

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Montgomery Bell State Park – A Six-Mile Overnight Hike For Beginners of All Ages

By Fran Wallas

**M**ontgomery Bell State Park in Burns was one of three parks that were built as recreation demonstration areas by the federal government in the 1930s.

Before you start your hike, notice the small building built by the Works Project Administration in 1936. This building was the original park information office. The yellow stone was quarried on the park.

As you climb the hill at the beginning of the hike, you will see that there are three shelters and the possibility of an 11-mile loop. Wildcat Shelter is the easiest to reach and is only three miles away. You won't need to wear yourself out with a heavy pack. You only need food for one night, camp stove and matches, warm sleeping bag and pad, rain gear, water bottle and flashlight.

The trail climbs to a wooded ridge above a creek. The white blazes are easy to follow as the trail winds along the ridge through the hardwood forest. The trail then drops down and follows a stream. There are a few shallow stream crossings. The Wildcat Shelter is next to the stream so there is plenty of water to use as long as you filter or purify it. The shelter has six bunk platforms built in for your sleeping bags. Winter nights are a great time to stargaze. Although Montgomery Bell is near a populated area, there is not much light pollution. You have the sense of being tucked

away in distant woods. Children will be able to experience a bit of wilderness.

In the morning, continue your hike crossing the stream a few more times. Watch the blazes. It is easy to miss the second stream crossing.

The trail climbs a steep hill and comes out at a road. Cross the road and follow the trail sign leading you up the road to your left.

The trail continues on an old logging road on your right near a gate. This isn't as confusing as it sounds. Follow the logging road and the blazes for about half a mile. There are several dirt roads and trails leading to your right. Don't turn on any of these. You will come to a clearly marked "M.B. Trail" sign where you need to turn off to the right. The trail becomes fairly level and easy to follow.

You will come to a trail junction with another large trail sign listing several possibilities. The shortest route back is 2.7 miles to the parking area. You begin to see Creech Hollow Lake peeking out through the trees. The trail leads to a grassy knoll beside the lake where you can relax and have a snack. Walk through the grass along the edge of the lake until you get back to the woods and the reassuring blazes.

Before you get to the end of the hike, you will come out near the park's visitor center. The easiest way back to your car is to take the road past the visitor center back to the old park office



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**Hiker Shirley Ora and Rosie at the Wildcat Shelter at Montgomery Bell State Park.**

parking lot. If you want to hike a little more and are interested in the history of the park, stop by the visitor center to ask about other short hikes to historic sites in the area.

### Directions

Take I-40 West to Exit 182 (Fairview/Dickson Highway 96). Turn left (West) onto Highway 96 and take it until it ends at Highway 70. Turn right on Highway 70 and go about three miles. The park entrance is on the right.

As soon as you enter the park you will see a small building on the left side of the road. Turn left into the parking lot beside the building. The Montgomery Bell trailhead is on the hill next to the parking lot. Trail maps are available for sale at the park office just down the road. Overnight hikers must register at the park office. You can call ahead in order to get your permit and be sure the shelter is available. The phone number is 615-797-9051.

#### Montgomery Bell State Park



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

### The beginning of Creech Hollow Lake at Montgomery Bell State Park.



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