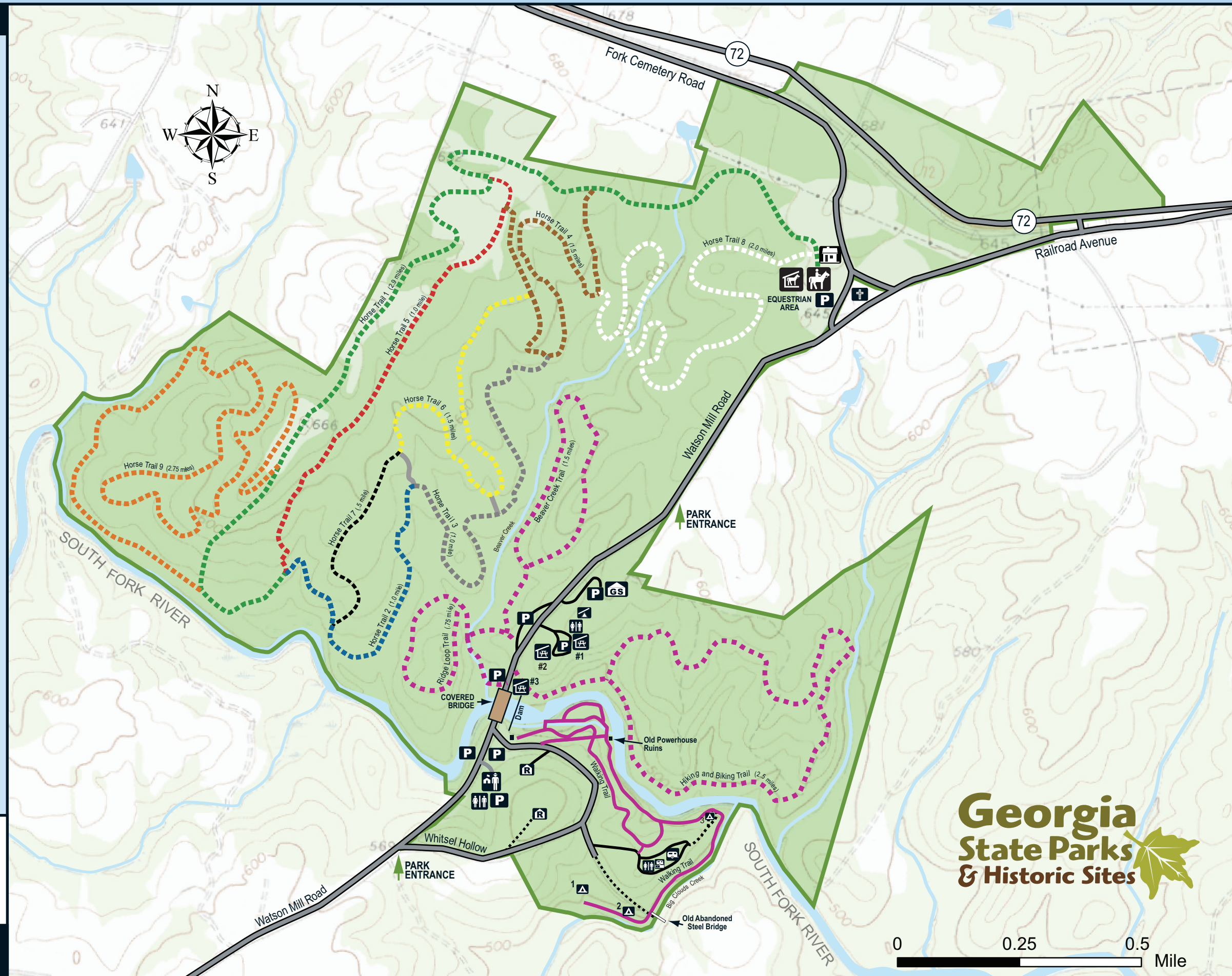


Watson Mill Bridge State Park Trail Map

650 Watson Mill Road, Comer, Georgia 30629 • 706-783-5349 • Reservations: 800-864-7275 • Emergency: 911 • GaStateParks.org



LEGEND

- Park Office
- Restroom / Comfort Station
- Parking
- Group Shelter
- Picnic Shelter
- Playground
- RV & Tent Camping
- Dump Station
- Pioneer Camping
- Staff Residence
- Horse Stables
- Horseback Riding
- Log Cabin
- Cemetery
- Walking Trail (foot traffic only)
- Hiking & Biking Trail
- Horse Trail 1 (2.9 miles)
- Horse Trail 2 (1.0 mile)
- Horse Trail 3 (1.0 mile)
- Horse Trail 4 (1.5 miles)
- Horse Trail 5 (1.0 mile)
- Horse Trail 6 (1.5 miles)
- Horse Trail 7 (.5 mile)
- Horse Trail 8 (2.0 miles)
- Horse Trail 9 (2.75 miles)
- Connector Trail
- Paved Roads
- Unpaved/Gravel Road



Other Emergency Number:
706-363-0981

WATSON MILL BRIDGE STATE PARK

Known as one of the most picturesque state parks in Georgia, Watson Mill Bridge contains the largest original-site covered bridge in the state, spanning 229 feet across the South Fork River. Built in 1885, the bridge is supported by a town lattice truss system held firmly together with wooden pins. At one time, Georgia had more than 200 covered bridges; today, less than 20 remain. Covering over 1,000 acres of land, the park is an ideal spot for an afternoon picnic or an overnight stay at the campground. Nature trails, bike trails and hiking/horse trails allow visitors to enjoy the thick forest along the river or travel into the park's backcountry. During summer, visitors often play in the cool river shoals.

The old Watson grist mill, from which the bridge got its name, operated during the late 1800s. The mill was run by Gabriel Watson and housed a furniture shop on the bottom floor. Evidence of the old mill is long since gone, but there is plenty of evidence of the old hydro-electric plant which was fed by the river. The present dam and raceway wall below the bridge were constructed around 1905 as part of the hydro-electric plant.

ACTIVITIES & FACILITIES

Camping - The park offers 21 combination tent, trailer and RV sites and 3 pioneer camping areas. A comfort station provides hot showers, flush toilets and laundry facilities.

Picnicking - There are 70 picnic sites and 3 picnic shelters. Shelters are reservable for a fee, and are available on a first-come, first-served basis at other times. An enclosed group shelter is available for rent and provides indoor seating for 90, a sink, oven, stove, BBQ pit and central heat and air conditioning.

Hiking and Biking - The park offers 7 miles of hiking trails and 5 miles of biking trails. Bikes are not allowed on hiking trails on the south side of the river or around the campground.

Horse Trails - More than 15 miles of trails are available for horseback riding. The equestrian area is 1.25 miles north of the covered bridge and includes a campground and rustic log cabin "bunkhouse." A central bathhouse is available for these campers and cabin guests.

Fishing - Park waters are open for legal fishing throughout the year. Persons age 16 or older must have a valid resident/non-resident fishing license.

Boating - Mill Pond is open to both private canoes and canoes rented from the park office.

Log Cabin - A rustic log cabin "bunkhouse" is also available.

TRAIL DESCRIPTIONS

Nature Trail

The 2 miles of nature trails run along the south side of the South Fork River and Big Clouds Creek. Portions of the trails wander through the historical portions of the park along the old powerhouse sluiceway, also known as a raceway. This man-made waterway channel is about 300 yards long and runs from the old dam just below the covered bridge to a second dam just above the foundation of the old powerhouse. The powerhouse generated electricity for a textile mill 10 miles away in Crawford, GA, for nearly half a century, beginning in 1905. The overlook at the head of this trail affords a view of the covered bridge and shoals below. At this site, the original Watson's Mill, gone by the end of the 1800s, once sat. The rest of the trails beyond the old powerhouse ruin meander through the woods along the banks of the river and creek and pass by the camping areas.

Biking & Hiking Trail

This six feet wide 2.5-mile loop trail runs along the north side of the South Fork River and is one of the most popular trails for hiking, mountain biking, and jogging. The trail meanders through hardwood and mixed forests and provides one of the best views of the lower shoals of the river. About half way around the loop is an overlook at the edge of what was once a natural beaver pond. Over the years, natural succession has taken place and the former pond area has now become a meadow. It most likely will eventually become part of the forest. Will it ever be a pond again? Only time, Mother Nature and the beavers will tell.

For the mountain biker, this trail is not overly technical as it is designed for beginners and intermediates. There are a few fairly steep grades. The entire trail is under shaded canopy. Whether you hike or bike, you will see a lot of biodiversity in the various types of environments the trail covers.

Beaver Creek Trail

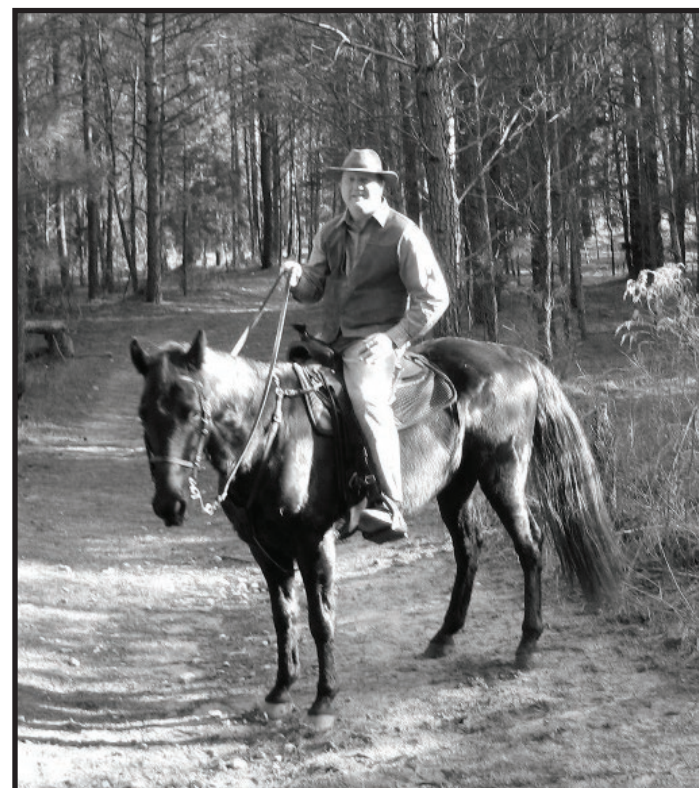
This six feet wide 1.5-mile loop trail runs up Beaver Creek and over a high ridge back through the hardwood forests on its return. The creek was once the site of several beaver ponds. The beavers left this creek area in the mid 1990s after a period of heavy downpours washed away the beaver dams. They now are most often seen in the river. As time goes on, the beavers may return. But even so, this area is an important wetland habitat. Birding opportunities abound on all trails, but especially on the trails on the north side of the river. This trail is for hiking, biking, and jogging. At the head of where the beaver ponds once began, there is a short rocky section and the entire trail is under shaded canopy.

Ridge Loop Trail

This six feet wide .75 mile trail begins in sight of the covered bridge where Beaver Creek dumps into the South Fork River. If you look carefully, to the right of the trail as it begins to climb up the ridge, old wheel ruts from "buggy days" can be seen when a horse and wagon was the mode of transportation. Ferns can now be seen growing in the old ruts. While heavily wooded with big trees providing a shaded canopy, the top of the ridge was once planted in cotton in the late 1800s. Much of the park was once in agricultural use whether planted in cotton or fenced for livestock. While this loop is just under a mile, it is also part of the overall trail system that accommodates hikers, mountain bikers, and joggers.

Horse Trails

Presently, there are 15 miles of horse trails in the park. These trails are designed for equestrians. Bicycles are not allowed on these trails. Dogs are also not allowed on horse trails. These trails go through a variety of environments. While almost unnoticeable, there are remains of old home sites from the 1800s. An agriculture society once occupied this area and, as the years have gone by, nature is taking back what had been altered by man. The state park was established in 1970. However, until the state park acquired additional land in the mid 1990s, private companies were managing portions of the properties for timber production. The overall state park management plan is to help provide sound resource preservation and conservation. However, due to the various uses of the land before it was acquired by the state park, there are numerous environments from "natural" forested areas to formerly "timber" managed areas. Along the creeks, large hardwoods with high canopies will be seen. Some of the formerly "timber" managed areas are now predominately pine forests and a few "old" abandoned field areas. While the park is full of wildlife, the deer population is truly wild and at the first sign of a person hiking a trail a deer will usually scatter. If you are riding horseback, the deer will generally stand in place for riders to get close-up views (the deer seem to see the trail rider as just another critter rather than a human). Because of the soil types in this area of the country, there are no "through the stream" trail crossings as streams are all crossed by way of culvert bridges. While there are some grades, most trail riders consider Watson Mill Bridge trails' terrain is not as steep as mountain trails further north nor as flat as the trails further south. This is one of the reasons equestrian trails are so popular at this site. There is something for everyone. At the head of the horse trail system, there is a camping area for equestrians wishing to stay longer than just a day.



SAFETY TIPS & ETIQUETTE

- Tell someone your itinerary and expected return time.
- Take a map, water, snacks, first aid kit, flashlight and whistle. Three short blasts on a whistle are known as a call for help.
- Do not stray from trails. If you become lost, stay in one location and wait for help. This will make it easier for rescuers to find you.
- Don't count on cell phones to work in the wilderness, but if they do, be able to give details about your location.
- Invest in good hiking socks such as those found at sporting goods stores. Avoid blisters by carrying "moleskin" and applying it as soon as you feel hot spots on your feet. Available in the foot care section of drug stores, moleskin is like felt that sticks to your skin.
- Be prepared for unexpected rain and wind which can lead to hypothermia. Always carry quality rain gear and turn back in bad weather. If you become wet or cold, it is important to get dry and warm as quickly as possible.
- Dress in layers and avoid cotton. Today's hikers can choose from numerous fabrics that wick moisture, dry quickly and conserve heat. Many experienced hikers wear a lightweight shirt that wicks moisture, while carrying a fleece pullover and rain jacket.
- Pack out all trash.
- Keep pets on a leash at all times and clean up after them.
- Do not pick flowers, disturb wildlife or take anything off the park.
- Protect the park and help prevent erosion by staying on marked trails.

CLIMATE DATA FOR COMER, GEORGIA

Month	Avg. High	Avg. Low	Avg. Mean	Avg. Precip.	Record High	Record Low
Jan	51°F	33°F	42°F	4.69 in	80°F (1975)	-4°F (1985)
Feb	57°F	35°F	46°F	4.39 in	81°F (1996)	3°F (1917)
Mar	65°F	42°F	54°F	4.99 in	89°F (1929)	11°F (1980)
Apr	73°F	49°F	61°F	3.35 in	97°F (1925)	26°F (1992)
May	80°F	58°F	69°F	3.86 in	100°F (1926)	37°F (1989)
Jun	87°F	65°F	76°F	3.94 in	107°F (1931)	45°F (1972)
Jul	90°F	69°F	80°F	4.41 in	108°F (1930)	55°F (1967)
Aug	88°F	69°F	78°F	3.78 in	107°F (1983)	44°F (1936)
Sep	83°F	63°F	73°F	3.53 in	108°F (1925)	31°F (1928)
Oct	73°F	51°F	62°F	3.47 in	98°F (1954)	24°F (1952)
Nov	63°F	42°F	53°F	3.71 in	86°F (1961)	7°F (1950)
Dec	54°F	35°F	45°F	3.71 in	93°F (1923)	2°F (1962)