

Buffalo River

National River
Arkansas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



An Island of Space and Time

The Buffalo comes as a surprise. How did a river so closely surrounded by civilization so thoroughly escape impoundment, impairment, and change? Yet it flows today as it always has. This integrity led to its designation as a national river on March 1, 1972, 100 years to the day after our first national park, Yellowstone, was established. Float the Buffalo, sit beside it quieted to all else, and you will discover its qualities as a national treasure. A half-wildness haunts this country. You are rarely 16 kilometers (10 miles) from a road, and often closer, but the land's true character has never been changed beyond recognition.

Rivers embody both change and permanence. Ever flowing, they are never quite the same. And so it is with the free-flowing and timeless Buffalo River. Time resonates among its ancient, carved out hills, but the present moment also dances like a twig down its rain swollen rapids. The Buffalo...an island of space and time where life forms extinct elsewhere persist.

The Buffalo River nestles in the Arkansas Ozarks. The Missouri, Mississippi, and Arkansas Rivers bound the region on the north, east, and south. On the west lies the prairie. These boundaries ecologically isolate the Ozarks. The region boasts 13 unique species of clearwater fish which could never disperse into surrounding muddy rivers. Isolated in livable conditions they survive comparatively unchanged. Several natural influences focus on the Ozarks, each lending life forms to these mountains' rare biological bounty. Here eastern woodlands and great plains meet. The glaciers halted their southward push here, depositing nor-

thern life forms but without scouring the hills. To the south lie rich alluvial lands. In the Ozarks the North's river birch, the East's beech tree, and the South's water tupelo share environments. Scorpions and roadrunners of the Southwest and lichens characteristic of arctic tundra both find niches here. The Buffalo River courses a sanctuary, a living biological museum with silent bluffs for walls.

No one knows the total number of plant species in the Buffalo drainage, but the Ozarks possess more than most areas, and more than 160 fish have been identified in the region. Curiously, only 43 mammal species are known, and 13 of these are bats.

The Buffalo Valley boasts 800 to 1,000 flowering plants enjoying a long season. It begins in January's warmer days with witch hazel blooming along the river and runs until late fall when pale, white Indian pipes hold forth from leaf mold deep in the woods. Ferns and mosses counterpoint the flowering plants. Delicate fernfalls spill like soft green fireworks from the faces of moist bluffs above the river, a special gift for floaters.

Why do plants crowd in so eagerly here? Diversity, a variety of habitats attracts them. When a living thing finds conditions right for survival it clings tenaciously to that habitat. The Buffalo and the Ozarks offer myriad choices—mountain balds, forests, meadows, hollows, dry and moist bluffs, springs, creeks, rivers, and gravel bars. The gravel bar community, a feature of the floater's world, often teems with "weeds," fast-rooting, quick-growing

plants with short life cycles. The river deposits their seeds on the bars and they attempt to reproduce before the next high water washes out the bars. In this sense gravel bars represent rapid change. But the gravel itself, mountains and bluffs ground down to stone, slowly plies its way downstream. It will become silt, and eventually, somewhere, soil.

Buffalo River bluffs, attaining heights up to 152 meters (500 feet), are the highest in the Ozarks. They represent stacks of ancient seabeds, eons of slow sedimentation. The river rises at 701 meters (2,300 feet) in the Boston Mountains, intent on carrying this material seaward again—the Ozarks perpetually dissolve themselves away, however slowly. On the geological timescale, catastrophic events happened here some 1.5 billion and 300 million years ago. After the first lava and then granites broke through the earth's crust, the entire area was uplifted, only to be subsequently covered with invading seas. The seas eventually retreated, to be followed by another dramatic uplift. Finally, erosive forces began the relentless sculpting still in progress today.

The Buffalo tumbles down 579 meters (1,900 feet) over its course, ending up only 122 meters (400 feet) above sea level where it joins the White River. Hemmed-in Hollow, one of many scenic side canyons, dramatizes this drop. Its 61-meter (200-foot) free-leaping waterfall is the highest of its kind between the Southern Appalachians and the Rockies. Many hidden and less spectacular side canyons have not been frequented since Civil War days. They still offer coveted isolation and are worth seeing

for that alone. Here you can trade stares with a frog and really feel that it might be the last frog on earth. It's a singular experience that enriches your sense of the natural world.

The meaning of the Buffalo River for our time and way of life is not difficult to grasp. It finds expression on the faces of people reacting to the river and its landscape: recreation and relaxation, exhilaration and enthusiasm. Some are soothed and some are challenged by the river. Still others challenge the river. The Buffalo provides a balance, and against it we can measure ourselves as an urban, industrial society. Call it curative or restorative, it is downright therapeutic.

Its special meaning for you is another matter, a matter between you and the river. Take a few moments by yourself at the water's edge and you will feel yourself wrapped in the river's gentle music and find the sounds of civilization stopped for a moment. This is the moment you have been waiting for, *your* moment in an island of space and time. Such moments are timeless and so natural. Why? Who knows . . . but take yours as a gift of the river, the wild and free-running Buffalo River.



The peaceful, looping meanders of the Buffalo belie the river's erosive, rock carving strength so evident in the steep bluffs. The missing ingredient in the photograph is time, endless spans of time. The best way to see the Buffalo—and to experience it—is by canoe, kayak, or other craft. You can bring your own or arrange rentals with several local outfitters.



A half-wildness haunts the Buffalo country. Left untended, man's works fade back into the environment and nature reasserts its grip on things. The river itself symbolizes this, its rising and falling taking and giving to and from the life along its banks.



A Way of Life Preserved

Well into the 1800s the Buffalo River country was an unbroken wilderness belonging to the Indians. Today it remains one of the least populated parts of Arkansas. Sparsely populated Newton County, through which the upper Buffalo flows, is the only county in Arkansas which has never had a railroad constructed within its boundary.

Virtually cut off from all contact with the outside world, the people of the Buffalo country continued lifeways that, in our nation as a whole, fell prey to time and change, to industrialization and urbanization. This country tells the same story today. A few steel bridges, scattered modern buildings, asphalt-surfaced highways...this peaceful valley has changed comparatively little since 1900.

The image of the Ozarks as an island preserving features lost elsewhere holds true both for its ecology and its culture. Social historians cannot agree on what culture—frontier or mountain—has been preserved here, but they do not dispute its preservation. Some of this culture is preserved in the Buffalo River's Boxley Valley, where people continue to follow traditional lifestyles.

The island effect created by the rough Boston Mountain terrain isolated the Buffalo River valley from surrounding improvements in communication, industry, and agriculture. The problem existed long before European settlers arrived in the early 1800s. The earliest native peoples here, the Bluff Dwellers, did not keep pace materially with surrounding peoples. By the time of Euro-

pean exploration the Buffalo Valley was largely an uninhabited seasonal hunting ground of the plains-dwelling Osage Indians. Until recently, the population trend since 1900 in the Buffalo Valley and the Ozarks had been downward. The exception came with the Great Depression when the self-sufficient agrarian lifestyle proved comparatively depression-proof. People plagued by unemployment fled cities and returned to the land to "grow their own" again. Most simply waited out the economic hard times, however, and World War II witnessed a massive exodus.

But times and values change. Today the region experiences new growth as people move here from urban areas for retirement or to find an alternate lifestyle. A life of relative hardship offering

greater feelings of self-sufficiency . . . what we sought to escape 20 years ago now appears attractive once again. In a sense the Buffalo River country has come full circle.

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Enjoying the Park

Getting Here Located in the mountainous region of northwest Arkansas, Buffalo National River can be reached by car by taking U.S. 65 or Arkansas routes 7, 14, or 21. Airlines and buses serve Harrison; airlines also serve larger cities nearby. Rental cars should be reserved in advance. You may want to plan on visiting some of the many other popular scenic and recreational areas that are within easy driving distance of Buffalo National River.

Camping Camping is an excellent way to enjoy the park and its surroundings. Twelve campgrounds, which are developed to varying degrees, are open year-round on a first-come, first-served basis. The largest and most popular is the Buffalo Point campground. Water and electrical hookups, restrooms, cold showers, and a trailer dump station are provided from April through October. From November through March services are limited to drinking water and vault toilets. Buffalo Point often fills from mid-June to mid-August. You should arrive before noon to find a site during this period. Fees of \$7 for sites with hookups and \$5 for tent sites are charged per night from April through November. A 14-day camping limit is enforced year-round.

Group campsites and picnic areas also are available at Buffalo Point. They can be reserved by writing the park superintendent.

The rest of the park's campgrounds are open free of charge. Lost Valley, the only campground not on the river, is the most popular upriver camping area. Drinking water and vault toilets are provided, and each of the 15 walk-in sites has a table and fire grate. The rest of the campgrounds—from Steel Creek downriver to Rush—provide excellent sites where you can begin or end a float trip. All these riverside areas have vault toilets. Steel Creek, Ozark, and Rush also have drinking water. Each campground can be reached by motor vehicles, but the steep, winding roads to Steel Creek and Kyles Landing are not recommended for large trailers, buses, or motor homes.

Accommodations The only overnight accommodations in the park are rental cabins located at Buffalo Point. For reservations and information write: Buffalo Point Concession, Rt. A, Box 214-0, Yellville, AR 72687; or call (501) 449-6206. A concession-run restaurant nearby provides the only food service in the park.

Food and lodging are also available in Harrison, Jasper, Marshall, Yellville, and other area communities. Write to local chambers of commerce for information on area services.

Fishing and Hunting The free-flowing Buffalo River provides productive waters for smallmouth and largemouth bass, catfish, and other favorite panfish. Fishermen must obtain an Arkansas license and obey state fishing regulations. Hunting is permitted on public lands within the national river boundary. Arkansas regulations pertaining to season, bag limits, and licenses apply. The rights of private property owners who have homes and livestock within the park boundary should be respected. Stop by an information station and let a park ranger help you choose a good hunting area.

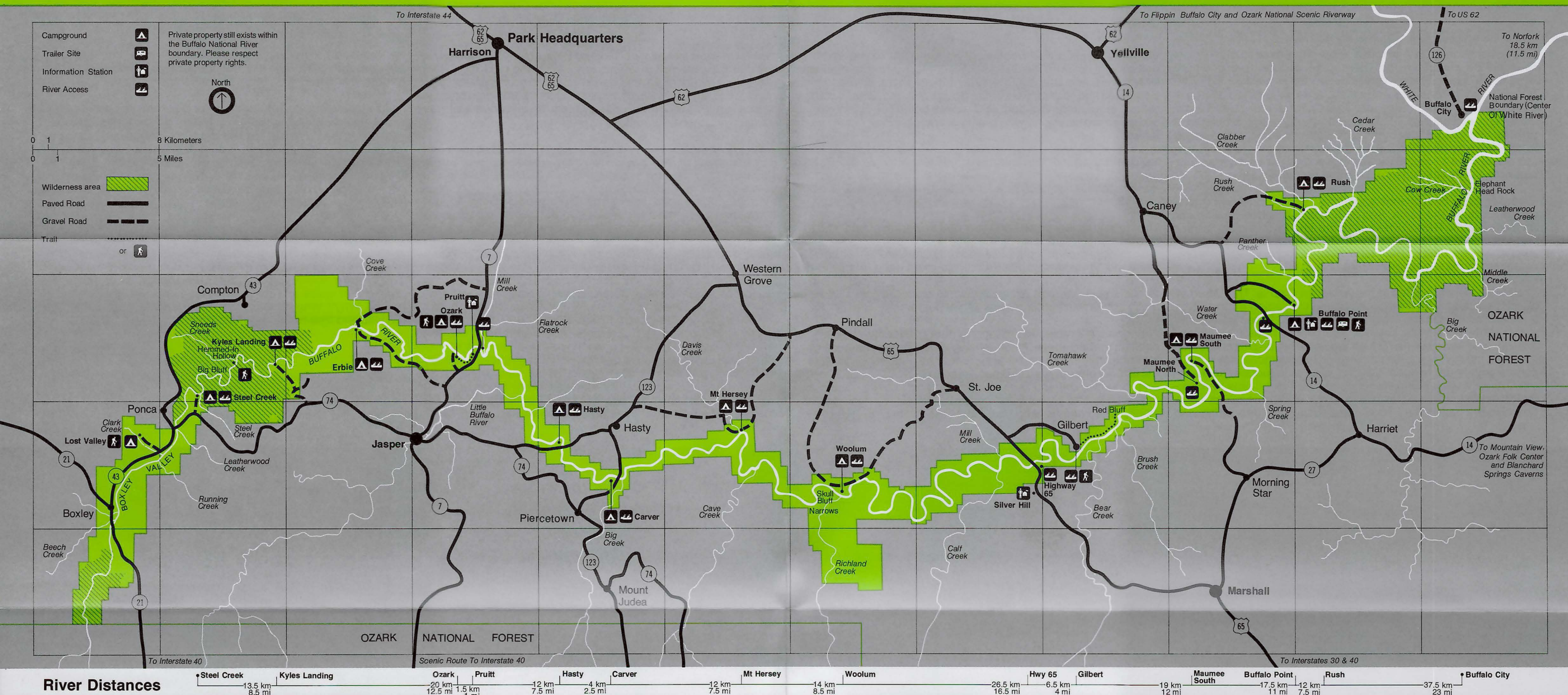
Hiking Short day-use hiking trails are located at Lost Valley, Hemmed-in Hollow, Pruitt, Gilbert, and Buffalo Point. For longer trips, backpackers can walk old, abandoned roads, follow the river, or hike crosscountry. Many old roads are shown on USGS topographic maps. River hiking often requires fording the river,

a difficult task during high water. Crosscountry hiking is most enjoyable in winter when undergrowth is sparse and ticks and chiggers are gone.

Interpretive Programs Naturalist programs are conducted at Buffalo Point, Lost Valley, and other riverside locations in spring, summer, and fall. Activities include evening campfire programs, guided hikes, canoe trips, and demonstrations of Ozark crafts and folk music. Check at an information station for program schedules.

To Learn More River guides, topographic maps, and books exploring the culture, natural history, and history of the region may be purchased at any information station or at park headquarters in Harrison. These publications can add new dimensions to your enjoyment of the Buffalo River area. You also can obtain information by writing to: Superintendent, Buffalo National River, P.O. Box 1173, Harrison, AR 72601; or by calling (501) 741-5443 or 449-4311.

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Floating the Buffalo

Few experiences in life can compare to a float trip down the Buffalo. The combination of clean water, high bluffs, wooded hillsides, and myriads of seasonal wildflowers is enough to turn the staunchest city lover into a nature enthusiast. A river trip is well within reach of anyone. Even the most inexperienced beginners can negotiate slow-moving sections of the river and there are plenty of canoes available to rent at modest prices. The Buffalo offers three different types of experiences to the floater. You can enjoy a near-wilderness environment (from Carver to Woolum and below Rush); an outdoor environment with limited facilities (from Steel Creek to Carver and from Woolum to Maumee); or a park setting with modern facilities (Buffalo Point area). You may choose to make a half-day float or a 10-day, 190-kilometer (120-mile) long expedition. Whatever trip you take on

the Buffalo, please remember to protect the river's beauty for floaters who will follow.

Approximately 25 park concessioners located along the river rent canoes and provide related services. Each outfitter offers basically the same services, but prices vary slightly. A concessioner will provide nearly everything you need for an enjoyable outing, including canoe, paddles, lifejackets, and a brief talk on canoe handling techniques designed to get you and the canoe safely down the river and through the rapids. Concessioners also will provide shuttle service for you and your vehicle to and from your chosen put-in and take-out points. You provide your own food and personal gear. For a list of canoe concessioners write the park superintendent.

For Your Safety Before setting out, check water conditions. Some experience is recommended for the Steel Creek-to-Pruitt stretch, which offers the most exciting whitewater. It is usually only floatable in winter and spring. Except during high water, the river below Pruitt is relatively safe even for novice canoeists. No one should go on the river during periods of high water; floodwaters pose extreme hazards even to experts. Watch water conditions during your trip, too; the river can rise very quickly and quietly. Pull yourself and your canoe well out of the water or you may wake up in the morning as a hiker. Always camp where you can move to higher ground when rain threatens.

Commonsense is your best protection against accidents. Observe water safety regulations. An approved lifejacket is required for

all floaters. Waterproof your gear, stow it low and balanced, and carry an extra paddle. Never go on the river alone. Poisonous snakes should be respected, for your sake and theirs. Snakes, like other animals, plants, and artifacts, are protected here. The river is great for swimming, but never swim alone or during high water. Diving is hazardous because unseen rocks lie below the surface. Climbing riverside cliffs, with their loose, crumbly, slippery-when-wet rocks can be dangerous; a fall means certain injury, and getting you to safety and medical help is difficult and dangerous. Make sure children realize they are in a natural area with hazards unlike those at home.