



## Buffalo Outdoor Center Review

**By Katherine Rodeghier Dec 16, 2020**

What have I gotten us into? The map handed to me at reception indicated this was the way to our cabin, but I feared we were lost as we drove down a gravel road along a mountain ridge in the Arkansas Ozarks. Then we spotted it: Windridge, our log home we came to appreciate as blessedly in the middle of nowhere.

It's one of the Buffalo Outdoor Center's 21 cabins scattered across the Ozark Mountains in northwest Arkansas. Sleeping from two to 12, some cabins come with outdoor hot

tubs, some have mountain views and WiFi access, some welcome pets and some have been value-priced for families. Two lodges, sleeping 16 and 36, cater to corporate retreats, family reunions and other group getaways. Rates for cabins range from \$129 to \$599 per night; the lodges are \$1,199 and \$1,749.

Windridge's log construction looked rustic, but once we stepped inside our cabin, we found a modern setup. We wouldn't be roughing it with a full kitchen, satellite TV, a sawed pine dining table and chairs and leather couches facing a stone fireplace. Four bedrooms, two upstairs and two down, had queen beds. Two full baths had walk-in showers.

But it was the view from the porch swing that stole my heart while watching the setting sun turn the mountain forests gold and the morning mist hug the valley below the ridge.

Buffalo Outdoor Center, which goes by its initials BOC, began in 1976 as a small canoe-rental operation run by Mike Mills, a devout outdoorsman who later served as the director of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism. The area was relatively undiscovered at the time. In fact, the highway where BOC now has its offices, Arkansas Route 43, was a dirt road until the 1970s. Development followed after the Buffalo National River, the nation's first national river, was established in 1972 under the umbrella of the National Park Service. BOC operates as an authorized concessioner in the Upper Buffalo Wilderness on the west end of the park.

While BOC has grown into a complete outfitting and lodging adventure resort — named Arkansas Small Business of the Year in 2013 — it remains happily in the middle of nowhere. The hamlet where it's headquartered, Ponca, has a population hovering around 100. Motorists passing through can't-miss BOC's 5,200-square-foot combination retail shop, grocery and deli selling pizza, sandwiches and breakfast burritos to guests who don't feel like cooking. It's where guests check into BOC cabins and its mountaintop RV park with full hook-ups, laundry and bathhouse.

Visitors also can rent a canoe or kayak here for a class I and II adventure on the river March–June, and at other times when water levels permit. They also can learn about zip line courses, mountain biking and some of the state's top hiking trails. The staff will help map out scenic drives on roads now paved with asphalt that dip and wind through long stretches of dense forest and green river valleys where Ponca's elk herd can be seen grazing around dusk and dawn.

### **Buffalo Outdoor Center**

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