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Paddling through the Gila Box National Conservation Area, Arizona

(<http://livingexposed.com/paddling-through-the-gila-box-national-conservation-area-arizona/>)



The Amazon, the Nile, the Mekong, the Gila... Rivers of Legend

Now you might not have yet heard of the Gila: it's a hot newcomer to the A-list of the world's rivers. If you catch the Tucson news, then you might have even heard the rumors that it [could soon serve as a border for the USA's 51st state](#) (piece of cake, considering it was once the border between the US and Mexico).

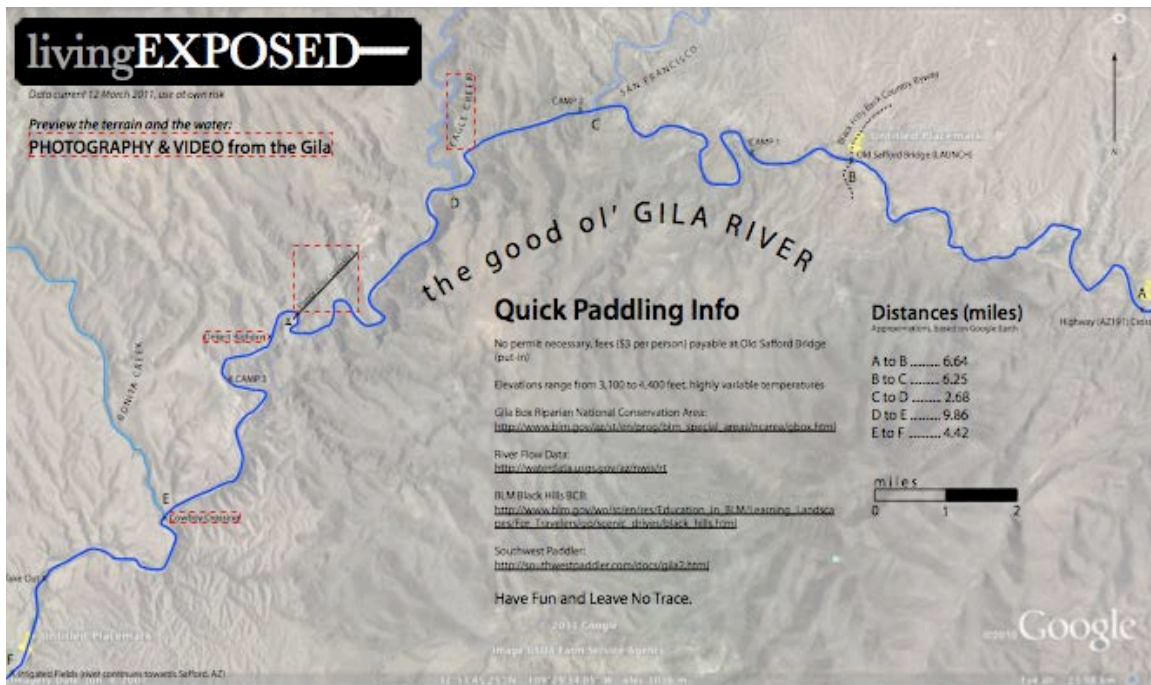
The stuff of politics and legends aside, it was simply our time to paddle a river – you know, see some country, find some adventure, sling some cameras. In this neck of the woods there is also, of course, the mighty Colorado, but the daredevil Kolb Brothers checked that one off a long time ago, [those lousy visionaries](#).

Besides, we didn't have much more than a long weekend, a couple of inflatable boats, and let's face it – a more highly-attuned sense of self-preservation. We sought more of a trickle.

Enter the Gila. 649 miles long, crossing the entire state of Arizona from east to west, navigable by boat in historic times but now running bone-dry somewhere short and south of Phoenix. 26 modest watery wilderness miles from up near Clifton down towards Safford was all we asked for. We got it.

A four day trip made in early March of 2011, covering twenty-some miles of the Gila River from the Old Safford Bridge on the Black Hills Back Country Byway to a takeout a short paddle downriver of Bonita Creek.

Here's our map with some info on it:



[Download the Gila Box Paddle Trip Overview Map](#)

Gila Box Info (<http://www.allaboutivers.com/rivers-in-arizona/gila-box-RUN517.html>)

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Put In:	Old Safford-Clifton Road
Take Out:	Bonita Creek
Difficulty:	Class II
Gradient:	12 ft/mi
Run Length:	19 miles
Current Streamflow:	131 cfs @ 03/28/2013 12:00 PM - GILA RIVER NEAR CLIFTON, AZ. , reading taken from USGS
Good Level:	300 to 600 cfs
Season	March, April
Comments:	
Permit:	None presently required
Character/Similar To:	The Gila Box consists primarily of Class II rapids that flow through remote canyon country.
Hazards:	Fences and other possible strainers
Water Craft:	kayak,wwcan,raft
Land Ownership:	Mostly BLM
Wilderness:	Yes
Camping on River:	Excellent sites available
Location:	In the Canyon Country (AZ), 200 miles Southeast of Phoenix
Shuttle Logistics:	Put-in: From Guthrie, Arizona, take US 191 north about 6 miles and turn left on Old Safford-Clifton Road. Head south some 4 miles to the bridge and the put-in on the right bank. Take-out: Take US 70 to Solomen, Arizona, east of the town of Safford. Head north

on Sanchez Road and follow the signs to the Bonita Creek take-out.

Gila Box Riparian National Conservation (<http://www.ohwy.com/az/g/gbiitnvo.htm>)

Four perennial waterways are the central showpieces of this remarkable area. Not only is it one of the most significant riparian zones in the Southwest, it is one of only two Riparian National Conservation Areas in the United States. A segment of Bonita Creek and 23 miles of the Gila River are included in this special natural area lined with large cottonwoods, sycamores, and willows. Cliff dwellings, historic homesteads, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep and over 200 species of birds make this cool, year-round desert oasis worth the short drive from [Safford](#). Inflatable kayak, canoe, and rafting enthusiasts will enjoy an easy to moderate floating adventure in the canyon. A series of primitive roads provide access to various points throughout the area. Backcountry primitive camping opportunities are available at Bonita Creek and within the Gila River.