

Cherohala Skyway National Scenic Byway

The Cherohala Skyway was opened and dedicated in 1996. The road has been designated a National Scenic Byway. The road cost over 100 million dollars to construct. The Cherohala Skyway crosses through the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee and the Nantahala National Forest in North Carolina. The name "Cherohala" comes from the names of the two National Forests: "Chero" from the Cherokee and "hala" from the Nantahala. The Cherohala Skyway is located in southeast Tennessee and southwest North Carolina. The Skyway connects Tellico Plains, Tennessee, with Robbinsville, North Carolina, and is about 40+ miles long. The Cherohala Skyway is a wide, paved 2-laned road maintained by the Tennessee Department of Transportation and the North Carolina Department of Transportation. The elevations range from 900 feet above sea level at the Tellico River in Tennessee to over 5400 feet above sea level at the Tennessee-North Carolina state line at Haw Knob.

The Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center in Tellico Plains is a must stop before starting up the Skyway. Stop by for free maps, Skyway driving conditions and local area souvenirs and gifts. Picnic tables and spotless restrooms are available. Our friendly staff will welcome you with important Skyway and area information!

The Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center is a product of a grant from the National Scenic Byway program. The visitor center was opened in September 2003 and is owned by Monroe County, Tennessee. The gift shop in the visitor center is a "not-for-profit" gift shop. Maintenance of resources along the Cherohala Skyway is by the highway departments of the appropriate state and/or the US Forest Service. The Cherokee and Nantahala National Forest through which the Cherohala Skyway traverses are managed by the US Forest Service, Department of Agriculture.

Outdoor activities such as hiking, motor touring, motor cycle riding, kayaking, canoeing, camping and bird watching abound in the Skyway area.

The Cherohala Skyway is a state-maintained highway. It is a 2-laned road with wide shoulders and 15 scenic overlooks. Along the way you can expect minimum cell phone coverage and limited toilet facilities. There are picnic sites, trailheads for hiking, and a wide variety of traffic types ranging from motor homes to bicycles. Some grades are as steep as 9% along the skyway. The trip across the skyway takes about 2 hours. It is approximately 25 miles long in Tennessee and 19 miles long in North Carolina. Food and fuel are available in Tellico Plains, Tennessee, and in Robbinsville, North Carolina.

It is important to be prepared for your visit based on the time of year you are traveling the Cherohala Skyway:

- Spring along the Cherohala Skyway is literally the "awakening of the forest after a long winter's nap". Wildflowers spring from the ground throughout these months. The annual rites begin early as red maple blooms in red and serviceberry in white. Around mid-spring the dogwoods and redbuds join the flowering show. Temperatures are usually moderate during this season. Typical spring weather is windy and warm. Daytime temperatures often climb into the 70s, but can cool quickly at night. Spring is a time to be careful with fires because the dry and windy conditions can change a campfire to a wildfire. Please be careful. Spring is a great time to get outdoors. Hiking, camping, fishing and cycling are all activities to enjoy along the Cherohala Skyway. If you like photographing nature, spring wildflowers and native wildlife are in abundance. Remember

though, harassing or feeding wildlife is illegal and can be dangerous. Black bears are very active in the spring of the year and should be left alone.

- Summer is a wonderful season for enjoying the Cherohala Skyway. The mile-high drive is spectacular. The long days and breathtaking sunrises and sunsets are unforgettable. You can escape the hot summer days at higher elevations where it's usually cooler. Temperatures in the summer are very unpredictable. Hot days and mild nights are normal. Thunderstorms are common and can build quickly and without warning. Daytime temperatures can reach the 90s with night time temperatures dropping into the 60s.
- Fall is a beautiful time of year on the Cherohala Skyway. Cool weather arrives and the changing leaves are spectacular. Viewing the fall foliage is a favorite pastime in the eastern United States. The leaves begin changing color as early as September in the higher elevations and continue through mid-November in lower elevations. The dogwoods, poplars, and sourwoods are some of the first to transform. The red oaks, hickories, and white oaks change later and often hold their leaves until late fall. Temperatures are generally moderate throughout the season. Highs range from the 70s during the day to the 40s at night. Normally, fall is also a time of low precipitation along the Cherohala Skyway. The pleasant temperatures and low rainfall make it a perfect time for hiking, cycling, camping and other outdoor activities enjoyed on the Skyway.
- Winter is a beautiful time along the Skyway. The leaves have fallen and the views from the overlooks are spectacular. Traffic is at a minimum and it seems as if you have the mountains all to yourself. Ice and snow can be expected throughout the winter months along the Cherohala Skyway. The roadway is generally treated for such hazards, keeping it passable for most of the year. CAUTION is the key word for traveling on the Skyway during winter. A popular activity in winter along the Cherohala Skyway is checking the freshly fallen snow for animal tracks. Deer, turkeys, raccoons, foxes, and other animals (even black bears) native to these mountains cross the Skyway and leave their tracks in the snow. Temperatures at or below freezing are common and should be prepared for, especially at higher elevations. If you hike in the winter take special precautions:
 - Dress in layers and remember that the cold mornings can lead to warmer afternoons.
 - Let someone know where you are going to hike, or even better, take a friend.
 - Don't drink from streams or rivers.
 - Take a snack, such as energy bars or candy.
 - Please bring out all garbage that you take in.

Your Road to Fall

Cherohala Skyway National Scenic Byway

October 1st-10th: 5,000+ ft Elevations

Best leaf peeping spots on the Cherohala Skyway: Big Junction, Santeelah, Hooper Bald, Huckleberry, and Spirit Ridge.

October 10th-20th: 4,000-5,000 ft Elevations

Best leaf peeping spots on the Cherohala Skyway: West Rattlesnake Rock, East Rattlesnake Rock, Unicoi Crest, Stratton Ridge, Mud Gap, Whigg Cove, Haw Knob, and Wright Cove.

October 18th-26th: 3,000-4,000 ft Elevations

Best leaf peeping spots on the Cherohala Skyway: Lake View, Brushy Ridge, Obadiah, Shute Cove, and Hooper Cove.

October 24th-31st: 2,000-3,000 ft Elevations

Best leaf peeping spots on the Cherohala Skyway: Bald River Falls, Oosterneck Creek, Indian Boundray, Turkey Creek, and Santeelth Gap

When you get to the Cherohala Skyway, stop in at the Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center located on Highway 165, in Tellico Plains, Tennessee, or the Graham County Visitor Center in Robbinsville, North Carolina, to pick up brochures and maps or talk to the friendly people about your time on the Skyway. They can help you plan your trip, find good restaurants, locate a waterfall to enjoy, reserve a campsite (1-877-444-6777), or any other special need you may have.

The Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center is open Monday through Sunday from 9 AM to 5 PM. Enjoy your time on the Cherohala Skyway and come back regularly to visit.

The Cherohala Skyway is an unforgettable drive that you will want to experience again and again.

the Cherohala Dragon

Have you slayed the Cherohala Dragon yet? Plan your visit and come test your driving skills!

As featured in RoadRunner Magazine, the Cherohala Skyway and the Tail of the Dragon are two classic roads that are the perfect combination for the serious motorcyclist. As you start your journey, be sure to come and see us at the Cherohala Skyway Visitor Center for information about weather, road conditions, and insider tips on where to stop to maximize your visit with us.

You can find this featured story as well as map details and more by visiting [RoadRunner Magazine](#). Looking for the GPS navigation for this ride? Download the [RoadRUNNER Rides](#) app to access this ride and 600+ other rides around the world!

Need more details of the Tail of the Dragon? You can find everything you need to plan your trip [here](#).

Directions to the Cherohala Skyway

From Asheville, NC to Cherohala Skyway:

Follow US 74 west for approximately 70 miles, and then turn north onto US 129. Take US 129 to Robbinsville, NC. Merge onto NC-143. Follow NC-143 for 12 miles to the beginning of the Cherohala Skyway at Santeetlah Gap.

From Knoxville, TN to Cherohala Skyway:

Take I-75 southwest to Sweetwater. Get on TN-68 and go south-west to Tellico Plains. Take TN-165 through Tellico Plains to where the byway begins.

From Chattanooga, TN to Cherohala Skyway:

Take I-24 east to I-75. Follow I-75 northeast to Sweetwater. Get on TN-68 and go southeast to Tellico Plains. Take TN-165 through Tellico Plains to where the byway begins.

Scenic drive from I-75, Cleveland Exit #20:

Take Cleveland Exit #20 from I-75 and follow Hwy. 64 E along the Ocoee River and the Ocoee Scenic Byway to Copperhill. Take Hwy. 68 N through Coker Creek and on to Tellico Plains.

History of the Cherohala Skyway

As you travel around the mountain curves to peaks of more than 5,000 feet, you may marvel at the engineering feat of building such a road. The history of the road is a long winding story that began in 1958. In the spring of that year the Tellico Plains Kiwanis Club members were talking about the need for a road connecting the people of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina.

"A highway that would enable their youngsters to search for the reality inside the dreams of their parents. A highway that would allow bright young men and women to expand their horizons beyond the noble mountains of their birth. They would travel to places beyond the horizon, then bring the lessons they learned home to the mountains. Rural villages would grow in knowledge and education, while retaining the values of the past." (Taken from Wagon Train: 30 Years Across the Far Blue Mountains by Jim Thompson).

Charles Hall was one of the men at that Kiwanis Club meeting and remained a driving force behind the push for the road, until the dedication of the Cherohala Skyway in 1996.

"I had a lot of good help on this," Hall said. "I didn't do it alone, I was just the one out front." Hall said during that Kiwanis meeting in April 1958, Sam Williams suggested they organize a wagon train to draw attention to the need for a road, "Since our roads are only fit for covered wagons." "We laughed at Sam a little while then got serious," said Hall. On July 4, 1958, 67 covered wagons and 325 horseback riders made the 42-mile trek to Murphy, N.C. The wagon train attracted the attention the men hoped it would and during its 30-year history was chronicled by local and national media. The route varied from year to year with the train making its way through small towns such as Tellico Plains and Robbinsville, Murphy, Hayesville, Franklin, Andrews and Bryson City, N.C.

It was on the 1960 wagon train, that then Robbinsville Mayor Smith Howell made the first announcement that the road connecting the two states would run from Tellico Plains to Robbinsville. Coincidentally, the 1960 wagon train remained the largest ever with 105 wagons and 776 horseback riders.

In 1962 Hall and several other men went before Congress to ask for money for the project. They had discovered the road could be built entirely on federal land, with it traveling through the Cherokee and Nantahala National Forests. The name Cherohala comes from combining the names of the two national forests. Later that year the Federal Highway Administration made the first appropriation for the road, but it was still a long way from becoming a reality. "After we got the first appropriation, it fell back to us to keep the wagon train going and the money coming in," Hall said. By 1967, the 10th anniversary of the Wagon Train, the road was finally under construction. As the Wagon Train ventured out on its annual journey in 1982, more contracts were being let for construction of the road and the Cherohala Commission had been appointed to promote and plan the new highway. Hall said construction was

delayed for about 13 years while they worked with 21 environmental groups who had concerns about the road. But finally on Oct. 12, 1996, the road was dedicated and is now designated a National Scenic Byway. Hall's wife, Billie Nell, said her husband was like the "Little engine that could" in his efforts to draw attention to the need for the road and seeing it through to completion. Hall said what is important to him is "the satisfaction of knowing it is done and is going to be enjoyed by so many people."

Mia Rhodarmer, Editor

Monroe County Advocate & Democrat