

TRAILS TO NATURAL BRIDGE

Trail 1. The Original Trail Length 0.75-mile

This trail was built in the 1890s by the Lexington and Eastern Railroad and continues to be the most popular route today. It is the shortest and easiest trail for hiking to the Natural Bridge.

Beginning at the gift shop the trail gently climbs 1/4-mile to the trailhead behind Hemlock Lodge. From here, you will see the steepest part of the trail before you, but at the top of the limestone steps it quickly levels off. There are four trail shelters, two of which were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps when there was a camp at Whittleton Creek in the 1930s.

The trail climbs over 500-feet through an impressive forest of hemlock, yellow poplar, white pine, and dense thickets of rhododendron. It ends beneath the span of the Natural Bridge. Access to the top of the bridge is through a natural fracture on the other side of the arch.

Trail 2. Balanced Rock Trail Length 0.75-mile

Named for an extraordinary rock formation along the way, this is the steepest trail in the park. Beginning at the trailhead behind Hemlock Lodge, hikers are immediately faced with a steep series of limestone steps leading to a small cave on the right. It is possible to go through the cave and emerge on the Original Trail at the first trail shelter. Past the cave, Balanced Rock trail again climbs up steps and around a switchback to the Balanced Rock, a large sandstone block on the left. From here, the trail gets steeper until hikers find themselves at the base of the sandstone cliff called Rocky Point. The trail follows along a ridgetop and descends to the junction with Sand Gap Trail, then ends near the large wooden shelter at the top of Natural Bridge.

Because of its steep grade, most hikers prefer to use Balanced Rock Trail as the downhill part of a loop trip.

Trail 3. Battleship Rock Trail Length 0.75-mile

This is the scenic route to the Natural Bridge. Start at the trailhead behind Hemlock Lodge and go up the Original Trail to the top of the first set of steps. Battleship Rock Trail forks off to the right and follows the ridge above the lodge parking lot. At the junction with Rock Garden Trail, Battleship Rock Trail makes a sharp left turn and goes up the hollow. At about 4/10 mile, you arrive at the foot of the Devil's Gulch, one of two stairways that leads to the Laurel Ridge Trail on the cliffs above. Battleship Rock Trail turns to the left and continues under the cliff to its end beneath the Natural Bridge.

Trail 4. Rock Garden Trail Length 1.75-miles

Rock Garden Trail starts along the Battleship Rock Trail just above Hemlock Lodge. It follows the ridge out above the lodge and takes the long way around, ending beneath the Natural Bridge. This is an enjoyable walk, just long enough to keep the crowds away, and one of the best routes on the park for bird watchers and plant lovers.

TRAIL RULES

You will be held responsible for your actions while hiking on the trails.

THE FOLLOWING ACTS ARE PROHIBITED:

- Hiking with pets.
- Carving or damaging rock formations & trees.
- Disturbing, capturing or killing any animal, including venomous snakes.
- Picking flowers or removing any plant material.
- Collecting specimens, including those for research purposes.
- Building fires or backcountry camping.
- Rock climbing and rappelling.
- Riding mountain bikes, ORVs or horses.
- Use of alcoholic beverages.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- ✱ Mile markers show distance to Natural Bridge.
- ✱ In a typical year, about 40 people fall from cliffs in this area; two die from their injuries, some are permanently disabled. It often takes several hours to rescue and transport accident victims to a hospital. Most victims are young adults who venture too close to the cliff edge.
- ✱ Trails close at night. Hikers must be out by sunset.
- ✱ Hikers must stay on the designated trails.
- ✱ Off-trail hiking is not permitted on this park.

For trail information, contact:

Park Naturalist
Natural Bridge State Resort
2135 Natural Bridge Rd
Slade, KY 40376
(606) 663-2214

For additional park information:

1-800/325-1710
www.naturalbridgepark.com

Natural Bridge State Resort Trail Guide

