



# FURS TO FACTORIES HERITAGE TRAIL

## **Welcome**

The *Furs to Factories Heritage Trail* has been described as a “museum without walls.” And it’s true. The story of how the Industrial Revolution played out in the Southern Appalachians is a compelling narrative that is linked to the nation’s history. Each stop along the way acts as a chapter in the story. A 1757 British fort, Cherokee museum, Victorian train station, 1890 railroad, historic copper mine, ancient trade path, two national scenic byways, and a textile mill village are examples of what modern day explorers will find on the *Furs to Factories Heritage Trail*. And getting there is part of the experience. Two national scenic byways, train excursions, and Cherokee National Forest hiking and biking trails make exploring the Tennessee Overhill a memorable experience.

## **Historical Background**

The Industrial Revolution took shape in Great Britain in the 1700’s, but it soon spread to the New World. The Tennessee Overhill played a major role in how the movement played out in the southern Appalachians. During the early 1700’s Cherokee Indians in the southern mountains provided millions of deerskins for the European market – money that venture helped fuel industrial growth in Great Britain. Profits from that trade later came back into the Overhill through capital investments in early industries like mining, timber, and textiles.

Fur trading was an early economic activity in the Overhill but it was short lived. Subsistence farming was the mainstay for many years. The vast natural resources of the mountains – timber, minerals, and water - attracted industrialists from all over the world and heavy industry was on the scene by the early 1800’s. Iron furnaces were established across the Overhill. Copper mining began in the Ducktown Basin, and gold was discovered at Coker Creek. Railroads replaced wagon roads and worker villages sprang up around mills and mines. Eventually the rivers were tamed for hydroelectric power, generating tourism as well as electricity.

## **The Tennessee Overhill Today**

Modern day travelers can explore the Furs to Factories Heritage Trail in southeastern Tennessee to experience the places where it all happened. Seven museums, numerous historic sites, and an 1890 railroad reveal compelling stories of Overhill Cherokees, fur traders, explorers, British soldiers, copper miners, railroaders, textile mill workers, farmers, and settlers –the people whose occupations and customs shaped the land and culture of the Tennessee Overhill. Much has changed, yet much remains the same. The Cherokee National Forest forms the heart of the Tennessee Overhill, preserving the lands and waters that attracted the earliest visitors. Many of the historic trade centers and worker villages are now thriving towns with places to dine, spend the night, shop, and maybe meet the descendents of the people who made history here.

## **Getting Around**

Getting around the Tennessee Overhill is part of the experience. Travel two national scenic byways, hike on an ancient trade path, or ride vintage trains on an historic railroad.

### **Cherohala Skyway**

This mile-high national scenic byway skirts mountaintops in the Cherokee and Nantahala national forests –thus the name “Cherohala.” The road connects Tellico Plains, TN to Robbinsville, NC across 51 miles that climbs to over 5,000 ft. Places with names like Stratton Meadows and Santeetlah reflect settlers and Native people who once lived in the coves and forest. The Charles Hall Museum and Skyway Visitor Center are located at the western gateway in Tellico Plains. The Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest sits a few miles off the Skyway near Robbinsville.

### **Ocoee Scenic Byway**

The nation’s first National Forest Scenic Byway winds alongside the rugged Ocoee River on US Hwy 64 between Ocoee, TN and Ducktown, TN. This was once known as the Old Copper Road, a route used by copper haulers to transport ore from the mines at Ducktown to the rail terminal at Cleveland, TN. A side trip on FS 77 up to the top of Chilhowee Mountain offers great views. The byway passes by the famous Ocoee Flume and hydroelectric dams – all listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Ocoee Whitewater Center, built for the 1996 Olympic whitewater races, is located near the eastern gateway near Ducktown. A restored section of the Old Copper Road, located at the Ocoee Whitewater Center, is open for hiking and biking.

### **Unicoi Turnpike Trail**

The path now known as the Unicoi Turnpike Trail predates written history. The places, events, and people associated with the trail are linked to our nation’s history. The original trail ran from Charleston, SC to the Overhill Capital of Chota (near present day Vonore, TN). People can follow the old trade path on highways that run between Vonore, TN and Murphy, NC. A section of original roadbed that lies in the Cherokee national Forest at Coker Creek is open for public hiking. Free trail maps are available at sites along the way.

### **Hiwassee River Rail Adventures**

Travel the Old Line Railroad through the Cherokee National Forest between Etowah, TN and Copperhill, TN. Built in 1890, passengers on this scenic mountain railroad ride vintage passenger coaches alongside the Scenic Hiwassee River, into the Hiwassee River Gorge, and around the Historic Louisville and Nashville Railroad Loop. On selected dates, trains run all the way into Copperhill, TN – an historic copper mining town.

### **1. Sequoyah Birthplace Museum**

576 Hwy 360

Vonore, TN

423-884-6246

[www.sequoyahmuseum.org](http://www.sequoyahmuseum.org)

Hours: Mon-Sat 9:00-5:00; Sun noon – 5:00

This museum, owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, is situated on the banks of Tellico Lake, near the site of the old Cherokee village of Tuskegee. Sequoyah, inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, was born in Tuskegee around 1776. Museum exhibits interpret the history of the Overhill Cherokee towns that once sat along the Little Tennessee River and the life of Sequoyah. Memorials to the Overhill Cherokee towns of **Chota** and **Tanasi** are located nearby. Authentic Cherokee crafts are offered for sale in the gift shop.

## **2. Fort Loudoun State Historic Area**

338 Fort Loudoun Road

Vonore, TN

423-884-6217

[www.fortloudoun.com](http://www.fortloudoun.com)

Hours: Fort is open every day from 8:00-l sunset

Visitor Center opens Mon-Fri from 8:00-4:30

This reconstructed fort was painstakingly built by the British in 1756-1757 at the request of pro-British Cherokee factions at the Overhill Town of Chota. The Cherokees wanted the fort to deter raiding by French allied Indians and to discourage French settlement. The fort sits on a hill overlooking Tellico Lake. The visitor center presents information on the fort's history and a short film adds to the visitor's understanding of the historical period in which the fort was built and ultimately destroyed. The remains of **Tellico Blockhouse** lie just across the lake from the fort. Built in 1794, it was there that federal and territorial officials implemented the Factory Act of 1798, a federal government plan to "civilize" Indians by maintaining "factories," or trading posts, where Indians would receive fair exchange for their furs as well as learn farming and mechanical skills. Visitors can wander among the foundations and look across the river toward the old Cherokee Nation.

## **3. Charles Hall Museum**

Hwy 165/Cherohala Skyway

Tellico Plains, TN

423-253-8000 or 866-761-9368

Hours: 9:00-5:00 every day except Christmas & Thanksgiving

An impressive collection of guns, historic photographs, and other artifacts can be found in the museum. Sitting at the western gateway to the Cherohala Skyway, the museum is located in the mountain town of Tellico Plains, a crossroads for travelers for over 10,000 years. The **Skyway Visitor Center** is next door.

## **4. Coker Creek Welcome Center**

Hwy 68/Joe Brown Hwy

Coker Creek TN

423-261-2286

Hours: 9:00-4:00, Tues-Sat

Coker Creek is a small mountain community that lies alongside Hwy 68 between Tellico Plains, TN and Ducktown, TN. Whites first poured into the area when gold was discovered in the 1830's. At the request of the Cherokee Nation, the United States government established Fort Armistead here to prevent gold diggers from intruding onto Cherokee lands but the effort failed. The fort was later converted into a stock stand for the Unicoi Turnpike, a toll road that connected this part of East Tennessee to towns and coastal ports in the Carolinas and Georgia. During the Trail of Tears the fort was reactivated by the federal government as an encampment for Cherokees who were forced west. Gold can still be panned here and a restored section of the **Unicoi Turnpike** is open to the public for hiking. Coker Creek Falls and Buck Bald are located in Coker Creek as well. Visitors should stop off at the **Coker Creek Welcome Center** for maps, information, and good conversation.

## **5. Ducktown Basin Museum**

212 Burra Burra Street

Ducktown, TN

423-496-5778

Hours: Summer - 10:00-4:00 Mon-Sat, Winter - 9:30-4:00, Mon-Sat

Located on the grounds of the Historic Burra Burra Copper Mine. Exhibits trace the copper mining heritage of Tennessee's Great Copper Basin. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the site

includes a number of mining structures and equipment as well as a dramatic overlook of the Copper Basin and a mine cave-in.

#### **6. Ocoee Whitewater Center**

4400 Hwy 64

Copperhill, TN

877-692-6050 - [www.fs.fed.us/r8/ocoe/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/ocoe/)

Visitor Center Hours: 9:00-5:00 daily, except for winter

Winter Hours: 9:00 – 5:00 Fri-Sun

Park Hours: Daylight till Dark

Built by the Cherokee National Forest for the 1996 Olympic Whitewater Slalom Races, this center includes the Olympic race channel, native plant gardens, and biking and hiking trails. A restored fire tower is located there and an original section of the **Old Copper Road** is open for hiking. Exhibits in the visitor center detail the history of the Olympic efforts that resulted in this splendid site. To see how the race channel was constructed, visit **Sugarloaf Mountain Park** (about 12 miles west on the Ocoee Scenic Byway/Hwy 64). The 1/10 scale model was developed by T.V.A engineers as a test before constructing the Olympic race channel.

#### **7. L&N Railroad Depot/Museum**

727 Tennessee Avenue

Etowah, TN

423-263-7840

[www.etowahcoc.org](http://www.etowahcoc.org)

Hours: 9:00 – 4:00 Mon-Sat (open Sundays during train excursion season)

Step back in time when you visit this Victorian train station, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The town of Etowah was built in 1906 by the L&N Railroad as a rail center and planned community for its workers. The Depot is open for daily tours. There are exhibits about the history of the L&N Railroad and its impact on Etowah, TN, as well as a walking trail and picnic area. A ticket office for **Hiwassee River Rail Adventures** is open there too. The **Historic Gem Theater**, which sits just across the street, presents live performances year round.

#### **8. Hiwassee River Rail Adventures**

L&N Depot

727 Tennessee Avenue

Etowah, TN

877-510-5765

[www.tvrail.com](http://www.tvrail.com)

Hours: Trains run from Apr-Nov (call for schedule)

Travel the Old Line Railroad through the Cherokee National Forest between Etowah, TN and Copperhill, TN. Built in 1890, passengers on this scenic mountain railroad ride vintage passenger coaches alongside the Scenic Hiwassee River, into the Hiwassee River Gorge, and around the **Historic L&N Railroad Loop**. A 19 mile section of the line is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. On selected dates, trains run all the way into **Copperhill**, TN – an historic copper mining town.

#### **9. Englewood Textile Museum**

101 S. Niota Rd

Englewood, TN

423-887-5455

Englewood grew out of three textile mill villages. The museum recounts the history of the mills and the women who worked there. In addition to the main museum, the grounds include the **Little White House**, a restored mill owner's home that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### 10. McMinn County Living Heritage Museum

522 W. Madison Ave

Athens, TN

423-745-0329

[www.livingheritagemuseum.com](http://www.livingheritagemuseum.com)

Hours: Mon-Fri, 10:00-5:00

This museum is a good place to learn about the farming and trade heritage of the area. Thirty exhibit areas depict life in McMinn County from the Cherokee Indians and early settlers through the 1940's. An extensive glassware collection includes rare pieces. The museum is located just off the **Historic McMinn County Courthouse Square** in downtown Athens. The square has retained much of its character from the time when it was a major farm and trade center.

### 11. Mayfield Dairy Farms Visitor Center

806 East Madison Avenue

Athens, TN

423-745-2151/800-629-3435

[www.mayfielddairy.com](http://www.mayfielddairy.com)

Hours: Mon-Fri 9:00-5:00 - last tour leaves at 4:00

Sat 9:00-2:00 – last tour leaves at 1:00

To see how dairy farming has changed over time, take the free tour of this dairy plant. The tour begins with an overview of the history of the Mayfield Farm and how it evolved into a modern dairy production plant. While touring the plant you will see how milk is bottled and popsicles are made. Finish up with an ice cream cone at the Ice Cream Shop. The **Mayfield Maze**, open in fall, is located nearby.

### 12. Historic District of Reliance

Hwy 30/310

Reliance, TN

423-338-2373

Perched on banks next to the Hiwassee River and surrounding mountains, this turn-of-the-century farm and trade community provides a glimpse into the late 1800's. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the land has been farmed for over a century. The **Historic Railroad Watchman's House** is there and sits next to the Old Line Railroad tracks and river trestle. It was built in 1898 for the L&N Railroad Watchman. It was his job to watch the trestle for burning embers spewed by steam engines and to douse the flames with water. **Webb Brothers Store** is still there, looking the same as it did in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is open from spring until early winter. The old Higdon Hotel and Hiwassee Union Church are not open to the public but they offer a glimpse into the landscape of a mountain community at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The **John Muir Trail** and **Benton MacKay Trail** can be accessed from here.



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