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Wild and scenic are good words to describe the Obed river system. The Obed Wild and Scenic River consists of sections of four streams: Daddys Creek, Clear Creek, Emory River, and the Obed River. These streams have been running their course for thousands of years, cutting into the sandstone of the Cumberland Plateau and creating a rugged landscape of wild land and water found in relatively few places in the eastern United States. The Obed and its tributaries have carved spectacular gorges with 400-foot cliffs above the streams. Huge sandstone boulders, once part of the cliffs above, now dot the streams, creating large whitewater rapids in the rushing water.

The American Indians who first visited this area may have used the bluffs as shelter during extended hunting trips. They found abundant game here, but the soil was poor and permanent set-

tlements were not built. The “Longhunters”—white men who hunted for animal skins and furs—came next to the region. They found the same rich hunting grounds as the Indians, but the pioneers and settlers in the Cumberland Plateau found the land in the river and stream canyons inhospitable, difficult to farm, and too far from the centers of commerce. The mainstream of human settlement flowed around and beyond the plateau to the rich farmlands to the west. The result is an undeveloped natural area sculpted by unceasing erosion over millennia.

The Obed river system contains a mixed forest of oak, hickory, poplar, pine, and hemlock. Shrubs such as mountain laurel and rhododendron also are common. During the spring, colorful wildflowers can be found on the forest floor and along

the streams. A variety of wildlife can be found seasonally in the stream gorges, including more than 100 species of birds. Along the banks of the streams you may spot signs of bobcat, beaver, raccoon, mink, deer, or a playful river otter.

Access to much of the Obed Wild and Scenic River is limited. A few bridges offer access to the streams for kayakers and canoeists interested in demanding whitewater boating. (The Obed system offers some of the most challenging whitewater in the Southeast, requiring serious whitewater skills and experience. It is not recommended for beginning or novice whitewater boaters.) Fishermen also use the streams, going after small-mouth bass, bluegill, catfish, or the muskellunge (better known locally as the “Jack fish”). For those who are not back-country oriented, a short walk from your motor vehicle to the

Lilly Bluff Overlook provides a great view of part of the rugged Obed Wild and Scenic River.

The Obed Wild and Scenic River was added to the National Park System in October 1976. The National Park Service and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) have joined forces to protect and manage this unique area. Through a cooperative agreement, lands within the Obed Wild and Scenic River that are part of the Catoosa Wildlife Management Area will continue to be owned and managed by TWRA. The goal is to preserve the river in a free-flowing condition and to preserve and protect the water quality, the wildlife resources, and the primitive character of the area for present and future generations. In this way, visitors today and in the future can experience and appreciate this part of wild America.

A Variety of Outdoor Pleasures



At any moment this fisherman's repose may be interrupted by a fish taking the bait.

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The park's streams have many beautiful surprises, among them this waterfall.

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A climber finesses his way up a sheer sandstone bluff.

James Thurston



Mistflower is one of many wildflowers native to the countryside.

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Picnics, one of summer's joys, are made even more pleasant by good food and good company.

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The ice, snow, and clear, cold water make a magical winter scene, a

reminder that all seasons have something to offer.

Russ Manning

Things to Do

**Paddling**  
Canoeing and kayaking bring many people to the Obed. This is one of the best and most difficult whitewater regions in the eastern United States. Civilization seems a long way off here. It is one of the few remaining places in the country where waters run free and where there has been little or no change in the natural sequence of events; that is one of the reasons the area was chosen to be a wild and scenic river. Because the Obed is rough country, any activity must be pursued carefully and in harmony with the land.

The cold rainy season between December and April is usually the only time the rivers are full enough for paddling trips. At that time, the streams can have nearly continuous rapids and dangerous currents—technical whitewater. Paddling or “running” this kind of water takes training, experience, and the right equipment. It is important to take certain precautions before making a whitewater trip:

- Always paddle with at least two other craft.



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- Make sure a family member or friend knows where and when you plan to begin your trip and where and when you plan to get off the river.
- Wear adequate clothing of the right type to protect yourself. The water can be extremely cold and therefore extremely hazardous. A wet or dry suit is advisable in the winter or early spring.
- Permission should be obtained from the landowner if you will be using access points that cross private property.
- The river level, on all sections, can change rapidly. The risk is too great if you attempt to paddle when the water level is in the trees.

- Know the conditions in the area where you plan to paddle. There are places where it is difficult to get off the river if trouble arises.
- There are times of the year and certain places where portaging difficult rapids may be necessary.
- Know what HYPOTHERMIA is and how to avoid it.
- Be familiar with the International Scale of River Difficulty and recognize your skill level.

**Canoe Clubs**  
For information about canoe clubs in your community and area, contact either of these organizations:

American Canoe Association  
7432 Alban Station Blvd., Suite 232  
Springfield, VA 22150  
703-451-0141  
www.acanet.org

American Whitewater  
1430 Fenwick Lane  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
866-262-8429  
www.americanwhitewater.org

**Camping**  
The Obed Wild and Scenic River has one campground, the Rock Creek Campground near Nemo. Rock Creek Campground has 12 sites, consisting of tent pad, picnic table, cooking grill, and lantern pole. There is no electricity or water available. A fee is required to camp at Rock Creek campground (check with the visitor center or the campground bulletin board for fee information). The campground is on a self-registration basis; there are no reservations available.

While camping on public lands, please carry out all your litter or dispose of it properly so that you and others can continue to enjoy the beauty of the Obed.



Russ Manning

**Hiking**  
Hiking can be fun if you are careful and know what you are doing. Always make sure someone else knows your plans. Know your route, and be wary of the bluffs along the gorge rim. For information about the Cumberland Trail (part of the Tennessee State Parks System) contact the Cumberland Trail Conference, 19 East 4th Street, Crossville, TN 38555. The website is www.cumberlandtrail.org.

**Hunting and Fishing**  
Deer, boar, turkey, and small game may be hunted in season with a permit from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. Firearms are prohibited except during hunting season when you must carry the necessary licenses and permits. A

Tennessee fishing license is required to fish in the area. Trapping is prohibited within the park. For fishing and hunting information in the Catoosa Wildlife Management Area, which has different hunting seasons than elsewhere in the state, write to Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, 464 Industrial Blvd., Crossville, TN 38555.

**Climbing**  
The sandstone of the Obed area offers excellent opportunities for rock climbing, providing vertical bluffs and overhangs. Climbers can test their skills on climbs 40-200 feet in length, on routes ranging in grade of difficulty from 5.7 to 5.13. As in whitewater boating, rock climbing involves serious risks of bodily injury, so training and experience in climbing are absolutely necessary before attempting any climbs in the Obed.

Information on climbing areas and regulations can be obtained from the National Park Service Visitor Center in Wartburg, Tennessee. 208 North Maiden St. Wartburg, TN 37887 423-346-6294 www.nps.gov/obed

Regulations and Safety

The Obed is being preserved in ways that let nature continue its work unimpeded. Wind, water, and time have shaped this landscape. The future is dependent on you. Being careful of the land and the water will ensure that the next person may have a similar opportunity.

Non-game animals, plants, and artifacts are protected here. It is illegal to harm or remove them. Wood ticks are prevalent in warm months, so examine yourself periodically and remove ticks before they attach themselves. Chiggers can also prove irritating.

Bluffs and cliffs are dangerous and can result in serious injury. Slippery, muddy rocks provide uncertain



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footing and can also result in injury. Be careful, because removal of an accident victim to safety and medical facilities is not an easy or quick matter.

Since this is a remote area with few roads and little traffic, protect your vehicle against the possibility of vandalism. Put valuables in the trunk and leave your vehicle locked. Park where you or a responsible person can protect your property while you enjoy the park. If at all possible have a friend drop you off and pick you up if you plan to float a section of the river.

Report vandalism to a park ranger or to the Morgan County Sheriff's Office.

# Exploring the Obed Wild and Scenic River

**River Chart**  
Use this chart as you plan your trip on one of the rivers or creeks. Look at the map and determine where you want to put in and take out. By checking the chart you can see the distance you will have to travel and the degree of difficulty of that section. Planning your trip in advance may offset an unforeseen problem and make your trip memorable for the right reasons. The chart is based on the Emory at Oakdale gauge levels.

	Distance	Average Difficulty*	Maximum Difficulty**	Flow (in cubic feet/second)		
				Minimum	Optimum	Maximum
<b>Obed-Emory</b> Adams Bridge to Potters Ford	4 mi/6 km	III	IV	1000	3000	5000
Potters Ford to Obed Junction	12 mi/19 km	II	III	1000	3000	5000
Obed Junction to Clear Creek Junction	4 mi/6 km	III	IV	500	1500	3000
Clear Creek Junction to Nemo	5 mi/8 km	II	III	500	1500	3000
<b>Clear Creek</b> U.S. 127 Bridge to Barnett Bridge	20 mi/32 km	II	III	1500	2500	5000
Barnett Bridge to Jett Bridge	5 mi/8 km	II	II	500	2500	4000
Jett Bridge to Lilly Bridge	2 mi/3 km	II	III	800	2500	4000
Lilly Bridge to Clear Creek Junction	2 mi/3 km	III	IV	1000	2500	3000
<b>Daddys Creek</b> Devils Breakfast Table to Obed Junction	2 mi/3 km	II	II	700	1500	3000

**Notes to Chart**  
\* Average difficulty indicates degree of difficulty of a section of river at optimum flow.  
  
\*\*Maximum difficulty indicates the highest rated rapid in that section of the river at optimum flow. Flow information on most streams in East Tennessee is available from the Tennessee Valley Authority. Call 800-238-2264 and listen to the "Emory at Oakdale" recording. Information can also be obtained from the USGS

gauge at <http://www.wildtnsh.er.usgs.gov>.  
  
**Area Closures**  
Catoosa Wildlife Management Area is closed to visitors every February and March to minimize impact on roads, environment, and wildlife. The area is also closed to all except hunters during the big game hunts in the fall and spring.

I-40 to the Genesis Rd. exit (Tenn. 298). From Knoxville and east, take I-40 to U.S. 27 north. Cross-country buses and scheduled airlines serve both Knoxville and Nashville where rental cars are available. No rail passenger service is within easy distance.  
  
Obed Wild and Scenic River is managed jointly by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. For topographic quadrangle



Obed Wild and Scenic River is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. Visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities.

**More Information**  
Obed Wild and Scenic River  
P.O. Box 429  
Wartburg, TN 37887  
423-346-6294  
[www.nps.gov/obed](http://www.nps.gov/obed)  
or  
Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency  
Catoosa Wildlife Management Area  
464 Industrial Blvd.  
Crossville, TN 38555  
1-800-262-6704  
[www.tnwildlife.org](http://www.tnwildlife.org)

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