

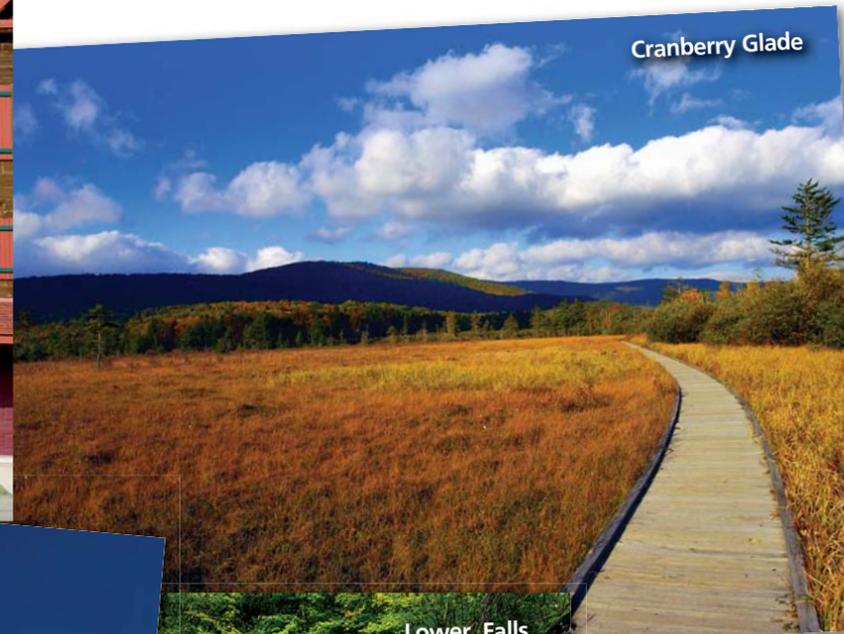
off the map

BY DANIELLE TAYLOR

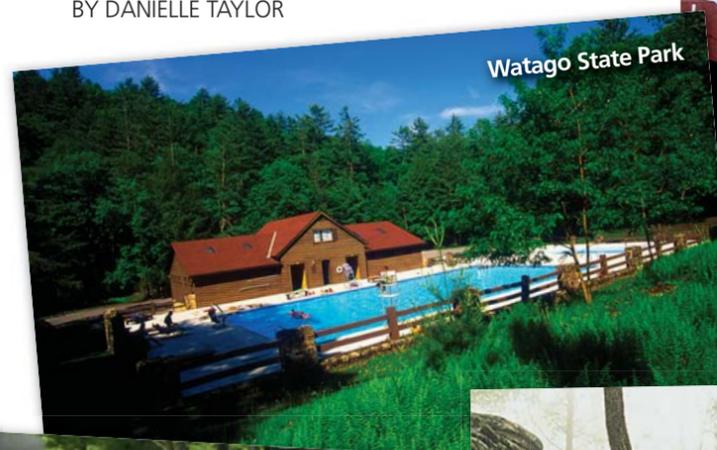
Logger's Run at Snowshoe



Cranberry Glade



Watago State Park



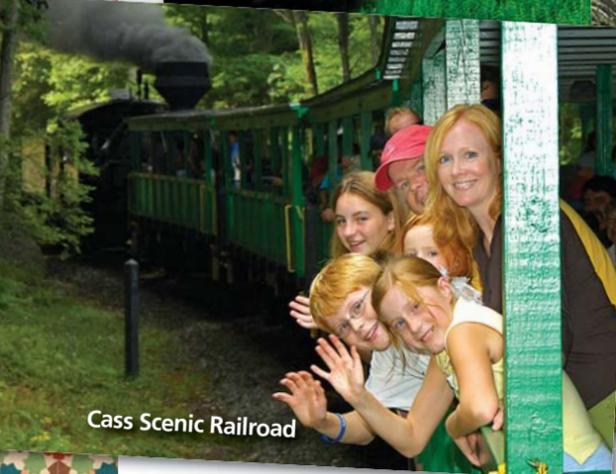
Lower Falls



Beartown State Park



Cass Scenic Railroad



Snowshoe Mountain Ski Resort



appalachian getaway

West Virginia's Pocahontas County offers year-round outdoor attractions for the whole family.

There aren't many places where visitors can enjoy world-class skiing, friendly Southern culture, breathtaking natural phenomena, highly advanced space technology and an annual roadkill cook-off. But then again, most places aren't like Pocahontas County, West Virginia. Nestled in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains and refreshingly devoid of urban sprawl, the

county prides itself on its endless opportunities for outdoor recreation, history and culture, and invites visitors to explore for themselves.

Go for a drive along one of the county's numerous scenic byways, or meander along one of its 800-plus miles of hiking and biking trails. Take in a show at the Pocahontas County Opera House, or visit one of the historic Civil War sites. But be sure to give

yourself a few days to explore — with so much to see and do, the only thing you might be short on is time.

recreation abounds

Well known for its popular Snowshoe Mountain Ski Resort, the largest winter resort in the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast, Pocahontas County welcomes thousands of snow-hungry visitors each winter season. Snow starts falling

Pocahontas County Convention & Visitors Bureau photos, except Logger's Run (Chris Struck photo) and Snowshoe Mountain Ski Resort photo

on the mountain as early as October and regularly continues into May, and the resort offers 60 slopes and trails as well as a 1,500-foot vertical drop.

But Snowshoe isn't only a winter destination. During the summer months, the resort turns into a mountain biker's paradise. With one of the largest trail systems in the East, and continuous lift and shuttle operations to get you back to the top for your next run, beginner and expert riders alike can spend days traversing the mountain and building their skills.

With 62 percent of the county's land in state or federal hands, the opportunities for adventure are endless. Eight

though multiple established campsites exist, visitors can set up camp in nearly any area of the forest. Horseback riding is also permitted, with dedicated trails for this purpose. Because of the terrain variations, the area is known as one of the most ecologically diverse national forests and features a wide range of flora and fauna.

In the 107-acre Beartown State Park, visitors can follow the boardwalk through massive, unusual sandstone formations that appear to grow out of the earth. Along the trail, interpretive signs explain the area's history, ecology and geology, and with the deep caves and looming overhangs, it's

rivers start here, providing miles of crystal-clear water for you to enjoy. Anglers can find several varieties of trout in the rivers as well as small-mouth bass, bluegills and channel catfish in the larger lakes and ponds. Hunters will also be in their element here: 350,000-plus acres of public land in the county allow both small and big game ample room to roam.

Snowshoe's Sunrise Backcountry Hut



Snowshoe Mountain Ski Resort photo

For a rustic epicure, a trek to **Snowshoe's Sunrise Backcountry Hut** is a must. Located nearly two rugged trail miles away from the resort's South Village, a visit to the gorgeous log cabin includes a gourmet four-course dinner, limited alcoholic beverages, and transportation via a trail-equipped van or a restored 1950s Army ambulance for the ultimate "away from it all" destination. Overnight lodging also includes breakfast. Dinner is \$75 per person Fridays and Saturdays beginning mid-December; lodging is \$999 for up to eight people and is available seven days a week. (877-441-4386)

cabins for rent

In an effort to simulate pioneer life, the eight furnished cabins in **Seneca State Forest** feature fireplaces, gaslights and wood-burning cookstoves. Water can be pumped from an on-site well, and all of the other basic necessities are provided. (304-799-6213; senecastateforest.com/accommodations.html)

Watago State Park offers 34 cabins that vary in construction, capacity, availability and amenities. For the traditionalist, 24 log-and-stone cabins featuring natural wood fireplaces are available from the last weekend in April to the fourth Monday in October. For effortless warmth, 10 modern cabins with frame construction, wood-paneled walls and forced-air furnaces are available year-round. Both styles feature electric lighting, modern kitchen appliances and bathrooms with showers. (304-799-4087; watoga.com/accommodations/accommodations.html)



peace and quiet

It's hard to really unplug from life on vacation when your BlackBerry won't stop buzzing, but in Pocahontas County, you really can leave your cares at home. The county's

National Radio Astronomy Observatory and **Robert C. Byrd Green Bank Telescope**

require quiet air to study distant celestial phenomena, so 13,000 square miles in the area have been designated a National Radio Quiet Zone. As a result, cell-phone service is spotty or unavailable in many areas.

If you find yourself in technology withdrawal, stop in for a tour at the Observatory's kid-friendly **Green Bank Science Center**. With interactive exhibits and exciting programs, the center makes learning fun for everyone, young and old.

Pocahontas County Convention & Visitors Bureau photo

easy to imagine bears making this area their home.

In the southern end of the county, Watoga State Park offers more than 40 miles of hiking trails plus an 11-acre lake with paddle and rowboats. The park also features 34 cabins (10 open year-round — see “Cabins for Rent”) and a number of campsites. Here and throughout much of the county, more laid-back outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy bird-watching as well as the spectacular display of foliage colors each autumn.

cultural destination

Aside from just natural wonders, the area also celebrates its heritage with a number of cultural attractions. The Pocahontas County Opera House, which celebrated its 100th year in 2010, frequently hosts bluegrass bands, dance and theater performance groups, family movie nights and other community activities.

One of the most popular opera house events each year, the Allegheny Echoes celebrates West Virginia's unique brand of music, culture and heritage. Timid beginners and seasoned performers alike join for a week of dulcimer, banjo and mandolin playing, and creative writers revive their muse while surrounded by like-minded artists.

With tongue firmly in cheek, the wildly popular annual Roadkill Cook-off pokes fun at the state's hill-billy reputation while serving up one-of-a-kind local cuisine. The official rules stipulate that all entries must have, as their main ingredient, any animal commonly found dead on the roadside, though the ones used need not come from such an authentic fate.

history lives on

Like most areas throughout the South, Pocahontas County features a number

of notable Civil War sites. Of these, Droop Mountain Battlefield, the location of West Virginia's last significant Civil War conflict, has been the best preserved. Following a two-day battle in November 1863, Confederate resistance in the state collapsed, which helped lead the way to an overall Union victory. Today, thanks to efforts from the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, visitors can traverse the park's hiking trails or climb the observation tower that overlooks the stunning Greenbrier River Valley.

Fans of America's industrial heritage will appreciate the county's historic railroads that continue to run in the modern day, albeit with tourists now instead of logs. The Cass Scenic Railroad uses vintage steam locomotives to transport visitors on two- or four-hour excursions to the past and demonstrates how the railroads used to play a role in everyday life. Using switchbacks to climb the 11-percent grade, the trains take visitors to a restored logging camp, then on to West Virginia's third-highest peak for those who take the extended tour.

Only a four-and-a-half hour drive from Washington, D.C., Pocahontas County offers an easily accessible escape from the ordinary. 

reviving the past

Eastern West Virginia has a long history with the logging industry, and lifelong county resident W.E. Blackhurst set out to capture what life was like for many area loggers during the early 1900s. His best-known book, “Riders of the Flood,” centers on the life of one young man who finds peril, adventure and romance after leaving city life and escaping to West Virginia.

Each September, the town of Ronceverte in neighboring Greenbrier County stages an outdoor production of the story (ridersoftheflood.com) downstream from the original site of the lumber mill in Blackhurst's book.



for more information

Visit the Pocahontas County Convention & Visitors Bureau at pocahontascountywv.com or call 800-336-7009.