

Shuckstack Firetower Hike



The hike is 6.8 miles roundtrip, it's rated Medium but could be Strenuous because of the elevation gain. Standing at the top of Shuckstack Lookout Tower is easily one of the most dramatic and alluring experiences that you'll find on any mountaintop in the Southeast. Sixty feet in the air, swaying gently in the wind, you feel as if you're standing inside a fixed mountain gondola. Through picture windows, you can spot the deep blue waters of Fontana Lake nestled inside the Smokies, as well as the full breadth of the Unicoi, Nantahala, and Blue Ridge Mountains.

Shuckstack Tower is located on a spur that juts off of the Appalachian Trail. The hike ascends a total of 2,100 feet in 3.4 miles, with the bulk of the steep terrain covered in the first 2.4 miles. At roughly 2.4 miles from the trailhead, just below the summit of Little Shuckstack, the path begins to level considerably, making your hike much easier over the course of the next two-thirds of a mile. At just over 3 miles, however, hikers will reach the steepest (but short) climb along the route. Shortly after ascending to the top of Twentymile Ridge you'll encounter a three-way intersection. The Appalachian Trail is marked with a simple white line blazed on the trees, while the path to the tower is marked with a white "T". Hikers should turn right here - the tower is only a tenth-of-a-mile from this junction.

Constructed in 1934, the Shuckstack Fire Tower is a small wood and metal building on a winding staircase. The view from the bottom of the fire tower is good, but the views from the top are amazing. As you begin to climb the 78 stairs, watch out for a couple of broken steps and a section of missing railing. As you climb up, you'll likely notice that the tower moves ever so slightly, but don't be alarmed. Wind continuously blows across this ridge, and the tower is made to give a little. At the top you'll be rewarded with spectacular 360-degree views. The Unicoi Mountains can be seen towards the west, the Snowbird and Nantahala Mountains to the south, the Blue Ridge Mountains to the southeast, and the Great Smoky Mountains towards the east and north. You'll also be able to see Fontana Dam, as well as all of the terrain you covered on your way up to the tower.



Shuckstack is one of only three fire towers still standing in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. When they eventually succumb to weather and age, there will be no way for visitors to climb straight into the sky, and the views from the top will belong once again to the birds. Do it soon before they are gone!

Directions:

Head towards Cherokee and Bryson City, take NC 28 to Fontana Dam, after you cross start your hike from the north side of the dam.