

July 5, 2011

I was fascinated by the mushrooms that I saw along the trail. These are the most common ones that we saw.



Little red ones

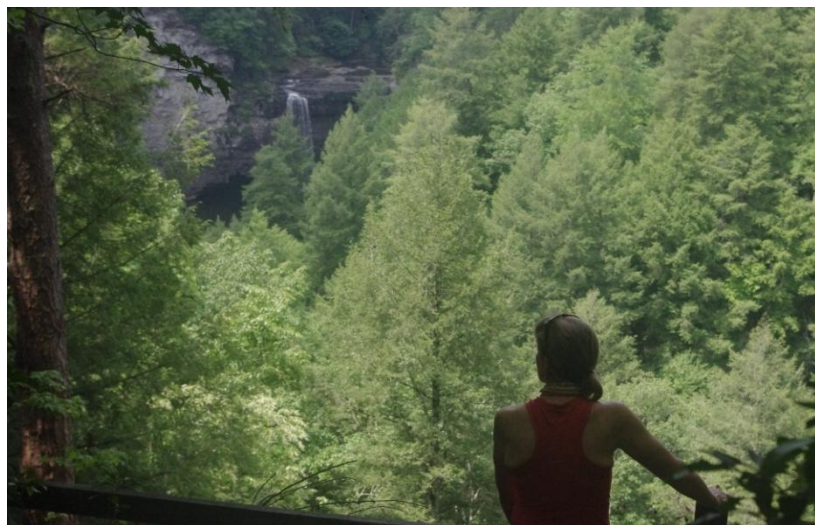
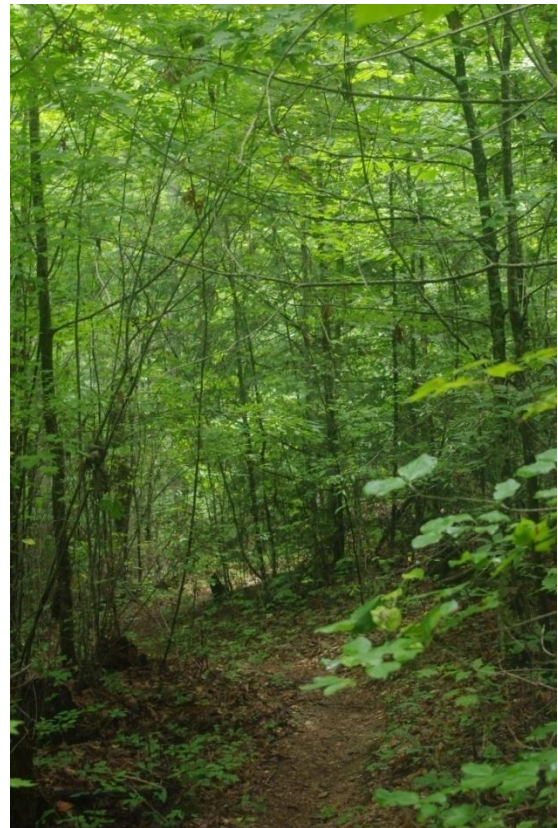


Golf ball on a stick

Pretzel mushroom (or is it hamburger bun mushroom?)



Today was a travel day. We moved from Monteagle, TN to Crossville, TN. We stopped at Falls Creek Falls State Park for part of the day. This is a much more populated set of trails and waterfalls than we had been experiencing. There was a small visitor center and a separate restroom building and shelter house for picnics. We decided to start the day with a walk on the Paw Paw trail. It was rated as an easy walk. There is a big variation in what people consider easy vs. difficult. The following photos are typical trail photos and Julie at the Cane Creek Falls Overlook.



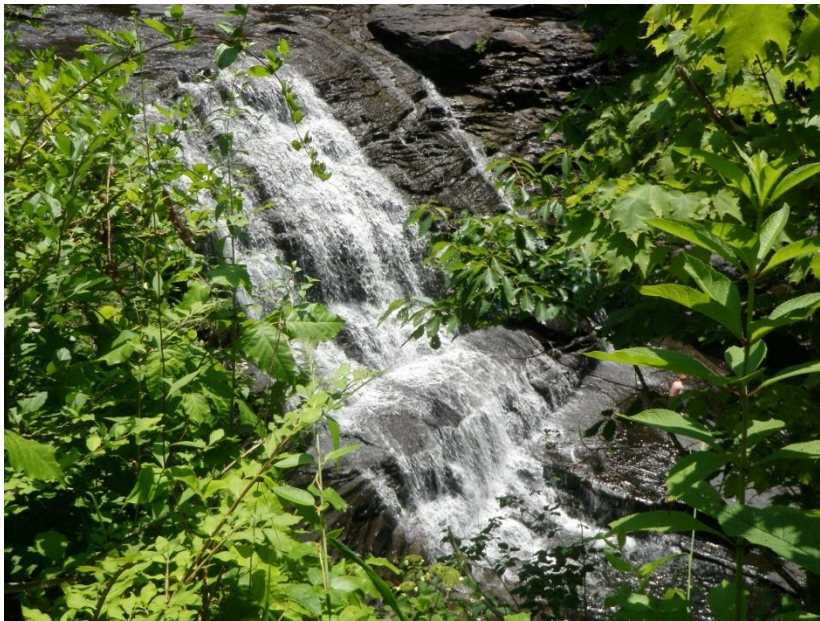
We only saw one other person on this trail and he was running. We were pleasantly surprised, but we did find lots of people at more popular sections of the park later in the day.



We had a simple lunch at the picnic shelter after doing the Paw Paw Trail and then followed the screams of excitement to the waterfalls with the pools filled with kids and all forms of humanity.



We saw this little guy on the way to the water. He was a little camera shy.



This is Cascades Falls with the plants blocking the visibility of the people.



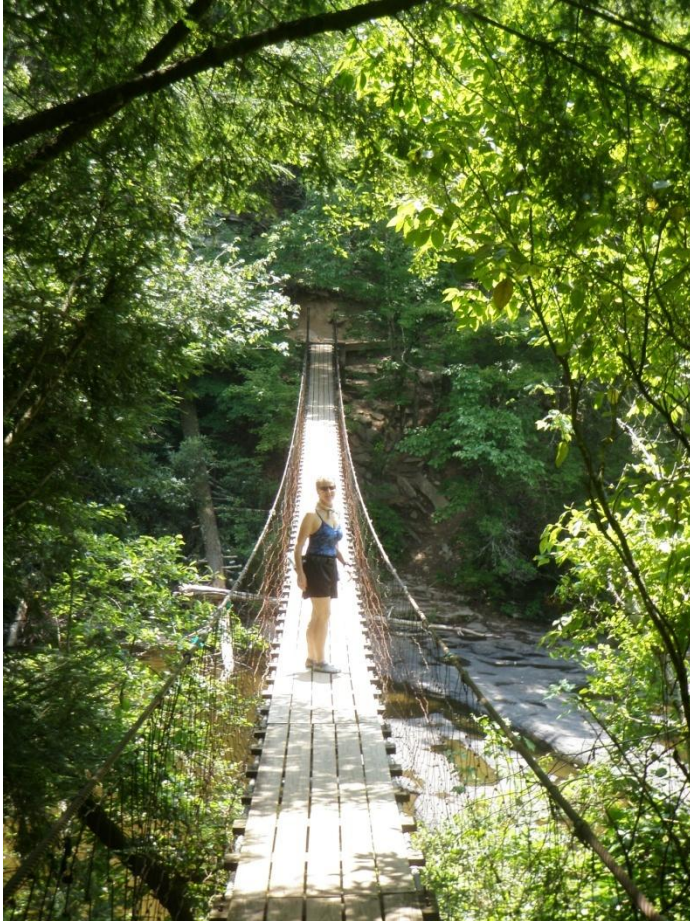
Look closely and you can see the suspension bridge that we later crossed on the path to Falls Creek Falls.



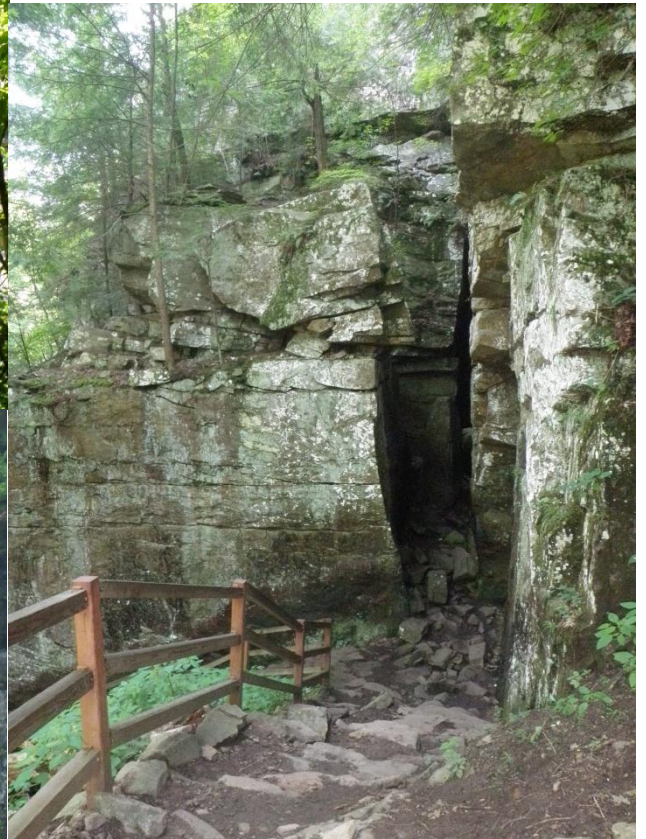
You can get a good view of Cane Creek Falls by getting your feet wet crossing the stream and looking back from the far side. There were a couple of kids sitting in the water at the very edge.

When you go back up stream you get to the cascades where most people were playing and you can see the suspension bridge above it.





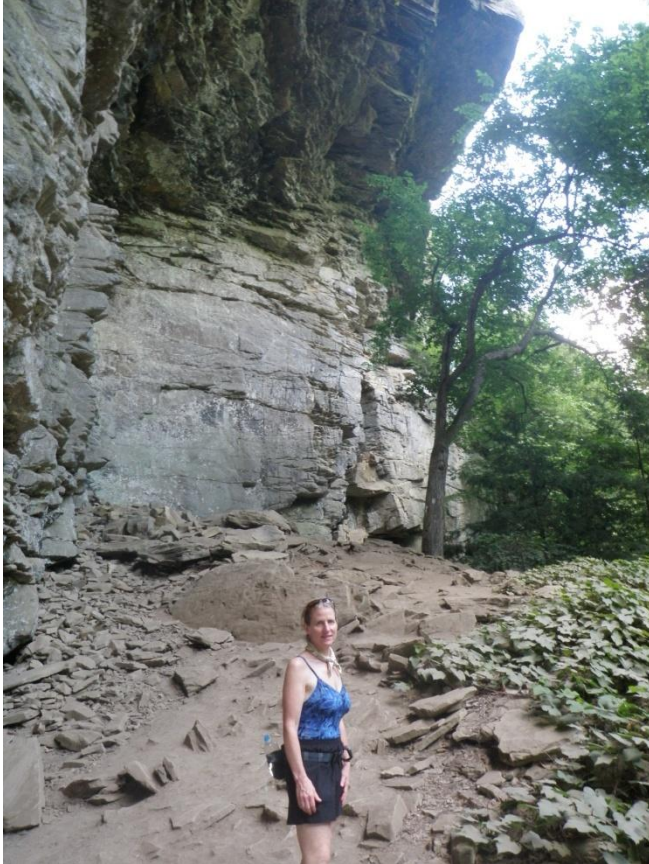
We were finally on our way to the big falls – Falls Creek Falls. Someone was accused of walking too hard and intentionally shaking the bridge. It will be up to the reader to determine who that was.



Part of the trail down to the falls.



View of the falls from an overlook.



The water was really cold!

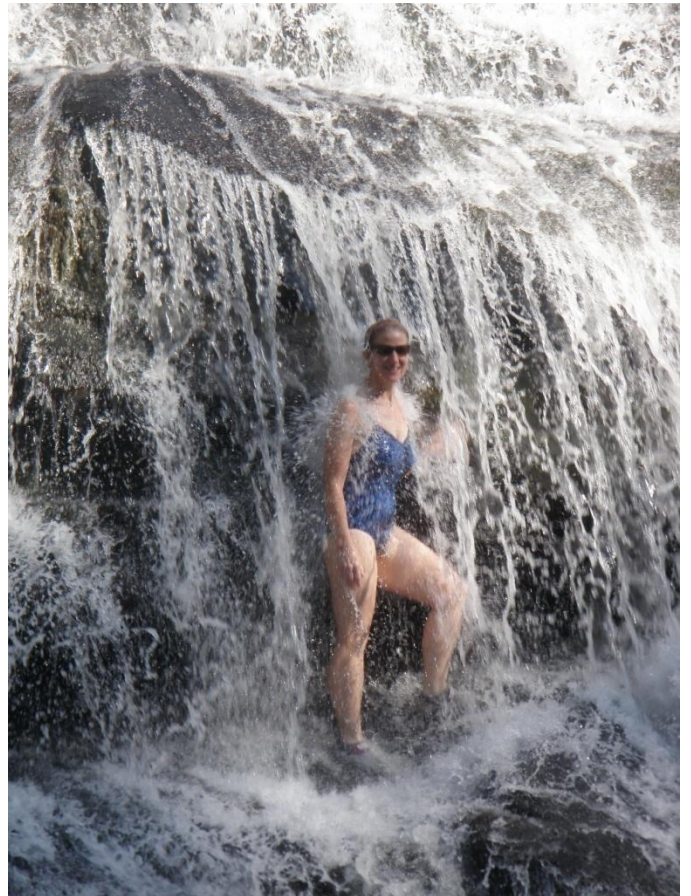


Once we got back to the cascades, Julie decided to play in the waterfalls. She said that this water was much warmer than at Falls Creek Falls.

We had an uneventful trip to Crossville. We took country roads and saw some interesting things along the way. We saw an overzealous UT fan - they had a full sized orange fiberglass elephant with a big T on it. We passed a deer ranch filled with young deer and a few adults. One place was selling roosters for \$5 each and another was selling pet rats. If the animals don't work out, we also saw a "Life-Like" taxidermy store.

We got caught in a heavy downpour as we got to the motel, but were rewarded with cookies at the registration desk and a rainbow out our room window.

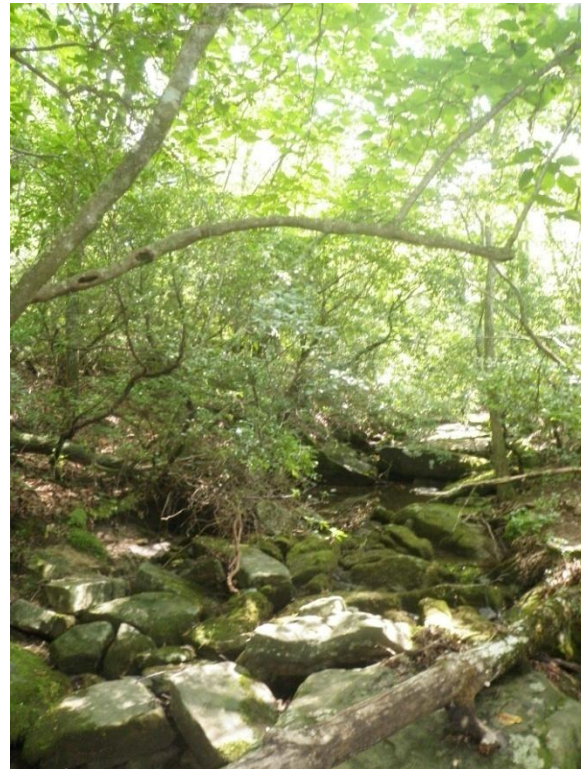
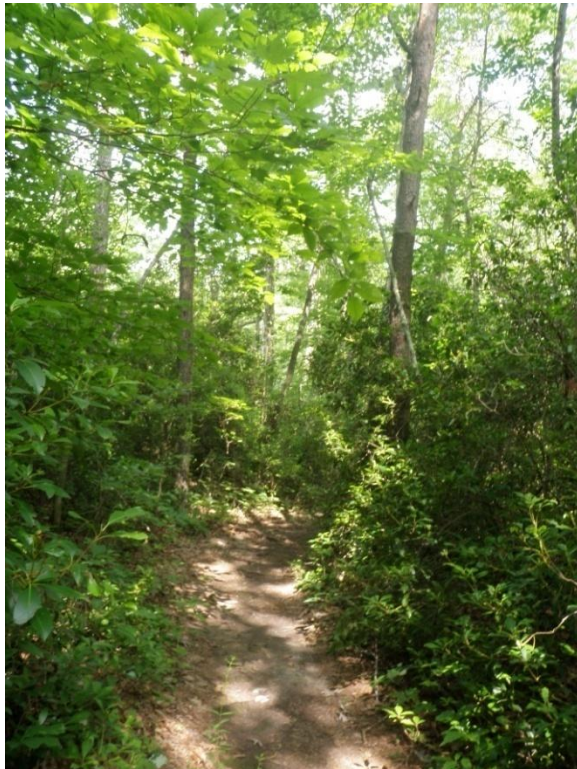
We took it easy and ate at the Bean Pot restaurant next to the hotel.



July 6, 2011

We didn't know it when started the day, but this would be the best day of hiking all week. It is amazing that you can drive miles and miles and then turn down a gravel road to get to an isolated trailhead at the same time as another car. I was impressed that the other couple was attempting the hike as they were rather large. They started ahead of us, since we took time to prepare a lunch, change shoes, and get a slow start. Shortly after we started, we saw a young boy coming towards us. Then a little while later we passed a man with 3 girls, who asked if we'd just seen the boy. We caught up with the large couple at the first significant waterfall. They were trying to decide whether to go on to the big falls. When we were taking pictures of a river, a couple of guys passed us. After taking a side trip to Caney River, we caught up with a family of four which we saw another time at the end of the hike. About half a mile from the parking lot, we passed an older lady and a boy. They were just starting and it was way too late of start a hike to the falls. Hopefully they turned back while they had time to get out before dark.

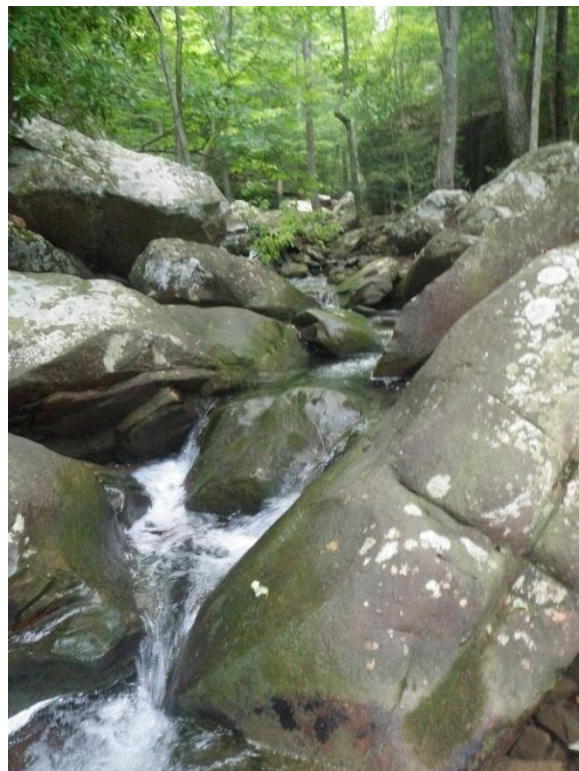
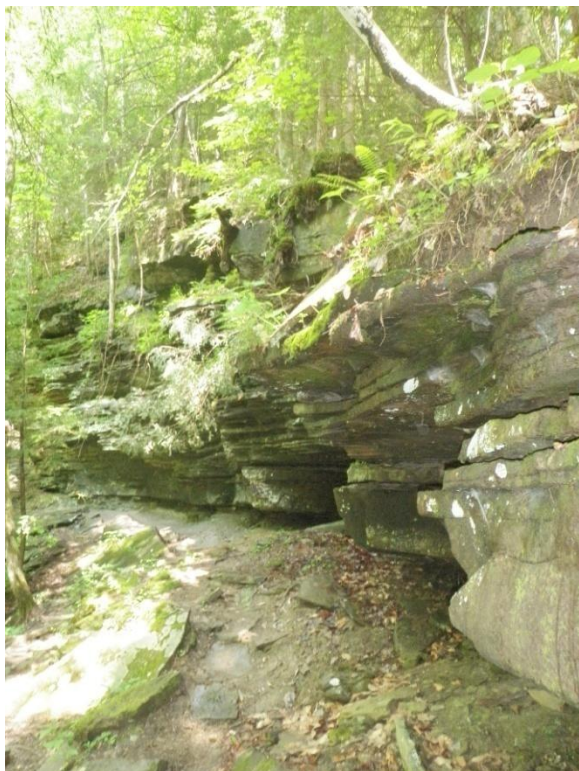
The hike started easy enough and did not seem nearly as difficult as some reports indicated.

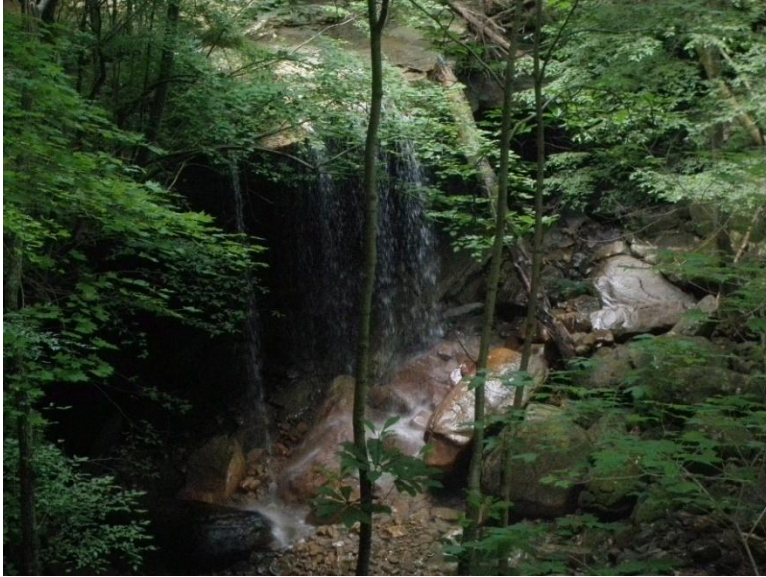




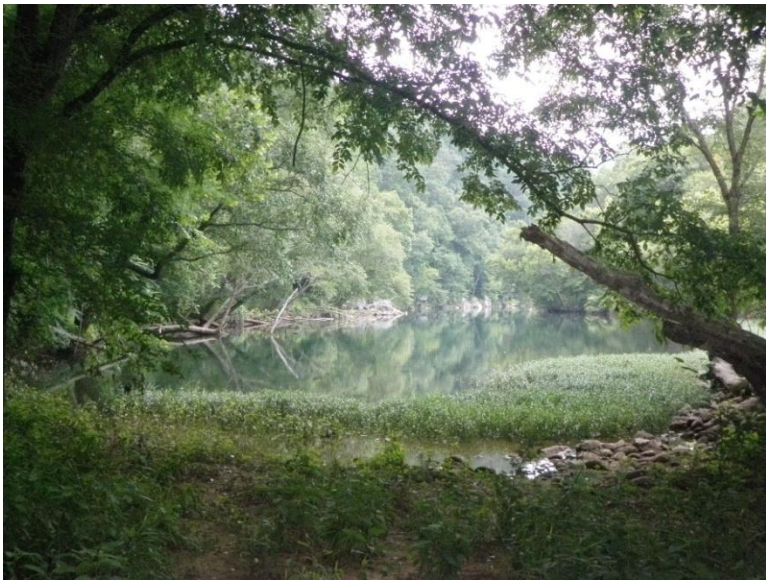
We got to a nice river crossing that had a cable to help you cross when the water was high.

We passed many rock formations along the trail and followed a small stream and provided nice babbling noises.

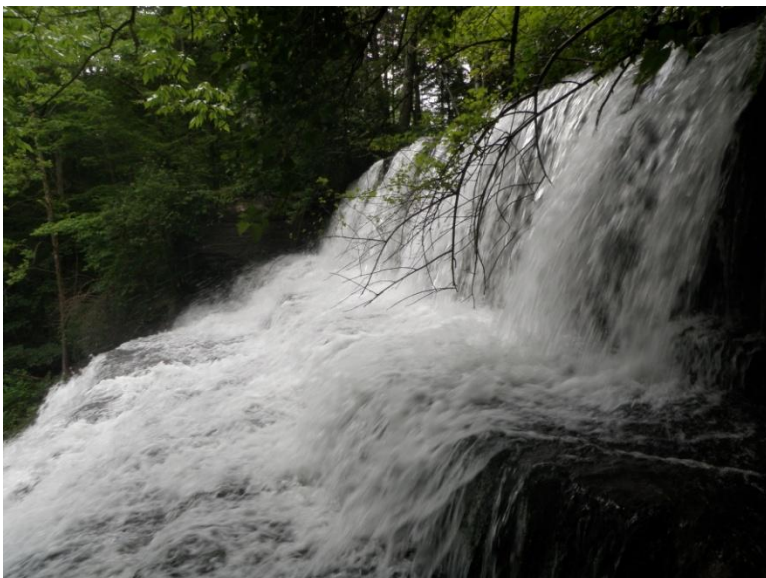




Big Laurel waterfall as seen from the trail.



We took a side trip to Caney River before going to Virgin Falls.



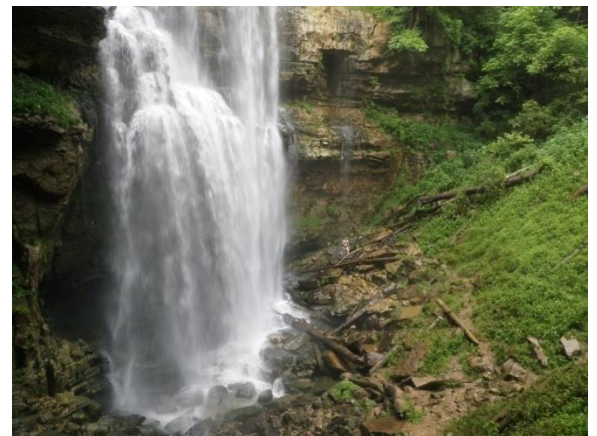
We were both hungry when we arrived at the falls so we had lunch before exploring. After eating our sandwiches we went to the top of the falls first and saw where the water comes out of the cave. The stream runs above ground for about 60 feet, before dropping over a 110 foot high cliff and disappearing into another cave. This photo is at the top of the falls.



We called this area the refrigerator since nice cool air blew out of the cave where the water emerges.



Virgin Falls was the prettiest falls of the trip with the most water flowing over. After exploring the top of the falls, Tom went to the bottom. The water/mist was cold and the trail down slick and muddy, just like he likes it!



It rained for about 45 minutes towards the end of the hike. It is quite pleasant to hike in the rain when you are dressed for it. The trail did become a muddy, sloppy mess, but fortunately we were passed the areas that would be slick when wet. Note the splashing mud!



It was a great day of hiking. The rain had stopped by the time we got to the car. We went for a Mexican restaurant for dinner when we got home.

July 7, 2011

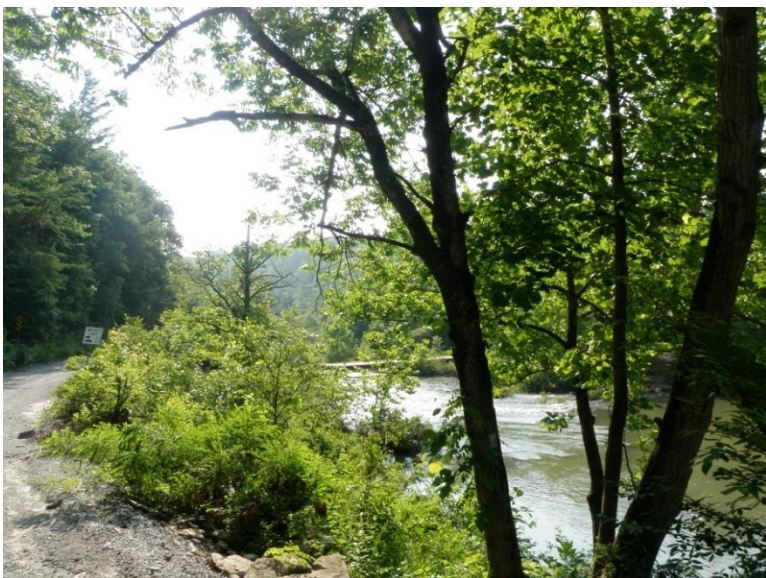
After several days of long hikes, we decided to take it easy and just do a couple of short hikes and drive through the Catoosa Wildlife Management area. From what we read, the WMA is geared towards hunting and ATV trails. We planned on going to the Point hike which follows several boardwalks. But due to a mix up of directions, we ended up at the Daddy's Creek trailhead of the Obed River section of the Cumberland Trail.



The last 14 miles or so of our drive to the trailhead was on a gravel road. The GPS seemed accurate but this is a picture of the road that GPS told us to turn on. We chose to ignore the GPS and follow the directions which we had found in multiple sources.

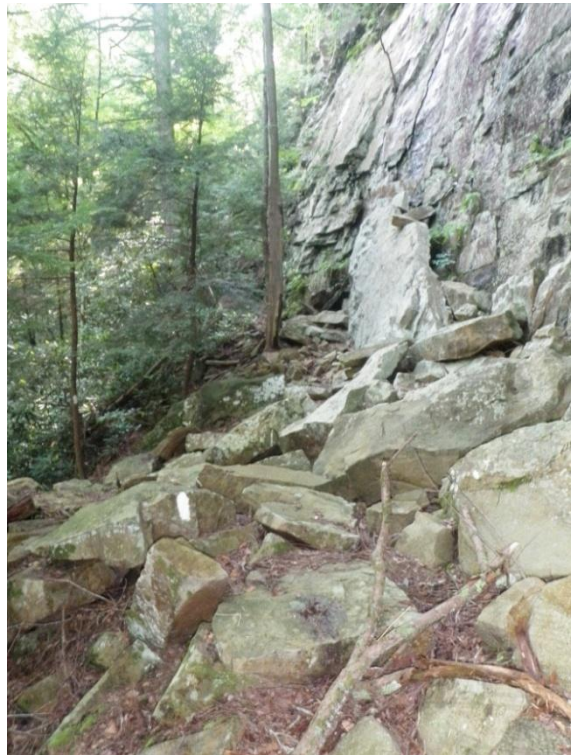
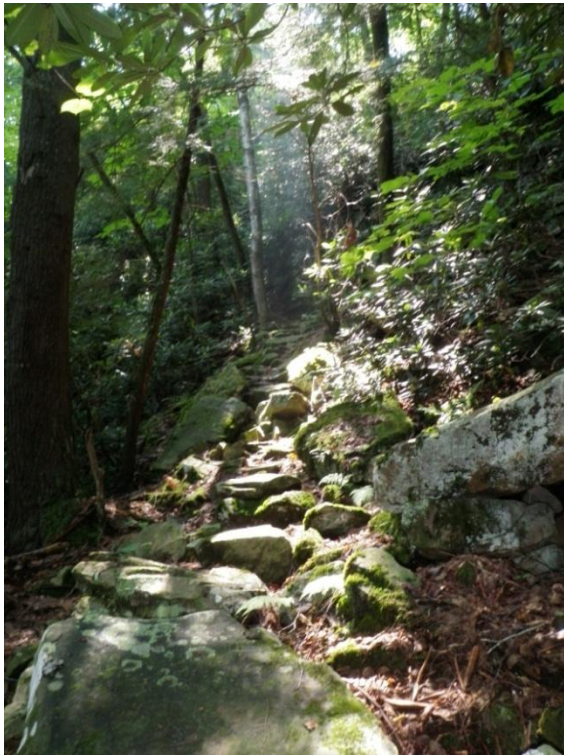


This section of the WMA was under restoration. We saw this really neat piece of equipment along the road. We weren't exactly sure what it was used for.



The Daddy's Creek crossing was the landmark for the trailhead. It was a narrow, sway back wood bridge.

The first trail that we started to follow was near the river. There were three different trail markers, so we thought we were going down the correct path. There was a neat muddy section that was very slick. It was like a thin layer of cement over sand. We continued until we came to an overgrown section. We backtracked and crossed the bridge, but did not find anything that looked like a trail. Since we had read that the trail had not been maintained since 2006, we almost gave up. Before leaving, we walked up the road and found another trailhead. We went a short distance and found another downed tree and dead end. Once again, we turned around. Then we noticed a big sign showing the distance to various points. After 30 minutes we were on our way. The trail was rocky in places and dirt/leafy in other areas. This section of the trail was known as the 'Trail of 1000 steps'.





There were sections of the trail with rhododendrons and plants with huge leaves. It felt like we were in a prehistoric jungle. I could imagine rain forest natives wearing the big leaves as loincloths.

We kept the hike short since we got such a late start and had other things to do, so we headed back to the car after only 50 minutes, which was not quite a mile.

The area was pretty isolated. We only saw a couple of other cars on the road and didn't come across any other hikers.



When we got back to car we changed to dry clothes and put our sweaty ones on the drying rack in our car. We found that the privacy shield is a great place to dry clothes. Sadly the car no longer has a "new car" smell.

Someone at another park saw our trunk area and thought that we used all of our space efficiently.



As we drove the 14 miles back on the gravel road we saw some wildflowers. We saw several ATV paths. We definitely need to come back and explore this area.

After lunch we went to the Minister's Tree house. This was a site recommended by the desk clerk at the Holiday Inn Express. It is possibly the largest tree house ever built and is 80 – 90 feet tall. We never saw an advertisement for it, but the parking lot was packed and there were 100s of people exploring the tree house and surrounding grounds. (That's only a slight exaggeration). The main oak tree is alive and there are six other oak trees that died after the roof was put on the tree house. We talked to the designer and builder. He says that God led him to build this tree house. He used over 250,000 nails. It is definitely an interesting place to visit but is probably an accident waiting to happen. We took way too many pictures. The house had a variety of features including a swing, a bell tower at the top of a scary ladder, old furniture, boards nailed everywhere, a Jesus garden, a chapel with a basketball goal, and a stained glass window. Rumor has it that church services are sometimes held there.

We made a full day of it. In addition to hiking and visiting the tree house, we had dinner at the Vegas Steakhouse and then went to the Cumberland County Playhouse. We saw the play "Little Shop of Horrors" which was very well done.



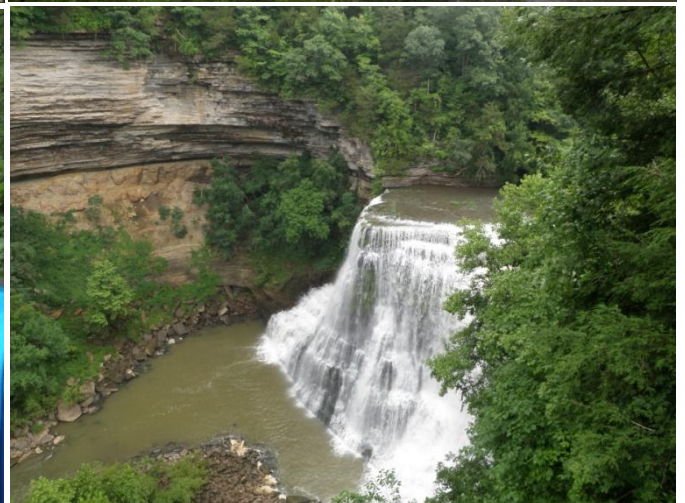


July 8, 2011

This was once again a travel day. We started the day with the usual Holiday Inn Express breakfast. This location had all of the usual items, but also had a pancake machine. You push the button and it makes two pancakes. It sounds like a printer and has a display to show the progress... making 1 of 2 pancakes...



We stopped at Burgess Falls State Park where we walked the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile path to view the three waterfalls. All three were very nice waterfalls with plenty of water. However, we found we enjoyed the view more when we had to work a little harder to get to it. (Or maybe we were getting a little 'waterfalled – out'.) It was a nice park, but the restrooms were still locked an hour after the park was open.



The next stop was at Julie's former co-worker's home on Kentucky Lake. They took us out on their boat to explore the northern portion of the lake. We went to the old quarry which is now known as the 'party cove'. On the weekends it is so crowded that it is difficult to get in or out of the cove because of all of the boats tied together. The kids were enjoying jumping off the cliffs, at least some of them. We also took the canal over to Barkley Lake where we saw an osprey nest. There were two almost full grown babies being fed by one of their parents.



We had a great dinner at the Catfish Kitchen and a late night desert of Strawberry Kool-Aide pie. It was a fun evening catching up with our friends.

July 9, 2011

After a lazy morning enjoying the lake-side view and watching the birds, we had an uneventful drive home.

