Hiking Trails From Leatherwood Ford Trailhead

Leatherwood Ford Trailhead offers some wonderful opportunities for the day hiker. The trails beginning here offer a wide variety of lengths, difficulty and scenery. For those wanting a brief stroll, there are boardwalks along the river at Leatherwood. The first section of the O & W trail has been specially improved to provide easy access for persons of varying abilities. This wide, level trail has a smooth, gravel surface and frequent rest benches. It provides a good view of the Big South Fork River.

Angel Falls Rapid

This level, easy walk follows an old roadbed along the river to one of the most hazardous rapids on the Big South Fork River. Continuous views of the river, views of high cliffs, spring wildflowers and easy strolling, combine to make this one of the most popular trails in the Recreation Area.

Use extreme caution when walking on rocks near the Angel Falls Rapid, the river here has already claimed two lives. The trail is wide and well-marked with a red arrowhead symbol and begins at the northern downstream end of the parking lot.

Round trip distance:	4 miles
Time:	2 hours
Rating:	Easy

Angel Falls Trail

Grand Gap Loop Trail

This trail offers an exciting cliff top overlook of the river and Angel Falls Rapid. By hiking to the overlook, one also gains access to the Grand Gap Loop Trail. Both trails are part of the long-distance John Muir Trail and are marked with a blue silhouette of John Muir. Use caution when approaching the overlooks and cliff tops on this trail.

The trail begins by crossing the low-water bridge to the west side of the river and continuing downstream 1.9 miles to Fall Branch. From Fall Branch, the trail climbs approximately 500 feet in elevation to reach the Angel Falls Overlook.

If you decide to hike the 6.8 Grand Gap Loop, be prepared with water, snacks and comfortable shoes. The Grand Gap Loop is not particularly strenuous but is remote with no water available.

Angel Falls Overlook

Round trip distance:	5.6 miles
Time:	3-4 hours
Rating:	Moderate

Grand Gap Loop

Round trip distance:	12.4 miles
Time:	5-6 hours
Rating:	Moderate

Leatherwood Loop Trail

This strenuous walk offers a variety of scenery and a large diversity of forest types. It features an overlook and a glimpse of the Cumberland Plateau's geology. The trail begins by following the O & W Trail along the river. It leaves the O & W trail and climbs approximately 500 feet in elevation to the gorge rim where a spur trail leads to an overlook. The trail goes through open woods, skirts the edge of an old field and eventually follows the old Leatherwood Ford Road before beginning a steep descent into the gorge and returning to Leatherwood Ford.

Round trip distance: 3.2 miles
Time: 2-3 hours
Rating: Moderate-Strenuous

O & W Railroad Bridge

This moderately difficult trail leads to the Oneida and Western Railroad Trestle. The Oneida & Western Railroad once ran from Oneida to Jamestown, Tennessee, a distance of thirty-six miles. The O & W trestle was erected in 1915 and served the railroad until its abandonment in March, 1954. The bridge is of the Whipple Truss design, an engineering style which was manufactured between 1847 and 1900. Research indicates that the bridge was once used on another railroad and later adapted for use by the O & W. Very few Whipple Truss bridges survive today.

The O & W Trail starts immediately under the easy end of the high water bridge. The first 1/4 mile of this trail has been improved for easy access. It would be an excellent choice for those wanting a brief easy walk. The trail is moderate and has an elevation gain of only 100 feet overall. Part of the John Muir Trail, is marked with the blue silhouette of John Muir. The last mile of the trail follows the route of a planned extension of the O & W to Leatherwood Ford that was never completed. In later years, the route was used for logging with a mule-powered tramway.

Round trip distance: 4.6 miles
Time: 2 1/2-4 hours
Rating: Easy-Moderate