

Video

Audio

>>MALE NARRATOR: **Lookout Mountain stretches for 100 miles through three states. We'll explore this outdoor lover's paradise from Top to Bottom, coming up next.**

>>Narrator: **100 miles long and 25 hundred feet high, Lookout Mountain spans three states as it stretches from Gadsden, Alabama to Chattanooga, Tennessee. Upon it's length one will find waterfalls, canyons, scenic vistas, unique towns, state and national parks and preserves and many more natural wonders.**

>>Bundy:

Lookout Mountain is more than a hundred miles long; it's fairly unusual because it's a flat top mountain. Ah, folks have lived here for basically forever. Prehistoric civilizations have lived in, on top of Lookout Mountain and in Little River Canyon for as long time has been able to be recorded archeologically speaking for human habitation.

>>Henderson:

Lookout Mountain lies at the extreme edge of what's known as the Valley and Ridge Province of the Appalachian Mountains. It is part of the Appalachian Mountains, and the next province to the west is the Cumberland Plateau. It's right at the boundary.

>>Beane:

It's a plateau where the people have been isolated with cliffs on each side of the mountain in a lot of areas. It's a very friendly place. It's still like stepping back fifty years in a lot of places.

>>Narrator: **Visiting the northern tip of Lookout Mountain is like a trip back in time. A concentration of family style roadside attractions are located on this northern portion of the mountain overlooking Chattanooga, Tennessee. These attractions, combined with those located in Chattanooga, earned the area the honor of being named one of America's Top Family Weekend Getaways by Southern Living Magazine.**

The northern-most attraction on Lookout Mountain is Ruby Falls. Lying just 2 miles across the state line in Tennessee, Ruby Falls is a sparkling 145-foot underground waterfall discovered by Leo Lambert and named for his wife Ruby. Gigantic stalactites and stalagmites appear in unusual and impressive form. But the highlight of the tour is Ruby Falls,

the breathtaking waterfall.
But Ruby Falls is just one of many caves on Lookout Mountain.

>>Henderson:

The are some wonderful caves on Lookout Mountain, and the caves are developed in the limestones that were deposited during the Lower Carboniferous or Mississippian Period. Limestones produce caves because they're literally dissolved by water. And the water that we're talking about is simply rain water that has percolated down through the soil and then down through the over laying rocks following cracks, and as the cracks go down, the water moves down with it. And it is dissolving the rocks as it goes, enlarging the cracks, following the cracks, and following the bedding plains in the limestone so that the caves develop both vertical shafts and, in some cases, horizontal or tilted rooms.

>>Narrator: One such cave is Frick's Cave and it is protected but the Southeastern Cave Conservancy.

>>Putnam: I'm one of the directors and former chairman and founder of the conservancy. We started it 1991; it's incorporated in Georgia as a nonprofit land trust to protect caves like this one. This is Frick's Cave. It's one of two caves in Georgia known as a home to the gray bat, myotis grisescens. There are about ten to twenty thousand gray bats in this cave in the summertime. They only use it in the summer; it's a summer roost. In the wintertime, they go over to a hibernation cave near Scottsboro, Alabama

>>Narrator: The Gray Bat is listed as endangered both federally and in Georgia. Gray bats will become easily frightened if disturbed and waste necessary energy trying to escape. This makes them a conservation challenge. To learn about their population, biologists observe them as they leave the cave at dusk.

Many other bats live on, and in, Lookout Mountain including the eastern Pipistrelle.

>>Putnam: But the most common bat that you might see is probably the Pipistrelle, and unlike the gray bats, which roost in

dense clusters of individuals with thousands of bats in a tight cluster on the wall. Pipistrelles are very solitary, it's a solitary little creature, and it'll cling to a formation like this or in a little nook or cranny or alcove and you seldom see more than one at a time. The neat thing about them is that you can often see them with a little bit of condensation on the fur, and they sort of sparkle when you look at them.

>>Narrator: Caving on Lookout Mt is a favorite pastime for many adventurers.

>>Cressler:

In the tri-state area we have around 12 thousand known caves between Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia. Tennessee having the most number of caves than any state in our country and it has around 8 thousand itself. And there are certain caves that we call sacrificial caves where people will go and have a great deal of impact. The majority of the caves though receive very little visitation and therefore the impact is minimal.

>>Narrator: While some people seek their adventure below Lookout Mountain others find it atop, and the Lookout Mt Incline Railway is the way to do it.

The steepest railway in the world has been in operation for over a century. Trolley style railcars carry passengers from the St. Elmo Station in Chattanooga to the observation deck at Lookout Mountain Station, the highest overlook on Lookout Mountain.

>>Henderson: The highest point is over 2000 feet high, about 2140, and it's located not too far south of Point Park.

>>Narrator: Point Park and the Lookout Mountain Battlefield are a part of the greater Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, the first national military park established in the United States. It was here that the "battle above the clouds" took place, a crucial battle for Chattanooga's rail center and, some thought, the gateway to the Confederacy.

>>Henderson: Every time I've been to Point Park I've marveled at what they had to accomplish. The battle is known as the Battle Above the Clouds because the Union observers at the base of the

mountain found that the fog combined with the gunpowder completely obscured just about everything. They had no idea how the battle was going until finally the fog lifted a little bit, and they could see the stars and stripes flying over the positions on Lookout Mountain.

>>Narrator: Just south from Point Park, and just inside the Georgia state line, is Rock City Gardens. Though most famous for its barn-top signs declaring, “See Rock City” a visit here takes the tourists on a nostalgic jaunt back to a time when motorists drove blacktop lanes in search of family fun.

>>Henderson:

Lookout Mountain is a wonderful place to go both for geological reasons and for recreational reasons, and a lot of the recreation is really based on the geology. Whether it’s caving or hiking or going to Rock City, it is a perfect place to go.

I’d say geologically the primary thing to notice at Rock City in addition to the sand stones are the cracks between the sand stones, the natural cracks that in geology we’d call joints. And if you’ve been there or planning on going there, you get to walk through some of those cracks, and you get to see how the erosion has taken place and how it will continue through time.

>>Narrator: And on a clear day, Rock City offers panoramic views of seven states, the Chattanooga Valley, Missionary Ridge Civil War battlefields, and a quirky farm pond in the shape of Georgia.

There are two state parks on Lookout Mountain, one in Georgia and one further south in Alabama. Cloudland Canyon State Park is located about 10 miles south of the Tennessee state line and is one of the most scenic parks in Georgia, offering rugged geology and beautiful vistas.

>>Elmore: Cloudland Canyon State Park was established in 1938. Currently the park encompasses around 2500 acres. We have camping facilities, cottage facilities, and a lot of day use facilities around here. One of the main reasons people come to Cloudland Canyon State Park is to hike and enjoy the beauty of the canyon and the waterfalls here.

>>Narrator: The park straddles a deep gorge cut into the mountain by Sitton Gulch Creek. The elevation differs from

800 to 1,980 feet. The most spectacular view into the canyon is found near the top of the rim trail but a hike deep into the canyon affords the hardy visitor views of two spectacular waterfalls.

>>Elmore: At the top, you will see a lot of the younger rock, which is the sandstone. As you go down, you'll see you'll go through different layers of sandstone; you'll go through layers of shale, which has a lot of vegetation. As you get closer to the bottom, the rocks will get darker from being there for so long.

Some of the wildlife that you will see here at Cloudland Canyon, we have some white tailed deer here; we've got a real good population of wild turkeys. There are a lot of herps here, reptiles, amphibians; we've got snakes anywhere. We've got timber rattlers here, copperheads, gray rat snakes, king snakes, got a vast array of wildlife here. A lot of people come here for birding. There are a lot of sparrows, nuthatches, some cardinals. A lot of people come up here especially over the canyon to do some bird watching.

>>Narrator: Not often mistaken for birds, but beautiful in flight none-the-less are the hang-gliders who love to launch from the Lookout Mountain Flight Park.

>>Woodruff:

We teach more people how to fly hang gliders right here at Lookout Mountain than any other place in the US. We probably put about a hundred new pilots in the air every year. So it doesn't sound like a lot, but in the hang gliding industry, it's quite a bit

>>Narrator: This inconspicuous ramp perched on the edge of Lookout Mountain is an ideal location for launching a hang glider. But what makes it ideal is the geography of the land and the moderate weather.

>>Woodruff: The ridge here runs 10 miles to the north towards Chattanooga and then it runs like another 40 miles south of here. So we've got a big broad valley with lots of places to land, big green fields because there's a lot of farming up this way and it's just really set up for hang gliding. It's perfect really.

>>Narrator: Hang gliding uses currents of air to stay aloft. Warm air rises so the experienced hang glider seeks out thermal activity. Hang gliders routinely stay aloft for 3 hours or more and climb to elevations of 15,000 feet.

>>Woodruff: We soar just like the hawks do and the buzzards. When we're flying, we're looking for thermals, which is basically a

column of hot air that rises, so you could get in that column and do 360's and gain altitude.

>>Narrator: Lookout Mt Flight Park is well known as America's premiere hang gliding park and school. Clair Vessort, a world-ranked hang glider, relocated here to pursue her passion.

>>Vessort:

I think it's related to freedom, and just cutting old ties with what's on the ground. When you're up there, I always say up there that life is really good. It doesn't matter how bad a day you had or what personal problems or whatever; it doesn't matter. Once you're up there, you're focused on just flying, and the feeling is just great. You just hear the wind and you feel everything. So you're soaring like a bird.

It's really simple, and that's really what I love about hand gliding is the simplicity of the wing; how it sets up, how easy it is to control. You just move your body in order to control the glider. So if you move your body to the right, you'll turn right. You move the right wing more, so you'll turn right. If you move your body more to the left, you'll move the left wing and turn left. If you move your body forward, you'll speed up. And if you move it back, you'll slow down. It's very simple.

>>Narrator: Students start their education on what's called the training hills. The first, and most important, skill these students are taught is: How to Land. Their graduation is a launch from Lookout Mountain.

>>Lefay: This is the first time I have launched mid day. Typically with the students especially or a very new pilot, they will launch either in the early morning or the afternoon when the conditions are really suppressed. The morning is usually particularly good for that.

>>Woodruff: If you've ever had a dream like you been flying before, it's kinda similar to that. But, you know, it's just getting off the ground and flying is like the ultimate freedom really, totally getting away, and then using the elements to soar to gain altitude. To stay up for several hours is fun. It's like a chess game, you know, you're out there making decisions, try to put yourself over the land that's gonna give you the best thermal activity, and when you make the right decision and it pays off and you get really high and all your buddies sink out and land, you know, you're feeling pretty good about yourself. It's hard to describe; flying is exactly that, you're flying.

>>Narrator: South of Cloudland Canyon and the Lookout Mountain Flight Park is a small mountain that branches off from Lookout Mountain called Pigeon Mountain. Named for the now extinct passenger pigeons that once nested here, the mountain is 10 miles long and 2,300 feet high. The state of Georgia now owns the mountain and it is a popular spot for

many activities.

>>Padgett: Pigeon Mountain is a Wildlife Management Area. We're not like a state park; we're open basically all the time. You can come and go as you please. The only thing that we really regulate is hunting.

It's a primitive place, and we are here to protect these natural environments; not to build things; not build facilities. So when you come to visit Pigeon Mountain, there's not any bathrooms, there's not any picnic tables, there's not any trash cans, so you need to take your trash home with you, bring a blanket to have your picnic on the ground and, for the bathroom, it's pick a tree and do a like a cat, dig a hole and cover it up or take it home with you. You can do that too.

Narrator: On the north side of Pigeon Mountain is an area called The Pocket where a small gorge has been carved in the mountain resulting in a beautiful waterfall. Also here is the Shirley Miller Wildflower Trail, an 800-foot boardwalk meandering through a patch of uncommon wildflowers.

>>Holcomb:

Well the north facing slopes and the stream that runs through this makes this a very moist sight, and the spring wildflowers here just thrive in this particular area.

>>Padgett:

One of the reasons that the boardwalk is here is because folks were loving the pocket to death and, even though they were being careful and not stepping on flowers and such, they were stepping on root systems and they were compacting the soil.

>>Holcomb:

If you want to see the wildflowers in the pocket, you need to be here from about mid March to mid April. We think the peak, and I tell anybody that calls our office, the peak will be the last Saturday in March, but if you can't make it then, there's something going on from mid march actually all the way through April.

>>Narrator: Atop Pigeon Mountain is an area called Rocktown, a collection of massive sandstone rocks exposed by thousands of years of wind and rain. This area of house-sized boulders makes a wonderful spot for a hike, but it is also earning a reputation as a world-renowned spot for bouldering, a variation of rock-climbing.

>>Rodriguez: It's a great place. It's a beautiful place. The water has done incredible things to the rock to give it contour and smoothness in certain parts and sharp in-cuts in others. That's a large reason why people come here. There's climbing all over this mountain.

>>Narrator: Luis has brought his star student here for some real world bouldering. Katherine Martucci has been bouldering for a little over three years.

>>Martucci: We've done a lot of hiking and rock climbing mixed together. My first climb, I was really glad when I got it. Some climbs will totally wear you out and you will not have any strength when you're finished. Others, like the scoop, you could do it a thousand times and never drain any energy.

>>Narrator: It is, again, the moderate temperatures of the Lookout Mountain region that have helped make Rocktown a choice spot for bouldering.

>>Rodriguez:

You can have year round climbing here at Rocktown. When we started climbing here, we didn't stop for 5 years (laugh). Climbing at a high level, you prefer the winter months, usually late October, November to April is the best time simply because when it's cooler, you have less humidity in the air; you sweat less, so therefore, you have more friction. But people still climb year round, and even in the hot steamy months they like the climbing so much that they come here and find some shady areas to climb at.

>>Narrator: Luis and Katherine have traveled here from nearby Chattanooga but in the winter others travel many times farther.

>>Leung:

It's a good winter destination for Montreal or Quebec climbers because, well, Canada's cover in snow in the winter, so. And, it's fairly close.

>>Kehl:

Well, I think this area draws a lot of people, especially in this time of year just because it's warmer than say, where I'm from, Maryland or up in the northeast. You really can't climb outside, and so everyone comes down here to climb on the southern sandstone. And, it's kind of like, you know, pilgrimage of the winter season.

>>**Narrator: Alex Gerrits operates a website for climbers called Dr. Topo.com. They offer free guidebooks to climbing locales such as Rocktown.**

>>Gerrits: It's one of the best places in the country. In my opinion, it's much better than the west, and the people in the south are really friendly, so that's nice.

>>Rodriguez: Bouldering, it's an extension of climbing. It's something that evolved from rock climbing and rope climbing. People wanted to really test their skills on rock, figuring out problems on rock without having to worry about the gear involved.

>>Kehl: I think bouldering is a more interesting sport. You go outside and you have this thing you have to conquer, and you break it down, problem solving. That's why it's called a problem. So it's kind of like a game just in your head, you know. You're just trying to figure things out.

>>Dorey: It's a challenge, and it's like every single time it's a challenge. You know, like every single time you pull on, you're like definitely challenging yourself. And, you're asking yourself, like, can I force myself to do this right now or am I going to give up or, you know, like, how hard can try right now.

>>Martucci: When you get to the top of something that you thought you haven't done, you feel like you won a million dollars. It is the best feeling, especially if you've been working on it for a long time. The longer you work on it, the better it feels.

>>**Narrator: There are many other activities to enjoy on Pigeon Mountain. Horseback-riding and mountain biking are popular and the caving is world-class.**

>>Holcomb: Well, Pigeon Mountain is an extremely dry area on top. It's got a sandstone cap over limestone, and that is why the area is so cave rich. A lot of the water percolating down into the limestone has created a variety of caves. There's two of the largest caves in the state of Georgia, in fact the largest cave in the state of Georgia is located in this area.

>>**Narrator: And the area is also popular with sportsmen and women.**

>>Holcomb: The wildlife up here is phenomenal. We're known from the hunters and fishermen for the deer and the turkey and

Pigeon Mountain has been one of the leading producers of turkey in the state for the last several years.

>>Narrator: Across the state line into Alabama lies another national park called the Little River Canyon National Preserve. The 14 thousand acres of the preserve protects one of the most extensive canyon and gorge systems in the US and one of the South's clearest waterways.

>>Bundy:

Little River Canyon National Preserve was legislated into existence in 1992, so at this time we're about ten years old. And it was a place that of course has existed for thousands and millions of years; it's a natural canyon. It's about twenty something miles long; it sits on top of Lookout Mountain. It's an unusual geologic feature, and it's an unusual area biologically also because of the height of the mountain this far south many species of migratory birds and things like that live here further south in their range than any place else.

The Little River itself that created the Little River Canyon, of course, starts with an east and a west fork north of here, travels mostly south along top of Lookout Mountain and cut the canyon. It's unusual, unique really because it is a mountain top river, and it drifts south through the canyon before it empties into Weiss Lake down in Cherokee County.

>>Narrator: Little River begins at 1,900 feet above sea level and by the time it empties into Lake Weiss it has tumbled over 1,200 feet... ending up at 650 feet above sea level.

>>Beane:

The, the park is on a plateau. Lookout Mountain is a large plateau over a hundred miles long. We have a two hundred square mile watershed for Little River Canyon, and Little River has a canyon that's about 450-foot deep at most of the overlooks in the middle. The canyon itself forms up here at Little River Falls right behind me, and it's about a forty-foot drop for the shorter side and goes down about twelve river miles to Canyon Mountain Park.

One of things that is really unique about Little River is that it's pristine water; it's relatively unpolluted, and it's very clear. And the reason for that is there's no upstream development, no industrial development, or no cities of significant size or anything to effect the water, and then the other thing is, geologically there's no sand, clay or any of the things that would cause the water to be

discolored. So when people come here and they visit Little River Canyon and they see this clear water, they think that they're in Canada somewhere, and they are not. They are in northeast Alabama on Lookout Mountain.

We get a lot people out here visiting the park that come out to see the resources. Many of them are sightseers; they come out just to view the scenery. We have a wonderful canyon here; it's one of the largest canyons east of the Mississippi. The people that come here range from people that come to visit for the flora and fauna. They see little dragonflies or come take pictures of special things. And there's about a hundred rare species that lives in Little River Canyon.

>>Bundy:

Little River Canyon National Preserve was set aside as a preserve and not as a national park so that a broader range of uses could occur here. We actually allow hunting in certain areas, fishing, of course, is legal under state regulation, and so it's truly a multiple use area set aside and managed by the national park service for all of the public to enjoy.

>>Narrator: But most people come just to sightsee. There are 8 overlooks along the western edge of the canyon overlooking a canyon that is, in most areas, 450 feet deep.

>>Bundy:

I like Lookout Mountain; I think it's an interesting and unusual place. You know, it's a geologic feature that crosses three political boundaries: the state line of Alabama and Georgia and Tennessee. And it links all three of those areas. The communities are similar. It's a flat top mountain; you can drive from Chattanooga to Gadsden basically on top of this long, flat mountain, and that makes it unique in my mind.