

Wonderful
WEST VIRGINIA

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Outside back cover: Spring comes to the woods of Nicholas County. Frank Ceravalo

About our cover: Amout Hyde Jr. created this dramatic color isolation image from the accouterments of a Civil War reenactor. To read about a fascinating piece of the state's Civil War history, turn to page 4.

Contents page photo: Baby bluebirds herald the arrival of spring and make for great birdwatching at the New River Birding and Nature Festival. Steve Shaluta



West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
www.wvdnr.gov

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FEATURES

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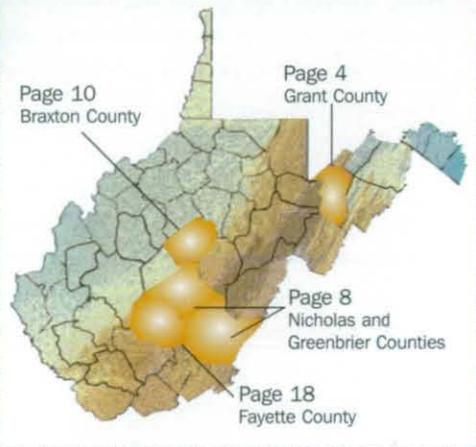
In 1863, under the supervision of the dashing Col. James Mulligan, the Chicago Irish Brigade constructed one of the best built and most impregnable forts in the Appalachians. BY KENNETH L. CARVELL

8 For the Animals: Tiger Mountain Refuge John and Myreda Forga's spontaneous response to the plight of an African lynx later led to their founding an organization that rescues big cats and other exotic animals. Tiger Mountain Refuge also works to educate the public about "novelty pets." BY CYNTHIA MATTISON

10 The Legend of Strange Creek Braxton County has a legend all its own, rooted in local history but shrouded in mystery, about a young man who died in the wilderness and a creek that forever keeps his memory alive. BY CAROL ANN GILLESPIE

18 Spring Spectacular: The New River Gorge Birding Festival In May, an array of spring migrants and a week's worth of exciting activities draw birders from across the country to this renowned scenic area. Find out why it is rapidly becoming known as a birding hotspot. BY SCOTT SHALAWAY

24 Tale of the Elk We're pleased to present but a brief sample of the captivating escapades and anecdotes included in this popular book by outdoor lover Bill Byrne, who wrote about the Elk River at the turn of the twentieth century. BY W. E. R. BYRNE



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| Welcome

The Places We Know

When I answered my telephone, the voice I heard was immediately apologetic. I don't mean to complain, said Dr. William Brown of Huntington, but there's something I have to tell you. Dr. Brown went on to say that he grew up in Sutton and knew the area like the back of his hand. "The photograph on page 30 of the January 2008 issue is not the Elk River, it's the Birch River," he told me, "and it had to have been taken from the Herold Bridge." Dr. Brown said he could tell it was the Birch by the way the river forked to the left, and he pointed out the location of the Johnson campground. I thanked him and told him we would follow up with a correction in a future issue.

I am certain that many West Virginians who have hunted, fished, and hiked our abundant forests and riverbanks have similar, intimate knowledge of the places they hold dear. To the casual observer, a photograph of a scenic, tree-lined river might depict any river in West Virginia. But if you've grown up beside them, you know their banks, their bends. Even from afar, as in a photograph, you recognize them, like the familiar face of an old friend, untouched by time.

Before he hung up, Dr. Brown also gave me a tip. Take I-79 north to Route 19 south, go about two to two and a half miles, then take a right onto Herold Road. Traveling this byway is like stepping back into the West Virginia of the 1940s, Dr. Brown said. It is wonderful and worth the trip.

Perhaps reading this month's excerpts from *Tale of the Elk* (or better yet, read the whole book!) would be a good primer for such a drive. Bill Byrne writes eloquently of the people and places of his beloved Elk River in an era that is now a part of history. What better way to fill a March afternoon than to curl up in a favorite chair with a steaming mug of tea and Bill Byrne for company?

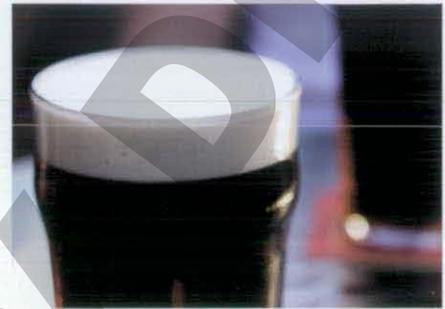
Whether by memory, the written word, or a wintry trek, this month may you spend a quiet moment and return to the woods and waters that are part of your history, to the special places you know so well.



Editor Sheila McEntee

David Fattaleh

| Reader Picks



Mountain State Brewing Company

We think Mountain State Brewing Company in Thomas serves up the best beer in the state. Started in 2005 by two brothers from West Virginia, this little microbrewery delivers big flavor. Our favorite brews are the dark, creamy Miner's Daughter Oatmeal Stout and the hoppy Seneca Indian Pale Ale.

Mountain State's beer is available at a number of restaurants and bars around West Virginia. They also have a cozy pub attached to the brewery in Thomas. The pub features a beautiful, handcrafted stone and copper bar and often hosts live music. It is a great place to unwind after a day of skiing in the Canaan Valley area or to celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

For more information, visit the Web site: www.mountainstatebrewing.com.

The Taylor Family
Charleston, WV

Note: Reader Picks should be no more than 120 words. Be sure to send contact information for your pick and your name and town. E-mail readerpicks@cannongraphicsinc.com, or write to Wonderful West Virginia Magazine Reader Picks, c/o WVDNR, Bldg. 3, Rm 663, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. E., State Capitol Complex, Charleston, WV 25305.

Sheila McEntee
sheila@cannongraphicsinc.com

| Letters to the Editor

More Places, More Small Towns

I am a subscriber and a fan of *Wonderful West Virginia* magazine. I own a guesthouse and campground near Mt. Storm (www.abramscreek.com) and frequently leave copies of your magazine around my guesthouse for out-of-towners to read. I would love it if each month your magazine featured about five or six pages of simply color photos of various beautiful places throughout the state (about 20 to 25 different photos and places, each with location in text below photo). I just think that the state has so much to offer and your magazine, in its current format, covers so little—much room for improvement on this topic....

Vincent Lombardi
Elk Garden, WV

I always enjoy reading your magazine. I was thinking that you could put a section in your monthly issue about small towns such as Clay, Webster Springs, Craigsville, Rainelle, White Sulphur Springs, and others. You could put history and a lot of pictures. Thank you.

Zachary Kiser
Charleston, WV

Many thanks for your good suggestions—we will certainly consider them. Many readers who responded to our recent survey also expressed interest in more articles on small towns. Look for those in future issues.

Kudos for State Parks

My wife and I have spent a lot of weekends at the different West Virginia state parks.

Our anniversary is March 1, and we try to spend a weekend and a few days near that time at a state park. Last year we were at the Blackwater Falls Lodge and it was snowing when we arrived and still snowing when we left. We had a room overlooking the ravine into the Blackwater River. This was exceptionally beautiful with the drifting snow. We were able to talk with many of the employees and the park manager. He took the time to share some things about the park and talk with us about what we liked about the parks

To all the workers at the state parks, keep up the good work.

Marvin Wilson
Martinsburg, WV

| Photo Assignment Reader Submissions



Each year we receive hundreds of photo submissions from readers. Sadly, space limitations prevent us from publishing many of the beautiful photographs we review. From time to time we would like to turn the Photo Assignment department into a mini-Gallery for reader photos. We hope you enjoy this first selection.

Two young bucks
Photographed by Kara Board of
Weirton, West Virginia



Irish-Built Stronghold:

HISTORIC FORT MULLIGAN

By Kenneth L. Carvell

Between August and December 1863, the men of the Chicago Irish Brigade (23rd Illinois Volunteers), under the supervision of Col. James A. Mulligan, built a strategic fort at Petersburg in Grant County to serve as a central point for Federal operations in several West Virginia counties. The masterfully constructed, earthen Fort Mulligan, which has been restored in recent years, and the brigade of Irishmen who built it, compose an interesting chapter in our state's Civil War history.

The men of the Chicago Irish Brigade were among a wave of Irish immigrants who were quick to enlist in the Federal army immediately after the fall of Fort Sumter. These men were conspicuously loyal to their new homeland and its Constitution, a document with no equivalent in their native land. Indeed, it is estimated that more than 175,000 Irishmen served in the Federal army.

The Chicago Irish Brigade was mustered-in in the spring of 1861 at Kane's Distillery in Chicago. In September, it moved to St. Louis, then Jefferson City, and finally to Lexington, in an effort to keep Missouri from seceding from the Union. At the Battle of Lexington, Col. Mulligan was captured and held prisoner until an exchange could be arranged.

In 1862, the Irish Brigade was deployed to western Virginia to protect the counties between the northern and southern lines. Their mission was to stabilize these counties and free them from the depredations of frequent raids from both sides. After being stationed in Clarksburg and Parkersburg, the Irish Brigade was moved to the present-day Eastern Panhandle, primarily to protect the South Branch of the Potomac Valley, an area of vital importance to both armies.

To the Union, defending this valley was critical. Here, Confederate forces could make swift raids on the B & O Railroad, which tied the east and west together and brought much-needed food, supplies, weaponry, and soldiers for the Federal army. To the Confederates, control of the area was equally important. The South Branch Valley was their stockyard. It offered dependable supplies of cattle, horses, and hogs. In addition, there were many young men of military age whom the Confederacy hoped to conscript for their cause.

Indeed, the South Potomac Valley provided a major jumping-off point for raids by both the north and south. It was a place for the northern unit, known as the "Home Guard," and Confederate units, such as McNeill's and Gilmore's rangers, to forage and recruit young men for their respective causes.

The Irish Brigade was assigned the difficult task of establishing order in present-day Mineral, Grant, Hardy, and Pendleton counties and controlling the frequent, devastating, and demoralizing guerrilla raids by Col. John Imboden and McNeill's Rangers. Federal soldiers stationed in this area had a difficult time, since bushwhackers were common.

Raiding parties would come screaming out of obscure hollows and surprise them in abrupt attacks.

Possibly as a result of the devastating Jones/Imboden Raid of late April and May of 1863, which wreaked havoc throughout much of northern West Virginia and down through the rich oil fields of Wirt and Ritchie counties, it was decided to build a Union fort at Petersburg. The site selected for the fort was the same site where Maj. Gen. John C. Fremont camped in the spring of 1862 with 20,000 troops.

The digging and other construction work for the fort was done by the Irish Brigade, with the help of cavalry and artillery units from West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Illinois. Over a five-month period, these soldiers performed back-breaking manual labor to construct gun emplacements, walls, bombproof areas, below-ground living quarters, and other structures. There were at least four bombproof areas, which were massive excavations covered with heavy logs and a thick layer of soil. These were essential for storing ammunition, weapons, and food, and for protecting the troops. The final act was to put an abatis around the outer wall. This consisted of felled trees with their bases against the wall and their branches cut off and sharpened.

Confederate General Jubal Early later declared Fort Mulligan one of the best built and most impregnable forts in the Appalachians. The fort also provided an excellent view of roads leading from Petersburg to Beverly, New Creek, Moorefield, Romney, and Franklin, as well as a clear view of the ford across the South Branch in Petersburg.

The fort construction was carried out under the supervision of Col. Mulligan, a strong leader who was much admired by citizens of both sides living in the counties policed by his men. Even the most loyal Confederate residents respected him for his fairness and impartiality in settling disputes and claims of destruction of property.

Col. Mulligan was well known not only for being fair-minded but also for his physical appearance. Both armies had strict codes of dress for their officers, but most high-ranking officers had idiosyncrasies for which they were particularly known. Col. Mulligan usually dressed in the roughest work pants and butcher boots, but he always wore a bright, emerald-green shirt and usually displayed a much-enlarged copy of his major military decoration around his neck. Despite his rough manner of dress, he could be identified immediately in a group by his charisma, handsome features, and military bearing.

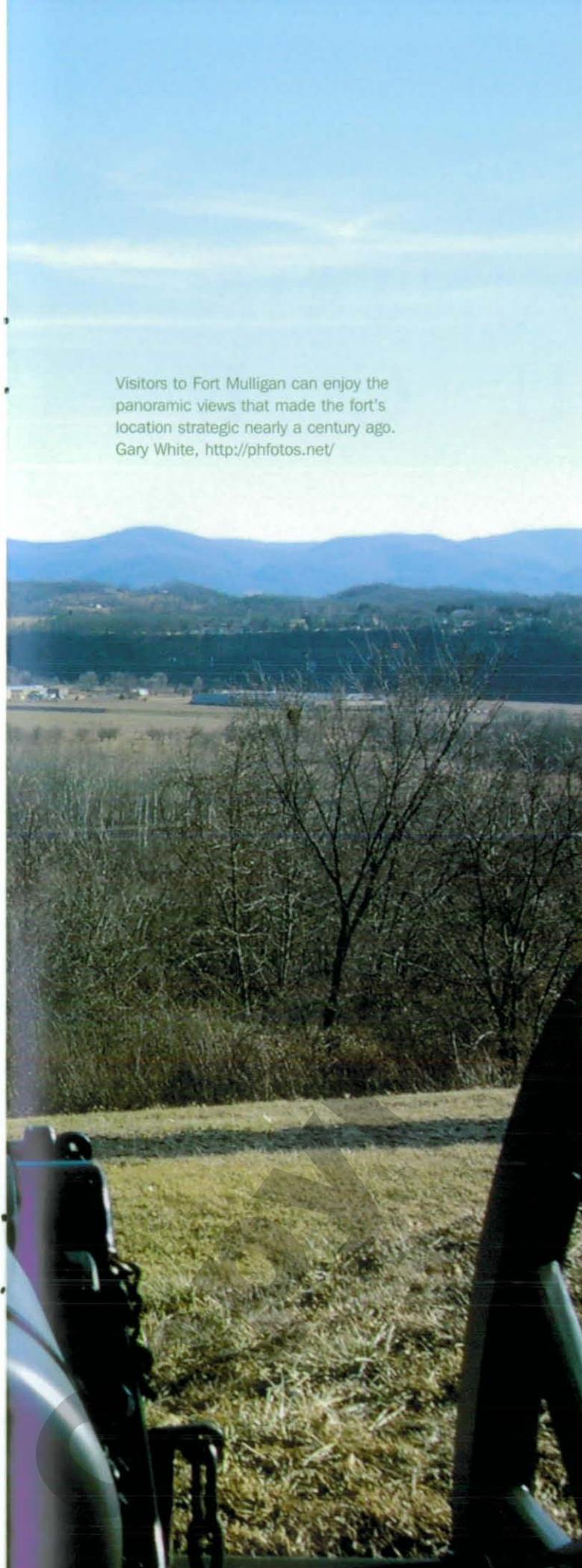
Col. Mulligan returned to New Creek in Mineral County in December of 1863, leaving Col. Joseph Thoburn in charge of his namesake fort. On January 3, 1864, Maj. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's forces moved into the area to capture and destroy the fort, but muddy roads halted their efforts. On January 30, Confederate troops captured 80 Union supply wagons on route to the fort. Col. Thoburn, realizing his supplies were low and knowing of the impending attack, evacuated the fort at night. On January 31, Gen. Early shelled the fort for some time before realizing it was abandoned. His troops destroyed the fort and collapsed the bombproof areas.

In July 1864, the Irish Brigade left Petersburg for the Shenandoah Valley and fought in the battles of Maryland

Heights, Snickers Gap, and Kernstown. It was at Kernstown that now Brevet Gen. Mulligan was killed. Obituaries written at the time of his death say that he had the respect of friends and foe. When he was in command at Keyser, Moorefield, and Petersburg, he had many opportunities to show kindness to captured Confederate soldiers and sympathizers and he always did so. Those who killed him did not know who he was until it was too late. Though they were only discharging their duties as sharpshooters in battle, they regretted what they had done.

The Irish Brigade continued to be active in Virginia campaigns and, in 1865, was transferred to the Army of the James at Richmond. It fought at Bermuda Hundred in





Visitors to Fort Mulligan can enjoy the panoramic views that made the fort's location strategic nearly a century ago. Gary White, <http://phfotos.net/>

March 1865 and at Hachers Run and Petersburg. The brigade then pursued Lee's army until the surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1865.

In 1993, the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS) acquired the six-acre Fort Mulligan site in a gift from William G. VanMeter. In 1999, this group merged with the Civil War Preservation Trust. The combined organizations began working with the South Branch Valley Civil War Society, Inc.; McNeill's Rangers Camp #582; the Sons of Confederate Veterans; and West Virginia Infantry Camp 7, Sons of Union Veterans to restore Fort Mulligan.

The groups worked diligently to clear the overgrown site, which now features walking paths and trails, as well as reconstructed artillery emplacements, cannons, winter huts with canvas shelter cloths for roofs and chimneys, and floors made from bricks obtained from a local church that burned during the war. In addition, the fort site still affords the same spectacular vistas that originally led to the fort's strategic placement.

Local citizens have preserved the magnificent and renowned work of the Chicago Irishmen, who fought to protect the citizens of today's Eastern Panhandle from the ravages of bushwhackers, raiders, and others who terrorized these communities during the Civil War.

For more Fort Mulligan history and a walking tour of the site, visit www.grantcountypress.com/fort-mulligan.html.

A longtime and popular contributor to Wonderful West Virginia, historian and retired West Virginia University professor Dr. Kenneth L. Carvell writes from his home in Morgantown.

Fort Mulligan Day

History comes alive with Union and Confederate encampments, blacksmith and other craft demonstrations, period music, and more at the second annual Fort Mulligan Day, to be held May 31, 2008, from 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM at Fort Mulligan. An evening tour of the site by lantern light is also featured. The event is sponsored by several historic preservation organizations and individuals to raise funds for mowing and upkeep of the Fort Mulligan site. For more information, call Kenneth R. Shobe at 304.257.1313 or contact Sarah Moomau at www.forthillmotel.com.

TIGER MOUNTAIN REFUGE

Though it has been some years since panthers and cougars roamed the dense, virgin forests of West Virginia, big cats of another kind have found a home in the quiet woods of Nicholas County. A tiger, lynx, lion, and leopard, as well as myriad reptiles and birds, which were unwanted, abused, or neglected, are now in the tender care of the Tiger Mountain Refuge.

The only facility of its kind in West Virginia, Tiger Mountain Refuge rescues big cats and other exotic species and gives them a permanent home, complete with a proper diet and veterinary care. The nonprofit organization also conducts educational outreach programs for schools, libraries, and 4-H and other summer camps, as well as at festivals and other events, to raise public awareness about the plight of big cats and other exotics in captivity.

"The majority of our animals are obtained through the pet industry," says John Forga, codirector with his wife, Myreda, of Tiger Mountain Refuge. "Most of them outgrow their habitats, whether it's a backyard, a basement, or a bathtub. Many of our animals are considered 'novelty pets,' which means they are really cool for a few months until they grow up and/or the owner learns just how much it costs to feed and care for them."

Six years ago, the Forgas attended an auction to buy hamsters and other animals for their pet shop and noticed a small cat walking around in a cage. "We overheard people talking about purchasing, destroying, and mounting the animal," John says. "Myreda bid against them and we purchased Tigger, an African caracal, or lynx, for \$2,000. He was blind, neutered, and declawed, and he was our first rescue."

Since then the Forgas have traveled near and far to rescue exotic animals. Two small alligators were acquired in West Virginia, one having been set loose in Charleston. Jumanji, a 450-pound Bengal tigress, was rescued at five weeks of age from a Missouri zoo after her mother refused to feed her. "She's a little cross-eyed, but she's a perfect girl otherwise," John says.

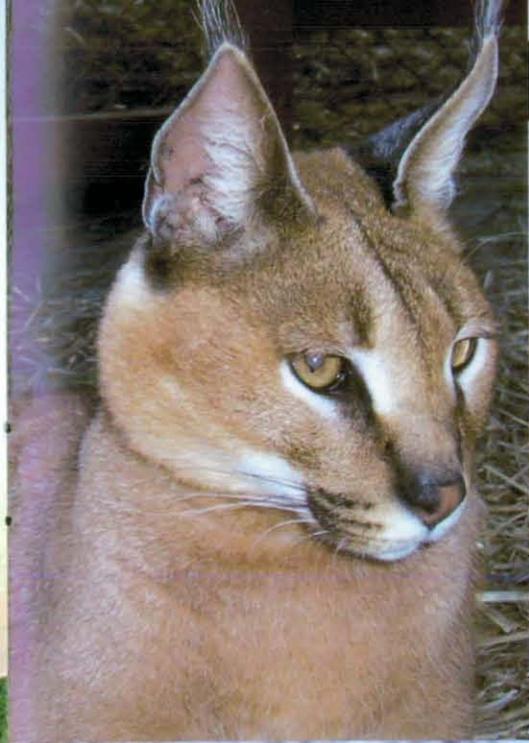
Alexander, a two-year-old, 550-pound African black-mane lion, was rescued from a zoo in Ohio at four and a half weeks of age. "The zoo went out of business," explains John. "Another zoo took Alexander's parents but didn't want the responsibility of caring for him, so we took him."

Alexander is one of the few animals at Tiger Mountain that is "perfect," John



says. Nikita, one of only 460 black leopards in the United States, was going to be put down when she was rescued by the Forgas at six weeks of age from a zoo in Ohio.

The Forgas sometimes find animals for rescue on the Internet; other times they are informed about an animal by individuals or law enforcement officials. Before accepting an animal, the couple determines if they have appro-



prate habitat and the equipment to move it.

"We also have a veterinarian examine the animal and assess its ability to travel," John says. "Due to the nature of our business, we hardly ever receive an animal that is healthy. Most of them have endured a lifetime of abuse and/or are malnourished and suffer great medical problems."

The big cats at Tiger Mountain,

though rescued at a young age and raised in a controlled environment, can never be considered tame, says Myreda. The Forgas interact with them playfully but cautiously. "They're just like people," Myreda adds. "They have good days and bad days and we quickly learn which is which. We use toys to interact with them and if they're having a bad day, we leave them alone."

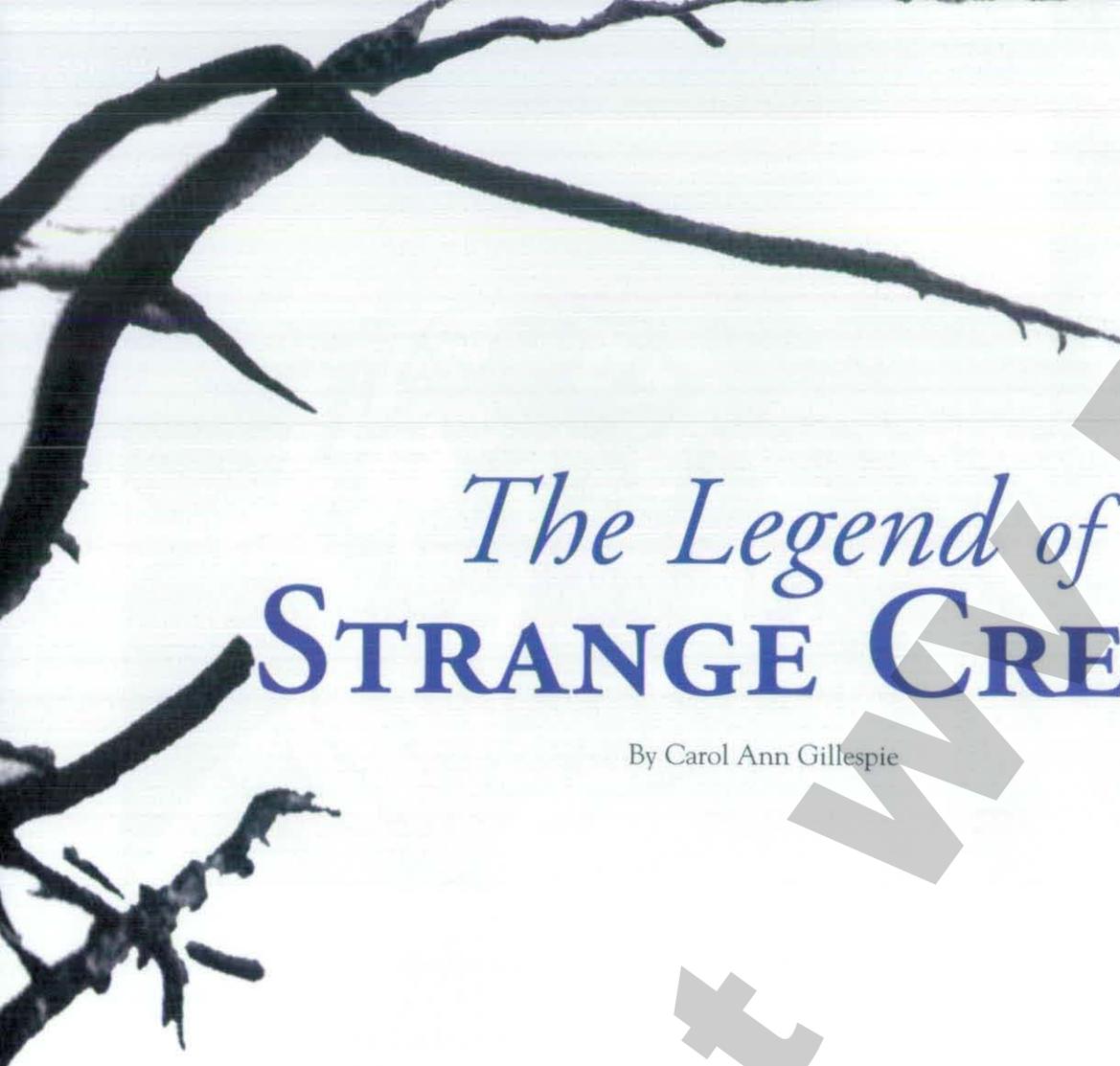
The Forgas operate a pet shop in Rainelle in Greenbrier County, where Tiger Mountain Refuge's exotic reptiles and birds also reside, and a thrift shop, the proceeds from which are used to support the refuge. "The animals that we care for are extremely expensive to feed," says Myreda. "For example, an adult tiger can eat about 70 pounds of fresh, red meat each day. The cost of each meal is \$209."

While the refuge currently occupies a 16 1/2-acre tract in Nicholas County, the Forgas hope to raise enough funds to buy property in Greenbrier County, move the refuge there, and open it to the public. Another dream is to purchase x-ray and other equipment and open a clinic that all state veterinarians can use to diagnose and treat animals.

The mission of the refuge is furthered by volunteers who serve as ambassadors, helping with everything from educational programs to maintenance to answering the phone. "One of our greatest needs at the moment is more volunteers who are willing to help spread the word," says John. "We just want people to know that we're here and that we're in it for the animals."

For more information about Tiger Mountain Refuge, visit www.tigermountainrefuge.org, call 304.438.9599, or e-mail wvbigcats@tigermountainrefuge.org.

Freelance writer Cynthia Mattison lives in Quinwood in Greenbrier County. Her articles have appeared in Autograph Collector, Inside NASCAR, and Diecast Digest.



The Legend of **STRANGE CREEK**

By Carol Ann Gillespie

Just as New York's Hudson River Valley has its spooky tale of Sleepy Hollow, West Virginia's Braxton County has the mysterious legend of Strange Creek. Both stories, while shaded with colorful folklore, have roots in local history. Whether the tale of Strange Creek is mostly true is a matter of opinion, but one thing is certain: the story has become a part of West Virginia's oral tradition through generations of telling and re-telling.

Before the events of this sad tale transpired, Strange Creek was known as Turkey Run. The stream originates on the western side of Powell's Mountain in Nicholas County, flows through Clay County, and ends in Braxton County, where it enters the Elk River near the village of Strange Creek. The creek is charming and a wader's delight. So what happened along its banks that forever changed its name?

The story begins with the first wave of white settlers to inhabit Braxton County. In 1784, when Native Americans were still the only inhabitants of the region, John Allison contracted to have his 11,000 acres of land surveyed. This

was the first land survey ever conducted in the county. A few years later, in 1789 or 1790, Benjamin Carpenter and his family became the first permanent white settlers to move to the area. Though white settlers in western Virginia had been subjected to regular and ferocious attacks by Native Americans since the 1770s or earlier, the Carpenters were not deterred. The family cut down trees, built log cabins, and started a small settlement near Centralia along the Holly River.

Yet, despite their strong, pioneering spirit, historic records show that in 1792, Benjamin Carpenter and his wife were murdered by two Native Americans who noticed wood chips floating in the Holly River. Since Native Americans did not use axes for chopping wood, the chips alerted them that white settlers were in the vicinity. It was not difficult for these American Indians to travel upstream and find the Carpenters.

Though violence such as this was a regular occurrence in the region, surveyors continued to survey large land grants in present-day central West Virginia. At this time a man

► Illustration by Lucia Robinson, inspired by an original drawing by Clinton Curtis in *River on the Rocks* by Skip Johnson

strange is my
name and I am
on strange
ground and
strange it is that I
cannot be found





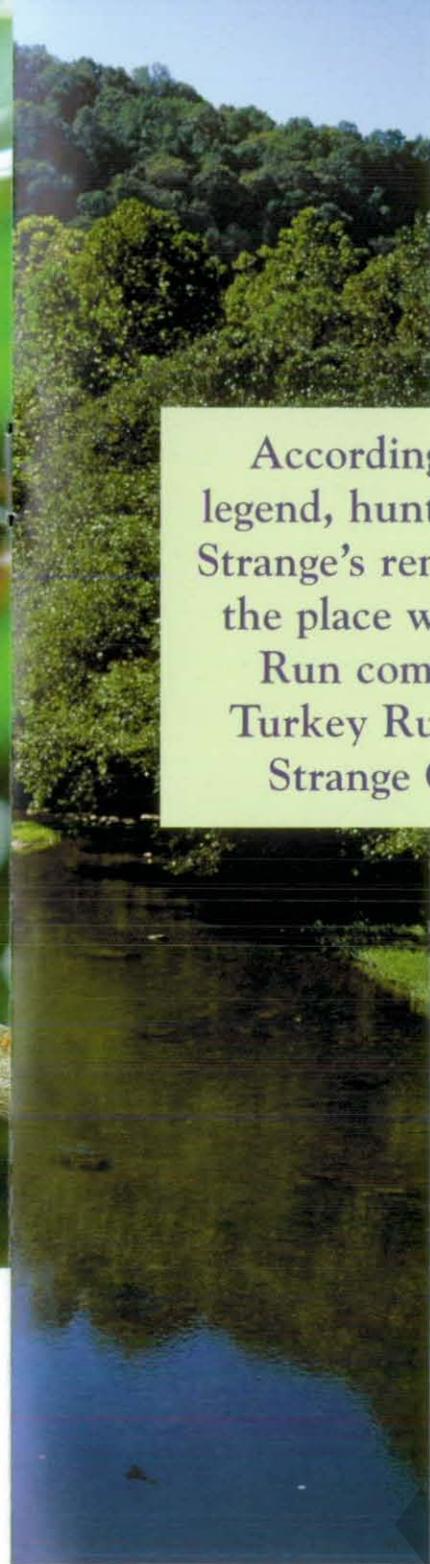
The Elk River at Strange Creek
Betty Rivard

named Samuel Young was also anxious to have his sizeable land grant along the beautiful Elk and Holly rivers surveyed. Thus, around 1795, a party led by Henry Jackson entered the region to survey Young's land.

The surveying party also included a young fellow named William Strange. There is some disagreement among accounts as to Strange's role in the party. Because of his youth and unfamiliarity with this wilderness, it was unlikely

that he was a guide or an advance scout for the party. In *Heritage of a Pioneer*, author Charles Dodrill assigns the role of party guide to Jerry Carpenter, an ingenious woodsman who lived near Sutton Lake. Jerry Carpenter was also Benjamin Carpenter's brother.

Some accounts claim that Strange was the hunter of the group and kept the camp cook supplied with fresh meat. However, Peter Silitch writes in the *West Virginia*



According to the legend, hunters found Strange's remains near the place where Big Run comes into Turkey Run—now Strange Creek.

Encyclopedia that Strange was more likely the group's cook since he was so young and inexperienced. He probably had been recruited by the party when they were encamped near Beverly in Randolph County. As the cook, he was certainly given charge of the packhorses.

Whatever was William Strange's role, he one day became separated from the rest of his party and hopelessly lost on the Elk River, not far from the mouth of the Holly River. According to one account, he got lost after taking some packhorses to the surveyors, who had gone ahead of the main party.

Dodrill claims Strange was instructed to follow the Holly River to its confluence with the Elk River. He was told to then follow the Elk until he came to the Carpenter settlement, where the party would meet up with him the second night.

Strange supposedly came to a fork in the path along the Holly River a mile from its mouth. He took the wrong path, and instead of fording the Holly and finding its junction with the Elk, he soon became lost. The path that he took crossed the mountain and finally arrived at the banks of the Elk.

Several accounts claim that Strange panicked and began to walk up the Elk River along the shore. He was unable to find its meeting place with the Holly and, encountering impassible falls and narrows, he became confused. He then back-tracked to his starting place. Evidence indicated that Strange tied his horse to a bush there.

In *River on the Rocks*, which features an account of the legend, author Skip Johnson notes that it is not hard to become disoriented and confused by the various rivers and streams in unfamiliar territory in West Virginia. From this point, no one knows for sure how the story ends. But one thing is certain. William Strange was never seen alive again.

When Strange did not arrive at the Carpenter settlement, his party searched the banks of the rivers and surrounding forest. Jerry Carpenter, the group's guide, led the party on a diligent hunt for the young man. One member of the group fired off a shot in hopes of alerting Strange that help was near, but Carpenter chastised him, fearing that the gunshot would alert hostile Native Americans to their presence. Sadly, no sign of Strange was ever found by the party.

According to the legend, several years later, hunters found Strange's remains near the place where Big Run comes into Turkey Run—now Strange Creek—about two miles below the community of Dille. Some say only Strange's gun was found. But others say that along with his bleached bones, a carving was discovered at the base of a beech (or sycamore) tree near the mouth of the creek. Dodrill writes that the inscription read "Strange is my name and I am on strange ground and strange it is that I cannot be found." Some residents of Dille tell it this way: "My name is Strange, and I'm on strange ground, I'm lost in the woods and I know I'll not be found."

Regardless of the wording, it seems that Strange realized at some point that his party would never find him. He was probably confused, hungry, disoriented, and losing hope. Perhaps carving his own epitaph into the tree was his way of making a mark for someone, someday, to find in this hostile wilderness.

Some folks question whether Strange really carved an epitaph. The beech tree has long since perished. Even the exact location of Strange's demise is one of much debate. What you believe is up to you. But we do know this: Turkey Run became Strange Creek long ago and now forever immortalizes an adventuresome young man and his misfortune. 🍂

Carol Ann Gillespie, Ph.D., a cultural geographer, enjoys researching and writing about Appalachian history and culture.

gallery

Frank Ceravalo: www.vistawv.com

Arnout Hyde Jr.: www.hydephoto.com

John Winter: images@johnwinter.com





(From left to right)
Color isolation image of a blooming rhododendron, the state flower
Arnout Hyde Jr.

Rhododendrons in bloom at Grandview, part of the New River Gorge National River
Frank Ceravalo

The forest floor near Norton Creek
John Winter





A Civil War reenactment at WVU's Jackson's
Mill State 4-H Conference Center
Frank Ceravalo

Spring



Indigo bunting

Spectacular

By Scott Shalaway . Photographs by Steve Shaluta

The appeal of the **New River Birding and Nature Festival** is threefold: First, the New River Gorge is absolutely beautiful in May. Second, spectacular migratory birds are abundant. And third, the event is informal and friendly and the logistics are easy.

In early May, at the peak of spring migration, birders in the know go where the birds go. One of West Virginia's birding hot spots is the New River Gorge, home of the New River Birding and Nature Festival. This year, from May 5 through 11, nearly 300 birders from across the country will come to the festival to enjoy the area's diverse birdlife.

Most attendees hail from West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, but the weeklong event has attracted birders from as far away as California, Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota, and Canada. Some stay for the week, some for a few days, and some locals pop in and out for a particular field trip or just to renew old acquaintances.

I remember meeting a group of birders early one morning at the first West Virginia Birding Fest in 2003. There were about 15 of us, most from West Virginia. Though two Elderhostel groups swelled the ranks during the week, the success of that first year was modest. But thanks to the vision and tireless leadership of cofounder Dave Pollard, who still

serves as cochair of the event, the festival has gotten bigger and better every year.

A resource coordinator for Fayette County, Pollard is an avid birder. By combining his personal and professional interests, he saw an opportunity to spotlight the area's natural heritage and also stimulate economic activity. Because the event takes place over a wide geographic area and visitors stay at a variety of hotels, campgrounds, cabins, and bed-and-breakfasts, it's difficult to assess the event's economic impact. But estimating conservatively, if 250 birders each spend \$400 on registration fees, meals, lodging, and travel expenses, that's an impact of \$100,000 in just seven days.

The festival's impact on the local economy enables Pollard to devote work time to the event. But to him, it's all about the people. "I enjoy meeting people and putting names to faces," he says. "We get a lot of repeat attendees, and when I see smiles on their faces, I know we've been successful."

After the first three years, word got out about birding in West Virginia, Pollard says. Thanks to word of mouth among

Killdeer



Cedar waxwing



birders and ads in *BirdWatcher's Digest* magazine (www.birdwatchersdigest.com), West Virginia has joined states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Florida, New Jersey, Arizona, and Texas that are known as birding destinations.

Pollard also notes with pride that profits generated by the festival are plowed back into environmental education programs in local schools. He wants to ensure that local children appreciate the New River area's natural heritage.

The appeal of the New River Birding and Nature Festival is threefold: First, the New River Gorge is absolutely beautiful in May. Second, spectacular migratory birds are abundant. And third, the event is informal and friendly and the logistics are easy. Pollard and cofounder and cochair Geoff Heater work hard to make the event as hospitable as it is rewarding for participants. In fact, for the seven days of

the event, no one works harder than Heater to find birds for participants, especially beginners.

A typical day begins with an early morning breakfast, where everyone meets to join the trips they signed up for in preregistration. Field trips are limited to no more than 20 participants and some are limited to just 10, so a quality experience is assured. Then it's off to the field.

Some vans stay within the Gorge, where scarlet tanagers, Baltimore orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, and worm-eating warblers are abundant. If the stars are properly aligned, birders might even see a Swainson's warbler, a species that reaches the northern edge of its breeding range in southern West Virginia.

Other groups pile into vans for trips to Cranberry Glades, Babcock State Park, the Sugar Creek/Gauley River area,

Great blue heron



and the High Country. High Country trees leaf out later than those at lower elevations, so birds such as golden-winged, Canada, and black-throated green warblers are easier to see.

The highlight of my five years at the festival came last year when I finally added the reclusive and elusive Swainson's warbler to my life list. At each of the previous four festivals I heard the bird, but I never saw it. Last May, thanks to Geoff Heater's expertise, five other birders and I got several great looks at a Swainson's along a stream sheltered by towering hemlocks. It's a day I'll never forget.

At day's end, members of each group compare notes and invariably envy each others' sightings. The wide variety of field trips offered at the festival leads to repeat attendees, whom Pollard calls the event's "bread and butter."

"Many people return just to get to places they didn't visit the year before," he says.

For the weary or less adventurous, there are mornings of "birding by butt" at Opossum Creek Retreat (www.opossumcreek.com) and "birding by boat" on the quiet section of the New River just below Hawk's Nest State Park. Birding by butt is especially popular after a hard day in the field. With an abundant supply of fresh coffee and terrific breakfast entrees, birders wander the grounds at Opossum Creek and sometimes enjoy bird banding demonstrations. On a good morning at Opossum Creek, the bird list can include Blackburnian, hooded, and parula warblers; indigo buntings; ruby-throated hummingbirds; and blue-headed vireos.

Birding by boat involves floating in rafts on the quiet lake below the rapids for which the New River is best known. Hawks and vultures often glide overhead, while cedar waxwings, Carolina wrens, and Baltimore and orchard orioles are common and vocal. At the water's edge, birders often see spotted sandpipers and green and great blue herons.

Another highlight is the bird behavior walk offered on Saturday of festival week. This easy, three-mile walk concentrates on birds' habits and behaviors. Participants see nesting eastern bluebirds and house wrens, and often adult killdeer perform their "broken wing act" to lure birders away from their nests.

Also adding to the festival experience is the illustrious company participants keep. Field trip leaders have included Bill Thompson III, editor of *BirdWatcher's Digest*; noted wildlife artist and author Julie Zickefoose; Ohio naturalist Jim McCormac; and nature sound recordist Wil Hershberger. In the evening after dinner, these skilled birders present entertaining indoor programs.

For more information and to register for the 2008 New River Birding and Nature Festival, call 304.574.4258 or visit the Web site www.birding-wv.com.

Certified wildlife biologist and syndicated columnist Dr. Scott Shalaway lives in Marshall County and is a regular contributor to Wonderful West Virginia.



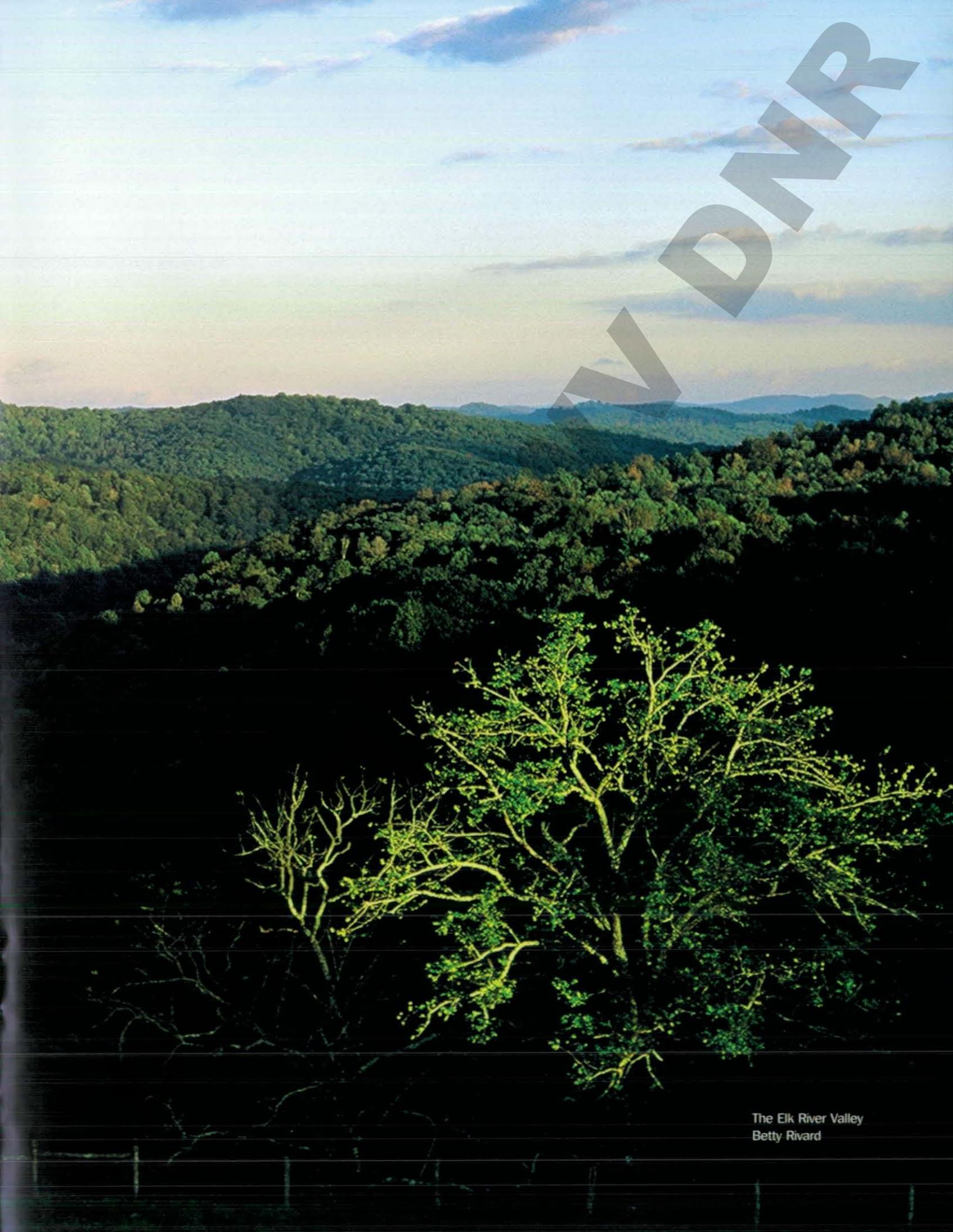
Scarlet tanager



Book of the Month:

Tale of the Elk by William B. Byrne

In the late 1920s, Charleston attorney and avid angler Bill Byrne began writing about his adventures on the Elk River in a series of articles for *West Virginia Wild Life* magazine. With humor and warmth he related local history and lore, as well as stories of the wildlife, natural beauty, and people of the Elk. In 1940, Byrne's articles were compiled and published in *Tale of the Elk*, a delightful book republished last year by Quarrier Press. We are pleased to present but a few captivating excerpts from Byrne's still-popular work on the following pages.



V DNR

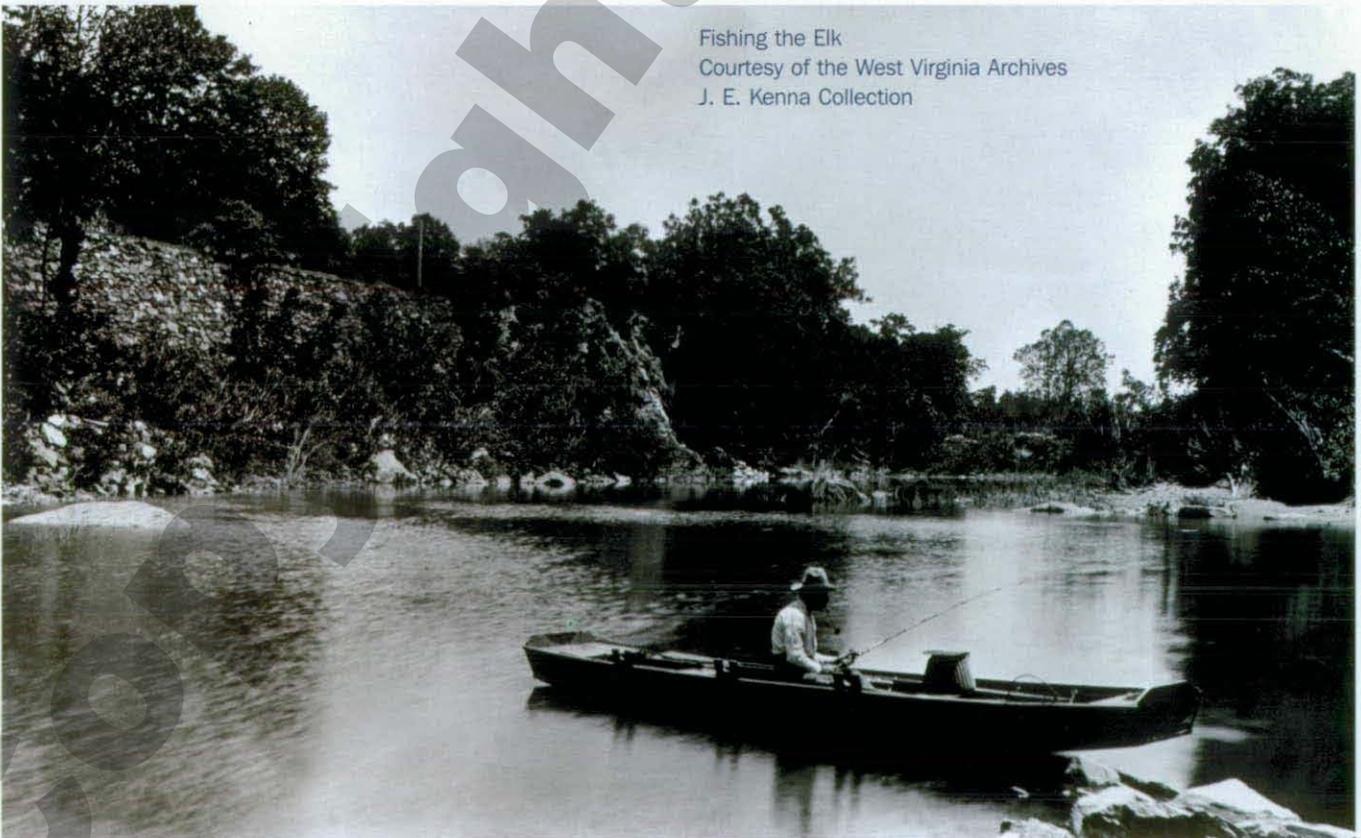
The Elk River Valley
Betty Rivard

From Chapter II, "The Dry Bed"

It was, I believe, in the year 1908, that I first saw the junction of the Big Spring and Old Fields Forks. Bill Hamrick and I left his residence at the mouth of Leatherwood, bound for the head of the Elk, crossing the mountain between Elk and Gauley, coming to the latter stream at the mouth of Straight Creek, just above "Pole" Barb's; thence up Gauley to the Three Forks, and nine miles over the mountain to the Forks of Elk, at the Harmon Sharp place. We spent some time fishing in Gauley as we passed along, reaching the Three Forks about sundown, the second or third day out, and we decided to cross the mountain that night. Just as we were about to leave the stream and take the trail across the mountain, in jumping from rock to rock in the bed of the Middle Fork, I got a terrible fall, sustaining a severe injury to my right knee, the pain from which was so intense as to make me deathly sick for the space of about fifteen minutes, and a fit subject for the ambulance and hospital, had any such been available. Being miles from any habitation, and fearing inaction and resulting stiffness would be the worst thing possible, I decided to try to make the trip across that night—six miles up to the top of the mountain on the Gauley side and three miles down the other side to Elk. Every step up the mountain was painful, but when I started downgrade and changed gears, the pain was much more

acute, and when we reached the Elk at Harmon Sharp place about 10 o'clock p.m., I was "all in," and no mistake. Bill built a campfire and soon had ready a good supper of trout, bread, and coffee, which we disposed of promptly. By this time the moon was riding high in the heavens and Bill hurried away to the river, after inquiring if I would join him. But for the first and only time in my life I was compelled to renege. "No, thank you, Bill," said I, weakly, "I'd better go to bed." Getting to bed consisted of smoothing off a place before the fire—that is, picking up the rocks and sticks and tramping down the rough places, weeds and briars, such as chanced to encumber the ground at the chosen spot, and there depositing myself, with head upon the lap of Earth and the starry dome for a "coverlid." Having selected a rather concave or scooped-out place for my bed, I tucked myself snugly in, and almost instantly was dead to the world—sleeping a sleep the depth of which no man knoweth who never slept under like provocation. About 4 o'clock in the morning I was rudely awakened by a violent shake and a voice—"Get up, I say—man, you'll drown!"

When I realized what all the fuss was about, the rain was pouring down in torrents in my upturned face, my body half submerged in the water which had filled the trough-like place in which I was lying, and Bill was standing over me with a fine string of brook trout. We hastened over to an old



Fishing the Elk
Courtesy of the West Virginia Archives
J. E. Kenna Collection

straw stack near by, under which we burrowed for shelter until the rain, heavy but short of duration, had ceased, when we rekindled the fire, before which we both lay down in wet clothes and slept for several hours.

And here let me take occasion to remark that a fellow will not take cold on a fishing trip, although he wear wet clothing all day and sleep in wet clothing all night.

From Chapter VIII, "John E. Kenna Descends the Elk..."

In August, 1886 or 1887, Senator [John E.] Kenna built—and I don't mean had built—a fine johnboat, at Webster Springs, and he and Fleet Porterfield undertook to fish from that point to Charleston. I accompanied them for two or three miles on the trip. I do not mean to say that I rode in the boat with them; for that is not the way that trip is made. If the water is at fishing stage, the shoals and the swifts, of which there are many, are so shallow that one man usually wades and guides the boat over the roughs, while the others walk or wade along and do the fishing; and if flush, the current is so swift and the channel so rough and rocky that it would be a perilous undertaking to travel in any sort of craft for the first twenty odd miles from Webster Springs down to the mouth of Laurel Creek, now the town of Centralia. My recollection is that Senator Kenna came to grief on this very trip down at Union Mills, a short distance below Centralia, where his boat was wrecked coming in contact with a rock, and that he had to call on old "Squirley" Carpenter who then lived thereabout, to convey him to Charleston in a canoe. Afterward, however, Mr. Kenna built another boat in which he made the continuous trip from Webster Springs to Charleston. So far as I know he is the only man who ever did so....

John E. Kenna held a strong hand with the people of Webster County. It was in the old Third Congressional District, which he represented for two or three terms before he was elected to the United States Senate in 1883. He hunted and fished with them during his campaigns and as well in the off year; went to their logrollings and house-raisings, and called them by their first names, and every man, woman, and child called him John. The story is told that in his last race for the House of Representatives, Kenna received every vote cast in Webster County, except one, and that was cast by a fellow who had borrowed \$10,000 from him and failed to return it.

Webster County is one of the most sparsely settled, and, from the standpoint of population, smallest counties in the State, but if those who lived there forty years ago, when I



The middle angler in this photograph is John E. Kenna, a Kanawha County attorney who represented West Virginia in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Also an avid photographer and outdoorsman, Kenna's brilliant political career was cut short by his untimely death at age 44 in 1893. He is one of two persons from West Virginia (the other is Francis Harrison Pierpont) to be honored with a statue in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall Collection. Courtesy of the West Virginia Archives, J. E. Kenna Collection

first knew the place, and all who have been born there since, had stayed at home and behaved themselves instead of moving out and spreading themselves all over creation, Webster would by this time be by far the most populous county in West Virginia. In those days the average of children per family was from twelve to sixteen, and the fellow with only eight or nine children was looked down on by his neighbors. Currence Gregory's family consisted of himself and his wife, and, if I am not mistaken, sixteen children—all girls but fifteen; and one of his neighbors by the name of Hamrick, had almost exactly the same number, with but one boy in the lot. I wish I could get hold of the photograph of Currence Gregory's family which John Alderson once showed me. It would fit in here just fine.

If anybody should check up on me and challenge the accuracy of these family figures, I hope they will take into consideration the fact that I am speaking merely from memory, and the further fact that it is not out of the way in matters of this kind to add a few, to cover future contingencies.

Once I asked one of the numerous Hamricks—I don't remember which one—how many children he had, and he replied that he had thirteen, all living. I said "Thirteen! Don't you know that thirteen is an awfully unlucky number?"

"Is that so?" said he.

"That is so," said I.

I saw him about a year later and he said, "Well, Bill, you needn't worry any more about my bad luck. Fourteen."

From Chapter V, "Big Creeks and Little Creeks"

Bergoo, which, as already stated, empties into Elk about a mile and one-half above Leatherwood, was once a famous stream for brook trout. I have never fished there since the advent of the Rainbow. It is a much smaller and swifter stream than Leatherwood. In fact, it is almost a succession of short pools and cascades.

Some years ago, having been struck with the peculiarity of the name, Bergoo, I inquired as to its origin and was told the tradition was that in the early history of that section of the country a large party of hunters had camped at the mouth of the creek for several weeks in the height of the game season, and had killed a bear, deer, turkey, pheasant, squirrels, and caught fish in great abundance. They feasted on these articles of diet one after another until the food palled on the crowd, when it occurred to the one who was cook for a certain day that he would vary the menu somewhat by serving it as a composite in the way of a stew. So he proceeded to chop up goodly portions of bear meat, venison, turkey, pheasant, squirrels, fish, etc., for his stew, and by way of adding zest and flavor to the mess, adding, as it simmered in the pot, occasional dashes of applejack. It is said that the whole *posse comitatus* fell to with a relish, and pronounced the meal by far the best they had had on the trip, and with one acclaim they named the place Camp Bergoo, and when the camp disappeared the name clung to the creek. I have looked it up in the dictionary and found "bur-goo"—with the accent on the Bur—and that it jibes exactly with that which tradition says gave us the name Bergoo—with the accent on the "goo."

The present day hunter and fisherman will, of course, be much interested in this dish, so far as concerns the mixed meat content, as it may stand them in good stead when out in the wilds and far from a Greek restaurant, a bunch find

themselves with nothing to eat but bear meat, venison, wild turkey, pheasant, squirrel, brook trout, rainbow trout, bass, etc., and they wish to vary the monotony of the bill of fare—but the fluid extract of apple seasoning would not appeal to them at all. Who for a minute nowadays would tolerate such use of such seasoning?

It is pretty hard for me to get away from Leatherwood and Bergoo, but if I were to recount all the haps and mishaps which I have shared or heard of in and around those, to me, hallowed precincts, it would require a book which in volume would lay over Encyclopedia Britannica as Ossa over a wart, and it would take me just thirteen years to get down Elk as far as Webster Springs—and I never would get to the mouth.

I cannot leave the place, however, without referring to an incident connected with a man who at that time was the oldest resident of that locality. About eighteen years ago, I went from Webster Springs up to Leatherwood, where "Bearskin Bill" Hamrick lived at the time, his father and mother, "Kelly Ben" and "Aunt Naomi," having moved down to Webster Springs years before. Bill and I arranged to leave early the next morning, go up to Whittaker Falls, get Calvin Hamrick, and proceed thence to the Upper River. While we were at breakfast, Sam Dodrill, who lived on the river a short distance below Leatherwood, came with the information that "Uncle Addison" Fisher, who had been ill for several days, was at death's door and could not live through the day, and that the neighbors must get busy and make a coffin for him. "Uncle Addison" lived on the river a short distance above Leatherwood, was about ninety years old, and had lived there practically all his life. Bill had carpenter's tools and some splendid thinly sawed white walnut lumber, suitable for coffin stuff. Of course, our trip was postponed until we, with the aid of "Rattlesnake Bill" Dodrill and Moore Dodrill, the latter being a son of Sam, fell to and by noon had the coffin made and delivered to the Fisher home; whereupon Bill and I proceeded up to Calvin's. Three years later I was passing the Fisher house, and much to my surprise saw "Uncle Ad" standing at the gate by the roadside. "Hello, Uncle Ad," said I, "this is indeed a pleasant surprise. Just three years ago I helped make a coffin for you, and now here you are out kicking up your heels like a two-year-old."

"Yes," said he, "and I've got that coffin in there under the bed handy, where I can get her when I need her."

To order a copy of Tale of the Elk, see the Bookshelf on page 32.

► A "small" (by standards of the day) Webster County family
Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, J. E. Kenna Collection



WVDNR News: Wildlife Resources for Teachers

Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites (OWLS)

The OWLS program provides grants of up to \$2,000 to public or private schools for the creation of outdoor learning sites at or near school grounds. The purpose of the program is to provide students with an outdoor learning environment where they can observe nongame wildlife species as part of an ecosystem.

OWLS projects are varied and may include creating nature trails, butterfly and hummingbird gardens, and wetlands or ponds; planting warm-season grasses; or creating nest boxes and other habitats for wildlife.

OWLS are an excellent resource for teaching ecology, life sciences, conservation, and environmental awareness.

The deadline for submitting OWLS proposals is November 1. For more information, visit the Web site: www.wvdnr.org.

The West Virginia State Wildlife Center

The West Virginia State Wildlife Center, located 12 miles from Buckhannon in Upshur County, is a modern zoological facility that houses native and introduced wildlife. Operated by WVDNR, the wildlife center is dedicated to helping visitors reach a factual understanding of West Virginia's wildlife.

Spacious enclosures enable the center's animals to interact with their environment, allowing for more natural behavior patterns. Interpretive signs explain the animals' life histories, biology, and relationships to humans.

Woodland wildlife can be viewed via a wheelchair-accessible interpretative trail that winds for more than a mile through a mature hardwood forest.

Waterfowl, trout, bass, catfish, and bluegill thrive in the well-stocked pond below the center's wooded picnic area. And a gift shop makes for enjoyable browsing.

The wildlife center is an excellent field trip destination for teaching students about West Virginia's rich wildlife heritage.

Generally, the center is open year-round, seven days a week, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Hours may vary with seasonal changes and weather conditions. A small admission fee is required April 1 through October 31.

For more information, call 304.924.6211.

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Correction: The grouse pictured on page 21 of the November 2007 issue is not a ruffed grouse but a sharp-tailed grouse. Thanks to wildlife artist Chuck Ripper for spotting this error.

Events Statewide | March

March – Date TBA

Easter Egg Hunt

Berwind Lake Wildlife Management Area
Warriormine
304.875.2577

March 1 – 2

Governor's Cup Ski Race

Canaan Valley Resort State Park
Davis
304.866.4121

March 7 – 8

Ohio River Festival of Books

Huntington
304.528.5700

March 7 – 9, 14 – 16

Apollo Civic Theatre – Play On!

Martinsburg
304.263.6766

March 8

**Woody Hawley Concert Series:
Terri Hendrix and Lloyd Maines**

Clay Center
Charleston
304.561.3570

March 8

**A Groovy Kind of Murder –
Karen Vuranch**

Hawks Nest State Park
Ansted
304.658.5212

March 14 – 16

Scrapbook Workshop

Twin Falls Resort State Park
Mullens
304.294.4000



March 15

22nd Annual Irish Festival

Pipestem Resort State Park
Pipestem
304.466.1800, ext. 379

March 15

Acting Accordionly!

Hawks Nest State Park
Ansted
304.658.5212



March 15 – 16

**Potomac Highlands Regional
Maple Festival**

New Creek
304.788.1831

March 15 – 28

**Annual Mid-Ohio Valley Heritage
Quilt Show**

Blennerhassett Island Historical
State Park
304.420.4800

March 21 – 23

Easter Weekend

Cacapon Resort State Park
Berkeley Springs
304.258.1022

March 21 – 23

Easter Holiday Celebration

Canaan Valley Resort State Park
Davis
304.866.4121

March 22

Easter Egg Hunt

Blackwater Falls State Park
Davis
304.259.5216

March 22

Easter Egg Hunt

Twin Falls Resort State Park
Mullens
304.294.4000

March 22

Easter Egg Hunt

Tomlinson Run State Park
New Manchester
304.564.3651

March 22

Celebration of Spring

Cathedral State Park
Aurora
304.735.3771

March 23

Easter Weekend

North Bend State Park
Cairo
304.643.2931

March 26 – 29

Quilters' Workshop

Canaan Valley Resort State Park
Davis
304.866.4121



MARCH						
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23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Times and events are subject to change. To ensure you have a wonderful experience, please call ahead before attending an event.

Order Form

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_____	Shawnee Captive: The Story of Mary Ingles	\$9.95	_____
_____	Wilderness Empire	\$17.00	_____
_____	West Virginia Hiking Trails	\$16.95	_____

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Total _____

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West Virginia Bookshelf

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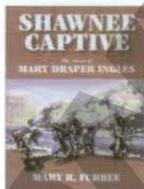


Tale of the Elk

By W. E. R. Byrne

\$29.95, 6 x 9, 464 pages, Hardcover

■ *Tale of the Elk* tells the story of one man's love affair with the Elk River. Historian Ken Sullivan calls the book "West Virginia's answer to Norman MacLean's *A River Runs Through It*." The book recounts tales of the friends Byrne made traveling up and down the Elk, including prominent West Virginians of the era.

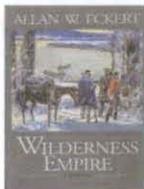


Shawnee Captive: The Story of Mary Draper Ingles

By Mary Rodd Furbee

\$9.95, 5.5 x 8.5, 112 pages, Paperback

■ In 1745, Mary Draper moved with her parents to Draper's Meadow in the Shenandoah Valley. In 1750, the first wedding of two white settlers in the region took place when Draper married Will Ingles. Tensions between settlers and Native Americans were fierce, and each side raided the other. Mary became a captive but vowed to escape and return to her husband. The story of this remarkable woman's harrowing and courageous trip home places Mary Ingles at the pinnacle of American frontier heroes.



Wilderness Empire

By Allan Eckert

\$17.00, 6 x 9, 653 pages, Paperback

■ The sequel to *The Frontiersmen* and Volume 2 of the *Winning of America* series, *Wilderness Empire* presents the savage but artful, eighteenth-century struggle between France and England to gain control of the Iroquois lands in North America. The war demanded that each seek the allegiance of the Iroquois without letting the tribe know that the winner would control their lands.



West Virginia Hiking Trails: Hiking the Mountain State

By Allen de Hart

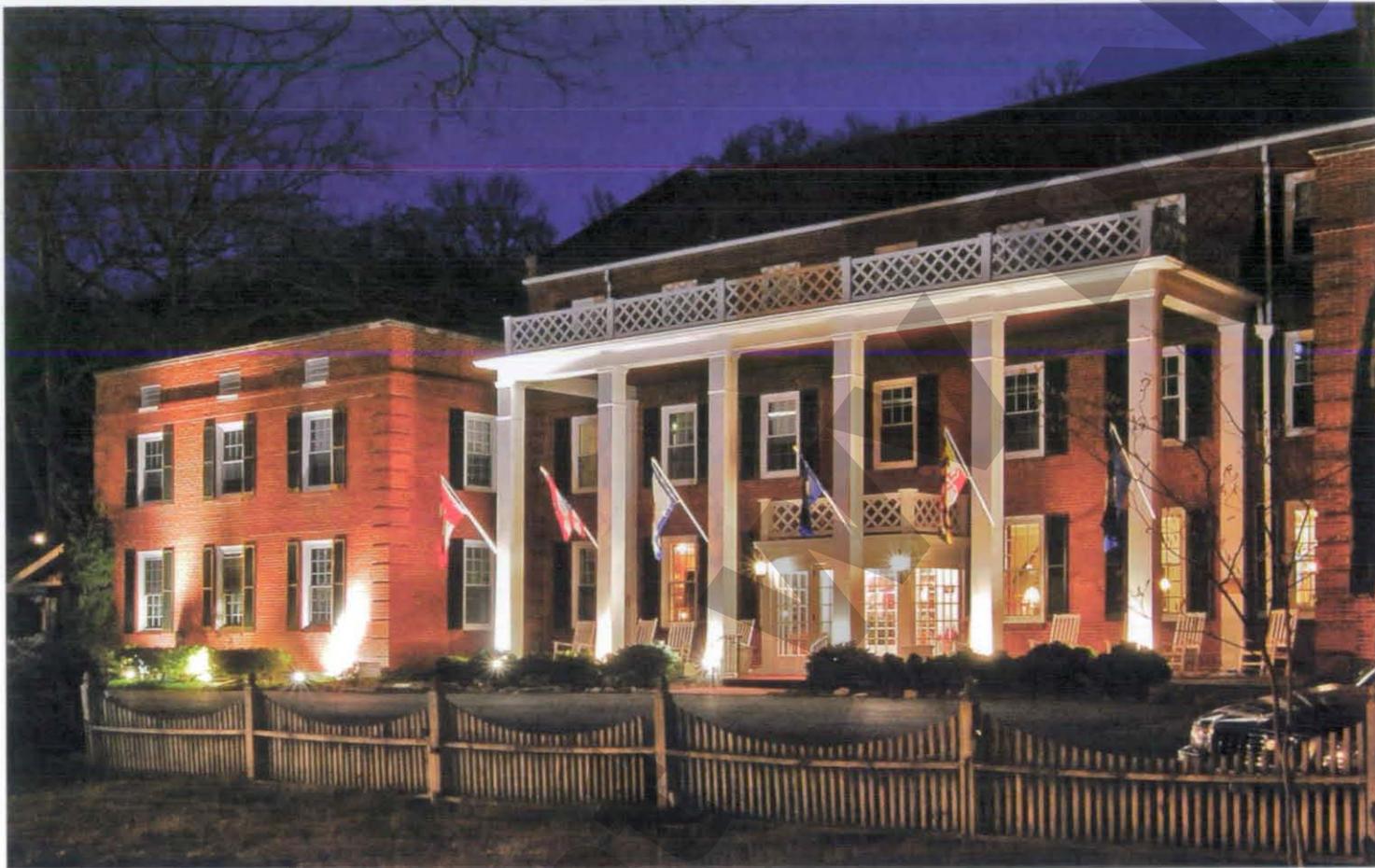
\$16.95, 5 x 7, 329 pages, Paperback

■ Completely devoted to hiking the spectacular hills and wilderness of the Mountain State, de Hart's revised guide has updated descriptions of more than 500 trails and covers nearly 2,000 miles, including the 300-mile Allegheny Trail. It includes clear and concise directions, easy-to-read trail maps, and extensive trail notes, and denotes trails for hikers of all ages and ability levels.





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