volume or advanced-beginner to intermediate levels in the range of 6" to 2'. In all cases, river levels refer to the McConnells Mill gauge and reference to the left or right side of the river is made as the boater faces downstream.

Slippery Rock Creek rises in a series of swamps that are located north and east of the hamlet of Boyers Pennsylvania. There are two main branches that start out as very small run outs from various marshlands and small impoundments east of state route 308. Converging near the town of Slippery Rock Pennsylvania, the South Branch joins the main stem at the village of Keisters. With the exception of a few low head dams and a nasty class III+ cataract immediately downstream from the state route 173 bridge, this section is uniformly flat water flowing past woods, farmlands, and the occasional summer cottage. That rapid, which is seldom run, drops 10 feet in 1/10 of a mile (that is 100 feet per mile) in what is known as Rock Falls Park. Eight and one half miles downstream, Wolf Creek enters from the north, often providing as much volume as the main stem. Finally, just above the village of Rose Point, Muddy Creek enters from the east. While Muddy Creek is dam controlled at Moraine State Park, the dam there has an overflow spillway and little Muddy Creek above Lake Arthur can contribute significant volume when conditions are wet. When these headwater areas are saturated from long periods of rain or following a wet winter, the water levels in the whitewater sections can change quickly. For example, in 1981 following the spring thaw, a series of storms dumped an inch or two of rain on the watershed. Already super-saturated, the marshes and impoundments could hold no more water. The estimated river level at McConnells Mill was more than thirteen feet. A similar situation occurred during the spring of 1989. An unusually wet period caused the river to stay around two feet. Rain driven spikes to three feet occurred every week, for several weeks. Severe thunderstorms caused fluctuations up to four feet. One evening following an exceptionally heavy rain, the level went to just over 7,500 cubic feet per second. Imagine paddling this creek in warm weather at those levels. Conversely, when these headwater areas dry out, it takes a significant amount of local rainfall to affect the stream flow to run-able levels. During the droughts of 1997, 1998, and 1999, the river level fell off the gauge. Flow rates often went as low as 50 cubic feet per second. This equates to stage levels in terms of minus feet. Major thunderstorms only succeeded in causing the creek to rise to zero, and then only for a few hours while the "bubble" passed.

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#### ACCESS POINTS

There are access points to the whitewater sections at the Kennedy Mill Bridge - township road 447. Park on either side of the bridge where a pull-off occurs. The put-in is immediately above or immediately below the dam from the right side. Here various fisherman trails provide easy access. If starting below the dam, the carry includes lifting over the roadside guardrail, negotiating some old barbed wire and sliding down the steep bank. If starting above the dam, the carry or drag is a few yards through the woods. This is all private property, however, so please respect landowner rights. Kennedy Mill is also a gathering spot for local teenagers and serves as a primary access point for fishermen. Parking can be a big problem. There have been numerous thefts from and vandalism to cars parked here.

The next access is at the road crossing in the village of Rose Point - old state route 422. (Note: get a map for this by using MapQuest and searching for Lat: 40.9705 Lon: -80.1818) There is controlled parking at the Rose Point Campground just up the hill on the west side or at the Camper's Paradise Campground a little further up the hill on the east side. Parking there will cost a dollar during the camping season. The put-in is on the right downstream side of the Iron Bridge. This is also private property. Lift over or under the guard fence and slide down a short embankment right next to the creek. In late May 2000, the bridge was closed to motor vehicles. The road approach to the bridge is through the village of Rose Point - turn north onto Old Route 422 from route 422 at the Harley Davidson shop. This turn is west of the route 422 bridge crossing the creek. Downstream of the old iron bridge a small, unnamed run enters on river right. If you drive west from the put-in, you will pass over a small concrete bridge in the heart of Rose Point. From that bridge to the Slippery Rock Creek, this small creek drops several dozen feet through a seriously narrow gorge. It is not known if this decidedly class IV gorge has been run but at the right water level it is possible. On the other side

of the bridge, in the Camper's Paradise Campground, are the remains of an old iron furnace. This is also worth a look. While there, say hello to Irene and Phil.

Immediately downstream, route 422 passes high overhead. On the southeast end of the bridge, there is a small parking area for about six vehicles. The carry is down a long steep bank on the south side of the bridge - river left. People still use this although I cannot understand why. If parking there, take care to not encroach on the land owner that has the adjacent property.

About one fourth mile below route 422, on McConnells Mill Road in McConnells Mill State Park, is the state park ranger station. (Mapquest Lat: 40.9651 Lon: -80.1696) There is ample parking at this location. The carry is across the field behind the station (the Park mows a clear path through the field) and down the hill on a well-defined path. This is a long carry and not particularly easy. The put-in involves an otter launch from the top of the steep, muddy bank (this can be accomplished in or out of boat).

Three quarters of a mile downstream is the McConnells Mill Dam. (MapQuest Lat: 40.9537 Lon: -80.1700) The take-out is on river left upstream of a rope float that extends across the river. It is suggested that boaters remain upstream of this warning device. While the seven feet high low head dam can be run, it is not recommended. In 2000, the Park service posted "no boating, wading, swimming" signs in regard to the dam. Please observe these warnings, since violations will just result in more restrictions. A successful run of the dam involves optimal river levels, the absolute right spot, and a lot of experience running waterfalls. A mistake will be very costly. Take out upstream - left where a hiking trail comes down to the creek and a large flat-ish rock juts out into the water in a large eddy. The put-in is immediately below the dam, down a set of steps behind the mill. There is a short lift over a brick wall and a carry/slide over some rocks to the water edge. This put-in requires caution when the water is high since the moving water and pulsing eddy are very tricky. An alternate, very low water (less than 0") carry is around the right side of the dam. This is a short carry and lift down the rock face. Caution must be used when approaching the dam (it is only a few feet from the take-out spot) and while descending the rock face. The put-in here is into a moving eddy / whirlpool between the dam and several large boulders. There is very limited parking at the Mill itself, but the main parking lot is at the top of the hill adjacent the Mill Picnic Area. It is a short walk up a very steep flight of well-maintained steps.

This is the beginning of the famous "Mile". One mile further on is the Eckert Bridge crossing. (MapQuest Lat: 40.9406 Lon: -80.1760) This is accessible from either side of the river, although the river right side (west) road is closed and barricaded for all but emergency vehicles. Parking on the bridge is limited to about twenty vehicles. On a busy day, this bridge could use a traffic cop. The approach road is a one-lane track that is marginally maintained. The park has opened a nice lot at the top of the hill (it is a long way up) to help alleviate parking problems.

Eckert Bridge is the starting point for the Lower Slippery Rock. The take-out for this "bottom" section is at Harris Bridge three and one half miles down river. (MapQuest Lat: 40.9120 Lon: -80.2167) (Note: Breakneck Bridge over Cheeseman Run is closed, you you have to go around) Take-out here on river right immediately upstream of the bridge where an old roadbed terminates or on river left immediately below the bridge piling. The river left spot is a much easier take-out but requires climbing the short bank to the road. There is plenty of roadside parking and a small parking lot at Harris Bridge where Mountville Road crosses the river.

If you miss the Harris Bridge take-out (it can happen!) be aware of a low head dam a few hundred yards downstream. This is an un-runnable seven feet high obstacle adjacent Heinz Camp. The next road crossing is the Armstrong Road Bridge, one-half mile downstream from the dam. There is a catch and release fly-fishing area there with a nice parking lot on river left.

#### GAUGES

The reported gauge for Slippery Rock Creek is approximately 5.5 miles downstream from the Mill, near Wurtemburg, where the Van Gorder Mill Road becomes the Camp Allegheny Road and crosses the river. While there is a distinct correlation between this gauge and the McConnells Mill gauge, because of the rapid change in level associated with heavy rain and the resulting "bubble" effect, the Wurtemburg reading is best used to identify trends in the flow. In addition, this gauge provides no useful information at very low or very high levels, except that the level is very low or very high.

A "stick" gauge is located at the base of the old Mill in McConnells Mill State Park. This gauge is accurate above -3". Because it is located at the top of a declining riverbed, this gauge is not meaningful below minus three inches. The Park people read this gauge every morning around 8:00 AM and report it telephonically if you call the Park number. Another good way to gauge the level is to look at the small rocks that form a line across the river downstream from the "stick" gauge. If they are exposed, the level is very low. If an inch or so of water covers them, the level is okay. If there is a lot of water over them and the big sloping rock standing out by itself on river right has water surging up onto its outside face, the river is getting real good. If that rock is covered, it

is very high. If the hydraulic created by the dam is a huge wave and the rocks at the put-in are covered, go home and watch cartoons.

There is another painted gauge on the downstream left side bridge pier at Eckert Bridge. This roughly correlates with the Mill gauge at levels above 1 foot.

#### THE GORGE

The Slippery Rock Creek Gorge was formed when the water of a glacial lake broke out of its banks and rushed to the Beaver River. Up to four hundred feet deep and maybe a thousand across at the top, the gorge is heavily forested. Numerous side creeks enter with several waterfalls that can be seen from the river or with a short hike. Notable among these are Muddy Creek, Cheeseman Run (Breakneck), and Hell Run.

The section from Kennedy Mill to just past the 422 Bridge flows through private property. In addition to the runnable Kennedy Mill Dam there are two notable rapids in this section. They are both at the beginning of the trip and are followed by a long series of pools and small riffles. There is an angler's trail on both sides of the river below Kennedy Mill. These are not particularly good but can be used to scout the rapids at the beginning of this section. There is also a great swimming spot at the end of the whitewater stretch. There are numerous huge boulders strewn along the riverbed, many supporting hemlock and other evergreen growth. About one mile below Kennedy Mill, at the end of a long pool and just to the left of a mid-river island, Muddy Creek enters. An island also splits the mouth of Muddy Creek. (With sufficient water, you can paddle up the right fork - left as you face it). Land on the left bank just below the confluence with Muddy Creek. There is a well-defined trail here that continues up the left side of Muddy Creek and that leads to a series of waterfalls dropping 68 feet over a one hundred yard stretch. This is the famous Muddy Creek Falls. The first and biggest drop is not runnable. The remaining drops including a ten-foot ledge have been run in an open canoe and in kayaks (class IV). Below Muddy Creek the river widens out and passes over a shoal into another long pool. At the end of this shoal and downstream of an old bridge pier (danger spot in high water) is a small rock that forms a nice surfing wave/hydraulic. The old Iron Bridge at Rose Point is now in view.

The few hundred yards from the Iron Bridge to the 422 Bridge is composed of a few riffles and moving pools. At certain water levels, some waves become playable. Just below the 422 Bridge is McConnells Mill State Park. McConnells Mill State Park is a narrow band of land surrounding the Slippery Rock Creek Gorge from just below Route 422 to Harris Bridge. Naturally, the highlights of this Park are the Gorge and the old Mill. However, there are exceptionally nice picnic areas on the plateau, excellent climbing cliffs in the gorge, and miles of hiking trails. In addition, the Hell Run natural area and the Cleland Rock Overlook are also part of the Park. McConnells Mill is a great destination spot year around.

Just past the Ranger Station put-in (see the sign that reads "Dangerous Whitewater") on river left the gorge narrows and the Slippery Rock Creek begins its descent. The "top" Slippery Rock is three quarters of a mile long. It contains one minor low-water rapid and four major rapids before terminating in the backwater of the McConnells Mill Dam. A marked hiking trail follows the left side of the river to Mill road at the old Mill. Upstream from the Mill, Alpha Pass Trail leads up the left side of the gorge to Alpha Pass Falls. This scenic highlight is easily accessed from a small parking area along McConnells Mill Road. There is a sign.

The pool behind McConnells Mill Dam is a few hundred yards long. I would love to see what the rapids at the bottom of that pool look like. The steep gorge continues below the McConnells Mill Dam through the "Mile". The Mile has been alternately called the "Miracle Mile" and the "Mighty Mile". Regardless, when a western Pennsylvania boater says "The Mile" he is referring to the Slippery Rock Creek between McConnells Mill Dam and Eckert Bridge. In addition to six major rapids, there is the class II put-in rapid with several good surfing waves, Shannon's Hole that is a tricky ledge below Rock 'N Roll Rapid, and several class I ledges.

Kildoo Trail follows on both sides of the river between the Mill and Eckert Bridge. These are both strenuous hikes, although the river left side is considerably easier. In addition to great class III whitewater, the careful boater will get to see many fishermen, sightseers, and the occasional unclad bathing beauty along this section of river. In 1998 and 1999, beaver started to set up shop in the pools above Eckert Bridge and deer and turkey frequent the hill sides. This section is also the scene of several drownings (seconded only by the short stretch above the Mill). A prudent boater will not be shy about warning tourists of the dangers of slippery rocks and fast moving currents.

Eckert Bridge serves as the mid-point between the upper Slippery Rock and the Lower Slippery Rock. The pool here is frequently used to train beginner boaters and for roll practice. Remember, however, that this is State Park property and no swimming is allowed.

The entrance rapid for the Lower Slippery Rock begins immediately below Eckert Bridge. The three and one-half miles that follow contain five major rapids and a bunch

of ledges and surfing waves. In the mid-nineteen nineties the Allegheny Trails Council completed construction of the Gorge Trail that follows the right side of the river from Eckert Bridge to the junction with Hell Run and then follows Hell Run to the Hell Run parking area on Shaffer Road. This great trail is part of the North Country National Scenic Trail system, and is a wonderful way to experience the lower gorge. The river widens out through this section and the sheer nature of the gorge tends to recede slightly. There are many scenic spots along this section including an ice cave a few hundred yards from the start and on river right. There is one spot where the river straightens for a hundred yards and then veers to the left. The mountainside is directly in front of the paddler at this point. It is spectacular in autumn and often elicits the remark "God, I love this River."

## THE RAPIDS

The descriptions of major rapids are based on normal river levels between 6 inches and 2 feet. Highlight narratives of river characteristics below and above these parameters are also provided, mostly to amuse the writer. Slippery Rock Creek is a class II to class IV run, depending on water levels and conditions. It is usually runnable all year with peak flows in the late winter (after the thaw) and early spring. By mid-Spring, river levels have usually stabilized in the 6" to 2' range.

### Kennedy Mill

The Kennedy Mill section can be boated as low as -6" and as high as 5'. Below -6" the passages are exceedingly scratchy to non-existent. Kennedy Mill Dam is 11 feet high. The downstream face is a 30 degree (more or less) slide about twenty feet long. This is a regular poured concrete structure with irregular features on the right and left side and a small lip at the bottom. This feeds out onto several irregularly shaped and positioned rocks (ledges) that form the bottom third of the slide. The bottom part contains varying holes, hydraulics, or waves depending on the water level. The slide can be cleanly run in open canoes at levels over 3". From 10" to about 2' this is a very exhilarating class II drop. At 4.5' a diagonal reactionary wave wall forms at the bottom right and makes a clean open canoe run very difficult. In addition, hitting that wave is like hitting a brick wall. It is very unforgiving and the "flipping" action is immediate and absolute.

Kennedy Mill Dam is best viewed from the road bridge.

To run Kennedy Mill Dam, as you approach the lip, line up on the bottom "V" of the center upstream and downstream bridge trusses. Maintain a slight angle to your strong side and take a stroke as you go over the lip. Have a brace ready at the bottom, but you probably will not need it. Eddy out to the right behind the big boulder that forms the (lower) put-in eddy.

Immediately below the boulder that forms the base for the left side (east) bridge pier is an eddy. This eddy is tight against the bank and between the upstream boulder and an undercut downstream one. This eddy is always there and filled with debris. At levels above 2', it becomes a whirlpool. At about 4', it becomes "Dead Cow Eddy". This is the eddy that an early boater once saw a dead cow. The cow had no chance of ever getting out of there, dead or alive. I know this because I was in there once at about 4.5'.

The river immediately enters a short class I rapid. This contains numerous small ledges and waves. Downstream is a behemoth rock that splits the river. Several smaller boulders, some trees, and other flotsam guard the upstream end of this giant. Go to the right of this rock into good eddies on the right or better eddies on the left on the downstream end.

Eddy-hop the next thirty feet or so to a point above a chute against the right bank. This ledge is the start of rapid two. There is a good eddy at the bottom of the chute on the right. At about one foot, the chute shapes a great surfing wave that can be attained easily from that eddy. The current also provides the power to get out of that same eddy. From there, stay right of center in the main flow. There is a strong advanced ferry move across the current to a low eddy above the final ledge - very difficult. There is a good eddy on river right above the final ledge - easy but has a nasty back-door strainer. There is an easy line over the last ledge by staying right of center. Beware the hole at the bottom. A better move is to drive to the center (left side of the main flow) and boof into the left side eddy immediately below the ledge. This is about a two-foot drop.

### The Upper Gorge

The Upper Gorge section, from Rose Point to Eckert Bridge can be safely boated from minus one foot (not recommended) to 5.5' (recommended for real good boaters only). Because it channel-izes, low water runs on this section of the river are possible. Three Rivers Paddling Club has conducted numerous late spring clinics at levels below zero. Somebody once commented that it is not very exciting but it is better than nothing. Because it is not drastically steep, high water runs are also possible. Beginner and novice paddlers should not attempt levels over three feet, however, and very high water belongs to advanced intermediates and experts. The section above the Mill has

often been paddled at 4.5 and 5 feet and the Mile has been paddled at levels up to eight feet. The Mile has also been rafted at something more than twelve feet (we put-in above the wall and the run took about eight minutes).

A hundred yards below the Route 422 Bridge a large rock splits the river followed by an island. On the right side of the island there is a small ledge coming off the right bank. This forms a nice class I hydraulic and a set of excellent surfing waves. Run the ledge on the right into the large eddy and surf away. In 2000, tree fall from both sides of the river completely blocked this channel - go left of the island.

Just below the Ranger's Station Put-In there is a series of small ledges and boulders that form a two step, class I rapid. This small set washes out completely over 2', but at lower water, it creates a great spot to practice eddy turns and peel-outs. The bottom ledge forms a neat hole-wave at lower levels and can be attained from the big eddy at bottom right to the next higher eddy on the left. This is an easy class I attainment that is great for beginners.

Downstream and around the next bend comes big rapid number three (First Rapid Below The Ranger's Station). The entry to this rapid is through a low wave train. The last wave of that is a highly surf-able glass wave. It is hard to get on, but once you are there, it is great. Catch the right side eddy above the first ledge drop and do an upstream ferry onto the wave. The first ledge is a straightforward drop into a few offset waves. Catch the eddy high left or just a little lower right. From there, pick either the top or next wave to perform power ferries. From the left side eddy, attain the top wave that is really a breaking hydraulic and surf your head off. Peel off and line up for the second ledge. There is a narrow chute into a dynamic eddy on the right, or keep angled left and run out between the rocks on the left. From the right side eddy, look around and you will see a room behind the big boulder on the right. It is a neat place to be. Being in it creates some interesting challenges to get through the boulder wall to the right of the final chute.

Rapid 4 (Airport) is just downstream. Named because of the amount of "air" that is gotten there, Airport is one of the "big" rapids on The Slip. It is composed of two parts; upper Airport that is a constricted double ledge requiring complex moves and strong eddy turns and, lower Airport that is "The Hole". At levels below zero, the upper part becomes very nasty and tight and the lower part hole disappears. As the level rises, the upper part opens up and become less technical but that bottom hole gets very big. Above 4 feet this is a rapid meant for strong intermediates and above. Enter this rapid to the right of a big rock in the middle. This same rock forms a wicked hydraulic at higher levels. Stay tight to the right of the rock angled sharp left and paddle forward as you pass by the rock. There is a dynamic eddy behind the rock or just paddle straight through angled left and driving forward. Pass to the right of the rocks coming out from the left bank that form the bottom ledge. Beware the big rock that sticks out just downstream on the right. It splits the stream at that point and you want to go to the left of it. It is undercut and frequently has a log or two pinned to its upstream end. The chute to its right is passable but be upright in your boat, and watch out for a broaching situation. Paddle to the moving eddy on the left. From that position there is a series of attainment moves that will take you all the way back to the top. These can be accomplished in an open boat from about zero to 1.5'.

From the left side eddy, move across the main flow to behind that big rock sticking out. From there, you are a boat length above the ender hole at lower Airport. Line up and go. After punching the hole go left or right into very dynamic eddies. From there you can set up to surf or ender, do some neat ferries, or peel out and run on past "Runway" that forms behind the last small rock on the right. Now that you are in the big pool look over at the sloping rock on the downstream end of the left eddy after "The Hole". The up stream outside edge of that rock is undercut. Several people have found that out by being there. In addition, this rock has claimed hundreds of kayak paddles over the years. To the best of my knowledge, no canoeists have fed this rock their sticks, yet!

Next up is rapid 5. This is the surfing-est rapid on the river. There is a single broken ledge at the top and a single split ledge at the bottom. Above the top ledge are several small waves. The top ledge creates a phenomenal canoe surfing spot from 3" to about 2' and the reactionary waves that result at higher water are even better. However, the only way to play on the ledge wave is to be in a small right side eddy just below it, or pivot on the wave itself. The bottom ledge is really a row of boulders that split the current. The left side is easiest into a high dynamic eddy - use the wave face to make the turn.

This is about the point in the run that you will begin to observe sightseers and anglers. Respect the anglers and put on a good show for the sightseers.

Downstream on the right is "Boat Launch Rock". Paddle around to the downstream side and drag your boat up the backside of this sloping eight-foot high boulder. Get back in your boat and otter launch off the rock. Remember about putting on a show for the spectators.

Next is rapid number six (The Last Rapid Above The Mill). This is a long shoal curving first to the left and then to the right. There are some neat eddy moves high up on the right and several waves can be surfed when the level is right. After the shoal, catch an eddy on the right. This will put you in line for the last drop that is a ledge chute into a frothy mess. This spot deserves its own guidebook. A large rock splits the river. With enough water, there is a clean line to the left of the rock, angled slightly right and past, or through a small hydraulic at the bottom. The usual line is to the right of the rock. This narrow chute drops a foot or two into an even narrower wave train between two very dynamic eddies. As the river level rises, crosscurrents start to form near the surface and the whole run out begins to surge. At levels from about 3" to about 1.5', a skilled boater can get in there and work eddy lines and cross currents to exhaustion doing pivots and figure-eight's. If you want to learn boat control, this is a great place to do it.

At higher levels (above 3') this ledge forms the second "big" rapid in the Gorge. The ledge washes out and a monster hole forms. This is river wide and deep. Getting in it is easy, getting out requires serious class IV skills. There is a very narrow line (about eighteen inches) of smooth water that actually flows over the sloping side of the right side boulder into the very dynamic eddy on the right. From there, a sneak out the backdoor goes to the right of that big boulder downstream (if the chute is not blocked by trees) or, you can make a very powerful ferry across the boiling waves to river left. (class IV).

Immediately below McConnells Mill Dam there is a line of smallish rocks extending the whole way across the creek. These distinguish themselves at low water. This is the start of the put-in rapid for the Mile. A class I-II set, this rapid continues to just past the Covered Bridge. About half way down on the left, a nifty wave sets up from about zero to 1.5'. It is tricky and tends to push to river right, but it is very surf-able. Just below, and almost directly under the upstream side of the Covered Bridge is a small pour-over/wave that creates a good ender spot at 2'. And, right in the middle of the river directly below the downstream side of the Covered Bridge is an irregular wave/hydraulic that is always ready to be surfed above 3'.

After a few more small chutes and ledges, including a chilling high water keeper (above 6') on the left where a four foot wide rock sits out from the bank about two feet, and a long pool waits rapid number 7. (Chicken Toes). This rapid was aptly named over twenty years ago for the three toes or slots between the rocks. Run any of the slots going forward or backward, no matter. They all drop about one foot, they are all wet, and at certain levels, they will all flip you. Around 1.5' the slots start to close down as the rocks wash over. About two feet the easy line is center angled right and paddle right through a (sort of) tongue. At higher water, the wave that starts forming at 1'10" gets big, then bigger, then very big. Eventually, it washes out.

Rapid number eight (ZigZag) follows. ZigZag is a double ledge drop starting to the left of a big boulder that splits the right side. The first ledge is about three feet wide and a foot high. Angle to the right and take a stroke or two into the narrow eddy behind the big rock. Peel out to river left, execute an immediate 90 degree pivot to your right and, angled left, drive down through the second chute into a big center river eddy. This rapid can be sneaked far left at levels above 3'.

The next rapid is the heart of the Slippery Rock Creek Gorge. (Triple Drop). At varying water levels, Triple Drop consists of two (very high water) to five (very low water) distinct parts. It is a slalom paradise from 3" to about 2'. At all levels, enter Triple Drop just left of center. There are several eddies on the left at the very top that can be used to boat scout. In the center and against the right bank, some micro-eddies require very fast turns or cross stream ferries. There is a super surfing wave right in the middle of all that stuff, upstream from the boulder that splits the channel in two. There is an excellent eddy behind that boulder that may be made from either side.

Immediately downstream is a small broken ledge and offset wave on the right half. Run through that wave, or drive left through a break in the wave to a moving eddy on the left against a moss covered bank boulder. From there, peel out and line up for the next ledge. Here the river narrows as it passes to the right of a huge boulder sticking out from the left bank. The top of this boulder is a favorite spot for tourists, and a good place from which to look at the rest of the rapid. A true bank scout will be performed from the right side, however.

This chute is squirrely at low levels and above 1.5'. In between, it is easy class II. There is a strong high eddy on the right and an amazingly powerful eddy on the left, almost under that giant boulder. The left side eddy extends downstream and behind the boulder. It is a safe haven. The right side eddy does not, and is not. If you go right, stay high and tight.

The moving pool below the chute flows right into and around a sizable boulder on the right. The very narrow chute to the right is runnable above 1'. It requires a very complex turn behind the rock. It is a trap at lower levels. Above three feet, that same rock and its sisters downstream form a lethal hole. The line is to the immediate left of that rock. This chute (number 2) drops into a "bowl" and then over another small one foot ledge

into another moving pool. The bowl is formed by the upstream right side rocks, a huge angled boulder (undercut) on the right, another monster boulder on the top left (forms left side of chute 2) and "Pyramid Rock." There is a left turn slot move in front of the pyramid shaped rock into a nice eddy behind that top left boulder, but the safe line is to the right of Pyramid Rock. The right side eddy in the bowl is very weird and it disappears at certain levels. Downstream from the bowl, past the moving pool, is chute 3. That drop is inconsequential and actually disappears or washes out at extreme low or high levels. The rock just below that chute and to the left is another spot that can be used to practice otter launches.

Now let us talk about what happens at Triple Drop when the water gets high. Around three feet, the top part above chute 1 starts to wash out. There are some big waves and a hole or two, but generally, it is no big deal. The hole at the first chute starts opening up and becomes a wave. The hole to the right of the second chute begins to form. In addition, the pillow on the face of Pyramid Rock takes on a life of its own. Around four feet, the previous description is prefaced by the word "big". At five and one half feet, the entire tone of the rapid changes to "huge".

At five feet and above, you enter Triple Drop through a significant class III wave train. Chute 1 is gone. Instead, there is a jet of water passing over the outside edge of the left side boulder. The line is right up against (and over) that rock. The move is into the eddy that still forms behind that rock. Instead of looking up at the spectators, however, you are now on the same level with them. The downstream hole on the right, that the entire river seems to flow into, is big enough to hold a small bus, and the pillow on Pyramid Rock is a small bus. Paddling this requires strong intermediate skills (and an acute interest in the effect of water at forty miles an hour). It is not very hard, but you must not be upside down or out of your boat. A swim here will cost you, at least, your boat.

Next up, rapid 10 (The Maze) is a slalom course between two to three foot high rocks forming a rock garden about fifty feet long. At the end of the rock garden, the current splits around two mid-river rocks. There is a line to the far right over a small ledge but most people take the second chute from the left. This is a narrow offset chute of class I difficulty.

Beware the upstream end of that giant boulder downstream. It is guarded by a big rock and always holds numerous logs and trees. Go to the left.

Rapid 11 (Rooster Tail & Rock 'N Roll) follows. This is also a two part rapid separated by a short (like about twelve feet) fast flowing pool. For those of you that tend to paddle straight through a rapid, be advised, there are thirteen eddy moves in the top part of this rapid above the rooster tail. Follow the main current through the entrance and drop into a wide chute that terminates in a large rooster tail right in the center. There is a good line to the left into a big eddy and a good line to the right into a big eddy. The right is harder. On the other hand, you can run the rooster tail -hole - wave. If you do, be ready to set up for Rock 'N Roll that is immediately downstream. Rock 'N Roll is a simple chute to the right of or over a mid-river rock. Run right, angle left, and drop into the run out wave train. There is a hot eddy move right opposite the mid-river rock, a hot eddy move left below the rock, and a very neat (below 1') ferry move from left to right behind the rock. You will see what I mean when you get there. From the bottom, there is an unbelievable attainment move at 6". It climbs about three feet from the bottom left, across the diagonal reactionary wave, and into the top right eddy.

After you totally screw up here, recover in the pool that follows and get ready for Shannon's Hole.

The center of the next ledge forms a wicked hole (very wicked at 2'). There is an easy chute to the left of the exposed rocks. Angle right to avoid hitting the downstream bank rock where all of the current goes, and take a stroke into the big eddy. Look at the hole. If the level is any thing over a foot, imagine this. Twelve-year-old Shannon is paddling a ducky for the first time on whitewater. She is with a large group of experienced boaters. The temperature is about eighty degrees. The level is about two feet. Shannon is "ace-ing" everything in sight. The group comes to this ledge. Several kayakers proceed to surf in the hole or catch Enders. Then somebody gets an idea. "Hey, Shannon, jump on in there". She does, and proceeds to side surf for the next ten minutes. The duration of this spectacle was not by design. Finally, somebody says "hey Shannon, you can come out now". We hear this plaintive cry, "I can't!" Shannon's Hole.

Downstream, a small ledge juts out between the left bank and a large rock. Run this far left. At levels above 6", the rock garden to the right presents an interesting diversion.

Number 12 (The Last Rapid Above Eckert also known as the Last Rapid On The Mile) follows a long pool. A large boulder sits on river right with a narrow flow going to its right. On the left is a rock garden followed by another giant boulder that blocks the entire left side. The main flow drops over a right to left offset ledge to the left of the top rock and to the right of the rock garden. There is a wave - hole at the bottom that gets

much bigger as the level rises. A big eddy sits behind that top rock. The run out is through a second wide chute into a third narrow chute, on the right, and a wave train.

As you sit at the bottom of this little rapid, imagine the effect of those big, flat boulders with about 8,000 cubic feet per second of water flowing over them. Probably, all you can imagine is monster holes and huge, crashing waves - right? Now imagine this; a four foot wide tongue of absolutely smooth water right through the middle of all that mess. Yep, it is there, it is awesome, and it is a hoot!

### The Lower Gorge

The three and one half mile long Lower Slip contains ten noteworthy rapids and ledges. These are the entrance rapid, the first big ledge, ZigZag Rapid Number 2, Second Big Ledge at Walnut Flats, Jane's Ender Rapid, the big ledge below Jane's Ender, the long rock garden, Penn (Pin) Ultimate Rapid, Hell Run Rapid, and the last ledge above Harris Bridge. These ledges and rapids are all class II in nature, with very avoidable rocks and holes, and an occasional pour-over. In addition, depending on the water level, there is numerous other waves and small hydraulics.

This section can be run as low as -3", again not recommended except as a bird watching trip. The Lower Slip has been successfully run in an open canoe at levels exceeding 7,500 cubic feet per second. I do not know what that is in feet - I was too busy watching trees floating down the river to worry about gauge levels. The optimum level for this section is between two feet and four and one half feet.

The entrance rapid can be seen from Eckert Bridge. It is a simple slalom course of ledges and waves that can be eddy-hopped and surfed the whole length. This is a good place to play when all your friends go to West Virginia. There is a long recovery pool and trails on both sides, to just above the first bend where Cheeseman Run enters on the left.

Downstream about a quarter mile the river cuts sharply left in front of an island. On the right side of that turn, extending two-thirds of the way across the channel, a shallow ledge and a neat hydraulic lie in wait. Go left. Immediately downstream, check out the neat back channels in the big boulders.

A few bends later is rapid number 14 (ZigZag Rapid Number 2). A diagonal line of rocks splits the channel, which goes straight ahead on the left and cuts right on the right. At the downstream end of this line, a two-foot high chute sits between the last rock and a large boulder on the left. This is a straight, unobstructed drop. Catch an eddy on the left. The second part of this rapid is an irregular, offset diagonal wave at the bottom of a fast channel wide chute. A strong eddy is at the top left above this wave, but requires a dynamic ferry to exit. Two succeeding right side eddies sit just above and next to the wave. Using these will result in a bone dry run at most levels.

About a half-mile further, in the area of Walnut Flats on the right, a small ledge runs out from the right bank. At lower levels, it is insignificant. Starting about 2', you can hear it calling you from far upstream. At 4.5', the hole is big and powerful. It is also completely safe unless you consider a wet face to be unsafe.

Following the rest of this pool (The Flats) a small creek (Grindstone Run) comes in from the left and the river constricts toward the right as it passes the sediment shoal on the left. There is always a Great Blue Heron feeding in this area, so keep your eyes open. The resulting wave train signals that rapid number 15 (Jane's Ender Rapids) is right around the corner. Jane's Ender starts with a series of reefs (ledges) on river left. There is an easy wave train down the right one-half. At the bottom of the wave train, catch an eddy on the right or the left. Jane's Ender drops over a short ledge that hides a big hole-wave on the left and a smaller deep hole-pour-over (Jane's Ender) on the right. Run center between these holes to an eddy along the right bank. At normal levels, this is class II. The danger with this rapid is the top left where a grouping of boulders catches every tree that floats by and creates an ugly (and big) strainer. That whole mess is badly undercut. Immediately downstream, the river drops over a second reef into a series of standing waves. The "famous surfing waves" form above four feet.

Two hundred yards further on, an unnamed creek enters from the right. The silt shoal formed there pushes the river left where it flows over a shallow reef guarded in the center by a nice rock. The chute between the rock and the left shore creates a fantastic surfing wave that is wide enough for two to three open canoes.

After some more pools, and rapid 16 - an unnamed class II rock garden (at 1 foot and higher), and another pool you will come upon rapid number 17 (Penn (Pin) Ultimate Rapid). Here, a large flat (usually dry) slab sticks out one third of the way across the river from the right side. From the left side, and just slightly downstream, another ledge forms a pour-over with an interesting wave set on its outside - right - end. Between these ledges is a chute. The sides of the chute are small, irregular reaction waves. The bottom of the chute heads straight through a narrow gap between two rocks. The left side rock is called Pin Ultimate Rock. "Pin Ultimate" is a remarkably accurate description of the events that unfold in this place. Scout this rapid from on top of the right side slab. To run this drop, line up just left of the right side slab. Angle left and

paddle forward hard. Aim for that gap and trust that you will make it. An alternative line is to the right of the left side hydraulic and in to the eddy behind the pour-over. (There is a good picture of this rapid, from below the Rock, in Mary Shaw and Roy Weil's Canoeing Guide to Western Pennsylvania). From the eddy behind Pin Ultimate Rock peel out to river left and work around the left side of the bottom rocks. One hundred yards farther on is the start of the last rapid in this section.

Rapid 18 (Hell Run Rapids) starts with a weird little cork screw wave smack in the middle of the channel. It is formed by the break between two diagonal rock ledges. At very high water, it is like looking into the pipeline of a breaking ocean wave. Go right. From the short pool behind the Corkscrew to a hundred yards or so above Harris Bridge, this rapid is non-stop class II action with just enough class III moves to make it interesting. Start center and work right to the right of three very large mid-stream boulders. There are dozens of eddies and surfing waves. About half way down, on the right, you will see the mouth of Hell Run. It offers safe haven, a place to take a breather and a very pretty view of this little creek. Downstream from there, on the far right side a wild diagonal ledge drops sharply into a right side eddy. A quick ferry to the left will put you in line for a few more waves and the final big eddy on the left. At levels over 2.5 feet watch out for some very nasty pour-overs in the center and left center below Hell Run.

When the Slip gets big, more than six feet, Penn Ultimate and Hell Run combine to form one very long class III rapid. While the water at Penn Ultimate washes out all of those rocks, it is moving very fast. Upstream from the Corkscrew a monster wave forms on the right side. That wave is kayak country, although a short open boat would probably survive. From below the Corkscrew, a wave train runs right down the middle. At eight feet and up these waves get bigger than six feet high. It is like riding a roller-coaster. You paddle up the face, teeter at the top for a moment, then blast down the back. The problem is that the last wave drops right over that first big rock in the middle. An eddy turn from the right side into the backwash of the pour-over will result in a very exciting ender, even with a fourteen-foot open canoe.

Right above Harris Bridge is the final play spot. This very long ledge offers room for several boats to end surf. It is quite a sight to see a half dozen kayaks jostling for space with two or three open boats.

### HAZARDS

With the exception of a few dozen undercuts, most of which are easily avoidable, an occasional tree, and a few broaching possibilities Slippery Rock Creek is a relatively safe place to boat. The real hazard here is high water. When the creek goes above three feet or so it gets very fast. In addition, numerous large holes form that will definitely beat up anybody who is in them. A swimmer will find the experience very unpleasant and the probability of lost gear is quite good. The other hazard is cold. This is a trout stream, after all. The water is cold until well into summer.

For many years, boaters have maintained a great relationship with the park service and The Slip has remained a free and open river. This is due, in part, to the efforts of local paddling groups like TRPC and the Keelhauler's Canoe Club and the good grace of Park management. Like most good whitewater runs and recreational areas, however, McConnell's Mill is beginning to get crowded. There is a lot of pressure from parking and multiple user activities. It is the obligation of every boater to act responsibly, and courteously, and to obey Park rules and good common sense. In other words, keep a positive image. If we continue to work with the park people, they will continue to work with us. And, for goodness sake, do not run the "Mill" on a crowded Sunday afternoon.