

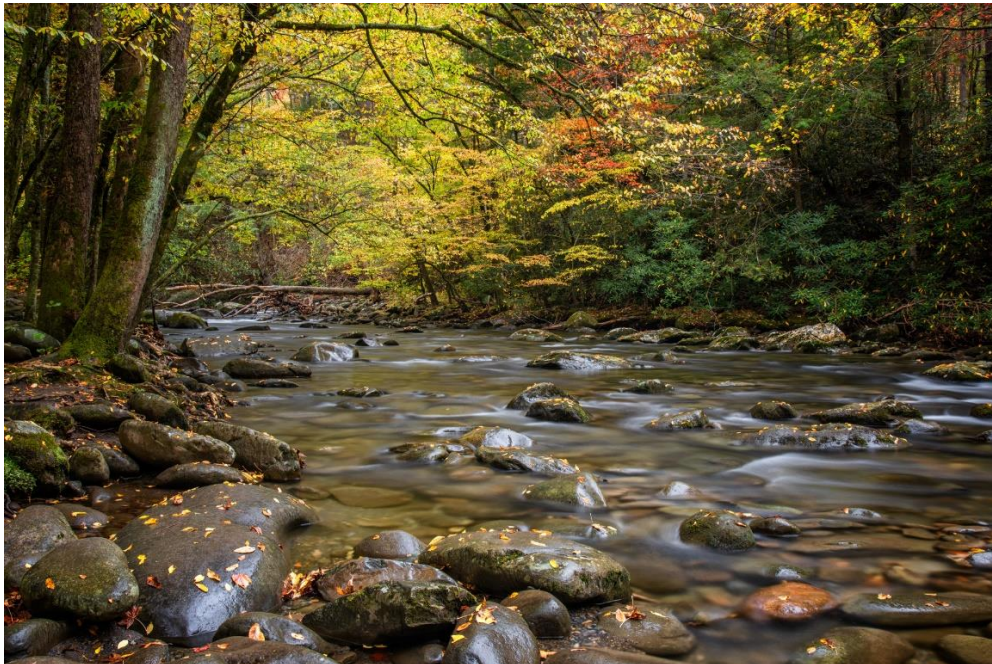
Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Images taken and Places I have photographed – Kaye Hargis

The Great Smoky Mountains NP is free to visit; however, **a parking fee of \$15 for a week has been instituted if you plan to park for more than 15 minutes at any location.** The park's website gives a lot of information and is where you can purchase the parking pass. The website gives alerts of road closures and notifications of buildings which may be undergoing renovation.

The Great Smoky Mountains NP is a large, beautiful park. Over the last twenty years, except for one extended stay, I have stopped to visit the park for a day or two on a number of my trips to North Carolina. I have not explored all the park offers, but I will share what I know and what I have photographed.

My only fall excursion into the park, I missed the peak of fall color at the higher elevations. There were pockets of fall color along the Little River Road which runs between Cade's Cove and Sugarlands Visitor Center.



As the field trip plans to be based in Townsend, TN, its location is at the northwestern side of the park; so, for some on the field trip, **Cade's Cove** may be their introduction to what the park offers. The primary access to Cades Cove is the 11-mile, one-way Cades Cove Loop Road. It is a narrow road along which are found log cabins and barns, old churches, and the Cable Mill Historic Area and Visitor Center.

Cades Cove Example of Buildings



As you drive the loop, on your left for most of the way will be an open large meadow area that would have been plowed fields in times past. If lucky, a bear may be spotted. Most definitely deer and wild turkeys are seen. Occasionally, I have heard that elk have been seen. It is also the area to see the lone tree growing with meadow around it.

Two lanes, **Hyatt Lane and Sparks Lane**, bisect the one-way loop. Each is two-way. It is along these lanes that the locations of a number of fine art photographs of Cades Cove are taken. Sparks Lane, which I have not driven, is the location of the classic image of trees lining an unpaved country road. It is easy to miss the turn onto these lanes and, if you do, you cannot turn around to go back.

Below is a collection of images taken in Cades Cove in the spring when I went to photograph the dogwood blooming. Of course, the dogwood bloom was delayed that spring. While the trees are bear of leaves, I share these images because I did drive Hyatt Lane. Use your imagination for the potential for fall color.

Cades Cove in Early Spring



Two roads accessed from Cades Cove Loop are **Rich Mountain Road and Parsons Branch Road**. They are both one-lane, one-way gravel roads. I have not explored them, but they sound interesting. Only drive them if you are familiar with forest service roads and comfortable with crossing low water streams. Rich Mountain Road heads back to Townsend and can probably be driven by most vehicles. Parsons Branch Road will take you toward the North Carolina side of the park. A higher clearance vehicle is recommended.

Rich Mountain Road – A scenic Townsend drive.

<https://www.insidetownsend.com/townsend-information/rich-mountain-road-a-scenic-townsend-drive/>

Parsons Branch Road

<https://www.smokiesguide.com/parsons-branch-road/>

There are numerous waterfalls in the park. Do research to locate them. If you like to hike, you will enjoy the trip in and out to visit one. I like the easy-to-get-to waterfalls. My criteria are a two-to-three-mile round trip (shorter mileage is better, next to the road is wonderful) along a trail rated easy to moderate. Call me a wimp but usually one way in or out is uphill and I don't do uphill joyfully.

As you drive east along Little River Road toward Sugarlands Visitor Center, the road runs next to the Little River. There are scattered places for parking beside the road. One place to check out is the large picnic area which is marked on park maps east of The Sinks. The Little River flows beside the picnic area and there is a narrow one lane bridge which crosses the river. The fall image of the river in the first grouping in this write-up was taken from this bridge. I was photographing beside a local photographer who takes and sells images of the park.

Two waterfalls I have photographed along this road are **The Sinks and Laurel Falls**. Actually, The Sinks is a large cascade. It is located next to the road with a parking area. If you follow the path downstream and after climbing up some large rocks, the trail takes you into the woods where I found fall color.

Along Little River Road



Laurel Falls



The Sinks

Laurel Falls is a popular trail and parking is limited. Get there early and it is not a problem. The trail is paved. The trail is 2.5 miles roundtrip and rated easy. The waterfall is 80 feet high. You can photograph the falls in its entirety and in detail.

Along the Laurel Falls trail is an area where erosion has exposed tree roots. I found it interesting with an other-worldly feeling. Taking pictures here will not be typical Smoky Mountain images.



Roaring Fork Motor Trail

Located just outside Gatlinburg, Roaring Fork Motor Trail is a 6-mile one-way one-lane scenic drive with a few historic log cabins and the trail heads to a couple of waterfalls. These cabins photographed with fall color or dogwoods in the spring make captivating images which are seen in galleries.

Two waterfalls, **Grotto Falls and Rainbow Falls**, can be accessed along this drive. **Place of a Thousand Drips** is next to the road near the end of the motor trail. The latter is a unique place as it is made up of many streamlets cascading over a rocky cliff face. If the weather has been dry, you may not notice it. It is best after a rain. Jim Walsh has photographed this motor trail and took a good image of this waterfall.

Grotto Falls is my favorite. While it is not a tall or large waterfall, the appeal is that it is found in a beautiful cove. You can walk behind the falls. The trail is 2.6-mile roundtrip and is trail rated moderate. Its height is 25 feet.

Roaring Fork Auto Trail Waterfalls



Grotto Falls

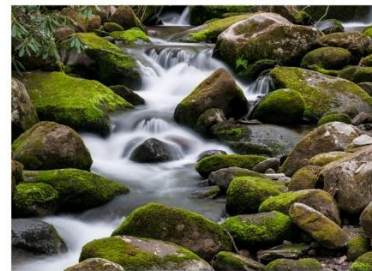


Place of a Thousand Drips

Along the second half of the motor trail, you drive beside a fast-flowing stream which cascades over mossy rocks and boulders. There are endless photographic opportunities. I have visited this motor trail several times in the spring. There are one/two car parking places along this part of the drive.



Roaring Fork Motor Trail



Oconaluftee Visitor Center
Southeastern /Cherokee Area



Mingus Mill

If you want to **photograph elk**, a very good place is in a large field next to the **Oconaluftee Visitor Center and Mountain Farm Museum**. People will park along the park road to watch and photograph the elk. Park rangers and volunteers will tell you to stay on the side of your car opposite the field. Some elk can be remarkably close to you. Early morning or late evening is the best time to see them.

At Oconaluftee Visitor Center and Mountain Farm Museum is a collection of old farm buildings and live farm animals.

I have not seriously explored this southeastern part of the park. Not far from this Visitor Center is **Mingus Mill** and a number of waterfalls. Also, the southern entrance for the Blue Ridge Parkway is in this area.

From Townsend to Oconaluftee Visitor Center is 50 miles. If you do not stop, it will be a 90-minute drive, or longer. However, you will probably want to stop because, on the **Newfound Gap Road** through the park, you will climb to higher elevations and there will be turnouts for grander vista views of the mountains. I do not normally do this type of landscape, but I know many will want to photograph them.

Clingmans Dome Road is taken from the Newfound Gap Road. It is a seven-mile road that will take you to an observation tower at the highest point in the park. The only time I visited it, the observation tower was in the clouds.

Hopefully, what I have shared will give you a sense of what there is to photograph in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. There is much to see and do. And, to photograph!

Note: The park roads are two lane mountain roads with the usual twists and turns. Plan extra time to reach a location. Also, start early before the tourists finish breakfast and head into the park.

Places of Interest Other than the Park

Oconaluftee Indian Village – Cherokee NC

<https://visitcherokeenc.com/play/attractions/oconaluftee-indian-village/>

If you trek across the park to photograph elk at the Oconaluftee Visitor Center, you might consider a mid-day break and visit the Oconaluftee Indian Village. There is an entrance fee and tours scheduled every 15 minutes. At different stations on the tour, a Cherokee will share and demonstrate their lifeways from arts, housing, transportation, hunting, and more. The tour ends with a demonstration of a few of their dances. I have recommended this to family and friends, and they have enjoyed it.

Gatlinburg, TN

If you venture over to photograph Roaring Fork Motor Trail, you may want to have lunch or dinner in Gatlinburg as you will be on the outskirts of the town. A glorified tourist village with gift, souvenir shops, and amusement venues. There are craft shops and artist shops as well. Pedestrians rule the main street through town. There are restaurants (my favorite has closed). It is a place where one visit in your lifetime is enough but may be worth it to say you have been there.

