

# Welcome to Henderson County

Located on the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains adjoining the South Carolina line, Henderson County's 358 square miles was occupied by members of the Cherokee Nation until after the Revolutionary War. Hendersonville was a hunting ground for the Cherokees well before William Mills came to the area in the late 1780s. Mills, a Tory, had been left for dead at the Battle of King's Mountain. But after the victorious patriots camped down for the night, Mills crawled away in the darkness and made his way west, working his way to the mountains. The wounded soldier lived in a mountain cave until tempers in the lowlands cooled and peace became a reality. From his hideout, he was able to marvel at the rich land below. Mills returned to the area after the Revolution and became the first white settler, receiving a land grant in 1787 that was one of the first to be issued west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

When Buncombe County was created in 1792, its territory embraced all the Cherokee lands, including those which later became Henderson County. In 1838-39, the state legislature made Henderson the separate county it is today, and Hendersonville received its original charter in 1847.

Surrounded by rugged mountain peaks, the county's rich valleys and sloping hillsides have proven very hospitable to apple trees, giving the county distinction as the largest apple-growing region in the state and host to the North Carolina Apple Festival in the fall. The central plateau's fertile soil also produces corn, wheat, rye, and other crops. From its strictly agricultural base, the county's economy has been boosted by manufacturing companies that have located here.

Tourism also plays a major economic role, with attractions like Carl Sandburg's home Connemara and numerous historic sites drawing visitors from all over. The area around Flat Rock was developed in the nineteenth century as large summer estates for affluent Charlestonians and others who sought refuge here from the sweltering heat and disease prevalent in the Low Country of South Carolina. While some of these grand estates remain, they have been joined by planned communities and developments both for tourists and for retirees.

Flat Rock's name comes from a tremendous granite outcrop said to have been the site of Cherokee gatherings. The main rock can be seen on the grounds of The Flat Rock Playhouse, one of the best seasonal theaters in the US and considered North Carolina's State Theater. The Pisgah National Forest in the northwest corner of the county was originally part of George Vanderbilt's vast Biltmore Estate. His interest in managing the forest lands led him to hire Gifford Pinchot, renowned as America's first forester. In the early twentieth century the US Congress designated the land that is now Pisgah National Forest for watershed and wildlife protection and for recreation. Its rich green expanse is crisscrossed with hiking and biking trails, and its abundant streams lure those interested in fishing.

In friendly Henderson County, you'll find a wealth of natural beauty, interesting attractions, and challenging routes to create a wonderful cycling adventure.



## Points of Interest

### Historic Hendersonville

Hendersonville, chartered as the county seat in 1847, will charm you with its friendly atmosphere and interesting attractions. Downtown Hendersonville, on the National Register of Historic Places, remains a vital part of the community's cultural and economic growth. Planter boxes brimming with seasonal flowers border the serpentine Main Street, with its specialty and antique shops. Offering visitors traditional Southern hometown charm, the historic district hosts many activities including the NC Apple Festival during Labor Day weekend, art shows, street dances and parades throughout the year.

Along Main Street you'll also find The Arts Center, whose rotating exhibits have included Ansel Adams photographs, Salvador Dali lithographs, Bob Timberlake original paintings, and Saturday Evening Post covers by Norman Rockwell. The Mineral & Lapidary Museum of Henderson County, located at the corner of 4th Avenue and Main Street, houses exhibits from North Carolina and the Smithsonian, English minerals, Indian artifacts and a special exhibit of fossils, gems and fluorescent minerals.

A few blocks east is Hendersonville's Historic Train Depot, which in 1897 had welcomed the first steam



engine to puff its way up the Saluda Grade, the steepest main-line standard railroad in the US. The depot houses the Apple Valley Model Railroad Club and their HO-scale model railroad, whose layout is typical of Hendersonville, Asheville, Brevard and Saluda, including the Saluda Grade. *For more information about all these attractions: 828.697.2022 or www.historichendersonville.com*

Hendersonville also claims the first air museum in North Carolina. The Western North Carolina Air Museum features award-winning restored and replica antique and vintage airplanes. The museum is located at the Hendersonville Airport. *For more information: www.wncairmuseum.com.*

### Historic Flat Rock

Flat Rock was established in the mid-19th century by wealthy Charlestonians, Europeans and prominent plantation owners of South Carolina's Low Country, who built large summer estates in the English manner. These families came to the North Carolina mountains to escape the sweltering heat, yellow fever and malaria which plagued the Low Country in summer. The entire district of Flat Rock is included in the National Register of Historic Places. Besides being the site of Carl Sandburg's home, Flat Rock features several attractions such as St. John in the Wilderness Episcopal Church, Historic Woodfield Inn and the Singleton Centre art studios, as well as, many unique specialty shops and enterprises.

Also here is the Flat Rock Playhouse, considered one of the ten best seasonal theaters in the country. With a 50-year history, the playhouse presents quality entertainment, rarely found so far from Broadway, such as comedies, American classics, musicals, farces and whodunits. Open from late May through mid-October, the playhouse offers matinees and evening performances Wednesday through Sunday. *For more information: 828.693.0731 or www.flatrockplayhouse.org*

### Connemara — Carl Sandburg's Home

Carl Sandburg was already famous when he retired at age 67 with his family to this quiet 240-acre retreat in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Flat Rock. Here this poet, minstrel, lecturer, biographer and Pulitzer Prize-winning author spent the last 22 years of his long, productive life. While in residence at Connemara he



published a novel, his autobiography and several volumes of history and poetry, including the *Complete Poems* for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1951. Life at Connemara was busy, too, for Mrs. Sandburg and her daughters, who continued to breed and care for a large, prize-winning goat herd and run the farm business.

Declared a National Historic Site in 1968, Connemara, including the main house which dates from 1838, is open to the public daily except for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Tours are available for a small fee, and a variety of programs (birth of baby goats in spring, poetry readings, musical events and dramatic performances) is offered year-round. Numerous hiking trails are also available; however, bicycles are not allowed on the trails and must be left in the parking area. 1928 Little River Road, Flat Rock. Admission charged. *For more information: 828.693.4178 or www.nps.gov/carl*

### Dupont State Forest

One of the newest state forests, Dupont State Forest straddles Henderson and Transylvania Counties and can be accessed via Old CCC Road off Crab Creek Road in Henderson County or Dupont Road (SR 1259) off the south side of the Southern Highlands Cross-State Route 8. The State of North Carolina purchased the land from Dupont after the company sold its industrial operation and surrounding land holdings in the late 1990's. Situated on a plateau of the Little River Valley, the 10,000-acre preserve encompasses waterfalls and rolling land bordered by moderately steep hills and mountains. The forest is presently open to the public for hiking, horseback riding, biking, and fishing (with a NC fishing license). *For more information: 828.251.6509 or http://www.dupontforest.com/*

### Holmes State Educational Forest

This 231-acre preserve, one of six in North Carolina, has been developed as a living environmental education center to help visitors better understand the value of forests in our lives. To this end, the center offers ranger-conducted programs for groups, trails with "Talking Trees" and exhibits, a demonstration trail, scenic trails and overlooks. Other amenities include a walk-in primitive campground and showers, restrooms, picnic tables and a

shelter, volleyball courts and horseshoe pits. Reservations are required for the picnic shelter, which has a large stone fireplace. The Forestry Center houses audiovisual exhibits describing the managed forest and serves as the starting point for the Forest's trails.

Located off Crab Creek Road on Old CCC Road in south-western Henderson County, the center is open Tuesday-Friday from 9 to 5 and Saturday and Sunday from 11 to 8. Closed Mondays. The Forest's season runs from mid-March to the Friday before Thanksgiving. No charge. *For more information: 828.692.0100 or www.dfr.state.nc.us/esf/holmes\_esf.htm*



### Pisgah National Forest

The Pisgah National Forest features some of the most beautiful and rugged mountain scenery and the best recreational opportunities in eastern North America. The forest's 501,691 acres offer campgrounds, trout streams, hiking trails, picnic areas, waterfalls and scenic vistas that support a variety of activities. Diverse wildlife habitats within the forest provide suitable environments for game animals and song birds, as well as many threatened and endangered species. The North Mills River Recreation Area, accessed from SR 1345 off of NC 191/280 near the community of Mills River, includes a campground and picnic area. Pisgah National Forest is located 18 miles west of Hendersonville just off Route 1. *For more information: 828.877.4423 or http://ncnatural.com/NCUSFS/Pisgah/*

## The Routes



A ride through Henderson County past the numerous apple orchards and mountain vistas clearly shows the reason for this area's popularity as a tourist destination. A 184 mile system of bicycle routes crisscrosses the county, showcasing the area's best. The principal route circles the county and is bisected by a west to east route that ties Hendersonville to the system. The numbered routes have signs like the one shown here. Unsigned connector routes throughout the county offer diverse alternatives and can be linked with signed routes to provide endless trip options. Being in the Blue Ridge Mountains, you can expect portions of the routes to be curvy and hilly, with some challenging climbs. Portions of these routes traverse remote areas where stores and restaurants are sometimes ten or more miles apart, so be sure to carry water and snacks as you explore the area.

### Route 1: Perimeter Route

Distance: 64 miles

This route circumnavigates the county and offers great views of the surrounding mountains. Quiet country lanes link the towns of Fletcher, Edneyville, Dana, Flat Rock, Etowah and Mills River. Tucked in among the mountains and valleys, these towns are separated by rocky, forested areas, lush fields and stands of rhododendron. Apple orchards of different varieties abound in the eastern part of the county, the largest apple-growing region in North Carolina.

Amid these orchards lies the community of Dana, situated in a valley surrounded by mountains, offering a brief respite from the usual climbs. There is a store and community park here where you might stop for a break. Route 3 intersects with Route 1 here. Further south there is an intersection with the cross-state Southern Highlands Route (Route 8). A family restaurant nearby offers "country cooking" for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Stop to explore the quaint town of Flat Rock at the southern end of the loop where historic sites, restaurants, art galleries and shops tempt you to linger. The town is also the site of the Flat Rock Playhouse and Connemara, the poet Carl Sandburg's home during his last years (see Points of Interest). Continuing clockwise through the southwest part of the county, the route follows the French Broad River, diverging north to Etowah. Stop at the nearby barbecue restaurant

or stock up at the small grocery store and head for Etowah's Recreation Park for a break. The park is open from 7:30 am until 9:30 pm and has a shelter, picnic tables, restrooms (portable toilet in winter) and a paved walking trail.

The northwestern side of the county is much less populated, especially where the route follows the boundary of the Pisgah National Forest. The town of Mills River, just off the route, offers a restaurant and stores. There are also two campgrounds in this area, one on the route and another in the North Mills River Recreational Area of the Pisgah National Forest (see Points of Interest) just to the north. In this vicinity, two unsigned connector routes provide access to the Mountains to Sea Cross-State Route and to the Buncombe County Bicycle Transportation System.

The Town of Fletcher at the top of the loop provides another good place to stop for refreshments. Enjoy lunch at one of the restaurants in the area or have a picnic at the Fletcher Community Park, where you will find a concession stand with restroom, picnic tables, playing fields and a walking trail.

### Route 2: Mountains to Sea Cross-State

Distance: 8 miles

North Carolina's Mountains to Sea Bike Route — a 700-mile route from Murphy to Manteo — skirts the northwest corner of Henderson County on the Blue Ridge Parkway, following the boundary with Buncombe County and the northern edge of Pisgah National Forest. An unsigned connector route off the northwest corner of Route 1 provides access to the national forest and connects to the cross-state route at Bent Creek Gap. A campground is situated within the national forest.

### Route 3: West-East Connector

Distance: 14 miles

This route bisects the county connecting Hendersonville to the rest of the system. Starting in the west, the route follows narrow and curvy roads, punctuated by some challenging climbs and then drops into Hendersonville via the Laurel Park community, a residential area with distinctive homes perched on the rocky slopes. Take a side trip up Laurel Park Highway to Jump Off Rock for a bird's eye view of the valley and surrounding mountain peaks. Hendersonville is a good mid-route stopover, with its charming historic district,

museums, shops and restaurants (see Points of Interest). On the east side of town, the route passes through Jackson Park, with its extensive playing fields, shady picnic areas and nature trails. Restrooms are located near the picnic area. The route also passes the Henderson Airport / Western NC Air Museum. The eastern terminus is in the Dana community (see Route 1 description).

### Route 8: Southern Highlands Cross-State

Distance: 20 miles

The 180-mile Southern Highlands Route runs from the Blue Ridge Parkway north of Brevard to Lincolnton where it intersects with the Piedmont Spur Cross-State Route. Running west to east across the southern part of Henderson County, the route also provides a connection to neighboring Transylvania County's signed bike routes. A few miles east of Flat Rock, the route heads south and east toward the historic town of Saluda in Polk County. An unsigned connector route offers an interesting alternative, looping through the small towns of Zirconia and Tuxedo, dipping into South Carolina through a protected watershed area of pristine forests and streams.

### Hendersonville to Fletcher Connector

Distance: 9 miles

Intended for traffic-savvy cyclists only, this route connects Hendersonville with the Town of Fletcher to the north. Initially winding past beautiful old homes through the Hendersonville historic district, conditions quickly change once on Asheville Highway (US 25), a very busy, five-lane road with commercial development. About half-way to Fletcher, the route begins to follow more rural, two-lane roads. The farther north you go, however, the curvier the roads become and you encounter more climbs. Fletcher Community Park, near the end of the route, offers a concession stand and restrooms.

### Other Unsigned Connector Routes

Thirteen other unsigned connector routes, totaling 69 miles, provide links between the signed routes within Henderson County as well as connections to existing routes in Transylvania, Buncombe, and Polk Counties. These unsigned routes can serve as shortcuts between signed routes or can link routes for additional mileage.

## Bicycling Henderson County

Surrounded by distinct mountain peaks on the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Henderson County offers spectacular scenery, a rich history, thriving industry, and varied points of interest. The county's topography presents a diverse combination of level or rolling valleys and steep mountain climbs, offering cyclists an interesting selection of challenging and scenic routes.

Hendersonville, the largest town and the county seat, is situated in the center and serves as the hub for routes that crisscross the county and connect with the smaller towns of Fletcher, East Flat Rock, Flat Rock, Saluda, Edneyville, Dana, Laurel Park, Etowah and Mills River. Of interest to cyclists, Henderson County was once home to a company that manufactured bicycle brakes and remains a wonderful place for cycling, whether on or off road. Diverse attractions in the county — such as Carl Sandburg's home, the Western Air Museum, and Holmes State Educational Forest — provide opportunities for sightseeing along the way. In addition to the road routes shown in this map, numerous mountain biking trails are available in Pisgah National Forest, in Dupont State Forest, and on the many gravel roads in the county.

This map shows a 184-mile system of routes that can be combined into innumerable touring options. The Henderson County system includes two signed routes covering 78 miles: Route 1, which loops around the perimeter of the county, and Route 3, which bisects the county from east to west. Route 2 is part of the North Carolina Mountains to Sea Cross-State Route that skirts the northwestern corner of the county for eight miles. Route 8 tracks the Southern Highlands Cross-State Route through the southern part of the county. An unsigned route, suitable for traffic-savvy cyclists, links Hendersonville with Fletcher, nine miles to the north. Other unsigned connector routes in different sections of the county totaling 69 miles provide additional links and options for creating unlimited route variations.

Happy cycling!

## Bicycle Laws

In North Carolina, the bicycle has the legal status of a vehicle. This means that bicyclists have full rights and responsibilities on the roadway and are subject to the regulations governing the operation of a motor vehicle. Under North Carolina law, bicyclists are required to:

- Ride on the right in the same direction as other traffic
- Obey all traffic signs and signals
- Use hand signals to communicate intended movements
- Equip your bicycle for night riding with a front lamp visible from 300 feet and a rear reflector that is visible from a distance of 200 feet

In addition, cyclists under the age of 16 are required by North Carolina law to wear an approved bicycle helmet.

## Safety Tips

- Ride defensively and in a predictable manner
- Wear a bicycle helmet every time you ride your bike
- Avoid riding at night, if possible
- When riding in a group, ride single file
- Wear bright-colored clothes to increase your visibility
- Be courteous to other drivers
- Keep traffic flowing by helping motorists pass safely

## Resources

**Hendersonville Chamber of Commerce**  
330 North King Street  
Hendersonville, North Carolina 28792  
Phone: 828.692.1413  
Fax: 828.693.8802  
Email: chamber@hendersonvillechamber.org  
Website: www.hendersonvillechamber.org

**Visitors Information Center**  
Henderson County Travel & Tourism  
201 S. Main Street  
Hendersonville, NC 28792  
Phone: 800.828.4244 or 828.693.9708  
Website: www.historichendersonville.com

**Henderson County Parks & Recreation Department**  
801 Glover Street  
Hendersonville, NC 28792  
Phone: 828.697.4884  
Fax: 828.697.4886

**Division of Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation**  
1552 Mail Service Center  
Raleigh, NC 27699-1552  
Phone: 919.733.2804  
Fax: 919.715.4422  
Email: bipeped\_transportation@dot.state.nc.us

**Visit the Division's website**  
www.ncdot.org/trans/bicycle for maps of cross-state, regional, and local bicycle routes; additional information on laws and safety tips; a calendar of bicycle events; and listings of North Carolina bicycle shops and clubs.



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# BICYCLING HENDERSON COUNTY



North Carolina Department of Transportation  
Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation