

Hike All the Trails at South Cumberland in 14 Day Hikes

Approximately 81 miles of white- and blue-blazed trails run through Savage Gulf, Fiery Gizzard, and all of the other parks that make up the South Cumberland State Recreation Area. We estimate that to hike them all without the help of a helicopter to pick you up and put you down on each new trail, you need to hike a total of close to 120 miles.

Have you got several days free and want to try it? How about a hike a day for two weeks? Or maybe one or two hikes every weekend for a couple of months? Any way you do it, you are guaranteed a great adventure with beautiful scenery, good exercise, and some serious communing with Mother Nature.

It took us 14 hikes to do all of the trails at South Cumberland. We've described below the hikes that we did, more-or-less in order of difficulty, easiest to toughest, assuming clear skies. Besides the length and the topography that it traverses, the most important factor in determining the difficulty of a hike is the weather. Even a short hike, when attempted in bad weather, can be an arduous undertaking.

We used a highlighter to mark the trails on a park trail map as we completed them, to make sure we did everything, including both sides of every day loop. And we got help – once from good friends and once from our husbands – for shuttling our car between the Great Stone Door and Savage Ranger Stations while we hiked. Thanks, guys!

We hope this list of trails and their descriptions will help you when planning your hikes



at South Cumberland State Recreation Area, the largest wilderness park in the Tennessee state park system.

Happy Trails!
Sally and Mary

Natural Bridge

Location: Sewanee Natural Bridge

Type: short bit

Difficulty: easy

Length: 0.1 mi.

Elevation Change: minimal

Description: More a picnic destination than a hike. We combined this with our hike to Buggytop Cave.

Laurel Falls Loop

Location: Great Stone Door, Savage Gulf State Natural Area

Type: short loop

Difficulty: easy

Length: 0.3 mi.

Elevation Change: 100 ft.

Description: This short loop can be combined with any of the hikes that start or end at the Great Stone Door.

Grundy Lakes

Location: Grundy Lakes

Type: loop

Difficulty: easy

Length: 2 mi.

Elevation Change: 100 ft.

Description: A gentle woodland walk around and between lakes and historic coke ovens.

Meadow Trail

Location: South Cumberland State Park Visitors' Center

Type: 2- mi. perimeter loop plus cross-trails

Difficulty: easy

Length: 3 mi.

Elevation Change: minimal

Description: A pleasant walk any time of the year, but the wildflowers are particularly beautiful in late summer and early fall.

Climber's Loop

Location: Foster Falls

Type: loop

Difficulty: moderate (steep ascent, descent)

Length: 3 miles

Elevation Change: 300 ft.

Description: From the Foster Falls observation deck, the trail descends to the splash pool at the base of the falls, a great place for a swim. It then skirts the foot of the sandstone cliffs frequented by rock climbers, ascends to the top of the plateau, crosses upstream of the falls, and returns to the observation deck and picnic shelter.

Greeter Loop and Laurel Trail

Location: Savage Gulf State Natural Area

Type: Shuttle, starting at Greeter Falls and ending at the Stone Door

Difficulty: moderate

Length: 7.0 mi.

Elevation Change: 270 ft.

Description: Take a short hike to and from the beautiful Blue Hole swimming hole (1.0 mi.). Then the Greeter Falls Loop (1.8 mi.), which connects with the Alum Gap Trail (1.4 mi.) at Boardtree Falls. Take the Laurel Trail (2.8 mi.) to the Stone Door Ranger Station.

Buggytop Cave

Location: Carter State Natural Area

Type: in and out

Difficulty: moderate (but with steep ascent on the way out)

Length: 4.5 mi.

Elevation Change: 640 ft.

Description: From the trailhead, hike 2 mi. to the Buggytop Cave, the impressive main entrance to Lost Cove Cave. Backtrack to the overlook at the top of the main entrance and on to the Peter Cave entrance (0.25 mi.). Retrace your steps to the trailhead. (As we write this, people are not allowed inside the cave. This is part of an effort to slow the spread of white-nose syndrome, a disease that is lethal to the bats that inhabit the cave.)

Big Creek Rim and Gulf

Location: Savage Gulf State Natural Area

Type: Loop

Difficulty: moderate to tough

Length: 10.0 mi.

Elevation Change: 745 ft.

Description: From the Great Stone Door Ranger Station, hike to the Stone Door (0.9 mi.). Then take the Big Creek Rim Trail (3.2 mi.) to Alum Gap. From there, the Big Creek Gulf Trail (4.0 mi.) drops into the gulf, then climbs back to the Great Stone Door. In the gulf, don't miss the short detour to Ranger Falls (1 mi.). From the Stone Door back to the Ranger Station is another 0.9 mi.

Fiery Gizzard to Foster Falls

Location: Fiery Gizzard

Type: Shuttle, starting at Grundy Forest and ending at Foster Falls

Difficulty: moderate to tough

Length: 12.3 mi.

Elevation Change: 255 ft.

Description: Trail begins near the kiosk to the left of the Grundy Forest picnic shelter and goes 1.5 mi. to Dog Hole Mine Trail, which takes you up to the top of the plateau and 2.8 mi. to the Raven Point Campground. There you take the 8.0- mi. trail to the Foster Falls trailhead.

Collins Loop

Location: Collins Gulf in Savage Gulf State Natural Area

Type: Loop

Difficulty: moderate to tough

Length: 13.0 mi.

Elevation Change: 840 ft.

Description: From the Collins West trailhead, hike 0.25 mi. to the Collins West campground to pick up the Collins Gulf Trail. Hike 4.3 mi. (including a 0.6- mi. detour to and from lovely Schwoon Spring) to the Sawmill Campground. Take the Connector Trail 0.4 mi. to the 1.6- mi. Stagecoach Historic Trail. At the top of the plateau, take the Collins Gulf Trail 6.2 mi. (including several boulder fields) to the Collins West Campground and the 0.25- mi. access road to the trailhead.

Great Stone Door Ranger Station to Savage Gulf Ranger Station, via the Stagecoach Historic Trail

Location: Savage Gulf State Natural Area

Type: Shuttle (Hint: get some friends to shuttle your car from one trailhead to the other!)

Difficulty: moderate to tough

Length: 15.1 mi.

Elevation Change: 845 feet

Description: It's a 0.9-mile hike from the Ranger Station to the Great Stone Door. From there, drop down into the gorge, following the Big Creek Gulf Trail (0.9 mi.). Take the Connector Trail (with short detour to and from the Decatur Savage cabin) to the Stagecoach Historic Trail (3.6 mi.), which goes to the top of the plateau (1.6 mi.). Take the South Rim Trail (5.8 mi. plus numerous short spurs to wonderful overlooks) to the Savage Day Loop Trail. Turn right on the loop trail and hike 1.2 mi. to the loop junction and then 1.1 mi. to the Ranger Station.

Savage Ranger Station/Hobbs Cabin Loop

Location: Savage Gulf State Natural Area

Type: Loop

Difficulty: moderate (but long)

Length: 20.2 mi.

Elevation Change: 220 ft.

Description: Hike 1.1 mi. from the Ranger Station to the loop junction. Turn right on the loop and hike 0.9 mi. to the North Rim Trail. After 0.3 mi. take the North Rim Trail 1.2 mi. to the Mountain Oak Trail. (You'll need to hike this 0.8-mi. trail twice, as well as the Big Tree Spur trail (total 2.5 mi) sometime during this hike. We did half, along with the spur trail, at this point; completed it from the North Rim Trail on the way back to the Ranger Station.) Hike 5.9 mi. to Hobbs Cabin. Return to the Ranger Station via the North Rim Trail (6.3 mi.) and the Savage Day Loop Trail (2 mi.).

Raven Point Loop

Location: Fiery Gizzard

Type: Loop

Difficulty: tough

Length: 10.4 mi.

Elevation Change: 550 ft.

Description: Start out on the Grundy Forest Day Loop, which begins to the right of the Grundy Forest picnic shelter and goes 5.1 mi. (plus a short detour to Sycamore Falls) through the Fiery Gizzard Gorge (crossing several boulder fields along the way) and up to the Raven Point Campground. After a 1-mile hike to and from Raven Point, take the Dog Hole Mine Trail 2.8 mi. back to the main Fiery Gizzard Trail. From there it's 1.5 mi. to the trailhead, going to the right on the day loop so as to hike the portion you didn't hike at the outset.

Savage Gulf Ranger Station to the Great Stone Door Ranger Station, via Hobbs Cabin

Location: Savage Gulf State Natural Area

Type: Shuttle

Difficulty: tough

Length: 16.8 mi.

Elevation Change: 860 ft.

Description: From the Ranger Station, take the Savage Day Loop (2 mi.) to the North Rim Trail. Hike 6.3 mi. to Hobbs Cabin. Take the Connector Trail (crossing nearly a mile of boulder field) to the Big Creek Gulf Trail (6.7 mi.). From there it's 0.9 mi. to the Great Stone Door and another 0.9 to the Ranger Station.