



## A Blessing for Some, a Tragedy for Others



Created by Congress in 1933, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was to promote/provide electrical power in the region as well as to control the flood waters of the Ohio, Mississippi and Tennessee rivers. With the advent of World War II, came the need for aluminum to support the war-time efforts. Consequently, TVA's plan to construct the Fontana Dam was escalated to a high priority project. The dam construction also was a godsend for hundreds of unemployed workers who flocked to the remote area.

But there also was a downside to the project. The lake created by the dam would cover existing homes along the river and flood five villages. More than 600 families in the Fontana area were relocated.

Another problem was the family cemeteries throughout the area that would be submerged or inaccessible when the area flooded. The graves subject to flooding needed to be moved. Most graves that were not to be flooded were left alone. Some were moved to higher ground and sadly some were indeed covered by the newly created lake. By 1945 the dam was complete and the workers left the area. TVA purchased the remaining settlements. Shortly thereafter, the land was turned over to

the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. — allowing the park to extend its borders to the northern shores of Fontana Lake.

However, the issue of access to the isolated cemeteries within the park complicated efforts to manage the area. Although documents of the time do not mention the cemetery issue, descendants claimed the Government promised them a new road along the north shore of Fontana Lake to visit their family areas. In fact, 6.2 miles of a replacement road were built, including a 375-yard-long tunnel. The project was halted due to budgetary and environmental issues -- as well as the fact that a good road already existed on the south side of Fontana Lake.

Efforts to address the problem culminated in 2010 when the Department of the Interior agreed to pay \$52 million to Swain County to satisfy any claims in this regard. Reflecting the intense emotions associated with the issue, the road from Bryson City to the southern end of the park is known locally as the “Road To Nowhere”. The northern end of the road culminates in the famous Tunnel on the Road to Nowhere.

There now are at least 26 cemeteries in the GSMNP that are visited by the descendants of the original settlers. In recent years, the park has been much more active in honoring the heritage of those families who were forced to leave.

--Benton MacKaye Trail Guide - Smokies Section

-- Rick Harris, TN/NC Maintenance Director



Benton MacKaye Trail Association

PO Box 6

Cherry Log, GA 30522