

Big South Fork

Big South Fork National River
and Recreation Area
Kentucky/Tennessee

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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 Big South Fork 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. The 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 Plateau

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 federal agencies 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, planning,

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 fishing, whitewater canoeing, rafting, kayaking, hiking, bicycling, hunting, 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.

Adventure on the River



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



Rafters usually enter rapids head-on, but sometimes the river takes control. The Eil 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 your skill and ability to read the river against the powerful force of rapidly moving water.



Kayakers seem to be underwater 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, North White Oak Creek, Clear Fork, and the New River, lure fishers, swimmers, and paddlers. They are also 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 appropriate equipment. Some streams in the park can be floated during any season of the year, while others have enough water for boating only during sea-

sons 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 riverbank 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 your adventure ends abruptly and the pace again changes.

Floating can be a dangerous sport in certain stretches of the streams in the park and at times of rising waters. Follow the U.S. Coast Guard's rules of safety: Make sure that you always wear a personal flotation device. 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. To help select a stream, check with the park staff, read published guides, or talk to commercial operators. For information on commercial rafting, contact the park (see "Information" below).

Fishing is good throughout the Big South Fork system; smallmouth bass, rock bass, and bream abound in the streams. A Ken-

tucky 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 park's waters. 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 and Forest. Blue Heron and Bandy Creek offer modern sites with water, electricity, restrooms, and showers. Bandy Creek also has a swimming pool. For reservations, call 1-800-365-CAMP.

Backcountry lodging, accessible only by trail, is available at the Charit Creek Lodge year round. Reservations are necessary. Write: Wilderness Lodging, 250 Apple Valley Road, Sevierville, TN 37826; or call 423-429-5704.

As you hike through the park 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 park. For up-to-date information, check with the visitor center at Bandy Creek campground.



The Big South Fork Scenic Railway

Sightseeing

Few roads go into the park 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.

Wildflowers and migratory birds abound in late April and early May. Autumn's pageantry of color usually peaks in mid-October; for many this is the finest time of the year.

The concessioner-operated Big South Fork Scenic Railway runs from mid-April through November and offers daily trips into the park to the Blue Heron Coal Mining Community. For more information call the Big South Fork Scenic Railway at 1-800-GO ALONG.

Hunting

Hunting and trapping are allowed throughout the park in accordance with state and federal regulations. Check with park rangers on the location of designated safety zones around high-use visitor facilities where hunting is not permitted. When hunting, be especially alert. Noises you hear in the woods may be a hiker, boaters making a portage, or another hunter. Check before you shoot!

Horseback Riding

Established horse camps at Station Camp and Bear Creek offer modern sites with water, electricity, restrooms, showers, and stalls for four horses.

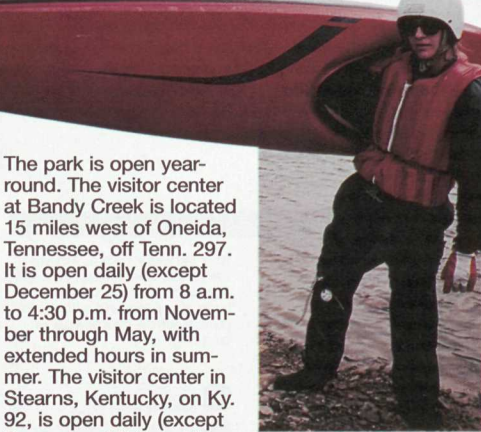
Concessioner-operated stables at Bandy Creek offer boarding facilities and guided



Green heron

rides that last from one or two hours to several days. For more information write: Bandy Creek Stables, 1845 Old Sunbright Road, Jamestown, TN 38556; or call 931-879-4013.

General Information



The park is open year-round. The visitor center at Bandy Creek is located 15 miles west of Oneida, Tennessee, off Tenn. 297. It is open daily (except December 25) from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. from November through May, with extended hours in summer. The visitor center in Stearns, Kentucky, on Ky. 92, is open daily (except December 25) from May through October from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Hours may vary from November through April.

Getting to the Park

The park is most easily reached by private vehicle. From I-75 southbound: take Ky. 461 south to Ky. 80 west to U.S. 27

south to Oneida, then follow TN 297 west into the park. From I-75 northbound: take U.S. 27 north, and proceed as above. From I-40: take U.S. 27 or U.S. 127 north. Both connect with Tenn. 52, which skirts the south edge of the park. U.S. 27 connects with Tenn. 297. The nearest commercial airports are in Knoxville and Nashville, Tenn., and in Lexington, Ky.

Climite 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 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 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 per year. The area is generally unaffected by blizzards and hurricanes, but tornadoes do occur.

Exposure to Weather Hypothermia is the progressive mental and physical collapse accompa-

nying the chilling of the inner core of the body. It can result in death by exposure. **Hypothermia is brought on by cold temperature and aggravated by wetness, wind, and exhaustion.** Most cases occur between 30° and 50°F. If you show symptoms of hypothermia—slurred speech, shivering, drowsiness, incoherence, fumbling hands—get out of the water, wind, or rain, and into a shelter and dry clothing. If you think 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.

Wearing a wet suit or woolen clothing will help prevent the onset of hypothermia, for they hold in 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 rock shelters visible throughout the park. These overhangs were used repeatedly by pioneers and moonshiners in historic times.

The archeological value of these rock shelters is in the stable dry nature of their soils to preserve bone, leather, and other



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.

For a Safe Visit Watch your step. **Unstable rocks and rotting logs** will not support the weight of an adult. **Be alert for poisonous snakes.** Copperheads and rattlesnakes are generally found on land but may sometimes be observed in the water. **All surface water is unfit for drinking** and should be boiled for two minutes before drinking. **Unattended vehicles** are targets for thieves; floaters

and hikers should arrange for safe storage of their vehicles or for shuttle service. For more information on how you can arrange this, check at the visitor center at Bandy Creek. **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 is part of the National Park System, one of more than 370 areas that are important examples of the nation's natural and cultural heritage. Write to: Superintendent, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, 4564 Leatherwood Road, Oneida, TN 37841; call 931-879-3625; visit www.nps.gov/biso.



Related Sites 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.

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 primarily 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 Pall Mall, near the York house.

The Kentucky portion of the park 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.

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Exploring Big South Fork

