

The High Country, North Carolina

Including the Blue Ridge Parkway, Blowing Rock, Boone, Valle Crucis, Banner Elk, Grandfather Mountain, Linville, and West Jefferson

Tucked into North Carolina's northwestern corner, the High Country is a rugged region of steep mountains, deep gorges, dense forests, and fast-moving streams that form the headwaters of four of the state's major rivers: the Watauga, New, Yadkin, and Catawba. With valleys ranging in elevation from 3,000 to 3,700 feet and peaks rising above 5,000 feet, the High Country is aptly named. You'll find little land that's flat here. The terrain is constantly rising and falling—most often in dramatic leaps—and on bike, foot, or by car, you can expect to grit your teeth as you go up, up, up and then down, down, down.

Bordered by Tennessee to the west, Virginia to the north, and the North Carolina foothills and Piedmont to the east and south, the region's remoteness, which made for slow settlement in the 18th and 19th centuries, is what draws many travelers here today. In fact, Watauga County, the center of tourism activity in the region, takes its name from a Cherokee word meaning "land of the beyond." Here the only skyscrapers are the Blue Ridge Mountains; suburban sprawl, stultified city air, and the pressed daily grind exist as mere memories from a distant place.

The first permanent settlers were the Cherokee, who farmed the rich, loamy soil of the valley



Linville Peak in the rugged High Country

Malcolm Campbell



The Blue Ridge Parkway passes through the High Country

floors and traded extensively with other tribes from as far away as the Ohio River Valley and Gulf Coast. By the mid 18th Century, the first white pioneers began settling the region. Known informally amongst settlers as "The Lost Province," the High Country became home to fiercely independent, self-sufficient people who in 1772—four years before Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of*

Independence—drafted the *Articles of the Watauga Association* to create the first majority-rule system of American democracy. Accordingly, mountain settlers weren't keen on answering to the English Crown. During the Revolutionary War, men from the area joined settlers from the Tennessee Mountains to form the Overmountain Men, a brigade that marched down into the Piedmont to defeat the British at Kings Mountain in 1780.

The 19th Century brought more permanent settlers to the area, as well as the first summer residents, wealthy "flatlanders." These seasonal visitors built summer homes or boarded in large resort hotels or boarding houses in villages like Blowing Rock, Linville, and Banner Elk. The Civil War had far less effect on this region than elsewhere in the Carolinas. The independent spirit of the mountaineers and the fact that few residents of the High Country had slaves explain why a number of men refused to take up arms for the Confederacy. In fact, some mountain residents must have known and ignored the fact that the surrounding craggy peaks and dense forests served as hiding places for escaped slaves traveling on the Underground Railroad.

By the late 19th Century, the bounty of hemlock, oak, hickory, and chestnut trees drew the logging industry, which wasted little time felling the old-growth timber. Railroads built lines into the mountains to transport this wood, as well as minerals and

ore mined from the hillsides. By the start of World War II, however, the trains stopped running because the lumber resources were exhausted and better roads had been built.

Today tourism is a major industry, and the area draws vacationers year-round. Summer is full of concerts and festivals; fall and spring dazzle with kaleidoscopes of colors; and winter bustles with skiers. Throughout the year, you'll find Charlotteans & Atlantans "in the know," as well as visitors from much farther away who discovered the area while touring the Blue Ridge Parkway.

With ample public land—the Pisgah National Forest, several large rivers, and four ski resorts—the High Country abounds with outdoor sports, while the plea-

tures of town—galleries, museums, shops, and restaurants—are just as plentiful. Resting after an active day comes naturally in the fresh mountain air. Here you can rock gently on one of the region's many front porches or in front of a wood fire before retiring for a restful night's sleep.

The Way Around

The High Country is home to dozens of small and even-smaller towns. While isolated communities remain (particularly in the Northern High Country), much of the area has opened to tourism. The High Country Host (a visitors bureau) identifies six counties as the High Country, but this chapter focuses primarily on three—Watauga, Ashe, and Avery. Here you'll find the major vacation villages of Linville, Blowing Rock, Boone, and Banner Elk, as well as the majority of lodging, dining, and shopping options.

Just a short drive apart, Boone and Blowing Rock are the heart of the region. The national media regularly lists both among "America's best small towns;" however, they are actually quite different. As the county seat and largest town in the region, **Boone** is the area's commercial center. But rest assured that the commercial sprawl you encounter along Route 321

southeast of town is not all there is. Boone's real character appears in its historic downtown, centered primarily on **King** and **Depot streets**, where there are good restaurants, artists' studios, crafts galleries, and unique shops.

Boone is named for Daniel Boone, who kept a hunting cabin in the late 1700s on the present-day grounds of Appalachian State University. The town evolved slowly. In 1800, an early settler named Jordan Council opened a general store just beneath Howard's Knob, but it wasn't until 1850 that Boone had enough settlers to found the Boone Post Office. Officially, Boone didn't incorporate until 1872. Today, as home to the university and its 12,000 students (who endow the town with vibrant hipness), Boone positively bustles.

Boone CVB
Watch for traffic

The resort town of **Blowing Rock** is just a few miles south of Boone on Route 321. If Boone has a few hairs out of place, Blowing Rock is perfectly coiffed. To many of its well-dressed, credit-card-at-the-ready visitors, Blowing Rock is the High Country. Indeed, this village was founded for the same reason many people visit today: vacationing. Beginning in the mid 1800s and hitting full steam in the 1880s, lowcountry planters and wealthy flatlanders began visiting in the summer to escape the heat and pesky mosquitoes. By the turn of the century, Blowing Rock had several large hotels and a full, summer social calendar. A similar migration occurs today. The village's year-round population of 1,500 climbs to more than 6,500 each summer and fall.

Blowing Rock sits on a high ridge that straddles the Eastern Continental Divide, a serrated, north-south-running bump that "divides" streams flowing east from those flowing west.

The Boonies

The same characteristics that slowed settlement of the High Country—rugged land and a hostile Indian presence—are what drew early American trail-blazer Daniel Boone here. Boone kept a hunting cabin on what is today the campus of Appalachian State University, and he earned income leading early mountain settlers over the Wilderness Road, a route he helped forge.



The actual Blowing Rock

Named for a rock formation that juts out over the Johns River Gorge and that catches winds funneling up the gorge, the village of Blowing Rock is actually separate from the rock, which is just south of the village on Route 321. To see the village's namesake, you'll have to pony up an admission fee; the rock is privately owned. The views are sublime, but if you don't make it, you're not alone. Many Blowing Rock visitors never visit the attraction, enchanted as they are with the great restaurants, shops, and galleries lining **Main Street**.

Northwest of Boone and Blowing Rock on Route 194, **Valle Crucis** (Latin for "valley of the cross") is a small village tucked into the surrounding mountains and rolling hills. In the late 1700s, early settlers

Samuel Hix, Joseph Mast, and Dr. Ezekial Baird came to the area to build farmsteads and churches, some of which stand today. The village has a number of buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, and the entire valley is a North Carolina Rural Historic District (the state's first). Originally known as the Baird Community, the settlement changed names to Valle Crucis in 1842, when Stillman Ives, an Episcopalian bishop, climbed a ridge, looked down on the valley, and noted that the streams and land formed the shape of a crucifix. Ives, who came to the area to start a divinity school, purchased 3,000 acres and launched the first Anglican monastic order since the Reformation in the 1500s. The school and monastery disbanded in 1852, but the Episcopalian presence continued. Today several religious retreats operate in the valley.

What's Happening?

Upon arrival, pick up a copy of the *Mountain Times*, a free weekly covering community news and entertainment happenings in the High Country. It's distributed everywhere in boxes, as well as on counters in shops, inns, and restaurants. Content is also online at: www.mountaintimes.com.

Valle Crucis has several bed and breakfasts—some with fine dining—and a smattering of artists' studios. The big draw is the Mast General Store, a National Historic Landmark and a destination unto itself. This old-timey mercantile store carries everything from dime-store candy to high-end shoes.

West of Valle Crucis on Route 194, **Banner Elk** is an attractive village that serves as base camp to North Carolina's two largest ski areas—Beech Mountain and Sugar Mountain. First settled around 1825, Banner Elk became a tourist destination around the turn of the century as flatlanders constructed summer homes or visited newly built hotels and boarding houses. Today in the winter, skiers and snowboarders populate the shops, restaurants, and lodgings lining the valley and in the summer, you'll find golfers, rafters, and cyclists doing the same.

Named for its resemblance to a reclined, bearded man, **Grandfather Mountain** is off of Route 221 just southwest of Blowing Rock. This privately owned mountain—held in the MacRae family since 1885—is



Sugar Mountain



Christmas trees in the Northern High Country

NC Division of Tourism

a scenic attraction, nature preserve, and International Biosphere Reserve. (More than 40 rare or endangered species live in the 16 ecosystems on the mountain.) Grandfather Mountain also has a nature museum; a wildlife habitat with black bears, mountain lions, and deer; and a suspension bridge across an 80-foot chasm.

A number of small villages make up the **Southern High Country**, including **Linville**, **Pineola**, **Crossnore**, **Spruce Pine**, and **Little Switzerland**. There are many upscale condominium resorts, golf courses, country clubs, and second-home communities here, plus a smattering of shops and inns. A handful of gem mines surround Spruce Pine, home to the North Carolina Museum of Minerals.

The **Northern High Country** is a broad but sparsely populated area where tourism plays second fiddle to agribusiness. Rural scenery—pastures, woods, weathered barns—reigns supreme, and life is measured by planting seasons rather than by Daytimer pages. The state's largest concentration of Christmas tree farms is here, and the big harvest season is

just after Thanksgiving. The **New River** flows slowly north through the northern High Country into Virginia. Located on Route 221, **West Jefferson** is the largest town in the area with just more than 1,000 residents. The town is home to a small gathering of excellent antiques and crafts shops, as well as to the Ashe County Cheese Company, the state's only cheese-making operation. Nearby, **Jefferson** features a 1904 courthouse that operates as a visitor center and museum. East of Jefferson and close to the Blue Ridge Parkway, the area around **Glendale Springs** annually attracts thousands of visitors to the Churches of the Frescoes, two small Episcopal churches with frescoes painted by Ben Long.



A mountain lion on Grandfather Mountain

Weather

In addition to the natural beauty and slower pace of life, the weather is a primary reason why the High Country is such a popular destination. Summertime is practically mosquito-free, and daytime temperatures rarely exceed the mid 80s, with evening lows in the upper 50s. Fall is spectacular with clear, crisp days. Highs are in the lower 60s with overnight lows around 40, making for perfect fire weather. Cold winter temperatures make the area a draw for skiers, with January highs averaging in the 30s and overnight

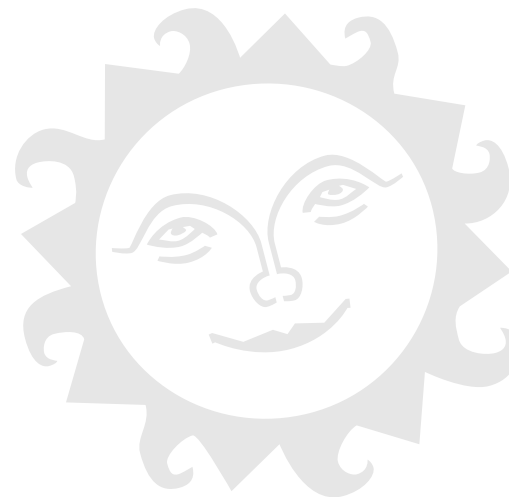
lows dipping into the low 20s. While snow cover is not guaranteed in the winter, you should be prepared for frozen precipitation during your stay. Spring comes late with daytime temperatures not reaching the 60s until May.

Getting to the High Country

✈ By Air: The **Asheville Regional Airport**, ☎ (828) 684-2226, www.flyavl.com, features nonstop flights to and from six major airports on various commuter airlines, plus USAirways. Rental cars and ground transportation are available; the airport is roughly 100 miles from Boone, about a 2.5-hour drive. ♦ An easier and slightly shorter drive (only two hours) is from **Charlotte Douglas International Airport**, ☎ (704) 359-4013, www.flycdia.com, which is served by all major airlines and rental car companies.

🚗 By Car: **From Atlanta**, take Interstate 85 north to Spartanburg, SC, where you take Interstate 26 west to Route 74. Follow Route 74 east to Route 221 north into Linville, where you take Route 105 north to Boone. Expect a five-hour drive. **From Charlotte**, take Interstate 85 south to Route 321 north into Blowing Rock and Boone. Expect a two-hour drive. **From Raleigh**, take Interstate 40 west to Winston-Salem and then Route 421 north to Boone. Expect a 3.5-hour drive.

Play Hard



Wide Open

Thank your lucky stars if you plan to hike, bike, paddle, ski, swim, climb, or ride horses in the High Country; numerous outdoor playgrounds exist to pursue these and many other adventurous sports. The following are the area's major, multi-sport public lands.

The 505,000-acre **Pisgah National Forest** stretches from south of Asheville to the High Country. To manage this vast wilderness, the National Forest Service divided the land into three "bite-sized" ranger districts, two of which are at your doorstep. The **Grandfather Ranger District**, 109 East Lawing Lane, Nebo, (828) 652-2144, encompasses 189,000 acres of some of the East Coast's most-scenic and rugged terrain, particularly in **Linville Gorge**, the deepest gorge east of the Mississippi River. Formed by the scouring action of the **Linville River**, the gorge measures 12 miles long with sides that tower more than 1,900 feet above the river. The federally protected, 12,000-acre **Linville Gorge Wilderness Area** has nearly 40 miles of hiking trails along the steep walls of the gorge and

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Linville Gorge

Who was Linville?

Linville, Linville Falls, Linville Gorge...the High Country pays hefty tribute to William Linville, one of its earliest white explorers. Linville and his family settled the area in the mid 18th Century, though not to the pleasure of the Cherokee. The tribe attacked William and his son, John, in 1766 in the gorge that bears his name. William died but John survived.

down to the Linville River below. The eastern wall of the gorge, formed by Jonas Ridge, is more popular, and hikers and climbers go bananas over the various trails and rock formations at **Table Rock**. To reach Table Rock Picnic Area, exit the Blue Ridge Parkway at Milepost 312 and take Route 181 south. At the intersection with Route 183, continue south on Route 181 three miles to Gingercake Road/Forest Road 210. Turn right and keep to the left at the first fork through the Gingercake Acres neighborhood. Forest Road 210 turns to gravel and continues to an intersection with Forest Road 99, where you turn right to reach Table Rock.

Other outdoor playgrounds in the Grandfather Ranger District include **Wilson Creek Wilderness Area**, a 5,000-acre spread of rugged land with numerous streamside trails. **Wilson Creek**, which forms on the flanks of Calloway Peak (the highest peak on Grandfather Mountain), is a National Wild and Scenic River that flows 23 miles through a narrow, rocky valley to the Johns River in Caldwell County. Paddlers

are awed by the spring flows on Wilson Creek, while hikers and mountain bikers are drawn to the more than 75 miles of backcountry trails. This is also a popular fishing area. There is a new visitor center, (828) 759-0005, located on Brown Mountain Beach Road in Collettsville. The center is closed in winter.

The **Appalachian District's Toecane Ranger Station**, Route 19-East Bypass, Burnsville, (828) 682-6146, oversees more than 75,000 acres of national forest land along the Tennessee

State line. Much of this district, including 6,684-foot **Mount Mitchell**—the highest peak east of the Mississippi—is profiled in the Asheville chapter, but 6,285-foot **Roan Mountain** is closer to the High Country than to Asheville. This stunning, bald ridgeline straddles Tennessee. In fact, **Roan Mountain State Park**, 1-800-250-8620, is located on Route



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The balds on Roan Mountain

143 in Tennessee. The area is popular with hikers, cyclists, and cross-country skiers. The 2,100-mile **Appalachian Trail** passes over the mountain. To reach Roan Mountain, take Route 194 west from Boone to Banner Elk, and then Route 19E north into Tennessee, where you'll turn left on Route 143 to Roan Mountain. (You can also reach the mountain by taking Route 261 north from Bakersville, and then Route 143 north.)

Several parks along the **Blue Ridge Parkway** offer multi-sport adventures. **Moses H. Cone Memorial Park** (Milepost 294) has 3,500 acres of land and more than 26 miles of historic carriage roads for hiking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing. **Julian Price Memorial Park** (Milepost 297) features 4,300 acres at the base of Grandfather Mountain, with miles of hiking trails, and paddling opportunities on 47-acre Julian Price Lake. The 440-acre **Linville Falls Recreation Area** has a visitor center located on an access road off Milepost 316 with restrooms, a small gift shop, and a large map outlining three hiking trails that lead to views of the spectacular upper and lower waterfalls. North from Blowing Rock on the parkway between Mileposts 238 and 244, **Doughton Park** is a 7,000-acre spread of pastures, valleys, and ridgelines with more than 30 miles of trails for hikers and several creeks popular with anglers. There are also horseback trails in the park.

The 1,500 acres of rugged, rural land in the **New River State Park**, Wagoner Access Road, Jefferson, (336) 982-2587, surround the New River, which is actually the world's second-oldest river. (Egypt's Nile River is older.) There are hiking trails, but the big sports are paddling, tubing, swimming, and fishing in the gentle current. To reach the park, take Route 221 north through Jefferson to Route 88, onto which you turn right to travel east. Cross the New River and turn left on Wagoner Access Road (State Road 1590), which leads to the park office.

Mount Jefferson State Natural Area, State Road 1152, Jefferson, (336) 246-9653, is a 541-acre park dominated by Mount Jefferson, which rises more than 1,600 feet above the surrounding land. Mount Jefferson provides hikers, cyclists, and cross-country skiers a serene place to catch sunsets from the summit, where unobstructed views stretch across rural pastures, woods, and distant mountains. To reach the park, take Route 221 north to West Jefferson. After passing State Road 163 on the right, watch for the park sign on the right. Turn right onto Mount Jefferson State Park Road (State Road 1152) and continue 1.5 miles to the park entrance.



Mose H. Cone Memorial Park

The Color Purple
 Each spring, more than 600 acres of Catawba rhododendron, the largest patch of wild rhododendron in the world, explode in purple on Roan Mountain. The one-mile **Roan Mountain Gardens Trail** winds through the colorful plants.

Dayhiking



The High Country is a hiker's paradise. With so many great walks and hikes in every direction, you can't travel far without stumbling across a foot path.

Blue Ridge Parkway Trails

◆ Some of the easiest trails to reach from Boone and Blowing Rock are just off the Blue Ridge Parkway. While some of these hikes are in the Pisgah National Forest, they're listed here because the trailheads are in parking areas on the roadway. The following is just a sampling of trails that intersect with the parkway.

◆ Just south of Blowing Rock at Milepost 294, the **Moses H. Cone Memorial Park** is an excellent place to combine sightseeing with an easy hike along more than 25 miles of carriage roads. The carriage paths are multi-use—hikers, cross-country skiers, and horseback riders use them—and are wide enough for pleasant side-by-side walking. The paths wind through the estate's 3,500 acres of pastures, woods, and mountain ridges. Optimum times to visit are late spring and early summer, when the multitude of mountain laurel and rhododendron blooms with pink and purple flowers. Bring a picnic; the scenic land begs for a blanket. Park at the Moses H. Cone Manor and pick up the free trail map from the park ranger information desk inside.

◆ While the trail map is sufficient to create a full day's worth of loops within the park, a recommended hike is the six-mile out-and-back **Duncan Carriage Trail** down to Bass Lake. The mileage includes a 0.8-mile loop around picturesque Bass Lake, a 22-acre pond at the bottom of the 2.5-mile descent from Cone Manor. From the lake, you can look across the expansive pastures to the white, 20-room house high above. To begin the hike from the manor's front porch, turn right (facing downhill) on the paved trail and follow it

to the signed intersection where you keep to the left on the dirt-and-rock path. Loop around Bass Lake and then retrace your steps to the parking area. The return trip is uphill; gauge your energy level before descending the entire way. To hike this trail going up for the first half, you can park at the **Bass Lake**

The Tanawha Trail

The 13.5-mile **Tanawha Trail**, which parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway from Price Lake to Beacon Heights (Milepost 304), provides excellent out-and-back hiking options from points along the parkway. "Tanawha" is Cherokee for "fabulous hawk," which is what the Native Americans called Grandfather Mountain. For a short, strenuous workout with excellent views, park at Wilson Creek Overlook near Milepost 303 and hike the Tanawha to Raven Rocks Overlook and back. Signs with feather icons show the way.



Entrance to the park, accessed off Route 221, roughly a mile south of Blowing Rock.

◆ On the opposite side of the Blue Ridge Parkway from Cone Manor, the three-mile **Flat Top Mountain** hike climbs past the Cone Family Cemetery to the summit of 4,558-foot Flat Top Mountain, where a lookout tower provides tremendous views of the surrounding mountains. To start, follow the road from Cone Manor past the stables to the parkway underpass. Turn right beyond the underpass and follow the carriage path through the pasture. Roughly a mile into the hike, you'll come across a short trail on the left that leads to the Cone Cemetery. The climb continues to the summit and the lookout tower that Moses Cone built for his wife's enjoyment. Retrace your steps to the car.

◆ The 4,300-acre **Julian Price Memorial Park** (Milepost 297) has a number of excellent hiking trails, ranging in difficulty from easy to strenuous. Pick up a free trail map from the ranger desk at Cone Manor (Milepost 294). The 2.5-mile **Price Lake Loop** is an easy, well-graded path around Price Lake that crosses several streams as it winds through an oak and pine forest. Rhododendron and mountain laurel line portions of the path, which is damp in places near the lake. ◆ From the Sim's Pond parking area (Milepost 296), the **Green Knob Trail** is a moderately strenuous, 2.3-mile loop that follows Sim's Creek, climbs through a pasture, and ascends 3,920-foot Green Knob. Fine views of Grandfather Mountain and Price Lake open up en route. After reaching the summit of Green Knob, continue the loop by descending a steep hill back to the parking area.

◆ The 5.5-mile **Boone Fork Trail** is a moderately strenuous loop that serves up generous helpings of open pastures, dense woods, rock outcroppings, and clear mountain streams. The trail, which starts at the Price Park picnic area (Milepost 296), ambles along Boone Fork, named for Jesse Boone (Daniel's nephew who settled here in the early 19th Century). Set out across the footbridge over the picturesque creek to the trail map sign, and head left on the trail for a counter-clockwise loop. The trail climbs through the woods to the Price Park Campground and continues to a fork where the Tanawha Trail breaks to the left. Bear right at all trail intersections to close the loop and to return to the parking area. En route, you'll cross several streams as you climb toward a rocky area that's great for a picnic.

◆ Further south on the Blue Ridge Parkway at Milepost 316, the **Linville Falls Recreation Area** offers a few short but rewarding hikes to outstanding views of Linville Falls. From the visitor center, the **Erwins View Trail** (a.k.a. the Linville Falls Trail) is a moderate 0.8-mile climb to Erwin's View. En route, you pass four overlooks. A half-mile up the trail, **Upper Falls Overlook** offers a view of the wide, gentle upper falls. After the Upper Falls, the Linville River fills a broad pool before narrowing into a rocky chute and dropping out of sight. Two-tenths of a mile further is the second overlook, **Chimney View**, where you catch the first glimpse of the 45-foot lower falls. This is a good spot to photograph both the upper and lower falls. The Erwins View Trail con-





Linville Falls

Some Grand Hikes

Grandfather Mountain, 2050 Blowing Rock Highway, Linville, ☎ (828) 733-2013 or 1-800-468-7325, www.grandfather.com, maintains 12 miles of hiking trails that wind



through the 3,000-acre, privately owned nature preserve. Several begin at the mountain's base on the Blue Ridge Parkway and climb to the summit of 5,964-foot Calloway Peak, the highest peak in the Blue Ridge Range. For

a classic day hike—one guaranteed to burn off breakfast—try the 5.2-mile, out-and-back hike on the **Daniel Boone Scout Trail** to Calloway Peak. This path rises 2,000 feet over 2.6 miles. Near the top, ladders and metal rungs help hikers make it to the rocky summit. Park at Boone Fork Parking Area (Milepost 300) and follow the Tanawha Trail left for the trailhead. You'll need to purchase a \$6 permit, available from Footsloggers in Boone or Blowing Rock (see *Local Outdoor Advice*) or from Grandfather Mountain (take Route 221 one mile south from Milepost 305). The permit comes with a map detailing the park's other trails. If you visit Grandfather Mountain, your admission is good for hiking the trails.

tinues to a fork to the left of which **Erwins View** provides a long-range vista of the falls and of Linville Gorge. To the right, **Gorge View Overlook** features a spectacular view of the Linville River flowing through Linville Gorge. ♦ You can also hike the one-mile **Plunge Basin Overlook Trail** and the 1.4-mile **Linville Gorge Trail**, which leads to the base of the falls. Both trails start on the opposite side of the Linville River from the visitor center.

♦ North of Blowing Rock, **E.B. Jeffress Park**, BRP Milepost 272, has two short hiking trails: the 1.2-mile **Cascades Nature Trail**, a self-guiding loop from the parking area through a hardwood forest to a waterfall on Falls Creek (exercise caution on the rocks at the top of the waterfall); and the short **Tompkins Knob Trail**, a half-mile loop from the parking area that encircles the historic, mid-19th-century Cool Spring Baptist Church. This log-constructed, open-air church was the scene of many 19th- and early 20th-century revivals, and the nearby Jesse Brown Cabin (circa 1850) was where the traveling evangelists would sleep.

♦ **Doughton Park**, between Mileposts 238 and 244, has more than 30 miles of trails through its 7,000 acres. This area was home to the Brinegar family in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, until the National Park Service acquired the land for the parkway. Their cabin remains and is popular with summer visitors who stop to see old hand-loom weaving demonstrations. There are several long trails within the park, including the strenuous 4.2-mile **Cedar Ridge Trail** and the moderate 7.5-mile **Bluff Mountain Trail**, both of which depart from the parking area. Also in the park: the five-mile **Flat Rock Ridge Trail**, the 3.3-mile **Basin Cove Trail**, and the 6.5-mile **Grassy Gap Fire Road Trail**.

Pisgah National Forest: Grandfather District

♦ The nearly 40 miles of trails in the **Linville Gorge Wilderness Area** wind through pure, rugged wilderness. There are good hiking trails on both the eastern and western rims of the gorge, as well as straight up the canyon along the Linville River. If you're up for a strenuous challenge, head to the Table Rock Picnic Area (see *Wide Open* for directions) and set out on the 5.6-mile **Shortoff Mountain Trail**. This rugged path passes the Chimneys, a popular rock-climbing area, and then winds through dense laurel and rhododendron before reaching a ridge-line with expansive views. The trail drops steeply before entering the woods where it climbs again. Eventually, you'll reach rocky Shortoff Mountain, where you can look out across Linville Gorge and see Table Rock Mountain, your starting point, in the distance. To complete the 11.2-mile hike, retrace your steps. ♦ From the same picnic area, the two-mile, out-and-back **Table Rock Trail** to the summit of 3,909-foot Table Rock Mountain rewards you with outstanding 360-degree views of Linville Gorge. ♦ Also at the Table Rock Picnic Area, the 1.5-mile **Table Rock Loop Trail** is a moderate hike around Table Rock.

♦ The easiest trail into the gorge from the eastern rim is the **Spence Ridge Trail**, which departs from a parking area off Forest Road 210. This 1.7-mile trail descends steeply to the Linville River and the intersection with the **Linville Gorge Trail**, an 11.5-mile path that extends the length of the gorge. (The trail is on the far side of the river, so you'll have to wade across to hike it.) After hiking down and exploring the river's edge, retrace your steps to the car. To reach the Spence Ridge trailhead, follow directions to Table Rock (*Wide Open*) but instead of driving eight miles on Forest Road 210, drive roughly four miles to the parking areas on both sides of the road.

♦ **Wilson Creek Wilderness Area**, with its 75 miles of trails, is another excellent place to hike within the Grandfather District. While most trails have trailhead signs, few are blazed throughout their length, so be sure to travel with a map and compass as you head into this wild and scenic watershed. You'll have little trouble following the popular, six-mile **Wilson Creek Trail** as it winds through Wilson Creek Gorge with sheer rock cliffs high above. When it's hot, this is an excellent hike because of the many swimming holes along its length. The trailhead is on Route 90 north of Edgemont on the left. There's a signed parking area from which you set out.



Malcolm Campbell

The Hiker's Bible

Planning to do a lot of hiking in North Carolina? Pick up the definitive state hiking guide, **North Carolina Hiking Trails** by Allen de Hart (AMC Books). This \$18.95 book is available in local bookshops.

◆ Other popular trails in the Wilson Creek Wilderness Area include the three-mile **Lost Cove Trail** and the 6.5-mile **Harper Creek Trail** to Harper Creek Falls. The best way to hike these and other trails here is to pick up a free map from the **Wilson Creek Wilderness Area Visitor Center**, (828) 759-0005, located on Brown Mountain Beach Road in Collettsville. (Closed in the winter.) You can also get trail information from any of the Pisgah National Forest ranger districts listed under *Local Outdoor Advice*.

Pisgah National Forest: Appalachian District, Toecane Ranger Station

◆ The Pisgah National Forest's Appalachian District borders Tennessee. Nowhere in the district is the hiking as scenic as it is on Roan Mountain, especially during late spring/early summer when the mountain laurel and rhododendron bloom. Located 45 minutes from Boone (see *Wide Open* for directions), **Roan Mountain** and the **Roan Mountain Highlands** feature several trails across the balds and through rhododendron patches. The 2,100-mile **Appalachian Trail** passes directly over the 6,285-foot summit and makes for outstanding out-and-back hikes from the parking area. (The trail south along the ridgeline into North Carolina serves up one expansive view after another.) ◆ For an easy stroll from the parking area, try the **Roan Mountain Gardens Trail**, a one-mile, partly paved loop through the rhododendron gardens. ◆ From the summit of Roan Mountain, the three-mile **Cloudland Trail** follows the crest of the mountain past the site of the Cloudland Hotel, which was built near the summit in 1885. The building fell into disrepair, and all that remains are a few scattered rocks from the foundation.

A Hike from Town

Need a break from shopping in Blowing Rock? Hit the village's **Glen Burney Trail**, a scenic, 1.6-mile path from Annie Cannon Park through the woods to Glen Mary Falls, a 55-foot waterfall. The trail also passes two smaller waterfalls—the Cascades and Glen Burney Falls—during its steep descent beside New Year's Creek. (The trail drops 800 vertical feet into the Johns River Gorge.) From Glen Mary Falls, retrace your steps to complete the 3.2-mile hike. To reach the trailhead from Main Street, take Laurel Lane to the parking area on the left just past the four-way stop.



Other Hiking

◆ In the northern High Country, **Mount Jefferson State Natural Area**, State Road 1152, Jefferson, (336) 246-9653, has two scenic trails worth exploring. The 0.3-mile **Summit Trail** departs from the parking area and ascends to the summit of 4,684-foot Mount Jefferson. From the summit, you can connect with the 1.1-mile **Rhododendron Trail**, a self-guiding trail with numbered stations highlighting various points of interest. (Pamphlets at the trailhead provide descriptions corresponding to the station numbers.) The loop begins at the summit and stretches along a ridge to Luther Rock, a rock outcropping with spectacular views of neighboring valleys and peaks. The trail then loops to return to the summit.

Mountain Biking



Mountain biking options on public land in the High Country range from forest roads to singletrack trails, all sharing a common denominator: They are rarely flat. In addition to trails on public land, there are popular places to ride on private land, but guidebooks generally do not mention them due to liability issues. So if the following sampling of rides fails to satisfy, ask the gear heads at the local bike shops for more options.

◆ The **Pisgah National Forest** offers a number of great rides on forest roads, especially in the **Linville Gorge Wilderness Area**. Bikes are not allowed within the gorge itself. No matter: The forest roads are so steep in places that you'll get as much of a workout as you would on many singletrack trails. The long, winding forest roads on the eastern side of the gorge leading to the **Table Rock Picnic Area** are perfect for non-technical mountain biking. (See directions in *Wide Open*.) Except for occasional dust storms kicked up by passing motorists, the ride on **Forest Roads 210** and **99** through the forest along Jonas Ridge is pure pleasure. Gingercake Acres Road (Forest Road 210) is paved at first, then turns to gravel and dirt for eight miles to the intersection with Forest Road 99. Park at any of the small parking areas along Forest Road 210 and start pedaling. The final stretch on Forest Road 99 to the Table Rock Picnic Area is paved but steep. (You'll likely have to walk.) This is an excellent place to lock your bikes and hike the short distance to the summit of Table Rock for a picnic.

◆ On Linville Gorge's western side, the eight-mile **Wiseman's View Ride** follows the Kistler Memorial Highway (a.k.a. Old Highway 105) from Route 183 in Linville Falls to this popular overlook. It's roughly four miles to the turn-off on the left to Wiseman's View, where the observation area features a great view across the gorge to Hawksbill and Table Rock mountains. Pack snacks and plenty of water. The ride begins at the Linville Falls parking area, located roughly a mile south of Linville Falls on Route 183.

◆ If you had two helpings of Wheaties for breakfast and you're up for an epic ride, then add another 12 miles to the Wiseman's View Ride by continuing six miles on Kistler Memorial Highway to Pinnacle Rocks Overlook. The 20-mile **Pinnacle Rocks Ride** serves up the same fare—grueling climbs, white-knuckle descents, and stunning views—but in super-sized portions. At the midway point, the observation platform looks out over Linville Gorge and the northern tip of Lake James. You'll see Table Rock, Hawksbill, and Shortoff mountains on the far side of the gorge.

◆ The 5,000-acre **Wilson Creek Wilderness Area** is increasingly popular with



Sugar Mountain Resort, Inc.

The Long & Winding (Forest) Road

Perfect for non-technical mountain biking, **Kistler Memorial Highway** departs from Route 183 in Linville Falls and skirts the western rim of Linville Gorge. "Highway" may be one of the biggest misnomers this side of the Mississippi. This is a long, winding, dirt and gravel forest road, where the hills are strenuous but the views sublime.



mountain bikers drawn to the rugged beauty of the watershed and its challenging rides. Trails open to mountain bikes include **Thorps Creek Trail**, which can be combined with **Schoolhouse Ridge Trail** to create a six-mile loop. The loop begins at the Mortimer Campground & Recreation Area. To get there from Linville, take Roseboro Road (State Road 1511) south. At 1.5 miles, the paved road turns to dirt (after passing beneath the Blue Ridge Parkway). Continue roughly nine miles to the T-intersection with State Road 90. Turn right and drive two miles to the campground area. The singletrack trail sets out from the campground beside Thorps Creek and ascends 2.4 miles to the creek's headwaters at Wilson Ridge. Bear left at each intersection to connect with Schoolhouse Ridge Trail and to return to the campground. ♦ Also in Wilson Creek, the six-mile **Greentown Trail** makes for an excellent 12-mile bike ride along an old logging road. The trail sets out through an apple orchard and descends to Upper Creek before riding beside Burnthouse Branch to Forest Road 198. Turn around here to retrace your route and complete the ride. To reach the trailhead, take Route 181 south nine miles from Pineola to the Greentown Trail parking area.

♦ Boone's **Greenway Trail** leaves the Watauga County Recreation Complex and winds six miles through the countryside, passing through thick stands of rhododendron and crossing the South Fork of the New River several times on wooden bridges. The six-mile ride traverses gravel and dirt surfaces at an easy grade, so it's perfect for a first-time mountain biker. To get to the trail, travel a half-mile south on Route 221 in Boone from the intersection of Routes 221 and 321. Turn left onto State Farm Road and drive one mile to the recreation complex.



Gnarly singletrack

Shrinking Violets Need Not Apply

Sugar Mountain Resort off of Route 194 in Banner Elk, ☎ (828) 898-4521, flips the switch on the Gray chairlift for mountain bikers on weekends, July–September, providing access to more than 20 miles of singletrack and doubletrack trails. The views from the mountain are tremendous, but keep your eyes on the trail during the screaming descents. (Not one of which is officially sanctioned by the Association of Shrinking Violets.) Lift tickets run \$20 for an all-day pass. Forgo the lift access and you can ride the trails for free. Similarly, you can ride more than 40 miles of trails for free on nearby **Beech Mountain**, but no lift service is offered. For a trail map, visit Beech Mountain Sports listed under “Rentals.”



Sugar Mountain Resort, Inc.

Rentals

The following businesses rent mountain bikes; some offer guided mountain-bike tours. **Beech Mountain Sports**, 325 Beech Mountain Parkway, ☎ (828) 387-2373, www.beechmountainsports.com; ♦ **Boone Bike & Touring**, 899 Blowing Rock Road, Boone, ☎ (828) 262-5750; ♦ **High Mountain Expeditions**, 915 Main Street, Blowing Rock, ☎ (828) 295-4200 or 1-800-262-9036, www.highmountainexpeditions.com; ♦ **Ski Country Sports**, Route 184 (across from Sugar Mountain), Banner Elk, ☎ (828) 898-9786 or 1-800-528-3874, www.skicountrysports.com; ♦ **Wahoo's Adventures**, Route 321 one mile south of Boone, ☎ (828) 262-5774 or 1-800-444-7238, www.wahoosadventures.com; ♦ **Magic Cycles**, 140 South Depot Street, #2, Boone, ☎ (828) 265-2211, www.magiccycles.com, does not rent bikes but welcomes cyclists for free route suggestions.

♦ For an easy, eight-mile ride on a flat dirt road, head to the village of Valle Crucis, north of Boone on Route 194, to ride the **Watauga River Road**. This pleasant route beside the beautiful Watauga River includes rolling pastures with weathered barns against a mountainous backdrop. To get underway, take Route 194 a quarter-mile north of the Mast General Store to Watauga Road on the left. Park at the bridge on Watauga Road and pedal four miles to the road's junction with Route 321. Turn around and retrace your route.

Road Biking

Where did Lance Armstrong find the will—and the wind—to recover from cancer and return to cycling to win the Tour de France five times in a row? Right here in North Carolina's High Country. Long-known to local and regional cyclists as one of the best places to ride, word spread worldwide when Armstrong praised the mountains around Boone in his memoir *It's Not About the Bike*. Here hundreds of miles of paved roads wind through stunning mountain scenery. The region has become so popular with cyclists that most local drivers know to expect them on the roads; however, tourists flock to the area in the summer and their driving can be hazardous. Be prudent and ride defensively at all times.

♦ So, where to ride? The **Blue Ridge Parkway** is an obvious route of choice. An officially designated bicycling route, the BRP combines pristine mountain scenery with slow-moving traffic. From



Boone CVB

Blowing Rock, you can travel north or south on the parkway and easily track your mileage with the highly visible mileposts. The ride north toward **Doughton Park** has fewer popular stops than the ride south toward **Linville Falls**, which can be to a cyclist's advantage. Regardless, the parkway is punishing in either direction with long climbs, screaming descents, and weather that changes by the hour. Parkway regulations require that cyclists have a light or reflector visible at least 500 feet to the front and a red light or reflector visible at least 200 feet to the rear during periods of low visibility, between the hours of sunset and sunrise, and while traveling through a tunnel.



NC Division of Tourism

◆ You can ride the 40-mile **Parkway Loop** from Blowing Rock by taking the Blue Ridge Parkway south to Milepost 305, where you pick up Route 221 to ride north back to Blowing Rock. This ride includes the Linn Cove Viaduct, a concrete bridge that snakes around Grandfather Mountain. Built from the top down to minimize impact on the

mountain, the viaduct is an awesome architectural wonder. The open views from the viaduct are sublime and give cyclists the sensation of pedaling through air.

◆ The **Todd to Fleetwood Ride** is unique because it's the only long, flat, paved ride in the area. This gorgeous 10-mile stretch on Railroad Grade Road beside the New River is ideal for a day when you want to be outdoors but don't want to muster the energy for a Lance-attack on some unsuspecting mountain. The rural scenery is of Christmas-tree farms, woods, and fields. To reach the ride's start, take Route 194 roughly 10 miles from Boone to the village of Todd, where you turn right onto Railroad Grade Road. Leave your car at

the park across from the Todd General Store.

◆ Also, check out **Route 194** west from Valle Crucis through Banner Elk; **Route 221** north from Blowing Rock; **Route 105** from Boone to Valle Crucis; and **Old Route 421** from Sugar Grove to Zionville.

This Road's a Beech

Serious cyclists, or those hoping to repeat Lance Armstrong's "I-found-myself-again-on-Beech-Mountain" ride, can tackle **Route 184** for the punishing 3.5-mile climb up the mountain to the Town of Beech Mountain. (At 5,085 feet, it's the highest town in the Eastern United States.) Park in Banner Elk, and ride Route 194 north to Route 184 on the right. Good luck.

Padding



Several rivers in and near North Carolina's High Country promise wet and wild good times. While experienced paddlers bring their own boats to hit the rapids of Wilson Creek and the Watauga River or the gentle waters of the New River, the uninitiated will be glad to know that numerous paddling outfitters offer expeditions ranging from gentle inner-tube floats to frothy whitewater rafting trips on the following major waterways.



Bob DeCamara

◆ Despite its name, the **New River** is believed to be the second-oldest river in the world behind the Nile. (Thomas Jefferson's dad, Peter, named the river by default: "Hey we found a new river!") Another account suggests the elder Jefferson named it for a Mr. New, who drowned in it.) More than 300 million years old, this gentle, wide river has its headwaters near Blowing Rock. Two forks—the North and the South—meet near the Virginia State line and continue north into Virginia and West Virginia. Twenty-six miles of the **South Fork** in Ashe and Alleghany counties make up the **New River State Park**, Wagoner Access Road, Jefferson, (336) 982-2587. This National Wild and Scenic River is popular with canoeists, beginner kayakers, and folks interested in an easy inner-tube float. See *Wide Open* for directions to the park.

◆ The **Watauga River** forms on Grandfather Mountain and flows through the High Country, gently at first with Class I and II rapids near Valle Crucis, and then much more aggressively downriver as it enters Watauga Gorge, a six-mile, rocky chute with high canyon walls. With names like *Hydro*, *Knuckles*, *Heavy Water*, and *Edge of the World* (a 10-foot waterfall), these Class IV–V rapids have created their own mythology. The upper section around Valle Crucis is popular with canoeists, beginner kayakers, and folks floating in tubes, while the Watauga Gorge is the domain of expert kayakers, white-water canoeists, and guide services running rafting tours. The river flows into Tennessee and the manmade Watauga Lake. The river is dam controlled, and the rafting season runs from Memorial

Padding Outfitters

Edge Of The World Outfitters, Route 184 in downtown Banner Elk, ☎ (828) 898-9550 or 1-800-789-3343, www.edgeoworld.com; ◆ **High Mountain Expeditions**, 915 Main Street, Blowing Rock, ☎ (828) 295-4200 or 1-800-262-9036, www.highmountainexpeditions.com; ◆ **New River Outfitters**, 10725 Route 221, Jefferson, ☎ (336) 982-9192 or 1-800-982-9190, www.canoethenew.com; ◆ **Wahoo's Adventures**, Route 321 one mile south of Boone, ☎ (828) 262-5774 or 1-800-444-7238, www.wahoosadventures.com; ◆ **Zaloo's Canoes**, 3874 Route 16 South, Jefferson, ☎ (336) 246-3066 or 1-800-535-4027, www.zaloos.com.



Day-Labor Day. Stop by any of the paddling outfitters for directions to put-ins and take-outs.

◆ **Wilson Creek** flows 23 miles from its headwaters on Grandfather Mountain to the Johns River in Catawba County. The natural-flowing National Wild and Scenic River has two sections popular with paddlers in the spring, when water levels are highest. The first is from Mortimer Recreation Area in the Pisgah National Forest to the forest's outer boundary, where primarily Class II rapids attract beginner white-water paddlers. The section of river from Wilson Creek Gorge to Brown Mountain

Beach Road gets downright freaky, especially through the 2.5-mile gorge, where Class III, IV, and V rapids (some with ominous names like *Boat Buster* and *Thunderhole*) await. Stop by any of the paddling outfitters for directions to put-ins and take-outs.

◆ Scenic flatwater paddling options in the area include 47-acre **Price Lake** in Julian Price Park, BRP Milepost 297. You can rent canoes by the hour from the campground in the summer. ◆ Though it's located in Tennessee, **Watauga Lake** is easily accessible from Boone (45 minutes west on Route 321) and is ideal for stunning flatwater canoeing. This pristine lake sits at an elevation of 2,000 feet, covers 6,430 acres, and has more than 100 miles of shoreline. Most recreational facilities for renting canoes and other watercraft are located on Route 321 along the lake's southern shores.

Rock Climbing



The High Country offers some of the best climbing faces in the Southeast, most of which are in the **Linville Gorge Wilderness Area**. (Most climbing routes in Linville Gorge are closed from January 15–August 15 to protect peregrine-falcon nesting sites.) The major action goes down (if you're rappelling) or up (if you're climbing) along **Jonas Ridge**, which forms the gorge's eastern rim. From the Table Rock picnic area (see *Wide Open* for directions), climbers have access to nearly 100 traditional climbing routes of varying difficulties.

Rock Ratings

The **Yosemite Decimal System** is the primary system for rating the difficulty of climbing routes. Any rating beginning with the number five denotes a free climb and the numbers following the decimal denote difficulty. A rough breakdown: 5.0 to 5.4 is easy; 5.5 to 5.8 is intermediate; 5.9–5.10 is advanced; and 5.11 and above is expert.

◆ The primary climbing face for beginners on **Table Rock Mountain** is the **East Face**, where several "easier" routes to the summit make fine practice grounds. If you're just learning the sport, chances are your guide will lead you up *The Cave Route 5.4* or *Jim Dandy 5.4*, which are the least-challenging climbs on the mountain. In total, there are 54 climbing routes on Table Rock.

◆ As its name suggests, **Little Table Rock** is smaller than Table Rock. But the cliffs on this face present nine good climbing routes, primarily for intermediate to advanced climbers. Two of the most challenging climbs are *League of Gentleman 5.11a* and *License to Dog 5.11a*.

◆ **The Devil's Cellar** is a deep chasm formed by Table Rock and a huge stone buttress. There are nine routes for beginner to advanced climbers. ◆ Other climbing areas in Linville Gorge are the **Amphitheater**, where you'll find 38 routes, as well as the **Mummy Buttress**, a monolith with two of the gorge's most popular climbs: *The Mummy 5.5* and *The Daddy 5.6*; the **North Carolina Wall** with 33 climbing routes; **Shortoff Mountain** with 57 climbing routes; and the 43 routes on **Hawksbill Mountain**.



For a Good Climb, Call...

...a High-Country guide service. Rock climbing doesn't afford many second chances if you make a big mistake, so unless you're a seasoned climber, join one of the region's outfitters. Each employs expert guides practiced in safe-climbing techniques. Some of the better known outfits: ◆ **Edge Of The World Outfitters**, Route 184 in downtown Banner Elk, ☎ (828) 898-9550, www.edgeoworld.com; ◆ **High Mountain Expeditions**, 915 Main Street, Blowing Rock, ☎ (828) 295-4200, www.highmountain-expeditions.com; and ◆ **Wahoo's Adventures**, Route 321 one mile south of Boone, ☎ (828) 262-5774, www.wahoosadventures.com. ◆ For climbing practice or instruction, head to **Footsloggers**, 139 South Depot Street, Boone, ☎ (828) 262-5111, www.footsloggers.com, where you can learn the basics on their 35-foot climbing tower.

Fly Fishing

Rules to Fish By

Unless you want to meet the local game warden on less-than-ideal terms, you'll need a state fishing license to fish 'round here. To order one over the phone with a credit card, call the **North Carolina Wildlife Resources Division**, ☎ 1-888-248-6834, or log onto www.ncwildlife.org, where you'll find retailers authorized to sell licenses, as well as information on state fishing regulations, including catch limits and release regulations for specific rivers.



Welcome to Trout Country, where rainbow, brown, and brook trout populate local rivers and streams. Popular fishing waters include the **North Toe**, **South Toe**, **Linville**, and **Watauga rivers**, along with the **North Fork of the New River**. Dozens of creeks throughout Ashe, Avery, Alleghany, and Watauga counties draw anglers as well, including the river-curiously-called-a-creek **Wilson Creek**. Also within the Wilson Creek Wilderness Area are four major trout creeks—**Andrews**, **Lost Cove**, **North Harper**, and **South Harper**—each teeming with wily ones

awaiting just the right fly. In general, rainbow and brown trout are found throughout the region; brook trout are primarily found at higher elevations.

◆ Such an abundance of rivers and streams begs for the services of a guide who knows the waters. Fortunately, fly shops and guide services are much easier to find than are the easily spooked brook trout. The major, full-service fly shops carry equipment, apparel, and hundreds of flies. Other services include fly-fishing instruction and guided trips, ranging from half- and full-day wading trips to full-day float trips. Full-service outfitters include Boone's **Appalachian Angler**, 174 Old Shulls Mill Road, (828) 963-8383, www.appalachianangler.com; and ◆ the two locations of Orvis-endorsed **Foscoe Fishing Company & Outfitters**, www.foscoefishing.com, 150 Sunset Drive, Blowing Rock, (828) 295-7636 and Shoppes at Tynecastle, 4533 Tynecastle Highway, Banner Elk, (828) 898-7555.

Horseback Riding



Located just outside of Blowing Rock, **Blowing Rock Equestrian Preserve**, 2880 Laurel Lane, (828) 295-4700, offers mountain trail rides, April–November, along the 26 miles of carriage trails in Moses H. Cone Memorial Park. ◆ **The Chadi Farm**, Route 194, Valle Crucis, (828) 963-5399, has thirty acres lined with equestrian trails that, in the summer, fill with young riders attending the Mountain Riding Academy. The farm offers trail rides exploring the private property, which includes a mountain with excellent summit views of Calloway Peak and Table Rock. ◆ **Banner Elk Stables**, 796 Shomaker Road, off Route 194, Banner Elk, (828) 898-5424, offers guided trail rides, ranging from one hour to overnight trips. Rides are offered year-round.



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Rainy Day Workout



Westglow Spa, 2845 Route 221 South, Blowing Rock, (828) 295-4463 or 1-800-562-0807, www.westglow.com, features a wide range of cardiovascular machines, free weights, and Cybex weight-training equipment. A variety of aerobics classes is also offered. When you're done, take a dip in the indoor pool or hit the whirlpools or sauna. Nominal day-use fee.

◆ **The Inn at Yonahlossee**, 226 Oakley Green, Boone, (828) 963-6400 or 1-800-962-1986, www.yonahlossee.com, has two fitness centers, one in the inn and the other at the resort's indoor tennis facility. The inn's facility is newer, yet both feature cardiovascular equipment (treadmills, elliptical cross trainers, stationary bikes), circuit weight-training equipment, and free weights. The tennis facility also has a 75-foot, enclosed swimming pool, plus six outdoor and three indoor tennis courts.

Swimming



When warm weather spreads over the High Country, residents and visitors alike take to the water in dozens of swimming holes found in rivers, creeks, and lakes. The Wilson Creek Wilderness Area is full of great places to cool off, especially along the lower 15 miles of **Wilson Creek**, where you'll find numerous swimming holes accessible from Ralph Winchester Road, which parallels the river. To get here, take Route 181 south from Linville to Route 2, turn left and drive roughly five miles to a left turn onto Ralph Winchester Road. Park at any of the pull-offs along the road and amble down to the river.

◆ **Wilson Creek Gorge** is so flooded with swimming holes that you're virtually assured of finding a private spot. Rocks line the river's path through the 2.3-mile gorge, creating pools of slow-moving, slightly swirling water. Use extreme caution swimming in moving currents or getting too close to the bases of ledges, where the force of falling water can push you under. The Wilson Creek Gorge Day Use Area is located along Ralph Winchester Road, beginning three miles north of Route 2.

◆ Also in Wilson Creek Wilderness Area, **Upper Creek Falls** is a popular cascading waterfall with an excellent swimming hole at its base. You'll have to hike nearly a mile on a steep trail to reach the falls, but that's a good thing. It's best to be hot before dipping into the cool mountain water. To reach the trailhead, take Route 181 south from the Blue Ridge Parkway near Milepost 315. Travel roughly 7.5 miles to Forest Road 982 on the left. Take this dirt road 100 yards to the trailhead parking area. Grab your towel and swimsuit and start hiking.

◆ You can't swim in Linville Falls but you can get wet further downstream in the **Linville River** in Linville Gorge. The only way to get to the river is by foot, and one of the better routes down into the gorge is the 1.35-mile **Conley Cove Trail**, located on the western rim. (From Linville Falls, take Route 183 south one mile to the Kistler Memorial Highway, a dirt road, which you follow roughly 4.5 miles to the Conley Cove Trailhead.) Swim in the river at the base of the trail or hike in either direction along the river to find other swimming holes. The drawback? After feeling refreshed and clean, you've got to hike up and out of the steep canyon.

◆ The stunning, 50-foot **Elk Falls** has a deep pool at its base. To get there, take Route 194 west from Banner Elk to Route 19E, which you take north. Just less than a mile after turning onto 19E, take a sharp right onto State Road 1303. Shortly, you'll come upon Elk River Road (State Road 1305) on the left, which you take four miles to the small parking area and picnic grounds. A trail leads a quarter-mile to the falls. ◆ The gentle flow



Your own, private swimming hole

of the **New River** makes it perfect for swimming. Head to the New River State Park, Wagoner Access Road, Jefferson, (336) 982-2587. See *Wide Open* for directions.

◆ Located in Tennessee, **Watauga Lake** is an unspoiled mountain lake that's only 45 minutes from Boone. Take Route 321 west from Blowing Rock to the numerous public access areas along Route 321, including the **Watauga Point Recreation Area** and the **Shook Branch Recreation Area**, both of which have designated swimming areas.

Downhill Skiing



With the highest-elevation skiing in the eastern United States (Beech Mountain) and one of the Southeast's greatest vertical drops (Sugar Mountain), North Carolina skiing presents its share of challenging slopes. When combined with the outstanding ski schools and well-groomed beginner and intermediate slopes, you have every kind of terrain you'll need to progress through the sport. As with all eastern ski resorts, the impact of global warming makes each season a game of cross-your-fingers-for-a-cold-and-wet-winter. Regardless, snowmaking is a perfected science here, and seasons generally last Thanksgiving–mid March. The following ski resorts have lodges with beverage and food services, equipment rentals, and instructional facilities.

◆ The state's largest ski area, **Sugar Mountain Resort**, 1009 Sugar Mountain Drive, Banner Elk, (828) 898-4521 or 1-800-784-2768, www.skisugar.com, has 20 trails (40 percent novice, 40 percent intermediate, and 20 percent expert) spread across 115 acres of terrain, 100 of which are lighted for night skiing. Beginners take it slow on *Easy Street* while advanced skiers carve turns on black-diamond *Tom Terrific*, *Boulder Dash*, and *Whoopededoo*. One triple chair and four double chair lifts whisk skiers to the summit, 1,200 vertical feet above, while two lifts have stops mid-ride. Skiers and snowboarders alike are welcome on all trails; Sugar also has snowboarding and tubing parks.



Sugar Mountain Resort, Inc.

◆ **Ski Beech**, 1007 Beech Mountain Parkway, Beech Mountain, (828) 387-2011 or 1-800-438-2093, www.skibeech.com, has 14 trails (30 percent beginner, 40 percent intermediate, 30 percent advanced) across 95 acres of skiable terrain, plus tubing and snowboard terrain parks. The vertical drop from the 5,506 summit is 830 feet, and you'll white-knuckle every foot of it on the black-diamond *Upper* and *Lower White Lightning* trails. There are six double chairs, one high-speed detachable quad, and three surface lifts. The slopes are closed between 4:30 P.M.–6 P.M. for grooming for the night-skiing session.

Learn Here, Ski Anywhere

There's a proud adage that if you learned to ski in North Carolina, you can ski anywhere, such are the conditions in this Mother Nature-challenged state where warm daytime temperatures often melt snow patches that re-freeze at night. Consider yourself warned: sharpen your edges and reflexes for those dull-gray, ice spots that can drop you like an anchor.

At the base of the mountain, Beech Tree Village is an alpine-style community, with shops and restaurants surrounding an ice skating rink.

◆ Just outside of Blowing Rock and two miles off of Route 321, **Appalachian Ski Mountain**, 940 Ski Mountain Road, (828) 295-7828 or 1-800-322-2373, www.app-skimtn.com, is a small, family-friendly ski resort with nine slopes (two novice, four intermediate, three advanced) open to skiers and snowboarders and served by two quads, one double chair, and two surface lifts. While advanced skiers will feel their runs are over before they begin—the vertical drop is 360 feet and there are 17 acres of skiable terrain—the resort feels huge to a beginner. An excellent place to learn, the mountain's French-Swiss Ski College emphasizes smaller classes to insure you'll get the individual attention needed to keep you upright on the slopes. There's an outdoor skating rink at the base of the mountain.



Sugar Mountain Resort, Inc.

◆ Located between Boone and Banner Elk on Route 105, **Hawksnest Golf & Ski Resort**, 2058 Skyland Drive, Banner Elk, (828) 963-6561 or 1-800-822-4295, www.ski-hawk.com, features 12 slopes (20 percent beginner, 40 percent intermediate, 40 percent advanced) open to skiers and snowboarders, a 619-foot vertical drop, and 20 acres of skiable terrain. There are two double chair lifts and one surface lift serving the slopes and the snowboard terrain park. All trails are open for nighttime skiing.

Cross-Country Skiing & Snowshoeing



When a major winter storm dumps on the High Country, the adventurous take to the Blue Ridge Parkway and Pisgah National Forest on cross-country skies or snowshoes. Popular places to explore include all the trails listed under *Dayhiking* and *Mountain Biking* in the **Wilson Creek** and **Linville Gorge wilderness areas**. Be advised that in heavy snow, it's safer to stick to forest roads than it is to bushwhack or to follow a backcountry trail. Of particular note: the **Kistler Memorial Highway** along the western rim of the Linville Gorge, and **Brown Mountain Beach** and **Ralph Winchester roads** in the Wilson Creek Wilderness Area.

◆ The National Park Service closes sections of the **Blue Ridge Parkway** in inclement weather, making for an excellent and relatively safe place to ski or snowshoe. For news of road closings, contact the parkway office at (828) 298-0398. Just a stone's throw from Blowing Rock, the 26 miles of carriage trails in the **Moses H. Cone Memorial Park** are the perfect place to shush through the silent land. If the parkway is closed, take Route 221 south from Blowing Rock to the park's Bass Lake entrance on the right.

◆ The higher elevations are more likely to have snow, so if you're interested in snow-

shoeing or Nordic skiing and the lower elevations aren't white enough, head for **Roan Mountain** where you may well find enough snow. Directions are under *Dayhiking*.

◆ It's hard to find businesses that rent snowshoes or cross-country skis, given the area's natural snow cover doesn't warrant enough demand. So unless you already own a pair, you'll either have to borrow or purchase the equipment. **Sugar Mountain Resort**, 1009 Sugar Mountain Drive, Banner Elk, (828) 898-4521 or 1-800-784-2768, www.skisugar.com, is the exception. The mountain offers guided snowshoe tours with equipment rentals included. Depending upon snow cover, you may explore the resort's mountain biking trails, the sides of the ski slopes, or a nearby golf course.

Local Outdoor Advice

Grandfather District, Pisgah National Forest • If you're heading into Linville Gorge or the Wilson Creek Wilderness Area, make a point of stopping at this ranger station to get the latest information on trail closures, nesting peregrine falcon information, and suggestions on scenic trails. The rangers are patient and helpful in providing suggestions on where to spend time in the district's more than 189,000 acres of land. • 109 East Lawing Lane, Nebo, ☎ (828) 652-2144


Footsloggers • With Boone and Blowing Rock locations, Footsloggers is a full-service outdoor store that sells all manner of gear, apparel, and footwear. The staff at both locations consists of serious outdoor enthusiasts who will gladly point you to the hot spots for hiking, mountain biking, paddling, and climbing. In fact, the store prints a free brochure listing some of the area's hiking trails and climbing spots. The Boone store has a 35-foot climbing tower, as well as a paddle shop located directly behind the main store. There is also an Outdoor Outlet, which carries name-brand outdoor gear and apparel at steep discounts. • Boone location: 139 South Depot Street, ☎ (828)-262-5111; Downtown Blowing Rock location: Village Shoppes On Main, Main Street, ☎ (828) 295-4453; www.footsloggers.com

Mast General Store • Along with candy, candles, and candelabras, you can purchase excellent outdoor equipment, gear, and apparel from the Mast General Store's various locations, as well as pick up some good advice on where to use it. In addition to the flagship store in Valle Crucis, try the Boone location at 630 West King Street, ☎ (828) 262-0000 • Route 194, Valle Crucis, ☎ (828) 963-6511, www.mastgeneralstore.com


K i c k B a c k

Not everything in the High Country proceeds at the pace of the Linville River rushing over Linville Falls. When you're ready to relax, try the following laid-back pursuits.

Antiques

 Antiquing in the High Country combines scenic driving from village to village with ample opportunities to discover rare treasures. The following is just a sampling of the dozens of shops throughout the region. ◆ The **Blowing Rock Antique Center**, Route 321 Bypass, Blowing Rock, (828) 295-4950, features roughly 50 antiques dealers, selling original art, collectibles, garden accessories, furniture, and home décor items. ◆ Open for more than 25 years, **Village Antiques & Gifts**, 1127 Main Street, Blowing Rock, (828) 295-7874, sells antique silver, estate jewelry, modern and antique glass, custom pine furniture, and handcrafted copper lights. ◆ In nearby Banner Elk, **The Gilded Age Antiques**, 10890 Route 105 South, Banner Elk, (828) 963-8633, www.gildedageantiques.com, sells 17th- to 19th-century English and European furniture and accessories. The shop boasts one of the nation's largest selections of Victorian majolica. ◆ If there's a center to the region's antiques action, it's Route 105 in Foscoe, where upscale dealers line both sides of the road. An example: **Staffordshire Antiques**, 8599 Route 105, Foscoe, (828) 963-4274, which carries a large collection of antique English chimney pots manufactured between 1840 and 1880. ◆ In Boone, **Timeless Treasures Antiques Depot**, 199 Howard Street, (828) 262-1957, and **Old Boone Antique Mall**, 631 West King Street, (828) 262-0521, are two antiques malls with extensive varieties of vendors. ◆ West Jefferson's **Old Hotel Antiques**, 6 Jefferson Avenue, (336) 246-2004, www.oldhotelantiques.com, is a large cooperative with 11 rooms of items, ranging from glassware to antique furniture.

Art & Crafts Galleries

 Located in Flat Top Manor in the Moses H. Cone Memorial Park (BRP Milepost 294), the **Parkway Craft Center**, (828) 295-7938, www.southernhighlandguild.org, features handcrafted works from Southern Highland Craft Guild members. Expect a variety of crafts, including glass, clay, jewelry, metal, fiber, wood, and paper. It's possible your visit will coincide with a demonstration by one of the guild's artists on the porch. Open March–November. ◆ **Traditions Pottery**, 4443 Bolick Road, Blowing Rock, www.traditionspottery.com, (828) 295-5099, offers a large selection of decorative and functional pottery from Mike and Janet Calhoun. Janet is a sixth-generation potter of the renowned Owens family of potters from Seagrove, NC. ◆ The family also operates **Traditional Owens Pottery** in the Wilcox Emporium, 161 Howard Street, Boone, (828) 262-1221, where you'll find a delightful variety of bowls, plates, cups, and decorative accessories. ◆ **IAGO**, 1165 Main Street, Blowing Rock, (828) 295-0033, www.iagoblowingrock.com, features work by national and international artists. Items include jewelry, metalwork, blown glass, pottery, and home furnishings.

◆ The big visual-arts buzz in the High Country centers around Appalachian State University's **Turchin Center for Visual Arts**, 423 West King Street, Boone, (828) 262-3017,

Art in the Park

One Saturday each month from May–October, hundreds of artisans travel to Blowing Rock for **Art in the Park**, a juried art show held in Blowing Rock Memorial Park on Main Street. Most of the work, which includes basketry, weavings, paintings, pottery, sculpture, leatherwork, wood carvings, photographs, quilts, and jewelry, is available for purchase. For the current or upcoming schedule, call the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce at ☎ (828) 295-7851 or 1-800-295-7851, www.blowingrock.com.



www.turchincenter.org, which opened in 2003 as the largest visual arts center in Northwestern North Carolina, Eastern Tennessee, and Southwestern Virginia. The large facility includes the **Martin & Doris Rosen Galleries**, where exhibits display the work of regional, national, and international artists. Also onsite: a community arts school and gift shop. Admission is free, donations are accepted, and the gallery is open year-round. ♦ In

Boone, the **Hands Gallery**, 543 West King Street, (828) 262-1970, is a crafts cooperative gallery with jewelry, pottery, metalwork, and woodwork from some of the area's best artisans, one of whom staffs the gallery each day.

♦ Located in a historic stone cottage on the grounds of the private Crossnore School, **Crossnore Weaving Room & Gallery**, 205 Johnson Lane, Crossnore, (828) 733-4660 or 1-800-374-4660, www.crossnoreschool.org, preserves the craft of weaving on turn-of-the-century, foot- and hand-powered floor looms. Mary Martin Sloop, who founded the children's school and home in 1913 for impoverished mountain children, opened the Weaving Room to provide income for mountain families and to pass the craft on to young Crossnore residents. In addition to the hand-woven clothing and home furnishings, the gallery sells locally made pottery and other crafts.

♦ In Valle Crucis, visit the **Mark W. Read Studio**, 1898 Broadstone Road, Valle Crucis, (828) 963-8191, www.markreadstudio.com, to view fine custom jewelry, sculp-

Pass It On

In 1923, an Episcopalian school teacher named Lucy Morgan established the Penland Weavers to revive and to preserve hand weaving as a craft and to provide local women a source of income. She invited expert weavers as guest instructors, and word of the learning opportunities soon spread, resulting in students arriving from afar. From that influx, the Penland Weavers evolved into the **Penland School of Crafts**, Penland Road (off Route 19E south of Spruce Pine), Penland, ☎ (828) 765-6211 or 1-800-227-3912, www.penland.org, which today is a national center for crafts education in more than a dozen disciplines, including ceramics, drawing, glassblowing, metalworking, photography, printmaking, textiles, and woodworking. Students visit for one- to eight-week workshops, where they learn from master craftspeople. On campus, the **Penland Gallery** exhibits and sells work by current and former students. Call for hours and for information about touring the school's 400-acre campus.



NC Division of Tourism

tures, and architectural pieces. Read's work has been exhibited in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, among other museums and galleries across the country. ♦ Take a view of the High Country home with you from the **Kevin Beck Studio**, Route 194 South, Valle Crucis, (828) 295-6868, www.kevinbeck.com, where you'll find the artist's oil and pastel paintings of various mountain scenes. ♦ West Jefferson's **Ashe County Arts Center**, 303 School Avenue, (336) 246-2787, www.ashecountyarts.org, includes a gallery and gallery shop exhibiting art and crafts in a 1930s building constructed by the Works Progress Administration.

Attractions

At 5,964 feet, **Grandfather Mountain**, 2050 Blowing Rock Highway, Linville, (828) 733-2013 or 1-800-468-7325, www.grandfather.com, is the highest peak in the Blue Ridge Mountain Range and also a 4,500-acre privately owned park. One of the most-visited attractions in Western North Carolina, Grandfather Mountain features a paved road up part of the mountain that passes two billion-year-old rock formations, Split Rock and Sphinx Rock; a nature museum with natural history exhibits; a quarter-mile paved trail through a wildlife habitat, with black bears, mountain lions, deer, river otters, bald eagles, and more; and a suspension bridge across an 80-foot chasm at an elevation of more than a mile. There are numerous hiking trails throughout the park, and the entire mountain is an International Biosphere Reserve that's home to 47 rare or endangered species of plants and animals. To get to Grandfather Mountain, take Route 221 one mile south from BRP Milepost 305.

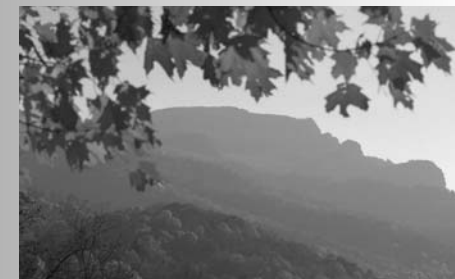
♦ Between Blowing Rock and Boone, you'll find North Carolina's first amusement park, **Tweetsie Railroad**, Route 321, Blowing Rock, (828) 264-9061 or 1-800-526-5740, www.tweetsie.com. The family-oriented park opened in 1957 and is still chugging along, thanks to its

Have Car, Will Gallery Hop

Pick up the guidebook *The Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina* for suggested driving tours that include stops at hundreds of mountain crafts shops, galleries, and studios. The 356-page book, which lists more than 500 stops along eight suggested "trails," sells for \$19.95 and is available from area bookstores or from the publisher, HandMade in America, ☎ (828) 252-0121, www.handmadeinamerica.org.

What's in a Name?

Grandfather Mountain was known to Cherokees as "Tanawha," which translates into "fabulous hawk." Pioneers renamed the mountain "Grandfather" when they noticed a ridge that resembles the profile of a reclined, bearded old man. There are many points from which to see this profile, but the most popular "face" is best viewed from the town of Foscoe on Route 105, seven miles north of Linville.



Hugh Morton



Tweetsie Railroad

centerpiece, a 1912 coal-fired, steam-engine locomotive named for its shrill whistle. Tweetsie travels on a three-mile track through the mountain woods and into "bad-guy" territory, where lo and behold, train robbers climb aboard with evil thoughts in mind. You'll be thankful for the good marshal—the one in the white hat, lest there be any doubt—who puts-a-hurtin' on the would-be train robbers. The park's theme harkens back to the Wild West—

can-can showgirls, cow pokes, and gunslingers—and it features amusement rides, live entertainment, and an authentic Old West main street. Tweetsie Railroad is a National Historic Landmark. In October, the venerable engine dons a ghoulish mask and becomes...Ghost Train™. Open April–October. Admission fee. Bring the kids, or the kid in you.

◆ Not the kind of place you want to visit after a couple of beers, **Mystery Hill**, 129 Mystery Hill Lane (off Route 321), Blowing Rock, (828) 264-2792, www.mysteryhill-nc.com, is an attraction where, in the Mystery House, you can stand at a 45-degree angle, see water flow uphill, and marvel over objects that seem to fall up. (Apparently, the house experiences a stronger-than-usual pull to the north resulting in some odd effects on the laws of physics.) You'll find enough optical illusions and hands-on experiments to entertain kids for a couple of hours, adults for much fewer.

◆ At the **Blowing Rock**, off Route 321 south of Blowing Rock, (828) 295-7111, www.theblowingrock.com, a northwest wind blows up the rocky walls of the Johns River Gorge with enough force to return handkerchiefs or other light objects dropped from the cliff. The attraction plays off the legend that a Cherokee brave leapt to his death from the rock because he was conflicted about leaving his Chickasaw maiden to return to his tribe. The maiden prayed to the Great Spirit, and a gust of wind blew the brave up and into the maiden's arms. (Don't try this yourself.) There's a self-guiding trail around the property and magnificent views from the rock and from an observation tower built over the gorge. Open daily, April–October; weekends, November–March (weather permitting). Nominal admission fee.

What Lies Beneath

Depending on your approach to the High Country, you may have passed billboards promoting one of the region's better-known attractions, the subterranean **Linville Caverns**, Route 221 between Linville and Marion, ☎ (828) 756-4171 or 1-800-419-0540, www.linvillecaverns.com. These limestone caverns deep in Humpback Mountain are pretty cool literally (year-round temp is a static 52 degrees) and figuratively (hey, you're *inside* a mountain). While Native Americans knew of the caverns long ago, it wasn't until the 1880s that white men "discovered" them. (They were puzzled over the sight of trout swimming "into" the mountain.) The caverns feature an interesting array of stalactites and stalagmites, as well as an underground stream in which blind fish swim. Half-hour guided tours explain the cavern's history and geology. Open daily, March–November; weekends only, December–February. Nominal admission fee.

Back Roads Touring



With no interstate and relatively few four-lane highways slicing through the High Country, the roads around Boone and Blowing Rock offer gorgeous, mountain countryside that makes driving anywhere a scenic journey. If your legs are tired or the weather isn't cooperating with your outdoor plans, simply grab a road map and hit the surrounding two-lane blacktops for some touring. If you prefer your routes a little more planned, some of the following picturesque highways are worth exploring.

◆ The king of all scenic roadways in the area is the Blue Ridge Parkway (see *Blue Ridge Parkway*), but there are many more roads worth exploring, including "**the Little Parkway**," a.k.a. **Route 221** between Blowing Rock and Linville. Prior to the 1987 completion of the Linn Cove Viaduct, the last-remaining section of the parkway, the 18-mile "Little Parkway" circumvented Grandfather Mountain to connect the two parkway segments. The highway twists and turns past waterfalls, rock formations, and the base of Grandfather Mountain. En route, it also passes Linville Falls, Linville Caverns, and an entrance to the Moses H. Cone Memorial Park.

◆ An 18-mile stretch of **Route 194** west from Vilas (north of Boone) to the small community of Cranberry is a North Carolina Scenic Byway. The drive passes through Valle Crucis, Banner Elk, and Elk Park. Highlights include the Watauga River Valley, the state's first Rural Historic District centered around Valle Crucis; the heart of North Carolina Ski Country in Banner Elk; and the scenic Elk River Valley.

◆ **Route 194** (east of Boone) and **Route 88** (west of Jefferson) constitute another North Carolina Scenic Byway called the **New River Valley Byway**. This 41-mile drive passes through Christmas tree country and skirts and crosses the world's second oldest river, the New River. The drive begins in Boone and follows Route 194 east into the New River Valley and the village of Todd. From here, the drive continues on **Route 221** north to West Jefferson, where you'll find the state's only cheese-manufacturing facility, the Ashe County Cheese Company (see *Shops & Stops*). Continue through Jefferson on Route 221 to the Route 16/88 intersection, where you take **Route 88** east into the heart of New River paddling country. The 10-mile drive from here to Laurel Springs passes through Ore Knob, a mining community with several copper mines. The drive ends in Laurel Springs, just a couple of miles short of the Blue Ridge Parkway, which makes an excellent return route. For more information on the state's scenic byways, log onto www.byways.org and follow the links to North Carolina.

◆ The Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce provides a free brochure entitled **Three Scenic Tours** that suggests a variety of driving itineraries from Blowing Rock. Choose from the "**Frescoes Tour**," which



A roadside apple stand

details a 70-mile driving route along the Blue Ridge Parkway and other rural highways and recommends various stops. Included among them are the Holy Trinity Church in Glendale Springs and St. Mary's Church in West Jefferson, where you can view frescoes created by North Carolina-native and world-renowned artist Ben Long (see "Churches of the Frescoes"); the **"Attractions Tour,"** a 20-mile itinerary with stops at various attractions like Tweetsie Railroad, Flat Top Manor, and the Daniel Boone Native Gardens; and the **"Blue Ridge South Tour,"** a 65-mile drive along and off the Blue Ridge Parkway from Price Park south to Linville Caverns.

Blue Ridge Parkway

The nation's most-popular scenic highway, the venerable **Blue Ridge Parkway**, (828) 298-0398, www.nps.gov/blri, passes through the region (125 miles of the road's 469 miles is in the High Country). In fact, Blowing Rock is the only full-service town directly on the parkway.

Hugh Morton



The Linn Cove Viaduct on the Blue Ridge Parkway

Built in the 1930s and 1940s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the road follows ridge lines of the Appalachian Mountains, connecting the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina. Its singular intent is recreation. The 45 mile-per-hour speed limit encourages leisurely driving, and the stunning scenery—easily enjoyed from numerous overlooks, pull-offs, and recreation areas—invites stopping.

Concrete mileposts mark every mile beginning with Milepost 0 near Shenandoah National Park and ending with Milepost 469 at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Blowing Rock and Boone provide access to the parkway at Milepost 292. The National Park Service offers free maps available from any visitor center on the parkway. (The closest to Blowing Rock is the park ranger desk at Flat Top Manor in Moses H. Cone Memorial Park at Milepost 294. Maps are also available from the sources under *Additional Information*.) All of the major parkway sites within a reasonable drive from Asheville are listed with milepost locations throughout the chapter.

Got Kilt?

Be ye Scot, or be ye not, you're invited to join the nation's largest gathering of Scottish clans at the **Grandfather Mountain Highland Games**, held each summer at MacRae Meadow on Grandfather Mountain. More than 30,000 people—many of them wearing kilts and whatever Scotsmen do or do not wear underneath—arrive the second full weekend in July for a rousing celebration of Celtic culture and competition. The games open to a bagpipe-led procession and the unfurling of nearly one hundred tartan banners. There are drum and bag-piping competitions, Scottish folk music concerts, Celtic-music jams, hammer throws, Highland wrestling, foot races, sheep-herding contests, and numerous dances held during the weekend. The games, which began in 1956, draw more than 135 clans, including Campbells, MacDonalds, McColls, and more. Call (828) 733-1333 or visit www.gmhg.org for event schedules and ticket information.



Hugh Morton

From the Farm

Beginning at 7 A.M. and continuing until "sellout" on Saturdays, May–October, and Wednesdays, July–August, the **Watauga County Farmers Market**, 891 Horn in the West Road, Boone, www.wataugacountyfarmersmarket.org, is where you'll find fresh mountain produce—organically grown vegetables, fruits, berries, herbs, and flowers—and other products of the region's farms, including cider, honey, butter, mustard, jams, eggs, and fresh-baked breads. The biggest find? Some of the nicest, most-genuine folks you'll ever encounter. ♦ The folks are just as friendly and the produce and other products just as fresh at the smaller **Ashe County Farmers Market**, 2nd Street, West Jefferson, (336) 219-2650. Open Wednesdays, 8 A.M.–2 P.M.; and Saturdays, 8 A.M.–1 P.M., April–autumn.



Boone CVB

Sin by the Bushel

If you think apples are the fruit of original sin, you can get into a whole heap of trouble at the **Orchard at Altapass**, 1025 Orchard Road, Little Switzerland, ☎ 1-888-765-9531, www.altapassorchard.com. First planted in 1908, Altapass' orchards straddle both sides of the Blue Ridge Parkway at Milepost 328.3. The trees start bearing fruit in early July and continue through the fall, the ideal time to visit. Open seasonally, seven days a week.

Gardens



The **Daniel Boone Native Gardens**, 651 Horn in the West Drive, Boone, (828) 264-6390, presents three acres of gardens as they might have appeared in the 18th Century. Trails wind past native North Carolina plants, including many rare species. The beautiful grounds contain ponds, wooden arbors, a wishing well, the Meditation Maze, and a reflection pool. Each season presents a different show of color—dogwoods and azaleas in the spring, rhododendrons in the summer, and hardwood leaves in the fall. The wrought iron gates at the entrance were made by Daniel Boone VI, the pioneer's direct descendent. Open daily, May–September, weekends in October. Nominal admission fee.

◆ In Blowing Rock off Laurel Lane, the **Annie Cannon Memorial Gardens** features pretty walking trails past the small but picturesque Broyhill Lake. These gardens also contain the entrance to the Glen Burney Trail. (See *Dayhiking*.)

Churches of the Frescoes

Each year, thousands of visitors take a brief detour off the Blue Ridge Parkway at Milepost 259 to visit two small Episcopal churches, where renowned artist and North Carolina native Ben Long painted frescoes. (A fresco is a painting on wet plaster that requires inordinate planning and patience to apply the pigments at the right level of moisture.) Merely 12 miles apart, **Holy Trinity Church**, 120 Glendale School Road (Route 16), Glendale Springs, ☎ (336) 982-3076, and **St. Mary's Church**, 400 Beaver Creek School Road (Route 194), West Jefferson, ☎ (336) 246-3552, are open daily, 24 hours a day. Long, who apprenticed in Italy to learn the ancient art of fresco, painted three frescoes—"Mary Great with Child," "John the Baptist," and "The Mystery of Faith"—at St. Mary's between 1974-77, often working during worship services. The artist's pregnant wife served as the model for "Mary Great with Child." For "The Last Supper," painted on an entire wall behind the altar inside Holy Trinity in 1980, Long turned to local parishioners as models for the apostles. The churches, which share a parish, have established a Ministry of the Frescoes and parish members are trained as docents to assist visitors. Admission is free but donations are welcome. Sunday services alternate between the two churches.



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Gem Mines

The ground beneath Western North Carolina is a gem superstore with pockets of valuable stones—rubies, emeralds, and sapphires, for example—waiting to be discovered. Get in on the hunt at one of several area gem mines open to the public. Mining methods vary—panning in flumes or creek beds or sifting through buckets of mining ore, for example—but most mines offer gem cutting and jewelry-setting services onsite. In general, the season runs April–November. Expect to pay by the bucket, with prices ranging from \$6–\$500 per bucket depending on the value of the ore. A sampling of area mines includes **Rio Doce Gem Mine/Jerry Call, Inc.**, 14622 Route 226 South, Spruce Pine, (828) 765-2099, www.riodoce.com, which guarantees you'll find gems in each bucket of ore. ◆ Run by two families who have mined the area since 1810, **Spruce Pine Gem & Gold Mine**, 15090 Route 226, Spruce Pine, (828) 765-7981, features year-round mining: outdoors in the warm months and indoors with a heated flume in the winter. ◆ **The Emerald Village**, 321 McKinney Mine Road, Little Switzerland, (828) 765-6463, www.emeraldvillage.com, is home to three mines, including the underground Bon Ami Mine, which features such historic mining equipment as lamps, dynamite plungers, and rail cars.

Historic Wanderings



The **Hickory Ridge Homestead**, 891 Horn in the West Road, Boone, (828) 264-2120, is a living history museum with eight log cabins that date from 1785 to the early 1930s. With the exception of the smokehouse, each historic structure stood in Watauga County prior to being relocated here. (The smokehouse was constructed onsite with 18th-century tools.) Inside each cabin, costumed docents portray either the owners of the cabin or people from the time periods. The lesson? Living in the mountains in the late 1700s and early 1800s was tough. Mountain settlers had to be entirely self sufficient. In addition to growing or hunting their food, settlers made their own clothes and presumably spent a lot of time by the fire in winter. There's a weaving house on the grounds with a 200-year-old human-powered loom made from chestnut. Visitors are welcome to attend workshops on weaving, candle making, and tin-smithing. Open year round. Free admission, but a \$2 donation is suggested.

◆ The restored **Brinegar Cabin**, which dates from the early 1880s, and the one-room **Caudill Family Homestead**, are in **Doughton Park**, BRP Milepost 238.5. For more information, see *Dayhiking*. ◆ **Flat Top Manor**, BRP Milepost 294, (828) 295-3782, was built on 19th-century textile



Flat Top Manor



The Mast General Store in Valle Crucis

A Retail DyMASTy

A cross between a history museum and a profit-amassing retail enterprise, the **Mast General Store**, Route 194, Valle Crucis, ☎ (828) 963-6511, www.mastgeneralstore.com, first opened in 1883. In 1887, Henry Taylor sold a half-interest to W.W. Mast, a descendant of Joseph Mast, one of the valley's earliest settlers. In 1913, Mast purchased the rest of the enterprise and endeavored to sell anything his customers might need. Promising everything "from cradles to caskets," Mast General Store became a legend. Today the store is a National Historic Landmark and still very much in business. Stop by to purchase traditional mercantile goods, clothing, and outdoor gear; to use the antique post office; and to warm up beside the potbelled stove. There are other store locations in **Boone**: 630 West King Street, ☎ (828) 262-0000; **Waynesville**, **Hendersonville**, **Asheville**, and **Greenville, SC**.

the Anglican Church since the Reformation in the 1500s. Church bureaucracy deemed the monastery too "Roman" and ordered it disbanded in 1852. Also on the campus: Bishop Ives' 1840s log cabin and the 1925 **Church of the Holy Cross**.

Museums



With a focus on the people and history of the Appalachian Mountains, the **Appalachian Cultural Museum**, University Hall Drive, Boone, (828) 262-3117, www.museum.appstate.edu, features permanent exhibits on many subjects, including Native-American ancestry, the Civil War, NASCAR, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Craft Renaissance. The museum is also home to an extensive collection of self-portraits by North Carolina artists. Open Tuesday–Saturday, 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; Sunday, 1 P.M.–5 P.M. Nominal

magnate Moses H. Cone's 3,500-acre estate. Cone, who was known as the "Denim King" because of the high-quality denim his mills produced, built the 20-room mansion to live in with his wife as their health declined. He lived out his days here as a farmer, philanthropist, and conservationist. You can follow in the footsteps of the Cones' daily morning walks on the Craftsman's Trail and then tour the grand home, where you'll find a visitor center and the Parkway Craft Center. The park is open year-round, but the Manor and visitor center are only open late March–early January. Free admission.

◆ The village of **Valle Crucis** along Route 194 in the Watauga River Valley constitutes North Carolina's first Rural Historic District. Many of the farm buildings and churches in the area are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including the **Mast Farm** (see *Sleep Well*), the original **Mast General Store** (see "A Retail DyMASTy"), and the **Mission School Conference Center**, a small campus of turn-of-the-century buildings that belong to the Episcopal Church. It was here, in 1842, that an Episcopalian bishop, Stillman Ives, founded the **Society of the Holy Cross**, the first monastic order in

admission fee, except Tuesdays, when admission is free. ◆ Located in the 1903 home built for D.D. and B.B. Dougherty, the two brothers who founded Appalachian State University, the **Appalachian Heritage Museum**, 175 Mystery Hill Road, Blowing Rock, (828) 264-2792, is a living history museum that portrays life at the turn of the century for a prominent mountain family. The home was the first in the area to have electricity and running water. ◆ In the same location, the **Native American Artifacts Museum** features more than 50,000 authentic Native-American artifacts, including arrowheads, spears, stone tools, pottery, jewelry, and eating utensils. A nominal admission fee serves both museums. Open daily, 8 A.M.–8 P.M. in the summer; 9 A.M.–5 P.M., the rest of the year.

◆ The **North Carolina Museum of Minerals**, BRP Milepost 331, Spruce Pine, (828) 765-2761, has an excellent presentation on the significance of mining to the state and to the mountain counties in particular. Visitors learn about geological history, including how gems formed, and about early mining ventures. Also on display is a broad array of locally found gems and minerals. Revolutionary War buffs will appreciate that the museum is in Gillespie Gap, which was a key stop for the Overmountain Men who descended from the mountains to defeat the British at the Battle of Kings Mountain. Open daily, 9 A.M.–5 P.M.

Performing Arts

♪ No one describes the area's cultural scene better than the tourism bureau, the High Country Host: "From banjos to violins, dosie-does to pirouettes, local storytellers to Neil Simon plays, and hand-thrown pottery to towering steel sculpture, the High Country offers a unique blend of traditional and modern culture." The following is a sampling of the region's performing-arts offerings.

◆ Described as the closest thing to Spoleto you'll find in North Carolina, **An Appalachian Summer Festival**, (828) 262-6084 or 1-800-841-2787, www.appsummer.org, is a month-long, multi-arts festival held each July on Appalachian State University's campus. Renowned musicians and vocalists from such genres as bluegrass and classical; dance companies with styles ranging from folk to modern; and actors, playwrights, and directors all converge in Boone to produce an amazing assortment of performances, most of which are held on campus in either Rosen Concert Hall or Farthing Auditorium. There's also a visual arts component with the annual Rosen Outdoor Sculpture Competition. ◆ The High Country's professional theater company is **Blowing Rock Stage Company**, 152 Sunset Drive, Blowing Rock, (828) 295-9627,

Picking in Valle Crucis

Outlasting the Energizer Bunny

The nation's third-oldest, continually running outdoor drama, *Horn in the West*, 591 Horn in the West Road, Boone, ☎ (828) 264-2120, begins each June, as it has every summer since 1952. The production tells how Daniel Boone and the fiercely independent pioneers who settled this remote area rebelled against British oppression and helped create a new nation. The production employs music, dancing, drama, comedy, and pyrotechnics on three stages. Shows are nightly except Mondays, late June–early August, in an outdoor theater. Call for exact dates and performance times.

stage.com, which performs a variety of musicals, comedies, and romances. Founded in 1986, the troupe has staged well-known productions and world premieres, including the musicals of North Carolina native, Robert Inman. Typically upbeat and entertaining, performances have included such productions as *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Godspell*, and *Shirley Valentine*. In late 2004, the company moves into the new **Blowing Rock Community Arts Center**, (828) 295-0112, www.brcac.org, on Route 321 Bypass. The 25,000-foot facility will also host dance and musical performances, and visual arts exhibitions.

◆ Mountain music is nearly as old as the hills, and numerous venues feature live performances of bluegrass, folk, and country music. Every Friday night, there are country and bluegrass jams at the

Todd General Store, 3866 Railroad Grade Road, Todd, www.toddgeneralstore.com, (336) 877-1067. This 1914 store is a gathering point for pickers—fiddlers, and banjo, dulcimer, and guitar players—and up to as many as 40 enthusiastic audience members. Performances are casual and free. In the summer on Saturday afternoons, the store also offers mountain music concerts. ◆ **Mountain Music Jamboree**, 9331 Route 16, Glendale Springs, (336) 384-4079 or 1-800-803-4079, www.mountainmusicjamboree.com, is a music and dance show featuring bluegrass music, old-time bands, clogging, and square dancing. Performances are Saturday nights, 7 P.M.–11 P.M., year-round.

◆ If country music is your taste, git' up and go to the **High Country Roundup**, 200 Den-Mac Drive, Boone, (828) 265-4604, www.HCRoundup.com, a three-hour, musical variety show featuring country, bluegrass, gospel, and oldies music. After dinner and the show, there's dancing for everyone. Shows begin at 7 P.M. on Friday and Saturday nights.

An Americana Music Celebration

Each spring, acoustic music fans flock to the campus of Wilkes Community College off Route 421 in Wilkesboro for **MerleFest**, ☎ (336) 838-6267 or 1-800-343-7857, www.merlefest.org, one of the premier bluegrass, folk, gospel, blues, Cajun, jazz, and Celtic music festivals in the country. Merle Watson, the son of legendary guitarist and Grammy Award-winner Doc Watson, was a respected folk musician who died in a tractor accident in 1985. Friends of Doc Watson convinced him to organize a musical tribute to his son. Since the first show in 1988, the festival has grown to draw more than 75,000 fans and such artists as Alison Krauss, Bela Fleck, Dolly Parton, Vince Gill, Willie Nelson, Earl Scruggs, and Doc Watson, of course. There are 15 stages, as well as impromptu jams throughout the school's campus during the four-day celebration. Tickets sell out months in advance. Call or visit the website for festival dates, scheduled performers, and ticket prices.

Shops & Stops



Shopping is a serious sport in the High Country, and the Western North Carolina Mountains have more unique boutiques than you can wave a Ben Franklin at. It'd be a folly to list them all, so the following provides general descriptions of retail hot spots, plus a few suggested stops. ◆ When you visit **Blowing Rock's Main Street**, you'll notice park benches along the sidewalks. Is this just smart municipal planning to encourage people to linger near retailers? Perhaps. But it's our observation that the benches are really there for those who shop until they literally drop. Main Street is the quintessential, upscale shopping area in the region, where you can find antiques, crafts, art, apparel, outdoor gear, home furnishings, and dozens of smaller items, from elegant accessories to commemorative knick knacks.



Boone CVB

Suggested Blowing Rock stops include: ◆ **DeWoolfson Down**, 304 Sunset Drive, (828) 295-0504 or 1-800-554-3696, where you'll find the same down comforters and pillows that your upscale inn most likely uses. ◆ **Cabin Fever**, 915 North Main Street, (828) 295-0520, for rustic furnishings and decorative accessories for mountain getaways, lake houses, and deep woods cabins. ◆ **My Favorite Kitchen Things**, 1098 Main Street, (828) 963-2710, for anything and everything related to the kitchen. ◆ **neaco**, 1081 Main Street, (828) 295-0709, for hip, decorative home accessories. ◆ **Skyland Books**, 1116 Main Street, Martin House Cottage, (828) 295-4231, for a large selection of bestsellers, children's books, fiction, and nonfiction. ◆ And **Tanger Shoppes On The Parkway**, Route 321, Blowing Rock, (828) 295-4444 or 1-800-720-6728, for more than 30 factory outlet stores, including Gap, Jones New York, London Fog, Nautica, Ralph Lauren, Coach, and Seiko.

◆ **Boone's historic downtown** around West King and Depot streets has rows of specialty stores, galleries, and antiques marts, as well as bistros and coffee houses for refueling when your energy runs low. Suggested Boone stops include **Heavenly Chocolates**, 691 West King Street, (828) 963-1826, for thousands of unique gifts, such as cards, picture frames, and as the store promises, "the hottest candles in the country used by Hollywood stars." Of course, there are chocolates and truffles as well. ◆ **Farmer's Hardware**, 661 West King Street, (828) 264-8801, sells a complete selection of Americana, plus general hardware products in a historic store with an ambiance that Home Depot can't touch. ◆ **Espresso News/Mosaic Books**, 267 Howard Street, Boone, (828) 264-8850, carries a fine selection of new fiction and nonfiction and has an in-house coffee shop.

◆ The **Wilcox Emporium Warehouse**, 161 Howard Street, Boone, (828) 262-1221, claims you can "shop the entire High Country under one roof." The historic, 60,000 square-foot warehouse features 240 merchants and three restaurants. ◆ For an unbelievable selection of maps—USGS topographical maps, trail maps, raised-relief maps, travel

maps, and antique reproduction maps—find your way to the **Blue Planet Map Company**, Shops at Shadowline, 240 Shadowline Drive, Boone, (828) 264-5400 or 1-800-810-6277. Blue Planet also carries an excellent selection of guidebooks, plus various tools for exploration, including compasses, altimeters, atlases, and more.

◆ **Blue Moon Books**, 271 Oak Avenue, Spruce Pine, (828) 766-5000, offers a wide selection of new and used books, with a special focus on both regional fiction and history. ◆ If you like to browse, you'll find nice collections of shops in **Banner Elk** along Tynecastle Highway, and **Valle Crucis**, along Route 194.

General Stores

The High Country's rugged terrain and sparse population have kept huge retailers like Wal-Mart from establishing a big-scale presence here, allowing general stores that carry a wide variety of products to prosper. One-part retailer and one-part community center, these general stores are a unique pleasure to visit. Inventory and services range from groceries, hardware items, mountain crafts, and video rentals to outdoor equipment, clothing, newspapers, and books. The best-known general store is the Mast General Store in Valle Crucis (see "A Retail DyMasty" under *Historic Wanderings*), but there are many more in the area, including the **Todd General Store**, 3866 Railroad Grade Road, Todd, ☎ (336) 877-1067, which opened in 1914; ◆ the **Old Hampton Store**, 77 Ruffin Street, Linville, ☎ (828) 733-5213, which opened in 1920 at the foot of Grandfather Mountain; ◆ and the most-recent addition to the High Country's general-store community, **Fred's General Mercantile**, 501 Beech Mountain Parkway, Beech Mountain, ☎ (828) 387-4838, which opened in 1979.

Spa & Massage

🕒 **Westglow Spa**, 2845 Route 221 South, Blowing Rock, (828) 295-4463 or 1-800-562-0807, www.westglow.com, is a European-style spa that offers numerous facial and body treatments. A complete list of services would take pages. A sampling of selections includes: antioxidant and oxygen facials, aromatherapy massage, body wraps, reflexology, raindrop therapy, and several chocolate treatments. Westglow also offers hair styling, manicures and pedicures, and classes for healthy cooking and personal stress management. There's a full fitness facility onsite (see *Rainy Day Workouts*) with personal trainers, an indoor pool, and wet/dry saunas. ◆ The **Spa at Chetola Resort**, North Main Street, Blowing Rock, (828) 295-5565 or 1-800-243-8652, www.chetola.com, is on the picturesque, private, 87-acre resort located a short walk from downtown Blowing Rock. Rejuvenating services include Swedish and deep-tissue massage, herbal body wraps, various facial treatments, and reflexology.



A pastoral scene at Westglow Spa

Rest Easy



Sleep Well

While you'll find a variety of accommodations in the High Country, a few generalizations about the lodging scene can be made. More upscale inns and B&Bs are found in villages like Blowing Rock and Valle Crucis, and more motel and hotel chain choices are located in Boone for people visiting Appalachian State University. Around Banner Elk, expect a higher concentration of no-frills, ski-lodge-style accommodations. The mountains are also full of cabin and condominium rental options; contact the chambers of commerce or tourism bureaus listed at the end of the chapter for more information. Be aware that as the leaves fall in October and early November, both the demand for lodging and the room rates go up. Make your reservations months in advance and expect to pay a premium.

Accommodations Pricing

Less than \$100	Inexpensive	\$
\$100-150	Moderate	\$\$
\$151-200	Expensive	\$\$\$
More than \$200	Very Expensive	\$\$\$\$

Prices are per room, per night, based on double occupancy during peak seasons. Note that B&Bs and most country inns include breakfast in the rate.

Baird House • One of the saddest sounds you'll hear is the crunch of dirt under your tires on the Watauga River Road as you pull away from this intimate mountain farm bed and breakfast. Set upon 16 acres fronting the Watauga River with spectacular views in every direction, the historic Baird House has seven rooms—four in the main house and three in the carriage house—each with a private bath. Built in 1790 by Dr. Ezekial Baird and his wife, Susanna, along the main route into Tennessee, the Baird House is one of the oldest homes in Watauga County. It has been carefully restored and includes many of the home's original features, including hand-planed doors, antique nails, and several original glass panes. Guestrooms have sitting areas, comfortable appointments like goose-down comforters, and each room in the main inn has a fireplace. The hot country breakfast will more than satisfy you. • 1451 Watauga River Road, Valle Crucis, NC 28691, ☎ (828) 297-4055 or 1-800-297-1342, www.bairdhouse.com • \$\$-\$\$\$

The Eseeola Lodge at Linville Golf Club • Bestowed with Mobil's four-star rating, the Eseeola embodies hushed ease. It's a golf-shirt-by-day, coat-and-tie-by-night affair, where evening perfume mixes with after-dinner cigar smoke in the cool mountain air. Built in the late 19th Century, the first lodge burned in the 1930s but was quickly

replaced by the current lodge, a handsome, rustic-looking building with chestnut-bark siding. The property features 24 rooms in the main lodge, available in two configurations—suites are larger than deluxe rooms and have separate living rooms and porches—as well as a cottage with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room, and full kitchen. All guestrooms at the resort have private baths, plus appointments like handmade quilts, antiques, and such modern features as cable TV. The inn's grounds are impeccably kept, and the lodge sits amidst thousands of acres that invite exploration. If at first the rates seem walloping, consider that they include daily breakfast and dinner in the lodge's famous dining room. Guests may use the outdoor heated pool, eight tennis courts, and fully equipped fitness facility. While you can use the resort as a home base for further High-Country exploration, you'll be in the minority. Most guests treat the Eseeola Lodge as a destination unto itself. The lodge is open seasonally from April–October. • 175 Linville Avenue, Linville, NC 28646, ☎ (828) 733-4311 or 1-800-742-6717, www.eseeola.com • \$\$\$\$

Gideon Ridge Inn • True to its name, Gideon Ridge Inn rests atop a secluded knoll of the Blue Ridge Mountains on the outskirts of the charming village of Blowing Rock. Up a narrow lane and past a high

hedgerow, this 1939 English Cottage-style mountain retreat warmly greets its guests. The experience is one of being transported to a time before TVs, telephones, Palm Pilots, and dawn-to-dusk pressures. Gideon Ridge Inn is one big, relaxed sigh. On the property, patios, lawns, stone paths, and terraced gardens feature entrancing views and silky breezes carrying the season's blossom scent. The inn's interior is equally inviting. Listed in the distinguished *Select Registry*, Gideon Ridge maintains fine standards, with such amenities as marble walk-in showers, soaking tubs, balconies, room refrigerators, and towel warmers. Common areas are furnished with deep, cushioned furniture, period antiques, and original work from mountain artisans. Though there are just 10 rooms and suites, the inn has a lovely rambling feel with nooks in which to curl up and read. The main sitting room features a grand piano and a six-foot stone fireplace. A hearty breakfast and afternoon tea are included. Dinner is served some evenings for an additional fee. (See *Dine Well*.) • 202 Gideon Ridge Road, Blowing Rock, NC, 28605, ☎ (828) 295-3644 • www.gideonridge.com • \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

The Inn at Ragged Gardens • On Sunset Drive just a block off Blowing Rock's Main Street, this handsome, bark-sided manor sits back from the sidewalk across a verdant lawn with fragrant, well-tended gardens. (There are also "ragged" or informal gardens onsite.) The inn was originally a seasonal cottage. In 1996, the owners restored the circa 1900 property to a state luxurious enough to join the prestigious *Select Registry* association of distinguished inns. There are 12 rooms, each decorated with a garden theme. Among the common

appointments are queen- or king-sized beds with goose-down comforters and pillows, private baths with bathrobes, and fireplaces. Most have sitting areas, whirlpool baths, and private balconies. Public spaces are elegant, and highlights include the granite staircase in the grand hall and the chestnut-paneled walls in the living room. Hot gourmet breakfasts are served in the glass-enclosed dining room, which operates in the evenings as Heirlooms Restaurant, one of Blowing Rock's fine dining establishments. • 203 Sunset Drive, Blowing Rock, NC 28605, ☎ (828) 295-9703, www.ragged-gardens.com • \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Lovill House Inn • Tucked discretely away on 11 acres of gorgeous mountain land, complete with its own stream and waterfall, this inn has five rooms in the main farmhouse and one in the Spring House, a separate cottage directly behind the inn. Each room has a private bath. The spacious Hickory Room has a two-room bath. Once the home of Confederate War hero and North Carolina State Senator Captain Edward F. Lovill, this 1875 home underwent a careful restoration that created a comfortable, welcoming retreat. You can wander the grounds, sit under the gazebo, or relax on the inn's wraparound porch. The wood-burning fireplace in the living room makes this a fine place to read after breakfast or in the evening before retiring to bed. The full country breakfast is hot and satisfying, as you'd expect from a property that's earned AAA's Four-Diamond award. • 404 Old Bristol Road, Boone, NC 28607, ☎ (828) 264-4204 or 1-800-849-9466, www.lovillhouseinn.com • \$\$-\$\$\$

Maple Lodge • It's hard to be more centrally located in Blowing Rock than at the Maple Lodge's location just a half-block from Main Street's shops and galleries. This property was built in the mid 20th Century specifically for accommodating visitors to Blowing Rock. The cheerful, yellow, two-story house is surrounded by a white-picket fence that encloses several well-tended perennial gardens. There are 11 guest rooms—three on the main floor and eight on the second floor—each with private bath and individually decorated with antiques and reproductions. Public spaces include two parlors downstairs with comfortable chairs and couches and a handsome library with wood-paneled walls and a wood-burning stone fireplace. You'll be served a hot breakfast—think blueberry pancakes with sausage or orange-pecan waffles—in the bright dining room overlooking a wildflower garden. • 152 Sunset Drive, Blowing Rock, NC 28605, ☎ (828) 295-3331, www.maplelodge.net • \$-\$\$\$

Mast Farm Inn • With an 1880s farmhouse, an acclaimed restaurant (see *Dine Well*), a wine bar & espresso café, a gift shop, and several cabins and cottages for accommodating guests, the Mast Farm has come a long way from its late 18th-century

settlement by Joseph Mast. Named in 2000 as one of *Travel + Leisure's* 10 favorite B&Bs in the entire country, the Mast Farm Inn knows how to make your stay memorable. It's had practice: The farmhouse has hosted guests since the turn of the century. There are eight large, comfortable rooms in the farmhouse, each with a private bath. Several rooms have fireplaces. Also onsite are seven private cottages, some of which are new, while others have been renovated from existing historic buildings on the property. For example, the 1812 Loom House was originally a two-room log cabin built on the farm. Josie Mast, a later owner of the farm, used the cabin for weaving on her loom. Today it's a romantic cottage for two guests with the original wood-burning fireplace, a massage tub for two, a wet bar, a comfortable bedroom, and a private porch with rockers. The bucolic grounds are stunning and feature organic flowers, vegetable and herb gardens, and grand views of the surrounding mountains. Included in your stay is a delicious, hot country breakfast. Mast Farm Inn belongs to the *Select Registry* association of upscale inns. • 2543 Broadstone Road, Valle Crucis, NC 28691, (828) 963-5857 or 1-888-963-5857, www.mastfarminn.com • ☎ \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$



A patio at Gideon Ridge Inn

Dine Well

Dining choices in the High Country range from home-style restaurants serving country cooking to fine dining rooms serving haute cuisine, with many variances in between. Inexpensive pizza and Mexican restaurants cater to Appalachian State University students in Boone, while chefs get creative with their cuisine in the villages of Blowing Rock, Banner Elk, and Valle Crucis. Throughout the High Country, you'll find outstanding dining in the many inns and small resorts that serve both overnight guests and the general public. Always call to make sure they're serving dinner on any given night and to make reservations.

Canyons • Looking to dine over a good view? You'll be satisfied at this casual restaurant, which overlooks an endless roll of mountains stretching to the horizon. (Want proof? Visit their website for live views from their webcam: www.canyonsbr.com) You can't pass this restaurant with its large parking lot on Route 321 just south of town without thinking, "Now that would be a fine place to have a drink and watch the sunset." And indeed it is. The American, Asian, and Southwestern items on the menu are reasonably priced and fairly good, but it's the view that takes top billing. The restaurant becomes a popular watering hole at night and often features live music. • Route 321 South, Blowing Rock, ☎ 828-295-7661

Crippens Country Inn & Restaurant • Crippens fuses country charm with elegance in a low-ceilinged dining room where the youthful yet attentive staff delivers a variety of game, fish, and vegetarian fare. As soon as you sit down, your server brings a variety of fresh-baked breads with a couple of spreads to sample as you look over the menu. The menu changes daily, but you can count on (and should order) whichever horseradish-encrusted fish the

chef is serving that day. (On one visit, it was oven-roasted Maine salmon with mirin butter sauce, wasabi mash, and crispy soy-fried shallots.) For starters, try the spinach salad with crispy pancetta, oven-dried tomatoes, pine nuts, goat cheese, and balsamic vinaigrette. For dessert, order the warm apple tart with caramel sauce and homemade cinnamon ice cream. Open daily for dinner. Reservations recommended. • 239 Sunset Drive, Blowing Rock, ☎ (828) 295-3487 or 1-877-295-3487

Daniel Boone Inn Restaurant • Housed in a white-washed building that was home to Boone's first hospital, this High Country institution has been serving heaping portions of country-home cooking since its opening in 1959. The atmosphere is decidedly casual, yet you'll see diners from all walks of life digging into the large serving bowls and platters of such foods as country-style steak, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, country ham biscuits, green beans, creamy corn, coleslaw, and fresh-stewed apples. In the summer, lunch and dinner are served daily. In the winter, dinner begins at 5 P.M. during the week, and lunch and dinner are both served on Saturday and Sunday, start-

ing at 11 A.M. Throughout the year, you can sit down for a family-style country breakfast from 8–11 A.M. every Saturday and Sunday. Reservations recommended. • *130 Hardin Street, Boone*, ☎ (828) 264-8657

The Gamekeeper • With a menu primarily consisting of wild game, including many unusual meats (ostrich, boar, and bison, for example), this upscale restaurant, housed in an attractive stone building, is true to its name. Rest assured The Gamekeeper is not putting novelty ahead of your palate; all of the game dishes are marvelously prepared and not one will have you uttering, "It tastes just like chicken." The menu changes daily, but sample starters may include baked double-cream brie crusted with mixed nuts and served with dried fruit, vanilla, lavender honey, thyme compote, and water crackers, as well as cream of new-potato soup with apple-smoked bacon and green onions. A recent entrée entitled "Field & Stream" featured grilled buffalo flank steak and fried crawfish tails with spicy steak fries and Gamekeeper barbeque sauce. For dessert, try the white-Russian cheesecake. The Gamekeeper also serves daily vegetarian selections. All food is prepared from scratch, and much of it is grilled over a hickory-wood fire. Open Thursday–Monday for dinner in the summer and fall, and for dinner in the winter only on Friday and Saturday. Reservations recommended. • *3005 Shull's Mill Road, Boone*, ☎ (828) 963-7400

Gideon Ridge Inn • There's just one seating each evening at this intimate restaurant in an English Country-style inn, where the chef prepares a prix fixe menu with five courses. Promptly at 7:30 P.M., the chef joins

diners to describe the menu and answer any questions. Menus offer such starters as pan-seared shrimp with yellow-tomato hoisin glaze, or crabmeat wrapped in phyllo with fresh basil aioli. Entrées may include such items as New Zealand lamb tenderloin en brochette with an East Indian spice rub and coconut curry sauce, or a grilled veal chop with morel mushroom sauce, topped with goat cheese. The expansive wine menu is well suited to the evening's fare, and the chef is happy to make recommendations. The cuisine is imaginative and the views of the velvety Blue Ridge Mountains are always stunning. Expect fresh ingredients, impeccable service, and a cozy atmosphere with only 24 fellow diners. Reservations required. Open Tuesday–Saturday, spring through fall, and Thursday–Saturday in the winter. • *202 Gideon Ridge Road, Blowing Rock*, ☎ (828) 295-3644

Heirlooms • Housed in the handsome Inn at Ragged Gardens, Heirlooms is a fine-dining experience that serves innovative, contemporary American cuisine in one of several intimate dining rooms: the sun porch, the garden, parlor, or the wine-cellar. Regardless of where you're seated, the food is delicious. For starters, try the pan-seared scallops served with fennel-leek red onion slaw and Pernod fume, or the lobster corn chowder, which features a poached medallion of lobster tail meat in a cilantro-crème fraîche. Recent entrées included grilled North Carolina mountain trout filled with lemon thyme, Southern wild rice, and a sweet-corn bourbon cream sauce, and "Low Country Black & Bleu Pasta," which is Gulf shrimp, andouille sausage, and fresh flounder lightly blackened and served with a bleu cheese cream sauce over fresh linguini.

Complement your meal with a vintage from the wine list, which has received *Wine Spectator's* prestigious Award of Excellence. Save room for dessert. The cognac crème brûlée served with fresh berries and homemade chewy gingersnap cookies is the ideal way to end your marvelous meal. Dinner served Tuesday–Saturday. Reservations recommended. • *203 Sunset Drive, Blowing Rock*, ☎ (828) 295-9703

Louisiana Purchase • Louisiana Purchase serves up a festive atmosphere, as well as delicious Cajun, Creole, and French cuisine. From walls lined with murals of the Big Easy to jazz music floating throughout the restaurant (live on the weekends, recorded otherwise), this restaurant permeates the senses with all things 'Nawlins. For starters, try the pan-seared jumbo diver scallops with tabouleh and mango sweet chili sauce before moving on to the "Mumbo Gumbo," a traditional Creole gumbo with chicken, okra, and andouille sausage, served with seasoned rice and topped with gumbo filé. Owner Mark Rosse is a serious wine connoisseur, and his wine list is regularly honored by *Wine Spectator* magazine. Once a month, the restaurant has a "special wine dinner," when Rosse invites a noted vineyard to host a seven-course meal. Do yourself a flavor and find out if one of these dinners is scheduled during your vacation. There's also a wine bar in a loft above the dining room that serves wines by the glass. Open for dinner daily except Mondays. Reservations recommended. • *3984 Shawneehaw Avenue, Banner Elk*, ☎ (828) 898-5656

Mast Farm Inn • With a reputation for outstanding cuisine served in an elegant but relaxed atmosphere, the Mast Farm Inn

draws dinner guests from throughout the High Country. It's worth the trip, whether you're descending the stairs from your room in the inn or driving from Blowing Rock or Banner Elk. Chef Matt Johnston prepares seasonal menus that change daily, but you'll typically find creative preparations of game, beef, and fish, as well as vegetarian dishes. There are always several tempting appetizers, but our money is on the warm spinach salad with apple-wood bacon, caramelized onions, and grilled Portobellos, served with poppyseed vinaigrette. For dinner, try the grilled tournedos of beef tenderloin, served with garlic-mashed potatoes and topped with a cabernet peppercorn sauce. The restaurant's carefully selected wine list complements the fare. Dinner is served daily (except Wednesdays) in the summer and fall and on Fridays and Saturdays in the winter. Reservations recommended. • *2543 Broadstone Road, Valle Crucis*, ☎ (828) 963-5857 or 1-888-963-5857

Village Café • Wandering Main Street in Blowing Rock, you'll come upon a walkway beside Kilwins Fudge & Ice Cream, which if you follow it, leads to the outdoor garden patio of the delightful Village Café. You can dine outdoors or inside the historic 1907 Randall Memorial Building, a pretty cottage that has served over the years as a crafts shop, public library, community club, and summer home. At one time, noted writer and artist Elliott Daingerfield worked in a studio on the second floor. But that's all in the past. What's important today is that this is an excellent place for a satisfying gourmet breakfast or lunch. Many of the menu items include fugasa, a traditional Argentine sour dough bread, made from scratch and baked daily. For breakfast, you might try the

French toast, made with fugasa bread and served with pure Vermont maple syrup, or the "Montrachet Eggs Florentine," which is three eggs scrambled with Montrachet goat cheese and fresh spinach. Lunch entrées are similarly innovative. Sandwiches include such varieties as pan-seared mountain trout on toasted fugasa with lettuce, tomato, and aioli; and a grilled Portobello with grilled onion, lettuce, tomato, and aioli. The café also offers a serious dessert selection, so save room or plan to stop back by for a mid-afternoon pick-you-up. If you visit in the winter, beeline for a seat indoors where you'll find Blowing Rock's largest, free-standing fireplace. Open daily, 8 A.M.–3

P.M. • *Off Main Street, Blowing Rock*, ☎ (828) 295-3769

Woodlands BBQ and Pickin' Parlor •

Located on Route 321 Bypass, this lively BBQ joint serves up classic beef and pork barbecue (chopped and sliced), barbecued chicken and ribs, and a variety of Mexican dishes. The "pickin' parlor" refers to the nightly live entertainment that makes Woodlands' lounge a popular watering hole throughout the year. True BBQ aficionados will tell you this is some of the best BBQ in the mountains, and we're inclined to agree.

• *8304 Valley Boulevard (Route 321 Bypass), Blowing Rock*, ☎ (828) 295-3651

Picnic Packing

Blowing Rock Market, 990 Main Street, Blowing Rock, ☎ (828) 295-7373, operates a full-service deli with Boar's Head meats, carries more than 900 wines, and sells a variety of picnic supplies. • **Kojay's Eatery**, 1132 Main Street, Blowing Rock, ☎ (828) 295-0015, is a delightful dine-in place or a picnic-supply stop where you can pick up cool wraps and sandwiches for the trail, plus a variety of delectable desserts. Kojay's also has a location in Banner Elk at 4533 Tynecastle Highway, ☎ (828) 898-3388. • In Boone, **Our Daily Bread**, 627 West King Street, ☎ (828) 264-0173, makes specialty sandwiches and includes a generous selection of vegetarian and vegan menu items. • There's a fine deli that'll pack picnics to go in the **Mast General Store**, Route 194, Valle Crucis, ☎ (828) 963-6511.

Just Desserts

No directions are needed to **Kilwin's Fudge & Ice Cream**, 1103 South Main Street, Blowing Rock, ☎ (828) 295-3088. Just follow your nose right up to the door and inside, where you'll find blocks of most every kind of homemade fudge. The cheerful counter staff is happy to cut samples. Also, try a taste of their many other candies and dipped ice cream in enough flavors to make decisions maddening. • Just a few door down is **Sunset Café**, 1117 Main Street, Blowing Rock, ☎ (828) 295-9326, which is actually a walk-up window. Here you'll also find lots of ice cream along with tasty quick lunches like grilled cheese, burgers, and hot dogs. Out back is a pretty, shaded garden for seating.

A Long-Weekend Itinerary

Day One

After breakfast at your inn, stop by Blowing Rock's **High Mountain Expeditions** (page 403) to rent mountain bikes and then pick up some picnic supplies across the street at **Blowing Rock Market** (page 434) before heading off to Linville Falls to park the car and ride **Kistler Memorial Highway** to **Wiseman's View** (page 401). On the ride back, stop at the **Conley Cove Trailhead** (page 409) to hike down to the **Linville River** for a picnic and swim. Hike back out of the gorge and ride back to your car to return your bikes.

Return to your inn to shower and dress for a relaxing afternoon in the **galleries** (page 414) and **shops** (page 426) of Valle Crucis, including the historic **Mast General Store** (page 422). Head for cocktails and dinner at the **Mast Farm Inn** (page 433).

Return to your inn for a restful night's sleep.

Day Two

After breakfast, head to **Kojay's Eatery** (page 434) to purchase a picnic lunch and then head to **Moses H. Cone Memorial Park** (page 395) to visit **Flat Top Manor** and the **Parkway Craft Center** (page 413). After touring the home, pack your picnic for the six-mile **Duncan Carriage Trail** (page 396) hike. Picnic at the bottom of the hill around scenic Bass Lake. Retrace your steps to the top and climb back into the car to drive the **Blue Ridge Parkway** (page 418) south across the Linn Cove Viaduct en route to **Grandfather Mountain** (page 415). Visit the museum and wildlife habitats and walk across the mile-high swinging bridge.

Climb back into your car and continue south on the Blue Ridge Parkway to **Linville Falls Recreation Area** to hike the **Erwins View Trail** (page 397) and to photograph the upper and lower falls. Spend the remainder of the day doing some **back roads touring** (page 417) before returning to your inn to shower and dress for dinner at the **Gamekeeper** (page 432).

Hit the hay.



Stroll the trails at Cone Manor

Day Three

After breakfast, spend the morning browsing the High Country's **antiques shops** (page 413), **art & crafts galleries** (page 413), and **shops** (page 425).

Head to **Westglow Spa** (page 426) for a massage and relaxing sauna. Finally, enjoy a casual lunch at Blowing Rock's **Village Café** (page 433) before reluctantly returning to the real world.

Additional Information

For additional dining, accommodations, and sightseeing information including the dates of special events, contact:

North Carolina's High Country Host, 1700 Blowing Rock Road, Boone, NC 28607, ☎ (828) 264-1299 or 1-800-438-7500, www.highcountryhost.com, operates a visitor center open Monday–Saturday, 9 A.M.–5 P.M.; Sunday, 9 A.M.–3 P.M.

Ashe County Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center, 6 North Jefferson Avenue, West Jefferson, NC 28694, ☎ (336) 246-9550, www.ashechamber.com. Open Monday–Friday, 9 A.M.–5 P.M.

Avery-Banner Elk Chamber of Commerce, 4501 Tynecastle Highway, Banner Elk, NC 28604, ☎ 1-800-972-2183, www.banner-elk.com, is open Monday–Friday, 9 A.M.–5 P.M. From May–October, Banner Elk opens a visitor center at the intersection of Routes 221, 105, and 181 in Linville, Monday–Friday, 10 A.M.–4 P.M.; Saturday, 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; Sunday, 1 P.M.–5 P.M.

Beech Mountain Chamber of Commerce, 403-A Beech Mountain Parkway, Beech Mountain, NC 28604, ☎ (828) 387-9283 or 1-800-468-5506, www.beechmntn.com, is open Monday–Friday, 9 A.M.–5 P.M.; Saturday, 9 A.M.–4 P.M.

Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, 208 Howard Street, Boone, NC 28607, ☎ (828) 262-3516 or 1-800-852-9506, www.boonechamber.com or www.visitboonenc.com. Open weekdays, 9 A.M.–5 P.M., the Boone Chamber offers brochures, information on area activities, and maps of the community.

Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce, 132 Park Avenue, Blowing Rock, NC 28605, ☎ (828) 295-7851 or 1-800-295-7851, www.blowingrock.com, is open Monday–Thursday, 9 A.M.–5 P.M.; Friday and Saturday, 9 A.M.–5:30 P.M.

*For in the true nature of things,
if we rightly consider, every green tree
is far more glorious than
if it were made of gold and silver.*

– Martin Luther
