

Appalachia –Summits of Splendor

A Special Departure for The Nature
Conservancy's Legacy Club to North Carolina

Itinerary

Dates: May 16 – 22nd, 2010

Cost: \$3,882, Single occupancy rate: \$4,482

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Day 1 - Sunday, May 16th

Arrive in Asheville, North Carolina

Welcome to North Carolina. You will be greeted at the airport and taken to the Grove Park Inn and Spa. Built in 1913 with granite stones mined from Sunset Mountain, the resort overlooks the city of Asheville, and provides majestic views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. With its distinctive undulating red clay tile roof and original Roycroft furnishings and fixtures, The Grove Park Inn captures the essence of the Arts and Crafts movement. Throughout its massive lobby, words of inspiration from noted authors and anonymous sources are etched in stone.

The group will gather for a cocktail reception and program orientation by the fireplace near the Sunset Terrace. Mike Horak, the Conservancy's Associate Director of Development based in our Asheville Office, will welcome everyone with an overview of our conservation priorities in the Appalachians. Discovery Tours guide Bob Faber will preview the itinerary for the next week. Dinner will follow on the lovely patio of the Sunset Terrace.

Overnight at Grove Park Inn, Asheville

www.groveparkinn.com

Day 2 - Monday, May 17th

Rumbling Bald Preserve, Chimney Rock, Bat Cave, Lake Lure

Depart for Hickory Nut Gorge conservation area after breakfast accompanied by Mike Horak and a Conservancy biologist. The rocky outcroppings and cascading waterfalls of Hickory Nut Gorge make it an ecological treasure of national significance. Located just 15 miles southeast of Asheville, Hickory Nut Gorge is home to 37 rare plant species. Its caves provide habitat for rare salamander and endangered bat species and its steep slopes and high peaks host an array of bird species.

Search for salamanders in the Rumbling Bald Preserve and hike to Eagle Rock Overlook for an amazing perspective of Conservancy assisted protected areas. In 2005, the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation agreed to permanently protect a portion of this exquisite landscape by creating a new state park at Hickory Nut Gorge. This new addition to the state's conservation lands will be managed to preserve the region's remarkable natural communities and to ensure that the public can freely enjoy the wilderness for generations to come. To date, more than 3,000 acres in the Gorge are under conservation protection.

For those capable of hiking a mile up a steep trail through a mature hardwood forest, you will be rewarded with Bat Cave's natural air conditioning: a cool moist draft that constantly pours out of vents on the side of the large cave. Bat Cave is the largest known granite fissure cave in North America. The main chamber is a dark cathedral more than 300 feet long and approximately 85 feet high. Fissure caves are formed by rock splits, boulder movements, and other motions of the earth, while most other caves are formed by water dissolving and abrading rock. The forests harbor a number of threatened or endangered native plants, such as broadleaf coreopsis and Carey's saxifrage. One of the Conservancy's goals in managing this preserve is to reestablish the critically endangered Indiana bat to its former habitat. The cave itself is closed to visitation at all times and the preserve is closed from October to mid-April in an effort to allow the bats to hibernate undisturbed. If bats are disturbed during hibernation, they fly around and quickly use up the stored energy that they need to survive the winter.

For a less strenuous but equally spectacular outing, take the optional tour of Chimney Rock State Park. The most recognized part of the park is Chimney Rock itself – a 315-foot rock outcropping with an elevation of 2,280 feet providing a spectacular view across Hickory Nut Gorge.

After your morning excursions, the group will continue in the van just a mile or so down the road to Lake Lure for lunch and a boat ride on the lake.

Return to the Grove Park Inn this afternoon and then venture into Asheville to sample some of the culinary offerings in this eclectic city.

Overnight Grove Park Inn

Day 3 - Tuesday, May 18th

Biltmore Estate, Asheville Art District, or rafting the French Broad River

Participate in a guided tour of the Biltmore Estate this morning. George Vanderbilt officially opened his magnificent home to friends and family in 1895. At the time, it was one of the largest undertakings in the history of American residential architecture. It took more than six years and a community of craftsmen to build it. The famous architect Richard Morris Hunt was commissioned for this undertaking, as was Frederick Law Olmstead, the creator of New York's Central Park and the father of American

landscape architecture.

Olmstead not only developed the gardens and parkland, but also protected the surrounding environment, managed the forest and reclaimed over-farmed land on the 125,000-acre estate.

After your tour and lunch, you may choose to remain in downtown Asheville to explore the art district and perhaps the Botanical Gardens at the University, return to the Grove Park Inn, or for a more adventurous afternoon, embark on a five mile rafting trip on the French Broad River.

Dinner tonight is at the Grove Park Inn on the terrace.

Overnight Grove Park Inn

Day 4 - Wednesday, May 19th

Blue Ridge Parkway to Blowing Rock

This morning, depart the lovely Grove Park Inn to drive north to the New River Headwaters area of North Carolina on one of the country's most famous scenic roads, The Blue Ridge Parkway. This road is a "window" to the region and provides access to scores of communities, with cultural and natural sites that help define this part of the country.

The New River Headwaters area of North Carolina ranks as one of the most diverse and critically important biological hotspots in the entire Southern Appalachians. Many species found here came to the region just one step ahead of the encroaching Ice Age and remained in the high peaks of these rugged mountains after the ice receded 10,000 years ago. This area has been a focus of The Nature Conservancy since the North Carolina Chapter established the Bluff Mountain Preserve in 1977. The Conservancy is currently working to protect Long Hope Creek, which feeds into the North Fork of the New River.

There are several points of interest that you may visit on your way to Blowing Rock. The Folk Art Center is just north of Asheville and has a nice collection of local art and interactive demonstrations by the artists. Another interesting stop could be the Museum of North Carolina Minerals. The mountains near Spruce Pine, North Carolina, are among the richest in minerals and gems in the United States, and more than 300 varieties are showcased in the Museum of North Carolina Minerals, located on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The museum is located at Gillespie Gap, an important stop for Revolutionary War fighters on their way to the Battle of Kings Mountain. Recently renovated, it features interactive displays about the minerals and gems found in the region as well as the historical importance of the mining industry that is the backbone of the local economy.

You will arrive in Blowing Rock mid-afternoon and check into The Inn at Ragged Gardens. Your

afternoon is free to walk around, visit Main Street galleries and shops or relax at the Inn.

You will be joined this evening by Merrill Lynch, The Nature Conservancy's Northwest Mountains Protection Specialist. Merrill will spend the next two days with you sharing his vast knowledge of the landscape and his 20+ years of experience as a Nature Conservancy scientist in North Carolina.

Participate in a discussion with Merrill over cocktails this evening before heading into town to enjoy dinner at one of the many fine restaurants in Blowing Rock.

Overnight at the Inn at Ragged Gardens

www.ragged-gardens.com

Day 5 - Thursday, May 20th
Grandfather Mountain

Depart for Grandfather Mountain accompanied by Merrill. Hike with the park naturalist on the trails to experience some of the 16 distinct natural communities represented here. Portions of the backcountry are sheltered within a Nature Conservancy trust.

Famous for its rocky summits, cliffs, and great views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and Piedmont, Grandfather Mountain is one of North Carolina's most biologically diverse mountains. Rock outcrops, spruce-fir forests, heath balds, and hardwood forests provide habitat for over 60 rare plant and animal species including the Carolina northern flying squirrel, Weller's salamander and four endangered plants: spreading avens, Heller's blazing star, mountain bluet, and Blue Ridge goldenrod. Grandfather is near the southern end of the range of species such as the northern saw-whet owl, hermit thrush, and New England cottontail.

The mountain's backcountry is accessible by a network of hiking trails of varying degrees of difficulty that run through this private preserve. The mountain is also a good place for birding, offering migratory birds in the spring such as Canada and Blackburnian warblers, rose-breasted grosbeak, scarlet tanager and migrating broad-winged hawks in the fall.

You'll have lunch in the park and return to Blowing Rk this afternoon.

ocOvernight at the Inn at Ragged Gardens

Day 6 - Friday, May 21st
Bluff Mountain

Today is a full day of activities, including another opportunity to visit a Conservancy preserve not open to the general public because of the rare and endangered plant communities that exist

here. You will use 4x4 vehicles to travel up Bluff Mountain Preserve road to a pull-off area. From there you will hike uphill for about a third of a mile to the top of the mountain where a rare southern Appalachian fen and many neo-tropical migratory bird species await.

Bluff Mountain offers scenic beauty, unusual landforms, and amazing botanical variety. Although relatively small in size, Bluff is one of the most ecologically significant natural areas in the Southeast. Hiking on Bluff, in just a few dozen steps you can walk from a Carolina hemlock forest to a dwarf red oak/white oak forest to a rare flat rock plant community. A broad, high plateau containing an unusual wetland and a southern Appalachian fen, adds to Bluff's unique character.

A fertile home for over 400 species of plants, including Indian paintbrush, Gray's lily, fringed gentian, spreading avens, and sundew, Bluff Mountain is known for its changing floral show from April through October that includes 25 endangered, rare, or threatened flowering plant species. The high-elevation hardwood forests of Bluff provide ideal nesting habitat for many neo-tropical migratory bird species such as black-throated green warbler, veery, rose-breasted grosbeak, scarlet tanager, and blue-headed vireo. In the spring, you may hear the distinctive drumming of ruffed grouse. Even elusive bobcats den in the shelter of rocky outcrops, while ravens are often seen soaring over the cliffs.

After an early lunch at the overlook, return to the base of the mountain to participate in an optional volunteer work activity. Multiflora rose is an invasive plant squeezing out the endemic plants at the base of Bluff Mountain Preserve. Just an hour or two of your help will make a big impact on controlling this problem. Equipment and gloves will be provided. An optional activity will be provided if you choose not to participate.

On your way back to Blowing Rock, stop in at West Jefferson, a small town with a reputation for keeping mountain music and arts alive. Stop in to catch some of the local bluegrass jam at the Bohemia Gallery, then, after listening to a few tunes, enjoy real North Carolina barbeque at Smokey Mountain BBQ restaurant, just down the road. Time permitting, visit a local cheese factory in West Jefferson and sample their goods.

Overnight at the Inn at Ragged Gardens

Day 7 - Saturday, May 22nd

Return to Asheville

After breakfast this morning and one last stroll along Main Street, depart for Asheville and your return home.