

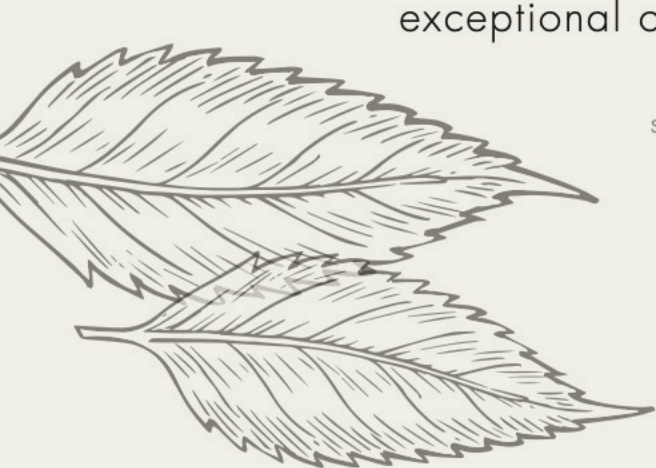
NATURAL WONDERS

A photograph of a person sitting on a large, mossy rock in a forest. The person is wearing a blue cap and a grey shirt. The background is filled with green trees and foliage. The foreground shows a dirt path and some roots. The text "NATURAL WONDERS" is overlaid in large, green, 3D-style letters with black outlines. The word "NATURAL" is on the top line and "WONDERS" is on the bottom line. The text is positioned in the center of the image, partially obscuring the rock and the person.



Explore two mesmerizing nature destinations located within 50 miles of Jackson County for an exceptional outdoor adventure experience.

STORY BY **ELIZABETH LAW**



Nature has a way of creating scenes which are sensationally beautiful to the human eye. Incredible rock formations covered in vibrant green moss, stunning cove overlooks and uniquely towering tree lines are just a few of the details from the natural wonders known as Buggy Top Cave and the Sewanee Natural Bridge.

BUGGY TOP CAVE TRAIL

A magnificent scene sits between Sewanee and Sherwood, Tennessee known as Buggy Top Cave. Within these Cumberland Plateau slopes, a curved overhanging bluff towers 150 feet tall and broadly spans 100 feet wide.

The lightly trafficked out-and-back trail is two miles long with abundant steep inclines and sizable boulders. A scenic overlook can be viewed while trekking along the edge of Spur Ridge before beginning a descent toward the cave entranceway. While touring this subterranean passage, outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy spotting various wildflowers such as trilliums, yellow trout lilies and bluets. The hike is classified as moderate and will be challenging for inexperienced hikers. White trail-markers along the path are clearly visible to assist with direction and remind hikers to stay on the designated trail.

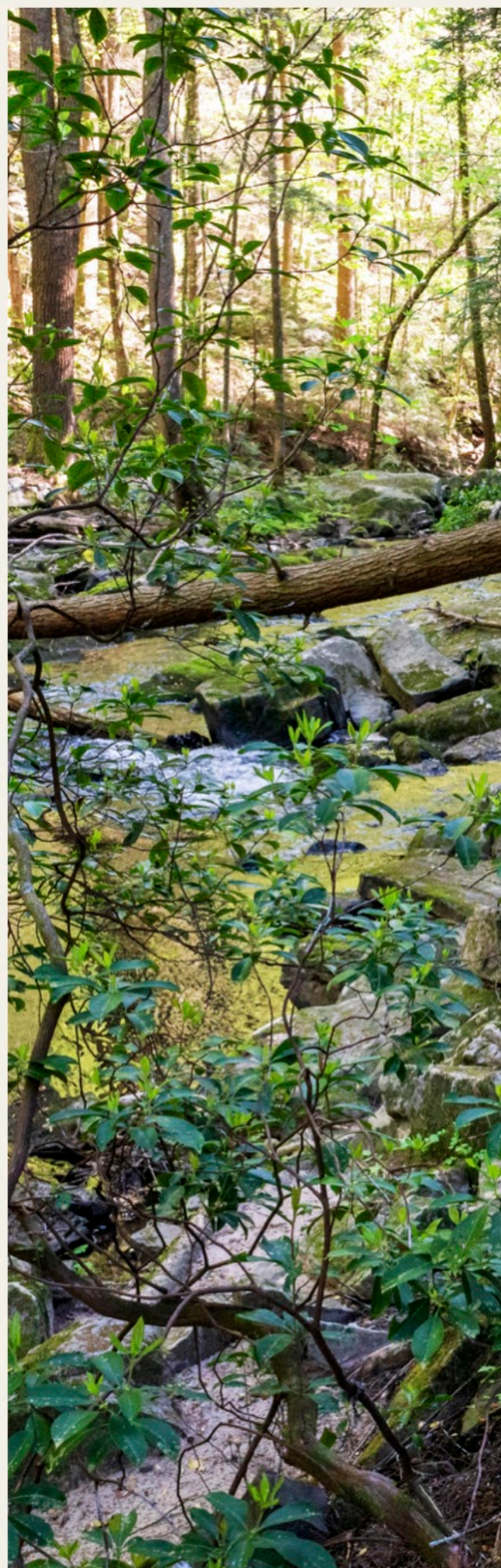
Officially known as Lost Cove Cave, the name Buggy Top is more commonly used when referencing the cave and is also labeled on the wooden trail head sign. The destination is part of the Carter State Natural Area located in South Cumberland State Park. The cave is in its natural element with no lighting or handrails, but for explorers looking to visit a wild cave, this is an ideal outdoor adventure.

When water levels are low, hikers can go in the Buggy Top entrance and emerge at the Peter Cave entrance. The water flowing through Buggy Top

Cave comes from Lost Creek, which disappears beneath the limestone bluff at a place called Big Sink, about a half-mile upstream from the cave. When the water levels are high, Crow Creek rapids stream through a large chamber, estimated 200 feet wide and 300 feet long, and out the mouth of Buggy Top, making it inaccessible for through-and-through exploration. The creek drops 40 feet within 100 yards downstream and eventually joins the Tennessee River several miles to the south near Stevenson, Alabama.

Hiking through the cave's interior can be challenging due to rugged terrain and easily missed turns within the chambers which lead to dead ends. If entering downward from the Peter Cave entrance, hikers can follow the creek bed out the Buggy Top entrance. The cave's 80-foot-tall mouth is said to be the largest cave opening in the state of Tennessee. The inside of the cave is spacious, spanning approximately 2,200 feet with a high ceiling. Buggy Top is also known for its extensive archaeological artifacts of the Woodland and Mississippian periods.

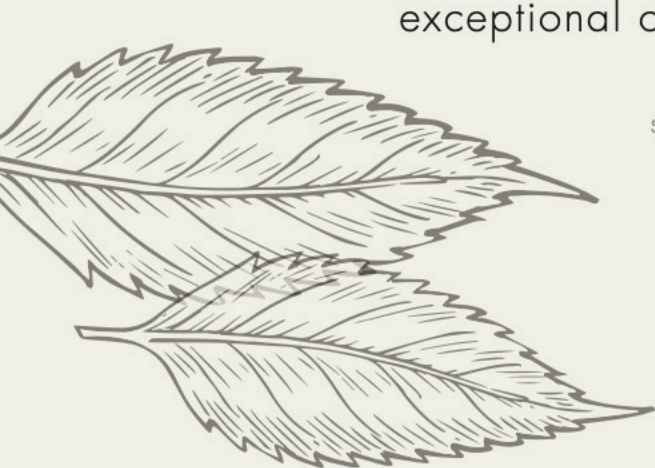
Generally, ranger-led tours are offered once a month during the summer season. These tours require a fee of five dollars. Hikers exploring the cave on their own are recommended to have caving experience and always use caution. It is suggested to carry a light of some type when exploring the dark, unlit cave. Individuals hiking alone should always notify someone of their location and plans.





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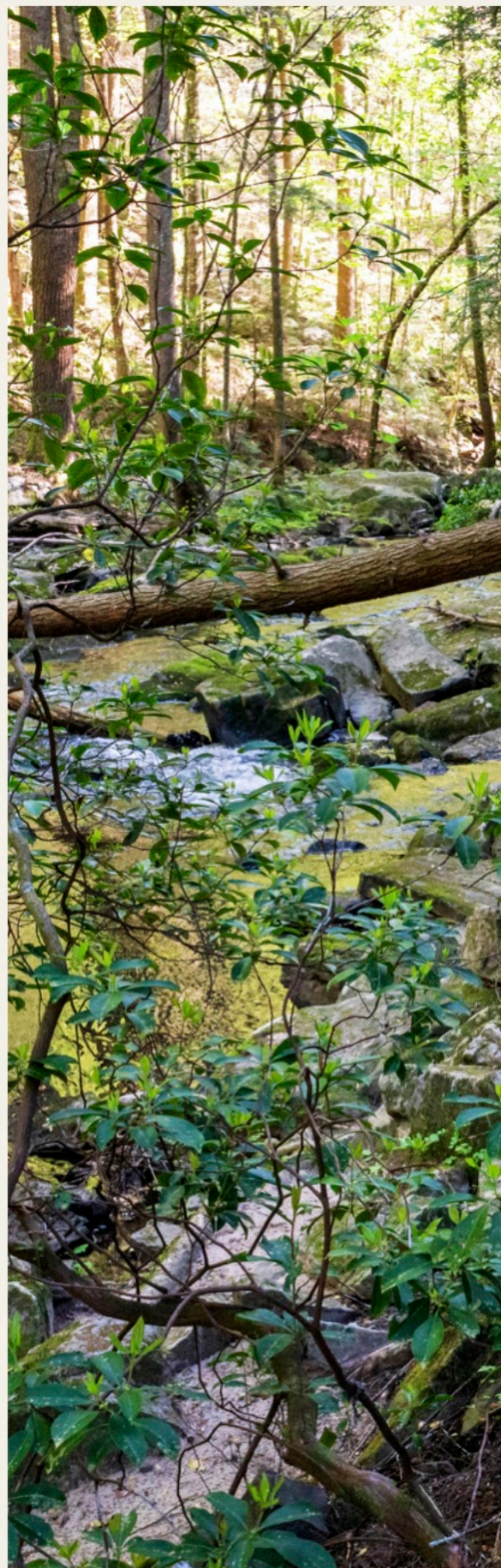
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OUTDOORS

The inside of the cave is open for public access between the months of May and November, but the trail can be explored year-round. The inside of the cave is closed between the months of December and April due to the growing problem of white-nose syndrome among bat inhabitants.

WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a fungal disease which has caused high death rates among bats and created a fast decline in the population of the species. An estimated 5.7 million bats have died since the disease was first documented in 2006. WNS has been confirmed in 22 states in the U.S., with mortality rates reaching up to 100 percent in some areas.

The cold-loving fungus invades the skin tissue of a bat's muzzle and wings during hibernation because they reduce their metabolic rate and lower their body temperature to save energy during the winter season. Bats suffering from WNS wake up to warm temperatures more frequently, leading to acidification, dehydration and the overuse of fat reserves leading to starvation before spring arrives. Bats infected with WNS use energy twice as fast as healthy bats.

The fungus is transmitted a few different ways. Bats can catch the disease from physical contact with other bats who are infected. They can also pick it up from the surfaces of the cave where they are hibernating. >>



Buggy Top Cave