

Adventures in Big South Fork

Adventures in the Big South Fork by Ryan Anderson

If you are an outdoor enthusiast that likes to camp, hunt, hike, canoe or horseback ride, then the BSF is the place for you to be! I've spent my life doing all these things and much more – much of that time was spent in the gorge of the BSF. I have traveled many places hiking and camping from the rain forests of South America to the deserts of Arizona, but this is still my favorite for many reasons. Where else but in East Tennessee or the South for that matter can you find such a splendid remote pocket of wilderness that sees very little traffic compared to places like the Great Smokey Mountains?

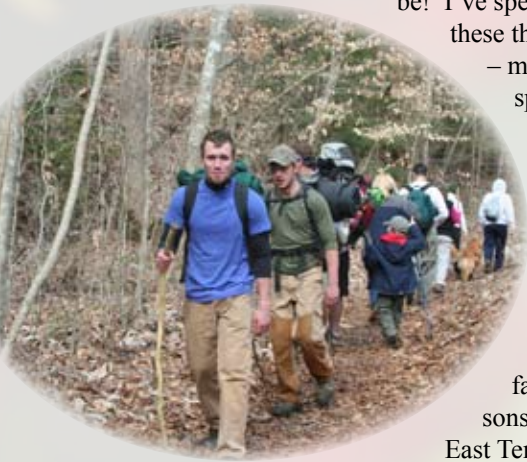
My adventures in the park are too numerous to list; however, I would like to share just one of my experiences to give you an idea of the rugged beauty and remote nature of this wilderness area. One of my favorite trails in the park is a 8-10 mile stretch of creek that empties into the BSF River. This trail is foot travel only, making the hike that much more remote and intense in its experience. On one trip this trail provided some of the most diverse wildlife I have ever seen in one outing – including being in the deep jungles. While on one such outing with a buddy during a 3 day hike, not only did we enjoy the silence of nature, but we also got to experience the excitement it offers.

The first part of the trip we enjoyed creek fishing – probably my favorite type of fishing. We caught everything from common creek chub to bass and red eye. We also saw a number of snail darters by turning over the rocks in the shallows. Snail darters are a type of fish that act as a good indicator of water quality – this water is generally very clean. After a day of wading, we enjoyed a night of campfire, dinner, and the company of a rattlesnake that had the misfortune of crawling into camp.

The next couple of days were filled with the usual sightings of deer, wild hog, squirrel, and beaver; but our greatest encounter was with a couple of bears we surprised. This was a first close encounter for both of us with a bear. Actually, I'm not sure who was most surprised....us or the bears. One of the bears crashed into the creek with an explosion of sound and water, while the other bear made us the most uncomfortable. This bear chose to stand about 30 feet away – all the while woofing and growling a most unusual growl. Needless to say, we picked up our pace.

What a rush of fear and excitement meeting those bears in this manner....on his terms, not ours!

About 2 miles downstream after our encounter with the bears, we came upon a mother bobcat with two kittens alongside – a rare sighting of this East Tennessee fauna. This particular hike of course had many other facets too detailed to go into, but where else can you have all these experiences crammed into just one hike? It has everything from fishing, hiking, and camping to wild adventure! The BSF has it all. Not only does it offer great adventure, each creek, deep hollow, and formation seems to have an identity of its own – its own story to tell. Places I have traveled have been places that few have traveled for quite some time. Some of these places will seem to beckon you over and over again to share the secrets and mysteries of the vast and remote flora and fauna. (See page 50 for more trail tales.)



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