

# Big South Fork

Big South Fork National River  
and Recreation Area  
Kentucky/Tennessee

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide



All photographs, except as noted, are by Bill Deane.

## Protecting the Landscape

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, within the National Area lush vegetation now blankets the ridges and covers sites that once were homesteads, logging camps, and mining communities.

Young trees now clothe most of the logged-over lands, and environmental controls are reducing the impact that mining has had

on the rivers and streams. This new growth hides mine entrances, encroaches upon the coal tipples, and is gradually transforming old fields into forests. Many of the old roads that crisscross the gorge are fading into the landscape and are now no longer passable by vehicles.

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 Pla-

teau 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 have worked together in a partnership of service to create and manage the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with its experience in managing river basins, was charged with land acquisition, plan-

ning, and development of facilities. Now completed, these lands and facilities are operated and maintained by the National Park Service for the benefit and use of the public.

The Big South Fork is set aside so that people can actively enjoy this rugged scenic area, in which opportunities abound for white-water canoeing, rafting, kayaking, hiking, bike riding, hunting, fishing, and horseback riding. 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



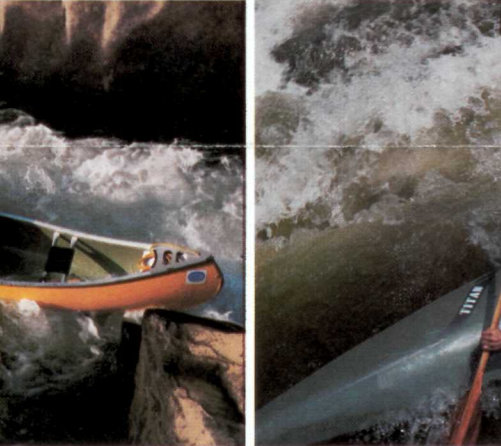
A kayaker poises on the brink of Double Falls. The falls—actually two drops complicated by undercut rocks—is only one of three rapids in a very short distance.



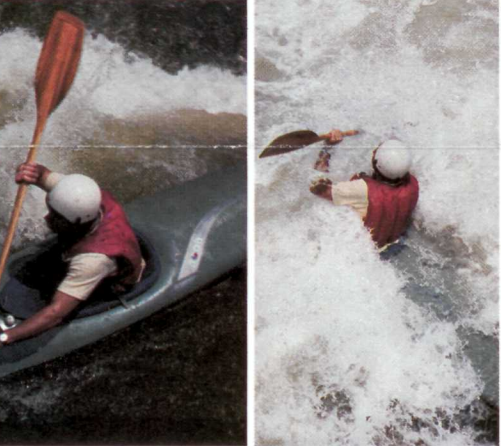
Rafters usually enter a rapid head-on but sometimes the river takes control. The Ell is a Class III rapid that requires a traverse to the left at the bottom of the drop.



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 main tributaries, the Clear Fork, North White Oak and the New River, lure fishermen, swimmers, and paddlers. They are excellent for a variety of whitewater paddling experiences. Some stretches are ideal for beginners, while other sections should be attempted only by highly skilled paddlers using sophisticated equipment. Some streams in the National Area can be floated during any season of the year while others have enough water for boating only during seasons with sufficient rainfall. 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 the results of previous agricultural, mining, and logging practices, the land today has a quality of wildness 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 closely at the banks and cliffs. As with slow motion film, you

are able to see more sharply 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. Rapids that you thought you would shoot through in seconds seem to take minutes as you lunge and thrust your way through. Then the adventure ends abruptly and the pace again changes.

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 floating Class III or more difficult waters. Select a stream that matches your experience and abilities with the challenge you are looking for.

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 at P.O. Drawer 630, Oneida, TN 37841.

To help select a stream that matches your experience with the challenge you are looking for, you should check with the park, read published guides, or talk to commercial operators.

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

Established campgrounds are at Alum Ford, Bandy Creek, Blue Heron, and Pickett State Rustic Park. Blue Heron and Bandy Creek offer modern sites with restrooms and showers. Bandy Creek also offers sites with water and electricity as well as a swimming pool.

Backcountry lodging, accessible only by trail, is available at the Charit Creek Lodge from mid-April to mid-December. Reservations are necessary; call 615-430-3333, or write Charit Creek Lodge, Gatlinburg, TN 37738.

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 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 in the Bandy Creek Campground.

### Hunting

Both hunting and trapping are allowed throughout the National Area in accordance with state and federal regulations. Check with Park Ser-



Visiting the Blue Heron mining community, hunting, and camping are just a few of the recreational possibilities at Big South Fork.



vice rangers on the location of designated safety zones around high-use visitor facilities where hunting is not permitted. **When hunting, be especially alert**, for the noise you hear in the woods may be a hiker, someone making a portage, or another hunter. Check before you shoot.

### Horseback Riding

Concession-operated stables at Bandy Creek offer boarding facilities and guided rides that last one, two, or three days. For more information call 615-879-4013, or write Bandy Creek Stables, Robbins, TN 37852.

### Sightseeing

Few roads go into the National Area or through the gorge, and many of the scenic overlooks are accessible only by horse and hiking trails. The Yahoo Falls, Devils Jump, and East Rim overlooks are accessible by regular passenger cars.



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



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

Wildflowers and migratory birds abound in late April and early May while fall's pageantry of color usually peaks in mid-October. For many this is the finest time of the year, with cool, clear days.

The concession-operated Big South Fork Scenic Railway operates from mid-April through November and offers daily trips into the National Area to the Blue Heron Mining Community. For more information call 606-376-5330 or write the Big South Fork Scenic Railway, Stearns, KY 42647.

## 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 17 inches

### How to Reach the National Area

The area is most easily reached by private car. To reach the National Area southbound from I-75 take Ky. 461 south to Ky. 80 west to U.S. 27. From I-75 northbound take Tenn. 63 west to U.S. 27. This road parallels the eastern boundary of the National Area. From I-40 west-bound travelers should exit at U.S. 27 north and eastbound travelers at U.S. 127 north. Both these highways connect with Tenn. 52 that skirts the southern edge of the

National Area and U.S. 27 connects with Tenn. 297 which passes through the Area and leads to the visitor center. The closest commercial airports are in Knoxville and Nashville, Tenn., and in Lexington, Ky.

**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 30°F and 50°F. If you show the symptoms of hypother-



mia—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.

**Cultural Preservation** The cultural resources of the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area are varied and significant. The most obvious of these features are the numerous rockshelters visible throughout the area. These overhangs were used repeatedly by pioneers and moonshiners in historic times. The archeological value of these rockshelters is in the stable dry nature of their soils to preserve bone, leather, and organic materials. To preserve this information and the association with prehistoric artifacts for current and future scientific study, the National Park Service

asks your help. Please do not dig or remove materials from these sites and report any incidents of digging that you may observe. Help preserve our cultural heritage.

### Safety

As in any outdoor setting there are inherent hazards that you should be aware of—such as **unstable rocks and rotting logs** that will not support the weight of an adult. 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.** Untended vehicles are targets for thieves, and floaters and hikers should arrange for safe storage of their vehicles or for shuttle service. For more information on how you can arrange this, contact the National Park Service visitor center at the Bandy Creek campground.

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.

**Information** Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 350 parks representing important examples of our country's natural and cultural inheritance. The superintendent's address is Route 3, Box 401, Oneida, TN 37841.



**Outside the National Area** Just outside the southern boundary of the Big South Fork is the settlement of **Rugby**, founded by Thomas Hughes. Like many social experiments, however, Rugby failed, but its buildings have survived, and Historic Rugby, Inc., maintains some of them. For more information write to: Executive Director, Historic Rugby, Inc., Rugby, TN 37733.

**Scott State Forest**, and the adjacent **Pickett State Rustic Park and Forest** are both managed by the State of Tennessee. Pickett is a fully developed park while Scott State Forest is used pri-

marily as a white pine seed farm.

**Fentress County**, to the west, is the home of World War I hero Sgt. Alvin C. York. His grave is located just off U.S. 127 in Fall Mall, near the York house.

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 available. For more information, write to: Daniel Boone National Forest, P.O. Box 727, Winchester, KY 40391.



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