

Gahuti Backcountry Hiking Trail



A brief introduction to Fort Mountain State Park, the location of Gahuti Backcountry Trail: Fort Mountain, situated in the Cohutta Mountains within the Chattahoochee National Forest Purchase Corridor, is now the largest state park in Georgia's mountain region. The park preserves 3,268 acres (slightly more than five square miles), enough room for the extensive trail expansion planned for the near future.

The name Fort Mountain stems from the intriguing ancient wall of piled stones that snakes along 885 feet of the mountaintop. The park's name implies one of the explanations for the wall's existence - fortification. But there are other fascinating theories about the origin of this mysterious structure. Read the park signs by the wall and decide for yourself.

Directions

Fort Mountain's approach road is to the north of GA 52 between Ellijay and Chatsworth. From the US 411-GA 52 intersection in Chatsworth, travel GA 52 East for slightly more than 7.0 miles to the Fort Mountain State Park entrance.

TRAIL SUMMARY Location: Western Blue Ridge, Cohutta Mountains, Fort Mountain State Park; **Features:** Backpacking trail, cascade, Cool Spring Overlook; **Distance:** 8.2 miles (loop); **Difficulty Rating:** moderate to strenuous; **County:** Murray; **Nearest City:** Chatsworth (W), Ellijay (E); **Maps:** Crandall Quad (GA); park map available at office; **Blazes:** Orange; **Campsites:** Three designated sites: mile 1.4: idyllic setting in rhododendron thicket near creek; mile 3.2: heavily wooded site south of trail; mile 5.0: site near scenic overlook and Big Rock Nature Trail; **Water Sources:** Mile 1.4, 1.8, 5.5 and 7.2 (seasonal spring)

Gahuti is the Cherokee word for Cohutta Mountain in Murray County. The name comes from the Cherokee words for "a shed [roof](#) supported on poles" and refers to a fancied resemblance to the summit of Cohutta Mountain.

Gahuti Backcountry's loop often skirts the isolated border the park shares with the Chattahoochee National Forest. Away from the busy activity areas, the trail winds along the ravines, spur ridges, and slopes of Fort and Cohutta Mountains. It follows the contours of this

terrain up and down numerous grades, most easy or moderate. There are a few long, steep descents and a few short, very sharp climbs. But there are no steady, strenuous ascents.

The first 2.6-mile section of the loop follows a tortuous, undulating route. Pay close attention to the frequent orange blazes. If you stop seeing them! you have probably walked past a turn.

The path roller-coasters down through an oak-pine forest to a Mill Creek tributary at mile 1.4. Here it turns left and [parallels](#) the branch before crossing Mill Creek below where the streams flow together. The loop continues beside Mill Creek, crossing it again at mile 1.8. After turning away from the stream, the treadway proceeds up and over spur ridges and in and out of ravines until it reaches the park's entrance road at mile 2.6. The trail crosses the pavement at a sharp angle to the left, then climbs a short distance to an old road on top of a ridge.

The wide walkway of the road descends gradually through a maturing forest. After a full mile of this easy hiking, the trail ascends moderately for 0.2 mile. Eighty-five yards before reaching a paved road, the loop turns left off the road onto path. At mile 4.2 it crosses another paved park road. Once across, the trail quickly settles into a pattern of alternating ups and downs similar to its beginning. On this side of the loop, however, the grades are generally longer and more strenuous. Here there are many outcrops. After several partial views west, you reach one high outcrop with a clear view.

Following a long, often steep descent, the trail crosses an unnamed stream and turns left onto the Big Rock Nature Trail at mile 5.5. Gahuti Backcountry shares the treadway with the nature trail through this scenic area for 0.2 mile, then parallels Gold Mine Creek as it gently cascades down a run of stair-step ledges.

After crossing the creek, the footpath climbs away from it along a line of bluffs. It then rises to near the top of a ridge before dropping back down to the slopes of Fort Mountain. Here the treadway, a cut path, continues nearly level as it half-circles around ravines. At mile 7.2 it crosses the beginning spring flow of Rock Creek.

Beyond this rivulet, which may be dry in summer, the trail ascends moderately through a dense stand of Virginia pine. This long upgrade ends where Gahuti Backcountry crosses the park road above the turn to Cool Spring Overlook.

The loop's final 0.3 mile dips to an old road, then rises back up to a view of the Cohutta Mountains, a crumpled mass of sharp ridges to the northeast. Up high across the valley, the Cohutta Wilderness preserves the pure wildness of an unbroken mountain forest. The tallest peak in sight, Big Frog, at 4,200 feet, straddles the northern boundary of the wilderness, across the state line in Tennessee.

The Gahuti Backcountry Trail has three designated campsites-one group per site per night. There is a small fee per person per night. Day hikers must stop by the park office and file a trip plan;

backpackers must reserve a designated site in advance and obtain a permit from the park office before hiking.

Highlights

Mile 5.5: View west of the Chatsworth Valley.

Mile 5.7: Junction with Big Rock Nature Trail featuring a stair-step cascade on Gold Mine Creek.

Mile 8.2: Overlook of the Cohutta Wilderness to the northeast.

Directions

(See page 188 for directions to the Fort Mountain State Park entrance.) To reach the Gahuti trailhead, travel into the park and past the information office toward the "Old Fort" section of the park. A short distance before the road curls into its turnaround loop, turn right at the sign for Cool Spring Overlook. The trail starts behind its prominent sign in the gravel parking lot.