

The Traveling Nature Photographer Blog by David George on www.davidgeorgephotography.com

Eastern Tennessee Adventures:

This first article is about eastern Tennessee. I am not going to review or discuss the retail centers most people go to see. Some may do a drive through the Great Smoky Mountain Park. Take some time to truly enjoy the park and forest. It is an amazing place if you take the time to enjoy it. That means get out of the car. Short easy hikes are available if needed. Some of the areas have amazing picnic areas next to the creeks and rivers.

WARNING to the people who cannot live without cell service or internet these places may be out of your comfort zone. That also means in most cases GPS does not work or it is wrong. One note, if you use GPS in mountainous areas you probably should set it for the fastest way or with no gravel roads as you may get a drive that is very unpleasant, steep, one lane gravel or dirt with no guard rails. Make your choices carefully.

The camping is great all around the area. I prefer the National Park Service Campgrounds and with the Senior Pass I get fifty-percent off. The two I prefer are Elkmont and Cosby. Another more remote campground is Big Creek which is in North Carolina east of the Cosby Campground. It has a very nice river with picnic tables around it with some places that may sound familiar. I will discuss it in turn but wanted to note it is not in Tennessee just over the state line going into North Carolina.



There is an old country store outside the campground. I highly recommend a visit. It is a remote store so understand it is not a supermarket. It does have shower facilities. Big Creek Country Store is its name and you will find signs many places telling how far away you are from the store. Kelly Scott is the owner at this time. It has been in her family for years. I think her grandfather built and owned it originally. Check it out at www.facebook.com/BigCreekCountryStore.

I am going to start out with a simple statement. I love eastern Tennessee. It fits me. I love the forests, woods, streams and rivers. In the most part the people are friendly. My point of view is from the years of traveling and staying in the more rural areas. Not saying the other areas are not friendly I just have my preferences.

I like the rural areas but you need to bring most of your supplies with you. There are some small stores with gas and firewood. I am not going into the GSMNP areas as you can see hundreds of articles on it. Very nice park and free. You can usually find a convenience market within a few miles.

Now on to the important things for this blog. While the fall is gorgeous so is the rest of the year so do not miss out. There are many out of the way places to go see history. I recommend you read a book called "Christy". It is about a pioneering young lady moving to very rural Tennessee and helping to establish education and help for the mountain people. It is based on true people and places. You can go east out of Newport to a town

called Del Rio. You will see the signs. The old post office and hotel are still in town. When you drive out to the place the people lived you will find most of the buildings are gone but the sites are marked. The church was moved in the mid-nineteen-hundreds and is still standing and in use.



When you go out of Gatlinburg toward Cherokee in a couple of miles you have the chance to check out Chimney Top picnic area. This place is highly recommended. You have the river running next to many picnic tables, restrooms including handicap facilities. It is hilly with a narrow road and lots of trees. It is a beautiful place to sit eat and just enjoy the wonders of nature. It is in bear territory so be aware. The park does an excellent job of keeping them out of the area. Just don't be overly surprised if late in the day or early morning you see one in the general area.



Another place to check out in Greenville Tennessee is the Andrew Johnson National Cemetery. The cemetery is very interesting but so is the Andrew Johnson National Parks Visitor Center and houses in Greenville. For those who do not know about this man he was the VP under Lincoln. He became President after the assassination of Lincoln. He signed the bill to purchase Alaska. He wanted to treat the southern states better than the democrats and some republicans after the war. He was impeached by the House of Representatives. The first President to be impeached. He survived the removal from office in the Senate by one vote. He later was elected back into the Senate. Greenville is about 20-25 miles north of Newport on US 321 when you can catch off I-40 or in Gatlinburg. If you need more information check out the NPS website www.nps.com.

Greenbriar is a national parks area just a couple of miles east of Gatlinburg. It has a large stream or river if you prefer that runs next to the access road. It has a large quantity of boulders that create pools and waterfalls. Some fly fish in the pools. There is a hike to trail the highest falls/cascades in the area for those so inclined to make the trip. There are many wooden bridges on the main road to the hiking area for the falls. There is a really nice large shelter area on the opposite road as you have to turn left to go to the falls. Go straight for the shelter and other hiking areas. Beautiful area within easy driving range out of Gatlinburg.



Elkmont and Cosby Campgrounds are very different. Elkmont is more “civilized” as some like to call it. It has more sites, a small campground store, a river and a creek that flow through the campground. It is the busiest campground so there is a lot of traffic both vehicular and human. It has a small village of houses next to it that belonged to some of the elite people in Tennessee. I am going to put that in another article. The most visited waterfall area is about a mile up the road to the entrance of the campground. The campground is about ten or twenty minutes out of Gatlinburg. It is between Gatlinburg and Cades Cove. So be prepared for lots of people and cars.



Cosby campground is about twenty to twenty-five miles east of Gatlinburg just off the intersection of Tennessee 32 and US 421. It is far more remote so be prepared for the nights to be dark. That of course will depend on the number of guests and the campfires. Like Elkmont it has flush toilets with sinks in very nice buildings. While Elkmont is pretty flat Cosby is at the base of a mountain. The campground is hilly with some campsites backing up to the forest. The drive around the campground has a nice climb going in and then the descent coming out. It has a group site, a nature trail that is easy and about a mile long. It has abundant parking for the hikers both day and backcountry.

Both campgrounds have animal visitors. The most common I have seen besides the squirrels is wild turkeys. They are just about everywhere. You may open the door of your camper or tent have them right outside. Deer are not uncommon but mostly stay out of the campgrounds especially during the day. Bears and snakes, yes you may see one or both but probably not in the campground. They do venture in sometimes but the bears would mostly like be at night. Just follow the bear food protocols and instructions from the rangers and hosts.

One of my favorite things is to sit around a campfire and talk to people I have met. I met a man from the same area of southern Indiana that my folks were from. His grandfather and my relatives knew each other. Strange to find that match in the mountains of eastern Tennessee. I get to know the people around me and that usually builds to having evening talks around fires. That is the way we are supposed to be, not going out and each person spends the time looking at their phones. We should spend more time actually talking to each other and not gossiping about others. The green forests seem to relax you and the flowing water soothes the soul. Come try these places out for a wonderful experience.

You can see more information at www.davidgeorgephotography.com and look for the various links. Reservation and camp information can be found at www.recreation.gov.