

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the **Women's Fall Backpack** with Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont. We hope you are looking forward to this program as much as we are! **Please read this letter in full, as it contains essential information for your visit to Tremont.**

How to Prepare:

You don't have to be an Olympic athlete to be able to backpack, but you *do* need to be in good shape. The Smoky Mountains are characterized by rolling hills and steep slopes that challenge any hiker. Attaining access to the more remote areas of the park is one of the more satisfying aspects of backpacking. You must be in good physical condition and, in consideration of others, be able to keep up with the group, hiking 5-8 miles per day in rugged, mountainous terrain while carrying a heavy backpack (roughly 20-25% of your body weight). In addition to carrying your own gear, you should expect to carry group gear, including tents, food, and cooking equipment.

We will teach you techniques that should lessen the difficulty and enhance your enjoyment. However, you can help by preparing yourself physically *before arriving*. Exercise your legs, heart, and lungs by hiking around your neighborhood, on hilly terrain, or even up and down stairs. Wear your hiking boots while doing so to break them in. If you come prepared, you will enjoy our hike together all the more.

What to Bring:

Bringing appropriate clothing and equipment is vital for both your safety and comfort. Be sure to read [Notes on Appropriate Gear](#) to help you make better-informed decisions on what items to bring with you. Please do not hesitate to bring items in question. Before hitting the trail, you will have an opportunity to review what you have packed with your Tremont staff leaders so that we might minimize excessive and unnecessary weight.

It may help to know the temperatures that we might expect. The month of October has seen an average daily high of 75 degrees F., and an average daily low of 43 degrees F. Keep in mind, however, that your hike may take you through higher elevations, which can sometimes mean temperatures changes of fifteen degrees or more, which can cause temperatures to dip below freezing. Also, keep in mind that the Smokies are a very wet and humid climate; expect it to rain at some point during your time here!

Leaders:

I am pleased to be one of the leaders for this trip. Visit our website to learn more about me and the rest of our [faculty](#). I will be your primary contact regarding details. If you have any questions, contact me by e-mail at elizabeth@gsmmit.org. Please understand that it may take several days for me to respond since most of my work time is spent outdoors with groups.

Routes:

Routes may range from 1,400 feet to over 6,000 feet above sea level. Expect about 5-8 miles of hiking each day, though some days may be shorter.

Arrival Time:

Please arrive at Tremont on Thursday no later than 7:00 PM. When you arrive, drive past our wooden Stop sign. Down the drive, you will see some parking on your left - this is directly below the Activity Center. Go up

the stairs from the parking area and meet me and Erin in the Activity Center. On Thursday night you will be staying in our platform tents, which have bunks and access to a shower.

Our orientation will begin at 7:15 PM. We will get to know each other, check over personal gear, distribute food and group equipment, review the route, and discuss backcountry etiquette and low-impact camping techniques. In the morning we will have breakfast, finish packing, and depart for our trailhead.

Parking Passes

Valid parking tags are required on any vehicles parking for longer than 15 minutes inside Great Smoky Mountains National Park as part of the Park it Forward program; this includes when parked at Tremont.

Please purchase your parking tag in advance, not when you arrive. Click here to [purchase your daily or weekly pass online](#). All revenue will stay in the park to provide sustainable, year-round support focusing on improving the visitor experience, protecting resources, and maintaining trails, roads, historic structures, and facilities. [Learn more about Park it Forward](#).

Transportation to Trailhead:

Tremont will provide transportation to the trailhead in a van. You can safely leave your vehicle on Tremont's campus.

Departure Time:

The program will end at Tremont on Sunday late afternoon. You are welcome to take a shower before departing.

Phone:

If someone needs to reach you during the program, a message can be left at our office number: (865) 448-6709 (Hours: Monday-Friday 8:00-4:30). Please note that no one is available in the office to retrieve messages after 4:30. For after-hours *emergencies only* the National Park Service may be called at (865) 436-1294.

Additional Logistics:

Please read our [latest COVID-19 guidelines](#) prior to your trip and let us know if you have any questions or concerns. Check out the "[Your Visit to Tremont](#)" document for a campus map and other basic information. *Wifi is available in the Activity Center, but we invite and encourage you to unplug for the weekend.*

We look forward to sharing the wonders of the Smokies with you. If you have any questions or special requests, feel free to call. See you soon!

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Davis
Field Program Specialist