

DESTINATION ★ NC ★ McDowell

No Boundaries

Bordered by the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Black Mountains, **McDowell County** offers unparalleled access to the highest mountain peaks east of the Mississippi, hundreds of miles of hiking and mountain biking trails throughout the Pisgah National Forest, and the Linville Gorge, which boasts some of the region's most stunning and rugged natural landscapes. At the heart of McDowell County are small, welcoming towns like Marion, Old Fort, and Little Switzerland brimming with historic charm, craft breweries, local art galleries, and outdoor festivals that showcase the area's rich Appalachian culture.

EXPLORE MILES OF SCENIC BEAUTY ALONG THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

A drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway, considered America's favorite scenic drive, provides easy access to some of the area's highest mountain peaks. It's also home to the highest concentration of rhododendron and azalea in the mountains. McDowell County provides access to the Blue Ridge Parkway from three points and 34 miles of the Parkway are located in the county.

WESTERN NC'S FASTEST GROWING TRAIL TOWN - OLD FORT

With 86 miles of state trails in development, Old Fort continues to expand its offerings for hiking and mountain biking enthusiasts. The county already boasts 140 miles of trails, providing a wide range of options for all skill levels, from easy walks to challenging treks. Be among the first to hike the recently reopened and revamped Catawba Falls Trail, and the Old Fort Gateway Trails.

VENTURE INTO THE BELLY OF A MOUNTAIN

Explore a subterranean network of limestone caverns at Linville Caverns. A guided tour allows visitors to get a look inside of a mountain complete with stalactites and stalagmites. Safe for all ages, with a few surprises along the way.

APPLE PICKING AT A CENTURY-OLD HERITAGE ORCHARD

The Orchard at Altapass is the Blue Ridge Parkway's only preservation apple orchard, with some of its trees more than 100 years old still producing heirloom apples. Live music, children's hay rides through the orchard, a model train display, a pollinator garden, and a general store – all with a cinematic mountain setting.



STROLL THE MAINSTREETS OF MARION

Marion maintains a small-town vibe, while continuing to add entertainment options for locals and visitors. Music venues, craft breweries, and an entertainment complex are newer additions alongside long-time favorites like Keeper's Cup Meadery and the McDowell Arts Council Association.

BLUEWAYS BY THE BLUE RIDGE

With access points for boating and fishing, Lake James is surrounded by mountain views, 33 miles of hiking trails, and 20 miles for biking across Lake James State Park. Set sail on a sunset cruise for peeks at wildlife such as eagles, otters, osprey, heron and jumping fish. The Catawba River at the Marion Greenway in Marion is part of The Blue Ridge Snorkel Trail, where you can step in, put on your snorkel, and explore vibrant aquatic life just beneath the surface.

STEP BACK IN HISTORY

McDowell County celebrates its heritage dating back to its Native American roots. The county's historical museums, event spaces, and cultural festivals provide an immersive experience for those looking to explore its past. The Historic Carson House offers a glimpse into what life was like for early European pioneers in the 1700s. The Old Fort Gateway Museum features exhibits about Southern Appalachian heritage. The region's rich mining history is explored at The Museum of North Carolina Minerals.

OLD-FASHIONED FUN AT THE LUCKY STRIKE GOLD AND GEM MINE

Historic Lucky Strike Gold and Gem Mine in Marion is open year-round for old-fashioned gold mining. The flume offers gold panning and gem screening, and guests can venture into the streams that run through the mine's campground. The Lucky Strike House Band plays on Tuesday nights. Camping sites are available, and a hiking trail winds through the historical gold mines of Vein Mountain and the mines of Rhom Town, and the historical Pea Vine railroad bed.

LARGE COLLECTION OF BELOVED OUTDOOR FESTIVALS

McDowell County hosts some of the region's most popular festivals, including the **WNC Bigfoot Festival**, the **Livermush Festival**, the **NC Gold Festival**, the **Old Fort Trails and Trains Festival**, **Mountain Glory Festival**, and **Dia de Muertos (Day of the Dead)**. These events highlight local culture, history, and the natural environment.

VISIT AN ALPINE VILLAGE

Established in 1910 as a summer retreat, Little Switzerland, named because of the surrounding slopes' resemblance to the Swiss Alps, sits high in the Blue Ridge Mountains along the Blue Ridge Parkway, offering breathtaking views and a unique blend of Swiss chalet-style architecture. Hike to Crabtree Falls or take a scenic drive on The DiamondbackNC, a winding route popular with motorcyclists and sports car enthusiasts. Join the weekly community square dance at Geneva Hall on summer Saturday evenings.

