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## Protecting the Landscape

During the 1900s much of the Cumberland Plateau was stripped of its marketable trees and easily accessible coal. Sediments from the denuded land and acid from 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.

Today young trees clothe most of the logged-over lands, and environmental controls are reducing the impact that mining

had on rivers and streams. New growth hides mine entrances, encroaches upon coal tipples, and transforms old fields into forests. Many of the old roads that crisscross the gorge are fading into the landscape and 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 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.

Big South Fork is set aside so that people can actively enjoy this rugged scenic area, where 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 welcomes you to the beautiful Cumberland Plateau.

## Adventure on the River



A kayaker poises on 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 Ell is a Class III rapid requiring a traverse to the left at the bottom of the drop.



Whitewater canoes are designed without a keel so that they can be turned quickly. 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 drops into a swirling pool that flows between huge boulders.

The Big South Fork of the Cumberland River and its tributaries, North White Oak Creek, Clear Fork, and the New River, lure anglers, swimmers, and paddlers. They are excellent for a variety of whitewater paddling experiences. Some stretches are ideal for beginners; other sections should be attempted only by highly skilled paddlers using appropriate equipment. Some streams in the park can be floated year-round, while others have enough water for boating only during seasons with plentiful rainfall. Heavy rains

can turn a placid river into a torrent not to be entered by anyone.

Floating the streams of the Big South Fork will give you entry to a land that time and events have passed by. You can still see evidence of previous agricultural, mining, and logging practices, but today the land has limited access, sparse development, and a quality of wildness. 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 are in another world and begin to pace your movements to its rhythms and moods. Where the stream flows slow and smooth, you can examine the banks and cliffs. As with slow-motion film you can see much more detail. Where the stream speeds up—twisting and dropping between boulders and over ledges—you become one with your paddle. Rapids that you thought would take 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: Always wear a personal flotation device (PFD). When canoeing have at least three canoes in your party. Kayakers and canoeists floating Class III or more difficult waters should wear helmets. Select a stream that matches

your experience and abilities with the challenge you are looking for. To select a stream that is right for you, ask park staff, read published guides, or talk to commercial operators. For information on commercial rafting, contact the park (see *General Information below*).

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,

depending on where you fish. 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 has a swimming pool. For reservations call 800-365-CAMP (800-365-2267).

Backcountry lodging, accessible only by trail, is available at the Charit Creek Lodge year-round. Reservations required. Contact: Wilderness Lodging, 250 Apple Valley Road, Sevierville, TN 37826; 865-429-5704.

When hiking you may discover abandoned structures that remind you that this area once was not so isolated. Trails lead to spectacular views along cliffs and bluffs. Be care-

ful; watch your footing at these overlooks. If you plan to hike or camp in the backcountry, check on the dates of hunting seasons beforehand, so you can be especially cautious during those times. For campfires use only downed wood; extinguish all campfires thoroughly before you leave. Better yet, use a portable stove to avoid danger of a forest fire. Do not bury trash. Pack out what you carry in.

Trailheads are located throughout the park. For up-to-date information check at Bandy Creek or Stearns Depot visitor centers.

### Sightseeing

Few roads go into the park or through the gorge. Many scenic overlooks are accessible only by horse and hiking trails. The Yahoo



Big South Fork Scenic Railway

Falls, Devils Jump, and East Rim overlooks are accessible by passenger vehicles. Wildflowers and migratory birds abound in late April and early May. Autumn's pageantry of color usually peaks in mid-October, a favorite time for visitors.

The concessioner-operated Big South Fork Scenic Railway runs from mid-April through November and offers daily trips to the Blue Heron Mining Community. For information call: Big South Fork Scenic Railway, 800-GO ALONG (800-462-5664).

### Hunting

Hunting and trapping are allowed throughout the park; state and federal regulations apply. Check with park staff about 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 hikers, boaters making a portage, or other hunters. Always 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. Guided rides, from one or two hours to several days, may be available. Contact the park for details.

For information contact the park, ask at a visitor center, or check our website.



Green heron

## General Information



**Visitor Centers** The park is open year-round. The Bandy Creek Visitor Center, 15 miles west of Oneida, Tenn., is open daily from 8 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (closed December 25). The Stearns Depot Visitor Center in Stearns, Ky., in the Big South Fork Scenic Railway Depot, is open daily from April through October from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Hours vary November through March (closed December 25). Contact the park for details about seasonal activities and programs.



**Getting to the Park** The park is easily reached by vehicle. • From I-75 southbound: take Ky. 461 south to Ky. 80 west to U.S. 27 south to Oneida, then follow Tenn. 297 west into the park. • From I-75

north-bound: take Tenn. 63 west to U.S. 27 north, and proceed as above. • From I-40: take U.S. 27 or U.S. 127 north. Both connect with the south edge of the park. U.S. 27 connects with Tenn. 297. Airports are in Knoxville and Nashville, Tenn. and Lexington, Ky.

**Climate** Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area is in a rugged gorge area of the Cumberland Plateau in southeastern Kentucky and northeastern Tennessee. It is a humid region, typified by mild winters and moist, warm to hot summers. Moist air from the Gulf of Mexico is brought

here by winds from the south and southwest. Flooding is most likely December through March when storm systems bring heavy rains. Summer thunderstorms can result in flash floods. Snowfall 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 accompanying the chilling of the inner core of the body. Unless treated quickly it can result in death.

To help avoid hypothermia, wear a hat, gloves, and layered clothing

(wool or synthetic materials, not cotton).

**Hypothermia is brought on by cold temperature and aggravated by wetness, wind, and exhaustion.** Most cases occur between 30° and 50°F. If you feel 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 someone with you is suffering from hypothermia do the same for the victim. Keep the person in a horizontal position and handle gently. Huddle close together to prevent further chilling. **Get help! Emergencies call: 911.**

**For a Safe Visit** Real dangers exist on the water. Ask rangers for safety tips, read bulletin boards, and know the regulations. **Your safety is your responsibility.** • 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 seen 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. Please be aware of the possibility of trespass and respect the rights of all property owners.

**Cultural Preservation** The cultural resources of the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area are varied and significant. The obvious features are the rock shelters visible throughout the park. These overhangs were used by pioneers and moonshiners in historic times. These rock shelters, with their stable, dry soils that preserve bone, leather, and other organic materials, are valuable to archeologists. 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. Report any incidents of digging that you may observe. Please help preserve our cultural heritage.

**Nearby Sites** Rugby, a utopian settlement founded by Thomas Hughes in 1880, is just outside the southern boundary of the Big South Fork. Like many social experiments Rugby failed, but its buildings survived and some are maintained by Historic Rugby, Inc.



Scott State Forest and Pickett State Rustic Park and Forest are managed by the state of Tennessee. Scott State Forest is used primarily as a white pine seed farm. Pickett is a fully developed park.

Sgt. Alvin C. York State Historic Park pays tribute to Sgt. York, the soldier from Tennessee who became one of the most decorated heroes of World War I. His grave lies just off U.S. 127 in Pall Mall, Tenn., near the Alvin York homesite.

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.

**More Information** Big South Fork 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. To learn more about national parks visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area  
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