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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Saturday/Sunday, May 21 - 25, 2012 | B6



TAKE MONDAY OFF

A Blue Ridge Joy Ride

This three-day road trip across the highlands of North Carolina and Tennessee takes full advantage of the Appalachian spring, with pit stops for waterfalls and bush puppies



RANGE OF OPTIONS Clockwise from left: The Market Tree Vineyard, which opened in Flat Rock, N.C., in 2011, is one of a handful of wine growers in the newly formed East of the Blue Ridge Area. Class II and IV rapids on Tennessee's Great River show their rate from April to October; the main street in Highlands, N.C., an old money resort town high up in the Blue Ridge Mountains; Elizabeth Leigh Inn, a four-room inn with a veranda porch in Hendersonville, N.C.

In Between Resorts

CRUISE ADVENTURE Follow the Appalachian spring from Charlotte, N.C., to Nashville, Tenn., some 600 miles across the Blue Ridge Mountains and Cumberland Plateau via Highways 25-74 W and 25-64 N. It's a less predictable itinerary than the well-trodden Blue Ridge Parkway winding farther north through Asheville. This journey offers more than enough temptation to stretch the trip to a week if you're not inclined to rush. And why should you? You'll arrive along the "Blue Wall," the Cherokee name for the great escarpment stretching across North Carolina into South Carolina and Georgia. In the space of 12 miles, the land descends down some 2,000 feet—some of the steepest descents east of the Rockies. The dramatic incline features granite outcrops, spouting waterfalls and temperate rainforests rich in biodiversity. The US highway corridor and especially the inns on a cul-de-sac as they snake across the Flat Wood State and into Tennessee past historic like Ducktown and Richwood, through Shelby and Hendersonville and roll on Cullman and Highlands, and scenery rewards you as the high crest of the Blue Ridge like two peaks of limestone Spindler. After lunch overlooking the rolling hills and lush valleys. Paddle through white water in Tennessee's Great River or opt for a more active paddle in Chattanooga along one of the country's best urban hike paths before catching the sunset atop a summit, home to a real-life Stegosaurs. It's wondrous indeed. Here's the itinerary:



The Tofu wrap at Madison's Restaurant and Wine Garden in Highlands' Old Edwards Inn.

DAY 1 / 19000

7 a.m. Escape Charlotte's airport via I-77 N, glide over the Charlotte River to Belmont and turn left on Main Street for Charlotte City. Belmont, well named and well located to, in the east of place where tall granite walls yellow take and up "great morning" in perfect company. Part of a morning that explains itself with destination, this vintage show and its cream parlor dishes up a hot, generously proportioned meal. Try the breakfast come into a daily special of vegetables and eggs.

10 a.m. Back on I-74 W. The beauty of 2nd century roadside architecture and trial attorney billboards waves as you leave behind Charlotte's north and strike deeper into the Piedmont. Approaching the former mill town of Shelby, take US-74 200 N to arrive at an old-school town square graced by a 1907-era courthouse transformed into the Earl K. Long Center. It would see work, it's devoted to Shelby's most famous son: introducing Earl Longage. The architecture exhibits and creative digital displays explore Mississippi's 1900s, Bragg's genius and the region's historical culture. Please turn page D8

ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

Blue Ridge Road Trip

Continued from page 28

12 p.m. Come lunch, pick sides in the local food fights over who serves the best barbecue or liver-mush, a regional delicacy made from ground pig livers and often mixed with cornmeal. Alton Bridges Barbecue (620 E. Grover St., about a 3-minute drive from the museum) wins most often, miles down to its proximity to the square and its savory Western Carolina chopped pork, pungent red colicase and the airy crunch of fresh popovers. As for the liver-mush, ask for it "split and dropped" (cut thin and crisped) at the Shelby Cafe (220 E. Lafayette St.) a block off the square. If the waitress takes a shine to you, free samples are provided.

1:30 p.m. From the old courthouse drive west on US-74 805 to US-74 816. The divided road pushing through the wooded landscape is a post-lunch palate cleanser. At mile marker 885, the first peaks loom. The easiest way to scale them is via I-26 W, which absorbs US-74 for the ride up. But before your ascent, duck down to Tryon via NC 308 West. The small arts community at the mountain's base was the birthplace of singer and civil rights activist Nina Simone. Tryon erected a statue of the hometown chanteuse downtown on South Trade Street, lined with art and craft galleries.

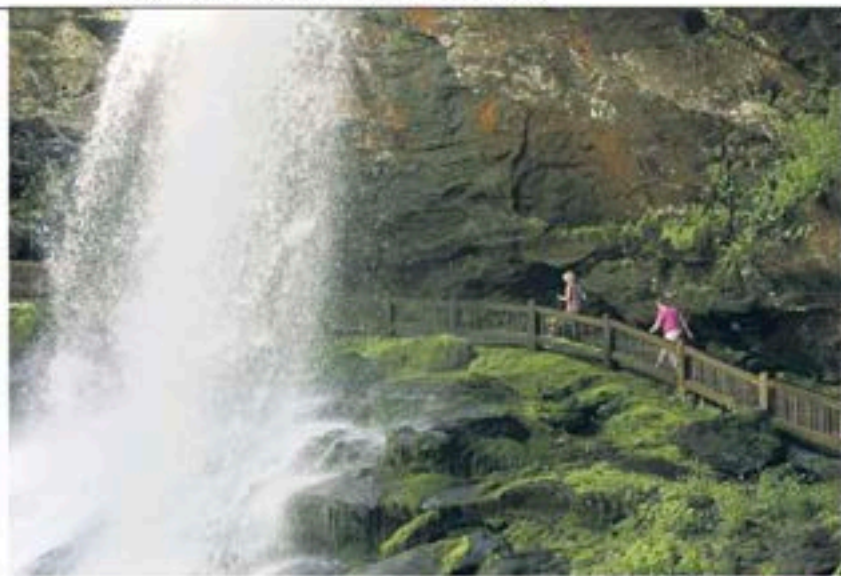
2 p.m. Return to I-26 toward Hendersonville, missing the slow-moving trucks grinding up the hillside. Take exit 53 and a right onto Upward Road. Three miles later, a right on Deep Gap Road leads you through apple orchards to the Market Tree Vineyard, a local favorite. The winery is one of seven wine growers in the newly formed Crest of the Blue Ridge AVA. Its modernist tasting room frames views of Mount Pisgah. Vineyards is growing up quickly in Western North Carolina, but it's still a town. Market Tree, opened in 2015, is producing a well-received Vidal Blanc and Cabernet Franc.

After breakfast, a two-hour loop hike leads to High Falls and Triple Falls, the latter a literal scenery-chewer in Hollywood's "Hunger Games."

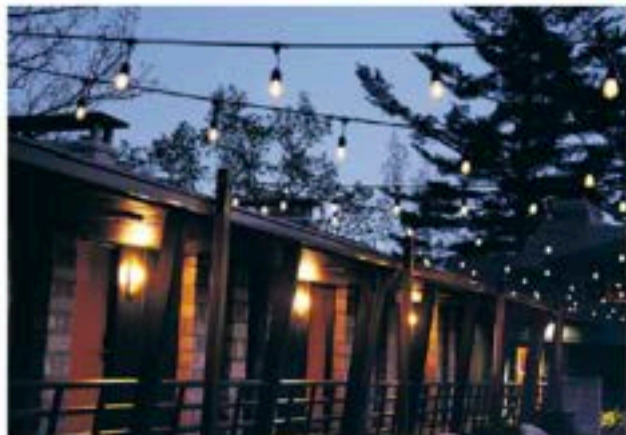
4 p.m. Deploying your GPS, steer yourself to Hwy US-64 W and into downtown Hendersonville. Overlooked by nearby Asheville, the smaller city is just as likable. Settle in on 5th Avenue at the Elizabeth Leigh Inn, a small, well-appointed B&B with a verdant garden right walkable blocks from downtown (from \$275 a night). Hendersonville's Main Street winds around landscaping and heavy outdoor dining tables. For dinner try the pork tenderloin and spring appetizer at Postern with a local draft beer after ward at Shine down the street.

DAY 2 / SATURDAY

8 a.m. After breakfast, set your GPS to DuPont State Recreational Forest Visitor Center via Kanawha Road for a one-to-two-hour morning loop hike to see the High Falls and Triple Falls, the latter a literal scenery-chewer in Hollywood's "The Hunger Games." Thanks to the falling waters' star turns, the parking lot can fill by 10 a.m., so come early. Also keep an eye on marked trails. Waterfalls are subjective, but



A RAIN FOREST IN APPALACHIA Cockeaise from top: Dry Falls in western North Carolina's Nantahala National Forest; Alton Bridges Barbecue in Shelby, N.C., where the chopped pork plates come with airy hush puppy; the Skyline Lodge in Highlands, N.C.



every year in North Carolina people either injure or kill themselves slipping on wet rocks.

10:30 a.m. The drive to Coblers and Highlands takes about an hour and change from the visitor center. Take a left onto Station Road and ahead your GPS and head for 296 W to Hwy US-64 W. The road is good and fun but you'll be rewarded with beautiful views. Soon after a left on Hwy US-64 W, the highway becomes a narrow, rambling two-lane flanked by tall rhododendrons that seem to be reaching out for an embrace.

12 p.m. Western North Carolina's cool mountain towns are where the poppish wealthy folks of Atlanta and Charlotte avoid every summer to escape the humidity. Coblers has no real downtown, but Highlands' Main Street is Southern chic. Lunch at Madison's Restaurant and Wine Garden in Relais & Chateau's Old Edwards (but is a happen and the people-watching priceless. The trout dip appetizer and haberdasheries wraps are delectable.

1:30 p.m. The region's reputation

as an arc of Range lovers, week-enders and preppers is on point, but that doesn't capture its serene beauty. Eyeball lovely countryside on Highlands Escarpment's restored expedition to Nantahala National Forest. The two-and-a-half-hour tour (\$300 per person) unfolds on a gassy Pinnacled, an Austrian (FWD) transporter, and reveals you with views and waterfalls including stupendous (if deceptively named) Dry Falls. Bring a rain poncho.

4:30 p.m. If nightfall perturbed with the Eat Pack they might have cooked up Highlands' woolly midcentury modern Skyline Lodge with its mountain views, low-slung lines and walls of composite stone. Rebook in 2023/2024, the property is as cool as one of Diner's wicker martini (from \$229 a night). For dinner try Oak, the property's steak house, or back to the Squigly and Curry's Kitchen for a spectacular setting, and dates such as 1960s mountain chicken and chili-brained omeo burrito.

DAY 3 / SUNDAY

7 a.m. It's a two-hour trip to Tennessee for a run on Occoee River white water. Grab breakfast sandwiches and coffee in the lobby before continuing on US-64 W through wildly dramatic urban scenes, past Franklin to Murphy where you join up again with Hwy US-74 W. The views west to the green Tennessee mountains should make it a happy reunion. You'll soon parallel the Occoee, a fast-moving river controlled and regulated by TVA dams. The federal authority regularly releases torrents of water downstream creating Class III and IV rapids that

draw river rats (ages 12 and up-only) eager to experience them. For less strenuous riverine outings, there's a Tennessee River tubing alternative farther on in Chattanooga.

10 a.m. To ride the rapids you need an approved guide and raft. The 23 operating licensed outfitters on Hwy-74 provide everything, including transport to and from your car. Heavily regulated, they tend to charge about \$45 an average for a half day (3-to-4 hours) and \$200 for a full day (5-to-6 hours plus lunch). Trips run April to October. Reserve seats well ahead of arrival via the Occoee Outfitters Association website, where companies post links to their trips and times. Afterward you'll probably be wet and sunbaked. If you can get there before 2 p.m., Cleveland's Red Hot Drive-In bar burgers and onion rings makes a satisfying option. To get there, take Hwy US-74 W (Census St.) through downtown Cleveland. Make a left on Hwy 11 Hwy US-64 W (it's back). Back on US-64 W, look for the 175 S on ramp then I-24 N sweeps down to Chattanooga and the Tennessee River.

2:30 p.m. Take exit 178 then US-27 N for downtown. Your GPS should get you to the trailhead at Blue Gown Hollow, the downtown neighborhood where Blues impresario Beale Smith was raised. You'll find parking and sturdy blue city shuttles (starting at \$9 for a day pass) on which to explore Chattanooga's pride and joy—the 16-mile-long Riverwalk. The trail will take you up Muhl to the Hunter Museum of American Art, across highways and

over the Tennessee via the auto-free Walnut Street Bridge.

4 p.m. Flip back in your car and your GPS can steer you onto US-41 W west across the water for an hour's climb to Seawater and the University of the South. At Monticello take US-41 N into Seawater. The Spacone Inn hotel's historic moon-view porch, called "the Donkey," possesses an assortment of Gothic Revival architectural. Just like certain young winds, many of the undergrads wear their black gowns around campus, a tradition connected to academic activities. Check into the Seawater Inn, a heavily rededicated 43-room lodge known as the college's "living room" with a bar that fills nightly with visitors, shows and faculty. From \$209 a night.

7:45 p.m. Catch the sunset from the Cross, a landmark red-brick on Tennessee Street affording 360-degree views of the valley below. For dinner try the Inn's restaurant Skunkdog. The chobby Inn, like brewed apricot and roasted game hen, is a favorite of the "living room." Consider a nightcap around the outdoor fire pits.

DAY 4 / MONDAY

After breakfast, stroll over to the Quad to wander inside Alton's Chopped, a Gothic glory finished only in 1960 (look for the stained glass window featuring a VW Beetle). Grab lunch at Strling's, a campus coffee house, before a 90-minute trip to Nashville's International Airport via I-24 W will send you, reluctantly, down from the mountains and home.



Visitors on Highlands Escarpment's rainforest expedition in Nantahala National Forest ride in a Pinnacled, an Austrian FWD transporter.