
Appendix: Travel Suggestions

While most of the Tennessee Valley Authority facilities originally featured informative visitor centers, budget reductions following the energy deregulation of the 1990s, coupled with recent heightened security concerns, have led to the closing of many of these centers. At this writing, four visitor centers are in operation: Fontana Dam, Norris Dam, Raccoon Mountain Pumped Storage Plant, and Kentucky Dam.

These four visitor centers correspond roughly to the geographical reach of the Authority, with Fontana Dam at the highest elevation above sea level, in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina at the eastern end of the region, and Kentucky Dam, in the flat lands of the west, just above the confluence of the Tennessee and Ohio rivers near Paducah, Kentucky. Fontana and Kentucky represent the range of dam types: Fontana a tall dam on a mountain tributary, Kentucky a broad, main river dam with a navigation lock operated by the Army Corps of Engineers. Norris, the first of the TVA dams, is more like Fontana in setting, though less dramatic.

A visit to the area around Knoxville, Tennessee, affords the most compact introduction to the broadly distributed TVA system. From Knoxville, one can easily visit the following representative TVA sites.

Norris Dam and Norris Town (1933–36)

Norris Dam is located on US 441, about twenty miles northwest of Knoxville. The highway crosses the dam on its way to Lake City, Tennessee. The visitor center is adjacent to US 441 on the Knoxville side of the dam; there is also a road to the bottom of the dam, where one can see (but not enter) the powerhouse. Across the road from the dam is Norris Dam State Park, which offers lodging in cabins originally built as workers' housing by the Civilian Conservation Corps at the time of the dam's construction. On the Lake City side of the dam is a marina, framed by the quarry from which the aggregate for the concrete of the dam was mined.

On the Norris Dam reservation are the Lenoir Museum and the historic Grist Mill and Threshing Barn, operated by the State of Tennessee. Together with the nearby, privately operated Museum of Appalachia, they offer an introduction to the history and culture of the area.

Norris Town, originally built to house construction workers for the dam, is considered to be the United States' first "new town" and has served as a planning model throughout the country. Its original layout survives, as do many of the original houses and the major buildings of the small commercial center.

Cherokee (1940–41) and Douglas (1942–43) Dams

East of Knoxville are Cherokee and Douglas dams, the former on the Holston River, the latter on the French Broad. The facilities of the dams are not open to the public, but both are approachable by car. The two were built from the same plans, as part of the accelerated construction attendant upon the war effort, and it is a striking experience to see what appears to be the same dam in two locations,

twenty miles apart. Cherokee is on Tennessee State Highway 92, between Jefferson City and Rutledge; Douglas is off route 139, ten miles southwest of Dandridge.

Fontana Dam (1942–45)

About fifty miles south of Knoxville on US 129 is Fontana Dam. (Be aware that 129 joins and then separates from US 441; it's easy to miss where 129 turns off to the east, into the mountains.) The eleven-mile stretch of 129 through the mountains is known as The Tail of the Dragon because of the 318 curves in that short distance. It is a favorite of motorcyclists and sports car drivers and has been featured in several movies, including *Thunder Road* (1958, with Robert Mitchum). Just over the North Carolina border, turn left at Deal's Gap Motorcycle Resort onto North Carolina State 28. Fontana Dam is nine miles from the Resort on 28. The tallest dam in the eastern United States, 480 feet from base to crest, it is dramatic. The visitor center, at the top of the dam, is a handsome modernist interpretation of the dogtrot type, with two enclosed pavilions connected by a covered breezeway. An incline tram originally operated between the visitor center and the turbine room, at the base of the dam, but it is not currently in service. Nearby Fontana Village, like Norris Town, was built originally as worker's housing and now functions as a mountain resort community. As recently as 2002, one of the original prefabricated houses (similar to the demonstration house at Pickwick Dam, shown on page 20) was still standing, but in very dilapidated condition; it is unlikely that it remains today.

Watts Bar Dam (1939–42)

Watts Bar Dam, located on Tennessee State Highway 68 about fifteen miles west of where 68 crosses Interstate 75 at the Sweetwater exit, has perhaps the most dramatically situated visitor center of any of the TVA dams: half-circular in plan, it cantilevers out over the bluff on the downriver side of the dam. It is not, unfortunately, open to the public, but it is readily visible from the roadway. Across 68 from the visitor center and transformer yard is the Watts Bar Resort, a collection of cabins originally built by the TVA for construction workers but subsequently transferred to private hands. This is the dam that first sparked my interest in the TVA.

Before You Travel. Please note that the information given here regarding access to the TVA facilities may change based on security conditions and other factors. You should confirm opening hours with the TVA before traveling; visit www.tva.gov/sites for more information on individual TVA facilities.

