

Jeremy's Mid-Week cruise # 5

Meet up at 8am - QT at 9765 Hwy 92, Woodstock, GA 30188

Plan for a full day. This will be the longest mid week cruise I've put on to date. Bring a flashlight as the tunnel gets dark. There will be comfort breaks and lunch will be somewhere. Make sure you check your oil, tires and tire pressure before arriving. Radios will be on the usual channel 7

The Road to Nowhere

In 1941, Fontana Dam was built in North Carolina, just below the newly created Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Dam, along with several others in the area was to provide power for the Aluminum Company of America or ALCOA. This was the official cover story. What wasn't known or talked about, was that the power was also being sent to "The Secret City" of Oak Ridge, TN – also known as home base for the Manhattan Project. At the time, the largest building in the world, K-25, was built for the enrichment of uranium. The entire city of Oak Ridge was created over a 3 year period during WWII. This was a MASSIVE undertaking, the size and scope of which, the world had yet to see. Huge amounts of power were required to power this operation. Hence the reason 4 separate dams were built to provide the power requirements.

Meanwhile, back at Fontana, an entire village of homes were created for the workers building the dam. Now known as Fontana Village, those former workers homes are now rentable as vacation cottages. However, the building of the dam and the subsequent lake behind it, displaced many families and small communities as is usually the case when a dam is built. These families had been there for several generations and family cemeteries were a concern. Since the lake borders the new national park and there were no roads in that area, the Federal Government promised the locals that they would build a new road around the North side of the new lake so they could reach the family plots that were now cut off. Work was started in 1943 and only about 8 & ½ miles were completed and a ¼ mile long tunnel built before all work ground to a halt. It was just on the other side of the tunnel that it was noted that snowflakes were melting on the now exposed rocks while sticking everywhere else. It was soon discovered that the rock in that area contained a mineral that created acidic runoff which would poison the nearby creeks and kill the wildlife. Construction was halted until a solution could be found. Only – nothing was ever done. After decades of just setting unfinished, the feds eventually decided that rather than finish the road, they would just give Swain county \$52 million dollars. Even still, the government drug its feet on this promise and clear up until 2016, they'd still only paid \$12 million. The county sued the federal government and in 2018, finally received the rest.

Now days, the road is seldom used save for tourists who have heard the story and locals who use the trails in the area for horse rides. The tunnel is blocked off for motorized traffic (although I have ridden my motorcycle through there a number of years back) and is available to walk through. The road stops a short distance on the other side of the tunnel. Of course, it's a favorite spot for graffiti artists and teenagers looking for a quiet spot to....do what teenagers do.

Jeremy Whitehead
Photos Below

