

BUFFALO RIVER GUIDE no. 3

AN AMATEUR'S REVIEW OF OUTDOOR TOPICS FOR THE 2005 T254 OZARK CANOE EXPEDITION



Fishing on the Buffalo River and the White River of Arkansas



The Buffalo National River begins as a trickle as it glides down the Boston Mountains and empties into the White River. The Buffalo River's cool, clean waters are the perfect habitat for Smallmouth Bass, Channel Catfish, Green and Longear Sunfish and Spotted Bass. The Buffalo River has oxygen-rich water and gravel bottoms that Smallmouth Bass love. There are over 50 species of fish that can be found in the Buffalo National River. The Buffalo is the river for all seasons.



***** The Buffalo River is a paradise for those interested in viewing fish underwater. The brightest and most colorful fish in the mid U. S. can be found in the shallows of the Buffalo River. Approximately, 20 species of colorful darters can be found in shallow and swift habitats known as riffles and runs. These habitats are most frequent in the upper and middle districts of the park. In all, 59 species of fish ranging from the small rainbow darter to the aggressive Smallmouth Bass can be found within the Buffalo River.

Water clarity is superb. Consider bringing mask, snorkel, and fins to view the underwater world. *****



Fishing the Buffalo

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 number of fish species. The biggest attraction here is the smallmouth bass. Anglers also go after largemouth and spotted bass, catfish, goggle-eye (rockbass), and a variety of other panfish.

Fishing in Arkansas' Ozark Mountain Region has long been enjoyed by visitors and residents alike. With two of the state's premier lakes -- Bull Shoals and Norfork -- and three of the state's premier fishing rivers -- Buffalo National River, White River and North Fork River -- this region is a favorite destination of anglers of all varieties. You can have your choice of fishing adventures including a variety of bass, trout and pan fish. And for a twist, the area lakes offer great scuba diving and spear fishing.

On May 9, 1992, the late Howard "Rip" Collins went on an impromptu fishing trip with a neighbor, and returned with a 40-pound, four-ounce brown. It still stands as a world record.

Browns are cousins to the rainbow, brook, cutthroat and lake trout and all are part of the action in Arkansas' cold mountain waters. While browns are the largest, rainbows remain the number-one catch. Jim Miller of Memphis, TN, reeled the state-record rainbow from the White River on March 14, 1981. It tipped the scales at 19-pounds, one-ounce.

Trout fishing was virtually unknown in Arkansas until the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built dams at Norfork, Bull Shoals, Greers Ferry and Beaver and created an ideal habitat downstream. Since the beginning, National Fish Hatcheries at Norfork, Greers Ferry and Mammoth Spring have supplied stocking trout for one of the state's most successful fishing industries. The combined in-state hatcheries produce over two million trout for Arkansas' waters each year.

Arkansas boasts over 150 miles of trout-filled streams for fishermen. The White River provides over 90 miles of habitat downstream from Bull Shoals. Trout are also found in Bull Shoals Lake.

Fly-fishing is popular in the tailwaters of all the state's big dams, but anglers must stay alert for sudden changes in river stages due to power generation at each site. Johnboats, flat-bottomed rigs with comfortable chairs, are the preferred mode of fishing travel below the larger dams. Guide services, full-service marinas, resorts, camping and cabins are all available in most of the trout zones.

Although fishing on Lake Norfolk can be excellent any time of the year and there is no closed fishing season, April is considered a prime month and March is also an excellent time of the year. Summer months find the fish in the deeper waters away from the shores and the preferred time to go fishing is at night. The best white bass time is the winter months with December being the choice of most anglers. For some species, spearfishing is permitted year 'round, but it is recommended that you consult the State Game and Fish Regulations.

And . . . not to be left out, the Buffalo National River is considered a very desirable smallmouth bass stream because of its pristine, oxygen-rich, swift flowing water and clean habitat. It also is laden with the kind of gravel bottoms and boulders that smallmouth seek for bedding. The preferred method of fishing the Buffalo is floating in a johnboat or canoe. Another enjoyed method is positioning your boat or canoe near the head of a swift, deep chute and casting your lure above a boulder bed and allowing patience to work its miracles. Knowledgeable local anglers suggest that to land the big one, try fishing the fast waters or fish at night working the surface lures.

Though most people fish the Buffalo for smallmouth, it's also perfect for spotted bass, channel catfish and sunfish. Good baits include more traditional fare such as worms, minnows and crayfish or crawdads.

One sure way to know that you will have the best opportunities for a successful fishing adventure is to secure the services of a qualified guide. The many outfitters, docks and accommodations providers in the region are a great source of information and referrals. Most have a list of the best in their area and can assist you in securing the professional guide services you're seeking. You'll find that prices are very reasonable compared to other areas of the country. One note, if you have special needs such as catch and release, discuss them with your guide upfront before you contract their service.

For The Record; Arkansas Sportfishing Records:
(Arkansas's Ozarks holds 9 of the 51 Statewide records)

- Trout, cutthroat: 9 pounds, 9 ounces, White River, Oct. 6, 1985
- Trout, rainbow: 19 pounds, 1 ounce, White River, March 14, 1981
- Bass, Ozark: 1 pounds, 8 ounces, Lake Norfolk, Aug. 8, 1982
- Bass, smallmouth: 7 pounds, 5 ounces, Bull Shoals Lake, March 1, 1969
- Bass, spotted: 7 pounds, 15 ounces, Bull Shoals Lake, March 26, 1983
- Bass, striped: 64 pounds, 8 ounces, Beaver Tailwaters - White River, April 28, 2000
- Bass, white: 5 pounds, 4 ounces, Bull Shoals Lake, April 23, 1984
- Bluegill: 2 pounds, 1 ounce, Boone County, May 2, 1974
- Drum, freshwater: 33 pounds, 12 ounces, Bull Shoals Lake, July 1, 1979

Smallmouth Bass

A number of streams have been selected for intensified smallmouth bass management. Refer to the 'Regulations for Flowing Waters' section starting on page 63 if you plan to fish for smallmouth.

The statewide daily limit is four.

In the Ozark zone, smallmouth bass must be at least 12 inches long to keep and in the rest of the state, they must be at least 10 inches long. Check your destination in the section starting on page 63 to see if special limits apply.



White River - Trout Fishing Profile

Species to be found: The fishery is noted for its trophy brown trout, but the staple fish is the rainbow, stocked by the millions, and the fish most likely to be caught. In addition to the brown and rainbow trout, there are a few cutthroats and brookies stocked in the White. The White River's name has been made by the huge brown trout found in its cold water—browns up to nearly 40 pounds. Experts guess that it is just a matter of time before a 50 pounder is caught. Brown trout over 20 pounds are

caught many times each year, and the angler who doesn't catch a 2 - 5 pounder needs to stay on the river just a little longer. Rainbow trout have been caught as big as 19 pounds on the White River, so the opportunity exists for a multicolored lunger. Most of the brown trout are wild, and some of the rainbows are wild. Most of the rainbow trout are stocked, and brown trout in much smaller numbers are annually stocked. Don't be too surprised to catch smallmouth and largemouth bass, catfish, or sunfish either, as they are plentiful in the river.

Average sizes: Rainbows typically run from 9 - 16 inches. Fishermen catch so many 15-inch rainbows they tend to fish out the river of these stockers until the next stocking date. Browns run from 10 - 18 inches, and many will be larger than that.

Regulations: From Bull Shoals Dam to Bull Shoals State Park, fishing is catch-and-release only for brown trout year around, and anglers are restricted to barbless, artificial lures and flies (no bigger than a size 8). It is closed to all fishing from Nov 1- Jan 31 of each year to protect the Brown trout spawning area. Also, the state park area of the river is also catch and release during the Nov-Jan period. The other fishable parts of the White River are subject to a two-creel limit on brown trout, and a total creel limit of trout of six. All brown trout kept must measure longer than 16 inches.

Places to fish along the river: Riffles (known as shoals) are very productive spots to fish the White. The shoals are named; some of the more famous ones are Roundhouse, Rim, Wildcat, Upper, Middle, Lower, Buffalo, and White Shoals. Many think that Rim Shoals is the best water on the White River, and the traffic in the area tends to back this theory. Fish around islands, submerged rocks, in the runs, in long pools and backwater eddies. When the water rises, the riffles become just more flat water, more of a glide. Fish the edges, the current breaks. Look for underwater structure. Look around the gravel bars before splashing around in the water, because you'd be surprised how many trout feed in the shallow waters. Fish are everywhere in this productive tailwater fishery.

Recommended Equipment

For spincasters, an ultralight medium spinning rod with 4 - 8 pound test line will do just fine, but if you are trophy hunting, a heavier weight outfit might better suit you. Flyfishers will want a 9-foot, 4 or 5 weight outfit, and a 6 weight won't be too heavy for some of these monsters and fast water. Leaders don't always have to be of the 7X variety, and 4X or 5X will suffice.

Top fly patterns: The best hatches occur in the spring (in April, May and June), and the best dry fly fishing is at this time. Hatches last until the end of summer, but most are small mayflies and caddisflies, as small as sizes 18 - 22. Most of the time, fish underwater with nymphs, wet flies and streamers. The best patterns are (and this is a diverse group of dressings) Sculpin, Muddler Minnow, Crayfish, Woolly Worm, Woolly Buggers, Zonker, Midge, Scud, Red Squirrel, Hare's Ear, San Juan worm, Shad, sow bugs, March Brown nymph, Caddis pupa, shrimp, Glo Bug, Prince nymph, Serendipity, Hoppers, Elk Hair Caddis, Sulphur, Light Cahill. Spinning lures include spoons, in-line spinners, and crankbaits. Combo rigs include microjigs tipped with waxworms. Shad imitations are important because the trout are used to feeding on shad sucked through the dam turbines.

Recommended Techniques

Nymph fishing is by far the most effective technique for flyfishing for trout, usually with a dropper rig. Glo-Bugs are often used as attractors on these droppers. Dead-drift nymphs when floatfishing across promising lies. Shrimp and sow bugs at the end of the dropper are the sensible way to imitate the trout's food source, since imitating snails, another of their meals, is hard to do.

Best access points: Along this 100-mile course there are access points galore, too many to even begin to name.

Quality of Angling

Few writers write about the beauty of the White River. Maybe they are too consumed by the numerous trout docks, resorts, and other establishments along the river. Maybe the powerboats cruising up and down the river disturb their aesthetic. But the White River, when shrouded by a gentle fog in the early morning, has an otherworldly quality. Great bluffs squeeze against the wide, gentle river. Thickly forested hillsides slope down to the banks. The White River has a lot of water, but it often seems crowded. Maybe it is, but there is more than enough room for all anglers. Float a little to the next shoal, to the next run. If you are a flyfisher, you are in the minority, although the preponderance of baitfishermen is dwindling little by little. Spincasting is still very popular