

Anna Ruby Falls: Self-guided School Fieldtrip Guide

Spectacular Anna Ruby Falls lies in the heart of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

General Site Information:

- Address: 3455 Anna Ruby Falls Road Helen, GA 30545
- Phone: 706-878-1448
- Site Fee
 - Free for self-guided school groups
- Site Hours
 - 9:00am-6:00pm with last admittance at 5:00pm, Monday-Sunday
 - May vary during off season

What you can do on your self-guided field trip:

- **Waterfall Trail: 0.4-miles one way**
 - Paved trail that runs along Smith Creek and eventually leads to Waterfall Observation Deck.
 - This trail is moderate/difficult due to the incline of up to 20% at certain points.
 - There are benches and interpretive signage going up the trail.
- **Lion's Eye Trail: 0.2-mile loop**
 - Paved trail that loops the length of the parking lot.
 - This is an easy trail designed for people in wheelchairs or with visual impairment.
 - There is interpretive signage in braille along the trail.
- **Waterfall Observation Deck:**
 - Two wooden decks at the top of the Waterfall trail where visitors can sit and view waterfalls.
- **Smith Creek Observation Deck:**
 - Observation deck outside gift shop where visitors can look onto Smith Creek.
 - Fish feeders are also placed on the observation deck for visitors to feed trout.
- **Gift Shop:**
 - The Anna Ruby Falls gift shop contains local merchandise and souvenirs based on Anna Ruby Falls.
 - There is also site information and maps for purchase and for free inside.
- **Picnic Areas**
 - Smaller picnic area near head of Lion's Eye Trail.
 - Larger picnic area with creek access on the opposite end of the parking lot.

Site Natural Features:

Beginning high on Tray Mountain as rain and snow melt, the Smith Creek, which forms at the base of beautiful Anna Ruby Falls, makes a 550-mile journey through Georgia and Florida to the Gulf of Mexico.

- Tray Mountain
 - The 7th highest point in Georgia at 4,430ft in elevation
 - Located in Towns and White County.
- Twin Waterfalls
 - Taller waterfall is fed by Curtis Creek and falls 150ft.
 - Smaller waterfall is fed by York Creek and falls 50ft.
- Smith Creek
 - Is fed by Curtis and York Creek and flows through the Anna Ruby Falls site, into Unicoi State Park, and into Unicoi Lake.

How the falls got its name:

In the 1860's, after the forced removal of the Cherokee and Creek Indians, the land was allotted to John H. Nichols, also called Captain Nichols, who was a Confederate soldier and planned to move to North Georgia with his wife, two sons, and daughter. He was allotted a parcel of land that included Tray Mountains, Helen, and Hardman Farms State Historic Site. While on a horse ride with his daughter, they came across the beautiful twin waterfall and Captain Nichols decided to name it after his only surviving daughter – Anna Ruby.



Site History:

- Pre-1800's
 - The land Anna Ruby Falls is on, along with the Northern third of Georgia and up into Kentucky, was once inhabited by the Cherokee.
 - Starting in the 1800, land began to be taken from the Cherokee people via the Georgia Land Lottery System.
- 1828
 - Gold was discovered in Dahlonega, Georgia. The first gold rush in American began.
 - Gold made the land more valuable, leading to increased need for Indian removal.
- 1830
 - Indian Removal Act was signed by Andrew Jackson, which authorized the forced removal of Native people off their land.
- 1831
 - Forced removal of Cherokees and Creek from their land began.
 - Cherokee and Creek were moved to reservations in Oklahoma via the Trail of Tears.
 - At least 3,000 Native Americans died on the Trail of Tears from famine, sickness, and harsh travel conditions.
- 1860's, Land was allotted to John H. Nichols, also called Captain Nichols, who was a Confederate soldier and planned to move to North Georgia with his wife, two sons, and daughter.
 - He was allotted a parcel of land that included Tray Mountains, Helen, and Hardman Farms State Historic Site.
 - Captain Nichols wife and two sons died of malaria.
 - When exploring the land one day, Captain Nichols came across a beautiful twin waterfall and decided to name it after his only surviving daughter – Anna Ruby.
- Late 1800's-Early 1900's
 - Land was purchase by Byrd-Mathews Lumber company, who began logging in the area. They were unsuccessful due to Tray Mountains' steep terrain.
 - Land was purchased by Smethport Extractions, who was cutting down Hemlocks for the tannins found within the tree. The tannins are used to tan hide when making leather
- 1925
 - The United States Forest Service purchased the land.
- 1964
 - Land was designated a Scenic Area and declared protected.
- Today
 - Anna Ruby Falls is the most visited Scenic Area in the Chattahoochee National Forest and the most visited waterfall in Georgia. Roughly 200,000 visitors each year.

Suggested readings and activities:

- More about the Chattahoochee Watershed from the Georgia River Network:
<https://garivers.org/chattahoochee-river/>
- What a cycle, water cycle activity from NWS and NOAA:
https://www.weather.gov/jetstream/ll_whatacycle
- Investigating your local watershed for 3rd-5th grade, from Alaska Seas and Water Sheds:
<http://aswc.seagrant.uaf.edu/investigations/details/4/14-investigating-your-local-watershed.html>
- National Park Service Trail of tears activity guide:
<https://www.nps.gov/teachers/classrooms/upload/Trail-of-Tears-Classroom-Activity-Booklet-2.pdf>