

# Red River Gorge Trails and Descriptions

The Red River Gorge has miles and miles of trails for all ages and experience. ***Be careful when hiking through the park as many of the trails come extremely close to high cliffs and bluffs. This is NOT an area for small children to run and play. Be extremely careful as each year, 1 or 2 people fall to their deaths because they do not exercise proper caution.***

The trails listed here are the more popular ones and are listed on many of the maps available in the area. The map shown here can be readily picked up at the Gladie Historic site, Natural Bridge State Park, and many of the local camp stores.

I have not hiked all of these trails though I plan to someday. The descriptions listed here are from various sources including personal experience. Though there might be several ways to get to a trail, feature or arch, I have used the most common approach. I have marked ones that would be good for a quick, easy walk for the inexperienced for day hiker. Unfortunately, the problem with many of the smaller hikes is that once you finish one, you have to drive to the next one. So plan your trips accordingly.

Though it is not really a trail, another important "hike" is the scenic automobile loop through the gorge. KY 715 starts at Pine Ridge, off of KY 15, and ends on KY 77. Though this is not really a loop, you can take KY 77 back to KY 15. This loop is a leisurely drive through the gorge and if one includes a couple of gravel road side trips, one can see most of the major attractions within the gorge. The loop is only about 40 miles long and be completed within 1 long morning or afternoon.

The Red River Gorge National Recreation Trail consists of a network of trail segments within the Geological Area. Some of these trails lead to specific features. Others are connected to other trails for hiking longer distances. The map is used only to show trails, features and direction. For hiking the longer, cross-country trails, topographical maps are suggested for use. These maps show both elevation and trails. And, they are readily available at the Gladie Historical Site. The information center at the Gladie Historical Site is open 7 days a week, April through October and weekends only in the fall and spring. The Gladie cabin, a reconstructed historic house, is the only remaining structure in the gorge, dating back to the early logging period of the late 1800's and early 1900's.



There is a topographical map available from the Stanton Ranger's office for \$11. It includes coverage from about 6 different USGS quads combined to cover the entire Red River Gorge Geological Area/Clifty Wilderness Area/Natural Bridge State Park/and surrounding areas of the Daniel Boone National Forest adjacent to these areas (with status to indicate private lands, etc.). It is a must for any serious hiker!!

I love music of all types and I think Love is great. I don't like to see, however, band names and long ago romances carved into rock faces. ***Defacing these rock formations is a crime.*** Please don't do it and encourage others not to also.

## Official Trails

- Sheltolee Trace National Recreation Trail - Trail # 100
- Double Arch- Trail #201 (.8 miles)
- Courthouse Rock- Trail #202 (2.4 miles)
- Auxier Branch- Trail #203 (0.8 miles)
- Auxier Ridge- Trail #204 (1.1 miles)
- Greys Arch- Trail #205 (0.9 miles) Moderate
- Cliff- Trail #206 (0.8 miles) EASY, QUICK
- Rock Bridge- Trail #207 (1.3 miles)
- Hidden Arch- Trail #208 (1.0 miles)
- D. Boon Hut- Trail #209 (0.7 miles)
- Bison Way - Trail #210 (3/4 Mile) Moderate
- Sky Bridge- Trail #214 (0.9 miles) EASY, QUICK
- Whittleton Branch- Trail #216 (2.0 miles)
- Whittleton Arch- Trail #217 (0.2 miles)
- Angel Windows- Trail #218 (0.5 miles)
- Swift Camp Creek - Trail #219 (6.7 miles)
- Koomer Ridge- Trail #220 (2.3 miles)
- Rough- Trail #221 (7.2 miles)
- Pinch-em-Tight- Trail #223 (1.8 miles)
- Silvermine Arch- Trail #225 (0.9 miles)
- Buck- Trail #226 (1.5 miles)
- Rush Ridge- Trail #227 (1.0 miles)
- Wildcat- Trail #228 (1.3 miles)
- Tower Rock- Trail #229 (1.0 miles)
- Princess Arch- Trail #233 (0.5 miles)
- Whistling Arch- Trail #234 (0.2 miles)
- Chimney Top- Trail #235 (0.3 miles) EASY, QUICK

## Unofficial Trails and Points of Interest

- Moonshiner's Arch
- Half Moon Arch and Rock
- Star Gap Arch
- Raven's Rock (2.0 miles) Very strenuous
- Timmons Arch
- Indian Arch



## Trail Descriptions

### Sheltowee Trace - #100 Strenuous

Named for Daniel Boone (his adopted Shawnee name), this trail traverses the entire length of the Daniel Boone National Forest. Part of the Trail passes through the Red River Gorge. Along this trail can be found towering walls, Indian Arch and beautiful vistas.

### Double Arch - #201 .8 Mile one way - easy/moderate

The Double arch trail leads off from Auxier Branch trail. The trail is fairly level for most of the way. It only goes up hill at the very end. The trail winds along the base of the ridge offering a view of Double arch from the bottom. It then winds around the arch and begins to go upward. There is a rock formation on the left hand side of the trail which looks like a head of a Copperhead. Just before the Arch(s) there is a series of steps which leads up to the arch. The Arch itself is composed of a major arch and then a thin arch above the first one. There is a trail off to the right of the arch that leads to the top.

### Courthouse Rock - #202 Strenuous

This trail splits off of Auxier Ridge leads to its namesake, Courthouse Rock. It mainly follows Auxier Ridge at its base as it winds along. The trail ends at the base of Courthouse rock. One can make a loop trail by taking the stairs up to Auxier Ridge and following it back to where the trail starts. If you are looking for views of the Gorge, this not a trail to take. It is mostly up and down hill the whole way. You can also reach this trail by way of Auxier Branch Trail.



### Auxier Branch - #203 1.0 Strenuous

The trailhead is located at the end of Tunnel Ridge Road. It starts down immediately and continues to descend into the valley. The Double Arch trailhead is located about 2/10 of a mile past the beginning of the trail. At the bottom of the valley, there is a nice level place to camp with a stream nearby to cool your feet in. The trail begins immediately back up and ends at the Courthouse Rock trail. The trail is well marked with the 'White Diamond'



### Auxier Ridge - #204 1.1 Easy

This trail begins in a parking lot off of Tunnel Ridge Road, about 4 miles along the road. The trail is very easy to follow, just look for the 'White Diamond'. It's level for the most part and while the scenery is not spectacular at the beginning, the wait is while worth it. The trail opens up on a high ridge with sheer dropoffs on each side. Clearly visible are Raven's Rock, Double Arch, Courthouse Rock and more. The trail connects to Courthouse Rock by a series of steep stairs. One can make a loop of Auxier Ridge and Courthouse Rock trails that will take a halfday to complete. This is a great trail for beginners both in terms of

views and hiking ease

### Grey's Arch - #205 .9 Miles

This feature is an spectacular arch, making a very popular area to visit. Take Tunnel Ridge Road from KY 15. The Greys Arch parking lot is about 1 - 2 miles up this road. The trail leads off to the right of the parking lot and wanders through the woods. The trail merges with Rough trail about 1/2 mile into the hike. The trail then wanders until one comes upon a sign pointing Rough trail (221) to left and Greys Arch straight ahead. If you take the Greys Arch trail you will end up on top of the ridge, just in front of the arch. If you want to walk out onto the arch, you will have to climb down a small, well worn path. It is very, steep and though not very dangerous, it should not be tried unless you are a fairly good climber. If you do go down, be careful as the sides drop off very quickly. You cannot reach the bottom of the arch from here unless you rappel off the side of the arch. This arch is very popular for repelling even though it is illegal. If you want to see the underside of the arch, you have to take the Rough trail. It goes below the ridge and the arch appears on the right hand side of the trail. A first time visitor thinks that this is often the closest the trail comes to the arch. This is incorrect. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CROSS TO THE ARCH HERE.** The undergrowth hides a 100 ft drop into a rock filled gully. I should know. The first time I went to Grey's Arch, this is exactly what happened, except I didn't fall. To reach the arch, continue down Rough Trail. You will switch back toward the arch and begin to descend into a box canyon. After a series of steep stairs the arch will be right in front of you with Rough Trail heading off to the left. A large recessed Cave will be on you right. The trail will go straight ahead and then cut back sharply to the left. It will then begin to climb steeply up to the arch itself. This trail is rated as moderate only because to reach the bottom of the arch, the trail heads down at a modest rate (steep at times). That and you will have to do some scrambling to get to the base of the arc

### Cliff - #206 - .8 Miles Easy

The Cliff trail starts and ends in the Koomer Ridge Campground. Look for a sign around campsite #13 or #35. Or if you stay at the campground, there are many paths leading to the trail from the cliffside camp sites. This trail follows the cliff here and never gets too close to the edge. There are several areas which open up to a spectacular view, especially at a small amphitheater built at the cliff edge. There are split rail fences whenever or stone fences along the cliff edges. The only problem is that a creek runs over the trail at one point as it disappears over the edge. It tends to make the area a little muddy so be advised. The whole trail is over extremely level ground and loops back to the campground so you can't get lost. Parking for this and all of the Koomer Ridge Campground trails is at the front of the campground to the left as you come in.



### Rock Bridge - #207 1.3 Moderate

Rock Bridge gets its name because the arch span crosses over Swift Camp creek. It is the only one in the area that was formed by water running over, under and through it. The trail starts at the picnic area at the end of a 3-mile gravel road off of 715 at Pine Ridge. It loops back around and ends at the same picnic ground. It doesn't matter which trail head you take because Rock Bridge is located at the Middle of the loop. Assuming you take the "Official" trailhead, marked by a large sign explaining Rock Bridge, the trail starts down immediately. The trail goes down a very steep grade until it bottoms out in a gully. It goes down to Swift Camp creek. Creation Falls is a beautiful waterfall right before the Bridge. You can cross the bridge but you have to climb up a couple of rock faces 4-5 feet high. The trail continues up and crosses Swift Camp Creek trail and Bear's Den trail. The grade back to the picnic area is not as steep as the one down and I recommend to those who are not in shape to go this way because it is far easier and you can see the whole loop.

### Whittleton Arch - #217 Easy

This trail begins in the Koomer Ridge campground in the primitive camping area. Park at the parking lot for hikers, and walk along the road toward the primitive area. You will find a well established path toward the pit toilets. Take this path and follow the trail past the toilets. From this point on, it's about .8 of a mile to the arch itself over very level ground. You will come to a fork in the path, take the left fork. From that point on, it is a quick walk to a place where you can see the arch from the overlook. To get to the arch, there is a series of steps that will lead you down and to the arch. To do the loop, continue down some more steps next to the arch. The trail will hug the ridge with a moderately steep climb towards the end. The trail will T-into the Koomer Ridge trail. Follow the sign (or turn right) back to the campground.



### Angel Windows - #218 .5 Easy

This is another nice walk with easy access to KY 715. The walk seems to descend into Parched Corn creek but actually stays fairly close to the ridge top. The trail is level for most of the way and shouldn't be challenging to anyone. There is one area where one has to be careful. A huge tree along the path has fallen creating a large hole in the middle of the path. One has to scramble around the hole and it has gotten quite muddy. Just beyond the arches there is a really beautiful canyon leading down into the gorge. The recessed caves here are extremely large and nice.

### Swift Camp Creek - #219

### Koomer Ridge - #220

### Rough - #221

### Pinch-em-Tight - #223 1.8 Miles, Easy -



## Moderate

Starting south of Grey's Arch, Pinch-em-Tight is a fairly easy to moderate connector trail. It connects up to Rough trail. Some nice views at the beginning before it starts through the woods.

### Silvermine Arch - \$225 .09 miles, Moderate

The Silvermine Arch trail again originates at the Koomer Ridge Campground. It starts at the same place as Koomer Ridge Trail and they run together for about 1/4 of mile. Follow the sign as it points off to the right, and you will end up walking along the back of the the campground. (Note you can also pick up the trail at the rear of the campground, across from the restrooms). The trail leads off into the woods and soon breaks into many smaller trails. Follow the main trail and soon you come to 2 sets of steep stairs. These stairs lead directly to the arch. Unfortunately the only way back is the way you came. The only hard part though is the stairs so take you time. Parking for this and all of the Koomer Ridge Campground trails is at the front of the campground to the left as you come in.

### Buck - #226

### Rush Ridge - #227

### Wildcat - #228, 1.3 miles Easy

The trailhead for this trail starts on KY715, about a mile past Chimney Rock Road. Though the parking is on the left, the trail starts across across the road. It dips down and up immediately but then mirrors KY 715 until it reaches an USFS road. The trail then follows this road and begins to descend into Swift Camp Creek. The trail is fairly easy with high rock walls with only one spot where is gets a little steep. Once it dead ends on Swift Camp Creek, the trail gets a lot rougher. An interesting feature of this trail is the evidence of the old logging roads that once criss-crossed the area. You can see the old roads at several places along the trail

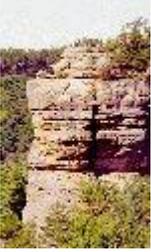


### Tower Rock - #229, 1.0 miles, Moderate

This trail starts on KY 715 with a small parking area (another for maybe 2 cars) on the south side of the road. The trail circles Tower Rock but does not lead to the top. For this, you must be a rock climber with the proper gear. The trail circles the base but doesn't offer any real views. It is a nice hike though on a hot day as it is



covered by trees the whole way. Round trip should take about 30 minutes.



### Princess Arch - #233, .5 miles, Easy

The Princess Arch trail starts at the Chimney Top road turn around. The trail leads off to the right of the turn around and goes for about quarter mile. It slopes down a little at the arch but it is not a serious walk. The trail leads out over the arch. Getting down underneath the arch is a little trickier. Head back up the trail and about 50 yards up the trail there is a path leading down from the right (conversely, as you are heading toward the arch, the trail is on the left). This is a steep climb down to the arch, so be careful. This will lead you back to the underside of the arch. To get back up, you will have to either use this path or climb up the rock face around the arch.

### Whistling Arch - #234, .5 miles, Easy

This is an enjoyable easy hike. From the trail head on KY 715, to the arch, the entire trail is fairly level. The arch itself is unspectacular but the area around the arch is very pretty. The arch gets its name from the sound it makes when the winds blow through it (it happens rarely). This walk makes a great warm up to Sky Bridge or just a nice walk on a warm day.

### Chimney Top - #235, .3 miles, Easy

Chimney Top is a rock formation which resembles a huge chimney. It raises 900 feet above the valley so the view is spectacular almost all of the time. The trail head starts at the left of the parking lot at the end of the Chimney Top Road. The trail itself is black topped all the way to the top of the cliff. Don't be alarmed if the trail seems to narrow. It opens onto the top of the cliff but there is a fence around the whole ledge. A tree used to be at the entrance to the fenced in area. Someone has since pushed it over and the USFS has carted it away. The bark of the tree was stripped off and it looked as if it had been twisted around in the wind. To get to the trail, take KY 715 through the upper Gorge. Turn onto Chimney Top Road. Take this gravel road until it ends at the parking lot.

## Unofficial Trails and Points of Interest

### Moonshiners Arch – Easy

Moonshiner's gets name from the moonshiners who used the arch create their "White Lighting". There is a hole in the top of the arch, which acted as a flue for the wood fires. To get to the arch, take KY 715 to the concrete bridge. Park in the parking lot on the north side of the bridge and take the trail on the far right that leads down to the river. Follow this trail for about 1/2 mile. The left side of the trail will open up to a grassy, marshy area with a trail leading off through it. Take this trail and almost immediately, you come to the arch.



### Halfmoon Arch and Rock - Easy, Moderate, Strenuous

Halfmoon Arch itself is easy to get to. Take the Chimney Top drive approximately 4.5 miles. You will see a high embankment on the left with some well worn paths up it and a wide parking area with trash cans and a guard rail on the right. Park here. When you go up the embankment, follow the path straight out the ridge. The trees will begin to thin out as you approach the arch. When the ridge appears to narrow to a thin ledge of rock that one has to jump down to, you are standing on top of Halfmoon arch. You can see Chimney Top off to the right and the path to Halfmoon Rock straight ahead. This is the easy part. If you want to see the arch you can either jump down to the ledge of rock and then jump down to the ground (the arch is off to the left) or one can climb down the rock face to the left to just in front of the arch. Be careful because it drops off on the left of the face. This was the moderate part. If you want to go up to the top of Half Moon Rock, the strenuous part is next. If you are afraid of heights or not of sure footing, DO NOT ATTEMPT THIS. It is not particularly dangerous, but if one is not careful, one can be seriously hurt or killed. To reach the path up to the top of Halfmoon arch, either cross onto the rock ledge and work around until you are at the bottom of the cliff face or cross under the arch and follow the path to the right of the rock ledge to a small climb up to the base of the bottom of the cliff face.

Now comes the fun part. One has to lift himself up onto the rock face and climb up the cliff. It is not particularly hard (except the first jump onto the face). You can see the path as it works its way up the face. None of the climbing is hard but the drop offs are extremely sheer. I have seen some hikers practically walk up to the top but unless you are a mountain goat, you will have to climb a little. Once on top of the rock, the views are some of the best in the gorge. Unfortunately, the only way down is the way you came up and in many ways is more difficult because you have to look down the cliff.



### Star Gap Arch - Easy

Take the Tunnel Ridge Road off of KY 15. About 1 mile from the end of the road, a old forest service road on a high ridge will be on your left. You can park here and take the road that leads off straight ahead. You will soon come to a path leading off to the right. If you take this path, you will soon arrive on top of the arch. Once on top of the arch, the only way down is to backtrack up the trail, looking for a path leading off to the left. Take this path (there is a small climb of about 5 feet) and you will backtrack back under the arch.

DO NOT begin hiking where you can see the Arch from the road (that's further up the road). There is a path leading off to the right and one might think that this leads to the arch. It doesn't though it does give you a good view of the arch from across the valley.

If you chose to go straight ahead on the path, instead of going to the arch, the road soon ends and a network of paths continue. All follow the ridge until the ridge ends. Note: some of these paths (on the left) are on private land. Be considerate and do not take these.



### Raven's Rock - Strenuous

This is possibly the hardest non cross-country hike in the Gorge. It would be the hardest with a pack for sure. But though the hike is hard, the rewards are worth it. First, though, a little history because this is an unusual hike. While most of the hikes are dirt paths, half of the trail up to Raven's Rock is a paved road. Back before the park service bought the land, a private venture planned to develop the rock (possibly putting a restaurant at the top). So a toll road was put in from the river to the very top. Fortunately the venture fell through and when the park service acquired the land, the area has begun to revert back to a natural habitat.

The trailhead is hard to find because it is not obvious. If you are coming from Sky Bridge, on KY 77 there is a group of houses on the right just past the Iron Bridge. There is a road turning off here but it is privately owned. You will have to park just past the Iron Bridge (there is space there for 2 cars) and walk up to the road or head up to the Martins Branch trailhead parking lot and then walk back. A third option is to turn into the group of houses, take the first lane on the right and ask to park there. There is a slight charge (\$2.00) and there is limited space. There is no parking along the road.

Once you cross over the creek into the group of houses take the first lane on the right. You will see the USFD barrier just ahead of you. For the next mile you will walk in a straight line along an old dirt road. The road is very swampy and muddy. After about a quarter mile you will begin to follow the river and it begins to dry out a little. After a mile the fun begins. The trail opens into a wide area with what looks like a dirt road heading off to the left. Take this road and it will immediately turn into the paved road mentioned earlier. It will also begin to head up the hill at a steep grade. It is like that for the next mile. Except for 2 level spots, the trail from this point on is all uphill. It follows the contours of the hill and except for the steepness, a very nice hike. The trail is almost continuously covered by the trees lining the road. When you come to a 'S' curve with high sandstone rocks on both sides you are just below the top. There are several nice views from here as the ridge begins to narrow. You are also at the hardest part of the hill. Just after the 'S' curve the road goes up at a very, very steep grade but then levels off at the top. The road really narrows here and quite interesting to see, as the sides drop off very quickly.

Once on top of Raven's Rock, the views are the best in the Gorge. You will have almost a 360 degree view of the entire area. Auxier Ridge and Raven's Window are clearly

visible. The sheer cliffs are lined with iron railings (a holdover from the developer) which is nice. It allows you to close to the edge without fear. It is a hard hike but worth it. I wouldn't rate it a hike for the casual hiker though. If it is your first time or if you have limited time, I would skip this unless I was in good shape and willing to spend a half a day. There are far less challenging hikes with great views for the once-a-year hiker.



### Timmons Arch - Easy, Moderate

The beginning of this hike is very easy depending on where you start. Finding the arch is another matter. Though it is not difficult to find, getting there can be hard. Assuming you start at the beginning of Wildcat Trail, take this trail until it deadends onto Swift Camp Creek. Turn left and go around the hollow in front of you. Once you come back around, Swift Camp Creek is right in front of you and down a bluff. Swift Camp Creek trail leads off to the left and there should be a trail leading off to the right, down towards the creek. Take this trail down. Once beside the creek, you will need to cross it and start up the hill on the other side. Here is the hard part. There is no trail at all to this arch from here. You will have to work your way up the side of the hill while drifting slightly to the left. Once you reach a solid rock wall, the Arch should be off to your left. The arch is visible in the winter but not in the summer. You can also not walk under this arch. You will have to scramble a little to get to the top



### Indian Arch – Moderate

This arch can be reached 2 different ways as it is located in the middle of Sheltowee Trace. Either by taking Sheltowee Trace to the arch or by starting on Bison Way to Sheltowee Trace (turn left!), this arch is fairly easy to get to. If you come the Bison Way route, you make a sharp right hand turn, go up some stairs and you are there. You can see the arch from below along the trail.