

Mountain Parkway Trails Corridor Outdoor Recreation

For outdoor enthusiasts, sightseers and families looking for fun vacations, the Mountain Parkway Trails Corridor is a prime destination. Daniel Boone National Forest, Cumberland Plateau, Red River Gorge, Kentucky River, The Knobs—these are the natural features that define this region, and for travelers to the area, turn any visit into automatic opportunities for adventure. Whether it is a relaxing river float, and enjoyable hike, an extended camping excursion or an intensive rock climb, the choices for outdoor fun are as diverse as the land itself.

Want to see Kentucky at its wildest? The Red River Gorge, which is located within the Daniel Boone National Forest, is the place to go, and the Red River Gorge National Scenic Byway is the way to get there. One of only three National Scenic Byways in Eastern Kentucky, this 46-mile road to adventure guides visitors through some of the most rugged, most beautiful terrain in the state. Heading north from the town of Zachariah, this scenic route circles the Red River Gorge Geological Area and provides travelers with many panoramic overlooks as well as stops at many points of interest. For instance, Angel Windows is a sandstone arch at the end of an easy, 1/4-mile hike. Just to the north on the Byway is Sky Bridge, the largest and most popular arch in the Red River Gorge Geological Area, and it is accessible by a 1/2-mile trail. Further down the Byway is Gladie Historic Site, the location of an early settlement, and today, it is the site of Gladie Cabin, a reconstructed log home dating back to the late 1800s. To the west of Gladie Cabin is Raven Rock, a large stone outcropping that can easily be seen from the Byway. Travelers on the Byway will exit the western end of the Red River Gorge through the historic Nada Tunnel. This 900-foot tunnel was built for a narrow-gauge railroad in the early 1900s and is now a one-lane passage for automobiles.

In the Red River Gorge, there are 90 miles of trails, giving hikers the opportunity to have close-up views of many of the fantastic rock formations, waterfalls and over 100 natural stone arches in the area. For a real walk on the wild side in the Gorge, the Clifty Wilderness, 12,646 undeveloped acres that were designated as wilderness by Congress in 1985, offers a rugged, challenging landscape for hikers. The Sheltolee Trace passes through the western end of the Clifty Wilderness. The Trace is Kentucky's famous, 269-mile national recreational trail that runs the length of the Daniel Boone National Forest and thus the entire Mountain Parkway Trails Corridor from north to south. For an extended stay to explore the trails, the nearby Koomer Ridge Campground has primitive tent camping and 19 RV sites.

Taking on the Red River Gorge area alone is one option, but experienced help is available. Red River Outdoors is a family-owned outfit that specializes in historical tours of the area, guided hikes, and organized rock climbing and caving trips. In addition, their trained staff is available to give climbing lessons. At their rental shop, they can provide

everything necessary for a fun trip into the Gorge, including maps, guidebooks, climbing gear, camping supplies, canoes and cabins.

The Torrent Falls Climbing Adventure in Torrent Falls – familiarly known as the *via ferrata* – which is close to the Red River Gorge can give anyone who has ever wanted to scale the sheer face of a mountain the chance to literally “hang out.” *Via ferrata* (in English, “Iron Way”) is a fixed-protection climbing path that has been popular in Europe for years. This safe rock climbing system allows visitors to test their skills scaling a rock face. And just how safe is it? The iron rungs used to anchor the cables into the rock are rated to hold over 9500 pounds. Climbing gear is provided, and for the really serious, expert instructions are available. No experience is necessary, and rock climbers from 10-years-old and up are invited to test their skills. Also on site is a climbing gear store, which is the most complete in Eastern Kentucky.

The Torrent Falls Climbing Adventure is actually part of Torrent Falls Scenic Resort, so rest from a long day of rock climbing is not far away. The 42-acre retreat features a bed and breakfast and log cabins for the weary and beautiful, cliff-side scenery for the sightseers, including the 165-foot Torrent Falls, the tallest waterfall in Kentucky.

The Natural Bridge State Resort Park is also in the Red River Gorge area, and it offers visitors more chances to explore the rugged beauty of the region, which could start with its namesake, the Natural Bridge, a 75-foot-long, 65-foot-high sandstone arch. For an easy way to view this natural wonder there is a sky lift available. The 2200-acre Park (it also resides in the Daniel Boone National Forest) has two campgrounds, Whittleton and Middle Fork, which have a total of 82 campsites with utilities and 12 primitive campsites. In addition, the Hemlock Lodge has 35 rooms as well as private cottages. There are ten hiking trails within the Park, and they range from half-mile strolls to 7-1/2-mile challenges. In addition, the famous Sheltopee Trace passes through the Park. For the young adventurers, there is plenty to enjoy at the Park, including a miniature golf course, and at Hoedown Island Lake, pedal boats and hydrobikes.

In this part of the Red River Gorge, climbers really enjoy their pizza, especially if it comes from Miguel’s Pizza and Climb Shop, located near the entrance to the Natural Bridge State Resort Park. Not only is this a great place for a pizza, but because it is also a climb shop, it is the local hang out for area climbers who freely share advice, so both good food and helpful climbing information are on the menu.

The Kentucky Reptile Zoo is also close to the Natural Bridge State Park. A non-profit organization, the Zoo has one of the best venomous snake collections in the county. It features native copperheads, rattlesnakes and cottonmouths as well as species from across the world, including spitting cobras, rhinoceros vipers, puff and death adders, king cobras, and green and black mambas. In addition, the Zoo exhibits non-venomous reptiles such as lizards, turtles, anacondas, pythons and alligators. Educational reptile shows are presented three times daily.

To the northwest of the Red River Gorge area, the 648-acre Pilot Knob State Nature Preserve features a self-guided nature trail to the top of the 730-foot-high Pilot Knob, one

of the tallest knobs on the Cumberland Plateau. The 1-1/2-mile hike is strenuous but the view from the top of the knob is spectacular. This is thought to be the place where Daniel Boone first saw the Bluegrass Region in 1769. From the top, visitors can also see the Cumberland Plateau and The Knobs Region.

Not all the adventures in the Mountain Parkway Trails Corridor involve rocks—especially since the Kentucky River and its three main tributaries run through the region. The Three Forks—the North, Middle and South—tumble out of the Cumberland Plateau and meet at Beattyville to form the Kentucky River. Here aquatic outdoor opportunities abound. The Department of Fish and Wildlife stocks the rivers on a regular basis with largemouth bass, striped bass, catfish and other fish to make an angling excursion onto these popular waterways worthwhile. Vacationers can also bring their boats, rafts, canoes or kayaks to simply spend a leisure, lazy day on the many miles of streams that slowly flow through the region.

Golfers enjoy the views as much as the game at the Corridor's 9-hole courses - Estill County Golf Club in Irvine, Beattyville Country Club in Beattyville and Meadows Golf Course in Clay City.

The Mountain Parkway Trails Corridor is an adventurer's paradise. And in this case, "adventurer" can mean any visitor from the hardcore outdoorsman to the dedicated hiker to the occasional sightseer because, in such geological diversity, opportunities abound for anyone who wants to enjoy this land of great natural beauty.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

- Red River Gorge: (606) 663-2852; www.southernregion.fs.fed.us/boone/rrg.htm.
- Koomer Ridge Campground, Red River Gorge: (606) 663-2852.
- Clifty Wilderness, Red River Gorge: (606) 663-2852.
- Red River Outdoors, Slade: (606) 663-9701; www.redriveroutdoors.com.
- Natural Bridge State Resort Park, Slade: (606) 663-2214; www.state.ky.us/agencies/parks/natbridg.htm.
- Miguel's Pizza and Climb Shop, Slade: (606) 663-1975.
- Via Ferrata Climbing Adventure/Torrent Falls Scenic Resort, Torrent Falls: (606) 668-6441; www.TorrentFalls.com.
- Kentucky Reptile Zoo, Slade: (606) 663-9160; www.geocities.com/kentuckyreptilezoo.
- Pilot Knob State Nature Preserve, Powell County: (859) 622-1476; www.naturalareas.eku.edu/pine.htm.