

By Rose Muenker • Photography by David Muenker

While driving along the park's Cades Cove and Roaring Fork scenic drives, we visited original cabins, admired stunning scenery and even spotted a black bear. On our drive up to Newfound Gap, snow started falling. Travelers jumped out of their cars to taste, touch and play in the tapioca-like snow. They proudly mounted miniature snowmen on their car antennas to show off back in town. We had hoped to miss the white stuff this year, but we couldn't help but get caught up in the excitement and the snows' magical beauty.

ON THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

From the Great Smokies, we began our drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway on its route through North Carolina into Virginia. Slopes and valleys sported lovely hues of red along with burnished gold, orange and bronze. We soon discovered how living and playing in the Rockies has instilled an ease with heights that we take for granted. Similar to visiting Colorado's Mount Evans, at Mount Mitchell, we followed a winding road up to a

*Autumn colors lured us from Kentucky to the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina, with a stop at Great Smoky Mountains National Park. America's most visited park was bustling with activity as families poured into Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge and Sevierville to spend Fall Break. With the Great Smokies, Dollywood and countless family attractions, entertainment options abound. And so do traffic jams, even on national park roads.*

FROM SNOW TO



1 Atalaya, now a historic site in Huntington Beach State Park, was the winter retreat of Archer Huntington and his wife, Anna, who created many of her sculptures here. 2 At the end of the day, the Blue Ridge Mountains take on a colorful blue cast. 3 Visitors cross a deep ravine on the suspension bridge at Grandfather Mountain, a favorite North Carolina attraction in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

SOUTH CAROLINA



parking lot and then climbed the short distance to the summit. We stood on top of the tallest peak east of the Mississippi River—a lofty 6,684 feet! The swinging bridge at Grandfather Mountain near Boone, NC, proved to be a popular favorite. For many of the visitors, crossing the bridge over a deep chasm was a white-knuckle adventure of a lifetime and an accomplishment that brought grins to their faces.

Several stops along the Blue Ridge Parkway showcase the area's history and tradition. In the Folk Arts Center outside Asheville, NC, local artists demonstrated traditional crafts, from broom making to quilting. We shifted gears from humble heritage to jaw-dropping opulence at the palatial Biltmore estate. Exploring the lavish residence, gardens, farm and winery easily filled a day.

Up the parkway at the Blue Ridge Music Center, we tapped our feet to bluegrass played by local musicians on fiddles, banjos and mandolins. At Mabry Mill we watched staff demonstrate





### WHEN YOU GO

- Great Smoky Mountains National Park**  
nps.gov/grsm
- Blue Ridge Parkway**  
BlueRidgeParkway75.org
- Grandfather Mountain**  
GrandfatherMountain.com
- Biltmore Estate**  
Biltmore.com
- South Carolina Tourism**  
SouthCarolinaTourism.com
- South Carolina Parks**  
SouthCarolinaParks.com
- Gullah Heritage Days**  
PennCenter.com



**1** Except for the state park campground and nature center, Hunting Island is a purely natural barrier island with white sand beaches, sea oats, sable palms, long-leaf pines and salt marshes. **2** The French Renaissance-style Biltmore mansion, America's largest privately-owned house, boasts 250 rooms and 175,000 square feet. **3** Leaves in Great Smoky National Park shine iridescent green in early autumn. **4** During the Gullah Heritage Festival on St. Helena Island in South Carolina, locals sell fresh collard greens, turnips and other popular vegetables.



how mountain homesteaders spun wool, wove bed covers on large wooden looms, and milled corn into grits and flour. Even more activities will be happening throughout 2010 to celebrate the Blue Ridge Parkway's 75th anniversary.

### HEADING SOUTH

With colder temperatures on the way, we set our course southward where we discovered the pristine beaches of South Carolina's coastal state parks. Huntington Beach, Edisto Island and Hunting Island captured our hearts and revealed our insatiable love for sandy beaches. And the park's dog-friendly policy meant that our dog Sonya could join us on walks and have her first-ever experience romping in the surf. Watching dolphins leap through the waters, pelicans dive for fish and egrets walk through golden salt marshes were daily sightings. Freshly caught shrimp and flavorful produce from nearby farms made eating a celebration.

Cultural and historic attractions further enriched our time in South Carolina, among them: Atalaya, the retreat of Archer and Anna Huntington, and Brookgreen Gardens designed to display her sculpture; Gullahs (African Americans from coastal South Carolina and Georgia) weaving sweetgrass baskets in Charleston's Old Market; and the "shouts" and other festivities of Gullah Heritage Days on St. Helena Island.

Much as we adored South Carolina's barrier islands, we needed to keep heading south to warmer climes. And we did, knowing that around the next turn yet another fascinating sight or encounter awaited us. **See ya on the road!**

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