



Interpretive Guide to the Coytee Loop of the East Lakeshore Trail Hiker Version

A watershed includes all of the lands that drain into a body of water. This trail is in the watershed of the Tellico Reservoir. The Watershed Association of the Tellico Reservoir (WATeR) is an all-volunteer organization that supports projects to protect and improve the watershed. Those projects include building and maintaining the East Lakeshore Trail (~10 miles) and developing this interpretive trail guide for the Coytee Loop portion of the trail (~1.6 miles).

To use this guide, start at the Coytee Trailhead. Directions to the trailhead can be found on the map included in this guide.

The name Coytee is a Cherokee word meaning gathering place. The area you are about to explore was once a Cherokee settlement. The Native Americans gathered in this area around a freshwater spring that later became known as Coytee Springs. The Cherokee were the original residents. European settlers arrived in the 1700's. Douthit Cemetery is a family cemetery from one of the earliest settlers. This cemetery is marked on the map at the Coytee trailhead.

Several families farmed this area over the next 250 years. Tennessee Valley Authority acquired the land in the late 1970's. Viable trees were cut and sold for timber. In January 1980, the gates were welded shut on Tellico Dam and the Little Tennessee River swelled to become Tellico Lake. This area continues to be managed by TVA.

There are several points of interest marked along the trail. Lettered trail markers (A-G) designate each point of interest described in this guide. Also, over 30 species of native woody plants are marked along the length of the East Lakeshore Trail. Several species can be found on the Coytee Loop Trail.

[Click for Pictures of Poison Ivy](#)

As you walk be aware of poison ivy. All parts of this plant contain oil that can cause skin irritations in susceptible individuals. Poison ivy can be recognized as having 3-parted leaves usually growing off of a vine. However, poison ivy can be found in shrubby clumps, a single vine independently growing or a large hairy vine growing to the tops of trees. Remember the adage, "Leaves of three, let it be."

MARKER A:

This area represents an ecosystem undergoing succession. Notice the size of the trees. Most are about the same size and species. At one time, this area was an open meadow or field most likely kept open through human intervention. Without farming or grazing the forest has begun to reclaim the area. Each plant species will succeed or replace the next until climax community plants are established.

Succession in this area begins with grasses. Shrubs, small woody plants, replace the grasses. Evergreens such as cedars and pines replace most of the shrubs. The final stage of succession is the growth of hardwood trees such as oaks, hickories and maples.

Forest succession: grasses --> shrubs --> evergreens --> hardwoods

Continuing up the trail you will see a tree marker for a Dogwood tree. The bark of this native species is checkered in an alligator skin pattern. Dogwood flowers are small and surrounded by 4 large white bracts; they aren't true petals. The small greenish center of the dogwood blossom is the

true flower. In East Tennessee predicting when Dogwoods bloom is tricky, but any time between early March and mid-April is common.

To follow this guide, take the Upper Ridge Trail (turn left at sign) to trail guide Marker B.

Before reaching this marker, you will encounter an extremely large White Oak tree. This tree was spared from lumber because of its crooked and branched shape. It provides food, homes and shade to many animal species.

MARKER B:

Exotic plants abound in this area. Privet shrub, shrub honeysuckle, Russian olive, and microstegium grass are all found in this spot. The label exotic or non-native species can apply to plants and animals. An exotic is a species from somewhere else that can survive in an ecosystem outside its normal home range.

[Click for Pictures of Privet](#)

Privet is a small shrub that has shaped dark green round leaves. It is commonly cultivated as a hedge.

[Click for Pictures of Russian Olive](#)

Russian olive has long narrow elliptic leaves that are yellow-green in color.

[Click for Pictures of Microstegium](#)

Microstegium grass grows approximately 8 inches high. The growth structure resembles that of bamboo with leaves branching off of opposite sides of the stem.

Humans through intentional planting or inadvertent seed dispersal introduce exotics in an area. Exotics out-compete native species by becoming more adaptable and using an area's resources. Exotic plants take sunlight and water, which can completely eliminate native plants from an area.

Other exotic plants you may see along the trail are monkey grass, Oregon grape, and mimosa.

[Click for Monkey Grass Pictures](#)

[Click for Pictures of Oregon Grape](#)

[Click for Pictures of Mimosa](#)

Continuing down the trail you will begin to notice the forest is changing. There are more pine and cedar trees. Evergreen trees are a stage of succession. This area was clear-cut as late as 1980. Walk farther and you will begin to notice fewer evergreen trees and more hardwood tree species.

Fort Loudoun Dam is located north of Powerline Cove and was commissioned in 1940 and completed in 1943. Fort Loudoun Dam has a generating capacity of 155,600 kilowatts. The power generated by the dam supplies electricity to eastern and southern Blount County.

As you cross the footbridge and traverse up the hill, look to your left. There is a wildlife trail from the woods leading to the water. Deer are common visitors to this area and are seen often.

MARKER C:

This section of trail is covered in pine needles. Pines are evergreen needle-leaved conifers. They have needle leaves that remain green year around and reproduce with seeds in a cone. Pines continually shed needles, while a deciduous tree, like an oak or maple, lose their leaves in the fall and re-grow them in the spring. Evergreen trees are an important component of an ecosystem because they provide cover all year.

[Click for Pictures of White Pine](#)

[Click for Pictures of White Oak Leaf](#)

Grape vines can be seen further along the trail. They are smooth and not covered with hairy roots like poison ivy. The small grape vines entangle in the low branches of young trees and grow along with the tree. The mature grape vines drape from the higher branches of the tree and are usually similar age as the host tree.

Poison ivy vine is sometimes confused with grape vine. Poison ivy grows up the trunk of the tree. Poison ivy, although a nuisance to humans, is very beneficial to animals. Over 60 species of birds, including bobwhite quail and ruffed grouse, feed on the berries.

[Click for Pictures of Sassafras](#)

A sassafras tree is marked further along the trail. This tree can be easily identified by its mitten shaped leaf. Other leaf variations are shown below. Gently crush a leaf and smell. Boiling the bark of the roots makes fragrant sassafras tea.

MARKER D:

[Click for Pictues of Chestnut Oak](#)

Trees provide multiple benefits to animal species. Large chestnut oaks have many holes that serve as homes to birds, lizards, squirrels and chipmunks. Acorns (seeds) are eaten by bear, raccoons, woodpeckers and blue jays.

Continue straight along the ridge trail until reaching a tree marked with a white blaze in the middle of an intersection. Bear to your right and follow the trail beside the river.

As you continue along the trail, observe the large dead cedar tree. This area of the forest is maturing from evergreen trees to deciduous hardwood species. Standing dead trees are essential to animals. Insects consume the dead tree matter and woodpeckers then peck out the insects creating tree cavities that are necessary for owls and other cavity nesters.

[Click for Pictures of Screech Owls](#)

Screech owls nest in tree cavities.

Many animals also call the river's edge their home. Notice the holes along the trail as you walk. Muskrats, mink, moles, and voles call these holes home. Animals require food, water, shelter and space to forage and feed. This area provides all of these requirements.

MARKER E:

[Click for Pictures of Lichen](#)

These limestone outcrops are typical East Tennessee geology. Limestone erodes to create sinkholes and caves. Wind, water and lichens are eroding these outcrops. Lichens are a fungus and algae growing together that break down rock to create soil. There are many species of lichens. At least 6 species can be found on these rocks. Notice the different colors and patterns.

[Click for Pictures of Resurrection Fern](#)

Resurrection fern can also be seen on top of an outcrop. Look for a small fern growing in colonies that look dried and brown. These ferns become green and lush once rain arrives and will remain green until they have released the absorbed water.

Peer underneath the outcrops. Bones and small shells can often be found here. Small mammals forage in the edge of the river for crayfish and mussels then retreat to safety to eat them.

In warmer months, ant lion holes can be observed. Look for concave holes in the soil under the outcrop. Ant lions are insect larvae that hide in the holes waiting for another unsuspecting insect to slide into the hole. Once inside, the ant lion reaches up, grabs the prey insect and pulls it down into the hole and consumes it. Ant lions eat ants, hence their name!

[Click for Pictures of Mud Dauber](#)

Dirt or mud dauber nests are also found underneath several of these rock outcrops. Dirt daubers are a wasp that collects mud in their mouth and attach this mud to a structure. As the daubers build, they find spiders, sting them to paralyze them and pack the spiders alive into their nests. An egg is laid with each spider. The spider provides food for the newborn dauber once it hatches.

MARKER F: (The bench facing the water)

Continue along the river until you reach the bench. This body of water is the Little Tennessee River. The Little "T" originates in the northern mountains of Georgia, flows through North Carolina and into the southern mountains of Tennessee. The Little Tennessee River meets the Tennessee River in Loudon County. The Tennessee River flows south through Georgia and Alabama, turns north and flows back into Tennessee and Kentucky into the Ohio River. The Ohio empties into the Mississippi River, which eventually makes its way into the Gulf of Mexico.

[Click for Pictures of Osprey](#)
[Click for Pictures of Osprey Nest](#)

Ospreys, a bird of prey, have made a resurgence in this area. Osprey readily nest on buoys, poles, sheds and docks in the water and feed exclusively on fish. Osprey populations declined in the 1960's and 70's because of the use of the pesticide DDT. Since the elimination of DDT in North America, osprey populations have rebounded and are common sights on many rivers in East Tennessee.

As you walk along the river notice the cooler temperatures and light breeze. This moist environment creates the perfect habitat for ferns and other moisture loving plants.

MARKER G:[Click for Pictures of Christmas Fern](#)
[Click for Pictures of Ground Pine](#)
[Click for Pictures of Spleenwort](#)

Prehistoric plants abound in this area. Christmas ferns, ground pine, which is a low growing ground cover, and spleenwort can easily be found here. These plants are seedless; they reproduce with spores.

[Click for Pictures of Raccoon Tracks](#)
[Click for Pictures of Opossum Tracks](#)

Many animals can be viewed as you continue along the water's edge. Invertebrates such as dragonflies and damselflies, blue gill, great blue herons and turtles can be seen in this small cove. Also look for raccoon and opossum tracks near the water.

Continuing up the hill, you walk through a small thicket of Russian olive an invasive exotic plant. Notice how few other plants are growing in this area.

Before crossing the bridge, notice the marked honey locust tree. Look up the trunk of the tree and you will notice large thorns. These thorns protect the tree and the small spiders that live near them. The lower spikes have been removed for your protection!

Bear to your right at the trail intersection to return to the trailhead.

MARKER H:[Click for Pictures of Leaf Litter](#)

Leaf litter is the leaf and organic debris covering the forest floor. Leaf litter provides cover and food for micro-invertebrates. These small arthropods (exoskeleton covered animals without a spine) consume leaves and convert them to soil. These animals are an integral part of the forest ecosystem. They are the recyclers of nutrients that feed the ecosystem.

[Click for Pictures of Pill Bug](#)

[Click for Pictures of Millipede](#)
[Click for Pictures of Centipede](#)

Carefully take a small stick and dig in the leaves. Pill bugs, earthworms, and millipedes can be viewed.

To return to the parking area, turn left at the trail sign

[Click here for: Coytee Loop Branch map](#)

Sources/Credits:

- Peterson Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs
- Peterson Field Guide to Birds
- <http://www.TVA.gov>
- Tommy Marsh, local historian
- <http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/cistandards2001/sci/ciscience.html>
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