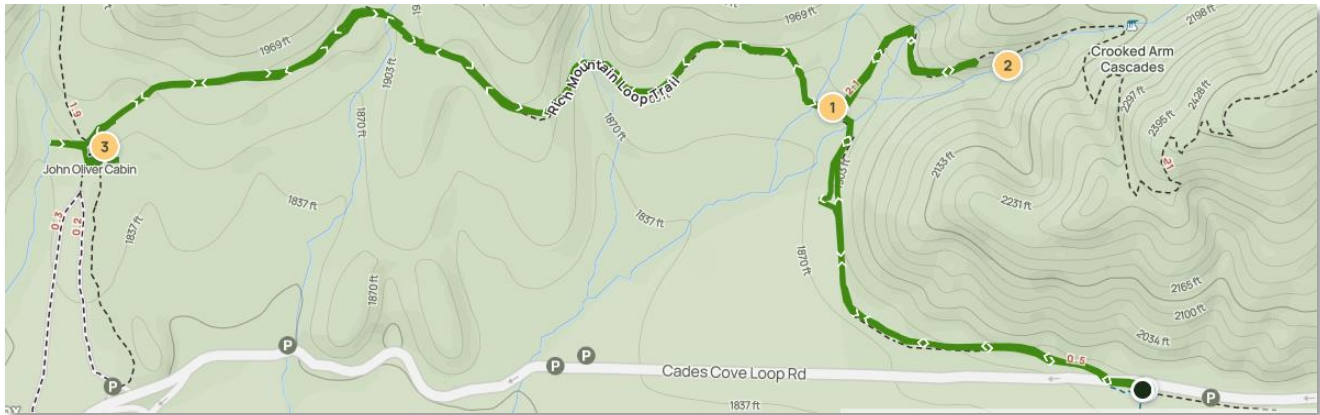


John Oliver Cabin Hike

Out & Back on Rich Mountain Loop Trail

Possible side trail to Crooked Arm Cascade

Trail Map



Elevation Profile



Trailhead

The trailhead is in the parking area at the beginning of the Cades Cove Motor Loop. Walk to the west end of the parking area where the Cades Cove Loop Road begins. Cross the road and begin your hike at the Rich Mountain Loop Trail sign.

Waypoints

- 1) Junction, Crooked Arm Cascade Trail
- 2) Crooked Arm Cascade
- 3) John Oliver "Honeymoon Cabin"

Hike Description

This is a relatively short Out & Back Hike totaling just 3.6 miles. There are four stream crossings with no bridges, that are usually rock hops. But if there have been recent rains you may get your feet wet. Extra socks in your backpack to change into when you get back to the car would not be a bad idea.

There are no steep climbs, though there is a modest climb with an elevation gain of less than 140 feet on the short side trail to the Crooked Arm Cascade. After that the hike is a series of three short climbs between the stream crossings, the largest of which is 60 feet. All of the streams in question flow from Rich Mountain and into Abrams Creek, the creek that flows over Abrams Falls and then ultimately into Chilhowee Lake, a TVA impoundment on the Little Tennessee River.

About ½-mile into your hike you will come to the Crooked Arm Branch, the creek that follow over Crooked Arm Cascade. Immediately after you cross the stream the Crooked Arm Ridge Trail junction

is on your right. From here it is a short hike with a modest climb to a point on the trail from which you can view the Crooked Arm Cascade, one of the least visited cascades in the park.

(Note: when you cross the Crooked Arm Branch on the Rich Mountain Loop Trail, if there is little or no water in the branch, you may want to save the Crooked Arm Cascade for another day. That said, the geology of the cascade is interesting. Also, this “trail” follows an old road that climbed the shoulder of Rich Mountain. At the top it ends in another road that today is the Scott Mountain Trail. That road passed through Schoolhouse Gap, into Tuckaleechee Cove and Townsend, a combination of roads that gave settlers in Cades Cove access to Maryville. All of this, an aggressive hike that adds to our understanding of the determination of those who populated this cove.

From the Crooked Arm Branch trail junction, you are just under a mile to the cabin of John Oliver and his wife Lurena. The Olivers were the first permanent European settlers in Cades Cove. They arrived in the cove in 1818 and built the John Oliver cabin in 1821. The cabin that you see here is not the original Oliver Cabin in which John and Lurena lived and raised their family. This is the “Honeymoon Cabin” built for their son, Elijah. The original Oliver cabin was several hundred feet behind this cabin to the right of the Rich Mountain Loop Trail, another old road that leads to the present day Indian Grave Gap Trail, and then to the Rich Mountain Trail, both old roads that lead ultimately to Townsend.

By 1850, the population in the Cove had grown to over 650 (and still growing). In addition to the cabins, most homesite also had a spring house, corn crib, smoke house, and barn. Root cellars were also common.

The advent of the Civil War brought a major disruption to those living in the cove. I touch upon this in more detail in the *Cades Cove Hike & Drive Loop* under *Guided Hikes*. For now, I will focus on John and Lorena’s son, Elijah. Elijah was born on March 20th, 1824. With the coming of the war, bands of raiders began to invade Cades Cove from North Carolina. Their objectives were far from honorable, among them the intent of forcing young men into Confederate service. Elijah and many of those in his generation left the cove and fled to Townsend, Maryville, and other areas further north. After the war, Elijah returned to the cove in 1865 with his family and bought the land on which he established his farm and homestead at the west end of the cove, just before the Abrams Falls parking area and trailhead. There is a parking area on the Loop Road, and a marked trail/road to Elijah’s farm. I encourage you to take the short Our & Back Hike to Elizabeth’s farm as well. The farm is more complete, with buildings that include a smokehouse, corn crib, spring house, and barn.

Enjoy your time at the John Oliver Cabin. Be sure to explore the surroundings and, by all means, look at the view toward Gregory Bald. The slight flat section that you see on top of the mountain is the bald. That is a far more demanding hike than this one. None the less, I encourage you to put it on your To Do list. Return to the trailhead the same way you came.

Comments

As you hike the Rich Mountain Loop Trail from the Cades Cove Loop Road parking area to the John Oliver cabin you are hiking through many years of history that I have separated into three periods.

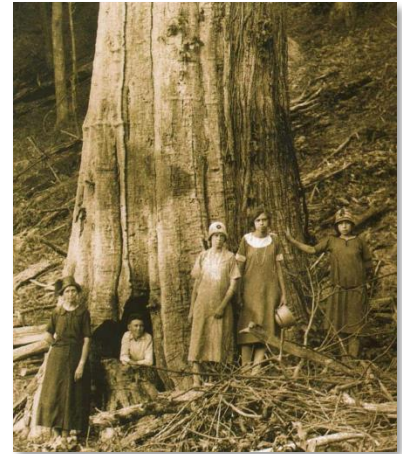
- 1) Before European Settlers
- 2) Farming and Logging
- 3) Coming of the National Park

Throughout all of this history there was impact on the Forests in the area, some minimal and some massive. Our focus here will be limited to the immediate area in and around Cades Cove, and to the Southern Appalachian Cove Hardwood Forests. What were these forests like before the activities of man, what are they like now, and what is their future going forward? The Southern Appalachian Cove

Hardwood Forest is a unique forest type, unlike any other in the United States. Within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, there are over six distinct Southern Appalachian Forest Types, each with its own collection of tree species that, taken together account for more tree species than the entirety of Europe.

Cades Cove Before European Settlers

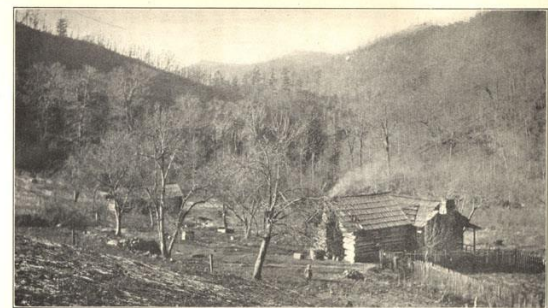
Try to imagine what this land looked like before settlers like John Oliver, and logging companies like the Little River Lumber Company, arrived. This photo was taken in the early 1800's somewhere in the Southern Appalachians in a Cove Hardwood Forest. The picture is of an American Chestnut. Trees like this covered the mountains around Cades Cove and throughout the park.



Before settlers arrived the occupants of this land were Cherokee Indians. They did, as all humans do, alter the land. But nowhere near the extent of settlers and loggers. Between 1903 and 1930, the Little River Lumber Company removed one billion (1,000,000,000) Board Feet of lumber from the areas it controlled in the GSMNP. The Little River Lumber Company was only one of the many logging companies in what is today the national park. Trees of choice for the loggers were Tulip Poplar, Chestnut, and Basswood. Neither the settlers nor the loggers practiced any form of reforestation. The loggers didn't care, and the interest of the settlers was farming and grazing land, not reforestation.

Farming and Logging

Next, visualize how this land looked from the mid-1800's until the National Park arrived officially in 1934. The photo to the right was taken from page 176 of Horace Kephart's book, *Out Southern Highlanders*, published in 1921. (I highly recommend this book) Virtually all of the trees from this farm and the surrounding mountains have been removed in order to provide crop land and land to graze cattle and pigs...no fences, just free range. Further, in the summer months cattle and pigs were driven to the balds where the weather was cooler, and the grasslands had revived from the previous year's grazing. The land bore no resemblance to what we see today. And, what we see today bears no resemblance to what was here before settlers and loggers arrived.



A Mountain Home
From *Our Southern Highlanders* by Horace Kephart, 1921 edition, page 176.
Copy located at Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina

Coming of the National Park

Now, let's move on to today. Is the land, the forest, going to return to what it was before farmers and loggers arrived, or is it going to continue as it is today? And, perhaps more important, does the land, both forest and grassland in the cove, look as it did when the park began, or has the change already begun?

The activities of man can change an environment very quickly. Large areas of forest can be logged, grassland can be plowed for farming, even the landscape can be changed dramatically with heavy equipment. Restoration, however, will take time, possibly many lifetimes. In the case of lands in and around the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the process of this restoration is referred to as *Forest Succession*.