



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **Mountain Trails Take Visitors on a Journey Through the Smokies**

JOHNSON CITY, TN—For those looking to get off the beaten path and explore the mountains, Johnson City’s network of trails provides visitors with a variety of options. Ranging from beginner to difficult, the trails in Northeast Tennessee are anywhere from one to 25 miles long, offering journeys in area parks or through the mountains.

“Our region is the perfect place to get out and experience nature, and what better way to do that than taking a brisk hike in the mountains. Hikers can travel trails located on the well-known Appalachian Trail, as well as in mountain parks surrounding the city,” said Brenda Whitson, executive director of the Johnson City Convention and Visitors Bureau.

In Johnson City, there are trails located on Buffalo Mountain, including the Tip Top Trails and White Rock Trail, as well as Winged Deer Park and a portion of the Appalachian Trail.

Nearby, visitors can also experience the Virginia Creeper Trail, located in Abingdon, Virginia, and Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium, located in Kingsport.

### **Buffalo Mountain Trails**

Located in a northwest corner of Buffalo Mountain, in South Johnson City, Buffalo Mountain Park stretches across 723 scenic acres and features 14 miles of walking and hiking trails, ranging from moderate to difficult and with more than 200 species of wildflowers.

The best views can be seen on Tip Top, the park's highest elevation at 3,300 feet, or White Rock Trail, offering hikers opportunities for bird watching and wildflower studies.

“Hikers can use the *Wildflower Guide: Buffalo Mountain Park*, a picture guide of the park with locations of wildflowers and descriptions of the traditional folk uses of each flower,” said Nathan Saunders, programming department of the Johnson City Parks and Recreation. “The guide also has a map of the trails covering elevation and trail length.”

Hikers can purchase the *Wildflower Guide* for \$4.50 at the Johnson City Park and Recreation office.

The Tip Top Trail in the Buffalo Mountain Park, stretching more than four miles, is an easy to moderate hike, but also provides adventurous hikers with several forks off the path to explore. Tip Top hikers can also experience the Lady Slipper Loop where, especially in mid-spring to mid-summer, hikers can enjoy the blooming lady slippers while hiking, huckleberries or the local wildlife, which travel the path for food.

Another trail to travel, which is also on Buffalo Mountain, is the White Rock Trail.

“White Rock Trail stretches three miles round trip and has an elevation of 1,500 feet with a view that is unmatched on a clear day. May and June serve as popular months to visit this trail because the rhododendrons are in full bloom; it also features a stream running along the path,” said Whitson.

Also, while on the White Rock Trail, hikers can explore Tower Ridge Trail, 88 miles of trail takes hikers to the area's communication towers, the prominent feature of the mountain and source of the name, before reaching the White Rock view of surrounding mountains.

Additional trails include the Cascades, Hartsell Hollow, Huckleberry Knob, High Ridge, and Stairstep Ridge all of which are found in Buffalo Mountain Park, but are much smaller in comparison to White Rock and Tip Top Trail.

### **Winged Deer Park Trails**

For those staying in the city, there are opportunities to hike at Winged Deer Park. The park has six different hiking loops that range from easy to moderate, with several paved trails, combining for a mile and a half hike, as well as Frisbee golf, sand volleyball courts, playgrounds, a boat ramp and many other athletic facilities that visitors can enjoy.

“Winged Deer Park trails stand out because of the area, with a lot of sinkholes and a cave. The geology and terrain is really distinct,” said Saunders.

### **Appalachian Trail**

One of the country’s most well known trails, the Appalachian Trail, passes directly through Johnson City. Touching 14 states, the Appalachian Trail is the longest footpath in the nation at 2,175 miles, reaching its highest elevation in the Smoky Mountains at Clingman’s Dome.

“Although conquering all 14 states of the Appalachian Trail is obviously for the most experienced hiker, hiking groups that want to experience a small piece of the Appalachian Trail can travel the Johnson City route,” said Whitson.

This route travels the Appalachian Trail through the Indian Grave Gap Trail, which is approximately 10 miles round trip. At the top, hikers can experience the open terrain, which provides 360-degree views of surrounding mountains, which include Unaka and Grandfather Mountains. In late summer, blueberries are in bloom.

A second Johnson City route that leads hikers on part of the Appalachian Trail is the Nolichucky River Hike. Starting at the Chestoa Bridge in Erwin, Tennessee, which is about 20 minutes from Johnson City, the Nolichucky River trail stretches more than eight miles. When traveled round trip, the hike can be completed in an average of five hours. A year round hike, Nolichucky River reaches almost 3,000 feet in elevation.

### **Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium**

While staying in Johnson City, visitors can take a day trip to nearby Kingsport, 25 miles from Johnson City, and visit Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium, which offers 25 miles of hikes along the Northeastern end of Bays Mountain. Bays Mountain Park operates year-round, and it is known for its trails with 60 different types of wildflowers.

“Many people use our hiking trails to build up endurance, using the hills, or Bays also has level trails for more moderate hiking. Hikers can also enjoy the wildflowers while hiking—it’s the basics in getting back to nature,” said Lydia Wiley, park director of Bays Mountain Park and Planetarium. “We also have mountain bike trails, as well as animals and habitats that the

park gets as close to nature as possible, including wolves, deer, bobcats, birds or prey and river otters.”

The planetarium, featuring a 40 foot dome ceiling and star projector, educates viewers through various film productions; all produced in-house, teaching viewers about evolution and the planets through humorous, lighthearted films, using a variety of methods, including animation and still photographs. On the weekends, weather permitting; park guests have the opportunity to observe the sun at the observatory deck.

“What is extra special about our planetarium is that we produce almost all of our own productions, such as the *Case of the Disappearing Planet*, a 30 minute film about the changing status of planets throughout the years, a lighthearted, fun family film,” said Adam Thanz, planetarium director at Bays Mountain Planetarium.

For more information, please call (423) 229-9447 or visit [www.baysmountain.com](http://www.baysmountain.com).

### **Virginia Creeper Trail**

The Virginia Creeper Trail, located in Abingdon, Virginia, is less than an hour away from Johnson City. The actual trail resides in Damascus, Virginia, and most hikers take a shuttle up to the trail entrance. With a rich history, this trail began as a Native American footpath, and was used by early pioneers, including the famous explorer Daniel Boone. Eventually, pioneers began the process of building a railway on this trail in the late 1800's; ultimately this path became the foremost transportation route for the coal and iron market.

The trail goes from Abingdon to Damascus and then up to Whitetop Station; it's approximately 34 miles long, with Damascus being the middle point. There are many trails that spur off from the Creeper Trail for those not interested in taking the entire 34-mile trip.

“Hikers can go up towards Rhododendron Gap or see wild ponies grazing along the trails,” said Whitson.

Hikers should be aware that the trail is open to bikers and horseback riding as well, and it is one of the most popular trails in the area.

Johnson City is located in Northeast Tennessee and is the fourth largest metropolitan city in the state. Set in a region known as America's First Frontier, Johnson City is “Where the Pioneer Spirit Began”—a historically significant and culturally rich community surrounded by an

abundance of unspoiled natural beauty. Johnson City has a history, which dates back more than 200 years, and its culture embraces individual creativity and encourages innovation through expression. The area is world-renowned for its modern and traditional Appalachian and bluegrass music, art and cuisine, and outdoor recreation for the whole family throughout all four seasons.

For more information on Johnson City, please visit [www.visitjohnsoncitytn.com](http://www.visitjohnsoncitytn.com) or call (423) 461-8000 or (800) 852-3392.

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