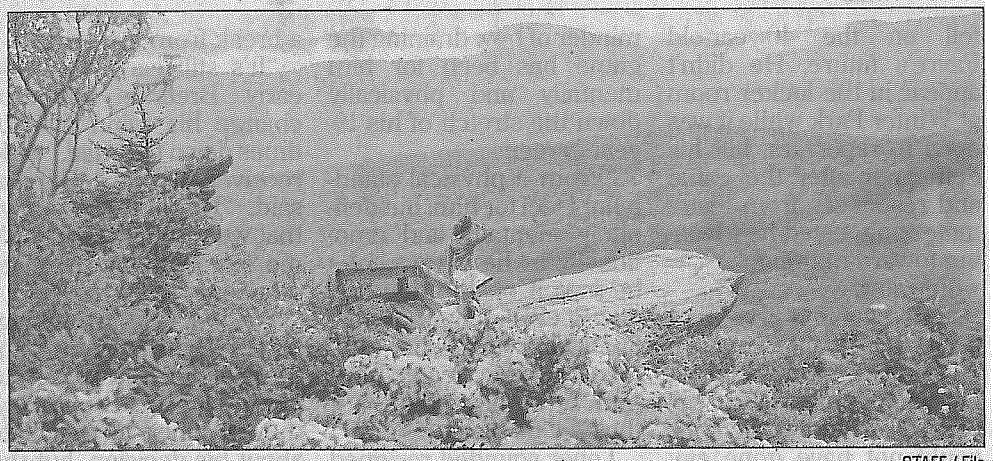
BREAKING OUT

Blue Ridge Parkway turns 75

By Mike Foley
STAFF WRITER
mfoley@greenvillenews.com



STAFF / File

A hiker takes in the Blue Ridge Mountains vista from a trail off the Blue Ridge Parkway south of Blowing Rock, N.C.

After 75 years, the Blue Ridge Parkway is still going strong. And this year, the 469-mile highway celebrates its anniversary in grand style.

Outdoor adventures are one of the highlights of the parkway's 75th anniversary, but not the only one. While you can certainly use the parkway as a conduit to skiing, hiking, biking, fly-fishing, running and back-packing adventures, there's plenty of other activities to try after you're finished.

And this year, the parkway is rolling out a huge list of events. So far, more than 400 events have been listed on the parkway web site and more are being added every day. You can find celebrations centered around music, art, heritage, wine, food and more all along the roadway.

While the parkway isn't officially a park, you'd never know it by driving, biking or hiking near it. Its southernmost point straddles Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Cherokee Indian Reservation in North Carolina at Cumberland Knob. At its most northern point is Shenandoah National Park in Virginia.

In many places, the park is bordered by land protected by the United States Forest Service, as well as state and local parks.

Here are some of this year's events that might interest outdoor enthusiasts:

■ Jan. 28-31 – The 12th annual Winterfest in Blowing Rock, N.C., near Milepost 291 offers plenty to do. Try the Polar Plunge if you're looking for a real eye-opener. Info: www.blowingrockwinterfest.com

■ April 17-18 – Both novice and experienced fly anglers will enjoy the Virginia Fly Fishing Festival in Waynesboro, Va., near Milepost 0. Besides everything fishing, the festival has wine tastings, conservation education and natural resources stewardship. Info: www.vaflyfishingfestival.org

■ April 21-25 – You can come for the 5K Dogwood Run on April 25 and stay for the other festival fun at the 55th annual Vinton Dogwood Festival in Vinton, Va., near Milepost 112. Festival highlights include a parade, antique car show, craft show, children's area, carnival and entertainment stages. Info: www.vintondogwoodfestival.org

■ April 24 – The inaugural Blue Ridge Marathon in Roanoke, Va., near Milepost 120 is a mountain-lover's delight. With 3,076 feet of total elevation gain and 6,140 feet of elevation change during the 26.2-mile race, runners will be tested. If you're not up to the test, a half-marathon, a five-person relay, a walk and a kid's marathon are offered. Info: www.blueridgemarathon.com

■ June 5-11 – The Blue Ridge Bliss Cycling Tour doesn't cover the entire 469-mile length of the parkway, but you will get in 287 miles of riding during the six-day tour. The tour begins and ends in Roanoke, Va. This is a guided, fully supported ride. Info: www.adventurecycling.org/tours

■ June 21-26 – At the official Blue Ridge Parkway 75th Anniversary Celebration in Boone, N.C., near Milepost 285, participants can choose a leisurely guided bike ride on the parkway or a headwaters hike and then kick back and enjoy barbecue, bluegrass, historical and ghost tours, and a wine and cheese fundraiser. Info: www.goboone.net

■ Mike Foley can be reached at 298-4744.

this year

FIND AN EVENT

A list of Blue Ridge Parkway anniversary events, which can be searched by community or region or by month, is at: www.blueridgeparkway75.org