



Shuckstack Lookout Tower – Great Smoky Mountains National Park, NC

Length	Difficulty	Streams	Views	Solitude	Camping
6.7 mls	★	N/A	6	★	N/A
Hiking Time: 3 hours and 30 minutes with 45 minutes of breaks Elev. Gain: 2,480 ft Parking: Park at the end of Lakeshore Drive. 35.46033, -83.81112					

[Click Here For Detailed Location](#)

By Trail Contributor: Zach Robbins



The Appalachian Trail first enters Great Smoky Mountains National Park by crossing Fontana Dam then vigorously climbs towards Shuckstack lookout tower. In 1944 the Little Tennessee River was dammed to form Fontana Lake, which drastically changed the regional landscape. Formerly, the Appalachian Trail passed through Deals Gap and climbed to Gregory Bald along the state line. In 1947 the trail was rerouted across Fontana Dam to ascend Shuckstack, the site of one of the tallest lookout towers in North Carolina. Officially, the Appalachian Trail does not cross the summit of Shuckstack, but a short 0.1-mile side trail brings you to the 60-foot lookout tower with

outstanding 360° views of the region. This is a popular hike despite its difficulty and you will see many day hikers, backpackers, and thru hikers on this trek. From the stairs you can see most of Fontana Lake, the Cheoah Mountains, Snowbird Mountains, Unicoi Mountains, and the remote interior of the southwestern Great Smoky Mountains. Despite its relatively low elevation, the views from Shuckstack are considered among the best in the national park.

While you're there – Save some time to stop at Fontana Dam, the tallest in the East at 480 feet. There are multiple locations to park around the dam, and you can walk across the entirety of the dam and check out the visitors center. From the dam you can see Shuckstack lookout tower high above the lake. The Appalachian Trail crosses the dam and follows Lakeshore Drive, but this is nearly 1 mile from the trailhead. If you choose to park here for the hike it would be an 8.6-mile round trip.

Mile	Summary and Highlights
0.0	Follow Appalachian Trail north from Lakeshore Drive gate
3.2	Unmarked summit path leaves Appalachian Trail
3.3	Shuckstack summit (4,024 feet) and 60-foot lookout tower

- ▶ **Mile 0.0** – Lakeshore Drive dead ends at the trailheads for the Appalachian Trail and the Lakeshore Trail. At the end of the pavement, the gated Lakeshore Trail begins straight ahead while the Appalachian Trail (*white blaze*) makes a left turn. For the next 3.3 miles you'll get few views as the Appalachian Trail climbs over 2,100 feet from Fontana Lake to Shuckstack. Along the way you'll pass through thick forest cover with few large hardwood trees and a lush understory of ferns and nettles.
- ▶ **Mile 2.8** – Cross over rock slabs with a southwest view of the Snowbird and Unicoi Mountain ranges.
- ▶ **Mile 3.2** – At the top of the ridge the Appalachian Trail turns left heading downhill while the unmarked summit trail to Shuckstack continues straight.
- ▶ **Mile 3.3** – The trail ends at the top of Shuckstack (4,024 feet). The 60-foot tower was originally built in 1934 and is publicly accessible. You'll have to climb 78 steep stairs to reach the top cab. The cab is open but the views are partially obscured by intact windows. The best views are from the stairs just below the top cab. The vast Fontana Lake spreads out below you from south to east. Located due south directly above the lake are the Yellow Creek Mountains, which are dominated by the taller Cheoah Mountains in the background. The Snowbird Mountains and Unicoi Mountains are the long, contiguous ranges to the southwest beyond Cheoah Lake. Gregory Bald is the broad peak immediately northwest across the Twentymile Creek watershed. Thunderhead Mountain is the tallest peak due north above the expansive Eagle Creek watershed. In the distant northeast beyond the Hazel Creek watershed lies Clingmans Dome, the tallest peak in the national park.
- ▶ **Mile 3.5** – Return to the parking area by taking the Appalachian Trail south. For a **longer, optional loop** – head north on the Appalachian Trail to Sassafras Gap and turn right on the Lost Cove Trail which connects to the Lakeshore Trail. This would be approximately 12 miles and would give you access to backcountry campsites #91 and #90.
- ▶ **Mile 6.7** – Hike ends at Lakeshore Drive.