



CANYON CHATTER



Weekend Ranger-led Hikes

For public and staff health and safety, weekend ranger-led hikes have been suspended until further notice.

However, the trails in the preserve remain open! Get out and enjoy the spring-time weather.

Programs with Partners

• EARTH FEST 2020!

- April 18, 2020—9:00 am to 3:00 pm at the Little River Canyon Center
- Celebrate Earth Day (Month) with live animal shows, face painting, food, programs, hikes and more!
- National Junior Ranger



Day—Become a Junior Ranger for Little River Canyon National Preserve and kick off National Park Week!

WELCOME

Betsy Dillbeck, T.A.R.C.O.G.

Welcome to the first edition of “Canyon Chatter”, a quarterly newsletter with news and information about Little River Canyon National Preserve. We hope to present items of interest and events on all aspects of park life here at Little River Canyon, written by NPS staff, volunteers, and our Friends of the Park organization.

Of course, each day, we get to experience the beauty of the Canyon and create ways for our visitors to enjoy their time spent with us, whether watching our 20 minute video about the Preserve, hiking one of our many trails, stopping at the overlooks that offer spectacular views of the canyon, or just stopping at the Contact Station located within the Jacksonville State University Canyon Center for maps and other educational materials available.

One of our visitors to the Canyon Center recently was the Maitland family from Jackson, Michigan. The Maitlands are a longtime host family to high school students from all over the world. Part of their curriculum for the students assigned to their family is touring the national preserves, parks, and monuments of the National Park Service. They have visited all 419 of these destinations and have collected the Junior Ranger badges and various patches from all of them. They proudly carry the vests and “capes” Mrs. Maitland has crafted to display all of their collection. Owning their own business, their own children and the host children will work for 7 days, and then load up their RV and travel for seven days, combining their travels



Pictured above are the Maitland family, left to right, Dagmar, from Denmark, Finn, from Germany, Jameson Maitland, and Gerald Maitland.

Superintendent's Corner

Steve Black, Superintendent

Since I became superintendent of Little River Canyon in 2015, the park has seen many changes and those are becoming even more apparent in 2020. The biggest change that the public will see is the large expansion of the parking lot at the main falls. This project is being done for several reasons, but most of all, the reason is we are just getting very popular with the public. The old parking lot, which had 99 spaces, was often full on busy summer weekends when the temperatures go up and people needed a place to cool off, and what better spot is there than Little River Canyon? With its flowing cool water, places for family to play in the river and enjoy nature, our park is seeing record visitation, and we simply do not have enough parking spaces for all.

The new addition is supposed to be done by mid spring of 2020, just in time for our first big rush of Memorial Day. With 64 more parking spaces, we should be able to accommodate all who want to visit the falls area of the Preserve. As work progresses on the main falls lot, the parking lot at Little Falls will be closed permanently. The old lot will be repurposed as a staging area for emergency personnel conducting rescues at Little Falls. There have been a number of accidents and near misses from people trying to get into the lot or exit onto AL 35, and that is the main reason for closing that lot.

Other changes are coming in the near future, and I invite you to visit the Preserve often to see what we have done or check us out on the web at www.nps.gov/liri.



A Word from Law Enforcement

Valerie Saferite, Chief Ranger

As winter rolls into spring, visitation will begin to increase at Little River Canyon National Preserve. In the past, we have had swimmers in the river as early as February (brrrr). However, this is not advisable, as the water temperature will still be low. The average water temperature for February/March is around 50° Fahrenheit. But, we all know that spring will bring the swimmers back to the river and with that, I would like to remind everyone of a few safety tips.

This is a natural area, and the trails to the river are not suited for flip-flops or bare feet. Good, sturdy hiking or trail boots/shoes are best. Each year, we have several ankle injuries. Sometimes these are minor, and others require rescue personnel. Many of these could be prevented with the proper footwear.

The river itself is beautiful, but powerful. In the spring, with the rainy season, the river flowrate fluctuates not only daily, but often hourly. This is extremely hazardous to persons with limited or no ability to swim or children. We recommend that everyone wear a personal flotation device; however, this is highly recommended for children and persons with limited or no ability to swim. There are many underwater hazards such as rocks and debris. These pose a risk to persons whether jumping in or floating down the river. When the river level is up, these hazards can be hidden causing an unsuspecting visitor serious injury or even death.

We would like our visitors to enjoy their time at Little River Canyon National Preserve but would like to remind you of a few regulations. Alcohol and drugs are illegal here. Your pet must be on a leash no longer than six feet. Park your vehicle in designated parking spaces only; if not, your great day at the river might be ruined if you return and your vehicle has been towed. The Preserve currently has NO camping areas. Do not climb over railings, and stay 50 feet away from the edge of the main falls. Watch for signs that designate closed areas, as these will be enforced.

If you are unsure if something is allowed or legal, please contact us before your visit to find out.

Enjoy your visit and stay safe!



The WORLD of Maintenance

From Little River Canyon National Preserve's **Maintenance Supervisor, Wade Lewis:**

Here is a list of items we are currently working on:

Parking lot project has been at a standstill for the last couple of weeks due to weather, rain, snow, and most everything except sunshine.

Just a reminder- the Little Falls (Martha's/Hippy Hole, parking area and access road is now closed to the public during the duration of the construction. This area is transitioning to become an emergency vehicle staging area.

We expect the announcement to be coming out shortly for our seasonal position. We will be searching for one person this year.

We will continue to work on the backcountry roads as time and weather permits. Use caution when driving on those roads as this wet weather has compounded the problems of deep ruts and mudholes.

Work Safely!

The Ranger Station

Matt Switzer, Interpretation Ranger

The year 2020 brings exciting new opportunities and offerings from the rangers here in the Interpretation and Education office!

Beginning in February, Little River Canyon began offering free ranger-led hikes on Saturdays, featuring a diversity of trails throughout the length of the park of varying difficulties. Topics on each hike are chosen by the ranger leading it, giving participants a multi-faceted look at this wonderful land. Hikes are expected to continue throughout the spring. These hikes mark the first time the Little River Canyon Junior Ranger patch is available!

This year will also see the launch of an astronomy program (and the opportunity to earn the Junior Ranger Night Explorer patch!), pop-up programs at popular locations this



summer, a brand-new Junior Ranger patch for children of all ages attending Junior Ranger programs, the BARK Ranger program (for pups and their people who are great



stewards of our environment), and hopefully a couple new programs we'll be testing this year.

After 27 years at Little River Canyon, the well-earned retirement in 2018 of Little River Canyon's original Interpretation Ranger, Larry Beane, left a gulf vaster than the canyon itself. The new Interpretation staff – Rangers Matt and Kaleb, and winter/spring seasonal Interpretation Rangers Kevin and Kari – are excited to carry on and expand upon his legacy and help our wonderful visitors learn about and more deeply appreciate the treasures we have here at Little River Canyon National Preserve!



Canyon Mouth Park

- Annual Passes are now available for purchase at the NPS offices located at the Little River Canyon Center.
- Cost of annual pass is \$35.00—Cash or Check only
- Passes are valid until December 31st of 2020 regardless of when purchased.
- **FEE Free Day is April 18th!**

Resources Management

Mary Shew, Resources Management Specialist

For us in Resources Management, a big part of our job is to learn about the resources here so that we can protect and restore some of these areas back to a natural state. A big component of that is dealing with exotic, invasive plant species. These foreign invaders have been here for a long time, while some are becoming newly established. Plants like privet (*Ligustrum sinense*), mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*), and princess tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*) produce a LOT of seeds and grow very quickly, making it difficult for native plants to compete successfully. These space invaders can change the structure of a natural area, therefore changing which critters use it and how they use it. It takes lots of time and money to remove these exotic plants, but it's a fight worth fighting. So, as spring rapidly moves in, we are compelled to come out of our caves and explore the outdoors or start planting on our own little space of the Earth. But as we do, we ask that you be aware of exotic invaders and their impacts. Help keep our slice of nature...native. To get involved, here are ways to help:

- Plant natives in your own yard....and if you do have a mimosa planted, please consider removing it and planting a redbud instead. Many think the Bradford Pear is lovely and benign, but it is not. It is invasive. There are other options, such as fringe tree or native crabapple or plums. To find out more about what you should or should not have in your yard (for nature's sake!), visit the following: [Alabama Invasive Plant Council](http://AlabamaInvasivePlantCouncil.org) at www.se-epc.org/alabama/
- When visiting parks and other areas, "play clean". This means clean your hiking boots, clean off your bike or boat before and after visits, and buy firewood where you burn it going into the house....so be clean everywhere you go... clean your shoes, gear, and equipment before you enter a new park, river, trail, etc.
- Lastly, be a tattletale. While in the park, if you see invasive, exotic species...we want to know about it! Especially if you see kudzu in the park! So one great platform for tattling, while showing off your really awesome pics, is iNaturalist. It's a free app where you upload your photos of plants and animals you see in our park. We want you to share photos of everything you see. By posting those pics or "observations" we can identify it for you, therefore giving us a record of what it is, where it is, and when it was found. That then gives us the opportunity to formulate a plan to seek and destroy. So documenting your day of galivanting in nature can help us to do a better job of protecting it. To do that, download and sign up for iNaturalist and join our projects: www.inaturalist.org/home

www.inaturalist.org/projects/little-river-canyon-national-preserve-a-living-ledger
www.inaturalist.org/projects/nps-cumberland-piedmont-network-invasive-species



VOLUNTEER News

Jana Sharp, Assistant Volunteer Coordinator

For the fiscal year 2019, our volunteers here at Little River Canyon National Preserve accumulated 4,395.25 hours of time freely given!! Whether they are staffing the front desk of the visitor contact station located within the Jacksonville State University Canyon Center, roving trails, aiding with programs, being the visitor contact at Little River Falls, assisting maintenance, or helping with the visitor rush during holidays, they are an essential part of the Preserve. We love our volunteers and greatly appreciate all the time they donate! Please take a moment to thank a volunteer the next time you see one!

Pictured are some of our currently active volunteers at the staff Christmas party. Left to right, Tom Clure, Hailey Weaver, Bill Fritz, Debbie O'Neill, Deb Sanden, Jeff Rickett, Sheila Hurtt, John Ingraham, Linda Arthur, and Paul Arthur



Friends of the Preserve

Established in 2010 as a 501(c)3 that recognizes Little River Canyon National Preserve as a special and nationally significant place, the group is overseen by a board of directors, who meet on the second Monday of each month at 4pm at the park office. An annual meeting is held each year in April.

The mission of the Friends group is to support positive visitor experiences to Little River Canyon National Preserve and Russell Cave National Monument and the surrounding areas. The group serves as ambassadors for the parks.

The Friends group is comprised of people who are passionate about the parks and strive to improve them and the visitor's experience.

Last year, the Friends group helped raise funds for the accessible playground at Canyon Mouth Park. They purchased small walkie talkie radios to be used during special events. The group helps to bring schools to the parks by administering grants.

Currently, the Friends group is working to fund additional equipment and accessible pathways at the playground.

If you are interested in joining the Friends group, please contact: Peggy Casey, President peggycasey@aol.com 256-504-5495, or visit us at www.friendsoflittlerivercanyon.org and like our page on Facebook.

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school curriculum, reading, and writing projects. When they stopped at Little River Canyon there were four teenagers and Mom and Dad. They had a great time telling the Rangers of all the parks they had visited and various experiences.

Meeting folks such as the Maitlands, and others from all over the world, is certainly one of the best aspects of working at a National Park Service site.



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