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2017/2018

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE PARKS

VIRGINIA & THE BLUE RIDGE

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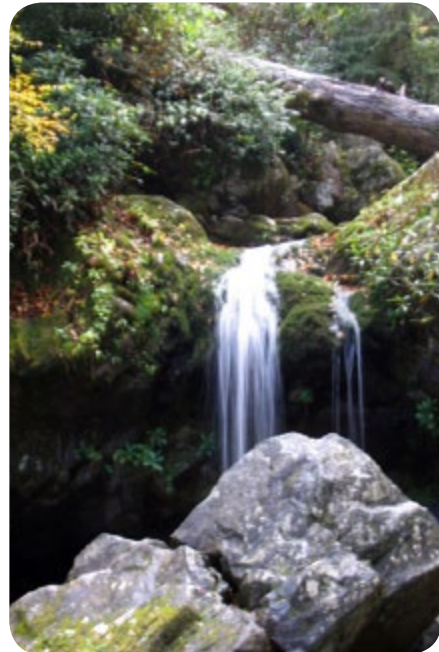
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WELCOME

The Blue Ridge Parkway, often called “America’s Favorite Drive,” is set against the spectacular Blue Ridge Mountains—so named for the bluish tint that the mountains put off from a mixture of sunlight, forest and fog. Construction commenced in 1935, in part, to connect **Shenandoah National Park** in Virginia with **Great Smoky Mountains National Park** in North Carolina and Tennessee. Originally called the ‘Appalachian Scenic Highway,’ it was envisioned as the first elongated national park, providing the recently enamored automobile traveler some of the most spectacular natural scenery in the U.S.



The Blue Ridge Mountains offer endless opportunity for outdoor adventure.

Carolyn Sugg

Today, the Blue Ridge Parkway is one of the most visited national park units, with an average of **16 million visits** a year! Commercial and residential development, air and water quality issues, and lack of sufficient funding, however, all threaten this valuable and vulnerable corridor. In collaboration with the National Park Service and several organizations, including land trust groups from all states on the route, thousands are working diligently to ensure the park is protected.

The Blue Ridge Parkway is more than just a road—it offers recreational opportunities, habitat for diverse plants and wildlife, access to America’s cultural heritage and is an icon of American progress. To learn more about how you can lend a hand in preserving the parkway, please call the **Blue Ridge Parkway Headquarters** at **(828) 298-0398** or visit **nps.gov/blri**.

The parkway embodies the sense of movement that the entire area represents, and acts as one of the major gateways to your adventures along the mountainside.

The National Park Service and National Forest Service are responsible for the management and protection of these resources, for the well-being of visitors and for overseeing all aspects of concession operations.

This guide has been made possible by the support of the sponsors whose messages appear inside. No matter what parks you decide to visit in Virginia and the Blue Ridge, we hope this guide travels along with you.



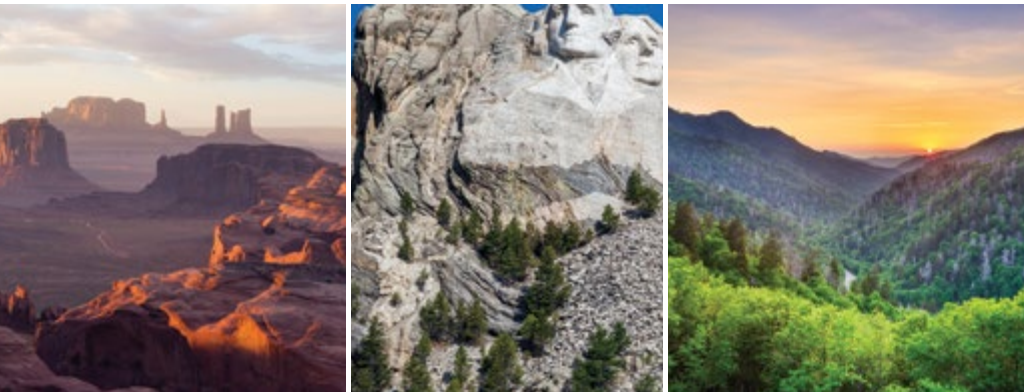
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Special thanks to Andrew Boye. (Cover: Blue Ridge at sunset by jaredkay/iStock.)

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WHAT'S NEW! WHY PARKS MATTER

“There is nothing so American as
our national parks.”

— Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Access to parks is one of the things that's truly great about life in America. Not just national parks, like FDR stated, but *all* parks. Parks afford everyone, regardless of race, income, social status or age, the opportunity to escape the concrete jungle and step into the wild. It doesn't matter whether it's a small step into a local park or a giant leap into the backcountry. The effect is the same. Time in nature feels good. Other values that parks bring may be less obvious. Since we take care of the things we value, I'd like to highlight a few other benefits we all receive from public lands:

Economic Impact America's federal, state and local parks and public lands generate \$200 billion in annual economic activity and support more than one million jobs! You might help a dozen businesses during a weekend hiking trip. Imagine the impact of a week-long national park adventure. Parks raise property values, too!

Conservation Trees produce the oxygen we need to survive, but did you know that they also help save money? It's estimated that trees in cities save \$400 billion in costs to retain stormwater. A single tree can store 100 gallons or more, which helps keep streets from flooding and reduces the need for artificial storage facilities. A tree can also absorb as much as three tons of carbon gas during its lifetime.



Mark, Joel & Alex – Support parks, stay healthy!

Take a deep breath in a park and you'll immediately know the value of greenspace.

Health & Wellness Studies show a high correlation between time spent in parks and improved health (and, in my view, happiness). You move more when you're outside, which decreases stress, makes you more fit and reduces the risk of many health issues, such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Exercise (which parks inspire) also positively impacts your cholesterol levels. A few years ago, I started bicycling to work every day. A year later, my overall cholesterol went down while my HDL—the “good” cholesterol—went up. The results of a small change in your exercise routine can be amazing! Parks invite this change.

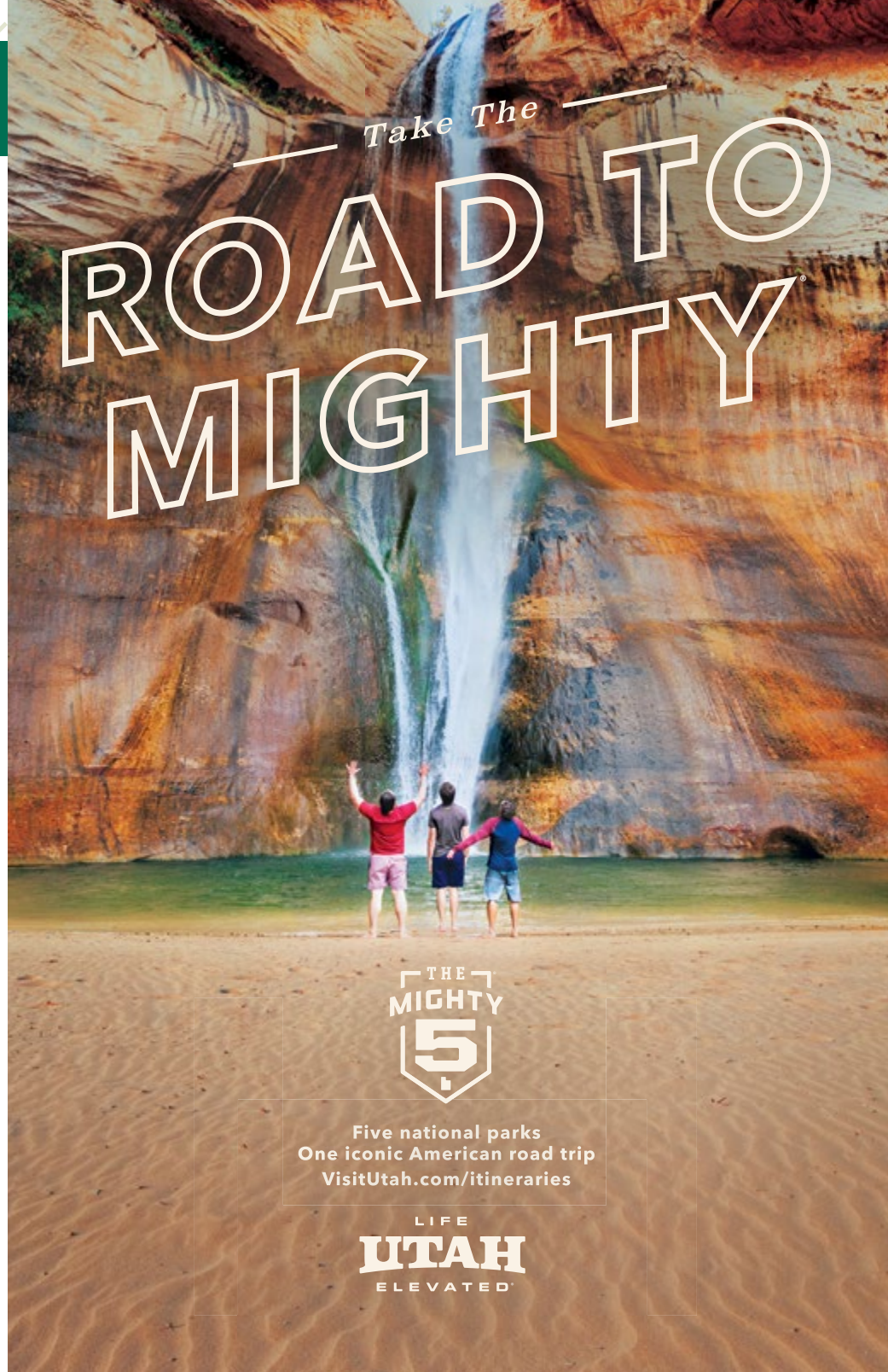
The value of parks is undeniable, so follow FDR's lead and support our public lands. It's the all-American thing to do. (Congress, take note!) You'll save the country money while improving our nation's health—and your own, too. Not a bad combination!

mark@americanparknetwork.com



GET CONNECTED AT YOUR FAVORITE PARKS!

Parks are about enjoying nature, but what if you want to share a great picture or are awaiting an important email? If you're looking to add connectivity to your park, or if you already have Wi-Fi and would like help adding content or generating sponsor revenues, please let us know at wifi@americanparknetwork.com.



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AT A GLANCE



If you are an outdoor enthusiast, the Blue Ridge Mountains are the perfect playground. Hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, fishing, rock climbing, skiing and just about any other activity you might crave are right around the bend. Bordered by **Shenandoah National Park** in the northern section and the **Great Smoky Mountains National Park** in the southern section, with the **Blue Ridge Parkway** running down the middle, public lands make up the heart and soul of the region.

WHO'S WHO

As you travel in the Blue Ridge, keep in mind there are several organizations dedicated to making your experience a memorable and safe one.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS)

The NPS is the federal custodian of more than a dozen sites in the region. As an agency of the Department of the Interior, the NPS has the responsibility of preserving and protecting the natural and cultural assets of national parks and providing for the parks' public use and enjoyment. For more information visit nps.gov or call the southeast regional office at **(404) 507-5600**.

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE (USFWS)

The USFWS is the government organization dedicated to the protection, conservation and enhancement of fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats. The organization has a hand in implementing laws that affect areas in the Blue Ridge Mountains, including the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act.

U.S. FOREST SERVICE (USFS)

The Blue Ridge Mountains include four national forests managed by the USFS: **Jefferson, George Washington, Pisgah and Nantahala**. The USFS mission is to protect and manage our natural resources.

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY ASSOCIATION (BRPA)

The BRPA is a non-profit association comprised of businesses and organizations that serve Blue Ridge Parkway visitors. Members work together to provide visitor information, family entertainment, recreation, shopping, lodging, dining and support services in communities along the scenic corridor. Founded in 1949, BRPA is an official partner of the Blue Ridge Parkway-National Park Service. For more information visit blueridgeparkway.org or call **(828) 670-1924**.

STATE PARKS

The parks highlighted in this guide are located in Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia and Tennessee. In addition, Kentucky, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Georgia and South Carolina are considered part of the Blue Ridge region. Please contact individual state parks or natural resources offices for more information about exploring the state parks of the Blue Ridge. See the chart in this chapter for specific state contact information to help you plan your visit. This resource will be invaluable.

APPALACHIAN TRAIL CONSERVANCY (ATC)

The ATC is a volunteer-based organization dedicated to the preservation and man-



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agement of the natural, scenic, cultural and historic resources associated with the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, which runs 2,175 miles from Maine to Georgia. The group provides outdoor recreation and educational opportunities to trail visitors, endeavoring to create an engaged community to ensure future generations can experience the trail. For more information or to learn how you can volunteer, visit appalachiantrail.org or call **(304) 535-6331**.

SAFETY & REGULATIONS

Please abide by the following regulations and safety tips, which are in place to help protect the parks, wildlife and you, the visitor. During your visit, please follow 'Leave No Trace' principles (see the "Preservation" chapter for more information).

Camping: Do not dig into or level the ground, as archaeological resources could be disturbed or erosion initiated.

Driving: Observe posted speed limits while driving. Watch for turns. Be especially alert for animals crossing the road.

Firearms: Regulations vary by park. Check with the park you plan to visit before your trip for more information.

Fires: Wood fires are permitted only in existing fireplaces at campgrounds and established picnic grounds. Use wood from inside the park or local sources and check with the park for burn bans and firewood restrictions.

Insects: To reduce your risk of being bitten by ticks, which are active year-round, stay on trails and avoid grassy, bushy areas.

Off Highway Vehicles: OHV rules vary by park. Contact the park before you visit to find out if OHV use is permitted.

Poison Ivy: Avoid poison ivy by staying on trails and avoiding brushy areas. A hat, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt also help.

Valuables: Don't leave valuables in your car. They are an easy target in a locked or unlocked vehicle.

Vandalism: Please take only pictures and memories home with you. Do not deface, destroy or remove and flowers, trees, shrubs, rocks or historical objects.

Wildlife: Feeding, petting or harassing wildlife is prohibited. Animals may seem tame, but they are wild and can hurt you and themselves if you are too close.

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY HIGHLIGHTS

HUMPBACK ROCKS

Mile Post 5.8: At the north end of the parkway, explore a 19th century farm or stretch your legs on one of the many trails surrounding the historic rock formations that served as landmarks for passing wagon trains.

PEAKS OF OTTER

Mile Post 86: The Peaks of Otter region has attracted for more than 8,000 years. Get a room in the historic lodge, enjoy the scenic lake front views from the full service restaurant, go fishing, or explore the trails through the area, like the one to Polly Wood's Ordinary, an inn that hosted travelers in the 1830's. Learn more at peaksofotter.com

ROCKY KNOB AND MABRY MILL

Mile Post 169-176: See the historic, water-powered grist mill that is the most photographed place along the parkway or hike into Rockcastle Gorge. Musicians gather on Sunday afternoons in

WHAT WAS THE BEST
MOMENT OF YOUR TRIP?
TELL US! @OhRanger.com

the summer and historic demonstrations are often given from May to October. For scheduling and other information call **(276) 952-2947**.

Craggy Gardens

Mile Post 364: Take the short hike through a tunnel of rhododendrons and other blooms to the summit for a 360-de-

gree view of the Smoky Mountains into Tennessee and Virginia.

OCONALUFTEE INDIAN VILLAGE

Mile Post 469: At the end of the parkway, head to Cherokee, North Carolina to experience authentic eighteenth century Cherokee culture. Learn more at visitchokeenc.com

IMPORTANT NUMBERS	
NORTH CAROLINA	
North Carolina State Parks	(919) 707-9300 • ncparks.gov
Fishing & Hunting	(919) 707-0010 • ncwildlife.org
Office of Tourism	(800) VISITNC (847-4862) • visitnc.com
Highway Patrol / Road Conditions	(919) 733-7952 or *47 / 511
VIRGINIA	
Virginia State Parks	(800) 933-PARK • virginiastateparks.gov
Fishing and Hunting	(866) 721-6911 • dgif.virginia.gov
Office of Tourism	(800) VISITVA • virginia.org
Highway Patrol / Road Conditions	(804) 674-2000 / 511
TENNESSEE	
Tennessee State Parks	(615) 532-0001 • tnstateparks.com
Fishing and Hunting	(615) 781-6500 • tn.gov/twra
Office of Tourism	(800) 462-8366 • tnvacation.com
Highway Patrol / Road Conditions	(877) 244-0065 or dial 511
WEST VIRGINIA	
West Virginia State Parks	(304) 558-2764 • wvstateparks.com
Fishing and Hunting Regulations	(304) 558-2758 • wvdnr.gov
Office of Tourism	(800) CALLWVA • wvtourism.com
Highway Patrol / Road Conditions	(877) 982-7623 or dial 511
FEDERAL PARKS & RECREATION	
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	(800) 344-WILD • fws.gov
National Park Service	See individual park chapters • nps.gov
U.S. Forest Service	(800) 832-1355 • fs.fed.us
Federal Recreation & Reservations	(888) 448-1474 • recreation.gov
Emergencies	911



The Appalachians are some of the oldest mountains in the world and are rich in culture and heritage. The first true inhabitants in the region are believed to have been a break-away group of Iroquois, later to be called Cherokee, who had moved south from Iroquoian lands in New England.

In the late 18th century, Scotch-Irish, German and English settlers were the first Europeans to arrive in significant numbers. The Cherokee were friendly at first, but fought when provoked, and eventually withdrew to the protection of the Blue Ridge Mountains. In 1838, after the discovery of gold in North Georgia, the U.S. government forced the Cherokee from their homes along the Trail of Tears.

After the removal of the Cherokee, the logging industry radically changed the land. In the 1930s, after years of public outcry for preservation, private efforts helped pave the way for the establishment of countless parks protecting these precious resources.

EARLY PEOPLE

The post-Ice Age peoples who knew these lands were hunters and gatherers. They were nomads who moved with the seasons picking nuts and berries and hunting caribou, elk and musk ox with spears and clubs.

Among the many native tribes living in and around the park area were the **Monacans** and the **Manahoacs**, who lived in the region just east of the Blue Ridge



Library of Congress

People began logging in the Blue Ridge region, which caused the need for protection.

Mountains. These were the tribes that explorer **John Lederer**, a German physician and scholar, encountered on his journey to the Blue Ridge Mountains in 1669.

Around 1650, the tribes began suffering from new diseases, including smallpox, measles and tuberculosis, introduced by French and Dutch fur traders and early Tidewater pioneers. It is estimated that 2,000 Monacans and Manahoacs lived in the region, but by 1730 most of them had died or moved away.

It is possible that Lederer was not the first European explorer to visit the Blue Ridge Mountains. **Captain John Smith** explored the Rappahannock River in 1608, but Lederer was the first to leave a written account of his journey. With the help of native guides, Lederer reached the crest of the mountains on March 18, 1669, and then spent six days hiking through the snow "hoping to find some passage through the Mountains." He described steep slopes, thick brambles and a forest teeming with wild game.

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENTS

In 1716, **Governor Alexander Spotswood** led a well-supplied party of 63 men from Germanna, near present-day Fredericksburg, Virginia, across the mountains to the Shenandoah River and back in what would become popularly known as the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe Expedition.

Spotswood was eager to encourage settlement in the area before the French arrived to begin their own settlements.

He initiated a generous land grant program that exempted settlers from taxes and attracted thousands into the area. Germans from Pennsylvania, as well as the English and Scotch-Irish from Vir-




Captain John Smith founded the first English settlement in Jamestown, Virginia.

ginia's Tidewater region, began settling in the area.

BLUE RIDGE TODAY

Today, there are numerous federal and state lands that protect the resources of the Blue Ridge. Conserving the area for both recreation and to protect the habitat is an important step in keeping the region as safe for the future as possible.

From National Parks, National Forests, BLM Land, State Parks and more, the region needs your help to stay as healthy as possible.

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ANNUAL EVENTS

2017

JUNE 3 NATIONAL TRAILS DAY

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Give back on this national day of trail maintenance, celebration and service.

(800) 972-8608 • americanhiking.org

JULY 9 SCENIC MOUNTAIN TRIATHLON

MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST

West Virginia's oldest triathlon: swim Summit Lake, bike Kennison Mountain and run the Cranberry Glades.

(304) 846-6790 • richwoodchamberofcommerce.org

JULY 26 – 30 FLOYDFEST

FLOYD, VA

An 80-acre plateau off the Blue Ridge Parkway is transformed into a temporary tent city music festival. Multiple stages featuring rock, bluegrass, folk and other genres.

(888) 823-3787 • floydfest.com

JULY 26 WILD PONY SWIM

CHINCOTEAGUE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

A very popular event here since 1925. Watch more than 300 native wild ponies swim across the Assateague Channel.

(757) 336-6161 • assateagueisland.com

AUGUST 3 – 5 MOUNTAIN DANCE & FOLK FESTIVAL

ASHEVILLE AREA, NC

Features performances by hundreds of the Southern Appalachians' best traditional mountain musicians and dancers.

(828) 258-6101 x 345 • folkheritage.org

AUGUST 11 – 19 PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY FAIR

MANASSAS, VA

Enjoy Virginia's largest county fair featuring livestock, Civil War encampment, rodeo, food, magic and circus shows.

(703) 368-0173 • pwcfair.com

SEPTEMBER 8 GAULEY SEASON 2016 OPENING DAY

GLEN JEAN, WV

The most epic period of planned whitewater releases in the world begins today!

(703) 368-0173 • nps.gov/gari

SEPTEMBER 30 NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Since 1994, volunteers have participated in this day of caring for our public lands.

(202) 261-6479 • publiclandsday.org

SEPTEMBER 1 – 2 SMOKY MOUNTAIN FOLK FESTIVAL

HAYWOOD COUNTY AREA, NC

Lakeside views with the region's best string bands, ballad singers and square dancers

(828) 452-2881 • lakejunaluska.com/sm-folk-festival

SEPTEMBER 16 FLOCK TO THE ROCK

CHIMNEY ROCK STATE PARK

Ornithologist-guided walks, raptor flight shows and workshops about the birds of the region.

(800) 277-9611 • chimneyrockpark.com

OCTOBER 5 – 8 THE FESTY EXPERIENCE

CONCERT GROUNDS AT DEVILS BACKBONE BREWING COMPANY IN NELSON COUNTY, VA

A weekend festival based around bluegrass band, the Infamous String Dusters, Festy offers a place to camp, savor local food, hear live music and enjoy southern hospitality.

(434) 220-4000 • thefesty.com

OCTOBER 7 OYSTER FESTIVAL

CHINCOTEAGUE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Just \$40 gets you all you can eat oysters from noon to 4 p.m. Purchase tickets early as they tend to sell out quickly.

(757) 336-6161 • chincoteagueoysterfestival.com

OCTOBER 13 – 15 GO OUTSIDE FESTIVAL

ROANOKE, VA

The event encourages healthy, outdoor recreation. See demos, competitions, view and try out new gear, pitch a tent, enjoy music and more.

(540) 343-1550 x 104 • roanokegofest.com

OCTOBER 21 BRIDGE DAY

NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL RIVER

Join the 200,000 people that converge to watch BASE jumpers parachute off the New River Gorge Bridge. Come early for Taste of Bridge Day on October 14.

(800) 927-0263 • officialbridgeday.com

OCTOBER 28 BLUE RIDGE FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL

FERRUM, VA

Music, storytelling and more to celebrate the rich history of folk life in the area.

(540) 365-4412 • blueridgefolklifestival.org

NOVEMBER 4 MOUNTAIN MASOCHIST

50 MILE TRAIL RUN IN LYNCHBURG, VA

This run has earned its reputation for being one of the "best trail races in the East."

(434) 846-2333 • eco-xsports.com

2018

MAY WILDERNESS WILDLIFE WEEK

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

The week offers eight days of programs and activities focused on the park.

(865) 453-8574 • mypigeonforge.com

MAY MIGRATORY BIRD CELEBRATION

CHINCOTEAGUE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Watch the spring migration: enjoy lectures, bird walks and kids activities.

(757) 336-6122 • chinco.fws.gov

MAY WILDFLOWER WEEKEND

SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK

Celebrate spring blooms and weather in Shenandoah with guided park hikes.

(540) 999-3500 • nps.gov/shen

JUNE 3 NATIONAL TRAILS DAY

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Give back on this national day of trail maintenance, celebration and service.

(800) 972-8608 • americanhiking.org



SEASONS

WINTER IN THE BLUE RIDGE

Cold weather, shortening days and heavy snows will typically hit the region around late October and last through the early spring months. And while there is no denying that activity slows a bit, winter months in the Blue Ridge can be just as vibrant and inviting as their more heavily traveled and temperate spring and summer counterparts—if you know where to look and what to look for!

Wintergreen and **Massanutten Resorts**, and many others in the region, offer great skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing and nordic trails, as well as lessons for beginners and snow tubing parks for those who would rather slide down the mountain. Massanutten has an indoor water park, offering a chance to get away from the cold temperatures outside. In ad-



The region is a prime destination for winter sports, without all the lines.

technat/Stock

dition to the more traditional mountain resorts, Lynchburg, Virginia also has a unique **Snow Flex Center on Liberty Mountain**. It's the only year-round synthetic ski slope in the United States, giving winter sports enthusiasts great winter fun even in the non-winter months.

Hiking is a wonderful way to experience winter in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The air is crisp and the low humidity makes visibility better than any other time of the year. Coupled with the lack of leaves on the trees, the winter opens up views that aren't possible during any other time of the year. Much of the region's wildlife is more active during the winter, and the snow on the ground makes it easier to spot animal tracks.

Winter is also a great time to enjoy indoor activities like exhibits, visitor centers and park museums that you may have missed during other seasons. Check with each park to make sure the buildings are open and to inquire about winter-specific children's programs as well.

Winter months can be very cold and the climate can change quickly. There is also very little average temperature difference in the winter between the Piedmont and the mountain valleys, so dress and prepare for cold temperatures, and always tell someone where you are and when you plan to return. For road status and closure info, call (828) 298-0398 (24 hours).

SPRING IN THE BLUE RIDGE

As the snow melts and temperatures start to warm, the Blue Ridge Parkway bursts with spring beauty. Take advantage of springtime in the region by seeking out one of the gorgeous wildflower blooms. The parkway is



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- They give us fresh water, clean air and unforgettable experiences.
- They give us beauty, serenity and escape.
- They are OUR public lands.

It doesn't take much to give a little something back to ensure that these places will be here for our children to enjoy. Join the thousands of individuals who play a part in helping to care for our National Forests every day.



Learn how you can help at www.nationalforests.org



Matt Machin

Visit in the fall to take in the full splendor of the region's colorful foliage.

home to a wide variety of native wildflower species. Some of the more well-known wildflower species you can see include buttercups, black-eyed Susan, rhododendron, azalea and mountain laurel. Bunches of wildflowers sprout from the ground each year, showcasing a vivid scene of color throughout the parkway. These blooms are some of the best displays in the nation. Blooms are prevalent throughout the entire region, though some sites are better known than others. For example, Great Smoky Mountains National Park is often called the “**wildflower national park**.” Celebrate the blooms in Shenandoah National Park during their **Wildflower Weekend** in May. Events include guided hikes for studying flowers along trails.

Take stunning close-up photos of their fragile petals, sketch them or just appreciate the views. Most peak blooms occur between March and June. Viewing locations vary by species. Blooms in Virginia typically come earlier than North Carolina due to lower elevation. Remember, these flowers are protected by the parkway and are not for picking. For more information on the Blue Ridge Parkway peak bloom dates and where the best spots are for viewing, visit blueridgeparkway.org.

Get a taste of the region by visiting one of the numerous **wineries** within Blue Ridge. The seasonably warm spring temperatures make it an ideal time to discover the **outdoor**

vineyards. Taste test local spirits, take a tour of the grounds, enjoy some fine dining and learn about the region's best grapes. Some wineries in the area comprise historic estates and scenic views. For a listing of the wineries, visit blueridgeparkway.org.

SUMMER IN THE BLUE RIDGE

Summer is a great time to explore the Blue Ridge, from enjoying the warm summer nights in your campsite to the various water sports. Each June, the famous synchronous fireflies begin to mate in Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Visitors from all over the country come to witness this special event.

The **synchronous firefly** is the only species in America that can synchronize their flashing light patterns. These flash patterns are used to attract mates. In the darkness you can see waves of the flashing yellowish lights on hillsides, an awe-inspiring display. These flashes usually appear in short bursts. The peak mating time (or flashing season) occurs for two weeks in June. Keep your flashlight to the ground or turn it off once you're at your designated viewing spot so you can best see the fireflies. It is prohibited to trap or catch fireflies at any time in the park.

Cool off from the hot summer temperatures by indulging in some fun water recreation. Blue Ridge is ripe with waterways just waiting to be explored. Waterski or sail the calm waters of Claytor Lake State Park. Visitors can rent motorboats, kayaks, canoes and personal watercraft from Claytor Lake Water Sports. New River Gorge is famous for its exciting **whitewater rafting**. Challenge yourself with larger rapids on the Lower Gorge, or take it easy with slower waters

on the upper river section. York River State Park offers special starlight canoe trips on summer nights.

FALL IN THE BLUE RIDGE

Fall foliage along the Blue Ridge is one of the most stunning displays of nature and one of the greatest attractions in the parkway. Magnificent **red, yellow, and orange leaves** paint the hillsides and mountains, creating a multihued canvas of colors. Go hiking to see the leaves up close and then capture brilliant vistas once you reach the top of your destination.

The best way to see the fall foliage is by driving along the Blue Ridge Parkway. This way you can view multiple areas via different vantage points instead of only one spot, increasing your likelihood of seeing the fall foliage since not all trees transform at the same time. The Parkway includes east and west facing slopes, and varies in elevation from almost 5500 feet in elevation. The Great Smoky Mountains have a grand diversity of trees. Around 100 species of native trees grow in the park.

The usual fall foliage peak is mid to late October. However, please keep in mind peak times vary depending on weather, rainfall and elevation. Leaves first start changing in higher elevations and slowly trickle down the peaks to the lower elevations. Many areas in the parkway offer free fall activities, orchards and special packages. For more information on the fall foliage, peak times and events, visit blueridgeparkway.org.



WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SEASON IN THE BLUE RIDGE? TELL US! @OhRanger.com



HIKING

One of the best ways to see and experience the beauty of the Blue Ridge region is by immersing yourself in its nature on hiking trails. From forests to national parks, the diverse and scenic trails available lead visitors into a range of paramount landscapes that highlight the ecological wonders of the southeastern United States.

Miles of hiking trails are woven among prime historical and natural areas. Walk across rolling hills or wooded paths. Capture photographs of the impressive Blue Ridge Mountains. See where the colonists originally landed or traverse part of the Appalachian Trail. No matter what kind of outdoor scenery and terrain you're looking to explore, the region has plenty of options to satisfy your appetite for adven-

ture, as well as provide a healthy dose of fitness and fun!

SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK

Shenandoah is located in the Blue Ridge Mountains just 75 miles west of Washington, D.C. The park was created in 1935, and its crowning glory is **Skyline Drive**, riding the north-to-south crest of the mountains through the park for 105 miles. Skyline Drive is marked with mileposts on the west side of the road to help drivers locate points of interest. The drive offers 75 pullouts with stunning views and serves as the jumping-off point for many of Shenandoah's renowned hiking trails.

Shenandoah spans 196,000 acres, with nearly 40 percent designated as wilder-



NPS

The view from the top of Old Rag Mountain is a 360-degree vista over lush valleys.

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The display uses a two-layer structure consisting of monochrome liquid-crystal overlaid with color liquid-crystal. The monochrome liquid-crystal permanently shows the time, while the color liquid-crystal displays maps, measurements and apps.

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TOOL button

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Direction Measurement



Altitude Measurement



Atmospheric Pressure Measurement

APP button

Can be assigned to any app.

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* Some functions are not available when the phone is connected to an iOS device.

TRAIL RUNNING

Trail running along the Blue Ridge Parkway is a scenic workout enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. Numerous cleared pathways make it easy to throw on some sneakers and hit the ground running!

The **Wild Oak Trail**, south and west of the town of Bridgewater, Virginia, is a favorite route for trail runners in George Washington National Forest. The trail is a 25.6-mile loop, nearly the length of a marathon. The Wild Oak Trail, however, is steep and difficult, and some runners need three days to finish the entire loop. In summer, beware of rattlesnakes and dense, overgrown vegetation.

The difficulties of The Wild Oak Trail notwithstanding, some exceptionally fit and tough trail runners not only run the entire trail in one day, but actually complete the loop twice in a single day. The **Virginia Happy Trails Running Club** holds an annual race here called the TWOT 100, where runners compete on a 100-kilometer course that incorporates several loops of The Wild Oak Trail. The **Shenandoah 100 Ultra-Endurance Race**, a mountain bike race, also uses part of the trail, as does the Grindstone, a grueling 101.85-mile endurance run that features an insane elevation loss and gain of 23,200 feet!

Competitive runners can register for the annual **Blue Ridge Relay**. This 208 Mile Blue Ridge Relay (BRR208) is one of the longest relay races in the nation. The race begins at Grayson Highlands State Park in Virginia and winds through scenic trails in North Carolina's High Country before finishing in Asheville, North Carolina. Runners pass epic vistas such as the New River, Grandfather Mountain and Mount Mitchell. Teams range



simonkr/stock

Make your next run a little more enjoyable and exciting by taking to a trail!

from a four person minimum to 12 person maximum. Visit blueridgerelay.com for more information about the race.

The **Rocky Knob Recreation Area** in Virginia has several trails runners can use. Black Ridge Trail is a moderate 3-mile loop that circles the Rocky Knob Visitor Center. Along the way are scenic views of Rock Castle Gorge and Black Ridge. Meanwhile, Rocky Knob Picnic Area Trail is an easier 1.3-mile loop through a forest of oaks and hickories. The Rocky Knob Summit & Shelter Hike is referred to as a "leg stretcher." The 1.1-mile loop begins at Saddle Overlook and varies from summits to a deep descent back to the overlook. Please note that the Black Ridge Trail is more suitable for a strenuous hike than a run. Check the park websites for more information on running trails and races.

ness. More than 500 miles of hiking trails meander through the park, many of them in the wilderness. The trail system includes a 101-mile segment of the famous **Appalachian Trail**. Many trails begin with a descent from the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a built-in challenge that saves the tough climb back to the road for last.

Old Rag Mountain is one of the most popular hikes in the park, and **Limberlost Trail** is an accessible favorite. The latter is an especially beautiful hike in June, when the mountain laurel blooms.

Camping is available at several campgrounds in Shenandoah for fees in the range of \$15-20 per night. A free permit is required for overnight stays in the backcountry. Keep in mind that campfires are not allowed at backcountry campsites, and all visitors are prohibited from bringing outside firewood into the park.

Getting There: Luray, VA 22835; (540) 999-3500; nps.gov/shen.

GRAYSON HIGHLANDS STATE PARK

Grayson Highlands State Park is settled in some of the most remote and stunning land in the state of Virginia. Located in the southwest corner of the state—near the border of Tennessee and North Carolina—the park is nestled next to the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area of Jefferson National Forest. Mount Rogers is the highest peak in Virginia at 5,728 feet.

Seek out a challenge by hiking the difficult **Cabin Creek Trail**. The 1.8-mile long trek may not appear that imposing at the start, as it cuts through flat sections of Massie Gap, but be prepared to pick up the intensity. Waiting on Whitetop Mountain is beautiful untamed water cascading down the rocks. The last 110 yards of the trail,



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THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL



sshopard/istock

The white blazes of the Appalachian Trail stretch from Georgia to Maine.

The Appalachian Trail was proposed in 1921 by conservationist Benton MacKaye, who imagined a series of outdoor camps in the Appalachian Mountains—refuges from city life—linked by a trail. The route was finally completed in 1937, thanks to hundreds of activists who helped blaze and mark the path from Maine to Georgia. MacKaye never imagined that anyone would, or even could, hike the entire 2,000-mile trail in one continuous journey, and no one did until 1948, when veteran Earl V. Shaffer “walk[ed] off the war” by completing the first thru-hike.

Today, hundreds of hikers repeat the feat every year, trekking all 2,181 miles between Maine’s Mount Katahdin and Georgia’s Springer Mountain. Successful hikers include a 6-year-old boy, several octogenarians and a visually impaired man with his guide dog. Emma “Grandma” Gatewood was a 67-year-old grandmother of 23 when she completed a thru-hike in a pair of Keds,

with a simple knapsack slung over her shoulder.

The entire trip, which requires careful planning and fierce dedication, takes four to six months, crossing 14 states, eight national forests, two national parks and 15 major rivers. The trail takes hikers through some of the country’s most spectacular scenery, and the views of the fall foliage from a mountain ridge are unforgettable. Elevations range from 6,643 feet at Clingmans Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains to near sea level at the Hudson River in New York.

The trail passes through many public lands along the Blue Ridge Parkway, including stops at many soaring peaks in Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains national parks. There are several opportunities to access the trail throughout the Blue Ridge region, and the parkway runs parallel to a long stretch of the Appalachian Trail. Ask at any Blue Ridge-area visitor center for more information, or learn more online: nps.gov/appa.

which follows Cabin Creek, lead to the serene spot and will get your glutes working overtime. The waterfall makes for a great photo opportunity and a shady, quiet spot for a rest. Be sure to hike with caution, as the area can get slippery!

The **Twin Pinnacles Trail** departs from the Visitor Center and the rocky outcrops along the 1.4-mile path yield 360-degree panoramas of the region. You’ll reach the highest elevation in the entire park at over 5,000 feet. Hiking in the fall offers unparalleled foliage opportunities. Vibrant reds, oranges and yellows paint the Appalachian landscape and transform it with the chilling weather. Enjoy the stunning rhododendron that grows along the moderately difficult loop.

While hiking in the park, be sure to keep your eyes peeled for wildlife. The park is home to a unique group of residents: a herd of **wild ponies**. These animals roam the

mountains and hillsides grazing and searching for food. Remember, these are wild animals and you should keep a safe distance at all times. Snap a photo and keep hiking, do not attempt to pet or feed them. Be respectful of the nature around you.

Getting There: Marion, VA 24354; (276) 579-7092; dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks.

PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK

Prince William Forest Park is only about 30 miles south of Washington, D.C., but features more than 15,000 acres of mostly wooded, rolling terrain. The park offers 37 miles of hiking trails, more than 21 miles of roads open for bicycling (nearly half of which are closed to most motor-vehicle traffic), front- and backcountry camping, and rental cabins in the woods.

The park has 16 hiking trails, most



ESSENTIAL GEAR

BACKPACK

Starting at three pounds, the **Gregory Paragon** is the **LIGHTEST**, and most supportive, pack in the backpacking category. A custom engineered ultra-light aluminum frame with flexible characteristics fits multiple torso sizes; and an innovative foam-matrix backpanel offers unprecedented breathability. Lightweight and ventilated, it's loaded with features (hipbelt pockets, stuff pocket, sunglass storage) and is solar ready.



of which are quite short and might be taken as nature walks rather than substantial hikes. A few of the trails are, however, multiple miles in length, with one stretching 9.7 miles. Of course, the shorter trails can be linked together by those wishing to crank out longer mileages.

Almost all the Prince William's hiking trails are accessible from or near the park's nine-mile loop road. The loop road begins and ends on the south side of the park, just north of the visitor center, which is a good place to stop for both general park information and up-to-date trail conditions.

Prince William Forest Park is the nation's largest remaining stand of Piedmont Forest, and it is also the largest green space in the greater Washington, D.C.

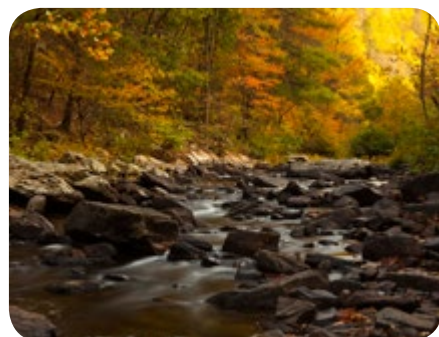
area. Hiking in the forest offers one of the best ways to appreciate the natural values of the area. Camping is available in the park at the Oak Ridge Campground and at the Turkey Run Ridge Group Campground. Cabins are also for rent within the park.

Getting There: Triangle, VA 22172; (703) 221-7181; nps.gov/prwi.

GEORGE WASHINGTON AND JEFFERSON NATIONAL FORESTS

The George Washington and Jefferson National Forests encompass 1,664,110 acres in western Virginia, with some parts extending into West Virginia and Kentucky. The two forests were combined in 1995. The forests contain nearly 500 miles of hiking trails, including 325 miles of the **Appalachian Trail** and 143 miles of **National Recreation Trails**. They also boast 23 designated wilderness areas, and collectively are one of the largest preserves of public land in the eastern United States.

Popular trails include the **Sandy Gap Trail**. Follow the route to the top of Warm Springs Mountain for gorgeous views, including Falling Springs Valley. Hikers can also see amazing rock art done by the Civilian Conservation Corps.



Idyllic creeks cut through George Washington National Forest.

Locust Spring Run Trail guides hikers through a Red Pine forest to end at Laurel Fork, a native trout stream. See where Stonewall Jackson marched his troops on a gap that the **Wildflower Trail** crosses. This trail is also known for its beautiful spring blooms.

Another popular sight in the forest is **Lake Moomaw**, which covers 2,530 surface acres and has a maximum depth of 152 feet, making it an ideal "two-story" sport fishery capable of supporting both warm water fish (bass, catfish, sunfish, crappie) and coldwater fish (trout).

Families can enjoy picnicking along the shaded woody shores of **Sherando Lake Recreation Area**. Known locally as the jewel of the Blue Ridge Mountains, 25 acre spring-fed lake features a relaxing sandy beach and access to multiple trailheads. The campground has 65 family campsites as well as group sites.

Don't miss the rustic architecture of structures built throughout the forests by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. Access to multiple trailheads provide numerous points of interest for families to enjoy. Mountain biking, picnicking, horseback riding and hunting are some of the activities allowed in the forests. Visit the forest website for more details and a complete list of permitted recreation.

There are several campground areas available throughout the areas as well as dispersed, group and RV camping. Visitors may also rent cabins.

Getting There: Covington, VA 24426, (540) 265-5100; www.fs.usda.gov/gwj.

Oh, Ranger!
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The weather in the region can change quickly in the shoulder seasons. Pack layers for warmth.



CLIMBING

Rock climbers come from near and far to challenge themselves on the various routes and rock faces within Blue Ridge. The region has some of the best rock climbing opportunities in the country. Climbing here ranges from easy to difficult, with plenty of thrills along the way. Here, climbers see vistas of gushing waterfalls, canyons and mountain ranges.

PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST

Tracts of the Pisgah National Forest, located in western North Carolina, were purchased by the U.S. government in 1891, making Pisgah one of the first national forests created in the eastern United States. The Cradle of American Forestry is a 6,500-acre historic site

within the forest that commemorates the area's role in the evolution of the United States Forest Service.

Many forms of outdoor recreation are pursued in Pisgah. Climbing enthusiasts flock to **Linville Gorge Wilderness Area**. The Linville Gorge, bisected by the Linville River and framed by Jonas Ridge on the east and Linville Mountain on the west, is sometimes referred to as the "Grand Canyon of North Carolina".

The terrain in and around the gorge is steep, offering many challenging climbing routes. Since it lies within a designated wilderness area, no mechanical equipment of any type is allowed.

The area is heavily used, so climbers in the area are required to have a

permit on weekends and holidays during the summer season (May 1 through October 31). It is also illegal to remove natural features such as rocks, plants or mosses from the area. Please wear a helmet! Climbers may encounter hikers, backpackers, hunters and fisherman engaging in some of the many recreational activities available.

Getting There: Asheville, NC 28801; (828) 257-4200; fs.usda.gov/nfsnc.

MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST

Monongahela National Forest is more than 919,000 mostly forested acres in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia. The forest contains **Spruce Knob**, which at 4,863 feet is the highest point in the state, and Monongahela offers a variety of outdoor recreation options, including hunting, trapping, fishing, wildlife viewing and rock climbing on the mountainous terrain. The forest also contains some 500 miles of hiking trails and 17 picnic areas.

Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area, divided in two by a low gap called Gunsight Notch, is nestled within Monongahela National Forest. The two halves of Seneca Rocks, North Peak and South Peak, collectively form a geologic fin on the north end of a larger rock outcropping known as the River Knobs.

The area is a prime destination for rock climbers, who follow more than 375 major climbing routes. While there are a number of vertical cracks in the rocks that offer secure anchor points, the routes vary from fairly easy to quite difficult.

Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area is located near the town of Seneca Rocks, West Virginia. Many lodging and camping options are available in the area and the

ESSENTIAL GEAR

MOMENTUM/PRIMROSE HARNESS PACKAGE

With everything you need to get started in the gym or at the crag, the Black Diamond **Momentum & Primrose** Harness Packages are a complete, convenient package for all-around climbers, featuring their most popular harnesses for all-around use.



larger region, including 23 campgrounds within Monongahela National Forest.

Getting There: Elkins, WV 26241; (304)636-1800; www.fs.usda.gov/mnf.

NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL RIVER

Its name is something of a misnomer: The New River is actually one of the oldest rivers in North America, and perhaps one of the oldest rivers in the world. Protecting this majestic waterway is the New River Gorge National River unit, located about 70 miles southeast of Charleston, West Virginia. The river began to take much of its present form about 500 million years ago, when the Appalachian Mountains themselves began to thrust up. The 53-mile-long gorge that the New River has since cut its V-shaped and averages close to 1,000 feet in depth.

The exposed rocks along the canyon walls (as well as in other parts of the 63,000-acre preserve) also offer many opportunities for rock climbers to en-



Remains/Stock

The climbing in the Blue Ridge region is challenging enough for experts, but still a great place to start learning.



Wendy

At Pilot Mountain State Park, climbers can access a number of great climbing routes .

gauge in their sport, set amid lovely waterfalls and cascades. New River Gorge features more than 1,400 established climbing routes on the cliffs, most of which are rated difficult to advanced. The rock faces range from 30 to 120 feet in height and offer a variety of cracks and smooth faces to challenge climbers, who come from all over the country. The cliffs here are made up of Nuttall sandstone, renowned among rock climbers as some of the finest quality climbing rock in America.

In addition to the hazards inherent with the sport of rock climbing anywhere, New River Gorge is home to both timber rattlesnakes and copperheads. Both species have been known to lurk in crevices on cliff faces, so take care when reaching up to unseen ledges.

The **Canyon Rim Visitor Center**, located just north of the famed New River Gorge Bridge (the third highest bridge in the U.S.), features a museum, slide show, picnic tables and scenic views of the gorge and bridge.

Getting There: Glen Jean, WV 25846; (304) 465-0508; nps.gov/neri.

PILOT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

It is immediately clear to approaching visitors how the park received its name, as Pilot Mountain, the lone peak of the park, can be seen from every direction. In 1976, the mountain was dedicated as a National Natural Landmark. The peak of **Big Pinnacle** towers 1,400 feet above the rest of the park. Beneath it lies the Piedmont Plateau countryside containing a seven-mile corridor connecting the moun-

tain section of the park with the river section and the Yadkin River.

Climbing is not permitted at Big Pinnacle; however, Pilot Mountain offers an abundance of routes ranging from beginner to advanced difficulties. The routes are grouped fairly close together and climbers can enjoy short walks between climbs to take advantage of all the park's opportunities. The rock is a quartzite monadnock that has survived millions of years of weather and erosion. The quality is poor in some spots and climbers should exhibit caution before trusting any fixed protection.

To access the climbing routes, visitors can follow the Ledge Springs trail and **Three Bears Gully**. It is not even necessary to go further than the gully as the Three Bears climbing area is immediately available with 11 routes for climbers. Papa Bear, Mama Bear

and Baby Bear are favorites of climbers.

From Three Bears Gully, the Amphitheater is just a five-minute walk and contains 18 routes. Both beginners and more advanced climbers will enjoy this area. The Black and Blue Velvet route is one of the popular climbs in the park.



While most opportunities within the park are top-rope routes, there are a few places for bouldering. The Trail Side Boulders are just a ten-minute walk from the parking lot and contain eight problems ranging in difficulty. In order to climb at Pilot Mountain, visitors must obtain a free "Registration and Activity" permit from the park's office before heading out.

Getting There: Pinnacle, NC 27043; (336) 325-2355; ncparks.gov/pilot-mountain-state-park










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PADDLING

Rapids, lakes and rivers provide a wide array of water recreation for visitors to the Blue Ridge. Take advantage of these plentiful, stellar waterways by kayaking. The possibilities suit people from all walks of life. Grab a paddle and traverse some rushing rapids for a real thrill ride, or go for a smooth lap in a lake for a calmer, relaxing afternoon.

Kayaking is a good way to soak in the sights and get a feel for the surrounding natural areas. Catch an eyeful of wildlife and glorious displays of flora as you paddle along, from white-tailed deer to wild turkey. Don't forget the thriving life underneath the water, too.

Whether you're interested in a short white-water rafting adventure or an extended kayak trip, you'll be able to hit the water however is best for you.

NEW RIVER GORGE NATIONAL RIVER

The New River began cutting its gorge through the Appalachian Mountains 500 million years ago, and the river is still cutting today, with an average gradient of about 20 feet of fall per mile and an average speed of three and a half to seven miles per hour in the canyon. That may not sound like much, but it's enough to engender big, powerful rapids, eddies, hydraulics and other challenges. New River Gorge National River, which flows between Hinton and Fayetteville, West Virginia, also features many mid-stream boulders and sharp, fin-like edges of submerged bedrock.

The **Upper Gorge** consists primarily of long pools punctuated by rapids up to Class III. The **Lower Gorge** is rougher, with many rapids in the Class III to Class V

range. These rapids are big, potentially dangerous and not for the faint of heart. Park officials warn that accidents up to and including fatal injury are possible.

Private boaters are allowed on the river, and it is especially popular with kayakers. With the variety of river conditions between the Upper Gorge and the Lower Gorge, boaters may choose a level of difficulty to fit their comfort level. With several access points along the river, trips from half a day to half a week are equally possible. Camping is permitted along the river's course.

Commercial options for running the New River in its gorge are available from a number of private companies. Advantages of running the river with a commercial operator include the assistance of professional guides, top-quality equipment and transportation to and from the river. The National Park Service maintains an online list of commercial vendors offering whitewater trips.

Whether paddling or hiking in the New River Gorge, visitors have the chance to observe a variety of **wildlife** in their natural setting. White-tailed deer, red and gray foxes, wild turkeys and black bears are examples of what some call the "charismatic megafauna" of the area. Subtler, but no less interesting, are the lizards, mink, snakes, and big and little brown bats that also live here. Many bats live in a park-constructed bat "condominium."

Getting There: Glen Jean, WV 25846; (304) 465-0508; nps.gov/neri.

CLAYTOR LAKE STATE PARK

It is located on Claytor Lake, a reservoir on the New River in **southwestern Vir-**

ginia. The park encompasses 472 acres, with about three miles of waterfront on the 21-mile-long Claytor Lake. Camping, swimming, fishing, hiking and nature and history programs are just some of the activities available in the park.

Boating is a premier pastime in the park and on the greater Claytor Lake. Powerboats are allowed on the lake, but the curvature of the shoreline and the timbered nature of the adjacent land absorbs much of the noise pollution. **Canoeing and kayaking** are also allowed on the lake, and boats of several varieties are available for rent in the park. The state of Virginia operates a free boat ramp as well.

Those wishing to experience paddling on moving water must obviously venture

off the still waters of the lake. Spectacular float trips on free-flowing stretches of the New River are possible both above and below Claytor Lake.

Fishing is popular in Claytor Lake State Park, too. Fishermen can land **bass, catfish, muskies, walleyes and striped bass**, from either shore or boat. The park recently launched a program to enhance fish habitats in the lake by placing underwater obstructions in key locations. Recycled Christmas trees are among the objects submerged in the lake to provide cover for the fish.

Getting There: Dublin, Virginia 24084; (540) 643-2500; dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/claytor-lake

Virginia Tourism Corporation



New River Gorge National River is a premier location for kayaking and canoeing.

YORK RIVER STATE PARK

Sitting on the south bank of the York River about 30 miles above the point where the river meets the **Chesapeake Bay**, York River State Park was once known as Taskinas Plantation, which was the site of a large warehouse that collected tobacco from local growers and shipped it to England in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Since 1980, the park has preserved 2,550 acres of York River frontage and associated marshes and wetlands. Because of the mixing of fresh and salt water and the wide variety of habitats, the park is home to a slew of plant and animal life. White-tailed deer, raccoons and bald eagles make their home here, and visitors can spot various species of turtles near where land and water mingle.

There are 30 miles of trails for hikers, horseback riders and bicyclists, and fishing and boating are popular on the river. Catfish, spot, croaker, white perch and

striped bass are among the many species of fish available to anglers, who can try their luck either from boats or the park's 360-degree fishing pier.

Boaters can bring their own craft or, from April to October, rent them in the park. Powerboats are allowed only on the river, but canoes, kayaks, paddleboats and jon boats can be used on the tidal creeks and shallow marshes. Guided paddling trips begin at the park visitor center, as do moonlight trips on appropriate nights and starlight trips during the new moon.

York River State Park is a day-use area with no overnight accommodations within its boundaries. Many lodging options and other services are nearby, however. Among other convenient venues, the historic town of Williamsburg is only 11 miles to the east.

Getting There: Williamsburg, VA 23188; **(757) 566-3036;** dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/yor.shtml.



If you want a little more excitement in your trip down the river, try rafting. You may get a little wet, but the adventure is worth it.

STAND-UP PADDLING



Stand-up paddle boarding is a challenge, but it can be a great way to explore the region's waterways and get a workout.

The burgeoning sport of stand-up paddling has roots in both surfing and kayaking. Using a long board that looks like a beefed-up surfboard, traditional paddleboarders kneel or lay flat and propel themselves with their arms on an ocean or lake, much like surfers trying to catch a wave. But more popular is stand-up paddleboarding, a challenging derivative that requires a paddle and a standing rider, and many kayakers pull out paddleboards for fresh takes on their favorite river runs. The Blue Ridge region is full of great paddleboarding spots, for either of the sport's varieties.

Beginning paddleboarders should start on calm water, like that of an inland lake, as they learn to maneuver on their boards. Without any harsh conditions, you will be able to get down the basics that you will use all the time. Stand-up paddleboarders need to develop the core strength to maintain their balance. Try paddling from a kneeling position first.

In the Blue Ridge, western Maryland's Deep Creek Lake State Park offers sandy beaches and flat water perfect for learning to paddleboard, with rentals available.

Here, you can really get your first feel for the sport while learning the basics. The lakes in the George Washington and Jefferson national forests—Sherwood Lake and Lake Moomaw among them—are also excellent for paddlers.

Running rivers on a paddleboard, down routes typically used by kayakers, is an exhilarating experience all its own. Runs that are simple in a kayak become maddeningly difficult on a board, and short drops demand all of a rider's skill and concentration. Head out to West Virginia's New River for a real whitewater challenge. For saltwater and waves, try the parks and waterfront of Virginia Beach.

When purchasing a paddleboard, it is important to consider how you'll use it. A river-running stand-up model is very different from a traditional board for racing on flat water, for example. If you are unsure what equipment to pick up, ask a salesperson at an outdoors store, like Blue Ridge Mountain Sports, for details. A board rental is a great option as you learn and experiment with the new sport.

ESSENTIAL GEAR

BAHIA PREDATOR PFD

Whether you need a lifevest for a quick kayak paddle or a full-day fishing excursion, the Kokatat Bahia Predator PFD fits the bill. The Predator features GAIA® PVC-free foam wrapped in durable 500 denier Cordura® providing many days of rugged use. Its ample main pocket will hold a small tackle/lure box and its second duplex front pocket offers additional storage. This unisex vest has multiple side adjustments to make for comfortable fit.



JAMES RIVER STATE PARK

Snuggled at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the heart of the state is James River State Park. The park offers options for serious paddlers, such as a canoe-in camp.

If you have chilling on your mind, grab a tube and slink two miles down river at a leisurely pace. In total, the park offers three miles right on the river and boating access to 12 miles of the river. Enjoy the relaxing joys of a float trip.

The calm waters of the 3-mile section of the James River that fall within the park provide for an array of possible activities including canoeing, kayaking, stand-up paddling, tubing and fishing. The section of the river that passes through the state park does not include any rapids over level I. Once you leave the park, you may find more intense and dangerous water flow.

Start at Canoe Landing and paddle the bend in the river down to Dixon Landing. If you aren't a boat owner or simply want to try your luck at a new activity, seasonal rentals of canoes, kayaks and

tubes are available at the Outdoor Adventures Canoe Livery. The livery also offers guided tours and a shuttle service for those who bring their own equipment (or those who don't want to paddle back up). Fees vary.

One day out on the water never feels like enough. Extend your day paddling trip into a whole weekend and explore more of the area. Canoe Landing Campground offers 13 tent sites and is open year-round.

Ideally located right next to the river and the canoe launch, campers can get out early on the water and explore. Reservations are highly recommended for these prime spaces. Take on a 2, 4 or 8-mile section of the river, depending on your speed and mode of transportation. The calm waters make paddling a fun and relaxing activity.

The Tye River Overlook promises scenic vistas of the confluence of the Tye River and James River, as well as of the Blue Ridge Mountains and surround farmland. Reach the overlook via a short .11-mile trail accessible from the Cabell Trail in the northeast part of the park. It takes users through the wooded steep area to a platform and is wheelchair-accessible.

Horses cannot go onto the platform and must be tied to the nearby hitches. A mounting block is provided at the western access point for the Cabell Trail to assist equestrians in re-mounting. Popular with mountain bikers and horseback riders, the 3.36-mile Cabell Trail is among the longest of the park's 15 miles of trails.

Getting There: James River State Park, Wingina, VA 24599; **(434) 933-4355;** dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/jam.shtml.



CAMPING

Camping in the Blue Ridge is an idyllic approach to enjoying the area in all its splendor. Developed campgrounds and backcountry camping are both available within various parks and recreation areas in Blue Ridge.

BIG SOUTH FORK NATIONAL RIVER AND RECREATION AREA

The Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, in northeastern Tennessee and southeastern Kentucky, protects about 125,000 acres around the headwaters of the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River. Within the reserve are large stretches of beautiful forest, pristine waterways and spectacular rock formations, the latter including eroded sandstone bluffs along the streams

as well as natural stone arches and chimneys.

Visitors who wish to camp will find five developed campgrounds. Backcountry camping is also available, though permits from the National Park Service are required.

The notable sights of the **Honey Creek** area are readily available to backcountry campers. Honey Creek Falls, Indian Rockhouse (and other rockhouses) and Ice Castle Falls are all worth seeing along the Honey Creek Trail. **Leatherwood Ford** is another area attractive to backcountry campers, along with the adjacent Leatherwood Loop Trail.

A ride on the **Big South Fork Scenic Railway** is another fun way to experience the recreation area's scenic wonders. The restored coal mining town of **Blue Heron** is a great destination for those with an inter-

Sproetniek/Stock



An evening under the stars at one of the many campgrounds in the Blue Ridge is one of the best ways to connect with all the region has to offer.



pchouii/Stock

Remember to check firewood restrictions in the area where you plan to camp before you head out.

est in history. Although the original buildings of Blue Heron are all gone (the mine ceased operations in 1962), the town was reconstructed as accurately as possible. At each building, take in displays and audio programs about the isolated community's former residents.

Prehistory buffs will also find Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area of interest. The park has identified 1,335 **archeological sites**, the most of any unit in the NPS Southeastern Region. Even that total is only an estimated 20 percent of the sites that actually exist in the park. Some of the known sites date back to Paleo Indians who lived at least 10,000 years ago.

Getting There: Oneida, TN 37841; (423) 286-7275; nps.gov/biso.

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Named for the mist that often hangs over its ridges, Great Smoky Mountains National Park straddles the border between North Carolina and Tennessee.

The park is celebrated for its biological diversity, beautiful mountain scenery and preservation of early southern Appalachian culture. The park covers 800 square miles and is the most visited of America's national parks.

Camping enthusiasts will find 10 developed campgrounds. Each individual campsite has a fire grate and a picnic table. Restrooms with running cold water and flush toilets are centrally located in each campground. There are no electrical hookups available, with the exception of a few five-amp outlets in the Cades Cove, Elkmont and Smokmont campgrounds for people with electrically powered essential medical devices.

Backcountry campers in Great Smoky Mountains National Park must acquire a permit at one of 15 different locations in the park. The automated stations are accessible 24 hours a day.

A highlight of any trip to the park is an ascent of **Clingman's Dome**. At 6,643 feet, it is the highest point in the park.

Drive seven miles up the mountain and then hike half a mile on a paved path to an observation tower at the very top. Panoramic vistas of more than 100 miles are possible on clear days.

An eight-mile hiking loop to **Charlies Bunion**, with a trail that passes through imposing rock formations and offers spectacular mountain views, is just one of many hikes in the Great Smokies. And the **Cosby** area, a lightly visited nexus of backcountry trails, is renowned for its lavish display of **wildflowers** in the summer.

Getting There: Gatlinburg, TN 37738; (865) 436-1200; nps.gov/grsm.

CHEROKEE NATIONAL FOREST


Located in the southern Appalachian Mountains of east Tennessee, the 650,000-acre Cherokee National Forest, is

the largest tract of public land in the state. The Tellico River zone, in the southern part of the forest, provides outstanding opportunities for fishing, camping, hiking and scenic driving along the Cherokee Skyway. Families flock to **Indian Boundary Recreation Area**, with nearly 90 campsites equipped with fire rings, picnic tables, lantern posts and electrical hook-ups. For a more rustic experience try the campgrounds along Tellico River and North River roads, or the historic Donley Cabin, a sparsely furnished Civil War era cabin.

During the day, visitors at Indian Boundary enjoy swimming at the sandy lakefront beach, canoeing and kayaking, fishing, hiking and bicycling. From the 3.6-mile lakeshore trail, visitors can watch beaver that inhabit a pond above the lake, identify several species of ducks and other waterfowl or try their luck at catch-

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ESSENTIAL GEAR

TREEPOD

If your kids fantasize about hanging out in a giant Oropendula nest or if you just don't want to build a permanent tree house in your backyard, the TreePod is the next best thing. This colorful little hideaway easily affixes to any hanging point with durable straps and a steel quick link.

One of the most innovative products in the growing suspended camping space, the TreePod doesn't require any tools for setup and doesn't harm trees! It breaks down easily and is highly portable, ideal for the backyard, birthday parties, the beach or weekend car camping.



Mitchell is the tallest mountain east of the Mississippi River. From the peak, visitors can marvel at the 1,946-acre park including tree-lined valleys and the Blue Ridge Mountains. The park consists of spruce-fir forest ecosystem characterized by evergreens, usually associated with more northern lands.

The family campground is the sole camping area within the park and contains nine tent-only sites. Campers wishing to backpack can leave vehicles overnight in the park and take a trip into the Pisgah National Forest.

The campground is in close proximity to multiple trails that allow visitors the opportunity to see and explore the mountainside forests. Just a short drive away, visitors can access a concession stand, gift shop and exhibit hall at the summit of Mount Mitchell. From there, an observation deck is a quarter-mile walk down a path with panoramic views of the area.

Take the Deep Gap Trail from the summit parking lot for a nice day-hike for campers in the park. Just a two-mile round-trip, the trail travels through forest, down Mt. Mitchell and to the peak of Mt. Craig, the second highest peak in the eastern United States. The hike involves a good bit of climbing, but is not strenuous. The Balsam Trail begins near the summit observation deck and is just a 3/4 mile loop that presents visitors with a chance to see the effects of acid rain in the park.

Getting There: Burnville, NC 28714; for more information call (828) 675-4611; or visit ncparks.gov/mount-mitchell-state-park.



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MOUNTAIN BIKING

Mountain biking is a fun activity for exploring the Blue Ridge. It's not only good for exercise, it's a good way to venture out and see the forests and parks. One of the more popular recreations, visitors have hundreds of miles of bike trails to choose from. Follow designated forest trails for fantastic views of the area, while getting acquainted with the lay of the land and the surrounding habitat.

You can stop and smell the flowers, spot various wildlife, and feel the warmth of the shining sun as you pedal. Please be sure to wear a helmet and always err on the side of caution. If you enjoy biking, the Blue Ridge is a wonderful spot to indulge in your love for the recreational sport.

DUPONT STATE FOREST

Known for its large number of lovely waterfalls, DuPont State Forest in western North Carolina is located just south of Asheville between Hendersonville and Brevard, not far off Interstate 26. A large part of the 10,400-acre tract at one time belonged to the DuPont Company, which arranged for the sale of the land on generous terms to the state of North Carolina. Horseback riding, kayaking, hiking, swimming and mountain biking are some of the outdoor activities enjoyed on and along the forest's nearly **100 miles of trails and roads**.

Mountain biking is one of the more popular sports in the forest. Riders can select routes with varying degrees of dif-

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Mountain biking is a great way to see parts of the forest that are inaccessible to cars.

ing bass, catfish and bluegill. The Indian Boundary Outpost camp store sells food, supplies and souvenirs.

Indian Boundary Recreation Area is located along the **Cherochala Skyway**, a National Scenic Byway that winds 43 miles through the Southern Appalachian high country in North Carolina and Tennessee. The skyway presents the cultural heritage of the Cherokee tribe and early settlers in the Appalachian Mountains. Visit the Cherochala Skyway Visitor Center in Tellico Plains for maps, road conditions, regional souvenirs and gifts.

Getting There: Tellico Plains, TN 3738; for more information please call (423) 476-9700; www.fs.usda.gov/Cherokee.

MOUNT MITCHELL STATE PARK

35 miles northeast of Asheville sits Mount Mitchell. Standing at 6,684 feet,



frahhaus/Stock

For your safety, stay on designated bike trails and always wear a helmet.

difficulty, from well-graded gravel roads to challenging single tracks. About four miles of trails in the forest amount to slick rock riding over hard granite surfaces. Mountain bikers in DuPont State Forest are asked to stay on established and designated biking trails, yield to horses and hikers, and steer clear of mosses and other sensitive vegetation.

A variety of lodging and camping accommodations are available in the vicinity of DuPont State Forest. More information, as well as downloadable maps of the area, can be found on the forest’s website.

Getting There: Cedar Mountain, NC 28718; (828) 877-6527; dupontforest.com.

GEORGE WASHINGTON NATIONAL FOREST

George Washington National Forest is administered in conjunction with Jef-

erson National Forest, and together the two forests comprise about 1.8 million acres—one of the largest protected tracts of land in the eastern U.S. The forests are home to more than 2,000 species of plants and almost 450 species of animals. The forests also offer any number of recreational possibilities to their 3 million visitors every year.

The two forests are located primarily in western Virginia, with smaller acreages in West Virginia and Kentucky. Photography, fishing, hiking, orienteering, bird watching and horseback riding are just some of the activities enjoyed by the visiting public. Mountain biking is also high on the popularity list.

Bicycles are permitted on forest roads, on many roads that are gated to vehicular traffic and on approximately 1,100 miles of trails. Cross-country travel on bikes is not allowed, and bicyclists should yield the right of way to horses and hikers. Because they are considered mechanical, bicycles are not allowed in any of the forest’s 23 wilderness areas.

Pandapas Pond, situated just outside the town of Blacksburg, Virginia, is a popular destination for mountain bikers. The 8-acre pond, encircled by an accessible boardwalk, rests on the eastern continental divide. It is adjacent to a small wetland where aquatic insects, turtles and other wetland species can be seen. Bicycles are not allowed on the boardwalk itself, but bikers can hop on the 17-mile Poverty Creek Trail from the pond’s parking lot.

Getting There: Roanoke, VA 24019; (888) 265-0019; www.fs.usda.gov/gwj.

SHERANDO LAKE

The Blue Ridge Mountains offer some of the most beautiful and challenging moun-

tain biking in the country. **Sherando Lake Recreation Area** is located in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Sherando and Upper Sherando Lake are the hallmarks of the area, which provides locations to camp.

The trail system is notorious for giving riders a workout. Make a loop that lasts 21 miles and covers all levels of difficulty. The Mills Creek Trail rides along the creek and checks in at 6.8 miles. The loop gains about 2,000 feet in elevation and the push to the top requires stamina.

Certain sections of the trails are extremely rocky. Torry Ridge is one such section that is highly technical, pushing your rock garden skills to the limit. Although very rewarding, using caution is key. If a section becomes too difficult, get off your bike and walk rather than attempting a portion beyond your skill level. Injuries can occur and preventing them is key. The effort doesn’t come without reward. Bikers won’t be able to find better views of the lake than on Torry Ridge.

Sherando Lake mountain biking is highly rewarding, but it is imperative that riders not attempt it without plenty of water and a reliable map. There are no locations along the trail to fill up on water. Plan to spend at least six hours on the entire loop.

Getting There: Stuarts Draft, VA 24477; (540) 291-2188; www.fs.usda.gov/main/gwj

PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST

Located in the triangle between the North Carolina cities of Asheville, Brevard and Waynesville, Pisgah National Forest covers more than 510,000 acres of mostly hardwood forest. Elevations are quite high for the eastern United States, with some mountain peaks exceeding 6,000 feet. Roughly

46,600 acres of eastern old-growth forest have been identified in the Pisgah, an astonishing total when compared to the small remnants of old growth found in other eastern states.

Recreation opportunities in Pisgah include climbing, fishing, hiking, camping, horseback riding, nature viewing and many others. Mountain biking is especially popular, and the Pisgah National Forest offers 111 different trails and roads open to the sport.

One of the more popular trails is the **Kitsuma/Youngs Ridge Trail #204**, found in the Grandfather Ranger District of the forest. It is a 5-mile-long single track route classified as difficult.

Another popular bicycling trail is **Bennett Gap Trail #138**. This trail, only three

ESSENTIAL GEAR

SLYTECH VEST BACKPRO FLEXI XT TRAIL

The Vest Backpro Flexi XT Trail will be your back's best friend, protecting it against hits to the spine thanks to Slytech's 2nd Skin™ XT technology, a slow memory highly flexible hexagon patterned foam. Lightweight and breathable, this poly-mesh vest boasts an integrated hydration bladder pocket, zippered back pocket and two side pockets for water, energy bars and gear, so you don't have to carry a backpack. Exceeds 1621-1 Level 1 CB certification.



miles long, is considered moderate in difficulty. Unless bicyclists are willing to backtrack, this ride requires two cars, with a shuttled vehicle left at the pick-up point and a drop-off vehicle at the beginning. Even though the trail is short, it offers a variety of great views. Keep in mind, the trail is quite popular and is often busy.

Getting There: Asheville, NC 28801; (828) 257-4200; www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc.

CARVINS COVE NATURAL AREA

Carvins Cove Natural Reserve is located less than 10 miles from downtown Roanoke, allowing visitors easy access to beautiful wilderness without traveling far from their urban home. At 12,700 acres, the reserve is the second largest municipal park in the United States and the largest east of the Mississippi River. The Cove is

connected to national, state, and local trail systems.

Home to hardwood and mixed pine-hardwood forests, the park also features a 630-acre reservoir and nearly 60 miles of multi-use trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding.

A day pass (\$2) is required to enter the park (a \$20 annual pass is also available), but this is the gem of southwest Virginia mountain biking. Carvins Cove offers 30 plus miles of trails for you to take your bike out on and push yourself to the limit.

Piece together an intense day with multiple trails that will take you up the mountain and back down to the parking lot again. Power up the difficult 1-mile **Hi-Dee-Hoe Trail**, and you'll be rewarded with a lightning fast descent, that should get the blood pumping.

Continue hitting the uphill by taking the **Gauntlet Trail** to hook up with the **Trough Trail**, which will get you climbing up to the final ascent again. Take a break and enjoy the view from the top.

After cooling down, prepare for the quick downhill. Get a rush by descending back down on **Buck's Rut**. The advanced trail requires intense focus, but is a wildly exhilarating run. Watch the switchbacks and hook up with the Hotel Trail to take you back to the parking lot.

Regardless of skill level, Carvins Cove offers something for everyone. A recent addition is the **Four Gorges Extension**, which throws in a few new challenges for riders. The contoured trail features banked corners and rolling bumps to put riders' skills to the test. Get that racing feeling in the great outdoors on this 1-mile adrenaline rush.

Getting There: Roanoke, VA 24011; (540) 362-1757; roanokeva.gov.



NATURE & WILDLIFE

The Blue Ridge region is comprised of uniquely rich and diverse wilderness. Here you will find the highest mountains in eastern North America commingling with more than 100,000 acres of forest ranging from spruce-fir to hardwoods and oak-pine. Arid valleys, wetland river basins, lakes and ocean coastline all provide ecosystems as distinct sanctuaries ripe for the growth and sustenance of thousands of plant and animal species!

While there are enough trails, rapids, rocks and bike paths to keep you active for any length stay, we encourage every visitor to slow down and keep an eye open for the plants and animals that may be right there with you. Here we have highlighted just a few of the plant and animal species that call this region home. Keep your binoculars handy and your eyes peeled—and remember to help keep wildlife wild. Don't feed or approach wild animals. Instead, view them from a distance. **Happy spotting!**

FLORA

The **Black-eyed Susan** (*Rudbeckia hirta*) is one of many members of the daisy family. Its dark brown to purplish center and yellow petals make it one of the more recognizable flowers native to the region. In 1918 the Black-eyed Susan flower was named the state flower of Maryland. The native Ojibwa, or Chippewa, people once used the flowers as a treatment for snake bites. It blooms between June and August.

- **Height** 1 meter
- **Distinguishing Features** Dark center, yellow florets

Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) was first recorded in North America in the 1600s and is native to this region of the eastern United States. A member of the blueberry family, the mountain laurel is known for its beautiful flowers. It is found in mountainous forest areas and on rocky slopes. It blooms between May and June.

- **Height** 3–6 centimeters
- **Distinguishing Features** Clusters of light pink to white flowers

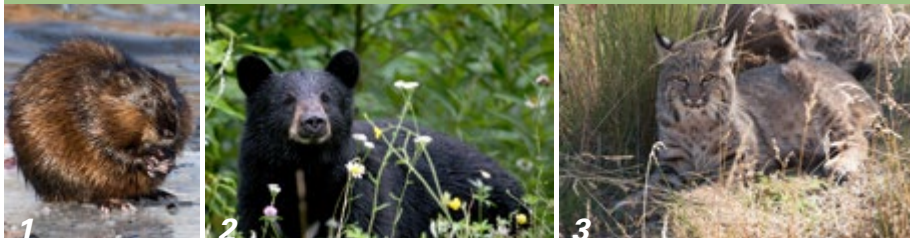
Queen Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*) wasn't named for its resemblance to the delicate fabric, but (according to legend) for when Queen Anne pricked herself with a needle while making lace. Its intricate leaves and dark red flower in its center imply the myth might be true! It blooms between June and August.

- **Height** 1 meter
- **Distinguishing Features** Fine hairs on stems, single dark red flower in center and root that smells like carrots



The Black-eyed Susan, the state flower of Maryland, was traditionally used by the native Chippewa people to treat snake bites.

WATCHABLE WILDLIFE



1 BEAVER (*Castor Canadensis*)

With their large flat tail and webbed feet, beavers are well adapted to a semi-aquatic environment and can glide swiftly and effortlessly through water. Beavers build dams and lodges that not only provide protection, but also create a favorable new habitat for other species. • **Weight** 70 lbs. • **Length** 3–4 ft • **Active** year-round. Photo: Bill Damon

2 BLACK BEAR (*Ursus americanus*)

Black bears like to eat juicy plant parts, insect larvae, fruits, nuts, acorns and occasionally meat. They range in color from dark black and chocolate-brown to cinnamon brown or blonde. To survive the scarcity of food in winter, bears hibernate for up to seven months. • **Weight** 200–585 lbs • **Length** 4.5–6.5 ft • **Active** Spring through fall. Photo: Jitze Couperus

3 BOBCAT (*Lynx rufus*)

Solitary and sly, bobcats roam in the deep, hidden parts of thicker forests. Active during the day, bobcats prey primarily on smaller animals like rabbits, mice, mink and weasels, but are capable of bringing down a deer. In spring, they give birth to between one and seven kittens. • **Weight** 10–15 lbs • **Length** 3.5 ft (including tail) • **Active** year-round Photo: James Abbott

4 COYOTE (*Canis latrans*)

At night you may hear this silver-gray member of the canine family singing in a chorus of howls and yodels. Coyotes search the grasslands for rodents, rabbits, berries, fruits and carrion, although they have learned to beg from people. Please do not feed coyotes! • **Weight** 18–40 lbs • **Size** 32–40 in long • **Height** 15–20 in tall Photo: karlumbriaco/iStock

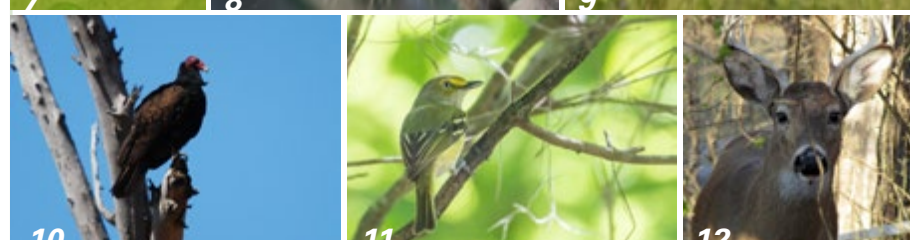
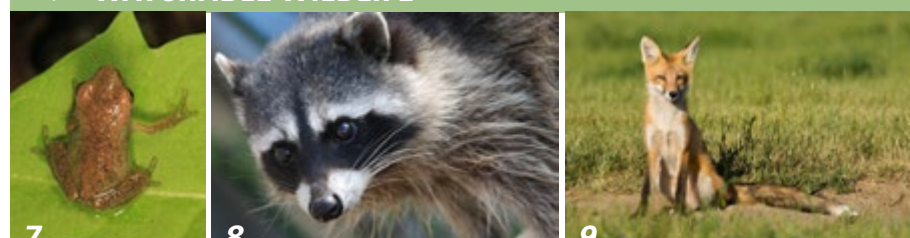
5 GROUNDHOG (*Marmota monax*)

Also known as a woodchuck, the groundhog's short, powerful limbs and curved, thick claws are well adapted for digging. They live in burrows with two to five entrances, which are their primary means of escape from predators. Herbivorous, groundhogs primarily eat wild grasses. • **Weight** 5–8.5 lbs • **Size** 1.5–2.5 ft • **Inactive** in winter. Photo: NPS

6 NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*)

The only woodpecker in North America that eats primarily from the ground, the northern flicker uses its long tongue to lick up insects, only pecking on wood as a mating call or to proclaim territory. Identify the bird by its black wing bars, spotted belly and white rump, which is obvious in flight. • **Weight** 4–6 oz • **Size** 1 ft long • **Active** year-round. Photo: Mike's Birds

WATCHABLE WILDLIFE



7 NORTHERN SPRING PEEPER (*Pseudacris crucifer*)

This nocturnal tree frog gets its name from its familiar peeping sound. Although rarely seen, these frogs are often heard. Their voice is a distinctive high piping whistle; a single clear note repeated at intervals of about 1 second. They live in wooded areas near ponds and lakes. • **Weight** Less than 1 oz • **Size** 1 in • **Active** spring through fall. Photo: Judy Gallagher

8 RACCOON (*Procyon Lotor*)

Raccoons are highly intelligent, adaptable animals, and excellent climbers. They are nocturnal and are generally seen in early morning or late evening in wooded areas along rivers or lakes. Raccoons are omnivorous, feeding primarily on small mammals, fruit, nuts, fish and insects. • **Weight** 10–30 lbs • **Length** 2–3 ft • **Active** year-round; Photo: David Slater

9 RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

Although this reddish fox, with white underparts, chin and throat, is common in the park, it is rarely seen because it is shy and nocturnal. It eats almost anything it can sink its teeth into, including birds, crickets and plants. • **Weight** 10–15 lbs • **Size** 15–30 in long • **Active** spring and summer; Photo: Rylee Isitt

10 TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes Aura*)

Turkey vultures have black or dark gray wings and a red or pink head. They are scavengers and are often seen soaring overhead while foraging for carrion above open country, especially within a few miles of the rocky or wooded areas that they use for nesting. • **Weight** 3.5–5 lbs • **Length** 24–28 in • **Wingspan** 6 ft • **Active** year-round; Photo: David Slater

11 WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*)

A small and shy songbird, the white-eyed vireo inhabits bushes and shrubby areas and is more noticeable for its explosive song than its appearance. Identify the bird by its distinctive white eye and gray-olive coloring. Interestingly, the white-eyed vireo bathes by rubbing against wet foliage. • **Weight** 0.5 oz • **Size** 4–5 inches long • **Active** spring through fall; Photo: Andrew Cannizzaro

12 WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

With their flashy white tails, these deer are commonly seen in woods and along roadways (drive carefully!). Their four-part stomachs allow them to get a large amount of nutrients from grazing on green plants and woody vegetation along established routes. • **Weight** 90–130 lbs. • **Length** 6–7 ft. • **Active** year-round; Photo: Lisa Zins



PRESERVATION

The Blue Ridge Mountains and Central Appalachian region represent some of the most diverse ecosystems in the country. This is an area of extremes, featuring the **oldest river in North America** (The New River, in Virginia and West Virginia) and the **highest peak east of the Rockies** (Mount Mitchell, in North Carolina). Steep mountainsides, dense old-growth forests, fissure caves, bogs and ocean dunes help make up a system of specialized habitats that support **an array of important species** from bears and falcons to rare wildflowers, endangered bats and reptiles.

Though much of the region has been protected through ordinances, conservation easements and the establishment of the national and state park and forest systems, human and natural threats remain a consistent reality. **Air pollution** coming from as far away as the Midwest, as well as the effects of **acid rain** and **ground-level ozone**, have decreased visibility in some of our parks by as much as 60 percent over the past 50 years! **Invasive species** including the **Tree of Heaven** (originally from China), **Reed Canary Grass** and **Purple Loosestrife** can contribute to deforestation, erosion and loss of habitat for animals.

There are countless people working in and around the region to protect natural resources and wildlife from these and other threats. If we all lend a hand and practice good habits, we can keep the land healthy for future generations. Learn about the regions you visit, follow Leave No Trace principles and get involved!

KEEP WILDLIFE WILD

Often what you don't do can have as much of an impact on the environment as what you do! As far as animals are concerned, you should never feed any wildlife or leave food exposed as it teaches wild animals to forage at campsites and human use areas. Picking wildflowers or other plants is strictly prohibited, as is walking off sanctioned paths in many parks.

FIRE CONTROL

Though generally less common and less intense in the Appalachian Mountains than other densely forested areas in the U.S., uncontrolled fires do still occur and have caused significant damage to already fragile ecosystems. For this reason, wood fires are permitted only in existing fire pits at campgrounds and established picnic grounds. Please use wood from inside the park or local sources to avoid transporting invasive species into parks.

LITTER AND WASTE

Do not leave garbage anywhere in the parks and make sure to pack out what you pack in. Leaving trash behind not only makes natural areas look unpleasing, but it can also harm the flora and fauna.

VOLUNTEER

Get involved with our national parks and public lands. Many use volunteers in resource management activities like invasive plant control or migratory bird monitoring. You can also help by working with the organizations listed in this chapter.



PRESERVING OUR PAST. PROTECTING OUR FUTURE.



PHOTOGRAPHY

The ecosystems of America's national and state parks and public lands are among the most diverse on the planet—from the wetlands of the Everglades to the temperate rain forests of Olympic National Park and the deserts of Death Valley to the mountains of Yellowstone and Grand Tetons. For both aspiring and experienced photographers, the goal of any trip to a national park is to capture its endemic wildlife.

Taking photographs of animals presents a unique set of challenges. Landscapes cooperate; wildlife does not. Not only are animals likely to react to a photographer's presence, but they are also driven by their own instincts and behavior, which can make capturing them difficult. The tips below will help you compose better wildlife images of all creatures great and small—from the bison to the tiniest hummingbird and everything in between.

- **Use a tripod.** If you are using a large telephoto lens, consider investing in a gimbal head, which will make it easier to track your subject.
- **Know your subject.** Before you take out your camera, understand your subject's

behavior so that you can be prepared for what it will do next.

- **The eyes have it.** Capturing your subject's eyes will lead the viewer into the picture and make your image more impactful. Always keep the eyes in focus and try to place them in the power points (the intersection of rule of third guidelines).
 - **Keep a safe distance.** You'll want to keep a minimum of 25 yards between you and your subject and more than 75 yards for larger predators. That means that you'll need a big telephoto lens if you want to get up close and personal.
 - **Shoot in burst mode.** Instead of taking a single frame, increase the probability that you'll capture the behavior, head position or angle by capturing multiple frames.
 - **Be prepared.** Wildlife, and particularly birds, move quickly and without provocation. Practice your panning skills to better catch birds when they alight.
 - **Timing is everything.** The best time to photograph wildlife is during the golden hours—at dusk and dawn—when the light is soft and less likely to cast harsh shadows across your subject's face.
 - **Keep it simple.** The easiest way to draw attention to your subject is to use a simple background. Use a shallow depth of field to blur any distracting backgrounds.
 - **Aim for the action.** Make your image more compelling by capturing your subject exhibiting its natural behavior—flying, hunting, eating or caring for young.
- The best way to take better photographs is to practice, and you don't need to go far. Buy a bird feeder and build a studio in your backyard, where you'll be able to create your own version of *A Star(ling) is Born*.



JPechar/Stock

Don't miss your shot! Be aware of your surroundings.



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An outdoor adventure in the Blue Ridge gives kids a chance to get back to nature and learn about plant and animal life, living history and the wonders of the ecosystem. Here's a helpful rundown of some fun ways kids can get involved.

JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM

The Junior Ranger Program is a great way to have fun while learning what makes any national or state park special. Pick up an activity booklet at a visitor center and complete as many of the activities as you can to earn patches and certificates.

WEBRANGERS

Kids can learn about national parks from home by becoming WebRangers. They can play interactive and educational games, take the WebRanger pledge, and print out and sign their membership card. Log on to nps.gov/webangers to get started!

HORSEBACK RIDING

Whether you're coming straight out of the city or have been riding all your life, taking a horseback ride is a great way to see a park! Many parks offer site-specific trails with a guide (or if you have the know-how, without one) and the experience is well worth it. A horseback ride beats a car trip through a park any day!

GET TO KNOW THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN WAY

Check at visitor centers for times and locations of ranger-led stories about settlers, native people and even ghosts! In many parks there are demonstrations where kids can learn about early Appala-

chian life, including food preparation, hunting and metal work.

WALK WITH A PARK RANGER

Get the real scoop on nature during a ranger-guided walk or attend a slide show at campground amphitheaters. Ask at visitor centers for current times and topics.

FISHING

There are thousands of miles of fishable streams in the Blue Ridge. The region is known for brook, rainbow and brown trout, other sport fish, and numerous catch-and-release lake species. Rules vary by state, but typically anyone over age 16 will need a valid fishing license, available for purchase in local communities. Always follow local, park and state fishing regulations.

BIKING

Road and mountain biking are great ways to see the varied terrain of the Blue Ridge. From pleasant paved roads to peaceful wilderness trails, there are several routes suitable for kids. Dupont State Forest in North Carolina has many easy options. Check with local park rangers for the best kid-friendly routes.

WILDLIFE VIEWING

From black bears and white-tailed deer to beaver and raccoons to the sly and elusive bobcat, the wildlife around the Blue Ridge offers a great chance for kids to get back to nature. Try to find animal tracks in the woods and guess what species they're from! Keep track of how many different animals you see. Always remember to not disturb animals in their natural setting.

Check with a park ranger for the best ways and places to view wildlife.

PADDLING

Aside from the well-known rapids of the region, there are also several easier paddling options for kids. Rafting, canoeing or kayaking is a nice way to enjoy the water.

Either paddle in a one-person water craft or join the whole family in a large raft! Check with a park ranger for the best and easiest paddling options and current river conditions. Remember to always wear a life jacket and follow safety precautions.

BIRDWATCHING

Birdwatching is a great way for kids to enjoy the outdoors. The Blue Ridge is home to many beautiful bird species. From smaller songbirds to larger birds of prey, a range of species wait to be discovered by the patient observer.

NATURE HIKING

The diverse nature around the Blue Ridge Mountains provides great hiking opportunities for all ages. Explore waterfalls, natural arches and giant cliffs. Miles of trails traverse mountains with stunning overlooks and dense forests, which are home to varied wildlife and trees that are especially beautiful during the fall foliage season. The region is also home to several lakes with great shoreline walks.

CAMPING

Sleeping in a tent or under the stars is an unforgettable adventure for kids. The state and national parks throughout the Blue Ridge have plenty of developed campgrounds. Some have amenities such as restrooms and potable water, while others have water and electricity hookups for RVs. A multi-day or overnight stay means a longer time to explore



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The Blue Ridge Parkway is designated
an All American Road by the
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Clockwise from top left: Teach kids to respect the environment around them and to practice "Leave No Trace" principles; photo: sianc/iStock. Camping is a great way to expose your children to the great outdoors, and allows them to build life skills and ignite their imaginations; photo: Virginia State Parks. Plus, there are always s'mores; photo: buzzanimation/iStock. An adventure is a fun way to bring a family closer together;; photo: viafilms/iStock.

surrounding nature and a chance to roast marshmallows over a campfire.

INTERPRETIVE TRAILS

Many trails have the added bonus of fascinating and educational information along the way. This can include signs, exhibits and placards. If it's self-interpretive, it may have an accompanying brochure, audio or even an app. Check with park rangers or the park website for self-interpretive materials. Sometimes the website will have material for parents or teachers to help them be the guide for their

kids! Interpretive trails are often short and easy to explore, making them ideal for kids.

STARGAZING

Being out in a park, far from city lights is one of the best ways to see the stars. On a clear, cool night, pack up blankets and find a spot away from campgrounds or facility lights. Kids can learn how to spot famous constellations, like the Big Dipper or Orion's Belt. Some parks host astronomy clubs for stargazing events, especially if a special cosmic event (like a meteor shower or comet) is going on.



Dear Adventure,

You occupy my every thought. I don't know how much longer I can go without seeing you. I was at the water cooler today, talking to Herb in accounting. He was droning on about his wife's Etsy store. Side hustle he calls it. I couldn't take it. I filled up my cup and dumped a glass of water on my head just to feel something.

I know we are not supposed to see each other again until next month, but I may just drive up and see you this weekend. Is that crazy?

Yeah, it's crazy. But life's too short to spend another weekend inside. You're the antithesis of Netflix and Chill. The antidote to my smartphone addiction. The reason I get out of bed in the morning.

What I'm saying is: I love you, Adventure.

See you this weekend.

Megan

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EDITOR'S PICKS



Clockwise from top left: Follow the white blazes as you walk along the Blue Ridge Mountains section of the historic Appalachian Trail; photo: daveynin. In all seasons, spot the wildlife that's so abundant in this thriving region; photo: Ketzirah Lesser. Take a deep breath and venture across the Mile High Swinging Bridge at Grandfather Mountain; photo: Elizabeth Albert.

- Hike to the top of **North Carolina's Mount Mitchell**, the highest point east of the Mississippi, reaching 6,684 feet.
- Hike among the old growth forests of the **Ramsey's Draft Wilderness** in the George Washington National Forest.
- Scale the cliffs of **Chimney Rock** or, if you're not up for the hike, take the 26-story elevator inside the mountain.
- Look out from the **Mile High Swinging Bridge at Grandfather Mountain** where you'll scan mountain ridges cascading away in all directions.
- Take the adventurous hike to the summit of the famed **Old Rag Mountain** in **Shenandoah National Park**.
- Escape to the larger-than-life splendor of **The Biltmore** in Asheville, NC, and tour the gardens for a perfect family day.
- Snap photos of a stunning, windswept sunset atop **Bear Rocks Preserve**.
- Hike past wild ponies towards the summit of **Mt. Rogers**, Virginia's highest peak.
- Raft the **Tuckasegee "Tuck" River**. As a Class I-II whitewater river—it's a great option for families looking for active fun.
- Paddle or raft the **New River** in southwestern Virginia.
- Pitch a tent in the backcountry of the **Dolly Sods Wilderness** in West Virginia.
- Fly tandem 2,000 feet over **Lookout Mountain** on a hang glider!

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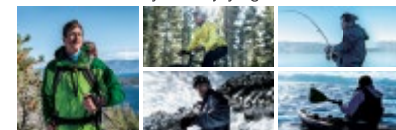


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