

Blue Ridge Parkway

continued from page 29

Into the Land of Mayberry

Exit the parkway at Fancy Gap, Virginia, and take the short drive south to Mount Airy, North Carolina, birthplace of actor Andy Griffith and inspiration for the fabled town of Mayberry where Andy and Don Knotts provided law enforcement and laughter.

Take a Squad Car Tour in a familiar black and white Ford to see the Mayberry-related sights in town. "It's one of our most popular attractions, and only costs \$30 a carload" says Jessica Icenhour, who promotes Mount Airy.

Mike Cochran came up with the idea for the tour, eventually found three 1960s Fords he modified into sheriff's cars, and business took off. "We take a 30-minute ride starting at Wally's Service Station, go by the world's largest granite quarry, point out the 'Mayberry' sights on Main Street, Andy's birthplace, and the museum," he says.

The Andy Griffith Museum, located in a new building adjacent to the Andy Griffith Playhouse, brings back memories with costumes, props, and memorabilia of the show, as well as items representing other highlights of Griffith's career such as *Matlock* and *No Time for Sergeants*.

Mount Airy goes all out on Sept. 23-26 when this year's Mayberry Days event celebrates the 50th anniversary of the television show that first aired in 1960 with a parade, shows, and appearances by original cast members. This year, the state barbecue championship event will take place during Mayberry Days as well.

Along Main Street, you'll find Floyd's Barber Shop, Snappy Lunch, and other reminders of Mayberry as well as Old North State Winery, the only winery in the state also licensed as a brewery.



The familiar scene of Andy and Opie is immortalized in bronze and stands outside the Andy Griffith Playhouse in Mount Airy, North Carolina.

Music is also on the agenda in Mount Airy, where you can watch the country's second-longest-running Bluegrass radio show being performed live each Saturday at the Cinema Theater. There are also

jam sessions and performances on Saturdays downtown, Thursdays at the Andy Griffith Playhouse, and seasonally at the playhouse amphitheater. "We program music events year-round so there's always something going on," says Tanya Jones, who directs the Surry Arts Council.

October brings the Autumn Leaves Festival, one of North Carolina's oldest and largest, as well as the Sonker Festival, where locals and visitors celebrate the traditional Appalachian deep-dish fruit pie.

From mouth-watering tastes to toe-tapping music to scenery you'll never forget, take a ride on the Blue Ridge Parkway — America's Country Road.

By Laura Purcell and Jane and Marvin Bond

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Blue Ridge Tree Climbing:
www.blueridgetreeclimbing.com
Floyd, VA, Tourism: www.floydvirginia.com
Galax, VA, Tourism: www.visitgalax.com
Mount Airy Tourism: 800-948-0949,
www.VisitMayberry.com



Galax hosts several large music festivals including the week-long Old Fiddlers Convention that takes place Aug. 9-14 this year.

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From left to right: SHEPHERDSTOWN, WV • HARPERS FERRY, WV • KIDS FUN RUN

Take it to the Treetops

Halfway between Floyd and Galax, you can experience the Blue Ridge from an entirely different perspective: above. Here, Bob Wray shares his passion for nature and adventure by helping others experience his favorite pastime, tree climbing, in multi-day classes or half-day experiences.

"I'm just a vertical hiker," says Wray, owner and proprietor of Blue Ridge Tree Climbing. Not the kind of tree climbing you might have tried as a child, Wray's gear involves helmets, harnesses, and a series of strong knots. He takes each step very seriously and is a patient teacher. Tree climbing isn't difficult, he explains, and if you sweat, you're doing it wrong. But it does take some skill, pulling your rope and pushing your legs in just the right sequence to inch yourself skyward. As you focus on coordinating your motions, you forget the fact that you're actually moving until you look down. While not as high as many office buildings, the perspective is entirely different. In the canopy, the world gets quieter, the birds nearer. "There's just something special about it," says Wray.