

Asheville, North Carolina

Including Black Mountain, Brevard, Flat Rock, Hendersonville, Hot Springs, and Lake Lure

The Appalachian Mountain Range, which stretches from Georgia to Newfoundland, formed between 250 and 450 million years ago as tectonic plates surged Earth's liquid core, smashed into each other, and pushed the land skyward. At birth, the peaks were as high and craggy as the Rocky Mountains are today, but time softened their edges, eroding them to a present average elevation of 3,000 feet. In North Carolina, the mountains proved the most resilient. This is where you'll find the range's highest and most-jagged peaks. And here, surrounded by these ancient mountains and spread across a high-plateau valley at the junction of the French Broad and Swannanoa rivers, is the free-spirited City of Asheville.

Sixty-eight thousand residents do indeed make a city, but Asheville's diverse and colorful population—mountain settlers' descendants, craftspeople, sophisticates, alternative types, and everyday folks—challenges the notion of cities as pretentious, impersonal, and buttoned-up. Alternately tradition-bound and New Age, fastidious and unkempt, cosmopolitan and rural, Asheville has a long history as a meeting point between cultures. In fact, the former frontier town developed around the intersection of pre-historic Native-American trading paths.

The earliest settlers were the Connestee, hunter-gatherers who traded locally mined mica for pottery, flint, copper, and tools with tribes as far away as the Gulf Coast



Downtown Asheville

Asheville CVB



The Appalachians are among the world's oldest mountains

Spanish explorers trudged through the area in search of gold. Cherokee society, with its own government, laws of progeny, and rich mythology, was advanced, and while inter-tribal skirmishes broke out over hunting lands and trade practices, the tribe essentially lived in peace. That is until the first white settlers made their way into the mountains in the 18th Century. Land negotiations favored the settlers and continually pushed the Cherokee west until the discovery of gold in Georgia prompted the 1830 Removal Act that sent all Native Americans east of the Mississippi to Oklahoma on the "Trail of Tears."

In the late 18th Century, the first pioneers settled the fertile Swannanoa Valley, which they called "Eden Land." By 1791, enough settlers had arrived that the State Assembly established Buncombe County, named in honor of the Revolutionary hero, Colonel Edward Buncombe. Soon thereafter, a log courthouse was built in Pack Square. In 1793, John Burton became the settlement's first developer. He purchased 200 acres of land surrounding the courthouse, subdivided it, named the development Morristown, and sold 42 half-acre lots for \$2.50 each. In 1797, Morristown honored then-Governor Samuel Ashe by incorporating the land as Asheville.

By the mid 1800s, the area's cool summer climate had begun to attract seasonal visitors, but it wasn't until the arrival of the railroad in the 1880s that the city took off as a tourist destination. The fresh air, expansive mountain views, and proximity of numerous hot sulfur springs attracted travelers, as well as tuberculosis patients whose doctors recommended Asheville as a geographic remedy. The city constructed hotels, boardinghouses, and sanitariums to host the influx. (Novelist Thomas Wolfe was born here in 1900 and grew up in a boardinghouse run by his mother for such visitors. His autobiographical novel, *Look Homeward Angel*, was set in Asheville.)

The Pre-Jet Set

George Vanderbilt, E.W. Grove, Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Calvin Coolidge, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, Will Rogers. These are just a few of the folks who rode the rails into Asheville in the early 20th Century to enjoy the city's sparkling social climate. Many of them stayed at the palatial Grove Park Inn, which from its opening in 1913 through the Roaring Twenties, was one of the "in spots" for the nation's glitterati.

and Ohio. Excavations of an 1,800-year-old Connestee village on the present-day grounds of the Biltmore Estate have turned up artifacts more than 6,000 years old. The Connestee descendants were the Cherokee, a powerful tribe that numbered perhaps 20,000 in the 16th Century when the first

construction on the Biltmore, a 250-room French château. E.W. Grove, another wealthy visitor, arrived from St. Louis in the early 20th Century to build the Grove Park Inn and several buildings downtown, including Grove Arcade, one of the country's first indoor shopping malls. Flush with cash from tourism and willing to hedge bets on future growth, Asheville erected a glittering downtown full of Art-Deco and Gothic buildings. The grand party, however, was headed for an Alka Seltzer. The Great Depression levied a sobering toll on the wealth that fueled Asheville's good times, and the city that was so dependent upon seasonal visitors spiraled deep into debt.

Ironically, Asheville's gargantuan debt saved its downtown architecture from the wrecking ball. Without the funds to "modernize," the city let its buildings sit until the late 1980s, when town officials recognized the value of preserving and revitalizing its center. The result is a vibrant downtown district with hip retailers, restaurants, and cafés housed in distinctive buildings. (In the Southeast, only Miami Beach has more Art-Deco buildings than Asheville.)

The outdoors permeates the region. The Blue Ridge Parkway, Appalachian Trail, Pisgah National Forest, and French Broad, Nolichucky, and Pigeon rivers surround the city. From *Bike* magazine's "Top 15 North American Cities for Mountain Biking" to *Canoe & Kayak's*

"Top 10 Paddle Towns in the U.S.," Asheville regularly appears on the national outdoor media's radar.

Asheville really isn't like anywhere else. The mix of rich history, interesting architecture, indigenous art and crafts, Biltmore Estate, museums, bistros, and shops, and outdoor playgrounds without limit, make this region one of the finest Play Hard Rest Easy destinations in the Southeast.



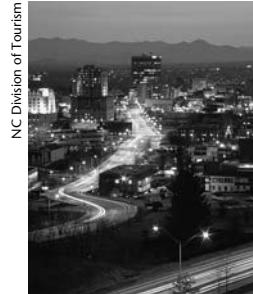
The 250-room Biltmore House



The French Broad River

The Way Around

The cultural and economic hub of Western North Carolina, **Asheville** is Buncombe County's biggest city (68,000 residents), complete with urban sprawl and its own bypass, **Interstate 240**, which loops north from Interstate 40 to lasso the city's downtown area. **Downtown Asheville** is the city's heart with shops, restaurants, art galleries, eclectic architecture, and attractions. It's best to walk downtown given the city's slightly dysfunctional street system (roads change names without warning). Metered parking spots are abundant.



Asheville's vibrant downtown

There are municipal parking decks at the Civic Center, on Rankin Avenue, and on Wall Street.

Pack Square and nearby South Pack Square make up the city's center. Located at the intersection of College Street, Broadway, and Biltmore Avenue, Pack Square features the 75-foot Vance Monument, a granite obelisk erected in 1896 to honor North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance; the cultural arts center, Pack Place; and the city's first skyscraper, the Jackson building. The streets surrounding Pack Square feature museums, shops, restaurants, and municipal buildings.

Biltmore Avenue, which extends south from Pack Square, is home to art galleries, cafés, and thrift shops. Eventually, this road

leads to the Biltmore Estate and **Biltmore Village**, where you'll find pleasant shopping and dining on cobblestone sidewalks. Biltmore Avenue continues north of Pack Square as **Broadway**, a bustling, commercial street with coffee and retail shops. Other major streets downtown include **Lexington Avenue**, a popular antiques corridor; **Wall Street**, a one-block road full of interesting specialty shops and cafés; **Battery Park Avenue**, parallel to Wall Street and also full of shops, cafés, and the indoor mall, Grove Park Arcade; **Haywood Street**, another stretch of retailers, plus the Pack Memorial Library; and **Market Street**,

a cobblestoned road with restaurants, the Thomas Wolfe Memorial Home, and a commanding view of the Jackson Building.

From downtown, both Haywood Street and **Patton Avenue** extend across the **French Broad River** to **West Asheville**, once a separate township that today is experiencing a

rebirth as a hip area full of funky shops and cheap eats. Northwest of downtown just across Interstate 240, the **Montford Historic District** is Asheville's oldest neighborhood with many attractive Victorian homes, a number of which are bed and breakfasts. **Montford Avenue** is the neighborhood's main thoroughfare. North of downtown, Broadway becomes **Merrimon Avenue/Route 25** and travels a mere six miles through posh neighborhoods into **Weaverville**. Weaverville is small community that's been popular with artists for some time but is increasingly luring young professionals and families who work in Asheville but prefer to live in a slower, more-rural area.

Located north of Asheville in rural, rugged Madison County, **Hot Springs** became popular in the mid 19th Century with travelers seeking the restorative benefits of its mineral springs. Today the small town attracts rafters, hikers, and bathers headed to the private Hot Springs Spa. The French Broad

Cosmopolitan, yet Cosmological

Dreadlocks, Birkenstocks, "river rats," hikers, tourists, shopkeepers, bankers, poets, painters ... there is no single Asheville type. "Live and let live" is the open-minded attitude that makes Asheville a haven for free spirits and friendly people.



The Wright Inn in Asheville's Montford neighborhood

Gordon Smith

River and the Appalachian Trail pass through town. To get to Hot Springs from Asheville, take Route 19/23 north to the Marshall Exit, and then Route 25/70 north roughly 30 miles.

Just a 20-minute ride from Asheville east on Interstate 40, **Black Mountain** was established in 1893 as a summer resort for flatlanders and today is a major religious retreat town and home to private Montreat College. Artisans, craftspeople, and travelers populate the lovely downtown with its collection of shops and cafés set against a Blue Ridge backdrop.

Southwest from Asheville in Transylvania County, **Brevard** is a scenic hideaway reached by taking Interstate 26 east to Exit #9, where you take **Route 280** south to **Route 64** into town. Its location on the eastern edge of the **Pisgah National Forest** provides miles of nature to explore. The more than 250 waterfalls nearby have earned Transylvania County the moniker, "Land of Waterfalls." Incorporated in 1868, Brevard is now a popular community for retirees, drawn here for the intellectual stimulation provided by the renowned Brevard Music Festival and private Brevard College. The town's busy **Main** and **Broad streets** have numerous unique shops, galleries, and cafés. You can look up and down the intersection of the two and see the mountains just outside of town.

Located southeast of Asheville off Interstate 40, **Hendersonville** is a large mountain town with a busy **Main Street** lined with benches, boutiques, antiques shops, art galleries, restaurants, and even an old-style soda shop where you can enjoy a frothy fountain malt. The town supports a large seasonal retirement community. Each summer, the population swells with seniors from Florida who travel north for the cooler air and rich cultural activities. Nearby is the delightful Village of Flat Rock. Sometimes called the "little Charleston of the mountains," **Flat Rock** was originally populated by lowcountry planters escaping the heat and mosquitoes. Today the town is best known for the acclaimed Flat Rock Playhouse and the historic Carl Sandburg Home. There are numerous upscale inns and restaurants leading into town along **Route 25**.

Traveling east of Asheville roughly 25 miles on **Route 64/74A**, you'll enter **Hickory Nut Gorge**, a 14-mile-long canyon, in which you'll find gorgeous **Chimney Rock Park** and **Lake Lure** of *Dirty Dancing* fame. Chimney Rock Park is private but worth every dime of the admission for its well-maintained hiking trails and for the quick 26-story elevator ride to the top of the Chimney for 75-mile views. Hidden among the towering Blue Ridge peaks, Lake Lure is a shimmering jewel.



Downtown Hendersonville

Weather

A city for all seasons, Asheville comes to life with spring flowers and bright green in mid April, gently migrates to bumblebees and brilliant wildflowers in summer, and bursts with fiery autumn color during its peak fall season, before curling up for a quiet winter with just the occasional dusting of snow. Average winter daytime highs are 47 degrees with overnight lows in the upper 20s. Average summertime highs are in the mid 80s, cooling to the lower 60s at night. Fall is cool and crisp with average daytime highs in the lower 60s. Spring is even cooler with average high temperatures in the mid 50s. Elevation makes a difference; a general rule is the air is three degrees cooler for every 1,000-foot rise in elevation.

Getting to Asheville

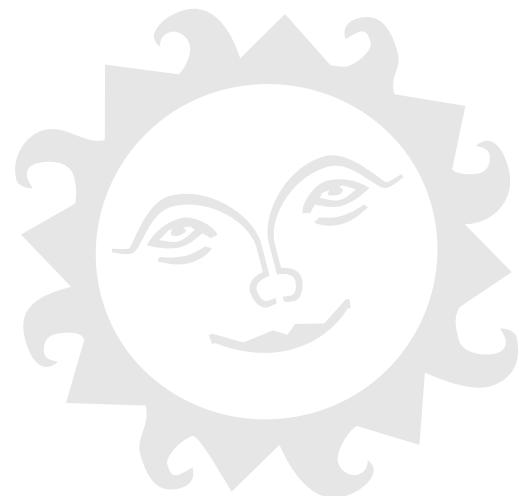
By Air: The **Asheville Regional Airport**, ☎ (828) 684-2226, www.ashevilleregionalairport.com, services several major airlines and offers both rental cars and ground transportation.

By Car: **From Atlanta**, take Interstate 85 north to Greenville, where you take Route 25 north to Interstate 26 west. Expect a four-hour drive. **From Charlotte**, take Interstate 85 south to Route 321, which you take north to Interstate 40 west into Asheville. The drive should take between two and 2.5 hours. **From Raleigh**, take Interstate 40 west for the 4.5-hour drive to Asheville.

I am two with nature.

— Woody Allen

Play Hard



Wide Open

Asheville is a cosmopolitan city at the doorstep of the rugged outdoors. It's not unusual to see adventurers in full-regalia—hikers in mud-splattered boots or river runners in Teva's glittering with mica—browsing the downtown shops and galleries like cultured frontiersmen on a break from the wild. Where have they been playing? Probably in one of the following outdoor wonderlands.

The **Pisgah National Forest** is a 505,000-acre beast of a place that the government could tame only by dividing it into three ranger districts. And "tame" is the wrong word. While there are kinder, gentler portions of the forest, it is primarily pure, unadulterated wilderness. As such, prudence is advised when entering Mother Nature's turf; don't head for Pisgah's furthest reaches without a first-aid kit, an eye on the time, and a partner. The national forest stretches across much of Western North Carolina, from the South Carolina State line well up into the High Country around Blowing Rock. South of Asheville, the **Pisgah Ranger District** encompasses



Many Asheville residents are equipped to play hard

Bisected by the Blue Ridge Parkway, the district includes the 18,500-acre **Shining Rock** and the 7,900-acre **Middle Prong wilderness areas**, as well as the former forestry school, the **Cradle of Forestry**. The Pisgah Ranger District's office, 1001 Pisgah Highway, Pisgah Forest, (828) 877-3265, is near Brevard on Route 276, 1.5 miles north of Route 280. A popular multi-sport launching point is the parking lot at the **Pisgah Fish Hatchery** off Forest Road 475. To get here, take Route 276 north 5.5 miles from Route 280 near Brevard to Forest Road 475 on the left, which you take two miles to the fish hatchery on the left.

The National Forest Service operates the **Bent Creek Research Forest** within the Pisgah District with land open for horseback riding (18 miles of trails), mountain biking (23 miles of trails), and hiking on the horseback and biking trails. To get here, take Interstate 26 east to Route 191 south for four miles, and then follow signs. ♦ With nominal day-use fees, two recreation areas within Bent Creek are also notable. The **Lake Powhatan Recreation Area** is popular with anglers and swimmers, and there are numerous hiking and mountain biking trails throughout. From Asheville, take Interstate 26 east to Route 191 south for four miles, and then turn right on Forest Road 806. The parking area is 3.5 miles ahead. ♦ The **North**

Mills River Recreation Area has trails for mountain biking, horseback riding, and hiking, and the river is a good fishing spot. From Asheville, take Interstate 26 east to Route 191 south for 13.3 miles. Turn right on State Road 1345 and drive five miles to the parking area.

Also within the Bent Creek area, the **North Carolina Arboretum**, 100 Frederick Law Olmstead Way, Asheville, (828) 665-2492, www.ncarboretum.org, is a 400-acre spread (only 60 acres are developed) with gardens, a greenhouse, interpretive trails, and wilderness open to hikers and mountain bikers. There is a nominal parking fee. To get there from Asheville, take Interstate 26 east to Route 191 south for two miles. Follow signs to the Arboretum, which is on the right.

The Bear Facts

Black bear sightings in the Pisgah National Forest are relatively rare, but enough bears live around Asheville that you'll want to know the following rules of engagement. First, don't ever feed a bear. Second, if you find bear cubs, leave the area slowly but steadily. A few more:



- Never run from a bear. (Run and you look like prey.) Walk backwards slowly facing the bear.
- If the bear charges, stand your ground and make yourself look big by holding your arms above you, standing on a rock, or waving a stick. Chances are the bear is performing a "bluff charge" and will move on if you stay put.
- In the highly unlikely event a bear attacks you, fight back aggressively. Do not play dead.



Waterfall in the Pisgah District

After a recent reorganization, the National Forest Service consolidated two ranger districts—the French Broad and the Toecane—into the **Appalachian Ranger District**. The original districts are now known as "stations." ♦ Northwest of Asheville, the 80,000-acre **French Broad Station**, 88 Bridge Street, Hot Springs, (828) 622-3202, encompasses some of the most remote, rugged terrain in the Pisgah National Forest. Rocky cliffs, deep gorges, and narrow hollows define this wilderness along the Tennessee border. ♦ The **French Broad River** bisects the area and draws canoeists, kayakers, and rafters to its whitewater and quickwater sections. ♦ More than 80 miles of the **Appalachian Trail** wind through the district

up and over numerous peaks, including **Max Patch**, one of the most-scenic mountains on the entire 2,100-mile footpath. To get to Max Patch from Hot Springs, head south on Route 209 for 7.3 miles to Meadow Fork Road (State Road 1175), onto which you turn right and drive 5.4 miles to State Road 1181. Turn right here and follow the road to its end at State Road 1182. Turn right and drive to the Max Patch parking area.

Six miles downstream on the French Broad from Hot Springs, the **Murray Branch Recreation Area** is a favored spot for anglers, canoeists and kayakers. From Hot Springs, take Route 25/70 across the French Broad River, turn left immediately after the bridge, and then right on State Road 1304 (River Road) for four miles to the parking area. ♦ The **Rocky Bluff Recreation Area** features fishing spots and hiking trails. From Hot Springs, take Route 209 south for 3.3 miles to Rocky Bluff.



The bald on Max Patch

The **Toecane Ranger Station**, Route 19-East Bypass, Burnsville, (828) 682-6146, oversees more than 75,000 acres of the Pisgah National Forest northwest of the Blue Ridge Parkway from Asheville to Blowing Rock and along the Tennessee State line. Much of this district is covered in the High Country chapter, but the southern end of the district includes several outdoor sites near Asheville, not the least of which is 6,684-foot **Mount Mitchell**, the highest peak east of the Mississippi. ♦ **Mount Mitchell State Park**, Route 128, Burnsville, (828) 675-4611, features nearly 20 miles of hiking trails, a paved road to the summit, and a concrete observation tower near the peak with views on clear days of up to 70 miles. From Asheville, take the Blue Ridge Parkway north to Milepost 355, then turn right on Route 128, which leads to the park.

Located southeast of Brevard, the **Dupont State Forest**, (828) 877-6527, is a 10,400-acre wonderland of granite mountains, dramatic waterfalls, and forested valleys in the Little River Valley. There are more than 90 miles of well-marked trails for mountain bikers, horseback riders, and hikers, plus many more miles of dirt and gravel roads. The forest's slick-rock trails

earned it the moniker "Moab of the East." It's one of the finest mountain biking destinations in the Carolinas. Five parking areas provide access to the forest, but this chapter describes only trails from the Corn Mill Shoals parking area. (See *Mountain Biking*.) To discover the rest of the forest, pick up a free trail map available from most of the sources listed under *Additional Information*. Or log onto www.dupontforest.com to view the map.

The 469-mile **Blue Ridge Parkway** (BRP) passes through Asheville, and along the road in both directions, you'll find ample opportunities for outdoor play, including hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and climbing. The road itself is popular with cyclists who endure long ascents and outrageous descents.



Dupont State Forest

Dayhiking

Lucky are the residents of Asheville who, when having a bad day, can drive 15 minutes to hike their concerns away. Don't let the dense forests and craggy mountains mislead you into believing that only serious Alpinists would lace up a pair of boots here. There are plenty of trails for all abilities, and while there are trails that call for back-country experience, most require merely a little fitness and an adventurous spirit. The following hikes, grouped by area, are just a sampling. If these don't suit your mood, stop by any of the sources under *Local Outdoor Advice* for more trail options.

Pisgah National Forest: Pisgah District

♦ There are more than 40 miles of hiking trails that wind over and around the rugged Shining Rock Ridge inside **Shining Rock Wilderness Area**. Named for the ridge's distinctive quartz outcropping that reflects the sun, the wilderness area features dense forests, open-shrub patches, grassy balds, the Pigeon River, and five peaks higher than 6,000 feet. Numerous parking spots provide access to the area. One of the easiest to reach is the **Black Balsam parking area**, located off BRP Milepost 420.2. From the parkway, take State Road 816 north approximately a mile to the road's end. Four trails begin here: **Ivester Gap, Flat Laurel Creek, Sam Knob, and Sam Knob Summit**.

♦ The **Sam Knob Summit Trail** is a moderate 2.5-mile hike that leaves Black Balsam parking area on the gated road behind the restroom facilities. Roughly a half-mile along the flat roadbed, a large meadow appears at the end of which is the hike's official trailhead on the right. The trail climbs via switchbacks until reaching an intersection where a right turn delivers you to the southern summit of Sam Knob and a left climbs to the northern summit. Both are worth visiting. On a clear day from the northern summit, you can see the highest mountain in the East, Mount Mitchell, nearly 50 miles away. Retrace your steps to return to your car.

♦ The **Flat Laurel Creek Trail** stretches 3.7 miles from the Black Balsam parking area to a parking area off Route 215. The orange-blazed trail departs from the southern end of the parking area along a roadbed and continues roughly a third of a mile until the path narrows to a trail. Along this route, you'll hike past some outstanding waterfalls and swimming holes, as well as through a high-elevation bog, a spruce-fir forest, and a beech-tree forest. There are excellent views of Sam Knob along the trail. If you're not up to the entire 7.4-mile out-and-back hike, stop at any point and retrace your steps.

♦ From the **Big East Fork parking area** off Route 276 roughly a mile north of BRP Milepost 412, you can piece together a whopping seven-mile loop to the summit of **Shining Rock** and back. The **Shining Creek** and the **Old Butt Knob trails** set out together from the parking area to Shining Creek Gap, roughly 0.75-miles into the hike. At this point, the Old Butt Knob Trail



Winter hiking in the Pisgah District

Day-use Areas

Three Pisgah National Forest day-use areas near Asheville have many trails to explore. All three have nominal parking fees. Directions to all three are in *Wide Open*. ♦ The **Lake Powhatan Recreation Area** has a swimming area that, in warm months, is perfect for cooling off after hiking any of the surrounding trails. Ask for specific trail suggestions at the gate. ♦ The **North Mills River Recreation Area** also has a number of good trails that you can inquire about when paying your day-use fee. ♦ There are more than ten hiking trails at the **North Carolina Arboretum**, most of which are easy. Pick up a map when you arrive.



Looking Glass Rock

departs right and stretches 3.6 miles along Chestnut Ridge over Old Butt Knob, through Spanish Oak Gap, and over Dog Loser Knob before reaching a spur trail on the right to the summit of 5,940-foot Shining Rock. (If you miss this trail and end up at Shining Rock Gap, climb the short distance north on the Art Loeb Trail from the gap to the summit.) After sum-

miting, take the Art Loeb Trail south to Shining Rock Gap,

where the 3.4-mile Shining Creek Trail closes the loop and returns to the parking area.

Highlights on the return trip include several swimming holes in Shining Creek.

◆ Just north of Brevard in the **Davidson River Valley**, the **Daniel Ridge Loop** is an easy four-mile hike with pleasant river and waterfall views. To get to the trailhead, follow directions to the Pisgah Fish Hatchery (see *Wide Open*) but continue another two miles on Forest Road 475 past Cove Creek Campground to the parking area on the right at gated Forest Road 137. The trailhead is on the left past the gate and over the bridge. The red-blazed trail follows the Davidson River upstream for the first stretch before turning right and climbing a mile to an intersection with the **Farlow Gap Trail**. Stay to the right, following the red blazes through a young forest that, depending on the season, may offer scenic views of Pilot Mountain, Cedar Rock, and Looking Glass Rock. You'll pass through a nice stretch of wildflowers, mountain laurel, and rhododendron before coming to a gravel road. Turn left to view a 90-foot waterfall, then backtrack and hike the gravel road to return to your car.

◆ Looking Glass Rock, which gets its name from the way it reflects light when water flows down the granite face and freezes, has the popular **Looking Glass Rock Trail**, a strenuous, six-mile out-and-back hike that rises 1,300 feet to the summit. To get to the trailhead, take Route 276 north 5.5 miles from Route 280 near Brevard to Forest Road 475 on the left, which you take 0.4 miles to the signed parking area on the right. The yellow-blazed trail begins with a pleasant wooded section before climbing steadily via switchbacks to the two-mile

mark, where the path levels out. You'll soon reach an open rock section with the letter "H" painted on it. (Your helicopter will land here should you join the motley crew of hikers who ignored warnings that Looking Glass is slick and steep.) From the landing area, the trail resumes a steep ascent to the summit. The cliff face, just beyond the summit, offers tremendous views of the forest and of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Remember: *The cliff does not have a guardrail. If you slip and fall, nothing will stop you from going over the edge, so exercise extreme caution, particularly if the rock is wet.* Backtrack to return to your car.

◆ For an excellent workout plus great views of Looking Glass Rock, pack a picnic

Real Men Read Maps

It's one thing to ask driving directions in the civilized world—no self-respecting man does that—but quite another to consult a map in the woods. Should you get lost, a good topographical map and a compass are your tickets back to the evening's Cabernet. While the hikes in this guidebook are chosen for being easy to follow, we recommend carrying a copy of **National Geographic's Pisgah Ranger District Map** with you. This waterproof, tear-resistant map includes the hikes listed here and many more. It'll set you back roughly ten bucks but will send you forward armed with excellent directions. Available from most area outfitters and bookstores.

and head for the **Cat Gap Loop** and the **John Rock**

trails. When combined, these routes create a 6.2-mile loop that begins and ends in the Pisgah Fish Hatchery parking lot off Forest Road 475. (See directions under *Wide Open*.) From the eastern end of the parking lot (furthest from the hatchery), set out on the orange-blazed Cat Gap Trail beside the Davidson River. After a couple of creek crossings, the trail leaves the river's side and begins climbing. It crosses a forest road and continues to an intersection with John Rock Trail on the right. Take this yellow-blazed

trail up to John Rock, a granite outcropping with outstanding views of Looking Glass Rock, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the hatchery directly below. This is a nice place to picnic. Though the rock face is not as steep as Looking Glass, there's no guardrail, so be careful, especially if it's wet. To continue, cross back into the tree cover and follow the yellow blazes to an intersection with the Cat Gap and Cat Gap Bypass trails. Take the orange-blazed Cat Gap Trail through all intersections to descend to your car.

Blue Ridge Parkway Trails

◆ North and south of Asheville on the Blue Ridge Parkway, there are dozens of hikes to scenic overlooks, waterfalls, and mountain summits. Some of these hikes are inside Pisgah National Forest but are listed here because the trails are accessible directly from the parkway. The following hikes are just a few of the trails along the parkway.

◆ Several hiking trails provide expansive views from the summit of 6,684-foot **Mount Mitchell** in Mount Mitchell State Park. (See *Wide Open* for directions.) After paying the entrance fee, drive to the summit where you can hike out-and-back on the various trails that begin or end at the peak, including the **Old Mount Mitchell Trail**, a two-mile path that originates from the summit of Mount Hallback; the **Balsam Trail**, a 0.75-mile, self-guiding nature trail; the mile-long **Camp Alice Trail**, which leads to a campground; and the 5.4-mile **Deep Gap Trail**, which departs from Mitchell and climbs four 6,500-foot-plus peaks—Mount Craig, Big Tom, Balsam Cone, and Cattail Peak—en route to Deep Gap. You can also descend on the **Mount Mitchell Trail**, a 5.6-mile path that originates from the Black Mountain Recreation Area. (See "Because It's There" on the next page.)

◆ A 15-minute drive north of Asheville between Mileposts 364 and 369, the 700-acre **Craggy Gardens Area** is a grassy bald mountain full of wildflowers. June is high season when the innumerable, purple rhododendrons burst into bloom. Craggy Gardens features a picnic area (Milepost 367.5), visitor center (Milepost 364.6), and a few



Hiker atop John Rock

An Appalachian Graveyard

Mount Mitchell's flanks are full of dead and dying fir and spruce trees, all victims of acid rain, high ozone levels, ice storms, and ravenous insects. It's sad to see the old growth expire but also encouraging to find young trees and shrubs, including blueberries and blackberries, thriving on the mountain.



Grassy Gardens

short hiking trails. The half-mile **Pinnacle Trail** switchbacks from the Craggy Dome parking lot (Milepost 364.1) to the 5,840-foot summit for 360-degree views. The 0.8-mile **Craggy Gardens Self-Guiding Trail** departs from the visitor center parking lot and leads to the picnic area. En route, signs identify the various plants living on the heath and explain the delicate balance in which they live.

◆ The mountain for which the national

forest is named is 5,721-foot Mount Pisgah. Legend has it that James Hall, a Presbyterian minister, climbed the mountain in the late 18th Century, took in the expanse of the French Broad River valley, and likened it to the promised land Moses saw from Mount Pisgah overlooking the Jordan River. To make your own proclamation from the summit, head to Milepost 407.6, where the **Mount Pisgah Trail** departs from the parking lot for a strenuous but short (1.2-mile) climb to the summit. At the top there's an observation platform and ungainly radio tower, yet the 360-degree views of the French Broad River Valley, surrounding mountains, and Asheville (on clear days) are spectacular.

To complete the 2.5-mile hike, retrace your steps. ◆ As its name implies, the **Devil's Courthouse** recounts a Cherokee legend about a devil named Judaculla who held court inside this craggy mountain. But the only plea you'll enter is "please slow down" to your hiking partner should he or she set off too quickly on the steep, strenuous half-mile climb through a forest of spruce and fir trees. At the 5,462-foot summit on a clear day, views stretch into three states: South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. The trailhead is at the parking area at Milepost 422.4.

Because It's There.

Want your own mini-Everest experience? Eat your Wheaties and set out early on the **Mount Mitchell Trail**, a grueling 5.6-mile hike from the Black Mountain Campground up 3,600 feet to the summit of the East's highest peak. Most fit hikers can make the summit in three to four hours. You'll have time to eat a picnic lunch and either beg for a return ride in someone's car or descend the way you came. To reach the trailhead, exit the BRP at Milepost 346 and take Forest Road 2074 north 2.5 miles to the intersection with Forest Road 472. Stay on Forest Road 2074 and follow signs to the campground. The blue-blazed trail is well-marked.

Pisgah National Forest: Appalachian District, French Broad Station

◆ For some of the region's most remote and rugged hiking, head north to Hot Springs and the French Broad River, where the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail (AT) winds through the area on its way north from Georgia to Maine. Numerous trails intersect with the AT for great loop possibilities. An excellent example within spitting distance of downtown Hot Springs is the 5.6-mile loop created by the **Appalachian Trail** and the **Pump Gap Loop** and **Lover's Leap trails**. A highlight is the final leg along Lover's Leap Ridge with its outstanding views of the French Broad River and Hot Springs 1,000 feet below. (A Cherokee

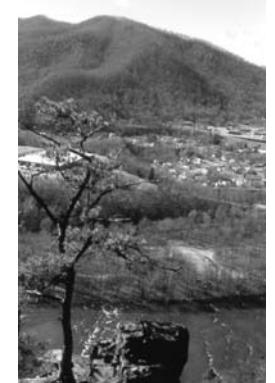
legend recounts that a young maiden leapt to her death from the ridge after learning of her brave's death.) From Hot Springs, take Route 25/70 across the French Broad River, turn left immediately after the bridge, and then left again on River Road. Follow signs to the Silvermine Trailhead, where you park. From the parking area, follow the Lover's Leap Trail to the first major switchback where you take the yellow-blazed Pump Gap Trail straight. At the next trail intersection the Pump Gap Trail splits (the loop begins here). Veer left and hike to the intersection with the AT in Pump Gap. Turn left onto the AT for the commanding views along the ridge. The AT descends steeply to the parking area.

◆ So scenic is the grassy bald atop 4,629-foot **Max Patch Mountain** that you almost expect Julie Andrews to twirl by, singing *The Sound of Music*. From the summit, you're treated to jaw-dropping, unobstructed



High atop Max Patch

360-degree views of the surrounding Tennessee and North Carolina mountains. There are two **Max Patch loop** trails to hike. The shorter 1.4-mile loop crosses the summit; the longer 2.4-mile loop encircles the bald. (The **Appalachian Trail** also crosses the mountain's summit.) Another route to Max Patch's summit is on a 0.25-mile grass and dirt path from the parking area. See directions in *Wide Open*.



Hot Springs from Lover's Leap Ridge

Mountain Biking

 News of the area's mountain biking scene is spreading fast, thanks to national attention like *Bike* magazine naming Asheville one of the nation's top five mountain biking cities.

What's the draw? More than 200 miles of trails in the Pisgah National Forest and nearby Dupont State Forest, plus many more miles of forest roads. Riders of all abilities can find terrain to explore. The one constant regardless of where you ride? The consciousness-awakening scenery of the North Carolina Mountains. Some of the better rides follow, grouped by area.

South of Asheville: Dupont State Forest

◆ To ride a **slickrock loop**, head to **Corn Mill Shoals** parking area. From Asheville, take Interstate 240 west to Interstate 26 east to Exit #9 for the Asheville Airport and Route 280. Take Route 280 south 16 miles into Brevard. (At the intersection with Route 64/276, continue straight into downtown Brevard. Note: Route 280 ends.) In town, turn left to follow Route 276 for 10 miles to Cascade Lake Road, onto which you turn left. The parking area is about two miles ahead on the left.



Unloading at Corn Mill Shoals



Atop Big Rock

Mountain Bike Nirvana

Mention North Carolina slickrock to mountain bikers, and they'll know you're referring to one of two trails at **Dupont State Forest**. The renowned **Big Rock** and **Cedar Rock trails** include long stretches of exposed rock leading to the summits of Big Rock and Cedar Rock, where there are unobstructed views of the surrounding mountains. And these two trails are just the beginning of the love you'll feel inside Dupont. In total, there are 98 named trails—singletrack, double-track, and forest roads—that climb, fall, twist, and twirl through the forest. Two features make Dupont's trails especially inviting: sand is part of the soil, so there's less mud, and the hills, while steep in sections, are not as long as those in the national forest. Add the ability to ride past several impressive waterfalls, and you've got the recipe for an entire vacation's worth of fat-tire exploration.

The **Corn Mill Shoals Road Trail** starts across the road from the parking lot. Turn right on the dirt and rock Corn Mill Shoals Road and bear left at the intersection with **Bridal Veil Trail**. (If you continue on Corn Mill Shoals, you'll come to an attractive rock and stream crossing.) Follow Bridal Veil past the first Cedar Rock trailhead on the left to the second intersection further ahead, also on the left. Take **Cedar Rock Trail** over rocky terrain to the slickrock ride along the summit. (If you have to dismount climbing the creek bed up Cedar Rock, don't turn around. This technical section is short.) The intersection with the **Big Rock Trail** is at the summit. You can take this trail right to continue over Big Rock or descend on Cedar Rock Trail. (Cedar Rock descends to Bridal Veil Trail, where you turn right to complete your ride). Continuing on Big Rock Trail, you'll ride more slickrock with tremendous, 360-degree views. The trail eventually descends to Corn Mill Shoals Road Trail. Turn left to return to your car. The descents on both Big Rock and Cedar Rock trails offer tight, slalom-like turns, and depending upon your speed, big bumps for plenty of air. A rider of any ability can ride (or walk portions of) these trails. But ride slowly at first to get familiar with the terrain.

◆ Other highlights of Dupont State Forest trails include rides to **Hooker Falls** and **Triple Falls**.

The best way to explore these and the 90-plus miles of trails here is to pick up either the free trail map published by the Division of Forest Services or the larger, waterproof map published by Friends of Dupont Forest, available for \$8 from most local outdoor and biking shops. For directions to the remaining four parking areas with access to the trails, visit www.dupontforest.com.

South of Asheville: Bent Creek Area

◆ Excluding forest roads, the majority of mountain biking trails inside the **Pisgah National Forest** is in the Pisgah District between Brevard and Asheville. In general, the trails are rocky and root-strewn with

Hawkeye was here

We're not talking Alan Alda but rather actor-turned-shoe-cobbler-turned-actor-again, Daniel Day Lewis, who played the original Hawkeye in the film, *Last of the Mohicans*. Numerous scenes were shot in Dupont State Forest on the Little River at four of its dramatic waterfalls: Triple Falls, High Falls, Bridal Veil Falls, and Hooker Falls.

tight singletrack on thigh-crunching climbs and screaming descents. Most are not recommended for beginner riders. With a few exceptions noted below, novice mountain bikers will want to fashion routes out of the dazzling array of **forest roads**, all of which sacrifice nothing in the way of mountain and forest scenery. There are three primary riding areas within the Pisgah District: the Bent Creek area (including Lake Powhatan Recreation Area); the North Mills River Recreation Area; and the Davidson River Valley.

◆ Most of the 11 mountain bike trails and forest roads inside **Bent Creek Research and Development Forest** are within 15 minutes of Asheville. In warm weather, you can ride the trails and roads to exhaustion, ending up at Lake Powhatan for a swim to cool down and clean up. For a novice rider, the two-mile **Boyd Branch Loop** offers a good workout, as well as a brief section of singletrack. To reach the trailhead from Asheville, take Interstate 26 east to Route 191 south past Biltmore Square Mall to Bent Creek Gap Road on the right. After 0.2 miles, the road forks. Bear left and drive two miles to the paved parking area at the **Hard Times Trailhead**. This is a good place to park for many of Bent Creek's trails; however, you can drive a short distance further to a better parking area for the Boyd Branch Loop. From the Hard Times parking area, continue 0.2 miles to a gravel road on your right. Take this road to the bottom of the first hill where there's a small parking area across from a gated forest road. Begin by riding past the gate and up **Boyd Branch Road**, which climbs moderately beside Boyd Branch Creek. The road ends at the highest point of the ride in a grass clearing. Take the singletrack trail on the right that descends into the woods and eventually crosses Boyd Branch Creek. The trail, which changes from rocky and root-strewn to packed dirt, soon intersects with the gravel **Bent Creek Gap Road**, where you turn right to return to your car.

◆ The four-mile **Sidehill Trail Loop** offers a pleasant mix of gravel roads with some moderately challenging singletrack and stream crossings. This loop begins at the Hard Times Trailhead (see directions in previous ride). From the parking lot, turn left and then right at the first road on your right. The surface changes to gravel before reaching the next gated road on your right, **Ledford Branch Road** (Forest Road 479E). Ride past the gate and uphill beside Ledford Branch creek to Ledford Gap, where you turn left onto the yellow-blazed, single-track **Sidehill Trail**. The trail climbs and falls along the side of the mountain with periodic stream crossings. At the first trail intersection, continue over the gap, following the yellow blazes. The descent is fairly steep and rocky, but by maintaining an easy speed, novice riders will find it enjoyable. The trail reaches a grassy clearing where the singletrack gives way to a gravel road. At this point, look for an unnamed singletrack trail on your left that descends



A forest road in Pisgah National Forest

Take Care of the Trails

Help keep the trails in the Pisgah National Forest open to mountain bikes by staying off trails closed to bikes and by practicing smart trail maintenance: Avoid muddy trails and dismount to carry your bike over wet patches where bike tires will harm the trail. Finally, be mindful of hikers and horseback riders. Yield to both.

into the woods. This trail crosses a stream before intersecting with gravel Bent Creek Gap Road. Turn right and follow this road straight at all intersections (you'll ride around several forest service gates), past Lake Powhatan, and over the dam to Hard Times Road on your left. Follow this road back to the parking area.

◆ Other great trails include the 1.5-mile **Ingles Field Gap Trail**; the four-mile **North Boundary Trail**; and the one-mile **Homestead Trail**. If you're loathe to buy a map and don't want to tote this book on the ride, Bent Creek is the kind of place where you can park, unload, and set off without a specific route in mind. Trails closed to bikes are marked as such.



Asheville CVB

Mountain biking Pisgah National Forest

South of Asheville: North Mills River Area

◆ The **North Mills River Recreation Area** features a mix of routes, from gently graded forest roads to radical singletrack. A good beginning loop is the 9.5-mile **Fletcher Creek Trail Loop**, a moderately challenging ride of forest roads and singletrack. To reach the trailhead, take Interstate 26 east to Exit #9 for Route 280 south to Route 191. Follow Route 191 south less than half a mile to North Mills River Road (Forest Road 1345) on the right. Take this road five miles to Wash Creek Road (Forest Road 5000). Turn right and drive roughly 2.5 miles to the **Trace Ridge parking area** on the left (a half-mile past the concrete bridge). From the parking area, ride past the gate onto Forest Road 5097. The road climbs gradually as it winds around Coffee Pot Mountain. Five miles into the ride, you'll reach the blue-blazed Fletcher Creek trailhead on the left, which you take as it drops through a meadow, past several trail intersections, and through a hardwood forest. After the Spencer Trail intersection, the Fletcher Trail climbs at a moderate incline before dropping over a rocky stretch and ending at Forest Road 142. Turn left to ride 1.5 miles to your car.

South of Asheville: Davidson River Valley Area

◆ South of the North Mills River area and north of Brevard, the **Davidson River Valley** is the most-visited area of the Pisgah District, yet it still affords the adventurous ample, accessible solitude. In addition to numerous well-known mountain biking trails—**Farlow Gap**, **Daniel Ridge**, and **Sycamore Cove trails**, among them—the Davidson River Valley has an extensive network of **forest roads**, providing more exploration possibilities than your legs or the waning daylight will allow. Another benefit to riding here is the number of waterfalls and swimming holes throughout. All are ideal places to rest, soak your feet, or take a dip.

◆ A number of great rides originate from the **Pisgah Fish Hatchery** parking lot on Forest Road 475. See directions under *Wide Open*. Perfect for the beginner, the 14-mile **Gumstand Gap/Sliding Rock/Looking Glass Falls loop** is on gravel forest roads and paved Route 276. From the parking area, turn left on **Forest Road 475** and ride the short

distance to the fork, where Forest Road 475B veers right. Take this road for a strenuous three-mile climb to Gumstand Gap where you'll find a parking area. From here, the road descends and soon intersects with another forest road from the left. Keep to the right and ride three miles to the intersection with **Route 276**, where you turn right. Two miles later, you'll reach the **Sliding Rock Recreation Area**, where there is a naturally occurring, 60-foot, granite waterslide emptying into a seven-foot deep pool. (Cost is \$1 per person.) Two miles beyond Sliding Rock on Route 276, you'll pass a parking area on the left for **Looking Glass Falls**, where the Davidson River spills 60 feet over a rocky cliff. To close the loop, continue on Route 276 for a half-mile to Forest Road 475 on the right, turn here, and ride the final two miles back to your car. Take two Advil. Note: *Route 276 can be exceptionally busy during the tourism seasons (foliage and summer) when mountain bikers should be on the lookout for the most dangerous form of wildlife: inattentive drivers.*

North of Asheville: Hot Springs Area

◆ Much less known than the Pisgah District, the Appalachian District's French Broad Station oversees a handful of great mountain biking trails. In addition to the following rides, there are more than 150 miles of **forest roads** that snake through every reach of the Pisgah National Forest, opening up tremendous views of the mountains, valleys, and French Broad River. The 3.5-mile **Mill Ridge Bike Trail** winds around some high-elevation fields with panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. To reach the trailhead from Hot Springs, take Route 25/70 south (toward Asheville) 3.5 miles to Tanyard Gap, where the Appalachian Trail crosses above the road on a concrete bridge. Turn left just after the bridge and left again at the next intersection to cross over Route 25/70. Follow this road (Forest Road 113) to the trailhead (marked by a sign) at the end of the road. The trail begins by descending along an old roadbed and turns left at the bottom of the hill to become a single-track trail. It winds through a clearing and then enters the gated Forest Road 113A, which climbs gradually back to Forest Road 113. Turn left at the road to return to your car.

◆ The easy 3.6-mile **Laurel River Trail** is a delightful ride along an old railroad bed paralleling Big Laurel Creek as it flows toward the French Broad River. To reach the trail from Hot Springs, take Route 25/70 south to its intersection with State Road 208 at Big Laurel Creek, where you turn right (continuing on Route 25/70) and drive 100 yards to the park-

Bike Rentals

The following businesses rent mountain bikes, and in some instances, touring bikes. Several also conduct mountain bike tours. **Backcountry Outdoors**, 18 Pisgah Highway, Pisgah Forest, (828) 884-4262, www.backcountryoutdoors.com; ◆ **Bio Wheels**, 76 Biltmore Avenue, Asheville, (828) 232-0300 or 1-888-881-2453, www.biowheels.com; ◆ **Liberty Bicycles**, 1378 Hendersonville Road, Asheville, (828) 274-2453, www.libertybikes.com; ◆ **Ski Country Sports**, 1000 Merrimon Avenue, Asheville, (828) 254-2771 or 1-800-528-3874, www.skicountrysports.com; ◆ **Sycamore Cycles**, 112 New Hendersonville Highway, Pisgah Forest, (828) 877-5790, www.sycamorecycles.com

ing area on the right. The trail begins just past the gate at the end of the parking area. The first mile passes through private property, so stay on the trail. Thereafter, you enter the Pisgah National Forest. The trail continues to the French Broad River at the town of Union. To return, retrace your route.

Road Biking

 While Lance Armstrong prefers the High Country roadways around Boone and Blowing Rock, cycling superstar Greg Lemond once called the Asheville region one of the best training locations in the world. Who can argue with either? Both areas have rural roads with long hills and sizzling descents through spectacular mountain scenery, and both straddle the Blue Ridge Parkway. From the bustling city of Asheville, you can soon be pedaling past weathered barns, mountain farms, and rushing streams.

Lighten Up

Blue Ridge Parkway regulations require cyclists to have a light or reflector visible at least 500 feet to the front and a red light or reflector visible at least 200 feet to the rear during periods of low visibility, between the hours of sunset and sunrise, and when traveling through a tunnel.

For the most part, the area is bike-friendly, and local drivers are courteous and safe. But watch for tourists who are not necessarily watching the road as they pass scenic overlooks. Your best bet? Ride defensively at all times. Also, remember that while there are flat stretches of road to enjoy, you are, after all, in the mountains, and roads go up, up, up and down, down, down. You'll want to downsize your normal mileage to account for the hills.

◆ So, where to ride? The **Blue Ridge Parkway** is an obvious choice, combining undeveloped mountain, valley, and pastoral scenery with slow-moving traffic (speed limit is 45 mph). It's an officially designated bicycling route, so you won't be the first cyclist to roll its asphalt. From Asheville, you can travel north or south on the roadway and track your mileage easily with the highly visible mileposts. From Asheville, the ride north toward **Craggy Gardens** is a 30-mile stretch that, if begun early in the morning, is a full-day's ride. ◆ Another long parkway segment is from Craggy Gardens at Milepost 364 north 25 miles to **Crabtree Meadows** at Milepost 340. The ride passes through Beetree Gap (4,900 feet), over Green Knob (4,760 feet), and through Buck Creek Gap (3,373 feet). Long uphill sections and seemingly shorter downhill sections line the route. Crabtree Meadows has public pay phones, just in case you're too pooped to finish.

◆ South of Asheville near Brevard are two state scenic byways popular with cyclists, Routes 276 and 215. **Route 276** enters the Pisgah National Forest from Route 280 and climbs 15 miles past Looking Glass Falls, Sliding Rock, the



Mountain roads are rarely flat or straight

Cradle of Forestry, and Pink Beds (an upland bog full of pink rhododendrons that flower in June) to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Ride early in the day during the busy summer and fall seasons. Route 276 continues north beyond the parkway another 18 miles past rural villages and farms to the small community of Bethel. ◆ From the town of Rosman, North Carolina Scenic Byway **Route 215** rolls north along the North Fork of the French Broad River eight miles to the small community of Balsam Grove. From here, it's another eight miles to the Blue Ridge Parkway. If you're feeling frisky, keep pedaling Route 215 north past the parkway to the town of Bethel. The 18-mile route from the parkway to Bethel climbs to nearly 6,000 feet and passes mountain farms, cascading streams, and the West Fork of the Pigeon River.

◆ Other scenic routes include **Route 25/70** near Hot Springs, **Route 209** south from Hot Springs, **Route 251** between Alexander and Marshall, and gated **Old Route 70** from Old Fort to the road's end. For additional rides and current road conditions, stop by any of the bike shops listed under rentals in *Mountain Biking*. Another source: the **Blue Ridge Bicycle Club**, www.blueridgebicycleclub.org, a group that organizes weekly rides.

Paddling



From quickwater and whitewater sections on the French Broad, Nolichucky, and Pigeon rivers to serene flatwater on numerous mountain lakes, paddling destinations surround Asheville. So when your legs tire from biking or hiking, give your back, arms, and shoulders a workout while appreciating the beauty of the Appalachians from the water. The area has plenty of places to rent canoes and kayaks, and many tour operators offer whitewater rafting, canoeing, tubing, and kayaking adventures. The following are the major waters in the area.



NC Division of Tourism

Serious Training Waters

Asheville's **Ledges Park** is an important training area for serious whitewater paddlers, including many Olympic hopefuls. Located on the French Broad, the park has a number of "play holes" and eddy lines, as well as a full slalom course. It's not just for experts. Beginners can put in at Ledges and float downstream for miles to any one of numerous takeouts. To get to the park, take Route 19/23 north to the UNC-Asheville Exit and turn left at the bottom of the ramp onto Broadway. Bear right at the intersection of Broadway and Route 251/River Road. Ledges Park is seven miles down Route 251. (You'll have to turn left at one T-intersection to remain on Route 251.)



Asheville. Downstream from Asheville, the river turns frothy through Barnard en route to Hot Springs. Downstream of Hot Springs, the river returns to an easier pace. The river's biggest whitewater is in the spring and early summer.

There are access points along the river from its headwaters to Hot Springs and beyond, the most convenient being public parks and national forest lands. Popular spots south of Asheville include: **Champion Park** on Route 64 in Rosman, south of Brevard; **Island Ford Access Area** off Route 64 just outside Brevard (10 miles downstream from Champion Park); and **Hap Simpson Park**, Route 276 two miles south of Brevard (20 miles downstream from Champion Park). Downstream from Asheville the water is quick enough that, unless you have significant whitewater experience, you'll want to navigate with a river guide. South of Hot Springs the **Murray Branch Recreation Area** is a favored spot to launch kayaks and canoes or to float in tubes. See directions under *Wide Open*.

◆ Less-known and less-crowded than the French Broad, the **Nolichucky River** is a wild whitewater river northeast of Asheville along the remote Tennessee border. The section from Poplar, North Carolina into Tennessee has numerous frothy rapids, ranging from Class III-Class IV. The scenery in North Carolina is awe-inspiring as the river flows through one of the state's steepest gorges. The rafting season runs March–October, and because the river is not damned, water levels depend upon rainfall. (For flow information, call the Tennessee Valley Authority, 1-800-238-2264.) The put-in is off Route 197 in Poplar but the take-out eight miles downstream in Erwin is tough to find. You'll want to hire a shuttle service. (See tour operators below.) ◆ Other navigable rivers around Asheville include stretches of the **Davidson** and **Pigeon rivers**, as well as sections of the **North Broad**. You'll find coverage of the **Chattooga** and **Nantahala rivers** in the North Georgia and Great Smoky Mountains National Park chapters, respectively.

◆ Surrounded by mountains, **Lake Lure** is a gorgeous lake with 27 miles of shoreline. While lake homes line the shore, you can still find ample solitude in secluded coves, far from the whizzing ski boats. And such is the beauty that despite development, *National*

Tour Operators & Boat Rentals

The following businesses operate river-running tours March–October, and most also run river shuttles and rent kayaks and canoes for personal use: **Appalachian River Adventures**, 172 Charlotte Street, Asheville, ☎ (828) 230-9380, www.appalachianriveradventure.com; ◆ **French Broad Rafting Expeditions**, Route 25/70, between Marshall and Hot Springs, ☎ (828) 656-2978 or 1-877-265-6867, www.frenchbroadrafting.com; ◆ **Headwaters Outfitters**, Route 64, Rosman, ☎ (828) 877-3106, www.headwatersoutfitters.com; ◆ **Huck Finn River Adventures**, Route 25/70, Hot Springs, ☎ 1-877-520-4658, www.huckfinnrafting.com; ◆ **USA Raft**, Route 25/70 between Marshall and Hot Springs, ☎ (828) 649-0560 or 1-800-872-7238, www.usraft.com.

Geographic saw fit to name Lake Lure "one of the ten most beautiful man-made lakes in the world." For canoe rentals, head to **Lake Lure Marina**, Route 64/74A East, 1-877-386-4255, www.lakelure.com. From Asheville, take Interstate 40 to Route 74A (Exit #53A) east 22 miles.

◆ **Lake Julian**, in Lake Julian Park, is a thermal lake used to cool the power plant that lurks on one side of the lake, so the water is always warm. (Even in winter, it rarely dips below 50 degrees.) You can rent a paddleboat or launch your own canoe or sea kayak for a fee of \$2. To reach the park from Asheville, take Interstate 26 east to Exit #6 and turn left onto Long Shoals Road. The park is one mile ahead on the right.

Fly Fishing



With one of Trout Unlimited's Top 100 trout streams—the **Davidson River**—plus many more rivers, creeks, and streams, the Asheville area lures fishermen from far and wide. Other popular rivers around the greater Asheville area include the **North Mills**, **Laurel**, **Pigeon**, and **French Broad rivers**, plus numerous tributaries of each. Depending on the river, local catches may include brook, brown, and rainbow trout; small-mouth bass; crappie; and the occasional muskie. The best way to fish these waters is with a guide. Fortunately, several world-class fly fishing operations are here to ensure you'll be on your way to hooking the wily ones in no time.

◆ **Davidson River Outfitters**, 4 Pisgah Highway, Pisgah Forest, (828) 877-4181 or 1-888-861-0111, www.davidsonflyfishing.com, is a full-service fly shop, guide service, outfitter, and fly-fishing school. Located a stone's throw from the Davidson River, this outfit offers classes in fly-tying, casting, and fishing, and puts together all manner of fishing expeditions, from half-day wading trips to full-day river floats. ◆ **Hunter Banks Company**, 29 Montford Avenue, (828) 252-3005 or 1-800-227-6732, www.hunterbanks.com, operates a full-service fly shop, a school offering casting and fly-tying instruction, and guide services for half- and full-day walk, wade, and float trips. ◆ Dozens of fishing guides operate in and around Asheville. A sampling: Bruce Harang's **Beaucatcher**, (828) 230-0450, www.beaucatcher.com; **Brookside Guides**, 1-877-298-2568, www.brooksideguides.com; and **Joe Whisnant's Big Foot Guides**, (828) 891-2784, www.bigfootguides.com.



Trout waters near Asheville

Horseback Riding

 **Berry Patch Stables**, 300 Baird Cove Road, Asheville (828) 645-7271, promises tame horses (and frisky ones, too) for its one- to two-hour trail rides. Berry Patch also offers riding lessons. ♦ Merely 10 minutes from downtown Asheville, **Fordbrook Stables**, 120 Fordbrook Road, (828) 667-1021, offers trail rides for all levels of riders. One ride climbs through several alpine pastures and woods before reaching a mountain clearing at 3,000 feet in elevation with panoramic views of Asheville, the majestic Grove Park Inn, and the surrounding mountains. ♦ **Sandy Bottom Trail Rides**, Caney Fork Road, Marshall, (828) 649-3464 or 1-800-959-3513, www.sandybottomtrailrides.com, offers two-, three-, and four-hour trail rides, as well as all-day and overnight backcountry rides. They also offer a popular three-hour ride to Long Pine Gem Mine.

Rainy Day Workout

 When the rain clouds are out but you must get your workout in, head to one of the following indoor fitness facilities, which admit visitors for nominal day-use fees. **The Sports Center** at the **Grove Park Inn**, 290 Macon Avenue, Asheville, (828) 252-2711 or 1-800-438-5800, www.groveparkinn.com, features a cardio room with bikes, elliptical trainers, treadmills, and stair climbers, plus a weight-training room with free weights and resistance-training machines. Choose from a selection of aerobics classes. Your day fee also includes access to the indoor pool, locker rooms, and towel service. ♦ Sporting the "largest selection of cardio equipment in Asheville," the **Asheville Racquet Club**, 200 Racquet Club Road, (828) 274-3361, www.wncfitness.com, is a tennis facility (26 courts, including six indoor) with an extensive fitness area. Expect more than seven tons of free weights, cardio and weight machines, an outdoor pool, and a basketball court. The club offers all manner of aerobics classes, and the men's and women's locker rooms each have saunas and showers.

Rock Climbing

 With miles of routes for novice to advanced climbers, **Looking Glass Rock** is one of the premier climbing destinations in the North Carolina Mountains. Some of the climbing faces on this granite monolith are more than 500 feet high. On the easier end, the **South Face** appeals to instructors working with beginners, while the **North Face**, which has been likened to Yosemite, is where the instructors head when their classes are over. In total, there are five climbable "sections" on the mountain and more than 25 routes, each of which has an intriguing name: *Short Man's Sorrow*, *Safari Jive*, and more than a few we can't print here. The mountain is a popular nesting area for Peregrine Falcons, and many routes are closed from mid January-mid August. ♦ If you've never strapped on a harness or

opened a carabiner, you'll find the Asheville area's climbing shops and guide services to be great places to learn the art of this vertigo-defying sport. In downtown Asheville, **Climbmax**, 43 Wall Street, (828) 252-9996, www.climbmaxnc.com, is an indoor climbing facility that offers instruction as well as guided tours. You can't miss the Climbmax outdoor climbing wall, which towers above the sidewalk and street below. ♦ **Black Dome Mountain Sports**, 140 Tunnel Road, Asheville (828) 251-2001 or 1-800-678-2367, www.blackdome.com, is an outdoor outfitter with an extensive selection of climbing gear. The business also operates a guided climbing tour service and offers rock-climbing instruction.

Swimming

 From large lakes to small river pools no larger than a bath tub, swimming spots are found throughout the area. So pack your swim trunks for your hike or bike and check out some of the following. ♦ South of Asheville in the Pisgah District of the Pisgah National Forest, Lake Powhatan in the **Lake Powhatan Recreation Area** is a small, scenic lake with a beach area, restrooms, and lifeguards in-season. The recreation area charges a nominal day-use fee. See *Wide Open* for directions. ♦ Perhaps the most popular swimming area (and thus the most crowded) south of Asheville is **Sliding Rock**, a huge granite slab of rock over which thousands of gallons of cool mountain water pour each minute. Handrails along the side of the rock allow you to climb to the top where you sit on your rump and slide down to the seven-foot pool at the bottom. There are restrooms, observation areas, and lifeguards on duty during the summer months. From Route 280 near Brevard, take Route 276 north for 7.6 miles to the parking area on the left. Cost to enter is \$1 per person.

♦ Several small swimming holes are found along **Route 276** between Route 280 and the Blue Ridge Parkway, including one at the Davidson River Campground. You'll have to pay to play (the campground charges a nominal entrance fee). The "Riverbend" swimming hole in the **Davidson**

River is wide and deep, and the current is slow. To get to the campground, take Route 276 north one mile past the forest entrance. ♦ Further ahead on Route 276, you can get your feet wet at the base of **Looking Glass Falls**, where the water fills a wide basin at the foot of the falls. It's only four



Asheville CVB

Sliding Rock

feet deep but plenty cool and clear enough to refresh your spirit. To access the falls, take Route 276 into the national forest roughly five miles from Route 280 near Brevard. A sign on the right directs you to the parking area.

◆ To combine an outstanding hike or mountain bike loop with a cool swim, head to **Daniel Ridge Falls** in the Davidson River Valley area. To access the area, follow directions under *Dayhiking* to the Daniel Ridge Falls Loop. You'll find several swimming holes in the Davidson River along the trail. ◆ Along its length from south of Asheville north to Hot Springs and into Tennessee, the **French Broad River** offers many swimming holes, from **Champion Park** in the town of Rosman on Route 64 south of Brevard to the **Murray Branch Recreation Area** south of Hot Springs. See *Wide Open* for directions to Murray Branch.

◆ Roughly 25 miles southeast of Asheville on Route 64/74, **Lake Lure** has a swimming beach and a quasi-amusement area called Water Works, which features water slides, bumper boats, and all manner of 'get-wet' equipment, plus restrooms with showers, a picnic area, and a snack stand. Nominal admission fee.

Skiing

 Despite Asheville's location in the mountains, most of the state's ski resorts are more than an hour's drive and are profiled in the High Country chapter. But two resorts are less than 40 miles from Asheville. ◆ Just 25 miles from downtown Asheville, **Wolf Laurel**, Route 3, Mars Hill, (828) 689-4111 or 1-800-817-4111, www.ski-wolf Laurel.com, has 54 acres of skiable terrain spread amongst 15 trails, the majority of which is ranked intermediate. The mountain's modest 700-foot vertical drop allows for a couple of expert runs: the *Flame Out* and *Upper Streak* trails. There's also a snow-tubing park. Two surface lifts, plus one double chairlift and one quad, service the trails, which are lit for nighttime skiing. The resort has a 26,000-foot lodge where you can rent skis and snowboards. ◆ With an elevation a mile high, **Cataloochee Ski Area**, 1080 Ski Lodge Road, Maggie Valley, (828) 926-0285 or 1-800-768-0285, www.cataloochee.com, is well-situated for making and keeping snow. The 740-foot vertical drop mountain has snowmaking capability on all of its 10 trails, which are serviced by three chairlifts (a double, triple, and a quad) and one surface lift. The slopes are 25 percent beginner, 50 percent intermediate, and 25 percent advanced.

Local Outdoor Advice

Pisgah Ranger District Office, Pisgah National Forest • Located on Route 276 roughly 1.5 miles from Route 280 near Brevard, this office is a clearing house of information about outdoor opportunities in the 157,000 acres of the Pisgah District. Forest rangers staff the office and happily recommend their favorite hikes and swimming holes.

Numerous free brochures are available, plus a variety of area maps and guidebooks are for sale. Also, there are restrooms, a gift shop, exhibits, and a nature trail that sets out from the parking area. • 1001 Pisgah Highway, Pisgah Forest, (828) 877-3265

French Broad Station, Pisgah National Forest • As one of two stations in the colossal Appalachian Ranger District, the French Broad Station in the center of Hot Springs oversees the 80,000 acres of rugged forest land along the Tennessee State line. The office provides a variety of brochures on mountain biking, hiking, and horseback riding trails in the area. Rangers will gladly help you select an outdoor adventure. • 88 Bridge Street, Hot Springs, (828) 622-3202

Backcountry Outdoors • This full-service outdoor store sells all manner of gear, apparel, and footwear; plus they operate a bicycle shop that rents and sells mountain bikes. Located at the entrance to the Pisgah National Forest, Backcountry Outdoors is staffed by serious outdoor enthusiasts happy to point you to their favorite spots for hiking, mountain biking, and paddling. • 18 Pisgah Highway, Pisgah Forest, (828) 884-4262, www.backcountryoutdoors.com

Black Dome Mountain Sports • This large Asheville store carries gear, apparel, and footwear for nearly every kind of outdoor pursuit. The shop specializes in hard-to-find rock- and mountain-climbing equipment, and the staff is exceptionally well-informed about the area's outdoor offerings. Also at Black Dome: guide services and instruction for climbing and spelunking. • 140 Tunnel Road, Asheville, (828) 251-2001 or 1-800-678-2367, www.blackdome.com

Bluff Mountain Outfitters • A serious trail shop for thru-hikers on the Appalachian Trail, Bluff Mountain sells anything and everything you might want for your trip into the woods. They sell outdoor gear and apparel, guidebooks, maps, and a complete selection of trail food, including organic health foods. • 152 Bridge Street, Hot Springs, (828) 622-7162

Looking Glass Outfitters • Located near the Route 276 entrance to the Pisgah National Forest, this shop sells gear, apparel, and footwear for paddling, hiking, climbing, and backpacking. The staff welcomes drop-ins looking for trail recommendations and directions. • 90 New Hendersonville Highway, Pisgah Forest, (828) 884-5854, www.lookingglassoutfitters.com

K i c k B a c k

What to do when your muscles cry "no more" or the weather plays foul? Check out the following laid-back pursuits in Asheville and the surrounding towns.

Attractions

◆ Founded in 1960, the **Botanical Gardens at Asheville**, 151 W.T. Weaver Boulevard, Asheville, (828) 252-5190, www.ashevillebotanicalgardens.org, fills 10 acres with trees, shrubs, vines, wildflowers, herbs, and other plants native to the Southern Appalachians. In total, there are approximately 700 species of plants. A walking path winds through the gardens and two meadows, as the birds trilling overhead re-set your stress level to "subdued." Grounds are open daily, sunup to sundown; gift shop and botany center open daily, 9:30 A.M.-4 P.M., March-mid November. Admission is free, but donations are appreciated.

◆ The **North Carolina Arboretum**, 100 Frederick Law Olmstead Way, Asheville, (828) 665-2492, www.ncarboretum.org, brings people and plants together. The 426-acre public garden features greenhouses, several garden areas, trails for hiking and mountain biking, and a 25,500-square-foot education center where lectures, clinics, and events are held. Pick up a map of the grounds from the information desk in the education center. Nominal parking fee, but entrance to the facilities and grounds is free. Grounds are open daily. Property hours are 8 A.M.-9 P.M., April-October; 8 A.M.-7 P.M., November-March. The Visitor Education Center is open Monday-Saturday, 9 A.M.-5 P.M.; Sunday, Noon-5 P.M.

◆ The 6,500-acre **Cradle of Forestry**, Route 276, Pisgah Forest, (828) 877-3130, www.cradleofforestry.com, is where the nation's forestry and conservation efforts began in the late 19th Century. Here, on land belonging to George Vanderbilt, Dr. Carl A. Schenck founded the the nation's first forestry school, the Biltmore Forest School, in 1898.

Packed In

Downtown Asheville's star is the 92,000 square-foot cultural facility, **Pack Place Education, Arts and Science Center**, 2 South Pack Square, ☎ (828) 257-4500, www.packplace.org. Housed within it are five major Asheville attractions: The **Asheville Art Museum** (see *Art Galleries*); the **Colburn Gem and Mineral Museum**, ☎ (828) 254-7162, www.colburnmuseum.org, which displays thousands of Carolina gems and minerals; **Health Adventure**, ☎ (828) 254-6373, www.health-adventure.com, a hands-on health and science museum; the 500-seat **Diana Wortham Theatre**, ☎ (828) 257-4530, www.dwtheatre.com; and the **YMI Cultural Center**, ☎ (828) 252-4614 www.ymicc.org, an African-American center that hosts exhibits, lectures, performances, and other cultural programs.



Pack Place

Vanderbilt had hired Schenck to manage the Biltmore Estate's land. Located onsite, the **Forestry Discovery Center** features exhibits on conservation and forestry, plus a brief film on the Cradle's history. Other sites on the historic campus include an old sawmill, a 1915 Climbmax logging locomotive, a gift shop, and café. Open daily, 9 A.M.-5 P.M., mid April-early November. Nominal admission fee.

◆ Located 25 miles southeast of Asheville, **Chimney Rock Park**, Route 64/74A, Chimney Rock, (828) 625-9611 or 1-800-277-9611, www.chimneyrockpark.com, is a privately owned, 1,000-acre park with a number of interesting rock formations; a 404-foot waterfall, Hickory Nut Falls; a nature center; a moonshiner's cave with a replica of a still; and more than 3.5 miles of nature trails, ranging in difficulty from easy to moderate. The park's crowning attraction is the Chimney, a 315-foot monolith with tremendous views that stretch more than 75 miles from its 2,280-foot summit. (You can walk to the summit or take a 26-floor elevator ride.) The beautiful scenery in the park has drawn filmmakers; numerous scenes from *The Last of the Mohicans* with Daniel Day Lewis and *Firestarter* with Drew Barrymore were shot in the park. There's enough to do here to fill a full day, so if you think you'll return, purchase a season pass, which at \$22 is less than the price of two \$14 one-time passes. Open daily (weather permitting), 8:30 A.M.-4:30 P.M. (until 5:30 P.M. during daylight savings).



Chimney Rock Park

NC Division of Tourism

Get Rich (Not So) Quick

Rockhounds flock to the Appalachian Mountains to hunt for valuable stones, including sapphires, rubies, and emeralds created a few hundred million years ago as friction from tectonic plate collisions exposed igneous rock to enormous heat. Get in on the action at the **Old Pressley Mine**, 240 Pressley Mine Road, Canton, ☎ (828) 648-6320 or 1-877-903-4754, www.oldpressleymine.com, where the 1,445-carat "Star of the Carolinas" blue sapphire was found. Be forewarned: Gem hunting requires patience, and while you may find a precious stone or two, the chances of finding a stone to fund your retirement are slim.

Antiques

 Antiques shops abound in Asheville, with the largest concentrations along **Lexington Avenue** in downtown Asheville, in the **Biltmore Village**, and in **Weaverville**, just seven miles north of Asheville. In addition to period styles you'd expect of a mountain community—Early American Country, for example—a surprising collection of shops sell European antiques. For example, **King-Thomasson Antiques**, 65 Biltmore Avenue, (828) 252-1565, www.king-thomasson.com, specializes in furniture made from native English woods. Items include Windsor chairs, dressers, chests-of-drawers, and cupboards from the 17th-19th centuries. ◆ With 12,000 square feet of retail floor, **Village Antiques**, 755 Biltmore Avenue, Asheville, (828) 252-5090, www.villageantiquesonline.com, features 17th



Transylvania Development Authority

through 19th-century furniture, artwork, and decorative accessories.

◆ With kudos from *Southern Living* and *Southern Accents* magazines, **Fireside Antiques and Interiors**, Biltmore Village, 30 All Souls Crescent, Asheville, (828) 274-5977, has four galleries of exquisite European furniture made from mahogany, pine, and walnut, as well as decorative porcelain accessories. ◆ Downtown Asheville's **Lexington Park Antiques**, 65 Walnut Street, (828) 253-3070, is a large antiques mall with more than 90 dealers spread over 26,000 square feet. Items on hand range from Americana collectibles to European fine art.

◆ In Weaverville, **Elkins' Antiques**, 99 Silverwood Farm Road, (828) 645-5285, www.elkinsantiques.com, specializes in fine American Southern Country furniture. Their inventory includes cupboards, hutches, armoires, wardrobes, tables, and desks. ◆ Looking for an antique door knob, door, sink, toilet, or fireplace mantel? Head to **Preservation Hall**, 55 North Main Street, Weaverville, (828) 645-1047, www.preservation-hall.com, where you'll find all manner of antiques salvaged from old homes. Even if you have no idea what you might want, chances are you'll find something old to make new in your home. There are three floors and more than 5,000 square feet of retail space. ◆ Numerous fine antiques shops line Cherry Street in **Black Mountain** and North Main Street in **Hendersonville**.

Art & Crafts Galleries

 So rich are its art and crafts offerings that Asheville was recently included in *American Style* magazine's list of the Top 25 Arts Destinations in the nation, along with such art behemoths as New York City, Chicago, and Santa Fe. The following are some highlights.

◆ Founded in 1930, the **Southern Highland Craft Guild**, www.southernhighlandguild.com, is a collective of more than 800 Southern Appalachian craftspeople whose work ranges from traditional quilting to contemporary glass. You can view members' work—woodwork, pottery, basketry, textiles, furniture, metal, and more—just a few minutes from Asheville at the guild's headquarters, the **Folk Art Center**, BRP Milepost 382, (828) 298-7928, or purchase select pieces from **Allanstand**, a retail crafts shop inside the center. Admission is free. ◆ The **Appalachian Craft Center**, 10 N Spruce Street, Asheville, (828) 253-8499, www.appalachiancraftcenter.com, displays and sells work by more than 100 area artisans working primarily with clay, but also with fiber, jewelry, wood, and glass. ◆ Located in a former industrial area of town along the French Broad River, Asheville's **Historic River District** is home to more than 30 working artists' studios. Potters, sculptors, and blacksmiths are just a few of the craftspeople here. Wander past the studios—primarily on Riverside Drive, Roberts Street, and Clingman Avenue—and chances are good you'll find several open with the artists working inside.



An art gallery in Brevard

◆ Traditional art also thrives in Asheville at the **Asheville Art Museum** at Pack Place, 2 South Pack Square, (828) 253-3227, www.ashevilleart.org. This visual-arts facility features more than 1,500 pieces of 20th-century American fine art, with a particular emphasis on work by Southeastern artists. Included in the collection are paintings by Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence, plus contemporary abstract work by Asheville natives Kenneth Noland and Donald Sultan. ◆ **Blue Spiral 1**, 38 Biltmore Avenue, Asheville, (828) 251-0202, www.bluespiral1.com, presents contemporary fine art and crafts by Southeastern artists in a three-floor space that's a work of art itself. Of special note is a gallery dedicated to the works of Will Henry Stevens (1881-1949), an early 20th-century American artist.

◆ The **Black Mountain Center for the Arts**, 225 West State Street, Black Mountain, (828) 669-0930, exhibits paintings and clay, fiber, and wood crafts by well-known regional and national artists. ◆ Also in Black Mountain, **Seven Sisters Gallery**, 117 Cherry Street, (828) 669-5107, is a laid-back place featuring clay, textiles, beads, metal, oils, pastels, and more by local and regional artisans. ◆ Downtown Hendersonville features a number of crafts studios. One you shouldn't miss is **WICKWIRE fine art/folk art**, 330 North Main Street, (828) 692-6222, www.wickwireartgallery.com, where fine art by established and emerging artists hangs alongside traditional and contemporary mountain crafts. ◆ In Brevard, **Number 7 Arts, A Fine Arts & Crafts Cooperative**, 7 East Main Street, (828) 883-2294, showcases basketry, jewelry, textiles, metal, paintings, and sculptures by more than 20 area artists.

Back Roads Touring

 Of course, the mother of all scenic roadways in the area, indeed in the nation, is the **Blue Ridge Parkway** (see *Blue Ridge Parkway*). But many more area roads are worth exploring. The Pisgah National Forest publishes *Forest Heritage National Scenic Byway*, a small brochure detailing a 79-mile loop through the national forest. Suggested stops along the way include Looking Glass Falls, Sliding Rock, the Cradle of Forestry, Pink Beds Scenic Area, and Lake Logan. Pick up a copy from the Pisgah District office on Route 276 (see *Local Outdoor Advice*). The drive runs the length of **Route 276** west through the forest, past the Blue Ridge Parkway, and into the small town of Bethel, where you take **Route 215** south back across the parkway to the intersection with Route 64 in Rosman. Take **Route 64** east through Brevard to close the loop.

◆ Combine a daytrip to the Hot Springs area with the pleasant **Hot Springs Loop**, which heads north from Asheville on **Route 19/23** to connect with **Route 25/70** north

to Hot Springs. The drive is largely rural and becomes particularly mountainous as you approach Hot Springs. To return, take **Route 209** south from Hot Springs to the town of Trust, where you take **Route 63** south into Asheville. ♦ From Hot Springs, driving to **Max Patch** is exceptionally scenic. At the mountain, you can park and walk a quarter-mile uphill to tremendous 360-degree views of the Tennessee and North Carolina mountains. See directions for this drive under *Wide Open*. ♦ The Madison County Tourism bureau publishes a free brochure entitled ***Madison County Driving Tours***, which details two loops through the county's rural scenery of rolling hills, rugged mountains, cows, pastures, barns, and roadside streams. Historical commentary explains the sights. The Asheville Visitor Center has copies of the brochure (see *Additional Information*) or you can pick up a copy at the **Madison County Visitor Center**, 72 South Main Street, Mars Hill, 1-877-262-3476. To reach Mars Hill from Asheville, take Route 19/23 north.

Biltmore Estate & Biltmore Village

Once the country home for George Vanderbilt, and today one of the most-visited attractions in the United States, the **Biltmore Estate**, 1 Approach Road, Asheville, (828) 225-1333 or 1-800-624-1575, www.biltmore.com, stands as a testament to the colossal wealth generated by the 19th-century American industrialists. George Vanderbilt's grandfather, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, made millions as a railroad and steamship baron, and his son, William, expanded the Vanderbilt fortune. So did William's three oldest sons. However, his fourth son, George Washington Vanderbilt, was content to spend. And spend he did. A world traveler, multi-linguist, cultured intellectual, and overall bon vivant, George arrived in Asheville in the 1880s at age 25. Attracted by the surrounding countryside, he purchased 125,000 acres on which to build Biltmore. After Vanderbilt's death, the government purchased much of the land to form the Pisgah National Forest. Today the estate, which remains privately owned by Vanderbilt's heirs, encompasses approximately 8,000 acres of forest, meadow, and landscaped gardens.

Construction on the home took five years (1890–1895) and the effort of more than 1,000 laborers to complete. The result was (and is) the largest private residence in the

Visiting Biltmore

A three-mile driveway from the entrance to the house gives you an idea of the scale of Biltmore, so you'd do well to devote a full day to visiting the home, gardens, and winery. Daytime admission is not cheap (nearly \$40 per adult), but the ticket is good for a self-guided visit through four floors of the Biltmore House; entrance to the acres of gardens and walking trails; entrance to the **Biltmore Winery**, including tours of the production areas and a complimentary wine tasting (for guests 21 and older); and parking onsite. The self-paced audio tours for rent are an excellent way to learn about the estate. To reach Biltmore Estate from downtown Asheville, follow Biltmore Avenue to Route 25 south, which leads to the entrance.



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United States: a 250-room French Renaissance château. Here are the numbers: 34 bedrooms, 43 bathrooms, 65 fireplaces, three kitchens, a library with more than 20,000 books in seven languages, and 250 acres of landscaped gardens designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, who also designed New York City's Central Park. More than 70,000 furnishings purchased by Vanderbilt on his world travels and original to the house remain, including oriental rugs, paintings—we're talking Renoir, Sargent, and Pellegrini—porcelains, bronzes, and furniture. So many items of note are in the house that merely mentioning a few—a chess set and gaming table that belonged to Napoleon and Chinese goldfish bowls from the Ming Dynasty—does little justice to the historic art on display.

Adjacent to Biltmore Estate is **Historic Biltmore Village**, www.biltmorevillage.com, a community planned and built by Vanderbilt and his friend, Biltmore architect, Richard Hunt. Constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the buildings are in architectural concert with Biltmore Estate. Nearly all of the original structures remain standing, including the heart of the village, the **Cathedral of All Souls**, 3 Angle Street. Today shops, galleries, and restaurants line the village. Learn more about the area at the **Biltmore Village Museum**, 7 Biltmore Plaza, (828) 274-9707, which presents the history of the village from the late 1800s to the present through photographs, maps, antique post cards, and artifacts. Open Monday–Saturday, 12:30 P.M.–4:30 P.M. Free admission.

Blue Ridge Parkway

The **Blue Ridge Parkway**, (828) 298-0398, www.nps.gov/blri, is the nation's most popular scenic highway (more than 21 million visitors a year drive portions of the road), and it passes just south of Asheville. (Take Biltmore Avenue/Route 25 south to the parkway.) Stretching 469 miles from Virginia's Shenandoah National Park to North Carolina's Great Smoky Mountains National Park along ridgelines of the Appalachian Mountains, the BRP rolls past stunning scenery that invites leisurely driving. Numerous overlooks, pull-offs, and recreation areas line the road, which was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s and 1940s, in part to give work to men who'd lost employment during the Great Depression. To take a drive, pick up the free parkway map printed by the National Park Service (available from all sources listed under *Additional Information*). Concrete mileposts mark every mile, beginning with Milepost 0 in Virginia and ending with Milepost 469 in North Carolina. All the major sites on the parkway within a reasonable drive from Asheville are listed in this chapter with milepost locations.



The Blue Ridge Parkway

Cool Movie House



Want to catch a flick more intellectually satisfying than *Terminator 7*? Head to Asheville's **Fine Arts Theatre**, 36 Biltmore Plaza, (828) 232-1536, www.finearts-theatre.com, an immaculately restored downtown Art-Deco wonder that shows first-run art and independent films. In addition to films featuring indie stars like Chloe Sevigny and Benicio Del Toro, the theatre offers "undiscovered" independent filmmakers a venue in which to show their work and talk with the audience.

From the Farm



Farms stretch in all directions outward from Asheville, and the fruit (and vegetables) of their labor appear at the region's many roadside stands and farmers markets. The big market is the **Western North Carolina Farmers Market**, 570 Brevard Road, (828) 253-1691, roadside on Route 191 southeast of Asheville. Overflowing with vegetables, fruits,

baked goods, plants, honey, and crafts, the market sits on 36 acres filled with rows of wooden tables outdoors and several large buildings with indoor tenants. Open daily, year-round (8 A.M.–6 P.M. April–October, 8 A.M.–5 P.M. November–March). ♦ The **Henderson County Curb Market**, at the corner of 2nd Avenue and Church Street, Hendersonville, (828) 692-8012, sells goods and crafts, including produce, baked goods, jellies, plants, flowers, and toys. Open Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 8 A.M.–2 P.M., May–December; Tuesday and Saturday, 8 A.M.–2 P.M., January–April.

Keep the Doctor Away

If there's one fruit that most epitomizes the North Carolina Mountains, it's the apple. Apple trees thrive in the cool summer nights and long sunny days, and no less than 14 juicy, crisp, and sweet varieties grow in the state. You can purchase apples from the farmers that grow them, or better yet, pick your own. Autumn is harvest time, and the best place to begin is in **Henderson County**, where a whopping 75 percent of the state's apples are grown. The largest concentration of roadside stands and pick-your-own orchards exists on Route 64 east of Hendersonville.

Historic Sites & Museums



Nearly all of downtown Asheville's 19th- and early 20th-century buildings remain standing (see "Frozen in Time"), so strolling the city's center provides a historic architectural perspective. The following are just the highlights. If you're interested in knowing more, stop by the Visitor Center on Haywood Street (see *Additional Information*) to request a printout with the complete list of buildings and their histories. (It costs \$0.25.)

♦ The **Grove Arcade**, built between 1926–1929 by E.W. Grove as the state's first indoor mall, occupies a full city block along Battery Park Avenue. Today it houses a collection of

boutiques and dining choices. Cream-glazed terra cotta covers this imposing Neo-Tudor Gothic building designed by Charles N. Parker. Don't miss the winged Griffin statues guarding the Battle Square entrance. ♦ Built in 1909, the **Basilica of Saint Lawrence**, 97 Haywood Street, is a Spanish Baroque Revival-style Catholic Church. Designed by world-renowned architect Raphael Guastavino, the red-brick church features two five-story towers that bookend its façade and an entirely self-supporting dome believed to be the largest of its type in North America. There are no wood or steel beams in the entire structure; everything is constructed out of tiles and other masonry materials.

♦ In Pack Square, the 13-story **Jackson Building**, designed by Ronald Greene, went up in 1925 as the state's first skyscraper. ♦ Built between 1926–1928, the **Asheville City Building**, 70 Court Plaza, is an Art-Deco masterpiece designed by architect Douglas Ellington. It is set on a marble base and crowned by a pink- and green-tiled octagonal, pyramid-style roof. ♦ Also designed by Douglas Ellington, the Art-Deco **S&W Cafeteria** building, 56 Patton Avenue, was built in 1929 for the cafeteria chain. The two-story building features a multi-hued, terra-cotta façade. Inside, Art-Deco decorations separate the interior lobby from the dining rooms. ♦ At the entrance to Wall Street and located at 10-20 Battery Park Avenue, the **Flatiron Building** is a wedge-shaped, eight-story, tan-brick building built in 1926. ♦ On the outskirts of town, E.W. Grove's **Grove Park Inn**, 290 Macon Avenue, went up in 1913 and was meant to emulate a Yellowstone Park mountain lodge Grove once visited. Designed by Grove's son-in-law (who had no architectural experience), the hotel features native timber and uncut granite boulders on a poured-concrete base. The distinctive red roof comes from red-clay tiles produced in Tennessee. Even if you're not a guest, visit the inn for coffee, tea, or dinner, so you can see the massive 120-foot by 80-foot main lobby, bookended by fireplaces so large you could park a VW Bug inside.

♦ As the second most-visited attraction in Asheville (the Biltmore is #1), the **Thomas Wolfe Memorial Home**, 48 Spruce Street, (828) 253-8304, www.wolfememorial.com, was the boyhood home of the famous author. Immortalized as "Dixieland" in Wolfe's autobiographical novel, *Look Homeward Angel*, the 19-room, Queen Anne-style boardinghouse was run by his mother for middle-class guests visiting Asheville. "Dixieland was a big cheaply constructed frame house of eighteen or twenty drafty high-ceilinged rooms: it had a rambling, unplanned, gabular appearance, and was painted a dirty yellow," wrote Wolfe. Prior to a

Frozen in Time

Downtown Asheville's architecture is like a freeze-frame of the good times the city enjoyed leading up to the Stock Market Crash of 1929. As a 19th- and early 20th-century vacation destination for wealthy sophisticates like Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Asheville spared no expense on its buildings. Without a unified style—Art-Deco stands next to Classical, for example—the eclectic mix might have been ripe for the wrecking ball in the homogenous 1950s had the city been able to afford the demolition. Buried under tremendous debt, Asheville let its city-center sit, and as a result, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Asheville one of 12 best-preserved and unique communities in the nation.



Grove Arcade



The Grove Park Inn

devastating fire in 1998, the house had been preserved nearly intact with original furnishings. After the fire, many items were salvaged, and the home underwent a \$2.1 million restoration for the May 2004 grand re-opening. A modern **visitor center**, 52 North Market Street, exhibits personal items from the home, the author's New York City apartment, and his father's stonemasonry shop. Catch the short

film about the writer and browse the onsite gift shop. Open Tuesday–Saturday, 9 A.M.–5 P.M.; Sunday, 1 P.M.–5 P.M., from April–October. Winter hours are Tuesday–Saturday, 10 A.M.–4 P.M.; Sunday, 1 P.M.–4 P.M. Moderate admission fee.

◆ The oldest surviving structure in Asheville, the red-brick **Smith-McDowell House**, 283 Victoria Road, (828) 253-9231, was built around 1840 by James McConnell Smith, one of the first settlers born west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Today period antiques furnish the house, and exhibits provide interesting details about Victorian life in Asheville. Rooms include a kitchen from the 1840s, an 1850s bedroom, and an 1890 dining room. The home also features gardens designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscaper of Biltmore Estate and New York City's Central Park. Also on the grounds is the Buncombe County Civil War Memorial. Open Tuesday–Saturday, 10 A.M.–4 P.M., Sunday, 1 P.M.–4 P.M., April–December. Closed Sundays and Mondays, January–March.

◆ Just north of downtown Asheville, the **Montford Historic District** is an attractive residential neighborhood of more than 200 turn-of-the-century homes. Here you'll find a large concentration of bed and breakfasts, as well as **Riverside Cemetery**, 53 Birch Street, where many of Asheville's best-known citizens are buried, including writers Thomas Wolfe and O. Henry, and North Carolina Governor Zebulon Baird Vance.

◆ Just north of Asheville in Reems Creek Valley, the **Vance Birthplace**, 911 Reems Creek Road, Weaverville, (828) 645-6706, is a pioneer farmstead where three-time North

Carolina Governor Zebulon Baird Vance was born in 1830. Vance, who also served as a Civil War officer and United States Senator, was the third child of early Buncombe County settler David Vance. The homestead includes various outbuildings and a reconstructed log home built around the original chimneys. Period antiques furnish the homestead; museum exhibits depict early pioneer days in the mountains. Open Monday–Saturday, 9 A.M.–5 P.M. Free admission.

◆ In Flat Rock, the **Carl Sandburg House**, 1928 Little River Road, (828) 693-4178, www.nps.gov/carl, was home to Pulitzer-Prize

Grove Park Inn

Ed Laycox

winning poet, author, biographer, folksinger, and humorist Carl Sandburg after he moved from Michigan in 1945. Widely considered a voice for the American people, Sandburg, along with his wife, spent more than 20 years on the farm named Connemara, and it was here that he wrote more than one-third of his life's work. The grounds include the circa 1838 home, a dairy barn, and various sheds. Also, there are two small lakes, an orchard, gardens, and walking trails. The home is open for guided, 30-minute tours offered daily beginning at 9:30 A.M. and ending at 4:30 P.M. Nominal admission fee.

◆ **Historic Downtown Hendersonville** offers a free brochure, *Art & History: A Hendersonville Walking Tour*, available from the visitor center at 201 South Main Street. The tour highlights nearly 30 notable sites and buildings, including the 1847 **Shepherd-Riley Building**, an antebellum commercial building; the 1850 **Ripley Building**, another rare, antebellum commercial building; and the 1882 **Oakdale Cemetery**, site of "**Wolfe's Angel**," the sculpture Wolfe made famous in *Look Homeward Angel*.



The Estes-Winn Museum

A Museum Without Walls

To discover Asheville's cultural and historic heritage, walk the **Asheville Urban Trail**, an interpretative trail downtown marked by sculptures, plaques, and granite markers. There are 30 "stations," each of which highlights an important site, building, or person from the city's past. Five trail segments represent key historic periods: the Pioneer Period, the Gilded Age, the Times of Thomas Wolfe, the Era of Civic Pride, and the Age of Diversity. The 1.7-mile trail takes two hours to walk. Pick up a trail brochure from the Asheville Visitor Center, 151 Haywood Street.

Planes, Trains, and Automobiles

Transportation-history buffs can check out three separate museums focusing on cars, trains, and airplanes. The **Estes-Winn Antique Automobile Museum**, 111 Grovewood Road, Asheville, (828) 253-7651, features a collection of more than 30 antique cars dating from 1905. ◆ The first train pulled into the **Historic Hendersonville Depot**, Maple Street off 7th Avenue, Hendersonville, (828) 698-0052, in 1879, though the present structure dates to 1902. Of note in the depot's baggage room: a model train with 500 feet of track. ◆ The state's first flight museum, the **Western North Carolina Air Museum**, 1340 Gilbert Street, (828) 698-2482, at Hendersonville's airport, houses a collection of restored vintage airplanes.

Hot Air Ballooning

For an uplifting experience and a unique way to see the mountains, get above it all in a hot air balloon. Two outfits provide rides in the area. ◆ **Mt. Pisgah Balloons**, 1410 Pisgah Highway, Candler, (828) 667-9943, floats over the Pisgah National Forest and the French Broad River. You'll be treated to great views of the mountains and the city of Asheville. ◆ **Transylvania Balloon Company**, 40 Pole Miller Road, Brevard, 1-877-500-0506, www.transylvaniaballooonco.com, flies over the apple orchards and scenic valleys of Henderson County.

Performing Arts

 So many theatrical, musical, and dance opportunities exist in the mountains that the following list captures just the highlights. In addition to contacting the groups directly, pick up a copy of *The Asheville Citizen-Times* or the weekly alternative paper, the *Mountain Xpress*, for show listings.

◆ Founded in 1946, the **Asheville Community Theatre**, 35 East Walnut Street, Asheville, (828) 254-1320, www.ashevilletheatre.org, performs six productions a year, including classics, musicals, and comedies. Recent shows were *The Sound of Music*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *Look Homeward Angel*. Performances are in the Heston Auditorium, named for Charlton Heston, who launched his career here with wife, actress Lydia Clark, in a 1947 production of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. ◆ **The Montford Park Players**, (828) 254-5146, www.montfordparkplayers.org, is Asheville's Shakespeare-in-the-park troupe. The all-volunteer acting and technical crew produces two plays—a comedy and a tragedy—by the Bard each summer. Free performances are in the outdoor Hazel Robinson Amphitheater, 34 Pearson Drive, in the Montford Historic District.

◆ The **North Carolina Stage Company**, (828) 669-4367 or (828) 350-9090 for tickets, www.ncstage.org, presented its first full season in 2003-2004 with productions of the Pulitzer

Prize-winning play *Proof* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The new troupe focuses on producing classics (with an emphasis on Shakespeare), as well as compelling modern plays. Performances are held in the Earth Guild Building, 33 Haywood Street, accessed via an alley off Walnut Street.

Other regional theatre troupes include: ◆ **Brevard Community Theatre Company**, (828) 884-2587, www.brevardlittletheatre.com, which performs three to four plays a year in the Barn Theatre, on the campus of Brevard College; ◆ **Hendersonville Little Theatre**, (828) 692-1082, www.hendersonvillelittletheatre.org, which produces four plays a year in The Barn on State Street, a converted riding stable between Kanuga and Willow streets in Hendersonville; and ◆ the **Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre**, (828) 689-1239, which produces traditional summer stock, plus one original script a year, in the historic Owen Theatre on the campus of Mars Hill College in Mars Hill.

◆ The **Asheville Symphony Orchestra**, (828) 254-7046, www.ashevillesymphony.org, performed

its 43rd season in 2003-2004 of classical, pops, and choral works (in conjunction with the **Asheville Symphony Chorus**). The well-known orchestra performs in Asheville's Civic Center, 87 Haywood Street, and really shines with its Masterworks series of classical works by such composers as Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms. ◆ The **Asheville Chamber Music Series**, (828) 298-5085, is a volunteer music organization that produces between four and six programs a year at Asheville's Unitarian Universalist Church, 1 Edwin Place. Visiting trios, quartets, and quintets include many of the nation's finest musicians. ◆ With the accompaniment of the Asheville Symphony Orchestra, the **Asheville Lyric Opera**, (828) 236-0670, www.ashevilletlyric.org, performs two major operas a year in Asheville's 500-seat Diana Wortham Theatre, 2 South Pack Square. Recent productions were *Don Pasquale*, *La Bohème*, and *Madama Butterfly*. ◆ Founded in 1932 as the Asheville Civic Music Association with the goal "to bring better music to Asheville," **Asheville Bravo! Concerts**, (828) 299-0820, www.ashevillebravocconcerts.org, delivers top-notch classical music performers, operas, ballet troupes, and more to the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium at the Asheville Civic Center, 87 Haywood Street. Recent performers included violinist Robert McDuffie with the Philharmonia of the Nations, the Moscow Festival Ballet, and pianists Katia and Marielle Labèque.

◆ Brevard College's **Paul Porter Center for Performing Arts**, 400 North Broad Street, (828) 884-8330, hosts numerous outstanding musical performances throughout the year by the college's nationally recognized music department. ◆ Founded in 1979 as Western North Carolina's first modern dance troupe, the **Asheville Contemporary Dance Theatre**, 28 Commerce Street, Asheville, (828) 254-2621, www.acdt.org, performs a varied repertoire, pulling from both traditional and experimental forms of modern dance. Performances are in either the Bebe Theatre, 28 Commerce Street, or the Diana Wortham Theatre, 2 South Pack Square.

Shops & Stops

 The combination of historic architecture and pedestrian-friendly streets makes shopping **downtown Asheville** particularly pleasant. In keeping with the city's creative



The lawn at the Brevard Music Center

Transylvania Development Authority

Eat, Breathe, & Sleep Music

One of the nation's best-known music camps and festivals for pre-professional musicians is the **Brevard Music Center**, 1000 Probst Street, Brevard, (828) 862-2100 or 1-888-384-8682, www.brevardmusic.org, where for seven weeks each summer, 400 students "eat, breathe, and sleep music." They receive instruction from the professional faculty and help perform in more than 80 public concerts, operas, and musicals. Their efforts are to your gain, as the quality of music is outstanding. Concerts are on campus in an open-air auditorium; seating is covered or on the lawn.

Gordon Smith



Inside the Grove Arcade

flair, expect generous helpings of galleries, antiques dealers, new-age boutiques, and funky apparel shops. A rough generalization: exotic retailers are on **Wall Street, Lexington Street** is the antiques corridor, and galleries line the sidewalks along **Biltmore** and **Broadway avenues**. ♦ **A Far Away Place**, 11 Wall Street, (828) 252-1891 or 1-888-452-1891, promises "gifts from the heart of the world." Indeed, you're far from Kansas when you step inside this fragrant-smelling shop with its collection of world art, clothing, religious artifacts, and global knick-knacks. ♦ The non-profit **Ten Thousand Villages**, 10 College Street, Asheville, (828) 254-8374, www.villagesasheville.com, sells crafts made by Third World artists who receive income from your purchases to care for their families. ♦ To find something you

didn't know you wanted, head to **The L.O.F.T. of Asheville**, 53 Broadway Avenue, (828) 259-9303, www.loftofasheville.com. The L.O.F.T. ("lost objects found treasures") sells funky furniture, paper journals, French soaps, scented candles, pottery, garden stuff, and more.

♦ **The Mast General Store**, 15 Biltmore Avenue, (828) 232-1883, www.mastgeneralstore.com, operates an outpost in Asheville, where you'll find everything from old-timey mercantile items (wind-up toys and Radio Flyer red wagons, for example) to clothing and outdoor gear. ♦ The **Grove Arcade Public Market**, 1 Page Avenue, Asheville, (828) 252-7799, www.grovearcade.com, is home to more than 30 specialty food, crafts, and service retailers in the renovated 1929 Grove Arcade building.

♦ South of downtown, **Biltmore Village** features more than 50 unique shops, galleries, and restaurants, many of which are in historic buildings along brick-paved sidewalks. Don't miss **Interiors Marketplace**, 2 Hendersonville Road, Asheville, (828) 253-

Positively Bookish

The Asheville region loves its bookstores—the number of independent and chain bookstores rivals that of much larger cities. ♦ **Malaprops Bookstore/Café**, 55 Haywood Street, Asheville, (828) 254-6734, www.malaprops.com, is as much a reading center as a bookstore, given the café is packed with tables full of customers sipping coffee and losing themselves in books. Malaprops carries fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, with a notable selection of work by Southern writers. ♦ **Accent on Books**, 854 Merrimon Avenue, Asheville, (828) 252-6255 or 1-800-482-7964, www.accentonbooks.com, carries religion, spirituality, psychology, gay & lesbian issues, and health titles. There's also a great children's selection. ♦ **The Captain's Bookshelf**, 31 Page Avenue, Asheville, (828) 253-663, is an interesting used bookstore with a large selection of first editions and autographed books. ♦ Located opposite Brevard College, **Highland Books**, 480 North Broad Street, Brevard, (828) 884-2424, carries a wide selection of new fiction and nonfiction, with special emphasis on regional titles, including outdoor and travel books. ♦ In Hendersonville, **Mountain Lore**, 555 North Main Street, (828) 693-5096, carries new fiction, poetry, and nonfiction with a special emphasis on regional titles.

2300, www.interiorsmarketplace.com, for all manner of art, antiques, and furniture. ♦ **The Compleat Naturalist**, 2 Biltmore Plaza, (828) 274-5430 or 1-800-678-5430, www.completnaturalist.com, is a nature store and wildlife gallery.

♦ Downtown Hendersonville has a great mix of apparel, jewelry, music, toy, art, and antiques shops spread across a six-block area. Park anywhere along Main Street or in one of the municipal lots on Church or King streets. In addition to another outpost of the **Mast General Store**, 527 Main Street, (828) 696-1883, notable stops include: ♦ the **Purple Sage**, 416 North Main Street, (828) 693-9555, for gourmet cooking items, including cookware, cookbooks, fine food, and wine; and ♦ **Dancing Bear Toys**, 418 North Main Street, (828) 693-4500, www.dancingbeartoy.com, an independently owned toy shop.

♦ **Black Mountain** offers art galleries, antiques shops, and gift boutiques, particularly along Cherry and State streets. Two neat stops include: ♦ **Town Hardware & General Store**, 103 West State Street, (828) 669-7723 or 1-800-669-7723, www.townhardware.com, an old-fashioned hardware and general store with tools, garden and home accessories, toys, and antique replicas of hand-crank ice-cream churners and apple peelers; and ♦ **Song of the Wood**, 203 West State Street, (828) 669-7675, www.songofthewood.com, which sells hammer dulcimers, bowed psalteries, and other traditional mountain instruments constructed by owner Jerry Read Smith, a legend in mountain-instrument making. The shop also carries numerous CDs by folk musicians.

♦ The downtown area of **Brevard** along Main and Broad streets is packed with cool boutiques and galleries, all set against the backdrop of the mountains. **The White Squirrel Shoppe**, 2 West Main Street, Brevard, (828) 877-3530 or 1-888-729-7329, www.whitesquirrelshoppe.com, is an interesting general merchandise and gift shop located in the historic 1899 McMinn Building. ♦ A couple of storefronts down, **Celestial Mountain Music**, 16 West Main Street, Brevard, (828) 884-3575, www.celestialmtnmusic.com, sells all manner of stringed instruments, including Cedar Mountain banjos, as well as accessories, sound equipment, and recordings.

♦ The **Chimney Rock area** has a number of shops worth exploring. Check out **Edie's Good Things**, Route 64/74A, Chimney Rock Village, (828) 625-0111, www.ediegoodthings.com, for handmade basketry, jewelry, pottery, glass, carved wood, and metal pieces, plus a collection of cards and music.



Transylvania Development Authority

Spa & Massage

 Housed in a historic home one minute from downtown Asheville, **The Asheville Oasis**, 73 Merrimon Avenue, (828) 257-2570, www.theashevilleoasis.com, offers facials, pedicures, manicures, and massage services. ♦ S-t-r-e-t-c-h your vacation out at

Fire, Water, Rock, Light

Travel + Leisure calls the \$42 million, 40,000-square foot, subterranean **Grove Park Inn Spa**, 290 Macon Avenue, Asheville, (828) 252-2711 or 1-877-772-0747, www.groveparkinn.com, one of the world's best spas. We agree. The architectural theme of fire, water, rock, and light plays out through five fireplaces, two waterfalls, a lap pool, mineral pool, whirlpool, and coldwater plunge. Light from glass skylights illuminates the rock walls. The atmosphere alone soothes your spirit, yet the real renewal begins in the spa's 24 treatment rooms, where dozens of massage and salon services are offered. Try the most popular treatment, "Fire, Rock, Water & Light," which includes a full body exfoliation; buttermilk and honey whirlpool bath; cream body wrap; waterfall massage; and more.



Grove Park Inn

Asheville Yoga Center, 239 South Liberty Street, Asheville, (828) 254-0380, www.youryoga.com, a community center offering all styles of hatha yoga. The center holds classes for all levels of practitioners in a room with soothing colors, high ceilings, and natural light. ♦ The **Hot Springs Spa**, 315 Bridge Street, Hot Springs, (828) 622-7676 or 1-800-462-0933, www.hotspringsspa-nc.com, has several outdoor hot tubs filled with 104-degree water from a natural mineral spring. Tubs are drained and re-filled after each use. Request Tub #5 bordering Spring Creek's intersection with the French Broad River. The spa also offers massage services.

More massage therapists than you can throw a loufa at work in and around Asheville. Two worth mentioning: ♦ Bob Counts of **Healing Essence Massage**, 1208 Conner Road, Lake Lure, (828) 286-1926, offers numerous forms of massage, including Kaya Regeneration Therapy, an ancient, Indian massage technique using hot oil pouches that promote relaxation, weight loss, and an increase in muscle mass. ♦ In Asheville, **Healing Hands**, 233 South French Broad, (828) 628-4075, offers a variety of massage options, as well as aromatherapy and energy-balance therapies.

Tours

To get oriented to Asheville and hear some anecdotes about the city's history, join **Asheville Trolley Tours**, 1-888-667-3600, www.ashevilletrolleytours.com, for a vintage trolley ride (on wheels) to all the major points of interest in town. Stops include the Grove Park Inn, Biltmore Village, the Thomas Wolfe Memorial, the historic downtown shopping district, and the Asheville Museum. The flexible tours allow you to get off to shop, dine, or sightsee, and then re-board to continue the tour. ♦ **Lake Lure Tours**, 2930 Memorial Highway, Lake Lure, (828) 625-1373 or 1-877-386-4255, www.lakelure.com, operates a tour of scenic Lake Lure from a covered pontoon boat. The ride goes past numerous locations used during the filming of the movie *Dirty Dancing*, as well as past stretches of gorgeous mountain scenery.

R e s t E a s y

**S l e e p W e l l**

With a long history of hosting travelers, the Asheville region has a rich offering of upscale resorts, country inns, and B&Bs. The following list includes options in Asheville proper and in the surrounding towns.

Accommodations Pricing

Less than \$100	Inexpensive	\$
\$100-150	Moderate	\$\$
\$151-200	Expensive	\$\$\$
More than \$200	Very Expensive	\$\$\$\$

Prices are per room, per night, based on double occupancy during peak seasons. Note that B&Bs and most country inns include breakfast in the rate.

The Cottages at Spring House Farm •

Ninety-two acres, five cottages, and wild birds too numerous to count—the Cottages at Spring House Farm are all about getting away. Situated 45 minutes east of Asheville in a rural farming community, this pro-ecology property features phone-less "cottages"—actually large, elegant log cabins—locally crafted with creative detail. (For example, porch beams were hewn from different types of trees fallen on the property, including oak, pine, walnut, cherry, and locust.) Cabin amenities include large decks with enormous hot tubs, serene forest views, gas grills, full kitchens, fireplaces, TVs with VCRs (but no cable), canoes, fishing gear for trout and bass, and breakfast provisions. (Innkeepers Zee and Arthur Campbell provide dinner provisions like steaks, chops, shrimp, or salmon, and veggies from the garden for an added fee.) Check-in is at the main house, a beautifully preserved 1836 post-and-beam farmhouse. Walking trails on the farm climb a mountain and wind past ponds, creeks, and flower meadows, including a sunflower field where flocks of goldfinch roost. • 219 Haynes Road, Marion, NC 28752, ☎ 1-877-738-9798, www.springhousefarm.com • \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Cumberland Falls Inn • Every detail of this B&B proves restful, from its location in Asheville's quiet Montford neighborhood to the serene walk to the front door. (You'll pass flowers, evergreens, koi ponds, and hear the music of a pleasant waterfall.) The Cumberland Falls Inn is a turn-of-the-century house lovingly restored with such details (all original to the home) as quilted maple woodwork, pine and fir floors, high ceilings, bay windows, and a wood-burning fireplace. The five spacious rooms include amenities like whirlpool tubs, fireplaces,

robes, TV/VCRs, and turndown service with bedside chocolates. Innkeepers Patti and Gary Wiles prepare a delicious gourmet breakfast featuring such items as Belgian waffles, Eggs Benedict, muffins, and fresh-squeezed juice. Early risers can take their coffee to the front or back sitting porches overlooking the property's extensive gardens. • 254 Cumberland Avenue, Asheville, NC 28801, ☎ (828) 253-4085 or 1-888-743-2557, www.cumberlandfalls.com • \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Grove Park Inn • Set high above downtown Asheville on Sunset Mountain, this inn stands nearly as majestic as the surrounding mountains. Simply put, the Grove Park Inn is one of America's grand old resorts. There are 510 rooms available in different configurations in three buildings: the 1913 Main Inn and two more recent additions, the Vanderbilt and Sammons wings. All feature comfortable furniture, private baths, televisions, coffee makers, and more. The inn's impressive past—the guest list reads like a who's who of 20th-century politics and celebrity—infuses the present, and it's easy to imagine yourself an important dignitary as you read the paper in the 120-foot by 80-foot main lobby bookended by two-story fireplaces. Service from the hotel's large staff is what you'd expect from such a lauded resort: attentive when you need help, out of sight when you don't. A sampling of amenities includes one of the nation's finest spas; indoor and outdoor pools; a century-old, Donald Ross-designed golf course; tennis courts; a full sports complex with a fitness facility; shops; and commanding views of the Asheville skyline. • 290 Macon Avenue, Asheville, NC 28804, ☎ (828) 252-2711 or 1-800-438-5800, www.groveparkinn.com • \$\$-\$\$\$\$

Highland Lake Inn • Bordered by a cascading waterfall, the entrance to Highland Lake Inn is a picturesque welcome to this 27-acre country retreat with its main lodge, guest house, and numerous cabins and cottages. A winding lane takes you back in time to childhood summer camp at the lake, complete with fireflies, cozy cabins, and rope swings. In fact, the Highland Lake Inn was once a camp, but it's highly unlikely former campers would recognize the nicely appointed lodgings available today. In total, there are more than 70 rooms, ranging from simple to deluxe. The finest are the 16 guestrooms in the Woodward House, but even the rustic cabins prove restful. Property amenities include a fine restaurant with an award-winning wine list, Highland Lake, canoes, bicycles, a tennis court, and outdoor pool. A hot country breakfast with selections from the inn's large organic garden is included for all but the cabins. Highland Lake Inn is close to the DuPont State Forest and downtown Hendersonville. • Highland Lake Road, Flat Rock, NC 28731, ☎ (828) 693-6812 or 1-800-762-1376, www.hlinn.com • \$-\$\$\$\$

The Inn on Biltmore Estate • Set upon a ridge above the Biltmore Estate Winery with stand-up-and-applaud views of the surrounding mountains, this inn is the only way to sleep over on the 8,000-acre Biltmore Estate. This Mobil Four-Star, AAA Four-Diamond property is what George Vanderbilt himself would have built, had his original intention of constructing an inn on the estate been realized during his lifetime. There are 204 guestrooms, plus nine suites; all are elegantly appointed with French- and English-manor décor. Rooms feature grand beds, comfortable reading

chairs, marble-accented bathrooms, custom robes and slippers, and Web TV with wireless keyboards (trust us, it's cool). Property amenities include an outdoor pool and hot tub, a fitness room, a stunning library, and numerous outdoor activities such as hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and paddling. The main dining room serves breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner. Admission to Biltmore Estate is not included in the rates, but the inn offers complimentary shuttles to the Biltmore House, Gardens, and Winery. • 1 Antler Hill Road, Asheville, NC 28803, ☎ (828) 225-1660 or 1-800-858-4130, www.biltmore.com • \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Ivivi Mountain Lake & Lodge • Awaken to a panorama of misty mountains reflected upon smooth-as-glass Lake Lure. Ivivi is South African for "renewal," and you'll experience just that at this contemporary glass and wood lodge on a forested peak overlooking what *National Geographic* calls one of the world's five most-beautiful lakes. Fine African art and artifacts imported by the inn's German owner create a smooth, soothing, and elegant effect in both common areas and the seven rooms. All guest rooms feature fine linens, silk bedspreads, soft bathrobes, satellite TV, and private baths so spectacular they belong in an interior design magazine. Most rooms feature a private balcony or stone terrace. Every evening, guests are treated to a leisurely boat ride across Lake Lure for breathtaking views that include multi-million-dollar, shore-front homes nestled among the trees. The innkeepers prepare a fresh-cooked breakfast, ever-present snacks, afternoon hors d'oeuvres, and evening wine, all included in the rate. • 161 Waterside Drive,

Lake Lure, NC 28746, ☎ (828) 625-0601 or 1-866-224-7740, www.ivivilodge.com • \$\$\$

The Lodge at Lake Lure • As the only inn directly on Lake Lure, this property boasts unrivaled views of golden sunlight twinkling off the water. After stepping through the entrance arch, covered with fragrant jasmine and roses, you'll become enchanted by this impeccable lodge, where a recent \$1.5-million renovation created the perfect marriage of rustic lakeside serenity and luxurious modern-day comforts. Beautiful wormy-chestnut paneling remains in the 1920 main lodge with many other charming features, including the occasional creak of original floorboards. However, the 16 guestrooms—12 in the main lodge, four in the adjacent "Shared Dreams" house—feature such contemporary amenities as whirlpool tubs, all-glass showers, fireplaces, televisions, and private terraces. Each evening guests are treated to an hour-long boat tour of Lake Lure and its stunning mountain vistas. Also included is a fresh breakfast cooked to order and afternoon wine and hors d'oeuvres. (On a limited schedule, the inn serves lunch and dinner for an additional fee. Call for details.)



The Lodge at Lake Lure's boathouse

Terraced gardens lead from the inn to the boathouse where you can take a swim, go for a paddle in a canoe, or read the paper on the deck. Overseeing the inn's operations is grand dame Giselle Hopke, originally from Germany's Black Forest, who has a gift for making guests feel utterly pampered. • 361 Charlotte Drive, Lake Lure, NC 28746, ☎ (828) 625-2789 or 1-800-733-2785, www.lodgeonlakelure.com • \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Mountain Magnolia Inn & Retreat • Jaded guidebook authors view plenty of before and after pictures displayed by proud innkeepers. When Karen and Pete Nagle show theirs, the only appropriate response is WOW. After purchasing the Victorian 1868 James H. Rumbough House, the Nagles enclosed the entire structure in a giant tent and went about transforming the grand home into the impressive inn it is today. The main inn has five guest rooms, each with private bath and several with gas fireplaces and private balconies overlooking the mountains. Miss Peggy's Suite works well for families or two couples traveling together—the suite has two bedrooms, plus a common sitting area with a gas fireplace. Also on the grounds, the Garden House has three bedrooms, two baths, and a fully equipped kitchen. Breakfast is hot, creative, and outstanding, as is dinner in the inn's highly regarded restaurant. A recent addition to the Nagle's lodging lineup, Fowler's Bend, is a former general store restored as a guesthouse. Located just two miles from the main hotel, Fowler's Bend overlooks Spring Creek and features two suites, both of which have two bedrooms with king beds and gas fireplaces, two baths, a deck, a den, and a kitchen and

dining area. • 204 Lawson Street, Hot Springs, NC 28743, ☎ (828) 622-3543, www.mountainmagnoliainn.com • \$\$-\$\$\$\$

Richmond Hill Inn • For the experience of a more genteel era when elegant surroundings, impeccable service, and exquisite dining were the way of Southern ladies and gentlemen, plan a visit to this 1899 Queen Anne-style Victorian mansion. Period décor and luxury amenities adorn each of the 36 rooms—12 in the mansion, nine in the Garden Pavilion, and 15 in the Croquet Cottage—available in several classes. (Even the least-expensive rooms make guests feel like royalty.) Nearly 50 acres of estate grounds feature sweeping Blue-Ridge views, walking paths, numerous sitting areas, several formal gardens and natural areas with more than 1,000 varieties of plants, a mountain brook that cascades through several pools to a nine-foot waterfall, and a perfectly tended croquet court. There's also an onsite exercise room. Afternoon tea with attentive waiters, cloth-covered tables, and delightful homemade treats is included, as is a full breakfast ordered from a menu with such selections as Eggs Benedict. The Inn's restaurant, Gabrielle's, is among the region's finest. A perennial AAA Four-Diamond, Mobil Four-Star property, the Richmond Hill Inn is the epitome of excellence in a serene setting. • 87 Richmond Hill Drive, Asheville, NC 28806, ☎ (828) 252-7313 or 1-888-742-4536, www.richmondhillinn.com • \$\$-\$\$\$\$

Sourwood Inn • In perfect harmony with its 100 acres of secluded surroundings, the impeccable Arts & Crafts-style Sourwood Inn blends excellent taste with gracious warmth in its 12 rooms. Each has a balcony

with a sweeping mountain view, a sitting area, period furniture, a natural wood fireplace, and a bathroom that deserves a paragraph all its own. (For starters, picture a frosted-glass door, pristine tile work, walk-in shower, towel warmers, and an elevated tub with a picture window overlooking the mountains.) Common areas—the lobby, library, game room, and numerous porches with rockers—are both spacious and intimate. Also onsite is the Sassafras Cabin, a lovely, two-level hideaway with two baths, a kitchen, a loft bedroom, and a pullout sofa in the living area. Grounds include two miles of groomed walking trails along which you can either work off the hot, made-to-order Southern breakfast or build an appetite for the delicious complimentary afternoon tea, cookies, and snacks. (Ask about the fixed-price, three-course dinners served Thursday–Sunday, prepared by Chef Kacia Duncan, a New England Culinary Institute grad.) It's hard to imagine how innkeepers, Susan and Jeff Curtis and Anne and Nat Burkhardt, could possibly do more to make guests feel welcome and utterly pampered. The inn is closed December 21–February 1; open Thursday–Sunday in February; and open full-time beginning March 1. • 810 Elk Mountain Scenic Highway, Asheville, NC 28804, ☎ (828) 255-0690 • www.sourwoodinn.com • \$\$-\$\$\$\$

WindDancers Lodge and Llama Treks • Set on 270 secluded acres of mountainous land just a short drive west from Asheville, this unique property features nine spacious suites in three lodges. The artfully decorated rooms have such amenities as whirlpool tubs for two with separate showers, fireplaces, comfortable sitting areas, and balconies with log rock-

ing chairs. (Two lodges—the Hickory and Maple—feature kitchens fully stocked for make-your-own breakfasts, while guests in the Llama Lodge are served a hot breakfast.) Balcony views are of pastures dotted with llamas against a panoramic backdrop of seven misty mountain ridges. WindDancers keeps the llama herd for its trekking service. These shy, gentle animals carry provisions for guided lunch, dinner, or overnight hikes, all of which are available for a reasonable charge. (Don't overlook this lodge just because you don't go for llamas. When you first meet one, it's hard not to be fascinated by their huge, expressive eyes, downy wool, and gentle ways.) WindDancer's finest feature is the graciousness of its hosts. The Livengood's (Donna & Gale, plus son Greg & his wife, Susan) are some of the warmest, most knowledgeable, and helpful innkeepers you'll encounter. • 1966 Martins Creek Road, Clyde, NC 28721, ☎ (828) 627-6986 or 1-877-627-3330, www.winddancersnc.com • \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

The Wright Inn • Situated in Montford, Asheville's neighborhood of grand historic homes, The Wright Inn is a Queen Anne-style Victorian home as lovely now as when it was built in 1899. Surrounded by award-winning gardens, the inn welcomes visitors with a wraparound porch and spacious gazebo. A step inside is a step back in time, as period antiques, rich furnishings, and fresh flowers from the garden adorn the inn. Of the 11 rooms, three are suites and include fireplaces, whirlpool baths, CD players, TVs, and high-speed Internet connections. All rooms have a private bath. Behind the home, the three-bedroom carriage house features two full baths, dining and living rooms, and a galley kitchen, making it ideal for families or couples seeking space and solitude. Innkeepers Mark and Vicki Maurer offer a warm welcome with an afternoon wine social. They also prepare a hot, three-course breakfast each morning. Guests are welcome to use the inn's bicycles. • 25 Pearson Drive, Asheville, NC 28801, ☎ (828) 251-0789 or 1-800-552-5724 • www.wrightinn.com • \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Dine Well

Downtown Asheville has an excellent mix of restaurants, ranging from traditional, upscale, watch-your-manners dining to unusual, even funky, spots nurtured by the city's free-thinking (and acting) community. Put this outstanding cuisine together with the city's strollable streets and you have a recipe for a great evening out. If you're staying in Asheville, you'll still want to consider the great restaurants in nearby towns, where the cuisine and service are just as special.

Early Girl Eatery • Nestled among the row of galleries and shops on Wall Street, Early Girl Eatery is just the spot for a pause during your stroll through the fabulous art of Asheville. The fare—call it nouveau-

Southern—features traditional Southern elements with unusual twists. For example: Aunt Mabel will love the biscuits yet may raise an eyebrow at the vegetarian herb-cream gravy smothering them. (One bite

and she'll be hooked.) All food is made from scratch with fresh produce and organic ingredients. In addition to a full range of breakfasts, Early Girl offers homemade soups, salads, and sandwiches, as well as such tempting dinner entrées as shrimp rice and okra beignets, and pan-fried mountain trout. The setting is relaxed and casual. • 8 Wall Street, Asheville, ☎ (828) 259-9292.

Gabrielle's at Richmond Hill • Thought by many to serve the finest cuisine in the region, Gabrielle's is set in the grand Richmond Hill Inn. Chef Perry Hendrix offers Modern-American cuisine on a seasonal menu, with such selections as striped bass roasted with salsa, asparagus, lobster, and meyer lemon; and roasted duck breast with wild risotto, rosemary poached pear, and black pepper foie gras sauce. Accompanying such fare is a selection of more than 200 vintages. (The list has earned *Wine Spectator's* prestigious Award of Excellence.) Dessert? How does apple 'Tarte Tatin' with buttermilk ice cream and Earl Grey caramel sound? The food is exceptional, and the service is top-notch. Diners can view the mountains and city in a serene atmosphere, thanks in part to a pianist who plays most evenings. Jackets recommended, reservations required. Open daily for dinner except Tuesdays. • 87 Richmond Hill Drive, Asheville, ☎ (828) 252-7313

Horizons • The Grove Park Inn's formal dining room provides a total-sensory experience, including smell, taste, hearing (the hushed silence of people dining in a historic setting), and sight (the nighttime view of downtown Asheville in the valley below). Expect an elegant evening: white linen service, fine china, and a wine selection that's

earned *Wine Spectator's* exclusive Award of Excellence. Horizons serves a prix fixe, four-course menu with seasonal selections. Starters may include items like roasted Vidalia onion, served with sweetbreads, morel mushrooms, and Clemson Blue Cheese; two soup options, including Horizons' signature lobster bisque; and several salad choices. Entrées include fish, game, beef, and vegetarian ingredients. (If it's on the menu, try the salmon crusted with whole grain mustard and served with beet couscous.) For dessert try the Rose Hip Brûlée, which is, in a word, divine. Dress well—jackets required for men • 290 Macon Avenue, Asheville, NC 28804, ☎ (828) 252-2711.

Laughing Seed • Meat-eaters who swallow their prejudices and sample the entirely vegetarian fare at this Asheville institution have the last laugh over those who dismiss the café without investigation. Laughing Seed's food is outstanding, with flavors that dance on your pallet like a happy child. The creative menu includes dishes like "Thai Red Curry," which is a spicy vegetable and tofu dish in a red-curry and coconut-milk sauce served over brown rice. Included in the mix are broccoli, carrots, red and green bell peppers, and shitake mushrooms. The "Laughing Chili Bowl" is a black bean chili served over a bed of brown rice and topped with organic smoked yogurt cheese. It comes with a corn bread muffin and can be spiced to your liking with the café's "five-alarm salsa." The menu is extensive, with numerous appetizers, soups, salads, sandwiches, entrées, and even treats from the juice bar. Expect a wait. Open for lunch and dinner daily except Tuesdays. • 40 Wall Street, Asheville, ☎ (828) 252-3445.

The Market Place Restaurant • With nods from such media as the *New York Times*, *Food & Wine*, and *Southern Living*, this restaurant is one of Asheville's finest choices for an elegant, sophisticated meal. Owner Mark Rosenstein opened Market Place in 1979 and continues, day after day, to serve meals that add to the restaurant's reputation. The seasonal menus are built on classic cuisine. Expect dishes that use ingredients found in the Western North Carolina Mountains. For example, you may find meats and game smoked with local apple wood or desserts topped with Biltmore Estate berries. Appetizers include the renowned "Market Place Crispy Potato Cake" made with goat cheese, quince and mustard applesauce, and topped with a garlic cream sauce. Try the sautéed halibut entrée, served with risotto cake, seasonal vegetables, and an organic apple and carrot sauce. Honored by *Wine Spectator* magazine, Market Place Restaurant has hundreds of exquisite vintages. Reservations recommended but not required. Open for dinner daily except Sunday. • 20 Wall Street, Asheville, ☎ (828) 252-4162

Mount Pisgah Inn Restaurant • The food is good, the location even better. Set 5,000 feet above sea level on the Blue Ridge Parkway, this restaurant features glass walls in the main dining room that serve up panoramic scenes of the mountains. The casual atmosphere makes this a convenient stop for travelers on the parkway, and a steady stream of hungry folks flows in for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées include fresh mountain trout baked or charbroiled in lemon butter sauce and filleted at your table, and fettuccini tossed in a garlic butter sauce with chicken, spinach, tomatoes, and mush-

rooms. The lunch menu includes a number of sandwiches and salads. Open seven days a week, from 7:30 A.M.–9 P.M., April–October. (Call for April and May hours). • BRP Milepost 408, Waynesville, ☎ (828) 235-8228

Mountain Magnolia Inn • Dining in this lovingly restored 1868 Victorian house feels like being a guest in a good friend's home. There are far fewer tables than you'll find in most restaurants, and the relatively small number of patrons, combined with the soft lighting—provided in part by the fireplace and candles—makes for an intimate evening. (Warm-weather dining on the outdoor patio is a pleasure, too.) Add in the cuisine and wine selection and you have a recipe for a memorable evening. Touting "creative American cuisine," Mountain Magnolia prepares a variety of appetizers, soups, salads, entrées, and desserts made fresh daily, many with locally grown ingredients. The inn's popular "Mountain Magnolia Trout" is especially rewarding—locally grown trout sautéed with white-wine butter, mushrooms, tomatoes, and green onions and served with herb-smashed potatoes and French-cut green beans with sautéed onions and toasted almonds. Make reservations well in advance. • 204 Lawson Street, Hot Springs, ☎ (828) 622-3543

Point of View • With seating for just 75 guests, reservations go quickly at this popular Hickory Nut Gorge restaurant. While the restaurant may not win any awards for interior design, it might just capture one for its signature "Mountain Trout Meuniere," a fresh-caught trout pan-sautéed in a lemon-butter sauce and topped with roasted almonds. Other selec-

tions include beef, lamb, veal, and fowl. Owners Rhonda Boyd and Brenda Hoyle proudly cook up these hot, fresh entrées as guests enjoy the lovely view of Lake Lure and the surrounding mountains. Dinner served nightly and reservations are suggested. • Route 64/74A, 1.5 miles east of Route 9 at Buffalo Shoals Road, Lake Lure, ☎ (828) 625-4380

Rezaz • Conveniently located at the edge of Biltmore Village, Rezaz serves up Mediterranean cuisine in a stylish, contemporary-bistro atmosphere. Appetizer selections include the divine shitake potato gnocchi, and "Merguez" (grilled lamb and currant sausage with a roasted-grape and port-wine sauce). For an entrée, order the "Paella Catalonia," which is saffron rice topped with shrimp, mussels, clams, braised duck, and chorizo tossed in sofrito & grilled lemons. Other dinner entrées include a range of sea and land dishes, and the wait staff is exceptionally knowledgeable about recommending the correct Spanish wine to complement the meal. Open for lunch and dinner Monday–Saturday. (The lunch menu is lighter with sandwiches, salads, and less-filling entrées.) • 28 Hendersonville Road, Asheville ☎ (828) 277-1510.

Salsa • Definitely not your corner Mexican joint, Salsa serves up heaping portions of Mexican and Caribbean cuisine creatively prepared to order and served with an exciting array of salsas. This place is authentic. Explore items such as patacones and empanadas, or opt for a new approach to old favorites like burritos, quesadillas, and tostadas. This cheerful, colorful, casual café always includes a variety of vegetarian

selections in its daily specials. Arrive early or expect a big wait at this popular eatery, as it's just a few steps around the corner from Pack Place, and there are only 75 seats. If there's a line, join it. The food and friendly service will make the wait worthwhile. Open for lunch and dinner, Monday–Saturday. • 6 Patton Avenue, Asheville, ☎ (828) 252-9805.

Tupelo Honey Café • A big hit with locals, Tupelo Honey is a taste of upscale Southern cooking in the heart of downtown Asheville. Lively chatter and clatter set the tone in the Charleston-esque café. The menu—put together by owner Sharon Schott and executive chef, Brian Sonoskus—features traditional Southern fare with a twist. For example, the entrée, Country Catfish, is a Cajun catfish topped with green tomato salsa and served over summer succotash. Other enticing selections include "Eggs Crawley" (sautéed crab cakes topped with poached eggs, asparagus, and hollandaise); a grilled peanut butter and banana sandwich; and a shrimp and grits dish with goat cheese. Breakfast and lunch are served daily beginning at 9 A.M., except for Monday when the restaurant is closed. Dinner is served only on Friday and Saturday nights. The breakfast menu, including the wildly popular Sweet Potato Pancakes, is available throughout the day. Reservations are not accepted, so come early. • 12 College Street, Asheville, ☎ (828) 255-4863.

Zambra • Slip into the sultry Moroccan atmosphere of Zambra and lose yourself in tapas and entrées from faraway lands. Order the peppercorn-encrusted flank steak topped with a tomato and herb-beurre bane

Beer Here?

Yep. And how. Asheville is home to several fine microbreweries that produce outstanding ales in small batches. A few eatery/brewery combinations worth sipping, er...slipping, into include **Jack of the Wood**, 95 Patton Avenue, Asheville, ☎ (828) 252-5445; and **Asheville Pizza and Brewing Company**, 675 Merrimon Avenue, Asheville, ☎ (828) 254-5339. In addition, two microbreweries, **Highland Brewing** and **French Broad River Brewing**, offer a fine selection of stouts and ales available from many area restaurants and bars.

Picnic Packing

- Locals love the **Blue Moon Bakery & Café**, 60 Biltmore Avenue, Asheville, ☎ (828) 252-6063, and it's no wonder. Ultra-fresh breads, sandwiches, soups, pizza, focaccia, and oh-so-irresistible desserts. Sit inside or outdoors to watch the world go by in downtown Asheville, or have your sandwiches packed for the trail.
- Everything served at the **West End Bakery**, 757 Haywood Road, in West Asheville, ☎ (828) 252-9378, is made from scratch with 100% organic flour and the freshest ingredients available. Sandwiches are available on a wide variety of breads, and the bakery packs a mean picnic for the trail, including delicious dessert selections.

Just Desserts

The **Old Europe Coffee House**, 18 Battery Park Avenue, Asheville, ☎ (828) 252-0001, on the west side of downtown serves up homemade European desserts on silver trays. The chocolate selection is delightful.

- Chocoholics in recovery had better steer clear of **The Chocolate Fetish**, 36 Haywood Street, Asheville, ☎ (828) 258-2353, an award-winning chocolate shop that serves American- and European-style truffles homemade with fresh ingredients. Little-known fact: the word "decadent" was first uttered here.
- True Confections**, Grove Arcade, 1 Page Avenue, Asheville, ☎ (828) 350-9480, sells an amazing selection of cookies, cakes, pies, and sweet breads baked in the shop. The desserts go perfectly with the shop's locally roasted coffees, espressos, and whole-leaf teas.
- While they don't serve desserts, they make delicious coffees at Asheville's **Double Decker Coffee Co.**, 41 Biltmore Avenue, ☎ (828) 255-0441, housed in a red, English double-decker bus.

and served over oranges and roasted sweet potatoes, or the sautéed scallops with crushed chilis, smoked bacon, shiitake, peas, and tomatoes tossed with a blue-cheese beurre blanc. The crisp calamari is also outstanding. The interior is gypsy hideaway, the taste is wonderfully exotic, and the location is downtown Asheville. Reservations recommended but not required. Open Monday-Saturday for dinner. • 85 West Walnut Street, Asheville, ☎ (828) 232-1060.

A Long-Weekend Itinerary**Day One**

After breakfast at your inn or B&B, swing by **Blue Moon Bakery & Café** (page 382) to purchase a picnic lunch and liquid refreshments. Then take your supplies and fresh legs to hike the six-mile loop on the **Cat Gap Loop** and the **John Rock trails** (page 343) in the Pisgah National Forest. Picnic on the summit of John Rock. After lunch, work up a good sweat completing the hike, and then head to **Sliding Rock** (page 355) for some wet, refreshing fun.

When you tire of sunning yourself, getting wet, then sunning some more, pack up and spend the remainder of the afternoon browsing the shops in scenic **Brevard** (page 371) or touring the historic **Cradle of Forestry** (page 358). Return to your inn and prepare for dinner at **Salsa** (page 381). After dinner, take in the vibrant city streets of downtown Asheville before returning to your inn to retire for the day.

Day Two

After an early breakfast at your inn, head to **Backcountry Outdoors** (page 349) south of Asheville to rent mountain bikes and grab a map of **Dupont State Forest**, where you can ride either the slickrock on the **Big Rock** and **Cedar Rock trails** (page 346) or along Dupont's many forest roads. After a couple of hours, return the bikes and grab an early lunch at Asheville's **Laughing Seed Café** (page 379).

Head down Biltmore Avenue with a quick stop at **Double Decker Coffee Co.** (page 382) en route to the **Biltmore Estate** (page 362), where you'll spend the remainder of the day. Been there, done that? Then, give your feet a rest and do some **back roads touring** (page 361) in your car. Try the **Hot Springs Loop** (page 361) with a detour to **Max Patch** (page 362) for tremendous summit views.

As the sun wanes, return to your inn to shower and prepare for dinner at **Gabrielle's at Richmond Hill** (page 379). Hit the hay.



Be sure to shop Wall Street in Asheville

Day Three

Linger over breakfast to soak in your vacation, and then head to the **Grove Park Inn Spa** (page 372) for their "Fire, Rock, Water, & Light" treatment. Fully refreshed, return to downtown Asheville to browse the city's **antiques shops** (page 359), **art & crafts galleries** (page 360), as well as its many **shops** (page 369). Break for lunch at **Tupelo Honey Café** (page 381) and continue your retail therapy until it's time to return to the real world.

Additional Information

For additional dining, accommodations, and sightseeing information, including the dates of special events, contact:

The Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau operates the Asheville Visitor Center, 151 Haywood Street, Asheville, NC 28801, ☎ (828) 258-6103 or 1-800-280-0005, www.exploreasheville.com, at Exit #4C off Interstate 240, which is fully stocked with brochures, fliers, and an exceptionally helpful staff. Open Monday–Friday, 8:30 A.M.–5:30 P.M.; Saturday and Sunday, 9 A.M.–5 P.M.

Black Mountain-Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce operates a visitor center, 201 East State Street, Black Mountain, NC 28711, ☎ (828) 669-2300 or 1-800-669-2301, www.blackmountain.org, open Monday–Saturday, 9 A.M.–5 P.M., except from November–March. Call for winter hours.

The **Visitor Information Center for Historic Hendersonville & Flat Rock**, 201 South Main Street, Hendersonville, North Carolina 28792, ☎ (828) 693-9708 or 1-800-828-4244, www.historichendersonville.org, is open weekdays 9 A.M.–5 P.M.; weekends, from 10 A.M.–5 P.M.

The **Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority** operates a visitor center at 35 West Main Street, Brevard, NC 28712, ☎ 1-800-648-4523, www.visitwaterfalls.com, open weekdays, 9 A.M.–5 P.M.; Saturday, 10 A.M.–4 P.M.

The **Hot Springs Information Center**, on Bridge Street across from the post office, is housed in a red caboose and is open Monday–Thursday, 8 A.M.–3:30 P.M. For more information, call ☎ 1-888-446-8774.

*Nature is the one place where miracles not
only happen, but happen all the time.*

— Thomas Wolfe
