



SMOKY MOUNTAIN FISHING IS HIGH ADVENTURE

One Trip to Swain County and You're Hooked. Ronnie Crisp directs his bass boat across the glassy-smooth waters of Fontana Lake. The sputtering of his motor disturbs the predawn silence, prompting a great blue heron to take wing, grudgingly giving up his favorite fishing spot. Near the shore ahead, a family of otters is getting in a little playtime before hunting for breakfast. Overhead, a sharp-eyed osprey scans the waters for a hapless smallmouth bass that ventures a little too near the surface. Ronnie's boat may be the only one on the water this morning, but already there's plenty of competition to land a prized catch that's lurking beneath the waters of this picturesque mountain lake, the jewel of Swain County, North Carolina.

"I'm just going to troll along this shore, about 10 feet out," says Ronnie. "Unless I miss my guess, there'll be bass feeding in some of these pockets ahead." Sure enough, Ronnie hooks a two-pound largemouth near the edge of the shoreline vegetation. It's a far cry from Ronnie's personal best at Fontana (7 lbs, 15 oz), but it's a dandy. "You just can't beat mountain lake fishing," says Ronnie. "Large- and smallmouth bass and crappie are along the shore. Walleye feed at about 40 feet down. You can even go down 140 feet for steelhead trout. I'm a fishing guide, but even when I don't have a customer you'll find me on the lake."

Fly Rods and Whitewater. If your idea of fishing is casting neatly tied flies into the current of a rushing mountain stream, Swain County will not disappoint. "Out here, it's not unheard of to hook a rainbow, brook and brown trout and maybe even a smallmouth bass in a single afternoon," says Ken Kastorff, owner of Endless River Adventures. For the past couple of decades, Ken has taken fly-fishers (from novice to experienced) to try their luck in the Nantahala, Tuckaseegee and Little Tennessee rivers. "Of course, we practice 'catch and release,'" says Ken. "We want to be sure that there will be fish swimming these streams for years to come." That "green" way of thinking is common among the locals of Swain County. Efforts are constantly underway to conserve water and energy and to recycle whenever possible.

Whatever Floats Your Boat. "Our visitors are good about caring for the lake," says Jo Mathis of Almond Boat and RV Park on Fontana Lake. "Many come to fish, but the smooth, protected waters attract skiers from all over. We also rent pontoons for picnickers and swimmers, as well as RV sites and cottages for folks who just want to enjoy the views."

When it comes to recreation, Swain County has something for everyone. The dam-controlled Nantahala River dishes up whitewater thrills for rafters and kayakers. There are 800 miles of hiking trails in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which makes up a large part of Swain County. Visitors also enjoy horseback riding, camping, shopping for local crafts, listening to live mountain music and exploring the rich cultural heritage of the Cherokee Indians and the Scotch-Irish pioneers.

For more information on touring the Smokies, contact the Swain County Chamber of Commerce, 210 Main Street, P.O. Box 509, Bryson City, NC 28713; chamber@greatsmokies.com; or 800-867-9246.