2020 SPRING HIKE DESCRIPTIONS

Friday Afternoon on your own suggestions:

We will not have organized hikes on Friday. Have fun on your own in and around Bryson City.

**Island Park, Bryson City** - Only accessible by a foot bridge, Bryson City's Island Park is cut off from the mainland by the Tuckasegee River that runs through the center of town. [https://www.greatsmokies.com/bc-island-park/](https://www.greatsmokies.com/bc-island-park/)

**Clingman's Dome, TN** - At an elevation of 6,643 feet, it is the highest mountain in the Smokies. The observation tower offers spectacular 360° views of the Smokies. A hike to Andrew's Bald begins at the edge of the parking lot. Just over the TN border, 25 miles from Cherokee. [https://www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/clingmansdome.htm](https://www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/clingmansdome.htm)

**Mingo Falls, Big Cove** - Mingo Falls is located in the Big Cove community just north of Cherokee. At 120-feet tall, it is one of the tallest waterfalls in the Southern Appalachians. The walk from the parking lot is short (just a hundred yards) but very steep. [https://www.greatsmokies.com/cherokee-waterfalls/](https://www.greatsmokies.com/cherokee-waterfalls/)

**Museum of the Cherokee Indian, Cherokee, Oconaluftee Indian Village** – Admission $12. Some of the most modern technology, computer-generated imagery, and special effects are used to retrace the 11,000-year documented history of the Cherokees. [https://www.cherokeemuseum.org/](https://www.cherokeemuseum.org/)

Saturday Hikes - 9am at trailhead to 4pm

Sunday Hikes - 9am at trailhead to noon (shortened version, fewer miles)

**Big Laurel (Alarka Laurel) headwaters of Alarka Creek**

Conleys Creek Rd. Big Laurel, NC 28713 Nantahala National Forest

Big Laurel is a rare remnant Red Spruce bog at the headwaters of Alarka Creek in the southwest corner of Swain County. At 4,000-plus feet, the southernmost stand of Red Spruce in the Southern Appalachians is situated in the tract managed by the U.S. Forest Service. This hike offers a unique view into a relict and more boreal type ecosystem containing an interesting intersection of spruce-fir forest and swamp forest-bog complex/southern Appalachian bog.

There are numerous rare species and many flowering plants of interest, so May is an excellent time to visit. The hike is generally composed of walking flat trails with a handful of short rises to view some of the surrounding rich and acidic coves. There is a large meadow with a covered shelter for picnicking and gathering around. No restrooms. **Length:** 5 miles roundtrip. **Difficulty:** moderate. **Elevation change:** 700 ft. **Hike Leader:** Owen Carson.

**Deep Creek Loop Trail & Waterfalls**

W Deep Creek Rd, Bryson City, NC

We will begin our journey on the Juney Whank Loop Trail, a cove forest floored in phlox and violets that highlights the Juney Whank Falls, a 90’ cascade and spray cliff, crossing midway by a footbridge. We will take the Deep Creek Horse Trail into an acidic cove forest, over a dry ridge, through laurel thickets and down to the Deep Creek Trail as we pass through Flame Azalea, lady’s-slippers, trilliums, geranium, and Speckled Wood Lily.
The Loop Trail will connect us with the Indian Creek Trail, which takes us south into an alluvial forest with Wake Robin, Nodding Trillium, and Solomon's-seal and ending at the 45’ Indian Creek Falls amongst Dwarf Crested Iris, Great Blue Lobelia, and Yellowroot. You'll notice that Indian Creek Falls is actually more of a water slide than a true waterfall.

We will take the Deep Creek Trail back and stop to admire Tom Branch Falls, a multilevel 75’ cascade shrouded in rhododendron, and spills into Deep Creek by a large White Oak. We follow the creek home.

Watch the brief video *Deep Creek Waterfalls and Wildflowers* for an overview of the Deep Creek area. Restrooms at the entrance. **Length:** 5 miles roundtrip. **Difficulty:** moderate. **Elevation change:** est. 550 ft. **Hike Leader:** Randy Burroughs. [https://smokymountains.com/park/hikes/deep-creek-loop-trail/](https://smokymountains.com/park/hikes/deep-creek-loop-trail/)

**Kanati Fork Trail**  
*Newfound Gap Road, (US 441) North from Bryson City*

The Kanati Fork Trail is one of the leading hikes in Great Smoky Mountains National Park for forest wildflowers. It's a bit on the demanding side as you zigzag upstream within the Kanati Fork canyon, and long views are scarce. An invigorating mountain climb, the Kanati Fork Trail loosely follows one of the headwater branches of the Oconaluftee River from Newfound Gap Road to Thomas Ridge. This is a fairly challenging trek due to its 2,100 or so feet of elevation gain across 2.9 miles. Do not choose this one if you have physical difficulties.

This is an exceptional site to see a lot of different species of spring ephemeral wildflowers, including Painted Trillium, Bluebead Lily, Foamflower, Indian Cucumber-root, Brook Lettuce, and Canada Mayflower, as well as many of the more common species in the Park. The groundcover carpet includes trilliums, violets, Dutchman’s Breeches, Rattlesnake Plantain, Trout Lily, Solomon’s Plume, and many others. The stately trees include Tulip-poplar, Eastern Hemlock, Yellow Birch, magnolia, maple, and Basswood. Among the prominent shrubs closer to the stream are rhododendron, Mountain Laurel, and Mountain Doghobble. Restrooms are located at Colllins Creek Pavilion on US 441 before the trailhead. **Length:** 5.8 miles roundtrip. **Difficulty:** moderately difficult. **Elevation gain:** 2,100 ft. **Hike Leader:** Ken Bridle. [https://smokymountains.com/park/hikes/kanati-fork-trail/](https://smokymountains.com/park/hikes/kanati-fork-trail/)

**Oconaluftee River Trail and Visitor Center**  
*1194 Newfound Gap Rd (US 441), Cherokee, NC 28719*

The Oconaluftee River Trail is a pleasant walk along the Oconaluftee River, located at the visitor center, and travels around the Mountain Farm Museum. As the trail meanders along the river bank it travels under the canopy of Eastern Hemlock, Red Maple, Yellow Buckeye, American Beech, American Sycamore, Mountain Basswood, Flowering Dogwood and Tulip Tree, among other species. More than 40 species of wildflowers have been identified along this route, making this an outstanding choice. During the springtime hikers can find several varieties of trillium and violets, jack-in-the-pulpit, Purple Phacelia, Squirrel Corn, stonecrop, phlox and Crested Dwarf Iris, among many other species.
Within the visitor center you'll find some fascinating museum displays focused on the history and culture of the Oconaluftee Valley and the Smokies in general, including American Indian and early Euro-American heritage, as well as information on the establishment of the park and the CCC’s lasting influence.

The free, open-air Mountain Farm Museum displays a number of vintage log buildings from the Great Smokies. Most of these relics—a barn, a farmhouse, a blacksmith shop, corn cribs, and more—date from the late 19th century. Living-history demos take place here regularly, helping bring these timeworn structures to life. Restrooms at Visitor Center. **Length:** 3 miles roundtrip. **Difficulty:** Easy. **Elevation gain:** 70 ft. **Hike Leader:** Jean Woods.

**The Road to Nowhere Hike – Goldmine Loop Trail & Noland Creek Trail North**


**GOLDMINE LOOP TRAIL**


Goldmine Loop is the first of many trails that can be accessed from the 33.5 mile-long Lakeshore Trail. Given the "Road to Nowhere" saga and the homestead relics it passes, the Goldmine Loop certainly sheds a little light on the complicated human history of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. From the tunnel parking lot, the hike begins with a walk through the 1,200-foot paved two-lane tunnel. Follow the Lakeshore trail for .6 of a mile. Just past the Tunnel Bypass Trail turn left onto the Goldmine Loop Trail. Following the loop, you’ll see evidence of old farms. The blacktop of the Road to Nowhere soon gives out. After passing the western end of the Tunnel Bypass Trail, you’ll reach the Goldmine Loop proper. The downhill hike into the Goldmine Branch drainage is steep. There may be muddy areas or small streamlets to cross. About halfway through the loop, you’ll come to a small Fontana Lake inlet. The lightly trafficked Goldmine Loop is a fairly easy hike that nonetheless has a few steep sections. 3-mile loop for this section.

**NOLAND CREEK TRAIL NORTH**

Starting at the parking area, the trail passes immediately under the viaduct and crosses Noland Creek on a wooden bridge. The trail progresses steadily uphill with the creek almost always in sight or earshot. The second bridge is surrounded by the remnants of an old farm. Before reaching the third bridge crossing, you may see remnants of numerous other farmsteads that dot the landscape. We expect to see typical spring wildflowers on both hikes.

No restrooms. **Length:** est. 4.5 miles roundtrip. **Difficulty:** easy to moderate. **Elevation change:** 700 ft. **Hike Leader:** Brent Martin.

**Thomas Divide Trail**

[Newfound Gap Road, (US 441) North from Bryson City](https://www.greatsmokies.com/trails/thomas-divide-trail)

The Thomas Divide Trail begins at a hairpin curve on Newfound Gap Road where the road crosses over the divide. The trail starts on an easy course following the ridgeline. From the outset, the track is even and soft underfoot. It remains as such for most of the trail’s course through a northern
hardwood forest, with American Beech, Yellow Birch, Sugar and Mountain maples, Red Oak, and serviceberry.

Though not readily noticeable, the trail eases off Thomas Divide for a short diversion to Beetree Ridge before settling into a gentle climb. Toothwort, Solomon’s Plume, Wood Anemone, Foamflower, Thyme-leaved Bluets, Nodding Mandarin, Canada Mayflower, Star Chickweed, Indian Cucumber-root, Meadow Parsnip, Wood Betony, Mountain Bellwort, Doll’s eyes, Wild Geranium, Mayapple, Vasey’s Trillium, Rue Anemone, Bear Corn, and Solomon’s-seal are all along the way.

Almost two miles from the trailhead, the Thomas Divide Trail eases into a dell on the ridgeline where it intersects the upper terminus of the Kanati Fork Trail. We will return along the same path back to (US 441). Restrooms are located at Collins Creek Pavilion on US 441 before the trailhead. Length: est. 3.6 miles roundtrip. Difficulty: moderate. Elevation Change: 320 ft. Hike Leader: Kathy Mathews.

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Available to all after scheduled hikes on Saturday

**Collins Creek Pavilion and Quiet Walkway**

Newfound Gap Rd. (US 441) North of Bryson City and the Oconaluftee Visitor Center
Reservation: Diane Laslie Order # 0271274636 from Recreation.gov

We have reserved the Collins Creek Pavilion Saturday from 7am – 3:30pm for hikers on the Kanati Fork or Thomas Divide Trails to use as a backup in case of rain or as a stopping point for restrooms or for others as an extra short hike on the Quiet Walkway (QW). The hike is available without reservation for Friday afternoon.

Left of the pavilion is a gated gravel road with a simple brown “Quiet Walkway” sign. About 30 yards down the road the typical QW marker stands at the beginning of a dirt path winding through a small grassy opening. Don’t be fooled by this rather inauspicious beginning. The Collins Creek QW is among the best.

Once it enters the woods, the path follows Collins Creek curving along the base of a steep, unnamed mountain peak (4,564 ft) to the right. The National Geographic map shows a 0.5-mile trail terminating at a bend in the creek. The quality of the surrounding forest has a maturity to it, less disturbed and weedy, under a shady canopy. The richness of this QW in early May is nothing short of remarkable. Most any trail in the Smokies will have wildflowers now, yet the diversity here is quite high and concentrated. Another plus is the easy accessibility. The trail is ample in width with smooth footing and a grade so slight, it isn’t worth mentioning. A low wooden bridge and short foot log facilitate crossing two narrow rills feeding into Collins Creek.

At least seven different fern species, three trilliums including Large White Trillium and Painted Trillium, Fraser’s Sedge, Alternate-leaved Dogwood, Showy Orchis, Bloodroot, Virginia Strawberry, and Hearts-a-bustin’ are tucked among the usual slate of herbaceous and woody plants present in a rich cove. Young birches shelter a glade of ferns and Wild Geranium. Near the end, Intermediate Fern and Solomon’s Plume are especially robust.
Our Hike Leaders

**Ken Bridle**, Ph. D. is a professional scientist of over 45 years. Ken was trained as a botanist with emphasis on plant physiology and natural product chemistry. He has worked as a natural heritage and watershed inventory biologist, field ecologist, science museum exhibits director and environmental consultant. He has been active with Piedmont Land Conservancy (PLC) as a volunteer, consultant, board member and staff member for over 25 years. He is currently Stewardship Director for PLC, responsible for easement monitoring and management of over 25,000 acres of land in more than 200 projects.

Ken is the author of several county Natural Heritage Inventory (1998-2002) as well as watershed assessments, wetland delineations, and rare plant and animal surveys. He is past Chair of the Wildlife Resources Commission, Nongame Wildlife Advisory Committee which helps to facilitate work and listing of rare animal species in this state. He is also past president of the NC Native Plant Society. He is a frequent leader of hikes and nature walks and a speaker on local conservation issues.

**Randy Burroughs** is a horticulturist, NC landscape architect, and earnest meadow gardener practicing deep in the mountains above Asheville. He has worked as a city horticulturist, on wetlands delineation for an engineering firm in Greenville, SC, and as a native plant garden manager at UNC-Asheville. He is now in private practice focusing on native landscape design & consultation. Randy had lead fieldtrips for the Cullowhee Native Plant Conference for 20 years.

**Owen Carson** has been working for the past decade with Equinox (Asheville) to provide ecological and botanical expertise in support of environmental planning, design, and restoration projects in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. He loves to share his passion for and knowledge of plants and the ecosystems that contain them – montane rock outcroppings and bogs are two of his favorites! For the past four years Owen has also devoted his time and knowledge in support of the NC Invasive Plant Council, where he is the current sitting President. Overall, he relishes in the enjoyment of collaborating with individuals and organizations to develop unique solutions for complex problems. In his free time, when applicable, Owen enjoys gardening, climbing, and exploring the outdoors with his wife, Sarah, and twin kindergarteners Hazel and Liam.

**Kathy Mathews, Ph. D.** is Professor of Biology at Western Carolina University. Her area of research specialization is plant systematics, which seeks to explain patterns of diversity in various plant groups. She studies problems in the taxonomy and evolutionary relationships of flowering plant groups, such as members of the gentian and strychnos families. Her focus is on southeastern plants and current research seeks to understand rapid speciation and biogeography in the high-elevation rock outcrop species, such as saxifrage (Micranthes) and sand-myrtle (Kalmia), as well as hybridization in Trillium. Kathy is on the Steering Committee of the Cullowhee Native Plant Conference and has led hikes for multiple botanical groups.

**Brent Martin** is a lifelong conservationist and educator, having worked over a decade as Southern Appalachian Regional Director for The Wilderness Society, and prior to that serving as Executive Director for Georgia Forestwatch and Associate Director for the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee. He has led outings for over twenty years for the above organizations, as well as Carolina Mountain Club, NC Bartram Trail Society, the Cullowhee Native Plant Conference, Highland Biological Station,
and many, many more. He is also a writer of non-fiction and poetry, and his poems and essays have been published in the *North Carolina Literary Review, Earthlines, Wildbranch, Eno, New Southerner,* and elsewhere.

**Jean Woods** received her botanical education at UNCC and was a student of Dr. Larry Mellichamp. Jean is a graduate of the Certificate in Native Plant Studies program at UNCC and was involved in its establishment. She is a past President of the NCNPS and served on the board of the Catawba Lands Conservancy and the Friends of Plant Conservation. Jean has been leading wildflower walks since the 1990’s and loves being in nature.

**Speakers**

**Friday Night**

*Randy Burroughs,* "A Tale of 3 Meadows"

(See Randy’s Hike Leader bio)

With habitat loss being the major cause of wildlife decline; and lawn being the #1 crop of that land; meadows are an attractive solution to one of our worst cultural habits. But how does one meadow? There are many methods. We’ll examine three: Meadow Gardening for traditional gardeners, Seed Mixes for larger areas, and Old Field Transitions for gardening naturalists.

The “Meadow Garden” evolves from the *English Herbaceous Border,* with familiar wildflowers drifting in a sea of warm-season grasses, which add structure, stability and winter appeal. Case studies illustrate design variations & installation. Bird, bee and butterfly approved.

“Seed Mix” meadows need special treatment and nurturing for the first several years. We’ll look at a year-two stumble and recovery. The “Old Field Meadow” springs from abandoned fields, pastures, and waysides where the real wildflowers grow. Local plants are emphasized. Site analysis will be discussed along with design, plant sources, establishment and meadow culture. There will be handouts with guidelines, formulas, books, plants, and plant sources. Teachers are welcome to copies of the PowerPoint presentation (bring a thumb drive).

**Saturday Night**

*Dr. Daniel Pierce,* “60 Years of Lessons and Adventures in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park”

Daniel S. (Dan) Pierce first entered the Great Smoky Mountains National Park sixty years ago. Since then the Park has played a huge role in his life as he shared family trips as a child, hiked and backpacked with friends as a teen and young adult, camped with his wife and children, fly-fished with his brother, served as a board member of the Great Smoky Mountains Association, and built a career in higher education based on research into the history of the Park. That research has resulted in four books: *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park, Corn From a Jar: Moonshining in the Great Smokies,* *Hazel Creek: The Life and Death of an Iconic Mountain Community,* and *An Illustrated Guide to Great Smoky Mountains National Park* (with poster artist Joel Anderson).
Pierce's talk will explore the lessons learned and adventures experienced during those sixty years. He currently serves as Interdisciplinary Distinguished Professor of the Mountain South at the University of North Carolina-Asheville where he teaches classes in Appalachian, Southern, North Carolina, and Environmental History.

Dan will join us early Saturday evening (5pm or so) to chat with our members and sell his books.