

The Beautiful Kiamichi

THE KIAMICHI RIVER (k-eye-a-meech-ee) flows 169 miles from its headwaters near Mena, AR to the Red River through the rich farmland and lush forests of southeast Oklahoma. Replete with wildlife, the Kiamichi was designated a critical watershed for biodiversity protection by The Nature Conservancy. It has remained mostly unaffected by man-made intrusions. In addition to the diverse biology, its other most enjoyable assets are beautiful scenery and superb water quality. RE took a 3-day, 2-night trip in February of this year. This is our report.

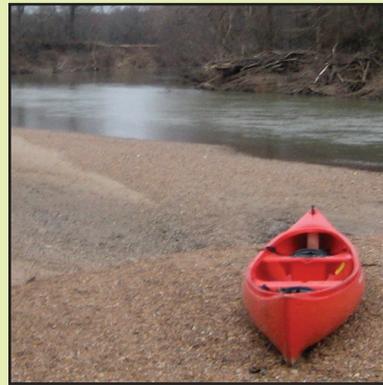
The logistics information at the end of this article should aid in planning your own trip. You may start and finish at different points or use ours. You may even decide a day-trip is sufficient to quell your adventure appetite. However, the breathtaking scenery and abundant wildlife makes a multi-day trip very worthwhile. You will float past mountains and pastures under the beautiful blue sky. We saw eagles, hawks, pheasants, river otters, deer and lots of grazing cows. The banks were covered with raccoon, bobcat, coyote, otter and deer tracks. If you're lucky you might even spot an elk. At lights-out the immediate forest around you erupts with the chorus of wildlife. It's absolutely incredible.

The river otters were the show stopper. Somewhat reluctant to use the word, these are the *cutest* animals. Extremely inquisitive, they approached the boat but not being used to humans they disappeared quickly. We even spotted one along the bank dining on a freshly caught fish.

The rapids did not exceed class II+ (on a scale of I-V+). At one point we had to stop and drain the canoe after a choppy wave train splashed a couple inches of water in the bottom. Hearing the rapid before you can see it is very intimidating, but the river's bark was much worse than its bite. There was no point where we felt the river was too technically challenging. Keep in mind the water level for our trip was higher than normal. Therefore, lots of potentially hazardous obstacles were covered.

The swift current reduced our efforts making the trip much easier. Arkansas Highway 2 crosses the river twice and the most difficult stretch is between the two underpasses. Approaching the second underpass is a blind S-curve with a strong current flowing straight into a bridge pylon. Whence the current flows, you flow. This is where we will make the distinction between proactive and reactive boat control, something of which most amateurs are blissfully unaware.

Proactive control is constantly working your paddle to steer and adjust your speed and line. Reactive paddling is allowing the current to push you wherever it wants, reacting only after you're in danger. To avoid danger you must maintain proactive control of your canoe. Keep your eyes open and paddles working. Adjusting your speed is critical. Good timing will ensure you're past the pylon before the river has a chance to push you into it. When canoeing, the person in the rear steers. Even if you have little or no experience, use your common sense. You keep control of your boat instead of allowing the river. This concept also applies to kayaks.



Only 2.5 hours from DFW, the Kiamichi is an ideal weekend adventure. Or, you can simply rent a cabin and dip your feet.

Essential Equipment

Some of these items are specifically suited for cooler weather. Warmer weather may require less.

We had the advantage of already owning most of our own equipment. Between gas, canoe rental, shuttle fee and food the two of us spent just under \$100 each for the trip.

- Mad River Adventurer® 16' canoe
- appropriately rated sleeping bags
- 3-season tents with rainfly
- breathable, waterproof windbreaker
- (2) layers of fleece
- all-weather pants
- neoprene gloves and polypro long johns
- non-steel toe, waterproof boots
- sandals for camp
- camp saw for firewood
- (2) extra large, heavy-duty "drybags"
- length of rope
- trowel and handy wipes
- sturdy & airtight water bottle
- headlamp flashlight
- small pack lantern
- thermal sleeping pad
- titanium pot and fork (or aluminum)
- multi-tool or pocket knife
- compact binoculars
- drawstring net sack for dirty clothes
- small camp seat
- firestarter material & lighter
- couple pairs of dry, warm socks
- pack towel
- water purification method

I would be remiss if I didn't mention this activity is inherently dangerous. Safety is your own responsibility. If you get in over your head and the search and rescue team has to come after you, they will stick you with a hefty bill if they can prove you weren't prepared. You should be wearing your (personal flotation devices) PFD's at all times.

In the event of an emergency, your cell phone will probably work as HWY 2 parallels most of the river's length. Admittedly, I checked the radar to keep tabs on an upstream storm system. Even though using a cell phone in the wilderness is contrary to the reason for being there, it was still a worthwhile safety measure.

The Kiamichi River is perfect for beginner and novice paddlers. Early spring and fall are perfect times of year to plan a trip, preferably under a full moon. I wouldn't recommend a longer canoe trip at a water level less than what we had. (see TRIP LOGISTICS) Try to go when weather systems are in the area, this ensures a good swift current which is ideal for longer trips. You won't have to wait long. Given the Kiamichi's location it's suitable for paddling quite often, the only exception being the height of summer. At some point when you're in a long-pool don't talk for several minutes, just look and listen. Hear the birds, feel the breeze and listen to the sound of the water. That is the best way to soak it up and I'd actually recommend doing that several times!

There is one year-round outfitter on the river, K-River Campground. (www.kriver.com) They offer an "own-car" shuttle service. Someone rides with you (in your vehicle) to the put-in and drives your car back to the campground after you put-in. Usually the campground is your final destination, but you may arrange a shuttle farther down river. The fees are reasonable but still one of your major trip expenses. If you're going to day-trip it, you should probably just rent a canoe or kayak at K-River. In addition to the canoe/kayak rentals, they have cabins, RV pads, showers, a W/D and even a free WiFi hotspot.

Regarding canoe rentals there are several places around the region. We recommend avoiding the classic "bench-sitter" style in favor of the newer canoes with adjustable seats. They are much more rugged, comfortable and provide better back support. Our dry-bags easily held all our gear and perfectly wedged side-by-side in the middle section of the canoe. We used a smaller, more accessible dry bag for snacks, a camera and other sundries such as lip balm and sunglasses. Although never in danger of falling out, we strapped them down with bungee cords nonetheless. You'll want to keep drinking water accessible at all times. We wedged our bottles unsecured between the two dry bags.

There was a small cargo hold in the stern where we stuffed dirty clothes and trash.

The Kiamichi is also a great place to take the family for a simple weekend getaway. It's also fun for a group of friends. Whatever way you decide to enjoy the Kiamichi please have fun and be safe! 🇺🇸

TRIP LOGISTICS

You don't necessarily have to use our GPS coordinates or logistics, but you can type them into Google Earth® (exactly as shown here) to see exactly where we were. Please see the website for link to river level gauge.

Day 1 - 2/25/2010

Put-in GPS coordinates: (Dry Creek)

(34°37'17.89"N, 95°14'11.97"W)

Put-in Time: 2:30 pm

Water Flow: 2300 cfs (cubic feet per second)

Water Flow Description: VERY swift

Air Temp: upper 40's

H₂O Temp: upper 30's

Take-out & night 1 camp GPS coordinates:

(34°36'0.77"N, 95°19'39.17"W)

Time: 4:30 pm

Distance traveled today: 6.5 miles

Day 2 - 2/26/2010

Put-in Time: 9:30 am

Water Flow: No visible change

Water Flow Description: VERY swift

Air Temp: lower 40's

H₂O Temp: no significant change

Take-out & night 2 camp GPS coordinates:

(34°36'0.77"N, 95°19'39.17"W)

Time: 4:30 pm

Distance traveled today: 22.5 miles

Total distance traveled: 29 miles

Day 3 - 2/27/2010

Put-in Time: 10:30 am

Water Flow: 4000 cfs

Water Flow Description: VERY swift

Air Temp: lower 40's

H₂O Temp: no significant change

Take-out coordinates: (K-River Campground)

(34°20'26.66"N, 95°38'5.45"W)

Time: 2:30 pm

Distance traveled today: 12.5 miles

Total distance traveled: 41.5 miles

YOU ARE NOT DONE, THERE IS MORE TO READ ON THIS STORY AND CANOEING IN GENERAL AT THE WEBSITE! PLEASE SEE THE BONUS CONTENT, IT WILL ANSWER SEVERAL ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE!