East River Trail

The East River Trail begins on the west side of the Seventeen Mile River near picnic shelters #5 and #6. The trail starts with a half-mile-long boardwalk that crosses the river to the east side of the park. As you walk along the boardwalk, keep an eye open for wading birds and river otters during the wet season and for deer and raccoon during the dry season.

The Seventeen Mile River is an ephemeral river fed by runoff water from rainfall and fresh-water springs. Rivers such as this one are also called blackwater since they have low oxygen levels that prohibit the hardwood trees from taking over the pine forest and allow the young longleaf seedlings to germinate and grow.

Looking in the river area along this trail you will see a mixture of Cypress, Black Gum and Red Maple trees. Scattered within the river are small islands that support pond pine, and other species of trees and bushes. This variety of plant life leads to a variety of wildlife. As you walk along the trail you may see or hear songbirds, owls, hawks, raccoons, whitetail deer, snakes, and other animals. If you follow the trail soon after sunset on a summer evening, you may be treated to a light show as lightning bugs rise from the riverbanks for their nightly mating flight.

Gopher Loop

Gopher Loop is a 1.5-mile loop trail that takes you into the sandhill management area of the park. You may access this trail at two points, the trailhead near the main park road (there is a small parking area) or the West River Trail as it joins into Gopher Loop.

A restoration project began in this sandhill area in 2005. Due to the height of the cypress trees in bloom are the months of April and May. If you look carefully in the branches you may be lucky enough to see the rare Greenfly Orchid in bloom.

West River Trail

Beginning near picnic shelter #6, the West River Trail is the oldest trail on the park. This trail travels along the western edge of the Seventeen Mile River from the picnic area to campground #2. Along the route, the trail passes under cypress trees and numerous trees where the wet-weather creeks feed the river. The trail bed is relatively compacted and easy to walk, but the trail can be narrow in places with exposed tree roots. As you travel along this trail you will experience two habitats: the river on one side and mostly upland pine forest along the other side. This occurs because this trail is situated in what is known as the ecotone, or boundary zone between wetland and upland habitats.

The upland pine forest in this area is dominated by Longleaf Pine and Wiregrass. This is one of the two types of longleaf habitats seen at General Coffee State Park. The other is the Longleaf-

Turkey Oak forest found in the sandhill areas. These upland forests are home to many smaller birds and small mammals. During the spring and fall, these woods are full of native flowering plants. Like the sandhill areas, the upland pine forest needs to burn periodically, every 2-5 years, to remain a pine forest. The park actively manages these controlled burns in the sandhill areas to study various sandhill restoration techniques. The scrub area toward the back of the park is a rare glimpse into the history of this area. Small sections of this area are being used as experimental areas to study various sandhill restoration techniques. The scrub area contains oak species and longleaf pine. The scrub area toward the back of the park is a rare glimpse into the history of this area.

Heritage Farm Interpretive Walk

This half-mile walk loops around the pond located at the park’s award-winning Heritage Farm. The best place to begin and end your walk is at the farm’s parking lot. Located along the walk are interpretive stations where you can read about the habitats, plants and animals found at General Coffee State Park. This walk is also popular with birding enthusiasts as many species of water birds and songbirds can be spotted near the pond year-round.

General Coffee State Park is one of southern Georgia’s “best kept secrets” and is known for interpretation of agricultural history at its Heritage Farm, with log cabins, a corn crib, tobacco barn, cane mill, barnyard animals and other exhibits. Seventeen Mile River winds through a cypress swamp where the park hosts rare and endangered plants. The threatened Indigo Snake and Gopher Tortoise make their homes in this Longleaf Pine/Wiregrass community. Overnight accommodations include camping, cottages, and the Burnham House, an elegantly decorated 19th century cabin perfect for romantic getaways. The park was donated to the state by a group of Coffee County citizens in 1970 and is named after General John Coffee, a planter, U.S. Congressman and military leader.

Horse Trails

The park features 12 miles (one-way) of horse trails that loop through the eastern side of the property. Parking for horse trails is available at picnic shelter #7. All riders must check in at the park office before proceeding to the trail area.

Small sections of this area are being used as experimental areas to study various sandhill restoration techniques. The upper sandhill areas contain oaks and mature longleaf pine. The scrub area toward the back of the park is a rare glimpse of habitats such as upland pine with exposed tree roots. As you travel along this trail you will experience two habitats: the river on one side and mostly upland pine forest along the other side. This occurs because this trail is situated in what is known as the ecotone, or boundary zone between wetland and upland habitats.

As the trail leaves the river and you return to solid ground, you are climbing the side of a small hill. The change from river to upland happens within just a few feet of trail as you rapidly climb the few feet in elevation needed to go from a wet river bottom to a dry sandhill. Here it is easy to see just how few feet of elevation can make a huge difference in the flora and fauna that animals and plants live in the area. Take note of the loose white sand that is common in these areas. The dry area you are now entering provides good growing conditions for many grasses and oaks. The understory of the forest is full of different species of blueberry bushes.

The trail will cross and re-cross the park road and continue back to the trailhead near the main park road (there is a small parking area) or the West River Trail as it joins into Gopher Loop.

SAFETY TIPS & ETIQUETTE

• Tell someone your itinerary and expected return time.
• Take a map, water, snacks, first aid kit, flashlight and whistle. Three short blasts on a whistle are known as a call for help.
• Do not stray from trails. If you become lost, stay in one location and wait for help. This will make it easier for rescuers to find you.
• Don’t count on cell phones to work in the wilderness, but if they do, be able to give details about your location.

Invest in good hiking socks such as those found at sporting goods stores. Avoid blisters by carrying “moleskin” and applying it as soon as you feel hot spots on your feet. Available in the foot care section of drug stores, moleskin is like felt that sticks to your skin.

• Be prepared for unexpected rain and wind which can lead to hypothermia. Always carry a lightweight shirt that wicks moisture, dray quickly and conserve heat. Many experienced hikers wear a lightweight shirt that wicks moisture, while carrying a fleece pullover and rain jacket.
• Pack out all trash.
• Keep pets on a leash at all times and clean up after them.
• Do not pick flowers, disturb wildlife or take anything off the park.
• Protect the park and help prevent erosion by staying on marked trails.

Climate Data for Nicholls, Georgia

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