

DID YOU KNOW?

The Floods That Redrew Boquete's Rivers

The Río Caldera hasn't always run where it runs today. On **April 7–9, 1970**, a storm dropped **464 mm of rain in 24 hours** — about a tenth of a normal year's total — onto the watershed above town. Natural debris dams built up in the riverbeds and then failed in sequence, sending walls of water, rock, and tree trunks downstream; witnesses reported the ground-borne rumble was mistaken locally for a volcanic tremor. The river and its tributaries didn't just flood — they physically re-cut their channels, in places two to three meters deeper than before. At Bajo Chorro, the channel widened from **23 to 84 meters**; at Quebrada Pandura, from **5 to 38 meters**. Eight people died. That same flood is also what destroyed the first house on the Serracín family finca in Bajo Mono — the property later rebuilt as Boquete's "haunted castle."

The Caldera has repeated the pattern since. In **January 2005**, it jumped its banks at the Panamonte hotel bridge, forcing the evacuation of more than 300 people and flooding the Feria de las Flores y del Café grounds just two days after that year's fair had opened. In **November 2008**, an even more dramatic event saw the river braid into dozens of new channels through town, some of them running straight down streets that used to carry cars instead of water; the Panamonte bridge connecting Bajo Boquete to Jaramillo was destroyed outright, and roughly a third of the Feria fairgrounds was gouged away. Boquete's rivers, it turns out, have redrawn the town's map more than once.

Sources: I. Alaniz, A. Mendoza & R. Bernal, "Inundaciones provocadas por el río Caldera, en Boquete (1970, 2005 y 2008)," Universidad Tecnológica de Panamá course project, published via Piragua – Fuego y Agua (2020); Milagros Sánchez Pinzon, "La furia del río Caldera," Semanario Culturama (2008).