

TRAVEL

Traveling side roads of the Mountain State almost heaven

Almost heaven...
Country roads take me home
To the place I belong
West Virginia...
- lyrics from a John Denver hit song of 1971

BY DOUG JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

Take mountainous State
Highway 20 south and east
of Beckley, West Virginia, to
the railroad/river town of Hinton,
cross the New River and follow
the narrow half-paved, half-dirt
National Park Service Road up
to Sandstone Falls.

Here you are at one of the few
waterfalls in the world where
you can walk out to the middle of
the river to get a better look. The
falls only tumble about 30 feet
but at one point the river is five
feet wide and wide. Anglers
stand in the deep pools at the
fall's base. Youngsters brave the
cool waters to perch on the fall's
edge.

It's just one of many spectacu-
lar views in the Mountain State.

As you crossroads the state you
are struck by West Virginia's
rugged beauty, its well-maintained
roads, and the wondrous
state parks, but most off all it's
the state's rural nature that
highlights the sharpest contrast
for those of us who live in south-
eastern Michigan.

Two of the state's biggest
cities, the capital, Charleston,
and nearby Huntington are each
less than half the population of
Livonia.

And the state's violent history
echoes down through the years:
the raid at Harper's Ferry; the
split with Virginia that led to the
creation of the non-slave state at
the height of the Civil War; the
bloody Hatfield and McCoy feuds;
the coal strike of 1930, vividly
depicted in the film "Matewan";
the coming to prominence of
such labor figures as John L.
Lewis and "Mother" Jones, the
angel of the coal fields; the horri-
ble mine and flood disasters.

Back at Beckley you can get a
feel for what it was - and is -
like to work the coal mines if you
stop at the Beckley Exhibition
Coal Mine.

Hitting the road

- For an interesting but brief history of the state try "West Virginia" by John Alexander Williams, W. W. Norton, publisher.
- For a list of white water runners, go to www.whitewater.com. The main West Virginia site is www.wvonline.com. Also, wvparks.com. The main state site is www.state.wv.us/tourism. The National Park Service's Web site for the New River is www.nps.gov/nrcr. A very complete list of links to almost every Web site in the state can be found at www.polsci.wvu.edu/wv/wvlinks.
- The state's toll free phone is (800) 847-4898.
- You may find cheaper motel rates at places like Oak Hill and Fayetteville than at Beckley.
- It takes less than one day to get to the Ohio/West Virginia border; most people take the Ohio Turnpike to Toledo over to southbound Interstate 77.

The hourlong tour takes you
on a ride inside an authentic coal
mine on "man trip" cars. Real
miners take you through the
history of coal mines and you see
the rich seams of coal.

The mine is open April 1 to
Nov. 1; tours run from 10 a.m. to
5:30 p.m. Also at the site is a
gift shop, small museum, camp-
ground, coal company house, and
superintendent's house.

North from Beckley near
Fayetteville you cross the
famous New River Gorge bridge.
Once a year (in October)
B.A.S.E. jumpers leap off the
span and drop the 900 feet to the
river below.

B.A.S.E. stands for building,
antenna, span, earth, fixed
objects from which jumpers leap
or rappel.

If you're not interested in

extreme sports chase any other
day. Stop by the Park Service's
visitor center and pick up the
official map for the New River
Gorge National River. Many side
roads are clearly marked and
with some care you can take a
narrow, dirt one-way road to the
bottom of the gorge.

Above looms the impressive
3,000-foot steel span. At your
feet is a tranquil spot in the
river. A brief but tricky hike
across a boulder field upstream
leads you to a patch of whitewater.
In early April wetsuits are
worn by river runners despite 80
degree air temperatures.

Other roads wind down into
the river gorge; at one point you
cross the New River on a one-
way bridge that also contains a
set of railroad tracks. It's river-
running the New, the Gauley
and the Cheat rivers that have
helped boost tourism in West Vir-
ginia.

If you want you can take jet-
boats in the summer on a portion
of the New River near Hawks
Nest State Park (304 469-2525).

A swing up from the big bridge
on U.S. 19 to U.S. 60 then north
to Babcock State Park brings
you to another scenic gem. With
some bypassing, the historic
Glade Creek Mill and waterfalls
in the dark are the "most photog-
ographed mill (and waterfalls)
in the United States." True or
not, the mill and falls are a photog-
rapher's delight and are eas-
ily accessible.

Another surprise is the
impressive waterfalls at Black-
water Falls State Park on the
eastern edge of the state.
Numerous stairs lead to the falls
on the west side of the river, but
an easy walk gives you a high
view from the east side. A quick
run over to the eerie Seneca
Rocks monoliths yields yet
another facet of the state.

Here are some other routes or
destinations to consider:

■ The drive down State High-
way 55 from Elkins south to
Interstate 64; beautiful valleys,
rivers and mountains can only
be matched in the American
west.

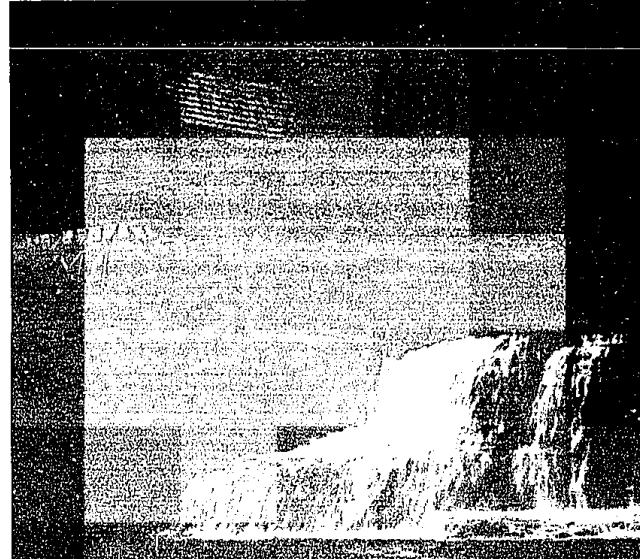


PHOTO BY DOUG JOHNSON

Most photographed: A grist mill and waterfalls make a picture-perfect scene at Babcock State Park.

■ A stop at Tamarack near Beckley where the "Best of West Virginia" is showcased is highly recommended. Fine arts and crafts are featured, but the best part is a superb food service operation run by the folks from The Greenerbriar, a noted five-star resort at White Sulphur Springs.

■ A trip south of Beckley to Twin Falls will take you deep
into coal country; railroad cars
loaded with the black rocks chug
alongside quiet rivers, roadways
taking you through small towns

filled with frame houses and the
ever-present house trailer.

■ On the return trip home
stop at Parkerburg along the
Ohio River and check out the
flood walls. Drop in for a meal at
the restored Blennerhassett
Hotel where they have been tak-
ing care of visitors for 102 years.

■ Nearby in Williamson and
the home of Fenton Glass where
they offer tours and demonstra-
tions. West Virginia is noted for
glass. One of the more famous
plants is in Milton west of

Charleston on I-64. Blenko Glass
and their artisans were featured
on a recent PBS show.

A bloody history and a daunt-
ing terrain have combined to cre-
ate West Virginia.

Mary Harris (Mother) Jones
called the place "medieval." It
wasn't "almost heaven" to her
but it drew her back many times
over a period of 40 years - much
as it draws visitors today.

Doug Johnson is a retired
Livonia teacher who lives with
his wife in Plymouth.

Celebrate Mardi Gras

Indulgence is...
Shopping!

Shop Laurel Park Place once each week
from February 14 through Mardi Gras (March 7)
and we'll reimburse one of your shopping trips!

In celebration of Mardi Gras, Laurel Park Place is helping you Indulge in shopping! Shop each of the three weeks designated below and you will receive a Laurel Park Place gift certificate worth the value of your lowest weekly receipt! Plus, you can enter to win a trip for two to New Orleans including airfare, accommodations in the historic French Quarter, a shopping spree and more!

Here's how it works. Simply make a purchase of \$35.00 or more each of the following weeks and you will receive a strand of Mardi Gras beads:

- February 14 - February 20: purple beads
- February 21 - February 28: green beads
- February 29 - March 7: gold beads

Bring the beads and your receipt to the Mardi Gras cart near Center Court to redeem them. When you have one strand of beads, you'll be eligible to enter to win the trip to New Orleans. Two strands of different colored beads: you'll be eligible to enter to win the New Orleans trip and receive a coupon for a free jerked shrimp appetizer at the Real Seafood Grill with the purchase of an entree. Three strands of beads (one of each color): you'll be eligible to enter to win the New Orleans trip and you'll receive a Laurel Park Place gift certificate worth the value of your lowest weekly receipt!

*These, hotel purchases and Laurel Park gift certificate sales excluded. Only one receipt allowed from a department store. Receipts cannot be combined. All beads must be accompanied by a receipt. Additional rules and regulations also apply and are available at the Mardi Gras cart or the Management Office.



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in Livonia on Six Mile, just one-quarter mile east of I-275.

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