

The heart of The Blue Ridge Parkway

There are lots of reasons for Alleghany County's moniker "Heart of the Blue Ridge Parkway." The first of which is that construction of the motorway began at Cumberland Knob just south of the Virginia border on Sept. 11, 1935. The midway point of the 469-mile scenic route from Shenandoah National Park to Great Smoky Mountains National Park also lies within the county. And not least of all, the man who pushed for this new national park unit to pass through North Carolina, rather than Tennessee, was the county's very own Rep. Robert Lee Doughton, also known as "The Father of the Parkway."

The stretch of the Parkway that passes through Alleghany County offers stellar views, gorgeous natural scenery, fascinating history, and ample recreational opportunities.

At Cumberland Knob, at Milepost 217.5, travelers can explore the first recreation area on the Parkway. The half-mile Cumberland Knob Trail (easy) is suitable for the children and leads to a rustic shelter constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps and a picnic area. The two-mile Gully Creek Trail (strenuous) wanders through a lush forest to the creek.

Between Cumberland Knob and the next recreation area, Doughton Park, more trails are waiting to be explored, including a hike with a view at Fox Hunter's Paradise, Milepost 218.6, and a loop around the pond at Little Glade Mill Pond, Milepost 230.1.

The county also boasts the Parkway's largest recreation area, originally called Bluffs and later renamed for Rep. Doughton. At 6,300 acres, Doughton Park includes seven trails that offer more than 30 miles of hiking through pastures and along rugged slopes, including a horse trail. Two of the foot trails lead to historic Brinegar and Caudill cabins.

During the season, the National Park Service offers interpretive programs at Brinegar Cabin. The Basin Creek Trail leads to Caudill Cabin, a structure that withstood the devastating flood of 1916.

At the picnic area, tables offer lovely mountain views. Perhaps the centerpiece of the area is The Bluffs Restaurant, which reopened in 2021 after spending a decade shuttered. There will be music on Sundays at the park and Bluffs in July, August and September, and you can see our events calendar for specific dates.

Visitors can stay at the Doughton Park Campground (tent and RV sites) or rough it by setting up their own backcountry camping site.

Most Repairs Complete

After several years of detours and closures due to scheduled paving and bridge replacement projects — and unscheduled rebuilding and repairs after Hurricane Helene in 2024 — the Parkway is now full reopened in Alleghany County, as well as all of Virginia north to the Shenandoah Valley and most of the rest of North Carolina.

(Some repairs are ongoing at the southern end of the National Park, which will require closing 60 miles between Mount Mitchell and Linville Falls until late summer or fall.)

In neighboring Virginia, the Blue Ridge Music Center is just over the state line and offers a wide variety of concerts on Saturday nights in the summer, daily live (and free) music, a visitors center and gift shop, hiking trails and the award-winning Roots of American Music museum. Our events calendar has listings of events at the center this summer.

The end of construction and repairs in the region means you can enjoy a peaceful drive



on the scenic roadway at your leisure. Leaf views along the Parkway are breathtaking any time of year, but especially spectacular when dressed in the colors of autumn.

Visitors are reminded to be mindful of all those who use the Parkway, including hikers, cyclists and motorcyclists, all of whom may be found in places to enjoy the view. Drivers often go slowly, sometimes as they enter or exit the roadway.

The Parkway intersects with several local roads, including often-used access points on Mahogany Rock and Air Bellows Gap roads.

Though the Parkway is open for motorists, motorcyclists and bicyclists, the park service cautions hikers in some of the backcountry areas to be vigilant for downed trees and other obstructions that may impact trails.

The Parkway is vital to western North Carolina's mountain tourist economy and is the

most-visited national park, with about 16.7 million visitors a year — more than Yellowstone, Yosemite and the Grand Canyon combined, according to the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation.

Traveling the Parkway through Alleghany County makes it easy to see why the Blue Ridge Parkway is America's Favorite Journey.

Helpful Hint

The milepost numbers increase as you travel southwest on the Parkway toward Great Smoky Mountains National Park. If the numbers are decreasing, you are headed northeast toward Shenandoah National Park.

Support

To support projects and programs that enhance and protect the Blue Ridge Parkway, visit BRPFoundation.org. For information on possible road closures, visit nps.gov/blri.

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& Friends;

- Thursdays, Willard Gayheart & Scott Freeman
- Fridays, Bluegrass Jam; and
- Saturdays (first and second) guest bands, (third) Sugarloaf Mountain Band, (fourth) Blue Ridge Ramblers, (fifth) Roger Stamper & Friends.

Fiddle & Fork Festival

A new event this year will be the Fiddle & Fork Festival on June 12-14, to be held at the music center and at The Bluffs.

The three-day festival will celebrate 250 years of music and food traditions in the

Blue Ridge, and is part of "Of the People: The Smithsonian Festival of Festivals," a series of programs marking the 250th anniversary of the United States and showcasing the nation's cultural landscape.

The weekend begins June 12 with an immersive dinner from 6:30-9 p.m. at The Bluffs Restaurant, featuring locally-sourced ingredients and recipes, and programming about the intersection of the Blue Ridge region's food and music. This is a ticketed event.

On June 13 from noon-5 p.m., a day-long free celebration will feature live mu-

sical performances, demonstrations and foodways presentations. Vendors will be on-site with food and drinks available for purchase. The day will finish with the Steep Canyon Rangers concert at the amphitheater, which is a ticketed event.

On June 14 from noon-4 p.m., The Bluffs will host demonstrations and presentations showcasing traditional domestic crafts and regional methods of food production, preparation and presentation. In the afternoon, there will be performances and interviews with

the Midday Mountain Music groups, honoring 20 years of daily, free music presentations on the Parkway and the contributions of these significant local musicians. The Music Center will be open from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. that day. Admission to these events is free. The restaurant will be open for diners on a first-come, first-serve basis.

More details can be found online at fiddleandforkfestival.com.

You can find more about all the center's events and more at the website, BlueRidgeMusicCenter.org.