

Outside and Down Under in Eastern West Virginia

The “green” in Greenbrier Resort, West Virginia, isn’t just on the golf courses. Visitors who venture off the Greenbrier’s famous fairways will find a variety of “green” adventures awaiting in and underneath the forests and streams of this gently rolling eastern section of the Mountain State.

Yes, underneath. The limestone terrain here is carved with underground passages, and commercial caves, such as Lost World Caverns and Organ Cave, offer lighted and wild caving expeditions led by experts in geology and caving techniques. Treks lasting anywhere from several hours to two days give visitors a chance to experience all of the formations, waterfalls, historical lore, and silence this underworld has to offer.

For those who prefer to remain topside, the 77-mile Greenbrier River Trail attracts cyclists, equestrians, and hikers for a ramble along a clear mountain river through historical towns and patches of brilliant lilies. Others may prefer to linger on a bend of the Greenbrier or one of its semi-secret tributaries to fish for bass or trout. Hiking is a perennial favorite activity, either among the rock formations at Beartown State Park, in Greenbrier State Forest, or the Monongahela National Forest.

Whatever adventure you choose, Pocahontas and Greenbrier Counties promise a feast of sights, sounds, and scents in a relaxing getaway setting. The number of former vacationers buying second homes in this scenic area is proof of its power to renew and invigorate.

Wild Caving

On a cool, humid morning, Organ Cave exudes a warm mist from its rocky mouth. About a hundred steps down its gullet and you’re enveloped in eternal cave night.

Switch on your headlamp and say good-bye to the emerald fields and scent of pines, the raucous echo of a crow. Down here, where nothing changes much for centuries, you’ll come to appreciate a narrower band of the sensory range. Beauty lives in water droplets and artfully-petrified mud. Everything appears butterscotch brown and has the texture of a ripe avocado.

Both Organ Cave, in Ronceverte, and Lost World Caverns, two miles north of Lewisburg, offer wild caving tours of various lengths in addition to their regular tours. Walking the lighted paths of a commercial cavern may seem eerie, but wild

caving through passageways seldom probed by cavers’ lamps is an alien adventure.

“It’s always about 54 degrees and calm in here,” says Steve Silverman, owner of Lost World Caverns. “No matter what the season, there’s always something interesting to see.”



A jumping rope along the Greenbrier Trail makes a refreshing stop in the Greenbrier River.

Forget straight lines and easy locomotion. On an underground wild tour, you’ll occasionally be bracing yourself to stay upright by using every part of your body — hands and feet, sometimes a shoulder, knee, elbow, or your butt. These caves are multi-leveled mazes with switchback tunnels and giant rooms.

In the silence between footsteps, all you hear is water dripping, splashing, echoing through the cave. It runs over the flowstone noiselessly, leaving minute deposits that will someday become stalactites, stalagmites, or other formations. In the end, daylight seems rich, golden, and more blindingly brilliant than anything you’ve ever observed.

The two caves each have their own niche. Organ Cave is still filled with hoppers used by Confederate soldiers when they mined saltpeter here during the Civil War. Lost World Caverns

is home to West Virginia’s first little natural history museum, a collection of replicas of the Smithsonian Institute’s castings of dinosaur bones — an allosaurus, triceratops, European cave bear, and much more. Six-year-olds especially like the polished dinosaur poop and gem sluice outside. Reservations are required for wild caving tours at both venues.

Greenbrier River Trail

Some trails make your circulatory system scream, challenging you toward hard-won vistas until your heart throbs in your ears. Other trails pamper you like royalty, laying out their offerings — a patch of black-eyed susans, a mossy waterfall, a vulture rookery — in rapid succession while you lope along comfortably with scarcely a catch in your breath. The Greenbrier River Trail is the latter sort.

The Greenbrier is one of the few rivers in this country to flow unimpeded by dams or other manmade obstructions throughout its course. Those who follow its namesake trail from Caldwell just outside of Lewisburg north to Cass can experience some of the nation’s finest smallmouth bass fishing, as well as near-pristine beauty and solitude.



The Horrock Tunnel on the Greenbrier Trail through Greenbrier and Pocahontas counties, WV, is a good place to stop and relax.

The Greenbrier River Trail, at 77 miles, is one of the nation’s longest rail-trails — former railroad right-of-ways converted to recreational uses. It traces the path of the former Greenbrier division of the C&O Railroad through what was booming timber country. The trail now snakes around the peaks of Marlin, Thorny Creek, and Thomas Mountains, past sleepy little villages with names such as Hopper, Stony Bottom, and Keister.

The route is interspersed with small farms, hemlock-shaded forest, and rhododendron-covered banks. In the early mornings, you can often see wood ducks and herons lifting off its quiet waters. The trail passes two state forests — Calvin Price and Seneca — and the Watoga and Cass Scenic Railroad state parks.

More than a day trip!

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