

Russell County – SITE VISIT

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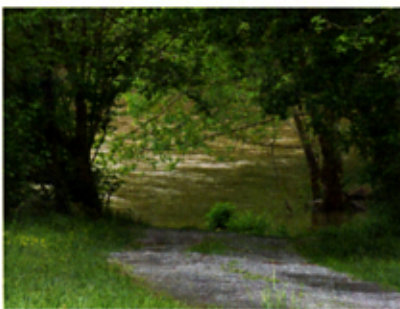
On May 5th 2009, toured portions of Russell County with Buzz Witt.

Also met with Greg Cornforth who provided us information on hiking and mountain biking trails.

Lebanon is the county seat. Population approximately 3200 in the town and about 33,000 in the county. Other primary towns include incorporated communities of Honaker, Cleveland and part of St. Paul. The unincorporated communities include Castlewood, Dante, Rosedale and Willis.

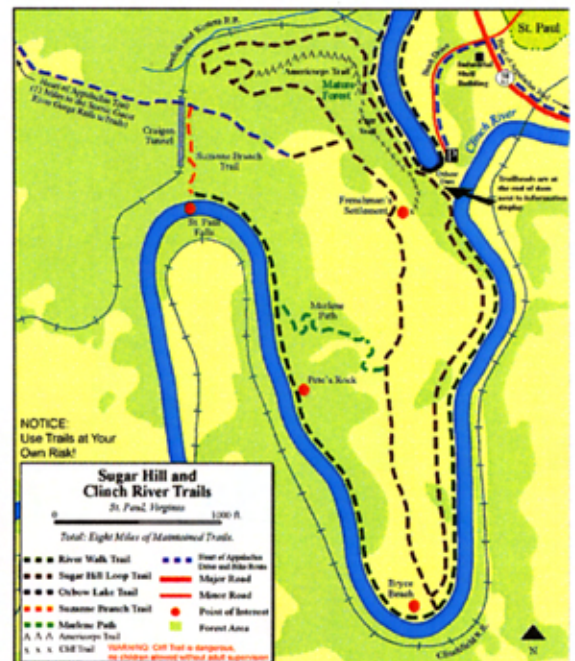
Our first stop was in St. Paul (which is a community located in both Wise and Russell Counties) at the trailhead for both Sugar Hill Loop and Clinch River hiking and biking trails. It is also the put in for the Clinch River Canoe Trail.

Sugar Hill Loop and Clinch River Hiking & Biking Trails

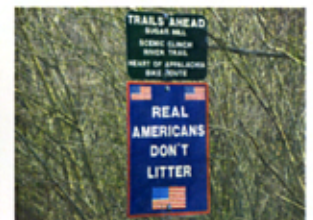
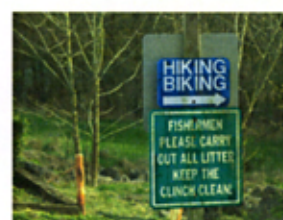


Ample signage, two parking areas, trash receptacles plus a tourism kiosk that included maps of the trails make this site one of the best trailheads in the proposed Spearhead Trail System and can be used as an example for others.

Note: A later discussion with one of the users of this trail suggested that a work crew needed to work on the middle portion of the trail which has become nearly impassable which would make it much more user-friendly to mountain bikers.

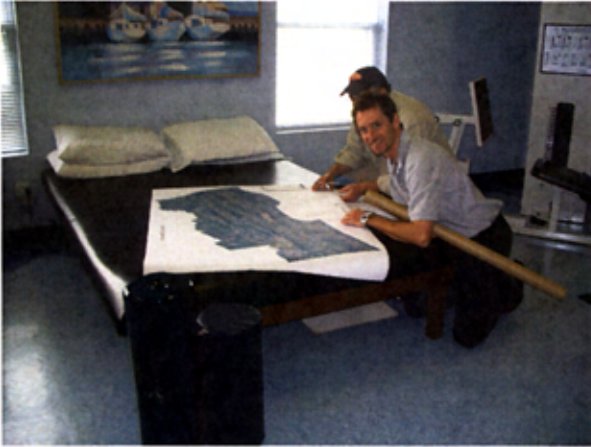


The Sugar Hill and Clinch River Trails are listed as part of the both the Virginia Birding & Wildlife Trail System and the Heart of the Appalachia Bike Route. The Clinch River is classified as a scenic river.



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Buzz and I then traveled to Lebanon and met with Greg Cornforth who is an avid mountain biker and hiker. He reviewed the maps we provided and pointed out trails he currently rides in the Clinch Mountain and agreed to help develop maps for that area.



One trail he mentioned actually starts at the Pinnacles in Washington County. Just take Brumley Gap Road three miles then turn left to go up Clinch Mountain. Other trails include Hidden Valley and Hyders Cap Road, Guest River Gorge Trail and trails around Laurel Bed Lake with the potential for more trails to be added. Also the Dante Trail (*See study*).



Two views of Clinch Mountain from the community of Lebanon in Russell County just as the morning fog rises.

Clinch Mountain in the morning

Our next stop was the Cliffside Grille which is located just off Hwy 660 overlooking Cedar Creek.

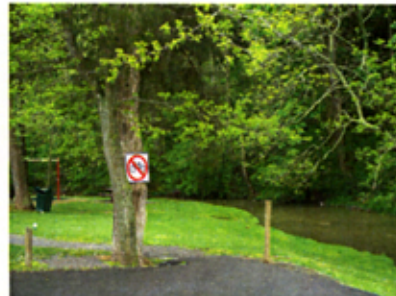


The restaurant specializes in barbecue and was quite good and had local flavor and charm. It is also located next to Cedar Creek that is stocked each year and memberships sold allowing club members to fly fish along its banks. (*Note: Little River in Tazwell is also part of Riverbound LLC*)

Local Contact for Riverbound LLC: Jake Musick

Recommendation: We need to find out more about Riverbound LLC and possibly include information about the fishing club on the website if they so desire. I would think one would also want to note this group on marketing publications promoting the county as a unique and inviting feature of the area which might encourage anglers and others to become members and come to Lebanon to fish as well as enjoy some delicious barbecue.

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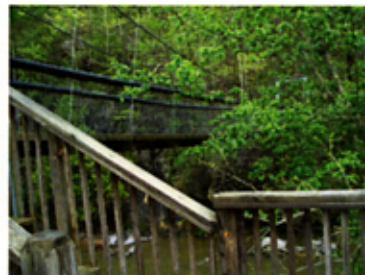


J.S. Easterly Park is located along Burgess Creek and offers both hiking and walking trails, a children's playground, tennis courts, a pavilion and restroom facilities. The walking trail is 1 mile long. The hiking trails take one past a very scenic crystal-clear waterfall. Call (540) 899-8041 for more information.



From Lebanon, we drove northwest on Hwy 82 then east on Hwy 640 where we crossed over Big Cedar Creek then turned left onto Hwy 721 for one mile which brought us to Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve.

Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve

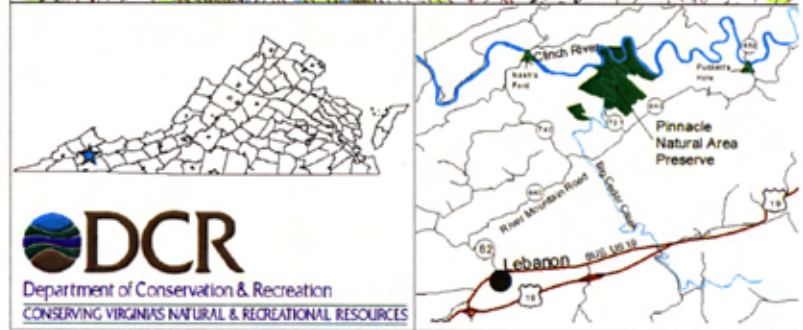
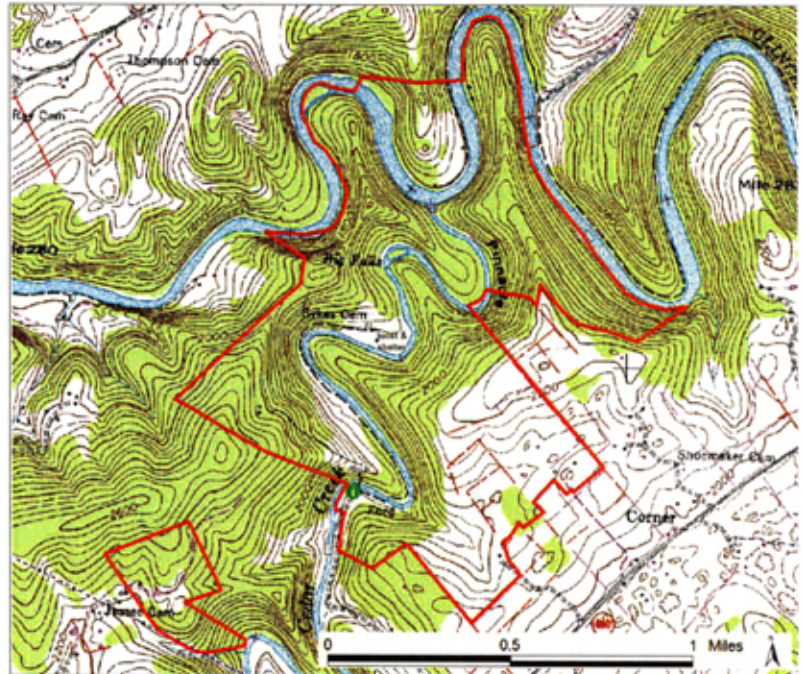


One of the notable features is the suspension bridge across the Big Creek River

Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve

SITE DESCRIPTION:

Towering cliffs, sheer limestone ledges, and waterfalls are but a few of the spectacular features of this preserve. Located near the confluence of the Clinch River and Big Cedar Creek, the topography of Pinnacle NAP has been modified by the forces of weather, water, and time to create this dramatic landscape. Towering above Big Cedar Creek is an impressive rock formation, the Pinnacle, from which the area derives its name. Cut from dolomite, the Pinnacle rises 400 feet above Big Cedar Creek. The Preserve's unique habitats support at least nine rare species and two rare natural communities.



VISITATION:

The 669 acre preserve is open year-round.

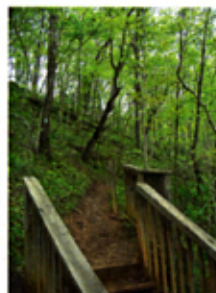
Public facilities include a suspension bridge, bike trail, hiking trails, picnic area & handicapped parking area.



Suspension Bridge across Clinch River



Bicycle Trail



Hiking Trails



Picnic Area & Handicapped Parking

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The sign on site states the following:

“Bordering Big Cedar Creek, a state scenic river, Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve resides in Virginia’s Clinch River watershed, home to the highest number of globally imperiled and vulnerable freshwater aquatic life. This preserve is characterized by interesting geology and a diverse array of rare plants, animals and natural communities. Named for the towering rock outcrop known as the Pinnacle, this preserve has an assortment of landscape features derived from the underlying limestone and dolomite bedrock. The geological variation here has led to biological diversity and created

*conditions suitable for several rare species. Growing in cracks and ledges along steep limestone cliffs are two globally rare plant species, Canby’s mountain-lover (*Paxistima canbyi*) and Carolina saxifrage (*Saxifraga carplimiana*), and one state rarity, American harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*). Another globally rare plant species, glade spurge (*Euphorbia purpurea*), is found along shaded creek banks within the preserve.*



Compatible public uses for Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve include hiking, nature study, fishing, bird watching and photography. Some uses are prohibited, such as horseback-riding, road vehicles, camping and collection of plants, animals and mineral. A trail system offering view of the Pinnacle rock, Big Falls, Copper Ridge, and Clinch River begins near the lower parking lot.

Preserve acquisition was made possible by assistance from Russell

County and The Nature Conservancy, along with funding from the Virginia Parks and Natural Areas Bond and the Open Space Recreation and Conservation Fund. Contact DCR – Division of Natural Heritage for more information. http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/documents/pqpinncal.pdf

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POTENTIAL BICYCLE ROUTES:

The scenery along VA 640 and VA 721 to Pinnacle Natural Preserve was beautiful and would make an excellent bicycle route from Lebanon. Going past VA 721 on VA 641 afforded us some additional breathtaking vistas. Continuing on VA 641, the road surface becomes a bit rough for road bikes.



Scenic view along VA 641



One of the beautiful views one finds along VA 740.

Leaving Pinnacle Natural Preserve, we then took VA 640 west 1.3 miles then right (north) on VA 740 2 miles to the intersection of VA 645, we turned right again (east) .71 miles and right on VA 798 took us to the boat ramp at Nash Ford accessing the Clinch River. All three of these roads are ideal for bicyclists.

Recommendation: Developing a bicycle route from Lebanon to Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve and onto Nash Ford would be highly recommended.

Nash's Ford River Access Area

Nash's Ford provides boat access onto the Clinch River north of Lebanon where one will find a concrete ramp and shallow water level. GPS coordinates are: 36 degrees 58' 2" north by 82 degrees 4' 45" west



A flow rate of 500 cubic feet second is considered a minimum level for the Clinch above Nash's Ford. Tandem canoes will have some scraping and dragging at this level. For this reason, local paddlers prefer levels between 700 and 900 cfs.

The Russell County Tourism website <http://www.russellcountyva.org/tourism/> notes "There are Class III drops in the section from Puckett Hole to Nash's Ford. Those drops should be scouted and can be portaged. When water levels are too low for this section, paddlers can move downstream. The section from Nash's Ford to St. Paul has a flatter gradient with flat water and riffles. It is ideally suited for beginner paddlers." Nash's Ford is one of 14 access points along a 112 mile floatable blueway. The Clinch River runs through Tazewell, Russell and Scott Counties.

For information on the Clinch River, fishing opportunities, and details on float trip plus maps, go to <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/waterbodies/display.asp?id=147>

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Scenic vistas will be found along both VA 645 and VA 640.



Jack Jessee's home c. 1883

A worthwhile stop: Jessee Mill located on VA 640.

There is a historical marker on either VA82 or VA 71 which provides some history of the mill. There is also an excellent website at <http://www.newrivernotes.com/swva/hssv-7.htm> which provides an overview of many of the grist mills that once operated in southwest Virginia. Jessee Mill is one of the few still standing. The historic home of Jack Jessee is located across the street.

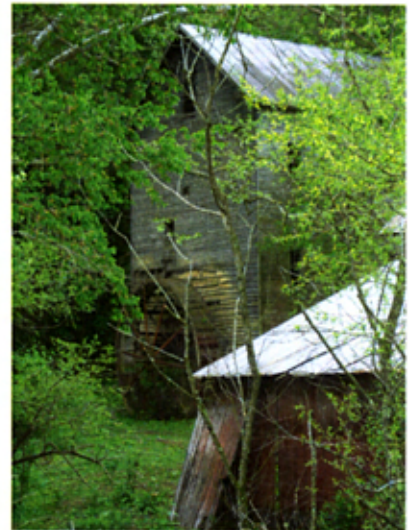
Recommendation: Efforts should be made to preserve this historical structure for future generations and add an historical marker at both the mill and the home (with permission from the current owners).

The Jessee Mill*

The Roller Process Jessee Mill was built between 1889 and 1900, by Andrew Jackson Jessee. It is located on Mill Creek four miles southwest of Cleveland on Route 645 and about six miles from Lebanon, in Russell Co., VA.

The mill was built from lumber grown and sawed on the Jessee farm which consisted of several hundred acres of land. Most of the lumber was yellow poplar and has not deteriorated with age. The machinery in the mill was made in Salem, VA. All the cogs or gears in the machinery are wood. Prior to the building of the present mill there had been a grist mill near the site of the present one for around fifty years.

The building consisted of three floors and the machinery was installed through the three floors. For several years the Jessee Mill was the only roller mill in Russell Co. People came from all over the county and surrounding counties to have meal and flour ground. Huge storage bins were located in the mill for storing grain for the farmers.



Mill Creek during that time was a thriving settlement. There was a general store, a one-room country school and a church. The mill was owned and operated by Jack Jessee until his death in 1922. His son, Wiley E. Jessee operated it for ten years. The mill closed in 1932.

Mr. Joe Axem served as the first miller at the Jessee Mill. Melvin Kestner operated the mill for twenty-five or thirty years. He lived in the white house just below the Jessee home. Jamie Chafin operated the mill for some time, also Tilton Jessee. Other men who served as millers sometime during the life of the mill are as follows: Vince Fields, Malcom Buchanan, Red Joe Jessee, Clint Fields, Bruce Campbell and Newton Massie.

Jack Jessee built a large brick home in 1883 and lived there until his death, which house is still standing (see photo above) The home is located just below the mill. The lumber was sawed on the place, and the carvings on the doors and wood work was hand carved. Located on the second floor hall is a red stained glass window which Mr. Jessee imported from England when the house was built. In Mr. Jessee's later life, he was unable to go to the mill, but he would lie in bed and see people coming to the mill through a large mirror near his bedroom window. He always wanted everyone to come in and talk with him.

**Please Note: This excerpt is taken in its entirety from the website <http://www.newrivernotes.com/swva/hssv-7.htm>*

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Continuing on VA 645 west again took us past beautiful vistas as well as White's Training Stable



One of the many vistas



Whites Training Stable



Scenic Bike Route



Town of Carterton



Carterton Boat Landing

We then took VA 640* west then turned north onto VA 614 to the old railroad town of Carterton.

Recommendation: VA 640 is part of the Heart of the Appalachia Bike & Motor Tour which goes through the counties of Wise, Russell, Tazewell and Bland from Burkes Garden to Guest River Gorge. Russell County should continue to encourage people to travel this route by highlighting the many sites unique to this area one will see along the way. *Details later in this document.*

The Carlton Public Boat Landing is one of the 14 access points on the Upper Pellissippi Blueway on the Clinch River. There is a 7.5 mile float from Cleveland to Carterton and an 8 mile float from Carterton to Saint Paul. Descriptions of both are provided below and are taken from the website: <http://www.dajf.virginia.gov/fishing/waterbodies/display.asp?id=147>

Cleveland to CartertonMap

Distance: 7.5 miles

Gradient: 3.0 ft/mile

Put in at the Cleveland access and rig up for flat water fishing. Top water lures should be effective for bass and sunfish. Numerous deep pools in this reach of river support walleye, musky and catfish. The take-out for this float is on the left side of the river at the Carterton access. To find the Carterton access, take route 614 off of route 640, then take a left onto route 855 and turn right across the railroad tracks and continue to the river.

Carterton to Saint PaulMap

Distance: 8 miles

Gradient: 2.5 ft/mile

This is a good float for anglers looking for a variety of species. Most of this section is flat water, with a few riffles and runs mixed in. Try for bass in the moving water, then rig up for sunfish or walleye in the slower pools. Live minnows, crawdads, or nightcrawlers could provide a good catch of different species. Put in at the Carterton access described above, and take out on the right, just upstream of the town of Saint Paul.



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A few sites along the roads in Russell County



Russell County has some unique school houses still standing. There are also some wonderful historic homes.

Efforts should be made to preserve these when possible.

The school (above) has a unique cupola.

The Little Ponderosa School House (to the left) still has its name above its door.



The Elk Garden Elementary School is located across the street from where the Elk Garden Fort once stood (at the corner of VA 19 and Hayter Gap Road aka VA 80)



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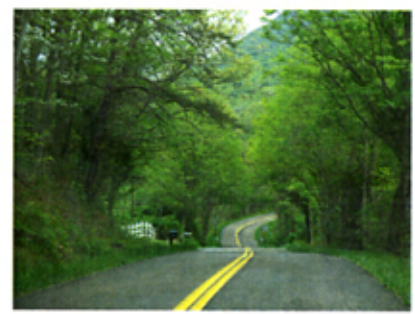
Rolling hills, lush farmland and cave openings can be seen along VA 71

TransAmerica Bicycle Route across America goes right through Russell County north along the edge of Rich Mountain from Washington County then eastward at the base of Priest Mountain then north through the town of Honaker crossing into Buchanan County following VA 80 the entire route.



The portion of the TransAmerica Bicycle Route 76 along VA 80 near the Russell County/Washington County line.

Recommendation: *Russell County needs to capitalize on the TransAmerica Bicycle Route through their county by providing information of what one might see along this route and encouraging bicyclist to stay in the area longer by developing side trips to areas like Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve and Jessee's Mill.*



There are two wildlife management areas in Russell County. One is the Clinch Mountain Wildlife Area. The other is Hidden Valley Wildlife Management Area which appears to be primarily (if not entirely) in Washington County. *Details are provided on the following page.*

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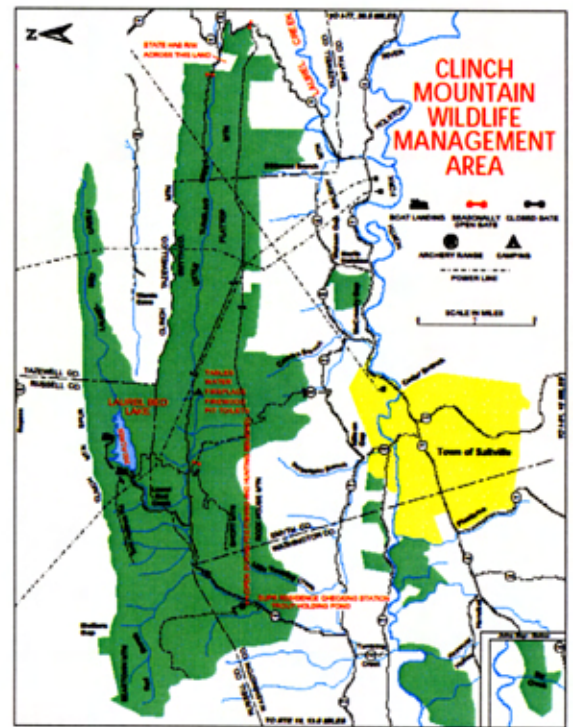
TWO WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS IN OR NEXT TO RUSSELL COUNTY

CLINCH MOUNTAIN WMA

Description: The Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area is the second largest in the Department's management area system but has the distinction of being the most biologically diverse due in part to the vast differences in elevation of the area. The area's 25,477 acres spread across Virginia's southwest highlands, occupying parts of Smyth, Washington, Russell and Tazewell Counties. There is a 330 acre man-made lake, one major stream and several tributaries.

Activities: Hunting, Fishing (including a few trout streams which require tags), horseback riding, wildlife viewing, hiking, and nature photography.

Facilities: There is ample parking space. Two boat ramps are available at Laurel Bed Lake. A shooting range for archery (limited use).



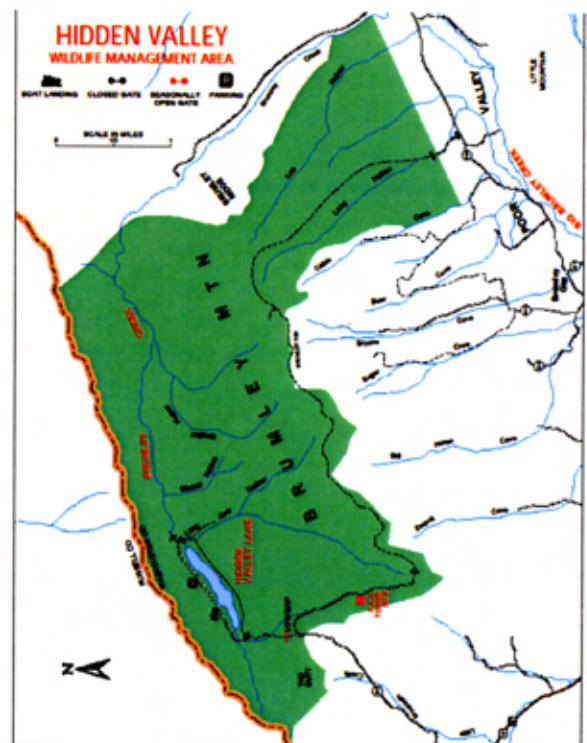
HIDDEN VALLEY WMA

Hidden Valley Wildlife Management Area is located in Southwest Virginia's Washington County, and is bordered by Russell County along the area's northwest boundary. This 6,400-acre property is mostly forested mountain land with the exception of a number of small openings, developed and maintained to enhance wildlife habitat. Hidden Valley Lake is situated at the head of the valley, from which flows Brumley Creek.

Fishing: Hidden Valley Lake invites anglers to fish for smallmouth bass, rock bass, bluegill, northern pike and walleye.

Hiking: With its network of closed roads, Hidden Valley Wildlife Management Area is excellent for hiking. Here, also, is the opportunity to view wildlife and photograph some of this area's unique mountain scenery.

Facilities: There is a boat launching ramp and parking on the north side of Hidden Valley Lake, accessible through Low Gap from Route 690.



Go to <http://www.dqif.virginia.gov/wmas/> for more information on these and other Virginia WMAs.

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BLUEWAY THROUGH RUSSELL AND TAZEWELL COUNTIES

*Upper Pellissippi Blueway along a 112 mile stretch of the Clinch River
through the counties of Russell, Scott and Tazewell*

The information below was taken in its entirety from <http://www.russellcountyva.org/tourism/>
More details at: <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/waterbodies/display.asp?id=147>

Pellissippi is the Native American name for the Clinch River. This river begins in Tazewell County, Virginia in the vicinity of the town of Tazewell. It runs 135 miles through all of Russell and Scott counties and the better part of Tazewell County. The Clinch is deemed navigatable by the VDGIF from the junction of Indian Creek and the Clinch River in downtown Cedar Bluff all the way to the Tennessee/Virginia State line. This is approximately 112 miles of float trip water with fourteen access points. Currently this is the longest blueway in the state. Two portions of the river are part of Virginia's Scenic River Program. Also the Big Cedar Creek flowing out of the Lebanon area into the Clinch is a scenic waterway. Big Cedar Creek is one of two creeks listed as scenic waterways in the State of Virginia. The remaining 21 scenic waterways are rivers.

A nice stop for floaters is at the confluence of the Big Cedar and the Clinch. Here at the 683 acre Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve trails and water falls are available. Click here to read an article about the Pinnacle area.

Wildlife on the Clinch is varied. Birders could see Blue Herons, Canada Geese, ducks, hawks, kingfishers osprey and owls. Animal lovers could see bear, beaver, deer, muskrat and otter. Plant enthusiasts will see a variety of trees (mostly hard- woods with a sprinkle of cedar and pine). The shore line also offers a variety of wildflowers. In April trilliums nearly completely cover some hillsides with a blanket of white on the ground while dogwoods and red buds bloom.

This web site, done by the Virginia Game and Inland Fisheries, provides excellent information about access to the Clinch. All fourteen access points are shown on a map of the river. Distances are given between accesses along with the water characteristics. Types of fish found in the different areas of the river are also listed. It is a most complete web site for the floater, fisherman and nature lover.

Another helpful web site is the USGS site which gives the water flow rate at Cleveland station. A flow rate of 500 cubic feet second is considered a minimum level for the Clinch above Nash's Ford. Tandem canoes will have some scraping and dragging at this level. For this reason, local paddlers prefer levels between 700 and 900 cfs.

There are Class III drops in the section from Puckett Hole to Nash's Ford. Those drops should be scouted and can be portaged. When water levels are too low for this section, paddlers can move downstream. The section from Nash's Ford to St. Paul has a flatter gradient with flat water and riffles. It is ideally suited for beginner paddlers. From St. Paul to Dungannon, there is more gradient and one Class III drop a mile below St. Paul. Local paddlers in this area prefer a minimum level of 250 cfs at the Cleveland station to avoid canoes dragging. Downstream of Dungannon, there are long stretches of flat water due to a low gradient.

Two good books include information on Virginia Rivers including the Clinch: Classic Virginia Rivers by Ed Grove, 1992, Howling Wolf Publications and Virginia Whitewater: A Paddler's Guide to the Rivers of Virginia by H. Roger Corbett, 1988, Seneca Press.