



NEW RIVER GORGE

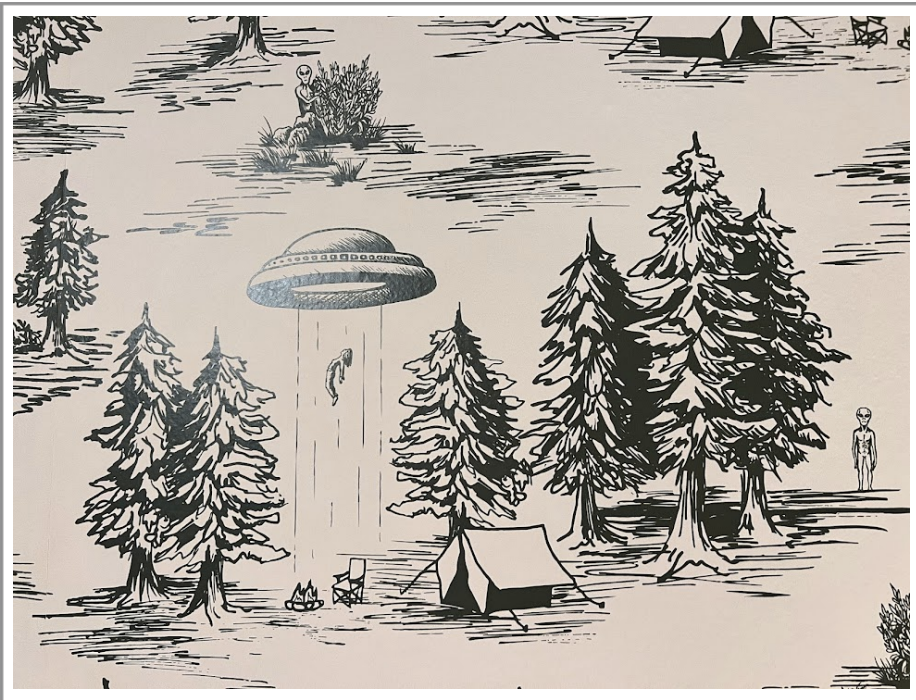
AUGUST 31 - SEPTEMBER 4, 2023

TRAVEL

New River Gorge is America's newest national park, number 63. Previously a national river, it was only designated as a national park in December 2020. Despite the name, I was astounded to learn it is one of the oldest rivers in the world. It's also one of the few that flow from south to north. One of the most recognizable features in the park is the New River Gorge Bridge. Completed in 1977, it was a huge boon for the area allowing motorists to cross the river in less than one minute, instead of a 45-minute drive along winding roads. We found ourselves with a free Labor Day and planned an adventure-filled long weekend. We left shortly after lunch on Thursday, and although the drive was long, 7+ hours, it was mainly smooth. Our base was in Fayetteville, WV, and our cabin couldn't have been better. A spacious, well-appointed interior and a huge back deck with Adirondack chairs, a fire pit, and string lights to complete the ambiance. Despite the late hour, we cracked a beer upon arrival and gazed up at the twinkling stars on the deck, happy to have reached our destination.



The cabin was great, inside and out!



Super fun wallpaper in the bedroom!



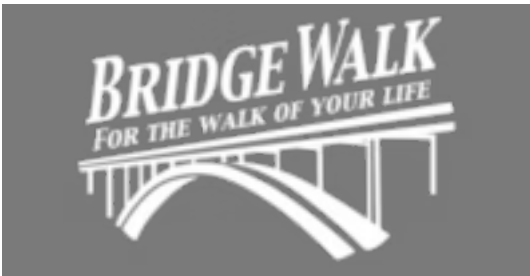
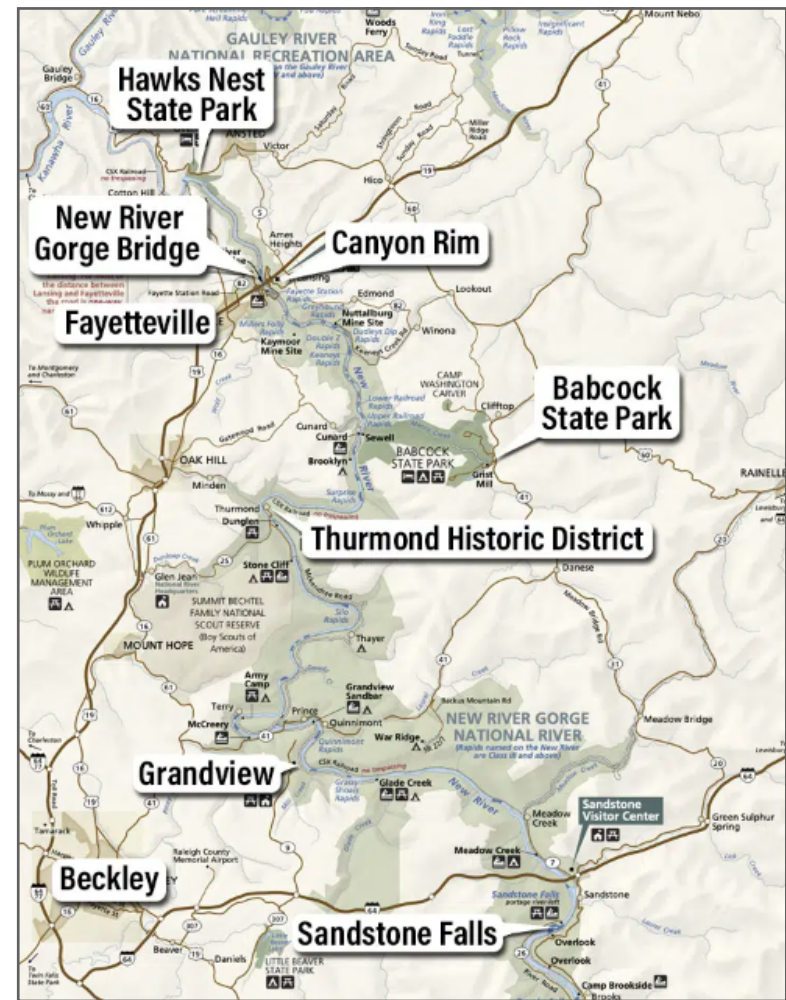
DAY 1

We had wanted to make the most of our time in West Virginia and since we drove down Thursday night, we spent most of Friday working from the cabin. However, since it was the Friday before a holiday weekend, things had slowed down and we were able to sign off around 2pm and head to the Canyon Rim Visitor Center. We looked through the exhibits and watched a short film on the history of the park including the coal mining that took place in the area. The film was outdated though, and still referred to the area as a national river!

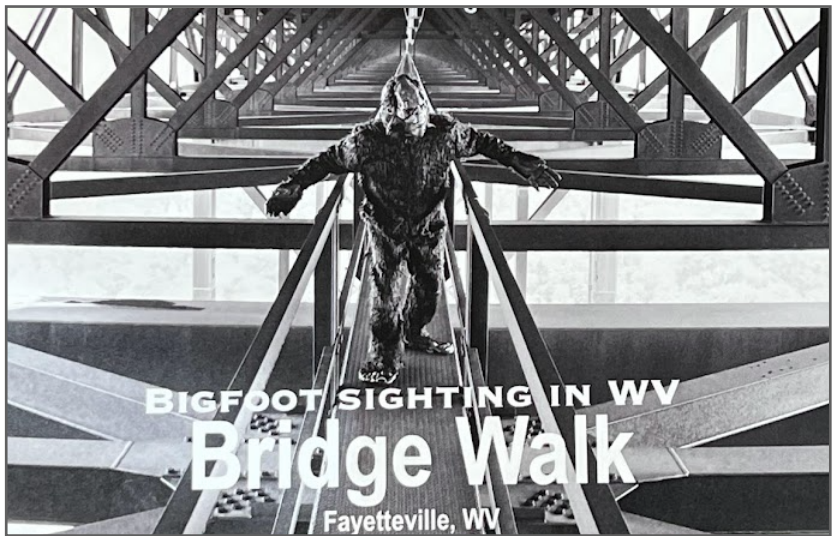
Just a short hop across the parking lot, we checked in at Bridge Walk! This one of a kind tour would allow us to walk the length of the New River Gorge Bridge on a 24" catwalk suspended underneath!! The bridge is the third highest in the United States and we were treated to quite a view of the river below, occasionally glimpsing rafters navigate the rapids. We were in a group of about 10 other people and our guide was a fantastic WV local who told us stories about the area and the bridge itself. We had plenty of time for pictures and even got the chance to sit down on the catwalk and swing our feet!



Not the most interesting park sign - I feel like this is a missed opportunity!



The main areas to visit in the park are located in clusters that are quite far apart. There are also several state parks in the area, making for a lot to explore in just a few days!







Towards the far end of the bridge it began to look like a hall of mirrors. So symmetrical!

Someone's a real jokester, although how they got up there I'll never know.



The Bridge Walk was such a fun experience and a perfect introduction to the park. I'm glad neither of us are afraid of heights and thoroughly enjoyed our time on the catwalk. Our tour wrapped up a little after 5pm. We stopped at Pies & Pints, a pizza restaurant we had wanted to try but heard it can get quite crowded. We had no problem at this hour and sipped a beer while we waited for our pizzas to go. We scarfed them down at the cabin and headed out to the back deck to watch the sunset.



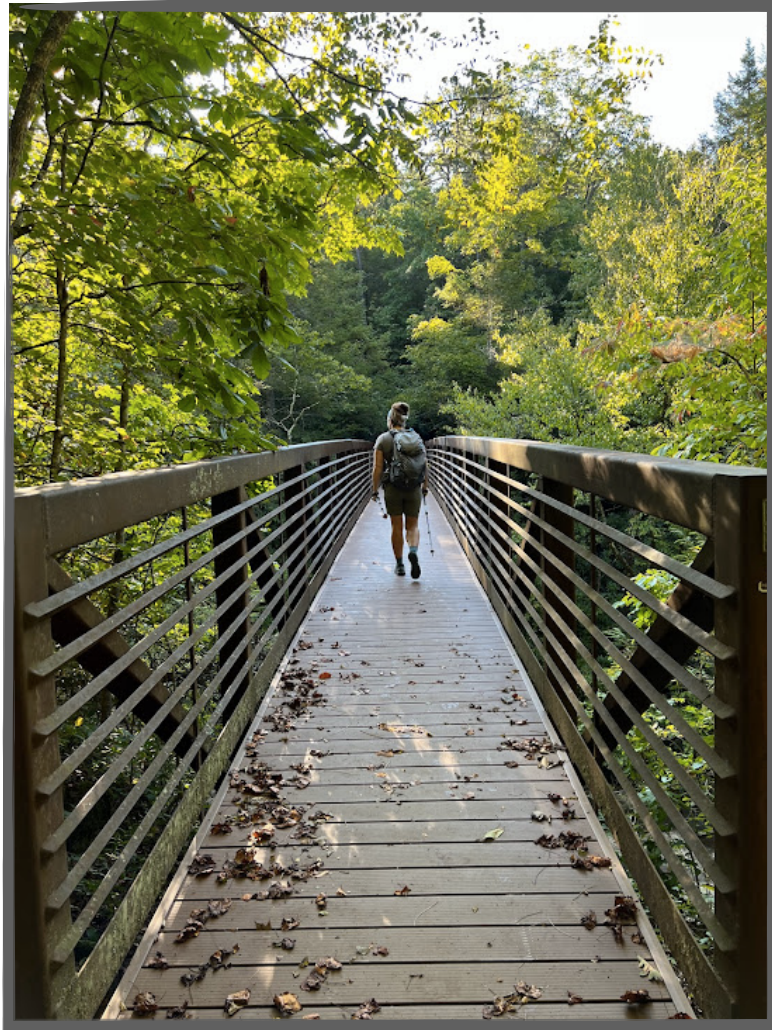
DAY 2

The first commercial rafting trip on the New River took place in 1968. Since then it has become a mecca for whitewater enthusiasts and remained that way until the designation of national park, which brought in a new crop of visitors, like us! Those interested in hiking, climbing, and other activities beyond the water. For our first day, we began with a short hike near our cabin called the Endless Wall Trail. The hike began within a nicely shaded forest and then approached a series of overlooks along the “Endless Wall”, a long line of sandstone ridges. The highlight of the hike is the Diamond Point overlook and unfortunately when we got there, it was completely socked in! The hike was still nice a good warmup for our legs, so we headed back the way we came to drive to our next stop, hoping the fog would burn off!



Endless Wall Trail:
2.33 miles
210' elevation gain
58 minutes

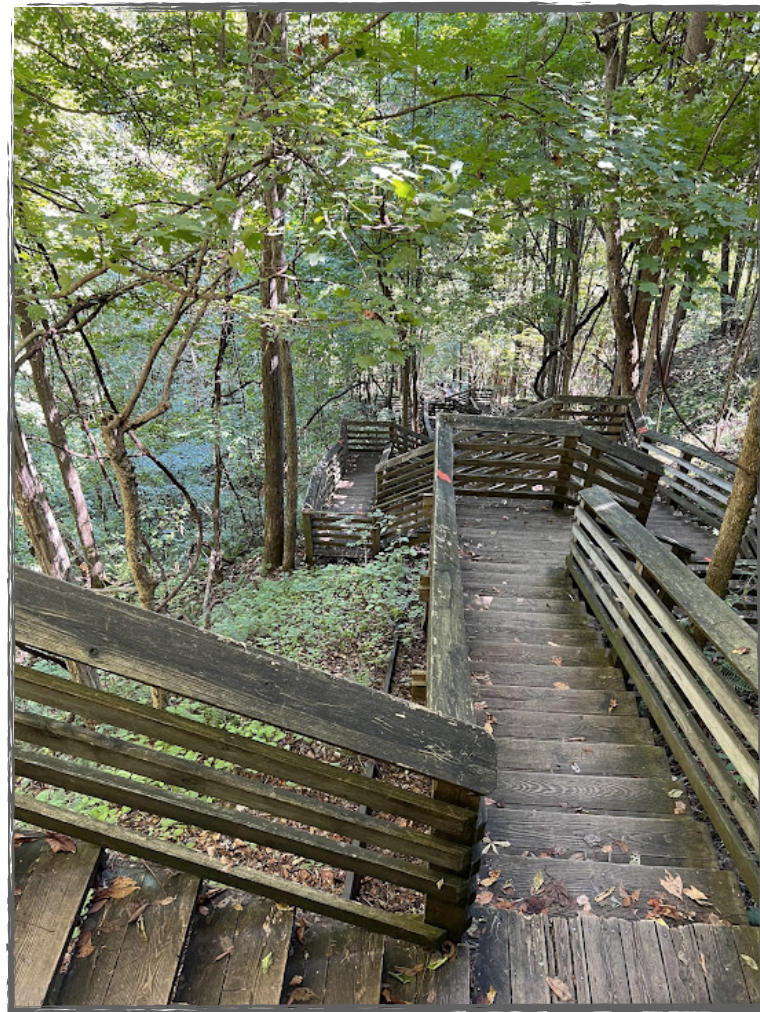




For our longer hike, we combined several hikes into a longer loop just across the other side of the New River. In a first for us, we parked in a lot in what was a community park to begin our trek. Very different from our experience in Glacier just a few weeks ago! As we pulled in, there was a HUGE group of people milling about in the parking lot, about to begin their hike together. We practically ran to the trailhead to get ahead of them and were able to leave them behind after a bit. Our first goal was to reach Long Point and we took the Fayetteville Trail through the woods. The trail was fairly easy as we climbed to the top, then down through a nest of Rhododendron roots before reaching the rocky outcropping of Long Point, which offered one of the best views of the bridge in the park.



We continued on towards the Kaymoor Miners Trail, walking through that trailhead's parking lot and then descending a very steep ravine to the top of the mining site. At Kaymoor over 16 million tons of coal were mined and processed between 1899 and 1962. It was a company town and at its height over 500 people lived here with houses, churches, schools, and even a movie theater! After looking around a bit, we walked down a set of over 800 (!) stairs to get to the coal processing site. By the bottom, my legs felt shaky and like jello! After a short look around we turned back and climbed the stairs which was so much harder.



After a brief rest we continued along the trail which had great views of the Endless Wall across the gorge. It was much clearer than this morning! There were also towering cliffs right next to us. Further still, we came across a beautiful, moss-covered waterfall. We had one last climb through the woods before making our way to the park loop trail where we had started. At this point, Mike got stung by a bee on his ankle! He was a trooper and pressed on through the pain, as we think he is mildly allergic. What a great hike sampling the best of New River Gorge (minus the bee sting)!

Fayetteville, Long Point, and
Kaymoor Trail Loop:
9.95 miles
2,021' elevation gain
4 hr 17 minutes



Eager for a break and hungry for lunch, we had a car picnic as we headed back across the gorge again to drive Fayette Station Road. This is a narrow, mostly one-way scenic drive that starts at the visitor center then descends to the New River, crossing it on a small bridge, then climbing up the other side. We took our time and pulled off the road at several points to gain views of the bridge from different vantage points taking advantage of the gorgeous weather.



With time left in the day, we made our way north towards Hawks Nest State Park. Along the way, we stopped at...the Mystery Hole! In the style of a true American roadside attraction, we paid \$10 and followed a guide, with one other small group, into the Mystery Hole. No cameras allowed! This was a very fun but bizarre stop. It's hard to explain, but we were taken to a room that was constructed in such a way that it seemed to defy gravity. Chairs stuck to the wall, marbles rolled up a wall, and water flowed the wrong way.

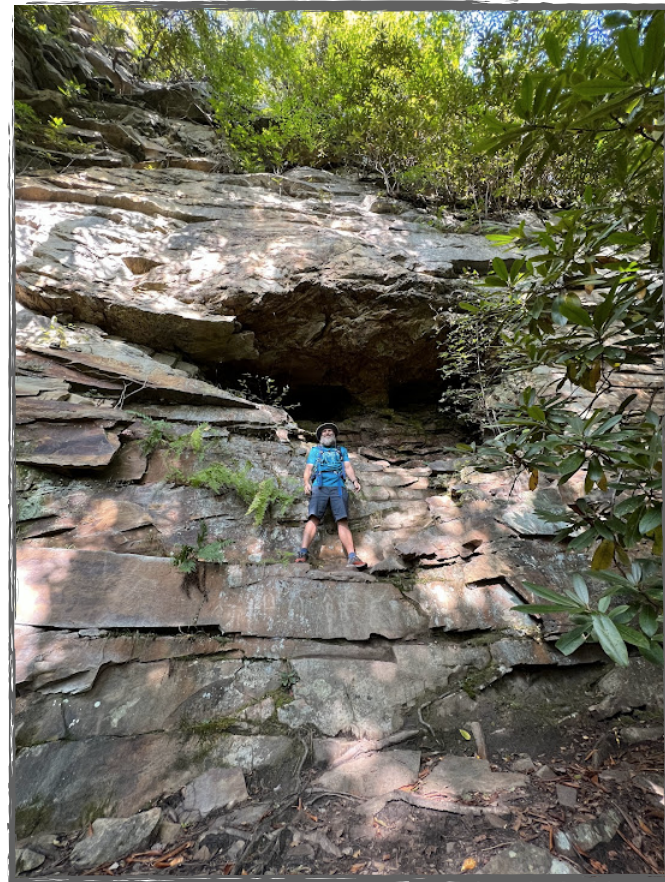


We then turned our attention towards more natural views, stopping at the Hawks Nest Overlook and Cathedral Falls before making our way to the cabin for beer and dinner on the grill. We were in for quite the surprise though because the water did not work in the cabin! After contacting our host, we learned there was a water main break and the water was shut off until it was fixed. We laughed about it because what could we do? We stayed stinky and luckily had enough filtered water to get us through the night. We washed our hands using hand sanitizer and melted ice in our cooler! We lucked out because it came back on by about 9pm that evening.



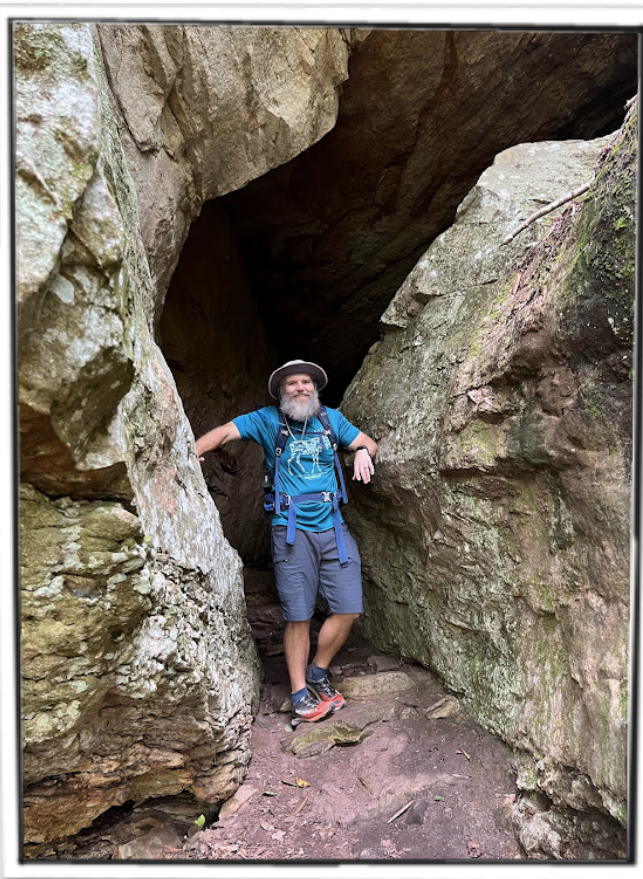
DAY 3

Worried we might encounter more fog early in the day, we decided to get a later start and stopped at the Cathedral Cafe in town for breakfast. This cafe, located in an old church, served up the most delicious lattes and breakfast sandwiches. Once in the car, we headed south towards the Grandview sector of the park. Even though we arrived late by our standards, 9am, it was still deserted! Here we again combined several shorter hikes into one long loop. We began by stopping at Grandview Overlook which provided a fantastic view of the horseshoe bend in the New River. We then set off along the Castle Rock Trail which was really fun with small ups and downs and lots of close-up views of the rocks. Mike couldn't resist climbing up some!





Castle Rock Trail intersected with Grandview Rim Trail which we stayed on to take us to Turkey Spur Overlook. Although we could have driven to the overlook, we'd always rather walk and we enjoyed the pleasant, mostly flat trail. The overlook itself was at the top of a short series of stairs, and there were several wooden observation platforms. Although this was nice, we thought the view from Grandview was much nicer. After a short break, we headed back down the trail and stayed on Grandview Rim Trail all the way back to the visitor center. We even ran into a small deer (with spots!) on the trail. We stopped to use a restroom in the park and there were swings, so for the first time in decades we had a good swing on the swing set! :) :)



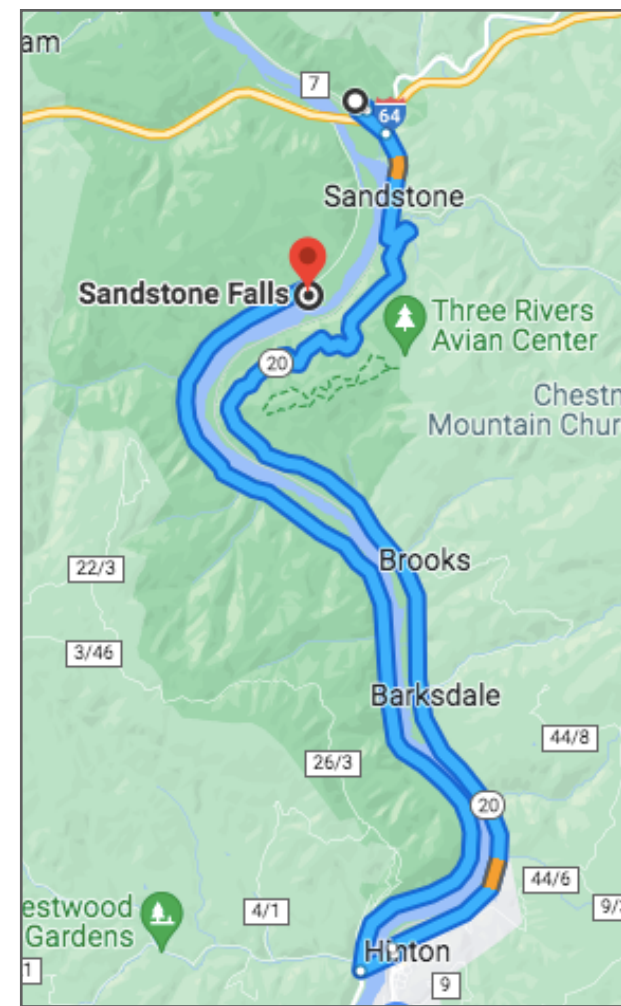
The last trail we did in the area was the Tunnel Trail. This trail does a loop around the "tunnel", a narrow path leading through the cliffs. Having done every trail in the area, we headed further south still, towards Sandstone Falls.

Castle Rock, Grandview Rim, and
Tunnel Trail Loop:
4.56 miles
528' elevation gain
2 hr 13 minutes





Sandstone Falls is the largest waterfall on the New River. It is a bit tricky to get to. We stopped briefly at the Sandstone Falls Visitor Center, then traveled down the highway, stopping at a scenic overlook to eat our lunch at a picnic bench. Once at the town of Hinton, we crossed the New River and headed back north to the falls themselves. The extra driving was absolutely worth it!



Our very circuitous driving route!

Sandstone Falls spans the New River at a place where it is 1,500' wide. Once at the falls, a series of boardwalks take you to various viewpoints of the falls and a small beach. Here, we still felt quite removed from the falls, so we ventured "off trail" making a path along the rocks and beaches. This proved to be a good decision as we escaped the crowds and had some solitude to take in the views!





On the way back to our car, we hiked the short Island Trail Loop through a more wooded area near the water. We then made the drive back to the cabin, making a quick stop at the grocery store for dinner supplies to spend one last relaxing evening at the cabin. Due to the fix in the water main, we were under a boil advisory for all water, so we picked up extra bottled water too, not wanting the hassle of boiling all the water we wanted to drink the following day.

Sandstone Falls:

1.74 miles

56' elevation gain

1 hr 10 minutes

DAY 4

Not wanting to waste a moment of our trip, we signed up for an ATV Adventure Tour with New River ATV at 8am on Labor Day. Based on the tour description, we were prepared to get muddy and have a great time. We had both of those in spades. We were in a group with 4 other riders and 2 guides. It was quite foggy again in the morning, but that didn't matter in the woods. After gearing up with helmets and eye protection and going through a safety briefing, we set off down trail. For the next 2+ hours we barreled up and down mountains, going through "puddles" that came over the top of the ATV. My boots were absolutely soaked and I was spattered with mud from head to toe. I actually felt nervous driving the ATV through this terrain, but it was fine from start to finish. We had a blast and it was more physical than I thought! I stood up a lot and my legs were sore the next day! We stopped a for a few breaks, one at a nice viewpoint.



Our trusty ATVs were clean at the beginning...



Once back at the car we literally had to totally strip down to our underwear. Luckily I had brought a trash bag so our boots, socks, and clothes all went in there and were sealed up for the drive home. We stopped at Cathedral Cafe again to get sandwiches to go and began the drive home. Luckily, once again we encountered minimal traffic. We even passed a huge tractor trailer fire on I-95 in MD which had closed the south-bound lanes but ours remained open and we got home in time to eat dinner and prepare for the next day,

back to work. We'd love to come back to New River some time and maybe try our hand at rafting or even rock climbing!



Just a tad more muddy at the end...