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The Buffalo National River

The **Buffalo National River** begins as a trickle in the Boston Mountains, where it flows north and then eastward through the Ozark Mountains until it merges 150 miles later with the White River at Buffalo City.

The upper Buffalo offers the river's finest scenic beauty. With its massive, towering bluffs, countless waterfalls, watchable wildlife, ties to both historic and prehistoric cultures, and remote, unspoiled location, the upper **Buffalo National River** wilderness is surely mid-America's finest outdoor destination.

In fact, the entire river is such a special place that in 1972, Congress designated it as America's first national river. This unique status protects the Buffalo from commercial or residential development, along with other destructive operations such as damming and gravel mining, thus preserving its scenic beauty and natural wild state forever.

Floating Season

The floating **season** on the upper Buffalo (Ponca to Pruitt) is March through June, with early July floating a possibility on occasion. The Buffalo is primarily dependent upon rainfall for its water level, so once the rains of spring and early summer have passed, so has the chance to float the upper section. (Hiking, however, is great year-round, as is trail riding!)

SPECIAL NOTE: As a river preservation measure, the National Park Service limits the number of rental boats that can be launched on any given day. **Therefore, if you are planning a weekend float, it is wise to reserve your boat(s) in advance.** For example, it is never too early to book a boat for a May weekend, which is the upper Buffalo's most popular floating month.

River Levels & Safety

The Buffalo is rated Class I & II, meaning that it is typically suitable for paddlers of most any age and skill level (see Young Children note below). Floating is generally done in canoes, with rafting and kayaking possible when the water level is high enough. In the event of flooding, the National Park Service will close the river to boating.

RIVER SAFETY & YOUNG CHILDREN:

Children should be at least age 4 and able to swim before floating the Buffalo. Consider taking little tykes to one of the pretty local swimming holes (just ask us a local for directions). Small ones love playing in the sand and splashing about in the calm water's edge rather than taking a long, uncertain canoe ride. If you need help determining if a float trip is right for a child or anyone else in your group, just call a local river outfitter

Float Trip Options

DAY TRIPS

The most popular float---and without a doubt the river's most scenic---is from Ponca to Kyle's Landing, a 10-mile float that takes between four and six hours to complete. When the water from Ponca to Kyle's is too low to float, the day-trip launch site is moved downriver to the Pruitt access, where you float seven miles to Hasty. Check river outfitter websites for current river levels and launching points.

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MULTI-DAY TRIPS

The most popular multi-day trip is the Ponca to Pruitt trip, a 24-mile float that takes a minimum of two days to complete. However, with 150 miles of **Buffalo National River** to explore, there are many ways to plan a multi-day trip. Call a local outfitter for expert assistance with planning an overnight float trip.

River Mileage

Here's a handy reference chart of the most popular float trips. Please remember that the "Time Required" to complete a trip can vary somewhat due to water level, weather conditions, and the speed and skill with which you paddle.

River Trip	# of Miles	Time Required
Ponca to Kyle's Landing	10 miles	4 to 6 hours
Steel Creek to Kyle's	8 miles	4 to 5 hours
Ponca to Pruitt	24 miles	2 days (min)
Pruitt to Hasty	7 miles	4 to 5 hours
Pruitt to Carver	11 miles	6 to 7 hours
Pruitt to Woolum	26 miles	2 days (min.)

Boat Rental

BOATS & EQUIPMENT

Canoes, rafts, and kayaks are available for rent. Paddles and life vests are included in your rental.

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HOW MANY BOATS YOU'LL NEED

When it comes to canoes, two adults per canoe is the **recommendation**. This allows for good balance and adequate room for gear. However, it is not uncommon for three small-frame adults or parents with one or two average-sized youngsters to share a canoe.

Most rafts can comfortably hold up to six people along with an average amount of gear. (Remember, rafting is highly dependent upon a good water level, so if the Buffalo is too low to raft you should consider a canoe.)

Launch Times & Sites

DAY TRIPS

Boats launch between 8:30 a.m. and Noon. This gives you plenty of time to complete your float before dark, and enjoy some hiking or picnicking along the way.

Launch sites for the Ponca to Kyle's Landing float vary, depending upon water level and the day of the week. On Saturdays, the National Park Service requires that rental boats be launched at nearby Steel Creek. Otherwise, if the water level permits, outfitters launch at Ponca which allows two additional miles of floating, as well as the chance to float alongside magnificent Roark Bluff.

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Glass, Trash, & Other Regulations

Glass containers are prohibited on the Buffalo River. And, ice chests MUST have the lids secured so that contents stay put in the event of a tipped canoe. Also, open beverages must be placed in a FLOATABLE holder, such as a can cooler.

At the launch site, you'll receive a trash bag that will conveniently help you keep your boat and the river debris free. At the end of your trip, simply place your trash bag in a park waste can.

For more information about park regulations such as campfires, pets, backcountry waste, etc., contact the Buffalo's National Park Service headquarters in Harrison, Arkansas.

Camping

The **Buffalo National River** is an outstanding float-and-camp river. The upper section offers several primitive camp sites with limited services.

CAMPGROUNDS NEAR PONCA

Lost Valley	Small campground located at the trailhead to the Lost Valley trail; just 1.5 miles south of Ponca on Hwy 43; not a riverside campground; small travel trailers and campers can fit here (remember, no hookups though)
Steel Creek	Large open camping area; located along the most scenic bluff on the Buffalo; also offers a horse camp for trail riders; just two miles downriver of the Ponca low water bridge
Kyle's Landing	Scenic camping 10 miles downriver of Ponca; great to use as an overnight spot for a multi-day trip

FEES: \$10 per night per site

SERVICES: These sites typically feature a tent site, fire grate, picnic table, lantern hook, and pit or flush toilets common to all campers. A few sites have pay phone service. None of the sites offer electrical or waste hookups.

RESERVING A SITE: Camp sites are available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

CAMPING ALONG THE RIVER: You may camp anywhere along the river as long as you stay 1/2 mile below or above a designated campground (such as Kyle's). While this type of camping is the ultimate outdoor experience, it also requires that you take special measures to protect the landscape. **Contact the National Park Service at for complete camping/campground details and regulations.**

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