

# Carolina country *Adventures*



# Carolina Country Adventures



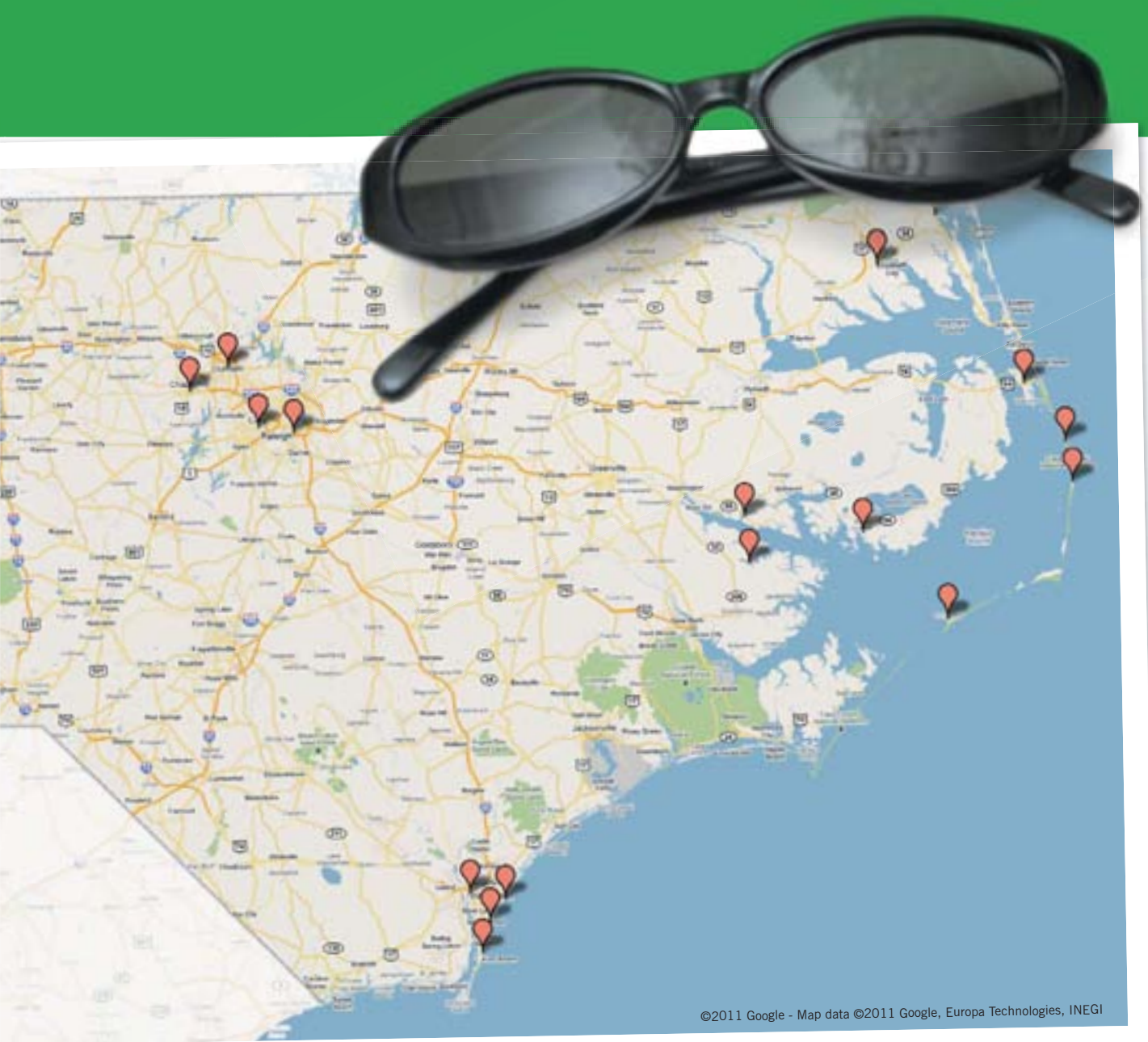
From one end to the other, North Carolina is about as diverse as any state in the nation. We've got hard gemstones in the west, soft crabs on the coast and red clay in the middle. The tobacco we grow in the mountains is different than what we grow in the east. What we live in, how we drive, what we eat 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 offer you six great travel stories about interesting areas in the mountains, Piedmont and coast. We've also updated the primary sources of general information about regions in our resource listings. The adventures we offer may be familiar to you, or they may not. In any case, each holds the promise for a lot of travel 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 36 to 38.



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*Writers*

- Renee C. Gannon
- Michael E.C. Gery
- Karen Olson House
- Tara Verna

*Designers*

- Warren Kessler
- Tara Verna
- Linda Van de Zande

*Advertising*

- Jennifer Boedart Hoey
- Jenny Lloyd

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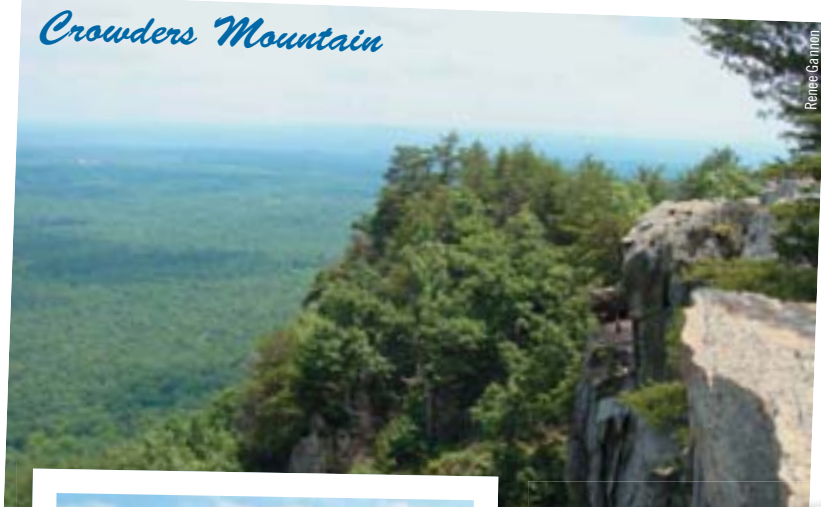
This supplement to Carolina Country is brought to you by North Carolina's Touchstone Energy cooperatives, serving nearly 2 million people in 93 North Carolina counties. We bring the power of human connections to all regions of North Carolina. Touchstone Energy cooperatives nationwide are committed to integrity, accountability, innovation and community involvement. Send comments and corrections to [editor@carolinacountry.com](mailto:editor@carolinacountry.com)



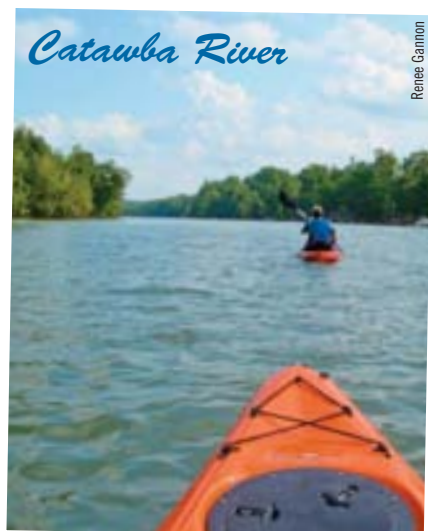
# Carolina Country Adventures

By Renee Gannon

*Crowders Mountain*



*Catawba River*



*U.S. National Whitewater Center*



*U.S. National Whitewater Center*

## *Gaston County: Beyond the bright lights of the big city*

Just west of Charlotte lies Gaston County, an area built by a textile industry that harvested power from the Catawba and South Fork rivers to turn its spindles. Today, outdoor activity takes place on those same waterways, and life in the mill towns turns at a more leisurely pace. These mill towns include McAdenville, whose Christmas light display dates back to 1956 and now includes 450,000 bulbs and 400 trees. What's one of the most popular destinations in the county? Mary Jo's Cloth Store in Gastonia, where kids playing a game of U.S. license plate tag could spend an entire day in its parking lot. The rivers and streams also provide catfish for the many fish camp restaurants in the area, where you could eat at a different camp each day of the month.

### *Raise your pulse*

Nestled on 400 wooded acres between Mount Holly and Charlotte, and along the edges of the Catawba River, is the U.S. National Whitewater Center (USNWC), an official Olympic training site. What you first notice when walking into the USNWC is the concrete. The USNWC features

a multiple-channel, customizable whitewater river that can be enjoyed by all skill levels. It is the largest manmade whitewater river in the country.

Since the center opened in 2006, more than 1.6 million visitors have tested the whitewater course by raft or kayak, hiked or biked the 14 miles of trails, ascended the outdoor

climbing wall that features a 46-foot spire, faced fears of falling on the high and low ropes courses upwards to 40-foot high, ridden the almost 1,200-foot zip line or taken the step off the 35-foot-high zip line Mega Jump. Visitors also join in Eco trekking and flatwater kayaking on the Catawba River.

The whitewater rafting courses grab your attention, with the rumbling, crashing water, rafters' laughter and screams, and shouted commands of the guides. Depending on the rafting group, the center's skilled guides can provide a ride from easy to exhilarating, racing through grades II to IV rapids, all with the help of the rafters.

The center is family and pet friendly, features a restaurant on-site as well as a retail store and rentals for all activities. [www.usnwc.org](http://www.usnwc.org) or (704) 391-3900.

Only have a few hours for an outdoor adventure? Try flatwater kayaking on the Catawba River with NC Flatwater Outfitters or hike a trail up Crowders Mountain.

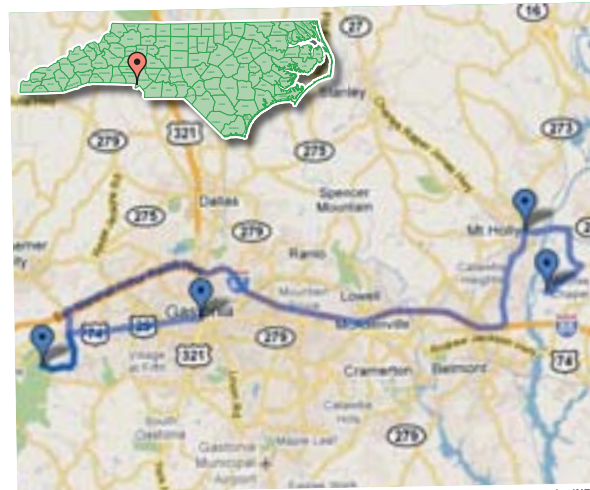
NC Flatwater Outfitters launches canoes, single and tandem kayaks from Tailrace Marina in Mount Holly, and provides year-round paddling along the many channels found on the Catawba River. Skill levels can be from non-existent to expert—you just need to stay in the kayak and know how to paddle to enjoy the quiet, scenic wildlife along the river and around Sandler Island. [www.ncflatwateroutfitters.com](http://www.ncflatwateroutfitters.com) or (704) 827-0000.

If a non-water activity is your idea of outdoors, then hike Crowders Mountain, with its rugged peaks rising 800 feet above Kings Mountain. With 15 miles of trails, ranging from easy to strenuous, about 500,000 visitors a year walk through this state park to reach the Overlook, which features a 150-foot sheer vertical drop with an open view to watch raptors fly in and out of the trees, and King's Pinnacle, the highest point in Gaston County, with a 20-mile panoramic view of the Piedmont area.

The park offers camping and picnicking sites, boating on a manmade 9-acre lake, rock climbing areas, environmental education classes and a nature center. [www.crowdersmountain.com](http://www.crowdersmountain.com) or (704) 853-5375.

Looking for a place to unwind after kayaking or hiking? Need to replenish a few calories? Head to historic Tony's Ice Cream in downtown Gastonia to try one of the 28 homemade ice cream flavors made in the plant next door or grab a bite to eat from the grill. Tony's has been a local favorite since 1915, starting as an ice cream cart-then-truck business before settling into its present location in 1947. The restaurant still has a nostalgic feel and is now run by a third generation of the Coletta family. [www.tonysicecream.com](http://www.tonysicecream.com) or (704) 853-0018.

For more information see *Western Piedmont travel resources* starting on page 53.



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## Lower your pulse

The area's communities boast a thriving arts scene, local museums, the historic Belmont Drive-In, Belmont Abbey (the first abbey cathedral in the country), a liberal arts college, a natural history museum celebrating its 50th year, and a nationally acclaimed botanical garden.

Started from the personal collection of founder Rudolph "Bud" Schiele, the Schiele Museum of Natural History in Gastonia boasts the largest collection of land mammal specimens in the Southeast, from raccoons to buffalo. It features five permanent exhibit halls, rotating exhibits and the James Lynn Planetarium. The museum also offers a 1-mile walk around the museum grounds that features the area's Stone Age heritage, a recreated Catawba Indian Village and an 18th-century farm. The farm shows how settlers and Indians learned to live with their environment. The museum houses the largest collection of Catawba Indian pottery outside of the Smithsonian. [www.schielemuseum.org](http://www.schielemuseum.org) or (704) 866-6908.

The Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden serves as another relaxation adventure. Located on 450 acres along Lake Wylie just south of Belmont, the complex includes an orchid conservatory, nine themed garden areas, water fountains, a half-mile woodland trail and a visitor pavilion. [www.dsbg.org](http://www.dsbg.org) or (704) 825-4490.



Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden

Renee Garrison