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Sweet Bourbon Glaze

¼ cup dark brown sugar, packed

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editor's note | OCTOBER Get Outside!

There's nothing like a dip in temperatures and the first sign of fall colors to lure me outside. The hard part is convincing me to come back in! And within the Deep South, there's so much to explore and enjoy in our big natural backyard.

I recently hiked down a mountainside to view the spectacular 95-foot Cedar Falls at Petit Jean State Park in Arkansas, a stunning masterpiece of nature, although the hike back up wasn't as fun. Petit Jean remains one of Arkansas's greatest treasures, filled with numerous hiking trails and a lodge dating back to the 1920s. It's also the first state park in the Arkansas system, one with a unique history.

We spotlight Petit Jean in this, our annual Outdoor Adventure issue, along with a guide to lesser-known national parks. Writer Tom Adkinson takes us behind the scenes in those lesser-traveled and devoid of crowds national parks, spots where getting back to nature means just that.

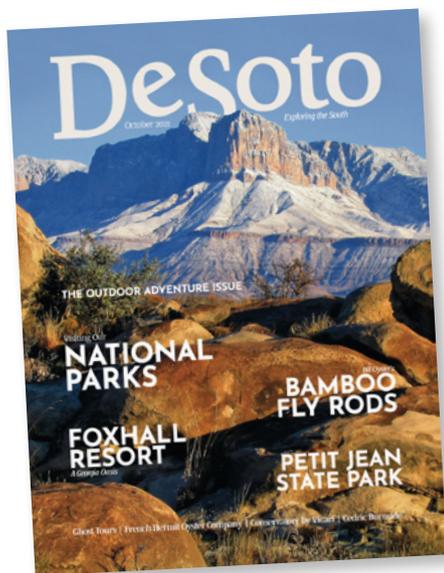
But it's also October, when the days shorten, the shadows lengthen, and All Hallows' Eve approaches. Rich Warren offers a list of spooky Deep South ghost tours, where apparitions range from a red-headed Memphis woman who plays the juke box to yellow fever victims in Holly Springs, Mississippi.



Our latest issue offers much more outdoor fun, from bamboo fly-fishing experts to UFOs, so what are you waiting for — get outside!

Happy Fall, y'all.
Chéré

Chéré Coen



on the cover

El Capitan at Guadalupe National Park in Texas, one of America's many natural wonders.

DeSoto

Exploring the South

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The Natural Remedy

Story and Photography by Joshua Savage

Getting children outdoors brings about numerous benefits, both physically and mentally, plus it incites creativity and promotes curiosity of the natural world.

Kids these days! They spend way too much time on screens. Distance learning has exacerbated the problem, and after countless hours of schoolwork glued to a computer, they usually want to play video games or watch YouTube and TikTok.

Even before the pandemic and online education, children were spending more time in front of computers and less time outdoors than previous generations, and rightfully, many parents are concerned. Will kids be cut off from the natural world? Is their intellectual, physical, and social development appropriate? Is too much screen time causing other problems? It's enough to drive parents crazy.

Years ago, Richard Louv wrote “Last Child in the Woods,” in which he investigates the rise of “nature deficit

disorder,” a condition stemming from a lack of time outdoors. The condition leads to behavioral issues and little or no respect for natural surroundings. And he wrote about the topic well before the advent of iPhones.

Kids today may seem perfectly fine. Perhaps all is well, or maybe adults notice signs that tell a different story. Whether explicit or implicit, they may sense issues like persistent anxiousness, trouble sleeping, hyperactivity, vision problems, and other abnormal behaviors. Parents have a responsibility to balance their child’s activities. Still young and developing, they don’t always know what is best. Give kids a choice, and the majority of them might be glued to the screen during most of their waking hours.

The easiest remedy?



Get those kids outside! Now, more than ever, kids need time outdoors. The amazing playground of nature has countless well documented and researched benefits.

Psychologist Christine M. Malone in Collierville, Tennessee, discusses many insightful advantages that are often taken for granted. For example, she says, exposure to sunlight stabilizes melatonin and serotonin levels, thus diminishing the chance of depression, anxiety, stress, and even trouble sleeping. Spending time outdoors leads to decreased obesity, increased muscle tone, and heightened senses.

Think about how much a kid's imagination expands while outside. Malone credits activities such as constructing forts, playing with pets, homemade obstacle courses, exploring the neighborhood, and sports as sensory stimulating pursuits that help kids navigate the environment, teach independence, build confidence, develop motor skills, and promote a sense of accomplishment. And of course, the physical activity builds muscles and wears them out so they sleep better at night.

Malone mentions that active learning, rather than sitting around and passively receiving information from screens, makes a difference in other areas. She discusses how kids who get a lot of outside time tend to pick up social cues, societal norms, and problem solving skills more quickly. These sorts of abilities are often lost when confined indoors.

And, according to WebMD and Reuters, research by scientists in Europe suggests that children who are exposed to more natural sunlight are less likely to become myopic, or nearsighted.

The motivations behind getting outside are almost limitless. Certainly playing in the yard or going to a local park is easy, but hiking and camping are fun and exciting ways to develop a deeper appreciation for the outdoors. Plus, the family time together is priceless. However, kids may need an incentive or at least a few distractions to make these types of trips more enjoyable and worthwhile.

Here are some helpful ideas:

- Bring plenty of treats on the trail or to the campsite, such as marshmallows, chips, or other tasty snacks. They can often work like a pacifier.
- Include their friends. This may be the single most helpful way for the kids to enjoy time outdoors. On the flip side, more kids can mean more complaints.
- Search for fairy and elf houses and holes in the forest, or better yet, build one out of rocks and sticks. This works especially well for younger children.
- Take breaks, especially if they involve water or wildlife. Schedule time within the hike to stop and let the kids take a dip in the water, rest, or let those imaginations run wild in the forest.
- Create a scavenger hunt. Before the trip, make a list of things you might see.
- For longer hikes, promise a treat (such as ice cream or dinner at a restaurant) if they do well.
- Play games along the trail, tell ghost stories in the tent, sing songs around the campfire.



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• Use the time to learn local plants and animals. Every area has different scenery and wildlife, and it's fascinating when you realize how many species exist in our world. It's impossible to learn about all of them in one lifetime. Take pics and look them up later at home. The SEEK app is helpful.

Family time camping or hiking is what you make it — intimate family conversations, an outdoor classroom, exercise, or outside entertainment. The experience can also be a time of solitude, a time to reflect and to listen to the distinct sounds of nature. But most importantly, hiking is unadulterated time spent enjoying the purity of our world with benefits galore.

Parenting can be tough, especially in these crazy times, but the easiest and most helpful remedy is free and right in front of us in the natural world.

.....
A native of the South, Joshua Savage, his wife, and his two daughters sold their possessions and began traveling the world. They are constantly on the hunt for new adventures. He has written novels, children's books, short stories and the recent travel guide, "100 Things to Do in Bend, Oregon Before You Die." Follow his family's adventures on Instagram & Twitter @savageglobetrotters.



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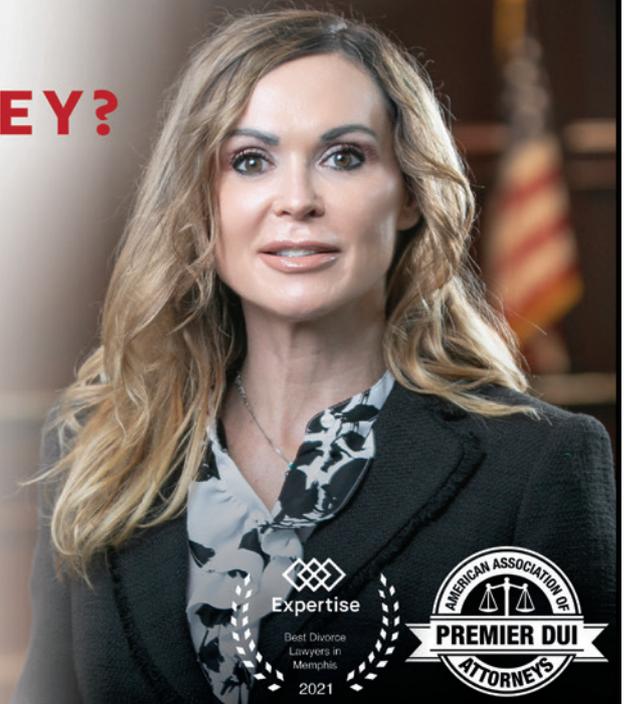
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The Bird Watcher

By Tracy Morin | Photography courtesy of Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation

Since 1995, Valery Smith has dedicated her life to rescuing and restoring compromised wild animals at her nonprofit, Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation, Inc.

Hearing the many responsibilities Valery Smith assumes at Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation (MWR), not to mention her boundless enthusiasm for the organization, some may imagine her a fresh-faced newbie. This sprightly 75-year-old hasn't lost an ounce of passion for the nonprofit she created in 1995, where she still serves as founder, executive director, and wildlife director.

"I just saw a need for it — North Mississippi did not have any rescue organization for wildlife at that time," Smith says of her initial inspiration. "I went to the library to learn how to form a nonprofit, got my 501(c)(3), and met with veterinarians to see if they'd donate their time. I got volunteers, started doing programs and education, put together a board of directors — it just kept on growing."

Smith makes her arduous journey sound easy, but taking in injured wildlife and nursing them back to health is a process rife with potential complications, as well as governmental regulations. She is one of only five people in the entire state to have federal and state rehabilitation permits to care for birds of prey.

Talented veterinarians in the area help Smith restore these delicate creatures to health. But Smith also works closely with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks; the federally run United States Fish and Wildlife Service; and local organizations like the Mid-South Raptor Center in Memphis and Mississippi's Jackson Zoo. Smith also personally attends many seminars and courses on wildlife rehabilitation to sharpen her skills further.



In other words, it takes a village when you're caring for this number of animals and species. In her first year, Smith took in nine animals. The following years, more than 400 of them would pass through the rehab annually, and now those numbers reach over 1,000. Generous contributions from the general public and financial grants have kept the program thriving.

One such donation came from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which in 2007 awarded MWR money and 154 acres of land in DeSoto County, just 15 miles from Hernando at Arkabutla Lake. The resulting Arkabutla Lake Wildlife Rehabilitation & Nature Center, affectionately called The Ark, also received a \$150,000 grant from Entergy to help build its educational pavilion for hosting wildlife shows and workshops. The Ark is now in demand for weddings and other special events, and Smith hopes that future donations will help build out its nature center.

Meanwhile, MWR created the Coldwater River Nature Conservancy program several years ago to help preserve Mississippi's wildlife and resources. A family from Senatobia donated 30 acres to this program in honor of their mother, Virginia Louise Moore Wilson.

"We're in the process of establishing a natural area of trails and wildlife viewing and hope to have Virginia Trails at Hunter's Creek completed in 2022," Smith says.

Though rehabbing injured wildlife is certainly a major focus of Smith's efforts, MWR's goals touch humans, too. Ultimately, Smith wants to correct what she sees as a "nature deficit disorder" in today's world, especially among youth.

"Growing up, my grandmother was really connected to wildlife, and I just followed her in that interest," Smith says. "As I got older, I realized God has something for everyone to do, and I had that love of wildlife and wanted to learn about different species. Our children need to learn, too."

Moreover, the success stories that MWR has created over the years are enough to bring a tear to anyone's eye. Smith still recalls with emotion the bald eagle with a badly infected leg

from an electrocution, found by a family on a nature walk as its distraught mate circled the area. Birds of prey, Smith explains, mate for life.

"We kept that bird for three months, and it was touch-and-go, but we gave her intensive care," Smith says. "We called the family when we were ready to release, and they followed us to right where they found her. She just took off, in the most beautiful flight. Then something caught my eye — it was her mate, following her to the nest! It was the most heartwarming thing I've ever seen."

Looking toward the future, Smith sees further growth possibilities for the organization she built, and she has been fortunate to find others as passionate about saving animals as she is. The MWR Facebook page regularly features fundraisers for the community to chip in, while dedicated volunteers created The Ark's nature trails by hand to accompany its educational pavilion.

Meanwhile, events like the Trunk or Treat, initiated in October 2020 as a way for families to enjoy Halloween while socially distancing, was such a success that it backed up traffic for a mile. This year, there are plans to move it to a more spacious setting in Arkabutla Park to better accommodate the crowds.

"My assistant wildlife director, Debra Crum, advertised this, and now we'll do it as a yearly event," Smith says. "I'm transitioning, and Debra will take over, because she's young. God puts everyone in their place. But I'll still probably die with a hawk on my fist."

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.....
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Bill Oyster demonstrates and checks the display monitors



Bill Oyster working at the engraving machine



The Wizard of Blue Ridge

By Debi Lander | Photography courtesy of Hollis Bennett and Bill Oyster

Bill Oyster shares his unique expertise on bamboo fly rod-making in the trout capital of Georgia.

The sign on the door reads, “Nobody gets in to see the Wizard. Not Nobody, not no how.” It’s not the Emerald City, but a different hue in Blue Ridge, Georgia, and this wizard, Bill Oyster, casts real magic.

Oyster’s a soft-spoken, somewhat shy man with a gray beard and mustache who also happens to be the foremost expert on bamboo fly fishing rods. But, he doesn’t hide secrets behind a screen; Oyster shares his wealth 22 times a year when he opens his Oz-like workshop to eight lucky students. They enter to watch and learn under the guidance of the master.

Participants come from all over the globe and with many different backgrounds, but they share traits common to the Yellow Brick Road travelers. They arrive with a passionate heart (for fly fishing), courage (to try their hand at a rare form of craftsmanship), and brains (to know where to make it happen).

In addition, they all enjoy working with their hands.

The bamboo rod-making classes take place in a mountain town aptly bearing the moniker of Trout Capital of Georgia. The school sprang from an accident, a literal one that befell Oyster in 1996. The up-and-coming professional competitive cyclist suffered a crash that eliminated his chances for the Olympic team. Oyster retreated to his hobby, fly fishing, but soon realized he needed to choose another career. He turned to guiding, teaching lessons, and making flies, but it wasn’t enough.

“Bill had studied aerospace, English literature, philosophy, and studio art while at Georgia Tech and the University of Florida,” says his wife, Shannen. “I knew my husband needed something that would challenge him, something that would use his vast knowledge and artistic skills.”



Around the same time, Oyster had become fascinated with the classic manual bamboo rod, an American standard stretching back to the 1800s. Wanting to make his own, he discovered that no instructions were available and found the few old-time artisans still around unwilling to share their knowledge.

Scouring libraries and fishing shops eventually produced a thin catch: a few videotapes and, later, a battered copy titled “A Master’s Guide to Building a Bamboo Fly Rod.” Learning from these, he worked for six months to finish his first project, but to great disappointment.

“My first rod looked terrible,” Oyster says.

Tapping his competitive genes, he upped his work intensity and improved his skills through trial and error. Others took notice and started to ask him to make rods for sale. After an Atlanta newspaper featured him in a story, Oyster got calls from many interested parties.

Custom hand-engraving of the hardware came next, today the signature of an Oyster rod. A Georgia charity organization ordered a rod for auction, intent on adding Jimmy Carter’s autograph. The former president first tried casting and fishing with the rod, then asked for one of his own. Oyster fulfilled Carter’s wish, adding the engraved grip with the presidential seal.

By 2000, Oyster was working long hours with too little profit. He started teaching others to make rods, beginning with classes in his basement. His reputation grew, and he purchased the Blue Ridge property.

Each student in Oyster’s class begins with a piece of bamboo — but no ordinary stalk of cane. Oyster’s stock comes from a 30-acre plot in Tolkin, China, chosen for its tensile strength that’s greater than steel. The process involves cutting and planing 24 pieces of bamboo to within one-thousandth of an inch, barely wider than a strand of hair. The pieces are glued together and wrapped with silk thread. After sitting overnight, the hexagon shape that runs down the core of the rod becomes visible.

Oyster and his assistant, Riley Gudakunst, closely oversee the students. They added a new teaching tool during the pandemic to avoid close contact. Riley shoots live videos of the teacher projected to monitors around the workstations. It gives each participant a laser-focused view of the process.

No clicking of heels or shortcuts, the project takes students six full days of 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. work. They leave with a sense of pride and a treasured heirloom.

“By the time they finish,” Oyster says, “I often see grown men cry.”

“This project was the hardest I’ve ever worked to build anything, and I’ve built many things, including guns,” says student John Dinkins from Jackson, Mississippi. “The class became empowering and gave me confidence.”

Melinda Smith, the only female in the class, agreed. They both hope to return a second time. A father/son team, Bradley and Collin Bertram, attended from Augusta, Georgia. The 21 year old and his dad previously built a kayak. Collin rated the bamboo rod class “a 10 out of 10.”

Camaraderie builds as the week progresses, some students becoming lifelong friends and fishing buddies, like Keith Hill of Seneca and James Looper of Pickens, South Carolina.

In addition to teaching the classes, Oyster fashions between 40 and 60 rods per year, most high-end custom orders. Clients have included professional athletes, famous writers, and billionaires, whose identity he fiercely protects. Most of these highly coveted rods start around \$5,000, with some fetching as much as \$30,000. In addition, Oyster also organizes fishing expeditions.

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Debi Lander is a freelance writer and photographer from Sarasota, Florida. She discovered the allure of fly fishing (the connection of sport with nature) on her recent trip to Blue Ridge. She hopes to return.



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Shades of Blue

Mary Ann DeSantis
Photography courtesy of Kim Michele Richardson

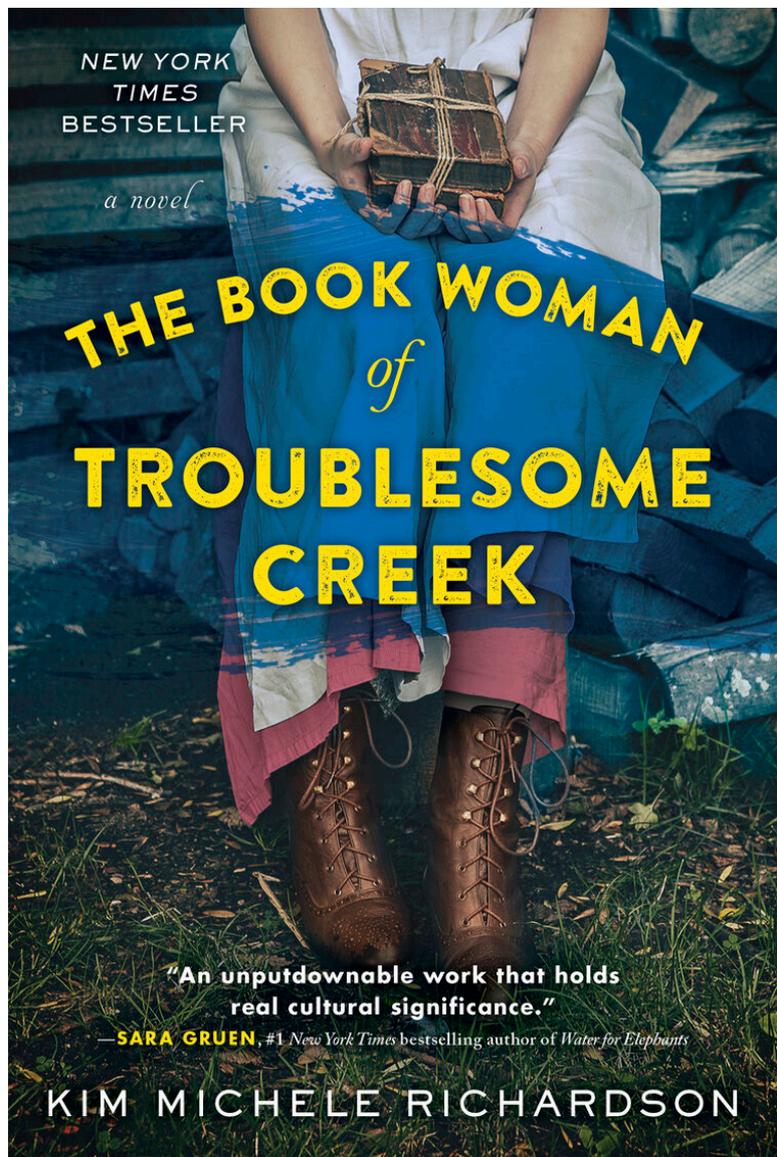
A moving story about the power of literacy over bigotry and fear, “The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek” tackles issues as pertinent today as they were during the Great Depression.

It would be hard to find anyone as fierce and brave as the Kentucky packhorse librarians during the 1930s and early 1940s. Trudging through treacherous Appalachian mountainsides, overgrown thickets, and isolated settings, the librarians knew the power of reading and how it could make a difference in the lives of the people they served.

Inspired by the true story of the Kentucky Pack Horse Library Service during the 1930s, author Kim Michele Richardson took “The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek” to the next level with its main character, Cussy Mary Carter, a blue-skinned woman (resulting from a real-life genetic blood disorder called methemoglobinemia). Cussy makes her deliveries on the back of her faithful pack mule, Junia, and considers her job necessary and one that will give her “a respectable life” despite her father’s strong objections.

Cussy is highly regarded as the “Book Woman,” but as a Blue, she is feared and reviled. She experiences racism, discrimination, and violence, but her will and determination to survive inspire not only the characters who receive her book deliveries but also today’s readers.

“When I sold this novel in the fall of 2017, I never dreamed it would mirror today’s world — the themes of sexism, racism, ageism, classism, nationalism, religious



prejudice that cripple society and how ignorance and fear breeds hate and toxicity into cultures,” says Richardson. “But every day when writing this book, I was reminded that poverty and marginalization were not so much economics or politics or societal issues as much as human issues that are best grappled with by reaching deep into the lives of those suffering them.”

Richardson’s own childhood of growing up in an abusive Eastern Kentucky orphanage that has since closed its doors provided her with empathy that translates to the book’s characters.

“As a survivor of abuse, poverty, homelessness, and more, I can relate to marginalized people and have much empathy for Cussy Mary and her family and the people of my state — anyone who has faced or faces prejudices and hardship,” says Richardson, who still lives in Kentucky. “It’s not hard to feel pain deeply, particularly if you’ve gone through hardships in your own life.”

Richardson wrote about some of those personal experiences in her best-selling memoir, “The Unbreakable Child.” She also authored the critically acclaimed novels,



books and magazines that Cussy would eventually pick for her own patrons.

“To further authenticate the work, I moved into a one-room shack atop a mountain for a year until my husband contacted Lyme’s, and I fell off the side of crumbly mountain steps and received seven breaks to my arm,” she says. “But these fierce, brave and remarkable women were worth it and every hard-ticking moment.”

Librarians have always been dear to Richardson, who remembers the compassion and wisdom of one who helped her during a lonely childhood summer.

“Librarians are lifelines for so many, giving us powerful resources to help us become empowered,” she says.

But it was the real-life blue-skinned people of Kentucky that Richardson could not get out of her mind.

“I was saddened to find how the Blues were treated — how people shunned and shamed them instead of embracing them for their very uniqueness,” she says. “It became important for me to humanize them, to shed light and dispel old stereotypes, to help inform others by bringing these unique people into a novel.”

“The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek” is widely taught in high schools and college classrooms, and Richardson provides a companion booklet for schools and book clubs on her website.

“If I’ve dropped seeds of kindness, courage, and compassion in a charged world as we know it, that’s all I could ever hope for,” she says.

Richardson is currently working on both a standalone and sequel to “Book Woman,” where she continues Cussy’s remarkable journey and introduces some other unique characters. The novel will be published in May 2022.

kimmichelerichardson.com

.....
A native of Laurel, Mississippi, Mary Ann DeSantis is a freelance writer and prolific reader currently based in Lady Lake, Florida.

“Liar’s Bench,” “GodPretty in the Tobacco Field,” and “The Sisters of Glass Ferry.” Her books reveal such a power of place that readers are easily transported to rural Kentucky within a few pages. Her expressive dialogue, vivid descriptions, and fast-moving plots have earned praise from Publisher’s Weekly, Oprah’s Buzziest Books, Southern Literary Review and more.

“All my novels are set in Kentucky, so as a Kentuckian it is absolutely critical that I present my history and people accurately, honestly, and with thoughtfulness and compassion,” says Richardson, who is known for her meticulous attention to detail.

Research for “The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek” took thousands of hours over the course of five years. In addition to her study of the Works Progress Administration’s Pack Horse Library Service, Richardson interviewed hematologists about the recessive gene that causes methemoglobinemia; visited fire tower lookouts like the one described in the book; talked to coal miners reminiscent of Cussy’s Pa; and studied food, flora, fauna, and old-time customs like the courting candle. Richardson spent hundreds of hours just selecting the



Mondo Grass and stepping stones

Cover Up

By Pamela A. Keene | Photography by Laura Ogg and Bowen Haley

Ground covers may be a great landscape problem solver.

Ground cover plants take their work laying down. Whether they're providing finishing touches on a landscape design or minimizing erosion, these low-growing wonders are versatile hard workers that can add interest to a home landscape.

"Many of our clients like to use ground covers to help remedy a bare spot in their gardens or to control erosion," says Scott Haley, a former eighth-grade teacher who with his wife, Beth, owns Southern Roots Nursery and Garden Center in Hernando, Mississippi. "We like to install ground covers to add bloom power in flower beds or to address hard-to-grow places in the lawn. No matter what the reason, ground covers can add another dimension to your home landscape."

The couple opened Southern Roots in 2014.

"In addition to teaching, Scott had started a lawn care business, and I was home-schooling our three young children," says Beth. "As we became more involved in the garden business, it naturally followed that we would open a retail nursery and garden center."

Over the past seven years, the Haleys have grown

Southern Roots Nursery and Garden Center to offer a wide range of plants like native trees and shrubs, annuals, and perennials. The couple has also built a successful landscape design and installation business.

"It's important that we ask lots of questions when we have a new design client to find out their objectives, their preferences, and particular challenges," says Scott. "Part of that process is determining whether they want something low-maintenance or like to spend time in the landscape by doing ongoing work themselves. Some people would rather just enjoy their spaces; others relish immersing themselves in gardening. These considerations definitely factor into plant selection."

Certain ground-cover plants can be invasive and may need to be kept at bay, such as English Ivy, Asiatic jasmine, or vinca minor.

"While these may be easier to establish in a shorter time, they often require frequent cutting back to avoid taking over," he says. "A low-maintenance ground cover such as creeping sedum or ajuga may be a better choice."

Consider whether the area is sunny, partially shaded



or full shade and whether the soil is naturally dry or more evenly moist or wet.

“Creeping Jenny, with its coin-shaped leaves, can do well in a variety of applications,” says Beth. “Planted in the sun, the foliage turns bright lime green, but in shady places it is a darker green. It’s one of the most popular ground covers we carry. Because of its trailing habit, we often use it in containers. It’s a perfect spiller to complement the thriller and the filler.”

Areas with high foot traffic may do well with a combination of stepping stones or pavers and a ground cover planted between.

“Evergreen mondo grass that does well in sun or shade is durable and low-growing,” she says. “It slowly spreads to fill in areas and can handle a wide range of growing conditions. It’s especially pretty when planted along pathways or around brick patios.”

Creeping thyme, a low-growing relative of the popular herb, not only blooms in pink, white or purple, it also provides an enticing aroma when walked on.

“Creeping thyme is better in lower-traffic areas, but it can handle some foot traffic,” says Beth. “When stepped on, the plants’ mint-like scent adds another dimension to your landscape.”

The perennial creeping phlox, also known as thrift, creates a colorful carpet of blossoms in the late spring. With five-petal blooms available from white to shades of pink, blue, and purple, its foliage dies back in the winter and slowly spreads into a larger area the next year.

Scott says he sometimes recommends other species of plants to perform the role of groundcovers, filling an area with a mass of foliage.

“Self-propagating plants like daylilies, lamb’s ear, or hostas can add textural or color interest in defined areas,” he says. “Although not considered conventional ground covers, they can grow into their space and help keep weeds down.

He suggests installing physical barriers to confine Bermuda grass in the lawn area and/or to manage other ground covers that may be aggressive

“Bermuda is our most popular lawn grass in much of the South, but it can become invasive if not kept in check,” he says. “Its long tendrils can be persistent, spreading into flower beds and other areas at will.”

Metal or plastic pieces can be partially buried in the ground to block the growth, but consider creating a barrier with natural materials, such as fieldstone or other rock to define the space.

“Ground covers can add layers and texture to your landscape and increase the visual appeal of your property,” says Beth. “Although it’s not always a priority for home gardeners, installing ground covers can be a nice addition, as well as a way to address erosion, weed control, and trouble areas. Natural plant materials can do hard work and make it look effortless.”

**facebook.com/
SouthernRootsnurseryandgardencenter/**

.....
Avid gardener and journalist Pamela A. Keene is a self-proclaimed “plant-a-holic.” After researching this article, she visited her local nursery and purchased three kinds of ground cover: creeping thyme, mondo grass, and variegated ajuga.

table talk | CONSERVATORY BY VICARI



The Conservatory by Vicari features a rooftop view of Corinth.



Cobb salad with fried lobster, house bacon, charred corn, avocado, and farm egg.



Seared lump crab cake with roasted corn sauce and baby spinach.

A Rooftop View

Story and Photography by Jackie Sheckler Finch

Conservatory by Vicari offers great views of downtown Corinth while serving up delicious cuisine.

A family photo shows six-year-old John Mabry standing on a stool in his Aunt Kitty's kitchen stirring a bowl of chocolate oatmeal cookies.

"I've been cooking ever since I was five years old," Mabry says. "It's been a long journey and I still love it."

Mabry continues that journey with his third restaurant. Since its opening on Sept. 1, 2020, Conservatory by Vicari has quickly become a favorite gathering place, offering a beautiful rooftop patio and third-floor dining room overlooking downtown Corinth, Mississippi.

Watching the sun set while a soft breeze whispers and a water fountain adds musical notes on the Conservatory patio is a lovely way to end the day. But so is an early morning brunch with friends sharing a meal while planning for a full day ahead.

"I think the Conservatory is a great addition to what's going on downtown," Mabry says. "You can be out shopping and have lunch at the Conservatory. At night, you can stop by, enjoy the view, and have drinks and some tapas. We have 16 different wines by the glass as well as specialty cocktails and beer."

Conservatory by Vicari features a tasty lunch menu with creative twists such as hot crab dip with pasta chips in lieu of potato chips, Cobb salad with fried lobster, beef tenderloin sliders, Coca-Cola braised brisket, a gelato bar, and much more.

For brunch, choices include biscuits and gravy, traditional eggs Benedict, salmon eggs Benedict, seared lump crab cake with roasted corn sauce and baby spinach, or the

popular crème brûlée French toast with warm maple syrup.

"I like it all or it wouldn't be on the menu," Mabry says with a laugh. "I eat almost every meal in my restaurants, partially because I love the food so much and partially because of quality control. It's a good way to keep an eye on what's going on and to be sure the food is the way it should be. I'm extremely picky about servers so my servers are excellent."

Just ask server Jake Pearson, who was busy making an old-fashioned cocktail with Larceny Bourbon.

"I like working here," Pearson says. "You get to meet some really nice people and offer them delicious food."

Coming home again

Born in Savannah, Tennessee, Mabry came to Corinth 10 years ago to take care of his mother. After graduating from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, he worked at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, then decided to enhance his cooking skills at a culinary school in France. Returning to America, Mabry shared his cooking talents at many hotels and restaurants.

So, when he came to Corinth, Chef Mabry did what came naturally. He opened a restaurant — Vicari Italian Grill — in February of 2015.

"Vicari is a small town in Italy that I visited often while in culinary school," Mabry says. "A great friend and culinary school classmate was from there. We went there when we had time off from school. The red sauce recipe in Vicari is a recipe that his Italian grandmother taught me."



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Next came V Taco in December of 2016, a fun taco/panini shop and margarita bar with a rooftop deck. His latest effort, Conservatory by Vicari, completes the Corinth trifecta of winners for hungry and thirsty folks.

“A lot of people said, ‘Why don’t you build something in Nashville or some other big city?’ But I like it here in Corinth,” Mabry says. “At this point in my life, this is where I want to be.”

As for those delicious recipes being served at Conservatory, they were all created by Mabry.

“I make all the recipes myself. I read a lot of food magazines and watch food shows but then I make the recipe the way I want it to be,” he says. “Everything is made from scratch.”

For himself, Mabry favors ribeye steaks and chicken scallopini.

“I like simple food but sometimes I like complex foods, like complex pastas,” he says. “The menu changes about every six months. But 70 percent of it stays the same. Pastas and appetizers change seasonally but the heart of the menu stays the same.”

The same can be said for the décor at the Conservatory. It is simple and comfortable with the spotlight on the view. Umbrellas on the patio offer shade or diners can choose to eat inside at tables or sit on high-backed stools at the bar. A fire pit on the patio adds ambiance and warmth for cool weather.

An elevator is available to bring guests to the third-floor Conservatory or diners can choose to walk the stairs.

As for that old childhood photo, Mabry says it is packed away somewhere.

“I know the picture is in a box, probably in a closet, but I still have the stool,” he says.

conservatorycorinth.com

.....
An award-winning journalist, Jackie Sheckler Finch loves to take to the road to see what lies beyond the next bend.



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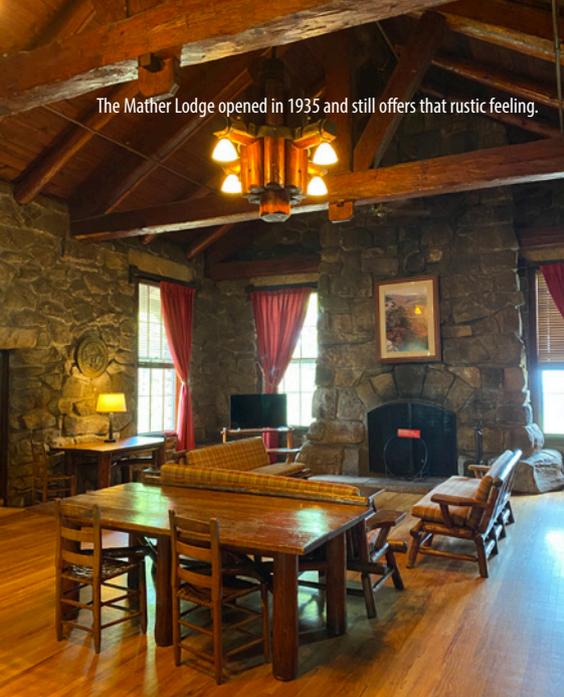
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exploring destinations | PETIT JEAN STATE PARK





The Mather Lodge opened in 1935 and still offers that rustic feeling.



The Davies Bridge, built in 1934 by the Civilian Conservation Corps, stretches over Cedar Creek in Petit Jean State Park.

Return to Nature

Story and Photography by Cheré Coen

Petit Jean State Park started a preservation movement in Arkansas and still offers breathtaking views and hikes along with its unique history.

In his early career at the turn of the 20th century, Dr. Thomas William “T.W.” Hardison worked as a physician for the Fort Smith Lumber Company of Arkansas, assisting lumbermen and mountaineers in his practice. When he accompanied management to a remote area of central Arkansas where a natural bridge existed, the company executives began discussing how to log the area.

“While listening to the discussion, the idea occurred to me that the trees might as well be left to live out their lifespan unmolested by axe and saw, and the area converted into a park,” Hardison was quoted as thinking at the time, according to the “Encyclopedia of Arkansas.”

The trees did meet the axe and saw, but only in areas easily accessible. Once the timber was felled, the lumber company moved on to other parts of Arkansas.

But Hardison remained. He met a young schoolteacher living on the mountain and they married, Hardison supplementing his rural medical practice with farming and writing. But he remained steadfast in the idea of preserving the unique landscape of Petit Jean Mountain.

Hardison first appealed to the federal government to make the region a national park, stating its unique geology and aboriginal rock art as reasons. When that failed, he convinced state officials to preserve the natural area, creating Petit Jean State Park in 1923, the first state park in Arkansas.

Today, Petit Jean remains one of the most popular parks in the statewide system, according to Park Interpreter B.T. Jones, and it all started in the 1920s.

Rustic Origins

A petite French woman believed to have worn men’s clothing to follow her beloved on a ship to the New World gives the mountain and park its name. When Little Jean became ill — and her colleagues realized her gender — she asked to be buried on the Arkansas mountain she had come to love. Her grave lies on the mountain’s pinnacle overlooking the Arkansas River that flows between the Ouachita Mountains and the Ozark Plateaus.

In the early days of Petit Jean Park, only nature existed. Visitors drove up the mountain and camped out, then enjoyed hiking through its almost 3,500 acres. In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps, a public works program established by President Franklin Roosevelt to develop parks, among other projects, arrived with about 200 veterans from World War I. They camped at Petit Jean and constructed the Mather Lodge with eight rooms, a sandstone fireplace built by hand, and breezeway where dances could be held. The lodge opened in 1935, named for Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service.

“This is all original park architecture, sometimes called ‘parkitecture,’” Jones says of Mather Lodge.

The CCC also built several rustic cabins, as well as hiking trails, roads, and bridges. Both the lodge and the cabins remain today and are open for visitors. The lodge, however, has been expanded to include a large restaurant overlooking Cedar Creek Canyon, a gift shop, and lobby. It now accommodates visitors with 24 guest rooms.



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One of the CCC members was George Gordon Snyder, an older artist who lied about his age to enter the Corps. He lived at Petit Jean for two years, painting 20 landscapes and buildings, such as the Mather Lodge, Jones explains. Snyder's artwork was shipped to Washington, D.C. for storage but later thrown away. One employee saw its beauty and plucked it from the garbage.

Today, the Smithsonian owns one of Snyder's paintings. The other, once dismissed to the garbage pile and rescued, lies behind the front desk of Mather Lodge. After a series of owners, the discarded painting was discovered to have been a Snyder original and was returned to Mather Lodge, Jones says.

Petit Jean is also a certified Trail of Tears National Historic Site since members of the Cherokee tribe traveled through the area in the 1830s during their forced migration to Oklahoma.

The Park Today

Petit Jean State Park is located near the town of Morrilton, about a 45-minute drive northwest of Little Rock. Visitors will find a variety of amenities, in addition to the relaxing, historic accommodations and campsites for RVs and tents. Rent a kayak or canoe to enjoy Lake Bailey and fish from its waters. Miles of hiking trails run the gamut, including the easy Bear Cave Trail and its fun rock formations, the descent to the dramatic 95-foot Cedar Falls, or hikes to archeological sites. And don't forget that lovely natural bridge.

The park hosts weekly events, from guided hikes to discussions about nature.

The new visitor's center opened in December 2020, with the grand opening in April due to the pandemic. This expanded space overlooking Lake Bailey details what Hardison experienced on his first trip to Petit Jean Mountain: the natural beauty, the animals that call the region home, and the unique geological formations scattered throughout the park.

Hardison's statue graces the front of the new visitor's center, a guardian over those trees he saved from axe and saw, now growing freely for generations to come.

.....

DeSoto Editor Cheré Coen loves visiting Arkansas state parks.



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- 8:00 a.m. Head over to Two Sisters Diner for an old-fashioned Southern breakfast. Try their fluffy pancakes with a side of grits and mile-high biscuits covered in chocolate gravy. The waitresses are so friendly, you may want to sit a spell.
- 9:00 a.m. Grab the camera and capture New Albany's greatest gift: the town's historic buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These storied locales are great fodder for social media posts.
- 10:00 a.m. Stop by High Point Roasters, get a cup of Joe, take a tour, and savor the aroma of roasted coffee beans from 14 different countries.
- 10:30 a.m. Grab a bike from the nice folks at the Union County Library and take off to the Tanglefoot Trail embraced by tall trees and tiny towns.
- 12:30 p.m. Belly up to a vintage soda fountain at The Vintage Market for a club sandwich, chicken salad, or even better, a fried bologna sandwich, a true Southern delicacy. Be sure to chat with the locals and shop a bit, choosing from country-style jams and jellies to antiques and handmade jewelry.
- 2:00 p.m. Stock up on plant-based soap products at Magnolia Soap & Bath Co. and check out the latest fashion at Muddy Mallard Boutique. Set aside some extra time and money for gift shopping at Itty Bitty Birdie.
- 4:00 p.m. Pick up a piece of pie or yummy cupcakes at Sugaree's Bakery and rest those aching feet at the Tanglefoot Plaza. Listen to live music and grab some ice coffee at Brew Albany or ice cream at Brain Freeze.
- 5:00 p.m. Weave through towering trees at the Park Along the River or grab a park bench while the kids play on the climbing playgrounds and the disc golf course.
- 6:00 p.m. Savor Mississippi Catfish with a cup of gumbo at the Tallahatchie Gourmet and don't forget that tall glass of sweet tea.
- 7:30 p.m. End a great day at the Action Lanes bowling alley, fun for kids and adults with super polished lanes, a rocking jukebox, and a game room.

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visitnewalbany.com

highpointroasters.com

thevintagemarket.org

newalbanymainstreet.com

tallahatchiegourmet.com

Local Favorites & Upcoming Events:

Dates are subject to change.

Union County Heritage Museum

Don't leave New Albany without a tour of the Union County Heritage Museum. Take note of the beautiful Faulkner Literary Garden named after the city's namesake, Nobel-Prize-winning author William Faulkner. Stroll through the Frisco railroad caboose, one-room schoolhouse, and the country store and blacksmith shop. Inside the museum is the Faulkner Library stocked with a stunning collection of books by and about William Faulkner. Mark your calendar for the Murder Mystery Dinner Theater's "Last Will and Testament" on Oct. 1 and 2.

ucheritagemuseum.com

Tanglefoot Trail

Jog, walk, or bicycle across the state's longest rails to trails 44-mile trek through the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. A land rich in history and wildlife, once traveled by Chickasaw Indians, explorers, and locomotives, every mile tells a story. Keep that camera handy with primo shots of rolling farms and pastures, along with forests and waterways. The trail preserves the abandoned railroad corridor assembled in part for the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad by Col. William C. Falkner, the great-grandfather of Nobel-Prize-winning author William Faulkner.

tanglefoottrail.com

Compiled by Deborah Burst





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DESIGNED BY ANDREW BARTOLOTTA

Happy Halloween



1. Bundtins, **Nothing Bundt Cakes**, 5338 Goodman Rd Suite 127, Olive Branch, MS
2. Garden flag, **The Speckled Egg**, 5100 Interstate 55, Marion, AR
3. Door decoration, **House To Home**, 8961 US-51, Southaven, MS
4. Halloween Napkins, **Cynthia's Boutique**, 2529 Caffey Street, Hernando, MS
5. Halloween party supplies, **The Pink Zinnia**, 134 West Commerce Street, Hernando, MS
6. Napkins, towel and dish, **Mimi's on Main**, 432 Main Street, Senatobia, MS
7. Tea towels, **Ultimate Gifts**, 2902 May Blvd Suite 102, Southaven, MS
8. Ribbon, **House To Home**, 8961 US-51, Southaven, MS
9. Witches, **Merry Magnolia**, 194 E Military Road, Marion, AR
10. Yard flags, **Bon Von**, 230 W Center Street, Hernando, MS
11. Wooden pumpkins, **Commerce Street Market**, 74 W Commerce St, Hernando, MS

THE ONES LESS TRAVELED

By Tom Adkinson

Photography courtesy of National Park Service, Hank Dye and Tom Adkinson

VISITING A NATIONAL PARK IN THE OFF-SEASON, OR CHOOSING ONE THAT'S LESS VISITED, CAN BE MORE FUN THAN FIGHTING CROWDS — AND STILL A GREAT THRILL.

When heading to the mall (remember doing that?), the target often is the biggest store, but it can be crowded, help may be scarce, and items sold out. Downshifting to a smaller store may result in a better experience.

The same holds true with America's 63 national parks, some of which practically get loved to death in peak vacation months — and that was true even before the pandemic lured people to the great outdoors in almost overwhelming numbers.



El Capitan with snow, Guadalupe Mountains National Park, TX



Yellowstone Bison



That's a pandemic irony. Americans wanted to commune with Mother Nature only to discover thousands of other people had the same idea. There were national park traffic jams and long visitor lines packed together to see the Old Faithful geyser or the rim of the Grand Canyon. Social distancing? Not hardly.

"One beauty of the National Park Service is that we have a park for every season," says NPS spokeswoman Vanessa Lacayo. "People generally think of the big and most famous ones, but there are gems that don't get the attention others do."

Some national parks are so remote they never suffer from too many visitors. For instance, Gates of the Arctic National Park in Alaska receives only about 10,500 visitors a year, but it's entirely above the Arctic Circle.

However, North Cascades National Park is barely three hours from Seattle, yet only 38,000 outdoor lovers visit it every year. In the Southeast, Congaree National Park is 20 miles outside Columbia, South Carolina, but only about 160,000 people a year cross its boundaries to canoe, fish, or stroll boardwalks through the region's largest old-growth bottomland forest. In a sense, they practically have the place to themselves. "More and more people want to get out in nature. We're seeing a lot of first-time visitors," Lacayo says, recommending people study the map to find parks with great attributes and fewer visitors. They are great fodder for Instagram photos and post-vacation cocktail party conversation.

For instance, there's a trio of national parks in West Texas and southern New Mexico to weave into one trip: Guadalupe Mountains National Park, Carlsbad Caverns National Park, and White Sands National Park. All are within 150 miles of El Paso, Texas.

"You have the opportunity to see three very different parks in a short period of time," says Elizabeth Jackson, chief of interpretation at Guadalupe Mountains, which contains the four highest peaks in Texas, the tallest Guadalupe Peak at 8,750 feet.

This is arid Chihuahuan Desert country — muted brown landscapes, yucca, agaves, and prickly pear cacti for the most part — that has a totally unexpected fall color season in McKittrick Canyon. The canyon is a geologic fluke with a moist, cool climate in relative terms. Its forest of ash,



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Look Rock View, Great Smoky Mountains National Park



oak, and bigtooth maples put on quite an autumnal show. It may not be as flashy as New England's fall color, but this is desert country.

Another world, this one underground, exists just 30 miles away in New Mexico at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. The park has 120 caves, the most famous of which is Carlsbad Cavern, a show cave with paved trails, dramatic lighting, and elevators that drop you 754 feet underground. Also in the park, but not open for tours, is Lechuguilla Cave, which has 140 miles of known passageways.

Two popular activities are watching thousands upon thousands of bats fly out of the cave in early evening during warm months and "star parties" throughout the year. The celebrities at these parties are the stars and planets sparkling in the dark desert skies.

The final jewel in this trio, White Sands National Park in New Mexico, gained national park status in 2019. It is tiny — 275 square miles compared to Yellowstone's 3,468 — but astronauts spot its gleaming white patch in an ocean of brown easily from outer space.

White Sands is the largest gypsum dunefield in the world. These rolling swaths of gypsum, the same stuff in sheetrock walls, plaster of Paris, and even toothpaste, are pure white and almost blindingly reflect sunlight. It looks like snow, and is powdery enough for sledding.

For those determined to go to a hugely popular western park such as Yellowstone (4 million annual visitors), winter requires more planning than summer, and first-time visitors especially are wise to book guided tours for activities such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and nature walks.

Most Yellowstone roads are closed in winter, and skis, snowshoes, snowcoaches, and snowmobiles become the main modes of transportation. Snowcoaches and snowmobiles are the only way to see Old Faithful, the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone, and other spectacular sights.

"Fall and winter are completely different from summer," says Robin Hoover, executive director of Yellowstone Country, one of Montana's tourism districts. "We like to promote them as the quiet time."

One thing is certain: in the frigid winter air, visitors won't be cheek-to-jowl with hordes of other vacationers competing to see geysers, bison, wolves, eagles, moose, and elk.

Into the Smokies

Great Smoky Mountains National Park — 500,000 acres of Appalachian beauty split between Tennessee and North Carolina — is America's most visited national park. Even through the pandemic year of 2020, the visitor count was 12.1 million, only slightly fewer than 2019.

October is prime time for fall color — and visitors. For a much less crowded experience, visitors should bide their time. Fall color usually hangs around well into November, but when the leaves do drop from the trees, new vistas open up. The wilderness is different.

“Winter is one of my favorite times to hike,” says park volunteer Hank Dye. “It’s not hot. There are no bears. There are no snakes. There are no bugs.”

The sprawling park has 800 miles of trails, with hugely differing degrees of difficulty, and Dye has some off-season tips.

“One of my favorite winter trails is the Thomas Divide,” says Dye. “The trailhead is below Newfound Gap in North Carolina, and it delivers the unexpected reward of easy walking and great views on the top of a ridge.”

He added that the best combination of “easy and pretty” is the Little River Trail in the Elkmont area between Gatlinburg and Townsend, Tennessee.

Dye is quick to remind winter visitors to be prepared, even on short hikes, and to seek current information at the park's visitor centers. Wear good boots, dress in layers, stay dry, tell someone your plans, and carry snacks and water.

“Remember, this isn't Disneyland,” he says.

Tom Adkinson has hiked, rafted, snowshoed and photographed in national parks throughout the U.S. He is a Marco Polo member of SATW, the Society of American Travel Writers, and author of “100 Things to Do in Nashville Before You Die.”

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The 1,100-acre property offers plenty of activities, such as bocce ball.



Shooting instruction is offered at Foxhall Resort outside Atlanta.





GEORGIA OASIS

By Cheré Coen
Photography courtesy Cheré Coen, Foxhall Resort

Foxhall Resort offers a quiet respite only minutes from the Atlanta Airport, allowing visitors to unwind and enjoy a host of activities in a pristine environment.



The Foxhall Bar overlooks Lunker Lake and the resort pools.

Accommodations include one-, two-, and three-bedroom villas overlooking the small but peaceful Lunker Lake.



Winding roads through quiet pine forests that jump across undisturbed streams make one doubt they are driving through the bustling Atlanta metropolitan area. And yet, Foxhall Resort is only 30 minutes from the world's busiest airport.

That's the draw of the sanctuary of rolling hills, placid pastures, and peaceful woods that features everything from golf and tennis to hunting, fishing, and long walks along the Chattahoochee River.

"You definitely don't feel like you're in the Atlanta metro area," says Nikki Tyler, Foxhall national sales manager.

That's how owners envisioned the resort that was once a sprawling equine facility consisting of waterways, fences, horse jumps, and polo fields. The expansive stables resembling something from the Kentucky hillsides housed the horses that were used in the 1996 Olympics.

Today, Foxhall Resort provides an escape from urban life, with its one, two, and three-bedroom villas overlooking the small, but peaceful Luncker Lake, one of 16 ponds on site that vary in size and allow for fishing, paddle boarding, kayaking, and canoeing. Foxhall provides tackle gear and boats, if requested.

"A lot of people bring their own because they're used to using their own," says Tyler.

Miles of hiking trails run through forest, fields, and water sources, and along a three-mile stretch of the Chattahoochee River.

"It's such a nice place to unwind," says Tyler. "Everybody gets their 'ah' moment when then turn in from the road. It's a beautiful piece of property."

Guests may sign up for a host of activities in the Clubhouse. One of the unique offerings is the Foxhall shooting range that includes a one-hour private shooting instruction for beginners and a round of 100 targets for more experienced sportsmen who come equipped with their own ammunition and guns. The resort also features a 15-station Beretta Trident Archery course, the 5-Stand, Wobble Trap and an archery range for those who prefer a bow and arrow.

Guided off-road ATV rides may also be arranged, or, for something less rugged, a 45-minute Foxhall Sunset Safari through the property.

Hunting remains a unique aspect of Foxhall, although some outings have



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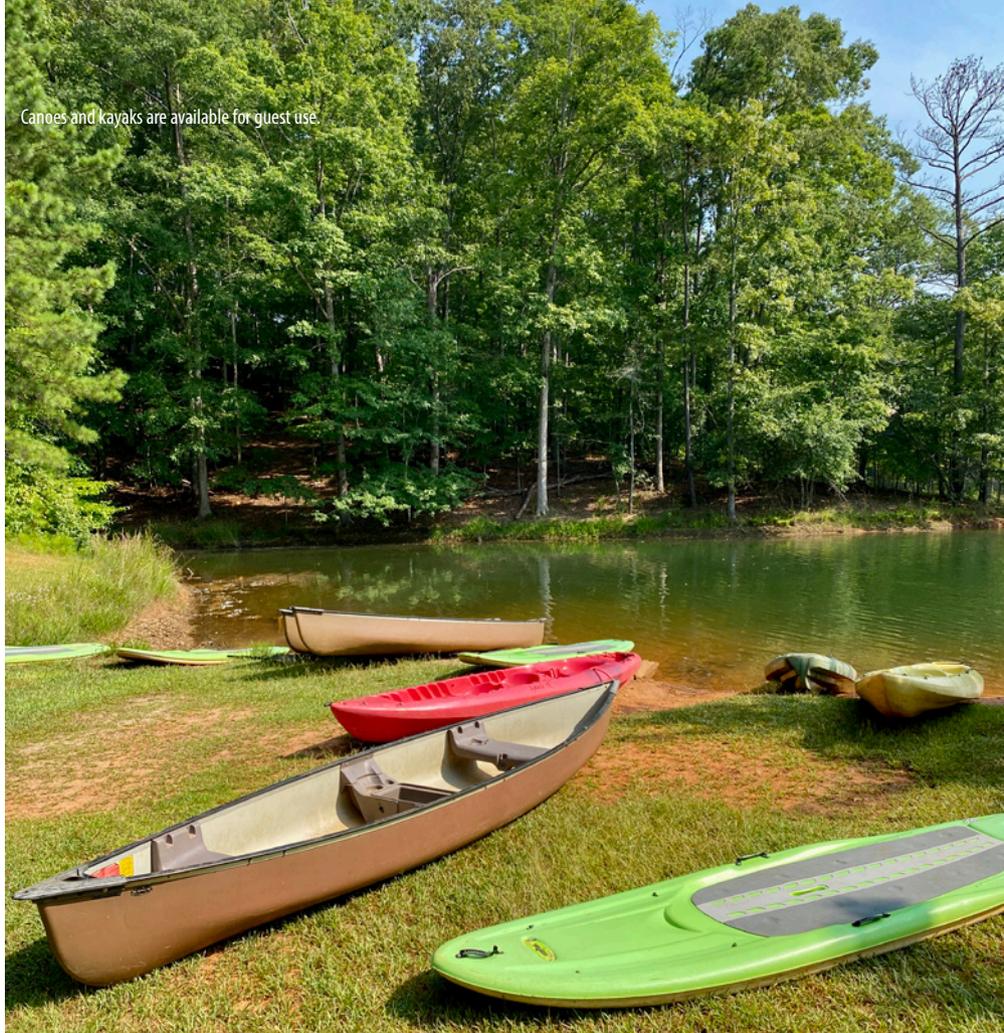
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been cancelled due to the pandemic. Guided morning and afternoon quail hunts, for instance — seasonal November through March — are offered with Foxhall’s own quail hunting dogs, but there is a chance they may be postponed this year.

“It will come back, but we need to be ready to do it right,” says Tyler. She suggests checking ahead for updates.

The Champion Lawn at the Polo Pavilion below the Clubhouse includes areas for Frisbee golf, volleyball, horseshoes, bocce ball, and an outdoor space with fire pit that’s perfect for picnics and other social gatherings.

Dining options include Pheasant Blue farm-to-table restaurant and the Foxhall Bar in the Clubhouse, both of which overlook the resort’s pools and Lunker Lake, perfect spots at sunset. A small market sells items for picnics and quick meals.

Equipment rentals are available for just about any activity, including tennis, pickleball and the golf driving range.

WEDDINGS & EVENTS

Naturally, a pristine property like Foxhall makes for a fantastic backdrop for weddings. In the beginning, marriage ceremonies were strictly held at a venue on the resort’s Legacy Lake with stunning views of the surrounding fields, Chattahoochee River, and the lake.

“It became very popular,” says Tyler, adding that the resort now hosts about 150 weddings a year, which may be surpassed in 2021. “This year, it’s been Friday, Saturday and Sunday every weekend.”

Today, couples also wed in the Grand Pavilion and Champion Lawn next to the gently flowing Water Gardens. With its flowering water lilies, the scene resembles Claude Monet’s garden at Giverny, France. A currently popular spot is the renovated riding arena, once the stables for those 1996 Olympic horses.

“They kept a lot of the characteristics of the stables, such as the barn doors,” Tyler says of the event space.

The clubhouse offers a ballroom and meeting spaces as well, making the resort an ideal place for corporate meetings and retreats, and social gatherings such as family reunions.

One of the most popular community events held at Foxhall in pre-pandemic times was Afternoon in the Country, a wine and food festival occurring the first weekend in November. For now, visitors are encouraged to check the website or call ahead to determine available activities and events.

FUTUREPLANS

Developer Harrison Merrill purchased the property in the early 2000s as part of a master plan to develop that part of Douglas County for a medical and technology hub, Tyler says. In addition to the multi-acre Foxhall Resort with its accommodations and urban sporting club, lots would be developed for residential use, upscale homes tucked away on the sprawling hillsides. Both visitors and residents may use the property and all its features.

“The big plan is the residential side,” says Tyler.

Foxhall’s accommodations are expected to expand from 87 rooms to 150 rooms and a Westin Hotel will emerge on the front road in 2024.

Regardless of the resort’s future plans, for visitors and residents alike Foxhall remains an oasis far from the madding crowds.

“It’s a unique property because there are the flatlands but there are also the highlands,” says Tyler. “It’s truly a lovely place.”

foxhallresort.com

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DeSoto Editor Cheré Coen thought she was lost driving to Foxhall Resort for this story and was amazed at the pristine beauty of the remote Georgia property.

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WALK ON THE GHOST SIDE

By Rich Warren

Photography courtesy of Mystic Ghost Rides and Haunted Holly Springs

GET YOUR HAUNTED FIX
THIS MONTH WITH GHOST
TOURS OF HISTORIC
PROPERTIES — AND EVEN
ONE ON THE WATER!

When autumn arrives and the temperatures cool, it's time to get out for a spirited walk. And we mean literally. Here are five premiere ghost walks — well, one happens on a boat — taking place this October.



BACKBEAT TOURS

When Backbeat Tours started offering walking tours of Memphis in 2006, the company focused mainly on the city's music scene. However, hearing stories of local hauntings, they decided to offer ghost tours, as well. These two-hour tours operate year-round, covering 2.5 miles in the city's South Main Historic District which, according to manager Meagan May, was once a cemetery frequently visited by "Resurrection Men," AKA grave robbers who dug up bodies for use as cadavers in a nearby medical college. May credits those robbers for the lingering "disturbed souls" that still roam the area.

Two well-known stops on the tour include the Orpheum Theater, haunted by 12-year-old Mary who was so excited by the performance she saw in the 1920s that she ran outside and was struck and killed by a passing trolley. Mary, a lover of musicals with braided hair and a white dress, has been seen frequently through the years by both performers and audience members.

Another stop is Earnestine and Hazel's, nowadays a dive bar and burger joint that was once a notorious brothel where several murders took place. Upstairs, a nasty spirit known only as "The Red-Haired Woman" still lingers in the room where she worked. While conducting a tour in that room several years ago, May had her ponytail yanked — hard — in full sight of tour-goers. Backbeat no longer visits Earnestine and Hazel's, and that's just fine with May.

HISTORICAL HAUNTS GHOST TOURS

Historical Haunts Ghost Tours also offers walking tours of the South Main area of Memphis, but in addition, they offer a Haunted Memphis Bus Tour and a Haunted Pub Crawl.

The bus tour makes a stop outside the Woodruff-Fontaine House Museum, where the spirit of Mollie Woodruff still mourns the loss of her husband and baby, leaving impressions on the bed covers in her bedroom that reappear after they've been smoothed out. The final stop on the Pub Crawl is the infamous Earnestine and Hazel's, giving visitors the chance to experience the haunted interior.

Owner Stephen Guenther takes pride in the fact that he and his team have personally vetted many of the haunted locations on their tours with paranormal investigations using recording devices to pick up ghostly voices as well as motion and vibration detectors in addition to devices that measure electromagnetic fields. Among his many personal experiences, he's had an interaction with the "Haunted Jukebox" at Earnestine and Hazel's, which over the years has started spontaneously playing songs based on conversations taking place inside the bar. Once, a gathering of women celebrating a recent divorce were greeted with Tammy Wynette's "D-I-V-O-R-C-E." Another time, people discussing James Brown suddenly heard "I Feel Good" erupting from the jukebox. In Guenther's case, an investigator asked the spirits if it was true that singer Wilson Pickett had composed a song inside the establishment. Suddenly, their devices started blinking and beeping, and the jukebox began playing one of Pickett's tunes.

GHOSTS OF TUPELO'S PAST

L. Sydney Fisher, author of several volumes of paranormal thrills and supernatural suspense, leads a tour called The Ghosts of Tupelo's Past on weekend evenings in October. The 90-minute, one-mile tour makes stops outside such haunted Tupelo locations as The Lyric Theater, where a ghost known as Antoine walks around humming, stealing keys, and moving things around.

The paranormal activity there may be due to the large number of people who died inside the building after a tornado in 1936 killed more than 200 of Tupelo's residents. As one of the few large buildings left standing, the theater was used as a makeshift morgue and hospital with surgeries and amputations taking place on the stage — the theater's popcorn popper was even used to sterilize the surgical instruments.

Fisher, who describes herself as a "sensitive," a clairvoyant medium who can see and hear spirits, has sensed another volatile ghost in the Lyric's set construction area who's been known to throw boards across the room.

"I won't take people in there because I don't want anyone getting hurt," she says.

Midway through the tour, a stop is made at the Nautical Whimsey restaurant, where another ghost named Buster, perhaps the spirit of a young Confederate soldier may be lurking after having fought in the 1864 Civil War battle near Tupelo. During the stop, tour-goers can order seasonal cocktails named for Tupelo's ghosts.

HAUNTED HOLLY SPRINGS

According to local lawyer Phillip Knecht, who leads two-hour, two-mile walking tours of Haunted Holly Springs during weekends in October, almost all the old houses in town have at least one or more spirits in residence. Entries inside these homes vary from year to year, but almost always a stop is made at the local Yellow Fever Martyrs Church and Museum, memorializing the more than 300 Holly Springs residents felled by the epidemic in 1878. According to Knecht, the mannequins there representing yellow fever victims have been known to change locations after the museum closes.

Other popular stops include Featherstone Place, where the ghost of Lizzie McEwen, an exceedingly mean-spirited victim of the epidemic, is frequently seen, always wearing a distinctive brooch. At Linden Hill, the ghost of Beulah Cawthorn frequently moves things around — she was a mentally



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disturbed young woman once found hovering over her parents' bed with a hatchet.

Knecht himself is spooked by the many paranormal activities inside Graceland Too, the former home of the late Paul MacLeod, an Elvis Presley fanatic who collected hundreds of pieces of Elvis memorabilia during his lifetime. On one tour there in previous years, an unplugged lamp turned itself on, frightening many participants to abandon the tour. Such paranormal activities inside the homes aren't uncommon, Knecht said, but his guests shouldn't expect them.

"Ghosts don't perform on command," he says.

MYSTIC GHOST RIDES

Mystic Ghost Rides on Mississippi's Gulf Coast takes a new approach to telling spooky stories. This October, Jenny Johnston, also known as "Mystic Molly," begins her second year of taking passengers on a 25-foot-long pontoon boat ride leaving from Bay Saint Louis and passing through Bayou Caddy to Bryan Bayou and back. If a bayou boat ride doesn't sound particularly spine-chilling, Johnston will quickly convince you otherwise.

"It's like the Addams Family out on the bayou," she says. "There were lots of deaths and torture taking place there."

Johnston says she tells true stories "with a splash of fiction," and since she dons a costume, plays spooky music, and tells her stories with dramatic embellishments, she promises "a little bit of theater" during the one-hour ride.

Stories include "The Curse of the Old Oak Tree," "Reptilians in the Devil's Swamp," and "Pirate Jean Lafitte and the Curse of the Lost Gold." Johnston adjusts her stories seasonally with a "Creepy Christmas" tour in December and for Valentine's Day she'll tell "The Untold Voodoo Love Story of Jean Lafitte." Expect to hear the "fractured fairy tale of Peter Rabbit" during the Kryptic Bunny tours during the week of Easter.

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.....
 Ohio-based travel writer Rich Warren travels the country and the world looking for offbeat and off-the-beaten-path stories. He is a graduate of the Elf School of Reykjavik and can tell you what the Amish wear to the beach in Florida.



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French Hermit Oyster Company

By Melissa Corbin | Photography courtesy of Coastal Mississippi

Couple finds love – and a new business that inspires and employs others – with a unique oyster harvest in Coastal Mississippi.

Once upon a time on Coastal Mississippi's Deer Island lived a reclusive Frenchman named Jean Guillhot, or "The Hermit of Deer Island" as most called him. The emigré literally sang French songs for his supper as he paddled toward tourists aboard the Sailfish delivering his weekly supply of oysters. Certain legends evolved from his life, the most savory being the French Hermit Oyster Company founded by Mike and Anita Arguelles in 2019.

When the Arguelles first met in the early '90s, their passion sprang from the very deep cups and flat tops that now make their living.

Back in the day, Mike enjoyed a hobby of tonging (using a large specialized tool to harvest wild oysters) off the

coast of his hometown of Biloxi, Mississippi. He hauled his catch up to Memphis, and served his wild harvests off the back of his truck, often educating naysayers about the oysters he presented.

"Everyone wanted shrimp back then. I'm from Memphis, and didn't really know much about them," Anita says of Mike's oysters, remembering she always took the smallest off his tray out of politeness.

The couple married in 1996.

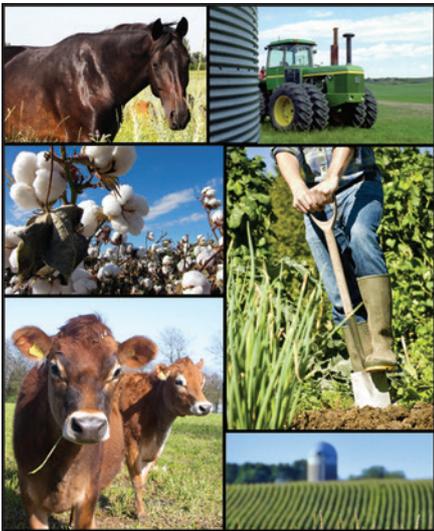
Employed by the University of Southern Mississippi at the Marine Education Center, Anita is no stranger to aquaculture. The couple also owns a marine contracting business which developed the infrastructure for a Deer Island

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Chef Austin Sumrall with French Hermit Oyster



Chef Austin Sumrall with French Hermit Oyster

oyster farm commissioned by the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) which offers oyster farming classes.

So, when Mike brought home the perfect oyster measuring 2 3/4-inches x 1-inch she remembers thinking, “This is the best thing I’ve ever eaten fresh. This is a business, not a hobby.”

The Arguilleses took the MDMR class and were among the first to graduate, but more importantly, the first to actually begin farming oysters for profit.

Now in its third season, French Hermit has found a groove as smooth as the very oysters this Coastal Mississippi farm produces. On a recent trip to the Deer Island farm with Biloxi still within sight, Mike pointed to floating cages in approximately six feet of water, a depth optimal for the essential sunlight the oyster’s diet of phytoplankton requires to grow.

“They need to stay close to the surface to yield a large crop,” he says. Combing over the thousands of weekly mature oysters, he pulls one from what looks like a giant lapidary.

“We get them as seed 30,000 per 5 quarts pale,” he says. “We sort them in the tumbler and harvest the market-sized ones.”

French Hermit oysters aren’t those rough, huge mounds of aphrodisiacs one typically might associate with mollusks. Free of foulings, these liberated gems can be found instead perched atop beds of artisan salts, or served in their own delicate juices as the crown jewel of a seafood tower in some of the finest restaurants imagined.

To achieve balanced salinity with mild flavor profiles, Mike says that 20-24 parts per thousand (ppt) is the sweet spot, whereas 35 ppt is full salinity, which is way too salty to consume. Meat-to-shell ratio is also a benchmark. He points to a freshly harvested, mature oyster from the Mississippi Sound whose meat spills almost to the edge of its shell.

“That’s what you want,” he says as he shucks his oysters with a pointed knife. Sticking the knife into the shell’s bill while balancing it on a flat surface, he cuts the eye — the muscle attached to both parts of the shell — loose once inside, pops it open, and serves it fresh in the deep cupped bottom shell.

While visitors may opt for a seat at a table, Mike suggests while on the boat to lean over, kissing the top of the oysters meat while sucking it up for good measure, thus saving your shirt from its otherwise likely demise.

Back on land, French Hermit Oyster Company's growth comes with discernment. "We're in new waters so to speak," Anita says.

The couple currently has seven farmers in their collective and expects more graduates from the 2021 class to come aboard for next season. The farmers buy their own seed and business, but all sell under the same process.

"Chefs love this, because of the consistency," she says. "We're selling thousands of oysters per week, so they have a consistent supply with multiple farmers. We have fun with the chefs, the farmers, and most importantly, with one another."

Still within the grips of hurricane season, Anita says the farmers of French Hermit remain in a cone of uncertainty.

"The wind causes a surge damaging the cages," she says. "The ropes break and the cages float away. You've lost your investment when that happens. So, you have to sink your cages during the hurricane. You only have about 24 hours to make that call to sink them. Once the storm is over, there are still days that the water is rough before hooking up the cages and pulling them back up. It's a lot of labor, which affects the cost."

The Arguilleses call French Hermit Oyster Company a "happy accident" but their oysters may now be found in choice restaurants throughout the Southeast, mostly in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee. Their Facebook page updates sales locations featuring the boutique oysters weekly.

Mark your calendars for Oct. 23 when French Hermit partners with Biloxi Shrimp Tours for a special reenactment. The Sailfish's Captain Mike Moore, who is also a French Hermit farmer, joins Mike in singing some of Guillhot's folk songs as they paddle out to meet tourists and regale them of the legendary "Deer Island Hermit."

frenchhermitoyster.co

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Corbin is a Tennessee-based journalist thirsty for stories about the people and places making their corner of the world unique. You can follow her adventures on Instagram @melcorbin.

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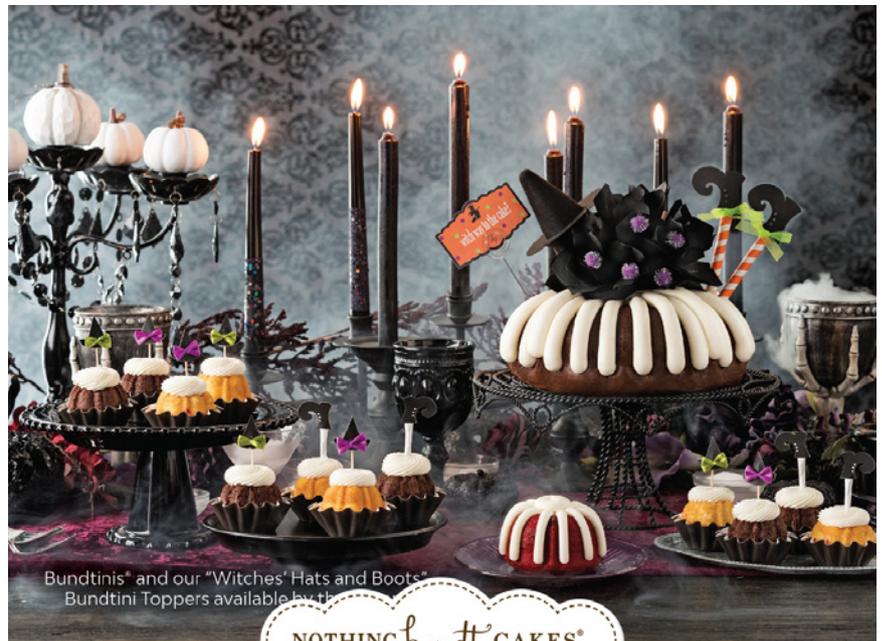
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Lights in The Sky

By Jason Frye | Photography courtesy of Burke County Tourism

UFOs and other nighttime aerial mysteries have plagued the South for decades.

October's chill night air always puts me in the mood for a ghost story. Maybe it was the stack of books I pored over as a kid, reading page upon page of tales of ghosts and specters, haints and witches, and, of course, UFOs and unexplained lights. Maybe it was the stories I heard around the fire at Boy Scout campouts. Or maybe I, like everyone else, wants an answer to the unexplained things around us. I'll save the story about that time I was spooned by a ghost for another issue because I want to talk about UFOs (or UAPs — Unexplained Aerial Phenomena — as they're called now, but we're sticking to the tried-and-true UFO) and weird lights we see across the South.

It must've been seven or eight years ago that I was in Morganton, North Carolina, researching my first travel guidebook when I got to talking about the Brown Mountain Lights with the director of tourism for Burke County, Ed Phillips. Ed and I parsed the details and recounted strange orbs and streaks of light on, around, and above Brown Mountain, just north of town and sightings and stories attributed to everyone from Cherokee and Catawba Native Americans to early settlers to Civil War veterans to whole Boy Scout Troops

68 DeSoto

to photographers for National Geographic, and even one of the most renowned paranormal investigators of our time. We settled on one fact: we'd never seen them.

Fueled by a fantastic meal and a couple of beers, I asked Ed if we could drive up to the overlook for a while and continue the conversation there, with Brown Mountain off in the distance. We did. And it was chilly. Late-summer nights can be cold in the mountains and I was underdressed, so about an hour into our talk, we decided to head back to town. In the middle of packing up our chairs, Ed asked, "Did you see that?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Tell me what you saw."

Ed wore an expression somewhere between wonderment and fear and I knew I had the same look.

There, across the valley, following the ridgeline of Brown Mountain, a yellow orb. It was joined by another. They traced the shape of the mountain, moved up, reversed course.

"That," I said. And chill night air be damned, we unfolded our chairs and sat back down.

For the next 45 minutes we were nearly speechless as we watched those two orbs go back and forth on the mountain,



sometimes hovering hundreds of feet above the ridgeline and peak, sometimes disappearing onto the other side of the ridge. A red orb joined them. They danced. Then they simply rose into the clouds and disappeared.

We were speechless for a few minutes. Then giddy. Then so confounded by what we saw we just got in the car and left. The next morning, I met Ed for breakfast and when I walked into the restaurant, he introduced me to a table full of locals, each one with their own Brown Mountain Lights story to tell.

The Brown Mountain Lights aren't the only such mysterious — possibly otherworldly — recurring lights that appear in the South, they're just the ones I've laid eyes on myself. Sightings of the Marfa Lights over in Texas, the Maco Light in North Carolina, and the Spooklights in Clinch County, Georgia, on the edge of the Okefenokee Swamp are just a few of dozens of phenomena from the Atlantic coast to the mountains of West Texas.

In 2020, most of us were spending a lot of time at home, and tons of sightings of weird lights in the sky were reported. According to data from the National UFO Reporting Center, in Southern states, some 2,113 UFO sightings were reported last year. Sure, some of them are misidentified planets, planes, satellites, meteors, and the like, but many defy explanation. Ghosts? Aliens? Ball lightning or St. Elmo's Fire or a will-o-the-wisp? Maybe. According to an Ipsos poll, 45 percent of Americans believe that UFOs exist and have visited Earth.

Why not? We've sent rovers and satellites to Mars, Venus, the moons of Jupiter and Saturn, even outside of our own solar system, so why wouldn't an intelligent species on another world do the same?

In March of 2021, the Department of Defense was forced to acknowledge dozens of leaked videos showing UFOs — sometimes one, sometimes two, sometimes a swarm of them — appearing on radar screens and weapons systems from navy ships and planes, from Air Force and commercial pilots, and from ground-based radar systems. The day I wrote this story, Canadian Royal Air Force pilots and a commercial airline pilot both reported the same UFO over the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

But if you're looking for a UFO story a little closer to home, I have a pair for you.

Back in 1973, a pair of fishermen from Pascagoula, Mississippi, claim to have been abducted by a UFO. Pascagoula is not far from Gulf Breeze, Florida, where, from the late 1980s to today, there have been loads of UFO sightings, including the famous/infamous/possibly debunked "Gulf Breeze Incident."

Those stories come from fishermen — known tellers of tall tales — and a building contractor known to his friends as a prankster. So how about something from the highest source: Jimmy Carter, 39th president of the United States. In 2005, Carter told GQ Magazine that as he was preparing to give a speech to a Lions Club chapter, he and 25 men saw a UFO in the sky. It approached, changing colors as it did, then flew off into the distance. Too many peanuts? A little nip from someone's flask to shake the pre-speech nerves? Who knows, but if you see President Carter, maybe you can ask him yourself.

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Jason Frye has never been abducted, but there are days he thinks it seems like a better option than work, so he's got his fingers crossed. Follow him on Instagram @beardedwriter where he promises to post pics from inside a UFO just as soon as they come pick him up.



All in the Family

By Kevin Wierzbicki | Photography courtesy of Abraham Rowe

Cedric Burnside comes from a long line of honored musicians to carry on a Mississippi Hill Country blues tradition.

When the words “blues” and “Mississippi” are mentioned in the same sentence, there’s a pretty good chance that the style of music being referenced is the Delta blues, the sort popularized in its early days by players like Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, Elmore James, and John Lee Hooker.

But there’s a distinctly different type of blues that rolls down from the Mississippi Hill Country in the northeastern part of the state. Some of the artists who worked in that sub-genre include Junior Kimbrough, “Mississippi” Fred McDowell, and the great R.L. Burnside. Today, the Mississippi Hill Country blues still resonates from a handful of artists, most notably singer, guitarist, and songwriter Cedric Burnside. Cedric comes from a long line of musicians, including his drummer father Calvin Jackson and his grandfather, R.L. Burnside.

Burnside says he realized early on that he was bound to be a professional blues man.

“As a little kid, six or seven years old, just watching my

Big Daddy (R.L.) and dad and uncles play house parties, I knew this was something I wanted to do for the rest of my life,” says Burnside. “I just loved this music.”

By the age of 13, Cedric was on the road with his Big Daddy, playing drums and beginning to understand that the music was an important way to tell the world what life was like for Black folks in North Mississippi.

Burnside later realized that the Mississippi Hill Country blues carried more significance than just being palatable music done in a certain style.

“I realized it later in life, in my 20s,” Burnside says. “A lady came up to me and she was crying and telling me that the music meant so much to her, that it brought her through hard times. She was so happy to have that music in her life. I knew in my heart that this music was very special, but seeing someone like that react to it really brought it home.”

With similar feelings about Burnside’s work prevailing



for a long time now, it should come as no surprise that Burnside was recently awarded the 2021 National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship. Like his extra-appreciative fan overcoming hardship thanks to his music, earning the award caused Burnside to get a bit of a lump in his throat.

“I’ve been nominated for Grammys and I’ve won a bunch of awards,” Burnside says. “But this right here is really special; I’m the youngest recipient and it means a lot to me. It means a lot to me that they look at me as a torchbearer of this musical style. It’s heartwarming. I’m glad to know that in 42 years that I’ve reached people that way. I’m honored that people notice.”

Burnside’s latest album is getting plenty of notice too. Recorded at Royal Studios in Memphis during the lockdown, “I Be Trying” rings true with the sound of Mississippi Hill Country blues on cuts like “The World Can Be So Cold” where Burnside’s words are accompanied only by his acoustic guitar playing, the reflection on personal change found in the title cut, and “Pretty Flowers” and “Step In” where rhythm and melody remind of where the music is ultimately from: Africa.

One of the sidemen on “I Be Trying” is Reed Watson, Burnside’s drummer and primary collaborator.

“Playing music with Cedric is what I imagine a cleanse must feel like,” Watson says. “All the negativity, pretense and nonsense that surrounds the music business is washed away when you are on stage with him; he doesn’t engage in that world. What Cedric does is make beautiful music conjured up from some place deep within his soul. All these folks in the South are trying to figure out how Hank Williams or Johnny

Cash did something, which is fine, but Cedric is digging back to Africa. He’s a truly unique musician with something to say and I’m glad that people are starting to give him his flowers while he’s relatively young.”

Speaking of young, there’s a whole new generation of Burnside’s set to carry on the family tradition. Burnside has three daughters, all of whom play drums and guitar. His youngest, 15-year-old Portrika, sings on one song on the new album, appropriately enough the title cut “I Be Trying.” Burnside expects that the girls will to some extent follow in his footsteps, especially Portrika.

“It was her first time but I doubt it’ll be the last. Portrika did a great job and she likes getting on stage and singing too,” he says.

Burnside will no doubt offer plenty of guidance for his offspring as their careers develop, some of which will be passed down from what grandfather R.L. Burnside told him.

“You can go through all kinds of situations, good and bad, but you have to learn how to get through those times the best way you can,” he says. “We’re always gonna go through hard times, but you gotta survive.”

cedricburnside.net

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Kevin Wierzbicki often travels to hear music and he’s heard the blues played live in places like Memphis and the Mississippi Delta as well as in several nations in Africa. He loves it when artists like Cedric Burnside help him understand that it’s all connected.

in good spirits | CATHERINE'S REVENGE





A Haunting Tribute

By Karon Warren | Photography courtesy of Angie Webb Creative

Spirited cocktail honors the Civil War ghost that haunts the Roswell, Ga., restaurant.

Coming from a successful popular resort restaurant in Vail, Colorado, Chef Kevin Nelson searched for just the right place to open his next venture. Nelson didn't want a strip mall location, preferring something unique. When he learned of the history of the former Public House restaurant in Roswell, Georgia, a short drive north of Atlanta, he felt it was his style.

"We're into history, and we wanted something with character that would differentiate us from others," says Nelson. But the building for his A-Street restaurant came with something unexpected.

Built in 1839 and rebuilt in 1854, the building originally served as a commissary for workers in the Roswell Mill. Once used as a Union hospital during the Civil War, it was rumored a forbidden romance formed between a 17-year-old Union soldier named Michael and a local nurse named Catherine. Following Michael's death at the hands of Confederate soldiers, the story states that Catherine committed suicide.

Through the years, many workers and visitors to the building have claimed to hear the couple dancing in the loft, moving objects and shifting through rooms. Even Nelson says it's possible he spotted one of the ghostly residents.

"I was taking photos with my phone in the storage area upstairs," he says. "When I turned on the flash, I could see an orb moving on the screen. I'm a skeptic, so I thought, 'That's weird.' But I couldn't explain it away."

Instead, Nelson decided to honor the ethereal residents.

"I needed to develop a drink menu and wanted to do something that spoke to the ghost stories and the paranormal history of the space," he says. "I knew Catherine's story and that seemed to be the most popular one, so I wanted to use her name."

Nelson describes Catherine's Revenge as "a little more potent" with gin and absinthe in the drink, but it's a lighter, refreshing recipe with cucumber and yuzu. Nelson also plans to make a cocktail honoring Michael, which he hopes to introduce by Halloween.

"Catherine's Revenge is becoming a signature cocktail for us so it's hitting the mark that we are enjoying being a part of," says Nelson. "We'll probably play a little more on it as we go further down the road."

astreetroswell.com

Catherine's Revenge Cocktail

*1 1/2 ounces gin
1/4 ounce absinthe
1/2 ounce yuzu juice
1/4 ounce ginger juice
1/2 ounce simple syrup
2 ounces cucumber soda
1-2 ounces club soda
Fresh sliced cucumber for garnish*

Directions:

In a cocktail shaker, combine ice, gin, absinthe, yuzu, ginger, simple syrup, and cucumber soda. Give it a quick shake and pour into a highball glass. Top with club soda to taste, and garnish with a thin slice of cucumber.

This makes a nice, light refreshing drink that is great any time.

As a quick alternative to cucumber soda, muddle four thin slices of cucumber with the yuzu, ginger, and simple syrup. Add ice, gin and absinthe, and shake well. Strain into an ice-filled glass, top with 3 to 4 ounces of club soda and stir. Garnish with a thin slice of cucumber.

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A graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi, Karon Warren remembers tales her mother told of her own grandmother haunting her home for years before the house was torn down and rebuilt. There was no mention of honoring her with a cocktail.

exploring events | OCTOBER

Hernando Farmers Market

Saturdays through October

Courthouse Square

Hernando, MS

8:00am - 1:00pm

Voted Mississippi's Favorite Farmers Market and 13th favorite in the nation by American Farmland Trust. This Mississippi Certified Market encourages & promotes access to fresh local foods. For more information call 662-429-9092 or visit cityofhernando.org/farmersmarket.

Unknown Child Exhibit

Through December 31

DeSoto County Museum

Hernando, MS

The Unknown Child Exhibit honors the memory of 1.5 million children who perished in the Holocaust. Stunning black-and-white photographs, interactive images and holograms of the faces of the lost children are part of the display. For more information visit desotomuseum.org or call 662-429-8852.

Grammy Museum Mississippi presents MTV Turns 40

Through June 2022

Grammy Museum Mississippi

Cleveland, MS

For more information visit grammymuseumms.org or call 662-441-0100.

3D & Fiber Art

October 1 - November 6

DeSoto Arts Council

Hernando, MS

Free Admission! For more information visit desotoarts.com or call 662-404-3341.

Charity Golf Tournament benefitting House of Grace

October 7

Hernando Golf & Racquet Club

Hernando, MS

11:00am - 5:00pm

Play golf for a cause! All proceeds go to help The House of Grace Domestic Violence Shelter. For more information call 662-429-0315 or visit houseofgrace.org.

37th Annual Octoberfest

October 8 - 9

Downtown Cleveland, MS

Don't miss this MBN sanctioned Barbecue competition, featuring a Friday night street dance, live music, arts and crafts, kids areas and more all day Saturday. For more information visit octoberfestms.com.

Water Tower 10K

October 9

Hernando Town Square

8:00am - 2:00pm

The 10-kilometer race, which will start in the heart of the city at Hernando's Town Square, features a course that will wind through the city's scenic, tree-lined streets. For more information call 662-429-9088 or visit Facebook.com/hernandowatertower10k.

Buddy Guy & Christone "Kingfish" Ingram

October 9

Horseshoe Casino

Robinsonville, MS

8:00pm

For information visit tickestmaster.com.

Martina McBride

October 14

Bologna Performing Arts Center

Cleveland, MS

7:30pm

For more information visit bolognapac.com or call 662-846-4625.

29th Mississippi Delta Tennessee Williams Festival

October 14 - 16

Clarksdale, MS

A hybrid in-person/online event will be presented with in-person presentations outdoors on the grounds of the Cutrer Mansion broadcast over the festival's streaming platforms available for all programming. For more information call Jen Waller at 662-645-3555 or email jwaller@coahomacc.edu.

Delta Hot Tamale Festival

October 14 - 16
Greenville, MS

The Delta Hot Tamale Festival is a fun-filled three-day event that celebrates local and regional artists, musicians, and tamale makers as well as some of the South's most influential chefs and writers. For more information visit mainstreetgreenville.com or call 662-378-3121.

Deep Blues Festival

October 14 - 17
Clarksdale, MS

For tickets and schedule of events visit deepbluesfest.com or email deepbluesfest@gmail.com.

36th Annual Natchez Balloon Festival

October 14 - 17
Natchez, MS

The Natchez Balloon Festival, established in 1986, is a weekend of hot-air balloons and outstanding live music. The festival site is located in historic downtown Natchez in the parklike grounds of the columned historic home Rosalie. For more information visit Natchezballoonfestival.com or call 601-442-2500.

Sawyer Brown & Little Texas

October 15
Crossroads Arena
Corinth, MS

7:00pm
For ticket information visit crossroadsarena.com or ticketmaster.com.

Young Frankenstein The Musical

October 15 - 31
Panola Playhouse
Sardis, MS

For more information visit panolaplayhouse.com/on-stage or call 662-487-3975.

Summer Jam:Benefitting John 3:16 Ministries

October 16
Landers Center Theater
Southaven, MS

6:00pm - 9:00pm
Featuring Crowder, Rend Collective and Andrew Ripp. For more information visit landerscenter.com or call 662-470-2131.

The Marvelous Wonderettes

October 21 - 24
Landers Center
Southaven, MS

For more information visit dftonline.org or call 662-470-2131.

Southaven Springfest

October 26 - 30
Snowden Grove Park
Southaven, MS

Great entertainment, extraordinary carnival midway including a variety of kiddie, major and spectacular rides, games, great concessions, live entertainment and more. In addition, Springfest will once again host the State of Mississippi Barbecue Championship sanctioned by Memphis Barbecue Network and KCBS. For more information call 662-280-2489 or visit southaven.org.

The Greatest Hits of Foreigner

November 6
Landers Center
Southaven, MS

8:00pm
For more information visit landerscenter.com or call 662-280-9120.

Winning the Golden Chicken

By Jan Risher



Gary Risher, the writer's father, is in the cap with the "F" on it, accepting the Golden Chicken for the giant win over Morton in 1976. Her younger brother, Robin Risher, is in the bottom left corner of the photo. She believes, if you look closely, that her dad is looking at her little brother.

A golden chicken defined my childhood. Not just any chicken, mind you — the Golden Chicken.

Back in those days, I didn't know enough to understand that the Golden Chicken tradition was an oddity. I do not possess the ability to convey the import of the Golden Chicken throughout my childhood and adolescence, but I will tell you that in Scott County, Mississippi, the Golden Chicken was the gospel, the axis on which the world kept a 'spinning, the basis of the way life operated. Whoever won the Forest/Morton football game got to take the beloved Golden Chicken back home for the year.

My dad was Forest High School's head football coach. In my mind, ages 6-16, whether or not my family had food on the table for the next year, whether we were a joyful household or a mopey one was all wrapped up in the Golden Chicken. To paraphrase Dani Rojas in the TV show "Ted Lasso," the Golden Chicken was life.

Everyone I know from those days can still recall the exact scores of Forest/Morton games — 22-20 and 10-7 stick out. Months after the football games, when the rivals would meet in basketball and the games got close, whoever won that year's Golden Chicken would, with vim and vigor, remind the opposing team of what really mattered. The football team would start chanting the score of the most recent game. The cheers had specific rhythms to go with the different scores. I can still hear deep voices saying "22 to 20" over and over, reverberating in the gyms.

Eventually, our whole side would join in. It was bliss.

Except when it wasn't.

In the dark years when we didn't win the Golden Chicken, their team would start the chants — like daggers to the heart and a reminder of the joy lost in Mudville.

Thankfully, we won the Golden Chicken most years.

In fact, for all of my growing-up years, the Bearcats had winning seasons.

With little success, I've tried to find common ground with other coach's kids who may care or have cared about a team to absurd lengths. I've wondered if people simply have a lot more to think about now, as compared to the long hours and sleepless nights I spent full of concern for the fate of the Golden Chicken.

These days, I attribute much of my positive outlook on life to the fact that the Forest Bearcats, the boys in red and blue, knew what to do under Friday night lights, with my dad strutting up and down the sidelines as their guide. I could hear him from the bleachers. My dad has one volume — the one he used from the sidelines to communicate with quarterbacks above the marching band and the roar of the crowd (The quarterback heard him just fine, thank you very much).

Last year, my dad, now 80 and still living in Forest, was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. His volume and energy have leveled off to what most would consider still to be rather extreme.

Aside from the way I feel about immediate family, I've never cared about anything as much as I cared about football back then. Everybody I loved cared as much as I did. We were a community. We were in it together, surrounded by care, a common enemy and, largely, living in a bubble of love.

Winning that game was really all that mattered. I wish I could feel it again. I wish for just one more Friday night with the most important thing in the world being that Forest beat Morton and bringing that Golden Chicken home.

.....
Jan Risher is a freelance writer who lives along the banks of the Vermilion River in Lafayette, Louisiana. She still loves the Bearcats. Contact her at janrisher@gmail.com.



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