

OLLI – NATIONAL LANDS IN WEST VIRGINIA – Part 2

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NATIONAL FORESTS



United States Department of Agriculture



“The George Washington and Jefferson National Forests stretch along the ruggedly beautiful Appalachian Mountains, extending from one end of Virginia to the other and even crossing into parts of West Virginia and Kentucky. Whether you are driving a back-country road, enjoying our glorious fall colors, using binoculars to spot colorful neo-tropical birds, or savoring the peacefulness of wilderness, remember that national forests are special places.”

(The George Washington and Jefferson National Forests are managed as one entity.) <https://www.fs.usda.gov/gwj>



“The Monongahela National Forest was established in 1920. Located in the north central highlands of West Virginia, the Monongahela straddles the highest ridges in the State. Elevation ranges from just under 1000’ to 4863’ above sea level. Variations in terrain and precipitation have created one of the most ecologically diverse National Forests in the country.

“Visitors to this beautiful place will enjoy breathtaking vistas, peaceful country roads, gently flowing streams, and glimpses of the many species of plants and animals that inhabit the Forest. You will also see a ‘working’ forest, which produces timber, water, grazing, minerals,

and recreational opportunities for the region and nation.”

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/mnf/about-forest>

EXPERIMENTAL FOREST



“The USDA Forest Service’s Experimental Forests (EF) are dedicated to **long-term research on ecosystem processes, silviculture and forest management options, wildlife habitat characteristics, and forest growth and development.**

“The **Fernow Experimental Forest** was established on March 28, 1934, to **address water quantity, water quality, and timber quality issues.** Today, forest health and clean water are still a focus, but data from the Fernow Experimental Forest are also contributing to research of issues that had not been identified 80 years ago, such as **biodiversity, endangered species management, carbon sequestration, atmospheric deposition, and climate change.**”

<https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/ef/locations/wv/fernow/>

NATIONAL PARKS



Harpers Ferry National Historical Park



The history of Harpers Ferry has few parallels in the American Drama. It is more than one event, one date, or one individual. It is multi-layered – involving a diverse number of people and events that influenced the course of our nation’s history. Harpers Ferry witnessed the first successful application of interchangeable manufacture, the arrival of the first successful American railroad, John Brown’s attack on slavery, the largest surrender of Federal troops during the Civil War, and the education of former slaves in one of the earliest integrated schools in the United States.

<https://www.nps.gov/hafe/index.htm>

Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park



Preserving America's early transportation history, the C&O Canal began as a dream of passage to Western wealth. Operating for nearly 100 years, the canal was a lifeline for communities along the Potomac River as coal, lumber, and agricultural products floated down the waterway to market. Today it endures as a pathway for discovering historical, natural, and recreational treasures.

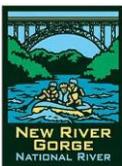
<https://www.nps.gov/choh/index.htm>

Appalachian National Scenic Trail



The Appalachian Trail is a 2,180+ mile long public footpath that traverses the scenic, wooded, pastoral, wild, and culturally resonant lands of the Appalachian Mountains. Conceived in 1921, built by private citizens, and completed in 1937, today the trail is managed by the National Park Service, US Forest Service, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, numerous state agencies and thousands of volunteers. <https://www.nps.gov/appa/index.htm>

New River Gorge National River



A rugged, whitewater river flowing northward through deep canyons, the New River is among the oldest rivers on the continent. The park encompasses over 70,000 acres of land along the New River, is rich in cultural and natural history, and offers an abundance of scenic and recreational opportunities.

Established in 1978, New River Gorge National River encompasses over 70,000 acres of land along 53 miles of the New River from Bluestone Dam to Hawk's Nest Lake. A rugged, whitewater river flowing northward through deep and spectacular canyons, the New River is actually among the oldest rivers on Earth. Here in southern West Virginia, the New River has carved and continues to carve the deepest and longest river gorge in the Appalachian Mountains.

Hiking along the many park trails, rafting the river, or biking along an old railroad grade, the

visitor will be confronted with spectacular scenery that certainly makes this place worthy of being included in our national park system. However, the significance of this place goes well beyond the beautiful scenery. When looking out from Grandview, Diamond Point, Long Point, or one of the many other viewpoints in the park, we are actually looking at a globally significant forest containing the most diverse flora of any river gorge in the south and central Appalachian Mountains. The Appalachian Mountain forests are some of the oldest and most diverse ecosystems in the world. Here in southern West Virginia, the New River has sliced through the mountains, creating a mosaic of habitats: unfragmented forest, cliff and rimrock habitats, forest seeps and wetlands, and mature bottomland forests. These habitats provide a refuge for endangered mammals and rare birds and amphibians, including the endangered Virginia big-eared bat and Indiana bat and the Allegheny woodrat, a species of special concern in West Virginia and in decline throughout the eastern United States. The waters of the New River system contain a mosaic of hydrologic features and aquatic habitats that support a highly productive aquatic ecosystem that includes distinct populations of native fish, mussels, crayfish, and a broad array of other aquatic life, including rare amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

Looking out from the many fantastic viewpoints in the park will also provide a glimpse into the unique cultural history of the New River Gorge area that contributes to the significance of this place. From almost any viewpoint in the park one will see the railroad tracks that opened this rugged and isolated land to the outside world in 1872. From Grandview one will see the rail yards at Quinnimont, where coal was first shipped from the gorge, and the piers of an old bridge which once connected the timber towns of Hamlet and Glade. From Diamond Point hikers will gaze down at the ruins of Kaymoor, an early New River coal mining town. In addition to the coal mines and company towns found throughout the gorge are the old railroad depots, rail yards, rail grades, railroad equipment, and associated towns, like Thurmond, that were developed to support the railroad. Also contributing to the area's rich cultural history are surviving examples of subsistence farms, former community sites, homesteads, and other places in the park where the ancestors of families long associated with the New River lived and worked. Bits of coal along the tracks, rows of old decaying coke ovens, gaping mine openings in the hillsides, old rusted mine cars, and the gravestones of early pioneer families provide tangible reminders of the people who worked and lived here during the late 18th and 19th centuries, supplying the coal and lumber that helped fuel the industrialization of our nation.

Today, New River Gorge National River is renowned for its excellent recreational opportunities: whitewater rafting, canoeing, hiking, rock climbing, fishing, hunting, bird watching, camping, picnicking, biking, and just enjoying the solitude the natural world. The Lower Gorge of the New River is a premier whitewater rafting location with imposing rapids ranging in difficulty from Class III to Class V, many of them obstructed by large boulders which necessitate maneuvering in very powerful currents, crosscurrents, and hydraulics. Commercial outfitters conduct trips down the river from April through October. The upper part of the river offers somewhat less challenging class I to III rapids for whitewater canoeing. <https://www.nps.gov/neri/index.htm>

Gauley River National Recreation Area



The 25 miles of free-flowing Gauley River and the six miles of the Meadow River pass through scenic gorges and valleys containing a wide variety of natural and cultural features. The Gauley River contains several class V+ rapids, making it one of the most adventurous white water boating rivers in the east. Gauley River National Recreation Area protects 25 miles of the Gauley River and six miles of the Meadow River that pass through scenic gorges and valleys containing a wide variety of natural and cultural features. Every September as water is released from Summersville Dam, whitewater enthusiasts from all over the world flock to the Gauley River to experience what is considered by many people to be one of the most thrilling whitewater rafting opportunities in the country. Dropping more than 668 feet through 25 miles of rugged terrain, the Gauley River's complex stretch of whitewater features more than 100 rapids with a steep gradient, technical runs, an incredible volume of water and huge waves. Its vigorous rapids, scenic quality and inaccessibility combine to make Gauley River one of the premier whitewater runs in the world.

Like the New and Bluestone Rivers, the Gauley has cut a gorge that supports diverse and abundant wildlife. Extremes in topography, elevation, and microclimate have resulted in a great diversity of plant life. The Gauley River flows through the gorge for approximately 25 miles with a stream gradient of 28 feet per mile. Within the gorge, the river is characterized by alternating pools and rapids with torrential water, boulders and exposed bedrock. Forests of oak, beech, yellow poplar, hemlock and dogwood support a wide variety of wildlife species including many rare and threatened species such as the Allegheny woodrat, cerulean warbler, eastern hellbender, and finescale saddled darter. High-energy rivers like the Gauley are an ecological driving force for some plant communities. Gauley River is an excellent example of a high energy system which supports rare plant species and their communities. Rare plants here include Virginia Spiraea, Appalachian Blue Violet, and Balsam Squaw-weed.

Gauley River National Recreation Area, New River Gorge National River, and Bluestone National Scenic River combine to make this part of southern West Virginia an oasis for recreation, inspiration, and investigation. These three parks are just a small part of a much bigger system of over 400 special places across the nation set aside to be preserved not only for us, but for the benefit of future generations. <https://www.nps.gov/gari/index.htm>

Bluestone National Scenic River



The Bluestone River and the rugged and ancient gorge it has carved is a richly diverse and scenic area of the southern Appalachians. Bluestone National Scenic River is preserved as a living landscape that provides an unspoiled experience for visitors and a haven for a variety of plants and animals. The park protects a 10.5-mile section of the Bluestone River in southern West Virginia.

Bluestone National Scenic River is not only a unit of our national park system, but is also a part of our Wild and Scenic Rivers system. The Wild and Scenic Rivers system protects rivers throughout the country that are free-flowing and possess "outstandingly remarkable" scenic, natural, cultural, geological, and recreational values. The headwaters of the Bluestone River begin at an elevation of 3,500 feet on East River Mountain near Bluefield, Virginia and flow for 77 miles to Bluestone Lake near Hinton, West Virginia at 1409 feet. The lower 10.5 miles of the Bluestone River, cutting through an impressive and biologically diverse gorge, has been designated as Bluestone National Scenic River.

The Bluestone River, named for the deep blue limestone streambed of its upper reaches in Virginia, has created a gorge 1,000 feet deep. The bottomland within the gorge of the Bluestone was first used by Native Americans. In the late 1700's the Lilly, Meadow, and Farley families built homesteads along the river. At the confluence of the Bluestone and Little Bluestone Rivers, the community of Lilly once flourished. The Bluestone Turnpike, a riverbank road used by those who farmed and timbered the area until the 1940's, is used today by visitors to the park.

The Bluestone River and the rugged and ancient gorge it has carved is a richly diverse and scenic area of the southern Appalachian Mountains. Time spent in thoughtful solitude along this little mountain river offers the visitor a vestige of primitive America. Over a thousand species of plants grow in several diverse Appalachian forest habitat types. The park provides excellent opportunities for watching many mammal, bird, amphibian, reptile and insect species. The riverbed habitat is alive with a carpet of macro-invertebrate aquatic species, and supports healthy populations of many warm water game and non-game fishes. The Bluestone River is classified as a High Quality Warm Water Stream by the state of West Virginia. <https://www.nps.gov/blue/index.htm>

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