tr tribune.com

78°F

Travelers Rest
Humidity: 68% Cloudy
Wind: 7 mph

20 Jul 2014
70°F 69°F

21 Jul 2014
80°F 69°F

Search the Tribune...

DAY TRIPPING: CHEROKEE FOOTHILLS BYWAY OFFERS A SCENIC ALTERNATIVE

Written by James Richardson Published in Destinations

1
Tweet

0
g+1

font size

Print

Email



Photo: James Richardson/Travelers Rest Tribune

With inspiring views and history worth reminiscing, Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Byway - also known as Highway 11 - winds its way across the northwest corner of the state.

With the southernmost peaks of the Blue Ridge Mountains serving as its backdrop, the nearly 120-mile route takes you through peach orchards and past parks, lakes, waterfalls and roadside farm stands. Getting from one end to the other allows for the opportunity to experience quaint villages - towns like Walhalla and Chesnee - many of which can serve as starting-off points of there own.

The two-lane roadway - originally used by the Cherokee Indians and English and French fur traders - extends from the Georgia line to Gaffney, just below the North Carolina line. The route is brimming with places to stop and things to see, several of which are highlighted here to encourage further exploration.

The southern terminus, at Exit 1 on I-85 near the South Carolina-Georgia border, is notably marked by Lake Hartwell State Park. One of many state parks along the byway, it provides access to 56,000-acre Lake Hartwell and serves as the "gateway" to South Carolina's mountain country.

Driving north from Lake Hartwell, motorists pass by the towns of Westminster - home of the South Carolina Apple Festival and the Mayberry Days Festival - and Walhalla, known as the "Garden of the Gods." Filled with Southern charm, along with antique shops, unique stores and great places to eat, a stroll through either can provide a pleasant diversion.

One S.C. gem, Keowee-Toxaway State Park, is located on S.C. 11, a couple of miles past the bridge over Lake Keowee. In addition to providing hiking and camping opportunities, the park serves as the gateway to the 43,500-acre Jocassee Gorges, a "Blue Wall" of hills that represent the sharp transition between the mountains and the Piedmont.

Long Shoals Wayside Park, a 10-acre park located just a couple of miles past Keowee-Toxaway is a stop that is easily missed, but it shouldn't be. Thanks to local community efforts, this once run-down turnout along a picturesque stretch of Little Eastatoe Creek has been transformed into something that deserves to be seen. Visitors can explore the shoals and small waterfalls, slide and swim, and walk a creek-side trail down to scenic Long Shoals. Stocked regularly by South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), it's also a popular spot with anglers.

Continuing north/east, the towering mountain which gives Table Rock State Park its name comes into view. Known well to area outdoor enthusiasts, the park's natural beauty never ceases to amaze, beckoning motorists to take pause in all things beautiful.

One of the favorite activities of visitors at Table Rock is the easy 0.2 mile hike to Carrick Creek Falls. Wading is allowed at your own risk in the creek near the observation deck at the base of the 15-foot falls, and on many days, children can be seen standing behind the often-photographed falls.

A short drive up the highway from Table Rock, Caesars Head State Park, named for a large, granite outcropping atop a mountain, offers spectacular views that extend into North Carolina and Georgia. Jones Gap State Park, home to the state's first designated scenic river, is nearby. The two parks form what is known as the Mountain Bridge Wilderness Area, an 11,000-acre area of pristine forest.

Raven Cliff Falls, arguably one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the Upstate, is located near Caesars Head. A viewing platform can be reached by a moderate 2.2 mile hike, or you can choose a slightly longer route to view the falls from the swinging bridge that sits in front of the falls. Both vantage points offer spectacular views of the 420-foot flume.

Just east of the intersection with U.S. 276, the South Saluda River Trout Enhancement Project improved angler access and trout habitat along a marked section of the river. The spot is partly located across the highway from Wildcat Wayside State Park, another popular stopping point worth a quick visit.



Two historical bridges can be seen near the byway's intersection with S.C. 101 in Greenville County. Follow the signs heading north and visit Poinsett Bridge, the state's oldest, surviving bridge. Built in 1820, it was part of the old State Road, which connected Charleston through Columbia to North Carolina. Follow signs heading south on 101 to visit Campbell's Covered Bridge, the only surviving covered bridge in the state.

Continuing on toward the National Scenic Byway's northern terminus, the route passes Glassy Mountain, Gowensville and Campobello, dissecting the area known as the Dark Corner - a loose-boundaried region once defined by murder, moonshine and mayhem.

After passing through the picturesque town of Chesney, one of the last main stops before entering the city of Gaffney is Cowpens National Battlefield, a Revolutionary war site commemorating the historic Battle of Cowpens.

And, as we reach the end of this roadway narrative, the non-inclusive sampling of highlights and attractions of Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Byway serves as illustration that it is not just merely a road through the hills. It is a destination within itself – a destination worth exploring.

Last modified onFriday, 18 July 2014 15:00

TAGGED UNDER

Day Trip | Dark Corner | SC State Parks

More in this category: **Northern Greenville County's must-see mountain views »**

Advertisements:

facebook . twitter . eNews