

Chasing Waterfalls - Letchworth State Park

Letchworth State Park is one of those places that I visited quite a bit while growing up but it seems every visit is an opportunity to experience something new. Every season has a lot to offer to see and do in the park. Covering over 14,000 acres, Letchworth has activities for everyone ... hiking on the more than 66 miles of trails, a swimming pool, whitewater rafting, camping, picnic tables with grills, playgrounds, and so much more. All of my previous visits have been during the typically busy times ... summer for picnics and fall to see the colorful leaves. It wasn't until earlier this year that I made my first ever winter visit and I had also never been there for sunrise. That all changed back in October when we planned to arrive early in the morning. The forecast for the day we planned to visit was going to be pretty cold which I knew would create some fog in the gorge. Add that to all the fall colors and I knew it would be amazing! Well, we didn't arrive as early as I hoped but I was in no way disappointed with our visit.

The park has four main entrances - Mt. Morris in the north, Perry and Castile in the middle, and Portageville in south. On the east side, you'll find the Parade Grounds entrance. There is an entrance fee per vehicle from May until the end of October. For fees and updated trail information, please check <https://parks.ny.gov/parks/79/details.aspx>. While I would typically use the Mt. Morris entrance, for this visit I planned on using the Portageville entrance and spending more time in the southern half of the park.



When entering the park from the south end, the first main area you'll come to is the Genesee Arch Bridge which was built from October 2015 until December 2017. The span it

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replaced was used daily since 1875. From the parking lot near the bridge, you can take Trail 1 down towards Upper Falls. The views along these stairs are stunning ... from the bridge and gorge themselves to the incredible stonework, you won't know where to look or how to take it all in.



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From the area around Upper Falls, you can either climb back up all those stairs or you can keep following Trail 1 along the river which will take you to Middle Falls and Glen Iris Inn. There are walkways to take you right next to the falls and more that lead up to the Glen Iris Inn. Be sure you take the time to walk around this historic former home of William Pryor Letchworth for whom the park is named.

At this point, we wanted to visit a few locations that required driving so we headed back to

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our car .. and yes, it meant walking back up all those stairs by Upper Falls. Talk about a good workout!

Our next stop was at Wolf Creek. There's parking for about 20 vehicles here along with a few picnic tables and grills for visitors to enjoy. My husband & son got the grill going while I went off to explore and take pictures. With this visit, what really struck me was all the stone work ... from stairs and walls to bridges and picnic tables. The Wolf Creek area is full of the work done by the Civilian Conservation Corp. No doubt, the park would not be what it is today if not for this depression era program.



After enjoying our yummy lunch, we headed off to see Lower Falls. This area is full of more picnic tables and also a new all-accessible playground. We saw a few families enjoying both before we headed down the stairs to the Lower Falls viewing area. There are approximately

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125 stairs down ... and what seems to be about 500 coming back up! .. but this portion of the Genesee River is worth every one of them. Unfortunately, Trail 6 down along the gorge and the bridge across it is closed for repairs but don't worry, if you walk just a little bit further, you're still able to see Lower Falls from pretty close up.



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Once we made it up all those stairs, we headed back towards Portageville to exit the park and re-enter just down the road using the Parade Grounds entrance. This side of the park is less popular but there is still plenty to enjoy. You'll have access to more picnic areas, a few cabin loops, and there are also several trails on this side of the park as well. Our destination was Trail 6A so we could see Lower Falls from the other side. We were able to go pretty far on this trail but due to conditions on the trail and the bridge being closed, we were not able to walk all the way down.





While I have hi-lighted some of the major points of Letchworth State Park, there is so much more to see and do. This park is full of history and locations throughout that are worth seeing. Whether you spend a day or a weekend, you'll definitely want to come back to "The Grand Canyon of the East". Voted the 2015 Reader's Choice Best State Park according to USA Today readers, this park is simply amazing. Hopefully this mini-tour has inspired you to start planning your trip!

Until the next roadtrip ... Donna

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