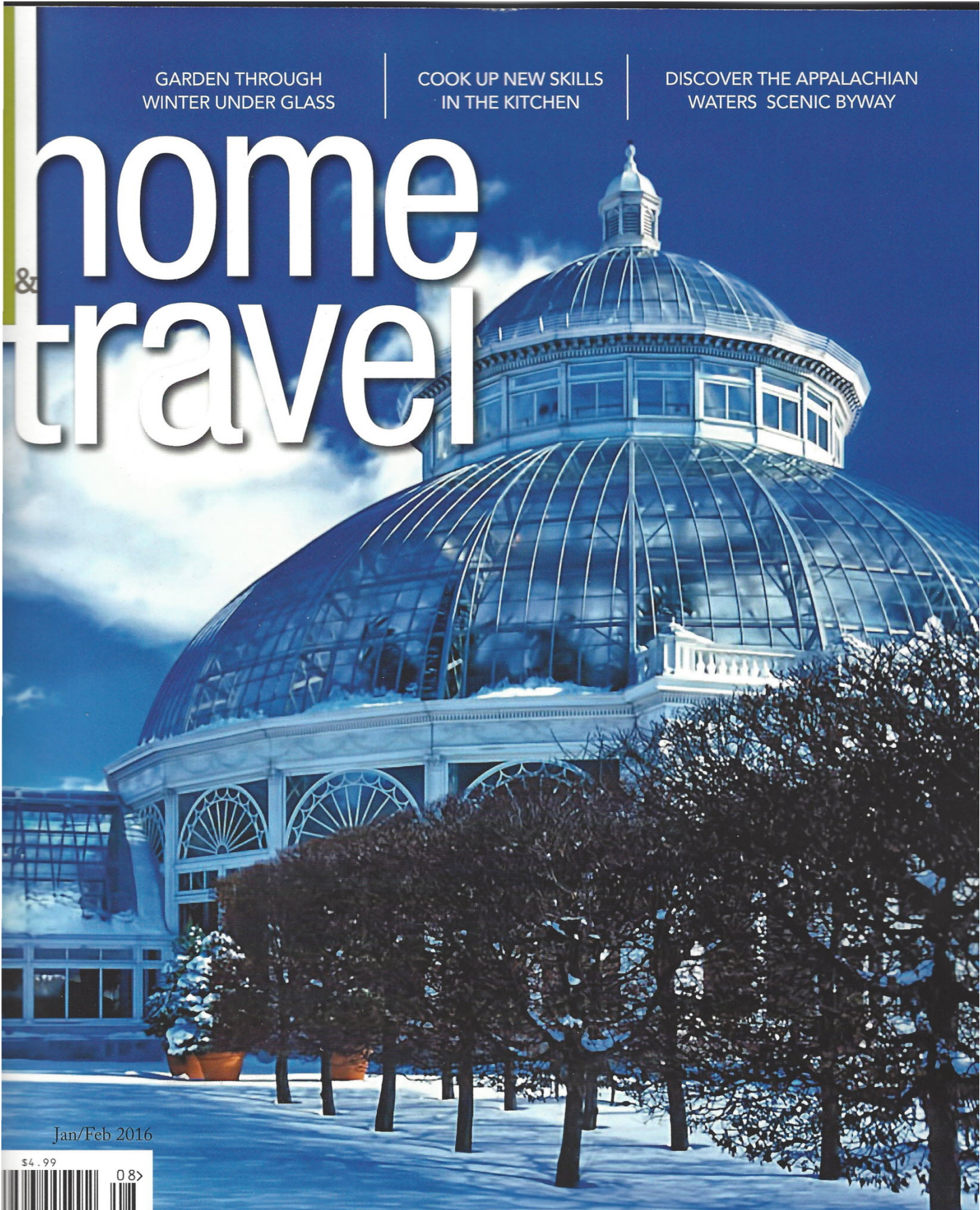


GARDEN THROUGH
WINTER UNDER GLASS

COOK UP NEW SKILLS
IN THE KITCHEN

DISCOVER THE APPALACHIAN
WATERS SCENIC BYWAY

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A ROAD TRIP LIKE NO OTHER

ARTICLE BY REED HELLMAN



A road trip along the Appalachian Waters Scenic Byway climbs into the heart of one of the world's signature ecosystems.

Winding 136 miles from Lexington, Va., west over the Allegheny Mountains to Summersville, W.Va., the byway, also known as Route 39, mixes sumptuous accommodations, natural hot springs, mountain traditions and a wealth of cultural attractions with hundreds of thousands of acres of public wildlands.

"This is one of the most globally significant forest biomes in the world," said Marek Smith, executive director

of The Nature Conservancy's Allegheny Highlands Program. "It's only rivaled in diversity by similar forests in China."

Abutting the byway, the Conservancy's 9,000-acre Warm Springs Mountain Preserve also shares a 13-mile border with the George Washington National Forest and stands as one of the largest and most ecologically significant private forests in the Central Appalachians.

The byway writhes and wriggles across parallel mountain ridges and, for a good portion of its length, traverses national forest land. It's a "driver's road," well surfaced and maintained, but coiling through looping switchbacks, steep inclines and sharply banked tight curves. Frequent pull-offs enable drivers to enjoy the panoramas without having to stay focused on the road ahead.





OMNI HOMESTEAD RESORT

PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY HARRIS



A ROAD TRIP ALONG THE APPALACHIAN WATERS SCENIC BYWAY CLIMBS INTO THE HEART OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S SIGNATURE ECOSYSTEMS.

Lexington, the byway's eastern gateway, is steeped in history, and has successfully updated itself while maintaining its charming Greek Revival and Queen Anne architecture. Civil War history abounds, and visiting the notable sites from behind a team of Lexington Carriage Company horses adds to the ambiance. To continue the historic theme, dine and spend the night at The Georges, a boutique lodging on Main Street, occupying two of the city's oldest structures. Don't forget to try the old-fashioned, homemade ice cream, served in handmade waffle cones at Sweet Things, just down the block.

Just outside of Lexington, the 600-acre Virginia Horse Center offers year-round events, stabling for 1,200 horses and a 4,000-seat arena. This world-class equestrian facility attracts local, national and international competitions and sales, and provides recreational, educational and demonstration opportunities for people living and traveling in Virginia.

The Appalachian Byway Geocache Challenge offers yet another way to explore scenic Route 39. Find six of the nine caches along the route and answer questions correctly to win a special

commemorative coin, available at the visitor's centers along the way.

Goshen Pass is the first tip-off that Route 39 is a truly majestic drive. Hardwood forests blanket the steep slopes and rare mountain flowers flourish among the boulders. Hunters, anglers and photographers find many opportunities along the Maury River. The town of Goshen can be a good first night's stop, where the Hummingbird offers classic B&B accommodations: welcoming, homey, clean and comfortable, with a sumptuous breakfast and the added attraction of active train tracks just beyond the front drive.

Beyond Goshen, the byway enters the George Washington National Forest and crosses Warm Spring Mountain at the Dan Ingalls Overlook trailhead for a 2.4-mile (round trip) hike that introduces Warm Springs Mountain and the region's natural and human history.

The region's expansive wildlands result in little noise pollution along with very dark nights, free from "light pollution." Away from any large urban areas, Bath County has nighttime skies that delight amateur astronomers and stargazers, and little to audibly disturb the sounds of nature.

WARM SPRING'S WATERWHEEL
RESTAURANT AT THE INN AT
CRISTMILL SQUARE



PHOTOGRAPH BY REED HEIMAN



THE JEFFERSON POOL

MANY PEOPLE FEEL THAT,
DESPITE ITS RUSTIC APPEARANCE,
THE POOL'S MINERAL-RICH WATER
HAS HEALING POWERS.

After topping the ridge, Route 39 descends into Warm Springs. Warm Springs is also steeped in culture, and Garth Newel Music Center is its centerpiece. Started as an Arabian horse farm, the land was repurposed as a venue for a resident chamber music quartet, classical and jazz presentations and a variety musical and dining events. A weekend package may include unique accommodations and gourmet meals along with the music.

In keeping with the theme of sumptuous accommodations in a pristine mountain wilderness, dining at Warm Spring's Waterwheel Restaurant at the Inn at Gristmill Square after a day of outdoor adventure makes perfect sense. Tables nestled into the historic grist mill's "workings" and the rustic surroundings serve as informal counterpoint to the elegant cuisine and well-stocked wine cellar.

Hiking the mountain ridges can be strenuous, but a soak in a naturally warmed spring can be both relaxing and therapeutic. The Jefferson Pools began as a spa resort in the 1750s and flow at a constant 98.5 degrees. Many people feel that, despite its rustic appearance, the pool's mineral-rich water has healing powers.



FALLING SPRING FALLS

Just before entering West Virginia, the byway passes the Hidden Valley Recreation Area. With the Jackson River and 24 miles of trails, Hidden Valley offers excellent opportunities for hiking, biking, camping and fishing.

"The Jackson River holds an ideal environment for rainbow trout," explained Andrew Lacks, lead guide for Natural Retreats Outfitters in Hot Springs. "They prefer colder water, and there are so many natural springs feeding cold water into the river."

The Hidden Valley B&B, formerly the Warwickton Estate, may seem familiar to movie-goers, as it appeared in the 1993 film "Sommersby," starring Richard Gere, Jodie Foster and James Earl Jones.

Crossing into West Virginia's Pocahontas County and the Monongahela National Forest, the byway passes Devil's Backbone, a dramatic arch of Tuscarora sandstone, called an anticline, exposed along the gorge of Knapp's Creek.

Mobile phones from various carriers will not work throughout much of the byway. The Green Bank Radio Telescope, perched atop a mountain in Pocahontas County, needs a location free from electrical interference caused by some phone and radio station towers. The National Radio Quiet Zone spans parts of 28 counties in West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland, and forms

the world's only safe haven for radio astronomy.

However, mobile phones work fine in Marlinton, the county seat and home of the West Virginia Road-Kill Cook-off, part of the annual Autumn Harvest Festival. An homage to traditional mountain culture, with a strong dash of tongue-in-cheek humor, the cook-off draws thousands of eager tasters, queuing-up to sample "Bear Butt Savory Stew," "Wild Fowl Menagerie" and "Drunken Deer Chili with Ramped Up Rice."

Along with the cook-off, culinary explorers focus on the Marlinton Motor Inn's restaurant, where chef Teresa Hammons prepares traditional mountain dishes for special occasions. From "ramp feeds" in the spring to autumn wild game dinners, Hammons' cooking echoes the ingredients and techniques handed down through her family. If you like to dine where the locals dine, this is the place.

The Carriage House B&B in nearby Huntersville could be one of the friendliest lodgings along the byway. The rooms are neat and comfortable and large gardens provide much of the breakfast fare. Guests find it nearly impossible not to fall a little in love with the lodging, owner Jeannie Dunham and her two friendly dogs.

Beyond Marlinton, the Highlands Scenic Highway, Route 150, can provide a 28-mile, high-

elevation alternate route, climbing to 4,545 feet as it crosses Black Mountain. The panoramas are sweeping, but snow comes early and lingers into the spring, and clouds can suddenly blanket the peaks and isolated valleys.

The Highlands Scenic Highway rejoins Route 39 at the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center. The center presents a variety of exhibits and programs on the area's unique ecosystem, wildlife and history. Leaving the national forest, the byway enters Richwood, home of the annual Feast of the Ramson. Each spring, the town hosts a festival celebrating the appearance of ramps, aggressively pungent wild leeks that grow throughout the Allegheny highlands. At Richwood High School, home of the festival, the earthy, penetrating tang of cooking ramps is a clout to the olfactory, as this oldest and largest "ramp feed" dishes out nearly a ton of the greens.

The byway ends in Summersville, where Summersville Lake and the Gauley River National Recreation Area draw crowds of boaters and whitewater enthusiasts. The recreational opportunities along the Appalachian Waters Scenic Byway, combined with the region's culture, history and natural splendor, make this a road trip that ably satisfies a wide range of interests.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARISSA HERMANSON



■ **RESOURCES:**

Appalachian Waters Scenic Byway
www.scenic39.com

VIRGINIA:

Lexington & Rockbridge – Area Tourism
877-453-9822
www.lexingtonvirginia.com

Bath County – Office of Tourism
800-628-8092
www.discoverbath.com

WEST VIRGINIA:

Pocahontas County – Convention and Visitors Bureau
800-336-7009
www.pocahontascountywv.com

Greenbrier County – Convention and Visitors Bureau
800-833-2068

Summersville – Convention and Visitors Bureau
304-872-3722
www.summersvillecvb.com



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