

Buffalo River Ramblings



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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

What happened to summer vacation? It seems like only yesterday that school was let out and already its time for students to go back. I remember when I was really young how summer vacation seemed to stretch on forever—a glorious release from schedules and studies to stay up late, sleep in and catch fireflies and cook “*some mores*”! I sincerely hope that today’s youth still are able to enjoy some of those simple summertime activities.

The Buffalo River is pretty low right now and there is evidence of moss and algae growth in quite a few areas. Several groups and agencies are closely monitoring this, and if a public safety issue develops I trust the public will be informed. Of course we all hope that the Buffalo National River can remain as a popular summertime destination for families and stays as a clean and healthful environment for all of the fish and wildlife that call the river home, but without adequate protection of the watershed, it seems that the Beautiful Buffalo River may go the way of so many other degraded streams. I certainly hope that never happens, but we must make our representatives aware that the Buffalo is worth protecting and it is their job to ensure that it is!

The Buffalo River Chapter has been going through some changes these past few months. Recently Farrel and I decided to swap out positions, so for now I will take over the position of Chapter Chair and Farrel will continue as Outings Director. Hopefully later this year we will find a time and place to reconvene our BRC meetings—all suggestions are welcome! A decision was also made to change our Buffalo River Ramblings Newsletter publication from four to three

times a year. This will save our chapter quite a bit of money that possibly could be used to support education or conservation causes involving the Buffalo River. I thank you in advance for your understanding.

SOLAR ECLIPSE CAPS OFF FLOAT DOWN THE BUFFALO RIVER: MAY 6-10th, 1994 By Jim Liles

News about the solar eclipse expected in August this year set me thinking about a particular river-long float, Ponca to the White River, made in May 1994, with my canoeing partner, Rene LeBrun. Rene had influenced me to take up canoe “poling” as a better way to navigate a river. He had convinced me that standing up and propelling the canoe “solo,” using a 15 foot aluminum pole, was at least as effective as paddling and was more comfortable in the long-haul. And a canoeist could certainly read the river better from a standing, rather than a sitting position. Through the decade of the 1990s, we made several multi-day poling-floats of Buffalo River each year, and for six successive years made a river-long trip taking 5 to 7 days for the 124.5 mile float, Ponca to the White River, plus the 0.7 mile up-river grunt to the public dock on the White or the 11.6 mile dash (about 3 hours) down the White to Norfork marina. I dug out my river logbooks and found the notes from that 1994 trip. Attached was this clipping from a newsletter issued by the Superintendent’s office, Buffalo National River. It read,

“Jim Liles, Assistant Superintendent, will be on the river for several days of resource assessment, Ponca to Buffalo City. He will be gathering data for the second edition of the Canoeing Guide, which the park staff (especially Jim) collaborated with the Ozark Society in producing in 1991. Accompanying Jim, poling canoes French-Canadian style, will be VIP Rene LeBrun, native of Maine, now retired to Henderson, Arkansas. We wish them good weather and a successful trip.”

Day #1: At 9:00 a.m. on May 6, 1994, we put our two canoes on the river at the Ponca low-water bridge with 24 inches of air space, an ample flow in the river. It proved to be just another perfect day in paradise, with clear skies and water, little wind and temps 68 to 75 degrees. The upper river was in its mid-spring glory, with delightful sights and sounds accompanying the rushing water. On such a beautiful Friday, we encountered only about 20 other folks on the river – all between Ponca Bridge and Ozark campground. We made 27 miles that day, choosing to camp on the gravel bar river right, at the confluence of the Big and Little Buffalo Rivers. We could not explore – without trespassing – the beautiful area immediately across the river from our campsite. That 160 acres of land was never acquired in fee by the National Park Service, simply because it was “bested” by one Herbert Van Deven, the Harrison High School history teacher who owned and lived on that riverside land. He adamantly refused to sell. A Little Rock-based realty & property management group called “Bella Casa LLC” currently own the property. The 160 in-park acres include “Lost Hill” and the half-mile-long valley to the east, an ancient channel of the Buffalo River. The “cut-off” valley may well be among the archeologically important areas once used by Native Americans on the Buffalo River. Life-long Hasty resident Earl Henry told us how rich with artifacts the little valley was, arrowheads plowed up year after year by Earl and other local plowboys. Wouldn’t it be great if that fine area were in public ownership?

Day #2: A highlight of the day occurred 2 miles above the mouth of Richland Creek, as we approached the “Nars (Narrows)”. A mature Bald Eagle graced the sky directly over that knife-edged ridge of limestone that separates the Buffalo from historic Richland Valley. The elegant eagle was a punctuation mark to the 8.5 river miles from Mt. Hersey to Woolum. Over that stretch of river Purple Martins were always in sight. Between 25 and 30 of the big swallows were often visible at once – occasionally making kamikaze runs directly at us from downriver. We made 29 miles that day, occasionally poling against squirrely winds, to a nice campsite near Margaret White Springs, about a mile above the bluff that bears her name.

Day #3: Another banner day, with the Buffalo River maintaining its ample flow, despite the rainless weekend. Not until below Gilbert did we encounter folks on the river – six fishing from two johnboats, and three canoes with six paddlers. Below the mouth of Tomahawk Creek a dozen nighthawks wheeled overhead, as we poled our canoes around a nameless horseshoe bend. In 2015 I suggested it be named “Branner Bend,” in a formal nomination to the U.S. Board of Geographic Names. Dr. J.C. Branner, Arkansas State Geologist 1887-1893, first described the Tomahawk Fault system that crosses the river here on the big bend, where “*a block in the earth’s crust less than a mile wide has dropped down 100 to 400 feet, along a distance of many miles.*”— quoted from Branner’s Annual Report of the Geological Survey of Arkansas for 1892, “The Lead and Zinc

Region of North Arkansas.” Incidentally, Dr. Branner went on to serve as Vice President and President of Stanford University, 1898 – 1912. My nomination of the name “Branner Bend” to the U.S. Board of Geographic Names was not supported by the NPS staff, Buffalo National River, which indicated that features on Buffalo River should be named after *people of local historic interest* associated with such places. The only local “historic” name hereabouts— “Low Gap,” river left, is a modest ridge-top declivity just before the Buffalo makes a sharp bend to the right and flows east for over a mile, but “Low Gap Bend” is not a name we’ve heard. (Recent observations: In April, 2015, on this same unnamed horseshoe bend, Suzie & I found the first active bald eagle nest ever reported on Buffalo National River. The nest is active again this year—we’ve resorted to calling the great river bend “Eagle Bend!”) Back to 1994: Rene and I, after passing the next great “horseshoe bend,” with the Maumee South campground and river access at its apex, made camp at the head of a long gravel bar (actually a 750—800 foot-long gravel island), to a crescendo of Goldfinch song. Made 30 miles on this splendid day!

Day #4: We awoke to a frenzy of feeding songbirds in the densely wooded riverbanks of our camp. One of the little warblers flew into a river-blasted sycamore in our campsite, its bright orange wing and tail patches revealing its identity as an American Redstart. Baltimore Orioles—the males also orange and black but more than four times larger than the tiny warbler—were singing as we launched. A graceful Osprey flew over us at 9:30 a.m., bearing a sucker in its talons. We soon passed under the Highway 14 Bridge, where the river gauge showed 5 feet, perfect water for this day’s float. The 9-mile run to Rush Creek was replete with river life – otter, eagle, beaver and countless birds. It was good to see the Belted Kingfisher females had returned to join their over-wintering mates – a pair on every mile of river, on average.

We both had to pull our canoes out below the mouth of Clabber Creek to unload gear and dump water taken on in our passage through the shoals – for us the most challenging feature on the lower Buffalo. After a 32-mile day, we made camp below the mouth of Leatherwood Creek. Electing to camp tent-less this last night on the river, I positioned my bedroll so I could see the North Star, hanging motionless above the rim of High Burr Bluff. I was rewarded with a rainless night and lots of stars—but our best celestial show was yet to come.

Day #5: We took our time breaking camp, as we had a mere 8 miles to reach the White River. River fog lifted at about 8 a.m. and I enjoyed the post-dawn songs of many birds. As the river carried us along, I was gratified to see that the cut bank, on river right, at mile 125-126—left so raw & eroded, “blown-out,” by the December, 1982 flood event—was now nicely green with grass, river cane, and scattered growth of sapling trees. I recalled my first run down the Buffalo River—1983, when I was struck by the widespread damage

from that major flood. It was reassuring to see how time and nature had healed those wounds, without man's intervention.

After a 2-hour run, we reached the White River, and poled up-river against a moderate current from Bull Shoals Dam releases, following close to the river's west bank for less than a half mile. Coming opposite the *White-Buffalo Resort*, we crossed to the resort's dock. Finding the new owners, Jan & Roscoe Turner, most hospitable, we hauled our canoes up the stairs and phoned our shuttle driver. Then we sat down at a picnic table in the shade of a big sycamore tree, to await the arrival of our reliable friend, "Big John," to come pick us up.

The fact that there was an imminent solar eclipse had slipped our minds as we lounged under the tree with the White River rushing by. It was well after 10:00 a.m. when we noticed that the leaf shadows at our feet were curiously becoming increasingly scalloped and that daylight was fading, although there was scarcely a cloud in the sky. It suddenly dawned on us that we were witnessing a notable celestial event, a near-total eclipse of the sun. As the moon slowly crossed the face of the sun and our surroundings grew eerily dark, Rene and I realized that all the leaf-shadows cast on the ground under the big sycamore were reflecting the progress of the eclipse (the leaves were still small, newly emerging, and thus allowed sunlight to filter through the tree canopy and sharply outline each leaf-shadow.) Each leaf shadow copied the advancing occultation of the moon across the sun, from right-to-left, until the eclipse maximum. All the shadows briefly disappeared at the moment of maximum eclipse at about 11:40 a.m., then began gradually reforming, their crescent-shapes reversed as the moon's "trailing" half gradually completed its passage across the sun. The entire phenomenon lasted about two hours—quite an end-of-river trip experience! The fact that the leaf-shadow show must have been ongoing across North America, wherever there were trees along the path of the eclipse, from the Maritimes to Baja California, did not diminish the pleasure of our "private showing." It was one of those natural events one has to experience to believe—a brief bit of *Chiaroscuro Art* dropped at our feet, having been projected from Sun to Moon to Earth, spun off from a perennial dance of those three linked partners on which all life depends.

Welcome New Members!

Barb Ostmann
Joe & Jody Rath
Cay Miller
Jason Mc Donald



Hikes... Editor's note: Please contact Farrel at wildsofa.fc@gmail.com or 479.200.2621 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 waiver.

Sept. 24, 2017 Erbie Historic Hike, meet at the Parker Hickman Cabin in Erbie at 10:00am to join us for this easy and informative historic hike. Approximately 4.5 miles with two possible wet crossings.

Oct. 22, 2017 Grand Tour Hike through the Ponca Wilderness, where we will visit many of the great features of the Buffalo River National River. Meet at Kyle's Landing at 9:00 am to shuttle to our starting point at the Centerpoint Trailhead. The hike is rated **strenuous**, approximately 11 miles with 5 possible wet crossings. There is a 15-person limit on both hikes.

Upcoming Events...

The Ozark Folklife Festival is at Tyler Bend, Buffalo National River on September 23, 2017 from 10 am to 5 pm. Come enjoy a day of traditional Ozark food, music, and demonstrations. Enjoy BBQ, fried catfish, ham & beans with cornbread, chocolate rolls and fried pies while listening to traditional musicians, watching cloggers, seeing demonstrations of how wool is turned into yarn and felt, making a mandolin, quilting and other Ozark crafts.

National Public Lands Day, Saturday September 30th 2017 The BRC hopes to be involved in a volunteer project with the NPS on this day with several projects on the Buffalo National River near Tyler Bend. Everything is still in the planning stages, so contact me, Laura Timby, at laurab2053@gmail.com if interested in volunteering and I'll keep you posted on what the projects may involve.

Saturday October 28th, 2017 the Highlands Chapter will host the Fall Ozark Society General Membership Meeting at the Ozark Smoke House in Fayetteville AR. Look for the Fall issue of Pack & Paddle or go to the Ozark Society website ozarksociety.net for additional information.

BRC 2017 Calendar

- 9/23/17 Ozark Folklife Festival, Tyler Bend, BNR
- 9/24/17 Erbie Historic Hike
- 9/30/17 National Public Lands Volunteer Opportunity
- 10/22/17 Grand Tour Hike
- 10/28/17 Ozark Society Fall Meeting, Ozark Smoke House, Fayetteville AR

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

~The Lorax, by Dr. Seuss

See you on the River. LT