

Little River Blueway

Little River Watershed Association

The Amazon of Appalachia

The Little River watershed is unique in having an extremely high fish diversity in a relatively small area. The watershed has 93 living native fish species and 107 total living fish species in a drainage area of 379 square miles, prompting the Little River to be called "the Amazon of Appalachia" (though the fish diversity per square mile is much higher than the Amazon's). The high fish diversity is primarily due to the pristine water quality provided by the headwaters in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, as indicated by the high number of minnow (27) and darter (16) species, including the federally listed small darter and dusky darter. The watershed also provides habitat for one of the highest salamander diversities in the world (with the Smokies being called the "Salamander Capital of the World"), and the Little River has a very healthy population of hellbender and mudpuppy salamanders.

The headwaters begin along the northern slope of the Appalachian Trail from Clingmans Dome to Spence Field, draining the areas known as Elkmont and Tremont, which are very popular trout fishing areas. The drainage traverses more than 5000 feet in elevation change, ending up at Fort Loudoun Reservoir. This downstream section includes 7.1 miles under fishing advisories for PCB contamination and 17.63 miles identified as "threatened" due to a recent decline in diversity.

Fishing

The headwaters in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) provide unprecedented access to trout, mostly rainbow but also brown and brook. Brook trout are the only indigenous species of trout in the Smokies, and currently they only populate areas actively managed for their success. As the little river warms and widens downstream from Townsend, smallmouth bass become the sought-after fish (as well as redeye bass and bluegill). A daily fishing report in and around the park is available at: <http://littleriverhunting.com/pages/fishing-report.htm>. For fishing rules, regulations, and licensing, visit: <http://www.state.tn.us/twra/rulesandregs.html>.

National Park Fishing Regulations

Season: Year-Round in Open Water.
License: Persons with a valid TN or NC state fishing license may fish all open park waters. Supplemental state trout licenses are not required in National Park. Persons under 16 are not required to have a license to fish in the park. Lures, Bait: Only artificial flies or lures with a single hook may be used. Obtain complete NPS regulations online: <http://www.nps.gov/grsm/playyourvisit/fishing.htm>

Native Americans: Going to Water

The Cherokee were the first humans to utilize and enjoy the Little River, residing in a town then called Ellijoy. Archaeologists and historians have not found the exact location of this town, although it is certainly on the Little River and probably not far from Maryville. After leaving the Overhill Cherokee towns on March 11, 1762, Henry Timberlake passed through Ellijoy and commented that the town was then abandoned. Timberlake's reference to the "Little River" beside Ellijoy is the first documented naming of the river.

The Cherokee commonly retrieved drinking water from the river and engaged in a ritual generally referred to as "going to water." This ritual included personal as well as group activities, including festivals, religious celebrations, and other cultural events such as the stick ball game and war games. The Cherokee utilized the fish and mollusks in the river and retrieved rocks, sand, and gravel as needed.

When archaeological work was conducted at Townsend in the 1990s, about a half dozen historic Cherokee houses were excavated along the Little River. These are associated with no known historic Cherokee town, and the data suggests that these settlements date in the 17th and early 18th centuries.

Rural Settlement Pattern and Roads along the Little River

Prior to European migration, Native Americans had established several settlements along the Little River from its mouth at the Tennessee River to its upper reaches in Tuckaleechee Cove. Beginning in the 1700's, several non-native immigrant settlements were established along the Little River. On the Tennessee River, a ford provided access to Knoxville. Near that point, the community of Rockford was established on the Little River (named after the "rocky ford" at the Tennessee River). Upstream, other small communities such as Wildwood and Ellejey were established near the fertile river bottoms. Roads were constructed to serve the communities and farms, and to link them at first by fords and then by bridges to the County Seat in Maryville. Two of those roads, River Ford Road and Old Walland Highway, still follow the river closely on its eastern side. Old Walland Highway serves Millers Cove and Tuckaleechee Cove, hugging the river through gaps and mountain cuts along the eastern bank. The old one-lane bridge near Kinzel Springs at the downstream end of Tuckaleechee Cove (Townsend) is a remnant of the old road system linking the up-river communities.

Swinging Bridges

Roads and bridges for animal-drawn and engine-powered vehicles were not the only accommodations to travel. Many people just walked. To

accommodate pedestrian traffic, several swinging bridges were constructed across the Little River. Two such swinging bridges remain (in reconstructed form). One is in Townsend downstream from the Hwy 321 (Wears Valley Road) bridge and upstream from the Webb Road bridge, in the area that was once the central operations for the Little River Lumber Company and central depot for the Little River Railroad on the southern side of the river. The other is downstream from the old one-lane bridge at Kinzel Springs. It used to link the "Sunshine" community on the eastern side of the river with the former Kinzel Resort on the western side of the river.

Little River Railroad and Logging

The Little River Railroad and the Little River Lumber Company were established to facilitate logging of the surrounding mountains. Logging spurs joined in Townsend, where the railroad proceeded on mountain cuts above the Little River down to Walland. The Little River at that time "...was described as the roughest, rockiest, ripporainest river in the eastern United States." (Maryville-Alcoa Times, Friday, February 28, 1975) The lumber company ceased operation in 1939, and its land holdings formed part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The old railroad bed between Walland and Townsend on the western side of the river was converted over much of its length as the new Great Smoky Mountains Highway, now US Highway 321.

Walland Tannery

In part as an impetus for the large scale logging along the Little River, an industrial tannery was established in what is now Walland, just upstream from the water gap in the Chilhowee Mountain range (now called Walland Gap). The tannery used bark from logs to produce a tanning extract used to cure cow hides. Most of the cow hides were imported from South America by rail. The tannery sat on a bend in the river that now contains a subdivision of homes. The Little River Railroad ended in Walland, and both the logging and tannery products continued their journey on the Augusta and Knoxville Railway (later Southern Railway) at a switching yard and depot in Walland.

"There were local people who resented and fought the tannery's existence from the time in 1902 that it tanned the first lot of hides and dumped the waste flesh, hair and tanning extract into the Little River. The wastes killed the fish in the river, they said, sickened their cattle that drank from it, and added a stench to the mountain stream that had forever run clear." (Knoxville News Sentinel, May 14, 1981)

The tannery burned in 1931, and was not rebuilt due to injunction and pending litigation over pollution from the operations.

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START	RIVER DESCRIPTION	FINISH
1 NORTH RIVER ROAD Turn left on Highways 321/73, Wears Valley Rd. Turn right immediately after crossing bridge. Parking in small gravel pull off on right side of road. River access to shoal just below Old Mill dam with NO PORTAGE. Do not use River Rage's concrete path.	- Little River passes under bridge. Watch for tubers. - Continue past Big Meadow Campground and Dark Island Campground on the right. - Pass under an old suspension footbridge and under Webb Road Bridge. - Look for remains of an old dam. Watch for rebar and chunks of concrete. - The river makes a sharp right turn with shoals on the right. - Approach Pumpkin Lane Bridge. Small stream enters on river right.	PICNIC AREA RIVER ACCESS ACROSS FROM APPLE BARN STORE - After slight bend to the left, river runs adjacent to US Highway 321. - Access point is on the left at picnic area. Nice access but ramp is for handicap use. - Alternatively, take out at the Townsend bike trail/greenway parking. Watch for parking lot on river left that is easily missed.
2 TOWNSEND GREENWAY PARKING ON US HIGHWAY 321 Use parking area for the walking and biking trail along Little River and through Townsend. Look for cleared bank access to use as a put in or take out.	- Work your way to the right side of the river to avoid a shallow shoal. - Pass under two bridges—Cameron Road and the historic Kinzel Springs Bridge. - Entering Sunshine community. Float past suspension foot bridge going from US Highway 321 to Walnut Loop. - There are good fishing holes before Old Walland Highway rejoins the water's edge. Caution: If the Townsend Water gate is below two feet, it is difficult to navigate through shallow sections without exiting the boat. - Pee Wee Springs—spring is piped on river right; some locals still visit this site for drinking water. - Pass Wesley Woods Methodist Church camp on river just before descending into a long horseshoe bend to the left. Note several small rapids and fishing holes from here to the next access point.	PICNIC AREA BETWEEN WALLAND AND TOWNSEND - Take out at the small picnic area on river left. - Watch for two large rocks in the middle of the river with one farther downstream. The take out is on the left above a small island.
3 PICNIC AREA BETWEEN WALLAND AND TOWNSEND Look for a small picnic area on the left side of Highway 321 on river left. Easy access and good spot to snorkel and swim.	- Work your way to river right after putting in and avoid the man made rock dams. - The river ambles through another small gorge with several holes good for fishing and swimming. - Pass a white house on the right bank on the river's edge near the Hesse Creek confluence. - The river splits into three channels as Hesse Creek enters, the center route is the safest. - You will pass under the Foothills Parkway. The section is good for swimming and smallmouth bass fishing.	FOOTHILLS PARKWAY BRIDGE - After a sharp right turn in the river, you will see the parkway bridge. - You can exit on river right underneath the bridge. - Alternatively, continue 100 yards through a rock jumble in low water and a fun rapid at higher water. Small access point on the right.
4 FOOTHILLS PARKWAY BRIDGE OLD WALLAND HIGHWAY Access Little River by either of two pull offs, beneath the bridge or just downstream across from a horse riding stable.	- The river meanders left with a wave and eddy just in front of a large limestone bluff. This is a good area for fishing. - When the river turns back to the right a few hundred yards downstream, look for a small access point where Doc Manning Road comes off of US Highway 321. This is a good swimming area, sometimes used for Baptisms.	DOC MANNING ROAD Doc Manning Road is a gravel dead end road off US Hwy 321 just upstream from Walland Center and the US Post Office. The access is steep.
5 DOC MANNING ROAD Doc Manning Road is a gravel dead end road off US Hwy 321 just south of Walland Center and US Post Office. The put in is steep, use caution.	- Paddle to the right side of the island just below the access point. - Look for Leatherwood subdivision on river right. A leather tannery was operated in this area. - Approach an abandoned concrete bridge with stars on the side - a good spot to stretch your legs on river left. Walk up to Walland Center Deli for lunch and fishing supplies. - Look for Chilhowee Inn, originally built in the early 1900's. The inn is just past the bridge on Old Walland Highway. - Past the Inn, there are shoals and slow spots. Watch for remains of an early hydroelectric dam on National Register. - Little River continues to Melrose Station Bridge, once a railroad stop.	PEERY'S MILL TWRA ACCESS - After going under Melrose Bridge, stay close to the river left bank. - Peery's Mill low head dam is ahead. You must exit the river on the left bank. A TWRA boat ramp provides easy access. This is a mandatory portage.

