

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

Buggytop Cave—A Cool Hike for a Hot Day

By Fran Wallas

Buggytop Trail in the Carter Natural Area, a 375-acre natural area located in Franklin County in South Cumberland State Park, is a strenuous five-mile hike.

There are some steep ups and downs and an exciting loop through a cave. If you are not an experienced caver, you will enjoy taking a ranger led cave trip for your first visit.

The hike begins with a short steep climb through the woods. The well marked trail winds around some interesting boulders that make good resting spots. The trail levels, and you begin to see summer wildflowers. Hike past the kiosk that has a map of the trail.

When you get to more open sunny spots, you may be lucky to find the rare Cumberland Rosinweed in bloom as well as the Eggert's Sunflower. Watch for lizards sunning themselves on the rocks. In about a mile and a half, the trail splits and you will take the trail to the right. The trail takes a steep climb down as it skirts a rock wall. At the bottom is a cool stream running out of the grand cave entrance shaped like a buggy top.

If you don't want to go through the cave, you can stop beside the stream. This is a great picnic and play spot. You can then return the way you came.

For the more adventurous, follow the ranger into the cave. You will need flashlights, sturdy hiking shoes, jacket

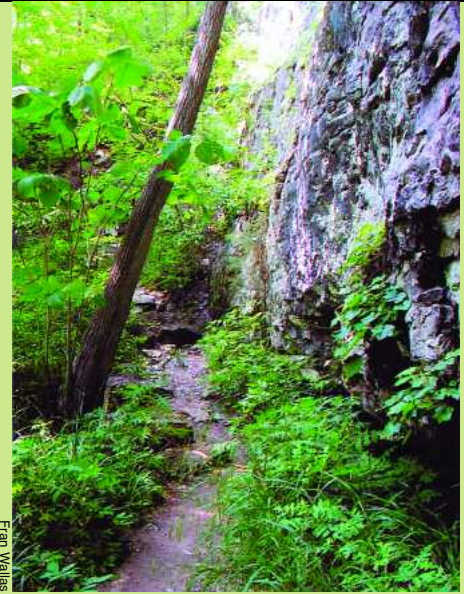
and a hard hat if you have one. When your eyes adjust to the dark, shine your flashlight at the roof of the cave to see it sparkle. The hike is sometimes a crawl through the winding passages and across several wet areas.

At the other end of the cave is another main entrance called Peter Cave. After this adventure, you will continue along the loop to a large bluff overlook. You are standing above the Buggytop Cave entrance and you'll get a view of the whole valley. This is a good time to soak up the summer heat that now feels great. Just past the bluff, you will get to the trail junction that leads left to Buggytop Cave. Unless you want to take the whole hike again, you will continue straight ahead, back to the parking lot.

Jason Reynolds



Cumberland Rosinweed is an endangered plant you might see as you hike on Buggytop Trail in the Carter Natural Area in South Cumberland State Park. Below: The entrance to South Cumberland State Park's Buggytop Cave in the Carter Natural Area.



Fran Wallas

This steep downhill trail leads to Buggytop Cave in the Carter Natural Area in South Cumberland State Park.

Directions

Take exit 134 off I-24 and turn towards Sewanee. Turn left on Highway 56 and go approximately six miles to the parking area on the left. Look for the Carter Natural Area sign. Buggytop Trail begins at the parking lot. Trail maps and the schedule of ranger led cave trips are available from the South Cumberland State Park visitor center in Monteagle. You may want to call the visitor center at 931-924-2956 to find out more information on cave trips.

Carter Natural Area



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville.)

Clarification

Information in the hike story on Frozen Head State Natural Area appearing in the May/June 2006 issue on page 27 stated that trail work volunteers are welcome on the third Thursday of each month when in fact, trail work volunteers are sought for the third Saturday of each month. However, if volunteers show up on Thursdays, park staff will try to use their help then also.



Allen Reynolds