

= Cloudland Canyon State Park =

Cloudland Canyon State Park is a 3 @, @ 485 acre (14 @. @ 10 km ²) Georgia state park located near Trenton and Cooper Heights on the western edge of Lookout Mountain . One of the largest and most scenic parks in Georgia , it contains rugged geology , and offers visitors a range of vistas across the deep gorge cut through the mountain by Sitton Gulch Creek , where the elevation varies from 800 to over 1 @, @ 800 feet . Views of the canyon can be seen from the picnic area parking lot , in addition to additional views located along the rim trail . At the bottom of the gorge , two waterfalls cascade across layers of sandstone and shale , ending in small pools below .

The park , previously known as Sitton Gulch (or Gulf) or Trenton Gulf , was purchased in stages by the state of Georgia beginning in 1938 . Under President Franklin D. Roosevelt , a project of Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression built the first facilities and signs in the park , which opened the following year . Today the park features a variety of campsites , cabins , hiking and recreational activities .

= = History = =

Cloudland Canyon was designated a state park in 1939 when the state began acquiring land from private owners . Three of these owners , from the Mathews , McCauley and McKaig families , still reside in the area . Expansion of the park continues sporadically as new land is purchased for it . The park was originally 1 @, @ 924 acres (7 @. @ 8 km²) , and has been expanded to its present size of 3 @, @ 485 acres (14 @. @ 1 km²) .

Until 1939 the only access to the area (and much of Dade County , Georgia) was through Tennessee or Alabama . That year Georgia began work on Highway 136 to connect U.S. 41 to the recently established park . The Civilian Conservation Corps did much of the early work to construct the state park and access roads .

= = Geology = =

The park is located on the Cumberland Plateau , atop Lookout Mountain . On the summit of Lookout Mountain , the waters of Daniel Creek and Bear Creek cut gorges through the rock , converging to form Sitton Gulch Creek . The flat @-@ topped mountains of the Cumberland Plateau are significantly different from the narrow Armuchee ridges beyond nearby Chickamauga Valley to the east . From a geological standpoint , Lookout Mountain is transitional between the flat @-@ lying sedimentary beds of central Tennessee , and the ridges and valley to the east , which display more intensive folding and faulting . Most of the canyon 's rock formations consist of sandstone ; shale layers below the sandstone are marked by pine trees .

Lookout Mountain was created through a combination of seismic activity and erosion . It was uplifted during the period of mountain building that formed the Appalachians , known as the Appalachian orogeny . Over 200 million years ago , the modern @-@ day parklands lay beneath an ocean . When first formed , the entire mountain was underwater , but the rim of the canyon eventually became a beach along the edge of the receding ocean . As the ocean dried up , Sitton Gulch Creek and its tributaries , particularly Daniel Creek , eroded the rock . The sandstone forming the bluffs has a tendency to fracture into blocks , creating unusual boulder formations . The concave shape of the top of Lookout Mountain also drains rainwater through fissures into the underlying limestone , forming miles of subterranean caves in the area .

The canyon is more than 1 @, @ 000 feet (300 m) deep , ranging in elevation from 800 feet (240 m) to over 1 @, @ 800 feet (550 m) ; the park 's peak elevation is 1 @, @ 980 feet (600 m) . The bottom of Cloudland canyon contains a slope of rock talus , which are sandstone and shale fragments . The valley floor is also rich in fossil @-@ bearing limestone .

= = Hiking trails = =

The Park contains several well @-@ marked trails which allow visitors to view the geology of the canyon and its surroundings , which spans millions of years . A paved , wheelchair @-@ accessible trail about 0 @.@ 25 miles (0 @.@ 40 km) long overlooks the rim of the canyon . The park also features four more extensive hiking trails , including one backpacking trail . These trails are generally considered moderate in difficulty .

The Waterfalls Trail begins on a paved section , at the main overlook , and progresses into the canyon along a 40 @-@ degree slope . Most of the trail consists of gravel , and a 600 @-@ step staircase . Each waterfall emanates from Daniel Creek , and both cascade down sheer faces at 60 feet (18 m) and 90 feet (27 m) . The trail is generally considered to be a strenuous hike , which can take up to 90 minutes to complete . Cherokee Falls is 0 @.@ 3 miles (0 @.@ 48 km) from the trailhead ; Hemlock Falls , at the bottom of the canyon , appears at 0 @.@ 5 miles (0 @.@ 80 km) . Each cascades into small pools at the base of the canyon , and continue down through a boulder @-@ strewn stream bed . The creek flow feeding the waterfalls varies considerably according to the season . The Sitton 's Gulch trail , commencing at the bottom of the Waterfalls Trail , runs parallel to the creek until it ends in a parking area in Trenton .

In contrast , the 4 @.@ 8 @-@ mile (7 @.@ 7 km) long West Rim Loop Trail is rated as moderately difficult , although it contains a few short , steep rocky sections . A scenic hike beginning at the Daniels Creek Bridge , it offers panoramic views before climbing out of the canyon and onto the plateau . This trail also provides views of Trenton , Georgia , neighboring Sand Mountain , and of Cloudland Canyon . Rhododendron and mountain laurel thickets are interspersed with sourgum and dogwood ; large oaks , hickories , hemlocks and maples shade the trail . Cottages , West Rim , and Walk @-@ In Camping areas are accessible via the West Rim Loop . Passing over varied terrain , most of the hike is moderately difficult , and is considered strenuous along several short sections .

The 2 @.@ 0 @-@ mile (3 @.@ 2 km) Backcountry Loop Trail provides access to the park 's eleven secluded primitive hike @-@ in camping sites . Beginning at the parking area for group camping , the trail passes through hemlock groves , before descending on a moderate grade into a hollow filled with spring and summer flowers . At the far end of the loop , hikers emerge from the hemlock groves onto level trail , among oaks and hickories , before returning to the parking area .

In the fall of 2011 , the park reopened the Bear Creek Trail , which had been closed to hikers for nearly a decade . This approximately 9 @.@ 0 @-@ mile (14 @.@ 5 km) trail is the longest trail in the park . This trail begins as a spur off of the Back Country Trail and drops down to Bear Creek . After crossing the creek , the trail continues up until it becomes a loop around the northeast portion of the park . Around the area of the creek , the trail crosses over private property for a brief distance . During wet seasons , the creek crossing can be difficult as there is no bridge or dry crossing available .

= = Facilities and activities = =

Cloudland Canyon State park features a variety of camping and lodging options . There are 16 rental cottages as well as a group lodge . The park also offers 73 tent , trailer and RV sites , 30 walk @-@ in camp sites , and 11 back country camp sites for backpackers . Four pioneer sites provide facilities for groups of tent campers . The East Rim has 24 camp sites located along a loop road ; many of the sites can accommodate RVs , and all feature water and electric hookups . Bathing facilities are located nearby . The West Rim Camp ground , located across the gorge and away from the park 's busiest section , is located in thick forest , and hosts approximately 48 camp sites spread along two loops . It too offers bathing facilities .

Picnic areas include a group pavilion , tennis courts , a children ? s playground and a disc golf course . The park has an interpretive center near the main parking lot , adjacent to the canyon . Annual events hosted in the park include a Wildflower Program in April , Adventure Weekend (also in April) , and a Kids ' Catfish Rodeo in May .