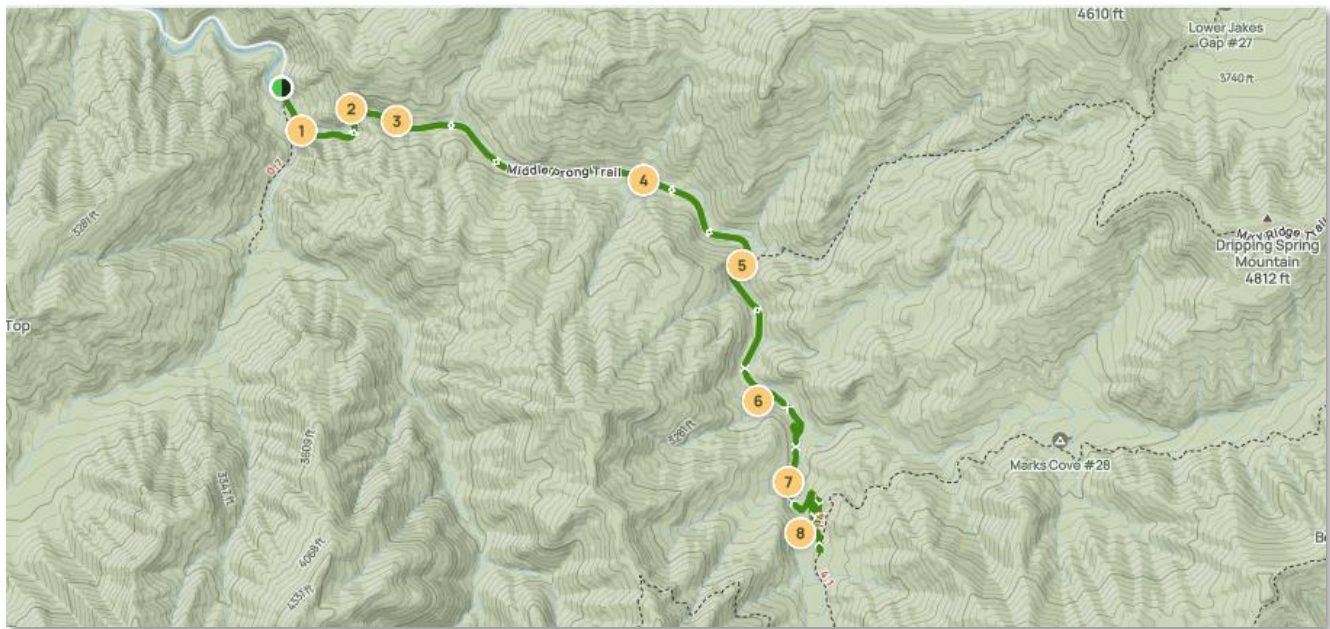
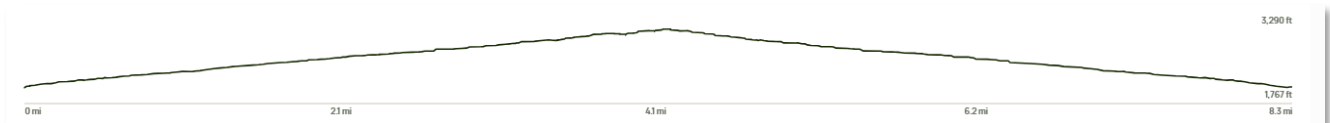


Indian Flats Falls Out & Back Hike Middle Prong Trail Trail Map



Elevation Profile



Trailhead

Follow the Laurel Creek Road from the Townsend Wye as you would if driving to Cades Cove. Soon after leaving the Wye, you will cross a bridge over the Middle Prong of the Little River and see the road to the Institute at Tremont to your left. At the institute the paved road will become gravel. Continue to the end of the road. You have arrived at the trailhead for the Middle Prong Trail.

Waypoints

- 1) Viewing Point for the cascade on the Middle Prong of the Little River.
- 2) Top of the cascade. Use caution, but from this rock outcrop you can see the top of the cascade.
- 3) Splash Dam.
- 4) Old Car left when the Little River Lumber Company left the park in 1939.
- 5) The ford over the Middle Prong to reach the trailhead of the Panther Creek Trail to Jakes Gap.
- 6) Site of a Little River Lumber Company logging camp. There were several.
- 7) The wooden bridge which replaced an old logging railroad trestle.
- 8) Indian Flats Falls. The end of the Middle Prong Trail is just beyond.

Hike Description

The Middle Prong Trail begins at the far end of the bridge over the Middle Prong of the Little River as you leave the parking area at the end of the Tremont Road. From there it extends 4.1 miles before it terminates in the trailheads of both the Lynn Camp Prong Trail and the Greenbrier Ridge Trail.

After you cross the hikers bridge over the Middle Prong continue straight ahead on the old Little River Lumber Company railroad grade. As soon as you cross the bridge you will see another railroad grade on your right. This one follows the Thunderhead Prong of the Little River. After crossing a bit of a make-shift bridge, this unmaintained trail continues for 0.7-mile and ends at the Thunderhead Prong¹. This is a very pleasant out-and-back hike that is particularly nice in the spring and the fall.

Returning to the Middle Prong Trail, soon after beginning your hike you will come to a log bench on the left of the trail. This simple log bench is a popular stopping point to view the Middle Prong Cascade. Why "cascade" and not "falls"? Well, in the minds of many it is a "waterfall". But, in my view the distinction is important, though not always clear. Basically, a waterfall is an unimpeded drop from the crest of the falls to a pool below. Think of water running off the side of a table. A cascade, by comparison, is a series of drops over a distance, very much like water running down a flight of stairs. Whatever you decide to call it, you have embarked on a trail along the Middle Prong of the Little River that is a series of cascades, one after another, with some pools in between.

As you hike up the old road grade you will come to a significant rock formation to your left (be very careful here). Looking upstream you can see the start of the cascade where the river is forced between rock formations on both sides. As you turn you can follow the cascade down to a sharp right bend at the end of the decent.

As you continue a short distance further, approximately 0.7 miles into your hike, you will come to two viewing benches and a three-step "falls". Some maps even identify this as "Lynn Camp Falls". It is not. It is the remains of a manmade structure called a "Splash Dam". If you examine the area carefully you will find holes drilled in the rocks around the area. A splash dam was a temporary dam build by loggers in late fall. Throughout the winter the impoundment was filled with floating logs. In the spring when the snow was melting and spring rains were filling the stream, the dam was destroyed, and the flood shot the logs downstream to a sawmill.

As you continue on (the trail gets a bit rocky in places) you will come to a "bridge" in the middle of the trail that spans nothing, except in the wet season. Beyond that a bit further the grade will level, and the terrain will open to a flat area where there once was a logging camp. On the right there will be a small berm or rise. Watch for evidence of a path or manway crossing it. Follow it and you will see an old car, now crushed by a fallen tree.

This area continued to be used by the Little River Lumber Company for five years after the park was formed in 1934. But in 1939 the day came when the Little River Lumber Company was required to leave. Anything left behind, so the story goes, became the property of the park. On the day they were to leave, they were one driver short. The car, again according to the story, a Cadillac, remained behind and sits there to this day.

At 2.3 miles into the hike the Panther Creek Trail, coming from Elkmont by way of Jakes Gap, fords the river to join the Middle Prong Trail. Look slightly upstream and you can see where the Panther Creek trail comes to the river on the other side. As you continue on, the road will swing to the left. You are now entering another area that was a former logging camp. Look for ruins left behind. On the left if you keep an eye out you will see the remains of a structure with a now fallen brick chimney. Also, there are old pieces track and metal parts.

As you hike you will come to a switchback. If you were to explore a bit beyond the two sharp turns in the switchback you would see a grade where the tracks extended forward and away from the turn made by the trail. These extended areas allowed trains carrying logs to move through the turn, throw a switch, and then back down to the next turn and repeat to move. In the end, by simply moving forward and backward, the load of logs was able to

move from the top of the switchback to the bottom without far more railroad track.

Moving on from this first set of switchbacks you will come to a wood bridge made by the national park after logging ceased. At one time, there was a single railroad trestle bridge crossing this whole section. This is the stream on which you will soon come to Indian Flats Falls. But, before getting there the trail must climb to another set of switchbacks, this time three. Our trail to the falls will be in the second.

After crossing the bridge, you will come to a turn to the right, followed a bit further on by two more gentle turns to the left. You will have then entered another set of switchbacks with a sharp right turn just ahead. When you reach the sharp left turn pause to look at the cliff wall straight ahead. Do you see the evidence of drilling in the rocks? Good. Now, look to your right. You should see a manway. This is the unmarked trail to the falls. Use care! Also, the area around the falls can be very slick when wet. It is not a long trail, but it is very rocky with some difficult steps. You will come out at the top of the middle falls. The upper falls are to your left. You will be standing on the crest of the middle falls, and the lower falls crest will be visible below on your right.

When you leave be as careful as you were coming in. I encourage you to then continue the trail and hike another tenth of a mile or so to the trail sign marking the end of the Middle Prong Trail. Straight ahead, the Greenbrier Trail will take you 4.2 miles to the Appalachian Trail near the Derrick Knob Shelter. To your left the Lynn Camp Prong Trail will take you 3.7 miles to the Mire Ridge Trail, and from there, about 2.5 miles to Jakes Gap. Add another 3 miles and you are at Elkmont.

Comments

This is not a difficult hike, ignoring the short manway to the falls. The trail follows an old logging railroad grade. There are some very rocky areas, and the trail does climb for most of its length. But the climb is not steep. Take your time and enjoy your surroundings. I would also encourage you to hike the entire length of the trail beyond the manway to Indian Flats Falls. At the end of the Middle Prong Trail you will come to the Lynn Camp Prong trail, a sharp turn to your left, and the Greenbrier Ridge Trail, straight ahead.

This is another trail that I prefer to hike from mid to late fall through spring. When the leaves are off the trees the views are incredible. The spring wildflowers are also something to behold.

In addition to the In-&-Out hike described here, the Middle Prong Trail can also open the door to several Point-To-Point hikes, as well as Loop hikes, even multi-day hikes. For example, by continuing on to the Appalachian Trail by way of the Greenbrier Ridge Trail, and then turning either north or south, several options are open. The Lynn Camp Prong Trail can lead to a Point-To-Point hike by following the Mire Ridge Trail and the Jakes Creek Trail into Elkmont. A loop trail by hiking to Jakes Gap on the Mire Ridge Trail and then taking the Panther Creek Trail to the ford of the Middle Creek Prong, then back to the Tremont parking area is another option. I will tell you that the last time I hiked the Lynn Camp Prong Trail and the Mire Ridge Trail to Jakes Gap I was very disappointed with how poorly maintained those trails were after campsite #28. That said, Mire Ridge offered some excellent views of the A.T. Ridge through Thunderhead.

¹ At one time there was a bridge over Thunderhead Prong that the trail crossed and continued to the Appalachian Trail in Spence Field at the base of Thunderhead Mountain.

Photos

Pictures of various points of interest along the hike.



View of Cascade from a log bench soon after the start of the hike.



Close-up form the top of the cascade.



At the second location of benches, you will see this "falls". It is the location of a manmade Splash Dam.



Car left behind when Little River Lumber Company pulled out. Not enough drivers.



Ford the Middle Prong here to take the Panther Creek Trail to Jakes Gap.

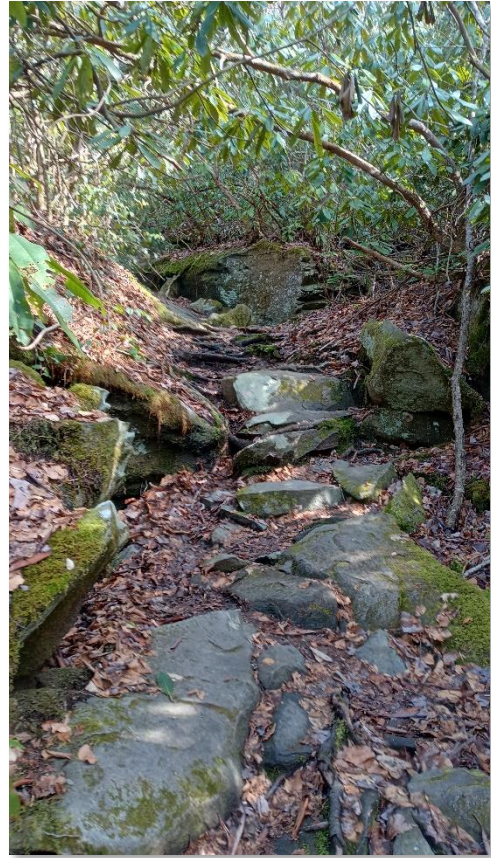


Remains of a structure in the logging camp.

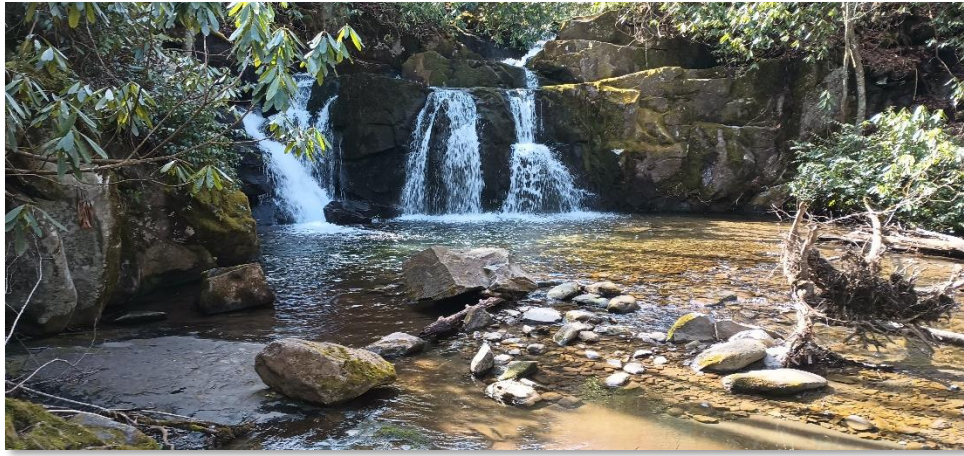


Piece of railroad track,
and

Bridge to replace trestles from logging days.



The start of the manway to the Indian Flats
Falls. Be careful...



Upper Falls



Middle Falls



Lower Falls from the top