

A decorative graphic consisting of three blue circles of varying sizes and two thin blue lines. One line starts from the top left and extends towards the center, passing through the top-left edge of the largest circle and the top-left edge of the medium circle. The second line starts from the top right and extends towards the center, passing through the top-right edge of the largest circle and the top-right edge of the medium circle. A third, larger blue circle is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page.

Floating the Buffalo National River

with First River Outfitter

Michelle Hulett

The Buffalo River

Beginning as just a trickle, The Buffalo National River runs down the Boston Mountains, flows north and then east through the Ozark Mountains, and 150 miles later it empties into the White River at Buffalo City.

The upper Buffalo displays unparalleled scenic beauty. This section of river winds past colorful and towering bluffs, waterfalls. The river also provides glimpses of wildlife such as beaver, mink, otter, deer, and eagles. The upper Buffalo National River wilderness is a remote, unspoiled location and one of the mid-America's finest outdoor destinatin.

The 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, and prevents other destructive operations such as damming and gravel mining, thus preserving its scenic and natural beauty forever.

Floating Season

Floating season on the upper Buffalo 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. Most floating during this time happens between Ponca and Pruitt. Hiking and trail riding, however, are great year-round!

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.** It is never too early to book a boat for a May weekend, 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. Until they are old enough to float, we recommend taking little tykes to one of the pretty local swimming holes (any local will be glad to give 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 and scenic float is from Ponca to Kyle's Landing. This 10-mile float usually 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 the First River Outfitter website for current river levels and launching points.

MULTI-DAY TRIPS

The most popular multi-day trip is Ponca to Pruitt, a 25-mile float that takes a minimum of two days

to complete. However, with 150 miles of River to explore, there are many ways to enjoy a multi-day trip. Call First River Outfitter for expert assistance with planning an overnight float trip.

River Mileage

This reference chart shows the most popular float trips. Please note that the “Time Required” to complete a trip can vary 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	25 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, life vests, and trash bags are included in your rental.

HOW MANY BOATS YOU’LL NEED

We recommend floating with two adults per canoe. This provides good balance and adequate space for gear. However, it is not uncommon for three small-frame adults or parents with one or two average-sized children to share a canoe.

Most rafts can comfortably hold up to six people with an average amount of gear. Note that rafting is very dependent upon water level, so if the river is too low to raft you should consider a canoe.

Kayaks provide a great alternative to canoeing. We have kayaks that fit one or two persons. Spray skirts, kayak paddles, and life vests are included in your rental.

Launch Times & Sites

DAY TRIPS

Boats launch between 8:00 a.m. and Noon. This gives you plenty of time to complete your float before dark, and allows time to picnic or hike a segment of trail along the way.

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

Glass, Trash, & Other Regulations

Glass containers are prohibited on the Buffalo River. Ice chests MUST have the lids secured so that contents do not litter the river in the event of a tipped canoe. 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 help you keep your boat and the river debris free. At the end of your trip, please place your trash bag in a park waste can.

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

Camping

The Buffalo National River is an ideal float-and-camp river. Nothing beats camping on a sandbar near the river for complete peace and tranquility. For those who don't want to be quite so isolated, there are also 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 but there are no hookups.
Steel Creek	Large open camping area; located along the most scenic bluff on the Buffalo just two miles downriver of the Ponca low water bridge. This area offers a horse camp for trail riders.
Kyle's Landing	Open and 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.**

Plan Your Trip Now!

Pick Your Options from the Chart Below

Select Start Point	Select End Point	Number of Days	Canoe Rates	Canoe Rates w/ Tax	Kayak Rates	Kayak Rates w/ Tax
Ponca	Kyle's Landing	1	\$50	\$54.50	\$45	\$49.05
Steel Creek	Pruitt	2	\$100	\$109.00	\$90	\$98.10
Kyle's Landing	Hasty	3	\$150	\$163.50	\$135	\$147.15
Pruitt	Carver	4	\$175	\$190.75	\$180	\$196.20

Hasty	Woolum	5	\$200	\$218.00	\$200	\$218.00
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Enter your personal information:

Name of People in Your Party	Age	Home Address	City	State	Zip

Bring This Completed Form To First River Outfitters For Your Trip