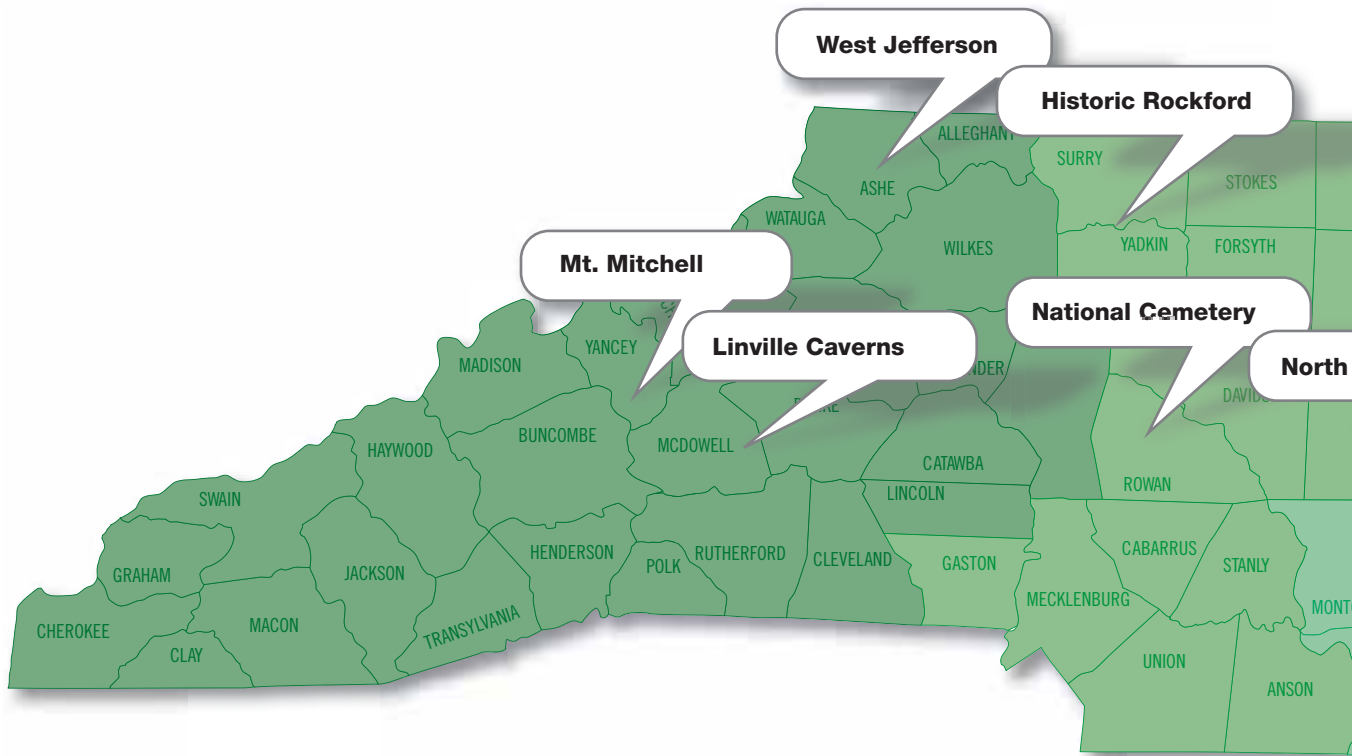




2010 Touchstone Energy 
Travel Guide

15 Carolina Country Adventures Ahead



2010 Touchstone Energy Travel Guide

From one end to the other, North Carolina is about as diverse as any state in the nation. We've got hard gemstones in the west, soft crabs on the coast and red clay in the middle. The tobacco we grow in the mountains is different than what we grow in the east. What we live in, how we drive, what we eat and how we talk varies from one region to another.

Our annual Touchstone Energy Travel Guide encourages you to experience this variety firsthand.

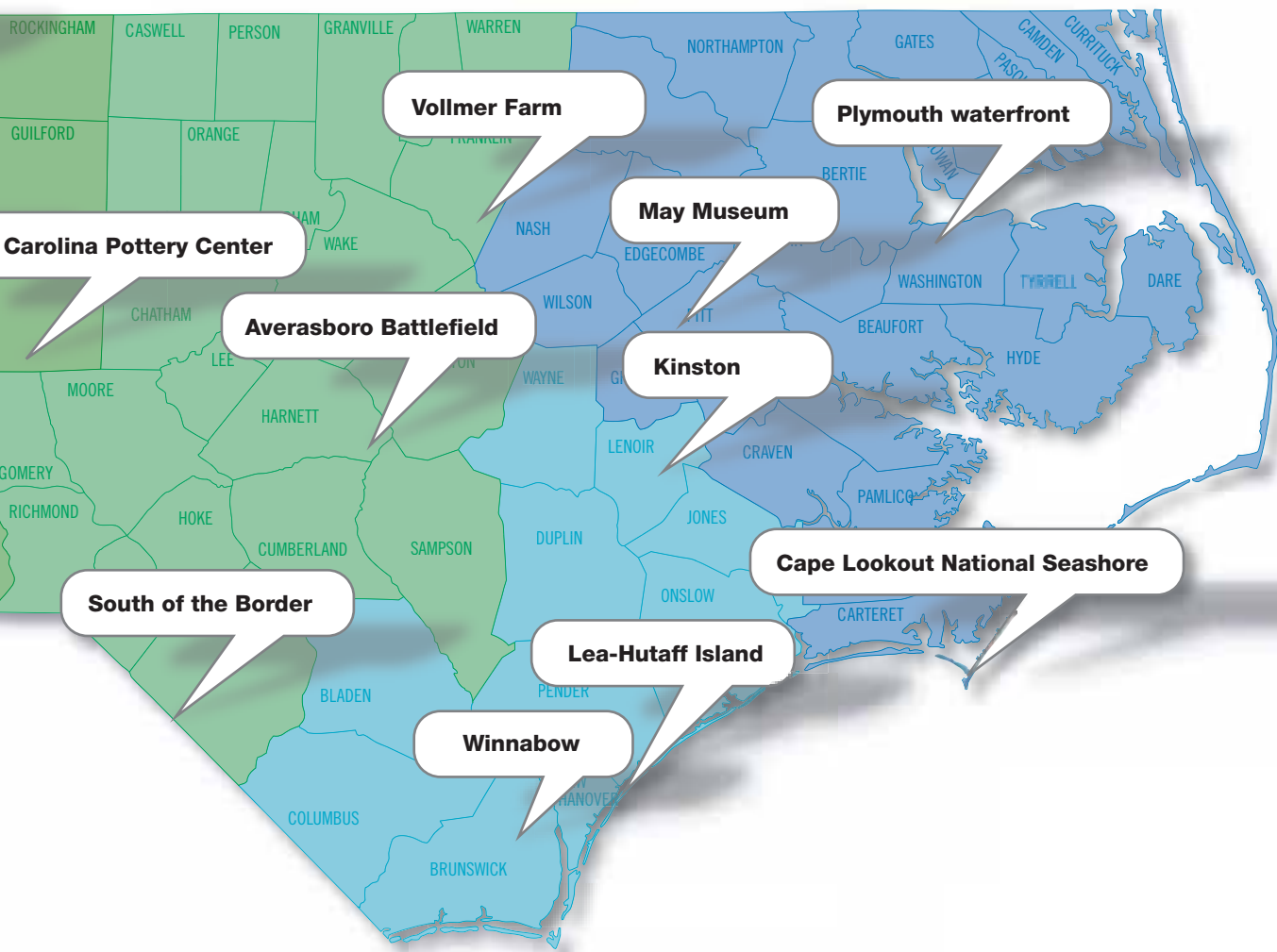
This year we've updated the primary sources of general information about each of five regions and accompany them with a set of Carolina Country Adventures. Among the three adventures for each region are some well-known standbys and some not so familiar, some historical, some recreational, some just plain fun.

As you make your way through this guide and through the countryside, you can be assured that a Touchstone Energy cooperative is nearby.

Thanks to everyone who helped us compile this guide, and to our sponsors: the cooperatives and the advertisers on pages 40 to 43.



Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives
of North Carolina
The power of human connections®



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This supplement to Carolina Country is brought to you by North Carolina's Touchstone Energy cooperatives, serving nearly 2 million people in 93 North Carolina counties. We bring the power of human connections to all regions of North Carolina. Touchstone Energy cooperatives nationwide are committed to integrity, accountability, innovation and community involvement.

Mount Mitchell State Park

Yancey County

By Renee Gannon



Mount Mitchell's peak offers a 360-degree view, and information kiosks diagram each range in view.

➔ I have lived in North Carolina my entire life. When we were kids, my dad drove the family every year from one end of the state to the other visiting the hot tourist spots as well as the little unknown gems. I enjoyed every stop. But somehow we missed Mount Mitchell.

I finally reached the Mount Mitchell peak—6,684 feet above sea level—on a beautiful, blue-sky early fall morning last year. My efforts were rewarded with a crisp 360-degree view of the Blue Ridge Mountains at the highest elevation east of the Mississippi.

My trip began a little more than 30 miles south in Asheville at milepost 384 on the Blue Ridge Parkway. My destination lay at milepost 355.4. With the curving, dipping and rising two-lane parkway (as well as several stops to peer out the scenic overlooks), the slow drive would take

almost one hour to reach my turn at Highway 128, and a final climb to the park headquarters within the Black Mountain range.

On Highway 128, yellow hues of tree leaves at the lower elevation gave way to hints of orange and red the higher I climbed. Clouds rushed down the mountainside. The outside temperature dropped from 54 degrees in Asheville to 36 degrees at Mount Mitchell.

Above the clouds

A winding brick walkway from the top parking lot leads visitors to the peak's viewing platform. Visitors wanting to spend more than a few hours scenic gazing have an abundance of activities to choose from in this 1,946-acre state park.

According to park history, French botanist Andre Michaux first explored the Black Mountains in 1787 searching for valuable plants for his government. He collected 2,500 specimens of flora and fauna. Around the same time, Englishman John Fraser collected plants to introduce to his homeland. The Fraser fir honors this botanist.

Mount Mitchell gained its elevation fame in 1835, when Dr. Elisha Mitchell took his excursion to find the highest point in the region. Unfortunately, while proving his ear-

lier measurements correct, Mitchell died in 1857 after falling from a cliff. He is buried at the mountain's peak named for his exploits.

These early explorers' botanic view is a little different from what visitors see today due to natural as well as man-made forces. The most visible damage is to the spruce pine trees, left ghost-like and bare by acid rain.

The park holds forests of red spruce, fire cherry, yellow birch, mountain ash and mountain maple. Mountain raspberry, red elder and honeysuckle add sweet smells to the area already filled with wildflowers, orchids and ox-eye daisy. You can glimpse any of some 91 bird species, deer, black bear, bobcat, gray fox and even the northern flying squirrel.

Picnic areas, horse trails and campsites are located throughout the park. Hiking trails crisscross the park from the easy three-quarter mile Balsam trail to the 16-mile strenuous stretch of the Mountains to the Sea trail. An Educational Center is also available for groups to learn more about the park and its ecology.

Mount Mitchell State Park is open daily, except Christmas Day. The on-site restaurant, concessions stand and museum gift shop are open May–October. 📍

Mount Mitchell State Park

2388 State Highway 128
Burnsville, NC 28714

(828) 675-4611

www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/momi/main.php

LAT: 35.765

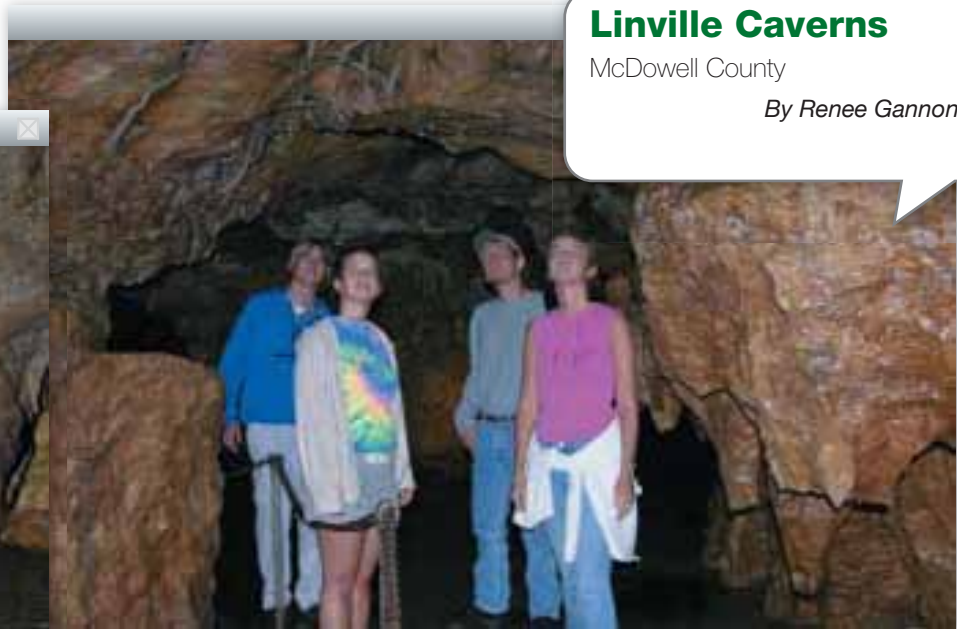
LONG: -82.265



Linville Caverns

McDowell County

By Renee Gannon



Trout swim in and out of the Linville Caverns in an underground stream, and visitors view the cavern's still-growing limestone.

➔ Tour Guide Gary, armed with a flashlight and a gray-mustachioed grin, leads us behind a gray steel door into Humpback Mountain, and the wonder and beauty of the Linville Caverns. The wet, dripping rock that greets us is still-growing limestone.

Eastern brown bats call the cavern home, and trout swim in and out via a cool 42-degree stream that fishermen in 1822 first curiously followed into the mountain.

The caverns are an estimated 20 million years old. Before it opened to the public in 1937, this show cavern (the only one in North Carolina) attracted the curious, including those early fishermen, Native Americans, hiding Civil War soldiers, explorers and treasure hunters. Today, lighted pathways lead you into this subterranean world.

Mysteries of the underworld

The cavern temperature is a constant 52 degrees year-round. A light jacket or sweatshirt and non-slip soles are recommended before entering the wet environment.

Gary introduces the cavern at the spot where those soldiers kept warm by an open fire and points with his flashlight to the top of the cave where

unseen vents let the smoke escape.

The cavern consists of three levels, eight rooms and a multitude of passageways, some of which are off-limits to visitors. Mineral-laden water is the key to the cavern's growing limestone, which takes 125 years to form just one cubic inch. The many colors in the rock are from iron ore rust, calcite, copper, algae and other elements. The water and minerals have created stalactites and stalagmites, forming draperies, columns and canopies of all shapes and colors, as well as natural passageways and open spaces.

On the tour, Gary warns us of the "cave kiss:" hanging rocks that could "kiss your head." Through passageways and open areas, Gary's flashlight illuminates "guess what" shapes that elicited our answers: dinosaurs, aliens, well-known characters such as Davy Jones and Frankenstein, skeletons and food. One room, the Cathedral Room, features a wedding—a frozen bride and groom standing before a frozen preacher.

You can hear the underground stream in this room. The stream leads to the cavern's bottomless lake. Standing in a tight cavern on top of a metal grate, you look down into the lake and imagine divers trying and failing to find the bottom.

Linville Caverns

19929 US 221 North
Marion, NC 28752

(800) 419-0540

www.linvillecaverns.com

LAT: 35.917

LONG: -81.938



At the end of the 40-minute tour, Gary had led us 2,500 feet below ground and 700 feet away from the cavern's entrance. He weaves a tale of two teen-aged boys in the early 1900s exploring the cavern with just lanterns. The lanterns went out, plunging the boys into total darkness. Gary asks us to cover or turn off all digital watches and mobile phones to eliminate any light source; he then flips a switch, plunging us into total darkness. Pitch black—I couldn't see my wiggling fingers in front of my face. Imagine the panic those teens felt. Did they make it out of the caverns alive?

More information

Linville Caverns is open year-round (daily March–November, weekends only December–February). Cost: \$7 adults; \$5.50 for 62 and over; \$5 children 5–12; Free for under 5 with adult or senior ticket. ⓘ

West Jefferson

Ashe County

By Renee Gannon



Kathleen George



Kim Hadley



Situated in the valley between Mount Jefferson and Paddy Mountain in the Blue Ridge Mountains, West Jefferson is a small town that is big on regional pride. With a thriving downtown, a local arts scene, recreation, and, of course, Christmas trees, visitors have an abundance of options at every turn. Oh, and then there's Ashe County Cheese.

Plenty to see and do

Downtown West Jefferson holds an eclectic collection of businesses, including locally-owned restaurants, art galleries (the Friday night Gallery Crawl is worth your time), a western wear store, gift and specialty shops, a toy and hobby store, and a farmers' market. Fifteen wall-size murals created by local artists provide a walking tour of the town's history and culture.

A staple of downtown since 1930, The Ashe County Cheese Store offers fresh-made cheese straight from the

original cheese plant located across the street. The plant's viewing room is open year-round at no charge so cheese lovers can watch the creation of the award-winning cheese varieties.

A few miles outside of downtown, at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, religious frescoes adorn the church's walls. The small century-old wooden church houses life-size frescoes created by artist Benjamin F. Long IV depicting Mary Great with Child, John the Baptist and Mystery of Faith. These frescoes are three of the nine found on the Blue Ridge Trail.

If you are looking for more than an art stroll, West Jefferson serves as a gateway to several state and national parks, including the New River State Park and the Mount Jefferson State Park. The New River is the second oldest river in the world and a des-

ignated American Heritage River. Canoeing, kayaking, fishing, tubing, picnic areas and camping are all available. Mount Jefferson at more than 1,600 feet above the valley, offers hiking trails, picnic areas, pavilions and local natural history education.

Ashe County is known for Christmas trees, and West Jefferson is no exception. The town annually holds the Christmas in July Festival over the Independence Day weekend to celebrate the town's roots among the Fraser firs.

West Jefferson started as a railroad depot stop more than 100 years ago. Today, the town has grown to a welcoming tourist stop for Blue Ridge Mountain travelers looking for small town charm, local art and natural adventure. 📍

Ashe County Chamber of Commerce

(336) 846-9550

www.ashechamber.org

www.visitwestjefferson.org

www.visitashecounty.com

LAT: 36.403

LONG: -81.493





➔ Mountain Area Travel Resources

Alexander County

(828) 632-8141
www.alexandercountychamber.com
www.visitalexandercounty.com

Alleghany County Chamber

(800) 372-5473
336-372-5473
www.sparta-nc.com

Andrews Chamber

(877) 558-0005/(828) 321-3584
www.andrewschambercommerce.com

Ashe County Chamber

(888) 343-2743/(336) 846.9550
www.ashechamber.com

Asheville CVB

(828) 258-6101
www.exploreasheville.com

Avery/Banner Elk

(800) 972-2183/(828) 898-5605
www.balconyoftheblueridge.com

Beech Mountain Chamber

(800) 468-5506/(828) 387-9283
www.beechmtn.com

Black Mountain

(800) 669-2301/(828)669-2300
www.exploreblackmountain.com

Blowing Rock

(877) 750-INFO
(828) 295-4636
www.blowingrock.com

Blue Ridge Parkway

469-mile scenic highway
(828) 298-0398
www.blueridgeparkway.org

Boone CVB

(800) 852-9506/(828) 262-3516
www.visitboonenc.com

Brevard/Transylvania County Tourism

Brevard-Transylvania Chamber
(800) 648-4523/(828) 883-3700
www.visitwaterfalls.com

Burke County Chamber of Commerce

(828) 437-3021
www.burkecounty.org

Burke County Tourism Development Authority

(888) 462-2921/(828) 433-6793
www.discoverburkecounty.org

Caldwell County Chamber

(828) 726-0323
www.explorealdwell.com

Cashiers Area

(828) 743-5191
www.cashiersnorthcarolina.com

Catawba County

(828) 328-6111
www.catawbachamber.org

Cherokee County

(828) 837-2242
www.cherokeecountychamber.com

Cherokee

(800) 438-1601
www.cherokee-nc.com

Clay County Chamber

(828) 389-3704
www.claycounty-nc-chamber.com

Cleveland County Chamber

(704) 482-7882/(704) 487-8521
www.clevelandcounty.com
www.clevelandchamber.org

Dillsboro Merchants Assn

(828) 586-3461
www.visitdillsboro.org

Franklin Chamber/Macon County

(866) 372-5546/(828) 524-3161
www.visitfranklinnc.com

Graham County Travel & Tourism

(800) 470-3790/(828) 479-3790
www.grahamcountytravel.com

Haywood County Chamber

(828) 456-3021/(877) 456-3073
www.haywood-nc.com

Haywood County/ Maggie Valley/Waynesville

Gateway to the Smokies
(800) 334-9036/(828) 452-0152
www.smokeymountains.net

Henderson County Travel & Tourism

(800) 828-4244/(828) 693-9708
www.historichendersonville.org

Greater Hendersonville Chamber

(828) 692-1413
www.hendersonvillechamber.org

Hickory Metro CVB & Regional Visitors Center

(800) 509-2444/(828) 322-1335
www.hickorymetro.com

Hickory Nut Gorge

(877) 625-2725/(828) 625-2725
www.hickorynut.org

High Country Host Visitor Center

Travel and accommodations
information
(800) 438-7500/(828)264-1299
www.mountainsofnc.com

Highlands Chamber & Visitors Center

(866) 526-5841/(828) 526-2114
www.highlandschamber.org

Jackson County Travel & Tourism

(800) 962-1911
www.mountainlovers.com

Kings Mountain-Branch of Cleveland County Chamber

(704) 739-4755
www.clevelandchamber.org

Lincolnton-Lincoln County

(704) 735-3096
www.lincolinchambernc.org

Madison County Visitor Center

(877) 262-3476
www.visitmadisoncounty.com

Maggie Valley Area CVB

(800) 624-4431/(828) 926-1686
www.maggievalley.org

McDowell Chamber

(828) 652-4240
www.mcdowellchamber.com

McDowell Tourism Development Authority, Old Fort

(888) 233-6111/(828) 668-4282
www.mcdowellnc.org

Mitchell County Chamber, Spruce Pine

(800) 227-3912/(828) 765-9033
www.mitchell-county.com

Mooresville CVB

(877) 661-1234/ (704) 799-2400/
(704) 664-3898
www.racecityusa.org
www.moorevillenc.org

NC Welcome Center

(1-40 West, Waynesville)
(800) VISITNC
www.visitnc.com

North Wilkesboro

(336) 667-7129
www.north-wilkesboro.com

Old Fort Chamber

(828) 668-7223
www.oldfortchamber.com
www.oldfort.org

Polk County Chamber

(828) 859-6236
www.polkachamber.org

Polk County Visitors Center, Tryon

(800) 440-7848/(828) 894-2324
www.nc-mountains.org

Rutherford County Chamber

(828) 287-3090
www.rutherfordcoc.org

Rutherford County Visitor Center

(800) 849-5998/(828) 245-1492
www.rutherfordtourism.com

Statesville CVB

(877) 531-1819/(704) 878-3480
www.visitstatesville.org

Smoky Mountain Host

Guide to attractions,
accommodations
(800) 432-4678
www.visitsmokies.org

Swain County Chamber of Commerce Welcome Center

(800) 867-9246/(828) 488-3681
www.greatsmokies.com

Wilkes County Chamber

(336) 838-8662
www.wilkesnc.org
www.explorewilkes.com

Wilkesboro Tourism Development Authority

(336) 838-3951
www.wilkesboronorthcarolina.com

Yancey County-Burnsville Chamber

(800) 948-1632/(828) 682-7413
www.yanceychamber.com