

Natural Places to Go for Photos

LATE WINTER, EARLY SPRING

Magnolia Gardens, Charleton, S.C. The garden swings into Spring around January 15th, with the first of thousands of daffodils and the dramatic bloom of the Flowering-Apricot. These heralds of Spring complement the already-blooming Camellias. Together, the excitement and anticipation of early Spring make January and February excellent months to visit. **From mid-February to mid-March**, the Garden is a riot of floral magnificence, with thousands of daffodils, flowering cherry and peach trees, and early-blooming Magnolias. Flowering shrubs, from quince to spirea, enliven the landscape. **The azaleas usually peak in the latter half of March through the first half of April.**

APRIL/MAY

Goshen Pass on Maury River, along scenic route 39 north and west of Lexington. Beautiful river with lots of trails in the area. Also good kayaking and fly fishing. Good in spring with "abundant" rhodo and native azalea; good in fall as well, with plenty of red maple and spicebush.

Greenbrier River/Little Pigeon River in Smokies, **from mid-April to end of May** (See detailed Smokies list at end.) Just a mile or so into trail yields great photo opps. (400+ miles)

Stillhouse Creek Road, off Plank Road east of Batesville: apple orchard that should be great when trees are in bloom.

Pocosin Hollow Trail, at mile-marker 59.7 on Skyline Drive. Trail volunteers said that the trillium are fantastic in late April and the pink lady slippers are great in early May. Just across the stream there's a large patch of slippers that shouldn't be missed.

MARCH THROUGH MAY

Edith J. Carrier Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, Harrisonburg.

Shenk's Ferry Wildflower Preserve, Pa. One of the greatest wildflower displays in the eastern U.S. Trilliums in April are highly photogenic due to uncluttered forest floor, according to Ian Plant, photographer. Lancaster County.

Maple Flats Sinkhole Ponds*, in Augusta County, in G. W. Nat. Forest, south of Waynesboro. **10,000-year-old bog-like ponds, rare swamp plants. "One of most botanically significant areas in Virginia."** VA Nature Conservancy leads field trips in May. USGS topo: Sharando quad. Take 664 south from Waynesboro, past Sharando, to first dirt road on right (about 1.3 miles, just past Pure gas station). Drive about two miles to small parking area at gate to trail. Swamp pink lilies in bloom in May at east end of Spring Pond near inlet. [Couldn't find on trip in 2008.] USGS topo map: Sharando quad.

Joyce Kimler Memorial Forest, N.C. Near Robinsville; best from **March to early May, when the forest floor is blanketed in wildflowers.** (400+ miles) “The best example of a virgin forest in the Appalachians.” Immense tulip and other trees along easy 2-mile loop trail.

Little Stony Creek Trail, Geo. Wash. Nat. For., Shenandoah County, VA. (117 miles) Take County Road 675 west from Columbia Furnace for 0.5 mi., turn right on CR 608, which soon becomes Forest Development Road 88. At 2.3 mi., turn left onto FDR 92 and go 3.3 mi. to the crossing of Little Stony Creek. The trail starts there. *USGS Wardensville, Wolf Gap, and Woodstock quadrangles, 7.5 min. series.*

Cascades Nat. Recreation Trail, Jefferson National Forest, Blacksburg Ranger District, along Little Stony Creek (not the same as above). 660 acres of “potential old-growth forest.” Steep canyon walls along creek, with tall cove hardwoods, rhodo, dogwood, **lots of wildflowers spring and summer. Good rhododendrons along creek. 66-foot waterfall is very popular with tourists, so go on rainy weekday.** From Blacksburg, go 19 miles west on US 460 to Pembroke. Turn right at Cascades NRT sign onto CR 623. Go 3.6 miles north to the trailhead. 3.8 miles round trip. *USGS Eggleston, Va. [Adams, pp. 58-60; Winegar, p. 125]*

Falling Spring Falls, Covington, Va. (About 110 miles.) Take exit 16 off I-64 onto US 220, go north for 9.7 miles to parking area. “Incredibly beautiful waterfall.” Mist provides great habitat for many plants. *[See Adams. P. 71; Winegar, p. 155]*

High Falls of Cheat River, Shavers Fork of Cheat, near Bemis, W.Va. Long, difficult hike to falls, but nice railroad ride is available. Contact Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad (877-686-7245) for information. *[Adams, pp. 203-205]*

Ewing Trail, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Va. Good for wildflowers; fossils of shellfish. *[Winegar, pp. 31-32]*

Breaks Interstate Park, far s.w. Va. and Ky. “The Grand Canyon of the South.” Miles of trails (note especially Laurel Branch Trail); **lavender blooms of catawba rhododendron in early May.**

Shamokin Springs Nature Preserve; Trillium House, at Wintergreen. **Boreal wildflower garden beneath canopy of yellow birch, with speckled wood lily, wild lily-of-the-valley, spotted coralroot, monkshood, Turk’s cap lily, and many ferns.** (Avoid May 19, 20 because of wildflower festival there.) *[Wingar, p. 284]*

Dark Hollow Falls Trail, Shenandoah N.P. Spectacular falls; good wildflowers and butterflies along the trail. Go during spring run-off. *[Va. Dept. F&G, p. 18]*

Rose River Loop Trail, Shenandoah N.P. Easy 4-mile hike along the Rose River and Hogcamp Branch. Beautiful streams with many mossy rocks and small falls. Park at

Fisher's Gap Overlook just north of Big Meadows, then follow directions in *Circuit Hikes in Shenandoah N.P.*, page 57.

Blue Ridge Parkway, good place for pink and yellow ladyslippers in mid to late May. **Road between Sugarlands and Cade's Cove**, in Smoky Mountain N.P., good place to look for yellow lady's slippers in mid-April.

Blackwater River Preserve, Southhampton Co, Va., just below Hickaneck Swamp. Put-in: Rt 621 bridge; take-out: 620 bridge. "One of best remaining examples of ancient baldcypress left" 800+ yrs. old. Contact: TNC (VA) 434-295-6106. Near Blackwater River, visit Three Sisters Swamp. In at Henry's Landing and out at Rt. 53 or Hunt's Bluff.

Three Ridges Wilderness Beautiful hike along AT to top of mountain, with many wildflowers and pink azaleas in bloom (mid-May for azaleas). Many mountain laurel and giant rhodo also. Drive south on BRP and park where route 664 crosses (Reeds Gap, at about mile marker 18).

Ramsay Cascade Trail, an 8-mile out-and-back trail through GSMNP. "One spot is almost magical: You pass through a gate of old-growth trees and then come to the largest tulip poplar on the trail. It takes four people holding hands to wrap around the thing. You hike along two different streams and then come to my favorite waterfall in the park. If you're gonna have one day-hike in the park, this would be it."

—Eric Plakanis, owner of A Walk in the Woods guide service in the Smokies.

Reddish Knob Easy to moderate. Reddish Knob, in the George Washington National Forest is one of the highest peaks in the state, with sweeping views and mountain flora. Drive along FR 85 South and the side road that leads up to the peak. Both roads are veritable arboreta and are lined with ferns, heath shrubs and many mountain wildflowers such as turkeybeard, Clintonia, gaywings, painted trillium, black cohosh, dwarf crested iris, stargrass, and much more. It was at Reddish Knob that former President Clinton delivered remarks at a "Roadless Lands" event in 1999, when the Roadless Rule in the National Forests was being deliberated.

Headwaters of the North River Hike of about 4 miles down along the headwaters of the North River in the George Washington National Forest, but can be shortened. Starts at an elevation of about 3,800 feet; ends at the Little River confluence (elevation there is 3,000 feet). Return by same route. Late April hike will likely present some nice river flows and possible sightings of rare mountain flowers and other flora. From Bridgewater, take US 42 about 3 miles south to Mossy Creek. Take SR 747 about 3 miles west to Mt. Solon. Take SR 731 north about 1 mile. Turn left onto SR 730 and proceed about 3 miles west to the Stokesville junction. Turn right on SR 718 and proceed about 1 mile north to FDR 95. The trailhead parking area is about .2 mile ahead on the right.

The **North River Gorge Trail** offers beautiful streamside scenery, interesting geology, and a chance to fish or view wildlife. It has gentle grades but requires fording the North River nine times and, therefore, should be hiked during periods of low water. It can be reached from a gated road leading from the south side of FDR 95 about 1 mile west of the

Wild Oak Trail parking area. The trail can also be accessed upstream from the North River Campground. Parking is available along FDR 95 but is not permitted in the North River Campground, except for those actually camping there.

The **Trimble Mountain Trail** is a 4-mile loop offering excellent views of Reddish Knob and Shenandoah Mountain as well as opportunities for seeing wildlife. It begins on the south side of FDR 95 about 1/4 mile east of the entrance to Todd Lake.

EARLY JUNE

Johnson Draft Trail / Braley Branch Trail / Braley Pond

Length: 2.5 mile loop or 1 mile loop

Starting location: Braley Pond Recreation Area. From Staunton, VA go west on Rt. 250 17 miles. Turn right on Rt. 715. Go 1.1 miles and turn left at entrance to Braley Pond. Braley Pond is good place for birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects.

Gaudineer Scenic Area Trail, near Durbin, West Virginia. 140 acre stand of virgin red spruce, some up to 40 inches in diameter and 250 years old, in moss and fern cloaked forest. Route 250 west from Staunton through Durbin; right onto FR 27 to trail head. 118 miles; 2.5 hours.

Joseph Pines Preserve, Sussex County, Va. Restored habitat for pitcher plants, sundews, rare lilies, and other native plants. Need permission and/or guide from Phil Sheridan of Meadowview Biological Research Station (pitcherplant.org).

Deep Run Ponds Natural Area, nr. Lynwood in Rockbridge County. Large area of Shenandoah sinkhole ponds. East Orebank Rd. to Brown's Gap Rd. (Route 708 connects 340 to Brown's Gap.) For further directions, call Brian Wender, the steward, at 540-265-5234.

Crabtree Falls, Virginia. Mountain laurel and rhodo at peak in early June.

Blanton Forest State Nature Preserve, Ky. 2,350 acres of virgin forest, just outside Harlan, Ky. Dense rhodo thickets.

Little Wilson Creek Trail. (235 miles) From Grayson Highlands State Park campground (see above), follow the old road down the ridge and turn southeast. At the powerline, turn left and head downhill through old apple orchard to the creek. Cross the creek and follow a small trail up the bank to the Little Wilson Creek Trail. Turn left and hike uphill.

Stream is especially beautiful, especially in June when the mountain laurel is in bloom.

(See *Wild Virginia* Falcon Guide for more details on bushwacking to make it a circuit hike.) *USGS Troutdale, Va. [Winegar, pp.248-149]*

Chestnut Trail—War Spur Overlook—War Branch Trail—App. Trail, a nice 2.5 mile circuit trail in the Mountain Lakes Wilderness. Nice view of stand of virgin trees along War Branch; walk through rhodo archway to virgin forest. From Blacksburg take

U.S. 40 west, past the town of Newport, until junction with County Road 700. Turn right and follow 700, or 613, as it is later numbered. Go past the Mountain Lake Hotel and the Mountain Lake Bio. Station. About 1.6 miles later, look for a small parking lot on the right side of the road. *USGS Interior, Waiteville, Eggleston, and Newport quadrangles, 7.5 min.*

Cranberry Glades and Droop Mountain Bog, in Monongahela N.F., Pocahontas County, W.Va. Great place for orchids, which begin blooming in late May and early June; fringed orchids in mid-summer. Look for arethusa orchids during first 10 days of June. [*Bently, p.59*] Great hikes throughout the Cranberry Wilderness area, particularly along the ridges through red spruce forests and along the North Fork of the Cranberry River. Deep, primeval forest along beautiful trout stream.

Pink Beds, N.C. Centered below Mount Pisgah near Brevard, North Carolina, is a lush area of cove forests and streams known as the Pink Beds, named for the profusion of pink wildflowers that grow here in the spring, including mountain laurel and rhododendron. The Pink Beds area offers excellent hiking and is especially appealing to naturalists, as the relatively flat valley sustains some very large pine trees and rare mountain bogs. An easy loop trail begins on the left side of the parking area. From Asheville, take the Parkway south to the intersection with route 276 (milepost 412). Take 276 south for 4 miles and look for the picnic area entrance on the left.

SPRING THROUGH SUMMER

Gorges State Park, North Carolina. Nearly 7,500 acres of temperate rainforest (80 inches per year), with rare and endangered species, waterfalls, deep and lush forest.

Cole Mountain 29S to Amherst, and take Rt. 60 west. Rt. 60 eventually goes up mountains; pass roadside picnic table on right; the AT crosses the road there. Start looking for Coffeytown Road on the right, where there will also be a sign for Mt. Pleasant hiking trails. Turn right on Coffeytown and continue to where Wiggins Spring (755) enters from the right. Take 755 (it will turn from paved to gravel) until you come to a parking area on the left near some open areas. Take AT trail up the mountain to the meadows. Round trip is about 150 miles.

Beartown State Park, W.V. Beautiful rock formations covered with moss and algae. Take I64 west into West Virginia, then north onto Route 219 for 21 miles.

Cumberland Falls, Ky. Can get behind the falls in a huge cave.

Pine Mountain State Park Nature Preserve, Ky. (390 miles) 800 acres of old-growth (200-300 yrs.), wildflowers, geological formations, just outside Pineville.

Dolly Sods Wilderness Area, W.V. Interesting sphagnum bogs “resplendent” with mosses and ferns. Drive through the Sods on FR 75 at sunrise or sunset for spectacular views. Trail along Red Creek is very nice. Hikes to waterfalls difficult. Best time is mid-May. [*Adams pp. 206 – 207; see also Big Stonecoal Run below*]

Wilson Creek Trail, Jeff. Nat. Forest, Little Wilson Creek Wilderness Area. (235 miles) 2.8 mile round trip. Lots of ferns, rosebay rhodo., striped maples, waterfalls along Big Wilson Creek. Interstate 81 in Marion, take exit 45 south onto Va. 16. Go 23 miles and turn west onto US 58. Continue 7.6 miles west to entrance to Grayson Highlands State Park. Trailhead is in campground. *USGS Troutdale, Va. [Winegar, pp. 234-235]*

Cabin Creek Nature Trail, also in Grayson Highlands S.P., starting in Massie Gap parking area. (235 miles) *[Winegar, p. 235]*

Buck Run Trail, in the Laurel Fork area of W. Va. (75 miles) Trail begins just east of the Locust Spring Picnic Area. To reach the picnic area, go west from Monterey on U.S. 250 for 21 miles and turn sharply right onto West Virginia Route 28. Go 6.7 miles and turn right onto a dirt road marked Locust Spring Picnic Area. After 0.5 mi., turn left at the first intersection (Allegheny Rd.—FDR 106—goes right). Bear right at the second intersection to the picnic ground. *USGS Thornwood and Snowy Mountain quadrangles, 7.5 min. series; Warm Springs Ranger District map, G.W. Nat. For.*

White Rock Falls Trail, in the St. Mary's Wilderness area. At White Rock Gap (mile marker 18.5), look for small grassy parking lot on right. Sign for beginning of White Rock Falls Trail is on the left of the BRP. Hike about 1 ½ miles to falls; turn around and return to car. Creek with some beautiful spots; interesting cliffs and other rock formations. *USGS Vesuvius and Big Levels quadrangles, 7.5 min.; Pedlar Ranger District map, St. Mary's Wilderness map, G.W. National Forest*

(At nearly 10,000 acres, St. Mary's is the third largest Wilderness Area in Virginia. The trails vary from rocky footpaths to old work roads and trails almost totally engulfed by mountain laurel and rhododendron. St. Mary's Wilderness has an abundance of diverse scenery: waterfalls, fern forests, open meadows, valley vistas, and high mountain wetlands. As with most wild areas, there are places that become over-used or abused and this special place is no exception. The primary route into the Wilderness off of FR41 was severely damaged by Hurricane Isabel in 2003.

Wild Virginia hike: "This [St. Mary's Wilderness Trail] is a ten-mile loop hike. Please bring sturdy shoes, food, water, and be prepared for any weather. We will start on the Blue Ridge Parkway and descend down the Mine Bank Trail, then go back up the Saint Mary's River Trail to Green Pond before walking a more level trail to the parking lot." See map on page 45 of *Wild Virginia*.)

Apple Orchard Falls—Corneilus Creek Loop Trail, North Creek Roadless Area, Jeff. Nat. Forest, Va. 5.75 to 7.0 miles circuit, moderate difficulty. Interstate 81 to exit 168, turn east onto CR 614. Go 3.3 miles and take left on FR 59. After 2.8 miles the road changes to gravel. Continue 1.6 miles to parking area for trailhead. "Spectacular" falls, huge granite cliffs, large hemlocks. *USGS Arnold Valley, Va. [Winegar, p. 270]* **Bottom Creek Gorge**, off BRP south of Roanoke. Home of Bent Mountain Falls, old-growth hemlock, rare ferns, and a pristine stream with great biodiversity. *[See Adams, pages 77-78.]*

Jones Run Falls, Skyline Drive milepost 84.1. **Great wildflowers and mosses near beautiful little falls.** Series of slides and cascades below falls. Good circuit hike. [Adams p.134]

Sandstone Falls, New River Gorge National River, W. Va. Massive falls second only to Great Falls. **Nature trail winds through Riverside Flatrock Natural Community, featuring rare natural community of plants. Great photos possible on foggy days.** [Adams, pp. 161-162] Drive to Hinton and take the mostly one-lane, mostly unpaved CR 26 for almost nine miles along the western side of the river to the park. (There's an overlook on W.Va. Rt. 20, but you can't get close. The alternative allows you to take a boardwalk to islands in the middle of the river just below the falls.) **Park is also home to some unusual plants and is excellent for fishing for smallmouth.** [March/April Blue Ridge magazine]

New River Trail State Park, between Galax and Dora Junction, near Wytheville. Trail is 57 miles long and features 28 r.r. trestles and three bridges. Beautiful mountain and river scenes, farmland. [Winegar, pp. 312-319]

Waterfall on Big Stonecoal Run, Dolly Sods Wilderness Area, W. Va. (145 miles) Strenuous hike, but you'll have this beautiful falls all to yourself. **Go when rhododendrons are in bloom, in early June.** [Adams, pp. 208-209; p. 212 for additional falls]

Mary's Rock, Shenandoah N.P. Nice hike for a sunny day; go early in morning. [See Gildart, pp. 24-27]

Hawksbill Summit, Shenandoah N.P. Park's highest peak. **"Outstanding natural spender."** Good views from summit. [Gildart, pp. 43-46]

Cedar Run Link Trail, Shenandoah N.P. Joins White Oak Canyon Trail and leads into part of park designated as wilderness; runs along Cedar Run, past Half-Mile Cliffs and Cedar Run Falls. [Gildart, pp. 48-49]

Doyles River Trail in Shenandoah N.P. is an interesting circuit. It descends on the Doyles River Trail down past the Jones Run waterfall to Doyles River. It descends 1330 feet before beginning its climb back up along Doyles River. The trail up Doyles River is rather steep and narrow where it climbs past the lower fall. (From the Adventure Club of New Jersey website) *Also see below.*

Jones Run/Doyles River Falls, Shenandoah N.P.; "Majestic" and "lovely" cascades, old-growth tulip trees, wildflowers along moderate 7-mile route. Park at Brown's Gap at milepost 83 and follow directions on page 83 of *Circuit Hikes in Shen. N.P.*

Calvary and Chimney Rocks, Shenandoah N.P. **"One of the prettiest hikes in the park; much of it through a designated wilderness area."** [Gildart, pp. 82-84] Beautiful rocks covered with lichens; old gnarled trees among them. Wild dwarf iris, mt. laurel, azaleas, other wildflowers along trail. Go when it is raining or just after.

Big Meadows, Shenandoah N.P. Park's greatest diversity of wildflowers and 270 plant species total. [Winegar, p. 291]

Stone Mountain Trail, northeastern end of Cumberland Mountain. Explore the eastern end of the 14-mile trail; deep hemlock forest lining banks of Roaring Branch. Miniature waterfalls among the sculpted sandstone are beautiful. [Winegar, pp. 59-60]

Little Stony National Recreation Trail, near Stone Mountain. Deep gorge lined with rhodo in May and June; trail follows old railroad bed. Cove hardwoods and hemlock. [Winegar, pp. 63-64]

The Glades, near Stone Mountain and Stony Creek. Boggy meadow formed by beavers; great number of wetland plants; pink steplebush in late summer. [Winegar, pp. 65-66]

Devils Fork Trail System, esp. Devils Bathtub Tail following Devils Fork, and the Devils Fork Loop Trail. Quiet pools beneath virgin hemlocks; expansive vistas and waterfalls. [Winegar, pp. 68-69]

Snorkeling in the Clinch River Valley. Great stream biodiversity in clear streams and rivers. (See next item.) [Winegar, p. 83]

Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve. "A naturalist's dream." Big Cedar Creek is beautiful and great for snorkeling. May even see hellbender and rare mussels. [Winegar, pp. 88-89]

Rich Hole Trail, in Rich Hole Wilderness; about 15 miles west of Lexington, Va.; James River District of G.W.N.F. Old growth forest; follows North Branch of Simpson's Creek. [Winegar, p. 163]

Lake Moomaw. Excellent fishing for crappie, bluegill, s.m. bass, yellow perch. "Spectacular displays of wildflowers" along Richardson Gorge Road approach to back entrance to the lake. [Winegar, pp. 173-174]

Hidden Valley Trail, follows the Jackson River in Hidden Valley, about 6 miles west of Warm Springs, in Bath County. Yellow-fringed orchid in open woods in late summer. [Winegar, pp. 176-178]

Laurel Fork Area. TNC preserve part of 10,000-acre Laurel Fork Special Management Area of G.W.N.F. Best example of northern boreal forest complex in Virginia. West on 250 from Staunton. [Winegar, pp. 182-184]

Augusta Springs Watchable Wildlife Area, west of Staunton. Half mile of boardwalk through 50-acre tract of wetlands on eastern end of Great North Mountain. [Winegar, p. 188; Va. Dept F& W, p. 46] From Staunton, 254 west 8 miles to Buffalo Gap, where 254 becomes 42. Continue on 42 for about 7 miles to parking area. Beautiful place!

Radio tower road over mountain from Shenandoah Valley is wonderfully scenic. Autumn evening would be ideal.

North River Gorge Trail, along North River near Shenandoah Mountain. (65 miles) Beautiful path along an especially scenic stretch of river. 4.8 miles round trip. Dry River District of G.W.N.F. west of Harrisonburg. Known for “hundreds” of pink ladyslippers. North River Road (FDR 95) to campground. Stokesville quad. [*Winegar, pp. 201-202*]

Mount Pleasant Scenic Area, in G.W. and Jeff. N.F., near Amherst, Va. (50 miles) Pristine hardwood forest “teeming with wildlife.”

Warbler Road, traversing 13 miles of old-growth hardwood forests, hemlock lined streams, open meadows, descending from the B.R. Parkway 2,700 feet; part of Peaks of Otter Loup. [*Va. Dept. F&W, p.77*]

Craig’s Creek Recreation Area, at Oriskany, Va. (120 miles), part of Iron Ore Loup west of Roakoke. Meadows, woodland, “exquisite” creek. [*Va. Dept. F&W, P. 82*]
Sweet Road, “cruises through dense forest free of human intervention.” (120 miles) [*Va. Dept. F&W, P. 83*]

Massie Gap, in Grayson Highlands State Park. Meadow, or bald, is great place for orchids, beginning in June. Spectacular vista. Go on weekday for relative solitude.

Magnolia Swamp, in southeastern Augusta County, noted for wet prairies with lots of orchids. [*Bently, pp. 34-35*]

Big Stony Creek, in Jefferson N.F., in eastern part of Giles County, Va. (150 miles) [Unnamed] road along creek is great place to look for orchids. [*Bently, p. 36*]

Blue Bend Recreational Area, in Greenbrier County, five miles north of White Sulphur Springs, W.Va. Blue Bend Loop Trail connects to Anthony Creek Trail and Greenbrier Trail, which ends in Anthony. Area proposed for wilderness designation. “Solitude and scenic beauty”; many rare species.

Greenbrier and Pocahontas county line, along Route 39, in W. Va., great place to find large purple fringed orchids blooming in mid to late June. [*Bently, pp. 164-167*]

Ivy Creek Natural Area, Charlottesville. Look for crane-fly orchids among beech trees around the first of August.

Trinity Church, Staunton, Va. Old church with 12 beautiful Tiffany Studios stained-glass windows. www.trinitystaunton.org [*March/April 2007 issue of Blue Ridge magazine*]

Craggy Gardens, along BRParkway around milepost 369. (Especially interesting place called “River of Grass” in *Blueridge Country* magazine near milepost 367.) Mid to late June for most spectacular rhododendron display anywhere.

Forest at Montpelier. Old-growth forest that’s part of tour of Montpelier. Might be able to visit forest without tour if doing “research.” Call 703-672-2728 for information.

Roaring Run Falls trail, in Jefferson NF near Fincastle in Botetourt County, just off I81, before Roanoke. See description in Bookmarks under Places to Go.

Blackwater Ecological Preserve Easy to moderate. Blackwater Ecological Preserve in Isle of Wight County, with an area of 318 acres, is situated on dry to mesic sand ridges and has two of Virginia's rarest plant communities--longleaf pine/turkey oak flatwoods and longleaf pine savannas. These and other communities at the preserve were once more common in southeastern Virginia, but are now limited to a few precious stands. Stop at the Chubb Sandhill Natural Area Preserve's longleaf pine restoration site and a drive through the red cockaded woodpecker habitat at The Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve.

Valley of Virginia Wildflower Meadows Displays of wildflowers set against Blue Ridge, apparently many photo ops. Region: [Shenandoah Valley](#); Locality: [Rockbridge County](#); 76 McClure Blvd; [Fairfield](#), VA 24435

Crabtree Falls Road Good area for rattlesnakes, apparently. Take 56 toward Crabtree Falls and then, just before the bridge at the confluence of the North and South Tye Rivers, turn right onto a dirt road (state road 687).

LATE SUMMER

Buffalo Mountain Natural Area Preserve Variable micro climates and soil high in magnesium create suitable habitat for specialized and unusual flora. Glades near summit hold rare plants; glades on south and southeast flanks of mountain fill with purple blazing-star and stiff goldenrod; mafic woodland seeps appear on southern base of mountain, where other rare plants can be found. Contact: Va. Dept Cons. and Rec Nat Heritage Program, Southwest Region Steward (540-676-5673); www.dcr.virginia.gov/dnh. (See lat. file for hard copy description and map.)

Beagle Gap, SNP Take AT west from parking area (about mile marker 100) through dwarf forest of gnarled and lichen-covered pines to spectacular meadows of wildflowers, broomsedge, and sumac. AT east also is supposed to be excellent.

FALL, WINTER, AND SPRING

Cathedral Falls, W. Va. Near Gauley Bridge. Surrounding rocks create a cathedral effect, with the falls as the “altar.” Best in fall, winter, and spring. [Adams, p.169]

Lower Falls of Hills Creek, Monongahela NF, W. Va. Beautiful falls best on overcast day in fall, winter, or spring. [Adams, pp.197-198]

Shenandoah Mountain Trail. Beautiful fall foliage, about 22 miles west of Staunton on 250. [Winegar, p. 191]

Babcock State Park in Clifftop, West Virginia. Classic scene of mill on creek with waterfalls in foreground. Take I64 West across state line, then Route 60 to Hilton Village, where you pick up 41 South to the park.

Little Stony Man cliffs; apparently a great place for cliff-face plants and spectacular views. Go on weekday to avoid hikers and rock climbers. Go north on Skyline Drive past Big Meadows and Skyland Lodge. Look for parking and trail on left.

Blackrock Mountain trail; milepost 84.8 on Skyline Drive, just south of Dark Hollow Falls parking area. This and Little Stony Man recommended by judge at CCC.

Dobie Mountain on the Albright Loop in the vicinity of Humpback Rocks. Start at the Humpback Rocks parking lot, milepost 6.0 on the Blue Ridge Parkway just south of the Visitors' Center and on the opposite (east) side of the roadway. About three miles ; a Sierra Club hike.

Road to Sugar Hollow, large white sycamore tree on right, past last bridge and before dirt road. Better when leaves are off the tree.

Beagle Gap, SNP Take AT west from parking area (about mile marker 100) through dwarf forest of gnarled and lichen-covered pines to spectacular meadows of wildflowers, broomsedge, and sumac. AT east also is supposed to be excellent.

WITHIN 50 MILES OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

Johnson Draft Trail / Braley Branch Trail / Braley Pond

Length: 2.5 mile loop or 1 mile loop

Starting location: Braley Pond Recreation Area. From Staunton, VA go west on Rt. 250 17 miles. Turn right on Rt. 715. Go 1.1 miles and turn left at entrance to Braley Pond. Braley Pond is good place for birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects.

Road to Sugar Hollow, large white sycamore tree on right, past last bridge and before dirt road. Better when leaves are off the tree.

Deep Run Ponds Natural Area, nr. Lynwood in Rockbridge County. Large area of Shenandoah sinkhole ponds. For directions and access, call Brian Wender, the steward, at 540-265-5234

Edith J. Carrier Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, Harrisonburg.

Carter's Mountain Trail. Trailhead on Route 53 just before Michie Tavern, on right, on way to Monticello. Good access to Montalto.

Kemper Park and Secluded Farm Trails. Trailhead on Route 53. Hike the farm trails, staying to the right and paralleling Route 20. Will eventually come to small pond. Hike uphill from there to reach trail to vineyard and apple orchard at top of hill. Beautyberry everywhere; many interesting trees; extensive meadows. Looks like excellent area for both birding and photography in spring.

Ivy Creek Swamps. Hike the gas pipeline right-of-way in Ivy Creek Natural Area northwest to creek, then head to left. Looks like an excellent place to photograph in late afternoon after a snowstorm, or in spring, summer, or fall late or early in the day.

Shamokin Springs Nature Preserve; Trillium House, at Wintergreen. Boreal wildflower garden beneath canopy of yellow birch, with speckled wood lily, wild lily-of-the-valley, spotted coralroot, monkshood, Turk's cap lily, and many ferns. (Avoid May 19, 20 because of wildflower festival there.) [*Wingar, p. 284*]

Big Meadows, Shenandoah N.P. Park's greatest diversity of wildflowers and 270 plant species total. [*Winegar, p. 291*]

Crabtree Falls, Virginia. Mountain laurel and rhodo at peak in early June.
Shenandoah Mountain Trail. Beautiful fall foliage, about 22 miles west of Staunton on 250. [*Winegar, p. 191*]

Augusta Springs Watchable Wildlife Area, west of Staunton. Half mile of boardwalk through 50-acre tract of wetlands on eastern end of Great North Mountain. [*Winegar, p. 188; Va. Dept F & W, p. 46*] From Staunton, 254 west 8 miles to Buffalo Gap, where 254 becomes 42. Continue on 42 for about 7 miles to parking area. Beautiful place!

Radio tower road over mountain from Shenandoah Valley wonderfully scenic. Autumn evening would be ideal.

Cedar Run Link Trail, Shenandoah N.P. Joins White Oak Canyon Trail and leads into part of park designated as wilderness; runs along Cedar Run, past Half-Mile Cliffs and Cedar Run Falls. [*Gildart, pp. 48-49*]

Calvary and Chimney Rocks, Shenandoah N.P. "One of the prettiest hikes in the park; much of it through a designated wilderness area." [*Gildart, pp. 82-84*]

Mary's Rock, Shenandoah N.P. Nice hike for a sunny day; go early in morning. [*See Gildart, pp. 24-27*]

Hawk'sbill Summit, Shenandoah N.P. Park's highest peak. "Outstanding natural spender." Good views from summit. [*Gildart, pp. 43-46*]

Whiteoak Canyon Falls #1, Shenandoah NP, Va. Beautiful in spring and fall. Go early on weekday to avoid crowds. [*See Adams, pp. 111-113; Gildart, pp. 47-49; Winegar p. 296*]

Jones Run Falls, Skyline Drive milepost 84.1. **Great wildflowers and mosses near beautiful little falls.** Series of slides and cascades below falls. Good circuit hike. [*Adams p.134*]

Doyles River Trail in Shenandoah N.P. is an interesting circuit. It descends on the Doyles River Trail down past the Jones Run waterfall to Doyles River. It descends 1330 feet before beginning its climb back up along Doyles River. The trail up Doyles River is rather steep and narrow where it climbs past the lower fall. **The upper fall is situated in a grove of mature hemlock. It's incredible!** (From the Adventure Club of New Jersey website)

Dark Hollow Falls Trail, Shenandoah N.P. **Spectacular falls; good wildflowers and butterflies along the trail.** Go during spring run-off. [*Va. Dept. F&G, p. 18*]

Rose River Loop Trail, Shenandoah N.P. Easy 4-mile hike along the Rose River and Hogcamp Branch. Beautiful streams with many mossy rocks and small falls. Park at Fisher's Gap Overlook just north of Big Meadows, then follow directions in *Circuit Hikes in Shenandoah N.P.*, page 57.

Jones Run/Doyles River Falls, Shenandoah N.P.; "Majestic" and "lovely" cascades, old-growth tulip trees, wildflowers along moderate 7-mile route. Park at Brown's Gap at milepost 83 and follow directions on page 83 of *Circuit Hikes in Shen. N.P.*

Mount Pleasant Scenic Area, in G.W. and Jeff. N.F., near Amherst, Va. (50 miles) **Pristine hardwood forest "teeming with wildlife."** [*Va. Dept. F&W, p.68-70*]

Warbler Road, **traversing 13 miles of old-growth hardwood forests, hemlock lined streams, open meadows**, descending from the B.R. Parkway 2,700 feet; part of Peaks of Otter Loup. [*Va. Dept. F&W, p.77*]

Blue Ridge Parkway, good place **for pink and yellow ladyslippers in mid to late May.** [*Bently, p. 32-33*]

Magnolia Swamp, in southeastern Augusta County, noted for **wet prairies with lots of orchids.** Located on South Fork of the Shenandoah River at the crossing of the N&W Railroad nearest the intersection with county road 658, four miles south of Stuart's Draft. [*Bently, pp. 34-35*]

Ivy Creek Natural Area, Charlottesville. **Look for crane-fly orchids** among beech trees around the first of August. [*Bently, pp. 216-217*]

Maple Flats Sinkhole Ponds, in Augusta County, in G. W. Nat. Forest, south of Waynesboro. **10,000-year-old bog-like ponds, rare swamp plants. "One of most botanically significant areas in Virginia."** VA Nature Conservancy leads field trips in May. USGS topo: Sharando quad. Take 664 south from Waynesboro, past Sharando, to first dirt road on right (about 1.8 miles). Drive about two miles to small parking area at

gate to trail. Swamp pink lilies in bloom in spring at Spring Pond. USGS topo map: Sharando quad.

Forest at Montpelier. Old-growth forest that's part of tour of Montpelier. Might be able to visit forest without tour if doing "research." Call 703-672-2728 for information. Beautiful open forest with huge trees. Good photo op of person hiking the trail at top end of Spicebush trail.

Riprap Trail. Deep woods, stream crossings, rocky slopes. Includes hike to Cold Spring Hollow middle section of Meadow Run. Catawba rhodo (rare in park), mt. laurel, fly poison, and many other wildflowers in bloom at end of May. Nice cascades on Meadow Run. Access via Wildcat Ridge Trail off Skyline Drive or, for easier hike, from trailhead. From Rockfish gap, go 15 miles to Riprap Trail parking area. (See map in map box.)

Shenandoah N.P., first overlook south of Dickey Ridge Visitor's Center. Good for panorama, esp. in fall.

Little Stony Man cliffs; apparently a great place for cliff-face plants and spectacular views. Go on weekday to avoid hikers and rock climbers. Go north on Skyline Drive past Big Meadows and Skyland Lodge. Look for parking and trail on left.

Blackrock Mountain trail; milepost 84.8 on Skyline Drive, just south of Dark Hollow Falls parking area. This and Little Stony Man recommended by judge at CCC.

Dobie Mountain on the Albright Loop in the vicinity of Humpback Rocks. Start at the Humpback Rocks parking lot, milepost 6.0 on the Blue Ridge Parkway just south of the Visitors' Center and on the opposite (east) side of the roadway. About three miles ; a Sierra Club hike.

Pocosin Hollow Trail, at mile-marker 59.7 on Skyline Drive. Trail volunteers said that the trillium are fantastic in late April and the pink lady slippers are great in early May. Just across the stream there's a large patch of slippers that shouldn't be missed.

Beagle Gap, SNP Take AT west from parking area (about mile marker 100) through dwarf forest of gnarled and lichen-covered pines to spectacular meadows of wildflowers, broomsedge, and sumac. AT east also is supposed to be excellent.

50 to 100 MILES

Goshen Pass on Maury River, along scenic route 39 north and west of Lexington. Beautiful river with lots of trails in the area. Also good kayaking and fly fishing. Good in spring with "abundant" rhodo and native azalea; good in fall as well, with plenty of red maple and spicebush.

Babcock State Park near Clifftop, West Virginia. Classic scene of mill on creek with waterfalls in foreground. Take I64 West across state line, then Route 60 to Hilton Village, where you pick up 41 South to the park.

North River Gorge Trail, along North River near Shenandoah Mountain. (65 miles) **Beautiful path along an especially scenic stretch of river.** Dry River District of G.W.N.F. west of Harrisonburg. Supposedly great for “hundreds” of pink ladyslippers. Latitude: 38.3475, Longitude: -79.18917 [*Winegar, pp. 201-202*]

Laurel Fork Area. **TNC preserve** part of 10,000-acre Laurel Fork Special Management Area of G.W.N.F. **Best example of northern boreal forest complex in Virginia.** West on 250 from Staunton. [*Winegar, pp. 182-184*]

Hidden Valley Trail, follows the Jackson River in Hidden Valley, about 6 miles west of Warm Springs, in Bath County. Yellow-fringed orchid in open woods in late summer. [*Winegar, pp. 176-178*]

Rich Hole Trail, in Rich Hole Wilderness; about 15 miles west of Lexington, Va.; James River District of G.W.N.F. **Old growth forest**; follows North Branch of Simpson’s Creek. [*Winegar, p. 163*]

Buck Run Trail, in the Laurel Fork area of W. Va. (75 miles) Trail begins just east of the Locust Spring Picnic Area. To reach the picnic area, go west from Monterey on U.S. 250 for 21 miles and turn sharply right onto West Virginia Route 28. Go 6.7 miles and turn right onto a dirt road marked Locust Spring Picnic Area. After 0.5 mi., turn left at the first intersection (Allegheny Rd.—FDR 106—goes right). Bear right at the second intersection to the picnic ground. *USGS Thornwood and Snowy Mountain quadrangles, 7.5 min. series; Warm Springs Ranger District map, G.W. Nat. For.* and this special place is no exception. The primary route into the Wilderness off of FR41 was severely damaged by Hurricane Isabel in 2003.

Wild Virginia hike: “This is a ten-mile loop hike. Please bring sturdy shoes, food, water, and be prepared for any weather. We will start on the Blue Ridge Parkway and descend down the Mine Bank Trail, then go **White Rock Falls Trail**, in the St. Mary’s Wilderness area. Just south of the Slacks Overlook, after milepost 19 on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Other trail entrance is between milepost 19 and 18. Circuit trail of 2.5 miles. **Creek with some beautiful spots; interesting cliffs and other rock formations.** *USGS Vesuvius and Big Levels quadrangles, 7.5 min.; Pedlar Ranger District map, St. Mary’s Wilderness map, G.W. National Forest.*

At nearly 10,000 acres, St. Mary’s is the third largest Wilderness Area in Virginia. The trails vary from rocky footpaths to old work roads and trails almost totally engulfed by mountain laurel and rhododendron. **St. Mary’s Wilderness has an abundance of diverse scenery: waterfalls, fern forests, open meadows, valley vistas, and high mountain wetlands.** As with most wild areas, there are places that become over-used or abused back up the Saint Mary’s River Trail to Green Pond before walking a more level trail to the parking lot.”

Apple Orchard Falls—Corneilus Creek Loop Trail, North Creek Roadless Area, Jeff. Nat. Forest, Va. 5.75 to 7.0 miles circuit, moderate difficulty. Interstate 81 to exit 168, turn east onto CR 614. Go 3.3 miles and take left on FR 59. After 2.8 miles the road changes to gravel. Continue 1.6 miles to parking area for trailhead. “Spectacular” falls, huge granite cliffs, large hemlocks. *USGS Arnold Valley, Va. [Winegar, p. 270]*
Skidmore Hollow, west of Harrisonburg, one of the few remaining stands of virgin forest in Va. Follow route 42/257 west from Bridgewater until it becomes road 85. (A left here takes you to Reddish Knob and the Little River area trails.) Go right instead toward Flagpole Knob. Follow dirt road for 2.75 miles, bearing right at the fork, and park in the meadow on the left before you reach Flagpole Knob. Follow a northwest bearing out of the meadow, angling right to avoid thick mountain laurel, and walk downhill .25 mile to the old growth. *Take compass and be ready for some bushwacking! USGS Brandywine quad; National Geo Trails Illustrated map #791.*

Skidmore Fork (trail along stream): Park at the right fork off of Dunkle Hollow Rd, just before the rough road crosses Skidmore Fork (now dry). Hike the road for about 1.5 hours to the end and then do some light bush-whacking (WEAR LONG PANTS as there are stinging nettles). Return the same way. Easy hike, approx. 5-6 miles.

Lake Moomaw. Excellent fishing for crappie, bluegill, s.m. bass, yellow perch. “Spectacular displays of wildflowers” along Richardson Gorge Road approach to back entrance to the lake. *[Winegar, pp. 173-174]*

Cranberry Glades and Droop Mountain Bog, in Monongahela N.F., Pocahontas County, W.Va. Great place for orchids, which begin blooming in late May and early June; fringed orchids in mid-summer. *[Bently, p30]* Look for arethusa orchids during first 10 days of June; large purple fringed orchid later. *[Bently, p.59]* Great hikes throughout the Cranberry Wilderness area, particularly along the ridges through red spruce forests and along the North Fork of the Cranberry River. Deep, primeval forest along beautiful trout stream.

Shenandoah N.P., first overlook south of Dickey Ridge Visitor’s Center. Good for panorama, esp. in fall.

Roaring Run Falls trail, in Jefferson NF near Fincastle in Botetourt County, just off I81, before Roanoke. Easy 1.5 mile trail. “Third best” hiking trail in Blue Ridge region. See description in Bookmarks under Places to Go.

Beartown State Park, W.V. Beautiful rock formations covered with moss and algae (?). Recommended by Ian Plant at CCC presentation. Take I64 west into West Virginia, then north onto Route 219 for 21 miles.

Headwaters of the North River Hike of about 4 miles down along the headwaters of the North River in the George Washington National Forest, but can be shortened. Starts at an elevation of about 3,800 feet; ends at the Little River confluence (elevation there is 3,000 feet). Return by same route. Late April hike will likely present some nice river flows

and possible sightings of rare mountain flowers and other flora. From Bridgewater, take US 42 about 3 miles south to Mossy Creek. Take SR 747 about 3 miles west to Mt. Solon. Take SR 731 north about 1 mile. Turn left onto SR 730 and proceed about 3 miles west to the Stokesville junction. Turn right on SR 718 and proceed about 1 mile north to FDR 95. The trailhead parking area is about .2 mile ahead on the right.

The **North River Gorge Trail** offers beautiful streamside scenery, interesting geology, and a chance to fish or view wildlife. It has gentle grades but requires fording the North River nine times and, therefore, should be hiked during periods of low water. It can be reached from a gated road leading from the south side of FDR 95 about 1 mile west of the Wild Oak Trail parking area. The trail can also be accessed upstream from the North River Campground. Parking is available along FDR 95 but is not permitted in the North River Campground, except for those actually camping there.

The **Trimble Mountain Trail** is a 4-mile loop offering excellent views of Reddish Knob and Shenandoah Mountain as well as opportunities for seeing wildlife. It begins on the south side of FDR 95 about 1/4 mile east of the entrance to Todd Lake.

100 TO 150 MILES

Gaudineer Scenic Area Trail, near Durbin, West Virginia. 140 acre stand of virgin red spruce, some up to 40 inches in diameter and 250 years old, in moss and fern cloaked forest. Route 250 west from Staunton through Durbin; right onto FR 27 to trail head. 118 miles; 2.5 hours.

Joseph Pines Preserve, Sussex County, Va. Restored habitat for pitcher plants, sundews, rare lilies, and other native plants. Need permission and/or guide from Phil Sheridan of Meadowview Biological Research Station (pitcherplant.org).

Shenk's Ferry Wildflower Preserve, Pa. One of the greatest wildflower displays in the eastern U.S. Trilliums in April are highly photogenic due to uncluttered forest floor, according to Ian Plant, photographer. Lancaster County.

Waterfall on Big Stonecoal Run, Dolly Sods Wilderness Area, W. Va. (145 miles) Strenuous hike, but you'll have this beautiful falls all to yourself. **Go when rhododendrons are in bloom, in early June.** [Adams, pp. 208-209; p. 212 for additional falls]

Little Stony Creek Trail, Geo. Wash. Nat. For., Shenandoah County, VA. (117 miles) Take County Road 675 west from Columbia Furnace for 0.5 mi., turn right on CR 608, which soon becomes Forest Development Road 88. At 2.3 mi., turn left onto FDR 92 and go 3.3 mi. to the crossing of Little Stony Creek. The trail starts there. *USGS Wardensville, Wolf Gap, and Woodstock quadrangles, 7.5 min. series.*

Falling Spring Falls, Covington, Va. (About 110 miles.) Take exit 16 off I-64 onto US 220, go north for 9.7 miles to parking area. “Incredibly beautiful waterfall.” Mist provides great habitat for many plants. [See Adams. P. 71; Winegar, p. 155]

Bottom Creek Gorge, off BRP south of Roanoke. Home of Bent Mountain Falls, old-growth hemlock, rare ferns, and a pristine stream with great biodiversity. [See Adams, pages 77-78.]

Craig’s Creek Recreation Area, at Oriskany, Va. (120 miles), part of Iron Ore Loup west of Roakoke. Meadows, woodland, “exquisite” creek.

Sweet Road, “cruises through dense forest free of human intervention.” (120 miles) [Va. Dept. F&W, P. 83]

Big Stony Creek, in Jefferson N.F., in eastern part of Giles County, Va. (150 miles) [Unnamed] road along creek is great place to look for orchids. [Bently, p. 36]

Blue Bend Recreational Area, in Greenbrier County, five miles north of White Sulphur Springs, W.Va. Blue Bend Loop Trail connects to Anthony Creek Trail and Greenbrier Trail, which ends in Anthony. Area proposed for wilderness designation. “Solitude and scenic beauty”; many rare species.

Greenbrier and Pocahontas county line, along Route 39, in W. Va., great place to find large purple fringed orchids blooming in mid to late June.

150 TO 200

Sandstone Falls, New River Gorge National River, W. Va. Massive falls second only to Great Falls. Nature trail winds through Riverside Flatrock Natural Community, featuring rare natural community of plants. Great photos possible on foggy days. [Adams, pp. 161-162] Drive to Hinton and take the mostly one-lane, mostly unpaved CR 26 for almost nine miles along the western side of the river to the park. (There’s an overlook on W.Va. Rt. 20, but you can’t get close. The alternative allows you to take a boardwalk to islands in the middle of the river just below the falls.) Park is also home to some unusual plants and is excellent for fishing for small-mouth. [March/April Blue Ridge magazine]

New River Trail State Park, between Galax and Dora Junction, near Wytheville. Trail is 57 miles long and features 28 r.r. trestles and three bridges. Beautiful mountain and river scenes, farmland. [Winegar, pp. 312-319]

Cascades Nat. Recreation Trail, Jefferson National Forest, Blacksburg Ranger District, along Little Stony Creek. 660 acres of “potential old-growth forest.” Steep canyon walls along creek, with tall cove hardwoods, rhodo, dogwood, lots of wildflowers spring and summer. 66-foot waterfall is very popular with tourists, so go on rainy weekday. From Blacksburg, go 19 miles west on US 460 to Pembroke. Turn right at Cascades NRT sign

onto CR 623. Go 3.6 miles north to the trailhead. 3.8 miles round trip. *USGS Eggleston, Va. [Winegar, p. 125; Va. Dept. F&W, p.125]*

Chestnut Trail—War Spur Overlook—War Branch Trail—App. Trail, a nice 2.5 mile circuit trail in the Mountain Lakes Wilderness. Nice view of stand of virgin trees along War Branch; **walk through rhodo archway to virgin forest.** From Blacksburg take U.S. 40 west, past the town of Newport, until junction with County Road 700. Turn right and follow 700, or 613, as it is later numbered. Go past the Mountain Lake Hotel and the Mountain Lake Bio. Station. About 1.6 miles later, look for a small parking lot on the right side of the road. *USGS Interior, Waiteville, Eggleston, and Newport quadrangles, 7.5 min.*

High Falls of Cheat River, Shavers Fork of Cheat, near Bemis, W.Va. Long, difficult **hike to falls, but nice railroad ride is available.** Contact Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad (877-686-7245) for information. *[Adams, pp. 203-205]*

Cathedral Falls, W. Va. Near Gauley Bridge. **Surrounding rocks create a cathedral effect, with the falls as the “altar.”** Best in fall, winter, and spring. *[Adams, p.169]*

Lower Falls of Hills Creek, Monongahela NF, W. Va. **Beautiful falls best on overcast day in fall, winter, or spring.** *[Adams, pp.197-198]*

200 TO 300 MILES

Wilson Creek Trail, Jeff. Nat. Forest, Little Wilson Creek Wilderness Area. (235 miles) 2.8 mile round trip. **Lots of ferns, rosebay rhodo., striped maples, waterfalls** along Big Wilson Creek. Interstate 81 in Marion, take exit 45 south onto Va. 16. Go 23 miles and turn west onto US 58. Continue 7.6 miles west to entrance to Grayson Highlands State Park. Trailhead is in campground. *USGS Troutdale, Va. [Winegar, pp. 234-235]*

Cabin Creek Nature Trail, also in Grayson Highlands S.P., starting in Massie Gap parking area. (235 miles) *[Winegar, p. 235]*

Little Wilson Creek Trail. (235 miles) From Grayson Highlands State Park campground (see above), follow the old road down the ridge and turn southeast. At the powerline, turn left and head downhill through old apple orchard to the creek. Cross the creek and follow a small trail up the bank to the Little Wilson Creek Trail. Turn left and hike uphill. **Stream is especially beautiful, especially in June when the mountain laurel is in bloom.** (See *Wild Virginia Falcon Guide* for more details on bushwacking to make it a circuit hike.) *USGS Troutdale, Va. [Winegar, pp.248-149]*

Massie Gap, in Grayson Highlands State Park. Meadow, or bald, is great place for orchids, beginning in June. Spectacular vista. Go on weekday for relative solitude.

300 TO 400 MILES

Pink Beds, N.C. Centered below Mount Pisgah near Brevard, North Carolina, is **a lush area of cove forests and streams known as the Pink Beds, named for the profusion of pink**

wildflowers that grow here in the spring, including mountain laurel and rhododendron. The Pink Beds area offers excellent hiking and is especially appealing to naturalists, as the relatively flat valley sustains some very large pine trees and rare mountain bogs. An easy loop trail begins on the left side of the parking area. From Asheville, take the Parkway south to the intersection with route 276 (milepost 412). Take 276 south for 4 miles and look for the picnic area entrance on the left.

Craggy Gardens, along BR Parkway around milepost 369. (Especially interesting place called “River of Grass” in *Blueridge Country* magazine near milepost 367.) Mid to late June for most spectacular rhododendron display anywhere.

Cumberland Falls, Ky. Can get behind the falls in a huge cave.

Pine Mountain State Park Nature Preserve, Ky. (390 miles) 800 acres of old-growth (200-300 yrs.), wildflowers, geological formations, just outside Pineville.

Greenbrier River/Little Pigeon River in Smokies in April and May. Just a mile or so into trail yields great photo opps. (400+ miles)

Joyce Kimler Memorial Forest, N.C. Near Robinsville; best from March to early May, when the forest floor is blanketed in wildflowers. Upper Loop Trail looks especially nice in *Blueridge Country*. Check out Rock Creek Cabins for place to stay (www.rockcreekcabins.com) (400+ miles) “The best example of a virgin forest in the Appalachians.” Immense tulip and other trees along easy 2-mile loop trail.

Breaks Interstate Park, far s.w. Va. and Ky. “The Grand Canyon of the South.” Miles of trails (note especially Laurel Branch Trail); lavender blooms of Catawba rhododendron in early May.

Blanton Forest State Nature Preserve, Ky. 2,350 acres of virgin forest, just outside Harlan, Ky. Dense rhodo thickets.

Stone Mountain Trail, northeastern end of Cumberland Mountain. Explore the eastern end of the 14-mile trail; deep hemlock forest lining banks of Roaring Branch. Miniature waterfalls among the sculpted sandstone are beautiful. [*Winegar*, pp. 59-60]

Little Stony National Recreation Trail, near Stone Mountain. Deep gorge lined with rhodo in May and June; trail follows old railroad bed. Cove hardwoods and hemlock. [*Winegar*, pp. 63-64]

The Glades, near Stone Mountain and Stony Creek. Boggy meadow formed by beavers; great number of wetland plants; pink steeplebush in late summer. The Glades lies atop Stone Mountain just southwest of Edith Gap at the Scott County line between High Knob and Hanging Rock. From the Chief Benge Scout Trail at Edith Gap, go south on VA 706 a short distance and turn right on FR 291. Walk 1 mile to end of road. By car, from Dungannon on the Clinch River (5 miles west of Russell County line), take VA 72 north

.5 mile to left turn on VA 653. Go 1.5 miles west on VA 653, turn right on VA 706, travel about 5 miles, turn left on FR 291, and go 1 mile to end of road.

http://www.sherpaguides.com/virginia/mountains/maps/stone_mountain.html [Winegar, pp. 65-66]

Snorkeling in the Clinch River Valley. Great stream biodiversity in clear streams and rivers. (See next item.) [Winegar, p. 83]

Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve. “A naturalist’s dream.” Big Cedar Creek is beautiful and great for snorkeling. May even see hellbender and rare mussels. [Winegar, pp. 88-89]

Pink Beds, in Pisgah N.F., near the Cradle of Forestry, US Hwy 276 in Transylvania County, NC. Vast area of rhododendron and mountain laurel that blooms in late spring. [Bently, p.60]

Road between Sugarlands and Cade’s Cove, in Smoky Mountain N.P., good place to look for yellow lady’s slippers in mid-April. [Bently, p.105]

Blackwater River Preserve, Southampton Co, Va., just below Hickaneck Swamp. Put-in: Rt 621 bridge; take-out: 620 bridge. “One of best remaining examples of ancient baldcypress left” 800+ yrs. old. Contact: TNC (VA) 434-295-6106 Near Blackwater River, visit Three Sisters Swamp. In at Henry’s Landing and out at Rt. 53 or Hunt’s Bluff. Contacts: Jeff Kirwan, College of Natural Resources, Virginia Tech 540-231-7265, jkirwan@vt.edu; Virginia Russell, N.C. Dept. Nat. Res.. Raleigh, 919-733-2162, Virginia.russell@ncmail.net.

--State champ baldcypress, west side of Blackwater River, 2 miles north of Route 260.

--State champ baldcypress, west side of Nottoway River, north of Route 653.

--National champ water tupelo, Nottoway River near Route 58 in Courtland, Southampton County

--National Champion Cherrybark oak, south side of Nottoway, east of 626 in Sussex County.

Ramsay Cascade Trail, an 8-mile out-and-back trail through GSMNP. “One spot is almost magical: You pass through a gate of old-growth trees and then come to the largest tulip poplar on the trail. It takes four people holding hands to wrap around the thing. You hike along two different streams and then come to my favorite waterfall in the park. If you’re gonna have one day-hike in the park, this would be it.”

–Eric Plakanis, owner of A Walk in the Woods guide service in the Smokies.

Smoky Mountains N.P.:

“Peak” Seasons in the Park

The timing of natural events such as fall color season and wildflower blooming periods is dependent on a variety of factors and can vary significantly from year to year. “Peak” seasons are impossible to predict in advance, however typical bloom times and fall color seasons are listed below.

Spring Wildflowers

The most abundant display of spring wildflower blooming usually occurs in mid- to late April, although late March and early April feature good showings of early flowers.

Flame Azalea

This wild shrub will be in bloom at the low and mid-elevations in April and May. On Gregory Bald they bloom in late June and early July. On Andrews Bald the season is usually in early July.

Mountain Laurel

This lovely shrub shows its white and pink flowers from early May through June.

Rhododendrons

Catawba rhododendron, which grows at elevations above 3,500', blooms in June. Rosebay rhododendron is in bloom at the lower elevations in June and at mid-elevations during July.

Fall Colors

At high elevations, fall color can be seen during the first two weeks of October. At lower elevations, leaves typically change between the middle of October and the first part of November.

For information: Call 865-436-1200 or go online to www.nps.gov/grsm and request “Great Smoky Mountains Trail Map.”

Fern Branch Falls, on Tennessee side of park. Looks beautiful from photo in *Blueridge Country*.

Vances Cove & Paddy Run

Remote Paddy Run and Vances Cove area in the northern reaches of the George Washington NF. Paddy Run is a beautiful trout stream that courses through Vances Cove Special Interest Area. Wildlife viewing, including spring wildflowers, early migratory birds. Several hiking options & destinations are within a short distance - including Great North Trail, Jonnie's Knob, Falls Ridge, and Big Schloss. Vances Cove is northwest of Strasburg. To reach it, head west on Hwy 55 from its intersection with I-81 near Strasburg (Exit 296). After approximately 13 miles, the intersection with Forest Road 93 occurs. Turn left (south) on FR 93 and proceed approximately 2.5 miles where there is an intersection with another Forest Road. This is Vances Cove.

“In the sheltered coves of Harpers Creek and Campbell Creek, tall cove hardwoods . . . thrive. Some trees attain enormous sizes.” (*Wild Virginia*, p. 36)

*Place already visited.