

Sugarlands Stone Cabin Trail Description

The hike is approximately 3 miles long (6 miles roundtrip) and begins at the trailhead for the Old Sugarlands Trail near the park headquarters. The park headquarters (built by the CCC) is located next to the Sugarlands Visitor Center just off Hwy 441 near Gatlinburg TN.

Difficulty

- **First 2.5 miles** - Old Sugarlands Trail and Old Road, difficulty - easy to moderate.
- **Last .5 miles** - Faint footpath (may not be discernable), difficulty - moderate.
- **Last 200 ft.** - Stream crossing then steep climb, difficulty - moderate to difficult (depending on water flow).

Parking - There is a short pull-off that will hold 4 - 6 vehicles directly in front of the trailhead. The alternative is to park your vehicle at the park headquarters across the bridge.

Trailhead (Old Sugarlands Trail) - From the park headquarters, walk out to the highway and turn left toward Gatlinburg. Cross the bridge over the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River. The trailhead for the Old Sugarlands Trail is just past the bridge on the right.

Route Description - The route veers right at all intersections until you come to the section for the last .5 miles at the top of a hill, here you take a left and try to find the beaten down footpath made by other hikers going to the cabin.

- As you hike into the forest from the trailhead almost immediately you reach an intersection with another trail, **stay to the right**. Very soon (.1 mi) you'll pass a cliff on your left; this was an old rock quarry which supplied material for some of the roads built in the area.
- **Approximately .7 miles** into the hike you come to an intersection at a hollow on a ridge. The wider trail goes left up the hollow; you should **veer right** and follow the small path down towards the river. Once off the ridge the trail mounts a berm that was once Hwy TN 71. The trail follows the river upstream. Hiking is fairly level for the next mile.
- At **approximately 1.5 miles** the trail turns left away from the river. Not long after you reach an intersection. Look through the trees you may be able to see the old CCC Clock Tower in front of you. It's really not what I would call a tower; it looks more like a 10ft high monument with the plaques missing. Some folks mistakenly think it's the remains of a large chimney/fireplace. Nope, it's the CCC Clock Tower. **Follow the trail to the right**.
- Not far from the previous intersection, the trail turns left again and comes to another intersection (**approximately 1.7 miles**). The Old Sugarlands Trail continues straight ahead toward Cherokee Orchard Rd. Here you **take a right** and hike what appears to be an old roadbed. You should immediately see a small three sided stone structure on your left (it's almost right at the intersection) as you travel down the road. Supposedly this small structure might have been the CCC trash incinerator.
- At **approximately 2.2 miles** you will come to an intersection on the old road. A left takes you to the Sugarlands Cemetery. **Take the right** and follow the road to the top of the hill.

- At **approximately 2.35 miles** you should be at the top of the hill on the old road. The road appears to continue down toward the river, though the road looks to be congested with trees. Here, at the top of the hill, you will get off the old road. You're going to **take a left into the woods** and hopefully find a beaten down footpath made by other hikers going to the stone house.

At the time of this writing there was a fallen tree to the left (assuming you are at the top of the hill on the old road). It almost looks like the tree fell across another road that intersects with the road you're standing on. Take a left and cross over the tree. Whatever trace there was of this other road almost immediately disappears not long after climbing over the tree. Look for a faint footpath and follow it.

- Follow the winding footpath **approximately .55 miles** to the stone cabin. **The cabin is approximately 2.9 miles from the Old Sugarlands Trail starting point.**

Near the end of the footpath you'll need to cross two streams. The first is small and easily crossed by rock hopping. In fact the first stream may not have much water at all if it hasn't rained recently. After crossing the first stream you climb over a small hump and reach another stream called Big Branch. You're almost there; the stone cabin is across Big Branch and up the bank behind a rhododendron thicket. While the cabin is less than 200ft away, you probably can't see it through the rhododendrons.

Crossing Big Branch is not recommended if there has recently been heavy rains. My first attempt at reaching the cabin was after a few days of decent rain. You can imagine my disappointment when I discovered I couldn't rock hop or wade across. All that way for nothing, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

Four days later I tried again, this time the flow of Big Branch was down a good ways. But I still wasn't willing to rock hop with a tripod and camera attached. Instead, I hiked upstream and found a shallow area with small stones and sand on the bottom. I removed my shoes and socks, rolled up my pants legs, then waded across. The bank upstream was not near as steep so the climb up the hill was a lot easier too. The only downside is the deadfall and rocks on the hump between the two streams. Navigating upstream over those obstacles was slow and tedious.

Gear/equipment Suggestions

- **Small hand towel** - If you're not be able to rock hop Big Branch, you'll need to remove your shoes and socks then wade across the stream. A small hand towel for drying your feet off once on the other side of the creek would be appropriate. In addition, those who are tender-footed might want to carry some lightweight water shoes to use (like the kind you might use for kayaking).
- **GPS** - Since the last half mile of the route is off trail, you might want to track your hike with a GPS so you'll have the breads crumbs to find your way back. Personally I don't think it's necessary, but if you're unsure then it might be a good idea.
- **Wide angle lens** - You should bring a wide angle lens if photography is your objective. The rhododendron thicket surrounding the cabin is tight; there's not much room for maneuvering for an optimum perspective while shooting outside the cabin. The interior is a little more forgiving.
- **Water and Snacks** - At the very least you should take some water anytime you're hiking in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.