



# TENNESSEE TRAILS

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## ROCK ISLAND STATE PARK

- By Evelyn Tretter -

Condensed from article printed in the March/April 1987 issue,  
The Tennessee Conservationist

A long-standing favorite among recreation areas in Middle Tennessee, Rock Island State Park is blessed with a central location, striking natural features, and an interesting history as both an early center of industry and a popular gathering place earlier this century.

Located about a mile off Highway 70S between McMinnville and Sparta, Rock Island State Park is about one hundred miles from Nashville and Chattanooga and only a little further from Knoxville, making it very accessible to visitors from middle and east Tennessee.

The land's features, both as nature first made them and people have since enhanced them, make Rock Island ideally suited for swimming and fishing. Below Great Falls Dam at the confluence of the Caney Fork and Collins Rivers, the Caney Fork flows down a wide, flat-floored gorge bordered by hundred-foot bluffs. Here lie the Great Falls of the Caney Fork.

Below the falls, the water pours through jumbles of giant boulders from pool to green pool. Here the water is at just the right temperature and the flat rocks make a perfect place for sunning or playing on even the hottest

day of the summer. Where the river joins Center Hill Lake is the natural sand swimming beach, nestling under towering bluffs studded with tall cottonwoods.

The park and the surrounding area also have some interesting history to recommend them. The little village of Rock Island, founded in the 1790s, was the first permanent white settlement and temporarily the county seat of what is now Warren County. An inn stood here in the old days, a place for stagecoaches to change their horses.

The center of the early settlement was the Point, where the Rocky River flows into the Caney Fork, upstream a mile or two from the state park. At this spot an island of solid rock, one-half acre covered with thin soil and trees, rises in midstream; and it is this "rock island" that gave the settlement its name. The small island can be seen today upstream from the bridge if one looks to the right when passing over the Caney Fork going from Rock Island toward Sparta on Highway 70S.

In later years, as logging on the rivers became common, rafts were tied up at the base of the Great Falls to be loaded and floated to Nashville via

the Caney Fork and Cumberland. Iron rings in the bluffs here remain as reminders of that flourishing activity. The coming of the railroad in 1881 contributed to its demise but brought other industry. The railroad also caused the town of Rock Island to move about a mile downriver to its present site.

In 1889 the Falls City Cotton Mill was built beside the falls and its water harnessed to manufacture cotton goods, with the main item being heavy sheeting. A three-story brick building overlooking the gorge housed the mill operations. Employees of the mill and their families lived in company houses on the hill above the mill. Ruins of these houses can still be seen in the woods that have reclaimed the site. The company town was called Falls City and had its own post office. The great flood of 1902 washed away the mill's waterwheel and its housing. It was never rebuilt.

Today there remain in the park relics of that era in the community's history. In 1928, the wooden stamp, formerly used with blue chalk to stamp the factory's name onto the rolls of sheeting at the mill, was discovered in a trash heap under the mill building. After a sojourn in the library at McMinnville, it was returned to Rock Island State Park and is now displayed in the visitor center.

The old mill itself still stands and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This year will see work begin on the mill's restoration, with plans including an interpretive center, an outdoor recreation facility, administrative offices and meeting rooms.

Rock Island embarked upon the next phase of its history when, in 1916, the old Tennessee Electric Power Company built the Great Falls Dam and constructed a power house. Here at the confluence of the Caney Fork and

Collins Rivers was formed a beautiful lake, something the average resident of the area had not had the privilege of enjoying.

Added to this bonanza was an unexpected phenomenon that increased the beauty of the gorge. When the water level rose above the dam, water flowed through underground crevices and caves to form numerous waterfalls from high on the bluff along the left bank below the dam. The power company, and later TVA, which now operates the power plant, tried to stop the flow with mixtures of concrete and tar; but the water always came through at new locations. Now there are small falls at various spots, but most of the leakage comes through to form the magnificent Twin Falls.

The old Webb Hotel, still standing as a private home between the park entrance and the highway, was built in 1920. Nashville residents came here to spend a week or two or rode over from the city on Sundays to dine at the hotel and return the same day. A block or two down the tree-lined road is the quaint little Victorian railroad station, now restored and used as a residence.

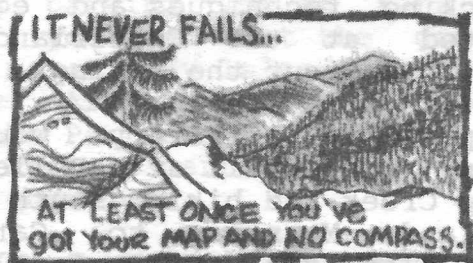
More than just wealthy Nashvillians came to Rock Island during this period. In the early 1920s, the Tennessee Electric Power Company created a park on the Warren County side of the dam and power house for the public to enjoy free of charge. Stone steps leading down to the gorge were built by expert stonemasons and are still in use. The steps had railings and gates of fancy ironwork that matched similar work remaining at the power plant. The company also built scenic walkways along the bottom of the bluffs.

The state of Tennessee started developing a state park at Rock Island in 1969, and work continues to the present. Fishing remains as popular

as ever, boat rental is available, and the family campground is modern in every respect. There are tennis courts, playing fields, a 2-1/2 mile foot trail along the bluffs of the Collins River, and a new trail along the bluffs of the Caney Fork River gorge.

Many people like to take long exploring hikes into the gorge, enjoying the rock formations, fossils, and the ever-present rush of water. Cultural programs, such as blue grass and gospel concerts, take place on holiday evenings in summer at the swimming beach. With these attractions and its astounding natural beauty, Rock Island State Park continues to draw pleasure-seekers to this area that has long been renowned as a resort.

EDITOR'S NOTE: TTA will have its annual Rock Island trip the weekend of August 22 and 23. Be looking for details in next month's issue.



Drawn & contributed by Alan Stokes

## CUMBERLAND TRAIL NEWS

### EAGLE BLUFF HIKE

July 4

Celebrate the Fourth on the Cumberland Trail as we hike to Eagle Bluff. Meet at 10:00 a.m. (EDT) at the Cove Lake State Park Cumberland Trail office.

Bobby Harbin will shuttle us to our starting point on the Old Kentucky Road. From there we will hike to the top of Cumberland Mountain and then along the Cumberland Trail to Eagle Bluff. After lunch we will travel along the C.T. to Devil's Racetrack

and back down to Cove Lake State Park. This is a hike of about five miles. Bring lunch and water. If some are interested in staying overnight, we may schedule an impromptu hike for Sunday. Contact Bob Brown for more information (615-748-4816).

### TTA/SIERRA CLUB WORK WEEKEND

Section 2 of C.T.

July 18-19

Randall Grimsley (program chairperson for Sierra Club) has suggested a joint work weekend with TTA on Section 2 of the Cumberland Trail, south of Caryville.

We will work both days on the trail with tools provided by Bobby Harbin. For those who wish to camp overnight, free campsites will be available at Cove Lake State Park.

Meet on both days at 8:00 a.m. at Bobby Harbin's Cumberland Trail office in Cove Lake State Park. For more information, call Bob Brown at 615-748-4816 (work).

### TRIP REPORT

#### 1ST ANNUAL CUMBERLAND TRAIL

#### COVE LAKE BIRDING WEEKEND

May 23-24

Though the turnout was sparse, the birding and leadership both days were excellent. Early Saturday morning, Phyllis Coe and David Sellers of Knoxville and I followed past state TOS president Boyd Sharp along the short C.T. section in the Cove Lake marshy area where our most interesting find was Prothonotary Warbler. Boyd then took us by car up Cross Mountain making frequent stops on the many successively higher switchbacks and finally by foot along a trail connecting reclaimed strip mine pits just under the 3,000-foot crest.

Along the road we heard a number of warbler species including many

American Redstarts, Ceruleans, Kentuckys, and Ovenbirds as well as several Hoodeds and Black & Whites and a couple of Wormeatings. Good views of a male Redstart and Scarlet Tanager and several singing Rose-breasted Grosbeak maloes were had. Many Chestnut-sided and Golden-winged Warblers were heard along the strip-pit trail with superb close looks at singing males of both species. Yellow-breasted Chats were numerous. A Sharp-shinned Hawk flew over and a pretty pink Copperhead dared us to tread on him. A new plant for me, thickly bedded in the strip pits, was Equisetum arvense or Horsetail.

That afternoon I hiked along the C.T. to Eagle Bluff where I heard the thin whistle of a Broadwinged Hawk and then was entertained a long while by a pair soaring over the valley making countless dives at each other until an approaching thunderstorm ran me off the mountain.

Next morning, Tennessee Breeding Bird Atlas project coordinator, Chuck Nicholson from Norris led George McKinney, a project volunteer from Speedwell, and me to the heavily wooded stream feeding Cove Lake where he sometimes finds nesting Swainson's Warblers. None sang for us, but we did hear a Yellow-throated Warbler and a Louisiana Waterthrush.

Next, we repeated Saturday's trip up Cross Mountain with equally productive results. This time on the strip pit trail, we found an agitated (thus probably nesting) female Golden-winged, and George caught a Red Eft, the dry land phase of a Red-spotted Newt.

Driving along the crest to a piney spot where Sharp-shinned Hawks often nest, we didn't see any nests but did spot a lone Sharp-shinned flying over us for the second time that morning. Redstarts, Ceruleans, Chestnut-sideds, and Ovenbirds were heard often at stops and finally we got a singing

Blackburnian Warbler in a tall oak at our turnaround point. The trip finale came when Chuck stopped us at a spot where three or four Veerys were singing their hauntingly echoing descending songs and giving single call notes. -- Bob Brown

SCOUTS TAKE NOTE!  
50 Miler Award for Scouts  
(From Smoky Mountain Council BSA Newsletter)

Starting June 1987, let the Cumberland Trail Staff be your support team for your troop's 50 miler on the Cumberland Trail.

The Cumberland Trail staff will help plan your itinerary and supply needs. They will also shuttle your supplies and fresh water to designated locations along the trail.

If your troop needs training, there are also periodic seminars in backpacking techniques and equipment conducted at the Cumberland Trail office throughout the spring.

One possible itinerary would be entering the trail at LaFollette at Big Gap Creek and hiking south on the Cumberland Mountain to Caryville, passing along the way, Eagle Bluff and Devil's Racetrack scenic overlooks.

This section, including the overlooks, is approximately 14 miles. Proceeding southward, the section from Caryville to Oliver Springs is 31 miles. From Oliver Springs to Little Brushy Mountain is 15.3 miles.

To schedule a 50 miler with the Cumberland Trail staff or to obtain information on shorter hikes, contact: Bobby Harbin, Park Manager, Route 2, Box 108A, Caryville, TN 37714, (615) 566-0902.



## Chapter News

### Memphis Chapter



JULY MEETING  
July 10, 6:30 p.m.

If possible, meet us at Lichterman Nature Center at 6:30 for a picnic dinner and a walk around the lake at 7:00. The fireside program will be at 8:00 p.m. and will feature John Stokes from Cumberland Wildlife Refuge and his birds of prey. There will be a charge of \$2.00 for non-members and \$1.80 for members.

SPRING RIVER FLOAT TRIP  
July 19

Carpool will leave at 6:30 a.m. from Oshman's parking lot at Park Place Mall or you can meet the group at 10:00 a.m. at Many Islands Campgrounds in Hardy, Arkansas. You will need to call John Parrish by Thursday, July 16, to reserve canoes or if you have further questions.

The cost of the trip is approximately \$20.00 per canoe which includes life jackets and paddles. Bring a change of clothing, extra shoes, and if desired, a swimsuit as there is a place to change at the campground. Bring lunch and any other personal items such as insect repellent, sunscreen, etc. You may wish to obtain a large plastic jug such as a pickle or mayonnaise jar for waterproof storing of your items. These can be obtained from fast food places.

You can bring coolers also, and you may want to bring some twine to tie these items together in the canoes just in case you suddenly find yourself and your canoe going in opposite directions. Of course, this will

never happen with our group. This trip will take approximately 5 hours. Call John at 795-7510.

### SAVE SHELBY FARMS FOREST UPDATE

This issue is still very much alive. A bill was introduced introduced in the Senate by Senator Steve Cohen and a similar one in the House by Representative Mike Kernell seeking to designate approximately 1000 acres along the Wolf River at Shelby Farms as a state natural area. This would not guarantee that the six-lane highway (Kirby Parkway) would be kept from cutting through the forest at Shelby Farms, but it would protect the area until further study is done to evaluate the matter.

The bill passed the Senate by a 28-0 vote but failed to get out of committee in the House. Representative Kernell will try to get this bill up for vote again in the Fall. So, your support and letters are still needed. A draft Environmental Impact Statement (E.1.5) is due sometime this Fall also and there will be a 45-day period after that for comments and letters to the appropriate people.

LEGISLATIVE RECEPTION -- On Thursday, August 13th, there will be a reception at the law offices of Lucius Burch at Second and Court Square, 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. City and County officials, senators, representatives, city council members, and others will be invited. We would like all TTA members across the state to consider this their personal invitation. The purpose of the meeting is for people to meet these elected officials and thank them for helping pass legislation such as the bills mentioned earlier. I am sure also that there will be other issues in the future that we will need help passing, and it makes letter writing and calling easier if you have previously met the person. Call me if you have questions. -- Jerri Bull, 901-363-4408



TRIP REPORT  
Fort Pillow State Park  
May 9, 1987

The Fort Pillow Historical Trail lived up to its advance billing as a hilly, rugged 10-mile hike. On a beautiful, sunny Saturday, thirteen hikers followed a mostly clear trail up and down hill and all around this Civil War battlefield site. This long trail is not walked often and is in need of maintenance in some areas, so we were glad to see a group of Boy Scouts clearing the trail as part of an Eagle Scout project. Although we saw few wildflowers, finding a patch of Green Dragons was a nice surprise. Everyone enjoyed the challenge of this trail and the companionship of new and old friends. -- Betty Porter

TRIP REPORT  
Life on the Wolf  
May 24, 1987

Ten canoes floated among the cypress trees, their knees, through button bush, and past fragrant wild rose bushes on May 24. The Wolf River was "decked out" in all her splendor for us 19 paddlers. We saw tremendous beaver lodges and felled trees, curious water snakes, a few lazy log-bound turtles, and a couple of graceful great blue herons.

We met at Mrs. Olgesby's canoe rental and cotton gin in Moscow, Tennessee. She shuttled us from our cars to the put-in where we teamed up (except for John Parrish who soloed -- whew!). The gentle current took us along the meandering river, sometimes through cypress stands, under and over fallen logs, and then to open water. We ate lunch on a very small sandy-muddy beach, just large enough for the noses of our boats to anchor themselves and us, standing and eating.

When we rounded the corner and saw our parked cars, everyone was a bit

disappointed and eager to canoe more, even though we had been paddling for 3 hours! We'd like to do this one again... Ok Memphis? Happy paddling!  
-- Jill Norvell



## Murfreesboro Chapter

MEADOW WILDFLOWER WALK &  
BUGGY TOP CAVE TOUR  
August 15, 1987

Meet at 9:00 CDT at the South Cumberland Recreation Area Visitor Center, located about three miles from I-24 on Highway 56 between Monteagle and Tracy City. The area behind the Visitor Center abounds with a variety of wildflowers, including two wild orchids, the yellow fringed and the yellow crested orchid. After an easy stroll through these meadows with Bertha Chrietzberg, the group will meet in the picnic area for individual lunches.

Immediately following lunch (12:30 p.m.), Randy Hedgepath will take the group on a cave tour of Buggy Top Cave. This will include a hike of 4-5 miles with a steep descent into the cave. Wear hiking boots or sturdy shoes, bring a flashlight, and plan for a cool trip on this hot, August day, into the cave's 58 degree temperature. The Buggy Top Cave trail has its own display of summer wildflowers, including one rare flower, the Cumberland rosinweed.

Contact: Bertha Chrietzberg  
1717 Elrod Street  
Murfreesboro, TN 37130  
(615) 896-1146

Randy Hedgepath, Ranger  
Naturalist, SCRA  
(615) 924-2956





## Nashville Chapter

JULY MEETING  
July 23, 7:00 p.m.

What a treat we have in store for us for our July meeting/picnic! Victoria and Bob Richards have offered to host us at their home in Portland, Tennessee — which is towards Gallatin. Lots of us have heard Bob talk about this place and are curious to see it. Bring a favorite dish and drinks. The plates and utensils will be furnished.

Head out I-65N for about 20 miles to Exit 112. Take exit ramp (112) and turn right on Hwy. 25. Turn left at the stop sign onto Hwy. 31W. Go north for 4 miles and cross the Red River. Turn left at the Rock Rest Farm driveway (first one). The Richards live in the brown house on the left. Park where you can. If you get lost, call 654-3594.

For more information, call Sally Garrard (home)371-8469 or (work)269-8000.

### WADING HIKE Saturday, July 25

Meet on the east porch of the Rutherford County Courthouse in Murfreesboro at 2 p.m. Wear wading shoes and bring a picnic dish to share, plus drinks for yourself. Utensils will be furnished.

We will go to a site on Stones River for wading, swimming, fishing (if you like), and supper. Then, after eating, we may take an evening stroll on a country road. If so, bring your binoculars for observing the stars. For more information, contact Evelyn Tretter, 859-0566.

## NASHVILLE CHAPTER NEWS

Recent outings of Nashville chapter members have included the Summer Lights Festival (Nashville really knows how to throw a party!), the Swine Ball (no derogatory remarks, please), and the Renaissance Festival in Triune, Tennessee. Come join us!

James Galloway, a member of the Nashville chapter, is running for Councilman-at-Large in the August 6th Metro Nashville General Election.

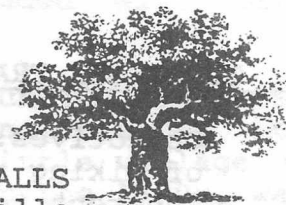
He asks all TTA members who are residents of Davidson County to contact him to discuss election issues and volunteer to help his campaign.

James can be reached at 292-4677, evenings, and lives at 915 Chancery Lane, Nashville, TN 37205.

## NEWS FROM

### OUR PARKS

FALL CREEK FALLS  
Rt. 3, Pikeville



July 7 Dress up your car, bike, or yourself for the "traditional" parade which ends in Campground A. Watermelon, cake and games will be available.

Aug. 8 Hawaiian Luau -- Roast pig, Hawaiian dress, and music around the pool. Tickets available at park office after July 1.

### WARNER PARK NATURE CENTER Nashville, 352-6299

July 8 Children's 2-1/2 mile hike: 10:00--1:00. Registration opens 6-24-87. For hikers 8 years and older.

Night Hike: 8:30--10:00 p.m. Registration opens 6-24-87.

July 22 Adult/Children Program: 9:00--11:00 a.m. Registration opens 7-13-87. Includes nature games and activities

July 25 Discover the Nature Center:

8:00--4:30 p.m. Registration  
opens 7-13-87. Call for list of  
classes and events

#### ROCK ISLAND STATE PARK

July 3 Old fashioned Independence  
Day Celebration. Contact Mary  
Lou Wilcox, Rock Island State  
Park, Rock Island, TN 38581, 686-  
2471.

#### FROZEN HEAD STATE NATURAL AREA

July 26 CCC Reunion: Everyone is  
encouraged to come and bring old  
photos from the CCC days. Meet  
at Picnic Shelter A. Contact  
David Engebretson, Frozen Head,  
Rt. 2, Box 1302, Wartburg, TN  
37887, 615-346-3318

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Objectives: To promote, construct, and maintain a statewide system  
of hiking trails, and to work for the conservation of natural resources  
inherent to this objective. Sponsor for the Cumberland Trail. Regular  
dues are \$8.00 per year; \$3.00 for students and family dependents.

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All submissions for the newsletter due no later than the 15th of each month.

## Come Hike With Us!

### Tennessee Trails Association

### P.O. Box 4913, Chatt. TN 37405



## Upcoming Hikes

### CUMBERLAND TRAIL:

July 4 Eagle Bluff hike -- details  
this issue

July 18 & 19 TTA/Sierra Club Work  
Weekend -- details this  
issue

### CUMBERLAND MOUNTAIN:

August 16 Rock Creek, John Muir Hike,  
Stephen Burke, 879-7770

### MEMPHIS:

July 19 Spring River Float Trip --  
details this issue

### MURFREESBORO:

Aug. 15 Summer Wildflower/Buggy Top  
Cave -- details this issue

### NASHVILLE:

July 25 Wading Hike -- details this  
issue