

Science and Nature

in the Blue Ridge Region

C'mon along as we explore the southern Appalachians in search of ginormous geology and geography, fascinating flora and fauna.

By **ANGELA MINOR**

Whether altered, restored or untouched by humanity, the story of the Blue Ridge region told by nature and science is singularly inspiring. Let's listen as she tells us her past, present and future.

ELKINS-RANDOLPH COUNTY TOURISM CVB



West Virginia

New River Gorge

Let's begin our journey on the continent's oldest river, surrounded by 1,000-foot cliffs. Carving its way through all the geographic provinces in the Appalachian Mountains, this 53-mile-long north-flowing river is flanked by rocky outcrops and sandstone cliffs. Immerse your senses in the sights, sounds, fragrances and power of the flow at Sandstone Falls. View the gorge "from the sky" with a catwalk stroll 876 feet up on the western hemisphere's longest steel arch bridge. nps.gov/neri

ABOVE: See a bird's-eye view from the bridge spanning West Virginia's New River Gorge.

LEFT: Learn ecosystem restoration at Mower Tract.

MAIN IMAGE: View 90° razorback ridges at Seneca Rocks.



ABOVE: Visit the Appalachian Forest Discovery Center and West Virginia Railroad Museum.

BELOW: Ride vintage diesel to steam at Durbin & Greenbrier Valley RR.

MUCH MORE TO SEE IN WEST VIRGINIA...

☞ **Blenko Glass Company**, Milton. The now world-renowned handmade glass company celebrates its 100th year in Milton (originally founded in 1893), after humble beginnings in a small hillside barn.

☞ **Spruce Knob – Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area**, River-ton. Perfect for rock climbers and the rest of us, these white and gray Tuscarora quartzite formations lie 900 feet above the river and offer views of unspoiled wilderness in all directions.

☞ **Seneca Caverns**, Riverton. Step back 460 million years into the heart of karst geology (landscapes formed by water dissolv-ing rocks) to see stunning cave features and formations.

☞ **Beverly Heritage Center**, Beverly. Spend the day in one of the first settlement-towns west of the Alleghenies touring museum exhibits in four historic buildings, each telling the story of local history, the Civil War and a journey through time.

☞ **Bickle Knob Observation Tower**, Elkins. Climb one of the few standing and publicly accessible fire towers in the Monongahela NF for a panoramic experience.

☞ **Durbin and Greenbrier Val-ley Railroad**, Elkins. Travel in vintage passenger trains behind steam locomotives through re-mote mountain terrain, or stay overnight in a real caboose.

☞ **West Virginia Botanic Garden**, Cheat Lake. Stroll the 82-acre gardens at your leisure or with an educational guide to learn about native plants, wetlands, garden design and

the ongoing projects in this slice of heaven.

☞ **Hatfield & McCoy ATV Trails**, Williamson. Ride 700+ miles on the largest off-road trail system in the world, and stop along the way at “ATV-friendly towns” on this Trails Heaven.

☞ **Helvetia – Swiss Village**, Randolph County. Enjoy traditional Swiss and German cultures through festivals, food, music and dance of the original settlers in this isolated region.

☞ **Civil War Trails**, statewide. Journey to dozens of locations and

Mower Tract

Within the Monongahela National Forest, visit the site of ongoing high-elevation forest ecosystem restoration. Once carelessly mined, a 40,000-acre tract is slowly regaining healthy soil and water systems and diverse native plant populations through multi-agency efforts. Specifically, red spruce and big-toothed aspen, once abundant in this ecosystem dating back to the ice age, are the focus of reforestation. These habitats are wildlife corridors and critical for sensitive species such as the Cheat Mountain salamander and Virginia northern flying squirrel. The Monongahela overall spans 1.7 million

acres and hosts seven Wilderness areas. fs.usda.gov/mnf

Appalachian Forest Discovery Center

Learn about forestry, nature, culture and history at this National Heritage Area site. From industrialization in the past to present-day conservation and management, the environments within this multi-county region are rich with resources and stories of life and living in the mountains. Located in a historic grist mill in Elkins, this heritage tourism initiative contains engaging exhibits complimented by specially curated yearly updates. elkinsrandolphwv.com

discover camps, forts and historic events that shaped the future of the state.

☞ **Dolly Sods Wilderness**, Grant/Randolph/Tucker counties. Ex-perience true wilderness across 17,371 acres, lofty summits, 47 hiking trails, during four seasons in this remote location.

☞ **Trans Allegheny Lunatic Asylum**, Weston. Tour the second largest hand-cut masonry building in the world; home to a (checkered) 160-year history of caring for the mentally ill (...and it may be haunted).

☞ **Roaring Plains West Wilderness**, Randolph/Pendleton coun-ties. Listen to the silence (despite the name) of these 6,792 acres amongst native vegetation, rich understory flora and diverse wildlife.

☞ **National Coal Heritage Area & Trail**, Oak Hill. Glimpse the unique culture of coal country via stops at preserved mining homes, railyards, company stores and other indicia of a largely bygone era.

☞ **Gaudineer Knob**, Huttonsville. Get the binoculars ready to see the diverse population of the 186 boreal forest birds who call this almost pure stand of native red spruce trees home.

☞ **Stirrup Gallery**, Elkins. Learn about life around the world from the Stone Age to the early 20th Century visiting the 10,000+ items on display at this free museum.

☞ **Snowshoe Mountain skiing**, Snowshoe. Carve some powder, snowboard or cross country on 60 trails at this popular winter-time destination; and relax afterward at local resorts.

☞ **The Greenbrier**, White Sulphur Springs. Treat yourself to a stay at one of the world’s finest luxury resorts whose varied history dates back to 1778 and guests have included presidents, royalty and celebrities.

☞ **Summersville Lake**, Summersville. The state’s largest lake runs to 327 feet deep as it dams the Gauley River and offers great boating, fishing, rock climbing, snorkeling and more.

☞ **Green Bank Observatory**, Green Bank. Visit seven large radio telescopes at the nation’s first astronomy observatory; plus pro-grams, events, the Science Center and stargazing. Green Bank is also home to Fort Warwick, recently discovered colonial-era site.



☞ Virginia

Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area

Ride the highest elevation road in the state in this 200,000-acre protected wilderness area. Or explore the 500 miles of trails, including a hike on 60 miles of the Appalachia Trail and a ride on horseback for 67 miles of the Virginia Highland Horse Trail. From the New River in the east to the summit at 5,729 feet, biodiversity is rich. In particular, the High Country is renowned for its meadows, spruce and fir forests, rocky outcroppings and wild ponies. fs.usda.gov/recarea/gwj/recarea/?recid=77722

Beagle Ridge Herb Farm

Spend the day in this mountain valley haven of specialized gardens spread across 160 acres in Wytheville. The beauty and aromas abound at the Lavender walk, water garden, Cottage garden, Tea garden,

ABOVE: Witness wild ponies at Mt. Rogers.

BELOW: Take a “growing” class at Beagle Ridge Gardens and Herb Farm.

RIGHT: Tap into deliciousness on the Virginia Maple Syrup Trail, Highland County.



MUCH MORE TO SEE IN VIRGINIA...

☞ **Natural Chimneys Park and Camp-ground**, Mt. Solon. Plan an overnight stay to marvel at the seven, 120-foot rock “chimneys” (that reveal 500 million years of geological history) during the day, and stargaze the night sky after dark.

☞ **Museum of the Shenandoah Valley**, Winchester. Learn about local heritage inside, and explore 90 acres (including a seven-acre garden of roses, perennials, vegetables, and water features) outside via three miles of trails.

☞ **Jackson River Scenic Trail**, Cov-ington. Take the whole family for a day-hike on this old railroad bed trail (of crushed smooth gravel) adjacent to the river; wheelchair accessible.

☞ **Edith J. Carrier Arboretum**, Harrison-burg. Visit diverse habitats of 100+-year-old forest trees, perennial, herb and wildflower gardens, wetland habitats, a greenhouse and nursery, and relax at the pavilion and tree terrace.

☞ **Rich Hole Wilderness Trail**, Lexing- ton. For a rocky steep challenge, hike or bike this 5.9-mile trail to the summit of Brushy Mountain; and bring a camera!

☞ **Museum of Geosciences**, Blacksburg. View the largest display of Virginia minerals in the state with over 14,000 items including gemstones, fossils and geophysical instruments.

☞ **Fenwick Mines Trails**, Craig County. Enjoy a leisurely walk through hard-wood forests and beside swamp and marsh habitats for wildlife and wildflow-er viewing on two trails.

☞ **Big Walker Mountain Lookout Tower**, Wytheville. Brave the 100-foot-observa-tion tower for a bird’s-eye view of the mountains.

☞ **Woodpecker Ridge Nature Center**, Troutville. Get the binoculars ready to scan for dozens of bird species in hardwood forests, open fields, ponds, evergreen stands and from the hawk-watch platform.

☞ **Natural Bridge**, Natural Bridge.

Famous for hundreds of years, plan a stop at this 215-foot naturally carved limestone gorge that is listed as One of the Seven Natural Wonders of the Modern World.

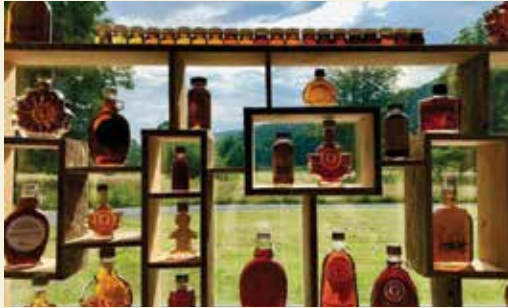
☞ **John C. Wells Planetarium and Mete-orite Collection**, Harrisonburg. Journey where no one has gone (yet) in a total immersion, advanced digital technology experience for a “real” view of the cos-mos; and see the collection of unusual meteorites in the lobby.

☞ **Mill Mountain Park**, Roanoke. Plan a weekend around this 900-acre urban

locale that includes 10 miles of trails, scenic overlooks, a wildflower garden, Discovery Center and the Mill Mountain Zoo.

☞ **Highland County**. For a panorama of high ridges and wide valleys, visit this location—one of the least populated counties in the eastern U.S.; and pick up some local maple syrup while you’re there.

BACK CREEK FARMS



☞ **Back of the Dragon**, Tazewell. Hug the ribbon curves (400 of them!) on 32 miles of two-lane mountain road famous amongst riding enthusiasts for the thrills and the views.

☞ **Trail Circuit – Cobbler Mountain/ Muddy Run/Jackson River Gorge**, Hidden Valley. Experience the geological diver-sity with a hike up mountains, across suspension bridges, beside wetlands and through gorges.

☞ **Science Museum of Western Virginia**, Roanoke. Stop in and gain knowledge about physics, geology, weather and the human body in this accessible-for-all facility, which also hosts a native pollina-tor butterfly garden.

☞ **Dehart Botanical Gardens**, Stuart.

At this 172-acre nature preserve, where holistic eco-sustainability is the mission, enjoy a mountain-waterfall loop trail to watch for over 400 species of plants and wildlife.

☞ **Breaks Interstate Park**, Breaks. Plan a trip to see the canyon geology five miles long, 1,600 feet deep, shared with Kentucky and representative of the Ap-palachian Plateau in this location.

☞ **P. Buckley Moss Gallery**, Waynes-boro. Enjoy the creativity of this artist’s vision and inspiration derived from the imagery, both natural and cultural, of the Shenandoah Valley.

☞ **Devil’s Marbleyard**, Natural Bridge Station. For the ultimate in “bouldering” in nature, check out the 500-million-year-old Antietam Quartzite rock slide with rocks as large as cars and 30-foot crevasses.

MUCH MORE TO SEE IN KENTUCKY...

☞ **Red River Gorge**, Stanton. If freestanding arches with rock shelters, waterfalls with natural bridges and craggy cliffs as a backdrop are calling, make this destination your next stop for intense rock climbing.

☞ **East Kentucky Science Center & Planetarium**, Prestonsburg. Experience the final frontier as if you were traveling amongst the stars at this technologically advanced 40-foot dome planetarium; and peruse the traveling NASA exhibits.

☞ **Kentucky Fold Art Center**, Morehead. Enjoy the creativity of generational artistry in Appalachia at the collection of 1,400+ pieces from self-taught artisans.

☞ **Daniel Boone National Forest**, London. With over 2 million acres spread across 21 counties, DBNF offers an extended vacation, with every landscape needed to hike, bike, swim, climb or just relax.

☞ **Elkhorn City Railroad Museum**, Elkhorn City. Founded by a 40-year railroad employee, this destination offers the opportunity to learn how the railroads played an integral part in Kentucky's coal field region.

☞ **Cumberland Falls State Resort Park**, Corbin. Stay at the beautiful lodge; take a tour of the historic Pinnacle Knob Fire Tower built in 1937; grab a seat on the Rainbow and Moonbow Mist Ride boats; and, of course, visit the falls.

☞ **Appalachian Artisan Center**, Hindman. Celebrate the di-

versity of the arts, including visual, musical, pottery, tools and more via exhibitions and permanent museum space.

☞ **Mountain Life Museum**, London. Tour seven structures filled with period tools, household items and farm equipment honoring the early pioneer settlement days.

☞ **Carter Caves State Resort Park**, Olive Hill. Plan a getaway to the 30-foot cave waterfall; hike the Box Canyon Trail; and visit the Bat Cave “Wild.”

☞ **Mountain HomePlace**, Staffordsville. Tour the 27-acre living history museum that represents a 19th-Century farming community complete with blacksmith shop, school, and homestead.

☞ **Hummel Planetarium**, Richmond. Enjoy a mixed-media presentation and a Live Star Talk to explore the universe at this location.

☞ **Cumberland Gap National Historical Park**, Middlesboro. Cross the gateway where humans and animals have passed for thousands of years to “get through the mountains,” and explore 85 miles of trails, pristine waters and pastoral scenery.

☞ **Appalshop**, Whitesburg. Learn how the science and technology of communication through multimedia has opened doors for creativity and self-expression of Appalachian voices.

☞ **Jesse Stuart State Nature Preserve**, Green-up. Combine a bit of Southern literature with quiet solitude at this location named for the famous and prolific author.

☞ **Kentucky Coal Mining Museum**, Benham. Learn about life at a coal camp hospital, school and town via the country's most extensive collection of mining memorabilia.

☞ **Kingdom Come State Park**, Cumberland. See some of the state's most unusual and spectacular rock formations—a natural sandstone bridge and Raven Rock, which measures 290 feet tall, and seems to fly into the air at a 45° angle.

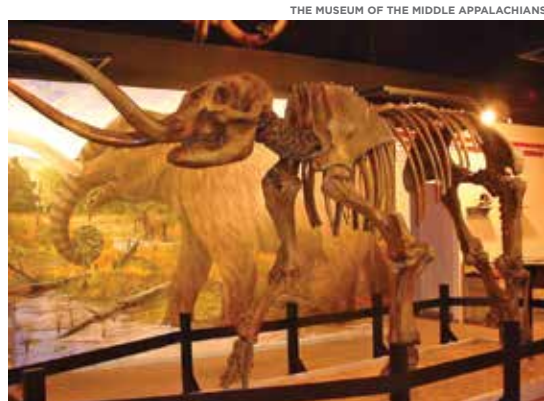
☞ **Big Sandy Heritage Center Museum**, Pikeville. For a comprehensive view of the region's history, including First Nation inhabitants, the Civil War, changes brought by industrialization and the famous Hatfield & McCoy feud, plan a stop at this location.

☞ **Jenny Wiley State Resort Park**, Prestonsburg. Swim, camp and fish at this water-lover's destination boasting the 1,100-acre Dewey Lake and a nearby theatre for evening entertainment.

☞ **Robinson Forest**, Clayhole. Experience the most diverse forest region remaining in North America and the most undisturbed watersheds on these 14,800 acres.

☞ **Lilley Cornett Woods & Appalachian Ecological Research Station**, Hallie. Take a guided tour of “old growth” forests; stop by the research center; and see some 530 flowering plants amongst the 554 acres of mixed mesophytic woodlands.

LEFT: Experience some of the world's best sport climbing crags at Red River Gorge.



THE MUSEUM OF THE MIDDLE APPALACHIANS



KENTUCKY TOURISM

Japanese Meditation garden, formal walled herbal display garden, Woodland garden, Gravel/Mediterranean garden and Wildlife Habitat garden. The owners' dedication to education and conservation has earned this destination recognition as a Certified Habitat Garden by the National Wildlife Federation, a certified Monarch Watch Site, a Bee Friendly Site and a Pesticide-Free Zone. beagleridge.org

Museum of the Middle Appalachians

Discover the wide expanse of time “From the Ice Age to the Space Age” at this facility. The Saltville Valley's ecosystems made it a natural location for animals of the late Pleistocene Epoch (the most recent ice age); and their fossils are still being discovered today. On display are the woolly mammoth, mastodon, musk ox and giant beaver among other mammals,



KENTUCKY TOURISM

ABOVE LEFT: Take a trip through time at the Museum of the Middle Appalachians.

ABOVE: Stand among ancient geologic formations in Mammoth Cave NP.

LEFT: Enjoy guided tours at Highlands Museum & Discovery Center.

Cave Wildlife Museum only minutes from the park. nationalparks.org/explore-parks/mammoth-cave-national-park

Southfork Elk View

For an easily accessible elk viewing opportunity, travel the paved road to the Breathitt County facility. The largest elk population lives in this area of the state. The landscape includes mountain views and wetlands; so keep an eye open for other wildlife. There are also trail rides available in the vicinity with upcoming plans to build a campground in addition to the primitive camping currently available. In addition to developed equestrian trails, the surrounding area has ATV trails. kentuckytourism.com/jackson/attractions/guided-tours/southfork-elk-view

Highlands Museum & Discovery Center

For a wide variety of experiences, visit this museum to ride an actual river towboat; learn about satellites; interact with displays about early cultures; see the early days of medical care in the region; discover the natural world; and “meet” early pioneers of art, music and aviation. The facility has permanent and rotating exhibits, an art gallery, workshops for kids and offers self-, semi- and fully-guided tours of their 11,000 historical artifacts. highlandsmuseum.com

fish and birds. Additionally, the museum contains a large collection of artifacts from Woodland period Native Americans (1,000 BCE to European contact). smythchamber.org

☞ Kentucky

Mammoth Cave National Park

Prepare to be amazed at the sheer size of this underground destination—1,000 miles (estimated) with 400 miles explored! This earns the distinction of being the longest known cave system on the planet. Guided tours are available for ten miles of the cave with up-close views of ancient geology at a comfortable (constant) 54° F year-round. Stay topside during your visit to explore the 52,800-acre forest, two rivers and 11 miles of trails. Conclude your stay with a stop at the Mammoth



SEQUOYAH BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM

ABOVE: Celebrate the creation of Cherokee written language at Sequoyah Birthplace Museum.

RIGHT: Explore caves and the huge underground lake at The Lost Sea.

👉 Tennessee

The Lost Sea

Explore these ancient geological caves that also contain the country’s largest underground lake. After taking the guided tour (with its pitch-dark “lights off” moment!), ride the glass bottom boat across this undersea wonder. See spiky



TN DEPT. OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT

clusters of anthodites (commonly called “cave flowers”) that are only found in a few caves around the globe. Also, on exhibit are casts of tracks of a visitor from 20,000 years ago—a giant Pleistocene jaguar. For the adventurous, a wild cave tour through crevices, cracks and mud through undeveloped rooms is an option. thelostsea.com

Ijams Nature Center

What began as a private bird sanctuary in the 1920s has evolved to become a leading wildlife sanctuary and environmental stewardship center for the region. Visit this 315-acre urban greenspace along the Tennessee River to walk 12+ miles of natural walkways, ride a mountain bike through the forest, test skills in the



VISIT KNOXVILLE

PAT & CHUCK BLACKLEY

ABOVE: Climb, hike and learn about wildlife at Ijams Nature Center.

outdoor rock-climbing area and paddle the waterways. Learn about native animal species from the 40 non-releasable animals who now call the center home; and stop by the visitor center to speak with knowledgeable and helpful staff. ijams.org

Sequoyah Birthplace Museum

One of the finest inventions of humanity was created by this grandson of a Cherokee Chief—a written language. Stop by this museum on Tellico Lake and learn

how an insatiable curiosity about the “talking leaves” of the Europeans inspired Sequoyah to distill his native language to a system of 85 symbols or letters. The results of his accomplishment, singular on a global scale, were widespread literacy and the first bilingual newspaper in the country. sequoyahmuseum.org

👉 North Carolina

Shining Rock Wilderness

Explore this unique geological area called



ABOVE: Hike the Shining Rock Wilderness Loop for vistas and wildflowers.

the Pisgah Ledge; an extension of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Encompassing over 18,000 acres, this is the largest Wilderness area in the state and contains three peaks soaring to over 6,000 feet. The foundation is comprised of complex folds of mica gneiss and schist dating back to the Precambrian era (4.6 billion years ago). “Crystalline cliffs” now stand amongst the deep greens of coniferous forests—earning this location the name “crown jewel of the Appalachians.” fs.usda.gov/recarea/nfsnc/recarea/?recid=48260

MUCH MORE TO SEE IN TENNESSEE...



ABOVE: Stop by the 1919 Cheoah Dam, once the world’s tallest overflow and largest turbine structure.

- 👉 **Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail**, Great Smoky Mountains NP. Slow down your travels on this 5.5-mile loop road to see roaring waterfalls, old homesites and mills, or to walk on the trails.
- 👉 **Ocoee Whitewater Center**, Polk County. Hike the trails at the rushing river’s edge; picnic; kayak the rapids; stroll the native plant garden; or simply sit in a rocker on the porch at this former Olympic whitewater venue.
- 👉 **McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture**, Knoxville. Founded in 1880, the museum’s permanent and rotating exhibits still follow this public museum’s mission “to display valuable archaeological collections and to portray the lives of the prehistoric inhabitants of Tennessee.”
- 👉 **Roan Mountain State Park**, Carter County. Camp at this destination to see a nature show of native wildflowers, shrubs and trees; glimpse rare wildlife; and spot a variety of bird species.
- 👉 **Ripley’s Aquarium of the Smokies**, Gatlinburg. Get up close and personal with sharks, rays, turtles and other aquatic animals at this location where conservation, appreciation and the welfare of animals is at the forefront.
- 👉 **Gray Fossil Site & Museum**, Gray. Watch discoveries in real-time at this active dig site that has revealed a 10-ton mastodon, rhinoceros, saber-toothed cat and hundreds of plants.
- 👉 **Cherohala Skyway**, Tellico Plains to Robbinsville, NC. Drive the

- long sweeping curves of this 41-mile “development-free” highway in spring to see the Unicoi Mountains awash with bloodroot, trillium, fire pink, redbud and dogwood blossoms.
- 👉 **Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park**, Elizabethton. Visit the oldest standing frame house in the state; hike the trails; and watch for wildlife at this popular location.
- 👉 **Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum**, Chattanooga. Choose from a host of train rides through east Tennessee to view historic sites, mountain scenery and gorgeous gorges, or hop onboard for holiday themed travel.
- 👉 **Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary**, Petros. Tour over 30 stations in this historic prison to learn what life was like on the inside.
- 👉 **Appalachian Caverns**, Blountville. Visit caves known to host other civilizations dating back 1,300 years, likely chosen for its ideal flowing water and exceptional ventilation.
- 👉 **Ely’s Mill**, Gatlinburg. For a glimpse into mountain history, visit one of the last remaining legacies of “old Gatlinburg.”
- 👉 **Science at Sugarlands Visitor Center**, Great Smoky Mountains NP. Attend this monthly series on the latest Smokies-related research on a variety of nature topics, followed by a guided walk led by the scientist.
- 👉 **Watauga Lake and the Butler Museum**, Johnson County. Spend the day at this sparsely visited slice of heaven with 104 miles of

- shoreline; then stop by the museum to learn why the town of Old Butler is at the bottom of the lake.
- 👉 **Fishing the Sevier County rivers**. Grab your gear and fish some of the best smallmouth bass streams in the world; and drive into the Smoky Mountains for pristine rainbow, brook and brown trout fishing.
- 👉 **Museum of Appalachia**, Norris. Stop by this living history pioneer mountain farm village that celebrates Southern Appalachian lives via artifacts, period buildings and festivals.
- 👉 **Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center**, Townsend. Celebrate the living history of the park with a tour of 13 furnished historic buildings, old transportation, Native American exhibits and mountain culture.
- 👉 **Benton MacKaye Trail – Section 13 – John Muir Trail**, Polk County. Hike along the Hiwassee River’s shoreline, and enjoy the up-close and personal experience with these rushing waters.
- 👉 **Albright Grove Loop Trail**, Great Smoky Mountains NP. Discover this well-kept secret destination of rare, old-growth virgin cove hardwood forests with a yellow poplar stand thought to be the oldest living things in the eastern U.S.
- 👉 **American Museum of Science & Energy**, Oak Ridge. Visit the “Secret City” of Oak Ridge, and learn the region’s role in engineering and technology from World War II to the present.



ABOVE: Enjoy easy access to all the gardens and exhibits at North Carolina Arboretum.

BELOW: Spot elk in Cataloochee Valley.

MUCH MORE TO SEE IN NORTH CAROLINA...

☞ **Bent Creek Experimental Forest**, Asheville. Tours and trails with interpretive signs share the ongoing research for sustainable forest management and ecosystem restoration first established in 1925 at this location.

☞ **Cataloochee Valley**, Great Smoky Mountains NP. Hike, fish, learn about history and catch a glimpse of the successfully reintroduced elk population.

☞ **Joara and Fort San Juan**, Morganton. Become a citizen archaeologist at this ancient Native American town and first inland European settlement in the country.

☞ **Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock**

Wilderness, Graham County. Find 60 miles of trails and the perfect camp spot among the “most impressive growth of eastern virgin forest in the United States.”

☞ **Western North Carolina Air Museum**, Hendersonville. Return to the Golden Age of Aviation at this living, active museum where there are no “velvet ropes to keep you away...only [vintage] airplanes and people who love them.”

☞ **Great Smoky Mountains NP wildflower trails**, Cherokee. Bring your guidebook and see how many of the 1,500 species of native wildflowers you can find on Deep Creek trails and the River Trail near Oconaluftee Visitor Center.

☞ **Groveswood Village**, Asheville. Plan time for an extended visit to four onsite destinations across 11 acres: an antique car museum, artists’ studios, galleries and Biltmore Industries Homespun Museum celebrating the rise of a handwoven wool cottage industry to the world stage.

☞ **Orchard at Altapass**, Spruce Pine. Grab some apples off the trees, visit the Butterfly Conservation Center and enjoy traditional music, food and fun at this 105-year-old orchard turned Appalachian Cultural Center.

☞ **Lake Chatuge Dam**, Clay County. Witness a feat of World War II engineering at this 3,336-foot long, 150-foot high, 980-feet wide earthen dam that created a lake with 128 miles of shoreline.

☞ **Biltmore Gardens and Grounds**, Asheville. Take a leisurely stroll

through the seasons across 8,000 acres and 20+ miles of trails to see meadows, forests and planned gardens where environmental stewardship is the guiding principle.

☞ **Graveyard Fields, BRP Milepost 418.8**, Transylvania County. Hike to the overlook for a view of the remnants of an ancient spruce and fir forest; then visit Yellowstone Falls on a moderately easy walk amongst wildflowers and berries.

☞ **Blackrock Mountain**, Jackson County. For a high-elevation hike and the equally thrilling views and massive rock formations, choose this location.

☞ **Judaculla Rock**, Sylva. Stop by this location, sacred to the Cherokee, to look at the mysterious petroglyph writings that possibly date back 3,000 years.

☞ **Wolf Mountain Overlook vertical bog, BRP Milepost 424.8**, Jackson County. Identify hundreds of blooming native flora thriving straight up this moisture-rich vertical cliff face, including a carnivorous species.

☞ **Emerald Village & NC Mining Museum**, Spruce Pine. Take an underground tour (or a UV light tour for glow-in-the-dark gems) in one of the 12 historic mines at the area’s attractions; pan for gold and gemstones; and view historic mining equipment.

☞ **Cradle of Forestry**, Pisgah Forest. Enjoy interactive exhibits, nature programs, guided tours and special events at this 6,500-acre heritage site credited as the “birthplace of science-based forest management.”

☞ **Asheville Museum of Science**, Asheville. Learn the geology, geography, weather patterns and forest biodiversity of the Appalachian Mountains.

☞ **Bechtler Mint**, Rutherfordton. Step back in time to the “golden crescent” at this historic public heritage center commemorating the contributions to economic life in the early to late 19th Century.

☞ **Wheels Through Time Museum**, Maggie Valley. To see the progression of motorized vehicles past to present, visit this display of over 300 rare machines, including motorcycles, “one-off” cars and memorabilia.

☞ **Henry River Mill Village**, Hickory. Take a guided tour of this ghost town that’s on the way back to life; and was featured in the movie “The Hunger Games” as home of Katniss’ District 12.

North Carolina Arboretum

For an immersive experience of botanical diversity, visit the 424-acre public gardens south of Asheville. Found within the coves and mountains of Pisgah National Forest, this protected space has been “cultivating connections between people, plants and places” for over 30 years. This uniquely structured arboretum offers outdoor and indoor activities. Walk or bike 10+ miles of trails through 65 acres of cultivated gardens. Or listen to lectures, view stunning works of art, experience traveling exhibits like the fragrant botanicals



ABOVE: Gaze into the cosmos at Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute.

ABOVE RIGHT: Stand upon peaks in the Blue Ridge at Caesar’s Head State Park.

sensory adventure or bring the kids for one of the popular youth programs. ncarboretum.org

Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute

Expect the unexpected during a tour of this facility, established at the beginning of space travel nearly 60 years ago. In

addition to a rich variety of planetarium and astronomical programs, the site has impressive museum and gallery collections. NASA artifacts, rocks and minerals (including a 15.3-carat emerald), fossils (including a dinosaur egg that visitors can hold), and numerous meteorites (including one that arrived here from another planet’s volcano!) await. Around the facility, find 70 species of wildlife and 95 flora species during daylight, and a Dark Sky Park at night. pari.edu



PAT & CHUCK BLACKLEY

☞ South Carolina

Caesar’s Head State Park & Overlook

Travel to the easily accessible ancient peak overlook on the Blue Ridge Escarpment (a granite gneiss and schist vertical thought to be tectonic in origin and eroded by water). Three states are visible from the rocky heights; and it’s a popular hawk migration watch point in spring and fall. In the park there are 60+ miles of trails, six waterfalls, primitive camping and 13,000 acres to explore, as well as a mysterious

Discover the
Blue Ridge Highlands
of Virginia

Blue Ridge
Travel Association

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 BLUE RIDGE TRAVEL ASSOCIATION
1-800-383-9144

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301 S. Main St.
 Harrisonburg, VA 22801
 (540) 433-3818
www.vaquiltmuseum.org

New Exhibits for 2021

Petra Pins:
Feb. 16-July 10

HERstory:
Feb. 16 - April 17

Endangered Species:
Feb. 16 - July 10

What's in a Word:
Feb. 16 -July 10

Treasures from
the Vault:
Feb. 16 - July 10

Closed until Feb. 16

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The museum is open from 10:00 am- 4:00 pm,
 Tuesday-Saturday



LEFT: Feel the cool air and spray of multiple waterfalls and streams at Jocassee Gorges.

BELOW: Pause for photos at the wooden 1909 Campbell's Covered Bridge.

rock passageway known as Devils Kitchen (with a mythical story included). southcarolinaparks.com/caesars-head)

Jocassee Gorges

Named by National Geographic in the list of "50 of the World's Last Great Places,"



CAMPBELL GEOLOGY MUSEUM | CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

ABOVE: Learn about vast fossil records at Bob Campbell Geology Museum.

RIGHT: Explore mountaintops and deep-pit caves at Crockford-Pigeon WMA.



CHUCK SUTHERLAND

MUCH MORE TO SEE IN SOUTH CAROLINA...

☞ **Ellicott Rock Wilderness**, Oconee County. Tap into your inner wilderness explorer through the dense forests, rugged terrain and the longest, largest free-flowing mountain river in the southeast.

☞ **Eastatoe Creek Heritage Preserve**, Pickens County. Explore this pristine mountain gorge to see native and rare plants and animals and a picturesque waterfall.

☞ **Table Rock State Park**, Pickens County. Climb the highest mountain completely within the state; take a dip in the old-fashioned swimming hole; and stay the night in the campground or a renovated Civilian Conservation Corps cabin.

☞ **Hagood Mill Historic Site**, Pickens. Step back in time visiting an 1845 gristmill, cotton gin, moonshine still, log cabins, Native American exhibits, the petroglyph site and blacksmith shop, or join in a folklife festival.

☞ **Hatcher Garden and Woodland Preserve**, Spartanburg. Add this living classroom of multiple garden landscapes including themes of native plants, butterflies, conifers, hostas, water plants, ericaceous species, woodland plants and hope and healing to your vacation list.

☞ **Fred W. Symmes Chapel**, Cleveland. Reserve a sunrise visit to the "Pretty Place" at this 108-year-old YMCA camp of 1,400 acres.

☞ **Oconee State Park**, Oconee County. Stay at one of the 19 historic CCC cabins, and begin a hike at the southern trailhead of the Foothills Trail (Blue Ridge Escarpment, 77-mile wilderness trail).

☞ **Paris Mountain State Park**, Greenville County. Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1936, it's home to history, four lakes, 15 miles of trails, campsites and swimming and fishing areas at this popular park.

☞ **Clemson Experimental Forest**, Clemson. Learn how "worn out farmland" has become an exemplar of forest management, clean air and water, and flora, fauna and habitat diversity.

☞ **Swamp Rabbit Trail**, Greenville. For a bit of urban green-space, walk or bike this 22-mile all-access walkway along the Reedy River.

☞ **Issaqueena Falls – Stumphouse Mountain Tunnel**, Walhalla. Visit the 200-foot cascade waterfall; explore an incomplete Civil War era railroad tunnel; or hike part of the 500-mile Palmetto

Trail that crosses the state.

☞ **Nine Times Preserve**, Pickens. Hike these 560-acres to see five mountains, seven unique types of forests and over 134 native wildflower species.

☞ **Jones Gap State Park**, Marietta. Try your luck at some of the best trout fishing in the state at this tranquil, 13,000-acre mountain woodland and cove destination.

☞ **Yellow Branch Falls Trail**, Oconee County. Pass through groves of hardwood trees, cross branches and get the camera ready for the 50-foot waterfall with multiple cascades.

☞ **World of Energy**, Seneca. Take the self-guided tour of exhibits and education to learn the history and future of energy production, followed by a picnic and nature trail walk at this location on the shores of Lake Keowee.

☞ **Chestnut Ridge Heritage Preserve**, Spartanburg County. Enjoy the quietness of this "hikers only" trail through forests at various stages of development amongst rocky outcrops with a keen eye open for the endangered white irisette flower.

☞ **The Liberty Bridge – Falls Park on the Reedy**, Greenville. Witness a feat of engineering and unobstructed views of Reedy River falls at this 345-foot, single suspension cable bridge—the only one of its kind in the country.

☞ **Chauga River Blueway**, Mountain Rest. Paddle beginner-friendly to Class IV rapids along this 31-mile stretch of waterway known as a freestone river.

☞ **Campbell's Covered Bridge – Beaverdam Creek**, Landrum. See the only remaining historic covered bridge in the state, read about the history on the interpretive signs, and enjoy a picnic by the creek.

☞ **Greenville Mill Tours**, Greenville. Choose from three unique tours and book a ride to see, hear and touch the impactful history of textile mills with visits to actual locations.



add this destination to your upstate wilderness list. The east-west trajectory of the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment at this location creates a unique opportunity to collect moist air from the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. The result – a rare inland temperate rainforest ecosystem. On the 43,000 acres are old-growth hemlock, tropical fern species found nowhere else on the continent and the rare and delicate Oconee Bell wildflower. discoversouthcarolina.com/jocassee-gorges)

Bob Campbell Geology Museum

If rocks, minerals and fossils are of interest, schedule a visit to see 10,000 of

them at this geology facility. Agates and geodes, faceted gemstones (including the largest topaz crystal ever discovered in the country) and cabochons from generous donors are on display. Also occupying a larger than expected amount of space is the full, life-sized reconstruction of "Smiley," the saber-toothed tiger and the complete skull of a T-Rex. While visiting, learn how fossilized teeth of the Columbian Mammoth and giant white shark and a skull of the largest known flying bird reveal their presence in this state. clemson.edu/public/geomuseum

☞ Georgia

Crockford-Pigeon Mountain WMA – and caves!

Journey to the southern terminus of the Blue Ridge for a popular rock climbers' "bouldering" location and an entire system of caves. Views from atop the mountains are stunning; and adventures beneath the surface are breathtaking. Brave 6.5 miles of subsurface trails and crawl through the 150-foot Worm Tube to reach one of the many rooms in Pettyjohn's Cave. Find the country's deepest unobstructed pit in Ellison's Cave (586 feet deep). And, visit Frick's Cave (only open once per year), which is home to 10,000 endangered gray bats for the rest of the year. georgiawildlife.com/crockford-pigeon-mountain-wma

Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge

Spend the day in the botanical garden paradise that boasts the largest rhododendron collection in the southeastern US. During a one-month window (mid-April to mid-May) these plants burst into bloom in a variety

LEFT: Hike rim trails along the dramatic canyon in Tallulah Gorge State Park.



of shapes, colors and sizes across the landscape. Stroll the 33-acre botanical gardens paths immersed in a diverse ecosystem of wildflowers, trees and shrubs, including native azaleas. Be sure to stop by The Daffodil Project, an international endeavor honoring children lost in the Holocaust. hamiltongardens.org

The Jane Hurt Yarn Interpretive Center
Join the celebration of this groundbreaking conservationist and environmentalist at the Tallulah Gorge State Park educational center named in her honor. In recognition of her early pioneering work saving thousands of wilderness acres in the state (and elsewhere), visitors can learn about park history, geography and wildlife, as well as the cultural and social significance of the area. Enjoy a trip through the gorge via an award-winning film, and view the exhibits on the history of Tallulah Falls, a Victorian resort town. georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/geography-environment/jane-hurt-yarn-1924-1995 ▲▲

MUCH MORE TO SEE IN GEORGIA...

- ☞ **Tallulah Gorge State Park**, Tallulah Falls. Visit the “Grand Canyon of the East” at this 2,689-acre park perfectly made for hiking, overlooks, fishing, paddling and camping; plus, a suspension bridge with waterfall views.
- ☞ **O. Wayne Rollins Planetarium**, Young Harris. Enjoy a detailed and immersive night sky via next gen planetarium digital projection inside the 40-foot dome.
- ☞ **Foxfire Museum & Heritage Center**, Mountain City. Walk amongst 20 historic log buildings outfitted with artifacts from the pioneering period of Appalachian history at this outdoor museum.
- ☞ **Gibbs Gardens**, Ball Ground. Stroll one of the nation’s largest estate gardens in 16 uniquely designed sections to see 24 ponds, 19 waterfalls, 32 footbridges and an English manor house.
- ☞ **Mason-Scharfenstein Museum of Art**, Demorest. Find inspiration at this destination that hosts exhibitions featuring a variety of media and themes including landscape paintings, printmaking and sculptures.
- ☞ **Fort Mountain State Park**, Chatsworth. Combine hiking with a mystery from history with a visit to the 855-foot-long wall thought to have been built by First Nation Cherokee on top of the mountain.
- ☞ **Historic Banning Mills**, Whitesburg. Discover the history of this hidden gorge; once home to 10 mills making textiles, pulp, paper, meal and wood products—and one of the first sites in the state to have electricity.
- ☞ **Expedition Bigfoot**, Blue Ridge. Pique your curiosity listening to recordings of howls and interviews with witnesses, and viewing life-size and interactive exhibits at this investigator museum.
- ☞ **Bell Mountain Park & Historical Site**, Towns County. Spot eagles, launch a paraglider or simply turn in any direction for mountain and lake

- views atop the 18-acre summit (115 steps up).
- ☞ **Tabor House & Civil War Museum**, Ellijay. Browse one of the largest libraries in the South from the Civil War period, watch videos about the history, see artifacts honoring the Cherokee, and tour rooms decorated with period pieces.
 - ☞ **Black Rock Mountain State Park**, Mountain City. Walk through forests of wildflowers, streams and waterfalls to stand at the Eastern Continental Divide and Georgia’s highest peak for vistas of four states up to 80 miles away.
 - ☞ **Dahlonega Gold Museum**, Dahlonega. Learn about the country’s first gold rush and its effect on a nation at one of the state’s oldest courthouses.
 - ☞ **Rock City**, Lookout Mountain. Return again and again to the top of Lookout Mountain for the massive rock formations, 400 native plants, enhanced trails and the chance to see seven states.
 - ☞ **Folk Pottery Museum of Northeast Georgia – Sautee Nacoochee Center**, Sautee Nacoochee. Learn about this distinctive regional artform where hand-created household items reflect the history and culture of the area.
 - ☞ **Shirley Miller Wildflower Trail**, Walker County. With less than a mile distance filled with spring wildflowers, a boardwalk and waterfalls, put this on the list.
 - ☞ **Pioneer Village – Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds**, Hiawassee. Witness mountain life in action at this permanent display of authentic structures with seasonal events such as blacksmithing, soapmaking, moonshining and more.
 - ☞ **Downtown Clarksville**. Take the walking tour to visit a dozen 18th and early 19th Century struc-

- tures and gardens where rare native plants still thrive.
- ☞ **Amicalola Falls**, Dawsonville. Climb 600 steps to the top of the 729-foot cascading waterfall—the third tallest east of the Mississippi River...or drive, if you prefer.
 - ☞ **Mtn Honey**, Clarkesville. See sustainable agriculture in action with a “staff” in excess of 12 million at this gold medal award winning farm; and indulge in a bit of sweetness.
 - ☞ **Northeast Georgia’s Scenic 197**, Habersham/Rabun counties. For a full tour of mountain scenery, lakes, museums and galleries, eateries and wildlife, take an extended trip on this roadway.



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