



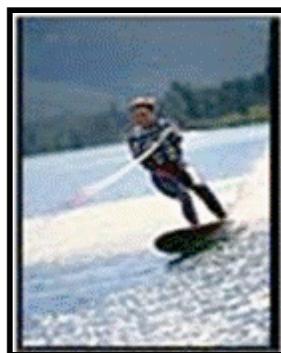
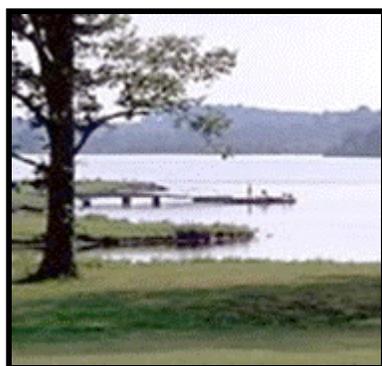
## Interpretive Guide to the Shoreline of Tellico Reservoir

A watershed includes all of the lands that drain into a body of water. The Watershed Association of the Tellico Reservoir (WATeR) is an all-volunteer organization that supports projects to protect and improve the watershed. These projects include building and maintaining the East Lakeshore Trail (~14 miles and growing), developing interpretive trail guides for these trails and the shoreline, shoreline protection, and watershed cleanups. The annual watershed cleanup in March each year has 400 – 600 volunteers that remove 5 - 6 tons of trash and debris from the areas surrounding the reservoir and its tributaries. Visit [TellicoWATeR.org](http://TellicoWATeR.org) for a full list of activities and ways to participate.

This guide details various points of interest along the shoreline of the Tellico Reservoir, and provides some history of the reservoir, which can be read during travel from one point of interest to the next. The points of interest can be found between mile 10 (between Lotterdale Cove and Toqua Golf Course) and mile 13 (the mouth of Bat Creek and the point of the Rarity Bay community) on the main channel of the reservoir and should take approximately one hour traveling slowly by motorboat. Binoculars are useful in observing wildlife in this area.

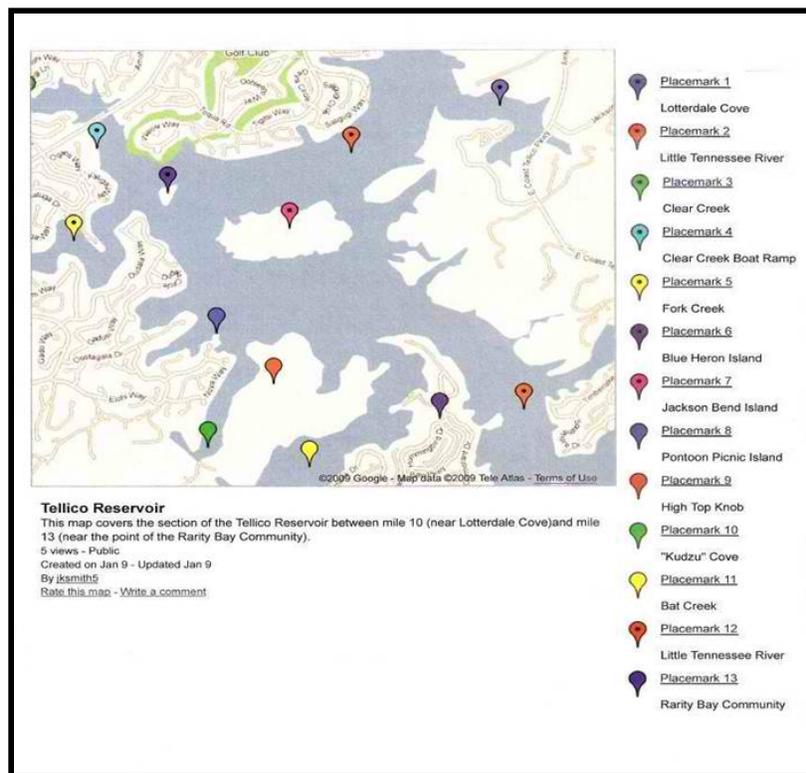
Construction of Tellico Dam began in 1967 and was completed in 1979. Tellico Dam is 129 feet high and reaches 3,238 feet across the Little Tennessee River. Tellico Reservoir has 357 miles of shoreline and 15,560 acres of water surface for recreation activities. The reservoir stretches 33 miles along the Little Tennessee River from Tellico Dam to Chilhowee Dam, which is further up in the East Tennessee mountains.

Several recreation areas, which include boat ramps, day-use areas, fishing areas, and campgrounds, are available on the reservoir. Visit [TVA.gov](http://TVA.gov) for more information about recreation opportunities on Tellico Reservoir.



This guide will begin at the Clear Creek boat ramp near the south end of Tellico Village. As you look out from the ramp, Clear Creek is to the left (N) and Fork Creek is to the right and behind you (SW) and Blue Heron Island is to the right (SE).

The following map shows the area covered in this guide. Click on the link to connect to Google maps to view an interactive version: [www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com).



### ***Point of interest #1 - Blue Heron Island:***

Blue Heron Island is located at the confluence of Fork Creek, Clear Creek and the Little Tennessee River. The island is appropriately named since it is the nesting place (rookery) of a large colony of great blue herons, which are commonly seen in the ponds and coves along the reservoir.

### ***Hérons:***

[Click for Pictures of Great Blue Herons](#)

[Click for Pictures of Great Blue Herons](#)

The Great Blue Heron is the largest and most widespread heron in North America. It can be found along calm freshwater and seacoasts. It is a large bird, with a slate-gray body, chestnut and black accents, very long legs and an "S"-shaped neck. Great blue herons are very tall and stand 38-54 inches. In flight, the bird looks enormous, with a six-foot wingspan. There are many herons along the section of shoreline covered by this guide, and it is very likely that you will see one wading in the shallows or perched on a dock or low tree.

Although great blue herons usually nest in trees near water and in colonies, they have been known to nest on the ground or away from water or as single pairs. Nest building begins in February when a male chooses a nesting territory and actively displays to attract a female. The nests are a large platform of sticks, lined with pine needles, moss, reeds, dry grass, or twigs that are usually placed high in trees. The eggs are a dull pale blue color and the female lays 2-6 eggs, then both parents incubate them for 25-29 days (4 weeks) until the young hatch. The parents bring food to the young at the nest for two months before they can fly and continue feeding the young birds for a few weeks after fledging. Blue heron nests can be viewed on the northeast side of Blue Heron Island facing the main channel. These nests are in the tops of several dead trees.

Great blue herons feed on fish, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, other birds, and small mammals. They forage for food by walking slowly and stabbing prey with a quick lunge of their bill.

[Click for Pictures of Green Herons](#)  
[Click for Pictures of Green Herons](#)

[Click for Pictures of Black-crowned Night Herons](#)  
[Click for Pictures of Black-Crowned Night Herons](#)

There are a few similar species of birds that might also be seen in the area. The Green Heron, which is much smaller, and the Black Crowned Night Heron are pictured below for comparison.

### ***Shoreline erosion:***



Lakeshore erosion

Several places on the island show erosion. Erosion is defined as the gradual wearing away of rock or soil by physical breakdown caused by water, wind or ice. The waves repeatedly slapping the shoreline have caused the erosion on Blue Heron Island. Some waves are naturally occurring as the wind blows across the water but others are caused by waves created by boats. The eroded areas of the island are obvious; the shoreline has collapsed into the water, revealing bare red clay and trees along the water's edge have tipped into the water.

Proceeding along the shoreline to the southeast from Blue Heron Island, there is a cove and then Pontoon Picnic Island, which is attached to the peninsula by a shallow marshy area. Pontoon Picnic Island is a popular picnic spot for boaters. A mowed area with picnic tables can be seen. Beyond this is another cove. Continue southeast toward the round hill, High Top Knob, and this will lead into "Kudzu" cove.

***Point of interest #2 - Second cove to the left of Pontoon Picnic Island adjacent to High Top knob:***

As you travel into this cove, notice the large hill (knob as they are called in East Tennessee) on your left. This is High Top Knob. At approximately 1100 feet in elevation, it is one of the highest peaks along the Reservoir.

[Click for Pictures of Mimosa](#)

If you are traveling through this area during June and July, you will notice trees along the water that are blooming in vibrant pink hues. These trees are mimosa, an invasive exotic tree native to Asia. They bloom from 4-8 weeks and are easily recognized by their flowers and distinctive leaves. Once the flowers are pollinated they become flat, straw-colored pods about 6 inches long containing light brown oval-shaped seeds about 1/2 inch in length. Pods ripen in August to September and begin to disintegrate soon after, but some will remain on the trees into winter. Seeds are mostly dispersed below or around the parent plant, but can be dispersed further by wind and water.

[Click for Pictures of Shagbark Hickory](#)  
[Click for Pictures of Tulip Poplar](#)

There are many native trees found in this area. Pines, hickories, dogwoods, tulip poplars and maples are along the shoreline and adjacent areas. Native trees grow well with other trees, provide a diverse array of food and habitat to animals and do not out-compete other species. Exotic species, such as mimosa, can quickly take over a natural area and convert it to just one plant species, which can greatly reduce the biodiversity of the area.

Approximately halfway into the cove there is a small waterway off to your left. This area is great for exploring in a kayak, canoe or tube. It is not deep enough for a motorboat. The area is narrow at first but opens up to a "bay" that offers a quiet place to play and view wildlife and plants.

[Click for Pictures of Red-ear Slider Turtle](#)  
[Click for Pictures of Painted Turtle](#)  
[Click for Pictures of Muskrat](#)

Many species of wildlife can be viewed in these quiet coves. Red-eared slider turtles and painted turtles can often be seen sunning on logs. The occasional muskrat may also be visible foraging quietly along the water's edge. These animals are all very skittish and can disappear in an instant so they are best observed using binoculars from a distance.

[Click for Pictures of Tree Cavities](#)  
[Click for Pictures of Flicker Woodpeckers](#)  
[Click for Pictures of Screech Owls](#)

Traveling further into the main cove, you will see several dead trees along the water on your left. These "cavity" trees are valuable because they provide habitat to many animals such as woodpeckers, wood ducks, owls and bats. They also provide a food source for insectivore animals since insects are usually consuming the dead trees.

Attached to two of these cavity trees are wood duck boxes. The wood duck nests in trees near water, sometimes directly over water, but other times up to a mile away. After hatching, the ducklings jump down from the nest tree and make their way to the water. The mother calls them to her, but does not help them in any way. The ducklings have been known to jump from heights of up to 250 feet without injury.

[Click for Pictures of Wood Ducks](#)

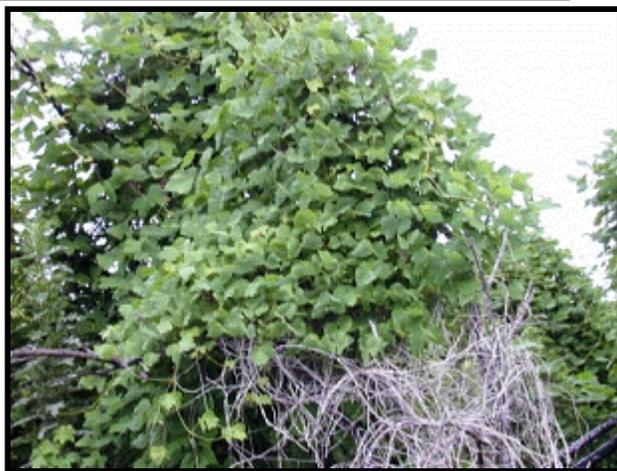
Natural cavities for nesting are scarce, and the wood duck readily uses nest boxes provided for them. If nest boxes are placed too close together, many females lay

eggs in the nests of other females. These "dump" nests can have up to 40 eggs. Visit [ducks.org](http://ducks.org) for free wood duck box plans.

Directly past the wood ducks boxes, you will see the remnants of a road that once crossed this area before Tellico dam was built and the Little Tennessee River backed up to form Tellico Reservoir. This area was flooded in 1979 when the gates on the dam were welded closed.

At the end of the cove, you will see a recognizable and dramatic invasive exotic plant: kudzu. It is native to southern Japan and southeast China in eastern Asia. Kudzu was introduced from Japan into the United States in 1876 at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, where it was promoted as a forage crop and an ornamental plant. From 1935 to the early 1950s, the Soil Conservation Service encouraged farmers in the southeastern United States to plant kudzu to reduce soil erosion and the Civilian Conservation Corps planted it widely for many years.

However, it would soon be discovered that the southeastern US has near-perfect conditions for kudzu to grow out of control — hot, humid summers, frequent rainfall, temperate winters with few hard freezes (kudzu cannot tolerate low freezing temperatures that bring the frost line down through its entire root system, a rare occurrence in this region), and no natural predators. As such, the once-promoted plant was named a pest weed by the United States Department of Agriculture in 1953.



Kudzu Growing on Trees

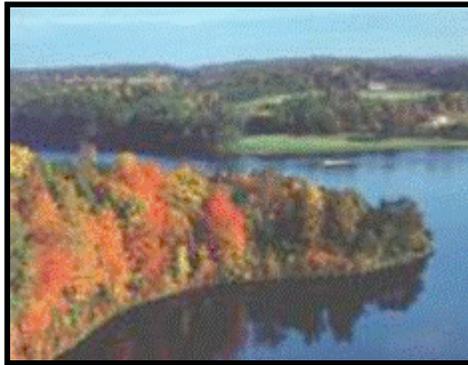
[Click for Pictures of Kudzu](#)

Kudzu is now common throughout most of the southeastern United States, and has been found as far northeast as Paterson, New Jersey, in 30 Illinois counties and as far south as Key West, Florida. Kudzu has naturalized into about 20,000 to 30,000 square kilometers of land in the United States and costs around \$500 million annually in lost cropland and control costs.

In the shallow water near the kudzu at the end of the cove, garfish 2-3 feet long can often be seen. Also carp, a rough fish, are common in many areas and can usually be enticed to the surface near docks with a few breadcrumbs. Bass and a variety of pan fish are the usual prey of most anglers in this part of the reservoir.

### ***Point of interest #3 - Jackson Bend Island, east of Blue Heron Island and southwest of Lotterdale:***

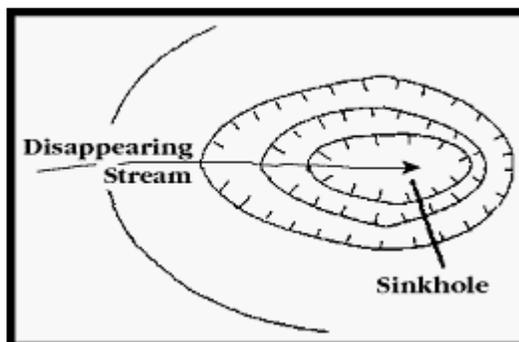
Jackson Bend Island is one of the many uninhabited islands on Tellico reservoir owned by TVA. This island is a popular camping and recreation spot for boaters and residents. The island has interesting geographic features, many of which are underwater. The south end of the island is very steep and the water depth reaches 40 to 50 feet quite close to the shore. The north side of the island has a more gradual slope leading to the water and the water depth is very shallow several hundred yards out away from the island. Care should be taken and the water depth buoys followed when traveling by motorboat around this island.



Island on Tellico Reservoir in the Fall

When viewing a topographic map of this island, many underwater sinkholes can be observed in this area. Sinkholes are quite common in east Tennessee. A sinkhole is a natural depression in the land surface, especially in limestone, where water flows underground into a passage or cave. Most sinkholes drain into a waterway. These sinkholes were probably above the water line of the Little Tennessee River and water flowed through them into the river. Once the valley was flooded, the sinkholes, too, were flooded and covered by water.

Some sinkholes are quite dramatic. There is a 50-70 feet diameter underwater sinkhole not far from the swimming beach at Ft. Loudon State Park that drops precipitously from 20 feet to over 95 feet deep.



Topographic Map Representation of Sinkhole

### **Caves:**

[Click for Pictures of TN Caves](#)

Many caves are found along the reservoir. Most entrances to these caves are now underwater since the completion of Tellico Dam. However, a few remain. A cave system exists that stretches several miles from the banks of Tellico reservoir east toward Greenback. These caves should never be entered because of their instability and the dangers associated with amateur caving.

[Click for Pictures of Moonshining](#)

Caves have played an important role in the history of East Tennessee. They have been used for everything from hiding slaves in the Underground Railroad, to hiding troops and supplies during the Civil War. More recently during prohibition, caves were used to hide moonshine stills.

### ***Turtles of the Reservoir:***

Several species of turtles inhabit this area. Snapping, musk, painted and slider turtles are very common.

The common “snapper” is a turtle with massive head and powerful jaws. The carapace (top shell) is tan to dark brown and often teeming with algae growth. The carapace also has three rows of keels (bumps) and is serrated on the back edge near the tail. The plastron (bottom shell) is yellow or tan and has no pattern. A snapper’s tail is often as long as the carapace. As adults, they can weigh as much as 50 lbs and live approximately 30 years.

[Click for Pictures of Snapping Turtles](#)

[Click for Pictures of Snapping Turtles](#)

Snapping turtles are rarely visible in the water but are often seen on land laying their eggs in May and June. The female will lay 25-50 golf ball shaped eggs in a 5-inch deep nest. The eggs will hatch in late August and September with only a few hatchlings making it to the water. The young are a favorite snack of raccoons, crows and great blue herons.

Care should be taken around adult snapping turtles. Their powerful jaws can inflict an extremely painful bite and often latch on to whatever they are biting. A snapper is an omnivore; they consume both plants and other animals. They will basically eat anything!

[Click for Pictures of Loggerhead Musk Turtles](#)

[Click for Pictures of Loggerhead Musk Turtles](#)

The loggerhead musk turtle is also found in East Tennessee. It is a small turtle, 3-5 inches in length. The carapace is keeled (bumpy) and brown or orangey brown. It may have darker spots or streaks on the top shell. Musk turtles have large heads that may also be spotted or streaked with lighter colors.

The females lay multiple clutches of 2-3 elliptical shaped eggs in mounds she builds in soft dirt or mulch. The eggs are laid May and June and hatch in late summer.

Musk turtles are highly aquatic and frequently seen crawling in shallow water among the rocks. Juveniles feed mostly on plants while adults eat mussels and small fish. Care should also be taken when handling musk turtles. They can expel a very stinky musky odor when frightened or threatened.

[Click for Pictures of Painted Turtle](#)

[Click for Pictures of Painted Turtle](#)

Painted turtles are easily recognizable and very abundant in the reservoir. The carapace of a painted turtle is oval and flat without keels or bumps. The scutes (scales) on the carapace are often outlined in green, yellow or red. The average

size of a painted turtle is 4 to 10 inches in length. Their head is streaked with yellow. Painted turtles are omnivores, feeding on both aquatic plants and animals.

Painted turtles nest in May and lay 2-3 clutches of up to 20 elliptical shaped eggs. The nests are often found up to 1 mile from the water. The eggs hatch in August and September.

These docile turtles are often seen sunning themselves on partially submerged logs and quickly drop into the water when approached.

[Click for Pictures of Red-ear Slider Turtle](#)

Red-eared slider turtles are similar in appearance to painted turtles. While the painted turtle's head is usually streaked with yellow, the red-eared slider has a red streak on its head. Sliders are 5 to 12 inches in length. Their carapace is oval shaped and more raised than the painted turtle.

Female sliders lay up to 25 oval eggs in June and July and the young typically hatch in September. The hatchlings eat insects, crayfish and tadpoles but change to a plant diet as adults.

Sliders are also fond of basking on logs like the painted turtle and are often seen in large groups. They are harmless turtles that are easily frightened by approaching humans. Red-eared sliders have been sold in the pet trade for many years. However, it is illegal in the state of Tennessee to own any native animal as a pet.

### ***History of the Shoreline area:***

The lower Little Tennessee Valley is one of the richest archaeological regions in the southeastern United States. In the 1880s, a Smithsonian Institution team conducted several excavations in the valley, uncovering artifacts and burials related to valley's 18th-century Overhill Cherokee inhabitants and prehistoric inhabitants. The Tellico Archaeological Project, conducted by the University of Tennessee Department of Anthropology in the late 1960s and 1970s in anticipation of the reservoir's construction, investigated over two dozen sites and uncovered evidence of substantial habitation in the valley during the Archaic (8000-1000 B.C.), Woodland (1000 B.C. - 1000 A.D.), Mississippian (900-1600 A.D.), and Cherokee (c. 1600-1838) periods. The expedition of Hernando De Soto likely visited a village at the mouth of the Little Tennessee River in 1540 and the expedition of Juan Pardo probably visited two villages further upstream (near modern Chilhowee Dam) in 1567.



**Burial Mound at Sequoyah Museum**

The Bat Creek site, designated 40LD24, is a multiphase site with evidence of occupation as early as the Archaic period. The site consisted of one large mound

(Mound 1) on the east bank of the creek and two smaller mounds (Mound 2 and Mound 3) on the west bank. Mound 1— which had a diameter of 108 feet and a height of 8 feet was located on the first terrace above the river, and is now submerged by the reservoir. Mound 2, which had a diameter of 44 feet and height of 10 feet, and Mound 3, which had a diameter of 28 feet and height of 5 feet were both located higher up, on the second terrace.



Bat Creek

In 1967, the Tennessee Valley Authority announced plans to build Tellico Dam, and asked the University of Tennessee Department of Anthropology to conduct salvage excavations in the Little Tennessee Valley. Litigation and environmental concerns stalled the dam's completion until 1979, allowing extensive excavations at multiple sites throughout the valley. "Mound 1" of the Bat Creek Site was excavated in 1975. Investigators concluded that the mound was a "platform" mound typical of the Mississippian period. Pre-Mississippian artifacts dating to the Archaic and Woodland periods were also found. The University of Tennessee excavators didn't investigate Mound 2 or Mound 3, both of which were no longer intact at that time. Neither the University of Tennessee's excavation of the Bat Creek Site nor any other excavations in the Little Tennessee Valley uncovered any evidence that would indicate Pre-Columbian contact with Old World civilizations.

### ***Sherman and the Civil War:***

#### **General Sherman and Monroe County**

An iron foundry was located in Tellico Plains from approximately 1850 until 1863. It manufactured products for the confederacy during the Civil War. After the battle of Missionary Ridge in the late fall of 1863, General Sherman marched several Union divisions through lower East Tennessee to relieve General Burnside's force, which was under siege by Confederate General Longstreet in Knoxville. Longstreet retired as Sherman approached, but while in Knoxville, General Sherman heard of the iron works the Confederates were using at Tellico Plains. Sherman ordered his main force to return from Knoxville to Chattanooga in preparation for the Atlanta campaign, which continued as the "March to the Sea". He dispatched General Morgan Smith's division, which he accompanied to Tellico Plains on December 10th and 11th, 1863. After crossing the Little Tennessee River at Bakers Creek (from what is now the Rarity Bay peninsula to Morganton Landing), Sherman and his troops traveled on to Tellico Plains. General Sherman and his soldiers demolished the Tellico Iron Works Foundry so effectively that it was never rebuilt. Sherman left Tellico Plains on December 12th for Chattanooga, by way of Athens.

### ***Cemeteries and the Tellico Reservoir:***

Several cemeteries can be found along the reservoir. Most of these are family cemeteries with some stones dating back as early as the 1700s. There are 14 cemeteries in the Tellico Village development and 2 within Rarity Bay. An obvious one to see from the water is on Bat Creek as you are traveling toward Rarity Bay. Look for the large tree on the hillside to your left. The small cemetery is underneath the tree and enclosed in a wrought iron fence.



Looking north from Morganton Cemetery, in the direction of now-submerged Morganton Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

### ***Ecological health of the reservoir:***

The ecological health of Tellico Reservoir was rated fair in 2007 monitoring conducted by TVA. Bacteria levels are generally low, and the state of Tennessee has not issued any advisories against swimming in Tellico Reservoir. The state of Tennessee advises against eating catfish from Tellico Reservoir because of PCB contamination which these bottom-feeding fish can pick up from the sediment in some sections of the river bed. TVA monitored Tellico Reservoir annually from 1991 through 1995 to establish baseline data related to the reservoir's ecological health under a range of weather and flow conditions. Tellico is now monitored every other year.

East Tennessee is an area with rich natural and cultural history. From the clear waters of Tellico Reservoir to the cool green mountains from which the Little Tennessee River flows, the natural beauty known as East Tennessee surrounds us.

### **Sources/Credits:**

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- Glenn Palmer, lifelong Blount County resident
- Google images

Written by Shaney Palmer, education consultant

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