

Travel



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(T, Ro-7B, S, F-6C, L, P, C-6C, R, W, G-5B) ** 150

Kentucky has 4-season parks

IT IS RAINING in Pine Mountain State Resort Park here in southern Kentucky, but it doesn't really matter. We are cooled down in our cottages, which make dark brown shapes down the hill between pine and maple trees.

Our group of friends occupies five of the ten cabins on the road leading downhill from the lodge, and we think of this cluster of two-bedroom cottages on Pine Mountain as "our town," a place where we can run across a few feet of grass to a neighbor for drinks, food and a game of Trivial Pursuit.

There are other accommodations in the park: modern rooms in the lodge, and one-bedroom log cabins uphill past the Living Stairway Trail. Wherever you sleep, you can eat in your cottage or in the lodge, walk to the nature center and game room, or cross the face of the mountain on one of the ten walking trails.

Pine Mountain is one of 15 state resort parks in Kentucky, all of them offering various combinations of lodge, cabins, campgrounds, hiking trails and nearby attractions. Most of them have lodges and cottages open all year, so you can "go to the cottage" at any time of year and you never need to repair the roof.

Pine Mountain was the first Kentucky state park, its 3,500 acres of forested mountainside donated by the residents of Pineville, the historic town at the foot of the mountain.

ITS LOCATION here in southeast Kentucky, 15 miles north of the Tennessee border, is of special interest because of its proximity to the Wilderness Trail, that 200 miles of foot-stopping hardship that carried pioneers through the Appalachians to the west.

If you look at a relief map of the area where Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia meet, you will understand why the colonists from the eastern seaboard could not move west across the Appalachian mountain barrier for 200 years, until Daniel Boone and his long hunters hacked a trail through the spine of mountains.

Cumberland Mountain and Pine Mountain are not mountains in the normal sense of the word, but high unbroken ridges that form stone "fences" ranging from 2,000 to 4,000 feet in height. These barriers have only a few well-hidden "gates" or water gaps to allow passage from east to west.

The buffalo, the Indians and eventually a few hunters found a break in the Cumberland ridge at Cumberland Gap, marked now by a national historic park ten miles from here near Middleboro, and another break in the 120-mile-long ridge of Pine Mountain here at Pineville.

Pine Mountain is a steep relentless climb, whether you are switchbacking uphill from Highway 25 E, walking uphill from the cottages to the lodge, or hiking the steep mountain trails with their elegant names: Honeycomb Falls Trail, Buccaroo Horse Trail, Fern Garden Trail, Moonshine Still, Living Stairway, Chained Rock.

CHAINED ROCK, one mile by car and another half mile on foot, is a huge rock perched menacingly above the city of Pineville, anchored by a huge



Iris Jones

contributing travel editor

chain in 1933 — allegedly to protect the town below. There are beautiful views of Pineville and the surrounding mountains from that vantage point.

The same road takes you to Laurel Cove Amphitheater, said to be one of the country's most beautiful natural amphitheaters. Planned park activities are held there in season.

The four well-defined seasons are part of the charm of this park. In spring, the wildflowers poke through the forest floor and the bees feed the roadside daisies. In summer, the rhododendron blossom in a riot of color on canyon floors already thick with trees and brush.

In fall, when the trees undress for winter, you can see through the barren branches to the rock ledges, walk in a bowl of autumn leaves or bend to see the tiny "British soldiers," red-topped stems poking up from green puddles of lichen.

THE LODGES and cottages are open year-round but of course the campground and picnic areas are closed in winter, when only the hardy climb the snaking mountain road and the picnic tables are heaped with snow.

All of the lodge rooms here have two double beds and a bathroom overlooking the woods. The two-bedroom cabins where we are staying have the same two-bed bedrooms, plus a living room with a huge dining table, kitchen facilities and a large screened porch. All of these accommodations are heated and air conditioned, and have both television and telephone.

There is no maid service in the cottages, but fresh linens are brought to your door daily. All bedding, dishes, cutlery, pots and pans and other household needs are provided. You need only bring your own food to fill the refrigerator.

The one-bedroom log cabins uphill from us, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the depression of the 1930s, have been renovated to include all of these comforts.

THE STATE resort parks don't all offer exactly the same accommodations, but the setup here at Pine Mountain is apparently typical in many respects. The same quality of accommodations, and lodge meals, can be found in all parks. Frankly, the



Battle Cannon of West Bloomfield makes her way along the Living Stairway Trail in Pine Mountain State Resort Park.

menu was varied but the food wasn't top quality in the lodge dining room.

Most of the resort parks are in a scenic setting, but not all of them are in wilderness settings like this one. Those that are most accessible to Interstate 75 are General Butler, a modern lodge facility with a nearby ski area, at Carrollton; Natural Bridge, with its great stone arch and gorge, near Slade's Buckhorn Lake, with its 1,250-acre mountain lake in Buckhorn; and Cumberland Falls, the Niagara of the south, in its wilderness setting near Corbin.



One of the many two-bedroom cottages at Pine Mountain State Resort Park in the mountains of southern Kentucky is nestled between pine and maple trees.

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