

ADDITIONAL TRAILS AT NATURAL BRIDGE STATE RESORT

Trail 5. Sand Gap Trail Length 7.5-miles

Our most challenging trail, Sand Gap requires 4 to 6-hours to complete. There are no shortcuts once you've started, so allow adequate time to make this trip before nightfall.

Sand Gap Trail begins near the upper end of the Balanced Rock Trail about 500 feet from the top of Natural Bridge. For the next 3.5-miles, Sand Gap follows an old logging road and is easy walking along the ridgetop. About 1.5-miles from the beginning of the trail, watch for a steel gate and turn 90 degrees to the right following the trail. Do not go through the gate. Beyond the gate is another road that leads off the park and into the land of lost hikers!

About 3.5-miles from the beginning, the trail descends steeply into Lower Hood Branch, still following an old road bed. It will soon level out in the vicinity of a bog, then turn right across a narrow bridge and begin to meander below the cliffs. At about 6.5-miles the trail descends to a bridge over Lower Hood Branch. From here, the trail climbs up the other side of the valley for about 0.2-mile following a skid road built by loggers in the 19th-century. As you climb up this section, watch carefully for the sharp left turn where the trail leaves this old road. From here, you'll wind around a couple of ridges then follow a fairly level grade for about 1.5-miles to the Hood Branch Trailhead near the skylift parking area.

Trail 6. Hood's Branch Trail Length 3.75-miles

Hood Branch Trail leads into the heart of Natural Bridge, and is just long enough so the crowds will be left behind. The trail begins under the Natural Bridge and follows the base of the cliffs to the Hood Branch Trailhead near the skylift parking area. About 2.25-miles from the Natural Bridge, the trail passes through a swampy section that was once cleared for a small farm. Cross two small footbridges and you'll soon see a trail shelter built by the Civilian Conservation Corps when they maintained a camp at Natural Bridge in the 1930s. From here you are 0.75-mile from the Hood Branch Trailhead.

An optional side trip along this route is about 1.5-miles from the Natural Bridge. The trail drops down and crosses Upper Hood Branch on a small wooden bridge. You have two options: you can bear left going upstream following the 0.75-mile Upper Loop that will bring you back to where you are; or you can bear right and follow the main trail out.

Trail 7. Henson's Arch Trail Length 0.3-mile

This short trail leads to a small but unusual limestone arch at the entrance to a cave. The cave is too small to be of much interest, but a ladder leads down into a sinkhole so that hikers can appreciate the cool, damp air beneath Henson's Arch.

Trail 8. Lakeside Trail Length 0.25-mile

This is a connecting trail between Whittleton Campground and other park trails and facilities. It begins across the road from the campground in the roadside parking lot, and follows the edge of the pond below Hemlock Lodge. It crosses a wooden footbridge and ends at the gift shop near Hoedown Island.

Trail 9. Laurel Ridge Trail Length 0.75-mile

Starting at the top of the Natural Bridge, this is easy walking around the rim of the cliffs. The trail goes past the skylift and winds out the ridge to Lookout Point, the sandy cliff visible from the Natural Bridge. Follow Laurel Ridge Trail on around the bend and you will come to the top of the Devil's Gulch, a steep stairway that leads down to Battleship Rock Trail and a shortcut to Hemlock Lodge and the parking areas. If you continue on Laurel Ridge past the Devil's Gulch, you will shortly arrive at another set of stairs on your right. This is the Needle's Eye Stairway, built in 1934 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, and it will also lead you to Battleship Rock Trail. Laurel Ridge Trail continues on to a dead end at Lover's Leap, with a commanding view of the canyon below.

Trail 10. Low Gap Trail Length 0.5-mile

This trail starts at the skylift parking area and climbs the hill to two footbridges. At this point the trail makes a switchback and continues to climb to a natural bench. After an easy walk, the trail ascends through a natural gap in the limestone. From here, the trail follows an old logging road and connects to the Rock Garden Trail. At this junction, hikers can go left to Hemlock Lodge, or right to the Natural Bridge.

Low Gap Trail provides the shortest route from the Natural Bridge to the skylift parking area, a distance of 1.25-miles. Hikers can start at the Natural Bridge and follow the Rock Garden Trail down to the Low Gap Trail which ends at the skylift parking area.

Trail 216. Whittleton Trail Length 2-miles

This trail was developed by the U.S. Forest Service and begins on the state park at the Whittleton Campground. Hikers should park near the check-in station and walk to the end of the left fork of the road.

Whittleton Trail is the easiest walking trail in the Red River Gorge. It follows Whittleton Creek for its entire length and ends along KY 15 at the entrance to the Tunnel Ridge Road. It serves as a connector between the trails in the Red River Gorge and Natural Bridge. Most hikers using this trail follow it to Whittleton Arch, a pleasant round trip of 2-miles from the campground. The arch is at the base of a sandstone cliff, and is not visible until you are there. It is not as spectacular as other arches in the area, but it is one of the largest. Whittleton Trail follows the grade of a logging railroad built in 1898 that ran from Natural Bridge to Chimney Top. Watch for signs of the Mountain Central Railway as you walk this trail.