

New River Gorge

New River Gorge National River
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).

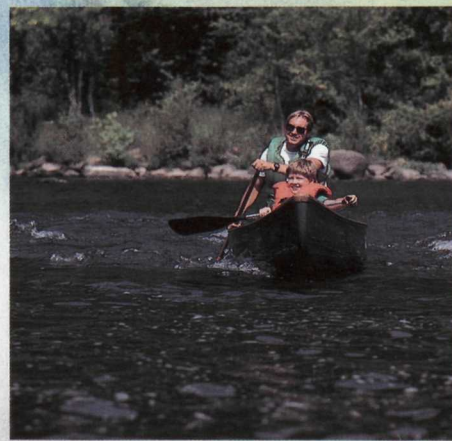
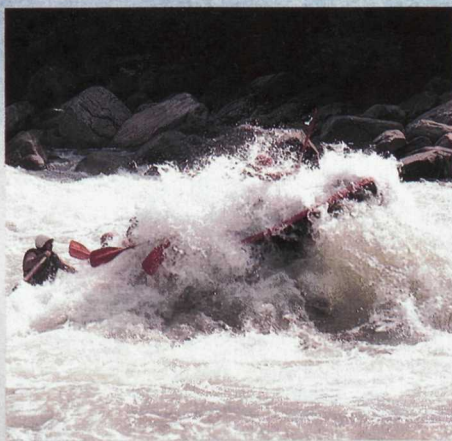


Whitewater Activities

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.



Visiting New River Gorge

About the Park New River Gorge National River was established in 1978 to preserve and protect 53 miles of the New River as a free-flowing waterway. Located in southern West Virginia, this park encompasses 70,000 acres of land along the New River between the towns of Hinton and Fayetteville. The park and the surrounding area are rich in cultural and natural history, as well as scenic and recreational opportunities.

Visitor Centers Stop first at one of the four visitor centers: Canyon Rim, Thurmond Depot, Grandview, or Hinton. All visitor centers provide an orientation to the park, sales publications about the natural and cultural history of the gorge, and information about park programs and activities.

Canyon Rim Located at the north end of the park, Canyon Rim Visitor Center is open year-round except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. An adjacent boardwalk has spectacular views of the gorge and of the New River Gorge Bridge, the world's longest single-arch steel span bridge.

Thurmond Depot In the early 1900s this railroad boomtown had the highest revenue on the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway. The historic depot has been restored to serve as a park visitor center. (Open seasonally.)

Grandview Known for both its overlooks and its spring rhododendron display, Grandview also has an outdoor theater. Grandview trails feature tunnels, rhododendron groves, and superb views. (Open seasonally.)

Hinton Located west of Hinton on W.Va. 20, this riverside center has exhibits and a video program. (Open seasonally.)

Sandstone Falls A fully accessible boardwalk leads to river-level views of the largest falls on the New River, which span 1,500 feet of the river.

Trails Miles of trails within the park offer an excellent means to explore New River Gorge. Trails feature old coal towns, waterfalls, geological formations, and views of the gorge. A few trails permit mountain biking and horseback riding; check with park staff for information on trail use. Some property within park boundaries is privately owned. Please respect the rights of property owners. Beware of decaying structures and industrial remains.

River Recreation Commercial whitewater outfitters conduct trips down the New River from April through October. For a list of licensed outfitters, ask at a visitor center or call 1-800-CALL WVA. Some of the finest fishing in the state is on the New River; a West Virginia fishing license is required.

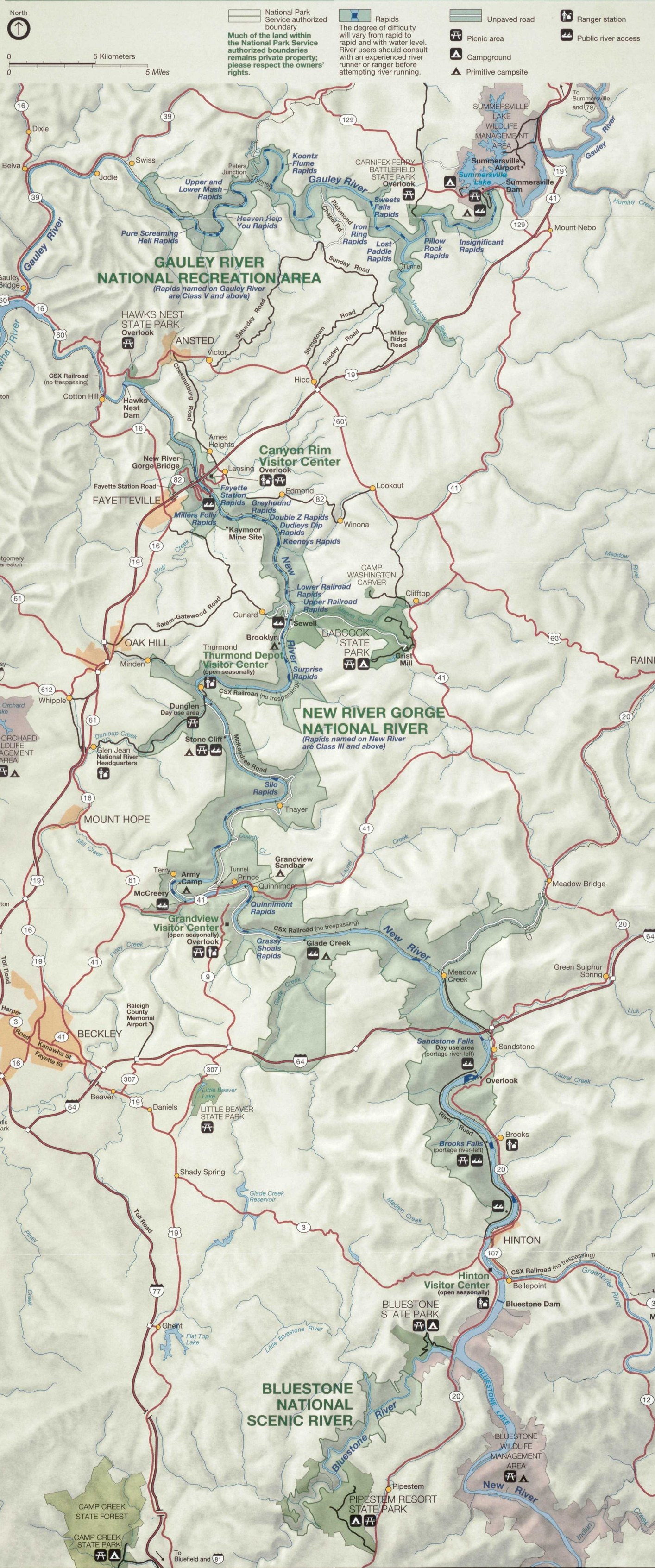
State Parks Within or near the boundaries of the park are seven West Virginia state parks: Carnifex Ferry Battlefield, Hawks Nest, Babcock, Little Beaver, Bluestone, Camp Creek, and Pipestem Resort. For more information concerning these parks and the accommodations they offer, write to the West Virginia Division of Tourism, 2101 Washington Street East, Charleston, WV 25305-0317, or call 1-800-CALL WVA.

Related Park Areas Gauley River National Recreation Area is about 30 minutes north of Canyon Rim Visitor Center. The Gauley is known for its rugged beauty, and superb fishing and whitewater. Bluestone National Scenic River, south of Hinton, protects a pristine area of the Bluestone River, and has hiking and fishing. Access is through Bluestone State Park or Pipestem Resort State Park.

Trains CSX Transportation owns and operates 70 miles of active rail lines that lie within the park boundaries. Trains pass through the park daily. An AMTRAK passenger train, the Cardinal, travels the length of the gorge regularly. For information call 1-800-USA RAIL. Trespassing on CSX tracks or access roads is dangerous and is strictly prohibited.

Further Information New River Gorge National River is part of the National Park System, one of more than 370 areas that are examples of our nation's natural and cultural heritage. Write to Superintendent, New River Gorge National River, P.O. Box 246, Glen Jean, WV 25846-0246; or call 304-465-0508; or visit www.nps.gov/neri on the Internet. For information concerning area services and activities, write to the Southern West Virginia Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 1799, Beckley WV 25802-1799; or call 1-800-VISIT WVA. Bridge Day is the third Saturday in October; for information call 1-800-927-0263.

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