

# Big South Fork

## Background

The Big South Fork National River & Recreation Area (BSF for short) is a 125,000-acre tract of land in East Tennessee near the Kentucky/Tennessee borders. Scout Troops could take a weeklong trip to Big South Fork and not experience everything. Big South Fork features impressive geologic formations, massive forests, and the beautiful Big South Fork of the Cumberland River.



## Camping

Bandy Creek Campground is in the middle of BSF and serves as an excellent base camp for troops with both older Scouts and younger Scouts. The younger Scouts can camp at Bandy Creek and venture out on various day hikes around the park that visit unique geologic features such as Twin Arches or Needle Arch. During the afternoon and evening, the younger Scouts can work on basic Scout skills or participate in fun, educational programs put on by the BSF rangers. Older Scouts can backpack numerous trails in the area. Simply drop off a few leaders and the older Scouts at a trailhead and pick them up in a few days. Because Bandy Creek Campground is located on the river, it can also serve as an excellent base camp for an extended canoe/kayak trip. Campsites at Bandy Creek cost fifteen dollars a night and feature luxuries such as shower houses, running water, tables, and grills. To sum up Bandy Creek in one word: base camp.

## Hiking

Hiking is a great way to see BSF. Some national parks and recreation areas such as Great Smoky Mountains National Park and LBL have excellent scenic parkways; Big South Fork, on the other hand, features dirt/gravel roads and rough, character building trails. However, hikers are rewarded with access to rock houses, arches, waterfalls, beautiful forests, and scenic overlooks.

Honey Creek Trail begins from the Honey Creek Trailhead Parking Lot. Honey Creek Trail has some of the roughest terrain in BSF. However, it also has some of the most beautiful. Hikers must be willing to crawl through narrow passages between boulders, descend climb on ladders covered in mesh, and climb over boulders. The trail gives access to rock houses, waterfalls, and bluffs. Because of the tight spaces and ladders, it is not recommended to backpack this trail. The loop does make a beautiful day hike. If hikers wish to camp, the Honey Creek Overlook parking lot, 0.8 miles from the Honey Creek Trail parking lot, has access to a few camping areas.



# The River

The Big South Fork of the Cumberland River is ranked as one of the ten top whitewater rivers in the United States. It has everything from smooth Class I stretches of water to violent Class IV rapids in addition to waterfalls that should never be run. The water volume of the Big South fork of the Cumberland River is rain dependent, and the best time to run it is around Mother's Day. The river runs through a deep gorge that is isolated from most highways. This can make rescue difficult. Paddlers should inform park staff of their plans prior to putting in.

One way to see the Big South Fork National Recreation Area is to canoe the river from Bandy Creek Campground to Blue Heron Mine. This trip takes around three days and will expose paddlers to all conditions ranging from mild Class I stretches to violent Class IV rapids. While on the river, paddlers should be keen to notice rocks that have been eroded by the rushing river. A lot of the boulders have their bases and undersides eroded away so that they appear to have a mushroom shape. Once the trip is through, paddlers should take a look at Blue Heron Mine. This is a restored mine from the early 20th Century and is worth the time taken to see it.

Angel Falls can be a very dangerous rapid if not run correctly. This rapid does not always seem difficult, but looks can be deceiving. Angel Falls was formed after someone set off dynamite in the gorge. This caused large boulders with very sharp and jagged edges to fall into the river and form Angel Falls. There is not much room for error. When the current is rough, paddlers can be ejected from their boats and dashed against the rocks located just underneath the surface.



# Side Trips

Rugby is a small community near BSF. Thomas Hughes founded Rugby in the 1880's as a utopian community. Seventeen of the buildings were constructed in the Victorian style and are fully restored. This village is a unique attraction that is very different from the architectural style most of us are familiar with. The Hughes Library and Christ Church Episcopal are both unchanged since the 1880's and are worth checking out. This trip is a relaxing conclusion to an eventful trip to Big South Fork.

Alvin C. York was a WWI Congressional Medal of Honor recipient. He was born in the hills of Tennessee and grew up in Pall Mall Tennessee. Corporal York's actions led to the capture of almost three hundred German soldiers, and he became the most decorated soldier of World War I. The state gave him a homestead upon his return from Europe. This homestead is now operated as a State Historic Park, and is open to the public for tours and viewing. The homestead of Alvin C. York is an excellent opportunity for Scouts working on civic related merit badges or anyone interested in the history of Tennessee.