

# MOUNTAINS

## Plan like a ranger when you visit parks



**Word from the Smokies**  
Frances Figart  
Columnist

Visitation at national parks is increasing and expected to continue to grow throughout the summer. Great Smoky Mountains National Park is experiencing high monthly visitor numbers, suggesting we may top 2019's record-breaking 12.5 million visitors by the end of 2021.

Even during 2020's lockdown, GSMNP visitor numbers reached 12 million. Like many parks and businesses in park gateway communities, the Smokies continues to modify operations in response to the pandemic. The park is fully accessible for outdoor recreation, but some indoor operations and educational programming remains limited. The best way to learn about current park operations is to visit NPS.gov.

In anticipation of this unusual summer, the National Park Service released a top-ten list of visitation tips encouraging members of the public to plan like a ranger.

"It really boils down to the notion that a trip well planned is more likely to be a successful one," Caitlin Worth, acting management assistant at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, explained. "Planning like a park ranger will help visitors have great experiences, make lasting memories, and stay safe."

**1. Have a plan...and a backup plan**  
A successful park visit begins at home with a trip to NPS.gov. Park websites have ideas about where to go, what to see, what to do, and most importantly, what you need to include in your planning. Flexibility and a backup plan are key, too, in case of changing weather conditions, road closures, and other unforeseen circumstances.

**2. Be patient with each other and us**  
Always remember to allow yourself extra time to get from one place to another and enjoy the experience. National parks are popular places to be in summer—especially as we transition out of pandemic lockdown mode.

**3. Travel off the beaten path**  
There are more than 400 national parks across the country. Try exploring the lesser-known ones. They can be a great option for travelers looking for all the beauty of nature, hiking trails, and rich history, with fewer crowds and lines.

**4. Reservations may be needed**  
Many campgrounds and lodges in and around well-known parks are already fully booked. Having a reservation guarantees you won't arrive at a park only to find that you need an entrance reservation, there's no place to



Ranger Caitlin Worth, acting management assistant at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, answers visitor questions and helps them plan their activities. PROVIDED BY NPS

sleep, or a popular trail is closed.

**5. Ask a ranger**  
Have a question? Ask a ranger. "We're always here to help," said Worth. "We can answer questions, share park stories, and let you know what activities are available before or during your visit to the park."

**6. Explore the new NPS app**  
Yes, NPS now has its very own app at NPS.gov—and new content is being added every day! The new NPS app offers tools to explore more than 400 national parks, including interactive maps, tours, and accessibility information. Plan ahead and you can even access it offline while in the park.

**7. Keep safety in the picture**  
Everyone who visits parks loves to take photos. But it's important to take them where it is safe. Some popular trails and views may be especially

crowded this year, so an unobstructed photo might require a bit of a wait.

**8. Don't pet the fluffy cows**  
"When the National Park Service wrote this tip, they were referring to the bison that are a big draw to some of our parks out west," said Worth. "But the Smokies iconic megafauna—elk and black bears—are just as treasured and we need your help to keep them safe! Keep your distance from wild animals, never feed the wildlife, and when taking pictures, use your zoom and give them room."

**9. Leave only footprints**  
Everyone—rangers, volunteers, visitors—plays a vital role in protecting the national parks, which belong to all of us. Caring for and sharing some of our nation's best treasures with millions of people means that litter removal is vital to the ecological health and beauty of all

parks, the Smokies included. So, carry out what you brought in, leave the spots you visit as you found them, and please stay on the trail to respect these incredible places.

**10. Ruffing it?**  
Many parks allow pets on leashes and in campgrounds, and some even have kennels. But sometimes these furry friends are best left at home. Discover what you can (and can't) do with your pet and follow the B.A.R.K. principles found at NPS.org.

*Frances Figart is the editor of Smokies Life magazine and the Creative Services Director for the 28,000-member Great Smoky Mountains Association, an educational nonprofit partner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Learn more at smokiesinformation.org and reach the author at frances@gsmassoc.org.*

## No plea deal as Stroupe murder trial moves ahead

**Lurah Lowery**  
Hendersonville Times-News  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Phillip Michael Stroupe II, who is set to be transferred back to the Henderson County Detention Center, will go to trial in October and face the death penalty, according to District Attorney Andrew Murray.

Stroupe is charged with first-degree murder in the July 26, 2017 death of Mills River resident Tommy Bryson. He is also charged with first-degree kidnapping and robbery with a dangerous



**Stroupe**

weapon.  
Stroupe's trial is set to start Oct. 2.

In May, documents in Stroupe's case file show that Murray's office and the defendant's attorneys were working toward a guilty plea rather than proceeding with a capital murder trial in October. Murray told the Hendersonville Times-News, however, that no plea deal negotiations took place.

Stroupe is being held at Central Prison in Raleigh. He was transferred from

the Henderson County Detention Center to the prison at Sheriff Lowell Griffin's request because of a "serious medical/mental condition" that the county jail couldn't provide adequate health care for, according to a May 25 safekeeping order in Stroupe's case file.

Stroupe stated in a court document that he has spina bifida.

Judge Peter Knight revoked Stroupe's safekeeping orders on July 22 and ordered his "prompt transfer" back to the Henderson County Detention Center to await trial.

Stroupe's next court date is Aug. 9 in

Transylvania County on five felony charges – two counts of possession of a firearm by a felon and one count each of carrying concealed gun, flee/elude arrest with a motor vehicle and robbery with a dangerous weapon.

*Lurah Lowery is the education and city government watchdog reporter for the Hendersonville Times-News, part of the USA Today Network. Email her at llowery@gannett.com. Follow her on Twitter @lurahlowery and Facebook.com/lurahjournalist.*

### Citizen Times

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

**Customer service**

To view important information related to your subscription, visit [aboutyoursubscription.citizen-times.com](http://aboutyoursubscription.citizen-times.com). You can also manage your subscription at [account.citizen-times.com](http://account.citizen-times.com). Contact the Citizen Times for questions or to report issues via email at [citizentimes@gannett.com](mailto:citizentimes@gannett.com) or 1-800-672-2472.

**Operating hours are:**

- Monday-Friday: 8:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m.
- Saturday: 7:00 a.m. -11:00 a.m. for technical support only
- Sunday & holidays: 7:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

**Full access subscriptions**

Subscribe and save today by visiting [citizen-times.com/subscribe](http://citizen-times.com/subscribe). Subscriptions below are billed per month and include access to citizen-times.com, tablet and smartphone apps, and the e-Edition, a digital replica of the print edition.

- Delivery of the Monday through Sunday print editions: \$68.00\*
- Delivery of the Friday through Sunday print editions: \$39.00\*
- Delivery of the Sunday and Wednesday print editions: \$32.00\*
- Delivery of the Sunday print editions: \$25.00\*

\*Plus applicable taxes

**Corrections and clarifications**

Our goal is to promptly correct errors. Email us at [accuracy@asheville.gannett.com](mailto:accuracy@asheville.gannett.com) to report a mistake or call 828-232-5829. Describe the error, where you saw it, the date, page number, or the URL.

**Contact us**

Customer Service ..... 1-800-672-2472  
 News Director ..... Jewell Walston | 828-232-5829  
 Advertising ..... 828-252-5611  
 Obituaries ..... 828-232-5966

**Postal information**

Citizen Times, USPS #236-000, ISSN #0336-0000, is published Monday through Sunday at 14 O. Henry Ave., Asheville, NC 28802. Periodicals postage paid at Asheville, NC 28802.  
 Postmaster: Send address changes to Customer Service, PO Box 62670, San Angelo, TX 76906.