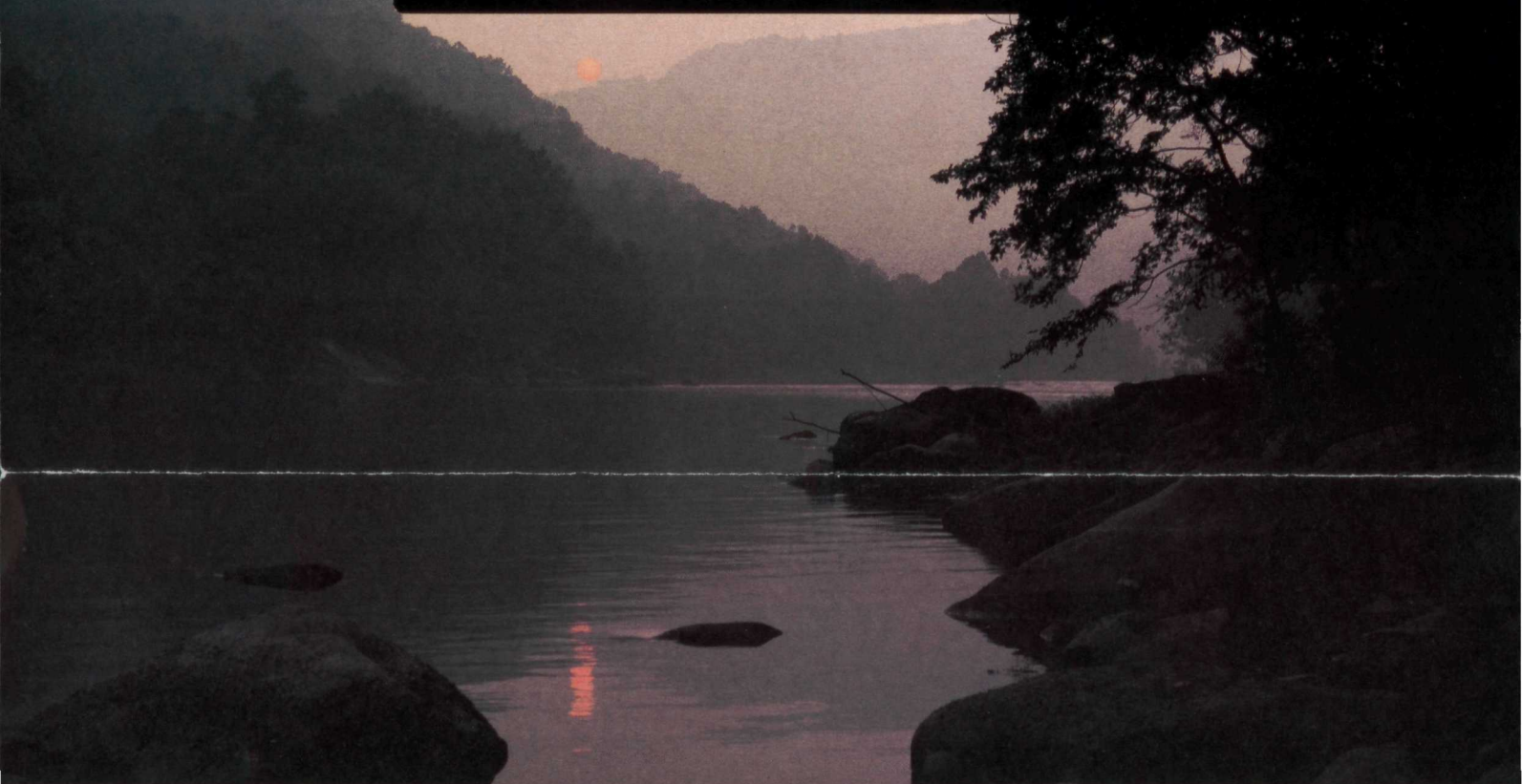


# New River Gorge

West Virginia  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Illustrations by Patricia Topper

## Welcome to the New River

The immediately perceived attractions are the river and its gorge. Together they present an impressive display of natural forces. The gorge remained virtually inaccessible along its entire length until the railroad opened this isolated part of West Virginia in 1873. The railroad followed the riverbank and made possible the shipment of coal to the outside world. In time company men clashed with miners in bitter labor disputes that have made their way into labor movement legends

and songs passed on to their descendants. Towns grew up, flourished, and were abandoned once the mines played out. In the southern stretches, where the river is deceptively quiet with a broad floodplain, farming developed as a way of life devoid of the strife of the coalfields, providing its own contribution to Southern Appalachian culture. The river, too, has served as a migration route for plants and animals as well as people. Here some of West Virginia's rarest plants are

found. And the New is one of the most renowned fishing streams in the state, and a premier whitewater boating river. Today 53 miles of this river and its gorge and 40 miles of its tributaries are preserved as New River Gorge National River, Gauley River National Recreation Area, and Bluestone National Scenic River, all units of the National Park System, for the use of this and future generations.



## What's in a Name

In this case the name is not at all descriptive, for the New River may be one of the oldest in North America; the most accepted estimates date it at least 65 million years in its present course. But the New once was a much longer stream that geologists call the Teays, flowing through central Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois and emptying into the Mississippi. The last advance of glacial ice during the Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago, buried most of this river and diverted the water of the New into rivers created by the glaciers: the Ohio and the Kanawha. Another noteworthy feature of the New is that it flows

across the Appalachian Plateau, not around or from it as most other streams do. This is just one more indication of its age, for the river had to be there before the mountains formed, and the Appalachians themselves are very old.

New River's deep gorge exposes geologic history as it slices through the layers of rock that tilted as the Appalachians rose. Rocks as old as 330 million years are exposed.

(See diagram at right.) Because of the nature of the tilt, the younger rock layers are in the northern area of the park. Some layers contain coal deposits (black streaks).

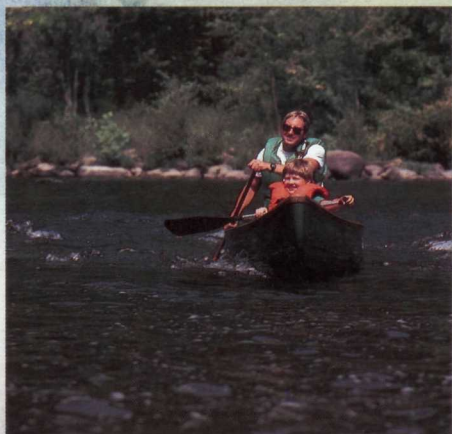
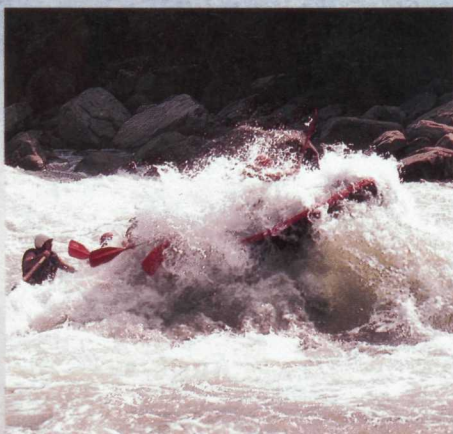


## Whitewater Activities

To many, the park is whitewater. Here the free-flowing New River falls 750 feet in 50 miles from Bluestone Dam to Gauley Bridge creating one of the finest whitewater rivers in the eastern United States. By comparison the Mississippi falls 1,428 feet from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, a distance of

2,300 miles. In the southern end of the park the river is more placid. Except for a few Class III rapids that challenge the intermediate canoeist, this section is ideal for beginning boaters who look for a leisurely float with occasional smaller rapids and excellent fishing from the banks or shallows.

North of Thurmond, the whitewater begins in earnest with rapids in varying heights and combinations ranging from Class I to V. Only experienced and properly equipped boaters should attempt to navigate these waters. It is advisable to go with an outfitter who knows the route and vagaries of the river.



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## Visitor Information

**Visitor Centers** The best place to begin your visit to the park is at one of the visitor centers. Canyon Rim Visitor Center is on U.S. 19 on the north side of the river. Open year round, this center has overlooks that provide spectacular views into the gorge and of the U.S. 19 bridge. This is the world's longest single steel arch bridge with a central span of 1,700 feet and a total length of 3,030 feet. It rises 876 feet above the riverbed. Once a year, on the third Saturday in October, the bridge is open to pedestrians, where a variety of activities draw up to a quarter of a million people. The other visitor center is at Hinton on the W. Va. 3 Bypass on the banks of the New River. It is open seasonally. Both visitor centers can provide you with an

orientation slide show, sales publications about the Gorge's nature and history, and information about park programs and activities as well as travels and accommodations in the area.

**Fishing** Fishermen find the New one of the best places in West Virginia to fish for small-mouth bass, muskellunge, walleye, catfish, and carp are among the other fish found here. Several of the streams flowing into the New are stocked with trout by the state. A West Virginia fishing license is required.

**Hiking** While you are boating or rafting down the river you may want to take a break and do some hiking. This is an excellent way to see some of the once booming but now abandoned communities in

the gorge. Check with park rangers for trail hike possibilities, access points, and proper preparation. New River Gorge is a developing park, so much of the land and riverside is still privately owned. Please respect the rights of the owners as you put in and take out and hike from and along the river bank. Check with a park ranger ahead of time to determine where park-owned property is located. Beware of the dangers inherent in the decaying and neglected structures and industrial remains. Planners are working to develop the Mary Draper Ingles trail that follows the route that this woman and her companion followed after escaping from Indians in 1755 in an attempt to return to their homes in southwestern Virginia.

**Whitewater Outfitters** The park maintains a list of all active commercial whitewater outfitters who run trips down the New River from early April to late October. Ask at either visitor center or at park headquarters in Glen Jean for the listing.

**State Parks** Within or near the boundaries of the park are five West Virginia state parks. Babcock and Grandview are within the park, and Hawks Nest, Pipestem, and Bluestone are nearby. All but Grandview, a day-use park, have accommodations. For more information on any of these parks write: West Virginia Department of Commerce, Marketing and Tourism Division, State Capitol Complex, 2101 Washington Street, Charleston, WV 25305, or call 1-800-CALLWVA.

**Amtrak** The Cardinal, an Amtrak train that runs between Washington, D.C., and Chicago, travels the length of the gorge in the park. There is one eastbound and one westbound train three times each week. Call 1-800-USA-RAIL for information on fares and times and to make reservations. This is an ideal way to get a glimpse of the abandoned towns and coal mining structures along the way that the railroad initially brought to life.

**Information** For further information about the park, write to: Superintendent, P.O. Box 246, Glen Jean, WV 25846-0246.

New River Gorge is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 350 parks representing important

examples of our country's natural and cultural inheritance.

For travel, accommodations, and services information, write to one of these: Southern West Virginia Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 1799, Beckley, WV 25802; Beckley/Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 1798, 106 McCreery St., Beckley, WV 25801; Fayette County Chamber of Commerce, 310 Oyster Avenue, Oak Hill, WV 25901; Summers County Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 309, Hinton, WV 25951.

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