

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

The Obed Wild and Scenic River Segment of the Cumberland Trail

By Fran Wallas

A hike at the Obed Wild and Scenic River Segment of the Cumberland Trail near Wartburg takes you to Alley Ford where people crossed the river before there were bridges.

A highlight on the way there as you cross the Obed River is the Old Nemo Bridge built in 1930-1931.

The trail, rated moderate, is 2.5 miles one way with many changing vistas. The hike begins with a gradual climb past the National Park Service campsites up to the first of many sandstone rockhouses. Native Americans used these bluffs for shelter. Later, the long hunters hunted in this area. Now people still hunt in the Catoosa Wildlife Management Area nearby.

A little further, you will see a nature trail leading off to the right. Save this trail for your return trip. You

may want to put an arrow made of sticks to mark the turnoff since it is not as obvious on the way back. As the trail gently rises and falls, you can snack on the plump blackberries growing beside the trail. The path curves left. It climbs above the rockhouses into an oak/hickory forest. This part of the trail is fairly level with several small bridges. A small section of the trail is on tailings of an old strip mine that is part of the history of this site. Frogs and other wildlife now enjoy the wet area at the side of the trail.

You will get to the Old Alley Ford Road that looks like a washed out rocky dry stream bed. The hike down to the river is well worth the steep climb. You can backpack and camp at Alley Ford. No permit is required. There is nothing better than sleeping on the soft sand listening to the sounds of the river. If you are doing a day hike, you may want to



Terry Bonham

The water is cool near the Nemo Bridge.

take your shoes off and wade in the shallow ford area. Some of you water babies may want to jump in clothes and all.

When you decide to climb back up, you will be returning on the same linear section of the trail. Remember to look for the turnoff to the nature trail. You will turn left on the nature trail and climb back down to the river. Your leg muscles will thank you for this wonderful exercise. The trail follows along the river all the way back to the campground. You may want to put on your swimming suit and take one last dunk to cool off before you head home.

A lichen-covered sandstone bluff can be seen at the beginning of the Obed Wild and Scenic River Segment of the Cumberland Trail near Wartburg.



Fran Wallas

Directions

Take I-40 to Exit 347. Go north on Highway 27 to Wartburg. Follow the green signs in downtown Wartburg to the Obed Wild and Scenic River and Nemo Bridge. Drive left and wind along the Nemo/Catoosa Road for seven miles to the Obed River. Just after crossing the bridge, turn right into the Rock Creek Campground. Park at the kiosk and walk down the campground road a short distance to the trailhead. The National Park Service, the Cumberland Trail Conference, and Tennessee State Parks jointly manage this trail.

Obed Wild and Scenic River



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