

The Road to Nowhere

Great Smoky Mountains National Park



'Nowhere' Is Somewhere Special

With so much to see and do in the Bryson City area, it is hard to imagine a day when you might have nowhere to go. But should that happen, there is always The Road to Nowhere, a scenic mountain highway that takes you six miles into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and ends at the mouth of a tunnel. On the map, it is called Lakeview Drive, but to the citizens of Swain County it is The Road to Nowhere — A Broken Promise.

From Bryson City, take Everett Street / Fontana Road three miles north to Lakeview Drive – a beautiful drive or strenuous bike ride through the National Park with an overlook of Fontana Lake and access to hiking trails including the 33.5 mile Lakeshore Trail.

The Story Behind the Road to Nowhere

In the 30's and 40's Swain County lost the majority of its private land to the US government for the creation of Fontana Lake and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Hundreds of families were forced to leave their small mountain communities. Not only were their homes gone, but also the roads leading to those communities.

The US government promised to replace NC-288 with Lakeview Drive stretching 30 miles along the north shore of Fontana Lake, from Bryson City to Fontana Dam; providing access to old family cemeteries. But Lakeview Drive fell victim to an environmental issue and construction was stopped at the tunnel about six miles into the Park. Swain County citizens gave the unfinished Lakeview Drive its popular, but unofficial name, "The Road to Nowhere".

In 2018, Swain County received the final payment on a \$52 million settlement from the US government in lieu of completing the road. And on weekends throughout the summer, the Park Service still ferries groups of Swain County residents across Fontana Lake to visit their old family cemeteries for Decoration Days and family reunions.

For more information, please visit the Swain County Heritage Museum at 2 Everett Street in downtown Bryson City.



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828-488-7857

Road to Nowhere Hiking Trails

GOLDMINE LOOP TRAIL

3 mile loop, easy to moderate
Elevation change 700 feet

Goldmine Loop is the first of many trails that can be accessed from the 33.5 mile long Lakeshore Trail. And it's one of the most popular for casual day hikers.

From the tunnel parking lot, the hike begins with a walk through the 365-foot paved two-lane tunnel. It's dark in the middle so bring a flashlight. And watch where the horses have been.

Follow the Lakeshore Trail for .6 of a mile. Just past the Tunnel Bypass Trail turn left onto the Goldmine Loop Trail. Following the loop, you'll see evidence of old farms. There may be muddy areas or small streamlets to cross. About halfway through the loop, you'll come to a small Fontana Lake inlet.

The trail then loops northward and soon intersects with the Tunnel Bypass Trail. Keep to the right and follow the bypass trail back to the parking area.

As shown on the map, the complete Tunnel Bypass Trail offers a shorter, easy alternative to the Goldmine Loop Trail. Also, those not wishing to walk through the tunnel can access the trail near the parking area and follow the bypass trail to the Goldmine Loop.

NOLAND CREEK TRAIL NORTH

8.4 miles total in and out, easy to moderate
Elevation change 707 feet

Starting at the parking area, the trail passes immediately under the viaduct and crosses Noland Creek on a wooden bridge.

The trail progresses steadily uphill with the creek almost always in sight or earshot. The second bridge is surrounded by the remnants of an old farm. Before reaching the third bridge crossing, you may see remnants of numerous other farmsteads that dot the landscape.

Near the upper end of a meadow, the trail crosses bridges twice before intersecting the western end of Springhouse Branch Trail. This is a good place to turn around.

NOLAND CREEK TRAIL SOUTH

2 miles total in and out, easy
Elevation change 143 feet

This 1-mile trail follows Noland Creek south to Fontana Lake. You can access the trail from either the viaduct area north of the parking lot, or the 190-yard long access path just south of the parking lot.

Much of the trail is soft, sandy and occasionally wet, with driftwood litter near the lake.

