

Thompson River near Gorges State Park - Waterfall Day



Directions: From the intersection of US64 and NC281 south in the Lake Toxaway area, turn south on 281 and drive 3.6 miles (passing the entrance to Gorges State Park on the left) to Brewer Rd (SR1189) on the left. Take the left but don't drive down Brewer Rd. Instead, park in the wide paved area next to the bank at the top of the road next to 281. The hike begins on the gated old logging road near 281 that heads uphill and away from 281.



High Falls

We'll start with **High Falls** (1), it's an incredible start for our waterfall day exploration of the Thompson River. Two rock walls come together in an 'L' shape with the river spilling 50' over one wall to form the waterfall. It's only about 1.5 miles to our first waterfall. Parts are rocky and the final drop down to the creek and the river crossing to get the best view might get your feet wet.



Reid Branch Falls

Next up is **Reid Branch Falls** (2) heading slightly uphill on the old road which had narrowed down over the years to the width of an ATV. The uphill only lasts for 0.1 miles, then heads gradually downhill losing 300' in elevation. At 0.75 miles into the hike, you should hear the definite sounds of falling water on Reid Branch on the left. There's a nice 20' waterfall down there, but you can't see it from the main trail. Look for an obvious red clay drainage area that serves as the steep path down to the creek. Before you get to the creek, look for a side path on the left that will take you to a view of the falls through the rhododendron. we'll have to go all the way down to the creek, get in the creek and wade up the short distance to the log pile for the best view. The creek isn't deep, but the wet rocks are slippery and you'll have to navigate through a small bit of rhododendron.



No Name Falls #1

Back to the main trail just before the High Falls path is a more overgrown road/path to the left. Do not take this left. Stay straight on the main road/path until it comes to the river at just under 1 1/4 miles. It usually takes us around 1/2 hour to get to this point. This road narrows to a single path over red clay at one point along the way, then widens back out. You will have heard the **no-name waterfall #1** off to the left then passed the side trail to High Falls. After this side trail, the road descends and switchbacks towards the river.

Cross the river the best way you can, you'll probably have to get your feet wet. Once you cross the river, keep following the logging road which is the main trail.



Great fishing

There are a few primitive campsites on the left side of the trail after you cross the river. Less than 1/2 mile past the river crossing is the side path down to the base of Reid Branch. You'll hear and maybe catch a glimpse of the waterfall. The trail down is easy to follow once you find it. It's very steep but there are trees to hold on to. You'll come out on a rock area that's a good place just to hang out. Don't get too close to the edge of the pool! It drops off steeply and is very deep. You'll go completely under water if you slip in.



Waterfall #2

These directions are from the parking area on Brewer Rd at Hwy 281 south. They are basically the same as the ones to Big Falls, revised for this falls. Hike up the old gated logging road as if you were going to High Falls. Not too far in is a more overgrown road/path to the left. Do not take this left. Stay straight on the main road/path until it comes to the river at just under 1 1/4 miles. It usually takes us around 1/2 hour to get to this point. This road narrows to a single path over red clay at one point along the way, then widens back out. You will have heard the waterfall on Reid Branch off to the left then passed the side trail to High Falls. After this side trail, the road descends and switchbacks towards the river. Cross the river the best way you can, you may have to get your feet wet depending on the water levels. Once you cross the river, keep following the logging road which is the main trail. It's still maybe a mile and a half to the path down to the side trail to the left down to waterfall #2 - we can name these when we get back!

The trail follows the river but is at different elevations above the river. Most times during the summer you can't see the river from the trail, but you'll hear it a lot along the way. There are a few primitive campsites on the left side of the trail after you cross the river. Less than 1/2 mile past the river crossing is the side path down to the base of waterfall #1. On my August trip, this path was fairly obvious and marked with flagging tape. We didn't see anybody on this warm Saturday. On to waterfall #2 - about 1 1/2 miles after crossing the river, the trail turns to the left and crosses a tributary of the Thompson River. There's another trail to the left right before this - don't take this. Right after this wrong trail, there is some old logging era cable at your feet on the correct trail. Pass this cable and take the next left down and across the tributary. You'll notice that an old logging road continued up the right side of the tributary. After crossing the tributary, continue up the trail. The Thompson River will still be on your left. In about 10-15 minutes after crossing the trib, look for a small side trail that leads down the steep bank. This trail is becoming more obvious also and was marked with flagging tape. Don't count on this, tho. It's steep, but there are quite a few small trees and rhodos to hang on to. Take your time and slide on your butt if you have to. You should be wearing clothes you don't mind getting dirty and shoes you don't mind getting wet. The trail comes out just down from the waterfall, but it's easier walking in the water among the boulders up for a better view.



Blasting cascades

We will likely skip this next one:

On to the next waterfall - about 1 1/2 miles after crossing the river, the trail turns to the left and crosses a tributary of the Thompson River. There's another trail to the left right before this - don't take this. Right after this wrong trail, there is some old logging era cable at your feet (ground hog day - I know) on the correct trail. Pass this cable and look for the next left (the main trail) down and across the tributary towards waterfall #2 and Big Falls. Don't take this! You'll notice that an old logging road continues up the right side of the tributary. This is where you want to go. This old road is overgrown, but it's obvious something has gone up through there. It follows the tributary up for about 0.3 miles to a tributary of this tributary. This is the creek that the waterfall is on. There's no trail at all up this creek, so it's a 1/4 mile fight through downfall and overgrown forest to see this 100' slide. Look at a topo map - you'll see both the tributary of the Thompson and the trib that the waterfall is on. Follow it up and it's obvious where the waterfall is. At the time of our trip, there was only one decent place to hang out and take photos from. The cliff is too steep to climb safely. If you decide to give it a try, save it for after some decent rainfall - the creek is very low volume by nature.

