

Carolina country *Adventures*



Carolina Country Adventures



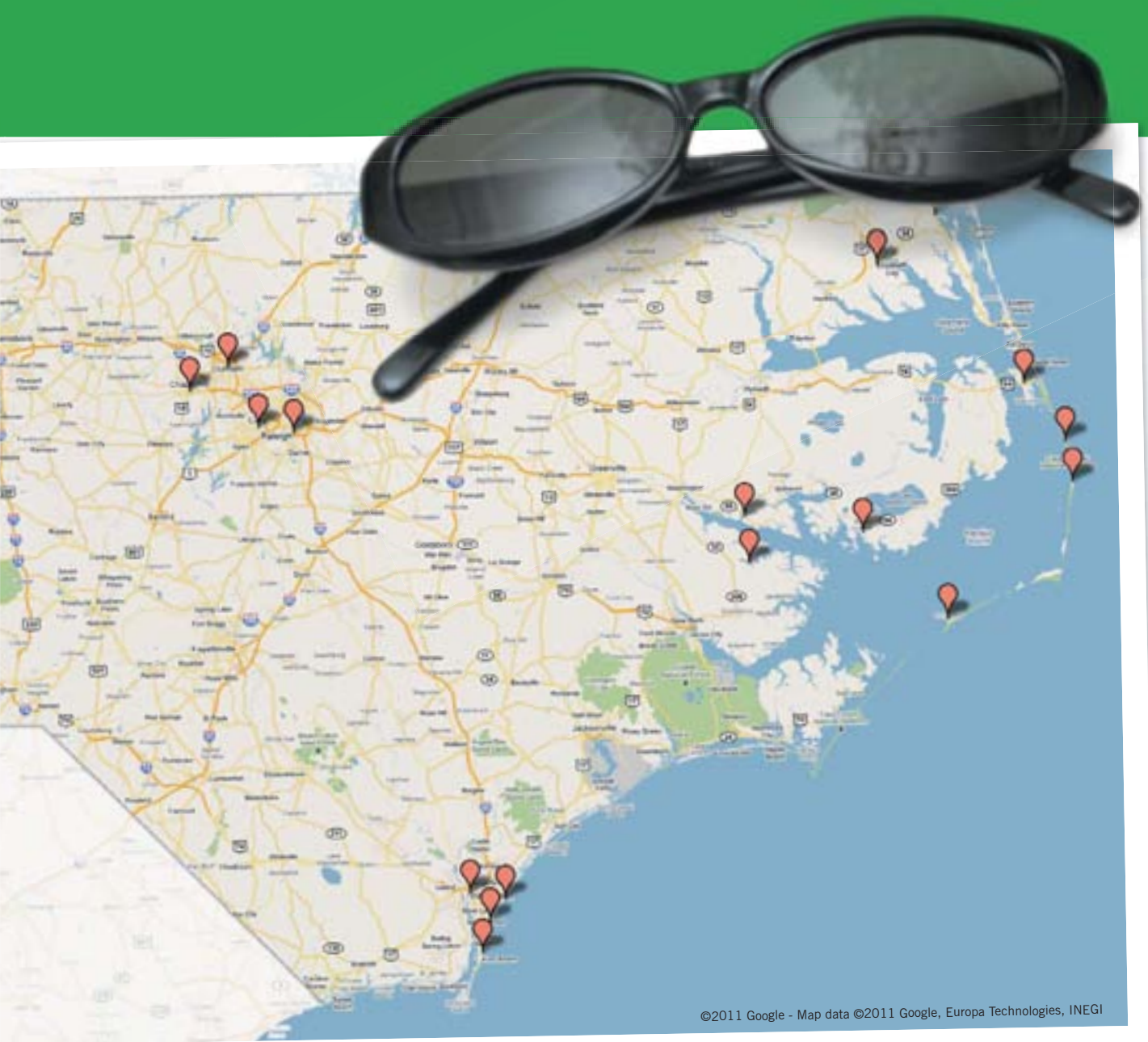
From one end to the other, North Carolina is about as diverse as any state in the nation. We've got hard gemstones in the west, soft crabs on the coast and red clay in the middle. The tobacco we grow in the mountains is different than what we grow in the east. What we live in, how we drive, what we eat 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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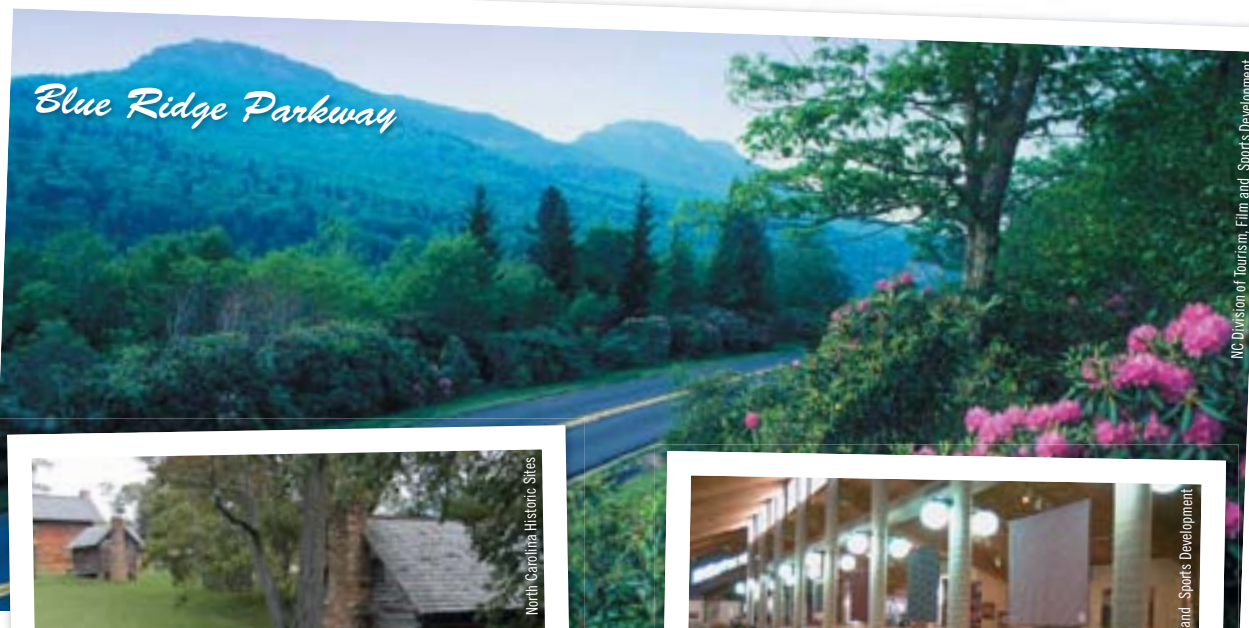
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This supplement to Carolina Country is brought to you by North Carolina's Touchstone Energy cooperatives, serving nearly 2 million people in 93 North Carolina counties. We bring the power of human connections to all regions of North Carolina. Touchstone Energy cooperatives nationwide are committed to integrity, accountability, innovation and community involvement. Send comments and corrections to editor@carolinacountry.com



Carolina Country Adventures

By Tara Verna



NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development



North Carolina Historic Sites



NC Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development

Land of the Sky: Looking beyond Asheville

With more than 200 mountain summits and peaks in Buncombe County, it's easy to understand the Asheville area's high-flying nickname, "Land of the Sky." Between the Blue Ridge Mountains and Parkway, it's even easier to pinpoint some of North Carolina's most scenic attractions. Although top-ranked Asheville certainly merits a visit, set aside some time to explore a few of the nearby sites that sometimes fall under the radar.

Black Mountain

Often labeled the "front porch of the western mountains," the friendly, artsy, small-town atmosphere of Black Mountain welcomes visitors to the Blue Ridge Mountains. Less than 20 minutes from Asheville, Black Mountain offers a thriving local music and art scene, dozens of restaurants worth their salt, and serves as a solid base camp for visiting many area attractions, including the ones that follow. Plan ahead to catch one of the following festivals during your visit: L.E.A.F. Festival, Sourwood Festival, Art in Bloom and more.

Shops & restaurants

Black Mountain is known for its artisans—local craftspeople often demonstrate their skills at iron works, dulcimer making, and throwing pottery. Song of the Wood off of West State Street specializes in handmade hammered dulci-

mers, one of the world's most ancient musical instruments. And the Old Depot Gallery gives mountain crafters a place to sell their original crafts including pottery.

Gaze into your loved one's eyes over dinner in Cheshire Village amid mountain scenery on The Blackbird's patio while listening to a local band. Try the juicy porkchops and the custard coconut cake. Families may opt for My Father's Pizza, a local favorite with an atmosphere-enhancing view of downtown from the patio. www.blackmountain.org or (800) 669-2301.

WNC Nature Center

Only 15 minutes west of Black Mountain lies a small, shady gem of a zoo, ideal for families. The 42-acre Western North Carolina Nature Center (WNC) exists to help preserve the plants and animals native to the southern Appalachian region. More than 200 animals call the center home including black bears, otters, red wolves, butterflies and bobcats.

In the Nature Lab and Educational Farm with petting area, children can touch a corn snake, hold a turtle or stroke angora, presheared.

The center provides a home for animals that were injured or have “imprinted” on people and cannot be returned to the wild. It is one of only 46 facilities in the country participating in the Red Wolf re-introduction program.

The center is open year round with both indoor and outdoor exhibits. www.wildwnc.org or (828) 298-5600.

Folk Art Center

Not even five minutes from the nature center you'll find the most popular attraction on the Blue Ridge Parkway—a place that ushers in more than 250,000 visitors each year. The bright and airy Folk Art Center showcases Appalachian culture and craft through events, exhibitions and shopping. In addition to an Eastern National bookstore with Parkway souvenirs and a Blue Ridge Parkway information desk, the center also houses three galleries, a library and the century-old Allstand Craft Shop. Beginning in March each year, visitors can see live craft demonstrations daily in the Folk Art Center lobby. www.southernhighlandguild.org or (828) 298-7928.

The Blue Ridge Parkway

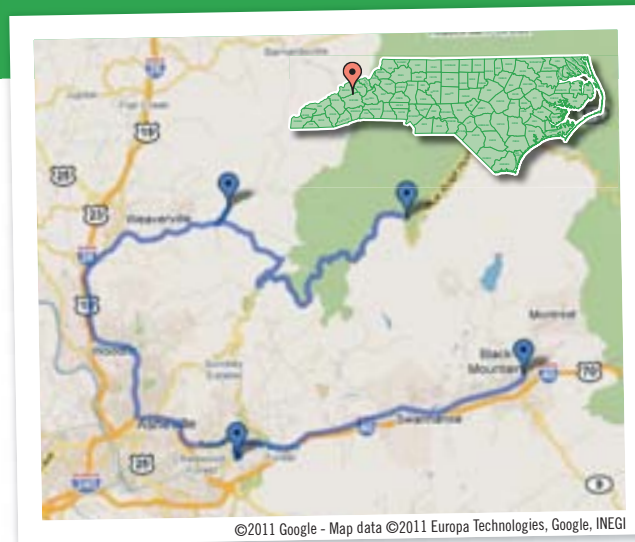
Several roads lead to your next stop, Vance Birthplace. However, avoid regrets by taking “America’s Favorite Drive,” the Blue Ridge Parkway. This 469-mile scenic drive runs through the Blue Ridge Mountains from Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Cherokee, NC. The Parkway climbs to 6,000 feet in elevation just south of Asheville.

In winter, parts of the parkway may be closed, but views are stunning through leafless trees. In spring and summer, colorful foliage and flowers beckon from the roadsides while waterfalls glisten and glow in the sunlight. In fall, trees crackle with color and you may even glimpse a meteor shower called the Orionids that begins in early October. www.blueridgeparkway.org or (828) 298-0398.

Vance Birthplace

Head 20 minutes north up the picturesque Blue Ridge Parkway to take in this N.C. State Historic Site—the birthplace of Zebulon Baird Vance. Rugged, dynamic and controversial, Vance rose to political popularity as a Civil War officer, three-time North Carolina governor, and U.S. senator.

Nestled in the Reems Creek Valley and surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains, this pioneer farmstead consists of a five-room log house with original chimneys and six outbuildings styled to resemble those built 1793–1840. There is also a visitor center with a small gift shop that offers mostly handmade items. No admission fees charged,



but donations are appreciated. Open Tuesday–Saturday from 9 a.m.–5 p.m. www.nchistoricsites.com/vance/vance.htm or (828) 645-6706.

Hungry? Head into Weaverville (10-minute drive) and stop by the Well-Bred Bakery and Café. Try a chocolate éclair, a ginger Florentine or a pecan praline cookie. Stay for the live music on Fridays and Saturdays. Leave with a fresh loaf of olive oil rosemary bread.

Craggy Gardens

Don't look down! The half-hour drive up and up and up the Blue Ridge Parkway to Craggy Gardens may feel like a never-ending coaster climb, but it will end, once you reach nearly 5,892 feet in elevation just south of Asheville.

Drive to the Visitor Center and its stunning views of southern Appalachian ridges to the east and west. Take the Craggy Pinnacle trail (1.5-miles roundtrip, moderate) through rhododendron tunnels, gnarled sweet birch trees and wildflowers. The 360-degree view at the top will leave you speechless. The blueberries along the trail offer a late-summer snack.

Bring a picnic and visit Craggy Gardens in June and July to drink in the sea of robust pink and purple Catawba rhododendrons. You can also find violets, May-apples, Turkscap lilies and blackberries. In the fall, view bright red berries on mountain ash while winter brings icy coatings to twisted trees.

The high elevation of Craggy Gardens causes temperature drops of 10–20 degrees, and the exposed rocky surfaces of these peaks allow many endangered plants to grow. Protect rare foliage by staying on designated trails.

Can't get enough of mountain heights? Only a half-hour away, Mount Mitchell (elevation 6,684) is the highest point in North America east of the Mississippi River. www.blueridgeheritage.com/attractions-destination/craggy-gardens or (828) 298-5330.

For more information see *Mountain Area travel resources* starting on page 52.

