

Seven Ponds Nature Center's
Great Wildflowers of the Great Smoky Mountains
April 15-20, 2018

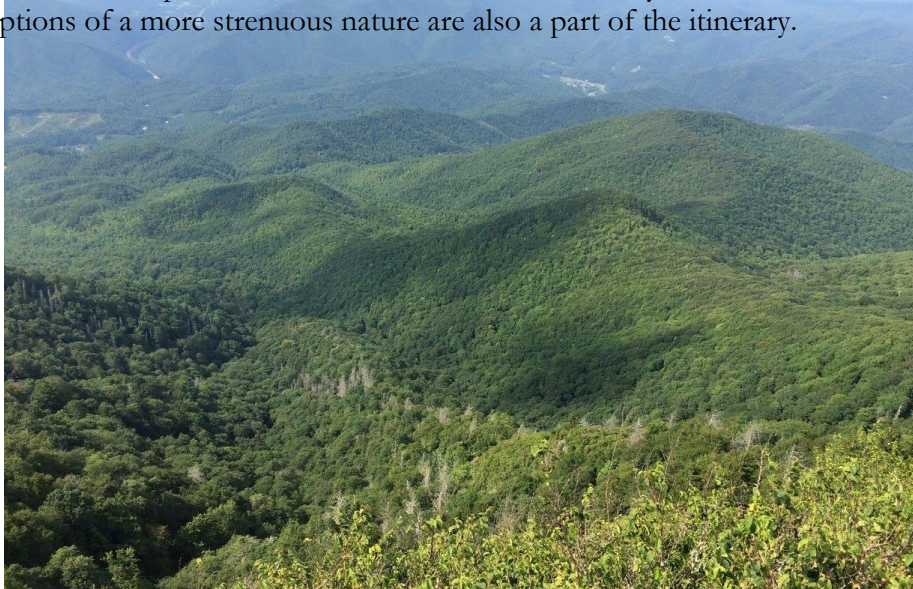
Introduction

The Southern Appalachians contain some of our country's most impressive natural features. The area is rich in waterfalls, old-growth forests, wildflowers, wildlife, and cultural history. At the heart of this area is Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the most visited park in the United States. The park is an International Biosphere Reserve which preserves the world's finest example of temperate deciduous forest.

Diversity is the hallmark of the Southern Appalachians. Fertile soil, abundant rainfall, and a variety of growing conditions encourage a number of different plant and animal communities. Broadleaf trees predominate in the coves, oak-pine forests cover dry mountainsides, and spruce-fir forests, like those found in Canada, thrive at upper elevations. Great Smoky Mountains National Park contains a world renowned variety of flora including more than 1,500 kinds of flowering plants. With the tremendous plant diversity, a wonderful variety of birds, mammals, and amphibians abound in the park as well.

The scenery in the Southern Appalachians is spectacular. A smoke-like haze envelops the mountains in picturesque fashion, helping to provide the name for the national park. Rustic trails wind through rich woodlands, along rushing streams to waterfalls and overlooks. The area's unspoiled landscapes are similar to those found by early settlers. Restored log cabins, stone walls, and pioneer cemeteries maintained in Great Smoky Mountains National Park stand as reminders of those who carved a living from the wilderness.

Seven Ponds has offered numerous trips to the Southern Appalachians in past years, and is pleased to offer this spring trip led by our own naturalists. The trip includes many of our favorite destinations in and around the park. Our activities will allow us to experience a variety of the area's features, including spring wildflowers, birds, trees, salamanders, mountain scenery, cultural history, and more. Spring wildflowers should be near their peak bloom. Most of the trip's hikes and other activities will be easy to moderate in difficulty, but activity options of a more strenuous nature are also a part of the itinerary.



Trip Itinerary

Sunday, April 15 – Trip participants should travel to Tennessee on their own, arriving at Greystone Lodge on the River in Gatlinburg by late afternoon. Greystone Lodge is within walking distance of the shops and attractions of Gatlinburg. At 7:00 p.m. we will hold an orientation meeting which will allow participants to learn more about the week's activities, meet other group members, and have questions answered.

The nature center will help set up transportation arrangements for any participants who are unable or unwilling to drive. We will also supply travel information to Greystone Lodge. Leaving Michigan, the drive south will take participants through Ohio, Kentucky, and into Tennessee on I-75. From Knoxville, Tennessee, it's east to Gatlinburg and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The drive to Gatlinburg from our area takes approximately 11 to 12 hours, similar to a trip from the Detroit area to Copper Harbor, Michigan. The drive south is a pleasant one with spring progressing further along with each mile traveled. Flowering trees, such as eastern redbud and flowering dogwood, will be at peak bloom in some areas. Near our motel in Gatlinburg the trees should be nearly leafed-out.



Monday, April 16 – Breakfast will be from 7:00 a.m.- 7:45 a.m. Our group will depart from the lodge parking lot at 8:00 a.m. for a full day at locations along the Newfound Gap Road, the main road that goes up into the park and over to North Carolina.

Throughout the day, we will climb in elevation, getting an introduction to the plants, animals, scenery, and history of the park along the way. The day's hikes will be easy to moderate in difficulty.

Our first stop will be the Sugarlands Visitor Center, at 1,500 feet. Here we'll examine a series of exhibits which depict the natural communities of the

Smokies, and participants will have an opportunity to pick up additional information about the park. Yellow-throated warbler, parula warbler, blue-gray gnatcatcher, and other birds can usually be found in the trees near the visitor center.

From the visitor center we'll travel the main road into the park, stopping at several scenic overlooks on our way to the Chimney's Picnic Area, at about 3,000 feet. Here, we'll hike the Cove Hardwoods Nature Trail which winds up and through a cove hardwood forest, the most diverse natural community type found in the southern Appalachians. We'll be treated to a carpet of spring wildflowers, including at least three types of trillium, showy orchis, and dwarf crested iris. The flowers in this area are so diverse and so abundant, that at times we will find it difficult to make progress along the trail. The area also supports old-growth trees,

mosses, and ferns, including the delicate walking fern. Overhead we'll hear the songs of black-throated blue warbler, black-throated green warbler, and blue-headed vireo. After the hike, we'll enjoy a picnic lunch next to the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River.

After lunch, we'll travel up the mountain road through spectacular scenery to Newfound Gap Overlook, at an elevation of about 5,000 feet. Here we'll look down the mountain to North Carolina and then take a short hike on the Appalachian Trail which crosses the road at Newfound Gap. Our walk will take us through a northern hardwood forest community of the type found in northern Michigan and we should see some of the earliest spring wildflowers in bloom, including spring beauty, trout lily, and bluets. We'll also be treated to such northern nesting birds as kinglets, brown creeper, and dark-eyed junco. We should also hear the beautiful song of the winter wren rolling across the mountainside.

We'll want to take our time at the stops above, but if time and energy allow we'll make an additional stop at Clingman's Dome. Here, one can take a hike through the spruce-fir forest to the Clingman's Dome Overlook at 6,642 feet, the highest point in Tennessee. On a clear day, seven states can be seen from this point. We'll then retrace our steps down the mountain and back to Gatlinburg for dinner.

Tuesday, April 17 – Breakfast will be from 7:00 a.m.- 7:45 a.m. Today we will leave Greystone Lodge at 8:00 a.m. and travel west on the Little River Road, making stops along the way to our eventual destination, Cades Cove. Our first stop will be at a scenic overlook for some Smoky Mountain photos. A bit further down the road we will park the cars and take a morning hike on the Laurel Falls Trail, a 1.3 mile, paved trail to the falls. The trail climbs through a second-growth forest of oaks and pine and provides views of nearby mountains. Trailing arbutus, wintergreen, and galax are some of the wildflowers found along the trail. After a break to enjoy the falls, we'll retrace our steps and continue west down the Little River Road.



Our next stop will be the Little Greenbrier Schoolhouse. This school was built in the 1880's to give the children in the area the opportunity to attend school. It remains as it was when the last classes were dismissed in 1936. If time permits, we will take the mile walk to the nearby Walker Sisters Cabin, enjoying wildflowers and birds along the way. The cabin played an interesting role in the history of the national park and we will spend some time learning about the Walker Family and their pioneer lifestyle before we continue on to Cades Cove.

The drive to Cades Cove is very scenic and our pace will be leisurely so that we can enjoy the many roadside wildflowers. We'll stop for a picnic lunch near the entrance to the cove, and then spend the rest of the afternoon exploring the area. At the time the national park was established, Cades Cove was a typical community of houses, farms, and churches. While many such areas were allowed to return to a natural state when they became parkland, the National Park Service maintains Cades Cove as an example of life in the mountains during days gone by. A one-way loop road takes visitors around the cove and we will make several stops to view homes, churches, a cemetery, and a working mill. The cove is a large open area



and we are likely to see such birds as eastern bluebird, wild turkey, and eastern kingbird. We'll also need to be on the lookout for groundhog, red fox, and black bear. After circling the cove, we will return to Gatlinburg for dinner. After dinner, for those who would like too, will go back out and head to chimney's to hike the cove's hardwood trail and look for salamanders.

Wednesday, April 18 – Breakfast will be from 7:00 a.m.- 7:45 a.m. Today we will leave at 8:00 a.m. to head up and

over the mountains to the south side of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Cherokee, North Carolina. Here we will enter the park in the Deep Creek area and take a 4.4 mile hike, sometimes called the "Waterfall Hike." We will visit Juney Whank Falls, Toms Branch Falls, and Indian Creek Falls. This loop trail is a good one for spring wildflowers, including some reported to be giant in size because of the growing conditions in the area. Strawberry bush, a southern shrub, is common along the loop trail, and we should find some of last year's fruit. Another common name for this shrub "hearts-a-bustin-with-love," is derived from the fruit. We'll plan on having lunch along the way, either in the Deep Creek Campground or along the loop trail. After our hike we will return to the south park entrance where we will stop at the Oconaluftee Visitor Center and walk around the Mountain Farm Museum. A short walk along the river there may provide some additional wildflower and bird species for our trip list. We will then retrace our route over the mountains and return to Gatlinburg for dinner.

Thursday, April 19 – Breakfast will be from 7:00 a.m.- 7:45 a.m. Today we will leave the lodge at 8:00 a.m. for an all-day trip to Joyce Kilmer Forest, an old-growth forest area southwest of the park. The drive to the forest on the Foothills Parkway will allow us excellent views of the mountains of the park, and if possible, we will make part of the drive on the Parson Branch Road, a seasonal road from Cades Cove. This road will take us off the beaten track and provide a chance to see some unusual wildflowers, including Catesby's trillium. Joyce Kilmer Forest is a spectacular natural area which is rich in wildflowers, birds, and other natural features. We will no doubt add some new wildflowers to our trip list, including the large trillium called sweet Betsy. Most importantly, the forest contains a large number of very big trees, especially tulip trees. These trees are very impressive, requiring four to five people to encircle them. We will plan on having lunch at the forest when we arrive and then take a hike on the three-mile loop trail. We will then return to Gatlinburg for dinner.

Friday, April 20 – The group will have memories of the mountains and wildflowers in their mind as the group heads home.

Additional Activities - In addition to the above scheduled activities. There are also a variety of things to see and do in the Gatlinburg area and participants may wish to explore these possibilities when not taking part in the nature center's planned activities.

Trip Leaders

This Seven Ponds' field tour will be led by Naturalist Cathy Wesley and Chief-Naturalist Carrie Spencer. Carrie and Cathy are naturalists who enjoy sharing their knowledge and love of all aspects of the natural world. Cathy earned her B.S. in Wildlife Biology from Michigan University, and is a full-time naturalist at Seven Ponds. Carrie has a B.S. in Fisheries & Wildlife from Michigan State University, is Chief-naturalist at Seven Ponds, and has led a variety of natural history trips for the nature center.

Accommodations

For all five nights we will be staying at Greystone Lodge on the River. Their address is 559 Parkway, Gatlinburg, TN 37738 and phone number is 800-451-9202. The lodge is right next to Little Pigeon River giving it a secluded, peaceful feel.

Transportation

Participants will travel to Gatlinburg as described in the introduction. Once we are in Gatlinburg, drivers will be expected to assist with transportation of group members during activities and will be reimbursed for days of driving. We will have radios in most of the vehicles in order to communicate directions and natural history information as we travel around the area during the tour.

Meals

On this tour, meals Monday through Thursday are included in the tour fee. Breakfast is a continental breakfast provided by the lodge. Lunch will be a picnic lunch brought along to eat in the park. We will plan on eating dinner together at the various restaurants in and around Gatlinburg. We will have a cooler available in the leader car to keep beverages and other items cold

Equipment

One suitcase per person should suffice, plus a day bag for carrying your lunch, field guides, rain gear, and other items on hikes. Either boots or tennis shoes are fine for hiking, depending upon your preference, as long as they are sturdy, well broken in, and without a smooth sole. Bring clothes which can be put on and taken off in layers. It can be very warm in Gatlinburg, yet quite cool in the upper elevations of the park. Additional equipment to consider includes binoculars, camera, hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, water bottle, notebook, wildflower and bird field guides, and hand lens.

Smoking

We ask that smokers refrain from smoking in vehicles and in all situations where non-smoking participants are in close proximity.

Preparing for the Trip

A pre-tour information packet, including wildflower and bird checklists will be sent out to all participants prior to the trip. As with any natural history field trip, you'll get more from the trip if you do some homework before you leave. Study your spring wildflowers or check your local library for books on Great Smoky Mountains National Park. An excellent overview is provided by the book *Southern Appalachians* in the Time-Life American Wilderness series. This book is available in the Seven Ponds library.

Trip Fee

The fee for the trip is \$990.00 (\$960.00 for Seven Ponds members). This includes room, meals as described above, transportation once in Gatlinburg, leader fees, and pre and post trip information. To sign up for the trip please send your name, address, phone number, email address, and a \$200.00 deposit to Seven Ponds Nature Center, 3854 Crawford Road, Dryden, Michigan 48428. Full payment is due April 1, 2018.

Cancellation Policy

In the event of cancellation, refunds will be made according to the following schedule. If cancellation occurs by March 1, a full refund including deposit will be made. If cancellation occurs between March 1 and April 1, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the trip fee will be refunded. If cancellation occurs after April 1, we will only be able to provide a refund for the portion of the trip fee which is recoverable by Seven Ponds.

Additional Information

If you have questions or need additional information please contact Cathy Wesley or Carrie Spencer at Seven Ponds, 810-796-3200 or cwesley@sevenponds.org.

