

# Obed Wild and Scenic River

National Park Service  
U. S. Department of the Interior



The official newspaper of  
Obed Wild and Scenic River



## Mission of the National Park Service

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

## Mission of Obed Wild and Scenic River

The mission of Obed Wild and Scenic River is to preserve the park's rivers in a free-flowing condition and to protect the park's rivers and their immediate environments for the benefit and enjoyment of this and future generations.

## Contact Information

Obed Wild and Scenic River  
PO Box 429; 208 North Maiden Street  
Wartburg, TN 37887  
(423) 346-6294

**In the event of an emergency dial 911.**

<http://www.nps.gov/obed>

Follow us on Twitter @ObedWSR and on Facebook as Obed Wild and Scenic River.

## Welcome to Obed Wild and Scenic River

The Cumberland Plateau is known for its dramatic scenery and for a level of biodiversity that has evoked comparisons with the tropical rainforests. The Obed Wild and Scenic River is one of the Plateau's crown jewels. Incredible beauty is hidden in every nook and cranny. You may have to invest some effort to appreciate the full scope of its grandeur, however. The very ruggedness and remoteness that make this place so special make it difficult or impossible to see from a vehicle.

The Obed's rock climbers share their unique, aerial perspective on the park with the turkey vultures that soar overhead, while whitewater paddlers are the only ones privileged enough to take in significant stretches of the park on any one outing. For the slightly more risk-averse visitor, the park's developed access points will offer you a small taste of what these canyons hold, while Lilly Bluff Overlook will allow you to peer into one of the park's deeply incised gorges from the Plateau's rim. Longer trails will let you experience the remoteness of this resource on foot. Or pretend to be a local for the day and head to the river for a picnic lunch and a refreshing dip in the unpolluted water of the park's streams. However you choose to enjoy the park, be sure to slow down and absorb the beauty of your surroundings and do your part to help us preserve it.

With the addition of several new faces to help interpret and protect the park's resources and with a newly remodeled visitor center which features several paintings of the park by a local artist, we welcome you to Obed Wild and Scenic River!



Painting of view from Lilly Overlook by artist Mara Trumbo.

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# Park Information

## Protect Your Park



*Dispose of your litter* in trash cans provided for that purpose. Recycle whenever possible.

*Leave all natural and cultural items* as you find them to preserve the past and present. Collecting or damaging items such as rocks, flowers or other vegetation is prohibited.

*Respect all wildlife* from a safe distance. Disturbing or removing wildlife is prohibited.

## Visitor Center



Located at 208 North Maiden Street on the courthouse square in Wartburg, Tennessee, the visitor center is open daily from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Eastern time. An introductory park movie/slideshow is available for viewing upon request.

## Top Visitor Questions

### 1. Is Obed Wild and Scenic River really a national park?

Yes! Even though the words “national” and “park” do not appear anywhere in its official name, Obed Wild and Scenic River IS a unit of the National Park System. In addition to the “icon” parks that come to mind when you think of America’s national parks, the National Park Service protects a wide array of other park units including national monuments, historic sites, recreation areas, seashores and, of course, wild and scenic rivers. Certain portions of Obed Wild and Scenic River lie within the 80,000-acre Catoosa Wildlife Management Area and are managed jointly with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. For more information on Catoosa WMA call (800) 262-6704 or visit <http://www.tn.gov/twra>.

### 2. Is Obed Wild and Scenic River really special enough to be included with the likes of the Grand Canyon, Yosemite and the Great Smoky Mountains?

Yes!! The United States Congress thought so, at least. Congress established Obed Wild and Scenic River to protect its clean, free-flowing streams and their “outstandingly remarkable” natural, cultural and recreational values. From its towering sandstone cliffs to the intimacy of its sparkling streams, Obed Wild and Scenic River is a place of truly remarkable beauty. With a sense of remoteness that is increasingly rare in the eastern United States, it is one of the last remaining vestiges of the wild and untamed land that once

existed in this region of the Cumberland Plateau.

### 3. May I hunt and fish in the park?

Yes. Except in designated safety areas, hunting and fishing is permitted on all park-owned lands within the boundary. State regulations are still in force and can be found at <http://www.tn.gov/twra>.

### 4. Do you have hiking trails?

Ask us about one of the following trails: Lilly Bluff Overlook Trail (.3 miles one-way), Bridge Trail (.5 miles one-way), Boulder Trail (.2 miles one-way), Point Trail (3.8 miles round-trip), Emory River Nature Trail (.7 miles round-trip) and the Obed Wild and Scenic River segment of the Cumberland Trail (14.2 miles one-way).

### 5. Can my family and I take a float trip down one of your rivers?

The streams of Obed Wild and Scenic River feature powerful and technical whitewater rapids in a scenic but extremely remote setting. Potentially lethal hazards are commonplace on the park’s streams, and all sections of river within the park demand a fairly high degree of whitewater skill and experience. See the article on page 3 of this visitor guide for more information about whitewater paddling in the Obed. Contact park staff at (423) 346-6294 for more information about regional streams outside of the park’s boundaries which are better suited to leisurely family float trips.

### 6. Can I rock climb at Obed Wild and Scenic River?

Visitors come from all over the world to climb at the Obed. The park has approximately 350 bolted routes and many opportunities for other styles of climbing. Climbing is an inherently dangerous activity, and it is essential that you obtain the necessary training and experience before attempting to rock climb on your own. See the article on page 3 of this visitor guide for more information on rock climbing in the park.

### 7. May I camp in Obed Wild and Scenic River?

Rock Creek Campground, located at the downstream end of the park, features 11 shaded campsites in close proximity to the Emory River. Facilities are primitive and the campground roads are narrow, so vehicle lengths including any trailers are limited to a total of 25 feet. There is a fee of \$7 per campsite per night, and campers must complete self-registration procedures

within 30 minutes of occupying a campsite. Alcohol is not allowed. Other campground regulations apply. The campground floods during high flow levels, so be prepared to evacuate during periods of heavy rain. Certain restrictions apply to backcountry camping. Call (423) 346-6294 or see the park webpage.

### 8. Are there other regulations that I need to know about while in the park?

All relevant state and federal regulations apply within the park. See Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations for rules that apply to all parks generally: Visit <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys> and follow the “Code of Federal Regulations” link to view these service-wide rules. For other regulations that are specific to Obed Wild and Scenic River and that are updated annually, see the park’s “Superintendent’s Compendium” by following the “Park Management” link on the park’s webpage.

### 9. What do I need to know to enjoy my visit safely?

Stay a safe distance from cliff edges. Be aware of dead trees that may be above you, especially in windy conditions. Rattlesnakes and copperheads, although present, will avoid you if given the chance. Check for ticks during and after any hike. Carry adequate equipment and be prepared for rapidly changing weather conditions.

### 10. How can I volunteer at Obed Wild and Scenic River?

The park is always in need of good volunteers, and we are excited to put your skills and talents to use! Contact the Volunteers-In-Parks program manager at [moria\\_painter@nps.gov](mailto:moria_painter@nps.gov) or (423) 346-6294.

### 11. Do you have a Junior Ranger Program?

Yes! Stop by our visitor center and we will put you on the road to becoming a ranger! Children completing the junior ranger program earn an Obed Wild and Scenic River Junior Ranger Badge.

### 12. Do you conduct educational or interpretive programs?

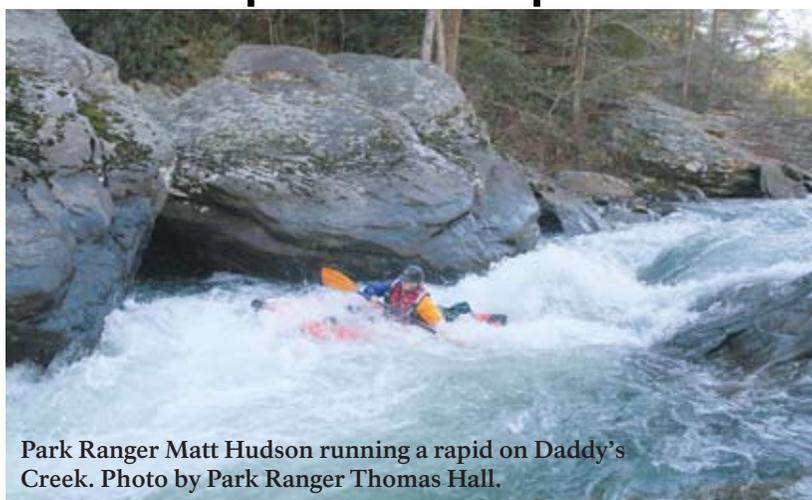
Park staff conduct a range of interpretive programs. Call (423) 346-6294 or check the park’s web page at <http://www.nps.gov/obed> to obtain information about programs scheduled for the near future. We would also be delighted to arrange an interpretive program for your classroom or other group. Please contact us at (423) 346-6294 to schedule a program.

## Wild and Scenic Whitewater: Experience Required

The powerful and technical rapids of the Obed Wild and Scenic River's spectacular streams draw seasoned paddlers from all over the eastern United States. Unfortunately, if you have limited experience with whitewater paddling, you have quite a bit of homework to do before you will be ready to safely negotiate the park's streams. Potentially lethal hazards including undercut rocks, fallen trees and recirculating "holes" abound on all sections of the park's streams. Hypothermia is a danger even during surprisingly mild weather.

Be aware, also, that the park's rivers can rise dramatically and without warning. When you see gigantic logs balanced precariously on top of house-sized, midstream boulders, know that those trees floated to their lofty perches. It is not uncommon for the river to come up 20 feet in bigger floods. Waves can build to heights of over ten feet. And if you are thinking that maybe you will wait until times of very low flow to take a float trip, you should know that the Obed's rangers perform more searches and rescues at times of low flow than they do at any other water level. Although the view from the bridges can be deceptive, even the handful of river sections within the park that are given a "Class II" rating are not suitable for beginners. Again, rangers perform more rescues on these "easier" sections than they do on the more daunting reaches of river.

There is good news, however. Experienced paddlers regularly float our streams without incident, and with time and experience you'll be able to join them. Whitewater paddling clubs are great places to receive training and to connect with experienced paddlers. There is an element of danger and unpredictability that will never be completely eliminated from whitewater paddling. With the proper training and equipment, however, you can mitigate those risks to such an extent that the most dangerous part of some river trips may well be driving to the put-in. We hope to see you on the river soon!



Park Ranger Matt Hudson running a rapid on Daddy's Creek. Photo by Park Ranger Thomas Hall.

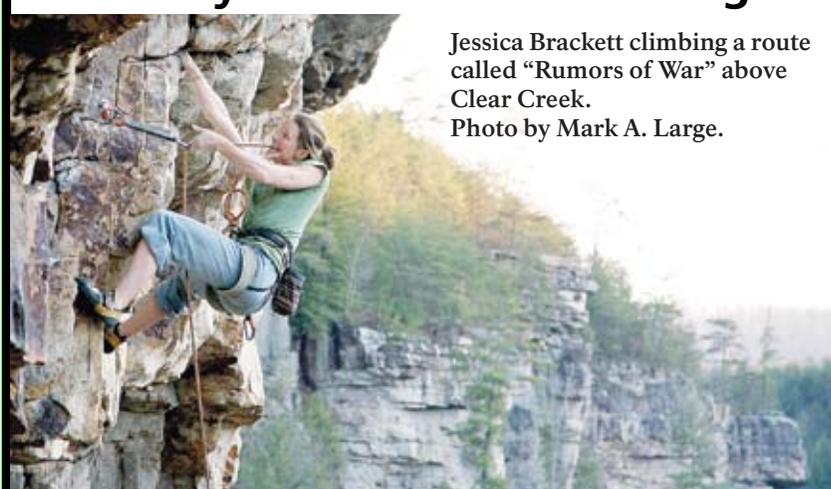
### What you need to know

- All sections of the park's streams feature potentially lethal hazards and require extensive whitewater paddling experience.
- Go with someone who is familiar with the section of river that you will be paddling.
- Essential equipment includes a lifejacket, helmet, throw rope, spare paddle, wetsuit or drysuit, a boat intended for whitewater use and basic survival gear.
- For recent river gage readings follow the "Real-time data" link at <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/tn/nwis> and see the following: "Emory River at Oakdale," "Obed River at Lancing," "Obed River at Adams Bridge," "Clear Creek at Lilly Bridge" and "Daddy's Creek near Hebbertsburg."
- January, February, March and April are the heart of the park's paddling season. During May and December minimum flow levels may or may not be present. You will only rarely find sufficient water in the park's streams in the remaining warmer months.

### What you need to know

- Rock climbing is an inherently dangerous activity. The park does not inspect or maintain any climbing routes or climbing hardware. Do not blindly trust permanent anchors.
- Have the necessary skills and experience or climb with an experienced partner. Human error is one of the most common causes of injury and fatality.
- Bring the appropriate equipment and know how to use it.
- Sport climbing is limited to an approximately two-mile band of cliffs. "Topping out" and placing bolts without a permit are prohibited.
- Traditional climbing and bouldering are allowed throughout the park.
- The park's climbing management plan can be viewed at: <http://www.nps.gov/obed/parkmgmt>.

## Beyond Vertical: Climbing Obed's Sandstone Cliffs



Jessica Brackett climbing a route called "Rumors of War" above Clear Creek. Photo by Mark A. Large.

"Tierrany," climbers scale an inverted staircase of colorful, uniquely featured sandstone until they seem to hang directly over the rapids of the Obed River.

Most climbers that come to the Obed are drawn by the park's approximately 350 "sport" or permanently-bolted routes. Sport routes within the park vary in difficulty from 5.7 to 5.14, with routes on the easier end of this range still being quite difficult for the average non-climber and with only a handful of individuals being capable of even attempting routes graded 5.14. "Bouldering," or unroped climbing in *relative* proximity to the ground, is also quite popular in the park and opportunities abound for "traditional" climbing, in which removable pieces of equipment are placed into natural imperfections in the rock to arrest a potential fall.

Over the years, the Park Service has developed a special relationship with its core group of "local" climbers. They show up in droves for volunteer days and are actively involved in spreading the word about park rules and good climbing ethics. Look for these climbers when you are out exploring the park. Although rock climbing demands a high degree of physical fitness and mental qualities such as focus, calmness under duress and the ability to manage fear, skilled climbers can make it look effortless, and it can be mesmerizing to watch as they casually traverse an overhang like a spider on the ceiling.

Climbers from all over the world can be found hanging from the Obed Wild and Scenic River's imposing expanses of rock. The Obed's cliffs are especially well known for being "steep," which in climber's lingo means that they often lean back beyond vertical and become overhanging. Above the junction of Clear Creek and the Obed River, for example, in the area known as "Stephen King's Library," routes with names like "Pet Sematary" and "Maximum Overdrive" extend up a vertical face of 40 feet and then out a dead-horizontal roof for approximately the same distance. In another area known as

## Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and Hydrilla: Under Attack By Land and Water

that they do not cause unintended harm to the park's resources.

Recently an aquatic plant known as hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*), also originally from overseas, has been found in park waters. Growing rapidly, hydrilla can quickly dominate native vegetation, forming dense mats at the surface of the water and dramatically altering the balance of the aquatic ecosystem. Hydrilla covers spawning areas for native fish and can also cause significant reductions in stream oxygen levels. Hydrilla also limits human uses of streams. Hydrilla-choked channels can make recreational activities such as swimming, fishing or wading difficult or impossible.

Hydrilla is currently present in Daddy's Creek, in the Obed River below its confluence with Daddy's Creek, and in the



Hydrilla mats. Photo by Nathan Parker. Inset: Single hydrilla stem.

Emory River below its confluence with the Obed. Park staff are currently evaluating what, if anything, can be done to limit the spread of this aggressive plant.

**What you can do:** When in the park, be on the lookout for dead or dying hemlocks and for the tell-tale cotton-ball-like egg sacks (see picture above) on the underside of hemlock branches. To report these observations or if you are interested in volunteering to treat and/or search for the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, call Justin Coffey, the park's biological technician, at (423) 346-6294. Also, be on the lookout for hydrilla (see the pictures above). If you find an aquatic plant that looks like hydrilla in sections of streams other than the ones mentioned above, please contact Justin.

## A National Park In Your Backyard

Obed Wild and Scenic River was created to preserve this primitive and beautiful area for all people to enjoy, no matter where they call home. The people who live near the park, however, have a special connection to these rivers and to the rugged land that surrounds them. Only a generation or two earlier, their kinfolk went to the river to get their water and to grind meal to make their bread. The deep river gorges were an impediment to travel, isolating the local residents from other areas and forcing a high degree of self-sufficiency. People sustained themselves in part by taking fish from the streams and game from the forests.

Today, many local people still enjoy fishing and hunting in and around the park. In the warmer months local residents are one of the park's biggest user groups, with picnicking and camping being two of the more frequently enjoyed activities. Swimming is also extremely popular. Although the park's rivers are a bit on the cool side most of the year, their refreshing waters provide a setting far more spectacular than any swimming pool. It is also wise not to paint with too broad of a brush. People come from all over to climb and paddle at the Obed. Many might be surprised, however, by the number of local young people and adults that are taking full advantage of these world-class opportunities in their backyard.

The relationship between the Park Service and the local community continues to improve significantly. Increasingly, large areas of privately owned, forested lands are being developed or posted as off-limits to the general public. As civilization continues to encroach on this nation's wild places, people begin to have a greater appreciation for the fact that public ownership preserves their ability to enjoy the land that they love. In a similar way, the regrettable degradation of lands and waters that were once pristine helps to underscore the critical importance of the park's mission of ensuring that the rivers known by local residents' grandparents will be the same rivers known by their grandchildren. School programs are vital to our progress in this area, helping children to recognize how special it is to have a national park in their backyard. We want them to know that this is *their* national park, preserved and protected for *them* to enjoy.



These girls are park neighbors and junior rangers. Obed programs help children connect to *their* park. Here, they discover a tree that has been gnawed upon by a beaver. Photo by Park Ranger Thomas Hall.



The deep shade of a hemlock canopy. Photo by Park Ranger Thomas Hall. Inset: Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

Many of us have listened to our grandparents talk about the great chestnut blight that devastated the American chestnut tree population during the early 1900s. This blight almost completely eliminated a majestic species of tree that was once a dominate feature of the landscape.

Today the forests of the Obed Wild and Scenic River and much of the southeastern United States face a threat of similar magnitude. The culprit is a tiny insect, originally a native of East Asia, known as the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (*Adelges tsugae*). If you've ever stopped in silent awe alongside a Cumberland Plateau stream as it leapt its way from boulder to boulder under the deep shade of a dense evergreen canopy, those were hemlock trees towering above you. Picture all of those trees dead and on the ground, the stream opened to full sunlight, and you'll understand how much we stand to lose. But the potential widespread death of our hemlock trees not only threatens to mar the most beautiful areas of the landscape—it also has the potential to radically alter habitat for a wide range of species. The Hemlock Woolly Adelgid has been found at locations near Nemo and Alley Ford. Park staff are working to identify the extent of the infestation and to plan a response strategy. Certain treatments do exist, but many are labor intensive and all must be carefully evaluated to ensure