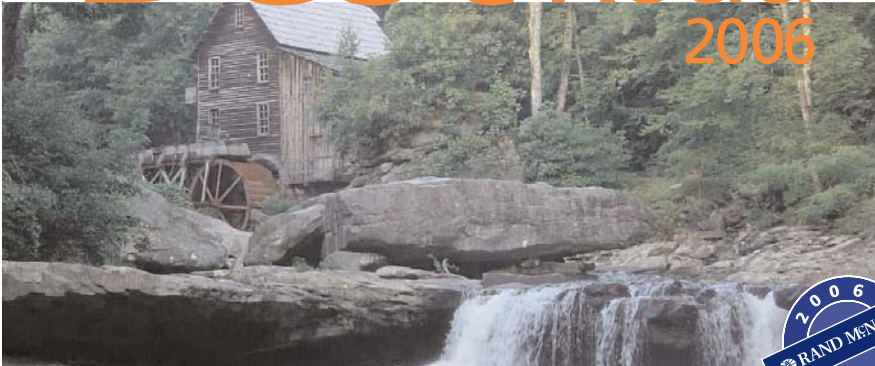


Best of the Road 2006



Glade Creek Grist Mill is one of the most photographed spots in Babcock State Park, West Virginia.

Beginning in Columbus, Ohio, the drive to Beckley, West Virginia meanders through some of the prettiest farmland and rolling hills anywhere. It crosses the Ohio River, lined by river towns with rich Victorian architecture and industrial history, and on into the steep foothills of the Appalachians. Loaded with outdoor recreation opportunities, natural attractions, museums, and down-home dining, it's a deep dive into the heart of American culture and history.



A mural in Columbus, Ohio's Short North district riffs Grant Wood's *American Gothic*.

Columbus wraps some of its best treasures right near the heart of downtown. A few blocks from the city core, German Village hums with activity. Built in the 1860s by German immigrants, the trendy neighborhood is one of the nation's oldest historic districts. The sturdy brick streets are lined with

boutiques, upscale restaurants, pubs, and coffee shops like Cup O' Joe, a local hangout. Students from Ohio State and neighborhood residents browse through the 32 rooms of the Book Loft, an independent bookstore filled with books, music, and lots of crannies in which to read. Open six days a week, the Visitor's Center at the Meeting Haus offers tours of the neighborhood.



The Book Loft in Columbus, Ohio, features 32 rooms of books.



Topiary couple in Columbus, Ohio, represents Seurat's *La Grande Jatte*.

To the east of downtown, on the corner of East Town and Washington, the Topiary Garden at Old Deaf School Park recreates in topiary Georges Seurat's painting *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*. There are 50 living sculptures of people, boats, and animals — some 12 feet high — in the nine-acre park.

The district north of downtown, the Arena District and Short North, is home to the Columbus Blue Jackets hockey arena, bars, shops, and art galleries. On the first Saturday of each month, a gallery hop along High St. invites browsers to check out blown

glass, sculpture, paintings, even furniture. At the North market, stalls selling Jeni's ice cream (made in Columbus), Vietnamese, Indian, and deli food, cheese, wines, honey, fruits, and even fresh flowers compete for shoppers.

South of Columbus, the drive quickly passes into farmland and wooded areas. In the Hocking Hills, lodging options range from simple campsites and motels to cabins at upscale resorts like Glenlaurel Inn and Inn at Cedar Falls. Dinner at the Scottish-style Glenlaurel Inn is a five-course affair for \$49 plus tax and tip. Entrees vary, but may include filet mignon, salmon, or rack of lamb, served in the castle-motif dining room.



A rock formation frames the forest at Hocking Hills State Park, Ohio.

Hocking Hills State Park, with more than two million visitors a year, packs in families at familiar sites like Old Man's Cave. Guided tours, such as one by local historian and septuagenarian Leland Connor provide an in-depth perspective of the land, while that of Mimi Morrison of Touch the Earth Adventures explores Lake Logan via kayak to spot vultures and eagles.

Just outside the park in Logan, Columbus Washboard Factory shows visitors how washboards can be assembled in just 45 seconds. See original 1800s equipment, buy a washboard souvenir, and then check out the world's largest washboard at 24 feet.

Climbing the Hills Ohio and West Virginia



For full maps of Ohio and West Virginia, see pp. 78-81 and 112 of the Rand McNally 2006 Road Atlas.

En route east towards West Virginia, **Etta's Lunchbox** serves up more than pizza and sandwiches. The walls and ceiling of this café and general store are covered with owner Ledora Ousley's collection of lunchboxes dating from the 1940s. Find your favorite lunchbox from your schooldays and Ousley usually makes a spot-on guess of your age. "First I had 20, then 50. Now I have 650," Ousley says, though not all are on display.



Barbie is just part of the extensive collection at Etta's Lunchbox Café, New Plymouth, Ohio.

The drive on Hwy. 550 to Marietta treads a rural route past farms, double-wide trailers, and gas stations advertising cigarettes, knives, Zippo lighters, and payday loans.

Across the Ohio River, Parkersburg, West Virginia, wears its age well. At the Visitors Center, detailed brochures are available for a tour of the Julia-Ann Square Historic District. Though the 26-home tour is designated as walk-by, the proud homeowners sometimes invite curious passersby in for a peek into the renovations.



Homeowners in period dress pose in Parkersburg, WV.



Right in downtown Parkersburg, oil rigs litter the grounds of the Oil and Gas Museum. Inside, visitors find a wealth of equipment, exhibits, and historic photos about the oil boomtowns and the tumultuous Civil War history here.

Near the Oil and Gas Museum, the Blennerhasset Museum of Regional History sells tickets to Blennerhasset Island State Park. The island, purchased in 1798 by wealthy Irish immigrants Harmon and Margaret Blennerhasset, can be accessed via a paddlewheel boat in summer.



A ferry shuttles visitors to Blennerhasset Island State Park in West Virginia.

Its original mansion, which burned in 1811, has been recreated, and docents dressed in period costume lead tours through the magnificent home. Families enjoy taking the horse-drawn carriage ride around part of the 169-acre grounds, which once served as training grounds for a secret army formed by Aaron Burr. Harmon Blennerhasset lost his fortune after he was arrested for treason for colluding with Burr.

Upriver in Williamstown, **Fenton Art Glass** remains one of the last of a long line of glass operations in West Virginia. It is still owned by the Fenton family, which founded it in 1905. Up to eight factory tours a day and an



A craftsman molds hot glass at Fenton Art Glass in Williamstown, WV.

extensive gift shop that also sells factory seconds draw visitors and collectors from all over the world. While seconds can be a great buy at 50 percent off retail prices, this hand-blown glass is not inexpensive. After a factory tour, many stop at DaVinci's Italian Restaurant. Famed for its surprisingly tasty German pizza (made with sauerkraut), the restaurant is packed on Sundays for purely American fare of ham, baked potatoes, and more.

A favorite Vienna stop is Holl's Swiss Chocolate. Founded by Fritz Holl and currently run by his son Dominic, the company hand-crafts, decorates, and hand-packs the confections, which are artfully displayed in cases. "Every piece has our name on it, so we want it perfect," says Dominic's wife, Michelle Holl. Samples are available ("You can't buy it until you try it," Holl says), though walking out without a box in hand is not an option for most.

Half an hour east of Parkersburg in Cairo, just off US 50, the 72-mile North Bend Rail Trail includes thirteen tunnels for bikers to pass through, including one purported to be haunted. **Country Trails Bikes**, just off



Riders can rent bikes in Cairo, WV for a rail trail trip through old train tunnels.

Main Street in Cairo, rents bikes by the hour (\$4) or day (\$32), services them, and sells bike supplies. One popular route burrows through three tunnels, past a gazebo, and on to an ice cream shop for a sweet finale.

Interstate 77 heads straight through Charleston and into Beckley and the New River Gorge area. But a more scenic route jogs east on US 60 along the Midland Trail. A platform at Hawks Nest State Park, in Ansted, overlooks the New River. Here, an aerial tram brings park guests to New River Jetboat Tours, a 30-minute wet and wild ride upstream to the New River Gorge Bridge towering 876 feet above.



Lover's Leap lookout is a favorite vista at Hawks Nest State Park, in West Virginia.

In the town of Ansted, Robin Hildebrand, president of Blue Smoke Salsa, proudly shows customers her selection of tasty, award-winning salsas, made on site. The production line is visible through a window inside the store. The company makes 600-1,200 jars per day, using peppers grown in the state. At \$5 a jar for flavors ranging from mild to extra hot, the salsa makes an unusual souvenir.



A variety of salsas and gifts are sold at Blue Smoke Salsa in Ansted, WV.

Most summer visitors to the area come for the river rafting. Eighteen companies offer raft trips ranging from a half day to overnight at www.wvwhitewater.com. There are gentle rapids on the Upper New River for families with small children, and big rapid rides on the New and Gauley Rivers. Because the river action is somewhat dictated by the amount of rainfall each season, the ride is different each time.

A perhaps lesser-known sport in the area is rock climbing. "If you climbed every weekend for the rest of your life, you couldn't do all the routes here," says Doug Ferguson, an American Mountain Guide-certified instructor for **Water Stone Outdoors** in Fayetteville. Ferguson relocated from Florida, where rock climbing tends to be an indoor sport. Now he climbs even on his days off, and never indoors.

With more than 1,600 sport climbing and traditional climbing routes, rock rats scramble up terrain as provocative as the route names: Nude Scientist, Party in My Mind, Cotton Mouth, and Satisfaction Guaranteed. Most routes are 80-100 ft., rated from 5.5 to 5.14—which for the uninitiated means pretty tough — from spots where there are two hand and foot holds for every move to real Spiderman stuff.



Mountain bikers also love the gorge. One easy route snakes down the gorge, bunny-hopping logs and railroad ties, past waterfalls, railroad trestles, and the former mining towns of Red Ash and Thurman, population 37. Bike rentals and guides are available at New River Bike and Touring Company.

Doug Ferguson rappels down a cliff in the New River Gorge, WV.

Many bikers, rafters, and guides end their day's outing at Pies and Pints pizzeria in Fayetteville. On Tuesdays, an \$8 all-you-can-eat pizza special includes their favorite spicy chicken chipotle pizza topped with chicken, red onions, cilantro, and crème fraîche. Brews are extra.

Most people wander down to Beckley during their visit due to the more extensive lodging, dining, and entertainment options. Learn about West Virginia's coal mining at the Beckley Exhibition Mine. Retired mine workers ferry visitors 1,550 feet underground via authentic "man cars" (akin to a miniature train) through the former working mine of the Phillips Coal Company. The half-hour tour details the history of the dangerous, dark, wet, and lonely business of mining. Joe Norkewitz, a guide who started working in the mines in 1949 at age 16, tells of his first job crawling through a 24-inch-high space with eight inches of water. "I just didn't like working in cold water all day," he says, and stuck at the site for two weeks before moving to another spot in the mine. A back injury forced him out of mining in 1988. The site also has a number of historic



A former miner, Joe Norkewitz, leads tours at Beckley Exhibition Mine in West Virginia.

buildings with period furniture, such as the Superintendent's Home, a coal worker's shanty, and the Pemberton Coal Camp Church.

Also in Beckley, **Tamarack: The Best of West Virginia** sits right off I-64. Six artisans work on site carving wooden instruments, designing cornhusk dolls, weaving baskets, and making other crafts. Works from these and nearly 2,000 other juried West Virginian craftspeople are sold here, including textiles, agricultural products, glass, pottery, wood, metal, jewelry, quilts, and wearable art. The top seller is gourmet food, though the store also sells coffee tables that ring up at \$15,000. Hungry shoppers make their way to the food court, which is operated by the chef of the highly rated Greenbrier Resort. There are simple daily specials, but gourmet dishes of fresh fish or meat are a bargain at less than \$15. It's a tasty end to an adventurous trip.

For additional information:

Arena District

375 N. Front St., Ste 200,
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 857-2358
www.arena-district.com

Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine

316 Ewart Ave., Beckley, WV 25801
(304) 256-1747
www.beckleymine.com

Blennerhassett Museum

137 Juliana St., Parkersburg, WV 26101
(304) 420-4800

Blue Smoke Salsa

119 E. Main St., Ansted, WV 25812
(304) 658-3800, (888) 725-7298

Book Loft

631 S. Third St., Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 464-1774, www.bookloft.com

Columbus Topiary Garden

480 E. Town St., Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 645-0197
www.topiarygarden.org

Columbus Washboard Factory

14 Gallaber Ave., Logan, OH 43138
(740) 380-3828
www.columbuswashboard.com

Country Trails Bike Shop

just off Main St., Cairo, WV 26337
(304) 628-3100

Cup O' Joe Coffee & Dessert House

627 S. Third St., Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 221-1563

Da Vinci's Italian Restaurant

215 Highland Ave., Williamstown, WV 26187
(304) 375-3633

Etta's Lunchbox Café & General Store

35960 OH 56, New Plymouth, OH 45654
(740) 380-0736

Fenton Art Glass Gallery

420 Caroline Ave., Williamstown, WV 26187
(304) 375-7772

Glenlaurel Inn & Wooded Cottages

14940 Mt. Olive Rd., Rockbridge, OH, 43149
(800) 809-7378
www.glenlaurel.com

Hawks Nest State Park

117 W. Main, Ansted, WV 25812
(304) 658-5196
www.hawksnestsp.com

Hocking Hills State Park

Hocking Hills Tourism Association
13178 State Route 664 South, Logan, OH 43138
(800)-HOCKING
www.1800hocking.com

Holl's Swiss Chocolatier

2001 Grand Central Ave., Vienna, WV 26105
(304) 295-6576

Inn at Cedar Falls

21190 OH 374, Logan, OH 43138
(800) 653-2557

Julia-Ann Square Historic District

1024 Juliana St., Parkersburg, WV 26101
(304) 483-1029

Leland Connor Guided Tours

960 Walbonding Ave., Logan, OH 43138
(740) 385-7136

Meeting Haus Visitor's Center

588 S. Third St., Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 221-8888
www.germanvillage.com

New River Bikes and Touring Company

103 Keller Ave., Fayetteville, WV 25840
(304) 574-2453
www.newriverbike.com

New River Jetboat Tours

One Riverfront Place, Thurmond, WV 25936
(304) 469-2525
www.newriverjetboats.com

North Bend State Park

Rt. 1, Box 221, Cairo, WV 26337
(304) 643-2931
www.northbendsp.com

Oil & Gas Museum

119 Third St., Parkersburg, WV 26101
(304) 485-5446

Parkersburg Visitors Center

350 Seventh St., Parkersburg, WV 26101
(304) 428-1130 or (800) 752-4982
www.greaterparkersburg.com

Pies and Pints Pizzeria

103½ Keller Ave. Fayetteville, WV 25840
(304) 574-2200

Tamarack

One Tamarack Place, Beckley, WV 25801
(888) 826-8722
www.tamarackwv.com

The Short North Business Association

120 W. Goodale St., Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 228-8050
www.shortnorth.org

Touch the Earth Adventures

P.O. Box 326, Athens, OH 45701
(740) 592-3496
www.hockinghills.com/earthtouch

Water Stone Outdoors

101 E. Wiseman Ave., Fayetteville, WV 25840
(304) 574-2425
www.waterstoneoutdoors.com