

Iron Mountain Recreation Zone



Wautaga Ranger Station



4400 Unicoi Drive
(off I-26, Exit 23)
Unicoi, TN 37692
(423) 735-1500

Steep, rugged mountains up to 4,000 feet in elevation characterize the Iron Mountain Recreation Zone.

The 11,900 acre Big Laurel Branch Wilderness/Wilderness Study Area combined with the more than 13,000 acres in Beaverday Creek, London Bridge Branch and Rogers Ridge roadless areas provide nearly 25,000 acres of backcountry recreational opportunities.

Try fishing for trout in Beaverdam and Laurel creeks and Chalk, Maple and Fagall branches. Roan Creek at the foot of Doe Mountain provides the headwaters for Watauga Lake.

A number of major highways skirt this backcountry area, including US 321 and 421, TN 67, 91, 133 and 167.

Follow the Trail! Enjoy the day, or several days, hiking on backcountry trails in the Iron Mountain Recreation Zone. Hike along Watauga Lake on the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.); begin your hike from US 321/TN 67 and head towards Damascus, VA. Spend the night in one of three A.T. shelters or pitch a tent in the woods. Try a 19-mile hike on Iron Mountain Trail #54 between Cross Mountain and TN 91 near Damascus, VA. If you're looking for a multi-day, 50+-mile backpacking journey, make a loop with this section of the Iron Mountain Trail and the Cross Mountain-Damascus section of the A.T.

Go Sightseeing! Pastoral farmsteads encircled with rugged mountains provide wonderful scenic drives along TN 167 between the headwaters of Watauga Lake and Mountain City. Pass through the "shortest tunnel in the world" on TN 133 at Backbone Rock, where you can picnic in one of two CCC-constructed pavilions, hike across the rock, or view 40-foot Backbone Falls. Experience picturesque creekside views of Laurel Creek along TN 91 between Laurel Bloomery, TN and Damascus, VA. Splash through the creek on Trail #51 on your way to 80-foot Gentry Creek Falls. Nearby Rogers Ridge Trail #192 leads equestrians, cyclists and hikers into the high elevation mountain balds of Rogers Ridge Scenic Area. View scenery and wildlife from Watauga Dam observation area and Wilbur Lake.

Sleep under the Stars! Listen to Beaverdam Creek from your campsite site in Backbone Rock Recreation Area. There are 11 fully-accessible sites, including 2 double-sites, wooden picnic tables, fire rings, and lantern posts, along with flush toilets and drinking water. An accessible vault toilet is nearby in the northern day use area. Campers enjoy picnic facilities and trails, one of which leads to the A.T.. Other developed campgrounds are nearby at Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area in Virginia and on Watauga River at TVA's Watauga Dam Tailwater Campground.

