

Travel



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Tennessee diary: Chattanooga's Lookout Mountain

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — Chattanooga is a Creek Indian word that means "rock rising to a point." The rock that rises above this green bowl of trees is Lookout Mountain, site of the "Battle Above the Clouds" during the Civil War, site now of Chattanooga's most popular tourist attraction.

There are two points of view about the garish signs that clutter the highway approaches to Lookout Mountain — they are either "Americana" in an old medicine-show sense, or they offend people enough to make them avoid the mountain altogether.

That would be a shame, because the 145-foot underground waterfall and the mountainside rock garden are worth every curving mile up the hill.

Lookout Mountain is one of four mountains looking down on this city beside the Tennessee River. The others are Signal, Elder and Raccoon mountains. Decisive battles of the War Between the States were fought here and of nearby Missionary Ridge (so named because the Indians decreed that this was as far into their territory as the missionaries could go).



1-of-a-kind traveler
Iris Jones
contributing travel editor

Lookout Mountain, that rock rising to a point, is the best known mountain because of its distinctive shape and geography. An inclined railway pulls you steeply uphill to the top. Point Park, its edges silhouetted by nineteenth century cannons, gives you a dramatic view of the city. It is hard to imagine up here that a waterfall is cascading 1,120 feet under the ground on which you stand.

RUBY FALLS is named for Ruby Lambert, the wife of the man who discovered it falling in underground darkness in 1928. Leo Lambert was one of the private investors drilling through Lookout Mountain to build an elevator to a deeper, known cave on the 460-foot level.

When the drill found an unexpected pocket of air on the 280-foot level, Leo went in to explore. Seventeen hours later he came out with excited stories about an unexplored cave and a glorious 145-foot underground waterfall.

Today, you walk two-fifths of a mile from the elevator to Ruby Falls, through a tastefully lighted tunnel. The lights highlight draped rock formations with names like "Crystal Chandeliers" and "Toltem Pole," plus a few that the guides have named "Bloody Nose Boulder" and "Headsache Rock."

The only hokey touch is when you approach the falls. A dramatic burst of music, a moment of total darkness and then the lights go on. A ribbon of water cascades down through a chimney of rock. It's worth the wait.

Admission is \$4 for adults, \$2 for kids 6-12.

ROCK CITY. You've seen lots of rocky mountainsides with sweeping landscapes of rock, and trees tucked into shady hollows, but you've probably never seen one with rock-walled pathways and signs saying "Hall of the Mountain King" and "Fat Man's Squeeze."

For most of us, such landscapes are scenic, but it took Frieda Carter to see this sandstone mountainside as a rock garden. Not the tiny rock garden full of wildflowers that you and I have in our backyards, but a 10-acre garden with rock bridges connecting mountain slopes.

Flowers and trees are skillfully cultivated on wild slopes, and you can lean across a stone balustrade to a magnificent view of the valley below.

Mrs. Carter saw that view for the first time in 1924 when her husband, Garnet Carter, was developing this mountain slope as a housing development. They kept this particular sweep of rock because you couldn't build a house on it anyway.

Frieda Carter marked a path through the landscape unwinding a ball of string as she walked among the rock formations. Then she planted a variety of plants along the string trail.

GARNET WIDENED the trail with flagstone and built stone bridges to make the view more accessible. He was an enterprising man. When he couldn't build a golf course beside a hotel project nearby, he invented miniature golf and called it Tom Thumb Golf.

When Carter went broke during the

Depression, he opened his wife's garden to the public and called it Rock City. Barn roofs all over the countryside suddenly bloomed with a three-word sign: "SEE ROCK CITY." Carter painted a farmer's barn free in exchange for the advertising space.

Nowadays, after you've paid your admission (\$5.50 for adults, \$2.75 for children 6-12), you can walk the stone pathways through mountain tunnels, across the rock bridges and between narrow clefts of rock to fully enjoy the cool, tree garden that the Carters created for you.

Only when you start to see elves tucked in a niche of rock does the garden begin to get "touristy," but that's the best part for the kids. Carter had a

lot of elves from his Tom Thumb Golf Courses, so it is not surprising that many of them found their way here or that Fairyland Caverns should have been added in 1947.

The Caverns are fairy tale exhibits visible from a tunnel that was built for another purpose. Garnet Carter was trying to build a miniature railway there when the roof fell in. The Fairyland ends with a huge Mother Goose Village added in 1964.

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Photos by Iris Jones



A visitor takes a look at the magnificent countryside of Tennessee near Chattanooga from the observation deck at Ruby Falls on Lookout Mountain. Left: A historic cannon on Point Park at the top of Lookout keeps watch over Chattanooga in the distance below.



The tunnel to Ruby Falls inside Lookout Mountain is lined with rock formations. Left: The trip to Lookout Mountain begins with a trip in the incline railway, a ride which is itself an adventure.

Tourist attractions around Chattanooga

Chattanooga calls itself the Scenic Center of the South. It is located at the junction of I-75, I-59 and I-24. There are many other things to do in the area other than the attractions on Lookout Mountain.

The Chattanooga Choo-Choo is a complex of restaurants, shops, model railway museum and hotel in the center of town. I'm saving my story about that for another day.

Civil War buffs may enjoy a private tourist attraction called Confederama on Lookout Mountain. It is a large model with Union and Confederate troops at battle stations and a narrator who uses lights to show the progress of the war.

The Chickamauga-Chattanooga National Military Park is the nation's oldest, largest and most-visited military park, found by following a seven-mile

marked trail though eight historic areas.

You might also be interested in the Raccoon Mountain Caverns, riding the one-mile skyride to the top of Raccoon Mountain, visiting the Old Mountain Opry on Signal Mountain, riding a raft down the Ocoee River rapids, or visiting one of Chattanooga's museums.

Hunter Museum of Art has a fine contemporary collection, as well as the eighteenth and nineteenth century collection for which it is known. There is an excellent collection of antique glass and antique furniture next door in the Houston Museum. The National Knife Museum is the only museum of its kind in the country.

For information, contact Chattanooga Convention and Visitors Bureau, Civic Forum, 1001 Market Street, Chattanooga, TN 37402 or telephone (615) 756-2121.

Rail trip set

The Bluewater Michigan chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will sponsor a fall color 500-mile round-trip from Pontiac to Dayton, Ohio, and return on Saturday, Oct. 22.

At Dayton, buses will take passengers for a 3-hour visit to the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base where there is an extensive collection of air and space craft.

The Dayton-Flyer, powered by a diesel engine, will have heated coaches, a commissary car and a dining car selling snacks and sandwiches. The trip starts at 6:45 a.m. and returns at 1 a.m. For information, call 676-1619, 541-5935 or 264-3111.

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El Presidente	459	489	449	499	499
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Tower	539	569	519	579	579
Holiday Inn	499	529	479	559	559
Hvatt Regency					
Oceanview	579	599	559	699	699
Regency Club	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	769

Prices are per person based on double occupancy.

SamsonTours

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