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# Wines down South



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## NORTH ON THE NEW RIVER

### Southwest Virginia's Bluegrass, Wine & Grandeur

*By Doc Lawrence*



GALAX, VA. It is the second oldest river on earth and like the River Nile that runs through Africa to the Mediterranean, the New River's journey from North Carolina, through Virginia flows northward. This river was the backbone of my Southwest Virginia Cascade Highlands journey.

The New River begged me to canoe north on the rapids and nothing beats going north on this mighty river than a novice shooting through the Virginia rapids. While in certain areas challenging, the rapids are manageable. Launch was at Blue Cat Outfitters and Greensboro, North Carolina writer Lynne Brandon joined me for miles of river fun.



*Charlie Bill Totten promotes Saltville with total passion, leading Greensboro, North Carolina writer Lynne Brandon on a tour of his favorite places.*

Spectacularly showcasing the grandeur of nature, Grayson Highlands State Park also has wild ponies. The rigorous hike to the summit to see the horses is worth the effort. More than memorable exercise, this was a prelude to the bike ride along the majestic New River Trail. A railroad track is now a first rate path alongside the New River featuring canopies of overhanging trees, spectacular bridges with quite a bit of history. Families, seniors, veteran bicyclers intermingled along this nature lovers delight.

Foggy Ridge ([www.foggyridgecider.com](http://www.foggyridgecider.com)) is the Blue Ridge home of Diane Flynt's delicious artisanal Hard Cider, a lower alcohol food friendly delight. Her venue is worth both a visit and some cider purchases. Nearby wineries include Villa Appalachia, Chateau Morrisette, AmRhein and Blackstock, which is a very

rare meadery where tasty Tupelo Honey Mead is produced.

### OLD TIME MUSIC

Galax is an epicenter of music, art and food. After dinner at the Galax Smokehouse, the Virginia home of Memphis-style barbeque that serves "the best banana pudding in the world," a tour of Chestnut Creek

*~continued~*



*Diane Flynt is the unchallenged queen of Virginia's outstanding Hard Cider.*

School of the Arts confirmed that Galax actively incorporates mountain music heritage with regional folk and fine art providing a large measure of visionary cultural diversity.

Galax, billed as the “World’s Capital of Old-time Mountain Music” offers live broadcasts of Bluegrass music on stage at the Rex Theatre on Friday evenings. WBRF produces one of only three live bluegrass and old-time radio shows in the country. The virtuoso banjo, fiddle, guitar and mandolin players combine rich falsetto harmonies, inspiring visitors to join locals in fast paced clogging that harkens to ancient Ireland and Scotland.

Walking around Marion somehow confirms that Norman Rockwell and Grandma Moses captured the majesty of small town living and the abounding joys found in rural America. Like this beautiful Virginia city, the palatial General Francis Marion Hotel ([www.gfmhotel.com](http://www.gfmhotel.com)) took its name from the Revolutionary War hero General Francis Marion and offers the amenities of a modern hotel with the romance the of the Jazz Age.

The upper mezzanine’s Card Room features floor tile motif of playing cards, a black rooster and a bubbling cocktail. Executive chef Marcus Blackstone expertly leads the gourmet restaurant, The Black Rooster.

Marion’s Lincoln Theatre ([www.thelincoln.org](http://www.thelincoln.org)) is one of only three existing Mayan Revival-style Art Deco era theaters in America. Exotic representations of mythological gods and creatures adorn the ceilings and walls



*General Francis Marion Hotel*



*The Lincoln Theatre in historic Marion, Virginia offers plays and musicals on a level that equals many large cities.*

alongside history influenced murals. The performance schedule is eclectic and includes the PBS-staple, “Song of the Mountains.”

Lovely Saltville is home to my favorite raconteur, the incredible Charlie Bill Totten who once told me “there’s nothing in the country that equals Saltville.” He backs his claims with the impressive Museum of the Middle Appalachians ([www.museum-mid-app.org](http://www.museum-mid-app.org)) featuring geology, Ice Age, Woodland Indians, Civil War and company town exhibits and a collection of more than 4,000 photos of Saltville.

Built in the Great Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps, Hungry Mother State Park features swimming, camping, cabin rentals, boat rentals, hiking and Hemlock Haven complete with a lakeside gourmet restaurant.

The area is unspoiled Virginia, pure Americana and a trove of tourism adventure where good things thrive. For more information visit [www.thecascadehighlands.com](http://www.thecascadehighlands.com).



▲ *Ray Kohl finds the serenity along the banks of the New River to be a productive place to conduct tourism business on behalf of the city of Galax.*



◀ *Ron Thomason is the legendary director of tourism for Smyth County, Virginia, and area included in the Cascade Highlands region. His roasted wild turkey served each year during season continues to garner gourmet acclaim.*