



Tennessee Naturalist Program Big Swan Creek Snorkeling Camp with Freshwaters Illustrated

Casper Cox, writer of *Snorkeling the Hidden Rivers of Southern Appalachia, a Photographic Snorkel Guide to Sites, Species and Gear*

When: May 1-2, 2020 (Rain date – May 8-9, 2020)

Who: Certified TNP Naturalists

Where: Fall Hollow Campground on the Banks of Big Swan Creek just off of the Natchez Trace, 10 miles east of Hohenwald. For more information on Fall Hollow visit <http://www.fallhollow.com>. Owners are Noel and Sheri Latus (931) 796-1480.

Costs: \$175.00/per person

What: Snorkel Guide Casper Cox, underwater photographer Lance Merry, along with TWRA Aquatic Biologist, Anna Dellapenta and TWRA Endangered Species Coordinator Pandy Upchurch will lead participants on a snorkeling adventure in the incredibly diverse Big Swan Creek. Wet suits, masks and snorkels will be made available but bring your own equipment if you have it. You will need water shoes, wading boot or sandals but NO swim fins or flippers. The group will observe fishes of incredible beauty, many with vibrant colors. We will snorkel over Redtail Chub mounds also populated by spawning Tennessee, Striped and Scarlet Shiners. Rosyside Dace and iridescent blue-capped Mountain Shiners are often found over area sunfish nests. A variety of darters are common including the Tennessee Logperch, Redline, Rainbow and Greenside Darters. We will also look for crayfish and mussels.

Accommodations:

Fall Hollow Campground – Tent/gravel bar/woods camping is \$10.00/day. RV sites are also available. Hot showers are available for campers. One motel room with 2 beds is available at Fall Hollow for 89.00 plus tax. This room must be reserved in advance. Call early! One cabin with 3 beds for 69.00 plus tax must also be reserved in advance.

Food: Restaurants in the area include Junkyard Dog Steakhouse and Lewis and Clark, An American Restaurant both are in Hohenwald. Lunch at the campground will be provided Saturday. Picnic tables are available. Breakfast is available at the Fall Hollow dining room for \$10.00.

Register: Register online at www.tnnaturalist.org

Schedule:

Friday, May 1

Set up camp. Arrive as early as possible to explore the area.

7:00PM – Snorkeling Presentation at Fall Hollow Dining Room

For a preview visit - <https://www.freshwatersillustrated.org/hidden-rivers>

Saturday, May 2

9:00AM – Breakfast at Fall Hollow Dining Room (\$10.00)

10:00AM – Snorkeling, Exploring

12:00PM – Picnic Lunch Provided

1:00PM -3:00PM -- More snorkeling, Exploring

Those wishing to stay longer are welcome to continue exploring as a group or on your own.

Other Adventures in the Area:

Lewis County History Museum

The museum is located at 108 East Main Street, Hohenwald, TN 38462,

GPS Coordinates N35 32.880 W 87 33.028

Admission:

Adults \$5, Seniors \$4, Students \$2

Hours of Operation:

Tuesday through Saturday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Sunday: 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

(931)796-1550

The Amish Welcome Center

Address: 3943 Highway 43 N, Ethridge, TN 38456

Phone: (931) 829-2433

Website: amishwelcomecenter.com

Hours: Open · Closes 5 PM

The Natchez Trace Parkway

Website: <http://www.nps.gov/natr/index.htm>

I have added this site last to illustrate what a bit of exploring will yield when seeking clear water. Though not quite in the mountains, this region shares the waters and diversity that flow from the Appalachians to the Tennessee River. I have enjoyed visiting this site for many years with fishy friends, snorkeling during the seasons of spring, summer and fall. The water is usually clear with the filtering long gravel runs which yield a great diversity of fishes. The Fall Hollow Campground is east of Hohenwald, Tennessee. The beautiful Natchez Trace Parkway passes overhead just downstream. RVs and campers park near the highway, but we prefer camping down close to the creek, in the woods or on a gravel bar.



The diversity of fishes found in Big Swan Creek is quite amazing. Not only are many of the typical Tennessee River species encountered but a few unique ones such as the Blenny Darter. The mound builders in this region are Redtail Chubs and so named as the younger fish sport bright red fins. Their mounds are populated by spawning Tennessee, Striped and Scarlet Shiners. Rosyside Dace also enter the vibrant flurry of activity while iridescent blue-capped Mountain Shiners are often found over sunfish nests. A variety of darters are common including the Tennessee Logperch, formerly the Blotchside Logperch.



Fishes of Big Swan Creek

Fishes
Commonly
Observed



Redtail Chub, Striped and Tennessee Shiners top photo. **Duck Darter** bottom photo.



Crayfish, Greenside Darter, Rainbow Darter, Lamprey. (Clockwise from upper left)

There are many types of crayfish found here with varied shapes, sizes, colors and markings.

Greenside Darters are wary, generally nocturnal and eat snails. Their sides are marked with W W Ws.

Rainbow Darters are one of the most widespread darter species found in North America, ranging from the southeast, west of the Mississippi River and all the way north to the Great Lakes.

Lampreys swim up into riffle runs to spawn, moving stones with their sucker mouths to build nests.



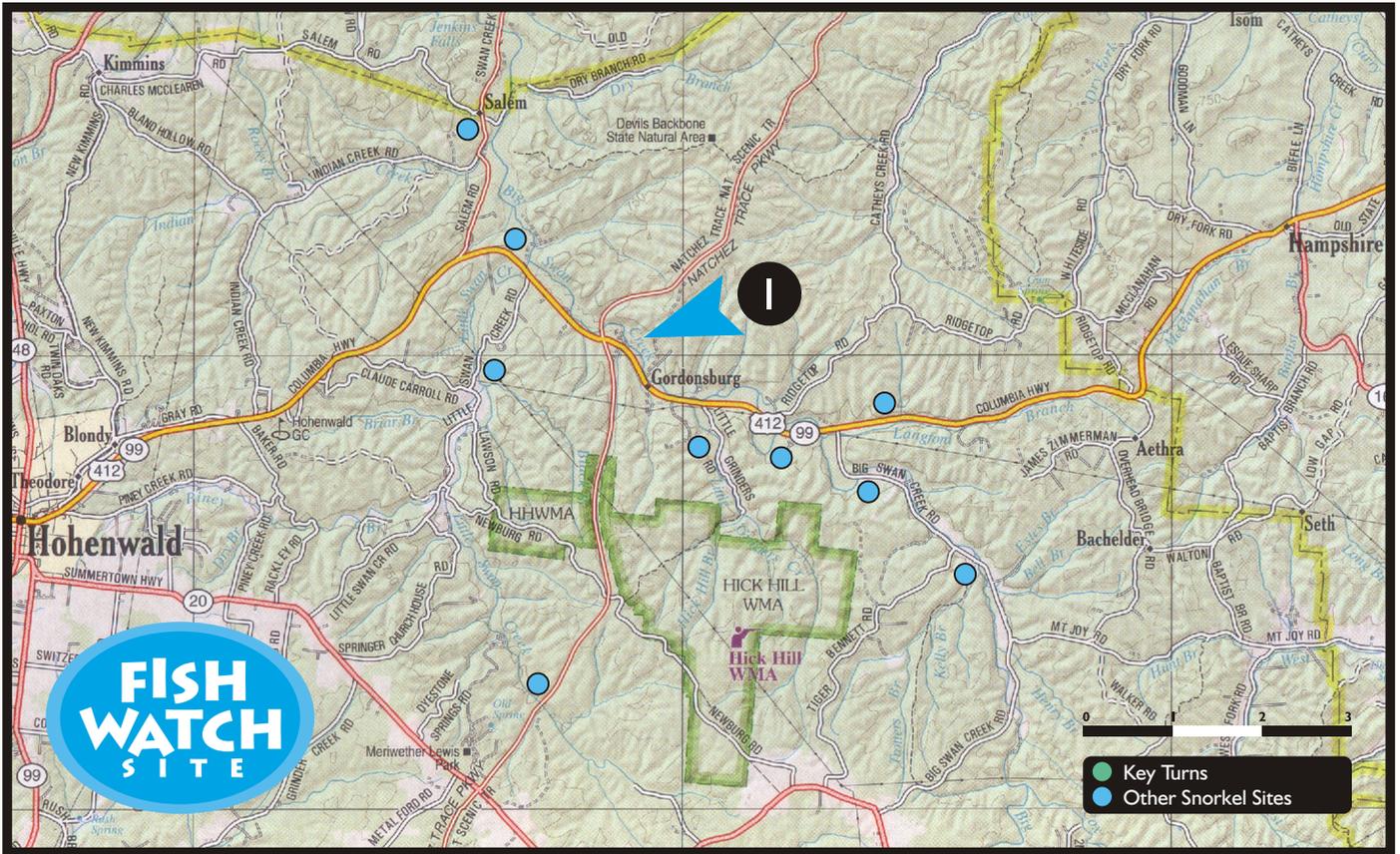
Blenny Darters occupy the fastest of gravel runs. It can be very difficult to stabilize yourself in the current while grinding into the substrate with all the coarse sand and gravel blowing by you. I had considered for years that Blennys would be found in the creek but only during this last 2019 season did I encounter not one but a pair. It is said during late winter their coloring is quite intense which lends to noting the enjoyment one receives while returning to the same area during different seasons. There is always something new to see with persistence while being at the right place and at the right time. Using a camera to capture these various creatures is an additional motivation to return again and again.



Tennessee Logperch, above, are usually quite wary and require extended patience to capture a nice photograph. This male allowed me to gain some very close images, as he appeared exhausted from a likely brawl session just downstream. His breathing was very rapid as he rested in recovery. I have yet to see a Tennessee Logperch brawl but have been told they are very intense and with their tough stone flipping noses, I suspect the battle can go on for a prolonged period.



Big Swan Creek • Map & Directions



Big Swan Creek flows alongside the Fall Hollow Campground just upstream of a Natchez Trace bridge. Hohenwald is to the west and most convenient for supplies and several good restaurants; Casa Grande, the Junkyard Dog Steakhouse and Lewis and Clark's Restaurant. Check out the Lewis County Museum if you have time, though quaint it is quite interesting.

The Natchez Trace Parkway runs 444 miles from Natchez, MS to the northern terminus below Nashville. Use your Gazetteer to explore areas north and south of the Fall Hollow Campground as there are many bridge crossings, picnic tables and scenic overviews while on the Trace.

Several access sites can be found at various Big Swan Creek / US 412 crossings but I am quite content exploring the long clear runs at the campground. Rich woods, gravel bars and creekside camping offer beauty, firelight, moonlight and shooting stars. Flowers, fungi, wild turkeys, Scarlet Tanagers and pawpaws can be found if you are there, at the right time, and lucky. It's a favorite site for me and fishy friends.