

HIKING TRAILS

Leatherwood Ford, East Rim & Bandy Creek Areas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Big South Fork National River &
Recreation Area
Oneida, TN



Leatherwood Ford Area



Leatherwood Ford is located on TN 297. From the Bandy Creek Visitor Center, turn right on Bandy Creek Road and drive 1.6 miles to a stop sign. Turn left onto TN 297. Low gear is recommended for the winding 13% grade down to the Big South Fork River. After crossing the bridge turn left into the parking area.

LEATHERWOOD FORD TRAILHEAD

Two large gaps in the bluffs and a low water ford in the river made Leatherwood Ford a natural crossing. Boardwalks provide a shady path along the river's edge.

Angel Falls Overlook Trail

2.8 miles one way MODERATE/DIFFICULT

Begin this trail by crossing the wooden low-water bridge constructed in 1938 by the Works Progress Administration and follow the blue blazes of the John Muir Trail. The trail ambles along the river for the first 2 miles. After crossing a large bridge over Fall Branch, begin a 0.8 mile series of switchbacks to the bluff top to reach the Grand Gap Loop. Turn right at the junction and follow the green hiking blazes about 350 yards to the awe inspiring Angel Falls Overlook.

Angel Falls Rapid Trail

2.0 miles one way

EASY

The Angel Falls Rapid Trail, beginning at the lower end of the parking lot, leads to one of the river's most famous and feared rapids. At the second foot bridge look for the reclaimed hillside of the old mine near Anderson Branch. Just before reaching the rapid, a cut in the bluff exposes a coal seam displaying the geological history of the Big South Fork area. Angel Falls was a 10-12 foot split current waterfall in the Big South Fork River. In 1954, before the park was established, some local fishermen decided to blast one of the huge boulders. Their intent was to improve boating and fishing. However, it created a dangerous class III-IV rapid with a bad undercut. Paddlers are strongly encouraged to portage this rapid. Hikers should also be cautious when near these rapids.



circa 1917



circa 1968

The Grand Gap Loop Trail

7.0 miles loop

MODERATE

Follow the directions for Angel Falls Overlook to reach the Grand Gap Loop. If you turn left on the loop the 1.4 mile western section is part of the John Muir Trail. At the junction with Fall Branch Trail Bandy Creek Campground can be reached in 5.1 miles. The John Muir Trail continues northward 10 miles to the Laurel Fork of Station Camp Creek. Turn right to visit Angel Falls Overlook. Notice: On weekdays the Grand Gap Loop is shared with bicycles. The total hiking distance includes the 2.8 miles each way from Leatherwood Ford to the loop for a total of 12.4 miles.

O & W Trail
2.3 miles one way

MODERATE



Part of the John Muir Trail, the O & W Trail follows the river upstream to the Oneida and Western Railroad Bridge. The bridge was previously used by another railroad and erected on this site in 1916. Trains carried coal, timber, passengers, mail and other goods across this bridge on three daily round trips between Oneida and Jamestown. On the west side of the bridge, you can climb a steep 1-mile section of the JMT past a waterfall and up to a large rock shelter known as The Devils Den. The John Muir Trail currently ends here.

East Rim Area

From Bandy Creek, follow the directions toward Leatherwood Ford. After crossing the bridge over the Big South Fork River, continue on Hwy 297 to the top of the hill. Turn right onto the East Rim Road.

EAST RIM TRAILHEAD

Parking for the East Rim Trailhead is located approximately 0.2 miles on the right. It provides access to Sunset Overlook and Leatherwood Loop. Parking for the East Rim Overlook is located at the end of this 1-mile road.

Sunset Overlook
1.3 miles one way

EASY

The beginning of the Sunset Overlook Trail is located across the road from the East Rim Trailhead parking. This 1.3 mile trail goes past a small pond before turning westward. The bare rock at the end of the trail provides a wonderful place to sit quietly and watch the sun set. Use caution on the open cliff line.

Leatherwood Loop Trail
3.3 miles MODERATE/DIFFICULT

Featuring a river overlook, the loop can be accessed from the East Rim Trailhead or the O & W Trail. The change in elevation from the gorge rim to river level and back again make sections of this trail fairly steep. The northern portion of the trail follows the route of the old Leatherwood Ford road.

East Rim Overlook
0.1 mile

EASY/PAVED

East Rim is one of the best overlooks in the park for viewing seasonal changes. The Big South Fork River has cut deeply into the Cumberland Plateau creating a beautiful gorge. In the spring paddlers may occasionally be seen negotiating the rapids below. Fall colors are typically spectacular from this location.



Bandy Creek Area

BANDY CREEK TRAILHEAD

From the Bandy Creek Visitor Center, turn left on Bandy Creek Road. Drive 0.25 miles west to the trailhead parking area.

Oscar Blevins Farm Loop
3.6 mile loop

EASY

A section of this loop along Bandy Creek was part of the original, very sandy, "get your wagon stuck" road to Leatherwood Ford. The loop features the old log cabin where Oscar was born in 1915, Muleshoe Rock Shelter, bluffs, old fields and a wet-weather waterfall.



John Litton Farm Loop 6.3 mile loop

MODERATE

The John Litton-General Slaven farm provides a glimpse of the subsistence lifestyle once so common in the Big South Fork. The story of this farm began in 1901 with the John Litton family and ended with General Slaven and his family in October 1979, when the National Park Service purchased the land. From the trailhead, this 6.3 mile loop uses a 1.1 mile portion of the orange blazed Duncan Hollow Multi-Use Trail and then the Litton Farm Road. Hiking the loop counter-clockwise, turn left on each of these roads to return to the campground. If beginning the hike following Duncan Hollow Road first, watch for the sign that directs hikers to turn right on the Litton Farm Road at the TVA power line.



Bandy Creek Loop Trail 1.3 mile loop

EASY

A quiet stroll through the woods, this trail may be started from the back of the Bandy Creek Visitor Center or across the parking lot at the far end of the pond. Horses exit the stable area near the pond and cross the hiking trail. Use caution and be prepared to yield to horseback riders.



WEST ENTRANCE TRAILHEAD

From the Bandy Creek Visitor Center, turn right on Bandy Creek Road and drive 1.6 miles to a stop sign. Turn right onto TN 297. The trailhead is located 3.9 miles on the right near the park boundary.



West Entrance Trail to Bandy Creek 3.4 miles one way

EASY

The West Entrance Hiking Trail passes through an off-set gate at the east end of the parking area. The trail coincides with the Collier Ridge Bike Loop for 0.3 mile. At 2.4 miles the trail joins the Oscar Blevins Loop. Turn right and continue to the Bandy Creek Trailhead. A portion of this trail is shared with bicycles.

West Entrance Trail to Laurel Fork 1.7 miles one way

MODERATE

The trail crosses the West Bandy Creek Road at the west end of the parking area. In 1.3 miles the trail will begin to descend steeply 0.4 mile to the creek. Upstream, the trail connects to the Sawmill Trailhead and the Slave Falls Loop in approximately 5.5 miles. Downstream, the trail to the right follows Laurel Fork Creek for approximately 6.6 miles to its junction with the John Muir Trail. The entire Laurel Fork Trail crosses the creek approximately 25 times.

TRAIL SAFETY

Be cautious as you hike the trails or use the backcountry. Wear appropriate footwear, carry water and a flashlight with you and use insect repellent. During the spring and summer there are poisonous snakes (copperheads and timber rattlesnakes), ticks, chiggers, and poison ivy found in this area. During the winter trails become slippery from ice and snow on the rocky surfaces and watch overhead for ice falling from cliffs.

