

Buffalo National River

Buffalo National River
Arkansas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



Connie Toops

A River Nestled in the Arkansas Ozarks

The Buffalo River comes as a surprise. How did a river surrounded by the progress of civilization escape impoundment, impairment, and change? To preserve the Buffalo as a free-flowing stream, it was designated as a National River by Congress in 1972. Floating the Buffalo can give you a feeling of the wildness that once haunted this country. The Buffalo nestles in the Arkansas Ozarks, which are bounded on the north, east, and south by the Missouri, Mississippi, and Arkansas Rivers. To the west lies the prairie. These boundaries have ecologically isolated the Ozarks, so the Buffalo threads its way through a living biological museum with silent bluffs for walls.



Matt Bradley



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The river originates in the Boston Mountains at an elevation of more than 2,300 feet above sea level. Over its course the Buffalo drops almost 2,000 feet to below 400 feet at its confluence with the White River. The gradient is steep and the water is faster along the upper river, leveling and slowing as the river runs its course. Long, quiet pools between rapids, and the presence of extensive valleys and plains in some places, obscure the vertical travels of the Buffalo. The land's wildness and isolation are dramatized by a side trip into any number of hollows flanking the Buffalo. One wonders if some have ever been frequented since they served as guerrilla hideouts during Civil War days.

The meaning of the Buffalo River today is not difficult to discern. It is reflected in the faces of people accepting the river's recreational challenges. It rises in the spirits of people immersed in this landscape's beauty. It finds its measure among the families who celebrate their multiple generations in the Buffalo environs with periodic riverside reunions. Here are exhilaration and enthusiasm, relaxation and recreation. Here these merge with living tradition as thoroughly as the wild and free-running Buffalo River merges with its ancient Ozarks setting.



Fishing the Buffalo



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The Buffalo is a favorite with anglers. Long pools provide excellent water for fishing. The Buffalo and its tributaries comprise one of the Nation's richest areas in total of fish species. The biggest attraction here is the smallmouth bass. Anglers also go after largemouth and spotted bass, catfish and goggle-eye (Ozark bass), and a variety of other panfish.

Float Fishing. Besides bank fishing, a favored traditional method on the Buffalo River is float fishing in flat-bottomed john-boats. Float fishing is most common on the lower (eastern) half of the river. It may be restricted at times by drought conditions.

Concessioners operate float fishing trips that may come complete with a

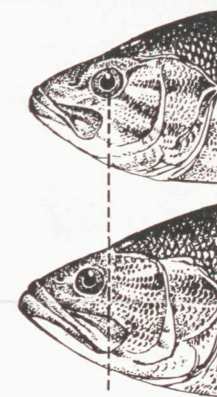
hearty meal—fresh fish even—cooked on a gravel bar.

For a list of these concessioners, write to the park superintendent.

Fishing Rules. Fishing is governed by state regulations, and an Arkansas fishing license is required.

Smallmouth bass
Jaw to mid-point of pupil

Largemouth bass
Jaw past eye



Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass. The smallmouth bass is so named because, in contrast to the largemouth, its upper jaw does not extend beyond the eyes (see diagrams). Although smallmouth bass up to five pounds are occasionally caught, most are in the one- to two-pound range.

A smallmouth bass in the Buffalo reaches 6 to 7 inches in length by its second summer. It may take four years for the fish to attain the 10 inches that it must measure before you can add it to your stringer.

Illustrations by John Dawson

Scenic Landscape Formations

Buffalo River bluffs reach to 500 feet above the river. They are the Ozarks' highest. These stacks of ancient seabeds have been relentlessly sculpted by erosion. Their towering multi-colored cliffs sharply accent the surrounding wild mountain beauty. The park's geology, with its numerous caves, sinkholes, waterfalls, springs, and interesting rock formations, typifies the Arkansas Ozarks.



Matt Bradley



Tim Ernst/Southern Images

Nature Along the River

In the Ozarks, species of the Southwest, Northeast, and Southeast mix with Ice Age remnants now typical of the Arctic. Armadillos, roadrunners, and scorpions co-exist here with lichens characteristic of arctic tundra. The park's ranges of elevation (from 385 to 2,385 feet), moisture, exposure, and soil types enhance this variety. The river boasts 59 species of clearwater fish. Whitetail deer, raccoon, opossum, bobcat, mink, beaver, and gray and fox squirrels are among the common mammals here. Black bear and mountain lion are rare, seldom seen residents.



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Enjoying the Park

Getting Here. Use U.S. 65 or Arkansas routes 7, 14, or 21 to get to the park. A commuter airline and buses serve nearby Harrison. Larger airports in Little Rock, Fayetteville, Ark., and Springfield, Mo., are 2- or 3-hour drives from the park. Reserve rental cars in advance. These central Ozark Mountains boast many scenic and recreation areas, many near the park.

Camping. Twelve campgrounds are open year round on a first-come first-served basis. Fees are charged only at Buffalo Point. This largest and most developed campground offers water and electrical hookups, restrooms, showers, and trailer dump station April through October. From November through March, services are limited to drinking water and vault toilets. Buffalo Point

campground fills most evenings from mid-June to mid-August. Arrive before noon then to find a site. Daily fees are charged April through November. The camping limit is 14 days. Buffalo Point also offers group campsites and day use pavilions which can be reserved by writing to the park superintendent. Lost Valley, the only campground not on the river, is the most popular upriver campground.

Its 15 walk-in sites have tables and fire grates. Drinking water and vault toilets are provided. The rest of the park campgrounds—from Steel Creek downriver to Rush Landing—are excellent locations for beginning or ending float trips. All have toilets. Steel Creek, Kyles Landing, Erbie, Ozark, and Rush Landing have drinking water. The steep, winding roads to Steel Creek and Kyles Landing

are not recommended for large trailers, buses, or motor homes.

Accommodations. A concessioner manages rental cabins at Buffalo Point. The restaurant there offers the park's only food service. For reservations and information write: Buffalo Point Concessions, HCR #66, Box 388, Yellville, AR 72687, or call (501) 449-6206. Find additional food service and

lodging in Harrison, Jasper, Marshall, Yellville, and other communities. Write to local chambers of commerce for information about services.

Hunting. An Arkansas hunting license is required and state regulations apply. Respect the rights of private property owners who have homes and livestock within the park boundary. Rangers at information stations can

provide current information on seasons and regulations.

Hiking. Short day-use hiking trails are located at Lost Valley, Hemmed-in Hollow, Pruitt, Gilbert, and Buffalo Point. For longer trips, hikers can walk the traces of former roads, follow old foot paths that wind along the river, or simply hike cross-country. Many old roads are shown on USGS topographic

maps. River hiking often requires fording the river, a difficult task which should not be attempted during high water. Cross-country hiking is best in winter, when undergrowth is sparse and snakes, ticks, and chiggers are dormant.

Interpretive Programs. Naturalist programs at Buffalo Point, Lost Valley, and other riverside locations in spring, summer,

and fall include campfire programs, guided walks and hikes, canoe trips, and Ozark craft and folk music demonstrations. Check at information stations for schedules.

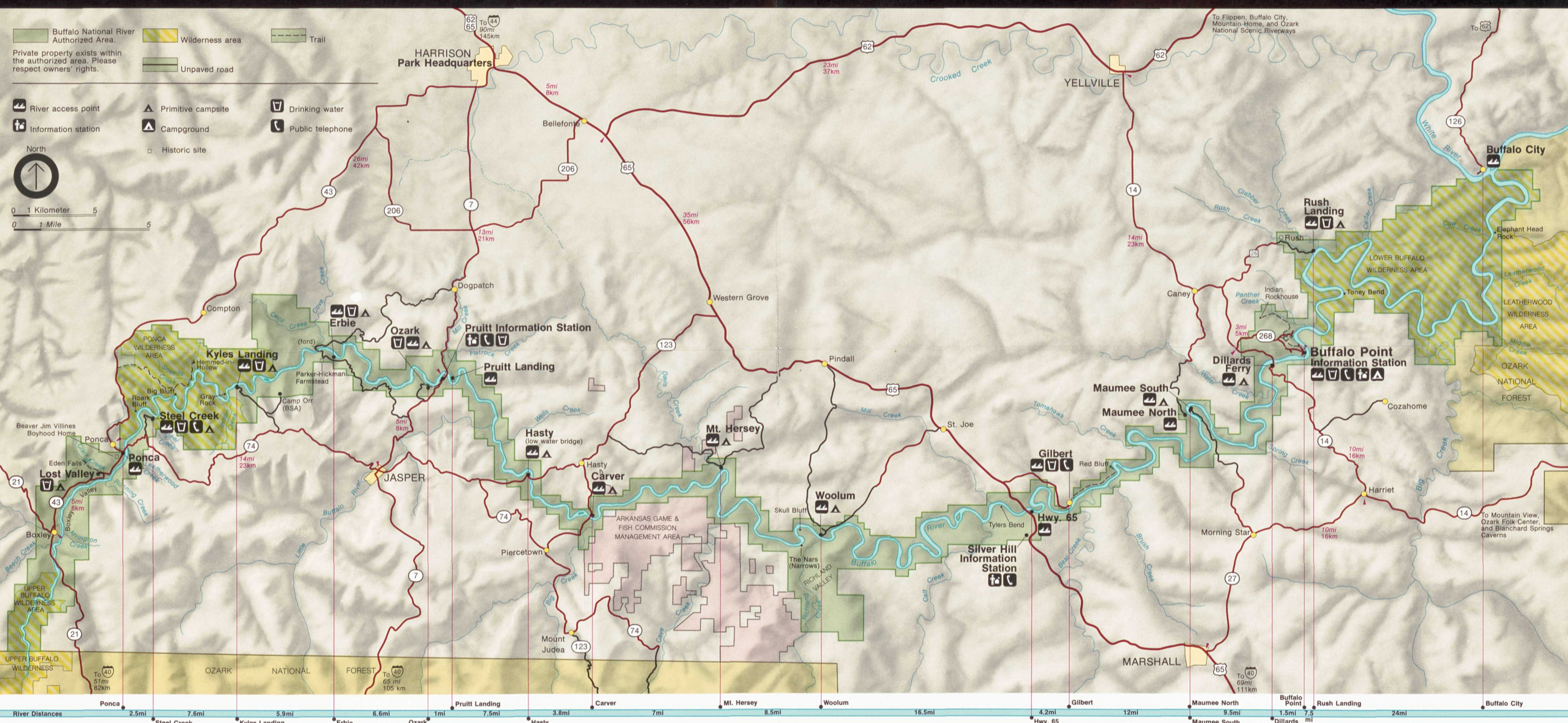
For Your Safety. The river is great for swimming, but never swim alone or during high water. There are no life-guarded swimming areas. Diving is extremely dangerous because unseen

rocks lie below the surface. Climbing riverside cliffs, with their loose, crumbly, slippery-when-wet rocks, can be hazardous. A fall means certain injury, and getting you to safety and medical help is difficult, dangerous, and may take several hours. Common sense is your best protection against accidents. Make sure you and your children realize that you are in a natural area with hazards unlike

those at home. Be alert to the presence of poisonous snakes. All animals, plants, geologic features, and artifacts are protected here.

To Learn More. River guides, topographic maps, and books exploring the region's culture, natural history, and history are sold at information stations and at park headquarters in Harrison. These can enhance your Buffalo River experience.

For Information. For more information about the park and your visit, write to: Superintendent Buffalo National River P.O. Box 1173 Harrison, AR 72602-1173, or call (501) 741-5443 or 449-4311.



Floating the Buffalo

Few experiences can compare to a float trip down the Buffalo. Clean waters, high bluffs, wooded hillsides, and myriad seasonal wildflowers conspire to turn staunch city lovers into nature enthusiasts. Inexperienced beginners can negotiate slow-moving river sections. Canoes may be rented at modest prices. Between Carver and Woolum, and below Rush, the river offers a near-wilderness experience. From Steel Creek to Carver and from Woolum to Maume you traverse an outdoor environment with limited facilities. Only in the Buffalo Point area do you find a park setting with modern facilities. Choices for length of float trips also abound. You can make half-day floats; a 10-day, 120-mile expedition; or anything in between.

Before Setting Out. Check with a ranger about river conditions before you set out. Canoeing experience is recommended for the stretch from Steel Creek to Pruitt. Offering the most exciting whitewater, this stretch is usually floatable in winter and spring only. Except during high water the river below Pruitt has relatively calm pools, periodic riffles, and only occasional fast water.

Concessioners. Along the river concessioners rent



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Tim Ernst/Southern Images



Neil Compton

River Access Point. Distances along river between access points are shown above. Average

floating time at "good floating level" is about two miles per hour.

canoes and offer related services. They provide everything you need for a trip—canoes, paddles, lifejackets—except personal gear and food. Heed their brief talks on canoe handling, which are designed to get you and their canoe safely down the river and through the rapids. Concessioners also provide shuttle services to and from your put-in and take-out points. Guided johnboat fishing trips are also available on the middle and lower

river. On these trips the concessioners provide all gear and the food. Write to the park superintendent for a list of canoe and johnboat concessioners.

Water Safety. Observe water safety regulations. An approved life jacket is required for all floaters. Waterproof your gear, stow it low and balanced, and carry an extra paddle. Never go on the river alone. No one should go on the river during periods of floodwater. Flood-

waters pose extreme hazards even to experts. Always camp where you can move to higher ground when rain threatens. Pull your canoe well out of the water or you may wake up as a hiker. The river can rise quickly and quietly.

The river invites swimming, but don't swim alone or during high water. Diving is extremely dangerous—unseen rocks lie below the water's surface.