



Mt. Cammerer and Big Creek – Great Smoky Mountains National Park, NC

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
17.8 mls	5	4	4	2	3
Hiking Time: 8 hours with 1 hour of breaks or 2 days for backpacking Elev. Gain: 4,360 ft Parking: Park at horse trailer parking area. See alternate parking notes below. 35.75414, -83.10784					

[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)



By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins

Although dwarfed by the many 6,000+ foot peaks in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Mt. Cammerer is a popular destination in the less-traveled northeastern region. The mountain, a tad under 5,000 feet, has a beautiful stone octagonal fire tower with incredible panoramic views of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. Although you won't find solitude on the hike to the peak, this trek is a minimum ~12-mile strenuous round trip from any direction meaning the hikers you pass will have earned their summit. The shortest, most popular option begins at the

Cosby Campground on the Tennessee side and uses the Low Gap Trail. The hike described here is the longest, most difficult option. However, this loop hike is easily accessed from I-40 and includes long stretches of beautiful hardwood forest and many sights along the mighty Big Creek that you won't have if you start at Cosby. There are multiple options for backcountry camping on this route, meaning you can hike this in one long day or break it in two for a perfect weekend trip. If you are only looking for a short day hike the Big Creek Trail is a very easy walk to Midnight Hole and Mouse Creek Falls. Otherwise we recommend climbing high above the valley to experience the magnificent views and scenery on Mt. Cammerer.

Parking at Big Creek Campgrounds – All of the campgrounds have parking issues throughout the year, especially during the summer. There are 3 parking areas and fortunately all of them are located along the beginning of this loop hike. If the Big Creek Trail parking area for campers and hikers is full, you can still park at the horse trailer lot or beside the ranger station. This hike begins at the upper parking area for horse trailers, be mindful to avoid parking near the trailers to give them room to turn. If parking is an issue there are usually rangers on site guiding cars to appropriate areas.

Frontcountry camping at Big Creek – There is frontcountry camping at the end of Big Creek Park Rd at the start of this hike. Visit this link for all information regarding reservations and fees for this campground.

Backcountry camping around Big Creek - There are 4 locations along this loop that are accessible for backcountry camping. Visit this link to reserve backcountry sites and see which ones are open/closed. You are not permitted to camp in locations that aren't official backcountry sites or Appalachian Trail shelters. Along the Appalachian Trail the Davenport Gap Shelter and Cosby Shelter are located close to intersections where you connect to the Appalachian Trail. The Appalachian Trail shelters are reserve only in the national park and you cannot camp on the grounds outside of the shelter. Primitive site #37 is located on this loop, and #36 is 0.4 miles from site #37. Note that site #37 and the Cosby Shelter have been intermittently closed recently due to aggressive bears.

Trails – None of the park trails are blazed with the exception of the Appalachian Trail. However, all intersections are marked clearly with signs and trail names. The park map and these trail directions and for purchase National Geographic maps are sufficient and include mileage markers between significant points.

Mile	Summary and Highlights
0.0	Follow Deep Creek Trail north from parking lot
0.4	Tom Branch Falls above Deep Creek
0.9	T-junction with Indian Creek Trail
1.9	Follow Loop Trail after third bridge over Deep Creek
3.8	Indian Creek Falls
4.9	Bridge over the middle of Juney Whank Falls

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – From the horse trail parking follow Big Creek Park Rd north towards the ranger station near the park entrance.
- ▶ **Mile 0.5** – After crossing a bridge over Chestnut Branch, turn left onto the Chestnut Branch Trail before you reach the ranger station. The trail gradually follows Chestnut Branch west.
- ▶ **Mile 1.6** – The trail turns right away from the stream and steeply switchbacks above the drainage.
- ▶ **Mile 2.1** – Closely follow the headwaters of a tributary to Chestnut Branch. This is your last reliable spot to fill up on water for a while.
- ▶ **Mile 2.6** – Chestnut Branch Trail ends at a T-junction with the Appalachian Trail (*white blaze*). Turn left following the Appalachian Trail south. (If you are camping at the Davenport Gap Shelter you will turn right instead.) From this point on the rest of the hike is also rated as a horse-use trail, be mindful of horses on this narrow trail because you will need to scramble off to avoid them.
- ▶ **Mile 3.6** – T-junction with the Lower Mount Cammerer Trail on the right. (Turn right here if you are camping at backcountry campsite #35.)

- ▶ **Mile 5.1** – Beside a band of cliffs is a rock outcrop with a view to the east of Mt. Sterling and distant Maggie Valley.
- ▶ **Mile 5.8** – Y-junction with the Mount Cammerer Trail. Turn right onto the trail heading towards the lookout tower. As you approach the fire tower the trees disappear and you'll be in a heath bald environment typically found at higher elevations.
- ▶ **Mile 6.4** – Mount Cammerer Trail ends at a northern promontory of Cammerer Ridge adorned with a beautiful octagonal stone lookout tower. This tower, originally built in 1939, was restored in 1995 and unlike most fire towers constructed of steel this rustic stone building adds to the scenery. To get 360° views, climb up the rocks to access the catwalk. Directly north and east the Great Smokies fall away sharply towards the Pigeon River Gorge. The Bald Mountains follow the state border while the Newfound Mountains lie east. On clear days you may be able to pick out the FAA station on Snowbird Mountain and the massive grassy bald of Max Patch Mountain. The biggest peak east is Crabtree Bald, the tallest in the Newfound Mountains. Mt. Sterling dominates the southeast horizon. You should be able to pick out the 60-foot fire tower on the summit. The second tallest mountain in the Great Smokies, Mt. Guyot at 6,621 feet, looms large to the southwest.
- ▶ **Mile 7.1** – Continue south on the Appalachian Trail at the Y-junction with the Mount Cammerer Trail. The trail initially climbs up the high point of Mt. Cammerer through tall grasses and thick rhododendron.
- ▶ **Mile 9.2** – Cross intersection with the Low Gap Trail. Turn left on the Low Gap Trail descending moderately towards Big Creek. (Continue straight on the AT if you are camping at the Cosby Knob Shelter.)
- ▶ **Mile 9.9** – After crossing Low Gap Branch the trail parallels the stream on river right.
- ▶ **Mile 10.2** – Trail passes through old growth forest with numerous gigantic hardwood trees.
- ▶ **Mile 11.8** – Low Gap Trail ends at a T-junction with the Big Creek Trail. Turn left passing by backcountry campsite #37. (Turn right for backcountry campsite #36.)
- ▶ **Mile 11.9** – Road bridge over the massive Big Creek. The Big Creek Trail is a wide, easy forest road track that closely parallels Big Creek for 5 miles to the parking lot.
- ▶ **Mile 12.1** – T-junction with the Swallow Fork Trail on the right.
- ▶ **Mile 15.0** – Second road bridge over Big Creek with a large pool below.
- ▶ **Mile 15.4** – Mouse Creek Falls can be viewed from the trail across Big Creek. Mouse Creek flows into Big Creek over this 35-foot double-drop cascade.
- ▶ **Mile 16.0** – Pass by Midnight Hole, a popular swimming area where Big Creek squeezes through boulders plunging 6 feet into a deep pool.
- ▶ **Mile 16.1** – Large river-wide cascade on Big Creek.
- ▶ **Mile 17.3** – Y-junction with hikers' only trail dropping to the right towards the lower parking area and the Baxter Creek Trail.
- ▶ **Mile 17.5** – Big Creek Trail passes through Big Creek Campground and parking area.
- ▶ **Mile 17.8** – Hike ends at the horse trailer parking area.