

BIG BEND

The Rio Grande

Administered by the National Park Service in Big Bend National Park and as the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River.

INTRODUCTION

The Rio Grande, or *El Rio Bravo del Norte*, borders Big Bend National Park for 118 miles and serves as the International Boundary between the United States and Mexico.

Pursuant to the 1978 Act establishing the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River, an additional 127 miles of river downstream from Big Bend National Park is now managed for recreation and preservation by the National Park Service. The Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River begins upstream from Mariscal Canyon in Big Bend National Park and extends to the Terrell-Val Verde county line. The boundary of the Wild & Scenic River downstream from Big Bend National Park extends from the center of the main channel of the river (the International Boundary) to the river cut-bank on the U. S. side. Public access to the river in the Lower Canyons is limited, and most of the land above the river bank is private property.

For river trips in Big Bend National Park or on the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River, a free permit, obtainable at any staffed ranger station, is required. Three options are available to those desiring to take a river trip: 1) You can bring your own equipment; 2) You can rent equipment west of the park at Study Butte or Lajitas; 3) You can hire a guide service that will provide all permits, food, equipment, and shuttles.

You are invited to explore and enjoy the enchanting canyons and open-water vistas of the Rio Grande.

River Use Information

A river-use permit is required on the Rio Grande administered by the National Park Service, except for persons day-fishing downstream from the National Park boundary. The permit is free and can be obtained at the following Ranger Stations: Persimmon Gap, Panther Junction, Rio Grande Village, and Lajitas (Lajitas Museum and Desert Garden).

If the river level exceeds 2.0 M (6 feet) at the gauge nearest your put-in, permits will be issued only to rigid kayaks, dories, whitewater canoes, and inflatable rafts with a minimum of four compartments and minimum dimensions of 6' x 12' on those sections of river of Class III or greater difficulty.

The Superintendent of Big Bend National Park may close to public use portions of the Rio Grande when necessary for public safety or for resource protection, such as peregrine falcon nesting season. The following closure will be in effect between January 1 and May 31 of each year in order to minimize disturbances to nesting falcons:

No motor will be operated on the Rio Grande administered by the National Park Service (a) for approximately 12.5 miles, between the rockslide in Santa Elena Canyon and the mouth of Alamo Creek about (1.5 miles above Cottonwood Campground); (b) for approximately 6 miles within Mariscal Canyon between the canyon entrance (Talley) and the canyon exit; (c) for approximately 8 miles within Boquillas Canyon from the canyon entrance to the Marufo Vega trail crossing; (d) for 7 miles in the Lower Canyons between Rodeo Rapids and Lower Madison Falls.

For additional information on the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, including more specific information regarding closures, please call (915) 477-2393. An information clearing house is maintained at this number where you may obtain estimates of anticipated Lower Canyons use for specific dates in the future. Information on your group size and trip dates will be appreciated for the benefit of other users. You may also call (915) 477-2251 for general information, or write to: Superintendent, Big Bend National Park, TX 79834.

CANYON TRIPS

Colorado Canyon — Although this canyon lies outside the park, it is included here because of the many requests for a relatively easy, one-day trip. This run can vary from 9 to 21 miles, depending on your put-in and take-out points. The most popular run is from Rancheras Canyon to the Teepees roadside park on Highway 170, a river distance of 9 miles. Floating on to Lajitas makes the run a total of 21 miles. Colorado Canyon is cut through igneous rock, unlike the three major park canyons, which are cut through limestone. This trip offers some fun rapids of Class II and Class III, but nothing exceptionally dangerous.

Santa Elena Canyon — A 19 mile, two-day trip begins at Lajitas and ends at the Santa Elena Canyon picnic area (Terlingua Creek). For the last 7 miles, the river is confined between sheer limestone walls that rise as much as 1,500 feet above the river. Rockslide Rapid is located one mile downstream from the western entrance of the canyon and is the major hazard for rafters and canoeists. At certain water levels, the Rock Slide becomes a Class IV rapid. Scouting this rapid before running it is essential. Prior to beginning your river trip, consult a Park Ranger about current conditions. Santa Elena Canyon is not within the boundaries of the Wild & Scenic River, but it is a spectacular part of the Rio Grande administered by Big Bend National Park.

Mariscal Canyon — A 10 mile, one-day trip begins at Talley and ends at Solis landing. Access to the put-in is rough and not recommended for ordinary automobile traffic. Consult a Park Ranger about the road conditions before your plans become final. Mariscal Canyon, 6 miles long with walls exceeding 1,400 feet, is spectacular. The rapids in the canyon area are Class II-III.

Note: Theft of property left in vehicles is not uncommon at Talley and Solis. Take proper precautions. No storage lockers are available in the park.

Boquillas Canyon — A 30 or 33 mile, two-day trip begins at Rio Grande Village and ends at Adams Ranch or La Linda. Permission to pull out at Adams Ranch can be obtained by calling (915) 376-2212. Advance permission is not required, however. There is a fee per vehicle and per person for use of Adams Ranch. Boquillas Canyon is the longest canyon trip in Big Bend National Park and its walls rise 1,200 feet above the river. Since no rapids rate higher than Class II, this is an ideal trip for the less experienced.

Lower Canyons — A 5 to 10 day float trip, a journey through the Lower Canyons offers a true wilderness experience. The trip begins at La Linda and ends at either Dryden Crossing (83 miles) or Foster's Ranch (119 miles), which is at the end of the Rio Grande Wild & Scenic River. Some river runners continue to Langtry (137 miles). If that is your chosen take-out, be sure to portage the dangerous weir at Foster's Ranch. Permission to take-out at Dryden Crossing should be obtained by calling Bill TenEyck at (915) 345-2379, or stopping by Dryden Merchantile in Dryden. Permission to take out at Foster's Ranch should be obtained by calling (915) 291-3232.

The terrain along the Lower Canyons is open desert, rugged hills, and deep canyons. Access to the river is difficult below La Linda. Most of the land is privately owned and use of the river bank is contingent upon user care and respect. The rapids in the Lower Canyons are considered Class II-IV.

Note: The management personnel at Black Gap Wildlife Management Area have revoked their policy of allowing put-ins for Lower Canyons trips at Maravillas Creek. La Linda is now the commonly-used put-in.

- Get a permit.
- Report all injuries or property damage or losses over \$100 to a Park Ranger.
- Carry out all litter.
- Bury all human waste 6 to 8 inches in soil or, better yet, use a portable toilet.
- Use a firepan if you build a campfire. A stove is better to protect the environment.
- Burn only charcoal or dead and down wood from the floodplain in a firepan.
- Wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket while on the river.
- Carry all gear in waterproof bags and boxes, lashed in to prevent loss in event of a capsizing.
- Camp well above the high water mark and out of any side canyons.
- Leave your pet at home.
- Respect private property.
- Have a fun, but safe, trip!

- Operate any vessel in a reckless or negligent manner.
- Overload vessels.
- Use firearms or explosives. They are strictly prohibited.
- Disturb in any manner natural, historic, or prehistoric features along the river.
- Forget to secure boats with lines at night; sudden river rises do occur.
- Take your pet on the river.
- Jug-fish in Big Bend National Park.

Swimming in the Rio Grande is not recommended. The river can be hazardous, even in calm-looking water. Be aware of strong under currents, shallow areas with sharp rocks and large tree limbs, and be watchful for trot lines with large hooks.

Equipment Checklist

A Park Ranger will make inspection of required equipment before issuing a river permit to determine compliance with regulations. The following equipment is essential for a safe river trip.

Required Equipment

- Boat . . . Canoes, kayaks, or heavy duty inflatable rafts.
- Life jackets . . . One USCG approved life jacket per person. Bring one extra per group, if possible.
- Paddles/Oars . . . Each vessel must carry an extra paddle or oar, except for kayaks, which must carry one extra paddle per party.
- Patch kit/pump . . . Inflatable vessels must have a patch kit and pump. Know how to use patch kit.

Please make required items easily accessible for quick inspection when applying for permit.

Recommended Equipment

- First aid kit . . . To handle major and minor emergencies.
- Plastic trash bags . . . Carry out all trash.
- Safety line . . . Rope length 50 - 100' and 3/8" in diameter. Carry tie-downs to secure gear in vessel(s).
- Bailing bucket . . . To remove water from inside vessel(s).
- Water-tight containers . . . To keep food, clothing, gear dry.
- Carry-out toilet . . . To pack out human waste.
- Flashlight . . . Advisable for all trips.
- Small shovel . . . Camp sanitation.

WEATHER & RIVER INFORMATION

Month	Average Max. (°F)	Average Min. (°F)	Average Precip. (ins.)	River Level (Ft./M)
January	67.7	31.8	.39	2.53/ .77
February	74.0	35.4	.30	2.58/ .78
March	83.2	44.4	.16	2.93/ .89
April	91.1	53.4	.58	3.07/ .93
May	96.8	62.8	1.43	3.54/1.07
June	103.1	69.7	1.44	3.89/1.18
July	101.6	70.8	1.47	3.15/ .95
August	99.4	71.0	1.61	3.87/1.17
September	94.9	65.3	1.30	4.16/1.26
October	87.2	54.0	1.30	4.31/1.31
November	76.8	40.2	.41	3.01/ .91
December	69.9	32.9	.34	2.65/ .80

These statistics are from Rio Grande Village, elevation 1,750 feet. Sunshine is abundant the year round. Infrequent and brief periods of cloudy weather are confined mostly to the winter months. Cold fronts can bring freezing weather with rain or snow; appropriate clothing and other gear should be carried from November through April. Hypothermia is a life-threatening danger that river users must be prepared to avoid during the cold months, just as heat stroke and heat exhaustion are dangers to be aware of during the hot months. Relative humidity is usually quite low. The "rainy season" extends from mid-July through early October, during which there can be locally heavy thunderstorms and some flash-floods. Rapid river rises can be dangerous to the unprepared.

**Colorado Canyon
925**

21	Lajitas										
2	904										
40	19	Santa Elena Canyon Picnic Area (Terlingua Creek) 885									
4	2										
48	27	8	Castolon								
4	2	1	877								
87	66	47	39	Talley							
6	5	3	3	838							
97	76	57	49	10	Solis						
6	5	4	3	1	828						
113	92	73	65	26	16	Hot Springs					
7	6	5	5	2	1	(Tornillo Creek) 812					
125	94	75	67	28	18	2	Rio Grande Village				
7	6	5	5	2	1	.5	810				
145	124	105	97	58	48	32	30	Adams Ranch			
9	8	7	7	4	3	2	2	(Stillwell Crossing) 780			
148	127	108	100	61	51	35	33	La Linda			
10	9	7	7	4	4	2	2	777			
231	210	191	183	144	134	118	116	86	83	Dryden	
15	14	13	12	10	9	8	8	6	6	694	
285	264	245	237	198	188	172	170	140	137	54	Langtry
19	18	16	16	13	13	12	11	9	9	4	640

Approximate mileages were calculated for the most popular put-in/take-out points. The number of days estimated for trips was calculated at a river level of 3.3 feet (one meter) with two people in a four-man raft, plus gear, at a rate of travel of 15-20 miles per day.

For additional information or current conditions, call (915) 477-2251, or write: Superintendent, Big Bend National Park, TX 79834.

Put-in/Take-out
Official IBWC River Mile
Miles Put-in/Take-out
Days Official IBWC River Mile



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