

Deep resources: There are 3.5 million miles of rivers in the U.S.



America's River Trails

FOR THE BEST BACKCOUNTRY ACCESS TO TERRAIN OTHERWISE HIDDEN FROM VIEW, TAKE A FEW DAYS — AND A CANOE — TO HIT THESE BLUE BYWAYS.

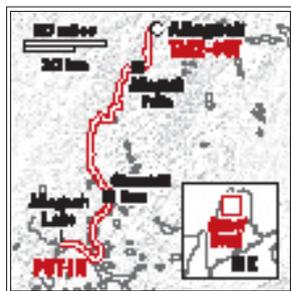
by **JOSH FULMER**

THERE'S NOTHING INTRINSICALLY WRONG with spending just a day on the water, but let's be honest: A canoe is, at its best, an escape vehicle. Loaded with an accomplice and plenty of provi-

sions for a longer sojourn, the simplest of watercraft can grant access to seldom-seen stretches of America. Here are four of our favorite ways to get away from (or into) it all for a short spell.

ALLAGASH WILDERNESS WATERWAY

LOCATION: Maine
LENGTH: 92 miles (eight days), with an optional three-day extension on Allagash Lake
HIGHLIGHTS: This wild yet accessible portion of the 740-mile Northern Forest Canoe Trail is a perfect introduction to North Woods paddling. You'll float through spruce and fir forests that shelter moose, mink, otter, black bear, and whitetail deer, plus birds of prey like the osprey and bald eagle. Whitewater paddlers can run seven miles of Class II



rapids below Churchill Dam, though you'll need to portage the 40-foot Allagash Falls (rentals from *Maine Quest Adventures* from \$25 per day; mainequestadventures.com).
ESSENTIAL GEAR: Through mid-July, pack a five-weight fly rod: Brook trout are plentiful.

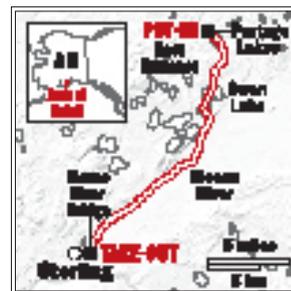
OFF THE WATER: Explore the caves near Allagash Lake's northeast corner. Bring a headlamp: The caves extend more than 70 feet, and there's a steep passage at the entrance.

SWAN LAKE CANOE TRAIL

LOCATION: Kenai Wilderness, Alaska
LENGTH: 24 miles (three days)
HIGHLIGHTS: One million people visit the remote Kenai National Wildlife Refuge every year, but only 6,000 venture into the peninsula's vast lake region, one of just two federally designated canoe systems

in the U.S. (the other is in Minnesota). The trail links more than 30 glacial lakes formed when chunks of remnant ice left depressions that filled with meltwater, all in the shadow of the majestic Kenai Mountains and the surrounding boreal forest, home to moose and bear (rentals from *Alaska Canoe and Campground* from \$28 per day; alaskacanoetrips.com).

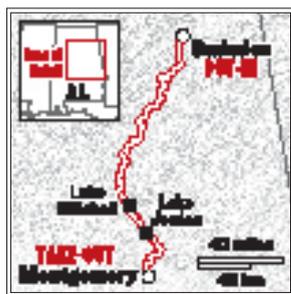
ESSENTIAL GEAR: You'll portage between lakes as much as paddle, so bring a well-padded yoke and a lightweight canoe.
OFF THE WATER: Beach your boat and explore one of the many forested islands that dot the lake system. Wildlife abounds — especially in the spring, when moose use the terrain as calving grounds.



HOLLY WILMETH/AURORA PHOTOS

ALABAMA SCENIC RIVER TRAIL: GADSDEN TO MONTGOMERY

LOCATION: Alabama
LENGTH: 175 miles (10 days)
HIGHLIGHTS: The Coosa is one of two rivers that make up the 631-mile Alabama Scenic River Trail, which stretches diagonally across the state and includes river, lake, and estuary paddling before the Gulf of Mexico. Launch your canoe in Gadsden and head south into Alabama's ridge-and-valley region, an undulating stretch wedged between the Cumberland Plateau and the Piedmont. Lay Lake, one of several lakes along the river, forces the route into the Narrows, a steep, rocky gorge with a water depth of 122 feet; Lake Mitchell, about 25 miles downstream, is home to two woodland preserves. Far-



Paddling Musts

◀ With strips of red alder, basswood, and black willow, the **SUNBURST ST** looks like an ordinary, if beautiful, paddle. What makes it rare is its carbon-fiber shaft, which drops its weight to a minuscule 15 ounces (\$170; bendingbranches.com).

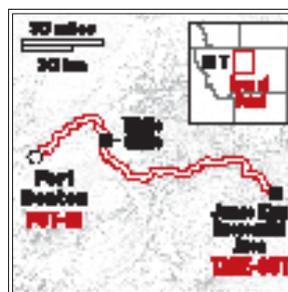
▶ Form and function shake hands with the **DULUTH PACK MONARCH**, an 18-ounce canvas pack with a waterproof liner that protects 7,000 cubic inches of gear. It hangs low so you can carry it and a canoe (\$345; duluthpack.com).



ther south, five miles of rapids — up to Class IV, depending on conditions — separate you from your takeout at Montgomery. The Alabama Scenic River Trail (alabamascenicrivertrail.com) can assist with portages and shuttles (*rentals from Terrapin Outdoor Center from \$40 per day; canoeshop.net*).

ESSENTIAL GEAR: The portage trails are well marked and maintained, but several are more than a mile long. Rather than shoulder your canoe and gear, bring a folding portaging cart — a collapsible set of wheels that attaches to one end of your boat and allows it to be pulled like a wagon.

OFF THE WATER: Hike the Swayback Bridge Trail near the dam on Lake Jordan. The network of concentric loops offers routes from one to 17 miles, nearly all of which skirt the lake as they wind through hardwood forest.



THE UPPER MISSOURI NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

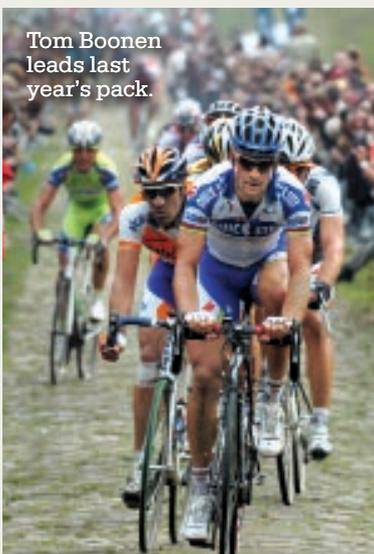
LOCATION: Montana
LENGTH: 149 miles (seven days)
HIGHLIGHTS: Follow Lewis and Clark's 1804 expedition down this long stretch of the Missouri, which Lewis described as "one of the fairest portions of the globe." The river carves a path through cottonwoods and steep shale banks before

reaching the White Cliffs, a section of bright, 300-foot-tall sandstone. A few miles downriver are the Badlands, a 61-mile strip that's one of the river's least visited areas; you'll most likely have five of Lewis and Clark's campsites plus massive geologic faults — some of which feature exposed dinosaur fossils — to yourself (*rentals from Upper Missouri River Guides from \$25 per day; uppermissouri.com*).

ESSENTIAL GEAR: The broad, calm Upper Missouri has no rapids to negotiate or portages to trudge, so load up a 19-foot expedition canoe with back-country amenities.

OFF THE WATER: At the Gist Bottom campsite at river mile 122, make the nine-mile round-trip hike up a primitive road to Lewis and Clark's viewpoint, the spot where the pair got their first look at the Rockies.

Tom Boonen leads last year's pack.



The Soul of Cycling: Paris-Roubaix

THE ULTIMATE TWO-WHEELED GUT CHECK IS NOT ABOUT THE TOUR.

If the Tour is the Super Bowl of bike racing, then **PARIS-ROUBAIX** is like a messy college-bowl game: bitterly fought, brutal yet beautiful, and so real you can taste it. The 161-mile race, held April 11, includes up to 33 miles of ancient cobblestone farm roads (that's *pavé* to you) that meander across the fields of northern France, and little about the race has changed since the contest was first held in 1896. (The only difference: In the early days, these were the good roads.) Lance Armstrong has never raced it — too dangerous, his people have said.

In France they call the race L'Enfer du Nord, the Hell of the North, and the cobbled sectors unfold like the rings of Dante's *Inferno*. When the leaders finally burst into the Roubaix

velodrome for the finish, after seven hours of racing, the crowd explodes in a cathartic roar, and the winner is awarded perhaps the last thing he'd ever want to see again: a mounted granite cobblestone.

SPECTATE: Watch live coverage on Versus beginning April 11, or fly into Paris or Brussels, rent a car, and with the help of GPS or a good Michelin map, leapfrog from *secteur* to *secteur* with the hordes of French and Belgian fans.

PEDAL IT YOURSELF: Book an organized ride through Velo Classic Tours (veloclassic.com) or Bike Belgium (bikebelgium.com).

ESSENTIAL VIEWING: The classic 1976 doc, *A Sunday in Hell*, chronicles the old-school glory.

—BILL GIFFORD

AMERICA'S ROUBAIX

Instead of cobbles, the 62-mile loop of the Tour of the Battenkill traverses 15 miles of upstate New York's dirt roads. Try your luck in the amateur races on April 10, or enter the recreational ride on the 17th and stay to watch the pros race the next day (tourofthebattenkill.com).