

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

TOP 12 LIST

Lance and Tina Holland led combination boat and/or walking tours to various destinations in the Park for over 25 years and created the following list. We're a little partial toward the North Carolina side.

1. **DEEP CREEK** If you are looking for a place to escape the summer heat and introduce the kids to a mountain stream, there is no better place than Deep Creek. For many years the youngsters around Bryson City, NC rode their bikes up Deep Creek with an inner tube strapped on, then launched on a floating voyage down the cooling stream. Soon entrepreneurs just outside the Park boundary started renting tubes equipped with the essential integrated seat. Over the years, folks have tossed enough rocks to create a channel for the swift but relatively safe rushing waters. Deep Creek is also the best place to get a taste of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park on foot. Three waterfalls are seen on an easy two mile walk. Because of the tradition started by the Bryson City youngsters, the first several miles is one of the few trails open to bicycles in the Park.
2. **FONTANA LAKE** The 10,600 acre, 31 mile long lake forms about half of the southern border of the Park. Since all of the north side of the lake is in the Park, and 90% of the south side belongs to the U.S. Forest Service, Fontana is arguably the most pristine large lake in the East. Fishing, boating, swimming, and site seeing are special on Fontana. The lake was chosen as the filming location for the movie *NELL* starring Jodie Foster and Liam Nieson. Boat rentals and launching ramps are available at several locales on the south side of the lake. Fontana Village Marina, near the dam, offers U.S. Coast Guard licensed tour boats and shuttles for hikers and fisherman across the lake into the park.
3. **PIONEER FARMSTEAD AT OCONALUFTEE VISITOR CENTER** A collection of pioneer farm buildings were moved from around the Park to recreate a farmstead of the mid to late 1800's. Living history and interpretive programs enhance the visit. Ironically, since any cultural history saved when the Park was established in the mid 1930's had to be at least 50 years old, this display and most of the interpretation in Cades Cove gives the visitors an incorrect picture of the people that were living in the Smokies before it became a Park. They think that everyone living in the Smokies was huddled in a weather beaten log cabin and dragging around some old horse drawn sled, and that's not true. Sure, there were people living up the hollers and in the back country that were still living a pioneer type lifestyle, but most folks that were living in the valleys and along the roads were living in frame houses, many had electricity and telephones, and they were riding around in Chevys and Fords. Fortunately, the entire prepark history is now 50 years old and interpreters have created some good displays like the logging history display inside the Visitor Center. The Park followed the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System and completed a new Visitors Center in 2015. Elk can often be seen in the adjacent fields around daylight and dusk.

4. **FONTANA DAM** The tallest dam in Eastern America (480 feet) was constructed during World War II in an incredibly short period of time as an essential war project. It primarily supplied electricity to the giant ALCOA plant just down the mountain to make aluminum for airplanes. The other wire went to the super- secret Manhattan Project facility in Oak Ridge Tn. to split the atom to make the world's first atomic bombs. The associated reservoir flooded the access to the well populated North Shore area resulting in the complete depopulation and addition of 44,000 acres of land to the Park. The infamous **Road to Nowhere** is part of that story. The North Shore today is the least used section of the most popular National Park in the world. The Appalachian Trail crosses the dam. A seasonally staffed Visitors Center is at the top of the dam.
5. **HAZEL CREEK** First touted in the early 1900's by *Our Southern Highlanders* author Horace Kephart as a Mecca for outdoor adventure such as trout fishing and hiking, Hazel Creek has almost mythical status among its many fans. With its pioneer, logging, mining, and early tourism history, many folks go there to study Smoky Mountain cultural history. In 1944 the area was completely depopulated and added to the Park. Since then the creek has become a must do for outdoor enthusiasts following in the footsteps of Kephart, J.G. Stikeleather, who operated the famous Hazel Creek Fishing and Outing Club, and other well known outdoorsmen. Many times I have been told "I must join the brotherhood" when being asked to guide first timers to the creek.
6. **MINGUS MILL** Even though this high tech, for the day, turbine mill was no where near 50 years old, it was saved and has remained in operation ever since. The corn meal ground and sold here provides much needed revenue. Operated by the Great Smoky Mountains Association, proceeds from purchases are donated to educational, scientific and historical projects in the Park.
7. **NEWFOUND GAP.** Site of President Roosevelt's Park dedication and many visitors only opportunity to experience a spruce/fir forest.
8. **SPRUCE/FIR FOREST ALONG THE CLINGMANS DOME ROAD** Just off both sides of this road is a little taste of Canada. The Appalachian Trail parallels the roadway and provides an easy opportunity to experience a forest type not normally found in the south. A great tale of ice caps, traveling plants, and elevation change can be told here.
9. **CLINGMAN'S DOME** Cool tower. At 6,643 feet, Clingmans Dome is the highest point in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It is the highest point in Tennessee even though the state line runs across the summit and the third highest mountain east of the Mississippi. Only Mt. Mitchell (6,684 feet) and Mt. Craig (6,647), both located in Mt. Mitchell State Park in western North Carolina, rise higher. The observation tower on the summit of Clingmans Dome offers spectacular 360° views of the Smokies and beyond for visitors willing to climb the steep half-mile walk to the tower at the top. Senator Thomas Clingman and Dr. Elisha Mitchell had a protracted feud over the two mountains heights that led to Mitchell's death.

10. **CATALOOCHEE VALLEY** The most important cultural history interpretive area in the Park in my opinion. Here the visitor will find original buildings in their original locations. The fine frame buildings preserved here give a much more complete picture of prepark settlement. The long gravel road access to Cataloochee once meant that you would probably have the area to yourself. Elk were reintroduced in the valley in 2001 and now a lot more folks make the journey, especially during the fall rut.
11. **CADES COVE** An early morning or late afternoon round through the Cove is worth enduring the crowds to view the abundant wildlife.
12. **MOUNT LECONTE** A trip to Leconte is a must for any serious Park enthusiast and of course to do the sunrise and sunset. LeConte Lodge, created in 1925 by veteran Smokies hiker Paul Adams, is the highest guest lodge in the eastern United States. It is situated on an open glade just below the summit of Mt. LeConte at an elevation of about 6400 feet. It is accessible only by hiking and is the only place in the Smoky Mountains National Park where a visitor can sleep overnight in a snug permanent structure.

Must see and do just outside the Park

1. **GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN RAILROAD** History and scenery at 17 miles an hour on a real railroad. Just down the street from Appalachian Mercantile. gsmr.com
2. **NANTAHALA RIVER** The most popular whitewater river in the country.
3. **TSALI AND FONTANA VILLAGE MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS** Since off-road biking is not permitted on all but a few trails in the Park, visit these two world class trail systems to practice your pedaling.
4. **THE DRAGON (US. HIGHWAY 129)** Forming 11 miles of the southwestern border of the Park, Highway 129 has become world famous among motorcyclists and sports car enthusiasts. Called the Dragon, the 11 mile stretch of road boasts 318 curves.
5. **JOYCE KILMER MEMORIAL FOREST** Located 20 miles south of the Park, the largest virgin forest in the East is truly one of our Nations treasures. The visitor can see what the southern Appalachians looked like before the arrival of Europeans.
6. Stop by the store and we will be glad to give you directions and tidbits from a couple of old hands.