

# Buffalo River Ramblings



Jan-March 2015

Newsletter of the Buffalo River Chapter of the Ozark Society

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*The challenge goes on. There are other lands and rivers, other wilderness areas, to save and to share with all. I challenge you to step forward to protect and care for the wild places you love best.” – Dr. Neil Compton*



## Buffalo River Reflections

by Laura Timby

The past month of rain has caused quite a rise on the Buffalo, with swirling brown waters seeping high up into the banks, and the swift current carrying huge logs and other debris on towards the White River. Only this past week has the river finally cleared enough to exhibit its characteristic turquoise blue color. The gravel bar has been swept clean and wave patterns in the sand have been laid down anew. A walk along the shore reveals new pieces of river glass carried in and gently deposited like jewels to reward an observant visitor. Fresh beaver chews are scattered about, reminiscent of intricate whittling sticks with their unique pattern of teeth marks. With temperatures well below freezing for the second straight week, ice flows along the bluffs and waterfalls have grown to dramatic proportions. Gone are the crowds of summer and the ensuing peace and quiet has emboldened the resident wildlife to venture out from their hiding places. This time of year it is not unusual to spot one or two Bald Eagles soaring high above the river. What an amazing time to get out and enjoy the river.

Our Buffalo River is like no other place on earth and it behooves us to ensure its continued protection. The “Battle for the Buffalo” is once again taking place. Let our elected officials know that we expect our river to be protected from large factory farms. Tell them to enact a permanent ban on medium to large CAFO’s in the Buffalo River watershed and we will settle for nothing less. Let your voices be heard, the River is counting on us.

## Hidden Giants by Farrel Couch

On most hikes I am always on the lookout for big grape vines, as it signifies the area hasn’t been disturbed. On rare occasions we find large vines, but only on three occasions have we found true giants. One such occasion occurred on our last hike into Dug Hollow. While skirting around below a high bluff we stumbled upon a huge grape vine growing up the side of the bluff and into the trees on top. The vine I am talking about is at least ten inches in diameter and I suspect centuries old. These vines have survived not only the ravages of time, but also the logging boom of the last two centuries. The vine in Dug Hollow was still in great shape compared to the two other giant grape vines I know of. Still solid and producing viable fruit, as we found out after getting to the top of the bluff and seeing the trees on top full of the past seasons grapes. The other two giant vines I have seen are split into ribbons. One still hangs from its parent tree in Whittaker Creek’s virgin forest. The other is in worse shape as it’s parent tree is long gone and its lower portion is on the ground being swept by Running Creek in Boxley, it also is in danger because it’s on private property in a grove of virgin Beech trees. Seeing these vines does my heart good as it shows there are a few survivors from the wilderness that once covered the rugged Ozark Mountains. A quick check on the Internet didn’t show much about the subject, except a few random photos of vines mostly for length not diameter. I would love to hear from anyone who knows of other giant vines. It seems that these vines should be protected and cataloged because of their size and rarity.

## Discovering Grapevine Falls by Cale Nicholson

I joined a group of six Buffalo River Chapter members (with two guests) to bushwhack about six miles down and back out of Dug Hollow in Newton County on the morning of December 14<sup>th</sup>. Like many similar

waterways in this area of the Ozarks, Dug Creek slowly meanders down the mountain on the north side of Cave Mountain Road to form an ever-increasing drainage with multiple waterfalls and stone formations before emptying into the Buffalo River. Little did we know setting out on that chilly Sunday morning, but we would make a couple of impressive discoveries before the day was through!

We took our lunch amidst a charming collection of sandstone cairns (welcome vestiges of hikers past) beneath one of the day's most impressive features, a 30 foot waterfall called "The Pour-off." Huge boulders litter the base of the falls and a few of us scampered around these monoliths like prehistoric woodland creatures exploring their Paleozoic world. Crossing the creek, we continued down the mountain further inspecting the bluff face as it steadily grew above us. Scrambling over a shifting bed of flaked shale, Farrell proudly pointed out "his" rock. Our trusty guide discovered this intricately weathered, freestanding sandstone, roughly 3 feet in diameter, about twenty-five years ago on the same hike we were presently enjoying. We all marveled at the complicated rivulets and hollows and joked about the best possible strategies for hauling out this stone, which must have weighed close to 150lbs.

As we continued down the creek hollow, the bluff line continued to rise several hundred feet above us to the point where there was no simple way for us to climb up so as to double our way back to our waiting vehicles. Little known to us, the most surprising part of the day's hike was waiting a few short paces ahead. Around the next bend, Farrell held the group up by letting out a yelp of astonishment! "Wow, folks! Look at that!" Our interest piqued, we scurried up to discover one of the largest grapevines any of us had ever seen. Its base, which was surprisingly intact for its size, measured approximately a foot in diameter. Craning our necks up, we observed that the vine climbed at least 50 feet up the bluff and when pressed, Farrell estimated that this giant grapevine had to be at least 200-300 years old!

Our luck continued to come up aces when turning the corner past the giant grapevine we were met with a 50 foot waterfall that none of us were familiar with. We were also happy to discover a serviceable place to make our ascent and, along with the help of a strategically placed climbing rope, we were able to scramble up to the top of the bluff face to begin our return journey. Looking out over the top of the newly discovered falls to the land below, I noticed dozens and dozens of smaller grapevines both littering the forest

floor and climbing the sycamores into the woodland canopy. "This is Grapevine Falls," I realized in awe. All present agreed and the naming was settled!

## **BUFFALO RIVER TRAIL WORK TO RESUME IN MARCH** by Ken Smith

In spite of uncertainties as this is written in early January, volunteers are to resume work on the Buffalo River Hiking Trail the middle of March.

Presently volunteers cannot work within the 5.5-mile middle section of the trail. In that section a tract of private land sits astride the trail route. Efforts are underway to acquire the tract for the National Park Service. If the tract is not acquired by mid-March (and that's a very tight deadline), volunteers this spring can work elsewhere

"Elsewhere" means completing short stretches of unfinished trail along the remainder of the entire 28-mile project. This work also needs to be done, and volunteers would see many interesting parts of the trail.

Whatever happens, volunteers have only about 2-1/2 miles left to complete all they can do in building the trail. Beyond that, a Park Service trail crew will need to install flights of rock steps, then develop parking spaces at trailheads, and finally install directional signs. Experienced "alumni" volunteers are to work the week of March 29 - April 4. College students on Spring Break will be on hand at times during March and April.

We expect to set up camp for volunteers at the group campsites at Tyler Bend on March 14, and close the camp on April 11. During that period, anyone coming to work on the trail can camp there free of charge. For further information, contact Ken Smith at 479-466-7994 or kennethsmith616@yahoo.com

## **EXCERPTS FROM A TRAIL-BUILDERS' DIARY – 2010** by Jim Liles

*Editor's note: This is a follow-up to previous "Excerpts from a Trail-Builder's Diary"*

02/17/10 – After enjoying the month of January in the great American Southwest, Suzie & I returned to the Ozarks to find them under several inches of recently fallen snow, which persisted into mid-February. Now finally back to trail-building, I worked west from the trails crossing of the Spring Creek road intersection, over relatively easy (flat) terrain, "vanilla trail-building," as Ken Smith calls it . . . At day's-end, I enjoyed a good eye-level view of a pair of beautiful Bald Eagles -- one adult and a first-year juvenile -- flying over the river. Made about 50 yards of new trail, over 5 hours.

02/19/10 -- completed another 50 yards, another pleasant day in the great outdoors.

02/23/10 -- Six hours on trail-work, making almost 70 yards (relatively easy-going -- really *vanilla*) . . . Took a long lunch break, walking about a half-hour down-river, along the trail I & other volunteers built in '09 . . . At *St. Peter Sandstone* bluff-top, noticed a fairly "fresh" set of tracks that matched those of a cougar; also found a big cat-like "scat" -- mostly containing deer hair. Cougars certainly inhabit the Ozarks! (I know the big cat well, having spent the 6 years before settling in the Ozarks in Big Bend Nat'l Park, Texas.)

02/25/10 -- Spent the day "checking-out" the country thru which the "new trail" passes, Spring Creek to the South Maumee road. I collected the cougar scat found two days previously, and made a plaster cast of the best track . . . What fine views from the trail!

02/27/10 -- Built 40 yards of trail (3 ½ hrs.) . . . saw a box turtle emerging from its winter "burial" in trail-side loam; watched a robin close by for much of the time I worked, engaged in pulling fat earthworms from the freshly-dug soil. Then I hiked back down to cougar-track-site, photographing same and collecting my plaster track-cast, now dry. . . A fine Bald Eagle flew over the river on my way back up to the truck.

03/04/10 -- Worked 4+ hours, built 35 yards of trail . . . Two hikers strolled through; said they had a place on the head of Water Creek . . . seemed well acquainted with the area . . . Tried to recruit them for trail building; said they were busy building trails on their land.

03/08/10 -- Cleared 45 yards (5 ½ hrs.)... saw Snow Geese moving north across azure sky.

03/18/10 -- Going now harder, on rocky hill-side -- made 25 yards, in 5+ hours . . . Back home to our "Bald Jesse Farm," where bloodroot and jonquils blooming!

03/19/10 -- Temperature over 70 degrees . . . Dedicated this last day of winter to finishing off a task that has occupied several day of the winter past: cutting out "the worst" of the lingering ice-damaged trails and over-look on our property bordering Buffalo National River, with a clear view of two river miles . . . Noted first sarvis bloom of the spring, along with other wildflowers.

03/23/10 -- Arrived at trail work-site, to find a volunteer group of 8 -- mostly college students from DePaul U. (Chicago) -- working away. I completed about 60 yards (over "vanilla" terrain: 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.), while the group, collectively, built about 190 yards of trail, over two days . . . Enjoyed the company of those healthy, enthusiastic kids!

04/08/10 -- A cooler day (high of 65 degrees . . . good working temp on my last day of trail-building until fall; made about 30 yards after spending a couple of hours trenching a trail through a big mound of dirt left by some pre-park (logging?) activity . . . Back home, the first ruby-throated hummingbird of spring arrived at sunset, to its "old" feeder location on the front porch, as Suzie & I sat enjoying the sunset -- then a final fire in the big fire-place, time to close up the fireplace and put up trail tools till fall.  
BACK ON THE TRAIL -- Autumn 2010: Upon returning to the Ozarks, after the summer in the Colorado

(and Canadian) Rockies, spent 10/27/10 revisiting trails I'd built in the mid & late '80s: the 1.8 mile "Falls Trail" from the Compton Trailhead down into Hemmed-in-Hollow; and the "Sneeds Creek Trail" (former single-track, historic road), back up to the trailhead -- a 7 mile "loop." . . . Admired the NPS trail crew work, vastly improving the stone steps I'd set 23-24 years earlier, along the "Falls Trail."

11/20/10 -- Joined by Rene Lebrun (my long-time canoeing partner, age 80), went to the BRT/South Maumee road crossing, in response to Ken Smith's e-mailed invitation to a volunteer trail workday. We met Ken, Layton Chambers and Larry, and proceeded to the up-river end of the completed trail -- a stretch which had been extended by about 245 yards, built by the recent fall (2010) volunteer groups . . . "Iron-Man" Rene and I roughed-out a preliminary "scratch-line" for about 100 yards, along the steep hill-side, over-looking the low-flowing Buffalo River; while Ken and his two helpers ranged on up-river, raking, lopping intruding limbs and saplings, and Ken "fine-tuning" the trail alignment, planting -- every 10 feet -- the little blue wire-flags, marking the "cut-line."

11/24/10 -- With Suzie's brother "Doc" Dockal (recently retired geology professor, U. of North Carolina) visiting from Iowa, I recruited him for a day on the trail. We worked together for 3 hours, Doc "roughing-out" about 25 yds, while I completed 25 yards of trail over the steep, rocky hill-side . . . We then hiked some of trail, down-river from Maumee Road, toward Spring Creek—nice country!

11/27/10 -- Assisted by Suzie's brother "Doc" and her son Jonathan, we spent 5 hours (collectively, 15) on the trail, completing 50 yards and another 75 yards of the route roughed-out—demonstrating that one man is a single "hand," while two's a crew and three's a spree!

11/30/10 -- I worked alone for 4 ½ hrs., completing 27 yards of new trail.

12/03/10 -- Put in the morning assessing a significant obstacle to completing the BRT over a quarter-mile wide tract of private land within Buffalo National River.

*Except for a riverside strip of 24 acres, the "J.I. Roberts tract" (originally 87.75 ac.) was not all acquired "in fee," by the National Park Service. Acquisition of 24 acres of the river and adjoining river bottom by NPS left the Roberts heirs with about 64 acres, which land lies between the river bottom south to the park's exterior boundary. While the NPS acquired, during the 1970s land acquisition for Buffalo National River, a "scenic easement" on those 64 acres --restrictions that prevent logging or any development by the landowners, NPS failed to make provision for a public trail right-of-way across the private inholding. (The NPS Director, George Hartzog, 1963 – 1973, testifying before Congress in behalf of the National River's establishment, had asserted that—should any land have to be left in private ownership, protective easements would be acquired by the NPS, including right-of-ways for public use trails.*

*Unfortunately, President Nixon had Hartzog replaced late 1972, before land acquisition commenced for Buffalo National River, or wording might have been added to the Roberts easements, assuring a future public-use trail.) On June 25, 2008—not long after Superintendent Kevin Cheri was posted to Buffalo National River—I provided him a written summary of the “Roberts Tract” situation, with a plea to have it resolved before trail building reached that obstacle. Now almost 7 years later, no effective action has been taken, to remedy the situation preventing the Buffalo River Trail’s completion. October 2014, Superintendent Cheri declared a “moratorium” on any BRT construction within roughly a mile of either side of the Roberts Tract, effectively shutting down all progress on completing less than 2 miles of trail yet to be built. . . In its meeting Jan. 10, 2015, the OS board of directors agreed to take on the challenge of addressing the Roberts tract impasse. Hopefully, with the influence and efforts of the Ozark Society, this issue will ultimately and satisfactorily be addressed.*

11/20/2010...after assessing the Roberts tract trail route, I visited with park neighbors Faye & Nolan Cox, over whose 640-acre Angus ranch one must cross, in order to reach the Roberts tract by vehicle. The Coxes told me that none of the Roberts family had, to their knowledge, visited the property since the 1970s . . . I contemplated that astonishing information as I proceeded to the BRT work-site and built 25 yards of trail, between 12:30 and 5:00 p.m. Afterwards, I drove down to Maumee South and visited with Ken and long-time volunteers Layton Chambers and Patrick DeAngelo, camped there in advance of a volunteer group’s work-week, and related my day’s discoveries.

12/03/10...explored some of the Roberts property on foot and located an old single-track “woods road” running east west across the northern part of the Roberts tract. During the present “leaf-off” season, the route affords good views of the river; the old ‘dozed lane is not eroded, and its grade is acceptable for a trail. No ground disturbance (digging) would be required. If only the Roberts heirs (residing in Shreveport, La.) could be persuaded to convey a quarter-mile-long “walking easement” for the Buffalo River Trail to cross their land.

12/04/10 -- While granddaughter “Wren” entertained Suzie, her son Jonathan & I worked about 4-½ hrs. I completed 15 yards of trail along the steep hillside, while Jonny almost finished another 15 yds . . . Back home to build a fire in cabin’s big fireplace, and have a good chili prepared by Suzie (supervised by 1 ½ year old Wren.)

12/07/10 -- Worked on trail 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., completing 15 yards, plus finishing touches on the 15 “roughed-out” yards Jonny contributed on 12/04 . . . A good trail day.

12/09/10 -- Drove to a parking spot 0.1 mile north of park boundary, on South Maumee road; after a short walk to end of completed trail, added 12 yards of new construction. (When I calculated the year-end totals, I

discovered that -- by this date -- I’ve seen completed 1 mile of the BRT, since beginning to work in the “Lower River District,” November, 2006.) Spent late afternoon 12/09 hiking ahead about a mile, over the flagged route, to a point where it descends thru a break in the St. Peter sandstone, beyond the nice “falls” of Cane Hollow, occasionally spilling over the big “horseshoe” bluff – wonderful features, along an interesting stretch of trail-to-be (if only the Roberts impasse is solved!)

12/16/10 -- Took time out from participating in the Christmas Bird Count (8:30 a.m. -- 6:30 p.m.) to work on the BRT, as our count “area” includes Maumee South. Back on the trail, spent 3 ½ hours “back-sloping” to 1:1 the last 140 yards of the completed tread’s “cut-line.” . . . Looked all afternoon in vain for an eagle to add to the Bird Count.

12/21/10 -- After beginning the day at 1:45 a.m., observing the total eclipse of the full moon—and on the Winter Solstice, at that—I later drove the 32 miles to my work site on the BRT. Arriving at the trail after “short-cutting” from the Maumee South Road, an adult Bald Eagle over-flew the river, directly out from the trail, having eluded me all afternoon on 12/16 (Bird Count-day) . . . Completed only 16 yds. of trail along a steep hillside, possibly like the area where volunteer Layton Chambers broke an ankle, trail scouting with Ken, last Spring. (From Layton’s mishap, I resolved to improve my foot-ware, and began to wear an excellent, high-top pair of boots Suzie ordered for me, for Christmas.)

Here ends my trail notes from 2010 . . . Why do I write them—and why does Laura Timby let them take up space in “Buffalo River Ramblings?” . . . As Edward Abbey put it, “*We write in order to share... We write, as well, in order to record the truth...to keep the record straight.*” I hope these notes serve as a reminder of this simple truism: A lot of people have been volunteering their good efforts for a lot of years to build a lot of trail, along Buffalo National River. I believe that the Buffalo River Trail itself—it’s gradually coming into existence—is justification enough for all that effort. I predict that—by those continuing efforts—we’ll ultimately see the BRT completed downriver to the Dillard’s Ferry, hopefully by February 2017 – my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, and Ken Smith’s 83<sup>rd</sup> By then I suspect we’ll both be ready to put away our trail-building tools for good.

## Welcome New Members!

- Rick Wise
- Rob & Stephanie Baker
- Rob & Tonya Lambert
- Nancy Pierson
- Emily Jones
- Jim, Marie & James Morgan
- Lance Beckman
- Marcus & Hope Fry

## It's That Time of Year Again: Dues are Due.

**The Ozark Society and Buffalo River Chapter dues are now due for 2015.** Dues for the Ozark Society are \$15.00 for an individual or family, \$25.00 for contributing, or \$200 for life (\$100 for seniors 65 and older) a one-time fee. BRC dues are \$10.00 annual, \$5.00 email only, or \$100 life (also a one-time fee). To become a member of the BRC you must first be a member of the Ozark Society. One check made payable to the **Ozark Society/ BRC** and sent to **BRC, PO Box 105, Gilbert AR 72636** or **Ozark Society, PO Box 2914, Little Rock AR 72203** will take care of your general Ozark Society membership plus your chapter dues. If you are a **new** member and paid dues after October 1, 2014 your dues will be good through 2015. Thank you for your continued support. Anyone wishing to contribute to the newsletter or willing to lead hikes or outings are encouraged to contact Laura at [ldtimby@ritternet.com](mailto:ldtimby@ritternet.com)



## Hikes...

*Editor's note: Please contact trip leaders prior to the event to sign up or to check on any changes. Don't wait too long as the hikes tend to fill up quickly. All hikes require you to sign a release waiver. Thank you.*

**Sunday January 25<sup>th</sup> Buffalo River Trail Erbie to Ozark Campground.** Approximately 6 miles, rated moderate. Meet at Ozark Campground at **9:00 am**, shuttle to Erbie Campground to start. There will be waterfalls, Adair Cemetery, Brown Cemetery, old home sites, and great river overlooks. 15-person limit. Contact Farrel at [f.t.couch@att.net](mailto:f.t.couch@att.net) or 479.200.2621 for more info and to sign up.

**Sunday February 8<sup>th</sup> Adkins Creek Bushwhack.** Meet at the junction of Hwy 16/21 south of Fallsville at **9:00am**. Bushwhack is approximately 8 miles long, rated strenuous, and includes waterfalls, great rock formations, bluffs, and rugged untouched beauty, 12-person limit. For more info and to sign up contact Farrel at [f.t.couch@att.net](mailto:f.t.couch@att.net) or 479.200.2621

**Sunday February 22, Buzzard Roost Rocks, Natural Bridge & Pam's Grotto** Meet at **9:00am** at the junction of Hwy 7, Hwy 16, and Hwy 123 at the old Pelsor store. Buzzard Roost Rocks is one of the most dynamic sandstone rock formations in the Ozarks (similar to the Bear Cave on Petite Jean Mountain), the Natural Bridge is arguably the state's highest, and Pam's Grotto is one of the most charming little water feature secrets in the Ozarks! Moderate to strenuous 5-mile hike, 10-person limit. Contact Cale for more info and to sign up: [calenicholson@yahoo.com](mailto:calenicholson@yahoo.com) or 501-294-9504.

**Sunday March 1<sup>st</sup>, Wolf Creek Bushwhack.** This hike is approximately 4 miles long and rated moderate. There is a 12-person limit. Meet at **9:30am** at the junction of Hwy 7 & 16 (near Deer). For more info and to sign up contact Judi at 870.421.6824 or [jnail1113@gmail.com](mailto:jnail1113@gmail.com).

**Sunday March 15, 2015 Indian Creek top to bottom** Meet at Kyle's Landing campground at **9:00 am**. We will then shuttle to the top to start. Rated strenuous, approximately 7 miles, 12-person limit. Visit what has been called one of the most scenic hikes in Arkansas. For more info and to sign up contact Farrel at [f.t.couch@att.net](mailto:f.t.couch@att.net) or 479.200.2621.



## Meetings...

**The BRC will meet at Noon on Sunday March 8<sup>th</sup>** at Dave & Maria Smith's place near Fox. We will begin with the membership meeting and potluck followed by a hike that Dave promises will not be *quite* as rigorous as last year! Please plan on attending; it should be lots of fun! Contact Dave or Maria at 870-363-4210 for directions or Laura at [ldtimby@ritternet.com](mailto:ldtimby@ritternet.com) for more info. We hope you can join us.

**Ozark Society Spring Recreation Meeting** to be hosted by the Highlands Chapter is tentatively set for the weekend of **March 21<sup>st</sup> at Ozark Campground** on the Buffalo National River. Check out the Spring Pack & Paddle or the Ozark Society web page [www.ozarksociety.net](http://www.ozarksociety.net) for more details

## BRC Jan-March 2015 Calendar

- **Sunday Jan 25<sup>th</sup> BRT Erbie to Ozark**
- **Sunday Feb. 8<sup>th</sup> Adkins Creek Bushwhack**
- **Sunday Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup> Buzzard Roost, Natural Bridge & Pam's Grotto**
- **Sunday March 1<sup>st</sup> Wolf Creek Bushwhack**
- **Sunday March 8<sup>th</sup> BRC Meeting, potluck & hike at Dave & Maria Smith's in Fox AR**
- **Sunday March 15<sup>th</sup> Indian Creek T-B**
- **March 21<sup>st</sup> Ozark Society Spring Meeting**

*"Conservation is a cause that has no end. There is no point in which we say, our work is finished."*

~Rachel Carson

See you on the river. LT