

Special Edition: Eastern Hiking Guide
Backpacker
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“Lofty hills...magnificent forests. ..extensive green meadows....one of the most charming mountain landscapes anywhere.” So wrote naturalist William Bartram in 1775 when he explored what's now western North Carolina. Then, as now (borrowing Bartam's florid phrasing), the silver flood of the Little Tennessee River flows like a vast serpent rushing after its prey. That strong current and a fortunate absence of dams along a 23- mile stretch make the Little Tennessee one of the best streams for canoe camping in the southern Appalachians.

On the first leg of the adventure, from Iotla Bridge near Franklin to the U.S. 19 bridge at Lake Fontana, you'll float on Class I waters through farmlands and pass Lost Bridge. This is where the Nantahala and Cowee Mountains begin to close in and turn the waters into jittery, Class II rapids. The houses vanish, forests line the river, and the land grows wilder. In October through April, when Fontana Lake is drawn down and The Narrows are exposed, the final mile becomes Class III-N white- water. Scout it before you ride it. Camp only on Nantahala Power Company land along the forested riverbanks below Lost Bridge. Avoid campsites along Needmore Road; they attract Class VI good 01' boys.

**Where: 150 miles north of Atlanta. Iotla Bridge is on Sanderstown Road 3.2 miles west from US 441, just outside of Franklin.

**Maps: For a river map and guide, see Carolina Whitewater (\$14.95; Menasha Ridge Press, 800-247-9437).

**More info: For canoe rentals and shuttles: Great Smoky Mountain Fish & Safari (828) 369-5295.

