

**2023 NSS Convention**

Elkins, West Virginia

# **Non-Caving Activities**



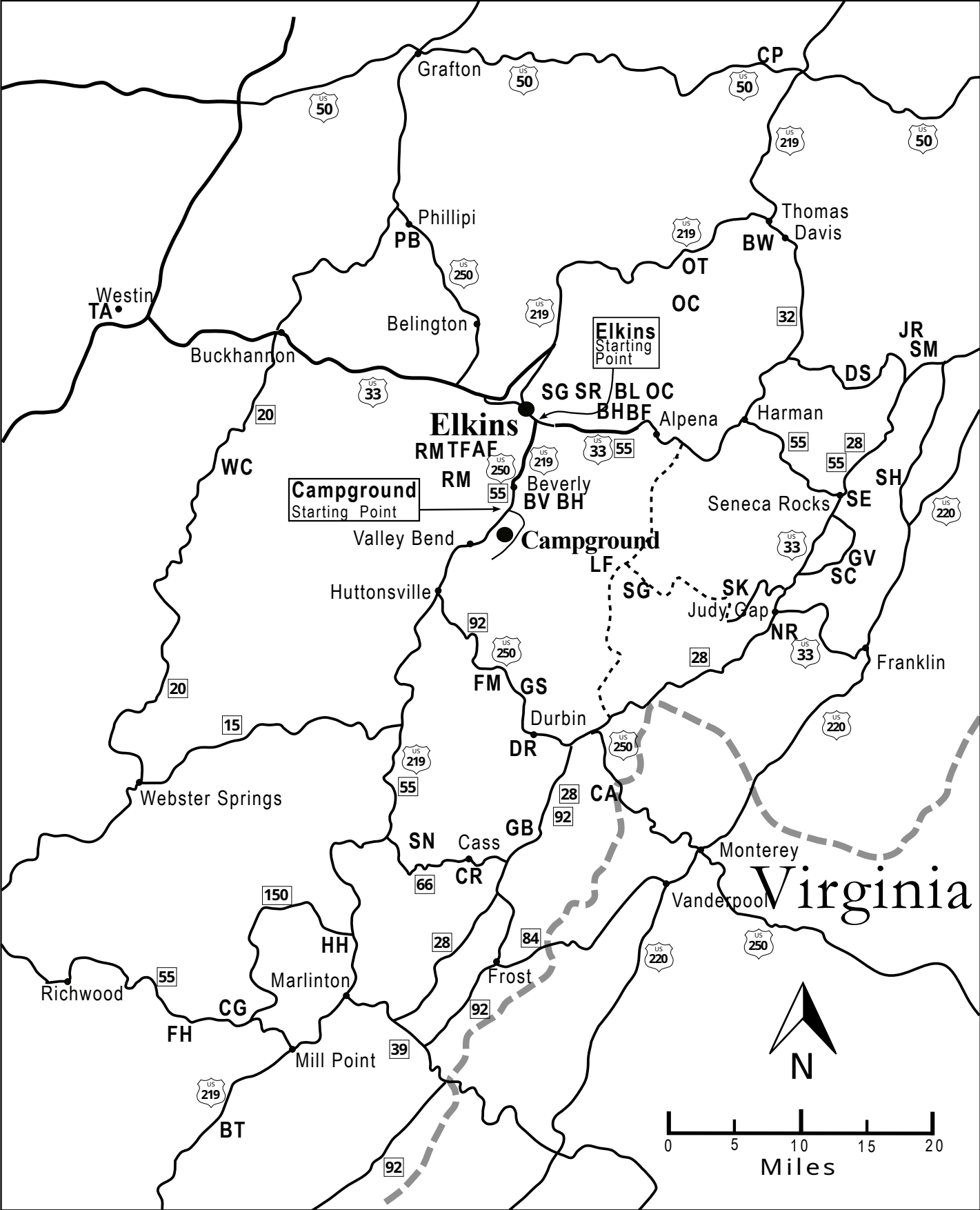
**by George Dasher**

## **DON'T FEEL LIKE SITTING IN SESSIONS OR CAVING?**

If you want a break from sessions and caving during the Convention, there are many other interesting activities within easy driving time from the convention site. This document provides descriptions and driving directions for many places that can provide a non-caving break.

# Locations of Non-Caving Activity Sites

Approximate locations of the sites are shown with two-letter codes.  
The codes are shown in the Table of Contents on the next page.



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There are two starting locations for the directions to the non-caving activity locations described in this paper:

**Campground:** The intersection of Back Road 38 and US Routes 219/250/33 near the campground. This is the starting point for trips to the south of Elkins. This starting point is about 8.5 miles south of the Elkins starting point.

GPS: 38.8094, -79.8817

**Elkins:** The intersection of US routes 219/250/33 on the east side of Elkins (at the McDonald's). This is the starting point for trips to the east, north, and west of Elkins. This starting point is about 8.5 miles north of the campground starting point.

GPS: 38.9177, -79.8426

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**Cover photo:** Upper Falls of Hills Creek. See description on page 8. Photo by Ryan Maurer.

July 18, 2022

## — ELKINS AND BEVERLY —

### APPALACHIAN FOREST DISCOVERY CENTER

The Appalachian Forest Discovery Center is located on the first floor of the Darden Mill, a National Historic Landmark, in downtown Elkins. The Darden Mill, built in 1902, was a historic grist mill known as the Elkins Milling Company. The West Virginia Railroad Museum occupies the second floor of the Darden Mill. Visitors will learn about the Appalachian region's rich cultural and forest heritage, how the people of this region interacted with this dynamic forest resource and how it, in turn, molded and influenced them. The Center is open Thursday through Sunday, 9:30 AM to 5 PM and admission is free.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take 11th Street past McDonald's. After several blocks, turn right at the traffic light onto S. Davis Ave. Turn left at a light onto 1st Street then right onto Railroad Ave. The museum is on the left immediately after the turn.

GPS: 38.9235, -79.8511 (Discovery Center entrance)

### BEVERLY

Beverly is not only the historical county seat of Randolph County, but is also the oldest West Virginia town west of the Allegheny Mountains. Its main street was at one time the Parkersburg-Staunton Turnpike, a 19th century stagecoach road that was the major highway through central Virginia. In the winter of 1865, one of the last large successful Confederate raids of the American Civil War was to Beverly, when two veteran Union Cavalry regiments were captured virtually intact. These soldiers were marched, some in their underwear and barefoot, to prisoner-of-war camps in eastern Virginia. Beverly was also the home to Stonewall Jackson's sister, who was a staunch supporter of the Union. The Randolph County Historical Museum is located in downtown Beverly at the corner of US-219 and Main Street.

**Directions:** Beverly is on the road between the campground and the college.

GPS: 38.8409, -79.8753 (Downtown Beverly)

### BEVERLY HERITAGE CENTER

The Beverly Heritage Center combines four historic buildings in the center of Beverly to tell the story of the Battle of Rich Mountain and the First Campaign of the

American Civil War, the pivotal role of the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, and daily life in a small rural county seat through the 19th century.

**Directions:** The Center is in the center of town at the Court Street intersection.

GPS: 38.8406, -79.8753 (Museum)

### NEW TYGART FLYER [train]

This is a diesel-powered train that departs from Elkins. The train travels east and under Cheat Mountain in an S-shaped tunnel, and then turns north and goes up the Shavers Fork to the High Falls of the Cheat River. The 46-mile round trip takes about 4 hours. There are many chances to see wildlife, including bald eagles and black bears. Trips leave at 11 AM Thursday through Sunday. Reservations are highly recommended. Call 304-636-9477 or visit [mountainrailwv.com](http://mountainrailwv.com) for more information. FEE

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take 11th Street past McDonald's. After several blocks, turn right at the traffic light onto S. Davis Ave. Turn left at a light onto 1st Street then right onto Railroad Ave. The train station is on the left after a couple blocks.

GPS: 38.9251, -79.8508 (Train station)

### RICH MOUNTAIN BATTLEFIELD

The Rich Mountain Battlefield is located just a few miles west of Beverly on the crest of Rich Mountain. The site is astride the old Parkersburg-Staunton Turnpike (which is a dirt road), on which the Confederates fought delaying actions early in the American Civil War—after losing battles at Grafton and Parsons. Principally, they burned bridges and instigated small holding actions as they retreated east, but they also constructed breastworks at the top and western bottom of Rich Mountain, where they hoped to stop the Federal advance. The Union did not attack the fortifications, but instead employed a local guide to lead them in a long flanking movement that caught the Confederates by surprise at the top of the mountain. Most of the Confederates were captured (and later exchanged), and this part of western Virginia was secured for the North.

**Directions:** from the Campground starting point go to Beverly and turn left (west) on Rich Mountain Road and follow it 5 miles to the site. It's about 20 minutes from the campground.

GPS: 38.8663, -79.9345 (Battlefield)



## THE STIRRUP GALLERY

Where can you learn about the Roman Empire, marvel over a collection of brilliantly colored butterflies from Peru, and get an up-close look at tools used by Native Americans? The Stirrup Gallery, located in the Myles Center for the Arts on the D&E campus, contains an eclectic collection of artifacts gathered from many sources. It's worth a visit between convention sessions.

GPS: 38.9336, -79.8439 (main entrance)

## STUART RECREATION AREA

This area is a short drive from downtown Elkins and features hiking trails, picnic shelters and tables, and a swimming area. There is a \$5 fee per vehicle.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for 3.5 miles and turn left on Old Route 33. Turn left after 2 miles onto Shavers Fork Road, then turn left after 4/10 mile onto the Forest Road 91, the recreation area's entrance road.

GPS: 38.9157, -79.7698 (start of entrance road)

## WEST VIRGINIA RAILROAD MUSEUM

The West Virginia Railroad Museum is a relatively new museum located near the former rail yard in downtown Elkins. It has a number of exhibits and displays about railroad history in Elkins and the surrounding area. The museum is open from 9-5 on Thursday through Sunday. FEE

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take 11th Street past McDonald's. After several blocks, turn right at the traffic light onto S. Davis Ave. Turn left at a light onto 1st Street then right onto Railroad Ave. The museum is on the left immediately after the turn.

GPS: 38.9235, -79.8511 (Museum entrance)

## — WEST —

## TRANS-ALLEGHENY LUNATIC ASYLUM

The Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum is located in Weston, which is about 40 miles west of Elkins on US-33. This is an old psychiatric hospital that was constructed using prison labor, and which was operated by the State from 1864 until 1994. It was originally designed to hold 250 people, but it had about 10 times that number by the 1950s. The hospital's main building is one of the largest hand-cut stone masonry buildings in the United States and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1990. The current owners offer historic tours and daytime paranormal tours 6 days a week, and several televised paranormal investigations have taken place at the facility. Visit [www.trans-alleghenylunaticasylum.com](http://www.trans-alleghenylunaticasylum.com) for information or call 304-269-5070.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-219 through Elkins and get on US-33 West toward Buckhannon. After about 35 miles, you will go under I-79. Stay on US-33 and cross the West Fork River in Weston after about 3 miles. Turn left onto Asylum Avenue and the asylum buildings will be on the left.

GPS: 39.0385, -80.4717 (Asylum)



*The Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum in Weston. Photo by George Dasher*

## WEST VIRGINIA STATE WILDLIFE CENTER

The West Virginia State Wildlife Center is a small outdoor zoo located approximately 12 miles south of Buckhannon on State Route 20 (Buckhannon is about 30 miles west of Elkins on US-33). It takes a little over an hour to drive to the Center, which contains a menagerie of 30 or so animals that were indigenous to the area when white men first entered the region. These include bear, elk, buffalo, mountain lions, white-tail deer, wolves, otters, foxes, bald eagles, and owls. There is also a gift shop and a picnic area. For more information, call 304-924-6211 or visit [www.wvdnr.gov/wildlife/wildlifecenter.shtm](http://www.wvdnr.gov/wildlife/wildlifecenter.shtm). FEE

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-219 through Elkins and get on US-48/US-33 West. After about 24 miles, get off at the Buckhannon exit and turn left onto Route 20. Follow Route 20 for about 12.5 miles to the Center.

GPS: 38.8581, -80.3108 (Wildlife Center)

### — NORTH —

## BLACKWATER FALLS STATE PARK

Blackwater Falls State Park has a large resort lodge and restaurant, camping and cabins, and West Virginia's highest aboveground waterfall, Blackwater Falls, which is 65 feet high. There is hiking, mountain biking, fishing, golf, and horseback riding. There are approximately 20 miles of trails, including an 8-mile-long trail to Canaan Valley. The park also contains Pendleton Falls, a tributary falls that is one of the highest waterfalls in the state. The area is located about 25 miles north-northeast of Elkins.



Blackwater Falls in Blackwater Falls State Park. Photo by George Dasher

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 right (east) at the eastern US-33/US-219 intersection (near McDonald's) in Elkins. Stay on US-33 for about 22 miles until Harman. Turn left on Route 32 and follow it for 19 miles to Davis. Turn left onto Blackwater Falls Road shortly after leaving Davis.

GPS: 39.1287, -79.4732 (Park entrance on Rt. 32)  
39.1129, -79.4842 (Blackwater Falls parking area)

## CATHEDRAL STATE PARK

This park is located in Preston County about 90 minutes north of Elkins. It is 133 acres in size, and contains the last virgin forest of eastern hemlocks in the Appalachians. The trees are up to 90 in height, with circumferences of 21 feet. There are six miles of hiking trails, and the combination of hemlocks, rhododendrons, ferns, mountain stream, and wildlife offers excellent hiking and photography opportunities. The park is a Natural Historical Landmark, as "an area that possesses exceptional value in illustrating the natural history of the United States."

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point go through Elkins on US-219 and stay on US-219 for about 45 miles, passing through Parsons and Thomas until you get to Silver Lake. There you bear left on Route 24 and stay on it until you reach US-50 in about 5.5 miles. Turn left on US-50 and the park entrance is on the right in about 1/2 mile (US-50 goes through the park).

GPS: 39.3263, -79.5339 (Park entrance)

## OLSON OBSERVATION TOWER

Olson Tower was one of many towers used to watch for forest fires until airplanes took over the task. The current tower is 136 feet high and was constructed in 1963.

The tower sits on the top of Backbone Mountain. Climb the 133 steps for breathtaking views. Although the cabin at the top is closed to the public, you are welcome to climb to just below the cabin structure. Breathtaking views of the town of Parsons, Blackwater Canyon, Otter Creek Wilderness, Canaan Mountain, and the Cheat River watershed can all be seen from the tower heights.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-219 through Elkins and Parsons. About 7 miles after Parsons, turn right on Forest Road 18. Travel 0.4 miles and stay to the right at the Y intersection onto FR 717. Continue on FR 717 1.6 miles to the parking lot below the tower.

GPS: 39.1721, -79.5847 (turn off US-219 onto FR 18)





Cass Scenic Railroad State Park. Photo by George Dasher

## PHILIPPI COVERED BRIDGE

The Philippi covered bridge is the oldest, longest covered bridge in West Virginia. It is one of the few covered bridges still in operation along a major highway, possibly the only one.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-219/250/33 north through Elkins. After about a mile turn right to stay on US-219/250/33. After 1.9 miles turn left to get on US-48/250 toward Buckhannon. After 6.7 miles turn right to stay on US-250. Stay on US-250 for 18 miles to reach the covered bridge.

GPS: 39.1529, -80.04416 (west end of the bridge)

## — SOUTHEAST —

### CAMP ALLEGHENY

Camp Allegheny is the site of a minor and inclusive Civil War battle in 1861. The Confederate camp is located on the Parkersburg-Staunton Turnpike, one of the few routes through the mountains in the 1800s. The old turnpike ascends Allegheny Mountain south of US-250's present-day route. Camp Allegheny is located astride the old turnpike near the Virginia-West Virginia state line. This is in the gap south of where US-250 crosses into Virginia. This fort is on private land, and consists of an extensive series of breastworks (in an open field) more than 5 acres in size.

Camp Allegheny is located at an elevation of 4,400 feet, and was one of the highest fortifications constructed during the Civil War. It was attacked on December 13, 1861, but the Federals were repulsed and retired to Fort

Milroy several miles to the west. Because of its exposed position, winter at Camp Allegheny was extremely harsh. Disease carried away hundreds of Confederate soldiers, and the losses of men and the logistical nightmare of keeping the camp supplied forced its abandonment in April 1862. Fort Milroy was also abandoned for the same reasons in the same month by the Union army. Everyone decided to go fight the war somewhere warmer.

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219/US-250 for about 40 miles south and east through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville. Stay on US-250 as it goes over Cheat Mountain and through Durbin and bear left to follow it after Bartow. After climbing Allegheny Mountain, turn right onto Old Pike Road just before you reach the

Virginia-West Virginia border. You will come to the parking area in about 1.9 miles. The site is just past the parking area.

GPS: 38.4746, -79.7279 (Camp Allegheny)

## CASS SCENIC RAILROAD STATE PARK

Cass is an old timber boom town that at one time had one of the largest lumber mills in the state. Several of the old logging steam locomotives are now used to pull visitors up Back Allegheny Mountain, which is west of the town. Almost all of these locomotives are Shays, which are slow steam engines that have gear-driven power to all wheels, including those under the tender. This allows Shays to climb grades as steep as 12%, swing around hairpin turns, and negotiate frail temporary track. In 1911, 3,000 miles of logging railroads existed within West Virginia, and today many of the state's hiking trails are old Shay railroad grades.

There are two train trips at Cass: A 2-hour trip to Whittaker Station leaves at 11 AM and 2 PM on Tuesday and Friday-Sunday. A 4.5 hour trip to Bald Knob leaves at noon on Tuesday-Sunday. FEE

There is a lot of history and scenery, as well as a historical exhibit at Whittaker Station. There are also gift shops, museums, the remains of the old logging mill, an engine shop, and a model train display in the town of Cass. For more information, call 304-636-9477 or visit [www.mountainrailwv.com](http://www.mountainrailwv.com).

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219/US-250 for about 30 miles south through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville. Stay on US-250 as

it goes over Cheat Mountain and through Durbin. Bear right on Route 92 in Bartow. After about 11 miles, turn right on Route 66 and follow it for 4 miles to the Park. (If your GPS tells you to take Back Mountain Road, don't do it. It's a very windy and slow road).

GPS: 38.3973, -79.9147 (Train station)

## DURBIN ROCKET [train]

The Durbin Rocket is a steam-powered train trip using a geared locomotive similar to the ones use in Cass. It departs from Durbin, which is located about 45 minutes south of the campground. The round trip is 10.5 miles and follows the scenic Greenbrier River, offering views of the river and the Monongahela National Forest. The ride requires 2 hours. It operates on Thursday-Sunday only. Call 304-636-9477 or visit [mountainrailwv.com](http://mountainrailwv.com) for more information, reservations, and departure times. FEE

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219/US-250 for about 27 miles south, passing through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville. Stay on US-250 as it goes over Cheat Mountain and into Durbin. The train station is on the right as you go through town.

GPS: 38.5452, -79.8233 (Train station)

## FORT MILROY

Fort Milroy is perhaps best known as the site of the highest Union camp during the American Civil War. Fort Milroy, also known as Cheat Summit Fort, offered an excellent view of the surrounding area including the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, which crossed about 100 feet below the fort. In guarding the Turnpike, Fort Milroy helped to guard entrance to the Tygart Valley River valley to the west.

Construction on Fort Milroy (named for Union Brigadier General Robert H. Milroy) began on July 16, 1861. Due to its high elevation, the Union Army faced a number of winter-related miseries. Snow was first reported for the year on August 13. Horses froze to death in mid-September. These issues, along with some success in driving Confederate forces from the area led to the abandonment of the fort in April 1862. One Indiana soldier is quoted as having said this of their departure: "With what a light step all started. Soon on the road turning at the brow of the hill, the fourteenth took what I fondly hope is their last look at Cheat Mountain."

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219/US-250 for about 21 miles south, passing through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville. Stay on US-250 as it goes up Cheat Mountain. Turn right on White Top Road (if you reach the river, you went too far). Stay on White Top Road for 6/10 mile then turn right onto Forest Road 245. The fort site is in 1/2 mile.

GPS: 38.6217, -79.8808 (site of Fort Milroy)

## GAUDINEER SCENIC AREA

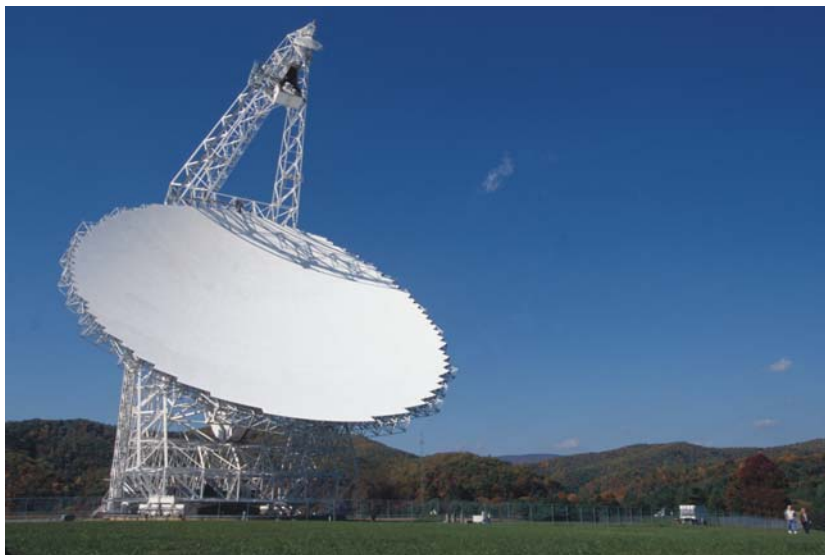
Gaudineer Scenic Area is located about 25 miles south of the campground. It is about 1 mile north of the highway on a dirt road very near the top of Back Allegheny Mountain. The area boasts a stand of virgin red spruce, some of which are over 300 years old. It is about 10 acres in size, and was left uncut because a surveyor did not correct for magnetic declination. The 250-mile-long Allegheny Trail passes nearby.

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219/US-250 for about 21 miles south, passing through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville. Stay on US-250 as it goes up Cheat Mountain. About 1.6 miles after crossing the Cheat River and the railroad track, turn left onto Forest Road 27. After 2.2 miles you arrive at the parking area for the loop trail.

GPS: 38.6000, -79.8512 (Turnoff from US-250)

## GREEN BANK NATIONAL RADIO OBSERVATORY

The Green Bank National Radio Astronomy Observatory is one of three radio observatories operated under contract with the National Science Foundation. The



Green Bank National Radio Observatory. Photo courtesy of NRAO/AUI



Observatory has eight radio-disk receivers, the largest of which features an innovative clear aperture, a collecting area of 2.3 acres, and a computer-controlled reflecting surface of 328 by 360 feet, making it larger than two football fields. Tours are provided. Guided tours of the grounds have a FEE and walking tours are free. For more information, see [greenbankobservatory.org](http://greenbankobservatory.org) or call 304-456-2510. (There is no cell phone service within several miles of the Observatory).

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219/US-250 for about 30 miles south through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville. Stay on US-250 as it goes over Cheat Mountain and through Durbin. Bear right on Route 92 in Bartow. After about 8 miles, the Observatory Visitor Center will be on your right.

GPS: 38.39729, -79.91426 (Visitor Center)

## LAUREL FORK WILDERNESSES

The North and South Laurel Fork Wildernesses are located on opposite sides of dirt Forest Road 14 in the area of Laurel Fork Campground. These two areas are 12,200 acres in size, offer plenty of opportunities for hiking and fishing, and have elevations that vary from 2,900 to 3,700 feet. The areas are bordered on the east by Rich Mountain and on the west by Middle Mountain, and are remote and a fine place to go if you enjoy solitude. Night temperatures can drop as low as 30° F in summer.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east. After about 16 miles, turn right onto Forest Road 14, Middle Mountain Road. Go about 11 miles and bear left onto Forest Road 423. The campground is about 1.5

miles down this road. Several trails leave from this area and the Sinks of Gandy is about 4.4 miles past the campground.

GPS: 38.7405, -79.6925 (Laurel Fork Campground)

## SINKS OF GANDY

Although on private land, the Sinks of Gandy is visited so often that it appears on State and Forest Service maps. The entrances are usually nice, cool places to visit, even for the non-caver.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east. After about 16 miles, turn right onto Forest Road 14, Middle Mountain Road. Go about 11 miles and bear left onto Forest Road 423. The Laurel Fork Campground is about 1.5 miles down this road. Leave the campground on Forest Road 40 and the Sinks of Gandy parking area is about 4.4 miles past the campground.

The upstream entrance is across the road about 1,000 feet WSW from the parking area. The two downstream entrances are located about 1/3 mile NNE of the parking area. All three entrances are out of sight of the road.

GPS: 38.7155, -79.6377 (Parking area)

## — SOUTH —

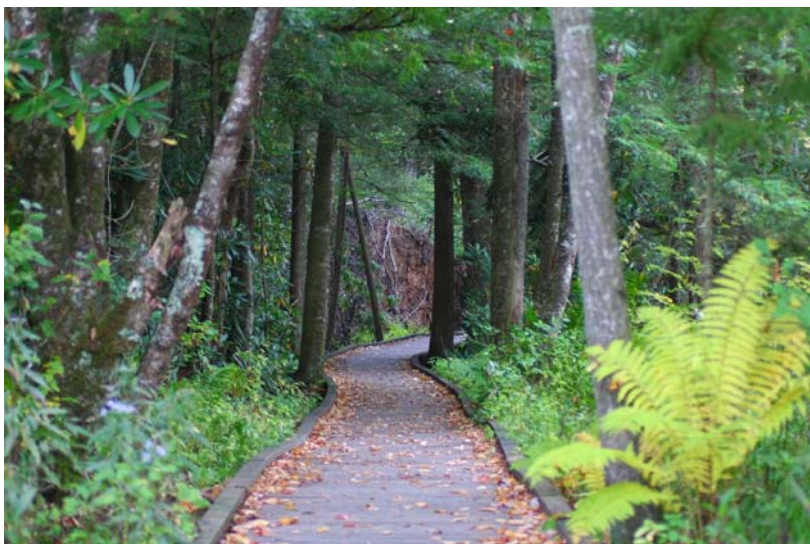
## BEARTOWN STATE PARK

Beartown State Park is a 110-acre natural area located on the eastern summit of Droop Mountain in northern Greenbrier County and a small portion of Pocahontas County. Recreation in the park consists of hiking along improved trails and boardwalks. Markers explain the natural processes at work in the area. The name “Beartown” was chosen because local residents claimed that many cave-like openings in the rocks made ideal winter dens for the native black bears, the state animal of West Virginia. Also, because the many deep, narrow crevasses were formed in a regular crisscross pattern, which appear from above like the streets of a small town. Beartown is noted for its unusual rock formations, which consist of Droop Sandstone formed during the Pennsylvanian age. Massive boulders, overhanging cliffs, and deep crevasses make up the beauty of the park. On the face of the cliffs are hundreds of eroded pits. These pits range from the size of a marble to others large enough to hold two adults. It is not unusual to see ice and snow remaining in the deeper crevasses until midsummer.



Old print of the upstream entrance to the Sinks of Gandy. Drawing by Porte Crayon and supplied by George Dasher.





Cranberry Glades Boardwalk. Image from www.forestwatcher.com

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219 south for about 72 miles, passing through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville (stay on 219 when it turns right in Huttonsville). About 7 miles after Hillsboro, turn left on Beartown Road and go 1.2 miles to the parking area.

GPS: 38.0519, -80.2757 (parking area)

## CRANBERRY GLADES

Together, the Cranberry Glades Wilderness and the Cranberry Glades Backcountry total about 52,000 acres. The two areas are located on the headwaters of the Cranberry River, about 90 minutes south of the campground.

The Cranberry is one of the major backpacking and day-hiking areas within West Virginia, and one of the largest wildernesses east of the Mississippi. It includes the entire drainage of the Middle Fork of the Williams River and the North Fork of the Cranberry River, with elevations that vary between 2,400 and 4,600 feet.

The 750-acre Cranberry Glades are located about 1 mile west of the Center. This contains a half-mile-long boardwalk and several large high-altitude bogs that are more typical of Canada than of West Virginia.

The Cranberry Mountain Visitor Center is located at the junction of State Route 39 and the Highland Scenic Highway (Route 150), and is open from 9 AM to 5 PM between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219/US-250 for about 48 miles south, passing through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville (stay on 219 when it turns right in Huttonsville). Turn right on Route 150, the Highlands Scenic Highway. Stay on 150

until it intersects Route 39 after 22 miles. The Visitor Center is at this intersection. To get to Cranberry Glades, turn right on 39 and then right again after 6/10 mile. The parking area is 1.5 miles down this road.

GPS: 38.1839, -80.2535 (USFS Visitor Center)  
38.1978, -80.2752 (Cranberry Glades parking lot)

## FALLS OF HILLS CREEK

The three Falls of Hills Creek are located about 90 minutes south of the campground. The first waterfall drops 20 feet, the second 45 feet, and the third 63 feet, making the lower waterfall one of the highest in the state. There is a walkway to the first fall that is paved and accessible, and there is a path (three-quarters of a mile long) and stairs leading to the third falls. This area—because of the falls and the surrounding gorge—is one of the most scenic and photographed in West Virginia. Hills Creek, below



Lower falls of Hills Creek. (The cover photo is the upper falls). Photo by George Dasher

the three waterfalls, sinks on Droop Mountain north of the Friars Hole Cave System, and then reappears at both Locust Spring in Pocahontas County and the Spring Creek Cenotes in Greenbrier County.

Take US-219/US-250 south from the campground for about 48 miles south, passing through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville (stay on 219 when it turns right in Huttonsville). Turn right on Route 150, the Highlands Scenic Highway. Stay on 150 until it intersects Route 39 after 22 miles. Turn right on 39 and then left after 5.4 miles onto Hills Creek Falls Road and the parking area.

GPS: 38.1786, -80.3390 (Parking area)

## HIGHLAND SCENIC HIGHWAY

The 22-mile Highland Scenic Highway is located about 1 hour south of the campground. The highway leads southwest and its southern terminus is at the Cranberry Mountain Visitor Center on State Route 39. It is 23 miles long and provides fine views and access to Stony Creek, Tea Creek, Laurel Creek, Williams River, Cranberry River, and Swago Creek.

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219/US-250 for about 48 miles south, passing through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville (stay on 219 when it turns right in Huttonsville). Turn right on Route 150, the Highlands Scenic Highway.

GPS: 38.3067, -80.0944 (Northern terminus)  
38.1839, -80.2536 (Southern terminus)

## SNOWSHOE SKI RESORT

Snowshoe is located about 1 hour south of Dailey on US-219. The resort itself is on the top of Cheat Mountain, and the turn-off is well marked. In winter, Snowshoe has 251 acres of skiable terrain with 1,500 feet of vertical and 57 trails. In summer Snowshoe has ATV and Segway tours, horseback riding, hiking, lift rides, fly fishing, “shooting clays,” and a zip line (in the heart of Snowshoe Village). There is also the Split Rock Pool, the Gary Player Signature Raven Golf Course, and 40 mountain bike trails. Many restaurants and shops within the village are open year round.

**Directions:** From the campground starting point take US-219/US-250 for about 34 miles south, passing through the towns of Mill Creek and Huttonsville (stay on 219 when it turns right in Huttonsville). Turn left on Route 66. After 7/10 mile, turn left on Snowshoe Drive and go about 5 miles to the top of the mountain and the resort.

GPS: 38.4147, -80.0329 (Snowshoe Visitor Center)

## — EAST —

### BEAR HEAVEN RECREATION AREA

Bear Heaven is a small area of interesting rocks along the unpaved Stuart Memorial Drive. It probably isn't worth a visit on its own, but worth a stop if you are driving on Stuart Memorial Drive.

If you visit Bickle Knob (see next site) Bear Heaven is about 3.5 miles down the road and on the right after you return to Stuart Memorial Drive.

GPS: 38.9323, -79.6805 (Parking area)

### BICKLE KNOB FIRE TOWER LOOP ROAD

There was at one time a Forest Service fire tower located on top of Bickle Knob. There is a picnic area here now, with an excellent view to the north. The area is located on Forest Service Road 91, which departs old US-33 in the area of Stuart Run Recreational Area. There is a junction: go up the mountain, not down the river (which is a very scenic drive in its own right). The road leads north to the old fire tower location, eastward to Bear Heaven, and finally south and back to Route 33 at the top of Shavers Mountain. Following Route 33 west and down the mountain will lead to Old Route 33, Bowden Cave (currently closed), and the Bowden Fish Hatchery. All told, the loop is about 16 miles long and makes an excellent scenic drive or mountain bike tour.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 3.5 miles and turn left onto Old Route 33. After about 1.75 miles, cross the Cheat River and then turn left on Shavers Fork Road. After 4/10 mile, turn right on Forest Road 91. The left turn to the observation tower site is after about 3.8 miles and the Bear Haven Recreation area is on the right after 7.4 miles. The left turn to go to the parking area for the Otter Creek Wilderness is after 8.9 miles.

When you get back to the paved Route 33 after about 10 miles, turn right (west) and head down the mountain. The right turn onto Old Route 33 is after about 2.25 miles and just before you cross the Shavers Fork River.

GPS: 38.9117, -79.7655 (start of Shavers Fork Rd)  
38.9345, -79.7314 (observation tower)



## BOWDEN FISH HATCHERY

The Bowden Fish Hatchery is located on the Shavers Fork of the Cheat River about 8 miles east of Elkins. It is on old US-33, and is a great place to take the kids and let them look at the trout.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 3.5 miles and turn left onto Old Route 33. The hatchery is on the right after about 5 miles.

GPS: 38.91092, -79.71534 (Hatchery)

## DOLLY SODS

Dolly Sods, Flat Rock Plains, Roaring Plains, and Red Rock Plains are found in an area above 4,500 feet in elevation located at the junction of Pendleton, Tucker, Grant, and Randolph Counties. The extensive Red Spruce forests that were once located here were logged very early in the 20th century. Lightning-caused fires broke out and the slash and high-altitude soils burned for several decades. This timbering, the fires, the high altitude, and the underlying sandstones of the Pottsville Group have produced a large subalpine plateau with a more-northern plant life than is typical of West Virginia. Freezing temperatures can occur any time during the year and snow can be expected any time between October and April.

Dolly is thought to be a corruption of the German surname “Dahle” and “sods” is an old German word meaning plains or open spaces. There are lots of great views within the high plains and there are grass plateaus, hiking trails, one campground, two “official” overlooks, and a dirt road that makes most of Dolly Sods easily accessible by car. This road was once a Shay railroad grade and it is not plowed in winter. The area was used by the U.S. Army for training during World War II and artillery shells are still sometimes found (report these to the Forest Service if you find one). The troops who trained here were later formed into the 10th Mountain Division and went on to fight in northern Italy in 1945.

The actual Dolly Sods Wilderness is located not on Dolly Sods, but rather on Red Creek, a tributary of the Dry Fork of the Cheat River. The Wilderness is 10,215 acres in size and is one of the most popular backpacking destinations in West Virginia. There are many miles of trails, one Forest Service campground, and a myriad of campsites located up and down the creek. There are no bridges across Red Creek—wading is thus required.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 22 miles until Harman. Turn left on Route 32 and follow it for 5 miles to Red Creek Road. Follow this road east (taking a second right turn) to the small

community of Laneville. The Dolly Sods Wilderness is located north of Laneville and the Sods (as well as Flat Rock, Roaring, and Red Rock Plains) are located up the mountain to the east. The USGS 7.5-minute topographic maps required when hiking in the area are Laneville, Hopeville, Blackbird Knob, and Blackwater Falls.

GPS: 38.9731,-79.3994 (Start of Red Creek Trail)

## GERMANY VALLEY

Germany Valley is located about 1 hour east of Elkins on US-33. It is south of Seneca Rocks and is between North Fork Mountain and the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River. The valley is best viewed either by driving the dirt road that traverses its long axis or from the US-33 overlook on the west side of North Fork Mountain.

Germany Valley is the structural center of the Wills Mountain Anticline. This is a large, asymmetrical anticline that dominates the geology of western Pendleton County. The anticline is 185 miles in length and extends from southern Pennsylvania south through Maryland and West Virginia and into Virginia. The resistant Tuscarora Sandstone is exposed along the sides of the anticline, and has been eroded completely through in the Germany Valley area. This has allowed the less resistant Middle Ordovician limestones and shales to be exposed on the surface; the result is a large karst valley with virtually no surface drainage.

The elongated outcrop “ring” of Tuscarora Sandstone (that surrounds Germany Valley) extends for 60 miles from Smoke Hole Caverns south into Highland County, Virginia. East of the valley, the eastern limb of the anticline is displayed by the eastward-dipping sandstone that forms the long line of cliffs along the crest of North Fork Mountain. The western limb of the anticline is displayed by the River Knobs (such as Nelson Rocks, Seneca Rocks, and Champe Rocks) that are vertically bedded and located west of the valley.

Germany Valley was the site of Hinkle Fort, the only French and Indian War fort in Pendleton County to survive that conflict. Germany Valley is also home to Hellhole and Schoolhouse Caves, two caves where the proto-NSS first learned its vertical techniques. Hellhole’s entrance drop is about 155 feet deep and provides access to one of the largest and most spectacular rooms in West Virginia. The cave is over 40 miles long and is the third longest cave in West Virginia. Schoolhouse is a short cave that contains many vertical pitches and several airy traverses and pendulums. It was at one time considered the most dangerous cave in the United States. Both caves

are now closed and gated year-round, predominantly because of endangered bats.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 35 miles until Seneca Rocks. About 2 miles past Seneca Rocks, turn left on Harmon Hills Road (Route 9). Follow the road for about 9 miles through the valley. You will emerge on US-33 at the end.

To return to Elkins, turn right. To reach a very good overlook above the valley, turn left and follow US-33 for about 7.6 miles. The overlook is on the left as you climb the mountain.

GPS: 38.7090, -79.4082 (US-33 overlook (approx.))  
38.8114, -79.3936 (Turn on US-33 to northern end of valley)

## JORDAN RUN WATERFALL

Jordan Run is the stream that flows into the North Fork River at Smoke Hole Caverns. Ask the landowner of the commercial cave if you can hike up the stream; the waterfall is about a half mile upstream. This is one of the most spectacular waterfalls within West Virginia and is relatively unknown. The hike is arduous, as you have to wade in the creek following the axis of a small, unnamed syncline, with the resistant Oriskany Sandstone on both sides of the narrow valley.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 35 miles until Seneca Rocks, then turn left onto Route 55. The Smoke Hole Caverns office is on the left after 13.5 miles.

GPS: 38.98590, -79.26589 (Caverns parking lot)

## NELSON ROCKS

Nelson Rocks is located about 90 minutes east of Elkins, and are about 10 miles southwest of Seneca Rocks on State Route 28. They are accessed via the dirt Nelson Gap Road, which intersects Route 28 about 1 mile southwest of Judy Gap.

Both Seneca Rocks and Nelson Rocks are formed of the basal Silurian Tuscarora Sandstone, which is a part of the vertical-dipping western limb of the Wills Mountain Anticline. Both sets of rocks have also been broken in two by a reverse fault, which has resulted in one sandstone bed moving laterally and into a position parallel to the first. While this fault is not that obvious at Seneca Rocks, it is very noticeable at Nelson Rocks because the two sandstone beds are about 100 feet apart.

Nelson Rocks is privately owned and there is both a Via Ferrata and a canopy tour. The Via Ferrata is a mile-long trail of fixed anchors, cables, and a swinging bridge. Heights of up to 200 feet are reached, offering a unique physical challenge. It is open year round, weather permitting. Children under 13 years in age are not allowed. The canopy tour includes 12 zip lines, 3 sky bridges, and a 40-foot rappel. The zip lines together are almost a mile long, vary between 150 and 680 feet in length, and are up to 80 feet above the floor. Both the Via Ferrata and the canopy tour require about 3 hours to do and waivers are required. Call 877-435-4842 or visit [www.nelsonrocks.org](http://www.nelsonrocks.org) for more information.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 35 miles until Seneca Rocks. Turn right at Seneca Rocks and stay on US-33 for 11 miles. Turn right on Route 92 then left on Nelson Gap Road after 6/10 mile.

GPS: 38.7005, -79.4722 (Nelson Rocks office)

## OTTER CREEK WILDERNESS

The Otter Creek Wilderness is a very popular, 20,000-acre area located along the wooded valley of Otter Creek that offers opportunities for day hiking, backpacking, fishing, and swimming. A good trail follows the creek (wading the creek is required), and there are also side trails that provide good loop hiking and camping. Because the area is designated a wilderness, its trail signs have been removed and its trails and shelters are not maintained. There are some caves in the wilderness, but they are currently closed by the Forest Service.

**Directions:** from the Elkins starting point:

To reach the downstream (northern) part of the Wilderness, drive through Elkins and take US-219 north



Otter Creek Wilderness. Photo by Bob Hoke



Seneca Rocks viewed from US-33. Photo by Mr. Schultz and downloaded from wikimedia.org.

## SENECA ROCKS

Seneca Rocks is located about 1 hour east of Elkins on US-33. It is one of the most-popular rock climbing areas east of the Mississippi River and is a traditional climbing area with over 440 documented routes, ranging from 5.0 to 5.13 difficulty. The Rocks is a vertical, 900-foot high, double exposure of the Tuscarora Sandstone and is a part of the western limb of the Wills Mountain Anticline. It is faulted, with one rock unit pushed up and into a position parallel to the other. The cliffs along the top of North Fork Mountain are also the Tuscarora Sandstone and are the eastern limb of the anticline.

There is a Forest Service Visitor Center nearby, a climbing shop and two guiding companies in the small community of Seneca Rocks, and a swinging bridge that leads to the Rocks themselves. In addition, a 1.3-mile-long switchback trail provides access to the Northern Peak; a far less formal trail allows hikers to descend the backside of the rocks.

to Parsons, then east on State Route 72 to Hambleton and Hendricks. Stay on Route 72 and about 2.9 miles after “downtown” Hendricks, turn right on a road that leads to the parking area. There is a swinging bridge that leads to the start of the trail.

To reach the upstream (southern) part of the Wilderness, drive east on US 33 for about 12 miles and turn left onto a Forest Road 91 at the top of Shavers Mountain. Bear right at a fork after about 1.4 miles and park where the road ends in about 7/10 mile. The area is located on the Harman, Mozark Mountain, Bowden, and Parsons USGS 7.5-minute topographic maps.

GPS: 39.0457, -79.6068 (Turn to northern parking area)  
38.9413, -79.6687 (Southern parking area)

Seneca Rocks is as vertical on its back as on its front, and the Southern Peak can be reached only by rock climbing. No one is sure who first reached the top of this peak, but when three men reached the summit in 1938, they found the inscription, “D. B., September 16, 1908.” This may have been D. Bittenger, a civil engineer who surveyed in the area for the U.S. Forest Service. Seneca Rocks was used by the U.S. Army to train during World War II and many of the older routes still contain the pitons left by the Army. The troops who trained here were later formed into the 10th Mountain Division and were deployed to northern Italy in 1945.

There is a popular swimming hole in the river below the rocks. To get there, turn into the Seneca Rocks visitor parking lot (not the USFS Visitor Center lot), and bear to your left. Pass through a series of parking lots and park in the last lot. A path of gray crushed rock leads about 50 yards down to the swimming hole.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 35 miles to reach the rocks. Turn right at the stop sign and then left after 2/10 mile to go to the visitor center.

GPS: 38.8326, -79.3755 (Visitor Center parking lot)

## SENECA CAVERNS

Seneca Caverns is located about 1 hour east of Elkins on US-33. The cave is within Germany Valley and although its tour is designed for the non-caver, it does contain some nice formations, including two very impressive flowstone mounds. The cave is 1,875 feet long, and the tour exits through a second entrance. There is also picnicking and “mineral panning” at the caverns. For more information, call 304-567-2691 or visit [www.senecacaverns.com](http://www.senecacaverns.com). FEE

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 35 miles until Seneca Rocks, then turn right to stay on US-33. After 7.6 miles turn left in Riverton onto Germany Valley Road, Route 9. Follow Route 9 for 3.3 miles to the Caverns.

GPS: 38.7633, -79.3886 (Caverns parking lot)

## SMOKE HOLE CAVERNS

Smoke Hole Caverns is located about 90 minutes east of the campground. It is not within the Smoke Hole Gorge, but is rather in the North Fork Mountain Gap, which is about 5 miles west of Petersburg. The caverns are relatively short, but are profusely decorated. The entrance



area was reportedly used by Native Americans to smoke meat and as a hiding place for whiskey stills during the Prohibition.

Smoke Hole Caverns is formed in the Tonoloway Limestone, the uppermost Silurian rock unit in West Virginia, within the western limb of the Wills Mountain Anticline. In fact, the entrance passage emulates this anticline and has east-dipping bedding on its east side and vertical bedding on its west side—and the largest formation room is then located more to the west within an area of vertical bedding. For more information, call 800-828-8478 or visit [www.smokehole.com](http://www.smokehole.com). FEE

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 35 miles until Seneca Rocks, then turn left onto Route 55. The Smoke Hole Caverns office is on the left after 13.5 miles.

GPS: 38.9859, -79.2658 (Caverns parking lot)

## SMOKE HOLE GORGE

The Smoke Hole Gorge is located south of Petersburg on US-220, about 2 hours east of Elkins. Here, the South Branch of the Potomac River has cut through the Cave Mountain Anticline and there are repeated exposures of the Oriskany Sandstone and the Helderberg Limestone.

The Smoke Hole Gorge is about 16 miles in length and it can be as deep as 2,000 feet. The upper third, southern part of the gorge contains a narrow state highway. As you enter the Smoke Hole by this road, you first drive past the eroded face of Cave Mountain on the right, with Cave Mountain Cave near its top, followed by the impressive Eagle Rocks. Downstream are more cliffs and spectacular scenery, and then a fork in the road is reached. A left turn, followed by a right turn, leads to the North Fork Mountain Gap and Smoke Hole Caverns; straight and downstream leads to a Forest Service Campground, Big Bend, and an outcrop of Tuscarora Sandstone. The river below the campground is accessible only by foot, canoe, and kayak, and the trip through the gorge is very popular and scenic. The Forest Service maintains 30 miles of trails within the Smoke Hole and these are marked with blue blazes. The required USGS 7.5-minute topographic maps for the Smoke Hole are Upper Tract, Hopeville, and Petersburg West.

**Directions** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 60 miles to Franklin. As you reach Franklin, turn left onto US-220. Stay on 220 for 12.5 miles to pass through Upper Tract. Just before crossing the Potomac River, turn left onto Smoke Hole Road, Route 2, to enter the gorge. After 5.4 miles turn left at Shreve's Store to stay on Smoke Hole Road, then after 1/2 mile, turn right

to continue on Smoke Hole Road. After 12 miles you will come to Route 28. Turn right to return to Seneca Rocks and turn right there to go to Elkins.

GPS: 38.9852, -79.2339 (Western end on Route 28)  
38.8053, -79.2768 (Eastern end on US-220)

## SPRUCE KNOB

At 4,832 feet above sea level, Spruce Knob is the highest point in West Virginia. East of the mountaintop it is possible to see the North Fork River Valley, Germany Valley, North Fork Mountain, and the long wall of Shenandoah Mountain. To the west, the Seneca Creek Valley and the Appalachian Plateau are visible. To the northeast are Roaring Plains and Dolly Sods, and to the southwest is the upper North Fork Valley.

Spruce Knob is located entirely within the drainage of the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River. However, the first ridge to the west, less than 2 miles away, is the Eastern Continental Divide, where the water flows to the Monongahela and Ohio rivers via Gandy Creek and the Dry Fork of the Cheat River. Six miles to the southwest, the East Fork of the Greenbrier River carries that water southward to the New, Kanawha, and Ohio Rivers. Spruce Knob is located about 1.5 hours east-southeast of Elkins.

There is a Forest Service campground and lake located just a few miles south of the mountaintop. In addition, the Forest Service maintains nearly 70 miles of trails in the Seneca Creek Backcountry, which is located northeast of this campground. These trails are open to hunters, hikers, fishermen, and mountain bikers, and provide access to Spruce Knob, Allegheny Mountain, Seneca Creek, Gladly Creek, and Whites Run. The required USGS 7.5-minute topographic maps are Spruce Knob, Onego, Whitmer, Circleville, and Snowy Mountain.

**Directions:** From the Elkins starting point take US-33 east for about 16 miles then turn right onto Forest Road 14, Middle Mountain Road. Go about 11 miles and bear left onto Forest Road 423. The Laurel Fork Campground is about 1.5 miles down this road. Leave the campground on Forest Road 40. The Sinks of Gandy parking area is about 4.4 miles past the campground on the left.

Continue on FR 40 until you reach FR 29/1 in about 1.2 miles. After 1/2 mile on 29/1, make a very sharp right turn onto FR 1 and continue for 3.1 miles. Turn left on FR 112 and go 6 miles to FR 104. Turn left and go 1.75 miles to the Spruce Knob parking area.

To continue the loop, return to FR 112 and turn left. Go about 7.4 miles and turn right on Briery Gap Road, Route 33/4. After 2.4 miles you will come to US-33. Turn left

and go 10 miles to Seneca Rocks. Turn left there to stay on US-33 and go 35 miles back to Elkins.

GPS: 38.5452, -79.8233 (Observation platform)