

# THE ROAD TO NOWHERE... AND SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN

one-day  
itinerary

*This itinerary works for the overnigher as well as the day-tripper from a nearby larger city seeking a dose of nature and small town living.*

The Road to Nowhere gets lots of attention simply for its name. It is a real road in Bryson City that ends at a tunnel inside the bounds of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. But that's the end of the road. If you want to venture further you have to do it by foot.

**A Little History.** The road received its name from a dispute during the 1930s and '40s when Swain County gave up the majority of its private land to the federal government for the creation of Fontana Lake and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Hundreds of people were forced to leave the small communities that had been their homes for generations. The road that led to the area was buried beneath the waters of the lake, cutting off access to a number of family cemeteries. The federal government made an agreement with Swain County to replace the road with a new one along the lake's north shore.

Construction on the road began in the 1960s but was halted because of an environmental issue, leaving the tunnel completed, but nothing else. The debate continues – build the road or secure a monetary settlement for Swain County from the National Park Service? Politics aside, the Road to Nowhere, as named by locals, remains a point of curiosity for visitors from near and far.

**Going Nowhere, Fast.** The Road to Nowhere is just a quick eight-mile drive outside of Bryson City. Before you go, enjoy breakfast and coffee with the locals at either the Everett Street Diner or Mountain Perks, both on the way to Nowhere. After breakfast, head straight out of Bryson City on Everett Street and don't make any turns. On the map it's called Lakeview Drive, but the road signs are marked Fontana Road. You'll pass Swain County High School and eventually see a sign that says you have entered the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. You will also see a sign that says "The Road to Nowhere – A Promise Broken." The road ends at a barrier with the tunnel in sight beyond.

The serenity of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park may have you yearning for more nature so turn around and head to Deep Creek to see the waterfalls. From the Road to Nowhere, make your way back to town and take a left on Depot Street. Follow the signs to Deep Creek Campground, making sure to follow West Deep Creek Road. This will put you at the Deep Creek entrance to the park. It's only three miles from the center of town. Trail signs for the waterfalls are well-marked. The trails lead to three different falls – Juney Whank, Indian Creek and Toms Branch. The Juney Whank and Indian Creek trails have moderate slopes, while Toms Branch is the closest to the trailhead.

After your hike, park in town and walk to any one of Bryson City's great lunch spots like Jimmy Mac's on Main Street, Papa's Pizza and The Filling Station on Everett Street, or Anthony's Pizzeria and Across the Trax near the train depot. After lunch spend the afternoon browsing the shops and galleries of Everett and Main street and in the depot area. You'll find stores chock-full of antiques, artwork and crafts. To tour working artists' studios, don't miss Elizabeth Ellison Watercolors on Main Street and Heath Creations Studio and Gallery on Depot Street. The Cottage Craftsman in the depot area showcases work from mountain artisans. At nearby Gil's Book Sale you'll find the popular Walt Larrimore books about a young doctor's impressions of Bryson City, as well as copies of Horace Kephart's "Our Southern Highlanders," detailing the history of the region.

Finish off your in-town day with dinner at Pasqualino's Italian Restaurant or The Station Restaurant, both on Everett Street. If it's summertime, stop in at Soda Pops and join the locals for an ice cream. If you're in town on a Saturday, June through October, catch the weekly "Music in the Mountains" concert at the train depot. It's free and starts at 6:30 p.m.

**For more information on touring** the Smokies, contact the Swain County Chamber of Commerce, 210 Main Street, P.O. Box 509, Bryson City, NC 28713; [chamber@greatsmokies.com](mailto:chamber@greatsmokies.com); or 800-867-9246.