



Saru River


Hidaka to Mitsuiwa

沙流川 Paddling Map 1:25000







5 hrs
Time




4.6
Gradient (mpk)




Class III
Difficulty



8km
Distance



3/5
Water clarity



May-Oct
Best season

The Saru River 沙流川 is one of Hokkaido’s premier whitewater kayaking rivers, with a number of sections of differing difficulty. These river sections are variously punctuated by large dams, but each section is beautiful in its own right. This section of tight gorge from Hidaka township to just above the Iwachishi Dam is an upper intermediate to advanced paddler’s dream. There’s a number of Class 2+ to Class 3 rapids, and a challenging crux about half way - a 3m drop easily



scouted from above on the bridge and from the river side. Paddling down the deep Saru River gorge should be on any Hokkaido paddler’s list.

LOCATION

The Saru River flows southwest from high up on the western side of the northern reaches of the Hidaka Range, in southern-central Hokkaido. This section of the river starts in the sleepy mountain town of Hidaka, and heads downstream 8km to just above Iwachishi Dam.

Put-in: The put-in is easily accessed on the northern side of the river, just upstream from the Saru River Campground. There’s a gravel road heading east from the main road. There’s a steep drop down to the river, but there’s a man-made slope that makes lowering the boats down to the river easy.

Take-out: Once you’re on the river, there are

precious few options for getting out of the deep gorge until 8km downstream, just past the Mitsuiwa Bridge 三岩橋. There’s a gravel road heading north from Route 237, which hairpins back south under the bridge. In a pinch, paddlers could also possibly take out just after the Mitsuo-ka Bridge 三岡橋 drop at the gravel-works, but note that this is private property.

GENERAL NOTES

This river section easily makes it into our top five paddling locations in Hokkaido. Given the right water levels, it ticks all the boxes: fun rapids, amazing scenery, great access, a feeling of adventure, and a lovely campground and onsen near the put in. The gorge/canyon is one of the best in Hokkaido, perhaps only rivalled by the Shokotsu River in Hokkaido’s far north. Considering this Saru River section is less than a 2-hour drive from Sapporo makes

HIDAKA

it an appealing weekend paddling destination. There are a number of dams along the Saru River which make it less conducive to long overnight trips, but the dams are well spaced apart. They essentially bookmark a number of bite-sized paddling sections that are perfect for short day trips.

ROUTE TIMING AND NOTES

Allow plenty of time for this section of river. We recommend at least 4-5 hours, due to the frequent stops for scouting. The beauty of the canyon is also not something to be rushed!

Put in on the river right upstream from the Usappu-bashi Bridge in Hidaka town. Right off the bat is a low-consequence Class 2 rapid, which might push Class 2+ in higher water. For the next 2.5km, there are at least three more notable rapids, most with wave trains to enjoy (or avoid, if that’s your thing). At around 1.5km, you’ll pass through a most impressive rock gate, which indicates the beginning of the Saru River Gorge.

The first scouting-recommended rapids come in the form of a rock garden at the 2.5km point, not far downstream from the gorge entrance. Once again, they’re fairly low-consequence, but a good studying of the river beforehand will increase the likelihood of a clean run. The entry is usually center of the river, but like us, you’ll likely agonize over whether to head left or right after the entry.

Beyond the rock garden is another 1.7km of frequent CII to CII+ rapids, culminating in a must-scout Class 3-4 3m drop below Mitsuo-ka-bashi Bridge. Adding to the drop’s trickiness is the three sets of wave trains leading up to the drop. The wavetrains on their own are enough to swamp an open-deck canoe in advance of the drop itself. There are good eddies on the river right before the drop, however, so we recommend pulling up to the side of the river and thoroughly discussing your options. The rather narrow rock-lined drop can be nasty, with the real possibility of head injury should you be pushed and flipped in the wrong way.

The river calms down somewhat for a while after the Mitsuo-ka Drop, but don’t be lulled into

RIVER DETAILS

This route is on Saru River (沙流川), or Sar in the Ainu indigenous language. The river is a Class A (一級河川) river, 135km in total length. This section of the river is between m and m wide. The gradient for this section of river is 4.6 mpk (24.29 FPM).



too much complacency. The Class 2+ rapids just upstream of Todoroki-bashi Bridge can be squirrely, and there’s a couple more notable rapids beyond there too. Approaching the take out just downstream of the Mitsuiwa-bashi Bridge, you’ll finally have some time to catch your breath and enjoy the last of the beautiful gorge scenery.

TRANSPORT

By car: There is room at the put in for about up to 10 cars to park, and the same at the take out. Both the put in and take out require a short drive along gravel access roads from the main road to the riverside.

Public transport: Hidaka Town is accessible by JR train and bus from Sapporo. It’s about 3.5 hours. From the bus terminal in Hidaka Town it’s about a 10 minute walk to the river. From the take out near Mitsuiwa Bridge, there are a couple of buses per day that stop at the Nakamitsuiwa bus stop 中三岩バス停; three in the afternoon headed north to Hidaka Town, and three headed south to Biratori.

SAFETY NOTES

The narrow gorge here would be a bad place to be in high water – there’s nowhere for the river to spread out, and the high rock walls in places makes escape options sparse. A number of the rapids are best scouted before running, particularly the rock garden at 2.5km, the rapids leading up to the large drop at Mitsuo-ka Bridge, and the drop itself. The drop appears to have become a little more wild in the past few years – it’s a must-scout spot, but in the worst-case scenario the river is benign beyond the drop for at least 500m.

ONSEN NEARBY

Hidaka Kogenso Hotel Onsen ひだか高原荘 (500yen) is good for a soak in Hidaka Town, but there’s no outside baths. Biratori Onsen Yukara びらとり温泉 ゆから (500yen) is a little more picturesque with outdoor bathing, but its further downstream (about 30km south of the take-out). ■

Japanese Map Glossary

Romaji	Kanji	English
bunki	分岐	junction
cho	町	town
dake/mine	岳/峯	peak
eki	駅	station
goya/koya	小屋	hut
hinangoya	避難小屋	shelter
ike	池	pond
kawa/gawa	川	river
kako	火口	crater
ko/mizumi	湖	lake
kyo	峡	gorge
numa	沼	pond
onsen	温泉	hot spring
sawa	沢	stream
taira/daira	平	plateau
tani/dani	谷	valley
taki	滝	waterfall
toge	峠	pass
yama/san/zan	山	mountain

ONLINE ROUTE GUIDE

Please visit the full route guides for GPS files, interactive maps, and extra safety notes: <http://hokw.jp/sarhidak>



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hokkaidowilds.org 2021/12/13

MAP FOLD & LAYOUT CONCEPT | Dominika Gan

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Saru River

Hidaka to Mitsuiwa



















沙流川（日高～三岩）
Paddling Map
1:25000

0 250 500 750 1,000 m

1cm on the map equals 250m on the ground

Magnetic declination from GRID NORTH: **10°21' W** | UTM Grid Zone: **54TXM**
 Grid: **1000m** | Map by hokkaidowilds.org CC BY SA 2021/12/13

Symbol Key

	Route (distance between points)		Contour lines (100m, 10m)
	National Highway		Power transmission lines
	Prefectural Road		Trees/no trees
	Municipal Road		Rocks/cliffs
	Minor Municipal Road		Onsen (hot spring)
	Walkway		Fumeroles
	Designated campsite		Highway number
	Put in/take out location		Portage required
	Dam/waterfall/weir		Rapids

ONLINE ROUTE GUIDES - Please visit the full route guides for route description, GPS files, and safety notes: <https://hokw.jp/sarhidak>

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PRINTING INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1

Load your printer with A3 printer paper (297mm x 420mm). If you've only got Tabloid or Ledger size (279mm x 432 mm), just follow the instructions below. You'll achieve an accurate scale, but the map will be clipped a little at the top and bottom.

STEP 2

Open the print window by clicking on File > Print (or hitting Ctrl + P on your keyboard).

STEP 3

Make sure "Actual Size" is selected.

STEP 4

For double-sided printing, select "Print on both sides of paper".

STEP 5

For best results, select the highest quality print option available on your printer (settings will vary).

STEP 6

You won't need this instructions page, so just select the pages that don't include this instruction sheet.

STEP 7

Click "Print".

PLEASE PRINT AT 'ACTUAL SIZE' (NO SCALING)

The 1:25,000 scale used in the map is accurate if the PDF is printed without scaling (i.e., ACTUAL SIZE). Follow the instructions on this page to ensure an accurate rendering of the scale.



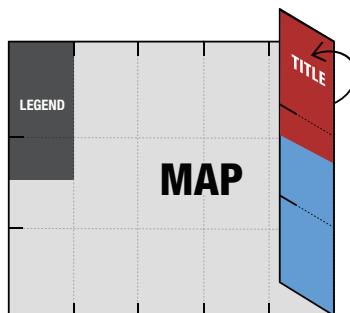
Figure 1. Ensure "Actual Size" is selected (Windows).

ORIGAMI INSTRUCTIONS

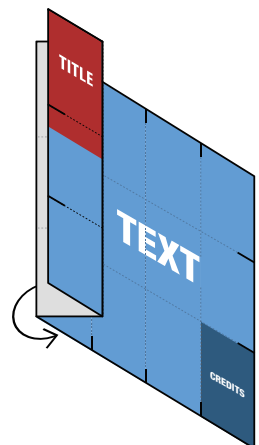
1



2



3



4



5



6



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