

# Porters Creek Trail

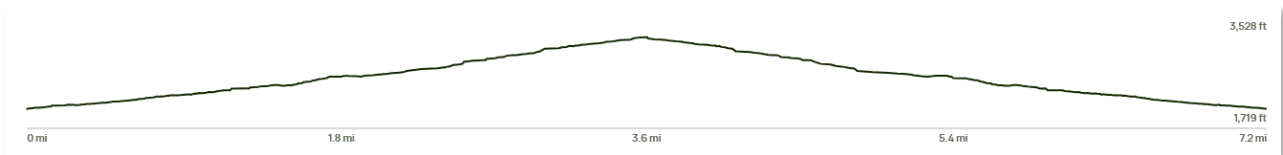
## Out & Back Hike

### From the end of Greenbrier Road to Backcountry Campsite #31

#### Trail Map



#### Elevation Profile



#### Trailhead

US 321 traveling East from Gatlinburg, in the Pitman Center Area, just before the bridge over the Little Pigeon River, turn right at the park entrance on the Greenbrier Road. Follow the Greenbrier Road past the Ranger Station, a picnic area, the Ramsey Cascade access road, and a second picnic area, to the parking area at the gated end of the road. The Porters Creek Trail begins at the gate.

#### Waypoints

- 1) Junction, Brushy Mountain Trail. Here also is an old barn, a springhouse, and the Smoky Mountain Hiking Club cabin.
- 2) Fern Branch Falls (not much to see in the dry season).
- 3) Trails end at Backcountry Campsite #31.

#### Hike Description

The Porters Creek Trail is an easy to moderate hike with an official in and out distance of 7.2-miles and an elevation gain of approximately 1,500 feet. The Porters Creek Trail is one of the two most popular trails in Greenbrier Cove. The other is the Ramsey Cascade Trail. Bordered on the North by the Greenbrier Pinnacle ridge, to the South and East by the Appalachian Trail Ridge, and to the West by Mt. Leconte, Greenbrier Cove was one of the

most populated areas in the park with evidence of human activity everywhere you look. The trail is particularly popular in the spring due to the abundance of wildflowers and the Fern Branch Falls.

As you approach ½-mile watch for a set of rock steps on the right side of the trail. At the top of the stairs, you will see evidence of a former homesite. You will also see rock walls and evidence of a springhouse in the creek behind. Back on the trail be alert for another manway to the right. At the top you will see the Ownby cemetery. Just beyond that is a stream crossing over a log footbridge and then a fork in the road. Take the right fork and then look for another well used path to the right. Follow that to an old log barn undergoing restoration, then to a springhouse, and beyond that the double cabin that once served the Smoky Mountain Hiking Club (back in the early 60's I had the opportunity to spend some time here while hiking in the area with the Purdue University Outing Club).

Return to the loop road and trail to continue on to the bridge over Porters Creek and then on to Fern Branch Falls on your left (sometimes just a trickle in the dry season). You are now about 1 ½-miles to Backcountry Campsite #31 and the end of the Porters Creek Trail. Throughout this section of your hike, you will be hiking in some mature forest with impressive trees.

### Comments

In the early 1800's (perhaps as early as 1800) the Whaley family immigrated to Greenbrier Cove. They came from North Carolina via a "road" that started somewhere near today's Smokemont. That road today has become the Dry Sluice Gap Trail. From the top they dropped down in the headwaters of Porters Creek and from there generally followed the route you hiked today from Backcountry Campsite #31 to the area known as Porters Flats.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were 26 families living in Greenbrier with 225 children attending the local school located where the rangers station is today. There were four grist mills, three cemeteries, two churches, two stores and two blacksmith shops. In 1925 Whaley offspring had built a two-story hotel where Porters Creek joins Middle Prong (the bridges to the Ramsey Cascade trailhead). I encourage you to look for evidence of these early settlers as you hike.