

July-August 2019

guideposts

WNC'S SPOT FOR TIMELY TIDBITS & NEWSY SNIPPETS

Artful Excursions

Set off on the new Blue Ridge Craft Trails to encounter a thriving heritage

“Come make an experience” is the clarion call of the developing Blue Ridge Craft Trails.

Established by the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA), a partner of the National Park Service and creator of the two-year-old Blue Ridge Music Trails, the new initiative will ultimately span 25 counties in Western North Carolina, directing visitors to some 200 points of interest that showcase the region’s craft heritage, including galleries, artist studios, and cultural sites.

Expanding on the work of HandMade in America—the lauded nonprofit that closed in 2015 after 20 years of helping WNC’s small towns transition from textile mills and tobacco farming to economies boosted by the arts, culture, and history—BRNHA facilitates cultural tourism across the region. Through the Craft Trails’ curated self-drive itineraries (found on the organization’s website), visitors can step into artisans’

STATE OF THE ARTS When complete, the Trails will include access to some 200 points of interest, including the studios of glassmaker Karen Hovis (top), ceramist Rob Withrow (center), and sculptor Joe Waldroup (bottom).

studios to observe pottery-making or beading, for instance, as well as try their hand at creating an artistic object, suggests Leslie Hartley, the project coordinator. There are also recommendations for food, breweries, music, outdoor activities, and scenic views to round out an excursion.

While the entire Craft Trails system won’t be complete until late 2020, the itineraries in Cherokee and Clay counties are ready for exploration. Interest points include the Murphy River Walk, Cherokee





DREAM WEAVER Visitors can expect to encounter artists like Carmen Haynes (above), as well as pieces like this hand-built, raku-fired lamp (left).



County Historical Museum (containing over 2,000 Cherokee artifacts and an interpretive center for the Trail of Tears), pottery studios, and several art and craft galleries, including those at John C. Campbell Folk School. Later this summer, the trail in Henderson County will be complete too.

Divided into the Far West, Central Mountains, High Country, and Foothills regions, or by the types of craft mediums, the Trails' easily navigable website goes into detail about the history of a particular craft, its relation to the area, and the locations where contemporary examples can be found.



CRAFT A ROUTE
Learn more at blueridgeheritage.com.

"We've taken up the excellent work where Hand-Made in America left off," says Hartley. "We've conducted outreach and research in these communities to see how we make this sustainable beyond the initial phase."

With the desire for more authentic experiences only growing in the travel industry, searching out unique works of art and meeting the makers might be the most sustainable idea for craft heritage yet.

—CONSTANCE E. RICHARDS

{News Flash}

The latest from throughout Western North Carolina

Asheville airport adds three major routes

Beginning in May, Asheville Regional Airport added three new destinations via American Airlines: daily flights to Dallas/Ft. Worth and Philadelphia, and Saturday and Sunday flights to New York City (LaGuardia Airport). Business was already booming at the airport: in the first four months of 2019, the facility saw a 37 percent increase in passengers over the same period the prior year.



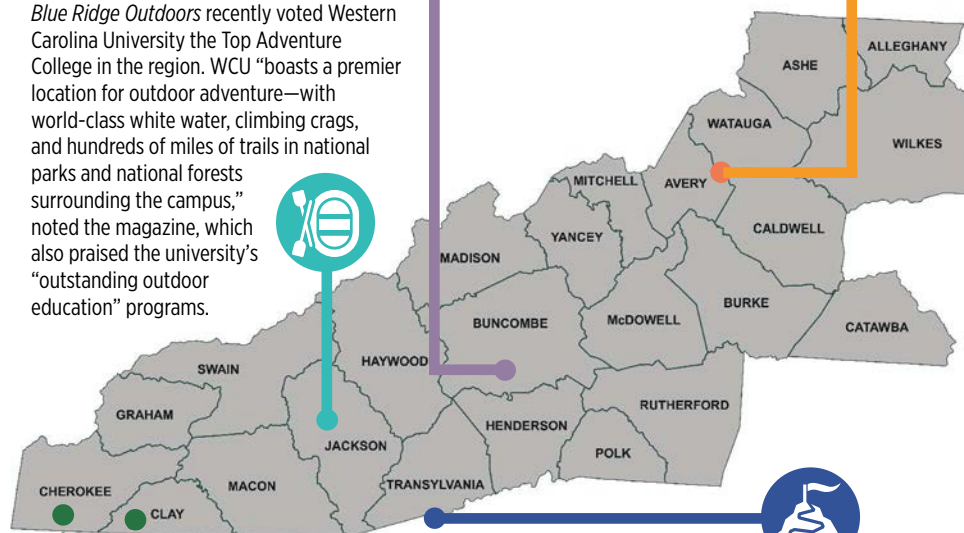
Grandfather Mountain to establish "Conservation Campus"

According to the nonprofit Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, the high-reaching attraction will break ground this fall on a \$5.5-million complex dubbed Conservation Campus. In addition to refurbishing and expanding Grandfather's current educational spaces, the project will add a new amphitheater and pavilion, among other features that will expand instructional offerings about the mountain and its rich ecosystem.



WCU again snags Top Adventure College award

For the fifth year in a row, the readers of *Blue Ridge Outdoors* recently voted Western Carolina University the Top Adventure College in the region. WCU "boasts a premier location for outdoor adventure—with world-class white water, climbing crags, and hundreds of miles of trails in national parks and national forests surrounding the campus," noted the magazine, which also praised the university's "outstanding outdoor education" programs.



Cherokee and Clay counties become official "gun sanctuaries"

This spring, commissioners in both Cherokee and Clay counties voted to become "Second Amendment Sanctuary" counties. While largely a symbolic step, resolutions proclaiming the designation—patterned after a movement that began in western states—affirmed the counties' commitment to opposing any new laws that would restrict citizens' rights to keep and bear arms.

Sassafras Mountain Tower offers vast vistas

With an elevation of 3,533 feet, the highest point in South Carolina is at Sassafras Mountain, which straddles the North Carolina/South Carolina border where Transylvania County meets Pickens County. Now, a newly completed observation tower installed by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources provides views as far as 50 miles into the Carolinas and Georgia.



State biologists seek hellbender sightings

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission has asked for the public's help in documenting sightings of the elusive hellbender, the massive mountain salamander that can grow up to two feet in length. Given concerns that hellbender populations are shrinking, the commission hopes to gain a better understanding of where they can still be found. Anyone who spots one is asked to report the location (and if possible, provide a photo of the slippery creature) to Wildlife Diversity Biologist Lori Williams via e-mail at l.williams@ncwildlife.org.

—JON ELLISTON