

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

Shuttle Hike - Stone Door to Greeter Falls

By Fran Wallas

Scenic overlooks and beautiful waterfalls are visual perks of a hike from Stone Door to Greeter Falls in Grundy County's South Cumberland Recreation Area.

Begin this six-mile hike by getting a trail map at the kiosk a little way down the paved trail. The map outlines hike details and the area's geological and historical information. The short paved portion of the trail leads to the Laurel Gulf overlook. The trail continues, unpaved, leading to Stone Door. Cross the short bridge at Stone Door to get a spectacular view of Laurel Gorge to the left and Big Creek Gorge to the right. One of the most scenic overlooks in Tennessee, this site is also significant since Native Americans traveled through the crack now called Stone Door as a way to get to and from the gorges. Be sure to experience traveling down the narrow passageway.

After exploring Stone Door, go back a very short way to the trailhead for the Big Creek Rim Trail on the left. The trail is mostly level and goes from overlook to overlook. Each bluff is a place to stop and experience the beauty and whispers of wind and water. In 3.2 miles from Stone Door, you arrive at the Alum Gap back-country campsite.

When you get to the junction with the Laurel Trail and Big Creek Gulf Trail, turn left until you get to Greeter

Trail. Follow the Greeter Trail past the Big Bluff Overlook and cross the suspension bridge over Boardtree Creek.

If you only want an easy hike, go right up the steps and follow the logging road left less than a mile to the Greeter Falls parking lot.

If you want a grand finale to your hike, don't go up the steps and go left. You can get a good view of upper Boardtree Falls in the winter if you walk a little further along the trail. The trail becomes more difficult with many rock steps leading down along the bluffs.

There is a split in the trail. Take the left turn that is clearly marked to the lower Greeter Falls. There is a metal spiral staircase leading to the bottom of the bluff. As you climb down the steps, you get good views of the icicles hanging from the rocks.

At the bottom of the steps, the trail goes to the 50-foot high lower falls. There are wood steps leading all the way down to the plunge pool, but these can be very slick in the winter. You don't need to go down the steps to get the best view. When you go back to the top of the staircase, go to the 15-foot upper falls. It is beautiful with a full winter flow.

Ascend to the main trail that runs along the bottom of the bluff line. In less than half a mile you will get back to the parking lot and the shuttle car waiting there for you.



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Above: Lower Greeter Falls. Below: Upper Greeter Falls.

Directions

Take two cars on this shuttle hike. Take Highway 24 to the Pelham/Winchester Exit 127. Take Highway 50 E towards Pelham and wind up to the top of the plateau. Follow Highway 50 until it ends at Highway 56 in Altamont. Turn left on Highway 56N and go about 1.3 miles to the Greeter Falls park sign. Turn right. The Greeter Falls parking lot is a half-mile further on the left. Leave one car there and drive back out to Highway 56. Turn right and follow Highway 56N until you get to the sign to Stone Door. Turn right on Stone Door Road and follow the road until it ends at the ranger station. The trailhead is in the first parking lot near the bathroom.

South Cumberland Recreation Area



(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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