

Orchid Walk #8, Mystic Falls and Biscuit Basin

Visit Biscuit Basin geyser area, find 4 species of orchids, view the 70 foot Mystic Falls, and maybe climb up to an overview of Biscuit Basin. If your timing is right, you might see Old Faithful erupt in the far distance.

Round-trip distances: 1 3/4 miles to the orchids and back, 2 1/4 miles to falls and back, and 4 miles for the whole loop

Elevation gain: Nearly flat to orchids, 160 ft gain. Steep to overlook, 520 ft gain; 7280 ft at parking lot, 7450 ft at Mystic Falls, and 7800 ft at the overlook.

Time: 45 minutes to 3 hours, depending on whether you go to the overlook.

Kids will like: Mystic Falls, seeing obsidian in the stone steps from the falls toward the overlook.

Visitor Center / Ranger Station: Old Faithful.

Orchid species: Coral root orchids (unidentified *Corallorhiza* species in bud), White and green bog orchid (*Platanthera* species), Ladies tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*).

Best time for blooms:

Coralroots (*Corallorhiza*): mid-June to early July

White Bog Orchids (*Platanthera dilatata*): mid-June to early July

Green Bog Orchids (*Platanthera aquilonis* and *P. huronensis*): early June to July

Ladies tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*): early August to early September

Other interesting plants: Brewer's monkeyflower (*Mimulus breweri*), Leopard lily (*Fritillaria atropurpurea*), Mitrewort (*Mitella* species), White Geranium (*Geranium richardsonii*). Brewer's Monkeyflower has dark pink blossoms and grows almost flat on gravel bars near the trail. The Mitreworts look almost like grass until you notice the teensy frilly green or greenish white blossoms along the stem. I usually see the Mitreworts in among the Bog Orchids, and sometimes I only notice them later when I'm looking at my photos. The White Geraniums grow in damp areas with part shade.

GPS:

Trailhead(s):

--Main Biscuit Basin Parking Lot N44° 29.104' W110° 51.117'

--Small parking area approximately 0.1 mile south of Biscuit Basin parking lot on east, at N44° 28.833' W110° 51.230'

Orchid locations:

--Coralroots (unidentified *Corallorhiza* species in bud): N44° 29.085' W110° 51.852'

--White Bog orchids (*Platanthera dilatata*): N44° 29.086' W110° 51.990'

--Green Bog orchids (*Platanthera* sp.): N44° 29.108' W110° 51.812'

--Ladies tresses (*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*): inside the boardwalk near hot springs. Viewable by binoculars and zoom lens only!

Let's Get Moving!

First, check that you have your bear spray, snacks, water, and mosquito repellent. Now let's enjoy Biscuit Basin from the boardwalks. If you're here in late July or August, look for the Ladies Tresses orchids around hot springs inside the boardwalks (I use my binoculars and a zoom lens). After enjoying the views of the thermal basin, then head almost due west. Right at the end of the boardwalks there's a large trail sign and the trail enters the woods. Read the trail sign and look at the map. In about ¼ mile on your right comes the trail junction to climb up to the overlook point. But first, let's go straight toward the waterfall and find some orchids.

Near this trail junction there's a wet area right below the trail that is chock full of Green Bog orchids amidst tangled dead trees. There is more than one type of Green Bog Orchid (*Platanthera* sp.) in this group. Some of the plants have a slightly yellow straight lip with a round spur behind the lip (*Platanthera aquilonis*), and others are green with a thinner spur (*Platanthera huronensis*).

Next you'll come to a left branch trail toward Summit Lake. Detour for just about 5 yards, and look immediately to your right for Coralroot Orchids. Then maybe go down to the stream to scout for other bloomers before you turn back to the main trail to Mystic Falls.

Continuing on the main trail to the falls, next stop is for White Bog Orchids (*Platanthera dilatata*). They are on the uphill side of the trail in a seep. Give these the sniff test for their sweet odor. You'll see more Bog Orchids on both sides of the trail as you approach the waterfall.

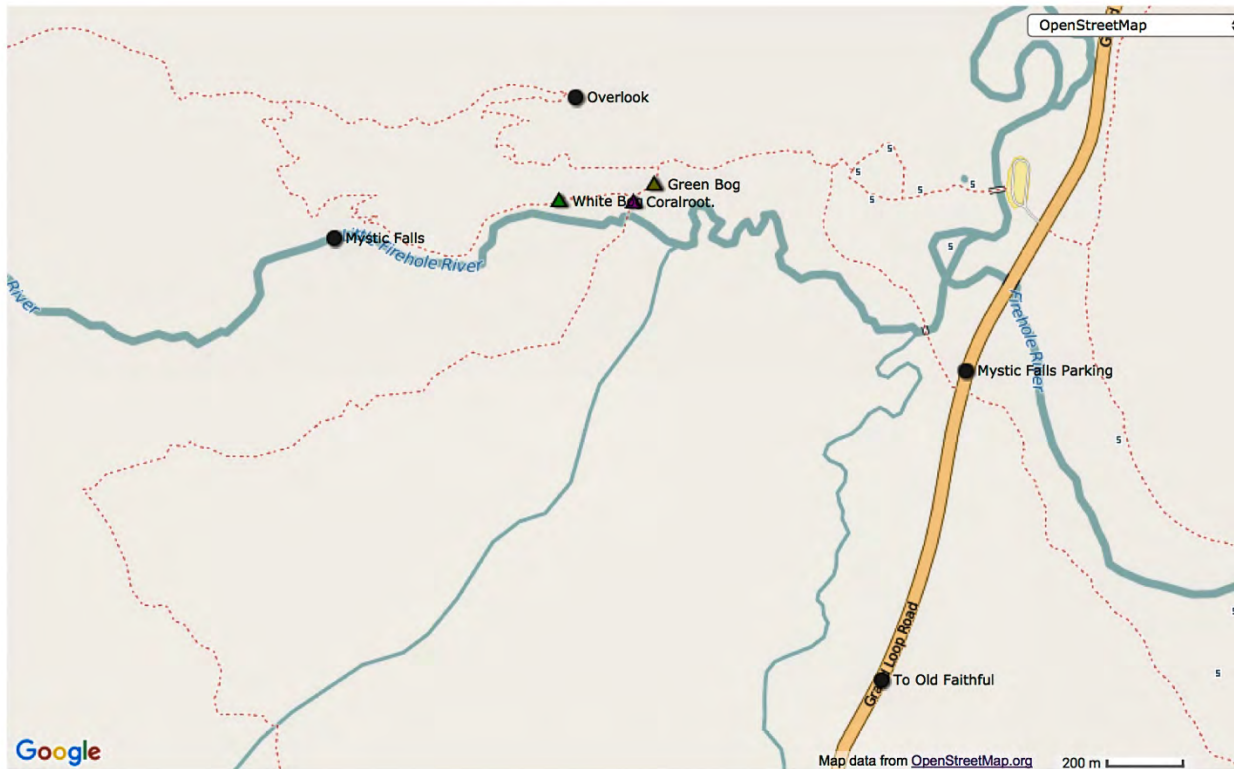
When you get to Mystic Falls, about 1½ miles from the Biscuit Basin parking lot, notice the thermal vents on the other side of the stream. And right here at the first nice view of the falls there is quite a bit of Stinging Nettle (*Urtica* species). So be careful what plants you handle.

Keep Going or Turn Around?

From the waterfall the trail climbs up some stone steps. Look down – the edging stones have very large seams of solid obsidian (black volcanic glass). American Indians made tools out of obsidian from Yellowstone. After you go up the steps, the trail tops out at about 7800 ft and turns east. Then you get to the overlook of Biscuit Basin and a grand panorama of the whole Upper Geyser Basin. I was lucky and saw Old Faithful and Grand Geyser erupt simultaneously from up here. If Old Faithful is due, you'll see that the benches around it are full of people, and you can decide whether to wait for the eruption.

Then it's down the switchbacks and back to the trailhead. Watch out for trails that aren't real, and stick to the official trail.

There is so much to do in the geyser area, what next? Back to Old Faithful to relax in a rocker at the Lodge? Or an espresso with live music at the Inn? Get out of the crowd for a picnic just north on the main road at Whisky Flats where there are usually bison grazing?



Map 8. Mystic Falls and Biscuit Basin (north is up)

<p>View of Mystic Falls</p>  <p>June 25, 2018</p>	<p>Brewer's Monkey Flower (<i>Mimulus breweri</i>)</p>  <p>June 25, 2018 Mystic Falls Trail</p>
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Visual Orchid Guide for Mystic Falls

Green Bog Orchid
(*Platanthera aquilonis*)



June 11, 2015, Mystic Falls Trail

White Bog Orchid with Spider
(*Platanthera dilatata*)



June 25, 2018 Mystic Falls Trail

Western Coral Root
(*Corallorhiza mertensiana*)



July 8, 2017 Mystic Falls Trail

Ladies Tresses, inside boardwalk!
(Photo from boardwalk)
(*Spiranthes romanzoffiana*)



July 8, 2017, Biscuit Basin