

The Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande

Wild and Scenic River Designation

A clear, blue Big Bend sky.

Canyon walls that have no end.

No sounds – except for the distinct call of a canyon wren and the little splash you make as your canoe paddle cuts through the waters of the Rio Grande.

Seven, maybe eight days of spectacular scenery, chal-lenging rapids, hot springs and the solitude only this part of the world can offer. Congress designated the Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande as Wild and Scenic due to its vast departure from urban growth, crowded freeways and so many people. The early settlers and explorers knew this was a special place and so can you! Pick a date and join us as we travel through this fabulous slice of Texas.

2005 Dates:

February 20-26 (Full Moon trip - 7 days)
April 2-9 (8 days)
September 24 - October 1 (8 days)
October 22 - 29 (Full Moon trip - 8 days)

Trip Description:

Covering 72 river miles, this seven or eight day trip (length depends on water levels) offers some of the most spectacular wilderness in North America. We'll explore this river section by canoe. Side canyon hikes, hot spring soaks and fun, Class II-III rapids are all part of the excitement.

The Lower Canyons of the Rio Grande is a true natural wonder – a place of beauty, history, geology and ecology. We canoe the river in 16-foot Old Town canoes that hold two passengers and gear. The guide(s) will paddle a solo touring canoe that carries the essential elements of the trip such as food, water, kitchen supplies, and first aid.

Itinerary:

Travel plans on the Rio Grande vary and are adapted to fit individual and group needs, weather, water flows and other considerations. No two trips are alike, but a typical seven-day adventure might look something like this:

Day 0 – Arrive Marathon, Texas. Pre-trip meeting at the White Buffalo bar in the Gage Hotel. (7:00 p.m.)

Day 1 – Early morning ride to the put-in at Maravillas Creek. After we load the canoes, put on our lifejackets and have a quick safety talk, our adventure begins. We start right out with a Class II rapid. After a delicious dinner we stretch out in our sleeping bags for a good night's sleep under a starry sky.

Day 2 – The river twists between rising cliffs offering new vistas at every bend. Passing small springs along the way, we camp within site of Cerro El Sombrero (Mexico), a spectacular geological landmark.

Day 3 – We'll explore a number of ruins that offer some great photo shots of the Big Bend and take another Class II rapid – Big Canyon. We'll camp where the canyon walls rise to 1500 feet.

As you travel through the Lower Canyons, you'll observe subtle and dramatic changes as the canyon walls climb toward the sky, telling their story of geological history. The human history and exploration of this area is evident from old home sites and the influence of our wonderful neighbor to the south – Mexico. Occasionally, we may be treated to the sight of a lonely vaquero moving his livestock to the river or the scant evidence of an old cowboy encampment. Springs (both hot and cold) feed parts of the river and provide a lifeline of liquid to the thirsty and tired adventurer.

Our trip begins in the Black Gap Wildlife area near Maravillas Creek and continues downstream to Dryden Crossing – a fish camp perched on the banks of the Rio Grande. We'll meet the morning of the trip at 7:00 a.m. at the Marathon Motel in Marathon, Texas.

Price: 7-day trip - \$1200/person; 8 - day trip - \$1350/person
(prices are based on total minimum group size of four or more)

Day 4 – More rapids today and a trip to Asa Jones pump house, a former candelillia wax camp perched high on the cliff. Good hot springs in the area where we'll spend some time soaking.

Day 5 – Today we'll travel through Bullis Fold, a major geological feature in the Lower Canyons where horizontal limestone has been folded over to almost 90 degrees. The deepest section of the Lower Canyons.

Day 6 – A busy day, as we navigate Panther Rapid and explore the magnificent San Francisco Canyon – one of the major side canyons we find along our journey.

Day 7 – Rising for the morning coffee, we watch the sunrise brighten the cliffs above our camp. The days have blended together and time has become something we rarely care about. A sense of sadness is among us as we pack up for the last time and head toward our take-out at Dryden.

The Take-Out: Our ending point is John's Marina, a fishing camp located on the high banks of the Rio Grande. Contrary to the name, this is not a town, village or business, but just a pretty spot at the end of a dirt road. After loading our vehicles and trailers, we'll travel 20 miles of dirt road back to Highway 90 and then another 75 miles to hot showers in Marathon.