

## Wildflowers and Waterfalls 2008

### Daily Itinerary

This itinerary may be modified based on weather and where the wildflowers are best.

**Sunday:** If you're flying in, we'll meet you at the Knoxville Airport at 12:00. We'll drive to the Park and enjoy a nice introduction to the cultural history of the Smokies by visiting the area once known to early settlers as the Little Greenbrier Community. We'll visit the Little Greenbrier School (first opened in 1882), a pioneer cemetery, and the Walker Sisters cabin and home site. This slightly ascending trail is along an old roadbed. Little Brier Gap Trail, 2.6 miles.

**Monday:** Our trail today rises at a steady, moderate grade as it passes through a forest of large Eastern Hemlocks and Fraser magnolias and then into a moist, sheltered cove hardwood forest. Well-known for its incredible display of wildflowers in April and May, the forest floor can be carpeted with up to 30 – 40 species of wildflowers. Rich in cultural history as well, Porter's Creek trail passes through Greenbrier Cove, a once heavily populated farming and logging community. Along the way we will have a nice view of Fern Branch Falls. We will hike to the end of the trail and to a backcountry campsite before turning back. Porter's Creek Trail, 7.3 miles.

**Tuesday:** Today we'll hike along the famed Appalachian Trail. This section, built in the early 1930s, was the first trail created for public use in the Park and provides spectacular views of the area. Always hiking above 5000 feet, we will experience the flora and fauna of the higher elevations of the Smokies. The craggy, rock face of Charlie's Bunion provides outstanding views of the Porter's Creek Valley and the main spine of the Smokies. The trail includes steady, easy climbs along with steeper, rocky sections and some declines. Those who choose not to hike the entire way can wait for the rest at one of the AT Shelters. Appalachian Trail to Charlie's Bunion, 8 miles.

**Wednesday:** Today we'll see a different part of the ecosystem as we experience the white water of the Pigeon River. Although the rapids are large enough to be exciting, the trip is completely appropriate for novice rafters. We won't be doing it all day, though, so there will probably be time to go to Clingman's Dome. Rising 6,643 feet above the Great Smoky Mountains, Clingman's Dome is the highest point along the Appalachian Trail and provides a 360° view of the surrounding mountains. From its 54 foot observation tower the average viewing distance is about 22 miles; but on a clear pollution free day, views can amplify as far as 100 miles into 7 states. The ascent, however, is easy - about a half-mile walk along a paved path from the parking lot.

**Thursday:** Today we will travel off the beaten path and into a natural limestone sink. Home to many rare plants, various caves, and a waterfall that flows into a cave, White Oak Sink offers unique opportunities to learn about the geology, natural history and cultural history of the area. Spring wildflowers abound in the sink, coating the trailside with a beautiful variety of colors. We'll begin our hike on an old roadbed with an easy uphill grade. The trail into the sink is an unmaintained trail with occasional steep ascents and descents. White Oak Sink, 5.0 miles

**Friday:** Our trek today will take us through Eastern Hemlock and deciduous forests as we hike along the Maddron Bald Trail. Built by the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC), the trail begins as an old roadbed and rises consistently, though moderately, throughout its entire length. Albright Grove, named for Horace Albright who was an advocate for the park and a director for the National Park Service, is an awesome remnant of old growth forest. Here you will experience the sights, sounds, and feel of this home to ancient trees. We'll have plenty of time to stroll among and admire the grand Eastern Hemlocks, silverbells, Fraser magnolias, tulip trees, and other tree species before returning along the Maddron Bald Trail. Albright Grove and Maddron Bald Trail, 6.5 miles.

**Saturday:** This short but rocky trail leads to a beautiful series of waterfalls. To reach our destination, we'll hike through two distinctive, yet typical, Smoky Mountain forest types of dry piney/oak woods and a hemlock/cove hardwoods mix. This will definitely be a photo op. The main waterfall tumbles over a 40-foot-high rock ledge and into a plunge pool at its base. You will have plenty of time to photograph the falls or to relax, enjoy, and absorb the beauty and sounds of the waterfall before heading back to our vehicles and a final lunch. If you're driving, you can plan to leave by 1 p.m. If you're flying we'll return you to the Knoxville airport by 3 PM. Spruce Flats Falls. 2.0 miles.