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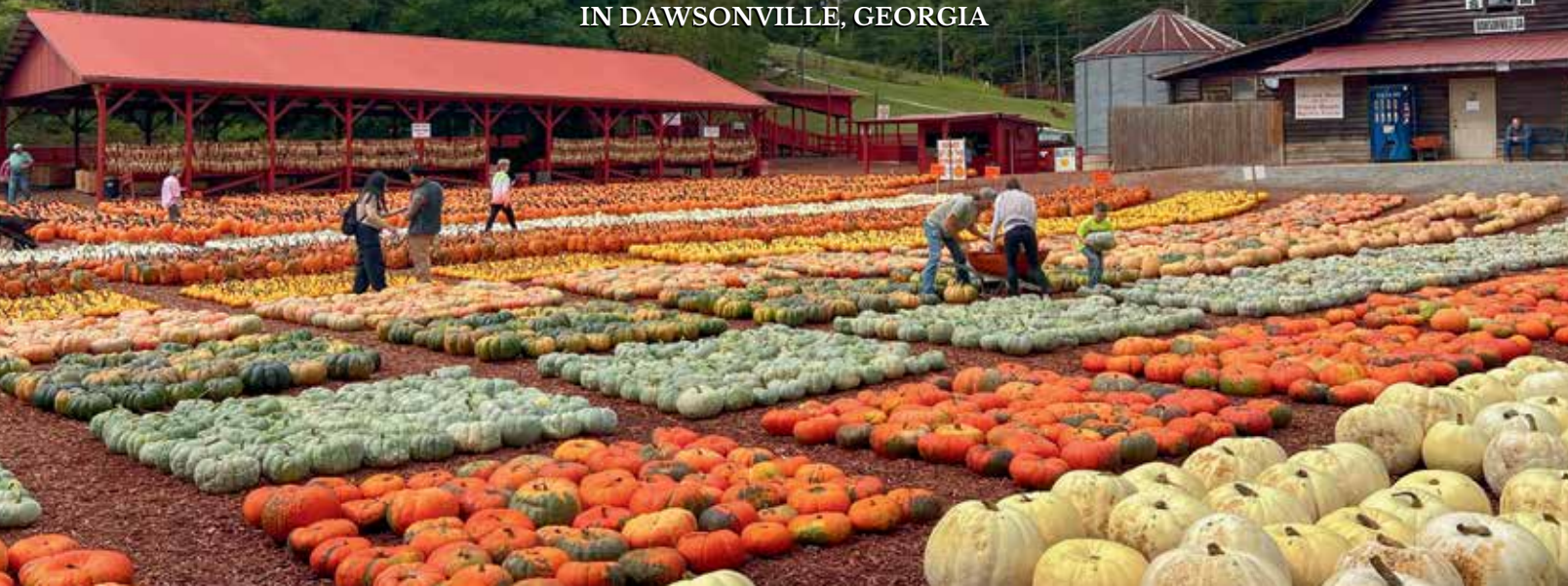
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Your mountain guide

Dear Mountain Traveler,
Welcome to the 35th Anniversary fall edition of *The Mountain Traveler* magazine. How about the view from the top of Amicalola Falls on the cover? Joni Abercrombie Anderson of Dahlonega captured fall's brilliant color and a magnificent long-range Northeast Georgia mountain view in her photograph.

Folks, it's 7:40 p.m. the day before this magazine goes to press. The final draft is pinned to large panels on the wall across the table from where I'm working, and as I'm giving it a final review, Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt are pickin' apart Scrugg's original 1949 version of "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" through the speakers of my computer. Yes, this is an exciting time for *The Mountain Traveler* team.

The writers for this magazine work for five community newspapers located in Lumpkin, White, Habersham, Rabun and Stephens counties. Their combined efforts produce this guide to our geographically blessed part of the world. *The Mountain Traveler* reminds locals of the outstanding outdoor opportunities in our backyards, and the magazine serves as a guide for our visitors. We're glad you're here!

As you read this edition, you may begin to crave a hamburger and fries. Yes, we pulled back the curtain on a few places where locals like to eat, because nothing tackles hunger better after a long hike than a hand-pattied hamburger. And if you are in Cornelia and looking for two more options, try Midtown Grill or Bigg Daddys (also in Helen).

Many of us enjoy hiking sections of the Appalachian Trail. Kimberly Brown's story gives a behind-the-scenes look at its Georgia section and how it is maintained. Keith Murden gives a first-person account of camping at Ramrock Mountain. There is also a feature on the Bartram Trail by Megan Horn.

Did you ever wonder how Rabun county's Warwoman Dell got its name? Or the origin of Screamer Mountain, also in Rabun County? Well, Enoch Autry does his best to explain. And check out Matt Akien's story on the historic Holly Theatre in downtown Dahlonega.

While you are reading through this edition, make sure to check out the ads from our advertising partners. These local entrepreneurs stand ready to make your weekend or day trip one you will not forget.

Here's to fall! We are glad you are spending some time with the perfect guide to hone your skills as a true mountain traveler. Y'all have fun out there, and make sure to fill your lungs with our cool mountain air. We believe it will fix what ails you!

Alan NeSmith

Publisher

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On the cover: Joni Abercrombie Anderson of Dahlonega took this photo at the top of Amicalola Falls at peak fall color.



Photo/Joni Abercrombie Anderson

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- ☐ Explore Dahlonega's golden history at a mine or the Gold Museum.
- ☐ Hike on the nearby Appalachian Trail, at Yahoola Creek Park or Lake Zwerner.
- ☐ Jam to live music at local venues.
- ☐ Visit Cane Creek Falls, Dicks Creek Falls or DeSoto Falls.

The historic Old Lumpkin County Courthouse houses the Gold Museum. Photo/Dahlonega Nugget

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Keith Murden, below, spent the night under the stars on Ramrock Mountain. The mountain gets its name from the chunky boulders visible along the trail and at the summit, above.

A rugged climb

Ramrock Mountain offers accessible AT camping

**STORY AND PHOTOS
BY KEITH MURDEN**

Ramrock Mountain rises to an elevation of approximately 3,200 feet above sea level and is well-known for having a spectacular view of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

It can be accessed by parking at Woody Gap, right off of Georgia State Route 60, and heading 1.5 miles south on the Appalachian Trail.

“Ramrock” is regional folk terminology used to describe rugged, bare rock

outcroppings like the ones that dot this particular mountain’s ridge and peak.

Hiking northbound from Woody Gap is another popular option, especially for day hikers. A short but steep one mile trek in that direction leads visitors to Preacher’s Rock, another local outcropping with a unique name.

Legend has it that a 19th-century lay minister would practice his sermons from atop the breathtaking overlook, his booming voice echoing through the valleys below. And while it offers a breathtaking view, space for overnight





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The summit of Ramrock Mountain offers access to primitive camping sites.

camping is extremely limited.

A 45-minute hike in the opposite direction leads to the Ramrock summit, which offers convenient access to several primitive camping sites from a nearby side trail.

CHASING DAYLIGHT

I arrived at the Woody Gap parking lot on Hwy. 60 at 6:20 on a Saturday evening, leaving precious little time to complete the hike before dark.

I scrambled across the busy highway to head south from the smaller Woody Gap parking lot, following the familiar white blazes that mark the Appalachian Trail. I meandered through the woods on a narrow, rocky path with a fairly steep drop-off to the left.

As someone who starts to get a little nervous around ledges, I was relieved to have the reinforcement of a fiberglass hiking pole that my co-worker had lent me ahead of the trip.

The trail descended in elevation a little at first, eventually winding through a ferny, boulder-filled forest.

I stopped there to take a short break and lay down my burdensome equipment. Even after dropping some weight at the Woody Gap parking area, I had

still brought too much gear.

The various straps and buckles felt like they were cutting deeper and deeper into the tender flesh of my back and shoulders with each step.

But I continued maneuvering over the jutting rocks and scrambled up a series of primitive stone stairs, making the final ascent to the rocky summit of Ramrock Mountain just as the sun was setting on the horizon.

The view was impressive, with the lights of downtown Dahlonega and stars growing visible in the distance. But I still had to set up my campsite — and daylight was waning.

NIGHT LIFE

Fortunately, I had no trouble locating the primitive sites. I set up my tent as fast as I could, and quickly built a fire with some partially-burned wood left behind by a previous hiker.

I was too exhausted to cook, so I hung a bear bag with my uneaten meal over the limb of a tree upwind from my campsite.

Finally, I gathered some more dead-fall to keep the campfire burning as long as possible.

I basked in its comforting glow for a

couple more hours, scanning the airwaves with a handheld two-way radio that I had brought along for company.

After all the broadcasters on the channel signed off for the night and the cozy roar of the fire gradually gave way to blinking embers, I reluctantly threw the rest of my gear inside the tent and crawled in, zipping my fragile portal to the outside world shut.

MORNING REFLECTION

The next morning, I returned to the overlook to enjoy the view in full daylight. Unfortunately, a thick haze obscured much of the mountain backdrop that I had caught only a fleeting glimpse of the night before.

I finally encountered another hiker for the first time as I was taking some pictures. He told me on a clear winter's morning, sunlight can be seen reflecting off of Atlanta's tallest buildings, roughly 65 miles to the south.

And while I don't believe I'll be planning any solo camping adventures in the freezing cold, I would recommend a round-trip day hike to Ramrock to anyone. For less time than it takes to watch a movie, you can sample the AT hiking experience and take in an unforgettable view at the same time.



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BEST BITES

Burger highlights in Lumpkin County

Strike gold at Public House

The BBQ Bacon Smash Burger at Public House leans sweet in all the right ways. The double-stacked patties come smashed thin with those caramelized edges, but it's the sauce that steals the show. Their barbecue sauce is warm, smoky, almost candy-kissed, and it wraps around the bacon and beef like it was made for them. Each bite hits with a gentle sweetness first, then the savory smoky notes and savory bacon slide in behind it. It's balanced, comforting, and the kind of burger that feels like a treat that'll have you planning your next visit ahead of time.

Public House is a Dahlonega treasure worth its weight in gold. The restaurant is located at 1108 N Grove Street just a few miles off the Public Square.

— BY ELIGHA ROPER



Public House

Address: 1108 N. Grove St., Dahlonega

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday,
11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m.-1 a.m.
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The BBQ Bacon Smash Burger at Public House features two patties and house-made barbecue sauce that steals the show. **Photo/Eligha Roper**



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Address: 19 E. Main St., Dahlonega
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 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday

Spirits Tavern's Bleusion burger features bacon, bleu cheese and coleslaw. Photo/Keith Murden

Spirits Tavern scares up savory burgers

Spirits Tavern in Dahlonega opened its doors on Halloween of 2014 and has been serving up supernaturally delicious specialty burgers ever since. The key to success for Spirits is their focus on locally-sourced, farm-to-table options with no artificial antibiotics or hormones.

With 17 different specialty burgers and six different proteins to choose from, as well as the option to build your own custom creation, Spirits has a burger to satisfy literally any taste. One of the most flavorful combinations is the Bleusion, a sweet and crunchy delight with the perfect hint of spice. The Bleusion features a hand-made Certified Angus Beef patty or an alternative of your choice, topped off with applewood smoked bacon, bleu cheese, sweet southern coleslaw, spicy pickles, onion straws and Spirits' signature wasabi mayo. The Bleusion is perfectly cooked to order and comes with a delicious side, like the tavern's popular tater tots. Add a cold craft beer from one of the bar's rotating taps and you have the recipe for an artisan dining experience that's so tasty, it's downright scary.

Spirits Tavern is right off the Public Square at 19 E Main Street.

— BY KEITH MURDEN

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Irish Paradise at Shenanigans

If you're wandering around the Public Square craving a classic Dahlenega burger, you just may find yourself outside Shenanigans Irish Pub. Recognizable for its dollar-filled walls and versatile brunch and dinner menus, Shenanigans is a go-to dining choice for tourists and locals alike.

Now imagine you're sitting down, flipping through the menu, when you spot the Irish Paradise burger. Crafted by Head Chef Dominic Patton, the Irish Paradise offers a unique blend of sweet and savory flavors. An Angus burger topped with fresh avocado, homemade honey chipotle sauce, provolone cheese, and a deliciously sweet, hand-crafted pineapple mango salsa, it's sure to give you that unique taste you're looking for.

Shenanigans Irish Pub is just a block from the Public Square at 87 N Chestatee Street.

— BY NATALEE SCHIFFHAUER



The Irish Paradise is an enticing, and aptly named, entree at Shenanigans Irish Pub. Photo/ Nataliee Schiffhauer

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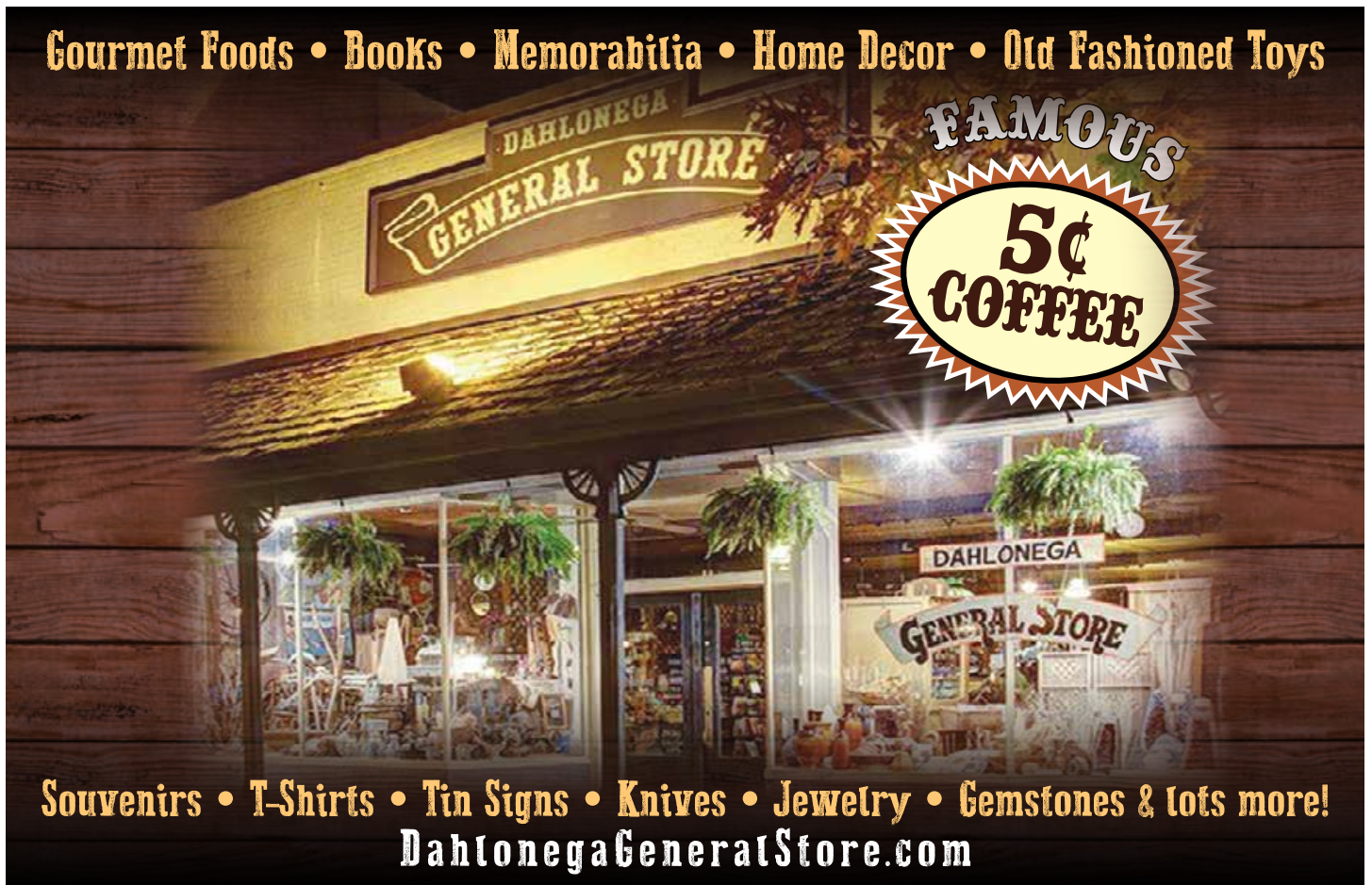
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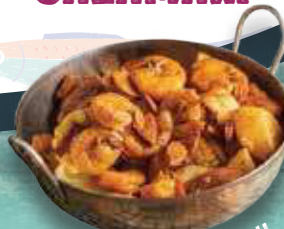
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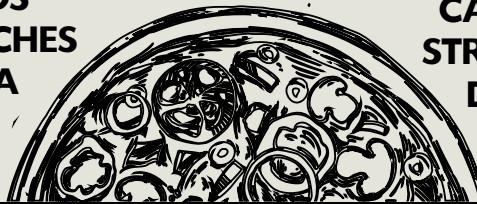
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Attendees line up outside The Holly Theater in anticipation of Sozo Bear's Night at the Movies annual film festival. Photo/Natalee Schiffhauer

Quite the production

Historic Holly Theater is home to year-round happenings and more

BY MATT AIKEN

It was once known as the Bat Cave. But that had nothing to do with any Batman-related movie releases.

Instead, it was because the then-dark and derelict downtown Dahlenega theater was overrun with, you guessed it ... actual bats.

"The Holly Theater was built in the '40s as a movie house, and then in the 1980s it had fallen into disrepair and wasn't being used," explains Marty Wallis, former chairman of the board, in a Holly history video.

But thankfully, that wasn't the final act for the West Main Street theater.

"In the early '90s, some of the fathers of Dahlenega decided that we needed a playhouse," said Wallis. "We needed an arts center, a place where the community could come together and com-



The musical cast of Children of Eden brought plenty of songs and spirituality to The Holly Theater for a series of recent performances. Photo/Delaney Nation

mune with the arts.”

That’s just what it became. And that was the beginning of The Holly renaissance that continues to this day.

In fact, it’s now hard to even imagine those dark bat-filled days at the historic theater. From concerts to plays to the occasional film fest, there’s always something happening at The Holly.

And Dahlonega resident David Zunker can attest to that. Over the years, the local retiree-turned-Holly thespian has been involved in numerous spirited productions. “It’s fun. It’s welcoming. It’s always looking for new challenges and new ideas,” he said. “And, of course, at its heart, it is theater.”

And to many it’s even more than that.

“It’s home,” said Zunker. “The enthusiasm and dedication that the people have for The Holly is a big part of it. ... It feels like The Holly, for a lot of people, is home.”

So if you want to find a home at The Holly, there’s always a show happening. You can get all the details and purchase tickets at hollytheater.com.

But why stop at the stage? As Zunker points out, there’s plenty to do in town before and after the final curtain.

“The fact that it’s right there on the downtown square, there’s the convenience of being able to walk to the square and then walk to The Holly,” he said. “You can have dinner and you can have an entire day of it.”

And no matter where you wind up during your Dahlonega visit, you shouldn’t have any trouble finding the historic hometown theater. Just look for the warm glow of The Holly marquee on West Main.

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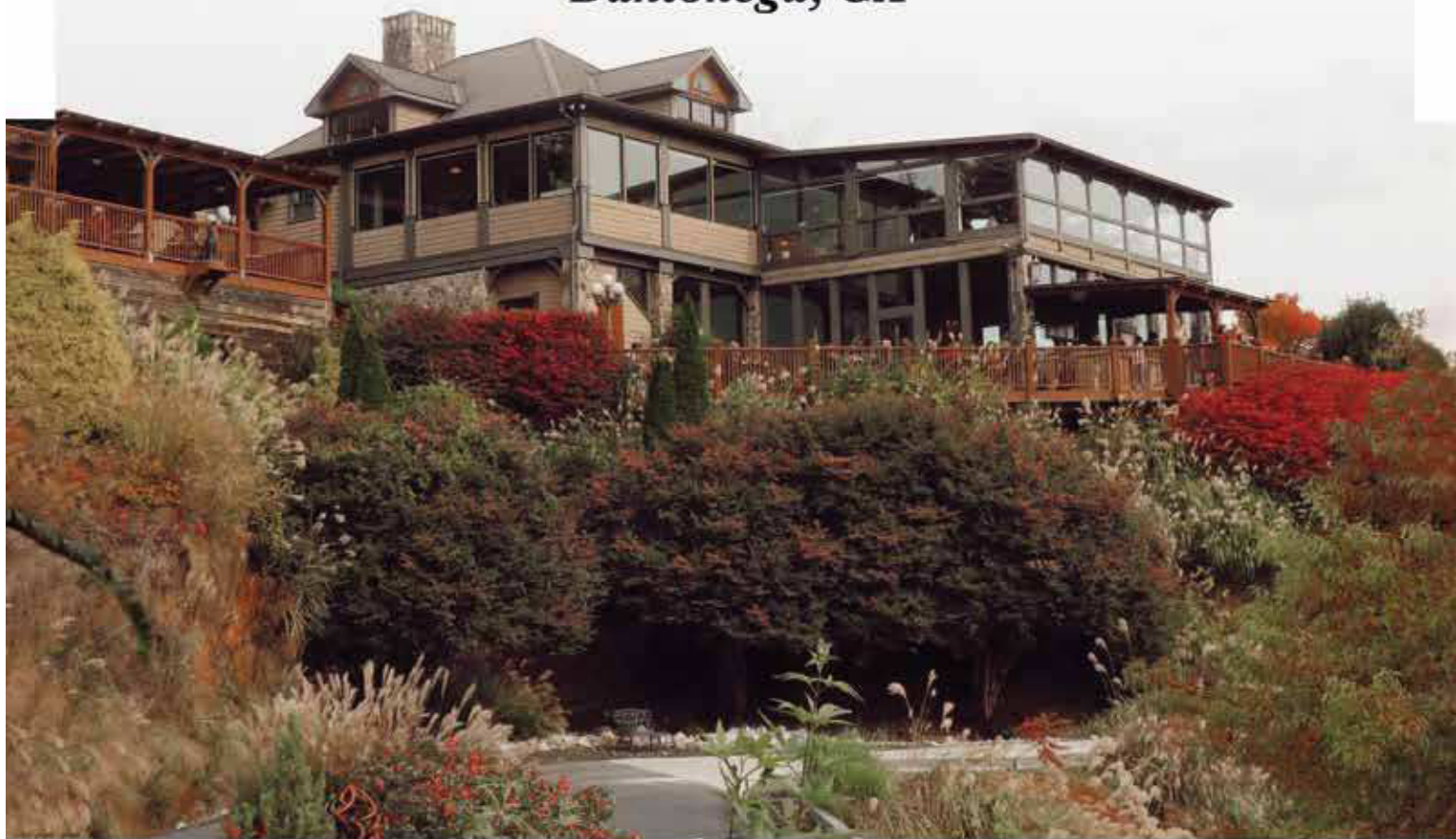
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The Gold Museum is one of the most visited historic sites in Georgia.

TOP 5

gold attractions in Dahlonega

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN BYNUM

When traveling around the Northeast Georgia mountains, be sure to visit Dahlonega and learn all about the rich history of the area.

Much of this history features gold mining — the people, places and stories that shaped Lumpkin County into what folks know today.

Our Top 5 list of gold mining attractions (in no particular order) will be sure to keep your family entertained for a day of discovering the wealth of fascinating knowledge that awaits here.

Visitors Center

The friendly folks at the Dahlonega-Lumpkin County Visitors Center are always ready to point you in the right direction toward the many gold-related sites in town. Whether you're looking for brochures or magazines, or to have your questions answered by an expert, they'll get you on the right path.

Gold Museum

Located on the Public Square, the original 1836 Lumpkin County Courthouse is now one of the most popular historic sites in Georgia. Check out

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the array of updated displays downstairs and upstairs, plus an informative film and knowledgeable staff ready to share the stories of bygone days.

Crisson Gold Mine

Once a working mine, Crisson still welcomes families to learn about the process of finding gold in local soil. Visitors can tour authentic mining equipment, discover gemstones and learn the perfect techniques for panning for gold.

Consolidated Gold Mine

If you're ready to go deep underground and back in time, Consolidated invites families to walk through the historical tunnels that miners once blasted with dynamite to find riches since the 1890s. In addition to the guided tour, miners of all ages can pan for gold, find gemstones, and even have them cut and polished onsite to take home an original piece of jewelry.

Diving Bell

Although it's found near the Square now, the Chestatee River Diving Bell was once designed to be submerged beneath the local waters and mine for hard-to-find gold. After being rediscovered decades ago and carefully restored, this historical artifact is majestically displayed in Hancock Park with informative exhibits.

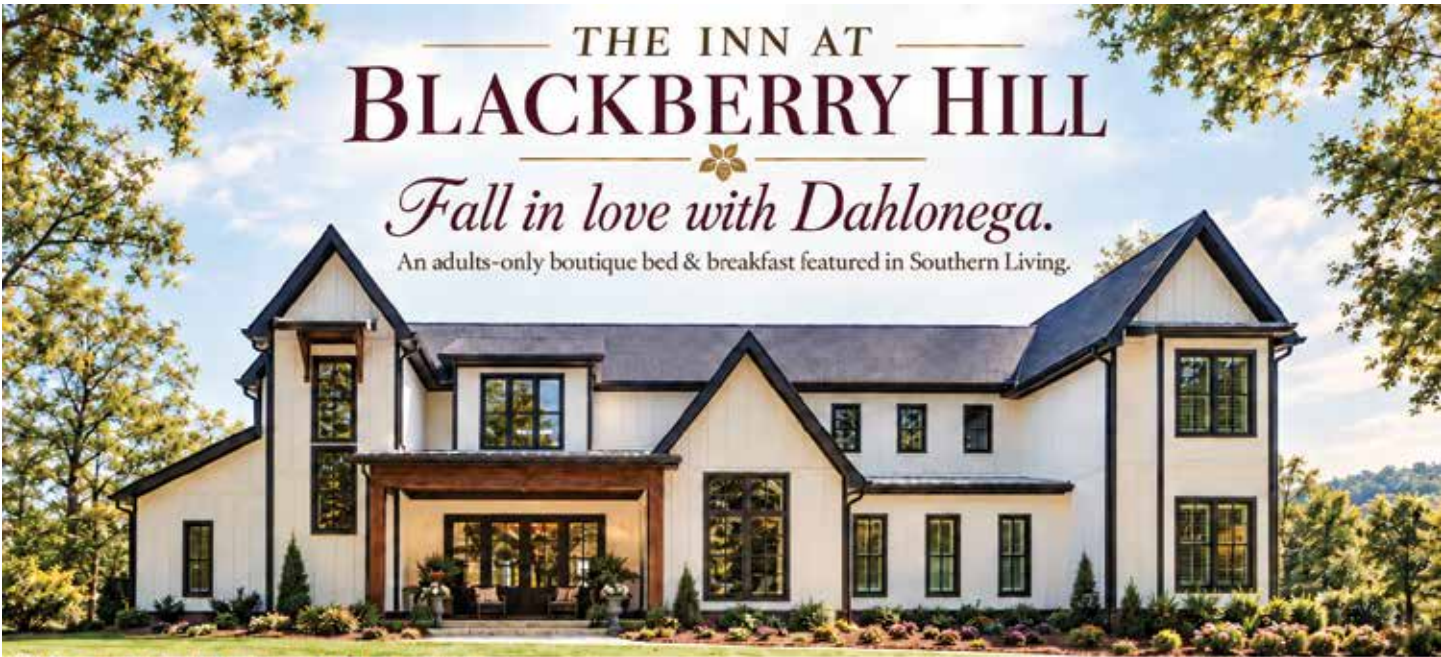


At Consolidated Gold Mine, Sara Shaw of Monticello discovered lots of treasures while gem mining.



Thousands of visitors every year learn about Dahlongega's gold mining history. At left, the Chestatee River Diving Bell was designed to mine gold at the bottom of the river.

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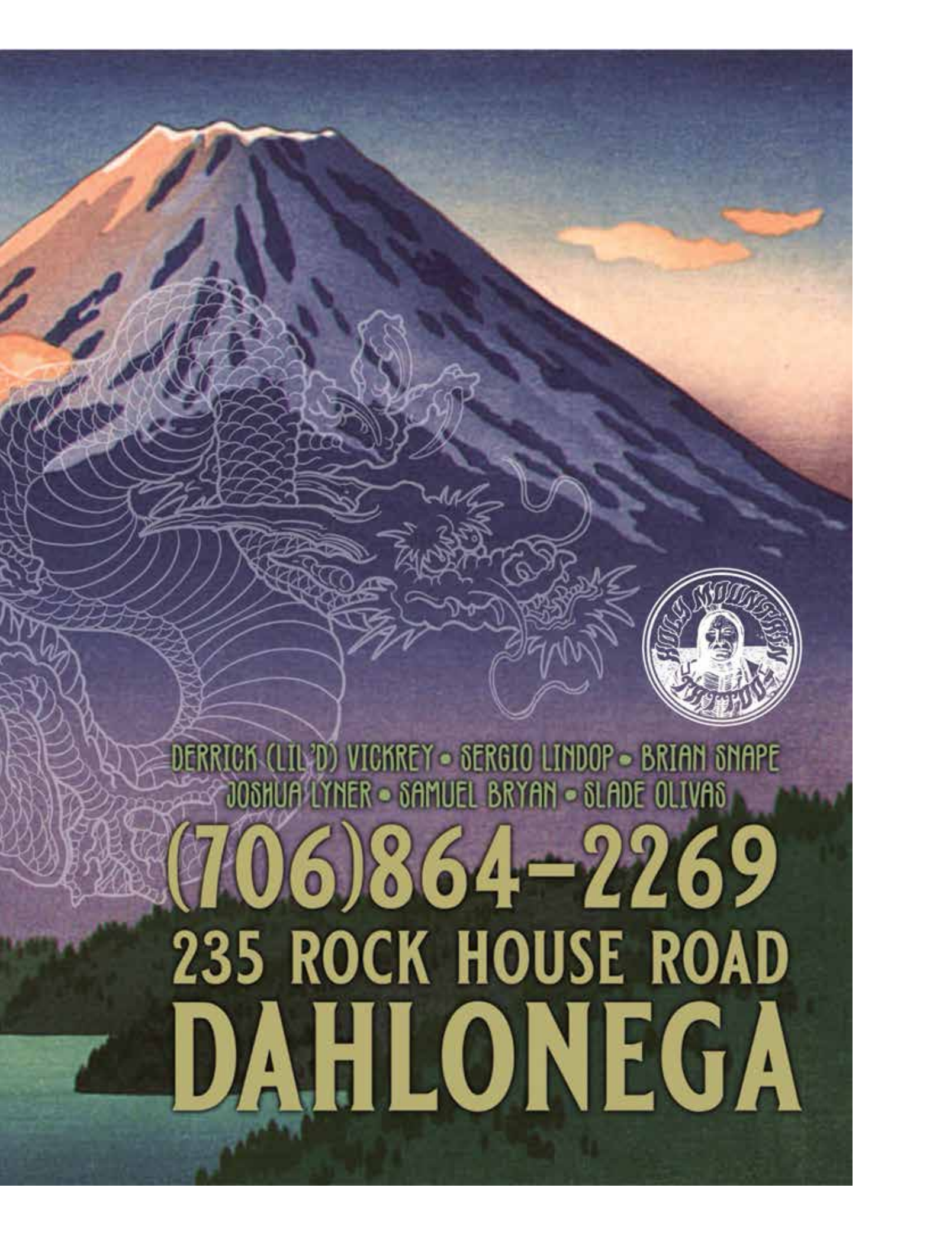


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HISTORY THROUGH MUSIC

Vintage Music Shop keeps
bluegrass on the Dhlonega square



This 1966 Gibson 12-string guitar was owned by Alvin Lee, who played at Woodstock.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ELIGHA ROPER

If you spend enough time wandering Dhlonega's square, you'll eventually hear it — fiddle music drifting down from somewhere above the sidewalks, threading through the chatter of tourists and the clink of restaurant patios. That mountainous sound belongs to John Grimm, a musician who has been pouring bluegrass into downtown for nearly four decades.

His shop, Vintage Music, on the Dhlonega square, feels like part of Dhlonega's rhythm. It's a place where vintage guitars hang like old stories, new players walk in with wide eyes and long conversations unfold as naturally as a fiddle tune.

"We deal a lot with vintage guitars," Grimm said. "Older, vintage guitars, you know, more collectible stuff."

But he keeps the door open for beginners too.

"We also have a lot of new instruments," he said. "Lower priced stuff for people that are just starting out playing."

The shop offers lessons, repairs and a chance to browse everything from banjos to amplifiers. If it has strings, Grimm probably works on it.

DAHLONEGA'S FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Grimm has spent some time playing outside on the square. Busking turned into a tradition that locals still talk about.



John Grimm, owner of Vintage Music in Dahlonega, plays from his rooftop.

"I used to go out and busk on this square sometimes," he said. "I found that you could do almost as well as playing in some venues. People just like what you're doing."

Then came the rooftop idea.

"One day, I just had an idea of playing out on the roof," he said. "So I went out on the roof and started playing, and had a little bucket on a rope."

Crowds gathered below. The bucket went up and down. Dahlonega had a fiddler on the roof.

"It was kind of fun," he said. "People really liked it, so I just kept doing it."

PASSING THE MUSIC ON

Teaching has become just as central to Grimm's life as performing. He works closely with Georgia Pick and Bow, an after-school program that introduces young musicians to traditional Appalachian music.



A row of vintage guitars wait for shoppers at Vintage Music in Dahlonega.



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"I do a lot of teaching through Georgia Pick and Bow, which is a fantastic program," he said. "It's open to everyone. Even if you're home-schooled, it's open to you as well."

The results speak for themselves.

"A lot of the kids that have gone through it have become really good musicians," he said. "Some even started playing professionally, and other ones have become teachers in Pick and Bow as they've grown up."

Those moments are ones that stay with him.

"If I teach some child a fiddle tune, sometimes I'll see them teaching another kid that same tune," he said. "It's very fulfilling to see it being passed on."

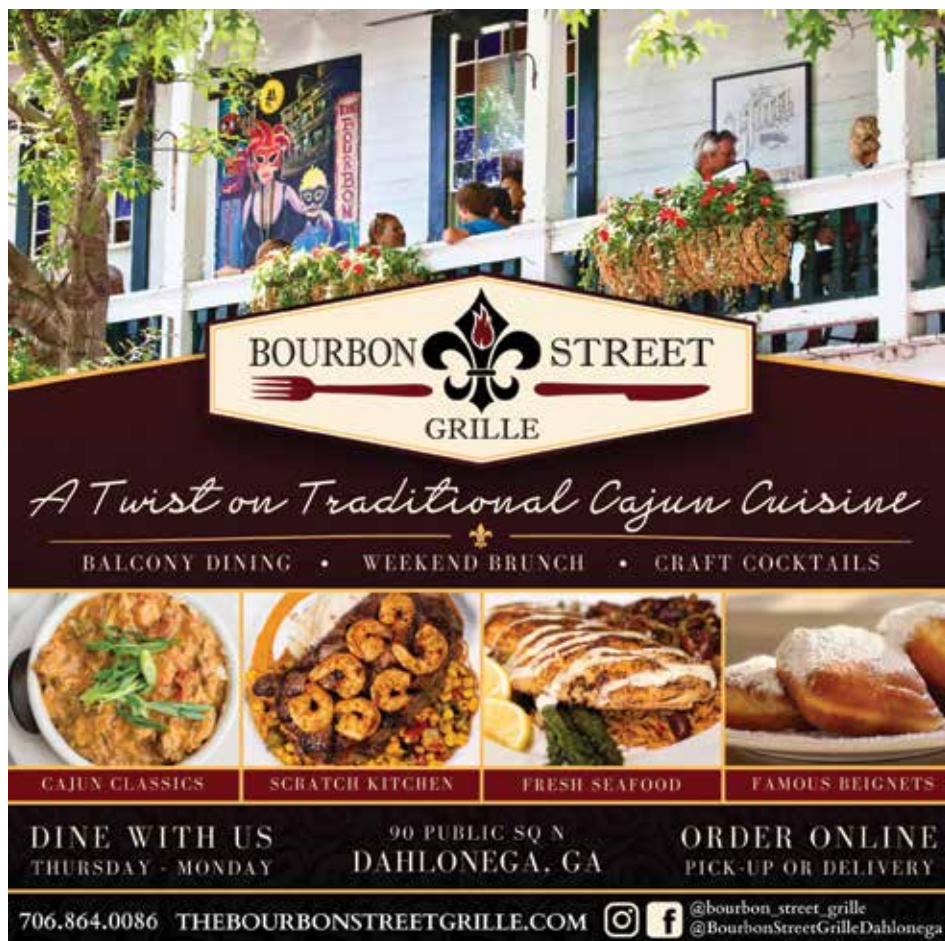
A LIFETIME IN MUSIC

Grimm has been part of Dahlonega's music scene longer than many of his customers have been alive.

"I've been in here, I think, 37 years," he said. "Since 1987. People come in and ask me all the time how long I've been here. I always say since before you were born."

His own musical journey started early.

"I started playing professionally



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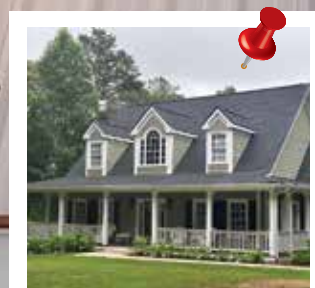
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when I was 12,” he said. “I was mostly influenced by the Beatles like most people my age.”

Rock and roll came first — Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Stevie Ray Vaughan — before he found his way into older styles.

“I got into 1920s style fiddling and banjo,” he said.

Today, that evolution continues. Grimm has earned first-place finishes

at several competitions, and his newest project has taken him across the country.

“The brand-new record out is just me playing with my son,” he said. “He’s become a very good fiddle player.”

The album recently carried him to San Francisco, California, where he spoke about the release — another chapter in a career that has become woven into the fabric of Dahlonega itself.



Vintage Music offers equipment, like these amplifiers, as well as instruments.

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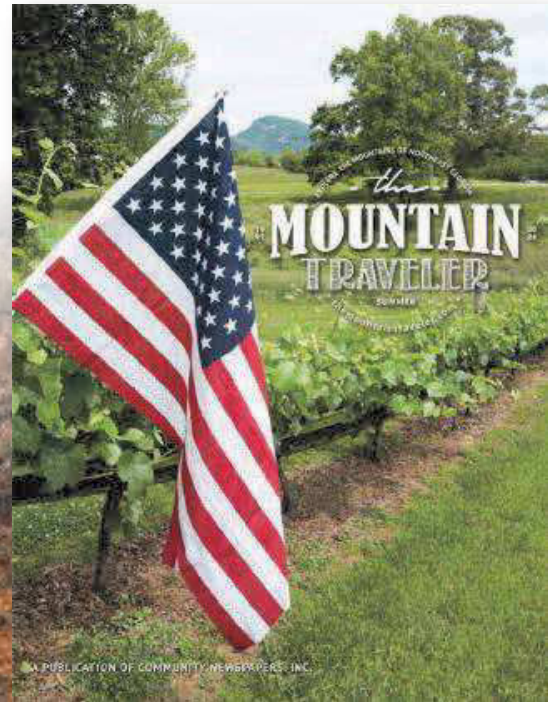
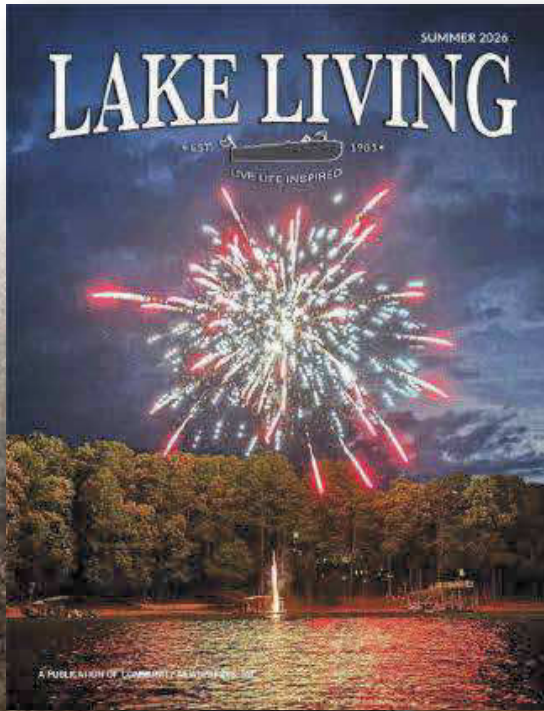


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White County

Unicoi Lake shows its fall colors. Photo/White County News

BUCKET LIST

Enjoy your fall with these can't-miss attractions and activities.

- ☐ Hike the 2-mile trail to see fall foliage at Smithgall Woods State Park.
- ☐ Visit White County's wineries and vineyards.
- ☐ Visit Helen during Oktoberfest from early September through early November.
- ☐ Chase the waterfalls at Dukes Creek Falls.
- ☐ Go antiquing and find treasures throughout White County.

Form meets function

Folk pottery museum offers a look at tradition

BY LINDA ERBELE

In the 19th century, there were no glass jars or plastic containers in which to store food. The jugs, bowls and churns created by community potters were much in demand, for utilitarian use, not as objects of art.

Face jugs, with their leering or silly faces, are often associated with folk art. Some people say they were created from a potter's whimsy, others say they were to keep the children away from the spirits stored in the jugs.

Community potters knew the best places nearby to dig clay out of the ground that would withstand the high heat of their home-made wood-fired kilns and would hold up for years of use. Most had their own recipes for homemade glazes to give their craft a sheen and a bit of design.

While the need for the items declined in the early decades of the 20th century, before the end of it – the items had become collectible pieces of art.

The Folk Pottery Museum of Northeast Georgia, co-located with the Sautee Nacoochee Center, has honored and helped to explain that tradition for 20 years.



The pottery museum was a passion project of Dean and Kay Swanson, its founding patrons. Their sons Chris and Stewart are co-chairs of the museum committee, so the Swanson family is still heavily involved with the museum. It held its grand opening Labor Day 2006.

The John Burrison Pottery studio, also located on the campus of the Sautee Nacoochee Center, was constructed and



The museum has a wide variety of examples of the pots and jugs made by the craftspeople in the area. **Photo courtesy of David Greear and the Folk Pottery Museum**

The museum includes a model of the traditional "groundhog" kiln. Pot-
ters had to crawl in it to place their pieces inside to be fired - "burned" in as they called it. Like-
wise, they had to crawl in to retrieve the pottery after the kiln had cooled. **Photo courtesy of David Greear and the Folk Pottery Museum**

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opened in 2025.

“That was something that Miss Kay had wanted for a very long time,” said Emily DeFoor, director of the museum. “Their sons championed it and it came to fruition.”

The studio offers workshops, classes and memberships.

“Folk pottery is a tradition that’s passed down within the family or learned from members of the community,” she added.

Folk potters didn’t see themselves as artists, so much of the early work is not signed. Some modern folk artists have adopted certain modern techniques, but they are still considered folk artists because the traditions were passed from family or community.

DeFoor says the museum’s permanent collection includes items from many famous pottery families in the

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A re-creation of Cheever Meader's workshop is on display at the Folk Pottery Museum of Northeast Georgia. Photo courtesy of David Greear and the Folk Pottery Museum

area, including the Meaders, Hewells, Cravens and Fergusons.

"Every six months the temporary exhibits are changed, so there's always

something new," she said. "The fall exhibition is called A Journey in Clay: the John Burrison Collection."

There is no cost to tour the museum.

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Burger highlights in White County

A smash hit on wheels

A food truck serving smash burgers with a fine-dining influence, Hoochee's River Basket brings elevated flavors to a casual favorite.

Lindsey Bryant opened Hoochee's River Basket in 2023 at the intersection of Highway 356 and Main Street in Helen. The business quickly outgrew that location and, operating as a food truck, eventually made its way to its current location behind Helen Tubing and Appalachian Roots at 9917 Ga. 75 in Helen.

Bryant said his team has always had an appreciation for fine dining, an influence reflected in the food truck's recipes and service. The same chefs have been with the business since day one, including head chef Tym Easton, who makes the French-style sauces that accompany the burgers.

Among Hoochee's most popular burgers is the Buddha Burger, combining salty bacon, sweet apple compote and spicy jalapeño with a blend of other ingredients. The Chopped Cheese, inspired by Bryant's travels to New York, features a burger patty chopped before it is assembled. The Sloppy Joe pairs tangy sauce with coleslaw and Hoochee's signature sauce.

Customers can also try Hoochee's take on Nashville hot fried chicken, which Bryant says brings an extra kick.

For Bryant, the goal is simple: to consistently impress customers with their food.

Hoochee's is open seven days a week from 11 a.m. to close, with closing times varying. To-go or-



The Buddha Burger at Hoochee's River Basket combines bacon, apple compote and jalapeño with the food truck's signature ingredients.

Tym Easton, Lindsey Bryant, Britany Bryant and Fiona Watson are the team behind the food truck's smash burgers and other menu favorites. **Photos/Carly Henderson**

Hoochee's River Basket

Address: Behind Helen Tubing and Appalachian Roots on Ga. 75 in Helen

Hours: 11 a.m.-close Sunday-Saturday

ders can be placed at 706-878-1900. For more information, visit Hoochee's River Basket on Facebook.

— CARLY HENDERSON

Built for good times

At Ol' Clyde's Table and Tavern on the square in Cleveland, treasured memories and small-town history meet hearty Southern fare.

Owner Ward Gann said it took over a year to renovate the 1940s-era building at 5 E. Jarrard Street into a welcoming space, repurposing century old wood from a barn in Hartwell for the interior.

"I found antique pieces whenever I could," he said of the décor, which includes both his grandfather and grandmother's hunting rifles hung near the front door.

Gann named his establishment after his beloved English spaniel, Ol' Clyde, who died in 2023. The quail hunting dog and family pet's portrait hangs above the stairs.

Ol' Clyde's serves diners downstairs, and there is a 17-seat bar upstairs. The bar was custom-built by local craftsman Chris Blauvelt. Gann likens its vibe to that of the pub in the 1980s TV sitcom "Cheers."

Entrees range from flavorful burgers to steaks, baby-back ribs, chicken, fish, salads and sandwiches, and are made to satisfy robust appetites, Gann said. Gann and his staff spend up to 14 hours smoking different types of meat, including brisket and pork.

"It's really, really tender and melts in your mouth," Gann said.

The brisket crowns Ol' Clyde's most popular burger, the Smokey Burger, along with cheddar, bacon, an onion ring, lettuce, pickle, onion and barbecue sauce.

As good as the Smokey Burger is, Gann said he favors the Ol' Clyde's Burger, which is topped with pork, pepper jack, bacon, lettuce, pickle, onion and jalapeño.

Burgers come with a choice of one side including coleslaw, French fries, green beans, mac n' cheese, collard greens, fried okra, a house salad, a Caesar salad, onion rings, sweet potato fries or mashed potatoes and gravy.

Ol' Clyde's also serves signature cocktails with names like Hound Dog, Cane Corso and Irish Wolfhound.

— DENISE ETHERIDGE



The most popular burger at Ol' Clyde's Table and Tavern is the Smokey Burger, topped with smoked brisket. **Submitted photos**



Bartenders Amanda Williamson, left, and Mandy Rogers pose with their boss, Ward Gann, who owns Ol' Clyde's Table and Tavern in Cleveland.

Ol' Clyde's Table and Tavern

Address: 5 E. Jarrard St., Cleveland
Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Sunday

Gather 'round the Campfire

Campfire Gather Round opened in Helen in 2024, adding its Campfire Signature Smash Burger to the burger choices available in the area.

Owners Matt Boggs and James Garity designed the restaurant with a comfortable, Western vibe.

Every hamburger bun carries the Campfire brand, stamped carefully by hand. The burger consists of two 4-ounce patties of chuck, cheese, bacon, lettuce, pickles, tomato and onion. The pickles are made right there at the restaurant. "Made from scratch" is one of the restaurant's tenets.

"All of our chicken is brined in-house, or hand-breaded if it's fried," Boggs says. "We make our own croutons and salad dressings."



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General Manager Andrea Jackson says the Signature Smash Burger accounts for 27 percent of sales. Other favorites include the fried green tomato appetizer and the Gunpowder Ribeye, which is seasoned with the restaurant's own blend of spices and herbs.

"It's the best steak in town, I swear by it," Boggs adds. "It didn't win best steak this year, but it's going to."

Campfire Gather Round

Address: 8160 S. Main St., Helen

Hours: 4-9 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday

Each smash burger gets a kiss of barbecue sauce and a bow of applewood smoked bacon while it cooks. **Photo/Linda Erbele**

The menu offers a good selection of other sandwiches and entrees, sides and dessert. It is open every day until 9 p.m. Located in the Alpine Village Shops, 8160 S. Main Street in Helen; parking is – quite unusual for the city of Helen – free.

Depending on the season, you may or may not need reservations. Give them a call at 706-878-7225 if you'd like to check.

The same ribeye is available at the Nacoochee Grill, a sister restaurant located in the historic Nacoochee Village. The Grill, a long-time favorite in the area, re-opened by Boggs and Garity in March 2026. Both reservations and walk-ins are welcome, Wednesday through Sunday, 4-9 p.m.

– BY LINDA ERBELE



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Soda Fountain Café, which won this year's White County News Readers' Choice Award for Best Burger, has been serving the community tasty comfort food for



The Georgia Burger is the most popular burger at the Soda Fountain Café. It features grilled onions, grilled peaches, bourbon glaze and Swiss American cheese. **Photo/Denise Etheridge**

Soda Fountain Café

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17 years. The café is located at 184 W. Kytle Street.

The café opened in July 2009 under the ownership of Steve and Terry Hopper. Eric and Jodi Bowen took over the restaurant in April 2011.

The café's hardworking staff includes the Bowens' adult son, Preston Bowen, and 12-plus-year employee Samantha Guess. Guess and Preston Bowen do the bulk of the cooking.

"Our most popular burgers are the Georgia burger which is topped with grilled onions, grilled peaches, bourbon glaze and Swiss American cheese, and for those who like a little heat it's the Devil Went Down to Georgia burger topped with grilled onions, grilled peaches, bourbon glaze, pickled jalapeños and pepperjack cheese," Eric Bowen said. "Our most popular sandwich is a toss-up between our



homemade chicken salad sandwich and our Philly steak sandwich."

The café's most popular desserts include a banana split, milkshakes and a brownie delight with a homemade brownie topped with Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla flavored ice cream and hot fudge.

Prices range from \$10-\$20 per person. The café is closed on Sunday.





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From left, Soda Fountain Café employees Sarah Jarrard, Samantha Guess, Kellie Boone and Joselynn Burke hold up a Georgia Burger with a side of sweet potato fries and a shake dubbed “The Elvis,” which contains vanilla ice cream, banana and peanut butter with bacon sprinkles. **Photo/ Denise Etheridge**

— BY DENISE ETHERIDGE



Soda Fountain Café won this year’s *White County News* Readers’ Choice Award for Best Burger. The café is located at 184 W. Kytle Street.

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The search for sasquatch

Are the rumors true?
Local researcher holds out hope

BY CARLY HENDERSON

Driving through White County, it is hard to miss Bigfoot.

The legendary creature stands in residents' yards, greets visitors outside businesses and appears on signs and decorations throughout the mountains. But behind the roadside statues and wooden cutouts is a more elusive question: Has the creature itself ever walked through White County?

Most U.S. Bigfoot sightings occur in the Pacific Northwest. Even so, people

A Bigfoot statue stands outside the Bigfoot Event Hall and Conference Center in Sautee Nacoochee.
Photo/Carly Henderson





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The Squatch Show's sign hangs above the entrance to the Bigfoot-themed shop in downtown Helen. Photo/ Carly Henderson



have claimed to see sasquatches within White County's borders for at least the last 50 years.

Reports go as far back as the late 1970s, when campers reportedly spotted a sasquatch on Lynch Mountain. In November 1999, a woman reported seeing a sasquatch cross U.S. 75 near Duke's Creek while heading toward Helen. The most recent documented Bigfoot sighting in White County listed by the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization was in 2009, when a man reported seeing a sasquatch in broad daylight near Duncan Bridge Road in Cleveland.

Bigfoot researcher Matt Pruitt says the Duke's Creek sighting is especially compelling because the witness had an unobstructed, close-range view illuminated by her headlights.

But a compelling report isn't the



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Biggy, a large Bigfoot statue, stands outside the Helen Hat Company in Helen. **Photo/Carly Henderson**

same thing as proof.

For Pruitt, that uncertainty is what makes the search interesting. He said many people who report encounters are well-regarded members of their communities, familiar with the local wildlife and had no prior belief in the existence of a North American ape.

So, does the creature really call White



Bigfoot researcher and author Matt Pruitt, who is from White County, explores during a Bigfoot expedition. **Submitted photo**

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BIGFOOT SIGHTINGS IN WHITE COUNTY

Reports compiled by the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization

Summer, mid-1970s: Two campers reported seeing a sasquatch at night on Lynch Mountain in the Sautee-Nacoochee area.

Summer, 1979 or 1980: A man searching for artifacts reported seeing a sasquatch in daylight at the foot of Horseshoe Mountain.

October 1990: Six young men reported seeing a sasquatch run up a steep embankment in the Upper Chattahoochee River Valley.

November 1999: A woman reported seeing a sasquatch following Duke's Creek across U.S. 75 while heading north toward Helen.

Late 1990s: A local fire and rescue professional and his friend reported seeing a sasquatch being pursued by dogs in the early morning on Pink Mountain.

Early 2000s: Two women reported seeing a sasquatch illuminated by floodlights near a cabin along Bean Creek.

March 2004: A married couple reported seeing a sasquatch in daylight while hiking in Andrews Cove.

October 2004: A woman reported seeing a sasquatch cross her backyard in the Sautee-Nacoochee Valley.

March 2009: A man driving south on U.S. 75 reported seeing a sasquatch in daylight near Duncan Bridge Road.

More information on the BFRO and sightings can be found at bfro.net. More information on Matt Pruitt and his research can be found at mattpruittonline.com.



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County home? Where would someone look if they wanted to search for Bigfoot themselves?

Pruitt recommends starting anywhere in the Chattahoochee National Forest. He said the forest provides remote, wooded habitat suitable for large, omnivorous mammals like a sasquatch.



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A gallery wall inside The Squatch Show in downtown Helen showcases Bigfoot-themed artwork and memorabilia. **Photo/Carly Henderson**

While many reported sightings occur where forests meet roads and rural properties, Pruitt believes the most likely places to encounter a sasquatch would be the more secluded portions of habitat that few people visit.

Hikers, hunters and outdoor explorers can listen for vocalizations that Pruitt describes as loud, sustained moaning howls that ascend and descend in pitch. They can also look for large, human-like footprints. Pruitt says the most compelling examples are about 14 to 16 inches long.

So, is Bigfoot a White County resident? Does he stroll through downtown Helen or wander the Cleveland square? Maybe he spends his days tucked away in the valleys of Sauttee-Nacoochee, far from the roads and tourists.

There is, of course, no way to know for sure. The mystery is what makes it interesting.

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A plastic skeleton rests inside a coffin in the back of the hearse used by Georgia Walking Tours for its Helen Haunts and History Walk.

Haunted Helen?

New tours delve into the area's paranormal history

**STORY AND PHOTOS
BY CARLY HENDERSON**

I'm a skeptic, but I began the Helen Haunts and History Walk with the secret hope that something spooky would happen.

My mom and I met Lilly and Brent Futo, owners of Georgia Walking Tours, outside Two Tire Tavern in Helen, where they were waiting in a decked-out hearse, complete with a coffin and plastic skeleton inside.

Brent asked whether we believed in the paranormal. My mom does. I'm

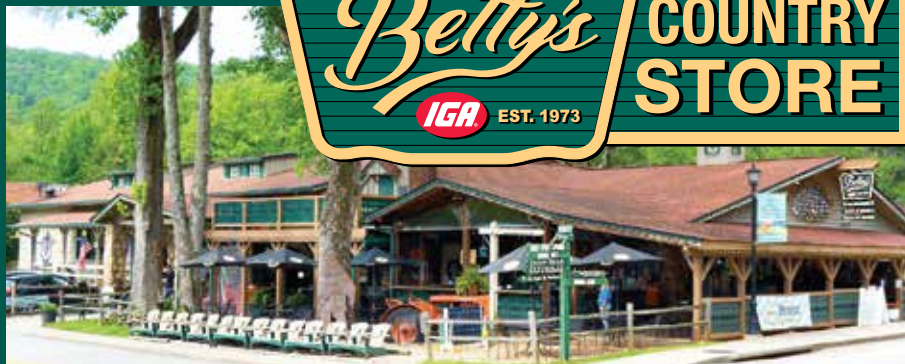
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Georgia Walking Tours owners Brent and Lilly Futo stand in front of the hearse used during the Helen Haunts and History Walk.



somewhat on the fence.

Brent and Lilly's enthusiasm for the subject was obvious; they had traveled to haunted destinations from Salem to Romania, where they were married at Bran Castle in Bran, Romania.

We set off through downtown Helen for the two-hour, two-mile walk, following stories of hauntings, history and even serial killers. Brent told us he considers himself somewhat of a skeptic, too, saying about 95 percent of paranormal experiences can be explained. As for the other 5 percent, well...

As we walked, he connected those unexplained stories to Helen's history, which intertwines with its legends. He told us about the gold rush and lumber industry that shaped the town, its transformation into Alpine Helen and the displacement of the Cherokee people along the Trail of Tears. Some people, he explained, believe the land carries a lingering curse.

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stevie@kassoufinsurance.com

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Top left to right: Jeremy McClure, Stevie Kassouf, Robby Kassouf.

Bottom left to right: Lisa McClure, Tracie Eversole, Sonya Kassouf (with Ryleigh Kassouf and Camden Kassouf), Delene Schoolman and Deirdre Dockery

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As the sun began to set, the streets of Helen grew quieter and less crowded. Eventually, it seemed we were the only ones out, save for Lilly and Brent and the increasingly eerie stories they were telling us about the places along our route.

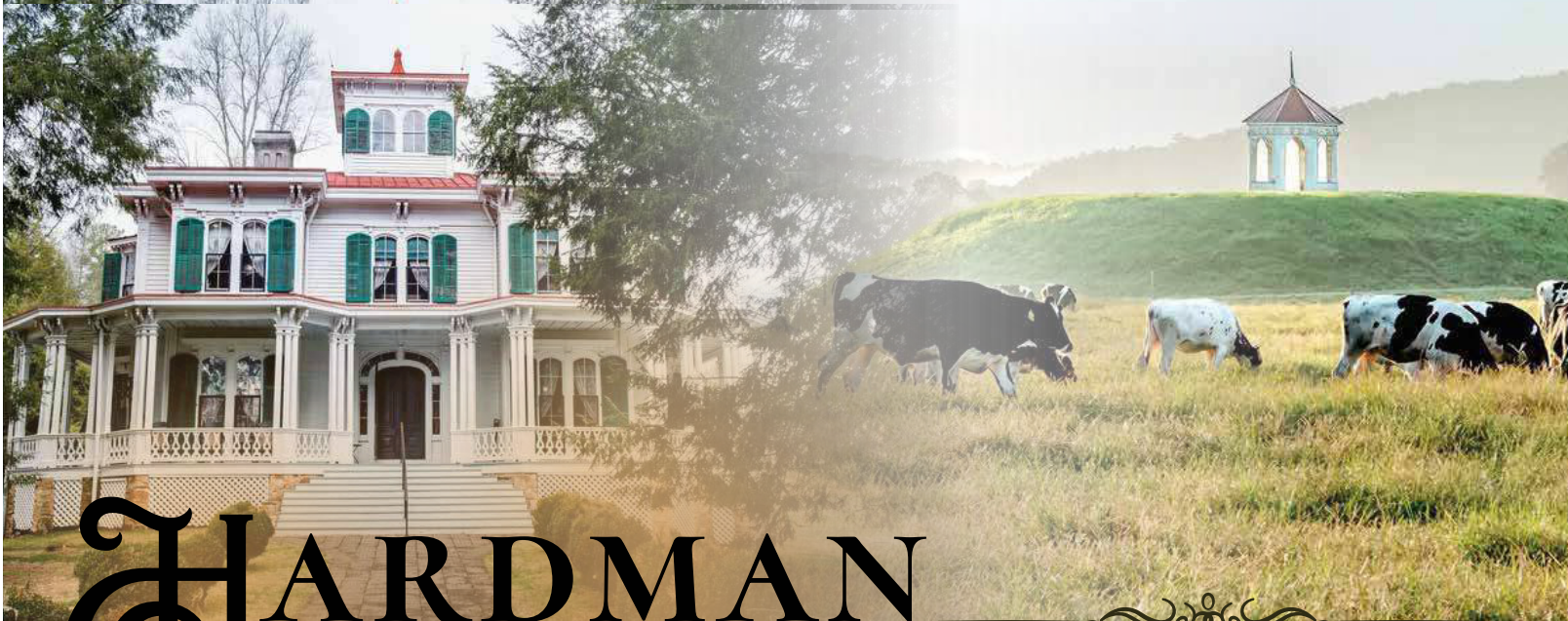
Brent also explained that four things can be haunted: land, buildings, objects and people. By the time we returned to Two Tire Tavern, I was ready to see if the stories we had been hearing had any substance.

We prepared to enter the tavern's basement, which Lilly and Brent explained was once used to treat people injured during Helen's lumber days. Brent said the tavern has more paranormal activity than any other supposedly haunted location he has visited. Lilly shared a story of a little girl rumored to haunt the site, known for moving a teddy bear from spot to spot.

We stood in the basement, equipped with an EMF (electromagnetic field) detector. The meter never went off, but the basement was unsettling enough on its own as Lilly and Brent recounted strange experiences from the building's past and present, right where we were standing.

The tour ended as it began, with the hearse. Brent and Lilly drove us back to our car— not a part of the tour, but a pretty cool bonus. We headed home, successfully spooked.

For more information about Georgia Walking Tours and its tours of Helen, visit georgiawalkingtours.com.



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- ☐ Visit one of the county's three state parks: Black Rock Mountain, Tallulah Gorge and Moccasin Creek.
- ☐ Go rafting on the Chattooga, and possibly brave the Bull Sluice rapids.

The view from Screamer Mountain in fall.
Submitted photo



Rabun Bald, Georgia's second-highest peak, features breathtaking views of Rabun County. The hike to the top is nearly a 6-mile round trip on the Bartram Trail. Photo courtesy of Peter McIntosh and Forward Rabun

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BY WESLEY BRANCH

Rabun Bald, Georgia's second-highest peak sitting at an elevation of 4,696 feet, is more than just its breathtaking views. It is a landmark representing Rabun County history and the history of Georgia.

In December 1819, the Georgia General Assembly passed an act which founded Rabun County, Georgia's 47th county, comprised of land ceded by the Cherokees. The county was named after William Rabun, a former Georgia governor who died almost two months before the county was established.

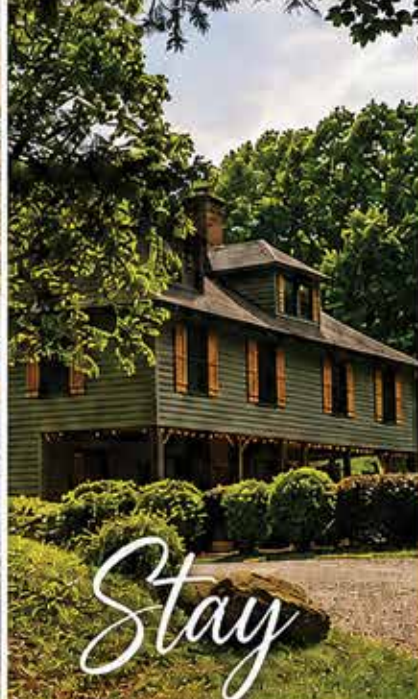
As a teenager, Rabun, formerly of Halifax County, North Carolina, moved to Georgia in 1785 to Greene County – later Hancock County.



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In 1805, Rabun began his political career and was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives. In 1810, he was elected to the Georgia senate and served as president of the senate until 1817, when he took over as the governor of Georgia following David B. Mitchell's resignation.

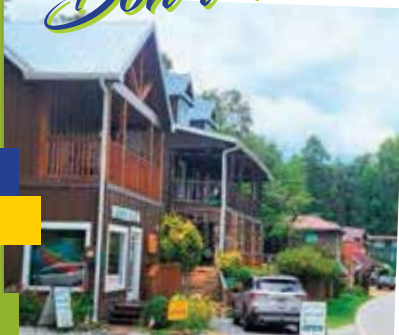
Later that year, he was elected to a full term as governor from the Democratic-Republican Party, but his term lasted just over two and a half years and ended at his unexpected death.

With the naming of Rabun County came the name Rabun Bald, the highest point in Rabun County and the second highest in Georgia after Brasstown Bald. The mountain has views that extend more than 100 miles for hikers of today to take in. The peak of Rabun Bald is

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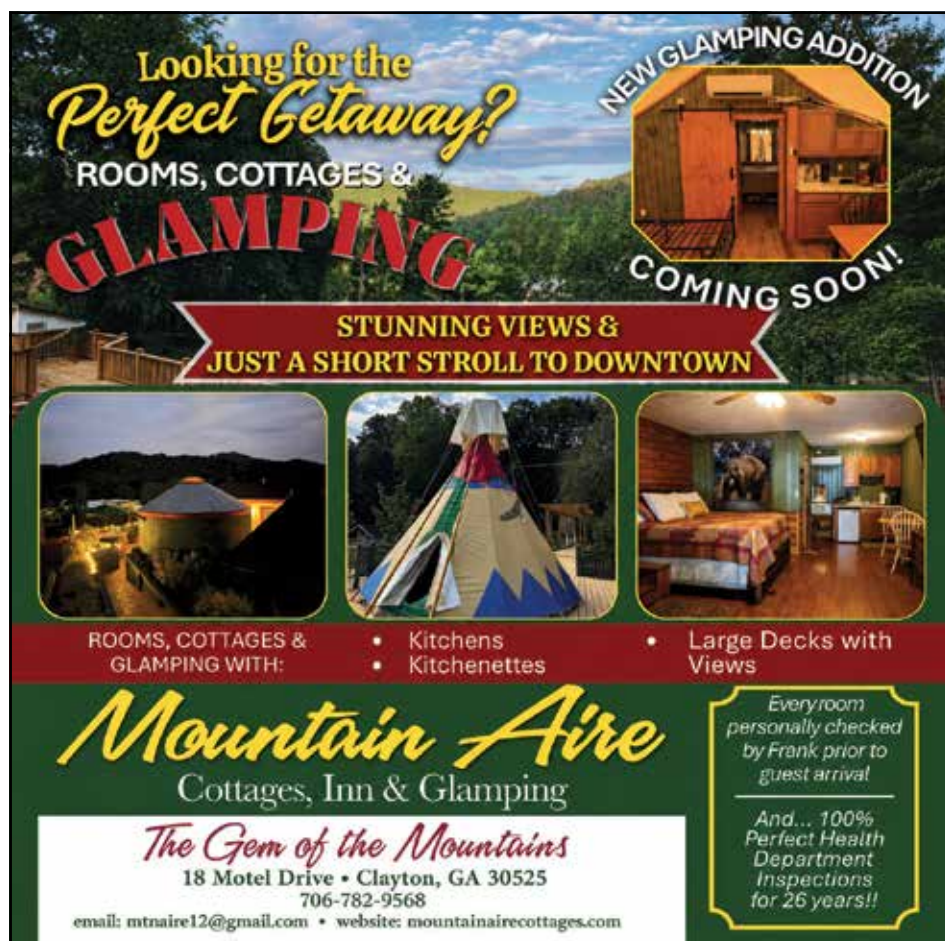
Getting there

From Clayton, take US23/US441/GA15 north to Dillard. In Dillard, turn left onto GA246 toward Sky Valley. Continue into Sky Valley, then turn left onto Old Mud Creek Road and follow it to Beegum Gap, where you'll access the Bartram Trail to the Rabun Bald summit.

accessed via the Bartram Trail system, named for naturalist William Bartram's journey from 1773 to 1777 across parts of Georgia, North Carolina, and other southern states.

According to Native American legend, Rabun Bald is occupied by fire-breathing demon people and according to reports, some campers have heard strange sounds during the night.

Today, Rabun Bald continues to showcase its scenic views and is still one of the most recognizable natural features in Georgia.



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BEST BITES

Burger highlights in Rabun County

Don't forget the sauce

“You gettin’ your usual?”

It’s the phrase regular customers hear when they walk into Five Points Grocery and smell the aroma of fresh burger patties sizzling on the grill.

Travelers through the Northeast Georgia mountains who are looking for Rabun County’s best burger can journey off the beaten path to the local convenience store, known to locals simply as “Five Points,” located at 762 Highway 76 East, Clayton.

The burgers are so good, in fact, readers of *The Clayton Tribune* voted them the best in the 2026 Readers’ Choice Awards contest.

“We try to make people feel welcome,” said Rita Bradshaw, who has been making the burgers at the location for over 16 years.

Five Points Grocery is owned by Shayne and Tora Beck and has been a local staple for decades.

“The burgers are amazing,” Tora said, noting the love and effort Bradshaw puts into them.

The burgers at Five Points are hand-pattied every day with the meat and veggies coming from local grocery store, Boles Market, fresh each morning.

Customers who order their burger



Five Points Grocery was voted Rabun County’s Best Hamburger in the 2026 Readers’ Choice Awards contest, as voted by readers of *The Clayton Tribune*. In front of the sign that they proudly display at the store is this double cheeseburger “all the way” with lettuce, tomatoes, pickles, onions, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and special sauce. Onion rings can be added to make it a meal. **Photo/Megan Horn**

Five Points Grocery

Address: 762 Highway 76 E., Clayton
Hours: 6 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Saturday;
lunch starts at 11 a.m.

“all the way” will get lettuce, tomatoes, pickles, onions, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and homemade special sauce, the ingredients of which are classified.

Additions include cheese, bacon and homemade coleslaw. You can even choose to make your burger a double.

Beck said that they appreciate all of their customers and look forward to serving everyone, whether locals or visitors.

“I love people,” Bradshaw said. She said she knows just about every customer and many of them come several

times a week.

Dick Huseman said he visits Five Points about once a week to buy a burger.

"It's the best burger going. And it's the sauce that makes it," Huseman said. "This is always a treat for me."

Bradshaw said the restaurant sells an average of about 40 burgers a day, but has sold as many as 100 in one day.

"I sell more of them than anything else," Bradshaw said about the burgers. "It's plenty to fill you," she said about the portions that are easily

shareable.

Customers can choose to add fries or onion rings to their burgers as well and make it a meal.

"It's just so fresh," Andrew Lumbert said. Lumbert is their local delivery man who will enjoy a burger for lunch about once a week. He described Five Points' burgers as some of the best he has ever had.

Five Points Grocery is open for convenience shopping Monday through Friday, 6 a.m.-7 p.m. and Saturdays, 7 a.m.-7 p.m. It is closed on Sundays.

The grill at Five Points is open weekdays, Monday-Friday starting at 6 a.m. for breakfast and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. for lunch. Breakfast is served all day.

There are many delicious breakfast options to choose from as well, including homemade biscuits and gravy.

As you leaf-lookers travel through the mountains, make going to Five Points Grocery for a burger your usual stop off the beaten path.

— BY MEGAN HORN

Burgers with a smash at 'The Last of the Dives'

Travelers venturing on the west side of Rabun County will find a local small-town landmark, Lake Burton Café: "The Last of the Dives."

It's located at 72 Jones Branch Road, Clayton, just off the beaten path from Highway 76 West and a few miles from Lake Burton.

Burger lovers will not be disappointed in the many options that are available to them at the restaurant, including single, double and triple smash burgers.

Lake Burton Café owner Heidi Timko said the smash burger includes a 3-ounce patty with grilled onions, American cheese and smash sauce. The smash sauce ingredients are confidential.

Timko has owned the business since 2001, but the dive itself has been around since the 1940s.

Timko said she personally enjoys the smash burgers, which are a new addition to the menu.

If you are still hungry, you can "build your own burger." The 6-ounce burger can be topped "all the way" with mayonnaise, mustard, ketchup, pickle, lettuce, tomato and onion.

The burgers are all hand-pattied.

Additions include a variety of cheese op-



Smash burgers are a new addition to the menu at Lake Burton Café. The smash burgers are 3-ounce burgers topped with grilled onions, American cheese and smash sauce. **Photo/Megan Horn**

Lake Burton Café: 'The Last of the Dives'

Address: 72 Jones Branch Road, Clayton
Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-10:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday

tions, mushrooms, chili, jalapeños, grilled onions, bacon and an extra patty to make it a double.

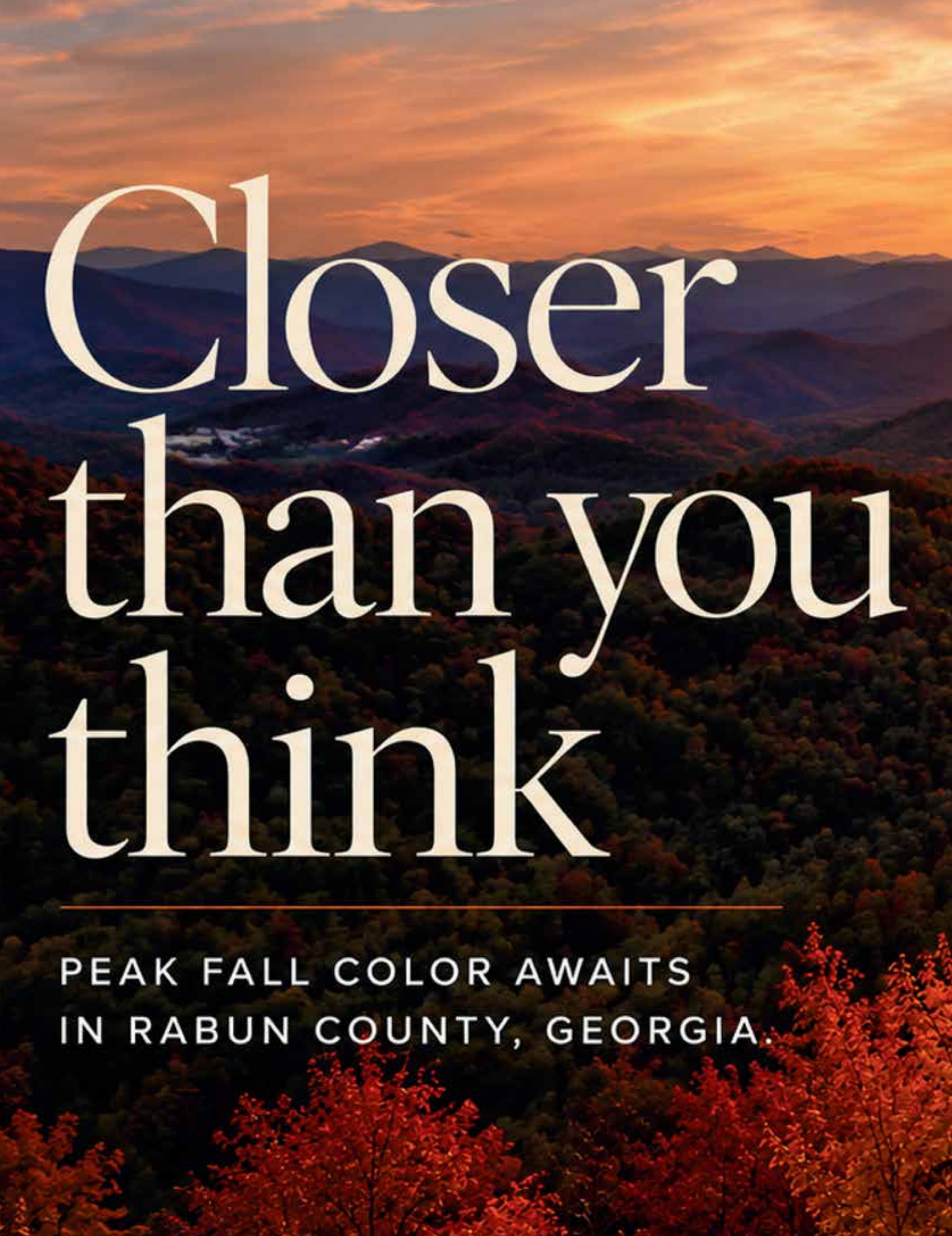
Sides include fries, sweet potato fries, onion rings, tater tots, hushpuppies, steamed broccoli, Brussels sprouts, slaw, chips or a side salad.

And don't forget the sauce.

Lake Burton Café's sauces — hot sauce, spicy ranch, smash sauce, tartar sauce, cocktail sauce and remoulade sauce — are all made in house.

In addition to burgers, Lake Burton Café offers a variety of options, including wings, seafood and pizza with a gluten-free crust available upon request.

Dawn Wilson said some of their best-selling menu



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items are burgers, quesadillas, pizza, shrimp and Phillies. She said that summer is the busiest season of the year.

Timko described the atmosphere as a “melting pot” where all ages can come together to hang out and make memories with friends and neighbors. The location often features live music on weekends as well.

So, take a piece of the dive home with you when you travel off the beaten path to enjoy a delicious burger. You might just find it to be a smashing success.

Lake Burton Café’s grill is open Tuesday through Thursday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. and Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.-10:30 p.m. It is closed on Sunday and Monday.

— BY MEGAN HORN

Where the locals go

For a burger that makes you happy with each bite, go to the restaurant where the locals go.

One step into Wildcat Grill at 1322 Old 441 South, Clayton, next to the Rabun County Golf Club, and you absolutely know you are in an eatery with a heart for the community. And that is even before a burger cooked with love touches your lips.

The restaurant is teeming with school pride for Rabun County Wildcat athletics – be it donated helmets, jerseys, photos or Wildcat artwork. The presence of the Wildcat Nation is strong, but the taste of Wildcat Grill’s burgers is powerful all on their own.

With each burger choice having a sports theme, all the options are winners, but The Wildcat, The Hole-in-One and The Fired Up burger score big.

The Wildcat, a bacon cheeseburger with battered onion rings, homemade chili and Nashville hot sauce, will make you cheer.

The Hole in One truly is an ace, being a double bacon Swiss burger with an accent of grilled onion.

The Fired Up is a double bacon cheeseburger with beer cheese and the popping heat of jalapeños.

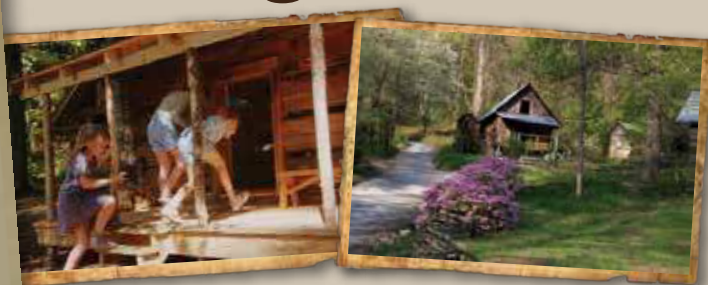
“I’ve heard from people that our burgers are the best in town,” said Tandi Burrell, owner/manager. “Ninety-five percent of my



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Wildcat Grill

Address: 1322 Old 441 S, Clayton

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

business is locals. We are always busy and during the winters, we don't slow down."

Wildcat Grill is open Tuesday through Saturday and open even later on Fridays for home Wildcat football games.

— BY ENOCH AUTRY

The Fired Up is a double bacon cheeseburger with beer cheese and jalapeños.

Photo/Enoch Autry



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- Legend**
- Downtown Areas
 - Places of Interest
 - State Parks
 - Appalachian Trail
 - National Forest

Map Prepared By GMR, September, 2018.
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Georgia Mountains
Regional Commission



Warwoman Dell, part of the Chattahoochee National Forest, is a major trailhead for the Bartram Trail.

WARWOMAN DELL: Etching a name in history

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ENOCH AUTRY

The mystery fuels the interest.

Stories passed down from generation to generation sometimes are fully entrenched in the truth. Other stories cannot be documented, but the stories are too gripping to ignore.

One of those stories in Rabun County is Warwoman Dell and how it came to be called that.

Warwoman Dell, located east of Clayton, is just inside the Chattahoochee National Forest. Warwoman Dell is a vital component of Bartram Trail, serving as a major trailhead and connecting hub for local trail sections and a stopping point where the



These mushrooms are just a small sample of the flora that grows in Warwoman Dell.

path intersects with Warwoman Road.

The various routes hikers can opt to take at Warwoman Dell lead them to tranquil locales with lush nature with views of some of the county's more than 120 registered waterfalls like Martin Creek Falls and Becky Branch Falls.

As for its name, Warwoman evokes an image of a strong-willed woman vanquishing her foes on the battlefield.

Years prior to settlers' arrival in the hills, the Cherokee ruled the Northeast Georgia area. Councils ran through present-day Rabun County and Western North Carolina.

In Cherokee society, women had a central role in decision-making, diplomacy and law. The most honored among them was known as "Ghigau" or "Beloved Woman." The early English settlers translated that somewhat

Continued on **PAGE 101**



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SCREAMER MOUNTAIN:

Mingling of lore, nature and legends

BY ENOCH AUTRY

If you think you hear distant screams as you travel the mountain of Rabun County, well, maybe you do.

Screamer Mountain is located just off Warwoman Road. Its steep incline of 2,972 feet to homes with majestic views could easily be a backdrop to a movie.

Three stories have been referenced about how Screamer Mountain's name came to be, but the ac-

curacy remains up for debate.

The first tale is a Cherokee legend which says a Native American woman stood at the top of the mountain and screamed throughout the entire night.

The second story is about the Trail of Tears, where a woman jumped to her death from the summit rather than being forced to leave Georgia during the Trail of Tears.

The Trail of Tears in Georgia began with the 1828



Left and above, the view from Screamer Mountain is magnificent in autumn. Submitted photos

Fall looks Better from Here



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Dahlonega Gold Rush and culminated in 1838 when federal troops forcibly removed more than 16,000 Cherokee people from their ancestral lands to Oklahoma.

The third tale involves natural sounds as local historical accounts also suggest the name may have come from the unsettling, loud screaming made by wild cougars or mountain panthers that once roamed the area in high numbers, or even strong winds screaming across the ridge.

Reviewing when Rabun County maps began noting Screamer Mountain does not offer resolution of which story is likely, but the echo of wildlife howling at the moon does sound like a reasonable explanation.

Screamer Mountain has been documented on maps since the 1890s.

So whether you hear winds or the





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cries of a mountain panther or something more ghostly, one thing is certain: Screamer Mountain's name reflects a place where natural forces and human storytelling collide.

At far left, the sun sets behind Screamer Mountain. At left, the forest is filled with small wonders, like these mushrooms embedded in moss. **Submitted photos**



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Bartram Trail volunteers clean up at Warwoman Dell following a storm. Photo courtesy of Blue Ridge Bartram Trail Conservancy

Community building

Bartram Trail inspires the next
generation of conservationists

BY MEGAN HORN

The Bartram Trail is 112 miles of history and adventure, and it awaits the next mountain traveler. Roughly 35 of those miles are in Rabun County.

It is cared for by the Blue Ridge Bartram Trail Conservancy and winds through the mountains of Northeast Georgia, including Rabun County, and western North Carolina.

The goal of the conservancy is to recreate, educate and inspire.

Bartram Trail Manager Faith



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At the heart of this transformation is the resort's new wedding garden, a romantic setting framed by the natural beauty of the North Georgia mountains. Designed for celebrations both grand and intimate, Dillard House has emerged into the best new wedding venue in Georgia, with the versatility to host large weddings, intimate micro weddings, private celebrations, and sophisticated corporate retreats.

Many Happy Returns

The result is a Mountain Farm Resort that feels at once familiar and entirely new. A place where couples can exchange vows immersed in the garden, families can retreat to a cottage, or colleagues can reconnect against a mountain backdrop, and returning guests can rediscover a destination woven into generations of North Georgia history.

Dillard House is not simply being renewed. It is becoming a new kind of North Georgia mountain escape. Rooted in tradition, elevated for today, and ready for what comes next.



You're on mountain meadow time.



More than a place to stay, Dillard House serves as a hub and spoke for exploring Rabun County and the surrounding North Georgia mountains. Horseback riding, cascading waterfalls and scenic trails, antique shops, and countless outdoor adventures are just beyond the resort. Another anticipated addition to the resort experience, Doghobble Dillard House, a new wine tasting experience, will invite guests to linger over a glass and discover the flavors of the region, while Rabun Brewing will bring a new brewery experience to the property.



The resort's accommodations are evolving as well. The newly renovated Paddock Rooms offer a refreshed take on mountain lodging, pairing contemporary comfort with the peaceful surroundings of the property. Coming soon, the new Grand Lodge Hotel will introduce another elevated lodging experience, joined by beautiful new cottages and distinctive tree houses tucked into the mountain landscape. The historic cottages are still available, giving guests the opportunity to experience the timeless charm and character that have long been part of their stay.



The Bartram Trail is well marked with yellow rectangle blazes all the way through to North Carolina to help keep hikers safe. Photo courtesy of Blue Ridge Bartram Trail Conservancy

Williams said the trail was created to commemorate William Bartram's travels through the region.

"The trail invites hikers to experience the same forests, rivers, plants, and wildlife that captured his attention more than two centuries ago," Williams said.

William Bartram was an 18th-century naturalist, artist, writer, and explorer who traveled throughout the American South from 1773 to 1777. Along the way, he carefully recorded the plants, animals, landscapes, and native cultures he encountered. His observations were later published in *Travels of William Bartram*, a landmark work of natural history and literature that continues to inspire scientists, writers, artists, and nature lovers, Williams said.

"The Conservancy's mission is to honor that journey by maintaining the trail, preserving the surround-

ing landscape, celebrating the region's natural and Cherokee heritage, and encouraging people to explore with the same curiosity and sense of wonder that guided Bartram," Williams said. "Preserving his legacy keeps both the physical trail and a deeper tradition of attentive observation, discovery, and care for the natural world alive for future generations."

Hiking the trail

The Bartram Trail is easily accessible for people wanting to take a day trip to the mountains.

Along with leisure hiking, Williams said the Blue Ridge Bartram Trail Conservancy also organizes naturalist hikes, guided hikes and educational events.

Martin Creek Falls is a popular waterfall destination off the Bartram Trail.

Motorists can take Highway 441 in

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Participants of the monthly “Walking with Bartram” at the Beechertown trail access section. Each month hikers are invited to join a hike through a section of the Bartram Trail. After one full year, participants will have completed the trail. Photo courtesy of Blue Ridge Bartram Trail Conservancy

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Volunteers participate in a work day at Appletree Group Campground along a North Carolina portion of the Bartram Trail. **Photo courtesy of Blue Ridge Bartram Trail Conservancy**

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Clayton, then turn on to Warwoman Road and travel for three miles. They will then see a Forest Service sign on the right. The parking area on the left upon entry is just a few feet from where the Bartram Trail heads up Becky Branch. Going up Becky Branch, carefully cross Warwoman Road and head towards Becky Branch Falls. Continue on the trail for about two miles until reaching Martin Creek Falls.

The section of the Bartram Trail that runs through Georgia begins at

the Russell Bridge Trailhead, located 14 miles east from Clayton on Warwoman Road until it ends at Highway 28. Turn right and travel south for two miles to the parking area on the left.

A large engraved granite boulder with an information kiosk gives hikers information about the trailhead. The Bartram Trail begins just across the road, following the Chattooga River. The trail is well marked with yellow rectangle blazes all the way through to North Carolina.



The Bartram Trail is located in both Georgia and North Carolina. Photo courtesy of Blue Ridge Bartram Trail Conservancy

Also accessible from the Bartram Trail is Rabun Bald, Georgia’s second highest peak.

The trail from Beegum Gap Trailhead is considered a moderate hike. The trailhead has limited parking with about five spaces. Head up the connector trail and keep left towards the Bartram Trail. At the kiosk, head left towards Rabun Bald for 1.5 miles.

Hikers should “leave no trace” and be mindful of their surroundings, Williams said.

Maintaining the trail

As manager of the Bartram Trail, Williams organizes ongoing maintenance and work days, keeps records, coordinates guided hikes and manages volunteers.

“Our number one priority is user safety,” Williams said. Maintenance includes updating and replacing signage that’s along the trail and ensuring it’s correct so hikers don’t get lost.

Williams said the goal is to make the trail more accessible. Funding for maintenance of the trail is largely from donations.

Community on the trail

Another way the Bartram Trail is managed is through about 80 to 100 dedicated volunteers working together to make it better.

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"I enjoy the camaraderie of the people I work with," said David Rothmeier, longtime Bartram Trail volunteer and trail maintainer. He has been volunteering with the organization for about seven years.

"We have a great community," Williams said. "I'm always learning from my volunteers."

Williams said the work days are opportunities for community building and coming together for the betterment of our environment. "I'm there because I want to work on the trail," said Rothmeier, adding that every trip to the trail brings new findings and experiences. "It's always different."

Make it your mountain destination to hike the Bartram Trail or participate in a trail work day next time you visit Rabun County. You might wander, but you won't be lost.

For more information or to join a trail work day, find Blue Ridge Bartram Trail Conservancy on Facebook, blueridgebartram.org or contact Williams at faith@blueridgebartram.org



The Bartram Trail, located in Georgia and North Carolina, is a beautiful hike in the fall season. Photo courtesy of Blue Ridge Bartram Trail Conservancy



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inaccurately into “Warwoman.”

When Cherokee warriors marched into battle, one woman would accompany them to provide guidance, counsel and care. These women represented strength – in both tender and the unyielding ways.

That personality balance is still merged into today’s name.

Born Nanyehi, Nancy Ward was a Cherokee leader who ascended to prominence when her husband died in battle against the Creek tribe. According to historical accounts, Ward grabbed her spouse’s weapon and led her people to victory.

The valor of Ward earned her the rank of “Beloved Woman of the Cherokee Nation,” which granted her the authority to speak in council and define tribal diplomacy. Ward championed peace and assisted her people

to adapt from hunting to farming and trade.

Maybe how Warwoman Dell truly got its name is left up to interpretation, but legitimate indicators may exist.

When naturalist William Bartram traveled by foot between 1773 and 1777 in the area now known as Rabun County and across into North Carolina into now Macon County, his accounts as transcribed by author Dick Cinquina reference the Cherokee, but not Warwoman specifically.

Throughout his writings, Cinquina points out the area is now Warwoman. In 1775, Bartram crossed the Chattooga River near the mouth of Warwoman Creek.

Warwoman Creek has been documented on regional maps and in trader journals for more than 250 years. The specific area known as Warwoman Dell was first established and put on Rabun

County maps in the late 1930s.

However, further findings show Warwoman Creek and the ancient Cherokee trail it follows have appeared under the “War Woman” designation in regional chronicles since the 18th century, as documented in the 1775 writings of James Adair.

But the name was formally fixed onto official geographic maps of Rabun County after the area’s 1819 land cession and subsequent county organization.

While Warwoman Dell may not have an absolute link to its name, the Cherokees who inhabited Northeast Georgia and Western North Carolina have a strong connection.

Despite the continued uncertainties about the name, the compelling and powerful links to the lives of women in local history does document a high level of influence in this mountain region.



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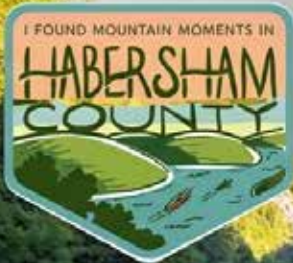
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Whether you enjoy the outdoors, shopping, or dining at locally owned restaurants, Habersham County has something for everyone.

- ☐ Walk on the Soque River Greenway.
- ☐ Enjoy the view from Tower Mountain.
- ☐ Catch a trout on the Soque River.
- ☐ Hike the Panther Creek Trail.
- ☐ Get a photo at the Big Red Apple monument and Train Museum in Cornelia.

Jefferson Street in Clarkesville has showy fall foliage. Photo/Carter Benton

One trail, many experiences

The hike to Panther Creek Falls explores backcountry woods, creek crossings, and even a beach



The 5.5-mile Panther Creek Trail can be challenging and steep in places. Some parts involve scrambling over rocks. **File photo**



Panther Creek Falls is the reward after 5.5 miles of winding trails. **File photo**

BY LANDEN TODD

If you want to spend the day on a trail this fall, Panther Creek Falls is a must-see while you're in Habersham County.

The hike begins at the Chattahoochee National Forest parking area, eight miles north of Hollywood on old US-441 between Clarkesville and Tallulah Falls.

The trail is open year-round, with picnic areas and public restrooms in the parking area. Parking costs \$4 and can be paid via the recreation.gov mobile app.

Access to the waterfall requires a strenuous 3.5-mile one-way hike that offers a thrilling backwoods experience. It includes creek crossings, roots and rocks to scramble over and steep drop-offs. But it's well worth trekking through hardwoods and mountain laurel, with the babbling of Panther Creek at your side, to get to the 80-foot cascading waterfall.

After enjoying the waterfall, which includes a sandy beach,

if you want to continue, you can proceed about another two miles. That section is more remote and rugged and leads to Davidson Creek, where you turn around to head back on the same trail.

The total distance to the falls and back is about 7 miles. To hike beyond the falls, the total is about 11 miles.

The Forest Service purchased 31,000 acres in Habersham and three other North Georgia counties in 1911 for \$7 per acre. In the beginning, the Chattahoochee was part of the Nantahala and Cherokee National Forests in North Carolina and Tennessee. Many of the early purchases were old homesteads and abandoned farm lands.

The Chattahoochee National Forest was proclaimed as a separate National Forest on July 9, 1936. Forest Service managers began to restore these lands by planting trees, fighting wildfires, controlling erosion, and introducing wildlife and fish back into their natural habitat.

BEST BITES

Burger highlights in Habersham County

Award-winning burgers

Hangry's Grill has become a top burger destination since opening in 2017. Each burger is made fresh and to order.

Specialty burgers like the Dirty Burger — which is topped with “everything but the kitchen sink” — and the Rancher — which is topped with cheese, bacon, fries and ranch dressing — are popular, according to Aaron Lee, who owns the restaurant with his wife Neahna.

The restaurant won Best Hamburger in *The Northeast Georgian's* 2025 Readers' Choice contest.

Hangry's Grill is located at 4739 Ga. Hwy 115, Clarkesville.

— BY SAMANTHA SINCLAIR

Hangry's Grill

Address: 4739 Ga. Hwy. 115, Clarkesville

Hours: 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday-Saturday



Hangry's Double Bacon Cheeseburger, served with fries.



AJ Averhoff places a burger topped with cheese and bacon on a grilled bun at Hangry's Grill. **Photos/** Samantha Sinclair



Old Towne Pub's Pub Burger is a third of a pound of Angus beef topped with applewood smoked bacon, home-made barbecue sauce and white American cheese on a brioche bun.

Burger in a basket

Old Towne Pub, nestled on the square in Downtown Clarkesville, has a variety of burger baskets to suit anyone's tastes. Each patty is a third of a pound of Angus beef served on a brioche bun.

A popular burger is the Pub Burger, which is topped with applewood smoked bacon, homemade barbecue sauce and white American cheese. Other options include a Fried Green Pimento burger, an All-Day Breakfast Burger, a Chili Cheeseburger, and The Soque, which is topped with a smoked trout dip.

For those who don't want beef, there's also a turkey burger called The Gobbler, as well as The Vegetarian made with Beyond burger patties.

While Samantha and Tommie Gore opened the pub in 2022, the building has been in Clarkesville since 1898, and the exposed brick in the walls was brought to the city by horse and buggy.

Old Towne Pub is located at 102 West Water Street, Clarkesville.

— BY SAMANTHA SINCLAIR

Old Towne Pub

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There's no question why Way-2Baked won Best Hamburger in *The Northeast Georgian's* 2026 Readers' Choice contest. The restaurant is known for its smash burgers, like the Godzilla, Meltdown, Smash-mouth and Mack Daddy.

As you wait, there's plenty to entertain with vintage pop culture decorations covering the walls. Save room for dessert — the restaurant is also known for its mini doughnuts. Owner Brooke Shedd has a big heart for the community — one way she gives back is with a Giving Wall where people can donate meals to those in need.

Way2Baked is located at 399 Cornelia Plaza Drive, Cornelia.

— BY SAMANTHA SINCLAIR

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BY HANNAH CAUDELL

In Habersham County, one structure has stood the test of time.

Erected almost 90 years ago in 1937, Chenocetah Tower watches over what the community lovingly calls Tower Mountain and overlooks Lake Russell. But the old fire tower that has become a historical landmark wouldn't have been possible without local farmers and an initiative to use the land for the public good.

The mountain was once named for Caleb Griffin, who owned the property in the early 1800s. The name "Tower Mountain" actually predates the gentle granite giant standing at its summit today, because there was a wooden tower on the property, according to the National Park Service history.

But before there was any kind of tower or structure on the mountain, it was called Chenocetah, a Cherokee word meaning "see all around."

The name stuck after 1937, when the stone structure was built as a fire tower. Many people believe the tower was erected through the efforts of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) of former President Franklin D. Roosevelt's time, a work relief program employing young men through the Great Depression. In reality, National Park Service records say the project was carried out by another federal agency, the Division of Land Utilization of the Resettlement Administration.

Chenocetah Tower was only one project attached to a larger initiative called the North Georgia Upland Game Conservation Project. In the 1930s, upward of one million farmers applied for federal aid. To combat this growing trend, this project was created in 1935, when 50,000 acres

Standing tall for nearly a century

Chenocetah Tower preserves 90 years of local history

Chenocetah Tower will be open to the public on Sept. 26 during Cornelia's Big Red Apple Festival. **Photo/The Northeast Georgian**

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in Habersham, Banks, Stephens and Franklin counties were acquired from farmers for public use. At the time, the government aimed to help farmers through tough economic times by purchasing their worn farmland on a voluntary basis, then relocating those farmers to more fertile property while using the purchased land for reforestation, rewilding and creating spaces for public use. Those same farmers were also guaranteed work on developing properties.

About 250 farmers would sell their properties to the government, resettling while helping to build the historic landmarks Habershamians and other visitors know and love today.

Chenocetah Tower wasn't originally meant to be a tourist attraction. For years, its intended purpose was to watch for fires from its 1,830 feet of elevation. It was dedicated on June 7, 1938 for that purpose; former Georgia Gov. E. D. Rivers was a special guest, and the event was sponsored by Cornelia's Kiwanis Club.

The tower served its purpose until 1971, when the Forest Service began using modern-day aircraft, which proved to be more cost-effective in surveying public lands.

Thirteen years later, in June 1984, when the trees had grown up alongside the tower and its lookout remained largely vacant, Chenocetah Tower was added to the National Register of Historic Places, according to its nomination form from that time.

A year later, the Chenocetah Conservation Corps formed to preserve the natural beauty surrounding the area, formed in direct opposition to the National Park Services' proposed land management plan, because locals felt the NPS plan wouldn't protect the property's scenic beauty.

From 1986 to 2000, the tower was reopened as the only operational stone

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Chenocetah Tower and the land around it on Chenocetah Mountain in Cornelia offer stunning views. This is Lake Russell seen from Tower Mountain on an autumn day. **Photo/The Northeast Georgian**

fire tower in the state. Today, it is the last standing granite fire tower in the United States, National Park Service records say.

Go to the tower, and most people will find that its wooden blue door is locked. Bars cover the windows to prevent entry into the site. However, it doesn't mean there aren't ways to explore the tower during certain times of the year.

This year, the tower will once again be opened to the public on Sept. 26 during Cornelia's Big Red Apple Festival. People interested in visiting the tower can take a hay-ride up Tower Mountain and ascend the spiral staircase to look out over Lake Russell and the greater Habersham County area. Even after almost 90 years, the views are still breathtaking.

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HEMLOCK HARBINGER

An invasive insect continues to plague the region's evergreens, threatening their extinction

BY SAMANTHA SINCLAIR

There's a reason why you may see more large trees that are dying or less shade on the river.

Hemlock trees are in danger of extinction in North Georgia due to an unfortunate infestation of the hemlock woolly adelgid insect.

The woolly adelgid is native to Asia and has no natural predator in North Georgia. The insects drink the sap from the trees, causing trees to die within two to four years if left untreated.

An infestation can be identified by white cotton ball-like growths on



Needles on this hemlock at Tallulah Gorge are starting to turn yellow due to woolly adelgid infestation. **Photo/Kimberly Brown**



Hemlocks extend like skeletons above the forest, marking an eerie future for North Georgia's forests. **File photo**



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March 7	Saturday	Clarkesville Mardi Gras
March 28	Saturday	Easter in Mauldin Garden
April 10	Friday	Cruise in with a Purpose Car Show at Pitts Park (in conjunction with Purpose Church)
May 8	Friday	Cruise in with a Purpose Car Show at Pitts Park (in conjunction with Purpose Church)
May 16	Saturday	64th Annual Mountain Laurel Festival
June 12	Friday	Cruise in with a Purpose Car Show at Pitts Park (in conjunction with Purpose Church)
July 10	Friday	Cruise in with a Purpose Car Show at Pitts Park (in conjunction with Purpose Church)
July 11	Saturday	Red, White, & Tunes
August 14	Friday	Cruise in with a Purpose Car Show at Pitts Park (in conjunction with Purpose Church)
September 11	Friday	Cruise in with a Purpose Car Show at Pitts Park (in conjunction with Purpose Church)
October 9	Friday	Cruise in with a Purpose Car Show at Pitts Park (in conjunction with Purpose Church)
October 17	Saturday	Fall Festival & History Harvest
October 31	Saturday	Trick or Treating on the Square
November 28	Saturday	Shop Small Business Saturday
December 4	Friday	Downtown Clarkesville Christmas and Parade
December 21	Monday	Candlelight Christmas Walk

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the branches. According to the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, the woolly adelgid has been attacking the eastern hemlock and Carolina hemlock over the past few decades.

According to Save Georgia's Hemlocks, infestations have been confirmed in 19 counties including Habersham, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union and White counties.

Hemlock trees can be found along the Soque River and in wooded areas in Habersham County. They thrive and adapt in dim and low light environments.

Brad Coppedge, Soque River Watershed Association (SRWA) board member, said the insects have become a real problem in the area, as the trees are so vulnerable to the insect and are valuable to the ecosystem.

"[Hemlocks] create a wonderful

canopy to provide shade and temperature protection for the river and the fish, and the trout," Coppedge said.

He added they also provide a sturdy foundation for the river basin. However, the insects, along with recent flooding causing trees to be uprooted, are creating a real issue along the river.

"If the flooding doesn't get them, the insects will," Coppedge said.

Coppedge said the SRWA is working to educate people on how to treat an infestation, especially how to apply the treatment so it doesn't leak into the Soque. They partner with Save Georgia's Hemlocks to provide workshops about once a year. He said the last workshop was well-attended, and it was discovered a lot of people were not using the right chemicals or using them properly.

Steven Patrick, agriculture and natural resources agent for the UGA

Extension office, explained hemlocks aren't native to the area, either.

"To me it is important to understand that the canopy of our forests have changed a lot in 200-plus years of our management," Patrick said. "Hemlocks didn't use to dominate the mountains. Other species did. We might need to begin learning about the tremendous diversity of trees that live in our area that can help keep our forests strong. They, too, provide shade, habitat for wildlife and fish, and also help regulate flow in our streams. Hemlocks aren't the only one."

He said the American chestnut was the "biggest deal" until chestnut blight and root rot set in.

"Losing them and cutting the mountains changed them forever," Patrick said. "Hemlocks, white pines and yellow poplars took over."



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DRAWING THE LINE

A state historic marker tells the story of the Indian Boundary Line

STORY AND PHOTO BY NOAH ANSLEY

Not a lot remains of the Native American populations that used to inhabit Northeast Georgia.

A historical marker in Banks County tells a little of that history.

The marker is located on the southbound side of U.S. Highway 441 marking the Indian Boundary Line. The marker was previously located near Line Baptist Church before the new highway was built.

On May 31, 1783, the Treaty of Augusta was signed to separate Cherokee land from white settlers in Banks County.

The boundary line for the Cherokee ran “from the top of Currahee mountain to the head, or source, of the most southern branch of the Oconee River, including all waters of the same,” according to the historical marker.

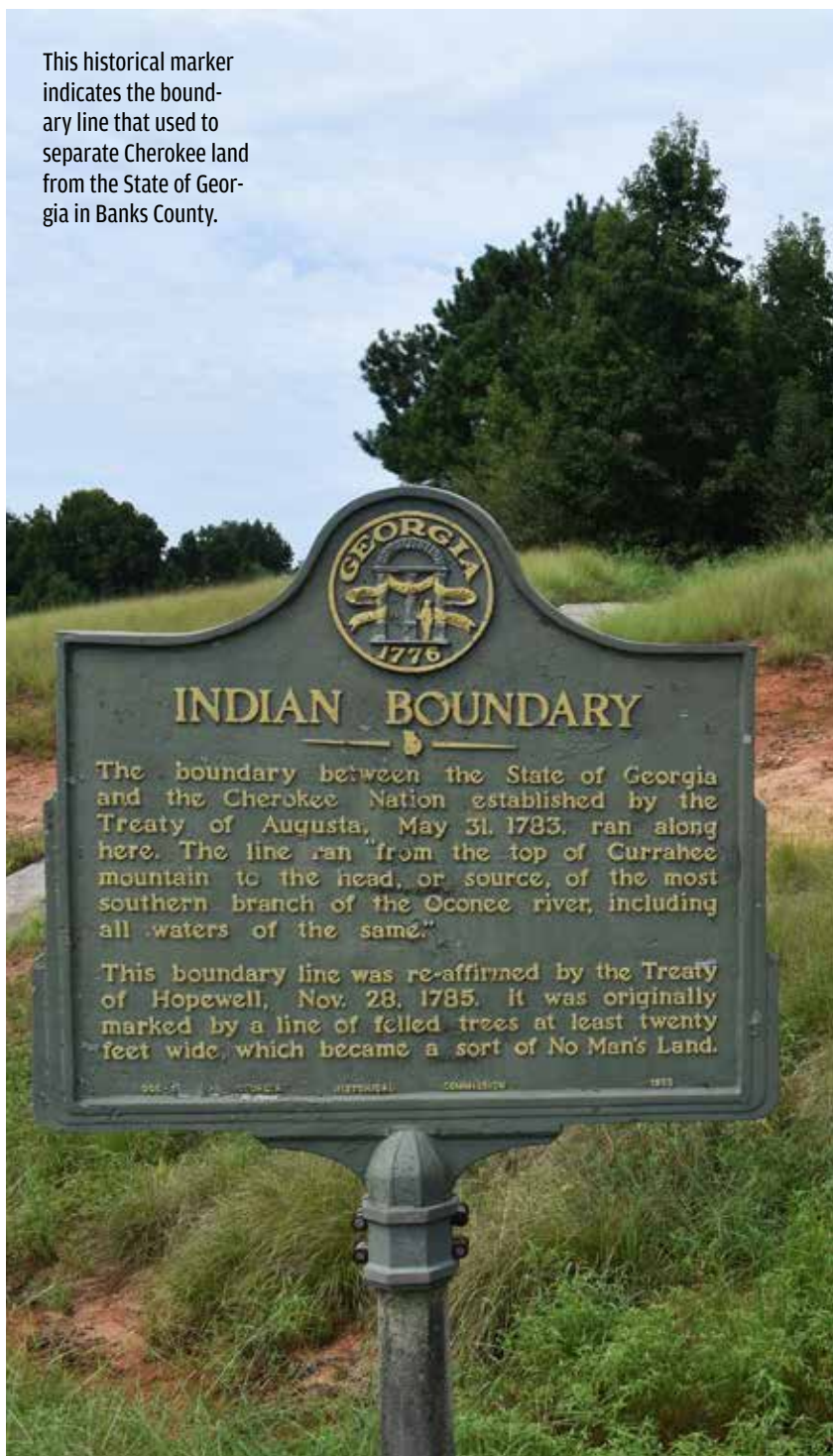
On Nov. 28, 1785, the Treaty of Hopewell reaffirmed the boundary line. “It was originally marked by a line of felled trees at least twenty feet wide, which became a sort of No Man’s Land,” according to the historical marker.

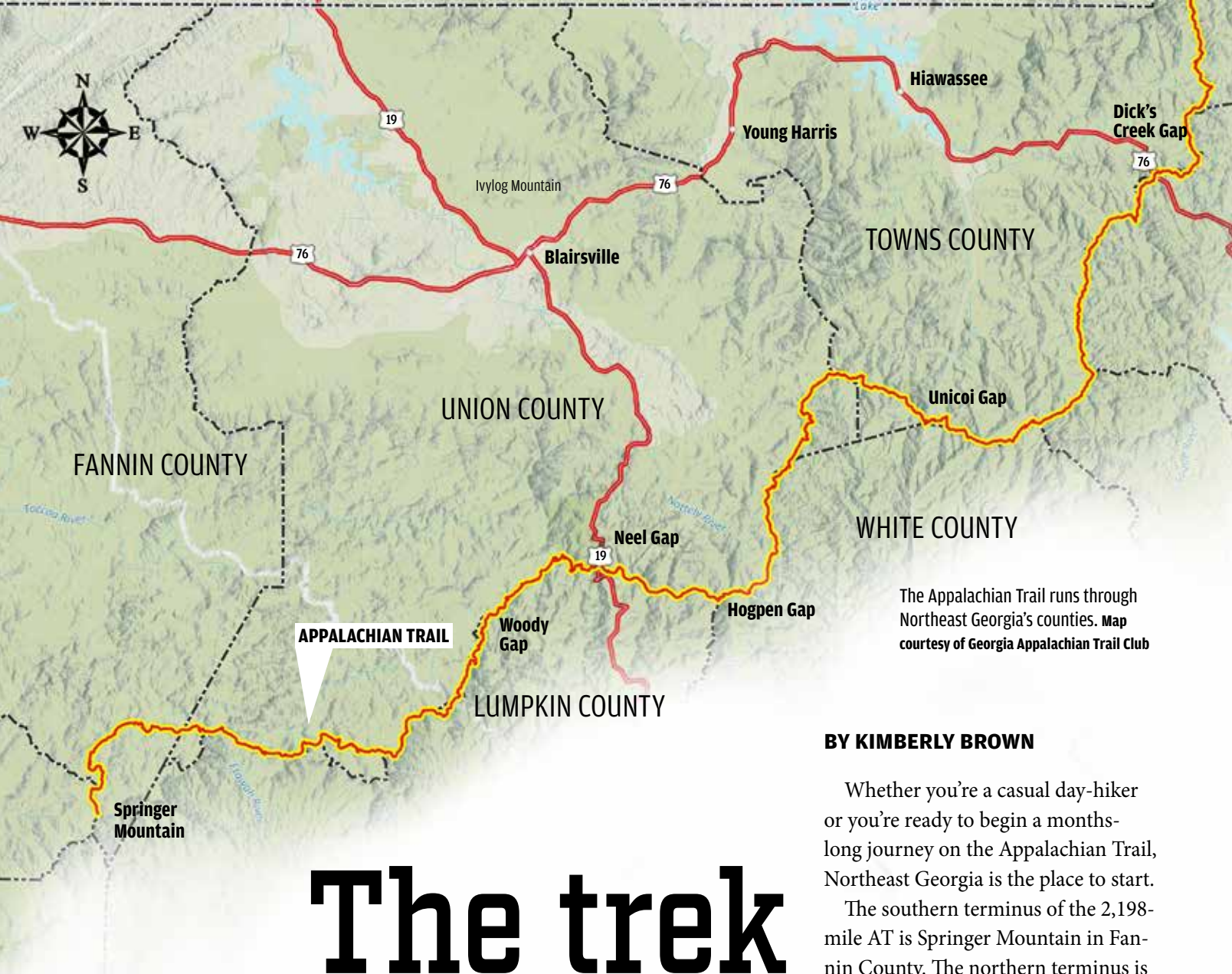
Some of the earliest white settlers who came to the Cherokee Indian frontier were called the Woffords Settlement.

These early settlers built forts to protect themselves as they were living on the land claimed by the Cherokee.

According to *The History of Banks County* by Jessie Julia Mize, the Indians “were likely to be incited by misunderstandings and depredations. Horses and farm animals were frequently stolen, and families had to be protected in fortress-type log buildings, surrounded by high wooden fences, usually located about a spring place to provide necessary water for people and cows.”

This historical marker indicates the boundary line that used to separate Cherokee land from the State of Georgia in Banks County.





The trek of a lifetime

One of the most-visited parks in the country starts in Georgia and is maintained by dedicated volunteers

BY KIMBERLY BROWN

Whether you're a casual day-hiker or you're ready to begin a months-long journey on the Appalachian Trail, Northeast Georgia is the place to start.

The southern terminus of the 2,198-mile AT is Springer Mountain in Fannin County. The northern terminus is Mount Katahdin in Baxter State Park, Maine. About 78 AT miles are in Georgia, before it crosses the state line into North Carolina.

Since 1930, the Georgia portion of the AT has been maintained by the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC), in cooperation with the National Forest Service and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC).

The AT is part of the National Park System and is one of the most visited parks in the country, said Ashley Luke, GATC president. Visitors include thru-hikers, section hikers, day hikers and backpackers who take advantage of AT camping areas.

Sarah Adams, ATC regional man-



A visitor walks through the arch at the Appalachian Trail approach at Amicalola Falls State Park. Though it's 8.5 miles to get to Springer Mountain where the AT begins, many thru-hikers prefer to begin their trek at this approach trail. **Photo courtesy of Georgia State Parks**

ager, said ATC's goal is "to help support local programs and partnerships on the ground."

AT maintenance projects include sustaining about 138 miles, which includes the path itself as well as approach trails and side trails, and ensuring overnight sites aren't impacted by increased hiking traffic.

With approximately 3,000 to 4,000 thru-hikers beginning the trek at Springer Mountain each year, in addi-

tion to many day hikers, the trail has seen unprecedented traffic.

"That's a lot of concentrated impact at our overnight sites," Adams said. "A lot of those AT shelters weren't designed for the amount of usage we see now. So we try to mitigate that impact, not only through projects to help the trail, but through education."

The season for northbound thru-hikers begins in February. Most hikers who undertake the adventure are

northbound, Adams said, with only 300 to 400 choosing to begin in Maine.

"It definitely requires a lot more people on the ground and resources to make sure the trail and surrounding environment are not negatively impacted because of it," Adams said. To assist with that, the ATC hires Ridgerunners, seasonal employees who educate hikers, protect the trail and assist with maintenance.

Luke said volunteers are vital to the

AT in Georgia.

"The trail was built by volunteers, and to this day, it's maintained by volunteers," Luke said.

In addition to maintenance, GATC, with 950 members, hosts monthly events, including hikes, backpacking and sometimes rafting trips.

Leon Rubin, an assistant editor of the GATC magazine, said more than 80 GATC members have hiked the entire

AT, although many members join the GATC having never hiked on it at all.

"They join out of interest in the trail, or the work the club does in trail maintenance, education, community outreach and conservation," he said. "GATC's hiking programs allow members to experience the entire Georgia section of the AT through a series of day hikes."

The club also holds "one-off hikes,"

including the Georgia 4000 challenge, where hikers can hike to 32 peaks in Georgia that are over 4,000 feet, including Georgia's highest peak, Brasstown Bald, at 4,784 feet.

How to access the AT in Northeast Georgia

While the AT officially begins at Springer Mountain, many choose to begin their AT adventure at Amicalola Falls State Park.

That's because the 6-mile drive to the Springer Mountain parking lot is rough terrain, Luke said, and the parking lot is about a mile north of the terminus.

"If you do that, you have to hike back about a mile to get to the true beginning of the trail," she said. "... Logistically, it's much easier to go from Amicalola, because you've got paved roads all the way there." There is also long-term parking at Amicalola.

"You go through the arch, you see the waterfall (Amicalola Falls), you hike all day, you get to the summit, and it's an accomplishment before you even start," Luke said.

The most typical, popular hikes on the AT in Georgia are at Blood Mountain or at Woody Gap going up to Preachers Rock.

"A lot of people go to Woody Gap and hike a mile up to Preachers Rock, and that's all the AT they'll ever be on," Luke said.

Less crowded options include Dicks Creek Gap, Unicoi Gap, Blue Mountain, Springer Mountain or Gooch Gap near Suches, Adams said.

"The Three Forks/Long Creek Falls hike includes a waterfall that was pictured on one of the U.S. Postal Service's Appalachian Trail Forever Stamps in 2025," Rubin said. "Springer Mountain is also popular for those wanting to visit the southern terminus of the trail, but it's not particularly scenic. Blue



Shown at the Appalachian Trail approach arch are Appalachian Trail Conservancy Regional Manager Sarah Adams, Georgia Ridgerunners Emma Stattelman, Gillian Purvenas, Hudson Brock and Kevin Takashita-Bynum, and US Forest Service employee Jesse Lumsden and seasonal ATC Basecamp Coordinator Tonya Lonsbury (in the back) at the 2026 GA Ridgerunner crew and support staff work day. **Photo courtesy of Appalachian Trail Conservancy**

Heading out?

For overnight AT adventures, there are several options. One is to begin at Springer Mountain, hike to the Gooch Mountain Shelter to camp (about 15 miles), then hike another 16 miles to Neel Gap (Mountain Crossing Outfitter) where you have left your vehicle or have someone pick you up.

Or you could begin at Neel Gap, overnight at the Low Gap Shelter (11 miles), and go another 13 to 16 miles to the Tray Mountain Shelter or Dicks

Creek Gap.

For a shorter hike, you could begin at Dicks Creek Gap, hike about 4.5 miles, spend the night at Plum Orchard Gap Shelter, then finish at Bly Gap, another 3.5 miles.

Or if tent camping isn't your thing, you can spend the night at the Len Foote Hike Inn, after parking at Amicalola Falls State Park. That hike is about 5 miles each way.



The sun rises over the summit of Blood Mountain on the Appalachian Trail. **File photo**

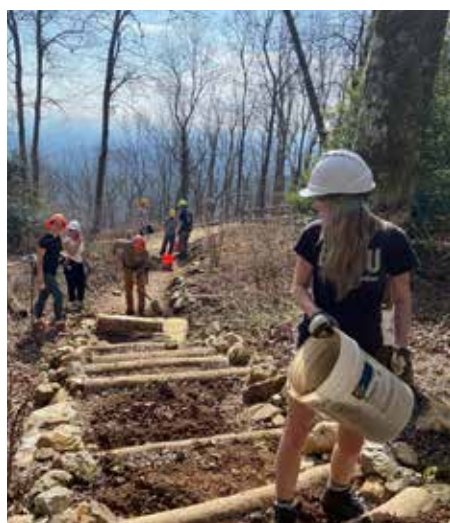
Mountain Shelter sits on a ridge and provides beautiful views, as does Powell Mountain, about 3 miles south of Dicks Creek Gap.”

If you’re choosing one of the more popular AT sections, Adams recommends going in the middle of the week or first thing in the morning to assure parking. As with any hike, you should plan ahead, make sure you have enough water and a first aid kit.

“We’ll still get reports of somebody getting hurt or lost,” Adams said. “Making sure you have a good map of the area is really important.”

Adams recommends you have a map of not just the trail you’re on, but surrounding trails as well, in case you get off your planned route. You should also be able to use your map offline, in case cell service is sparse.

While thru-hikers get most of the attention, the AT was not built with



Students from Bowling Green State University in Ohio spent part of their spring break helping with trail maintenance on the Appalachian Trail near Woody Gap. **Photo courtesy of Georgia Appalachian Trail Club**

the idea of people hiking almost 2,200 miles, Luke said. She said the trail’s creator, Benton MacKaye, worried that people would lose their connection

with nature, so he proposed the trail for people to spend time outdoors.

“Not that they would hike 2,200 miles,” she said. “That was something that happened later.”

Hikers are not the only thing that have increased on the AT. Adams said there has been an increase in bear encounters, even from last season.

“We’ve been receiving more reports this year than we have ever before, which is from bears getting into people’s food they have stored and bears trying to get into someone’s tent,” she said. “It’s definitely not the bears’ fault. It’s totally our fault.”

If you encounter a bear or ever feel unsafe on the trail, she recommends using a reporting form found on the ATC website, appalachiantrail.org, in addition to calling 911. For more information about GATC, including upcoming events and hikes, visit georgia-atclub.org.

Go for a HIKE

There are plenty of opportunities to wander on public access hiking trails in Dawson, Habersham, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union and White counties in Northeast Georgia. The following is a county-by-county listing with general directions provided.

Dawson

Amicalola Falls East Ridge Trail

Distance: 2.2-mile loop

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous

Get there: Trail begins at the Amicalola Falls Visitor's Center

Amicalola Falls Staircase

Distance: 0.3 miles

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Trail is inside Amicalola Falls State Park. You can start at the top or bottom of the stairs.

Amicalola Falls West Ridge Trail

Distance: 0.6 miles round trip

Difficulty: Easy and ADA accessible

Get there: Explore the western ridge of Amicalola Falls on this shaded, quiet trail that crosses a small bridge and winds its way along a foot path to the visitor center.

Amicalola River Trail

Distance: 2.9-mile loop

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous. First 0.4 mile is wheelchair accessible.

Get there: Trailhead is located on state Route 53 where the Amicalola River passes under the highway bridge. Main parking lot is on the north side of the bridge.

Wildcat Campground Trail

Distance: 1.5-miles one-way

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous

Get there: Trailhead is off Steve Tate Road, north of Pleasant Union Baptist Church.

Habersham

Broad River Trail

Distance: 7.9 miles out and back

Difficulty: Moderate to hard

Get there: State Route 365 north from Cornelia. Turn right onto Rock Road, then left onto Dicks Hill Parkway. From there, go to Forest Service Road 87. Go 3 miles to trailhead at Dicks Creek.

Lady Slipper Trail

Distance: 6.2-mile loop

Difficulty: Moderate to hard

Get there: Trailhead is off Lake Russell Road, Cornelia. Follow signs at Nancytown Lake.

Lake Russell Trail

Distance: 4.7-mile loop

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Get there: U.S. 441 north from Cornelia, exit at state Route 197. Turn left on Lake Russell Road, go toward Nancytown Lake and follow the signs.

Panther Creek Trail

Distance: 12.8 miles round trip. Note: a 7-mile, moderate alternative is to hike to Panther Creek Falls and return.

Difficulty: Strenuous

Get there: U.S. 441 north from Cornelia for 16 miles. Left on Glen Hardman Road, then right onto Old Historic Highway 441 for 1 mile to the parking area.

Sourwood Trail

Distance: 3.8-mile loop

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: From Dicks Hill Parkway in Cornelia, turn onto Lake Russell Road. Turn left to Nancytown Lake. Trailhead begins at the Nancytown Dam.

Tallulah Gorge Loop Trail

Distance: 1.8 miles

Difficulty: Hard to strenuous due to steep stairs into the gorge.

Get there: Inside Tallulah Gorge State Park, 338 Jane Hurt Yarn Drive, Tallulah Falls.

Lumpkin

Dockery Lake Trail

Distance: 7.1 miles round trip

Difficulty: Moderate to hard

Get there: Take East Main Street in Dahlonega to Morrison Moore Parkway intersection and turn left. Remain on that road until Stonepile Gap, then take state Route 60 to Dockery Lake Recreation area.

Lake Zwerner Trail

Distance: 3.5-mile loop

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: From Dahlonega's public square take East Main Street to the Morrison Moore Parkway intersection and turn left.

Yahoola Creek Park Trail

Distance: 1.1 miles

Difficulty: Easy

Get there: Take East Main Street in Dahlonega, then right on Memorial Drive. Go two blocks and turn right on Morrison Moore Parkway. Take the first left onto Mechanicsville Road.

Rabun

Angel Falls Trail

Distance: 1.6 miles round trip

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: From Tallulah Falls, take U.S. 441 North for 1.7 miles, then turn left on Old 441 and go 2.5 miles, then left on Lake Rabun Road to the Rabun Beach Campground.

Bartram Trail

Distance: 35 miles one way

Difficulty: Strenuous

Get there: Trailhead is on Hale Ridge Road, Dillard.

Chattooga River Trail

Distance: 10.7 miles

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Trailhead is where SR 76 east crosses the Chattooga River at the Georgia/South Carolina state line.

Coleman River Trail

Distance: 1.8 miles round trip

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: U.S. 76 from Clayton for 8 miles. Turn right heading north on Persimmon Road and drive 4 miles. Turn left heading northwest on FS Road 70 for 1.25 miles. Trailhead is on the right.

Hemlock Trail

Distance: 1 mile

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Begins at Moccasin Creek State Park and follows an old railroad bed for about 1 mile. The hike, which offers good fishing access, ends at Hemlock Falls.

Minnehaha Falls Trail

Distance: 0.4 miles round trip

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Get there: From Habersham County, take Bear Gap Road until the trailhead is on the left. From Rabun County, take Seed Lake Road to Low Gap Road to Bear Gap Road until the trailhead is on the right. Parking is limited.

Rabun Bald Trail

Distance: 3.1 miles round trip via Beegum Gap or 5.6 miles round trip via Hale Ridge Road

Difficulty: Moderate to hard

Get there: Beegum Gap Trailhead is near Sky Valley and Hale Ridge Road is in the Warwoman Wildlife Management Area.

Warwoman Dell Nature Trail

Distance: 1.4-miles round trip

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Get there: Trailhead is on Warwoman Road at the Warwoman Dell Recreation Area.

Willis Knob

Distance: 15 miles

Difficulty: Moderate (trail is also open to horseback riders)

Get there: Trailhead is on Willis Knob Road, off Warwoman Road.

Stephens

Currahee Mountain Trail (Col. Robert F. Sink Memorial Trail)

Distance: 5.4 miles round trip

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Trailhead is adjacent to the Camp Toccoa Museum.

Towns

Jacks Knob Trail

Distance: 2 miles one way

Difficulty: Moderate to hard

Get there: Trailhead is in the Brasstown Bald parking lot.

Lake Chatuge Trail

Distance: 1.2-mile loop

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Trailhead is in the Lake Chatuge Recreation Area, off SR 288 south of Blairsville.



Mount Yonah stands in the distance at the Dukes Creek trailhead overlook in White County. **Photo/Joy Burnette**



Rocky Mountain Trail

Distance: 1.8 miles one way or 3.5-mile loop with Appalachian Trail

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Two trailheads available, at Unicoi Gap or Indian Grave Gap Road, both off state Route 75 north of Helen.

Union

Arkaquah Trail

Distance: 5 miles

Difficulty: Strenuous

Get there: Trailhead is in the Brasstown Bald Visitor Center Parking lot.

Bear Hair Gap Trail

Distance: 4-mile loop

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Begins and ends in Vogel State Park.

Byron Herbert Reece Appalachian Trail Access

Distance: 1.9 miles round trip

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous

Get there: Trailhead is at 34.7359°N, 83.9183°W just north of Mountain Crossings at Walasi-Yi.

DeSoto Falls Trail

Distance: 0.25 miles to lower falls and 0.75 miles to upper falls

Difficulty: Lower falls is moderate, upper falls is easy

Get there: Take U.S. 129 North from Cleveland or 18 miles from Dählonega on U.S. 19 North to the DeSoto Falls Recreation Area.

Dockery Lake Trail

Distance: 7.1 miles round trip

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Trailhead is at Dockery Lake Campground off Forest Service 654.

Duncan Ridge Trail

Distance: 19.1 miles one way

Difficulty: Strenuous

Get there: Take U.S. 19/129 South from Blairsville, for 9.5 miles, right onto state Route 180 and go 3 miles to Wolfpen Gap.

Lakeshore Trail at Dockery Lake

Distance: 0.5-mile loop

Difficulty: Easy

Get there: Trailhead is at Dockery Lake Campground off Forest Service 654.

Lake Winfield Scott Trail

Distance: 0.4-miles

Difficulty: Easy

Get there: U.S. 19/129 south from Blairsville, then state Route 180 to Lake Winfield Scott campground.

Logan Turnpike Trail

Distance: 3.8-miles

Difficulty: Easy to strenuous

Get there: U.S. 19 North from Dählonega to Turners Corner. South on U.S. 129, then left on Town Creek Road.

Mill Shoals Trail

Distance: 5 miles round trip. Can be looped with Yellow Mountain Trail.

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous

Get there: Trailhead is off Forest Service 236 near Camp Frank D. Merrill.

Slaughter Creek Trail

Distance: 2.7 miles

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Take U.S. 19/129 South from Blairsville, turn right onto SR 180 and enter Lake Winfield Scott Campground.

Wagon Train Trail

Distance: 5.8 miles one way

Difficulty: Moderate to strenuous

Get there: Access the trailhead from the Brasstown Bald Visitors Center parking lot, off SR 180 spur.

Yellow Mountain Trail

Distance: about 3 miles one way. Can be looped with Mill Shoals Trail.

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Trailhead is off Forest Service 236 in the Cooper Creek Scenic Area.

White

Dukes Creek Trail

Distance: 2 miles

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

Get there: The trailhead is off Richard B. Russell Scenic Highway, a half-mile east of the Raven Cliffs.

Helen to Hardman Heritage Trail

Distance: 2 miles round trip

Difficulty: Easy and ADA accessible

Get there: Park either near the Helen Waterpark or at the Hardman Farm Visitor Center

Hogpen Gap to Unicoi Gap

Distance: 14.5 miles one way

Difficulty: Hard

Get there: Hogpen Gap trailhead is south of Hiawassee off the Richard B. Russell Scenic Highway. Unicoi Gap trailhead is near Helen.

Raven Cliffs Trail

Distance: 5 miles

Difficulty: Moderate

Get there: Trailhead is off Richard B. Russell Scenic Highway, 2.8 miles from SR Alt. 75.

Unicoi Lake Trail

Distance: 2.5-mile loop

Difficulty: Easy

Get there: Trailhead is on SR 356 north of Helen, near the Unicoi State Park entrance.

Yonah Mountain Trail

Distance: 5 miles

Difficulty: Strenuous

Get there: Turn off SR 75 North onto Tom Bell Road, then turn on Chambers Road.

Note: Difficulties are Easy, Moderate, Hard and Strenuous and come from various sources. Complete directions can be found by entering the trail name in your GPS.

Chasing waterfalls

Dawson County

Amicalola Falls

The stunning Amicalola Falls, located in Amicalola Falls State Park, is 729 feet tall. Several viewing spots for the falls are easily accessible. Amicalola Falls State Park is located on state Route 52.

Amicalola River Trail

This trail features “Edge of the World” rapids. From Dawsonville, take state Route 53 west. The road begins to descend into the Amicalola River Watershed. The trailhead and parking is on the right, before the bridge over the river.

Bearden Falls

Bearden Falls has no designated trail. Follow Nimblewill Creek and Bearden Creek (the right fork) for approximately 1.5 miles and you’ll find the falls. From Dahlonega, take state Route 52 West for 8 miles to Nimblewill Church Road on the right. Follow Nimblewill Road for 4.5 miles to the National Forest boundary and continue on FS 28-2 for two more miles, where the road begins to climb the side of Frosty Mountain on the way to Nimblewill Gap.

Cochrans Falls

Travel west on state Route 52 from Dahlonega 14.5 miles to the second entrance for Wesley Chapel Road, just inside Dawson County. Turn right on Wesley Chapel Road and, after nearly a mile, turn left on Dan Fowler Road. Go 1.2 miles, turn left on Blackhawk Road and go about two miles.

Falls Creek Falls

Falls Creek Falls is a set of four waterfalls. Follow state Route 136 to the Dawson-Pickens county line and turn south on Monument Road. The trailhead is 3 miles on the left at the kiosk. Follow Tobacco Pouch Trail 0.3 mile to the junction with Falls Creek Trail, then go 3.3 miles.

Habersham County

Cascade Falls

Rhododendron Trail starts at the historic Chenocetah Fire Tower in Cornelia and descends to Lake Russell in Mt. Airy. The trail to the almost hidden Cascade Falls is 1.75 miles in and is good for families. The complete trail to Lake Russell is approximately 2.6 miles. From Chenocetah Drive,

Note to hikers

Northeast Georgia has scenic wonders to enjoy in its forests and along its rivers and streams. Many of its picturesque waterfalls have relatively short and easy trails, while others require a more strenuous effort. Some of the waterfalls are close to each other and can be visited on one trip. Many of the waterfalls offer breathtaking views and quiet places for contemplation. Access and degree of difficulty vary.

Included here is a county-by-county guide to many of the waterfalls in Dawson, Habersham, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union and White counties.

follow the road to the top of the mountain. The trail starts on the left, across from the marble entrance sign. Follow the blue blazes.

Panther Creek Falls

This 6.6-mile trail is for experienced hikers. The trail begins across the highway from the Panther Creek Recreation Area on Historic Highway 441. Some high shoals are 2.3 miles in, then the waterfall is 3.3 miles in.

Raper Creek Falls

Take state Route 197 south toward Batesville. Stay on 197 south 2 miles past the junction with state Route 255, which leads to Helen. Turn left onto Watts Mill Road. Go 1.2 miles onto Oakey Mountain Road. Go 0.2 miles and turn right onto Raper Creek Road. Bear left from there for 0.2 miles to the parking area and trail on the right.

Tallulah Gorge State Park

There are five waterfalls inside Tallulah Gorge State Park on the Tallulah River. They are: Bridal Veil Falls, Hurricane Falls, L’Eau d’Or Falls, Oceana Falls and Tempesta Falls. TGSP is located on U.S. 441 on the Rabun-Habersham county line.

Lumpkin County

Cane Creek Falls

Located on the grounds of Camp Glisson, Cane Creek Falls is open to the public during daylight hours except when camp is in session. You must check in at the visitors center prior to visiting the falls. From Dahlonega, follow Business U.S. 19 and state Route 60 north for two miles. Turn left at the sign for Camp Glisson and go 1 mile to the parking area near the bottom of the falls. Swimming is not permitted and fishing is permitted on a catch-and-release basis.

DeSoto Falls

Two waterfalls can be viewed from the DeSoto Falls Trails. Trout fishing in Frogtown Creek is allowed and camping is available. To reach the falls, from Dahlonega travel north on U.S. 19 for 13.5 miles to Turners Corner. At this intersection, turn left and proceed on U.S. 129 for 4.2 miles. A sign at the trailhead lets visitors know the history of the discovery of a plate of armor in the 1880s.

Dicks Creek Falls

The falls are located at the convergence of Dicks Creek and Waters Creek in the Chattahoochee National Forest. To reach the falls, take U.S. 19 13.7 miles to Mt. Pisgah Church Road and turn left. Travel 2.6 miles to the falls, which will be on the left. Parking is available on the right.

Black Falls

Black Falls is on the Etowah River and is on the property of Camp Frank D. Merrill, 11 miles north of Dahlonega. Access may be restricted. Check with the visitors center before attempting to visit the falls. To reach the camp, travel north on U.S. 19 for 2 miles and turn left onto Camp Wahsega Road. Follow this road for 9 miles to the entrance.

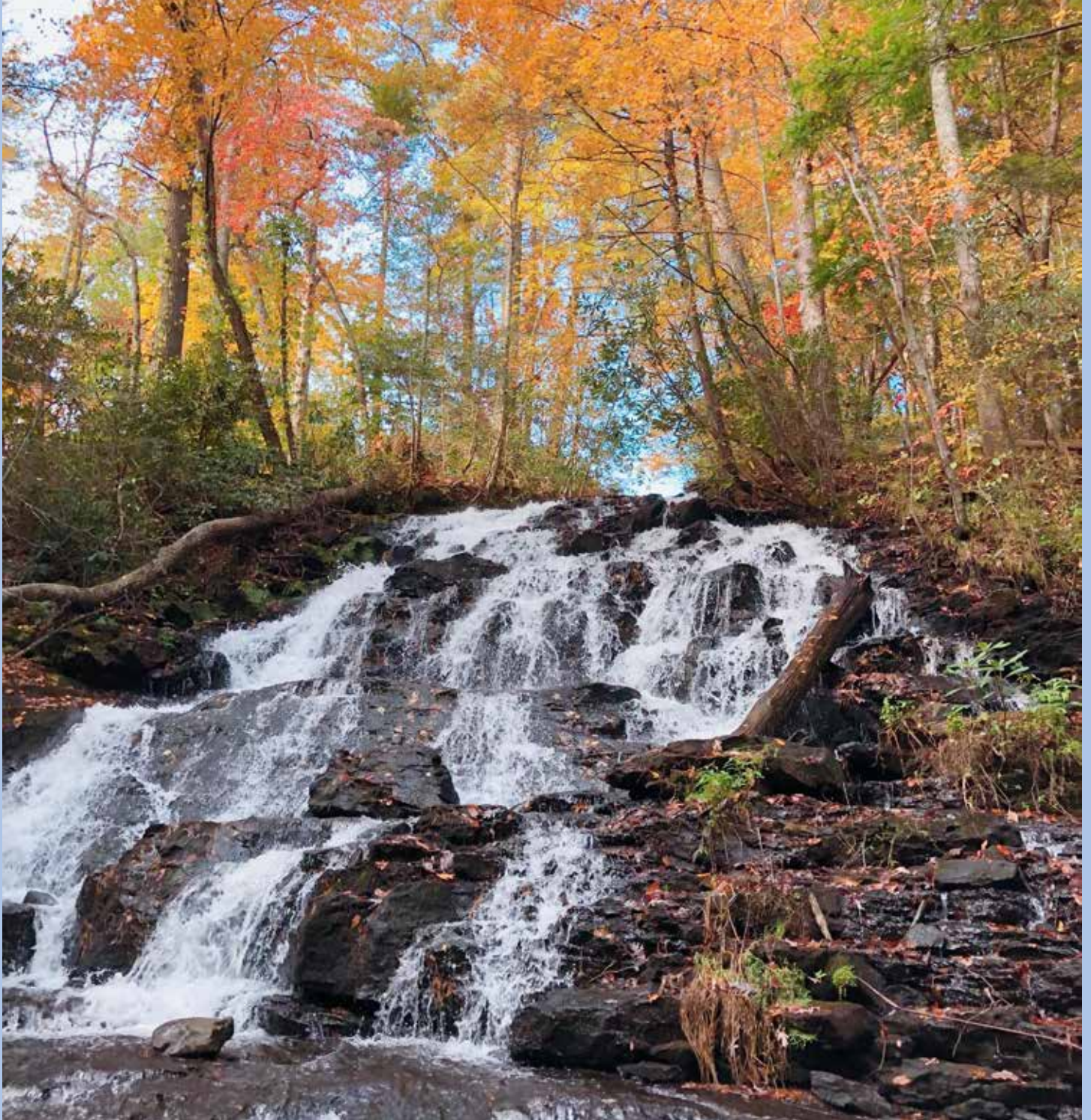
Blood Mountain Creek

Three falls flow from Blood Mountain Creek. To reach the falls, take U.S. 19 north 13.7 miles and turn left onto Mt. Pisgah Church Road. Travel 3.3 miles to the ford across Crow Mountain Creek. Continue for 1 mile to Blood Mountain Creek. A well-used but difficult trail follows the left side of the creek. The lower falls are about 100 yards from the road. The middle falls are another 50 yards upstream.

Rabun County

Bad Branch and Crow Creek

Follow Low Gap Road to the right, instead of going straight toward Minnehaha. At 0.3 miles, you reach Crow Creek Road. Go right and follow the road 2.8 miles to a pull-off on the right. Trailhead is on the left across the road. Bad Branch is a five-minute hike. To get to Crow Creek Falls, stay on Crow Creek Road for another mile. Pull off to the right at telephone pole No. 41-72. Trail is across the road.



The waterfall at Vogel State Park in Union County. Photo/Jennifer Powers

Becky Branch Falls

From Clayton, drive east on Warwoman Road for 2.8 miles and park on the left side of the road by the branch. Walk up the right side of the branch on the trail for about 200 yards to a bridge at base of falls.

Darnell Creek Falls

From Clayton, drive north on U.S. 441 to the Rabun Gap Post Office. Turn right on Kelly's Creek Road. Go 1 mile and turn right on Darnell Creek Road. Continue 0.4 mile, bear left at the fork with the private Chestnut Mountain Road. Drive across the bridge and bear right for another 0.3 mile.

Park at the fork and take the right fork onto the old wood road. Hike is about 0.25 mile to the falls.

Denton Branch Falls

From Clayton, take U.S. Highway 76 west for 8 miles to Persimmon Valley Road. Turn right and continue 4 miles to Forest Service Road 70, to the left. Look for Coleman River WMA signs. Continue down this road for 6.6 miles. Denton Branch Road is off this road to the right, just past the "Tate City Mall" and Chapple Road. This road is rough, rocky and single-lane. The trailhead is a couple hundred feet down this road.

Dicks Creek Falls

This waterfall is about 60 feet high and makes a sheer drop over a granite mound into the Chattooga River. From Clayton, drive 6 miles east on Warwoman Road. Turn right onto Dicks Creek Road or Sand Ford Road. Go 0.5 mile, then take a left across the creek. Go 3.5 miles. Cross second ford and park at Bartram Trail sign. Follow trail north to Dicks Creek. Follow creek to viewing area at top of falls.

Hemlock Falls

This 15-foot falls is on a scenic trail directly across from Moccasin Creek State Park. Children may be interested in the Lake Burton Fish Hatchery next door to the campgrounds. From Clarkesville, take state Route 17 to Alternate SR 255. When this road dead ends, turn right onto SR 255. In Batesville, turn left onto SR 197, driving past LaPrade's at Lake Burton to Moccasin Creek State Park.

Holcomb Creek Falls

The Holcomb Creek Trail (1.3 miles) begins at the intersection of Hale Ridge Road (FS Road 7) and Overflow Road (FS Road 86) and follows a short loop to its end on Hale Ridge Road, passing Holcomb Creek Falls and Ammons Creek Falls. Take Warwoman Road east from Clayton for 10 miles. Turn left on FS Road 7 (Hale Ridge Road) and drive 9 miles. Park to the east of intersection with Overflow Creek Road (FS Road 86).

Kilby Mill Falls

From Clayton, take U.S. Highway 76 west for 8 miles to Persimmon Valley Road. Go 3.2 miles past the turn for Tallulah River Road and Tate City. Park just before the bridge to the right. From the parking area, follow the trail into the woods and up the creek. You'll pass a 20-foot fall before reaching Kilby Mill Falls.

Martin Creek Falls

Half mile walk to a two-tier waterfall, follows the Bartram Trail along the west side of the creek. From Clayton, go east on Warwoman Road for 3 miles. Turn left onto FS Road 152 and drive past the Game Checking Station. Park in the small cleared camping area on the left at a sharp left bend in the road. Walk west from the camping area. Cross Martin Creek, then travel uphill about 0.4 mile to the top of the falls.

Minnehaha Falls

The Minnehaha Trail (0.4 mile) follows Fall Branch until it dead ends at Minnehaha Falls. Take Old Highway 441 South from downtown Clayton to Lake Rabun Road. Continue on Lake Rabun Road for 6.2 miles. Take a left on Low Gap Road (at Flat Creek Community sign). Bear left onto Bear Gap Road for 1.6 miles to a small pullout on the left. The trail starts on some wooden steps to the right, which lead to the falls.

Mud Creek Falls

Also known as Little Estatoah, the falls have a vertical drop of 100 feet and flow into Estatoah Falls in Dillard. Take U.S. 441 North to Dillard. Turn right onto state Route 246 and follow signs to Sky Valley. At Sky Valley's entrance gate, stay left. Turn right on Tahoe Road and follow to the falls.

Panther Falls/Angel Falls

Falls are close to the Rabun Beach Recreational Area. Turn right into Area 2 of the recreation area. Drive back along the loop road to the sign designating the trailhead. This is an easy trail that follows Joe Branch north of the recreation area to the two waterfalls. Panther Falls is located about a half-mile up the trail, while Angel Falls is another 600 yards down the trail.

Sawmill Creek Falls

Located on USFS land, but best accessed by a trail that begins on the private property of Covecrest Teen Camp. Visitors are welcome, but request permission at the office first, 25 Falls Drive, Tiger.

Stonewall Creek Falls

From Clayton, take U.S. 441 south for 2.7 miles, turn right onto Tiger Road. Go 1.1 miles, and turn left onto Old 441 S. Go 2.3 miles and turn right at Stonewall Falls Mountain bike trail sign. Continue on this road for 1.3 miles. Parking area is uphill to the left.

Stephens County

Contentment Falls

A 5-mile trail leads to this waterfall off the Toccoa Falls College campus. Trail access is behind Gathany Museum near Gate Cottage.

Toccoa Falls

Toccoa Falls is located on the campus of Toccoa Falls College in Toccoa. At 186 feet, it stands as one of the highest free-falling waterfalls east of the Mississippi River. Located off state Route Alternate 17 on the campus of TFC.

Towns County

Cupid Falls

Near Young Harris College in Young Harris. Take U.S. 76 to Maple Street, go through Young Harris campus to Thomastown Road. Falls are on the left.

Enota Mountain Retreat

The grounds of this facility in Hiawassee contain two major falls. Visitors must obtain permission before accessing the property at 100 state Route 180, Hiawassee.

High Shoals

Blue Hole Falls and High Shoals Creek Falls are located on High Shoals Creek in the High Shoals Scenic Area of the Chattahoochee National Forest. These falls are easily accessed and feature two observation decks. Located north of Helen on state Route 75 off Indian Grave Gap Road.

Union County

Canada Creek Falls

There are several falls on Canada Creek, in the Chattahoochee National Forest and on private land. The upper falls are public. From Dahlonega on state Route 60 North, go approximately 16 miles and turn left at Tritt's Store across from Woody Lake. Go 1.6 miles, turn right on Canada Creek Road. Go 2.4 miles to the ford across Canada Creek, cross Canada Creek and follow on foot the trail down the right side of the creek.

Helton Creek Falls

A pair of falls with a well-maintained stairway and an observation platform. From Blairsville, take U.S. 19/129 south 11 miles, turn left on Helton Creek Road on the left just past the entrance to Vogel State Park. Go 2.2 miles to small parking area. Trailhead will be on right.

Horse Trough Falls

An easily-accessible falls located where Horse Trough Creek joins the headwaters of the Chattahoochee River. From Helen, take state Route 75 North for 8 miles, turn left on FS 44, proceed 5 miles on the unpaved, steep road to the Upper Chattahoochee Campground. The falls are 0.2 mile from the parking area.

Lake Trahlyta Spillway

On Wolf Creek just below the dam in Vogel State Park, with the approach including a boardwalk trail and an observation platform. Vogel State Park is located south of Blairsville on U.S. 19/129.

White County

Anna Ruby Falls

Located off state Route 356 north of Helen and adjacent to Unicoi State Park, Anna Ruby Falls tumbles down the side of 4,430-foot Tray Mountain. It consists of Curtis Creek (153 feet high) and York Creek (50 feet) which form Smith Creek. Start at the visitors center and climb a half-mile paved trail along the whitewater creek. There is an admittance fee.

Dukes Creek Falls

Park at the Dukes Creek Falls Recreation Area, off Richard B. Russell Scenic Highway (\$4 fee per vehicle). A handicapped-accessible path takes you to an overlook, but after that, you'll descend steep stairs and continue on a dirt trail for almost a mile down to the falls. Includes two cascades fed by Davis and Dodd creeks. Davis falls is 200 feet and narrow; the Dodd falls is short and thundering.

Raven Cliff Falls

Six-mile round-trip hike that passes several waterfalls before arriving at Raven Cliffs. Entrance road is Forest Service Road 244, about a mile past the Dukes Creek Area (see above). Turn left onto FS Road 244 and follow to the marked parking area on the left. Trailhead is across FS Road 244 and heads upstream on the left side of the creek.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Ongoing

Thursdays through Oct. 8, Acoustic Sunsets concert series at Hamilton Gardens at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee, 5:30-9 p.m. The evening features a food court, wine and beer garden and original live music. Free admission.

Each Saturday through Oct. 10, Dahlonega Appalachian Jam music sessions, on the Gold Museum lawn on the Dahlonega Public Square, 2-4 p.m.

Each Saturday through Oct. 10, Dahlonega Farmers Market at Hancock Park, 8 a.m.-1 p.m.

Each Saturday and Tuesday through mid-October, Amicalola Regional Farmers Market. 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Located at Dawsonville Farmers Market Pavilion, 86 Allen St., Dawsonville.

Saturdays (8 a.m.-1 p.m.) and Tuesdays (9 a.m.-1 p.m.) through October, Union County Farmers Market. Features produce and handmade, local goods. Held at 290 Farmers Market Way, Blairsville. Free admission. Details: unioncountygga.gov/farmers-market.

Each Friday through the end of October and seasonal shows in December, free concerts at the Old Union County Courthouse, Blairsville. Music begins at 7:30 p.m. Variety of regional musicians are featured. Details: visitdowntownblairsville.com.

Each Saturday through October, Saturday Night Bluegrass Jam in downtown Tallulah Falls Main Street. Bring lawn chairs to watch and instruments to join in. Music starts at 6 p.m. and usually ends around 9 p.m. Features a bonfire.

Through Sunday, Nov. 1, 56th Oktoberfest 2026. Official celebrations at the Festhalle. The Helen Oktoberfest is the longest running Oktoberfest in the U.S. Details: helenchamber.com/oktoberfest.

Through November and December, Celebrate Christmas



Celena Schoen of Demorest shows off her two-faced "politician jugs" at last year's Folk Pottery & Arts Festival in Sautee Nacoochee. **White County News** file photo

in Dahlonega from the day after Thanksgiving until Jan. 7, 2027. Decorated public square, special entertainment and treats from merchants during Open House. Lighting of the Square and giant Christmas tree on the plaza on Friday, Nov. 27. Santa arrives in Dahlonega to join the annual Christmas Parade on Dec. 12. For a complete list of events, visit dahlonegachristmas.com.

September

Sept. 26, Your State Parks Day. Join Friends groups to volunteer at participating parks for cleanup projects indoors and outdoors. Parks include Black Rock Mountain, Hardman Farm, Moccasin Creek, Smithgall Woods, Tallulah Gorge, Traveler's Rest, Tugaloo, Unicoi and Vogel. For project details and times for each park, visit explore.

gastateparks.org.

Sept. 26, Agrifest, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Freedom Park, Cleveland. Features farm animals, crafts, fresh produce, live music and harvest-themed activities. Details: whitecountychamber.org.

Sept. 26 (7:30 p.m.), Oct. 26 (7:15 p.m.), Nov. 25 (6:35 p.m.), Dec. 23 (5:15 p.m.), Full Moon Hike, Tallulah Gorge State Park, Tallulah Falls. Hike to the suspension bridge and watch the moon rise above the gorge. Meet at the Jane Hurt Yarn Interpretive Center. Call and sign up in advance, space is limited. \$10 per person, \$5 parking. Details: 706-754-7981.

Sept. 26, Oct. 24, Nov. 21, Dec. 26, Community Contra Dance in the Historic Gym on the Sautee Nacoochee Community Association campus. Begins with free warm-up lesson at 7:30 p.m., followed by a dance from 8-10:30 p.m. with live

music. Bring a snack to share. Cost is \$8 for SNCA members, \$15 for non-members, \$10 for students and teens and free for children 12 and younger. Details: 706-878-3300 or snca.org/contra.

October

Oct. 1-4, Currahee Military Weekend, Toccoa. Event includes museum tours on Thursday, with three-day passes available that day only, and at 7:30 p.m., a showing of "Band of Brothers" at Currahee Vineyards. Friday, the Ritz Theater will screen the last episode of "Band of Brothers" at 10 a.m. Tours will continue at the museum and Camp Toccoa. There will also be military re-enactors. Saturday, the Currahee Challenge 5k and 10k takes place at Currahee Mountain. The Currahee Heroes and Heritage Festival will occur in downtown Toccoa, and dinner Under the Stars will be at 6:30 p.m. with special guest speaker Col. Cole at Currahee Vineyards.

Oct. 2, Dahlonega First Friday Night Concert Series begins. Bring a chair and blanket to Hancock Park to enjoy great live music. 6:30-8:30 p.m. Details: 706-482-2707 or dahlonegadda.org.

Oct. 3, "Spooky" Art in the Park, hosted by Dahlonega Arts Alliance, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. All local artists and all original art and handmade crafts. Just off the square in Hancock Park in downtown Dahlonega.

Oct. 3-4, Indian Summer Festival in Suches at Woody Gap School, Suches, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. each day. Features a craft show, 10K run, country square dance, weaponry demonstration, auction, play performed by elementary students, pork barbecue plates, hamburgers, hot dogs and festival food. Details: suches.com/festivalinfo.htm. Proceeds benefit the school.

Oct. 9-10, Judy Harris Memorial Ghost Walk, 7-9 p.m., downtown Dawsonville. Hear ghost stories at the Georgia Racing Hall of Fame and visit the Historic Jail and much more. Details: GeorgiaRacingHOF.com/ghostwalk.

Oct. 9-11 and Oct. 15-17, Georgia Mountain Fall Festival, Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. features first-class musical performances, arts and crafts, unique attractions, food and more. Tickets are \$10. Details: georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/localevents/fallfest.

Oct. 10, Fausett Farm Sunflower Run, 5K race and 1-mile fun run, held at Fausett Farms, Dawsonville. Run or walk through fields of sunflowers. Details: business.dawsonchamber.org.

Oct. 10-11 and Oct. 17-18, Sorghum in the Mountains, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Features arts and crafts, sorghum syrup making and other demonstrations, music and vendors. Held at Meeks Park, Blairsville. Admission costs \$5 for ages 13 and older. Details: members.visitblairsville.com.

Oct. 17, Downtown Clarkesville Fall Festival. Details: clarkesvillega.com.

Oct. 17-18, Gold Rush Days Festival, features more than 300 arts and craft exhibitors and food vendors all around the Public Square, includes a buck dancing contest, wrist wrestling competition and more to the crowning of the Gold Rush King and Queen and a parade. Details: goldrushdaysfestival.com.

Oct. 17 (9 a.m.) and Nov. 21 (11 a.m.), Dec. 19 (11 a.m.) Beginner Archery, Tallulah Gorge State Park, Tallulah Falls. Try archery for the first time or brush up on your skills. Must be able to draw 20-pound bow. Meet at the Jane Hurt Yarn Interpretive Center. Register in advance, space is limited. \$15 per person, \$5 parking. Details: 706-754-7981.

Oct. 23-25, 59th Annual Mountain Moonshine Festival and Car Show, held at the Georgia Racing Hall of Fame and Dawsonville City Hall's Main Street Park. Details: destinationdawsonville.com.

Oct. 24, Appalachian Brew and Music Festival, brings craft breweries from Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Alabama to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee. Held 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Food, regional arts and crafts and Appalachian and Americana music. Details:



Santa arrives at the Toccoa Christmas parade. *Toccoa Record file photo*

georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

Oct. 24, 11th annual Twin Rivers Challenge bicycle race, sponsored by Tallulah Falls School. Registration is at 7:30 a.m. and the rides begin at 9 a.m. The routes are 70 miles, 46 miles and 25 miles. Details: tallulahfalls.org.

Oct. 24, Great Helen Duck Race. 4 p.m. Paul Margarita Deck. Annual fundraiser for Family Promise of White & Habersham. Win up to \$3,000. Details: fpwh.org/events.

Oct. 24, Hardman Farm's Mountain Farm Celebration, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Learn history and culture of North Georgia in the late 1800s. Play games, mine for gems and visit craft vendors. Admission is \$8. Details: 706-878-1077 or gastateparks.org/HardmanFarm.

Oct. 24-25, Art-Oberfest Arts & Fine Crafts Festival 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m.-3 p.m. on Sunday at the Helen Arts & Heritage Center. Details: helenarts.org.

Oct. 24-25, 49th annual Toccoa Harvest Festival, held along Doyle Street in Toccoa, features more than 160 craft and food vendors. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. on Sunday. Details: mainstreettoccoa.com.

Oct. 29-31, Haunted Village at the

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee, 6:30-10:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$5 in advance; \$7 at the gate. Must be 6 or older to enter; anyone 6-12 must be accompanied by an adult. Details: georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

Oct. 30, Halloween at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee, 5-8 p.m. Free admission. Details: georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

Oct. 30, Halloween Children's Parade - 10 a.m., Tugalo Street Greenspace, downtown Toccoa. A festive Halloween parade through downtown, homemade costume contest, and activities across the downtown area.

Oct. 31, Fall Festival at Vogel State Park, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Features a cakewalk, hayrides, live music and food during the day with a campfire and storytelling at night. Park pass or \$10 parking. Details: explor.gastateparks.org.

Oct. 31, Trunk or Treat at Rock Creek Park, Dawsonville, 4-6 p.m. Free fun for the whole family, including candy, treats, toys, carnival games, bounce house, hayrides and more. Details: dawsoncountygga.gov.

Oct. 31, Downtown Trick or Treat in Cornelia, 3-6 p.m., visit local

businesses for candy and costume contest; free to attend.

Oct. 31, Trick or Treat on the Clarkesville Square.

Oct. 31, Trick or Treat in Demorest.

Oct. 31, Scares on the Square, Dahlonega, 5-7 p.m. Dress up and stroll around town in a festive atmosphere. Merchants will hand out candy.

November

Nov. 7, Art in the Park presented by Chestatee Artists, featuring local artists and handmade crafts, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. All local artists and all original art and handmade crafts. Just off the square in Hancock Park in downtown Dahlonega.

Nov. 5, Salute to Veterans Dinner at the Rabun County Civic Center, 201 W. Savannah St. Clayton. The event that begins at 4:45 p.m. is organized by Forward Rabun/Rabun County Chamber of Commerce. Dinner is at 5 p.m.

Nov. 7, 9th Annual Salute to Veterans Car Show at the Union County Farmers Market, Blairsville. Event held from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. and features more than 150 vehicles, veterans' booths, North Georgia Honor Guard, flag ceremonies, food

and more. Proceeds benefit local veteran organizations.

Nov. 7-8, Holiday Bazaar, 1411 Jack Dayton Circle, Young Harris. Begins at 10 a.m. Saturday and runs through 4 p.m. Sunday. Features 75 regional vendors with a wide variety of homemade gourmet foods and Christmas décor. Santa Claus will be at the event.

Nov. 13-14, The annual Mistletoe Market Arts and Crafts show for Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild will be November 13th and 14th at the First United Methodist Church, Blairsville. Hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. both days; admission is \$3. There are over 30 vendors with varying arts and crafts for sale.

Nov. 21, Dawsonville Christmas parade and tree lighting. From 2-8 p.m., the Jingle Market will have crafts, homemade products and more. Parade begins at 4 p.m. and goes through downtown. Event will feature music, dancing, pictures with Santa, cooking decorating, face painting, hot cocoa and coffee. Tree lighting at 6 p.m. Details: 706-265-6278.

Nov. 26-Dec. 31, Mountain Country Christmas in Lights 2025, Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee. Show runs each Thursday, Friday and Saturday from Nov. 27-Dec. 6, then every

night, Dec. 11-23. Closed Christmas Day, and Dec. 26-31 will be drive-thru only, 6-9 p.m. Admission, \$12 per person with children 12 and under admitted free. Details: georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

Nov. 26-New Year's Eve, Christmas Lights Spectacular, Cornelia City Park, 5-11 p.m. each night.

Nov. 27, Lighting of the Village. The Annual Lighting of the Village will take place from 5 to 7 p.m. on the Marktplatz, downtown Helen.

Nov. 28-29, Mistletoe Market 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m.-3 p.m. on Sunday at the Helen Arts & Heritage Center. Features original handmade works, fine arts and crafts. Details: helenarts.org.

Nov. 28, Dahlonega Arts Alliance Christmas Art Market, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. in Hancock Park.

Nov. 28, Small Business Saturday, shop local all day in Habersham County.

Nov. 28-29 and Dec. 5-6, 19th annual Christkindlemarkt, Helen, a traditional German event that offers unique gifts, decorations, and savory and sweet foods, drinks and candied treats. Details: helenchamber.com.

December

Dec. 1-31, Tour of Trees, Union County Community Center, Blairsville. Great for family photos.

Dec. 4, Habersham County Christmas Parade, Clarkesville, 5 p.m. Parade travels up Washington Street to the Square. The event will include Clarkesville Christmas, photos with Santa, live music, roasted marshmallows and hot cocoa and the Christmas tree lighting.

Dec. 4, ChristmasFest, 5-9 p.m., downtown Toccoa. Kick off the holiday season with evening festivities, lights, shopping, and family friendly holiday activities.

Dec. 4-5, 11-12, 18-19, Victorian Christmas at Hardman Farm, 4-7 p.m. Step back in time to Christmas of 1877 during an open house at Hardman Farm Historic Site. Includes live music and s'mores around the campfire. Pre-registration is required, with tickets available to purchase online. For details, visit gastateparks.org/HardmanFarm or call 706-878-1077.

Dec. 5, Christmas in Cornelia, Downtown Cornelia and Fenders Alley, Cornelia, 4-9 p.m. Features food, shopping, photos with Santa, hayrides, live entertainment,

Cornelia's Christmas tree lighting.

Dec. 5, Christmas in the Mountains and Lighted Parade, 12-7 p.m., with the parade beginning at 6 p.m. in downtown Cleveland. Details: 706-865-5356 or info@whitecountychamber.org.

Dec. 5, Christmas at the Gorge, 1-3 p.m. features crafts, Christmas music, Santa, snacks and a hayride. Free event with \$5 parking or annual pass.

Dec. 5, Holiday on the Square and Christmas Parade, downtown Blairsville, 6-7 p.m. Will feature a parade and tree-lighting immediately after. Details: unioncountyhistory.org.

Dec. 10, Toccoa Christmas Parade, 7-8 p.m., throughout downtown Toccoa. Hosted by the Toccoa-Stephens County Chamber of Commerce, featuring holiday floats, marching bands, and a festive evening parade.

Dec. 12, Sunset Candy Cane Hunt at Tallulah Gorge State Park, 5-7 p.m. Hunt candy canes, enjoy a holiday movie, s'mores, hot chocolate. Meet at picnic shelter in the day use area. \$5 parking or annual pass. Details: 706-754-7981.

Dec. 12, Annual Christmas Tree Lighting at Vogel State Park, begins at 4 p.m. and features caroling, hayrides, visits with Santa, bonfire, hot chocolate and more. Culminates with the lighting of a blue spruce. Bring an unwrapped gift for a child 12 or under (no toy guns or knives).

Dec. 21, Candlelight Christmas Walk in Clarkesville. Details: Clarkesvillega.com.

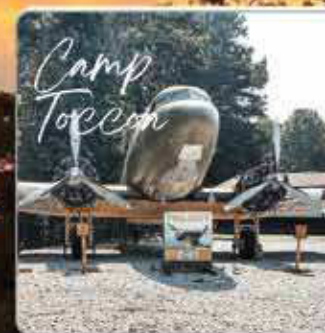
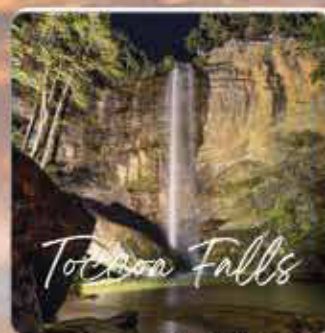
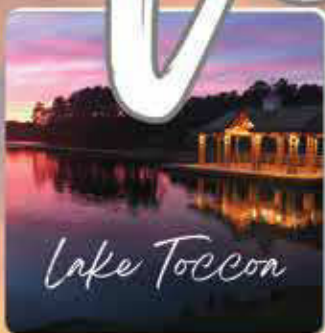
Dec. 31, New Year Fireworks at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee. Gates and food trucks open at 6 p.m. and fireworks begin at 8 p.m. Usher in 2027 with a bang! Details: georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

Dec. 31, New Year's Eve Celebration, Helen. Ring in the New Year at the Festhalle with the 13th Annual Dropping of the Edelweiss. Event begins at 8 p.m. and includes live music, dancing, party favors, heavy hors d'oeuvres, champagne toast at midnight. Beer and wine will be available for purchase. Admission is \$30 for adults, \$15 for kids ages 6-12. Details: 706-878-1908.



Oktoberfest is an annual, weeks-long event that spans downtown Helen. *White County News file photo*

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Stephens County

Currahee Mountain shows off its fall colors. Photo/Aubrey Sims

BUCKET LIST

Stephens County offers shopping, historical sites and natural beauty.

- ☐ Enjoy Lake Toccoa and its amenities, such as paddle boating.
- ☐ Get a selfie on top of Currahee Mountain.
- ☐ Take a scenic photo of Broken Bridges on the Tugaloo Water Trail.
- ☐ Paddle on the Tugaloo River Water Trail.
- ☐ Explore the history of WWII and the paratroopers who trained at Camp Toccoa at Currahee.

More than a mountain

Currahee Mountain is Stephens County's landmark

BY J. TODD TRUELOVE

Like a silent sentinel, Currahee Mountain has stood vigil over the area that's now Stephens County for millions of years.

Julia Cox, an academic professional with the University of Georgia's Department of Geology, said that Currahee Mountain "is composed of granitic gneiss, which is quartz-rich metamorphic rock that is more resistant to erosion than surrounding rock."

Cox said that Currahee's resistance to erosion is what caused it to stand higher than the surrounding area.

"The metamorphic rocks (such as gneiss, schist, amphibolite and quartz-

ite) of the Georgia Piedmont and Blue Ridge were all formed and uplifted during multiple mountain building events affecting the eastern edge of North America 400-250 million years ago," Cox said.

Cox said that the Appalachian Mountains around that time frame were a lot like today's Himalayan Mountains.

"Today's Appalachians and foothills (the Piedmont) are erosional remnants of those once greater mountains," Cox said.

Kelly Vickers, a former registrar at Toccoa Falls College who is working on a pictorial and literary book related to Toccoa, said that early tradition records





Metamorphic rock shows on the side of Currahee Mountain. **The Toccoa Record** file photo

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indicated that Currahee Mountain derived its name "after a fierce Native American warrior who fought during the Revolution against the encroaching colonists."

Vickers said that he has collected extensive documents describing Currahee Mountain from the early 1800s.

"Early accounts mention an ill-kept hotel at the foot of Currahee in the early 1800s," Vickers said.

"A briefer mention of Currahee from a tourist notes that Currahee Mountain is 'a notable and abrupt spur, giving a grand view from its summit of probably a hundred miles in extent.'"

The Stephens County government recognizes Currahee Mountain's importance to the area.

At some 800 feet in height from the ground and 1,700 feet above sea level, the mountain has been linked to wars

from the Civil War, to World War II, to a local legend.

The name, Currahee, is from the Cherokee tribe and means "stands alone."

Legend has it that Andrew Jackson battled against the Native Americans at a site called Fort Hill near Currahee Mountain.

But though Jackson had military campaigns against the Creek Indians from 1813-1814, there are no records of Jackson fighting at Currahee or in northeast Georgia.

There are, however, accounts of the Battle of Currahee, also called the Battle of the Narrows, in the Civil War on Oct. 18, 1864.

That battle occurred during William Tecumseh Sherman's March to the Sea.

Accounts tell that after Sherman's win at Atlanta, he sent a small regiment

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to Northeast Georgia to destroy grain fields.

The battle was not on the mountain itself but within sight of it.

A marker on US 441, south of Willingham Avenue in Baldwin from the Georgia Historical Society states that in the Battle of Currahee, Confederate troops saved Habersham County from “pillaging by Union troops and camp followers and also saved grain fields for Confederate troops.”

Currahee Mountain also served as the training base for paratroopers from units in World War II.

Known as “Camp Toccoa,” the site trained troops from Parachute Infantry Regiments (PIR) 506, 501, and 511 and Parachute Regimental Combat Team 517.

Local community volunteers and the Stephens County Historical Society have worked in recent years to restore the site and preserve the camp’s legacy.

Those efforts have included the reconstruction and restoration of four former barracks and the installation of a C-47 transport plane, the same type of aircraft troops used to leap from during World War II.

The training at Camp Toccoa spawned the phrase, “Three miles up. Three miles down.” That’s the distance marching from the base to the top of Currahee Mountain and back.

The city of Toccoa’s Currahee Military Weekend that usually takes place during the first weekend in October regularly features a running event up and down the mountain.

Signs atop the mountain warn vandalism is a felony,

Attempts have been made to clean the mountain, but the graffiti persists.



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BEST BITES

Burger highlights in Stephens County

For that old-fashioned burger

If you're looking for a no-frills, good old-fashioned hamburger in Stephens County for a fair price, look no further than the X-Factor Grill in downtown Toccoa.

The Cornerstone Burger is succulent, juicy, cooked to a medium temperature, and piled high with lettuce, tomatoes, red onions, and pickles.

And it starts at \$7.99, but you can make it a double for \$10.99 and add cheese, bacon, or slaw for pennies on the dollar.

Owner Bryan Westmoreland said the restaurant uses a third-pound sirloin beef burger with a toasted bun, and it comes with your choice of side. Fried pickles would be a fabulous pairing.

The restaurant also makes the White County Burger, a 1/3 ground sirloin burger with slaw, mustard, ketchup, pickles, and onion. That's also for \$7.99, or \$10.99 for a double.

X-Factor is located at 27 E. Doyle Street, Toccoa, and is open Monday through Saturday, 7 a.m.-3 p.m. The restaurant is closed on Sundays.

— BY MICHAEL O'HEARN



X-Factor Grill
Address: 27 E. Doyle St., Toccoa
Hours: 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Saturday

X-Factor owner Bryan Westmoreland puts the finishing touches on the restaurant's Cornerstone Burger. **Photos/** Michael O'Hearn



The pimento cheese burger is a favorite at Ping's Grill at Lake Toccoa. Photo/J. Todd truelove

Ping's Grill

Address: 201 Black Mountain Road, Toccoa

Hours: 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. and 4:30-8 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday-Saturday

Burgers that are full of flavor

Tim Fleming knows a thing or two about what goes into crafting a good burger.

Fleming's got 20 years of experience in grilling burgers. He currently operates Ping's Grill at Lake Toccoa.

Prior to that, he was the cook at the Toccoa Elk's Club.

"We use a blend of chuck, brisket and short rib for our burgers," Fleming said. "It's a leaner ground beef."

Fleming said the brisket and short rib add to the flavor.

"We use a regular flat grill and put it on a toasted bun," he said.

Fleming said that a medium cook is best, though people have different opinions. "Some like it well done," he said.

Ping's offers a variety of burgers.

Fleming said that many people like Ping's pimento cheese burger. "The Zeusanator would be the next (favorite)," he said. "That's a double patty with bacon, jalapeno, lettuce, tomato, onion, and pickles."

Ping's is located at 201 Black Mountain Road, Toccoa. Hours are Tuesday through Thursday, 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. for lunch and 4:30-8 p.m. for dinner; Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. The restaurant is closed Sunday and Monday.

— BY J. TODD TRUELOVE



A Toccoa tradition

If the name of the item is on the sign outside, then it had better be good when patrons order and eat inside.

At least that's how Thomas Bell, third generation owner/operator of Bell's Hamburgers on Big A Road in Toccoa, sees it.

The big sign out front of the eatery is iconic in Toccoa-Stephens County, a fixture of the Big A Road landscape for almost 70 years.

And just how good are Bell's hamburgers?

So good that Toccoa-Stephens County residents overwhelmingly voted them as the best in the county

This is a fully loaded mushroom burger ready for eating at Bell's Hamburgers. Photo/Tom Law

as part of the Best of Stephens County promotion staged recently by *The Toccoa Record*.

Here’s how one reviewer puts it: “I ordered the burger and I must say, it was incredibly moist and delicious –



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Employees of Bell’s Hamburgers are proud of the quality food products they make for customers. Making sure burgers are done right are (from left) Marla Feaster, Kayla Davis, Sherry Martin and Tiko Brown.
Photo/Tom Law

one of the best I’ve had.”

Another reviewer says the burgers are “griddled patties that sizzle with a

purpose.”

They are so good that Bell estimates he and his staff make and sell more

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Stephens County Board of Commissioners

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Accomplishments for 2025:

- o The Board of Commissioners was able to provide a partial rollback of the millage rate for FY26, providing reduced property taxes for homesteaded properties in the County.
- o The Board provided quality-of-life updates to the Building & Building Inspections Ordinance, changing the way that Camper Permits are pulled, now allowing residency during homeconstruction and for certain vacation purposes.
- o Over 20 miles of County roads were paved, including all of Historic Highway 17.
- o Heritage Rise is nearly complete and a new 165-unit single-family residential community is under construction.
- o The County implemented its own “Courthouse Christmas” for the first time to much citizen acclaim.



STEPHENS COUNTY
GEORGIA
1905

Stephens County, nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Northeast Georgia, is known for its friendly people, progressive government, quality schools, ruggedness and scenic beauty. Among the most scenic areas of the county are the 900-foot-high Currahee Mountain, the last mountain in the Blue Ridge Mountain chain, and 186-foot-high Toccoa Falls. Stephens County is the home of Toccoa Falls College, North Georgia Technical College (Currahee Campus) and serves as a medical hub for all of northeast Georgia.

The mission of Stephens County Government is to provide mandated and non-mandated services to our citizens in an effective, efficient, and responsive manner while maintaining fiscal integrity. The basis of providing these services shall include the safety and well-being of the public, the protection and improvement of our natural resources, heritage and culture, and fostering the expansion of economic opportunities.

We, the members of the Stephens County Board of Commissioners, are looking forward to continuing our efforts to build a quality environment where our citizens can grow and prosper.

than 1,000 of them in the four days a week (Tuesday through Friday) the restaurant is open.

Actually, diners can choose between six different varieties of burger.

The selections include a Jumbo Burger which comes with mustard, ketchup, onions and pickles. Cheese is extra.

A Deluxe Jumbo is also a popular item. It's a big burger with all the fixin's including lettuce and tomato. Then for big appetites, there's the Bacon Double Deluxe Jumbo.

For a little different take on the classic burger, Bell's offers the Mushroom & Swiss Steakburger which features a half-pound of ground sirloin cooked to order and topped with Swiss cheese and grilled mushrooms.

For younger diners whose appetites are still growing, there's the junior hamburger.

And for the truly adventurous, Bell's

Bell's Hamburgers

Address: 1445 Big A Road, Toccoa

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

can add chili or a fried egg or both onto a burger for a small extra charge.

Hamburgers have been a key part of the Bell's menu since the restaurant was started back in 1961 by Bell's grandfather.

"Been there since Day One," Thomas Bell said.

So, is there a secret ingredient or cooking process that can be attributed to the popularity of Bell's Hamburgers?

"Not really," Bell said. "We start with fresh ground beef, of course. We do that every day. That's about it."

— BY TOM LAW

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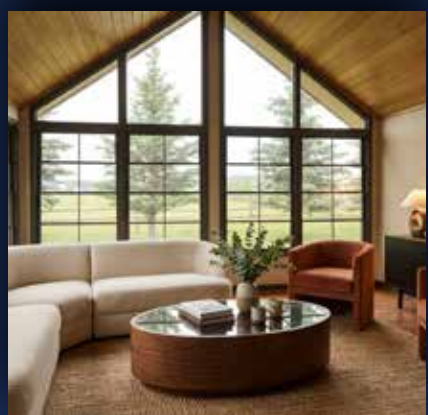
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The friendly skies

Millions of birds take flight across Northeast Georgia each fall

BY TOM LAW

On any given night across Northeast Georgia from August to November, millions of birds take to the night skies in their migratory travels in search of warmer climates in which to spend the winter.

For instance, the night of Monday, Sept. 14, some 19.8 million birds crossed the state of Georgia during the night, according to the Cornell Lab web site. Most neotropical migrants fly anywhere from 900 to 3,000 feet.

An estimated 1.7 million crossed Habersham County the same night, while an estimated 2.17 million flew over Rabun County. The peak time for the Rabun flights was 9:20 p.m. when about 332,500 did a flyover at about 2,500 feet.

Some of the bird migrants included Tennessee warblers, common nighthawks, hooded warblers, scarlet tanagers and yellow-billed cuckoos, according to Cornell Lab. Scientists from Cornell University, the University of Massachusetts, Purdue University and



The scarlet tanager is one of the many birds currently migrating through northeast Georgia. Photo courtesy of Cornell University



Blue grosbeaks like this one are among the migrating birds now passing through northeast Georgia. Photo courtesy of McCauley Library

The observation tower at Brasstown Bald near Blairsville is a good place to view birds migrating through the area. CNI Newspapers file photo



This brightly colored Magnolia Warbler is a songbird that breeds in northern forests but migrates across the Gulf of Mexico during the fall. **Photo by Evan Lipton/McCauley Library**

the University of Illinois contribute to Cornell Lab of Ornithology, a research unit of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, which studies birds and wildlife and provides extensive resources for scientists and bird enthusiasts.

Birds migrate two times annually, northward in spring and southward in the fall beginning in late August until early November. The peak southward migration takes place September through October.

The great migration provides a huge payoff for humans as it provides “great opportunities to see all kinds of birds,” according to Joel Volpi of Habersham County, the official ornithologist of

Mud Creek Proper in Habersham County.

“These birds are navigating celestially at night, flying eight or 10 hours,” Volpi said. “They’ve got to settle down, feed and rest in the day to rest up before they continue their migration, and so many of those resting spots are right here in Northeast Georgia. They are readily seen in our area, especially in the morning hours.”

The birds come from as far north as the Arctic Circle, Volpi said, and travel as far as South America where they spend the winter. Some simply like the winter climate right here in Northeast Georgia and take up residence during the cold weather months with full-time feathered residents like cardinals and certain types of sparrows.

“Yellow-bellied sapsuckers and juncos are some of the ones who will stop in the area for wintering,” Volpi said.

Sapsuckers are woodpeckers that are commonly found the northeastern United States and Canada but winter in warmer climates. Juncos are little sparrows that flit about forest floors of the western mountains and Canada and then flood the rest of North America in the winter.

Northeast Georgia is a prime spot for bird-watching in the fall, Volpi said.

“The mountains are excellent places to watch birds,” he said. “Rabun Bald, Brasstown Bald are good places to watch. Even downtown Cornelia is good, because Cornelia is close to the upper escarpment where there is a significant change in elevation that takes place quickly. If you’ve ever seen Cornelia from the air, the sharp incline is easy to see.”

Volpi also suggests Panther Creek, Tallulah Gorge and “any mountaintop or hiking trails in the area” as excellent places to watch birds.



A yellow-bellied sapsucker is a woodpecker that spends warm weather in the northern U.S. and Canada, migrates southward in the fall and can be seen in Northeast Georgia. **Photo courtesy of South Carolina Public Radio**



Magnolia warblers can be identified by their distinctive black stripes. **Photo courtesy of Stokes Birding Blog**

Not all birds migrating through the area do it nocturnally, Volpi said.

“Many of the bigger birds, the raptors such as hawks, falcons and eagles, migrate in the daytime,” Volpi said. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources re-introduced peregrine falcons to Tallulah Gorge in 2018 after an absence of more than 80 years.

Volpi offered two other tips to enhance bird-watching activities.

“There are a number of excellent electronic sites that provide good information,” he said. “I suggest you seek out some of those.” Merlin ID app by Cornell Lab and birdcast.org has live maps of the migration and both are free.

And when you are attending a high school football game during a “Friday night under the lights,” concentrate on the lights for a few minutes.

“Insect-eating birds are drawn to the lights. During this migration time of the year, I betcha you’ll see some birds flying around the lights of football stadiums,” he said. “When I lived closer to Atlanta, I would go to see the Braves at night and there would be a number of birds, mostly common nighthawks up there too.”

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A hidden gem

Currahee Military Museum is steeped in history

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL O'HEARN

The Stephens County History Museum and Currahee Military Museum have become international landmarks for those interested in Toccoa and military history.

It is housed in the historic 1915 Train Depot in downtown Toccoa near First Citizens Bank and Toccoa City Hall.

The museum is led by executive director Andrea Dalrymple.

People come from as far away as Germany to visit the museum, and attendance has exploded since the airing of the HBO miniseries, “Band of Brothers,” 25 years ago.

“The Currahee Military Museum is a true hidden gem in downtown Toccoa,” Dalrymple said. “We love welcoming our amazing visitors from all across the globe. From history buffs, fans of HBO’s Band of Brothers, and military service members, to school groups and vacationing families.”

Actor Tom Hanks and famed director Steven Spielberg began filming the series in 1999 and sent a co-producer of the show, Ivan Schwarz, to Toccoa to see about filming scenes in Toccoa.

Schwarz hired Joe Hobbs as a costume designer to produce all the WWII uniforms and equipment to be used in the filming, and it was decided that T-shirts would be made using the picture of the Camp Toccoa T-shirt Schwarz took when visiting the Currahee Military Museum. All of the crew involved in the filming would get a shirt.

The completed series features several scenes





This display shows photos from World War II.



At left, a scene from the museum. Above, the T-shirt later reproduced for the movie "Band of Brothers."

with actors wearing Camp Toccoa T-shirts. The original shirt that was donated to the museum was made by Capt. and Mrs. Robert Meyers of Westminster, South Carolina. The Stephens County Historical Society copyrighted the shirt, and it's a popular seller at the museum's gift shop.

Visitors will find exhibits on local sites and prominent figures from Toccoa, including silhouette artist George Washington Hitt, jazz singer Ida Cox and Olympic weightlifter Paul Anderson.

The building was expanded to house the Currahee Military Museum, which contains information on the regiments who trained at Camp Toccoa in World War II.

A six-stall stable where the soldiers from Company E, 2nd Battalion, 506th PIR and 101st Army Airborne can be found in the Brenda J. Carlan Hall. Carlan is the former executive director of the Currahee Military Museum.

A new exhibit focuses on a 1700s wooden beam transferred from Marmion Farms in France, the site of the first photo of the first captured Nazi Germany flag by the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions in France on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

Another new addition to the museum involves horse and rider models depicting the infamous story of Mario Patrino, Company F, 506th PIR, during D-Day. The Loden Exhibit Hall recognizes local veterans from each U.S. war, including Tuskegee Airman Lt. Col. Leroy Roberts.

The museum was named a 2025 Best of Georgia Regional Winner by the Georgia Business Journal.

"We deeply care about our history and heritage here," Dalrymple said. "We cannot wait to welcome you to Toccoa, share our stories, and hear yours."



Far left, a military jeep. At left, a sign at the museum.



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Union County

BUCKET LIST

Union County is home to rich history and natural beauty. Below are the county's must-see places.

- ☐ Explore Vogel State Park's Lake Trahlyta, miles of trails and new visitors center.
- ☐ Visit Lake Nottely and hike the Nottely Reservoir Trail with its lakeside views.
- ☐ Learn history at the Old Union County Courthouse museum.
- ☐ Visit the Byron Herbert Reece Heritage Farm.
- ☐ Walk on a Meeks Park trail along Butternut Creek and the Nottely River.

The 22-acre Lake Trahlyta at Vogel State Park shows amazing fall colors. Photo/Jack Becker



Duncan Ridge Trail Race

The Duncan Ridge Trail 50K/30K race takes place each fall, “one of the toughest 50Ks in the Southeast, with more than 10,000 feet of elevation gain.” The race begins at Vogel State Park and follows the Coosa Back Country Trail to the Duncan Ridge Trail. This year’s race is 7:30 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 21. Details: ultrasignup.com.

The rugged beauty of Duncan Ridge Trail

BY KIMBERLY BROWN

Many Northeast Georgia adventurers who enjoy a long, rugged hike know about the Duncan Ridge Trail, which runs partially in Union County.

The trail stretches about 35.5 miles across the Northeast Georgia mountains. It intersects with the Appalachian Trail near Long Creek and Three Forks in the west, and it intersects with the Appalachian Trail again near Blood Mountain in the east.

Brandon Young has helped organize the Duncan Ridge Trail (DRT) 50K/30K race for 16 years. “The DRT is one of the tougher trails in North Georgia, if not the toughest,” Young said. “To my knowledge, it was designed as a possible re-route of the Appalachian Trail.”

According to the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, in the 1960s, there was a plan to extend the Blue Ridge Parkway into Georgia. That plan would have displaced some of Georgia’s Appalachian Trail sections, so the Duncan Ridge Trail was created to replace those sections. It was even



The Duncan Ridge Trail is one of the most rugged trails in the Northeast Georgia Mountains.
Photos/Brandon Young

called “Appalachian Trail” for a few years.

However, the Parkway extension idea was abandoned in 1985, and officially deauthorized in the 1990s, with negative impacts to the AT and disruption of surrounding forests being primary reasons. So, Duncan Ridge became its own trail.

It was designed without switchbacks, Young said, “making it an endless up and down, going over knobs and ridges.”

But that hard walking is worth it for the views.

“The best views are at the top of Coosa Bald and Akin Mountain,” Young said. “Lots of mature hardwoods throughout with some large rock structures as well.”

He said fall and winter when the leaves are gone allow for the best viewing, because “otherwise it’s pretty thick cover.”

The trail’s western terminus is near Long Creek Falls in Fannin County, at the junction of the Appalachian Trail and Benton MacKaye Trail near Three Forks. Its eastern terminus is where it intersects the Appalachian Trail on the west side of Blood Mountain, near Slaughter Gap and Slaughter Mountain.

Duncan Ridge Trail can be accessed from a variety of points. One of the most convenient is Wolfpen Gap on Ga. 180, about halfway between Vogel State Park and Suches. The trail crosses the highway at the gap and roadside parking is available. From there, hikers can follow the blue-blazed Duncan Ridge Trail in either direction along the ridge.

The trail can also be reached from Vogel State Park via the Coosa Backcountry Trail. The Coosa trail begins at the park’s backcountry trailhead and eventually joins the Duncan Ridge Trail near Coosa Bald.

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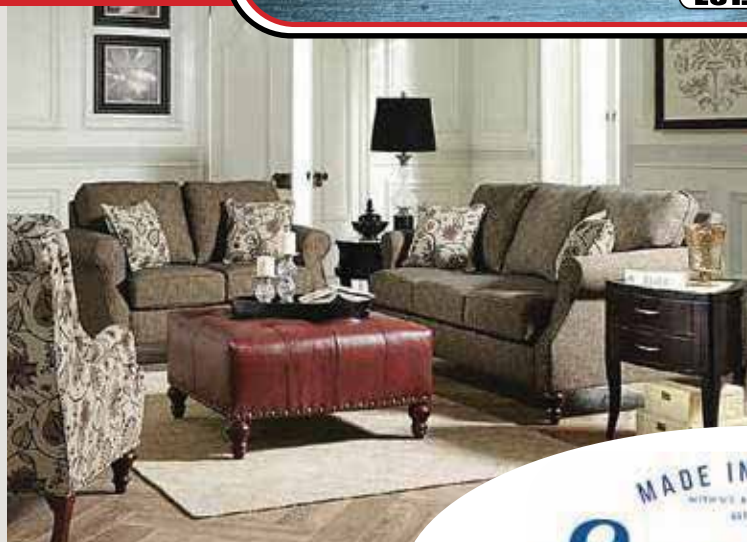
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BEST BITES

Burger highlights in Union County

A Blairsville staple

The Hole In The Wall has been a Blairsville institution since 1931, popular for its burgers, all-day breakfast and full, country-style meals.

Owner and chef Mark Cox said the Hole In The Wall Burger, which includes chili, house-made coleslaw, cheese and “the garden,” lettuce, tomato, onion and pickle, is a customer favorite. But Cox said they serve a variety of burgers.



The Hole in the Wall's namesake burger is a customer favorite. **Submitted photo**

“We have a bacon/onion/mushroom/Swiss, we have bacon/onion/bleu cheese, we’ve got mushroom/Swiss, we’ve got farm burgers and we’ve got chili cheese dogs,” he said.

The menu includes hand-cut French fries, a variety of salads, hot dogs and chicken sandwiches. For heartier appetites, Hole In The Wall offers a variety of “meat and vegetable” meals, including pork chops, fried catfish, smothered chicken and more. Friday and Saturday nights the restaurant offers Cox’s prime rib. The restaurant’s all-day breakfast is especially popular, Cox said.

— BY KIMBERLY BROWN

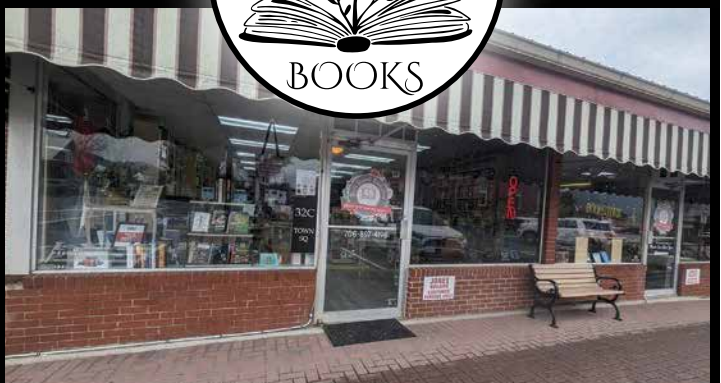
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Burger makes it more than seafood

“Fresh, never frozen” is the mantra of Mike’s Seafood Market and Grill owner Stephan Holland.

While Mike’s Seafood, located in Blairsville, is primarily a fresh seafood restaurant and market, Holland said his steakburger and ribeye are popular items on the menu.

Mike’s Seafood comes “fresh from the ocean” delivered three times per week. That includes redfish from Louisiana, mahi-mahi from Florida, trout from North Carolina, Norwegian salmon and Georgia shrimp.

But when people don’t want seafood, Holland said, “I pride myself on having one of the best burgers and one of the best ribeyes you’ll ever eat. ... They’re exceptional, fresh, never frozen.”

About the fan-favorite burger, Holland said he doesn’t get fancy with it.

“I think it’s all about the meat,” he said. “Good, fresh, never frozen meat will go a long way. It makes quite a difference.”

Mike’s Seafood’s steakburger is \$12.95 for a side and hushpuppies, Holland said. The burger can be customized with cheese, bacon, onion petals or barbecue sauce.

Holland doesn’t have a food service background, but the restaurant is a great fit because he loves people and said, “It’s all about making people happy. ... I’m here every day, I spend time with my customers and I check on every meal that comes out of that kitchen.”

— BY KIMBERLY BROWN



Mike’s Seafood Market

Address: 513 Murphy Highway, Blairsville
Hours: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. and 5-9 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

The steak burger at Mike’s Seafood Market and Grill is a customer favorite. **Submitted photo**



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A man and a child are riding bicycles on a dirt trail through a forest. The trees have vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and red. The man is in the foreground, wearing a dark t-shirt and pants, riding a mountain bike. The child is slightly behind him, also on a bike. The ground is covered in fallen leaves.

Towns County

BUCKET LIST

Towns County, consisting of Young Harris and Hiawassee, is home to Lake Chatuge and other beautiful sights. Below are places to see and things to do when visiting Towns County.

- ☐ Visit Lake Chatuge for stunning autumn views.
- ☐ Walk the lake shore trail at Hamilton Rhododendron Gardens, at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.
- ☐ Enjoy the view from Bell Mountain.
- ☐ Visit the highest peak in Georgia, Brasstown Bald.
- ☐ Hike to High Shoals Falls and Blue Hole Falls on one beautiful trail. Trailhead is on Indian Grave Gap Road.

Kaspar, Lando and Buzz Rawlings enjoy a fall bicycle ride on the Jack-rabbit Trail near Lake Chatuge. Photo courtesy of Hayesville Bike Shop

Fall's front-row seat

BY KIMBERLY BROWN

For peak leaf foliage with a great lake view from mid-October through November, head to Lake Chatuge in Towns County.

One of the best places to get a panoramic view of the lake and surrounding fall color is Bell Mountain Overlook, said Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce President Julie Payne.

"Bell Mountain looks right down on the lake," Payne said. "It's a great spot."

To access Bell Mountain, head toward downtown Hiawassee on US-76/GA-75. At the traffic light by the Towns County Courthouse, turn onto Shake Rag Road, which will wind up the mountain. There's a parking area near the top, but you'll have to walk up to the viewing platforms.

The narrow, winding, steep road is worth the panoramic views. But if you don't want to risk your vehicle's brakes coming down the mountain, there are other places to view the lake, Payne said.

"Hamilton Gardens at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds has a garden path with multiple walking trails that take you down to the lake," she said. "That's a good one."

There's also a walking trail at Chatuge Dam in Hayesville, North Carolina, Payne said, at Clay County Recreation Park.

"That's a really pretty walking path, and there's lots of trees around the lake," she said.

Another path is Jackrabbit Trail, which is just across the state line in Hayesville.

"It's nice and wooded and has pretty leaves at leaf time," she said. "There's



Bell Mountain is one of the prime places to see fall color at Lake Chatuge in Hiawassee. Photo courtesy of Thomas Lee Warman

biking and walking paths and a campground. It's a peninsula that juts out into the lake."

Payne also recommends Twigg's Overlook at Brasstown Valley Resort, Hiawassee, which she said can be accessed between the Brasstown Valley

Resort building and the Brasstown Valley Stables. While it doesn't overlook the lake, she said, "It is a pretty leaf view." It is open to the public.

So, if you want to enjoy fall leaf color without a long, backwoods hike, a trip to Towns County is perfect.

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BEST BITES

Burger highlights in Towns County

Brews, burgers and fun

For creative burgers, an upscale menu and family-friendly fun, the Hiawassee Brew House is the place to be.

Chef John Woodrum and brewer Kai Amantiad keep the menu fresh by including something new each week.

"I do something different every day I'm there, and in five years, I haven't done the same thing twice," Woodrum said.

Hiawassee Brew has two permanent burgers on the menu: The Basic Burger includes certified Hereford beef, lettuce, tomato, pickles, onions and optional cheese. The OG Prime Grind Burger is certified Hereford beef, sharp cheese, grilled onion, pickle, house-made bacon jam and mustard.

But that's only the beginning of Hiawassee Brew's burger offerings. Just about every week, Woodrum has a special creation burger, and those have included the Umami Burger and the El Jefe Burger.

The El Jefe included a heritage beef jalapeño smash burger on a toasted potato bun with creamy elote, Boar's Head jalapeño pepper jack, fresh-shaved Cotija, and Tajín. The Umami Burger was a hand-chopped New York strip/pork belly burger on a toasted potato bun with hickory smoked Gouda,



Hiawassee Brew has a variety of specialty burgers, but on the menu daily is the OG Burger, which has hand-patted CHB Beef, cheese, onion, pickle, house-made bacon jam and mustard. **Submitted photo**

Hiawassee Brew

Address: 616 S Main St, Hiawassee

Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday-Saturday



Brewer Kai Amantiad and Chef John Woodrum of Hiawassee Brew offer specially brewed beer and creative food, with something different almost every day. **Submitted photo**

charred scallion mayo and garlic/soy mushrooms.

Woodrum said Hiawassee Brew is "very family friendly," which includes the family's best canine friend. "We even have a dog bowl on our menu."

Hiawassee Brew also offers specialty beers under brewer Kai Amantiad. "He brews new beers every week, so it's always changing, but we do have some that are staples," Woodrum said.

Hiawassee Brew can be found on Facebook, where Woodrum says they have about 23,000 followers.

Hiawassee Brew offers live music each weekend, featuring local artists. Music begins at 6 p.m. and goes until closing.

— BY KIMBERLY BROWN

Saddle up!

For smashburgers that are crispy on the edges, juicy in the middle and stacked with bold, unexpected flavors, head to Bronco's in Hiawassee. Or, if you're closer to Dahlonega, you can visit Bronco's new Dahlonega location.

Owned by Mike Plummer and Sam Godfrey, Bronco's has been a local favorite since 2025. Plummer is a seasoned restaurateur, and Godfrey has served as sous chef at the award-winning Cúrate in Asheville, North Carolina.

"Our goal is pretty simple: make delicious, high-quality food, keep the atmosphere fun and casual, and get you a great meal without the long wait," Godfrey said.

Plummer echoed that goal.

"At the end of the day, it's about good food and good people," he said. "We want to serve quality food quickly, keep things fun and approachable, and be a place that is truly a part of the community."

The Bronco Burger includes American cheese, grilled onions, pickles and buck sauce. Other



Bronco's Jalapeño Popper Burger is overflowing with American cheese, roasted jalapeño cream cheese, fresh jalapeños, bacon, onion rings and spicy ranch. **Submitted photo**



The goal of Bronco's co-owners Mike Plummer, left, and Sam Godfrey is to serve high-quality, delicious food in a fun atmosphere. **Submitted photo**

Bronco's

Address: 195 N Main St, Hiawassee

Hours: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday

burger varieties are the Cowboy Burger, the Baja Burger, the Black & Blue Burger, the Jalapeño Popper Burger, the All-American Burger, and a Black Bean Burger.

Burger, fries and a drink are about \$15. The menu also has barbecue sandwiches, tacos, burrito bowls, and if you want lighter fare, a variety of salads.

— BY KIMBERLY BROWN

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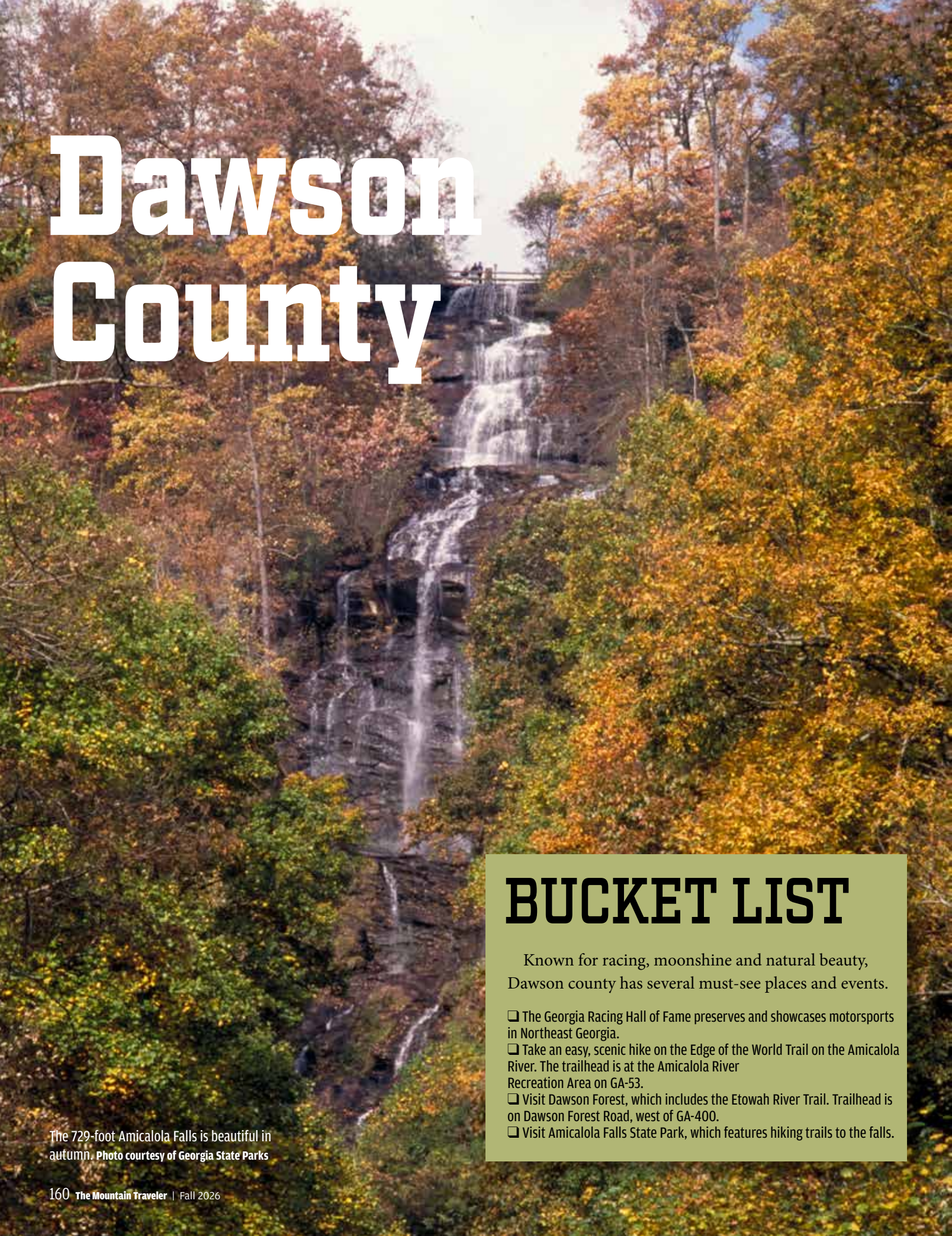
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Dawson County



The 729-foot Amicalola Falls is beautiful in autumn. Photo courtesy of Georgia State Parks

BUCKET LIST

Known for racing, moonshine and natural beauty, Dawson county has several must-see places and events.

- ☐ The Georgia Racing Hall of Fame preserves and showcases motorsports in Northeast Georgia.
- ☐ Take an easy, scenic hike on the Edge of the World Trail on the Amicalola River. The trailhead is at the Amicalola River Recreation Area on GA-53.
- ☐ Visit Dawson Forest, which includes the Etowah River Trail. Trailhead is on Dawson Forest Road, west of GA-400.
- ☐ Visit Amicalola Falls State Park, which features hiking trails to the falls.

Breathtaking color

Considered one of Georgia's seven wonders, Amicalola Falls is perfect for autumn

BY KIMBERLY BROWN

A great place to see beautiful fall color, take in an amazing waterfall and have a variety of hiking options is Amicalola Falls State Park in Dawson County.

Amicalola Falls is considered one of the Seven Wonders of Georgia, along with Tallulah Gorge, the Okefenokee Swamp, Providence Canyon, Radium Springs, Stone Mountain and Warm Springs.

According to Kenneth Krakow's Georgia Place Names, "Amicalola" is a Cherokee name meaning "tumbling waters," with "ama" meaning "water" and "kalola" meaning "tumbling."

Krakow says the name refers specifically to the series of waterfalls on Amicalola Creek that are called Amicalola Falls.

He also notes several historical spellings, including Amakalola, Armicalola and Ummah Caloloke.

The spectacular, 729-foot waterfall is the third-highest cascading waterfall east of the Mississippi.

According to The New Georgia Encyclopedia, in the mid-19th century, Bartley Crane became the first known white person to settle near the falls, where he operated a grist mill, farm, hospitality service and distillery.

In 1893, the *Cherokee Advance* reported that Crane and his two sons had been arrested for moonshining. Distilling spirits wasn't against the law in Georgia until after the Civil War, when the federal government began taxing it.

Bartley Crane died in 1915, and the property passed to his son, John Hunter Crane, who operated a general store, a barber shop, and rented cabins at the base of the falls. By 1860 the Methodist Episcopal Church had formally



Mountain colors seen from the visitor center at Amicalola Falls State Park are magnificent. **Photo courtesy of Georgia State Parks**

established a campground in the area, but the site was used for gatherings as early as 1846, and meetings continued throughout the nineteenth century.

Amicalola Falls became a Georgia state park in 1940. The Civilian Conservation Corps built the first major facilities in the 1930s, and the park officially opened to the public in May 1940.

Now, visitors to Amicalola State Park can see the falls a variety of ways. To view from the bottom, park at the Visitor Center and walk the short, paved path to the viewing platform. Or, you can walk up the 604-step staircase for more stunning views of the falls.

To view from the top, you can drive to the top, or you can walk up via the staircase or via the East Ridge Trail, which begins at the visitor center.

There is a parking area for those who want to begin their Appalachian Trail trek at the park, or you can hike up to Len Foote Hike Inn for an overnight stay.

BEST BITES

Burger highlights in Dawson County

A Dawsonville tradition

A Dawsonville tradition since 1966, the Dawsonville Pool Room is home to the famous Bully Burger.

The Pool Room was originally opened by Gordon Pirkle, who also founded the Georgia Racing Hall of Fame. Now, it's run by Gordon Pirkle Jr., along with his sister, Hayley Garrett; his daughters, Kimberly and Ashley; his son, Glenn; and former wife Deana.

"My daddy's had this for 60 years, and he'll be 90 this year," Pirkle said.

Pirkle and the Pool Room staff pride themselves on the hand-pattied burgers with toppings prepped fresh every morning, as well as hand-cut fries.

The restaurant's specialty is the Bully Burger, which is a "burger all the way," Pirkle said, with house-made slaw, onions, ketchup, mustard and pickles.

According to local legend, the Bully Burger was named for longtime Dawsonville Pool Room cook, Bully Thurmond, who had a habit of memorizing orders rather than going by a written ticket, Pirkle said. But when things got busy, he just made the burgers his way and didn't worry about remembering the individual toppings the customer had requested. Bully's combination of toppings became the beloved Bully Burger.



The Bully Burger, Dawsonville Pool Room's specialty burger, comes with a variety of toppings, including house-made slaw. The burger is named for a long-time employee, Bully Thurmond.

Dawsonville Pool Room

Address: 9 Bill Elliott Street, Dawsonville

Hours: 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Mondays, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Saturday-Sunday



Gordon Pirkle Sr. stands outside the Dawsonville Pool Room, which he founded in 1966.

— BY KIMBERLY BROWN



Burger and Shake in Dawsonville offers a menu full of burgers, shakes, meals and more.

Submitted photos

Burger and Shake

Address: 66 S 400 Center Lane #175, Dawsonville

Hours: 11 a.m.-8:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, noon-4 p.m. Sunday

Family-owned favorite

Since 2016, Burger and Shake has been a Dawsonville favorite to get fresh burgers and hand-spun shakes.

The restaurant is owned by Anna Tsang, her husband Raymond Leung, and their business partner, Ivan Lin.

Each burger is cooked to order, Tsang said. "It's traditional, old-school burgers," she said. "Fresh, no frozen at all. Local people really like them."

You can get almost anything you want on the burger, Tsang said. "You can have it all the way or with everything, and we create signature burgers with different ingredients. Customers can pick their choices. We can tailor-make it."

In addition to burgers and shakes, the restaurant has a full menu, which includes hot dogs, a variety of Philly cheesesteak sandwiches, plates with hamburger steak, chicken tenders, country fried steak, shrimp, barbecue pork or chicken livers.

— BY KIMBERLY BROWN

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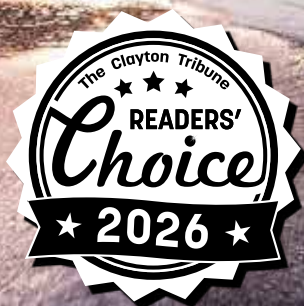
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