

# The Joys of Going Slow in Nelson County

## Virginia County's Wines, Brews a Draw

Slow down when you get to Nelson County. Slow down and really enjoy it all. Make all of the stops along the Red, White, and Brew Trail, linking a group of distinctive wineries and breweries and the rest of Nelson County's countryside attractions.

That rural aspect is Nelson County's biggest draw: small-town tranquility, access to the Blue Ridge Parkway and Appalachian Trail, abundant winter sports and golf, fishing in clearwater streams, and the kind of relaxation only possible beyond cell phone range.

"Nelson County is a total mental shift from northern Virginia," explains Steve Crandall, owner of Devils Backbone Brewing Company and a transplant from Alexandria. "When I go to the courthouse, I know everyone's name."

The county's fertile hillsides also attract vintners and brewers, eager to use the region's unique topography and microclimate as tools to craft quality beverages. With a healthy group of artisans currently making their respective potations, and more on the way, the Red, White, and Brew Trail is evidence that Nelson County has achieved a critical mass and become a destination for wine and beer aficionados.

## Check Out the Brews

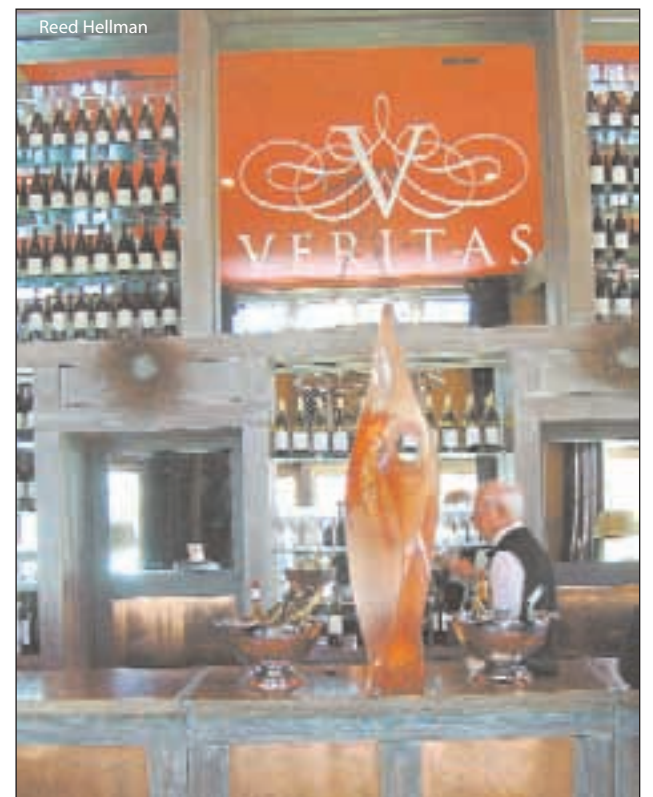
Although each operation is different, there are common threads such as using locally grown ingredients whenever possible and closely watching culinary trends. Devils Backbone Brewing Company, in Roseland, is an example. Housed in a sprawling log structure, set against the mountainous background, Devils Backbone would be right at home in Jackson Hole and Wyoming's Tetons. "I wanted something like that," confesses Crandall.

Guided by head-brewer Jason Oliver, Devils Backbone produces four standards — two lagers, an India Pale Ale (IPA), and a Bavarian-style hefeweizen — along with a roster of seasonal specialties and even a ginger beer. Brewmaster Oliver backs up his 14 years of experience with 11 medals for beers he's brewed and accreditation in brewing science from the internationally recognized University of California-Davis Master Brewers Program.

Along with the brewery, Devils Backbone offers a bar and comfortable dining area. The menu is upscale pub food, artfully designed, prepared, and presented by Chef Shawn Goodwin. His diners are the beneficiaries of his onsite herb and vegetable gardens. "We

make as much as we can from scratch," he says, "And we make good use of the local produce. I like to go out and meet the farmers."

The brewery also grows its own hops and barley for the beers, and roasts



Veritas Winery's tasting room reflects the style of the entire facility.

the barley. Their "Morning Bear" Imperial Coffee Stout uses coffees roasted by Trager Brothers, a local specialty roaster.

Blue Mountain Brewery, in Afton, holds a number of distinctions: it is the first Virginia craft brewery to begin canning its beers; the first rural "off-the-grid" brewery; and will soon be the state's largest grower of hops. In addition to its Nelson County brewpub, Blue

Mountain beer is available at 300 locations across the state in bottles and on draft.

"As the brewer, the biggest thing I will tout about our beer is the water," writes Taylor Smack, one of Blue Mountain's owners. "Afton is famed for its water, being right on an old fault line. Having our own deep-drawn water, we don't have to worry about added chlorine, fluoride, or the fluctuation of important trace minerals . . ."

"We cover many styles," continues Smack. "We bottle three year-round beers, three seasonal varieties, a lot of seasonal draft-only offerings with styles hailing from Belgium, the UK, Germany, and America, and brew and bottle a very special bourbon barrel-aged Imperial Stout three times a year, called Dark Hollow."

As with Devils Backbone, Blue Mountain Brewery boasts an on-site restaurant. Even though the menu is relatively small, the kitchen serves many daily specials focusing on locally produced foods. All breads come

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