

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

South Cumberland Recreation Area's Foster Falls

By Fran Wallas

Cool waterfalls, gorges and a creekside trail await hikers at Marion County's Foster Falls in South Cumberland Recreation Area.

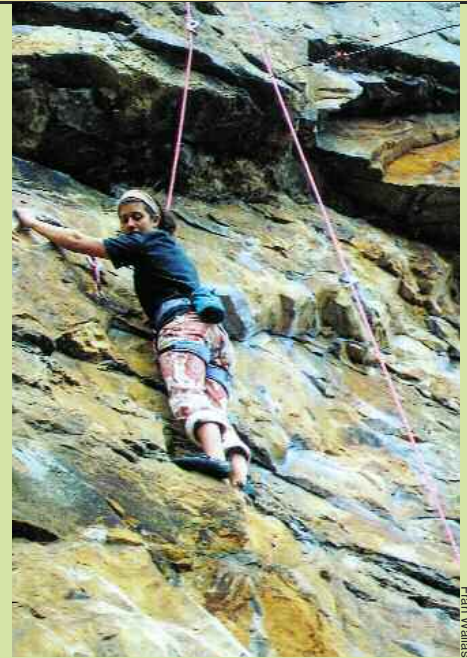
The trail begins in the woods and quickly gets to an open area with power lines. Turn left at the power lines. Stop at the observation deck for a photo of the falls. Follow the power lines until the trail cuts off on the right. The climb down into the gorge is strenuous descending steeply from rock to rock. The trail is beautifully built with rocks put in just the right places to look natural and be where you need them.

Cross the suspension bridge over Little Gizzard Creek. Turn right towards the pool below Foster Falls. You have gone less than half a mile, but you are in another world. The falls may be slower in the summer, but the water will cool your feet as you sit down to enjoy the view. If someone has already taken this spot, turn around and follow the trail beside the creek. There is a large rock embraced by roots of a dead tree. This is another quiet place to enjoy the cool water.

The trail turns right and climbs quickly part way up the bluff. The trail then turns left and runs below the bluff line where all the rock climbers enjoy their sport. Most climbers don't mind if you stop to watch them attempt these well known bolted climbs. In about a mile, you get to the sign for climber's exit 2 to your right. The climb out of the gorge is difficult. You will rejoice when you reach the wooden steps at the top. The access path ends at the main trail.

Turn left on this level easy part of the hike. There are wonderful views along the way. In about a half-mile, you arrive at the Small Wild camping area. There are six campsites and up to four tents are allowed on a campsite. Water is available in a stream that is just a short way further along the trail. There are also more amazing overlooks nearby where you can see into Laurel Gorge.

Your return hike the next day is easy with a level trail all the way back. In about two miles, you will be back at the parking lot. Be sure to sign out at the kiosk.



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Brianna Millar of Roselle, Ill., spent part of her spring break climbing bluffs on the bolted climbs at Foster Falls. *Below left:* Foster Falls seen from the first overlook on the trail.

Directions

Take I-24 to exit 134. Turn on Highway 41 South toward Monteagle. In less than a mile, the highway turns left at the SCRA/Fall Creek Falls brown sign. Drive about six miles. You will pass the park visitor center and drive through Tracy City to the stoplight where the main road seems to end.

Turn right at the brown sign for Grundy Lakes and Foster Falls. Drive 7.5 miles to the turn off for Foster Falls on your right. The road ends at the trailhead parking lot. The trailhead is right behind the picnic shelter. Sign in at the kiosk. If you are going to camp overnight, you need to fill out a registration form.

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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.)



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