Rivers and Rapids

Your Guide to Floating and Fishing the streams of Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma

Ben Nolen, left, and Bob Narramore after the 1967 Texas Water Safari

Bob Narramore and I (Ben Nolen) started canoe racing together in 1961. By training together, a minimum of four days per week, we were putting in a lot of paddle time. Initially we raced the traditional "stump thumpers," but quickly made the transition to the more sophisticated U.S.C.A. and pro model canoes. In 1966 and 1967 we were Texas State Champions, competing regularly in marathon races in Texas, New Mexico, and Louisiana. We entered the Texas Water Safari twice, finishing sixth in 1967, after leading the race from San Marcos to Cuero, and "wrapping" our canoe during the second night. The Safari race course, in 1967, stretched 467 miles, from San Marcos to Freeport.

Henry "Hank" Stowers, then the Outdoor Editor for the Dallas Morning News, recruited us to help document, and expose, some of the pollution problems on the Trinity River immediately below Dallas. While working on this project, Hank suggested we put all our "trip time," and accumulated "river knowledge" to good use, and publish a river guide. Over the years, "Rivers and Rapids" has evolved from that meager beginning, and is now recognized as one of the premier river guide books in the country.

Bob now owns and operates High Trails Canoe Outfitters in Garland, one of the oldest and largest in Texas. He is still active with canoe clubs and river runners in north Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. I now live in Bandera, Texas, and own Maverick Properties, a real estate company. I still spend all the time I can fishing and floating the Medina, Guadalupe, Llano, and Devils Rivers.

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RIVERS AND RAPIDS is published for the purpose of offering ONLY suggestions for the best possible ways to float the streams herein. Due to the possibility of personal error, typographical error, misinterpretation of information, and the many hazards, both natural and man-made which are subject to change, RIVERS AND RAPIDS, its owners, employees and all other persons or companies, directly or indirectly associated with this publication, assume no responsibility for accidents, injury, death, or damage incurred by individuals or groups using this publication.

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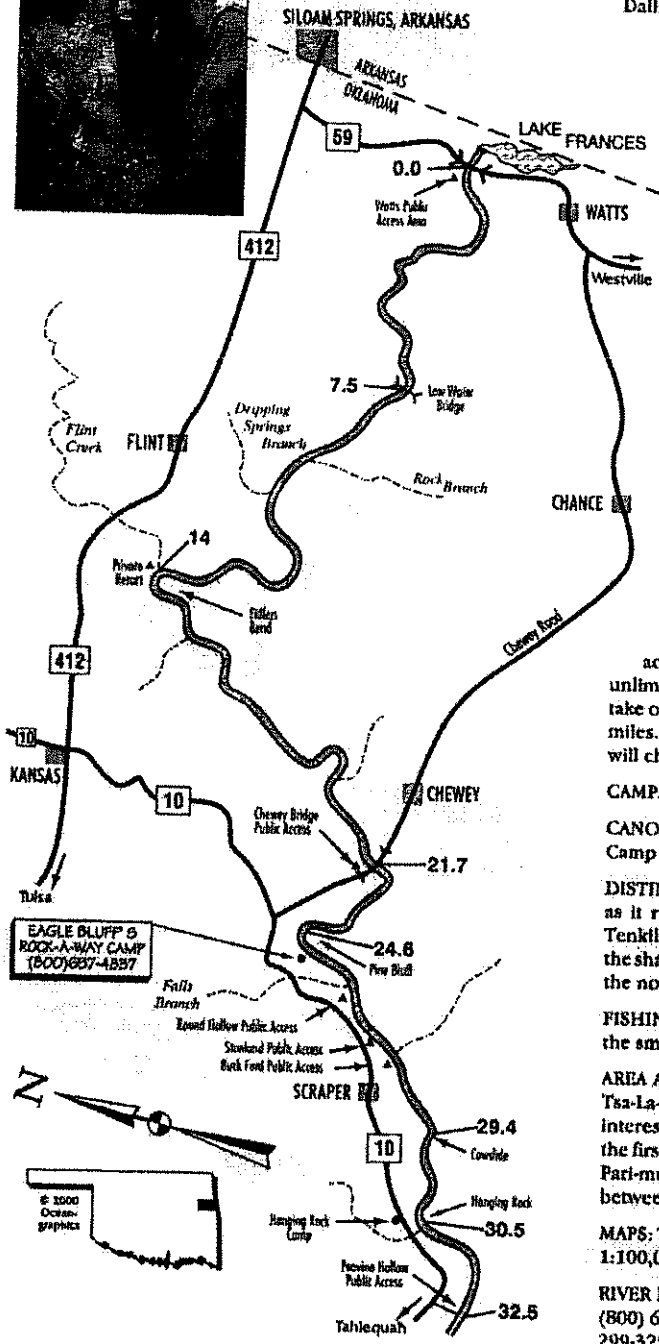
ILLINOIS RIVER

WATTS PUBLIC ACCESS AREA TO PEAVINE HOLLOW PUBLIC ACCESS

32.5 MILES



PHYSICAL LOCATION: Northeastern Oklahoma, Adair, Delaware and Cherokee Counties. Oklahoma City 195 miles, Tulsa 75 miles, Dallas 260 miles and Austin 450 miles.

GENERAL COMMENTS: The Illinois is highly developed for canoe traffic. Campgrounds and canoe/raft rentals are numerous and adequate. An excellent, clean, clear flowing stream with few hazards; a stream anyone can enjoy! Get an Oklahoma fishing license if you plan to wet a hook. All private canoes are required to display a trip sticker on the starboard bow. IT IS LAW - no glass containers allowed on the river.

WATER QUALITY: Excellent to good.

WATER FLOW: Always adequate, especially on the lower 8.8 miles. During excessively dry periods the 21.7 mile section above Chewey bridge will be too low for enjoyable canoeing.

PREFERRED SEASONS: Anytime of the year offers enjoyable canoeing on some section of the Illinois. May 1st through October 1st, however, is considered the "float season."

HAZARDS: The low water crossing at 7.5 miles should be considered dangerous at high water levels.

PUT IN: The initial put in is the public access point at Watts Public Access Area, off Hwy. 59, north of Watts.

TAKE OUT: The first take out is the low water crossing at 7.5 miles, the next is the Private Resort at 14.0 miles. Chewey Bridge Public Access is next at 21.7 miles. Public access areas, camps, road crossings, and canoe liveries offer unlimited take out/launch points below Chewey Bridge. The last take out for this section is adjacent to Hanging Rock Camp, at 30.5 miles. Many of these areas offer fine access, but the private camps will charge a nominal fee for put in, take out, or parking.

CAMPING: Camp sites, both public and private, are abundant.

CANOE RENTAL & SHUTTLE SERVICE: Eagle Bluff's Rock-A-Way Camp (800)657-4837 or (918)-456-3031.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: The Illinois is scenic and beautiful as it runs from the dam at Lake Frances to the headwaters of Tenkiller Reservoir. It has several stretches of mild rapids. Some of the sharp turns and overhanging limbs may pose minor hazards for the novice or unwary.

FISHING: Although there are 68 other species of fish in the Illinois, the smallmouth bass is the most prominent.

AREA ATTRACTIONS: See the Cherokee Heritage Center and the Tsa-La-Gi Ancient Village, southeast of Tahlequah. Other places of interest are the historic Murrell Mansion, and Fort Gibson, one of the first forts in the West (1824), restored to its original condition. Pari-mutuel horse racing is featured at Blue Ribbon Downs, located between Sallisaw and Vian, south of Tahlequah.

MAPS: The Adair and Cherokee County road maps. The AR-OK-MO 1:100,000 topographical quadrangle.

RIVER FLOW INFORMATION: Eagle Bluff Raft and Canoe Rentals (800) 657-4837 or the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission (800) 299-3251 or (918) 456-3251.

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ILLINOIS RIVER

PEAVINE HOLLOW PUBLIC ACCESS TO HIGHWAY 62

24.1 MILES

PHYSICAL LOCATION: Northeastern Oklahoma, immediately north of Tahlequah, in Cherokee County. Oklahoma City 185 miles, Tulsa 65 miles, and Dallas 250 miles.

GENERAL COMMENTS: Very similar to the upper section, with highly developed canoe and campground facilities. As the river meanders downstream, it becomes slower, deeper, and wider. An abundance of access points offer a wide variety and selection of trips.

WATER QUALITY: Excellent to good.

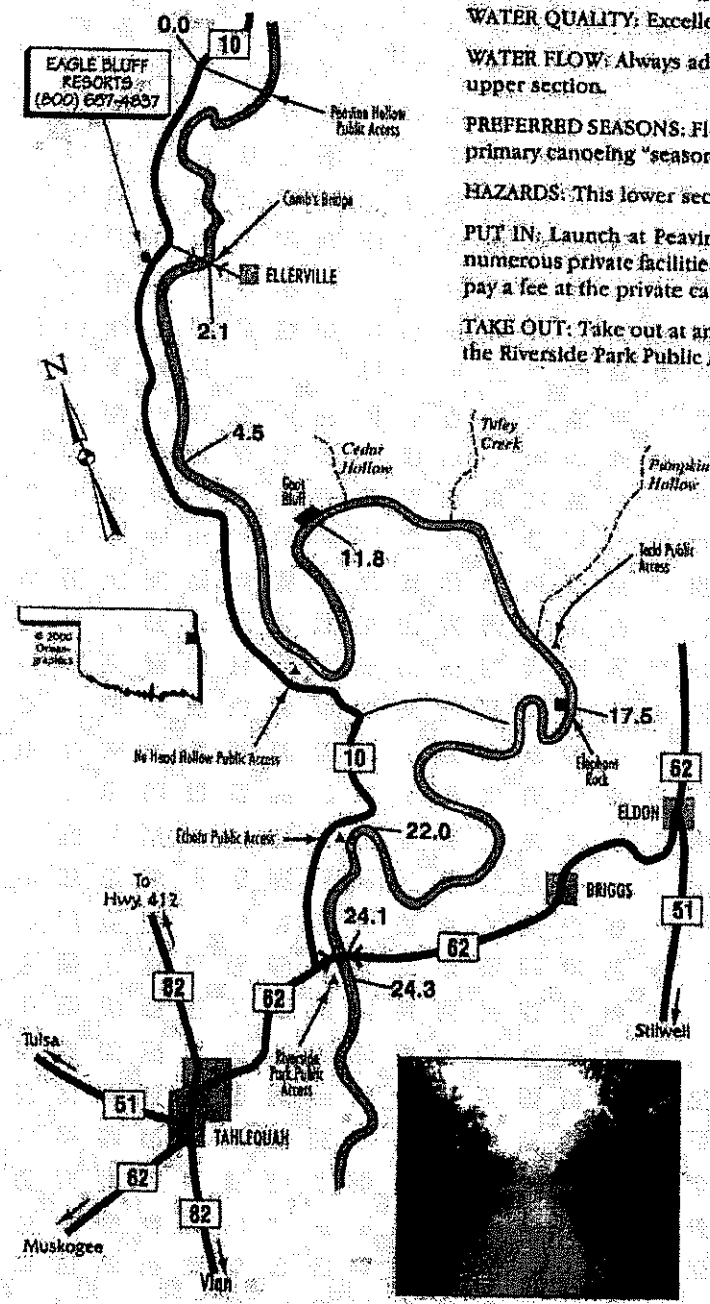
WATER FLOW: Always adequate. Will always have better year-round flow levels than the upper section.

PREFERRED SEASONS: Floating the Illinois is enjoyable anytime of the year. However, the primary canoeing "season" extends from May through September.

HAZARDS: This lower section is virtually hazard free.

PUT IN: Launch at Peavine Hollow Public Access. Alternate put ins are available at the numerous private facilities, the public access areas, or Comb's bridge, 2.1 miles. Expect to pay a fee at the private camps for launching and parking.

TAKE OUT: Take out at any of the alternate put ins. The last take out point for this trip is the Riverside Park Public Access at 24.3 miles.



CAMPING: The private and public access points offer a wide variety of camping facilities.

CANOE RENTAL AND SHUTTLE: Check with Eagle Bluff Resorts, (800) 657-4837.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: The Illinois is Oklahoma's best known scenic river. Bordered by an ever-changing oak and hickory forest, it flows clear and clean. Some small rapids still show up along the river, although it gradually becomes slower, deeper and wider than the previous section.

FISHING: Including smallmouth, largemouth and rainbow trout (stamp required), there are 69 species of fish in the Illinois. The smallmouth is the dominant game fish, but large numbers of the others are caught annually. The smallmouth and the trout will hold close to, or in, the faster currents, while the largemouth will be caught in the deeper, slower pools. For best results, stay with light tackle, low visibility lines, and small baits resembling the natural foods of the area and season.

AREA ATTRACTIONS: Same as the previous section. For additional information, contact the Lake Tenkiller Association, (918) 457-4403, the Tahlequah Chamber of Commerce (918) 456-3742, or the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, (800) 299-3251.

MAPS: The Cherokee County road map and the Chewey, Moodys, Tahlequah and Proctor, Oklahoma topographical quadrangles.

RIVER FLOW INFORMATION: Eagle Bluff Resorts, (800) 657-4837, Tulsa C.O.E. (918) 581-7666 or Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, (800) 299-3251.