

By LEONARD ADKINS

EXPLORING
WATER
AND LAND

7 RICH AND REWARDING RIVER WALKS

Our walks columnist and his wife have done the homework for your enjoyment of these fulfilling wanders along the riverside.

Countless trails meander along rivers and streams throughout the Blue Ridge region. Some provide contact with wildlife and forest lands, some pass through the region's rural scenery. Others are decidedly urban and lend insight and access to a city's history, culture, dining, shopping and lodging options. Laurie and I recently dedicated several months to discovering as many of these easy to moderately easy walking pleasures as we could. Come along to sample some of those we enjoyed the most.

Tennessee

The Tennessee River is no small waterway, being close to a quarter mile wide as it courses its way through Chattanooga. The city's paved Riverwalk stretches for more than 13 miles, providing soaring views of the river from high bluffs as well as descending to come into intimate contact with the rolling water.

We were on our way home from a trip farther south when we made an impromptu decision to spend a couple of hours exploring the trail's passage through the downtown area.

It was early on a Sunday morning, so the Hunter Museum of American Art was closed, but the outdoor sculpture garden is always open. Two works in particular caught my eye: Deborah Butterfield's bronze horse that looks like it was created with pieces of driftwood and John Dreyfuss's multiple statues that make up a nostalgic scene from a baseball game.

The Riverwalk made an absolutely unnecessarily, but-oh-so-much-fun-to-walk zigzagging pathway down the hill from the museum to several large cabin cruisers docked along Ross's Landing at river's edge. Striking up a conversation, I found that they

were traveling together on a journey that was taking them from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. Chattanooga and the Tennessee River were just a side trip for them.

Chattanooga has spent more than \$200 million in the last few years revitalizing its downtown Riverpark and this investment is most apparent in the area around the Tennessee Aquarium. Although it was still too early for the attraction to be open, numerous families were already wandering around the plaza, with children playing in the cascades of the staircase waterfall.

The Walnut Street Bridge across the river is billed as "one of the largest pedestrian bridges in the world" and is an attraction on its own. It took us across the river to wander along the northern shore. Multiple paved pathways go through Coolidge Park, passing by an indoor carousel and interactive water fountain before leading to Renaissance Park. It's a 23-acre green space that was once an area polluted by now-removed manufacturing plants. Here we watched a huge snapping turtle surface from the depths of a small lagoon before retracing steps back to our car.

The Market Street Bridge and downtown Chattanooga reflect on a calm-surfaced Tennessee River.

West Virginia

Morgantown may well be the king of river walks. Several different streamside trails, with a combined mileage of more than 45 miles, connect with the Caperton Trail. The latter, a paved pathway, parallels the Monongahela River for close to six miles, taking in just about everything that makes a river walk worthwhile.

A veggie Reuben and a cheese Panini lunch at Terra Café began our exploration of the route near its northern end. The emotionally charged JFK Memorial brought forward progress to a halt just a few moments after we started, as the life-size sculpture depicts young John-John saluting his slain father.

The Core Arboretum's three miles of dirt pathways drew us off the Caperton Trail to wander through 95 acres of hillside and floodplain. We were here in early fall, so the conservation area's celebrated spring flowers were long gone, but we were compensated by autumn's colorful leaves.

Back on the main route, Laurie did some holiday gift buying at the Quilt Shop in Seneca Center, a repurposed glass factory. It beckons trailside with boutique shops and restaurants, along with an exhibit of products from the area's many former glassworks.

The Historic Downtown Morgantown Walking Tour (downtownmorgantown.com) encouraged another detour, which led to more shopping in the circa 1785 Old Stone House. Proceeds from the sale of items by regional artists are donated to local charities.

After returning to the trail, we watched herons, ducks and kingfishers float by the river's edge, while farther out, huge coal barges drifted by. We arrived at Table 9 just as dinner time rolled around. Its picture windows and patio kept our focus on the river as local brews poured freely from the taps.

The day came to an end at the Marriott at Waterfront Place, located a short distance from the trail's southern end. The hotel's shuttle drivers, who usually provide rides to the airport, will take guests to points along the Caperton Trail if their schedule permits.

The conversation with our driver, WVU student Mike Barno, turned to why he chose to go to school in Morgantown.

"I grew up in northeast Ohio and always liked to hike, but almost everything near home was cornfields," he told us. "I came here because, first of all, I liked the idea of going to a big school located within a small town, but also because I knew that I could be hiking on a trail just a few minutes' walk from my room."

South Carolina

Unlike the wide Tennessee River as it passes through Chattanooga, the Reedy River in Greenville is, at times, not much wider than a creek. But, that's a good thing. It means it's easier to become more intimately acquainted with it. The best way to do that is to walk the three mile downtown portion of the 21-mile Swamp Rabbit Trail.

The five-minute walk from the Hyatt Regency on Main Street to the trail goes by the Mast General Store, M. Judson Booksellers and O. P. Taylor's Toys—all places we made note of to visit later in the day.

After a breakfast of coffee and bagels at Spill the Beans, we sauntered along the trail to Reedy River Falls. Not many cities can boast of a waterfall flowing through downtown, so it only makes sense that Greenville has wisely decided to capitalize on it. Millions of dollars were spent creating upscale 32-acre Falls Park, replete with terraced levels and eye-pleasing natural landscaping. Soaring above all this is a pedestrian bridge unlike any other in the United States. The gently-curving Liberty Bridge appears to float above the falls, its concrete deck held in place by a single suspension cable.

BOTTOM: Panoramic view of Morgantown, West Virginia shows the Coliseum Arena and campus of West Virginia University as the Monongahela flows by.

BELOW: Young John-John salutes his father at Morgantown's JFK Memorial.



VISIT GREENVILLE SC

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Farther downstream is Cancer Survivors Park and Fear Not, a compelling bronze sculpture by Charles Pate Jr. that depicts a gentle lion permitting a child to cuddle up to it and gain courage to face what lies ahead. Laurie couldn't resist the symbolism and sat on the lion's back to bolster her spirits, too.

Children frolicking in the Cleveland Park Playground made me realize just how important it is for localities to make facilities such as this available to the public. Not only were the kids having fun, but they were also building muscles on the monkey bars, developing coordination by going across balance beams and learning cooperation when 10 of them decided to go down the slide together.

I'm not sure if it was coincidence or if it was coordinated by the staff, but the

opening of the zoo's gates happened at the same moment the African lion's outrageously loud roar resounded across the playground. A mile-long pathway winds by enclosures of lions, leopards, tortoises, giraffes, anteaters, orangutan, and dozens of other animals going about their daily lives.

A detour of a few hundred feet on the return walk brought us to Sidewall Pizza for lunch where Kathleen McKenzie, assistant manager, recommended we order a half Spicy Italian/half Margherita pizza. Her ideas of what to do later that evening turned out to be just as spot on as her pizza suggestions—we watched a free outdoor movie in the Falls Park amphitheatre, took in a lively set at the Blues Boulevard Jazz club and ended the day with ice cream rolls in Crème Shack.



ABOVE: The 14-acre Greenville Zoo is in Cleveland Park.

TOP: The 345-foot Liberty Bridge sits in the heart of downtown Greenville, spanning the Reedy River as it overlooks an urban waterfall and the rolling gardens of Falls Park on the Reedy River.



ABOVE: While parts of the Yadkin River Greenway make their way through the streets of North Wilkesboro, much of it meanders through preserved green spaces.

North Carolina

The Yadkin River Greenway was a complete surprise. The greenway's website shows the North Wilkesboro segments of the trail to be located close to city streets. Yet, we found the pathways to be, for the most part, passing through wonderfully preserved green spaces.

The unpaved 1.3-mile Jefferson Turnpike section begins off Northwest Reservoir Road to follow narrow Reddies River downstream. We were here in mid-spring and the nearly-grown leaves of sycamore and poplar trees essentially blocked out any traffic noise, giving the illusion we were in a deep forest.

We stopped for a break beside something I had never seen before, a tree with eight trunks—which we dubbed the “octotree.” Multitudes of butterflies gathered around small puddles, a muskrat startled us when it slid into the river and a pair of wood ducks floated by.

Our walk, in fact, soon became a birding excursion. A black and white warbler walked up and down a tree trunk foraging for insects, while an unseen ovenbird called out its distinctive *teacher! teacher! teacher!*

The Jefferson Turnpike section is connected to the Mulberry Fields portion of the greenway via a few city blocks. It's still

beside the Reddies River, but the nature of the outing changed. Now paved, the 1.9-mile pathway was bordered by open fields of tall corn stalks. No longer walking among trees, we were exposed to a great expanse of sky, enabling us to keep birdwatching. Turkey vultures circled overhead, a red-tailed hawk soared high above them and a couple of eastern meadowlarks were perched on top of the stalks.

A footbridge across the river enticed us to take a detour of less than a mile roundtrip to Brushy Mountain Smokehouse and Creamery. True to its name, the restaurant served a tasty pork barbeque and house-made ice cream. (Mine was chocolate cherry and Laurie's was Butterfinger extreme.)

Back on the trail, the pathway began paralleling the slightly larger Yadkin River. Birding was replaced by people watching as we encountered increasing numbers of joggers, walkers and families of bicycle riders.

The greenway came to an end next to the WRMC Wellness Center with more than a dozen pieces of outside exercise equipment. Despite having just walked several miles, Laurie couldn't resist working out on the rowing and elliptical machines.

Georgia

The Chattooga River on the border of Georgia and South Carolina was declared a Wild and Scenic River in 1974. There are no roads that parallel the river within a quarter-mile as it passes through a portion of Chattahoochee National Forest. This means that the Chattooga River Trail has an almost wilderness-like setting as it runs beside the river on a moderately easy 6-mile out-and-back hike that Laurie and I did early one September morning.

Running concurrently with the Bartram Trail, a 114-mile pathway through Georgia and North Carolina, the Chattooga River Trail headed southward from the Russell Bridge on GA 28 in Rabun County. It swung away from the stream to cross the West Fork of the Chattooga River on a metal and wooden bridge. We also quickly learned not to expect Appalachian Trail-level maintenance. However, yellow blazes made it easy to follow the route slowly winding back toward the waterway.

The gently flowing river sounds blended with those of crows, cardinals, warblers and woodpeckers as the pathway passed through a forest of towering deciduous and evergreen trees. Partridgeberry, galax and running cedar covered the forest floor.

This is not an old growth forest, but tree sizes give the impression of being decades old. That's why we were so surprised to come across old farm machinery in an overgrowing meadow. These were not just small implements like a wheel barrow or shovel. No, these were remnants of large pieces of equipment with gears, pulleys and

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ABOVE: The Chattooga River, on the Georgia/South Carolina border, earns well its Wild and Scenic Designation.
LOWER LEFT: You can feed the goats in 25-cent servings.

And how can you pass up a roadside attraction called Goats on the Roof!

rubber tires. Just to the side of the trail was a fairly modern hay bailer with weeds and small trees growing through its rusting skeleton. A chimney on the other side of the trail marked where a farmhouse once stood.

Adeline Ford, which we had determined to be our turnaround point, provided the best view of the river. Wide and shallow, its clear waters flowed over multi-colored rocks and stones that have been shaped and rounded by the river's movement.

The nice thing about doing a hike in early morning is that there is the rest of the day to explore the area by automobile. And how can you pass up a roadside attraction called Goats on the Roof! Geared toward families, it features a small playground, café and souvenir shop. The real reason to stop, of course, is the goats wandering about on

a grass-covered roof and in a ground level pen. A 25-cent vending machine dispenses feed (goat chow?) into a paper cup and when Laurie offered hers to a kid goat, it wrested it out of her hand, consuming both food and cup in only a few bites!

A few miles north is 106-acre Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center, an outgrowth of the Foxfire magazines and books of the 1960s. A walking path winds along the hillside where living history demonstrators and crafters present, and help preserve, the life skills and culture from earlier days. The blacksmith and weaver relayed the history of their crafts, but it was the talented hands of broom maker Carole Morse that impressed me the most. Using wire coming from what she called a late 1700s “broom horse” to attach broom corn to a handle, she created

a hearth broom in a matter of minutes.

A cabin in River Campground in nearby Lakemont was our accommodation for the night. The campground is not the resort type of place with upscale glamping or amenities, but its rustic facilities do provide direct access to trout fishing in the Tallulah River.

In addition, owner Melissa Heiden is a great ambassador for the area. Over breakfast at the Rusty Bike Restaurant, she relayed how she has come to enjoy northern Georgia: “I was apprehensive when I inherited the campground from my father. I knew nothing about the area and did not want to leave my home in Florida. Yet, I found the weather to be to my liking and the people to be so friendly—I made many new friends within the first year—that I now wouldn't want to be anywhere else.”



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Kentucky

State park lodges are some of my favorite destinations. They are invariably situated in scenic locales with miles of hiking trails, yet provide the opportunity for a bit of luxury by sleeping indoors and having someone else prepare meals for you in the restaurant. Some lodges, being made of steel and glass, resemble modern motels, while others bear a striking resemblance to the grand lodges built in national parks during the first half of the 20th century.

I prefer the latter, and Dupont Lodge in Cumberland Falls State Park certainly falls into that category. With a stone block exterior, huge beams of hemlock logs

The Cumberland River's Cumberland Falls, at 70 feet, is touted as "The Niagara of the South."

soar over the two-story interior with knotty pine paneling and multiple fireplaces. An extensive terrace overlooks the Cumberland River, as do the restaurant's picture windows. (Insider tip: Some of the guest rooms are rather small by today's standards and overlook the parking lot. Others are larger and have a view of the river valley. Be sure to inquire when making reservations.)

I, of course, am not here to spend a lot of time indoors. I'm here to take a walk beside the Cumberland River—and the obvious place to start is its famous waterfall. Cumberland Falls, hailed as the "Niagara of the South," drops close to 70 feet while spanning the river's width of more than 120 feet. As if that is not impressive enough, the park's literature says the waterfall is one of only two locations in the entire world where it is possible to see a moonbow. (The other is supposedly Victoria Falls in Africa, but moonbows have also been reported in California, Arizona, Hawaii, Africa, Iceland and Australia.) Consider yourself lucky if you see one, as the phenomenon happens only on clear nights around the time of a full moon.

It was not nighttime, but very early in the

morning when I arrived at the falls, so I was taken aback by the large number of people already there. The park is in somewhat of an isolated part of Kentucky, but the falls are evidently special enough to attract visitors from far and wide.

Although it runs beside the Cumberland River, the Moonbow Trail is not a flat and easy route like Georgia's Chattooga River Trail. Within a few yards of the falls, it descends a steep set of stairs and continues along with numerous abrupt ups and downs. Sometimes high on the hillside, sometimes going across soft sandy beaches, the pathway comes to a confluence with Dog Slaughter Creek at 2.5 miles. I had originally planned on turning around here, but realized that in just a few hundred yards I could visit a second cascade, Dog Slaughter Falls, where the water drops 20 feet inside a deep and narrow cove. It is well worth the few extra steps, but I'll caution that it takes a traverse of a rocky trail along a cliff face to reach it.

As I retraced my steps, I contemplated the catfish dinner I was going to have in the lodge's restaurant and the air conditioned room and soft bed I was going to be able to sleep in that night.

Virginia

"This was the route of a Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad line that ran from the late 1800s to the 1960s and brought people from Covington to the Homestead Resort. After that, there was a company that ran scenic rail excursions for close to eight years."

Chad Williams is telling us about the Jackson River Scenic Trail, a basically flat multi-use pathway that runs for 14.4 miles (and probably more by the time you read this) from near Lake Moomaw to close to downtown Covington. We met him on a chilly and foggy early fall morning after having spent the night at Cliff View Golf and Fly Fish Inn. The inn is on the opposite side of the river, but it was a simple matter of walking a few hundred yards to cross the stream on Smith Bridge, a former roadway span now open to pedestrians.

According to Teresa Hammond, executive director of Allegheny Highlands Chamber of Commerce and Tourism, Williams, who is director of Allegheny County Parks and Recreation, is the driving force behind the trail: "He has procured an abundance of grants, physically worked on the trail, developed a loyal following of trail enthusiasts, and continues to come up with new and creative ideas to push the project forward."

The trail meanders away from the river for a few miles upstream, but the five-mile

section we were walking downstream remained in sight of the renowned trout fishing waters the entire time. A small brook flowed from the hillside into the river and picnic tables conveniently appeared just about the time I was thinking of taking a rest break.

There were certainly long stretches through thick woodlands, but when my mind wanders back to this day, the image that comes to mind is of a pastoral and rural landscape where cattle graze in sprawling open meadows as crows caw overhead. The few houses located in an area Williams called Dunbrack Circle were so serenely emitting fireplace smoke from their chimneys that I envisioned I was walking through The Shire in Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" (although there were no hobbit holes).

The trail passes within a few yards of the

BELOW: *At Clifton Forge's Hill Crest Mansion Inn, Leonard and Laurie Adkins awoke to the "performance breakfast," with five courses presented by a tuxedo-clad server.*

RIGHT: *Smith Bridge is near the southern end of the 14.3-mile, rail-to-trail Jackson River Trail.*

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