

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

Fine Swimming Holes Along the Piney River Section of the Cumberland Trail

By Fran Wallas

The Piney River Section of the Cumberland Trail is a seven-mile linear trail starting as an easy level hike alongside Duskin Creek. It is a route to some good swimming holes.

In a few short turns you come to a metal bridge crossing the creek. Look for Pink Lady's Slippers near the bridge. After crossing the creek, the trail slopes upward, and soon returns to creek level. Try to find the Gaywings, an unusual rosy flower, near the "Main Trail" sign. The trail follows the banks of the creek with lots of swimming holes along the way. You start a steep climb through rhododendron and laurel. In about a mile, you come to the White Pine Cascade where you may want to spend some time.

If you are anxious to get to the campsite to take off your pack, continue to the Spider Den spur trail a half-mile past the cascades. To camp for free in this site or park overnight at the trailhead, you need to register ahead by calling the Cumberland Trail state park office at 423-566-2229 or by going online to the Cumberland Trail Conference Web site www.cumberlandtrail.org.

The spur trail is very steep and winds down into a beautiful cove. Even

if you are not going to camp, this side trail is worth the effort. The backcountry campsite is one of the best in the state. Someone has built tables and chairs out of rocks so that you can sit comfortably and view the bluffs and creek. You can enjoy exploring the rock house, the creek, and an old railroad stone wall.

If you have arrived at the campsite early in the day, you may want to leave your gear and head back up to the main trail. The hike continues to the bridge over Deep Pool, and a spur trail to Hemlock Falls. The main trail turns right and starts down to a junction with logging camp loop. You will probably not want to take this loop but continue on the main trail.

The hike follows an old Dinky Line railroad bed to a bridge at Rockhouse Branch and then to the 100-foot suspension bridge over the Piney River. There are usually many wildflowers in this area. Switchbacks gradually lead you high above the river. The only difficult part of this trail is the McDonalds Branch crossing, a tricky boulder hop across wide drainage. In about five and a half miles from Spider Den, you reach the Piney River/Twin Rocks trailhead and the picnic area parking lot.



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White Pine Cascade on Duskin Creek along the Piney River section of the Cumberland Trail. Below: Gaywings bloom along the trail.

Directions

The hardest part about this hike is finding the trailheads. Take Highway 68 to Shut-In-Gap Road just outside Spring City. Follow the road about a mile to the Piney River Picnic Area. If you are doing a shuttle hike, leave one car here. Continue on Shut-In-Gap Road another four miles until you get to the Stinging Fork Trailhead (see the large brown sign on your right). Drive past this trailhead about another 1.4 miles and turn left on a primitive road called Walden Mountain Road. (There may be no road sign.) As you drive along the road, don't take the first road that veers to the left or the next road angling to the right. Continue straight and the road goes steeply downhill. The road levels out at a culvert and then goes downhill to another culvert. Immediately past the second culvert, pull off on the left and park. The trail starts at the pull off. If you only have one car, this is the best place to start the hike.

Piney River Section of the Cumberland Trail



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville. You can read about her other Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks on the Web site www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes.)



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