

# The Kenai River

Flowing out of the western edge of the Chugach Mountains, the Kenai River runs turquoise blue from Kenai Lake through canyons and whitewater till it spills out onto the low elevation woodlands to where it finally meets the salt water of Cook Inlet near the town of Kenai. For almost 80 miles the river frolics through 3 sets of whitewater and forms 7-mile long Skilak Lake. A trip of 4 to 5 days is an ideal time to spend on this world-class fishery watershed, even though there are good sections that are an easy day float. If you are looking for a trip where you will not see anyone, this is not the trip. In fact the Kenai and Russian Rivers are two of the most heavily fished and visited sites in the state. There will be lines of combat fishermen on the shore that may make it nearly impossible to pull over in some places. July and August are the busiest times. But the incredible scenery of the river and the great fishing opportunities, combined with road access at numerous points make this a great trip for family or friends. In a raft it is a casual float through the Class III and III+ rapids, while in an inflated kayak there is more heart thumping adrenaline as you navigate the rapids along the way. Most of the river is within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and is a lush spruce and cottonwood forest among steep mountains until it exits at Skilak Lake where the more rounded hills are the landscape feature. And all along its length occurs one of the greatest salmon runs of south-central Alaska. Four species of salmon are here with the King salmon reported to be the largest of its kind. Fish up to 80 pounds have been pulled from these waters.

## Put In & Take Out Options for the Western Chugach - Part 2

There are 2 sections of the Upper Kenai River to run and there is road access for all of them. From Anchorage you take the Seward Highway around Turnagain Arm to the Sterling Highway Junction and then take the Sterling Highway to the lower end of Kenai Lake to the start of the upper river. There several spots where you can rig and launch a raft including the Kenai Lake outlet (small boats that can fit under the Kenai River Bridge can depart the Quartz Creek boat ramp), the Cooper Landing Boat Launch, the Cooper Creek Campground, the Russian River Campground and Sportsman's Landing. The next good access is at Jim's Landing and is a take out for the upper 13 miles of river or a put in for the next, more rapid, section of the Kenai river. Below Jim's Landing is the Kenai River Canyon and the Class III+ rapids. After traversing part of Skilak Lake, the Upper Skilak Campground is a good access spot and is a likely take out for a trip from the Kenai Lake Outlet and through the Kenai River Canyon.

## The Upper Kenai River Runs in the Western Chugach - Part 2

### Kenai Lake to Jim's Landing: 13 miles

There are several starting spots but where the Sterling Highway crosses the river just after it exits the lake is a common one. If you are doing a multi day trip you might have time to fish the west end of the Kenai Lake and there are places near Snug Harbor where you can launch. Once out of the lake and on the river expect, right away, some Class II rapids along Fisherman's Bend. Next is Cooper Creek then the Class III Schooner Bend rapids. The best line is down the right side. Two miles later is the Russian River confluence and there will surely be boats and fishermen along here. Below this spot the river is easy Class I to Jean Creek. Jim's Landing is here and is just above the Kenai Canyon and the biggest of the rapids.

### Jim's Landing to Upper Skilak Lake Campground: 11 miles

This is the crux section of the river having the Canyon, plus 13 miles of lake to paddle. If there are headwinds this may be impossible in a raft. From Jim's Landing the Kenai Canyon is quickly reached and it is a 4-mile section of sheer walled gorge making lining or portaging near to impossible. Below the canyon is a braided section that can have logs and sweepers in the channel. Once on the lake it is 6 miles of lakeshore bluff to the Upper Skilak Lake Campground.

**Note: Most of the above information adapted from [Alaska.org](http://Alaska.org)**