

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Gatlinburg, Tennessee

Phone: (615) 436-9564

www.nps.gov/grsm

Ridge upon ridge of endless forest straddles the border between North Carolina and Tennessee in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. World renowned for the diversity of its plant and animal life, the beauty of its ancient mountains, and the quality of its remnants of Southern Appalachian mountain culture, this is America's most visited national park. Covering more than a half million acres in North Carolina and Tennessee, these ancient mountains are home to a wide variety of plant and animal life unsurpassed in the National Park Service. The Park also offers a glimpse into the lives of early Southern Appalachian farming families and community lifestyles. Seventy-seven historic structures concentrated in five historic districts include a collection of log cabins, barns, churches, grist mills and various outbuildings. In addition to its role in preserving the rich natural and historical heritage, the Park is a place for outdoor recreational pursuits. These range from a short stroll in the woods to a more extensive hike in the backcountry. Camping, fishing, picnicking, and horseback riding, or just viewing magnificent scenery are favorite pastimes. Every season in the Smokies can be the best time to visit: spring wildflowers, summer camping along cool mountain streams, fall foliage, and winter's crisp, blue skies are all reasons to visit. But planning is the key to a safe and enjoyable stay.

Andrews Bald Trail

This is an easy and pleasant hike that begins at the third highest point in the eastern United States. Most any hiker with even the least amount of experience can do this hike without any difficulty. For this reason expect to see other hikers on this trail. No worries though, Andrews Bald is large enough to handle even the biggest crowds and still afford hikers with their own little picnic spot. The views make this a worthwhile hike, in spite of the company. The hike begins at the Clingman's Dome parking lot on Forney Ridge. Be sure to walk the .25 of a mile up the hill to the Clingman's Dome Tower. This is the third highest point in the Eastern U.S. and the highest point in the park at 6643 feet. The trail itself is 1.8 miles long (3.6 miles roundtrip).

hikingthecarolinas.com/andrews.php

Balsam Corner

(6,040 ft) The trail goes through cool spruce and balsam forest in Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Spring water and shelter are offered near Balsam Corner Treat. Hike starts at Round Bottom parking area beside Straight Fork. The trail features a beautiful stream. From Highway 441 at park entry, turn on to the Big Cove-Road at 9 miles immediately across concrete bridge, turn right on to gravel road, and follow it for 5 miles to Round Bottom Parking area. Walk up road, and cross the concrete bridge. About 150 yards beyond the bridge to the left is the faint Ledge Bald Trail. Make a steady gradual climb to Balsam Divide. Continue north on ridge until crossing Mount Sterling, then make a left to Tri-corner Knob and Mount Guyot on the AT.

Boogerman Trail

The trail winds along Caldwell Fork, twisting and turning over numerous footbridges. The sound of rushing water fills the air and the creek views are "typically Smokies". Although there is frequent horse traffic, that is a small price to pay to view this extremely beautiful creek. Caldwell Fork Trail never leaves sight of the creek. After passing the first sign for the Boogerman Trail the bridge crossings become more frequent. The creek scenes are so beautiful that it is almost surreal. Up until recently the bridges were in a state of disrepair and many were unsafe. Thanks to the diligence of the Park Service, the bridges have been repaired and are all in good shape. The frequent crossings of the bridges are nice because it gives a close up look at one of the more picturesque creeks in the Smokies. During the month of June, the blooming and fragrant Rhododendrons that line the creek put on quite a show.

hikingthecarolinas.com/Boogerman.php

Cataloochee Mountain

First settled in the early 1830's Cataloochee is still a quiet valley on the fringes of the Smokies. This is where the Blue Ridge Mountains meet the Great Smoky Mountains. Many of the first settlers came here in search of peace and the freedom that wilderness has to offer. Coincidentally, that is the same reason that I like to hike there. The road to the Cataloochee area is dirt, narrow and full of pot holes. The rugged qualities of the road are the source of many visitor's complaints. The positive side of that is that it helps to keep the crowds away from this beautiful, remote valley. Large campers have great difficulty negotiating the winding road, so you won't see many of them. Not hearing the gasoline generators that these campers bring with them is a big plus.

Charlie's Bunion

(5,560ft) Yes it's true that the most crowded section of the Appalachian Trail is the section that leads to Charles Bunion. Perhaps it's the views or maybe it's the ease of access. Either way it's well worth the frequent greetings to other hikers, to make the trip through this busy stretch of the A.T.. Novice hikers enjoy this one way walk of 6 miles because the trail is well graded and doesn't have any great elevation changes. Experienced hikers, including AT Thru Hikers, like this section of the trail because of the stunning views. I like it for both reasons. The trail begins at the Newfound Gap parking lot, in the heart of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. This is a great place to meet people, and other hikers, from all over the world. This section of the AT begins to the left of the path to the rest rooms. For the first mile or so you will see many walkers that wander from the parking lot. Don't worry they won't go far before they turn back.

hikingthecarolinas.com/charles.php

Clingman's Dome

USGS Maps: Clingman's Dome, Bryson City

Clingman's Dome is the highest mountain in the Great Smoky National Park. Third highest in Eastern America, the highest point on the Appalachian Trail. Observation tower provides splendid panoramic views above Fraser firs. Drive Southwest 1.3 miles to Indian Gap. Can be driven to within a half mile. Park and go southwest on the Appalachian Trail, which passes through, gap just West of Spur road. Take side trail for last 50 yards to tower. The trail provides a strenuous 2 mile roundtrip.

Deep Creek

Is 3 miles north of Bryson City. There is a 7-day camping limit from May 15 -October 31 and a 14-day limit during the rest of the year. There are 118 individual sites and 6 group sites. Open April-October.

Mount Cammerer

At 4928 feet in elevation, Mt. Cammerer is on the edge a precipitous slope overlooking the Pigeon River Gorge.

The mountain directly across the gorge with the white aviation tower on it is the 4263' Snowbird Mountain. The elevation of the gorge that the fire-tower overlooks below is less than 2000'. Also below you and outside of the park is the water tower for the hydro-electric plant in the Big Creek area. To the south is the Mt. Sterling Ridge with another interesting fire-tower on its highest point. Beyond that is a seemingly endless expanse of mountains we call the Smokies.

hikingthecarolinas.com/mt_camerrerr.php

Mount LeConte

To reach the trailhead from North Carolina you must first drive over the crest of the Smokies at Newfound Gap. As you descend on 441, driving towards Alum Cave Trail, the ridges that tower above the road show the exposed sandstone that makes up the backbone of the Smokies. These are the first glimpses of the ever changing mountain terrain that is a characteristic of the 6595 foot monolith you are about to climb. Evidence of landslides that are the result of steep slopes and 80+ inches of annual rainfall surround you as you approach the trail.

hikingthecarolinas.com/test.php

Mount Sterling Loop

Mt Sterling is in the northwestern section of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. This is a heavily traveled part of the park but it is still possible to enjoy the many features this area has to offer. This is a loop hike that requires a minimum of a two night stay in the backcountry. The Laurel Gap Shelter and Mt. Sterling campsites are rationed meaning that reservations are necessary to camp in these locations. The backcountry reservation center is open 7 days a week from 8AM to 6PM and can be reached at (423) 436-1231. Campsite 39, in the Cataloochee area is not rationed but you still must fill out a backcountry permit. The Backcountry Camping Link has complete details about permit procedures. This process is essential to the survival of the Park because of the heavy traffic it receives. The hike begins and ends at Pin Oak Gap on Balsam Mountain Road. The road is a dirt road that takes you deep into the backcountry of the Balsam Mountain Area. Unfortunately it is only open from Memorial Day to Labor Day. I highly recommend picking up a trail map from the Park Service before heading into the backcountry. It sells for the paltry sum of one dollar and is a wealth of information. It can also prevent getting lost in the backcountry.

hikingthecarolinas.com/mt.php

Pretty Hollow Gap

USGS Maps: Cove Creek Gap, Luftee Knob

From Cataloochee Valley in the Great Smoky National Park the trail has an easy grade after the first 2.5 mile climb. Much of the route is high on the gorge above a beautiful stream. Take US 276 for 5.8 miles North from US 19 at Dellwood; turn left onto SR 1395 (old NC 284) just before I-40 entrance. Go 7.9 miles turn left onto paved road. After 2.9 miles turn left at bridge in Cataloochee Valley, drive 2 miles to bridge at old schoolhouse. Park near gate to dirt road, cross gate and head West. Follow trail signs up the creek to Pretty Hollow Gap. Worthwhile to go 2 miles more to Mount Sterling with magnificent views from tower. This trip can be combined with the Cataloochee Valley hike described above. 12 mile round trip.

Ramsey Cascades

There are many beautiful creek hikes in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park and beauty is in the eye of the beholder. While it is difficult to say which is **THE** most beautiful creek hike, the hike to the Ramsey Cascades must rank in the top ten. Close to Gatlinburg, TN., a mere 15 minute drive, this hike is easily accessible from one of the most visited towns in the Smokies. The countless waterfalls that line the trail make this a wonderful hike to "walk off" a huge meal! Big Creek, Eagle Creek, Hazel Creek and Deep Creek are a few of the more well known creek hikes. Ramsay Cascades is not as well known but ranks in my top 10 creek hikes of the Smokies. This one is great for a day hike and no horses are allowed. The absence of horse traffic means a better quality of trail and fewer insects.

hikingthecarolinas.com/Ramsey_Cascades.php

Smokemont

Reservations available. It is adjacent to Newfound Gap Road 6 miles north of Cherokee. It is opened year around, and there is a 7-day camping limit from May 15 – October 31 and a 14 day limit during the remainder of the year. There are 140 individual and 10 group sites open March-October. Camping supplies can be purchased in Cherokee.