

Self-Driving Tour #1

Mountains & Countryside

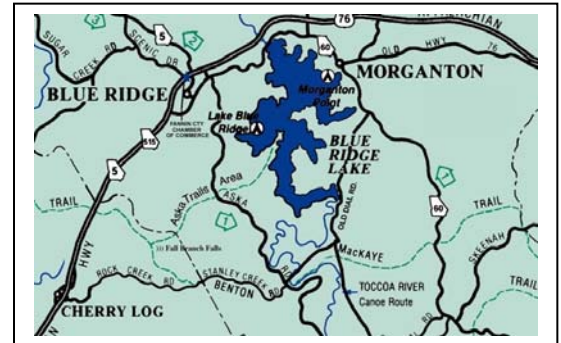
Blue Ridge – Dial - Morganton



This is a beautiful drive through the mountains and countryside surrounding Blue Ridge and Morganton in Fannin County. The drive begins at the intersection of the Appalachian Highway (U.S. 76) and Highway 5 at McDonald's in Blue Ridge. Total mileage is 37 miles. Approximate drive time is 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours. Begin the trip by going east toward Blairsville on the Appalachian Highway starting at McDonald's.

Total Miles Directions/Description

- .7 Turn right at Windy Ridge Conoco.
- .8 Turn left at stop sign at Pizza Hut (Old Hwy. 76).
- 3.2 **Blue Ridge Lake & Dam.** Turn into the parking area on the left, overlooking Lake Blue Ridge Dam, one of the largest earth dams in North America, built in 1930. Lake Blue Ridge has 100 miles of shoreline, 80% of which is National Forest land. Return the way you came.
- 5.2 **Aska Road.** Turn left on Aska Road. On the right is Harmony Church, one of many pretty country churches throughout the county.
- 6.2 **Weaver Creek Road** (also known as Hog Gut Road because of its many twists and turns.) A side trip of 3.8 miles takes you through a narrow mountain farm valley with old churches, farms and one of the old dairies, Campbell Farm.
- 7.2 **Dry Branch/Lake Blue Ridge Recreation Area.** For a nice view of Lake Blue Ridge, turn left on Dry Branch and follow less than one mile to a Forest Service recreation area with picnic area, camping and a boat ramp.
- 8.2 **Snake Nation Road,** Named by Cherokee Indians prior to the Trail of Tears in 1835-36, Snake Nation winds through a pastoral valley, ending near Camp Morganton.
- 9.4 **Deep Gap – Aska Trails.** Here you reach the top of Deep Gap, over 2,200 feet, and look toward Springer Mountain, where the world famous Appalachian Trail begins in Fannin County. .2 miles on the right is a trailhead for the Deep Gap portion of the Aska Trails. Another trailhead is located .4 miles from Deep Gap on Shady Falls Road. Trails range from 1 to 5.5 miles and are open all year.
- 12.3 **Toccoa River Rapids.** Turn left into a parking area to get a good look at the Toccoa River, one of Georgia's most pristine trout streams. This is popular spot to view the rapids, or to put in or take out tubes, canoes and kayaks. The Toccoa is a favorite trout stream for serious fly fishermen. It flows northward into Tennessee, where it becomes the Ocoee River, site of the 1996 Olympic whitewater kayak competition.
- 13.2 **Stanley Creek Road,** On the right is the entrance to the Rich Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Stanley Creek Road ends in Gilmer County at Cherry Log (Rock Creek Road). For a short hike to **Fall Branch Falls**, follow Stanley Creek 3 miles, just past Forest Warden Garfield Stanley's home. The trailhead is marked with the Benton MacKaye white diamond. Hike in is ¼ mile to the base, following the white diamonds.
- 13.5 **Shallowford Bridge.** On the left is the historic Shallowford Bridge. You may want to stop and look at this old one-lane bridge, built in 1920 and one of the last remaining of its kind.





- 15.9 **Big Creek Road.** This road leads to Gilmer County through part of the Rich Mountain Area.
- 16.5 **Toccoa Valley Campground.** On the left is Toccoa Valley Campground, a good place to camp or rent a canoe, funyak or tube. This is the beginning of the Dial community, the oldest community in Fannin County since Cherokee days, settled in 1834.
- 18.1 **Newport Road.** Turn left at the stop sign.
- 18.5 **VanZandt House.** To your left, in the valley is the original VanZandt house, home of one of the pioneer families of the area. The house, one of three in the area dating back to the 19th century, is the oldest in Fannin County. The log cabin within its walls was built in 1834.
- 18.8 **Dial Road.** Turn right at the stop sign.
- 18.9 **Cochran-Davenport House.** (left) Built in 1885 by George Cochran for his bride, Elizabeth VanZandt, the house was known as the “fancy” house in the valley and boasts Victorian gingerbread detailing, as well as a separate entrance to the formal parlor. All the outbuildings for this small farmstead remain intact, including an interesting spring house on the south.
- Old Dial Bridge – Cherokee Fish Trap.** On the right is the Old Dial Bridge over the Toccoa River. There is a Cherokee Indian fish trap, visible as a distinct “V” in the river on the east side of the bridge. For the next mile, the beautiful Toccoa River will be on the right.
- 20.2 **Chastain House.** On the left is a house built by Jason Chastain in 1865, after acquiring the land in the Cherokee Land lottery. The boxwoods in front of the house were planted over 100 years ago by his wife Mary, who brought them here from North Carolina.
- 21.3 **GA Highway 60.** Dial Road intersects with GA Highway 60, one of the most scenic routes in the Georgia mountains. To the left is the return trip to Morganton and to Blue Ridge. To the right is the route to Suches and Dahlonega. For a detour to see the Old Skeenah Mill and the Swinging Bridge over the Toccoa River, turn right. To return to Blue Ridge, turn left.
- 22.0 **Old Skeenah Mill.** On the left is the Skeenah Creek Campground. The Old Skeenah Mill was built in 1848 by Willis Woody, who brought his family to the Skeenah Valley (named after the Cherokee word for “black bear”) in 1839. The Mill is listed on the National Register. A water-powered sawmill was also located on the creek. The Skeenah Mill was once a popular place for neighbors to gather and chat as they waited for their wheat or corn to be ground.
- 22.7 **The Swinging Bridge.** .7 miles on the right past the Old Skeenah Mill is the dirt road (4 bumpy miles) to the Swinging Bridge over the Toccoa River. The bridge is a 270-foot suspension bridge built by the US Forest Service. Park at the berm and hike in to the bridge in about five minutes on the Benton MacKaye/Duncan Ridge National Recreation Trail. This is a beautiful area with huge old growth hemlocks.

As you leave the Swinging Bridge, turn left for the return trip to Morganton, approximately 7.5 miles. In Morganton, turn left, then right to Lakewood Junction. Turn right again to Hwy 515, then left to Blue Ridge.

A Word to the Wise ... *The law of the forest is “leave no trace.” Please pack in all you will need and pack out all your trash. If you build a fire, never leave it unattended. Use good judgment when hiking, particularly around waterfalls where rocks are often wet, moss covered and slippery. If hiking during hunting season, wear a brightly colored vest. Unexpected encounters with animals can be pleasurable or problematic. A hawk or owl soaring silently above is a pleasure. Watch for woodpeckers, turkeys and mountain grouse near the forest edges. The flash of a white-tail deer is an every day occurrence. More rare is sighting a black bear or bobcat. Most animals will flee the presence of humans, but be on the lookout for copperheads, wasps, yellow jackets and other biting, stinging critters.*