

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Possum Creek Segment of the Cumberland Trail

By Fran Wallas

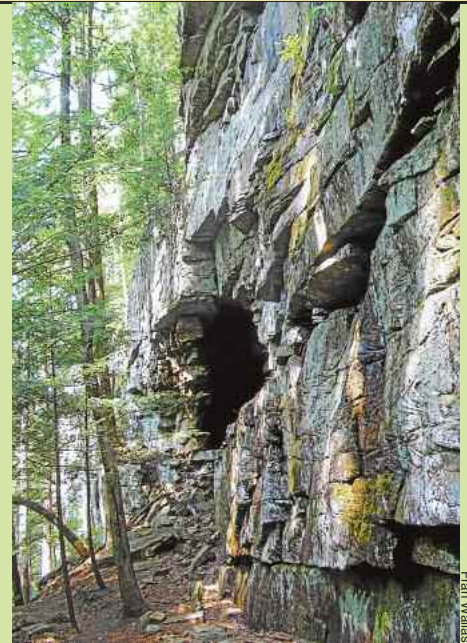
**T**he Possum Creek Segment of the Cumberland Trail State Scenic Trail in Hamilton County is a strenuous trail that begins as an easy hike through a hardwood forest and offers hikers fall colors, waterfalls and gorgeous gorges.

In just a few steps, you come to a pretty waterfall tucked at the side of the trail. You descend a little further and cross a bridge over a branch of Blanchard Creek. The trail parallels the creek as it climbs so you have views of the creek on your right and rockhouses and bluffs on the left. In early fall you will enjoy the showy reds of maples, golds and browns of oaks and the very red sourwood. Later in the fall after the leaves have dropped, you will get the spectacular views of the creeks and the bluffs on the other side of the gorge. The trail descends through rhododendron and a Hemlock forest. In about a mile and a half, you cross a long bridge over Big Possum Creek. The hike to this point and the return would be a nice moderate three-mile day hike.

After crossing the bridge, you climb

steeply to an old railroad grade. The trail is only level for a short distance before it turns off on the left and continues to climb up to the rock escarpment. The turnoff on the left is well marked with a sign, but it is easy to daydream and miss it. There are several switchbacks, but the climb to the top of Hughes Ridge is very steep. There are several rockhouses where you can escape from the rain or hot sun. The trail is wonderfully level at the pine forest at the top of the ridge. When you start another descent, there is a side trail blazed with yellow that leads to a not-to-be-missed overlook. After about a 400-foot descent and about three miles from the trailhead, you come to the backcountry campsite on the left of the trail. You can set up camp and spend the rest of the day exploring the area.

Early the next day, leave your gear at the campsite. Continue on the trail to Stack Rock and climb the stairs beside it. Go an extra two miles beyond Stack Rock to Imodium Falls, a Class V drop named by the paddlers. The falls is the grand finale of this hike. Return to your campsite, pick up your gear and enjoy the hike back to the trailhead.



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The trail at the base of a rock escarpment on the Cumberland Trail's Possum Creek Segment. *Below left:* A bridge on the trail over Big Possum Creek on the Possum Creek Segment of the Cumberland Trail.

### Directions

**From the North:** Take Highway 40 to Highway 111. Go south on Highway 111 to the Jones Gap Road exit. Turn left at the end of the exit ramp and go back over the highway. Turn right immediately on Heiss Mountain Road and drive past the gas station. In a half mile there is a guardrail on the left near the trailhead. You can park on the side of this dead end road.

**From the South:** Take Highway 27 to Highway 111. Go north on Highway 111 to the Jones Gap Road exit. At the end of the exit ramp turn right and take the first right on Heiss Mountain Road as described above. There is a trail map on the trailhead kiosk.

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(*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](http://www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes).)



Fran Wallas