



SOUTHWEST PADDLERS

Outdoor Recreation Guide for
Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah



Canoes, Kayaks & Rafts

Gear

River Outfitters

Campgrounds

Apparel

Instruction

Black River

Report by Marc W. McCord

Big Lake to the Salt River Confluence
— 90 Miles

General Description

The Black River flows east out of Big Lake in the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest of Greenlee County, then turns south near Alpine, then turns southwest before flowing into Graham County. Between Maverick Mountain and Willow Mountain the river turns northwest, flowing past the confluence of the Big Bonita River before reaching its confluence with the Upper Salt River just southwest of Fort Apache. Altogether, the Black River flows about 90 miles. Beginning just west of the Arizona-New Mexico state line, its headwaters are very near those of the Blue, White, Big Bonita and Little Colorado Rivers and some of their tributary streams.

Known mostly for its excellent smallmouth bass, catfish and rainbow, native, brook and brown trout fishing, the Black River also offers very challenging Class II to IV whitewater with some Class V rapids and drops in high-water conditions during a short season of a couple of months in Spring during years when a significant winter snowpack in the surrounding mountains occurs. The river flows through the San Carlos Apache Reservation. This river is NOT recommended for inexperienced whitewater paddlers due to its potential difficulty and very remote location. Just getting to the Black River can be more difficult than paddling it, though anglers can gain access at numerous points along its reach. It is necessary to obtain permits for paddling or fishing from the San Carlos Apache Nation, and camping is restricted to specified areas, so be sure to inquire as to allowable campsites along the river before beginning a trip.

The upper river begins in mountain vegetation of trees and shrubs, then descends toward the Salt River confluence through desert scrub brush, chaparral and typical prairie vegetation. Along the way you may be treated to sightings of beavers, bears, turkey, elk and various species of birds. The surrounding area is remote and undeveloped, though there are some camping areas and access points strategically

Technical Data

Class Rating	I
Length	90 miles
Minimum Flow	cfs
Optimum Flow	cfs
Maximum Flow	cfs
First Put-in	
Lat. / Long.	
Last Take-out	
Lat. / Long.	
Elevation	7,900 to 4,400 ft. msl
Gradient	39 fpm (average)
USGS Gauge	Web:
Boats	Canoes, Kayaks, Rafts
Season	March thru July
Permits	Yes. See "Permit Requirements" at left



Central Arizona Paddlers Club

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<http://www.azpaddlers.com/>

located along the river off forest roads, state highways and US highways. The river will freeze in winter, and road conditions will be treacherous, so know the conditions before you go.

Location

Situated in east central Arizona in Greelee, Graham and Gila Counties, the Black River flows through Apache Sitgreaves National Forest and the San Carlos Apache Reservation near the towns of Eagar, Alpine and Fort Apache. The nearest significant town is Safford a few miles to the south. The headwaters are just a few miles west of the New Mexico state line. Flagstaff is about 180 miles to the northwest. Phoenix and Tucson are each about 225 miles away to the west and southwest, respectively.

Distance from Major Cities

Phoenix 225 miles; Tucson 225 miles; Flagstaff 180 miles; Salt Lake City 702 miles; Albuquerque 260 miles; Denver 697 miles; Dallas 1,017 miles; Austin 1,036 miles; San Antonio 1,017 miles; Houston 1,222 miles; Oklahoma City 1,125 miles; Little Rock 1,469 miles; Kansas City 1,470 miles (all distances are approximate and depend upon starting point, destination point on the river and route taken.)

Water Quality and Flow

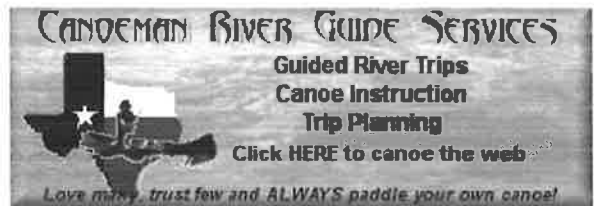
Water quality is usually very good to excellent, flowing clean, clear and cold from mountain snowmelt in an area of very limited development. Normal flows are low, and will be too low for boating except during the snowmelt runoff season or after a significant rainfall within the drainage basin. Fishing can be enjoyed for a much longer season in spring and early summer months.

Best Times to Go

Optimum canoeing, kayaking and rafting can be usually be enjoyed in March and April providing there is sufficient winter snowpack in the surrounding mountains and/or winter rains to feed the river. May through July is usually the best time for fishing, especially for bass and trout. The East Fork tributary is stocked with trout on a weekly basis in the summer, and some of that release finds its way into the Black River, as well. Avoid winter trips to this stream - it will probably be frozen and road conditions are hazardous with precipitation.

Permit Requirements

The Black River forms the boundary between the San Carlos Apache and the White Mountain Apache Nations. Permits from the appropriate nation are necessary for activities along the Black River involving using the lands of either reservation. These can be obtained from any of the San Carlos or Fort Apache Game and Fish vendors in the area. Sportsmen interested in applying for one of the trophy elk tags or wanting information about the other hunting and fishing opportunities available and permit requirements on the San Carlos Apache Reservation should contact the Wildlife & Recreation Department at 1-928-475-2343 or 1-888-475-2344. The department's fax number is 1-928-475-2701, and their address is P.O. Box 97, San Carlos, Arizona 85550. Visitors wanting additional information about the other recreational



opportunities offered by the San Carlos Apache Tribe can call the Administration Offices at (928) 475-2361. Further information on permit fees, etc. can be obtained by calling the numbers above or visiting the web site of the San Carlos Apache Nation at <http://www.sancarlosapache.com/>.

To contact the **White Mountain Apache Nation** for information and permits regarding the Black River and adjacent lands write to The Outdoor and Recreation Division at 100 West Fatco Road, P.O. Box 220, Whiteriver, Arizona 85941, or Phone: 1-928-338-4385 / Fax: 1-928-338-1712.

Hazards to Navigation

The Black River has numerous boulder garden rapids and occasional outcroppings that are rated in the Class II to IV category, but some of the larger rapids can escalate to Class V in high-water conditions. The river should generally be considered to be a Class III to V stream due to the remoteness and difficulty of getting outside assistance in an emergency situation. Snowmelt waters will be very cold and rapids will soak paddlers, so dressing for the conditions is recommended. Strong intermediate whitewater boating skills, expedition paddling, Swiftwater Rescue and Wilderness First Aid training are highly recommended for boating the Black River and its tributaries.

River Access Points

Campgrounds and Accommodations

Liveries, Outfitters & Shuttle Services

There are no known liveries, outfitters or shuttle services operating along or near the Black River. Plan on bringing everything you need and running your own shuttles. Allow adequate time for setting up shuttles due to the long driving distances and sometimes difficult road conditions.

Reviewer's Comments

The Black River is a seldom runnable, exciting, and very scenic whitewater river that is suitable for canoes, kayaks and rafts paddled by seasoned whitewater boaters. The rugged, remote location of the river demands that paddlers be self-sufficient and capable of self-rescue in an emergency situation. Fishermen love this stream because it is secluded, clean and clear, loaded with bass, trout and catfish, and only about four to five hours from Phoenix, Tucson or Flagstaff. Late spring through mid-summer are the best times to visit the Black River, and winters are to be avoided because of dangerous road conditions.

The mountains and trees of the Apache Sitgreaves National Forest offers spectacular natural beauty, and the river flows through this majestic landscape near the New Mexico state line until it enters the desert of the San Carlos Apache Nation Reservation in Graham and Gila Counties as it approaches its Salt River confluence a few miles southwest of fabled Fort Apache. The water will be cold and the rapids will insure a wet ride, so be prepared. With no commercial services available along the river paddlers and campers will need to be thoroughly prepared for whatever conditions they encounter. Be sure to check current conditions before making a trip to

the Black River, and be certain that you carry a camera - packed in a waterproof and impact-resistant case. The Black River, especially in high-water conditions, can be an E-ticket ride!

Click the links below for information regarding the section of the Salt River and its tributaries where you want to paddle.

[[Salt River Homepage](#)] [[US Highway 60 to Roosevelt Lake](#)] [[Roosevelt Lake to Apache Lake](#)] [[Apache Lake to Canyon Lake](#)]
[[Canyon Lake to Saguaro Lake](#)] [[Stewart Mountain Dam to Granite Reef Dam](#)] [[Big Bonito River](#)] [[Canyon Creek](#)] [[Tonto Creek](#)]

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