



2026

TrailLink Unlimited 

Guides



**Oconaluftee
River Trail**
North Carolina



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The Oconaluftee River Trail is a popular 3 mile out-and-back trail along the banks of the river of the same name. The popular gravel trail is one of two in the Smokey Mountains National Park that allows bicycles and dogs (the other is the Gatlinburg Trail). It's a mostly flat and easy trail with a few small hills, doable for users of all ages.

While the river is the obvious attraction here, one of its most interesting features lies right at the start of the trail behind the Oconaluftee Visitor Center. It's called the Mountain Farm Museum, a collection of wooden structures typical of a 19th century homestead in the Smokies. There's a blacksmith shop, an applehouse and John E. Davis House, a cabin made from native chestnut wood, a species that was decimated by blight in the 1930s and 40s. The log-cabin was relocated here from its

original spot along Indian Creek near Bryson City. Living history demonstrations help immerse visitors into the lifestyles of settler farmers.

Once you are done with the open air museum, proceed along the trail into the woods. A canopy of hemlock, maple, sycamore, dogwood, tuliptree and yellow buckeye shields the trail from the sun's rays, making for a cool walk or ride even in the summer. Don't be surprised to spot elk, deer and other wildlife through the trees.

Along the way, there are interpretive signboards which detail the customs and worldview of the Cherokee people. The word Oconaluftee is a distortion of a Cherokee word "egwanulti" meaning "by the river." It referred to a village that once sat on the river bank but has now come to refer to the river itself.

The trail ends right on the edge of the city of Cherokee along US 441. You can turn back here or you can head into town.

While the trail is open year-round, April through late fall make for the best times to visit, particularly if you love vibrant displays of wildflowers.



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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Oconaluftee River Trail

North Carolina

States: North Carolina

Counties: Cherokee

Length: 1.5miles

Trail end points: Oconaluftee Visitor Center to outskirts of the city of Cherokee, NC

Trail surfaces: Dirt

Trail category: Greenway/Non-RT

Trail activities: Bike, Walking

Parking & Trail Access

The Oconaluftee Visitor Center is located on US 441, 1.5 miles of Cherokee, NC. If starting in Asheville, NC take I-40 west to Exit 27 (Great Smoky Mountains Expressway). Continue west on US 74 past Waynesville, Sylva and Dillsboro to Exit 74, Cherokee. US 441 will take you into Cherokee.



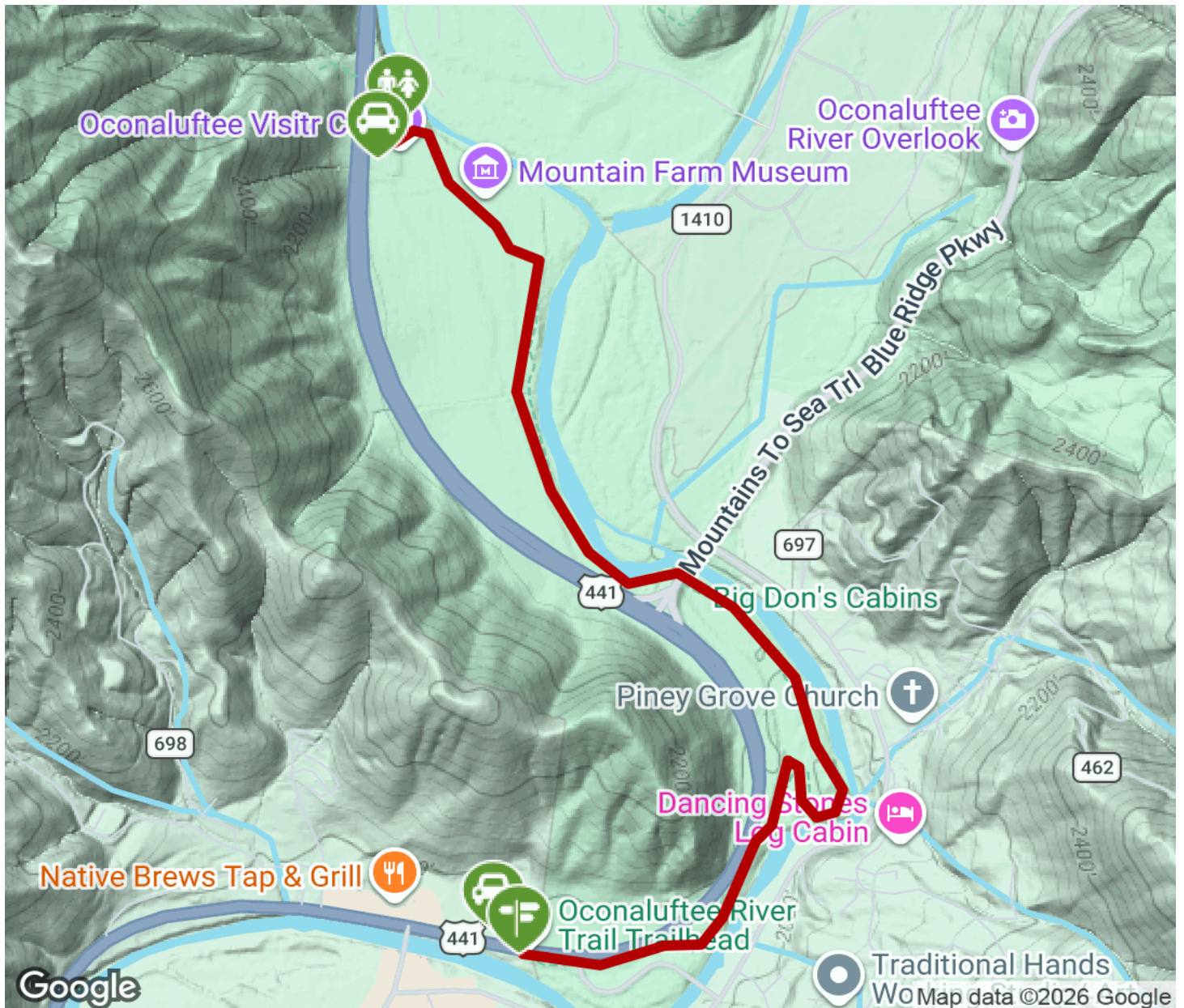
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Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



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