

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



SMOKIES GUIDE

The Official Newspaper of the Smokies • Winter 2023-24



Barbara Hatcher, Chief of Facility Management

Words with a Ranger

In my role as chief of facility management, I'm responsible for the maintenance and operations of park buildings and infrastructure including 10 campgrounds, 11 picnic areas, 90 historic structures, 150 cemeteries, 270 miles of road, and 848 miles of trail. Thankfully, I'm only one member of an incredibly capable and devoted team that makes it all possible day in and day out.

Some fourteen years ago, I began my park service career right here in the Smokies as a park engineer, but before that I worked as a community planner and transportation engineer in the public and private sectors. After moving on to other managerial positions in different regional and Washington offices, I was grateful for the chance to return to this park last year. The

Continued on page 8

For current road conditions, call 865.436.1200. For seasonal road closures, see map page 6 or visit nps.gov/grsm.
Image courtesy of Great Smoky Mountains Association.

Your Guide to Winter Driving

Take road closures and conditions into account when planning your trip

Winter is typically the quietest season in the Smokies, which makes it a great time to get out and explore the park. With a little planning and a few extra layers, the well-prepared can find frosty fields, snow-dusted mountaintops, and waterfalls dripping with icicles. The first step is knowing which roads will take you there.

Several of the park's secondary and higher-elevation roadways are closed for the winter season to ensure visitor safety. Other roads may be temporarily closed due to unsafe conditions and reopened as soon as possible. Road salts are not used within the park to protect vegetation and water quality. Instead, road crews regularly plow and apply a mixture of sand and gravel called 'chat' to improve traction.

One major roadway subject to frequent closure is Newfound

Gap Road (US 441), the main route connecting Gatlinburg, Tennessee, and Cherokee, North Carolina. This road stretches 33 miles across the mountains and rises to a height of 5,046 feet. Even though conditions may seem safe down around Gatlinburg or Cherokee, temperatures drop rapidly at higher elevations, and precipitation is much more frequent and heavy. The steep grades and blind corners of this road quickly become dangerous in inclement weather.

As you enjoy the park this winter, remember to reduce your speed, avoid sudden braking, and leave extra space between you and the vehicle in front of you. Travel speeds on most of the park's paved roads average 30 miles per hour. To plan your trip, see the park map on page 6 for seasonal road closures and the map on the back page for alternate routes.



PARKING TAG REQUIRED!

Parking in the Smokies for more than 15 minutes requires a valid parking tag (annual tag pictured).

For more info, scan code with camera app



OUR PARK
ON SOCIAL MEDIA



GreatSmokyMountainsNPS



GreatSmokyNPS

SMOKIES TRIP PLANNER



Visitor centers

Sugarlands, Oconaluftee, and Cades Cove: open 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m. December through February, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. in March.

Clingmans Dome: closed for winter, reopens 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m. in March.

GSM Institute at Tremont: open 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday only.

All visitor centers are closed on December 25.



Road closures

- Many secondary and higher-elevation roads close in late fall and remain closed through winter. Refer to the map on pages 6–7 for closing and opening dates.
- All roads are subject to temporary closure due to dangerous driving conditions.



Shuttle services

Local shuttle services offer convenient transportation to and from the park's most iconic destinations. Routes, schedules, pricing, and pick-up/drop-off locations vary. Visit go.nps.gov/GRSMShuttles for a list of authorized concessioners.



Weather

As winter arrives, days can be sunny and 65°F or snowy with highs in the 20s. Conditions vary considerably between low and high elevations. Nearly 70 inches of snow fall on Mount Le Conte every year. Lows of -20°F are possible at the higher elevations. At lower elevations, snows of an inch or more can be expected about three to five times a year. Milder temperatures typically arrive by mid-to-late April.



Campgrounds in the national park

The National Park Service maintains developed campgrounds at ten locations in the park. There are no showers, and hookups are only available at Look Rock Campground (ten campsites include electric and water hookups). There are circuits for special medical uses at Cades Cove, Elkmont, and Smokemont.

Campsite reservations are required at all park campgrounds. Sites may be reserved up to six months in advance.

Make your reservation online at recreation.gov or call 877.444.6777.

Site occupancy is limited to six people and two vehicles (a trailer is considered one vehicle). The maximum stay is 14 days.

Campsites for larger groups are available at Big Creek, Cades Cove, Cataloochee, Cosby, Deep Creek, Elkmont, and Smokemont. Reservations are required and may be secured up to a year in advance. For more information, visit nps.gov/grsm.

Site	No. of Sites	Elevation	Expected Open Dates 2024	Nightly Fees	Max RV Length
Abrams Creek	16	1,125'	4/26 – 10/27	\$30	12'
Balsam Mountain	43	5,310'	5/10 – 10/14	\$30	30'
Big Creek	12	1,700'	3/29 – 10/27	\$30	tents only
Cades Cove	159	1,807'	open year-round	\$30	35'–40'
Cataloochee	27	2,610'	3/29 – 10/27	\$30	31'
Cosby	157	2,459'	3/29 – 10/27	\$30	25'
Deep Creek	92	1,800'	3/29 – 10/27	\$30	26'
Elkmont	220	2,150'	3/8 – 11/24	\$30	32'–35'
Look Rock	68	2,600'	4/26 – 10/27	\$30–36	no limit
Smokemont	142	2,198'	open year-round	\$30	35'–40'



Firewood

To prevent the spread of destructive pests, only USDA- or state-certified heat-treated firewood may be brought into the park. Campers may gather dead and down wood in the park for campfires.



Picnic areas

Picnic areas at Cades Cove, Deep Creek, Greenbrier, and Metcalf Bottoms are open year-round. Big Creek, Chimneys, Collins Creek, and Cosby open March 29; Look Rock opens April 26; and Heintooga opens May 10. Picnic pavilions may be reserved for a fee at recreation.gov. Some restroom facilities at picnic areas may be closed for the season.



Accommodations

LeConte Lodge (accessible by trail only, reopens March 25) provides the only lodging in the park. Advanced reservations required. 865.429.5704 or lecontelodge.com



Services

There are no gas stations, charging stations, showers, or restaurants in the national park.



Event reservations

The Appalachian Clubhouse and Spence Cabin at Elkmont can be reserved for daytime events at recreation.gov starting April 1, 2024.



Pets

Pets are allowed in front-country campgrounds and along roads as long as they are restrained at all times. Pets are not allowed on park trails, except for Gatlinburg and Oconaluftee River trails. Pets must be kept in control on a leash no longer than six feet.

SMOKIES GUIDE

Smokies Guide is produced four times per year by Great Smoky Mountains Association and Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

nps.gov/grsm
SmokiesInformation.org

Publication dates

Spring: March
Summer: June
Autumn: September
Winter: December

Senior Editor

Frances Figart

Managing Editor

Aaron Searcy

Supporting Editor

Valerie Polk

Lead Designer

Emma Oxford

Design assistants

Karen Key

Miranda Bemis

NPS Coordinators

Stephanie Kyriazis

Stephanie Sutton

© 2023 GSMA

P.O. Box 130

Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Available in digital

format at issuu.com/greatsmokymountainsassociation

♻️ Printed on recycled paper



Download the free NPS App for interactive maps, tours, and more.



Bicycling

Most park roads are too narrow and heavily traveled for safe or enjoyable bicycling. Bicycles are permitted on park roads but prohibited on trails except Gatlinburg, Oconaluftee River, and lower Deep Creek and Indian Creek trails. Helmets are required by law for persons age 16 and under and strongly recommended for all.



Horseback riding

Some 550 miles of park trails are open to horses. See park trail map for trails and rules. Horse camps are available at Anthony Creek, Big Creek, Cataloochee, Round Bottom, and Tow String. Make reservations at recreation.gov.

Three concession horseback riding stables offer rides from March through November. Call for exact opening dates.

• Cades Cove 865.448.9009
cadescovestables.com

• Smokemont 828.497.2373
smokemontridingstable.com

• Sugarlands 865.436.5470
sugarlandsstables.com



Fishing

Fishing is permitted year-round in the park, but a Tennessee or North Carolina fishing license is required. Either state license is valid throughout the park, and no trout stamp is required. Fishing with bait is

prohibited. Special permits are required for the Qualla Boundary and Gatlinburg, and licenses are available in nearby towns. A free fishing map with a complete list of all park fishing regulations is available at visitor centers.



Backcountry camping

Camping can be an exciting adventure for those who are properly equipped and informed. To facilitate this activity, the NPS maintains more than 800 miles of trails and more than 100 backcountry campsites and shelters throughout the park. One of the greatest challenges is deciding where to go. Here are some tools to help.

1. **Get the map.** Go online to view the park's official trail map (go.nps.gov/GRSMmaps), which shows all park trails, campsites, and shelters. Park rules and regulations are also listed here. You can purchase the printed version of the trail map for \$1 at any park visitor center or online at SmokiesInformation.org.

2. **Plan your trip.** Call or stop by the park's Backcountry Office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for trip planning help. The office is located in Sugarlands Visitor Center, two miles south of Gatlinburg on US 441. 865.436.1297.

3. **Get a permit.** Make your reservation and get your permit

through the Backcountry Office at Sugarlands Visitor Center (*by phone or in person*) or online at smokiespermits.nps.gov.

Reservations and permits are required for all overnight stays in the backcountry. The cost is \$8 per person per night. Reservations may be made up to 30 days in advance. Backcountry camping permit holders are not exempt from parking tag requirements.

Winter hikers should be especially aware of abrupt weather changes and the danger of hypothermia—the dangerous lowering of body temperature. Always carry an ample supply of food, water, and reliable rain gear. Layer clothing that provides warmth when wet (not cotton). Be prepared for rain, snow, cold, wind, and sudden weather changes, especially at the higher elevations. Stay dry and know your limits.

See page 4 for more hiking tips and trip essentials.



Special events and ranger activities

See page 5 for more things to do and visit go.nps.gov/GRSM-calendar for a full calendar of events.

• **December 9:** Festival of Christmas Past, Present, and Future at Sugarlands Visitor Center, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

• **December 9:** Holiday Homecoming at Oconaluftee Visitor Center, 11 a.m.–3 p.m.



Learn the BARK principles so you and your pet can have a safe and fun visit any time you go to a national park.

Take the BARK pledge:



Bag and bin your pet's waste



Always leash your pet



Respect wildlife



Know where you can go

*The **only** two pet-friendly trails in the Smokies are the Gatlinburg Trail in Tennessee and the Oconaluftee River Trail in North Carolina. Pets **must** be kept on a leash no longer than six feet at all times.*

Check out the BARK ranger products at SmokiesInformation.org

GSMNP BY THE NUMBERS



12 million+ visitors per year



1,000+ species new to science found in the park



31 species of salamanders



69 species of mammals



9,900+ species of insects



16 mtns. higher than 6,000'



Keep it **SMOKIES SMART**:

- S** Stay hydrated
- M** Map your hike
- A** Always wear proper clothing/footwear
- R** Remember your flashlight
- T** Turn back when conditions change

Tell someone where you're going, stay on established trails, pack the essentials, and know what to do in case of an emergency.

Let the NPS Backcountry Office help you plan and prepare for your hike.
Call 865.436.1297,
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

PACK ESSENTIALS

- **Navigation**—map, compass, and knowledge of how to use them
- **Water and food**
- **Extra layers**
- **First aid kit**
- **Headlamp** or flashlight
- **Traction support** like microspikes and hiking poles
- **Rain gear** and pack cover or waterproof bags
- **Emergency whistle**
- **Sun protection** with sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat



FOR A LONGER HIKE

- **Repair kit** with multi-tool or knife
- **Fire starter**
- **Shelter**—emergency tent or tarp

IN AN EMERGENCY

- Call 911 if you can acquire a signal.
- Remain with any injured parties until help arrives. Use what basic first-aid techniques you know, but do not attempt invasive intervention unless you are medically trained.
- Use an emergency whistle to issue a series of three spaced blasts every few minutes to alert rescue crews. If you are in an open area, display brightly colored clothing or gear.



YOUR CELL PHONE IS **NOT**

- a light
- a map
- a survival kit
- always going to have service

THINGS TO DO IN THE WINTERTIME

Hit the trail

There are more than 800 miles of trails in the Smokies ranging from leisurely quiet walkways to challenging mountain ascents. Just be sure to come prepared with rain gear, layers, traction support, and plenty of water and snacks.

Download a free copy of the park's trail map at [nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov) or purchase one for \$1 at a visitor center or kiosk. Visitor center bookstores offer hiking references including *Day Hikes of the Smokies* and *Hiking Trails of the Smokies*. See page 4 for pack essentials.



Explore Smokies history

Visit Cherokee, North Carolina, and immerse yourself in history and culture at the Museum of the Cherokee People, one of the longest-operating tribal museums in the country. Visit motcp.org for hours and details.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to many historic structures including churches, mills, and log cabins. In Cades Cove, Cataloochee, Elkmont, and Oconaluftee, the bareness of winter reveals hidden structures, cemeteries, and other reminders of past Smokies residents. *John Oliver Cabin photo by David McGregor.*



Spot winter wildlife

There's still plenty of wildlife to see in the Smokies even after the bears have ambled off to their winter dens. Elk and white-tailed deer remain active in the Smokies, and birds (like this tufted titmouse) are much easier to see when deciduous trees lose their leaves. Take photos of what you see and use the iNaturalist app to identify and share your observations.

Remember to avoid feeding or approaching wildlife. If you see wildlife from your vehicle, continue to the nearest pull-out before attempting to view. Sudden stops can be dangerous and cause traffic delays for others. *Photo by Warren Lynn.*



Celebrate the holidays with us



Saturday, December 9

**Festival of Christmas
Past, Present, and Future**
Sugarlands Visitor Center,
10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Holiday Homecoming
Oconaluftee Visitor Center,
11 a.m.–3 p.m.



**For a full list of
programs for the
public, please visit:
go.nps.gov/GRSMcalendar**

Parking tag purchase locations within the park

Parking tags may be purchased at locations designated by these symbols on the map:



Automated Fee Machine (AFM)

- Available 24 hours per day
- Accepts credit/debit only
- Daily and weekly tags only

Located at Sugarlands Visitor Center, Cades Cove Loop Entrance, Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area, Newfound Gap, Oconaluftee Visitor Center, Deep Creek Picnic Area, Clingmans Dome, Greenbrier, Cosby, Big Creek, Townsend Wye, Look Rock, and Cataloochee.



Visitor Center

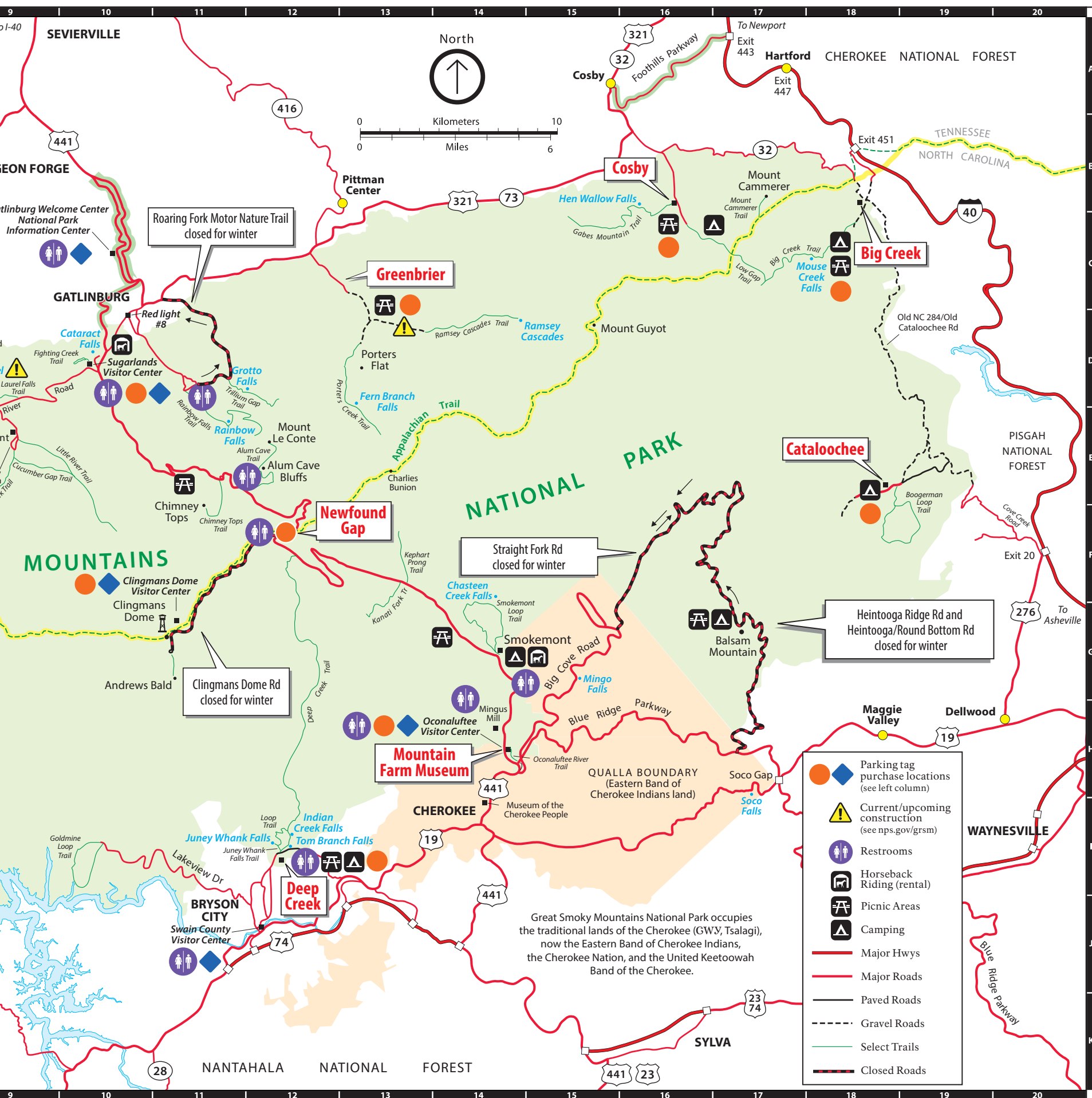
- Open business hours (see page 2)
- Accepts cash or credit/debit
- Daily, weekly, and annual tags available

Located at Sugarlands, Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, Cades Cove, Oconaluftee, and Clingmans Dome (closed in winter).

Parking tags are available outside the park at Great Smokies Welcome Center in Townsend, Gatlinburg Welcome Center, Swain County Visitor Center, and select area businesses.

For all purchase locations, see go.nps.gov/GRSMfees.





Words with a Ranger
Continued from page 1

Smokies family is second to none, and I've made many of my most cherished memories hiking and camping here with my loved ones.

Winter is typically a quiet season in the mountains, but there will still be plenty going on behind the scenes. A few projects we'll be working on include constructing an accessible campsite at Look Rock Campground, upgrading campground water systems at Balsam Mountain, and restoring the final historic cabin in Elkmont. Meanwhile, our roads, custodial, and utilities teams will be waking up early and staying out late so the rest of us can continue to enjoy the Smokies.

Road crews based in Cherokee, Gatlinburg, and Cades Cove are out seven days a week maintaining roadways and keeping them clear of rocks, trees, ice, and snow—sometimes 24 hours a day. Our custodial and grounds employees arrive early—often before sunrise—to clear walkways and make sure visitor centers and restrooms are clean and accessible. Every day, utility operators conduct testing and repairs to ensure we maintain a potable water supply for drinking fountains and toilets.

If all goes smoothly, the hard work and many different jobs of the facilities management team will fade into the background as you explore the Great Smoky Mountains this winter. Just be sure to pay attention to road signs, avoid relying entirely on your phone for directions, and make a back-up plan. Some roads or facilities may be closed due to dangerous conditions, but there's still plenty to see and do even when wintry weather strikes. Visiting the park is about the experience—not always the destination.



Raccoon and firewood pest illustrations by Lisa Horstman.
All others by Emma Oxford.

LEAVE ONLY FOOTPRINTS

Writing on or carving into trees, stones, or structures can cause permanent damage—it's also a crime! Taking a photo is always a better way to remember your time in the Smokies and helps preserve the park for others too.

I'm not feeling the love.

BIN IT FOR THE BEARS

Help protect bears by packing out all trash and food waste and using bear-proof dumpsters in the park.

PUSH AND LIFT

Sheesh! As if we didn't have enough to worry about...

KEEP PETS ON DESIGNATED TRAILS

Remember that the Gatlinburg Trail and Oconaluftee River Trail are the *only* pet-friendly trails in the park.

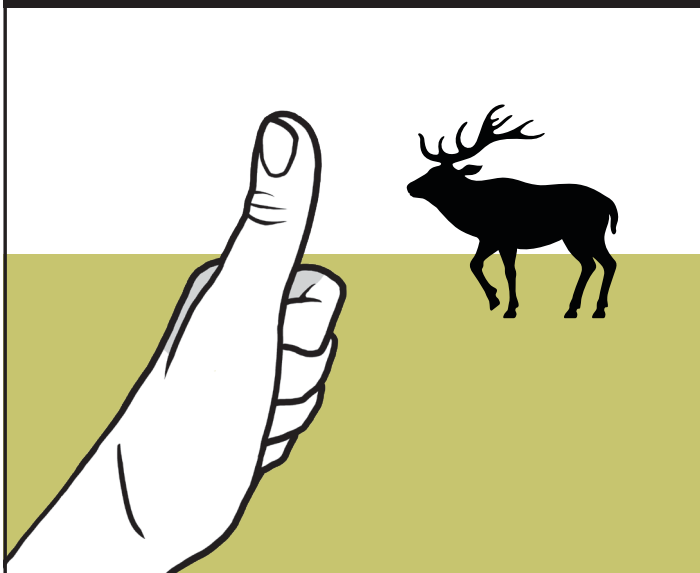
All pets must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet at all times.



PLEASE LEAVE YOUR FIREWOOD AT HOME

Use only heat-treated or dead and down wood within the park. Harmful pests can hitchhike into the park on your firewood, which could kill millions of trees.

ALWAYS USE THE RULE OF THUMB



When viewing wildlife, hold your arm out straight. If you can't cover the animal in your line of sight with your thumb, you're too close!

PARK SAFELY IN THE SMOKIES



IF YOU LOVE THE SMOKIES

Join the park's partners in helping to protect this special place for future generations

Great Smoky Mountains Association

Great Smoky Mountains Association (GSMA) brings people of all backgrounds together as

advocates and stewards to honor, sustain, and protect Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

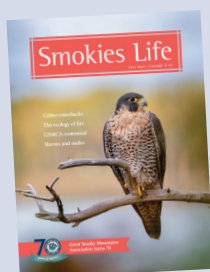
GSMA operates the park's official bookstores, publishes books and other high-quality media about the Smokies, and supports the park's educational, scientific, and historical preservation efforts. Since 1953, GSMA has contributed more than \$47 million to the national park.

Become a GSMA member today by visiting SmokiesInformation.org or call us at 888.898.9102, ext. 257.

Interested in working in the park? GSMA is currently hiring for retail and information desk positions! Rates begin at \$15/hr. plus opportunities for monthly bonuses. Apply online at SmokiesInformation.org/employment.



GSMA members enjoy...



- Bi-annual *Smokies Life* journal
- *Smokies LIVE* e-newsletter

- Discounts at park bookstores and local businesses



- Exclusive group hikes and expert-led events



Friends of the Smokies

Since 1993, Friends of the Smokies has raised over \$85 million to assist GSMNP in providing visitors a safe, memorable experience while protecting the park's historic and natural resources.



Every year, the park requests funding for projects and programs that would be unfulfilled without support from Friends.

Examples include:

- Trail rehabilitation
- Preservation of historic structures
- Facility repairs, upgrades, and renovations
- Accessibility improvements
- First responder equipment and training
- Educational programs for 10,000+ students
- Conservation and wildlife management

Learn more and become a 'Friend' at FriendsOfTheSmokies.org.



Discover Life in America

Discover Life in America (DLiA) is devoted to cataloging every living

species in the Smokies through the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory. This ongoing project helps the National Park Service better understand and protect the 21,000 kinds of organisms documented in the Smokies, with more discovered every day.

DLiA also offers internship, volunteer, community science, and education opportunities that provide firsthand experiences in the Smokies, promote the importance of biodiversity, and foster stewardship of the natural world. Learn how you can support DLiA at dlia.org or call 865.430.4757.

Join the discovery!



Record life in the park with the iNaturalist app! dlia.org



Tremont

Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont offers kids and adults an opportunity

to connect with nature through immersive, multi-day experiences in the national park. Through residential workshops, summer camps, and school programs, Tremont promotes curiosity and inspires learning for thousands of individuals each year.

Adult workshops include the Southern Appalachian Naturalist Certification program, photography courses, backpacking adventures, community science, and professional development for teachers.

Visit gsmnit.org for program information or to learn how you can support life-changing learning experiences in the Smokies. Header photo by Rich Bryant.

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS INSTITUTE AT TREMONT

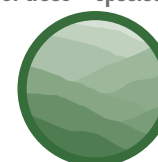
GSMNP BY THE NUMBERS



90+ historic structures



3,400+ species of fungi



500,000+ acres of land



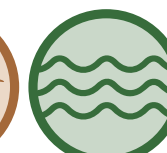
848 miles of trails



135 species of trees



250+ species of birds



2,900 miles of streams

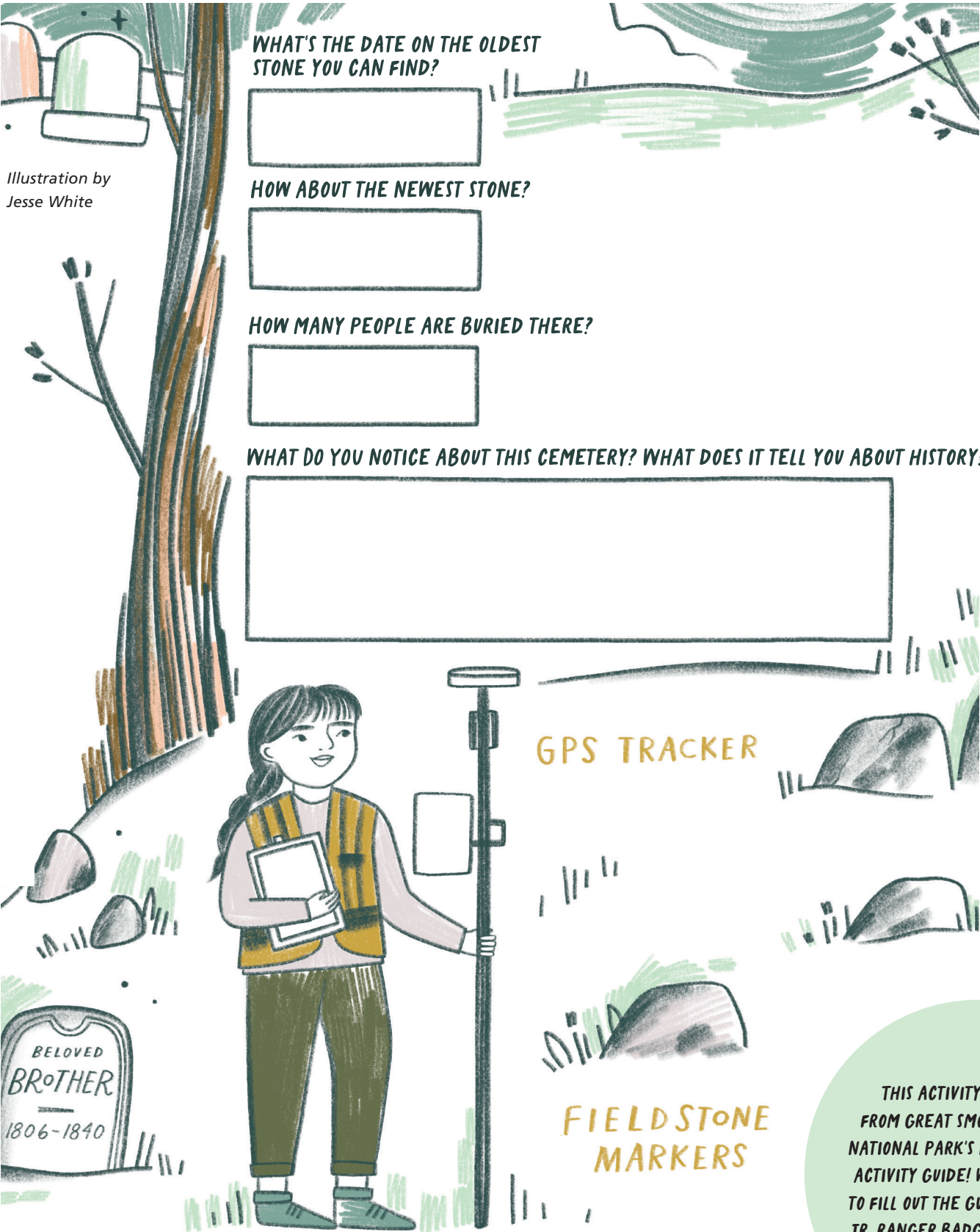


Illustration by
Jesse White

WHAT'S THE DATE ON THE OLDEST
STONE YOU CAN FIND?

HOW ABOUT THE NEWEST STONE?

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE BURIED THERE?

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT THIS CEMETERY? WHAT DOES IT TELL YOU ABOUT HISTORY?

GPS TRACKER

FIELDSTONE
MARKERS



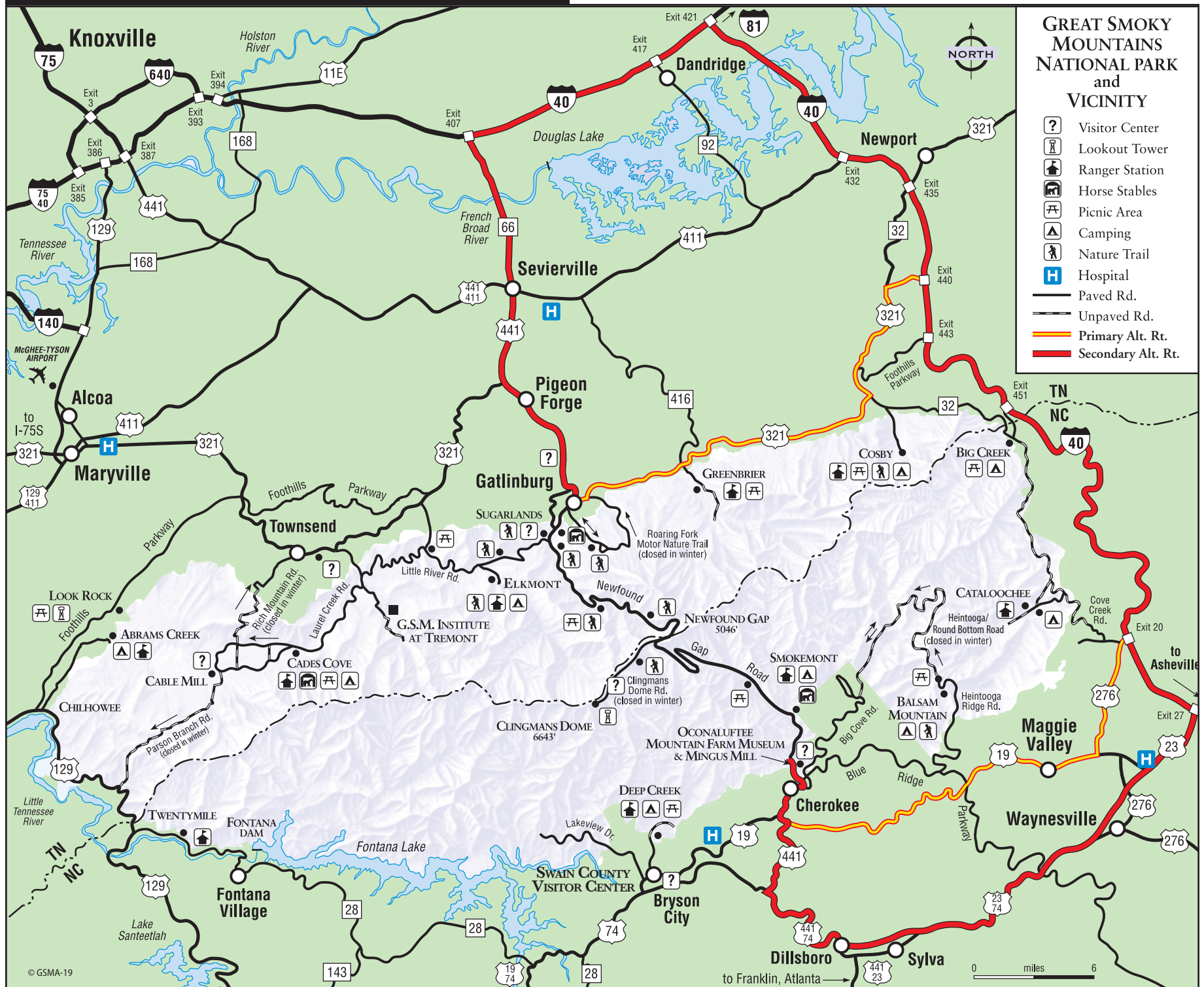
People have lived in the Smokies for thousands of years. **ARCHEOLOGISTS** and **HISTORIANS** study the things left behind to learn who was here and what their lives were like. Archeologists map these things to make sure we know what needs to be protected. Cemeteries are great places to start learning about the past. Try exploring a cemetery in the park and answering these questions!

THIS ACTIVITY IS ADAPTED
FROM GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS
NATIONAL PARK'S NEW JR. RANGER
ACTIVITY GUIDE! WORK AS A TEAM
TO FILL OUT THE GUIDE AND EARN A
JR. RANGER BADGE. AVAILABLE AT
ANY PARK VISITOR CENTER!



SMOKIES INFORMATION

For more information, go to nps.gov/grsm



Information

General park info:

865.436.1200

nps.gov/grsm

Backcountry info:

865.436.1297

smokiespermits.nps.gov

Emergencies

911

Cherokee Police

828.497.4131

Gatlinburg Police

865.436.5181

Avoid the fine

A valid parking tag must be displayed when parked for more than 15 minutes anywhere in the park. Pets are only permitted on the Gatlinburg and Oconaluftee River trails, which allow dogs on a leash. Persons feeding wildlife are subject to a \$5,000 fine. Picking or digging plants is prohibited in the park.

Accessibility

Restrooms at Cades Cove, Oconaluftee, and Sugarlands visitor centers are fully accessible. For more information about accessibility, go to nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/accessibility.htm.