

## Swain County is a cool mountain town to spend some summer days in

Swain County is swell. That's a good way to describe the many amusements and spectacular mountain scenery that awaits visitors to that western North Carolina destination.

First, a bit of history. Swain County was formed from Jackson and Macon counties in 1871. It was named for David L. Swain (1806-1868), a governor of North Carolina and president of the University of North Carolina.

Swain County has 533 square miles of area, 85 percent of which is owned by the federal government. About 200,000 acres of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is located in Swain County. Also, 21,000 acres within the Nantahala National Forest and several thousand acres of Tennessee Valley Authority land are also in Swain. The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians hold another 30,000 acres of property in the county.

If you're looking for some peace and quiet, Swain County is a good place to start. The county's year round population is just 12,300 folks. The county was also picked by "Outdoor Magazine" among its choices as "best places to live."

Cool weather is the norm in Swain County. The average year-round temperature is 74 degrees. Of course the winter temps are really cool with an average of 40 degrees.

Swain's elevation and location in the Smoky Mountains means rainfall is usually abundant. The average yearly amount is 60 inches. On the higher slopes, that figure an approach 90 inches per year.

Highway access to and from Swain County is excellent. Highways 19, 23, and 74 offer quick access to I-40. Highway 441 goes over the mountains to Gatlinburg in Tennessee and southward to Georgia. Travel time to Swain County from either Gaston or Cleveland counties is under three hours.

Bryson City is the seat of Swain County and offers a good place to take in a variety of activities there or to use as a jumping off spot of regional attractions.

Slicing right through the middle of town, the Great Smoky Mountain Railway is perhaps Bryson City's most popular draw. Each year sees thousands of folks come to Bryson, board the train, and take a tour of the surrounding mountains.

Another neat thing to do in Bryson City is riding inner tubes down Deep Creek. The creek is an icy cold stream about two miles outside of town at the entrance to the Deep Creek campground and Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

Tubes with seats (a must) rent for just a few dollars per day. Several vendors offer the circles of rubber and there are also places to change your clothes. In addition to tubing, Deep Creek has a series of hiking trails, trout fishing areas, picnic tables and places to pitch your tent. All of this in the cool and refreshing mountain forest.

the point of a huge tunnel, and then abandoned.

The drive is a twisting mountain road that's bordered by lush vegetation and in places offers a look at Fontana Lake below. Near the tunnel, there's a place to park your car and walk. One trail follows Noland Creek and another actually lets you walk the length of the famous tunnel. Horseback riding is a popular activity in this area and it's not unusual to see a number of folks and their steeds along the way.

Swain County is home to the tallest dam in Eastern North America. Built during World War II, Fontana Dam was a project of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Standing over 400 feet tall, Fontana Dam is 376 feet wide at its base and contains

2.8 million cubic yards of concrete. Fontana Lake is 10,640 acres in size with 240 miles of shoreline.

Visitors to Fontana Dam can walk across the top and peer over at the Little Tennessee River far, far below. A welcome center has information about the dam as well as a snack bar and restrooms. Fontana Lake offer several places to rent boats as well as Fontana Village with lodging and other amenities.

The Cherokee people have been a part of the Swain County landscape for centuries, so it's little wonder their story past an present is still being played out there.

A well-known tourist town for decades, Cherokee is a conglomeration of gift shops, eateries, the site of the

outdoor drama "Horn in the West," and more.

More information on

Swain County is available at [www.greatsmokies.com](http://www.greatsmokies.com) or by calling the Swain County

Chamber of Commerce in Bryson City at 1-828-488-3681.



Photo courtesy NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development

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