

Big South Fork

National River and Recreation Area

Kentucky/Tennessee



All photographs, except as noted, are by Bill Deane

During the 20th century, much of the Cumberland Plateau was stripped of its marketable trees and easily accessible coal. Sediments from the denuded land and acid from the mines filled the streams. Although loggers and miners are still active on the plateau, young trees now clothe most of the logged-over lands and environmental controls are reducing the impact that mining has on the rivers and streams.

Life was often hard for those who directly depended on the area's natural resources for their livelihood, and cash income was usually very limited. The U.S. Congress was aware of the needs of the area and decided to set aside a part of the Cumberland Plateau in order to provide new economic opportunities for the region through recreation. The legislation also provided for the

protection, conservation, and interpretation of the natural and cultural resources and maintenance of the river as a free flowing stream. To accomplish this task, two agencies of the Federal Government are working together in a partnership of service to create and manage the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, known locally as the "National Area."

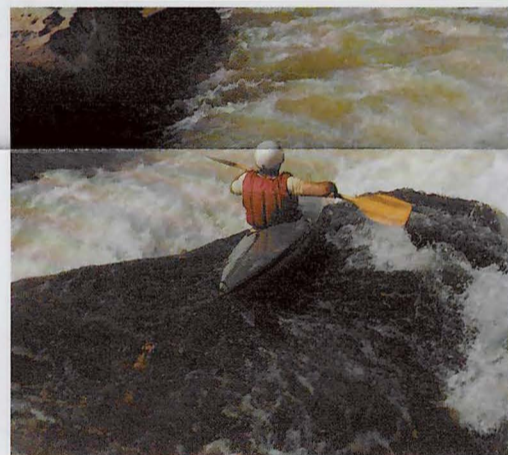
Within the National Area, lush vegetation now clothes the ridges and covers sites that once were homesteads, logging camps, and mining communities. This new growth hides mine entrances and encroaches upon the coal tipples and is gradually transforming old fields into forests. Many of the old roads that crisscross the area are fading into the landscape and are now no longer passable by vehicles.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with its many years of experience in managing river basins, determined which parcels of land were needed to maintain the integrity of the river valleys and to provide for the type of development and use authorized by the Congress. The boundaries were then established by the Congress, and the Corps of Engineers was directed to proceed with acquisition. As tracts of land are acquired, they are turned over to the National Park Service for protection and management.

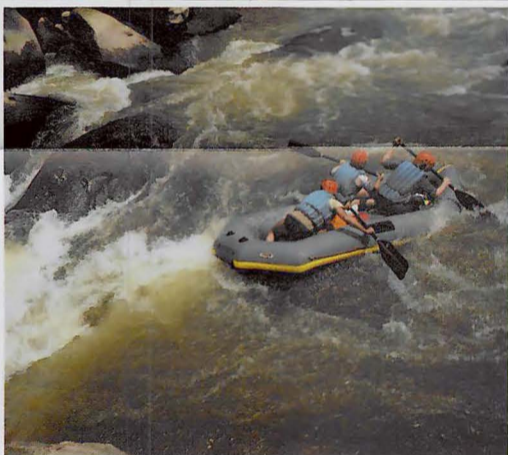
The Corps of Engineers has also been busy developing plans for the construction of facilities that will be provided within the National Area. As these facilities are completed by the Corps, they will be operated and maintained by the National Park Service for the use and enjoyment of the area's visitors. For its part,

the National Park Service sees the Big South Fork as an area set aside so that people can actively enjoy this rugged scenic area, an area in which opportunities abound for whitewater canoeing, rafting, kayaking, hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, and horseback riding. Today, even though the planning and development are not complete, the staff of the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area stands ready to welcome you to the beauty of the Cumberland Plateau.

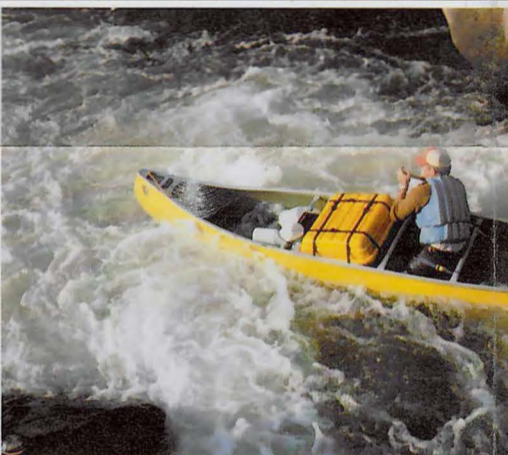
Adventures on the River



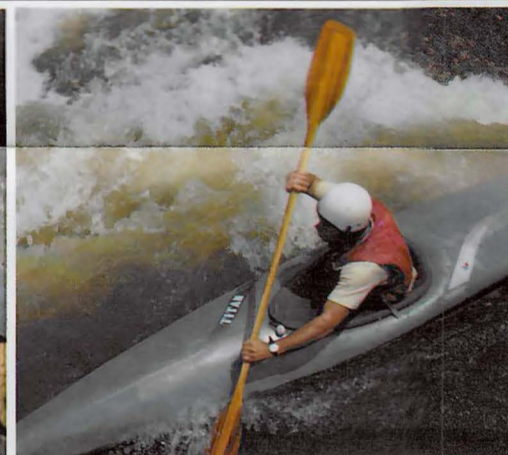
A kayaker poises on the brink of Double Falls. The falls—actually two drops complicated by undercut rocks—is only one of three rapids in a very short distance.



Rafters usually enter a rapid head-on but sometimes the river takes control. The Ell is a Class III rapid that requires a traverse to the left at the bottom of the drop.



Whitewater canoes are especially designed without a keel so that they can be turned quickly. And they are made of materials that will not shatter or tear on impact.



Kayaking pits a person's skill and ability to read the river against the powerful force of rapidly moving water.



Kayakers seem to be under water as much as on top, and they have to develop skill in rolling when overturned.



The Washing Machine is a drop into a swirling pool that flows between huge boulders.

The Big South Fork of the Cumberland River and its two main tributaries, the Clear Fork and the New River, lure fishermen and swimmers and are excellent for all kinds of whitewater paddling. Some stretches are ideal for beginners, while other sections should be attempted only by highly skilled paddlers using the most sophisticated equipment. Some streams in the National Area can be floated at any season of the year while others have enough water for boating only at certain seasons. A heavy rain can turn a placid river into a torrent not to be entered by anyone.

Floating the streams of Big South Fork will give you entry to a land that time and events have passed by. Although you can still see results of previous agricultural, mining, and logging practices, the land today has a quality of wilderness with limited access and sparse development. At no time is this more apparent than when floating the streams or camping on a river bank as the

sun sinks behind the gorge rim. You realize that you have come to another world and begin to pace your movements to its rhythms and moods. Where the stream flows slow and smooth, you are able to look at the banks and cliffs, passing by in slow motion. You are able to see more sharply than normally and you seem to see more. Where the stream speeds up and twists and drops between and around boulders and over ledges, you become one with your paddle. A rapids that you thought you would shoot through in seconds seems to take minutes as you lunge and thrust your way through. Then the adventure ends abruptly and the pace again changes.

To help you select a stream that matches your experience with the challenge you are looking for, the National Park Service and the Corps of Engineers have prepared a *River Guide* to the Big South Fork and some of its tributaries. The *Guide* gives access

points, distance in miles between access points, difficulty of the stream, average drop in feet per mile, and the time of the year the stream can be floated. To get a copy of the booklet, which costs 35 cents, write to: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, P.O. Box 1070, Nashville, TN 37202. Attn: Map Section, or to the superintendent, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, P.O. Drawer 630, Oneida, TN 32841. Besides the *Guide*, you should be familiar with *Canoeing*, a booklet published by the American Red Cross and available through local chapters.

Floating can be a dangerous sport in certain stretches of the streams in the National Area and at times of rising waters. Follow the Coast Guard's rules of safety. Make sure that you always wear a personal flotation device and when canoeing have at least three canoes in your party. Kayakers should wear helmets as should canoeists and kayakers floating Class III or more

difficult waters. Commercial rafting on certain stretches of the river is now a reality. For more information and the addresses of the concessioners, write to National Park Service headquarters in Oneida, Tennessee.

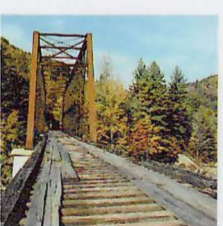
Fishing is good throughout the Big South Fork system; smallmouth bass, rock bass, and bream abound in the streams. A Kentucky or Tennessee license is required, so make sure you have the appropriate license for the place you intend to fish. Boaters are reminded that motorized vessels are prohibited on most sections of the Big South Fork.

Swimmers will find hazards throughout the waters of the National Area. Holes, submerged rocks, tricky currents, and ledges can entrap feet and legs, so be extremely careful when swimming. Do not swim alone.

Beyond the River

Hiking and Camping Newly constructed trails and old logging roads crisscross the National Area giving the hiker access to both the quiet isolation and scenic splendor found in the river gorge and surrounding countryside. As you hike through the National Area you may discover abandoned structures that will remind you that this area once was not so isolated. Other trails will lead to spectacular views along the tops of cliffs and bluffs. Be careful as you approach these overlooks and watch your footing.

If you plan to spend some time hiking and camping in the backcountry, you may wish to check on the dates of the big game hunting seasons beforehand, so that you can be especially cautious during those periods. For campfires use only



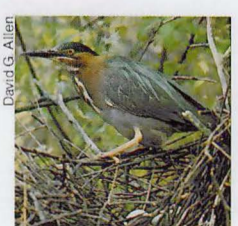
Hiking and finding abandoned railway bridges, hunting, and camping are just a few of the recreational possibilities at Big South Fork.



downed wood and be sure the fire has been thoroughly extinguished before you leave. Better yet, use a lightweight portable stove to avoid any danger of a forest fire. Do not bury any trash. Carry out everything that you bring in.

Trailheads are located throughout the National Area. For the latest trail information visit the National Park Service Visitor Center on the Leatherwood Ford Road. Established campgrounds are found at Bandy Creek, Alum Ford, and Pickett State Rustic Park and Forest.

Hunting Both hunting and trapping are allowed throughout the National Area in accordance with state and federal regulations. **When hunting, be especially alert, for the noise you hear in the woods may be a hiker,**



The native flora and fauna always delight the observer at Big South Fork. Perhaps you will see a green heron (top) or maidenhair fern.

someone making a portage, or another hunter. Check before you shoot.

Horseback Riding Old logging roads and specially constructed horse trails combine to provide countless miles of bridle paths weaving throughout the National Area. Park Service rangers will be glad to help you plan your ride through the Big South Fork with information about trails, camping, and parking locations for your vehicle and trailer.

Sightseeing Few roads go into the National Area or through the gorge, and most of the scenic overlooks are accessible only by horse and hiking trails. Honey Creek in Tennessee and Yahoo Falls in Kentucky are two scenic overlooks which are usually accessible by regular passenger cars when the roadway is dry.

Outside the National Area Just outside the southern boundary of the Big South Fork is the settlement of Rugby. It was founded by Thomas Hughes in the 1880s. Like many social experiments, however, Rugby failed, but its buildings have survived, and Historic Rugby, Inc., maintains several of them while others are privately owned. For more information about tours or accommodations write to: Executive Director, Historic Rugby, Inc., Rugby, TN 37733.

Fentress County, to the west of the National Area, is the home of World War I hero Sgt. Alvin C. York. The grave site of this legendary soldier is located just off U.S. 127 in Pall Mall, near the York house. The Sgt. Alvin C. York Museum is located on Tenn. 52 on the public square in Jamestown.

The museum is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free.

Scott State Forest, surrounded by the National Area, and adjacent Pickett State Rustic Park and Forest are both managed by the State of Tennessee. Pickett is a fully developed park with a broad range of facilities and is used primarily as a white pine seed farm.

The Kentucky portion of the National Area is adjacent to Daniel Boone National Forest. The forest has a special area for hunters using longbows, crossbows, and muzzle-loading rifles. Campgrounds and picnic areas are scattered throughout the forest. For more information, write to: Daniel Boone National Forest, P.O. Box 727, Winchester, KY 40391.



Solitary chimneys remind hikers that they are not the first to tramp these woods.

General Travel Tips



The Climate Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area is situated in a rugged gorge area of the Cumberland Plateau in southeastern Kentucky and northeastern Tennessee. It is located in a humid climatic region, typified by mild winters and moist, warm to hot summers. Moist air from the Gulf of Mexico is brought into the area by prevailing winds from the south and southwest. Flooding is most likely from December through March when storm systems bring heavy rains. Summer thunderstorms can also result in flash floods. Snowfall occurs intermittently in the area

and averages 43 centimeters (17 inches) per year. The area is generally unaffected by blizzards and hurricanes, but tornadoes do occur.

How to Reach the National Area The area is most easily reached by private automobile. To reach the National Area from I-75, take either Ky. 92 or Tenn. 63. Both highways connect with U.S. 27. This road parallels the eastern boundary of the National Area. From I-40, westbound travelers should exit at U.S. 27 north and eastbound travelers, at U.S. 127 north. Both of these highways connect with

Tenn. 52 that skirts the southern edge of the National Area. The closest airports are in Knoxville and Nashville, Tennessee, and in Lexington, Kentucky. Each of these airports is served by nationwide airlines. Transcontinental bus lines also serve the area.

Exposure to the Weather Hypothermia is the progressive mental and physical collapse accompanying the chilling of the inner core of the human body. It can result in death by exposure. **Hypothermia is brought on by cold temperatures and aggravated by wetness, wind, and exhaustion.**

Most cases occur between -1°C and 10°C (30°F and 50°F). If you show the symptoms of hypothermia—shivering, slurred speech, drowsiness, incoherence, fumbling hands—get out of the water, wind, or rain and into a shelter and dry clothing. If you realize someone with you is suffering from hypothermia, do the same for him or her. The quickest way to restore body heat is to remove the clothing and put the person into a dry sleeping bag with someone else, for body to body contact works quickest. Wearing a wet suit or woolen clothing will help prevent the onset of

hypothermia, for they hold the body's heat in.

Safety As in any outdoor setting there are inherent hazards—unstable rocks, rotting logs that will support the weight of an adult—that you should be aware of. In Big South Fork you should also be alert to the **poisonous snakes** that inhabit the area. Copperheads and rattlesnakes are generally found on land. Occasionally they have been seen in the water though this is not their normal habitat. **All surface water is unfit for drinking and should be boiled for two minutes before drinking.** Unattended vehicles are



targets for thieves, and floaters and hikers should arrange for safe storage of their vehicles or for shuttle service with a local rescue squad. For more information on how you can arrange this, contact the National Park Service headquarters in Oneida, Tennessee.

Until the land acquisition program is completed at Big South Fork, federally owned lands will be interspersed with privately owned tracts.

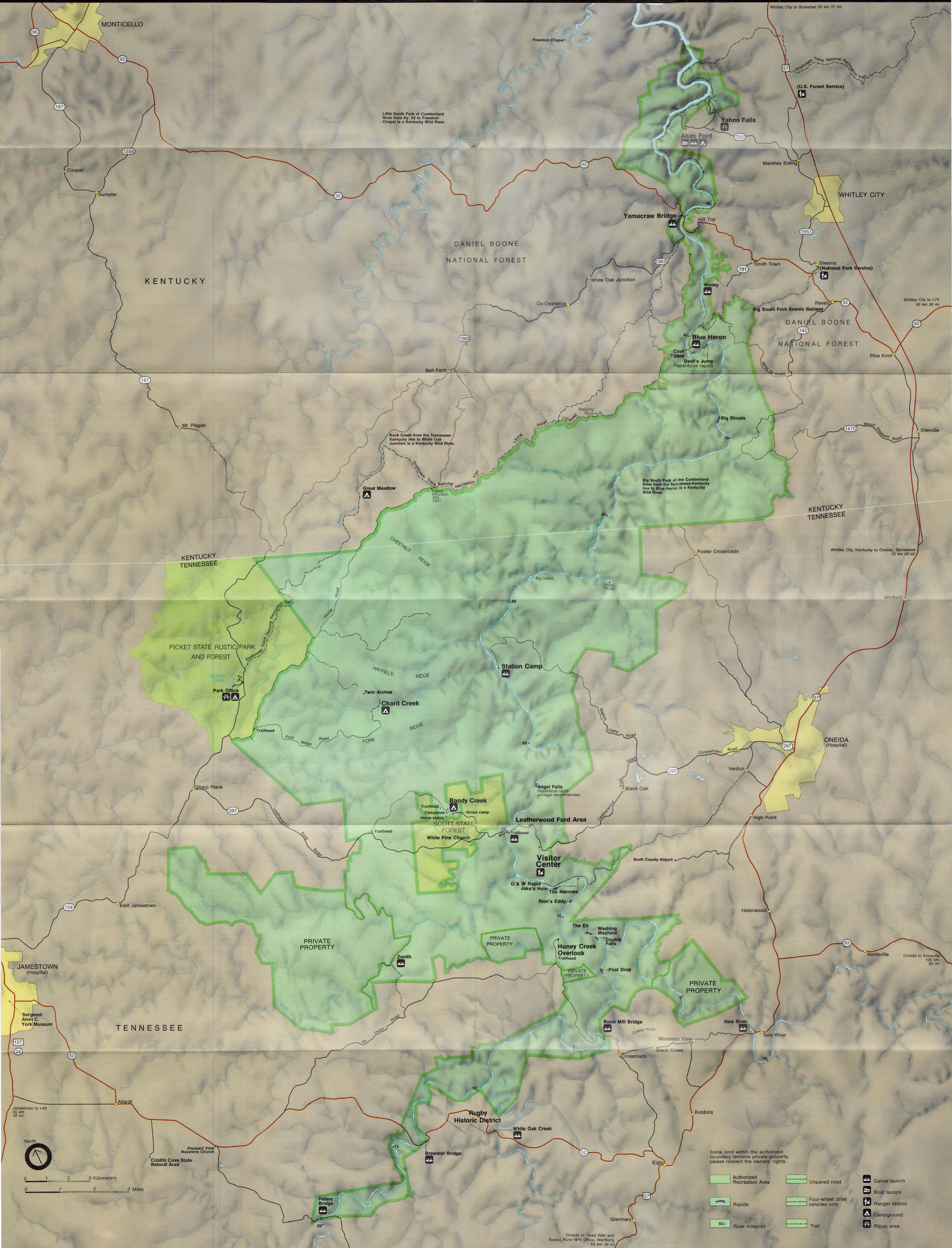
Be aware of the possibility of trespass and respect the rights of property owners.

Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area is managed by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The superintendent's address is P.O. Drawer 630, Oneida, TN 37841. For more information about the Corps of Engineers write to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District, P.O. Box 1070, Nashville, TN 37202.

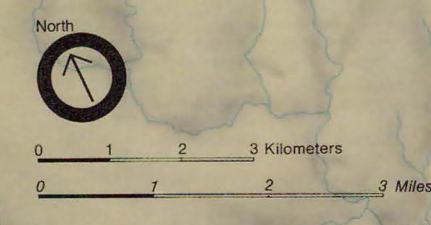
Big South Fork

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

U.S. Army
Corps of Engineers



- Some land within the authorized boundary remains private property; please respect the owners' rights.
- Authorized Recreation Area
 - Unpaved road
 - Rapids
 - Four-wheel drive vehicles only
 - Trail
 - River milepost
 - Canoe launch
 - Boat launch
 - Ranger station
 - Campground
 - Picnic area



Oneida to Obed Wild and Scenic River NPS Office, Warburg, 55 km, 34 mi