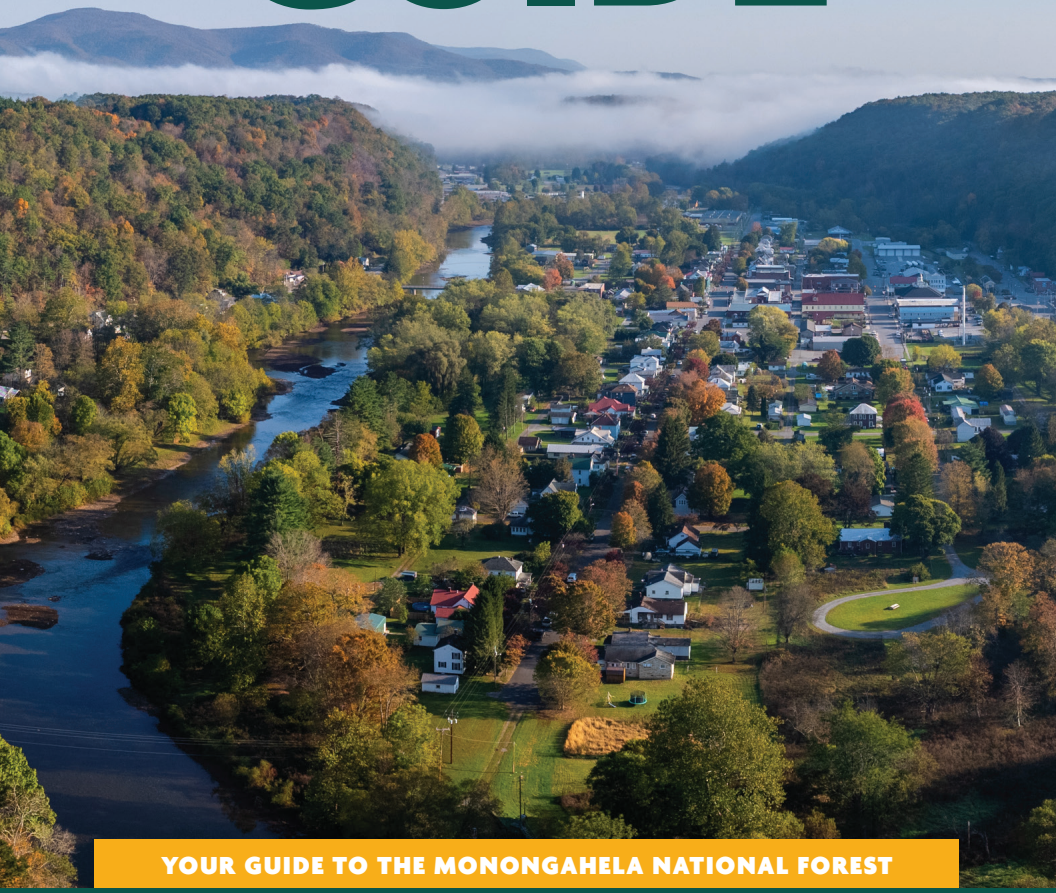
MON FOREST TOWNS

WEST VIRGINIA

FIELD GUIDE



YOUR GUIDE TO THE MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

SCENIC DESTINATIONS

CHARMING DOWNTOWNS

FOREST MAP & ITINERARIES

MON FOREST TOWNS

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For more information and an interactive map, visit MONFORESTTOWNS.ORG.

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AMENITY KEY

- Lodging
- Dining
- Gas Pumps
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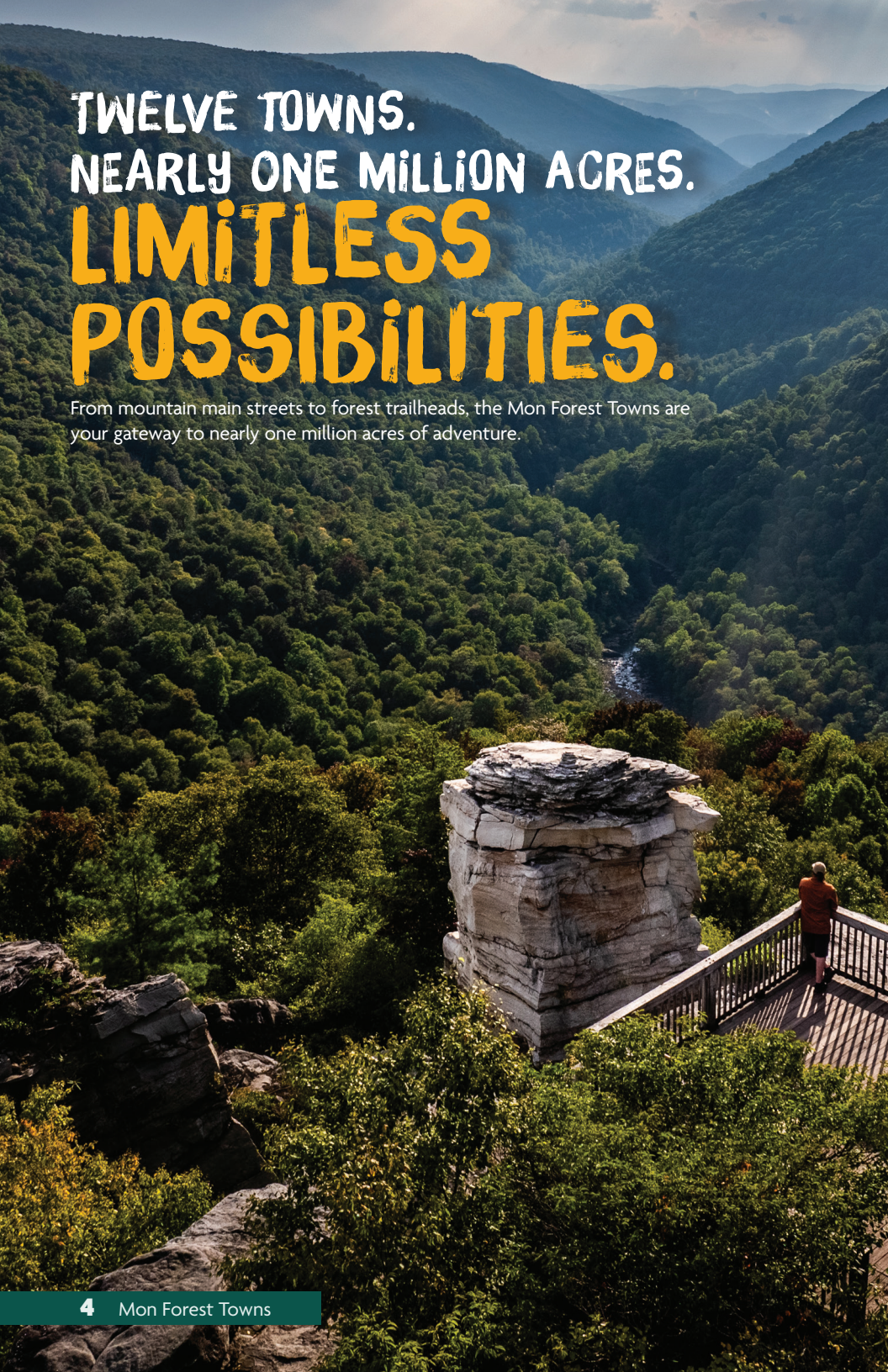

TWELVE TOWNS. NEARLY ONE MILLION ACRES. LIMITLESS POSSIBILITIES.

From mountain main streets to forest trailheads, the Mon Forest Towns are your gateway to nearly one million acres of adventure.



What if your next favorite place isn't a single destination, but an entire region waiting to be explored?

Across the mountains, winding rivers, and deep forests of West Virginia's **Monongahela National Forest**, 12 towns offer countless ways to experience one of the most remarkable landscapes in the eastern United States. Some began as remote settlements on the Appalachian frontier. Others grew alongside railroads and timber camps. Today they are gateway communities to the forest, where trailheads are minutes from main streets and local outfitters share historic buildings with family-owned restaurants.

These are the Mon Forest Towns: **Cowen**, **Davis**, **Durbin**, **Elkins**, **Franklin**, **Marlinton**, **Parsons**, **Petersburg**, **Richwood**, **Seneca Rocks**, **Thomas**, and **White Sulphur Springs**.

Spanning nearly one million acres of West Virginia, the Monongahela contains some of the most diverse landscapes in the Appalachians, with sweeping rocky overlooks, crystal-clear trout streams, hidden waterfalls, mossy spruce forests, and Arctic-like bogs.

But the forest is only part of the story.

The towns are where adventures begin and end. They're where you'll find coffee before sunrise, locals who know every bend in the river, and live music after a long day on the trail.

This guide was created to help you experience both.

Inside are detailed profiles of each town and suggested itineraries, whether you're planning a weekend getaway, a family road trip, or a hiking adventure. Think of the itineraries as starting points, not fixed schedules. One day might run from a scenic railroad ride to an evening concert in Thomas; another from sunrise at Seneca Rocks to dinner in Franklin. Stay in one town and explore deeply, or follow the mountain roads and discover how each community reveals a different side of the forest.

Either way, you'll quickly realize that the Mon Forest Towns are more than places on a map. Together, they form a connected region where outdoor adventure, Appalachian heritage, and community come together to create experiences you won't find anywhere else.

ABOUT THE MON FOREST TOWNS PARTNERSHIP

The Mon Forest Towns Partnership is a community-led nonprofit uniting 12 gateway communities in the Monongahela National Forest region. Mon Forest Towns works to build thriving communities through regional collaboration and a shared connection to the Monongahela National Forest by connecting trails to main street, supporting local business development, and leveraging the power of the partnership to create places to live, work, and play. To learn more, visit **MONFORESTTOWNS.ORG/ABOUT**.



WHY DOES THE BLACKWATER RIVER RUN THE COLOR OF TEA?
It starts upstream in the high-elevation wetlands of Canaan Valley—where red spruce and hemlock slowly stain the water dark before it ever reaches Blackwater Falls.







THOMAS

Located 6 miles from Blackwater Falls State Park, Thomas has become one of the Mon Forest region's most creative small towns.

Thomas feels like a trailhead for creativity. Its historic brick buildings sit high above the **Blackwater River**, anchoring the heart of the town. You'll find painters carrying canvases, mountain bikers covered in trail dust, musicians unloading banjos, and travelers strolling in and out of storefronts with a coffee in hand.

Inside the historic buildings, you'll find galleries showcasing regional painters, photographers, and makers alongside vintage shops, local goods, and cafes that feel more like gathering places than quick stops. The energy here is creative, but never polished to the point of losing its mountain-town grit.

Because Thomas never really separates the outdoors from the arts, a day might start at a waterfall, wind through a gallery opening, and end with fiddle tunes spilling out onto Front Street. Use this choose-your-own-adventure itinerary to explore everything from high-elevation bogs and hidden caverns to some of the tallest peaks in West Virginia.

DAY 1 ITINERARY

Canaan Valley Loop

The Canaan Valley Family Loop is a scenic three-day road trip through West Virginia's highlands that blends waterfalls, caverns, mountain towns, and easy outdoor adventures perfect for families of all ages.

Scan for itineraries online

MORNING

After breakfast at **TipTop** or **Happy & More Bakery & Cafe** in Thomas, explore the **Blackwater Canyon Railroad Grade**, which begins just below Main Street.

This gentle walk passes several roaring cascades on the way to **Douglas Falls**, a scenic 35-foot waterfall. Along the route, interpretive signs reveal how the community's industrial past shaped today's downtown, and tell the story behind the hundreds of brick "beehives" now returning to nature.

MIDDAY

Explore Downtown Thomas & Davis

Return to the twin mountain towns for lunch and exploration. Both communities offer walkable downtown areas with unique shops and galleries.

AFTERNOON

Blackwater Falls State Park

Drive south on WV Route 32 for approximately 2 miles to Blackwater Falls State Park, home to one of West Virginia's most photographed waterfalls. The amber-colored waters plunge 57 feet into a dramatic gorge lined with hemlock and red spruce forest.

Blackwater Falls Trail

The main attraction features two viewing options. The Gentle Trail offers an accessible view from above, while the Boardwalk Trail descends 214 steps to a misty observation deck where families can take in the views just feet from the falls.

Pendleton Point Overlook

A short drive within the park leads to this overlook, which features the deepest point of Blackwater Canyon—nearly 1,000 feet. A tower viewer helps children spot more waterfalls tumbling into the canyon below.

Elakala Trail

Just to the left of the park lodge is a short trail that crosses a beautiful wooden bridge over a small waterfall, perfect to get your feet wet.



Lindy Point Trail

While this unassuming trail may seem to be just a rhododendron tunnel, it leads to one of the most stunning overlooks in the Mon Forest region: Lindy Point, where sandstone outcrops jut out into the Blackwater Canyon's sea of green.

Alternative Activity: Pendleton Lake within the park offers swimming, paddle boating, and fishing during summer months.

EVENING

Enjoy dinner at **The Smokehouse at Blackwater Falls Lodge** or visit one of the many nearby restaurants in Thomas or Davis.

No visit is complete without a stop at the **Purple Fiddle**. Part music venue, part deli cafe, part Appalachian institution, the Purple Fiddle has become the heartbeat of Thomas with touring acts from around the world. At night, the space is packed with folks ready to toe tap to all types of tunes—from bluegrass to folk to rock.

Lodging Options

Blackwater Falls Lodge Full-service lodge with restaurant, pool, and nature center
Blackwater Falls Cabins Two-bedroom classic cabins with full kitchens
Canaan Valley Resort Full resort with multiple dining options and family activities
The Billy Motel A boutique motel with on-site restaurant located between Thomas and Davis

DAY 2 ITINERARY

Canaan Valley Loop

Explore sandstone crags, caverns, and sweeping mountain vistas.

MORNING

After breakfast, drive to **Seneca Rocks**, following US 33 East for approximately 30 miles through mountain passes with dramatic views. Watch for the dramatic profile of Seneca Rocks appearing on the left.

Seneca Rocks Discovery Center
This free visitor center offers interactive exhibits on geology, natural history, and the area's rock climbing heritage. Children can participate in Junior Ranger programs and enjoy the spectacular views of the 900-foot rock formation from the grounds.

Sites Homestead
Adjacent to the Discovery Center, this restored 1830s pioneer homestead offers a glimpse into frontier life. The short walking path crosses a scenic footbridge over the North Fork River.

Seneca Rocks Trail
With a steep climb of nearly 900 feet to the summit, this 3.6-mile out-and-back hike may not be suitable for younger children, but for others, this iconic trek rewards with outstanding views of the North Fork Valley.

MIDDAY

For lunch, choose from **Front Porch Restaurant**, a family restaurant above Harper's Old Country Store serving up pizza, subs, and views of Seneca Rocks; **Harper's Old Country Store**, a general store offering deli items and snacks since 1902; or **Yokum's Grill**, which dishes out burgers, hot dogs, and sandwiches.

Option A River Play at North Fork
The shallow, clear waters of the North Fork River near the Discovery Center provide an excellent spot for children to wade and explore on warm days.

Option B Spruce Knob
From Petersburg, take US Route 28/55 south, then follow signs to Spruce Knob via Briery Gap Road and Forest Road 104. The drive takes approximately 45 minutes on winding mountain roads.

Whispering Spruce Trail at Spruce Knob
At 4,863 feet, Spruce Knob is the highest point in West Virginia. This easy loop trail circles the summit through an alpine-like landscape of wind-sculpted red spruce trees. From it's historic stone observation tower and trailside overlooks, enjoy sweeping peak views—without the climb.



AFTERNOON

Smoke Hole Caverns
From Seneca Rocks, drive north on US Route 28/55 for approximately 13.5 miles to this family-friendly cavern for an underground adventure. The guided tour explores dramatic stalactites, an underground stream, and the colorful Rainbow Room. Children especially enjoy feeding the cave fish and learning about the cavern's moonshine history. The duration of the tour is 45 to 60 minutes, and the temperature is 56 degrees year 'round, so bring jackets. It is not fully wheelchair accessible.

EVENING

Continue to **Petersburg** on US 28/55. Enjoy dinner at **The Hermitage Taphouse**, serving upscale–casual American cuisine in a renovated 1841 inn with outdoor seating.

Evening Walk
After dinner, stop at one of Petersburg's several parks for a walk along the **South Branch of the Potomac**, or visit **Fort Mulligan** for an educational sunset view!

Lodging Options

- **The Hermitage Inn** Historic 1841 inn with modern renovations and on-site restaurant
- **Smoke Hole Resort Cabins** Log cabins with kitchens near the caverns
- **Fort Hill Motel** Budget-friendly option in Petersburg





SENECA ROCKS' TOWERING WHITE TUSCARORA QUARTZITE FINS RISE nearly 900 feet and were formed more than 440 million years ago when ancient seabed rock was thrust vertically skyward by immense tectonic forces.



SENECA ROCKS

This unincorporated community is home to one of West Virginia's most iconic natural landmarks: Seneca Rocks.

The unmistakable formation of Seneca Rocks anchors the **Spruce Knob–Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area**, the first national recreation area created under the U.S. Forest Service.

Long before hikers, bikers, and climbers arrived, though, Indigenous Peoples traveled the nearby **Seneca Trail**, connecting lands from Florida to Canada. Modern-day adventurers now come from around the world to climb more than 375 established routes, hike the scenic trail to the summit overlook, or fish and float in the area's picturesque rivers. Nearby attractions like **Smoke Hole Canyon** and **NROCKS Outdoor Adventures** add even more adrenaline to the experience, while historic sites, backcountry horseback rides, and mountain hospitality make Seneca Rocks more than a destination—it's a defining place of Appalachian adventure.

DAY 3 ITINERARY

Canaan Valley Loop

Soak in sweeping valley views and wander wetland walks.

MORNING

Enjoy breakfast in Petersburg at **The Grove Cafe & Bakery**, a cozy cafe serving freshly baked goods and coffee; **Sue's Country Kitchen**, a home-style diner offering hearty breakfasts; **Station Cafe**, a coffeehouse tucked into an old train station that now houses a charming gift shop, art studio, and visitors center; or **Family Traditions**, a casual eatery known for generous portions of traditional American and comfort food.

MIDDAY

From Petersburg, take US 28/55 south toward Cabins, then turn onto Forest Road 75. Drive to the **Bear Rocks Preserve** parking area at the end of FR 75, approximately 45–60 minutes.

Dolly Sods and Bear Rocks Preserve

The Dolly Sods Wilderness is a place that hardly feels like West Virginia at all. Rising above 4,700 feet, its windswept heath barrens, high mountain bogs, and wide-open skies feel more like Canada than Appalachia. Spanning 17,000 acres with 47 miles of rugged trails, Dolly Sods is known for its dramatic rock formations, stunted red spruce, and wild, untamed terrain. It's challenging, breathtaking, and absolutely worth the trek. Two of the easiest trails to navigate are **Bear Rocks Trail**, a 0.5–1 mile easy loop over otherworldly boulders, and **Northland Interpretive Loop Trail**, a 0.5 mile loop to an enchanting highland bog.

AFTERNOON

Drive to Canaan Valley on Forest Road 75 to Laneville, then follow WV 32 north to Canaan Valley for approximately 30 minutes.

Canaan Valley Resort State Park

Cradled between the Canaan Valley Refuge and the Monongahela National Forest, Canaan Valley Resort State Park spans roughly 6,000 acres of high-elevation wetlands and forests. While it's a popular ski destination in winter months, there's no shortage of outdoor activities year 'round.

Option A Blackwater River Trail

Following the river through Canaan Valley Resort State Park, the **Blackwater River Trail** offers an easy, scenic walk surrounded by wetlands, wildlife, and sweeping mountain views.



Option B Scenic Chairlift

If the crew is tired of walking, stop by the **Canaan Valley Ski Resort Area** and purchase a lift ticket to the top of **Bald Knob**. The summit offers incredible views of the surrounding Canaan Valley. The chairlift operates seasonally, so confirm availability.

Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge

The Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge protects one of the highest and most unique mountain valleys in the eastern United States. Stop by the **Visitors Center** to learn more about ongoing efforts to restore and protect this unique landscape. The **Freeland Boardwalk Trail**, located at the end of Freeland Road within the wildlife refuge, winds through fragile wetlands, offering an easy, 0.5-mile immersive and accessible walk through one of the most ecologically unique landscapes in Appalachia.

Return to Davis

Continue north on WV 32 for approximately 15 minutes to Davis for a picturesque end to your Canaan Valley adventure.

EVENING

Complete the loop with dinner in Davis.

- **Sirianni's Cafe** Pizza and Italian favorites
- **The Billy Motel / Ish Kitchen** Creative American cuisine
- **Hellbender Burritos** Monster wraps with vegan options
- **Milo's Cafe & Restaurant** Casual fare and cocktails
- **Wicked Wilderness Pub** Sandwiches, burgers, comfort food
- **Moguls** Steak and seafood

DURING WORLD WAR II, Dolly Sods Wilderness was used as an Army artillery training ground because its rugged terrain resembled Europe's battlefields. Even today, unexploded ordnance is occasionally discovered in remote areas, a lingering reminder of the region's surprising military history.









PETERSBURG

A mountain town where trout streams, high ridges, and deep forest quiet still shape the rhythm of the day.

Surrounded by the towering peaks of the Monongahela National Forest's Allegheny Front to the west and the rolling South Branch Valley to the east, Petersburg is the kind of mountain town that still feels wild in all the right ways. Here, native brook trout streams wind through quiet valleys, rugged ridgelines stretch toward endless views, and outdoor adventure comes naturally.

Anglers flock to the nearby **North Fork of the Potomac** for some of the best trout fishing in the region, while hikers and backpackers set out across hundreds of miles of trails leading to places like **Chimney Rock**, **North Fork Mountain**, and the windswept beauty of **Dolly Sods** and **Roaring Plains** Wildernesses. Whether you're floating the rivers, exploring high-elevation hikes, riding into town on a scenic railroad, or simply breathing in the stillness of the mountains, this quaint town offers something increasingly rare—room to slow down. This is a place where nature sets the pace.









DAVIS

From windswept wilderness to downtown breweries, this Tucker County town knows how to do adventure right.

What does a mountain town look like after a full day outside? In Davis, it looks like muddy hiking boots inside breweries, mountain bikes rattling in pickup trucks, and ski jackets tossed over restaurant chairs—even in July, when cool mountain air settles into the valley after sunset. Less than 15 minutes from **Canaan Valley Resort State Park**, **Blackwater Falls State Park**, and **Dolly Sods Wilderness**, Davis has become one of the Mon Forest region's favorite outdoor basecamps. Travelers come to hike windswept bogs, bike rocky forest trails, paddle remote rivers, ski through spruce forests, and chase waterfalls hidden deep in the mountains. Old rail grades and abandoned coke ovens still hint at the area's timber and coal heritage, but today the rhythm of the town revolves around outdoor adventure.

After a day outdoors, nearly everyone ends up in town to either fuel up or wind down. Craft beer flows at local breweries, lines spill out of the eclectic collection of restaurants, and laughter echoes down the valley. In Davis, the mountains help shape the food, the conversations, and the culture.

ADD A DAY ITINERARY

Blackwater Canyon Scenic Loop

For hikers looking to pack big scenery into a single day, this flexible itinerary combines canyon overlooks and rugged forest trails before winding down with good food, cold drinks, and Davis' mountain-town charm.

Scan for itineraries online

MORNING

Begin your morning in **Davis** at **Trailhead Coffee** for a cup of joe and pastry, or for a heartier breakfast, join the locals at **Milos Cafe & Restaurant**.

Option A Table Rock Trail

This remote overlook delivers spectacular 180-degree panoramic views across the Dry Fork and Cheat River valleys and is much less crowded than Lindy Point. The nearly level trail through northern hardwood forest offers a true backcountry feel, with dramatic rock outcrops and deep valley views. Excellent for sunrise photography.

Access From WV 32, turn onto Canaan Loop Road at Canaan Heights. Follow the gravel road approximately 10 miles to the trailhead on the left.

Option B Pase Point + Dobbin House Loop

Starting from the Harold Walters Nature Center in Blackwater Falls State Park, this loop passes Pendleton Lake then heads southwest into the forest. The trail skirts the edge of Blackwater Canyon for over a mile, offering glimpses of the gorge through the vegetation. Red diamond markings follow the spur to Pase Point Overlook, which provides dramatic views into Blackwater Canyon.

Access Enter Blackwater Falls State Park from Route 32 and follow signs to Pendleton Lake. Trail access is starts at a small wooden footbridge near the lake's western edge.

Option C Red Creek Trail to Lion's Head

One of the most stunning viewpoints in Dolly Sods Wilderness, Lion's Head offers dramatic cliff-top views across the valley below. The challenging, 7- to 9-mile out-and-back route follows Red Creek through the wilderness, crosses Big Stonecoal Creek (wear appropriate clothing and shoes), then climbs a rocky path to the overlook. Allot 3 to 5 hours, and navigation skills are recommended, as trails are unmarked; download offline maps before departing.

Access Park at the Red Creek Trailhead area off Forest Road 19 near Laneville.



AFTERNOON

After your morning hike, refuel at one of the valley's local eateries, like the iconic **Sirianni's Pizza Cafe**, for pizza, sandwiches, or Italian dishes. It's cash only, but there's an ATM on-site. Or enjoy **Hellbender Burritos**, where the burritos have become part of local legend.

MID AFTERNOON

Explore Downtown

While Thomas may be known for its art and shopping scene, Davis has its fair share of options, too. Whether seeking outdoor gear, attire, or locally crafted keepsakes, you can easily spend the afternoon roaming the town and enjoying the historic walking tour.

EVENING

Grab a pre-dinner brew at **Stumptown Ales**, where outdoor enthusiasts and locals gather over local craft beer. Then enjoy dinner and a cocktail at **ISH at The Billy Motel**, a retro-chic restaurant with an international cuisine. End the evening with a wide array of sours, IPAs, and lagers at **Big Timber Logging Camp**.

Lodging Options

The Billy Motel A renovated mid-century roadside motel for a memorable stay

Bright Morning Inn A longtime favorite for travelers who want a quieter home base

Valley View Cabin Resort Luxury one- and two-bedroom cabins

Vacation rentals Numerous options throughout Canaan Valley









FRANKLIN

A historic mountain town that is known for its iconic rocks but will win you over with its Victorian charm and frontier history.

Franklin sits in a wide mountain valley where some of West Virginia's most recognizable landscapes rise just beyond town. Less than 30 minutes away, **Spruce Knob** reaches the highest point in the state, while the sharp quartzite fins of **Seneca Rocks** pull in climbers, hikers, photographers, and road-trippers year-round. Surrounded by the Monongahela National Forest, Franklin works as a quiet basecamp for big adventure. **North Fork Mountain** offers long ridge hikes with sweeping views, while nearby rivers and streams draw anglers and paddlers. After a day outside, downtown slows things back down with historic streets, front porches, and local gathering spots that still feel rooted in place. Part of downtown is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, with beautiful Victorian homes and the **Pendleton County Historical Museum** that captures generations of Appalachian life and Civil War history. Today, Franklin balances that heritage with simple mountain traditions: summer nights at **Warner's Drive-In**, weekends at the farmers market and **Treasure Mountain Flea Market**, and local craft beverages that celebrate the flavors and culture of the Highlands.

A DAY ITINERARY

Seneca Rocks to Franklin

Venture deep into the Seneca Creek backcountry for waterfalls, rugged mountain trails, and wilderness views, then wind down in Franklin with a hearty meal and locally crafted spirits.

Scan for itineraries online

MORNING

Stop at **Yokum's Store** in Seneca Rocks for coffee, breakfast items, and picnic supplies for an early start to your S**eneca Creek Backcountry Hike**. You'll want to allow ample time for the day's long excursion. Pack a substantial lunch, extra water, and layers for variable mountain weather.

Seneca Creek Trail to Seneca Falls
The Seneca Creek Trail follows a former railroad corridor along crystal-clear **Seneca Creek** through one of West Virginia's premier backcountry areas. The trail passes numerous small waterfalls, swimming holes, and excellent backcountry campsites. Multiple creek crossings require waterproof footwear. The hike to **Seneca Falls** is a 10-mile out-and-back trek, but you'll be rewarded with a secluded cascade that pools in stunningly blue water.

Huckleberry + Horton + Lumberjack Trail Loop
For those wanting variety in scenery, this loop from the Spruce Knob parking area descends through spruce forest on the **Huckleberry Trail**, connects via the **Horton Trail**, and returns on the **Lumberjack Trail**. The route traverses diverse terrain from dense forest to open meadows. Expect muddy sections on the Lumberjack Trail. Navigation skills are recommended for this 10.5 mile loop.

MIDDAY

Drive to Franklin
After the morning hike, drive to Franklin for a late lunch or early dinner. From Spruce Knob area, return to US Route 33, head west to WV Route 28 North, then continue to Franklin. Allow approximately 1.5 hours total drive time.

Lunch in Franklin

- **The Korner Shop Cafe** Hearty meals after a long hike
- **AGK Italian Restaurant** Pizza and Italian fare
- **Moe Fatz Orange Cat Cafe** Hand-dipped ice cream and fresh fare

Smoke Hole Canyon Scenic Drive
From Franklin, take US Route 220 North, then join the 20-mile Smoke Hole Road (County Route 2), which winds through a dramatic gorge carved by the South Branch Potomac River. Multiple pull-offs allow you to stop and photograph the canyon's dramatic geology. The Big Bend Campground area offers river access for cooling off after the morning hike.

High Knob Trail
If you're still hungry for scenic views, from Franklin, take US 33 east for to the state line for a challenging 3-mile out-and-back to a restored lookout tower in the neighboring George Washington-Jefferson National Forest.

EVENING

After an eventful day of hiking and exploring, celebrate with a libation—or two—from a local distillery before dinner.

Option A **Swilled Dog Distillery** (Upper Tract, approximately 15 minutes from Franklin)
This dog-friendly, award-winning craft distillery offers tastings of whiskey, bourbon, gin, and hard cider with indoor and outdoor seating. Reservations are recommended for guided tastings. Check the website for hours.

Option B **Dry Run Spirits Distillery** (Franklin)
Located on a historic mountain homestead, this small-batch distillery produces traditional Appalachian applejack and maple moonshine using heritage apple trees and farm-tapped maple sap. This must-visit destination offers free tastings including a property tour and the opportunity to explore the 176-year-old homestead and surrounding trails.
Hours: Daily noon to 6 pm

Lodging

- **Vacation rentals** Options available in Franklin and the surrounding area
- **The Star Hotel** Historic hotel in downtown Franklin
- **Camping** Return to Big Bend Campground or other Forest Service sites for primitive camping



WHILE ELKINS IS KNOWN FOR ITS BREWS, local legend says that, underneath Elkins, a network of tunnels was built to connect speakeasies and rumrunners during Prohibition.







ELKINS

A vibrant mountain town where arts, history, and small-town charm meet easy access to some of West Virginia's wildest forests, trails, rivers, and outdoor adventures.

Elkins surprises people. In a region defined by steep grades and winding mountain roads, downtown is remarkably flat—walkable historic streets lined with coffee shops, breweries, galleries, bookstores, and locally owned storefronts, all framed by the high ridges of the mountains. Home to **Davis & Elkins College**, Elkins blends mountain-town energy with easy access to the Monongahela National Forest. The **Allegheny Highlands Trail** rolls straight out of downtown, while nearby roads lead hikers deep into the **Otter Creek** and **Laurel Fork** wilderness areas. Families can ride the historic **New Tygart Flyer** to **High Falls of Cheat**, climb the fire tower at Bickle Knob, or catch an evening square dance at the **Augusta Heritage Center**. Mountain bikers head for the rugged trails around **Mower Basin**, while anglers, paddlers, and backpackers spread out across the surrounding highlands.

Elkins works as both basecamp and destination—a mountain town with enough character to keep you lingering after the adventure ends.

DAY 1 ITINERARY

Blackwater Canyon Family Loop

Blackwater Canyon Family Loop is a two-day scenic driving adventure connecting Elkins and Parsons through trails, towers, and trains, with a little history thrown in.

Scan for itineraries online

MORNING

Begin the day in downtown Elkins with breakfast before heading into the forest. Several options offer hearty meals to fuel a day of family exploration.

- **TipTop** Modern coffee shop offering specialty drinks, pastries, and a relaxed atmosphere
- **Byrd's House of Donuts** Freshly-made donuts in a variety of flavors that children will love choosing
- **The Crossing Coffee Bar** Located inside the Delmonte Market, featuring specialty lattes, daily lunch specials, and a shopping area
- **Scottie's of Elkins** Classic American diner fare with breakfast served all day

Option A **Bickle Knob Observation Tower**
Drive northeast on US Route 33 into the Monongahela National Forest to reach this historic 1933 Civilian Conservation Corps fire tower. The short walk from the parking area takes less than five minutes, making this an excellent viewpoint for young children. The observation deck offers 360-degree panoramic views of Randolph County's mountain ridges and provides opportunities to spot birds and discuss forest history.

Option B **Bear Heaven Recreation Area**
Located along the same forest road, this primitive area features unique rock outcroppings and boulder formations suitable for scrambling and exploration.

MIDDAY

Option A **Allegheny Highlands Trail Bike Ride**
Rent bikes at Joey's Bike Shop in downtown Elkins (reservations recommended) and enjoy a leisurely ride on the Allegheny Highlands Trail. The first several miles are paved and flat, following the route of the historic Western Maryland Railway along Leading Creek.

Option B **New Tygart Flyer Scenic Railroad**
Board the vintage diesel-powered **New Tygart Flyer** at the **Elkins Depot** for a four-hour wilderness excursion to the High Falls of the Cheat. The train climbs through mountain grades, passes through a 1,800-foot S-curve tunnel, and crosses a high bridge over the Shavers Fork before arriving at an 18-foot-high, 150-foot-wide waterfall. A boxed lunch is included. The train operates weekends from May through October; advance booking is recommended.

Explore Downtown Elkins and Lunch
Return to Elkins to explore the charming downtown area, which offers a walkable main street with shops and restaurants like **Clementine's Cantina**, **Beanders**, and **CJ Maggie's**. After lunch, stop at the **Elkins Depot Welcome Center** and the **Delmonte Market**.

AFTERNOON

Appalachian Forest Discovery Center & Railroad Museum
Located in the historic 1902 Darden Mill, this center features interactive exhibits about local forest ecology. The upstairs West Virginia Railroad Museum displays railway artifacts and memorabilia. Both are suitable for a quick 30-minute visit and operate Thursday through Sunday from late May through October.

EVENING

Dinner and drinks in Downtown Elkins

- **Bambino's Bistro** Italian fare, including wood-fired pizzas
- **Big Timber Brewing** Small-batch craft beers and mountain-town hospitality in a laid-back taproom
- **Fox Hops Brewery** Woman-owned craft brewery serving house-made beers and food, including sandwiches and appetizers
- **Oxley House** Upscale Appalachian cuisine in the downtown historic Tygart Hotel
- **The Forks Restaurant & Inn** French–Appalachian fusion in a romantic hilltop setting, located 10 minutes from downtown and worth the drive—make reservations.
- **Smoke on the Water BBQ** Upscale BBQ in a riverside setting with creative sides and smoked meats

Lodging

- **Tygart Hotel** Historic downtown hotel with modern amenities and powerful artistic storytelling
- **Holiday, Wingate, and Hampton Inn hotels** Family-friendly chain hotels with pools and breakfast

DAY 2 ITINERARY

Blackwater Canyon Family Loop

Journey from Civil War battlefields to charming small towns.

MORNING

Begin the day in downtown Elkins with breakfast before heading to **Parsons**. From Elkins, head north on US 219 for approximately 20 miles (30 minutes). The scenic route slowly rises through pastoral farmland before climbing into the mountains of the Monongahela National Forest in Tucker County.

Corrick's Ford Battlefield

On July 13, 1861, just three months after Fort Sumter, one of the first land battles of the Civil War was fought along the **Shavers Fork** of the **Cheat River** at this site. Confederate General Robert S. Garnett became the first general killed in the Civil War, shot while directing a desperate rearguard action to allow his retreating army to escape pursuing Union forces.

The battle marked the end of a weeklong campaign in which Union General George McClellan defeated Confederate forces at the nearby Rich Mountain and Laurel Hill, forcing Garnett to retreat through rain and mud. The Union victory here helped secure western Virginia for the Federal cause and led directly to West Virginia statehood in 1863.

Downtown Parsons Historic Sites

Tucker County Courthouse

Built in 1900, this stately courthouse stands as a monument to one of West Virginia's most colorful political episodes, the Tucker County Seat War of 1893. The town of St. George had been the county seat since 1856, but the new railroad bypassed it in favor of a location that would become Parsons. On a dark night in 1893, Ward Parsons led 200 armed men to St. George, broke into the old courthouse, stole all of the county records and even the bell from the tower, loaded everything onto wagons, and hauled it back to make his namesake town the new county seat.

Historic Western Maryland Railway Depot

Located along the paved Parsons section of the **Allegheny Highlands Trail**, this beautiful 1889 Victorian depot exemplifies the architecture that accompanied railroad expansion into the mountains. Interpretive displays explain how the railroad transformed this region from wilderness to industrial center within a generation.



MIDDAY

Lunch In Parsons

- **B & J's Family Diner** Charming small-town diner offering classic American fare
- **The Sunrise Coffee Co.** Coffee, pastries, and grilled breakfast bagels
- **Piccolo Paula's Caffé** Casual eatery with American and Italian offerings
- **MR Pizza** Family-run local favorite serving hearty pizzas and wings

Option A **Fernow Experimental Forest**

In the Fernow Experimental Forest just outside Parsons, scientists are working together with nature to explore sustainable ecosystem management. Discover recovering American chestnut plantations at the Cheat District Ranger Station, or venture into the experimental forest to see firsthand historic and modern forestry methods.

Option B **Historic Swinging Bridges**

Near Hendricks and the Otter Creek Wilderness Trailhead, historic pedestrian swinging bridges cross the river, offering unique photo opportunities. Children often enjoy the gentle sway of these bridges.

EVENING

Either continue north on US 219 to Thomas and Davis (35 minute drive) and enjoy these unique sister towns that offer a plethora of dining and entertainment options, or head back to Elkins by taking WV 32 south through Parsons, then WV 72 south to Elkins. The 50-mile drive takes approximately 1.5 hours, including stops, and offers beautiful mountain views throughout.





JUST OUTSIDE PARSONS, the Fernow Experimental Forest occupies the land that was the first tract of the Monongahela National Forest. Established in 1934, it became a pioneer in watershed and red spruce research, shaping modern Appalachian forest management practices still used across the region today.



PARSONS

A riverside mountain town where rail-trails, wilderness landscapes, and small-town hospitality create an ideal base for exploring the Mon Forest.

Located at the confluence of the **Shavers** and **Black Forks** of the **Cheat River**, Parsons is a place where rivers, rail-trails, and wilderness adventures come together. Downtown cafes and pizza shops, sit just minutes from some of the region's best outdoor recreation, making Parsons a natural hub for exploring the Potomac Highlands. The **Allegheny Highlands** and **Blackwater Canyon** rail-trails meet in town, offering more than 40 miles of scenic biking and hiking through riverside valleys and remote mountain canyons. Nearby access points lead visitors to hidden waterfalls in the **Otter Creek Wilderness** and **Canaan Mountain Backcountry**, while paddlers and anglers take advantage of several access points to the Cheat River's clear mountain waters. For sweeping views across Tucker County, climb the 100ft **Olson Observation Tower**. After a day outdoors, travelers can camp along the Shavers Fork River at **Five River Campground** or settle in at the **River City Inn** to enjoy the town's relaxed mountain pace.









MARLINTON

A charming mountain town that is a natural gateway to some of West Virginia's most scenic high-country landscapes.

Marlinton sits where river valleys, rail-trails, and scenic mountain roads meet. Home to the 78-mile **Greenbrier River Trail** and an **IMBA-designated Trail Town**, the town has become a favorite basecamp for cyclists, hikers, paddlers, and anyone looking to explore at their own pace.

Old railroad tunnels and trestles carry riders deep into the forest, while trail systems at **Monday Lick**, **Tea Creek**, and **Gauley Base** offer rugged backcountry riding. Located along the 316-mile **Allegheny Trail**, it's the perfect stop for thru-hikers or launchpoint for those just gearing up. Nearby, the 43-mile **Highland Scenic Highway** climbs towards mountain overlooks and the strange, Arctic-like landscape of **Cranberry Glades**.

Downtown Marlinton is quaint and easily walkable. The historic **Pocahontas County Opera House** bring music and performances into the valley year 'round, while galleries carry local artisan wares and riverfront restaurants serve up downhome dishes. From family camping at **Watoga State Park** to long gravel rides on country roads, Marlinton makes a natural gateway to West Virginia's high country.

DAY 1 ITINERARY

Cranberry Country Scenic Loop

From endless overlooks to moderate day hikes and stunning vistas, discover the southern Monongahela's most iconic landscapes on this three-day loop.

Scan for itineraries online

The Cranberry Country Scenic Loop delivers three days of spectacular driving and moderate day-hiking through the southern Monongahela National Forest's highest mountains, from Marlinton through Richwood and Cowen.

MORNING

Enjoy breakfast in **Marlinton** at **Rivertown Café**, **Dirt Bean Café and Bike Shop**, or **Greenbrier Grille**, and pack a picnic lunch before driving to the **Highland Scenic Highway**. Head north on US Route 219 for 7 miles, then turn left onto Highland Scenic Highway (WV 150). It will take approximately 30 to 40 minutes to reach the trailheads.

MIDDAY

Option A **Red Spruce Knob Trail** (most popular)
Climb through an enchanting moss-covered red spruce forest to reach the highest elevation along the Highland Scenic Highway. This beloved easy-to-moderate trail offers a perfect introduction to the ancient boreal ecosystem that makes this region unique. Limited trailhead parking is available at the parking area between **Red Lick** and **Little Laurel overlooks**.

Option B **Black Mountain Trail**
Follow a historic 1930s logging railroad grade through dense hardwood and spruce forests. This peaceful and moderately difficult trail leads into the **Cranberry Wilderness**, offering solitude and forest immersion. Ample trailhead parking is available at **Big Spruce** and **Williams River overlooks**.

Lunch
Enjoy a picnic at one of our favorite spots:

- **Williams River Valley Overlook**
- **Big Spruce Overlook**
- **Little Laurel Overlook**
- **Red Lick Overlook**
- **Williams River Road Pavilion** (located just below the US 150/WV 86 intersection)

AFTERNOON

High Rocks Trail
Continue south on **Highland Scenic Highway** past **Williams River Valley Overlook** for 3 miles. Limited trailhead parking is available to the left.

Experience the most dramatic viewpoint on the Highland Scenic Highway from a rocky outcrop perched high above the Williams River Valley.

Return to Marlinton by taking the Highland Scenic Highway south to US 219.

EVENING

Enjoy dinner in Marlinton

- **Trailhead Pizza Company** Pizza and craft beer
- **Mountain Tavern Restaurant** Pasta, calzones, strombolis, pizza, and more
- **Dari Land** Outdoor seating for ice cream, burgers, and other American classics
- **Mim's Kitchen** Homecooked mid-century meals served cafeteria-style (seasonal)

Evening Activities

Option A Enjoy live entertainment at the **Pocahontas County Opera House**, a historic venue that has hosted quality music and theatrical performances since 1907, or **Discovery Junction**, an outdoor stage that hosts seasons First Friday events. In the mood for karaoke or trivia? Check out **Old Mountain Tavern**.

Option B Enjoy a quick hike on the **Marlinton Overlook Trail** to an elevated viewing platform that rewards you with stunning panoramic views over historic downtown Marlinton, the Greenbrier River, and the surrounding mountains. It's the perfect time for golden-hour photography as the sun sets over the valley.

Option C Wind down after a long day of mountain adventures with a riverside stroll straight from downtown along the paved Greenbrier River Trail and Marlinton's **Stillwell Park.**

Lodging Options

- **Downtown Rentals** Easy access to dining and shops
- **Moore House Inn and Cabins** Historic farmhouse and hand-hewn pre-Civil War log cabins
- **Old Clark Inn** Cozy B&B with outdoor deck and fire pit
- **Stillwell Park Campground** Riverside dispersed camping

DAY 2 ITINERARY

Cranberry Country Scenic Loop

Explore boreal wetlands and cascading waterfalls.

MORNING

After enjoying breakfast in Marlinton, head to the **Cranberry Mountain Nature Center**: Take US 219 south and continue onto the Highland Scenic Highway (WV 39) for 20–25 minutes. The Nature Center is located at the intersection of WV Routes 150 and 39.

Stop in for excellent interpretive exhibits, current trail conditions, and maps. Warm up along a short interpretive path located behind the building, which leads to a scenic overlook with views across the **Little Levels Valley**.

Cranberry Glades Boardwalk Trail

To find this gem a short 5-minute drive from the Nature Center, travel 2 miles west on the Highland Scenic Highway (US Route 39), then turn right on Forest Road 102.

Experience one of West Virginia's most unique and iconic ecosystems: a high-elevation boreal bog, typically found in Canada. The accessible boardwalk loops through sphagnum moss mats, stunted red spruce, and carnivorous plant habitat.

MIDDAY

Option A **Falls of Hills Creek Trail** (most popular)

Continue on WV 39 west for a 10-minute drive on the Highland Scenic Highway, then turn left at the sign.

A short but dramatic hike descending into a narrow sandstone gorge to visit three of West Virginia's tallest waterfalls. Expect stairs, misty air, and powerful cascades—especially in spring.

Option B **Cow Pasture & Thomas Reserve Loop** (for bog lovers)

If the Cranberry Glades left you wanting more, this longer, 7.1-mile loop departs from the same trailhead and explores the wetland wilderness boundaries of the **Cranberry Glades National Botanical Area**.

Lunch

Here are a few great picnic stops that offer restrooms, shade, and easy access back onto WV Route 39 for your drive to Richwood.

Cranberry Mountain Nature Center
Falls of Hills Creek Scenic Area
North Bend Picnic Area



AFTERNOON

Drive to Richwood by continuing west on WV 39 for 15–20 minutes.

Rudolph Falls & Gateway Trail

Just outside downtown, take a short walk along the river, starting at the **Gauley Ranger Station**, or jump into a refreshing cascade located next to the **Four Seasons Lodge** in Richwood, perfect for warm summer afternoons.

Explore Historic Downtown

Browse art galleries, walk Richwood's historic district, or stop into local shops for handmade goods and river-town nostalgia.

EVENING

Dinner

Oddfellers' Fine Foods Comfort-food classics with local charm in a restored historic building
Oakford Diner A long-standing Richwood favorite with a nostalgic American menu
CB's Hole in the Wall Casual meals in a laid-back atmosphere

Lodging

Downtown Rentals Provide easy access to dining and shops
Summit Lake Campground Located in a lakeside forest setting
Cranberry Campground / Big Rock Campground National forest camping close to the wilderness.



A FORMER TIMBER BOOM TOWN, Richwood once had the world's largest clothespin factory. It is often called the Ramp Capital of the World.







RICHWOOD

Head into the mountains for wilderness trails and trout streams, then wander a walkable downtown filled with art and unexpected culinary finds.

Richwood rewards people who are willing to take the long way. Tucked along the **Cherry River,** this small mountain town has a growing creative energy that feels thoroughly unique. Downtown is walkable and full of surprises. You'll find locally roasted coffee, contemporary Appalachian art in a gallery that looks like it was plucked from Tribeca, and restaurants that feel far bigger than the town itself. Places like **Oddfellers' Fine Foods** and **Bloomfield Richwood Art Gallery** reflect an independent streak that fits naturally beside Richwood's deep mountain roots.

Outside town, the landscape turns wild fast. **The Cranberry Wilderness**, **Cranberry Glades**, **Williams River**, and **Summit Lake** all sit within easy reach, offering trout fishing, mountain biking, paddling, and quiet backroads through spruce-covered mountains.

Each spring, Richwood hosts the **Feast of the Ramson**, one of West Virginia's oldest food traditions—part community gathering, part celebration of a stubborn little mountain plant with a powerful smell.



DAY 3 ITINERARY

Cranberry Country Scenic Loop

Discover tranquil mountain lakes and the wild beauty of the Williams River backcountry.

MORNING

Start your morning watching the sun rise at **Summit Lake**, located 15 minutes from Richwood. Follow **Highland Scenic Highway** (US 39) for 7 miles, then turn left onto Summit Lake Road and continue straight. This calm mountain lake is framed by spruce and hardwoods and is perfect for early morning photography, birdwatching, or a quiet stroll.

Summit Lake Trail
A gentle 2-mile loop tracing the shoreline, with misty morning views and plenty of wildlife.

Morning Murals & Coffee
Stop at **Rosewood Coffeehouse** in Richwood for fresh brews, locally inspired flavors, and fun merch. Take a stroll through downtown to see some of Richwood's bold murals, and visit the **Mill Whistle Arts and Richwood Heritage Center** for hands-on lumber-town history.

MIDDAY

Drive to Williams River
Depart the Highland Scenic Highway and follow WV 20 north for 30 minutes. Enjoy a hearty homestyle brunch in **Cowen** at **Hilltop Diner**.

Cowen Nature Walks
For a light walk before heading into the **Williams River Backcountry**, **Big Ditch Wildlife Management Area** offers a peaceful, family-friendly loop through forest and lakeshore habitat. Alternatively, stop by Cowen's 3 miles of multi-use downtown **Nature Trails**, located just past the IGA on Railroad Avenue, which offer a more rugged trip through Webster County's forested hills.

Williams River Scenic Backway
Enjoy one of the most beautiful and remote drives in the Monongahela National Forest by following the crystal-clear Williams River through steep-walled wilderness valleys rich in wildlife, swimming holes, and fishing access. This route reconnects with the Highland Scenic Highway, setting you up for optional short hikes in the **Tea Creek** and **Honeycomb Rocks** area.

AFTERNOON

Option A Tea Creek Interpretive Trail
A peaceful forest walk with wildflower meadows, interpretive signs, and a wildlife viewing area.

Option B Honeycomb Rocks Trail
A short and easy loop to a fascinating rock formation featuring geometric "honeycomb" weathering patterns.

Option C Complete Your Alternate Hike
If you didn't get to **Red Spruce Knob**, **Black Mountain**, **High Rocks**, or **Greenbrier River Trails** earlier in the trip, this is a great time to complete one before returning to **Marlinton** or **Richwood** for dinner, depending on your lodging.









COWEN

Cowen is a laid-back mountain town that is the gateway to the Williams River and the western edge of the Monongahela National Forest.

Once a busy railroad town, Cowen now serves as a western gateway to the Mon and some of West Virginia's best trout waters. The **Williams, Elk, Gauley, and Cranberry Rivers** flow just outside town, drawing anglers into cold, clear streams that stretch deep into the **Cranberry Wilderness**. **Big Ditch Lake** offers an easier pace, with warm-water fishing and walking trails close to town. Mountain bikers can ride Cowen's stacked-loop trail system downtown or head farther into the **Bishops Knob**, **Tea Creek**, and **Cranberry Backcountry** areas.

If a scenic drive is more your speed, Cowen has you covered with the **Highland Scenic Highway** and **Williams River Scenic Backway** to the east and the waterfalls of **Holly River State Park's Mountain Parkway** to the west—winding through high ridges, gravel hollows, and dense spruce forests that feel wonderfully removed from modern noise. Cowen works best for people who find themselves on the path less travelled on the hunt for hidden gems just around the riverbend.





THE WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY has raised trout in the Greenbrier Valley for more than a century, helping stock Appalachian streams while giving visitors a close-up look at native fish.



WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS

White Sulphur Springs is a trail town where historic mountain charm meets a new wave of restaurants, restored spaces, and outdoor recreation in the southern Mon Forest.

A top recreation destination around the time of the country's founding, White Sulphur Springs knows how to blend the rugged frontier with classical elegance and modern ammenities. Located between **Greenbrier State Forest** and the Mon, this town is finding new energy without losing its roots.

Home of the **Greenbrier Resort**, White Sulphur Springs boasts a walkable downtown filled with charming storefronts, local restaurants, breweries, and gathering spaces that draw both visitors and locals. You'll find trout streams winding through town and the 78-mile **Greenbrier River Trail** just down the road. Visitors can explore **Watoga** and **Beartown State Parks**, hike into the **Big Draft Wilderness**, go for a swim at **Lake Sherwood** and **Blue Bend**, or pedal up **Kate's Mountain**, all within a 30-minute drive. Less than 10 minutes from **Lewisburg**, White Sulphur Springs has become a polished basecamp for exploring the Greenbrier Valley and the Monongahela's southern edge.

DAY 1 ITINERARY

White Sulphur Springs to Marlinton to Durbin

Ride a historic steam train at Cass, scramble through ancient rock formations at Beartown, and cool off along the banks of Lake Sherwood.

Scan for itineraries online

MORNING

Fuel up for a demanding day of hiking at a local option like **Cook's Country Kitchen** for down-home breakfast favorites. Or for a more upscale option, make reservations to enjoy the iconic buffet at **The Main Dining Room** in **The Greenbrier** resort.

Option A Greenbrier State Forest—Rocky Ridge Trail

Begin with the signature hike of **Greenbrier State Forest**. This challenging trail summits Kate's Mountain (3,280 feet). **The Rocky Ridge Trail** ascends steeply along a ridgeline and earns the hiker outstanding Greenbrier Valley views.

Option B Lake Sherwood Trail

Drive to Lake Sherwood for a scenic loop around the 165-acre lake, with excellent ridge views. At the end of your hike, cool off with a quick jump in Sherwood's beach area.

Option C Anthony Creek Trail

Head southwest to Blue Bend Recreation Area (approximately 30 minutes) for a final afternoon hike. The Anthony Creek Trail offers streamside walking through scenic forest along a stocked trout stream at the edge of the Big Draft Wilderness Area. Even a short hike here is satisfying.

MIDDAY

Enjoy lunch in one of the many dining options in White Sulphur Springs.

Drive to Droop Mountain Area

Head north on US Route 219 approximately 45 minutes to the Droop Mountain area.

Beartown State Park

Catch your breath with this short and easy scenic boardwalk trail that explores an otherworldly landscape of towering sandstone formations, deep crevices, and boulder-filled passages. A half-mile elevated boardwalk winds through the 300-million-year-old rock formations.

AFTERNOON

Watoga State Park

Option A Ann Bailey Trail to Lookout Tower

Continue north to Watoga State Park (approximately 25 minutes) for an afternoon hike to the Ann Bailey Lookout Tower. Named for a Revolutionary War–era scout, this trail is 6 miles out-and-back. It follows an old roadbed across Pyles Mountain and Workman Ridge to a historic fire tower offering sweeping views of the Greenbrier River Valley and surrounding highlands.

Option B Arrowhead Trail to Lookout Tower

This popular 2.2-mile trail offers a moderately challenging route through diverse forest with good views. Highly rated by local hikers for its scenic quality and workout.

Option C Greenbrier River Trail

Continue past Watoga to Marlinton and stop by Greenbrier Bikes or Dirt Bean for an afternoon bike rental. With a downtown trailhead, either direction on the 78-mile rail trail will offer incredible views, but we recommend heading north for approximately 10 miles to see the historic Sharps Trestle Bridge and 500-foot-long tunnel.

EVENING

Enjoy one of the many dining options in Marlinton.

- **Trailhead Pizza Company** Pizza and craft beer right next to a bike shop
- **Alfredo's Greek & Italian** Casual Italian and Greek dishes, from pasta to pizza
- **Greenbrier Grille** Fill up on country classics with riverside dining
- **Dari Land** Outdoor seating for ice cream, burgers, and other American classics
- **Mim's Kitchen** Fill up a plate and grab one of their signature sweet treats (seasonal)

Lodging Options

- **Watoga State Park** Cabins and campgrounds within the park; CCC-era cabins offer historic charm
- **Vacation rentals & B&Bs** Wide array of downtown rentals on the riverside
- **Greenbrier Grille and Lodge** Simple rooms above the restaurant with river views
- **Marlinton Motor Inn** Basic motel accommodations in town
- **Seneca State Forest** Rustic pioneer cabins and campground about 20 minutes from Marlinton

DAY 2 ITINERARY

Marlinton to Durbin

Venture through ancient forests, historic fire towers, and secluded river valleys.

MORNING

Enjoy an early breakfast in Marlinton or Durbin and pack a lunch for a full day of adventure.

Thorny Mountain Fire Tower Loop

This rewarding 4-mile loop climbs to the 65-foot Thorny Mountain Fire Tower, featured by *National Geographic* as one of the nation's top places to embrace the wild. The route uses the **Thorny Creek Trail** along scenic **Seneca Lake**, then the **Loop Road/Allegheny Trail**, and descends the steep **Fire Tower Trail**. The historic tower offers 360-degree panoramic views of the surrounding highlands.

MIDDAY

Gaudineer Knob Scenic Area

Drive 30 minutes to **Gaudineer Knob Scenic Area** by heading north on WV Route 28, then south on US 250 toward Durbin, continuing on US 250 south approximately 20 minutes. This remarkable National Natural Landmark protects approximately 50 acres of virgin red spruce forest—trees that were standing when European settlers first arrived. The interpretive loop trail is one of two short 0.5-mile loops. The quiet, cathedral-like atmosphere is magical, and interpretive signs explain the forest's ecology and history.

AFTERNOON

Option A Smoke Camp Knob Trail

Continue to the Durbin area via US 250 north, parking at a small 2- or 3-car pull-off at the entrance of the **Lake Buffalo Recreation Area**. Near Durbin, this steep climb to a former fire tower site rewards hikers with expansive 180-degree views stretching to **Spruce Knob** and into Virginia. The trail ascends through the **Rothkugel Plantation**, an interpretive area documenting early–20th century reforestation efforts. The overlook at the summit remains relatively unknown, offering a quiet alternative to more popular viewpoints.

Option B West Fork Trail

Located in downtown Durbin, the **West Fork Trail** is a scenic rail-trail that follows the gentle grade of an old railroad along the West Fork of the Greenbrier River between Durbin and Glady, offering about 22 miles of relatively easy



terrain perfect for hiking, biking, and exploring forested river valleys. The trail winds through peaceful woodlands and river bottoms, making it a great choice for outdoor enthusiasts seeking long, uninterrupted stretches of nature, wildlife viewing, and quiet backcountry adventure.

Option C East Fork Rail Trail

With a trailhead at **Island Campground**, this remote route follows the East Fork of the Greenbrier River, passing through hemlock and pine stands and numerous small waterfalls. While you're unlikely to complete the full out-and-back unless you plan on setting up camp at **Abe's Run** dispersed campground, the trail offers beautiful valley views and interesting rock formations hidden from most hikers.

EVENING

Relax with dinner at either **Station 2 Restaurant**, where you'll enjoy comfort food and local favorites in a converted mercantile building decorated with firefighter memorabilia, or **Rustic Roots Bar & Grill**, which dishes out American bar favorites in a family-friendly atmosphere.

Lodging Options

Station 2 Motel Simple rooms above the restaurant; includes breakfast.

Castaway Caboose Reserve your own private, beautifully restored train car in Durbin

Cass Scenic Railroad Company Houses Restored two-story vacation cottages sleeping 4 to 14 guests; available year 'round

Vacation rentals Several cabins and home rentals are available in the Durbin area

East Fork Campground Developed private campground in Downtown Durbin with riverside access and amenities

Island & Lake Buffalo Campgrounds Remote Forest Service campgrounds 10 minutes outside Durbin, offering a quiet night under the stars



FOR A MORNING REST option before the day's hikes, visit the Green Bank Observatory (approximately 25 minutes south). The Science Center opens at 9:30 a.m. with free exhibits, optional guided tours, and more than a dozen easy trails on the grounds.









DURBIN

Durbin is a quiet mountain town where scenic railroads, trout streams, and backcountry adventure define the pace of life.

Positioned along the headwaters of the **Greenbrier River**, Durbin sits in the center of some of West Virginia's wildest country and anchors the state's longest hiking route, the 316-mile **Allegheny Trail**. The age of steam still shapes the town's rhythm, from the whistle of Cass Scenic Railroad's historic engines to the West Fork Rail Trail's ghost towns.

Less than 30 minutes from Durbin, **Gaudineer Knob** rises into a high-elevation red spruce forest with sweeping overlooks and cool mountain air even in midsummer. **Shavers Fork** cuts through the valley below, drawing anglers who chase native and stocked trout in some of the coldest water in the state. **Mower Basin** delivers rugged, backcountry mountain biking with long climbs and flowy downhill terrain.

And then there's the quiet. Quiet like you've never experienced before. The **Green Bank Observatory** and the **National Radio Quiet Zone** help protect one of the quietest pockets of airspace in the country. Durbin doesn't try to compete with modern life, and that's the point.



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