

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Summary Report

Gary E. Everhardt Park Break Program

Clemson University Institute for Parks

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Sponsor



**INSTITUTE
FOR PARKS**

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I. Introduction

Long before it became a national park, the region known as the Great Smoky Mountains was called “Shaconage”—the land of blue smoke—by the Cherokee Nation, the area’s ancestral stewards. Today, over 12 million annual visitors come to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to experience the magic and quiet found beneath the cool canopy of a hardwood forest, alongside a flowing river, or on the edge of a scenic ridge line.

Great Smoky Mountain National Park (GRSM) has four visitor centers that provide interpretation and various resources to help travelers with wayfinding, but, increasingly, curious visitors are trading in their maps for social media and websites that highlight the most popular regional attractions. Websites and apps are useful tools, but navigating the breadth of GRSM online can be challenging. The Gary E. Everhardt Park Break Program aims to provide trail descriptions to better equip visitors with the knowledge to explore *more* of the park’s 848 miles of trails in one of the world’s oldest mountain ranges.

Year after year, GRSM welcomes more visitors than any other U.S. national park, yet most experience only a small fraction of its 522,000 acres. High, concentrated visitation and foot traffic present challenges for park management, who must carefully balance recreation with the conservation and preservation of the park’s natural, cultural, and historical resources.

With support from the Friends of the Smokies, Clemson University Institute for Parks, the George Wright Society, School of Natural Resources at the University of Tennessee, and the National Park Service, Everhardt Park Break fellows traveled to GRSM for one week and developed site narratives, site descriptions, and photographs documenting underutilized park destinations for promotional purposes. These multimedia materials will help guide visitors toward destinations that better match their desires, expectations, and accessibility needs and expectations, while also supporting park personnel in distributing visitation more evenly across GRSM.

II. Gary E. Everhardt Park Break and Assessment Team

The Gary E. Everhardt Park Break is a seven-to-ten-day park-based leadership and service-learning program for graduate students from diverse backgrounds. Applications are solicited prior to the program. Between seven and ten graduate students considering careers in park and cultural site management are selected for participation. Upon arrival, the selected students explore topics of importance to the host park and interact with park researchers, natural and cultural resource managers, and policy makers. The program is focused on providing graduate students with leadership opportunities in parks and protected areas, and is the only graduate-level service, science, and stewardship program that focuses on scientific and other scholarly inquiry in a park managed by the National Park Service (NPS). Since 2008, more than 180 students have participated in the program which is coordinated by the Clemson University Institute for Parks in partnership with the George Wright Society. Below are the biographies of the eight “Everhardt Fellows” and the three faculty facilitators that participated in the 2025 GRSM Park Break program.

Team Photo



Everhardt Fellows



Audrey Roy is a master's student in Environmental Sustainability at the University of Ottawa with academic and professional experiences in environmental management, sustainable governance, and clean energy policy. Her research explores pathways to making national parks zero waste, with a particular focus on the role of environmental and fiscal policy in supporting sustainable park operations. Audrey is passionate about bridging research and policy to promote sustainability in park and protected area management.



Chunyan Hua is a Ph.D. student in the community resources and development program at Arizona State University. She holds a B.A. in accounting from Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics and an M.A. in hospitality management from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She worked in accounting for 6 years at Renmin University of China in Beijing. Chunyan's research focuses on gamification in the tourism industry. She is interested in Chinese ink painting and Chinese poems.



Faith Breads is a writer from Waldorf, Maryland. She is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing as well as a concurrent degree in Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming. She nourishes her writing through movement, completing a thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail in 2021 and a 550-mile section hike of the Pacific Crest Trail in 2024. She graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park, in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature.



Katherine (Katie) Frey is currently pursuing her master's degree in Forestry from Michigan State University. She is currently a communications manager working for the MSU College of Social Science, and she holds a B.A. in French, B.A. in Professional Writing, and an M.A. in Strategic Communications, all from MSU. Katie is interested in the intersection between people and forests. She teaches yoga and enjoys the outdoors through running, hiking, camping, backpacking and taking her dog for long walks.



Madelyn (Maddie) Cottrell is a master's student in the Parks and Recreation Lab within the College of Natural Resources at the University of Idaho. She also holds a Certificate in Sustainability from the University of Georgia. Her research focuses on the human dimensions of parks and protected area management, with an emphasis on public-private stewardship and visitor use management. Maddie serves on the Conservation Committee of the Sierra Club's San Diego Chapter, volunteers with the Tidepool Protection, Education, and Restoration Program at Cabrillo National Monument, and is an active member of Impact 100 Pensacola Bay Area.



Madison Janes is a master's student in the Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Lab in the School of Natural Resources at the University of Tennessee, with a B.S. in Environmental Studies and Sustainability from Michigan State University. Her research focuses on parks and protected areas, visitor experiences, and the human dimensions of natural resources. Outside of academics, she enjoys hiking, reading, baking, and exploring coffee shops.



Russell Hicks is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Applied Park Science Lab at Kansas State University. He has a M.S. in Parks, Recreation, and Tourism from the University of Utah and a B.S. in Park Management and Conservation from Kansas State University. His research focuses on visitor use management and recreation ecology, with a focus on developing novel methods to more efficiently collect data on visitor use and impacts to public lands.



Nate Trappe is a Ph.D. candidate in Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management at Clemson University. He holds a B.A. in Business Administration and an M.A. in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and is passionate about nature-based recreation, physical health, youth development, and conservation. He founded a publishing company and currently works for a non-profit organization that encourages people to spend time outdoors and collect data for conservation. He loves bears and ice cream.

Faculty Facilitators



Dr. Bob Powell is the Director of the Institute for Parks at Clemson University and the George B. Hartzog, Jr. Endowed Professor in the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management. He also has an appointment in the Department of Forestry and Environmental Conservation. Bob's research and outreach program, which focuses on environmental education and interpretation, park and protected area management, sustainable tourism, and biodiversity conservation is supported by organizations such as the US National Park Service, National Science Foundation, and US Forest Service and has taken him to over 40 countries and 7 continents.



Dr. Ryan Sharp is an Associate Professor in the School of Natural Resources at the University of Tennessee. His teaching and research focus on visitor use management in parks and protected areas. He has been fortunate to work with agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. National Park Service and partner with international agencies in countries such as Argentina, Aruba and the Seychelles.



Dr. Lauren Stephens is a Senior Lecturer and the EDGE Coordinator in the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management at Clemson University. She holds a B.S. in Secondary Education, M.P.W. in Professional Writing, and Ph.D. in Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, with a Youth Development program focus. She is passionate about student learning and engagement, where her approach to teaching and mentoring is grounded in viewing students as people first and students second. Stephens' research focuses on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning through pedagogy and course design and on the ways contextual factors, such as relationships and social media, influence student-athletes' perceptions of body image, eating behaviors, and related symptoms.

III. GRSM Trails and Parkway Descriptions

Over a six-day period, Everhardt Park Break fellows described and evaluated 19 sites or 22.64 miles of trails and 42.65 miles of parkway in and around Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We developed descriptions and a library of photos of “accessible trails” that will document the typical tread, barriers (e.g., staircases, steep sections), characteristic features (e.g., waterfall, historic cabin, old growth trees), and typical scenery. We also developed narratives describing a range of trails, overlooks, and road destinations along with providing photos of these destinations that can be used by NPS personnel to develop webpages. The full list of sites and their categorization are provided in the table below.

Table 1. Trails and Parkway sections

Site	Accessibility	Narrative
Cades Cove Visitor Center Area Trails	☒	☐
Cataract Falls	☒	☐
Cooper Road	☒	☐
Cove Hardwood Trail	☐	☒
Deep Creek Trail to Indian Creek Falls	☒	☐
Elijah Oliver Trail	☒	☐
Finley Cane Trail to Bote Mtn. Trail to Lead Cove Trail Loop	☐	☒
Foothills Parkway Cosby to I-40	☐	☒
Foothills Parkway Walland to Wears Valley	☐	☒
Foothills Parkway Chilhowee to Walland	☐	☒

Gatlinburg Trail	☒	☐
John Oliver Trail	☒	☐
Lakeview Drive	☐	☒
Middle Prong Trail	☒	☐
Oconaluftee River Trail	☒	☐
Schoolhouse Gap Trail	☐	☒
Smokemont Nature Trail	☐	☒
Sugarland Valley Trail	☒	☐
West Prong Trail	☐	☒

IV. Accessibility Descriptions

Park Break Fellows described and evaluated 10 trails for potential impediments and barriers to trail users with mobility difficulties or users of mobility assistive devices (e.g., wheelchairs, walkers, strollers, etc.). Fellows photographed the parking areas, trail entrances, and trail surfaces to provide visitors with a visual reference for standard trail conditions and potential barriers to use. (See appendix for list and meta-data of all photographs).

Table 2. Accessibility Sites

Site	
Cades Cove Visitor Center Area Trails	Gatlinburg Trail
Cataract Falls Trail	John Oliver Trail
Cooper Road Trail	Middle Prong Trail
Deep Creek Trail	Oconaluftee River Trail
Elijah Oliver Trail	Sugarland Valley Nature Trail

Cades Cove Visitor Center Area Trails



Pathway to the Cades Cove Visitor Center from parking lot

Length: 0.3 miles (0.48 km) roundtrip

Elevation Gain: Flat

Overview

Cades Cove Visitor Center is approximately 5.5 miles (8.5 km) around the Cades Cove Loop Road. The paths and trails near the visitor center that access the gift shop, restrooms, and the Cable Mill Historic Area, which includes the Becky Cable House, Cable mill, blacksmith shop, and barns, are primarily paved or hard-packed gravel and relatively flat. The path beyond the Becky Cable House has a step that transitions to a dirt path. There are restrooms, a bookstore and gift shop, and multiple historic buildings including a gristmill that operates spring through fall.

Photo Gallery

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1yS9TzdQrJy8PajpQw8V9IBZG2KXRcljW>

Cataract Falls Trail



Hike 1.82 miles on Cataract Falls Trail from the Sugarland Visitor Center

Length: 1.82 miles (2.9 km) roundtrip

Elevation Gain: 63 ft (19.2 m)

Elevation Loss: 63 ft (19.2 m)

Overview

Explore the 1.82-mile unpaved out-and-back trail to Cataract Falls, which follows a wide dirt and gravel path beside Fighting Creek. The trail has a slope of approximately 1-2% with a maximum grade of 7%. While mostly smooth, the path has some exposed roots and rocks, a few of which are marked with cones. A wooden pedestrian bridge crosses the creek, with its ramps bordered by logs that form steps.

The trail includes three to four stair sections, the longest being 15 steps, which cover roughly 6 ft of elevation gain. The narrowest point of the trail is about 2 feet wide, where the trail passes under the Park Headquarters Road. From the Sugarlands Visitor Center to the trailhead, the first 200 feet of the path are paved. Accessible parking and restrooms are available at the Sugarlands Visitor Center.

Photo Gallery: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/109SGsionvJlFKLmHRBUj9LKma7XipOnZ>

Cooper Road Trail



Hike one mile from Abrams Campground parking area to backcountry campsite #1

Length: 2 miles (3.2 km) roundtrip

Elevation Gain: 196 ft (59.74 m)

Elevation Loss: 196 ft (59.74 m)

Overview

Travel one mile along Cooper Road Trail to backcountry campsite #1. This trail was historically used to travel in and out of Cades Cove by Native Americans, early settlers, and the logging industry. These days, the Cooper Road Trail is the road less traveled. The wide trail is a former road that begins as gravel and transitions to dirt with roots, rocks, depressions and three stream crossings.

Photo Gallery:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HzYdSO-clt2IEvIT7A7YRSZdQyRlDcpA>

Deep Creek Trail to Indian Creek Falls



Hike 0.8 miles to Indian Creek Falls from the Deep Creek trailhead

Length: 1.6 miles (2.6 km) roundtrip

Elevation Gain: 160 ft (48.8 m)

Elevation Loss: 160 ft (48.8 m)

Overview

Hike 1.6 miles (2.6 km) roundtrip along Deep Creek, which features views of two waterfalls, Tom Branch Falls and Indian Creek Falls. The trail is a wide, gravel path with occasional roots and rocks. At approximately 0.3 miles (0.5 km), the trail flattens out near Tom Branch Falls. Take in the view on one of five benches or stony steps alongside Deep Creek before proceeding an additional 0.4 miles (0.6 km) to the Indian Creek Trail junction. After crossing the footbridge, there are three creek-side benches and one bench further up the trail with an elevated overlook of Deep Creek. Turn right at the junction with Indian Creek Trail and proceed 520 feet (161 m) to Indian Creek Falls on the left side of the trail. Approximately 22 steps lead to a small viewing platform. Use caution in the fall and winter, as sections of the trail may become icy.

Photo Gallery: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vUJptT0ubM1oOeOeCjaFrSaeas4qB7M>

Elijah Oliver Trail



Hike one mile roundtrip to visit Elijah Oliver Place from the Cades Cove Loop

Length: 1 mile (1.6 km) roundtrip

Elevation Gain: 77 ft (23.47 m)

Elevation Loss: 77 ft (23.47 m)

Overview

Hike one mile (1.6 km) roundtrip to the nineteenth century cabin where Elijah Oliver and his family lived in the late 1800s. The historic structure consists of two cabins that are connected by a breezeway and share a common roof, along with a corn crib, smokehouse, springhouse, and barn. Expect to find a wide, gradual incline with some areas of dirt, gravel, rocks, roots, uneven surface, and one stream crossing on the way to the cabin. Turn around after reaching [Elijah Oliver Place](#).

Photo Gallery:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1mOmPpehc0R4yKAYw4LSvxyDAlawS2qgJ?usp=drive_link

Gatlinburg Trail



Hike 1.9 miles on the Gatlinburg Trail (one-way) beginning at the Sugarlands Visitor Center

Length: 3.8 miles (6.10 km) roundtrip

Elevation Gain: 28 ft (8.5 m)

Elevation Loss: 117 ft (35.7 m)

Overview

Hike 1.9 miles along the Gatlinburg Trail (one-way) on a scenic trail connecting the town of Gatlinburg to the Sugarlands Visitor Center. The trail follows the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River and passes through lush forest and features remnants of old homesites. The trail is relatively wide and flat, with sections of paved road, crushed stone, roots, and uneven dirt. It is one of the few park trails that allows dogs and bicycles.

Photo Gallery: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1U6AuOAAqax-LFxHMAtzk9n4L0bkJ8wdA>

John Oliver Trail



Hike 0.3 miles from the parking area to John Oliver Cabin

Length: 0.6 miles (0.96 km) roundtrip

Elevation Gain: 51 ft (15.54 m)

Elevation Loss: 51 ft (15.54 m)

Overview

Explore the 0.3-mile paved trail to the 1818 John Oliver Cabin, an ADA accessible path that travels along the edge of the field and turns into a wide gravel path 150 feet before reaching the cabin. The cabin is surrounded by gravel and has views of the eastern side of Cades Cove. At the cabin, there is a step to get onto the uneven boards of the porch and another step across the threshold of the cabin door. There is not a ramp to access the interior of the cabin. The alternative dirt and gravel path is shorter (0.2 miles or 0.3 km) but has a steeper grade and occasional roots, rocks and ruts.

Photo Gallery:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gntc6EA0oez-8T4tvYfUi9MkBzKp-cCD>

Middle Prong Trail



Hike 1.3 miles from the parking area to Lynn Camp Falls

Length: 2.6 miles (4.18 km) roundtrip

Elevation Gain: 400 ft (121.93 m)

Elevation Loss: 400 ft (121.93 m)

Overview

Travel 1.3 miles (2.09 km) along the Middle Prong of the Little River to enjoy canopied views and the sound of water dancing downstream. Because the trail is converted from an old logging railroad, expect to find a wide trail with a gradual incline with some areas of dirt, gravel, rocks, roots, uneven surface, and some ruts from streams. Turn around after reaching Lynn Camp Falls, an overlook with two benches.

Photo Gallery:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1XT1wWYmOY5__l0pCNkTL4MMCxxGYsK2o?usp=drive_link

Oconaluftee River Trail



Hike 3 miles roundtrip from the Oconaluftee Visitor Center

Length: 3 miles (4.8 km) roundtrip

Elevation Gain: 70 ft (21 m)

Elevation Loss: 70 ft (21 m)

Overview

Hike 3 miles roundtrip on the Oconaluftee River Trail that connects the Oconaluftee Visitor Center to Cherokee, North Carolina. Biking and pets on a leash are allowed on the wide gravel and dirt path. Interpretive signs share Cherokee information about the area, and the Mountain Farm Museum near the visitor's center has a collection of historic buildings that offer a glimpse into 19th-century Appalachian farm life. The trail is made of dense gravel and dirt and winds under a leafy canopy of oak, maple, and sycamore trees. In the open meadows near the trail entrances, you may see elk grazing or resting in the early morning or evening. Please stay at least 50 yards from elk and all wildlife.

Photo Gallery:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_hZi-QRT8RIYzIE9xr1UFVguJgOrx_Br

Sugarlands Valley Nature Trail



Hike 0.5 miles on Sugarlands Valley Trail

Length: 0.5 miles (0.8 km) loop

Elevation Gain: 23 feet (7 m)

Overview

Explore the Sugarlands Valley Nature Trail, a 0.5-mile (0.7 km) paved loop located just south of the Sugarlands Visitor Center. This fully ADA accessible trail meanders through a lush cove hardwood forest alongside a stream, featuring historic stone chimneys and rock walls that hint at the area's past settlements. It is suitable for visitors of most ages and abilities, including those using wheelchairs or strollers, and it provides the opportunity for a peaceful and educational walk through the natural and historical resources of the Sugarlands Area.

Photo Gallery:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CUcXOivr1uWa06Jvc7Yrt55y4lIKlIrd>

V. Narrative Descriptions

More detailed than the accessibility site summaries, the 9 narrative site descriptions are designed to inform visitors and encourage exploration of lesser-known recreation opportunities throughout Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Park Break Fellows walked or drove all trails/parkways, used a surveyor's wheel and vehicle odometers to measure distances of trails and parkways, photographed and researched local flora, fauna, and historic features, and recorded elevation changes to create concise yet comprehensive overviews of each site.

Table 3. Narrative Sites

Site	
Cove Hardwood Trail	Foothills Parkway (Walland to Wears Valley)
Finley Cane Trail to Bote Mountain Trail to Lead Cove Trail Loop	Schoolhouse Gap Trail
Lakeview Drive	Smokemont Nature Trail
Foothills Parkway (Cosby to I-40)	West Prong Trail
Foothills Parkway (Chilhowee to Walland)	

Cove Hardwood Trail



Hike 0.75 miles from the Cove Hardwood Trailhead at the Chimney Picnic Area

Overview

Explore a forest of giants and wind through a mountainside of spring wildflowers on this iconic 0.75-mile loop hike. The Cove Hardwood Forest is among the most diverse and is home to a multitude of trees, plants, and animals. The forest also tells a story of human settlement, logging, and regrowth, representing the resilience of the forests that make up the present-day park.

Expect to climb several sets of stairs and step over roots and rocks at the beginning of this loop trail, but once you reach the trail junction the terrain climbs more gently and ends with a gradual descent. Find solitude among the songbirds and ephemeral streams. The vibrant flowers of spring, the lush green of summer, the parade of color in fall, and the peaceful hush of winter create a sense of an enchanted forest here in every season.

Detailed Directions

The trail begins in the Chimney's Picnic Area with stairs that wind up past the group picnic site and then transitions to soil, roots, and rocks. The first section of the trail has two sets of steps (40 in total), but the trail becomes less steep for the rest of the hike. After the steps, approximately 700 feet from the trailhead, there is a junction with an arrow pointing to take

the loop to the right. Continue to follow the loop around until it eventually begins to descend back to the junction. Turn right to return to the trailhead and parking area.

Length

0.75 miles (1.21 kms) roundtrip

Parking and Trailhead

Seven parking spots next to the trailhead and extra parking throughout the Chimney Picnic Area. Don't forget [your parking tag](#).

Nearest Restrooms

[Chimney's Picnic Area](#)

Nearest Campground

[Elkmont Campground](#)

Alternate Hikes (these are similar hikes)

Smokemont Nature Trail

Cooper Road Trail

Accessibility Information

Hike has some steep sections, stairs, and occasional roots/rocks on the trail.

Photo Gallery

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IRmhNi4gfuy9frRgDKW6wmjufgWINm8a>

Finley Cane Trail to Bote Mountain Trail to Lead Cove Trail Loop



Hike 6.9 miles from Finley Cane to Lead Cove via Bote Mountain

Overview

This looped route links three shorter trails, offering hikers a chance to experience the biodiversity of Bote Mountain at various elevations and temperatures. Climbing over 1,200 feet across 6.9 miles (11.10 km), hikers will experience the rhododendron-lined thickets on Finley Cane Trail, the ridgeline views atop Bote Mountain, and a cool descent beneath the mixed hardwoods and tulip poplar trees on Lead Cove trail. This all-season loop provides wildflowers in the spring, shade in the summer, leaf-lined vistas in the fall, and unobstructed views to the east and west of the Bote Mountain ridgeline in the spring and winter. Located only minutes away from Cades Cove and Cades Cove Campground, this loop trail is perfect for hikers looking to step away from the crowds and onto a trail steeped in both history and elevation.

Detailed Directions

Begin at the Finley Cane trailhead, the left-most, rocky path that parallels Laurel Creek Road. Over the next 2.6 miles, hikers will rock-hop across both wet and dry streams as the trail rises and falls along the mountainside. Along the way, you'll cross Sugar Cove Creek before reaching a muddy intersection with Turkey Pen Ridge. At this junction, veer slightly right to begin a gradual ascent along the north flank of Bote Mountain. About 1.5 miles in, you'll pass two hitching rails for horseback riders. Keep an eye out for seasonal wildflowers, mushrooms, and salamanders. Before reaching the Bote Mountain Trail junction, the trail winds through an area

of native switch cane—Finley Cane’s namesake—which was historically used for disciplinary purposes with the white settlers in the area and for baskets by the Cherokee.

At the Bote Mountain Trail junction, turn right to begin a rocky 1,015-foot climb. Bote Mountain Trail is a well-established trail used by cattle farmer James Spence in the mid-1800s. Rhododendrons and mountain laurels line the path as the canopy opens and the trail twists steadily uphill. This 2.48-mile stretch is steep and sun-exposed in places. As you near the Lead Cove Trail junction, enjoy sweeping views of Thunderhead and Defeat Ridge to your left.

At the Lead Cove trail junction, turn right to begin a 1.83-mile descent beneath moist, cool hardwood hollows. Bears and other wildlife may be spotted here. In the spring, various trillium species, iris, and bloodroot color the trail. This trail will terminate at Laurel Creek Road, returning hikers to the Finley Cane trailhead and their parked cars.

Length

2.6 miles from Finley Cove Trailhead to Bote Mountain Trail Junction

2.48 from Bote Mtn. Trail Junction to Lead Cove Trail Junction

1.83 from Lead Cove Trail Junction to Finley Cane Trailhead

6.9 miles (11.10 km) loop

The total ascent for this trail is 1,215 feet.

Parking & Trailhead

Head West on Laurel Creek Road, towards Cades Cove, and parallel park on the left (south side) at one of the two pull-offs available near the Finley Cane Trailhead. These pull-offs service three trails: Turkey Pen Ridge Trail, Finley Cane Trail and Lead Cove Trail. If you park on the opposite side of the road, be careful as traffic can be heavy. Don't forget [your parking tag](#).

Nearest Campground

[Cades Cove Campground](#) (available seasonally)

Nearest Restroom

[Cades Cove Campground](#) (available seasonally)

Alternate Hikes

West Prong Trail: 5.4 miles (8.7 km) roundtrip

Turkey Pen Ridge Trail: 3.6 miles (5.8 km) roundtrip

Accessibility Information

There are no designated accessible parking spaces at this time. This trail includes dirt and loose gravel with rocky sections, protruding roots, water crossings, and steep grades.

Photo Gallery

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xMgCAork1d_TzIz4s2XBEHrgrJIwZuIJ

Lakeview Drive



View from the Fontana Lake Overlook 3.2 miles from the start of Lakeview Drive

Overview

Lakeview Drive is an 11.4-mile (18.3 km) roundtrip paved road that climbs out of Bryson City, North Carolina, and offers scenic views of Fontana Lake and the surrounding mountains. The drive includes four overlooks and several hiking trails such as Noland Creek Trail, Benton McKaye Trail, Goldmine Loop, and Lakeshore Trail and is ideal for visitors seeking a road less traveled for leaf-peeping, wildlife viewing, and picnicking. Lakeview Drive ends at the mouth of [Lakeview Drive Tunnel](#), a 1,200-foot unlit, pedestrian-only tunnel and the trailhead for Lakeshore Trail to Fontana Dam.

Lakeview Drive links Swain County's early settler and logging history and highlights the sacrifice of these communities to the formation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the construction of Fontana Dam in the 1940s. Hikers may see evidence of these early communities and the remnants of the area's many former historic churches, homesteads, farms, orchards, and sawmills. Lakeview Drive was originally planned to connect the displaced residents to cemeteries and other important community sites, but environmental challenges halted construction in the 1960s. The road now serves as a scenic gateway to [Great Smoky Mountain National Park](#).

Detailed Directions

From the Great Smoky Mountains Association Visitor Center and Store in downtown Bryson City, follow Everett Street north and continue on Fontana Road for about 2.5 miles until you reach the Great Smoky Mountain National Park entrance called Lakeview Drive.

Mile 3.2: Fontana Lake Overlook has 8 parking spaces, 1 picnic table, and 1 trash can

Mile 5.0: Access to Noland Creek Trail and Benton McKaye Trail with 21 parking spaces

Mile 5.4: No trail access, 6 surplus parking spaces

Mile 5.7: Access to Lakeview Drive Tunnel, Tunnel Bypass Trail, Goldmine Loop Trail, and Lakeshore Trail with 12 parking spaces

Length

11.4 miles (18.3 km) roundtrip

Parking

Parking varies by overlook. Don't forget [your parking tag](#).

Nearest Restroom

[Oconaluftee Visitor Center](#)

Similar Routes

Foothills Parkway (Cosby to I-40) [\[Link\]](#)

Foothills Parkway (Chilhowee to Walland) [\[Link\]](#)

Foothills Parkway (Walland to Wears Valley) [\[Link\]](#)

Accessibility Information

Accessible parking spaces are available at each overlook and parking spot. The entirety of Lakeview Drive is paved but adjacent trails are on gravel or soil with occasional rocks and roots.

Photo Gallery

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1SPgLbCX3uFpyMsR0xMVnLioNgwnGbDM_

Foothills Parkway (Cosby to I-40)



Foothills Parkway East via Cosby from the Cosby Overlook, 1.4 miles from the Cosby entrance

Overview

Looking for the path less traveled? Take the Foothills Parkway East from Cosby, Tennessee, and climb 1,000 feet in elevation along Green Mountain for 5.6 miles (9 km) of sweeping views of the eastern Appalachians. Enjoy eagle-eye vistas of Cherokee National Forest, Cosby Valley, and Raines Knob from one of four scenic overlooks.

This section of the Foothills Parkway offers an ideal opportunity for visitors to take in the grandeur of the Smokies with ease. Accessible via Cosby, it provides a scenic alternative for those traveling to or from Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Gatlinburg or Pigeon Forge, and North Carolina.

Visitors can stretch their legs at the Cosby Picnic Area, only 6.5 miles from the Cosby entrance of Foothills Parkway. Cosby is known for its breathtaking landscape, quiet hikes, spring wildflowers, fall foliage, and old-growth forest.

Detailed Directions

This section of Foothills Parkway stretches from Cosby Highway by US 321 to I-40, Exit #443. Mileposts mark the distance from the Cosby Highway entrance.

For visitors traveling west to east, take U.S. 321 E and turn left onto Cosby Hwy.
In 1.8 miles, turn right onto Foothills Parkway, beginning at an elevation of 1,363 feet.
Mile 0.4: The Foothills Parkway sign, at 1,487 feet, has ample, undesignated parking spaces.
Mile 1.4: Cosby Overlook, at 1,811 feet, faces southwest and has ample, undesignated parking spaces.
Mile 2.2: Green Mountain Overlook, at 2,136 feet, faces southeast, making it a great location for sunrise chasers, and has ample, undesignated parking spaces.
Mile 3.6: Allen Grove Overlook, at 1,948 feet, faces northwest and has ample, undesignated parking spaces.
Mile 4.7: Greasy Cove Overlook and Foothills Parkway, at 1,603 feet, faces northwest and has ample, undesignated parking spaces.
Mile 5.6: The Foothills Parkway East via Cosby terminates at Interstate 40 at Exit 443.

Length

5.6 miles (9.01 km) one-way

Parking

Undesignated stalls, but ample parking is available at four scenic overlooks along the parkway.
Don't forget [your parking tag](#).

Nearest Campground

[Cosby Campground](#) (available seasonally)

Nearest Restroom

[Cosby Picnic Area](#) (available seasonally)

Similar Routes

Lakeview Drive [\[Link\]](#)
Foothills Parkway (Chilhowee to Walland) [\[Link\]](#)
Foothills Parkway (Walland to Wears Valley) [\[Link\]](#)

Accessibility Information

There are no designated accessible parking spaces at this time.

Photo Gallery

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/128TW9JxACUDJI8AiTQcm8gFluD9fyGRp>

Foothills Parkway (Chilhowee to Walland)



Look Rock Overlook, 7.1 miles from the southern entrance to Foothills Parkway at Chilhowee Lake

Overview

Drive the Foothills Parkway West that connects the community of Walland to the southwest corner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park at Chilhowee Lake. The parkway is popular among individuals seeking to drive the “Tail of the Dragon” north of Chilhowee Lake. Between Chilhowee Lake and Walland, Tennessee, the parkway has 16 parking areas, 14 of which are scenic overlooks. The parkway climbs the ridge of the foothills over Happy Valley and offers views looking both east towards Great Smoky Mountains National Park and west overlooking Maryville and Alcoa.

The views available along the parkway vary throughout the drive. Along the southern portion of the parkway, southeastern overlooks face the mountains that surround Cades Cove, providing the opportunity to see the sunrise over one of the most iconic locations of the park. Southeast-facing overlooks along the northern portion of the parkway offer views of working farms in Millers Cove. On clear days, the Cumberland Plateau can be visible from northwest facing overlooks.

Two improved viewing platforms can be found at Look Rock, 7.1 miles from the southern entrance to the parkway. A set of stairs lead down to the lower platform, directly adjacent to the parking lot. Just north of the parking lot, a short, paved trail leads to the [Look Rock Tower](#).

There are no trash cans available at the parking areas throughout the parkway, so please be sure to plan accordingly and take any waste with you.

Detailed Directions

This section of Foothills Parkway stretches from US HWY 129 by Chilhowee Lake to US HWY 321 near Walland, Tennessee. Mileposts mark the distance from the Chilhowee Lake entrance.

Between Mileposts 3 and 4 are two overlooks that face southeast.

Between Mileposts 4 and 5 are two overlooks that face southeast.

Mile 6.4: One scenic overlook facing southeast.

Mile 7.1: Look Rock Tower Trail and lower Look Rock Overlook have ample parking and access to Look Rock Tower.

Mile 7.5: Look Rock Picnic Area and Campground provide restrooms and ample parking.

Between Mileposts 10 and 11 are two parking areas and one overlook facing northwest.

Mile 11.4: Two overlooks on either side of the parkway.

Between Mileposts 13 and 14: Two overlooks that face northwest

Mile 14.2: Parking area on the southern side of road.

Between Mileposts 15 and 16: Two parking areas that face southeast.

Mile 16.6: intersection with US HWY 321

Length

16.6 miles (26.7 km) one-way

Parking

Parking is available throughout the parkway. Don't forget [your parking tag](#).

Nearest Restroom

[Look Rock Picnic Area](#) (available seasonally)

Similar Routes

Lakeview Drive [\[Link\]](#)

Foothills Parkway (Cosby to I-40) [\[Link\]](#)

Foothills Parkway (Walland to Wears Valley) [\[Link\]](#)

Accessibility Information

All parking areas and turn offs provide at least one accessible parking space with most providing two accessible parking spaces. Larger parking areas at miles 7.1 and 15.4 provide four and three accessible parking spaces, respectively. The lower Look Rock viewing area is only accessible by

stairs. [Look Rock Tower Trail](#) is a 0.8-mile paved trail of mild to moderate steepness, and the ramp accessing the top of the tower is steep.

Photo Gallery

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1STBqhEPJen300kxXET2HBSFOxyXJf2nh>

Foothill Parkway (Walland to Wears Valley)



Foothills Parkway viaduct near Rocky Mountain

Overview

Drive the Walland to Wears Valley section of the Foothills Parkway that is approximately 14.75 miles (23.74 km) long and climbs to nearly 2,500 feet in elevation near Caylor Gap. This section of the Foothills Parkway was completed in 2018 and has expansive views of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The smooth road clings to the southern slopes of the mountains with winding viaducts that cross valleys and connect Grassy Mountain, Rocky Mountain, and Davis Mountain. There are multiple scenic overlooks and ample parking to view the Smoky Mountains and the Wears Valley.

See the [Foothills Parkway Overview](#), Foothills Parkway (Walland to Chilhowee), and Foothills Parkway East (Cosby to I-40) for additional information.

Detailed Directions

The Foothills Parkway (Walland to Wears Valley) is accessible from U.S. 321 south of Walland and northeast of Line Springs Road in Wears Valley. There are 10 waysides and overlooks that allow visitors to stretch their legs, picnic, and enjoy the views including at:

Milepost 17: four parking spaces, a curb cut, and a sidewalk to the welcome sign

Milepost 18: 17 parking spaces and two accessible parking spaces with views of the Little River

Milepost 21: Capshaw Branch Overlook has 44 parking spaces and four accessible parking spaces

Milepost 22: six parallel parking spaces

Between Milepost 23 and Milepost 24: parking area on the mountainside of the road and access to a seasonal roadside waterfall

Milepost 25: parking area on the mountainside of the road about halfway up Dancing Gap Mountain

Near Milepost 25: Townsend Overlook, 10 parking spaces, one accessible parking space, views of Townsend and the “peaceful side of the Smokies”

Between Milepost 26 and 27: two parking areas near Caylor Gap: main parking area with 12 parking spaces, including one accessible parking space; secondary parking area with five parallel parking spaces, views of rolling hills to the West and full panoramic views of the Smoky Mountains

Milepost 28: 10 parking spaces and one accessible parking space with views of Mount. Le Conte and Roundtop Mountain

Milepost 29: Six parallel parking spaces

Length

14.75 miles (23.74 km) one-way

Parking

Ample but varied parking along the parkway. Don't forget [your parking tag](#).

Nearest Restroom

[Great Smokies Welcome Center](#) (7929 E Lamar Alexander Pkwy, Townsend, TN 37882)

Similar Routes

Lakeview Drive [\[Link\]](#)

Foothills Parkway (Cosby to I-40) [\[Link\]](#)

Foothills Parkway (Chilhowee to Walland) [\[Link\]](#)

Accessibility Information

Listed overlooks have accessible parking spaces.

Photo Gallery

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Schoolhouse Gap Trail



Hike 4.4 miles on Schoolhouse Gap Trail (past Tremont on way to Cades Cove-N side of road)

Overview

The trail follows a wide, mostly gently graded former roadbed offering an experience suitable for hikers of many skill levels. This trail is popular for wildflowers, birding, and horseback riding and traces part of a proposed 1840s road by Dr. Isaac Anderson, who aimed to connect East Tennessee to Hazel Creek. Though the full route was never finished, this trail offers a glimpse into early Smoky Mountain travel.

Detailed Directions

Schoolhouse Gap Trail is a 4.4-mile roundtrip hike (2.2 miles one way) that offers a peaceful walk with a touch of history and a chance to spot seasonal blooms and wildlife. The trail begins on the north side of Laurel Creek Road, 3.9 miles past the Townsend “Y” on the route to Cades Cove.

The trail parallels Spence Branch, passing spring blooms such as trillium and cardinal flowers, and reaches Dorsey Gap at 1.1 miles, where it intersects with Turkeypen Ridge Trail near a marshy birding area. Around mile 1.2, an unmarked path leads toward White Oak Sinks (not

part of the official trail system). At 2.0 miles, the trail meets Chestnut Top Trail and ends just beyond at Schoolhouse Gap, near Scott Mountain Trail.

Length

4.4 miles (7.1 km) roundtrip

The total ascent for this trail is 503 feet.

Parking and Trailhead

Trailhead is located on the north side of Laurel Creek Road, 3.9 miles from the Townsend “Y” on the way to Cades Cove. The parking area includes 5 trailer parking spaces and 3 standard vehicle spaces. Pull-outs are available before the trailhead for 2-3 cars, but a walk along the road is required to reach the trailhead. Don't forget [your parking tag](#).

Nearest Restroom

[Cades Cove Picnic Area](#)

Alternate Hikes (these are similar hikes)

Spruce Flats Falls Trail: 2 miles (3.2 km) roundtrip

Cades Cove Nature Trail: 2 miles (3.2 km) roundtrip

Abrams Falls Trail: 5 miles (8 km) roundtrip

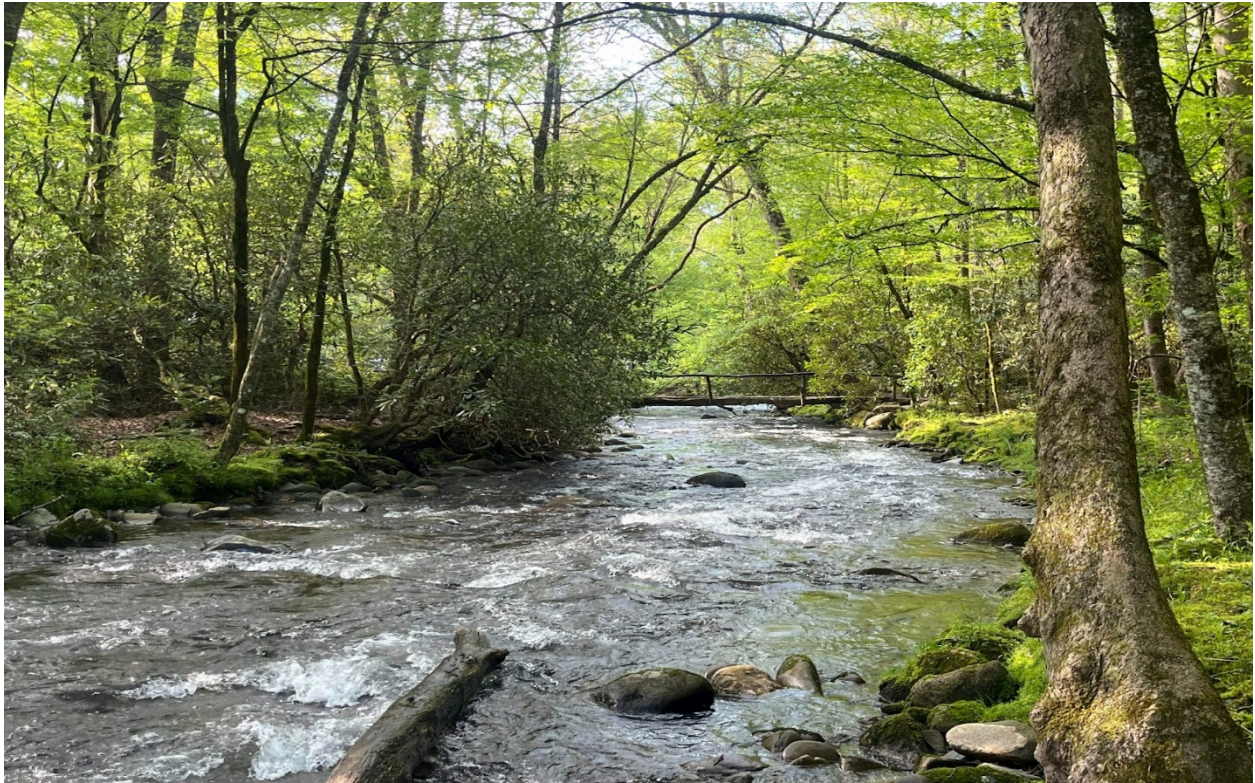
Accessibility Information

It is a natural surface trail with gravel, rocks, and some muddy sections.

Photo Gallery

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_7YCxXJI05_H00fXwVhycFdit5gkpTif

Smokemont Nature Trail



Hike 0.78-mile roundtrip on the Smokemont Nature Trail from the Smokemont Campground

Overview

This scenic loop hike near Smokemont Campground provides a peaceful escape and views of the surrounding peaks. Hike across narrow log bridges over pristine Bradley Fork and enjoy wildflowers, lush trees, and bird song. Once known as Bradleytown, the Smokemont region's history is tied to early 1900s logging and Champion Fibre Company before the establishment of the park and included barracks, stores, churches, and sawmills.

This hike is suitable for hikers of many skill levels, especially for families or hikers camping in the area looking for a short hike away from the bustle of Cherokee or Gatlinburg. This trail also has designated picnic areas near the trailhead, which are perfect for a post-hike snack or lunch.

Detailed Directions

Begin at the trailhead, located across from campsite B31 in the Smokemont Campground. The trail is marked by a sign reading "Smokemont Self-Guided Nature Trail." Cross two small log bridges, then look for a sign with an arrow pointing to the right: this is the start of the loop trail.

At the start, the trail follows the Bradley Fork upstream before turning right and climbing gently to the top of the loop where one can enjoy scenic views to the east and northeast from the

ridge. The trail then curves to the west side of the mountain and begins a gentle descent back to the Bradley Fork and the log bridges.

Length

0.78-mile roundtrip

The total ascent for this trail is 168 feet.

Parking and Trailhead

18 parking spots at the Smokemont Campground. The trailhead is located directly across from the campground at site B31. Don't forget [your parking tag](#).

Nearest Restroom

Smokemont Campground

Alternate Hikes (these are similar hikes)

Smokemont Nature Trail with Bradley Cemetery: 6 miles (9.66 km) roundtrip

Accessibility Information

No designated accessible parking spaces at this time. The trail has two narrow log bridges with handrails that may be challenging for those with mobility limitations. The trail has some steep sections and occasional roots/rocks.

Photo Gallery

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1q91hWIOLvlqrBEqdB6WND0snmvWECrrS>

West Prong Trail



Hike 2.7 miles on the West Prong Trail off Tremont Road

Overview

West Prong Trail is a 2.7-mile (4.3 km) horse and hiking trail that climbs nearly 1,000ft from Tremont Road near the [Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont](#) to provide hiking connections between the [Tremont-Elkmont](#) trails and [Cades Cove](#) trails. Seasonal wildflowers and wildlife such as deer, black bears, and wild hogs are popular sights on this trail. For hikers interested in exploring the settlement history of Cades Cove, mile 0.3 presents a fork, where hikers can travel 100 yards to Walker Valley Cemetery, the serene resting place of several residents of the area from the late 1800s and early 1900s. Hikers that opt for this route may retrace their footsteps or follow an unmaintained trail that reconnects with West Prong Trail at mile 1.1.

West Prong Trail continues to scale the side of Fodderstack Mountain to take hikers through hardwood forests with pines, sourwoods, and chestnut trees. West Prong Little River sings from below. [Campsite #18](#) at mile 2.1 is a large group camping spot with a fire ring and bear cables along the river. The trail continues through the campsite, across the footbridge to the right, and to the left at the hemlock tree. Hikers that reach a sign for campsite A have traveled too far into the campground and should turn around to locate the trail.

The West Prong Trail ends at mile 2.7 at the junction with Bote Mountain Trail.

Detailed Directions

The trailhead is just before the entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont. From the parking lot, there is a pump house uphill to the left. The trail starts behind the pump house.

Mile 0.3: Fork that offers a 100-yard spur trail to Walker Valley Cemetery to the right as West Prong Trail continues to the left. Hikers that go right can reconnect with West Prong Trail at mile 1.1 by following the unmaintained trail, or they can reconnect with West Prong Trail by following their footsteps back to the fork.

Mile 2.0: The trail crosses a creek that is traversable with a rock-hop.

Mile 2.1: Large group camping area with fire ring, bear cables, and access to West Prong Little River

Mile 2.7: The trail ends at the junction with Bote Mountain Trail. Hikers return the way they came along West Prong Trail to the trailhead.

Length

2.7 miles (4.3 km) to Bote Mountain Trail

5.4 miles (8.7 km) roundtrip

Parking and Trailhead

The trailhead and car parking are available just past the entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont to the right. Surplus parking and large-vehicle parking is available to the left just past the main parking area. Don't forget [your parking tag](#).

Nearest Restroom

[Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont](#)

Alternate Hikes (these are similar hikes)

Schoolhouse Gap Trail: 4.4 miles (7.1 km) roundtrip

Finley Trail: 1.83 miles (2.95 km) one-way

Lead Cove Trail: 2.48 miles (4 km) one-way

Accessibility Information

Accessible parking spaces are available at the parking spot. This trail is soil and includes occasional rocks, roots, water crossings, log footbridge crossings, and moderately steep grades.

Photo Gallery

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15rfbP10aiREUrEmYF3RsK-J2iHXg-NTB>

VI. Summary

In summation, Park Break Fellows authored accessibility descriptions for 9.31 miles of trails and narrative descriptions for 13.33 miles of trail and 42.65 miles of parkways in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Additionally, Fellows captured and cataloged a photo library of 183 photos (metadata included), with an average of 8 or more photos per description. We hope that our work will fulfill our shared goal of dispersing visitors throughout the park and increasing trail access for those with different abilities.

Park Break Fellows would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Kendra Straub and each National Park Service staff member that shared their time, wisdom, and knowledge with us over the course of the week. You all made our visit truly enriching and unforgettable. We're lucky to have such dedicated hands caring for our public lands.

We'd also like to thank Kathryn Hemphill, Dan and Kathy Brooks, and Friends of the Smokies for spending an enjoyable evening with us and for making this program possible. Thank you for all that each of you did to bring this program to life and for all that you continue to do as stewards of Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Lastly, we'd like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Bob Powell, Dr. Ryan Sharp, and Dr. Lauren Stephens for developing and leading such a unique, fun, and informative service-learning opportunity. Your dedication to student growth, hands-on education, and conservation leadership created a truly transformative experience that will stay with us well beyond this week.