

Abrams Falls

Trail Features:	Waterfalls, Fall Hike
Trail Location:	Cades Cove
Roundtrip Length:	5.2 Miles
Total Elevation Gain:	675 Feet
Avg. Elevation Gain / Mile:	260 Feet
Highest Elevation:	1,758 Feet
Trail Difficulty Rating:	6.55 (moderate)



Trail Description:

The October 2008 issue of Backpacker Magazine listed their top 10 most dangerous hikes in America. The list was developed using casualty statistics as a result of lightning, altitude sickness, extreme weather and drowning, among several other measures. The magazine ranked this pathway as the ninth most dangerous trail in the country, mainly as a result of high exposure to drowning and hypothermia hazards. The article cited 29 deaths on this trail since 1971 as a result of water-related accidents.

After crossing the footbridge at the trailhead, hikers should turn left to proceed towards the waterfall. A turn to the right at this junction would lead you over to the Oliver Place.

The path leading from Cades Cove to the waterfall weaves around the ridges that predominate in this area, all the while roughly following Abrams Creek. The route traverses through pine-oak forest along the ridge tops, while passing through rhododendron and hemlock forests closer to the creek. Although much of the trail travels alongside Abrams Creek, the creek is mostly inaccessible due to thick rhododendron growth.

At roughly nine-tenths of a mile from the trailhead, you'll begin to notice several downed trees alongside the trail. In April 2011, a massive tornado, categorized as an EF-4 with maximum wind speeds ranging between 165 and 170 miles per hour, and an estimated maximum path width of one mile, ripped through the western end of Cades Cove and downed more than 4,500 trees in the area. As a result, the Abrams Falls Trail was closed for a month as crews worked to clear trees blocking the path.

At almost 2.6 miles, you'll reach the short side trail that leads to Abrams Falls. Hikers should turn left and cross a footbridge to reach a fairly large "beach" area to admire this beautiful waterfall.



Although Abrams Falls is only 20 feet high, the large volume of water rushing over the sandstone cliff more than makes up for its lack of height. In fact, Abrams Falls is the most voluminous waterfall in the park. Although the broad, deep pool at its base is very picturesque and inviting, swimming here is extremely dangerous due to strong currents and the presence of an undertow.

The 5.2-mile roundtrip hike to Abrams Falls is relatively short, and is considered to be moderate in difficulty, thus helping to attract nearly 1,000 visitors per day during peak season, and making it one of the more popular trails in the park.

Both the waterfall and the creek are named after a Cherokee chief by the name of Oskuah, who later adopted the name Abram (or Abraham). His village once stood several miles downstream from the waterfall.