



2023

YEAR IN REVIEW

ANNUAL REPORT

OUR MISSION

We are the fundraising partner for the Blue Ridge Parkway, providing support for initiatives along the 469-mile route, including natural resource protection, historical and cultural preservation, visitor amenities, and education and outreach.

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Cover photo by Margaret Wiktor

Even with the moniker America's Favorite Drive, the Blue Ridge Parkway is so much more than a 469-mile roadway. The Parkway is winding trails and rivers, craggy peaks, and lush valleys. It's expansive mountain views and cherished historic landmarks. It's your memories and my memories of afternoon drives, family picnics, stary camp-outs, wildlife sightings, changing seasons, and most of all—joy.

Your support stretches to all corners of the Blue Ridge Parkway, making a difference from the wildflower bays buzzing with bees to the neighboring 5,721-foot summit of Mount Pisgah.

This year brought so many accomplishments to celebrate. Because of your generosity and the work of volunteers, there is a sturdy new viewing platform atop Mount Pisgah. The high-elevation landscape of Waterrock Knob is healing after the removal of graffiti-covered plane wreckage, leading to the discovery of a rare grass at the site.

Through our small grants program, you created a lending library of outdoor gear for a group of Latino adventurers. You are giving bats a fighting chance to thrive in the mountains through the funding of scientific research. More children built a relationship with the outdoors through our Kids in Parks program. The Blue Ridge Music Center shared mountain music at its Virginia campus and additional Parkway destinations with the summer concert series and Milepost Music program.

The impact of your contributions is rippling across the mountains and into the Parkway's gateway communities through the Blue Ridge Rising initiative and summit, designed to engage park neighbors in efforts to strengthen the entire region.

As you can see in this report, there is truly nowhere your support can't take us on this incredible journey to protect and uplift the Blue Ridge Parkway.



Carolyn Ward
Chief Executive Officer
Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

Thank you to the Foundation and its supporters for another outstanding year of stewardship on the Blue Ridge Parkway! As we pivot into 2024, I'm inspired by the work we accomplished together in 2023. Whether connecting millions of people with the sights, sounds, and stories of the southern Appalachian Mountains, or ensuring protection of the delicate resources that we steward within our park's boundaries—this work is possible through our partnership.

The National Park Service is said to be in the "forever business." Our mission, as set in the 1916 Organic Act, is "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." During 2023, there were many Foundation projects that demonstrated our commitment to this mission.

One such project was the removal of debris from a decades-old plane crash near Waterrock Knob. An area of incredible beauty and biodiversity had become burdened by the growing popularity of this off-trail site. Heavy use, significant resource damage, and increased need for emergency response led us to take action. Thanks to the Foundation, this area is now healing—and plants that were unknown at the site have now been found in the area.

In Virginia, we were proud of the work done by the Foundation to engage Parkway communities in planning for the future of the Blue Ridge Music Center. We are looking forward to an expansion of operations there in response to this important input.

The popularity of the Parkway is no surprise. More than 16.5 million people visited in 2023. Together, we can ensure that the Parkway experience is protected and supports local economies for generations to come.



Tracy Swartout
Superintendent
Blue Ridge Parkway

PRESERVING HISTORY & CULTURE

BLUE RIDGE MUSIC CENTER

Hear the mountains

Through your support, the Blue Ridge Music Center has continued to be nationally recognized as a musical and cultural asset, serving as a catalyst for regional travel and tourism, and promoting bluegrass, old-time, and American roots-based music and artists. The Music Center defines a shared regional identity, provides a place of common interest, and contributes to regional vitality.

In 2023, the Music Center hosted a successful summer concert series with headliners that included Watchhouse, Steep Canyon Rangers, and Sierra Ferrell. The Milepost Music program brought performances to Humpback Rocks, Peaks of Otter, Mabry Mill, Doughton Park, and the Asheville Visitor Center. Music Center visitors enjoyed Midday Mountain Music shows daily on the breezeway.

In response to significant growth in recent years, the Music Center focused on gaining a better understanding of the interests of its visitors and changing trends in music consumption by developing a comprehensive strategic action plan. This plan identifies opportunities for enhancing, leveraging, and marketing the Music Center's existing facilities and will act as a guide for growth in the coming years.



The summer concert series welcomed Sierra Ferrell (top), Amythyst Kiah (above), and Larry & Joe (right) to the outdoor amphitheater. Photos by Mike Duncan





EDUCATION & OUTREACH

YOUNG STEWARDS

Kids in Parks expands its footprint



The Kids in Parks program began an extensive expansion of its network of family-friendly trails in South Carolina in 2023, while also adding adventures in Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Virginia. Over the next four years, three TRACK Trails will be established in each of South Carolina's 46 counties for a total of 138 new locations. This expansion, made possible through a grant from the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation to support the goals of Diabetes Free SC, will ensure that more kids and families can engage in outdoor recreation to foster lifelong wellness and meaningful connections to public lands.



The TRACK Trail grand opening at Lynch's Woods Park in Newberry, S.C.



The Peak to Prosperity Palmetto trailhead and group hike in Little Mountain, S.C.



The TRACK Trail ribbon cutting ceremony at Hidden Lake at the Newberry Recreation Complex in Newberry, S.C.

GRANTS

Funding the future

The Foundation awarded two grants to make outdoor adventures better experiences for everyone. Latinos Aventureros en las Carolinas received \$5,000 to stock El Closet, a lending library of outdoor gear and supplies for members of the Hispanic community. The Carolina Mountain Club received \$11,200 for trail maintenance tools and equipment.

“After almost a year of bringing people together in the outdoors through events, we have noticed a need for an outdoor supply borrowing closet,” said Vivianette Ortiz Caraballo with Los Aventureros. “Now we can offer all the basic necessities for our participants to have fun and enjoy the outdoors.”



Carolina Mountain Club members repair a park trail



Latinos Aventureros enjoy the outdoors thanks to camping equipment and hiking poles from El Closet



TRAINING & EQUIPMENT

Saving lives

Thanks to donors, Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) were purchased and distributed to Parkway locations. National Park Service staff and more than 20 volunteers received training on the proper use of these life-saving devices and certification in first aid and CPR from the American Red Cross. Now more people are prepared to assist park visitors when emergencies arise.



NPS volunteers train in CPR in Asheville, N.C.

ENHANCING VISITOR EXPERIENCES

PLATFORM PARTNERSHIP

Reconstruction atop Mount Pisgah

Thanks to donor support for the Foundation's Trails & Views Forever program, Carolina Mountain Club volunteers constructed a new observation deck atop Mount Pisgah last fall. Originally built in 1979, the platform endured decades of exposure to the elements and required frequent repairs. Now, the deck will continue to give hikers a spectacular view of the surrounding landscape of Pisgah National Forest. The platform is accessible via the trailhead at milepost 407.6. This project was inspired by the memory of Lisa Hambrick Hagebak and championed by her family to recognize her love of the North Carolina mountains and Blue Ridge Parkway.



Volunteers with Carolina Mountain Club reconstruct the Mount Pisgah viewing platform. Photos by David Huff



The observation deck atop Mount Pisgah replaces the original built by the U.S. Youth Conservation Corps in 1979



BUCK SPRING LODGE

Not forgotten

A new interpretive panel shares the story of Buck Spring Lodge, a summer hunting retreat built by George Vanderbilt in the 1890s on what was then part of his 125,000-acre estate. The sign, located in the Buck Springs Gap Overlook parking area at milepost 407.6 near Pisgah Inn, helps visitors envision the Adirondack-style structures that stood at the site until the early 1960s. Just downhill from the sign, a trail leads to the springhouse, the only remaining structure from the retreat.



The lodge's springhouse still stands at the site



A Parkway visitor reads the new interpretive panel



Historic photo of Buck Spring Lodge courtesy of Blue Ridge Parkway/National Park Service

PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES

WATERROCK KNOB

Flora found

During the summer, the Foundation funded the removal of plane wreckage from Waterrock Knob, milepost 451, to help protect natural resources at the site and keep visitors from exploring an area far from rescue assistance. Since then, the crash site has begun healing from trampling, erosion, soil compaction, and vegetation removal caused by the use of unauthorized social trails.

Rehabilitation of the landscape by National Park Service staff and volunteers yielded the discovery of *Calamagrostis cainii*, an endangered species of grass that only grows at rocky, high elevations along the North Carolina and Tennessee border. Waterrock Knob is home to a concentration of rare and sensitive species, as it is one of only four high-elevation sites in the park. The discovery of another endangered plant emphasizes the need to preserve the Blue Ridge Parkway's biodiverse landscape.



Calamagrostis cainii. Photo by Chris Ulrey



Crews worked to prepare wreckage to be lifted from the site



Wreckage was removed via helicopter
Photo by Reggie Tidwell

TINY CREATURES, BIG IMPACT

The bats & the bees

Researchers at Virginia Tech's College of Natural Resources & Environment partnered with the National Park Service to better understand the bat populations along the Parkway and how to protect them. Donor support funded the purchase of acoustic detectors, a device used to pick up the frequency and rhythm of bat echolocation calls. The information gathered will help identify common and rare bat species, determine their locations in the park, and collect data that shows trends in their health and vigor.

Students and volunteers from Appalachian State University spent two summers surveying populations of bees in the park, and the results are in. More than 100 species of bees were identified in both Virginia and North Carolina, yielding the amazing discovery of two new species since a 2015 bumblebee inventory. The federally listed endangered species *Bombus affinis*, the rusty patched bumblebee, was found in Virginia, and both states yielded *B. pensylvanicus*, the American bumblebee, a vulnerable and threatened species. The National Park Service is working to create additional pollinator sites throughout the park to help foster this trove of pollinator biodiversity.



A Virginia Tech researcher attaches an acoustic detector to a tree outside the Blue Ridge Parkway headquarters in Asheville, N.C.



Endangered northern long-eared bat



The endangered rusty patched bumblebee



A wildflower bay is prepared through solarization

EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

The Denim Ball

Decked out in denim, more than 200 guests admired a unique collection of vintage cars as they celebrated the sixth annual Denim Ball at the Perry Car Barn in Blowing Rock, N.C. The sold-out event raised nearly \$200,000 to fund continued improvements at Moses H. Cone Memorial Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Donations from the evening and proceeds from ticket sales will fund projects at the 3,500-acre park, including the construction of an ADA-compliant ramp at Bass Lake to allow greater access to the popular loop trail.

We are grateful for the support of guests, sponsors, and those who contributed to the live and silent auctions. The Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority was the event's exclusive Denim King sponsor. The evening was also made possible thanks to The Rosemyr Corporation, Mast General Store, Modern Automotive of Boone, Forever Mountain LLC, Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show Foundation, Appalachian Mountain Brewery, Blowing Rock Brewing, Boonshine Brewing Co., Pepsi, and Sunset & Vine. Special thanks to our hosts, Chip and Monica Perry.



(1) The Perry Car Barn (2) Donna Lewis, Larry Imeson, Ken Lewis, and Janet Cone arriving to the event (3) Allen Moseley, Jim McDowell, Jim Deal, Deborah McDowell, Alfred Adams, and Cindy Wallace (4) David Soyars (center) and Mark File (right) admire a vintage vehicle. Photos by Lonnie Webster

RECEPTIONS

Memorable meet-ups

Members of our community of stewards gathered together for three fantastic events in 2023. During the March reception at the Floyd Center for the Arts, Earl White and Adrienne Davis entertained guests with old-time fiddle, guitar, and banjo music. Blue Ridge Parkway Superintendent Tracy Swartout spoke to guests at the July reception at Reynolda Village in Winston-Salem, N.C., and again at the Monte Vista Hotel in Black Mountain in November. We are thankful to the guests, speakers, and musicians for joining us to celebrate the Parkway and the contributions of donors and volunteers.



(1) Jim Newlin, Whitney Brown, Will Griffin, and Carolyn Ward, CEO of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, at the Floyd Center for the Arts (2) Musicians Adrienne Davis and Earl White in Floyd (3) Bill & Elizabeth Hollan at Reynolda Village in Winston-Salem (4) Gary Johnson, Carolyn Ward, Kevin Brandt, and Phil Francis at the Monte Vista Hotel in Black Mountain (5) Julie H. Moore, Richard Emmett, and Greg Andeck at Reynolda Village

DECEMBER 5, 2023

Two-State Summit

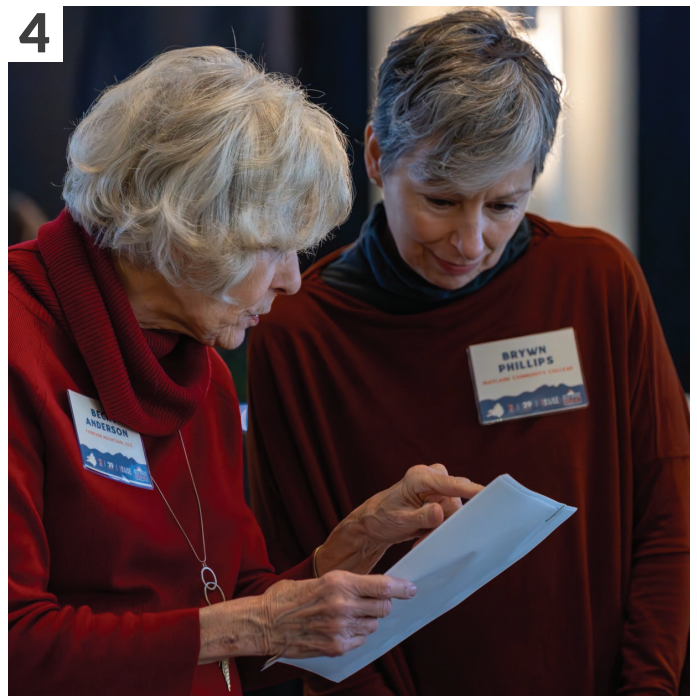
More than 130 leaders from North Carolina and Virginia gathered to discuss strategies for unifying and strengthening communities adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway during the Blue Ridge Rising Two-State Summit on Dec. 5-6 in Blowing Rock.

Hosted by the Foundation, the summit highlighted six key focus areas that were determined by participants in a series of 30 listening sessions hosted earlier in 2023. Presenters highlighted the top action strategies in marketing, education, advocacy, resource protection, visitor experiences, and capacity building.

The strategies include:

- developing a unified regional voice
- creating travel itineraries to highlight the region
- advancing connector trails and greenways
- protecting Parkway viewsheds
- bolstering workforce development in hospitality and natural resources
- promoting safe bicycling adventures
- identifying dark sky areas for stargazing

Thanks to this involvement and collaboration from community members across the region, a Blue Ridge Rising action plan will be finalized in early 2024, and the Foundation and its partners will implement the first projects soon thereafter.



(1) Carolyn Ward, CEO of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, welcomes guests to the summit (2) Kyle Case and Ann Bass collaborate at the summit (3) Lisa Moyer, co-owner of outdoor adventure company Muddy Squirrel, speaks about enhancing visitor experiences (4) Becky Anderson and Brywn Phillips discuss the summit schedule

PICK YOUR WAY TO GIVE

We invite you to explore these avenues of giving to sustain the Parkway for current and future generations.

Tribute Gifts

A donation in honor or in memory of a loved one is a meaningful way to celebrate their connection to the Parkway or to commemorate a milestone, such as a birthday, anniversary, or wedding. (See the list of 2023 tribute gifts on page 22.)

Monthly Giving

As a monthly donor, you can become a Parkway Protector by supporting the Foundation's work year-round by making an automated recurring donation. (See the list of Parkway Protectors on page 26.)

Beneficiary Designations

By naming the Foundation as a beneficiary in your will, 401(k), IRA, or life insurance policy, you will create an enduring legacy that protects the Parkway for many years to come.

Sample bequest language:

"I, [name], of [city, state, ZIP], give, devise, and bequeath to the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation (Tax ID: 31-1512730), [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property] for its unrestricted use and purpose."

Beneficiary information for IRAs, 401(k)s, and insurance policies:

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717 S. Marshall St., Suite 105B
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The Foundation is raising funds for repairs to Mabry Mill

Workplace Giving



Contact your participating human resources office to give to the Foundation through EarthShare's Workplace Giving, Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign, or the N.C. State Employees Combined Campaign (#1121). Some companies will match employee gifts. Ask your employer for information or visit doublethedonation.com/brpfoundation.

Additional Opportunities

For more ways to give, including Donor Advised Funds, IRA Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs), and gifts of stock, contact development officers Jordan Calaway (jcalaway@brpfoundation.org) or George Ivey (givey@brpfoundation.org).

Give Now!



To make a gift now, scan the QR code or visit BRPFoundation.org to donate.

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View from Craggy Pinnacle by Jon Bilous

COMMUNITY OF STEWARDS

The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation is thankful for the individuals, businesses, foundations, and partners who contribute to the safekeeping of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Donors who gave \$250 or more between January 1 and December 31, 2023, are acknowledged on the following pages. They form a Community of Stewards that is committed to preserving and protecting the scenic route today and forever.

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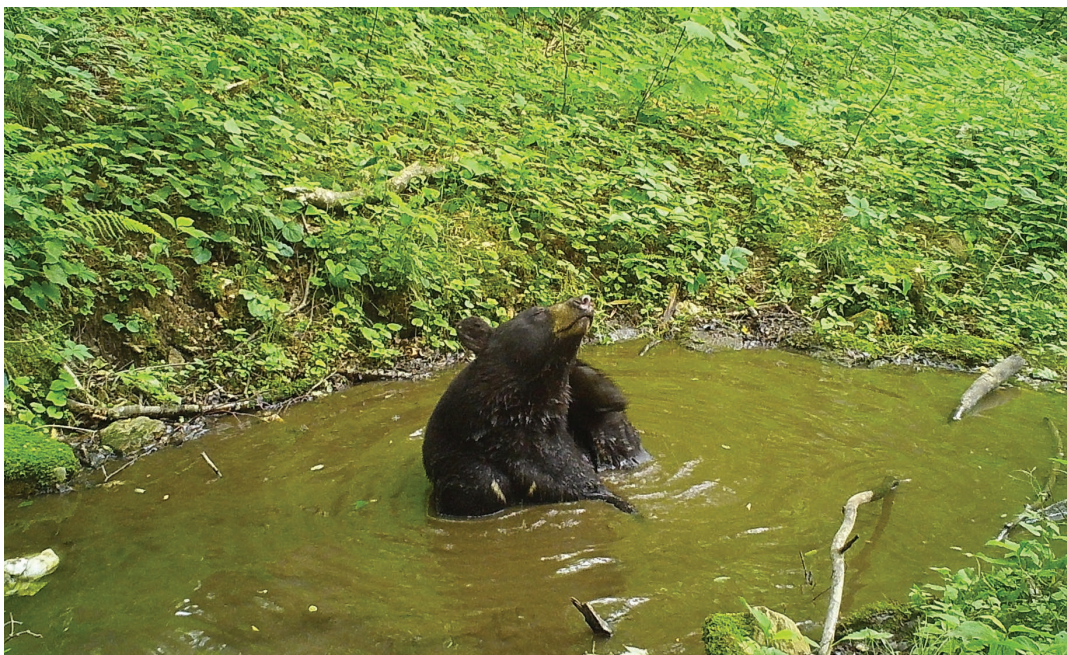
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A Foundation-funded wildlife camera catches a black bear enjoying a bath

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The André Michaux Society

When you plan a gift, you become a member of The André Michaux Society, which honors the French botanist and explorer who enlightened others about the natural wonders of the Blue Ridge Mountains.



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Butterflies at Mount Mitchell Overlook, milepost 350. Photo by George Ivey

REMEMBRANCE

Linda Combs

In 2023, Linda Combs, a member of the Foundation's Abbott-Everhardt Society, passed away. In addition to her numerous professional accomplishments, Combs was a visionary leader. Her guidance was instrumental in the success of North Carolina's Parkway license plate program, which raises more than \$500,000 each year to support national park enhancements.

When learning of her induction to the society, which honors past chairs of the board of trustees, she wrote to CEO Carolyn Ward. "The opportunity to serve as chair of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, alongside you and dedicated members of the Board of Trustees, was a tremendous honor in and of itself."

We are so appreciative of the friendship and stewardship she shared with the board and staff.



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The Blue Ridge Parkway license plate is the perfect example of how a community of supporters can make a big impact. In 2023, North Carolina drivers raised \$574,461 to enhance the national park by purchasing or renewing their Blue Ridge Parkway license plate. That is the largest amount raised through the program in more than a decade. Thank you, North Carolina plateholders!

And there is more great news. Virginia drivers can now support the Blue Ridge Parkway with their very own specialty plate. The new tag is the only one in the commonwealth dedicated to providing funds for the Blue Ridge Parkway.

To learn how to get your Parkway plate, visit GetThePlate.org.

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REMEMBRANCE

Marcus B. Simpson, Jr.

As a child in the 1950s, Mark's favorite place to go on weekends and during the summer was the Blue Ridge Parkway. He loved nothing more than to explore the variety of wildlife and wildflowers found in many habitats from north to south.

While he was in college, he spent his summers leading campers from Camp Carolina in Brevard, N.C., on hikes along the many trails. In his early 20s, while still attending medical school, he found time to explore the avian habitats and wrote many articles for *The Chat*, the quarterly publication of the Carolina Bird Club. In his pieces, he documented the unusual species he found, particularly at the higher elevations, such as the Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and American Woodcock.

His fascination with the avian life of the national park only grew over the years and in the late 1980s, while working as a pathologist in Washington, D.C., he spent as much time as he could studying the habitat and bird life along the entire length of the Parkway and adjacent areas. This research culminated in the publication of his masterful work, *Birds of the Blue Ridge Mountains*, published by UNC Press in 1992. It is still a popular book for locating bird species along the Parkway.

His work did not end there. Mark took a special interest in the calling and breeding habits of the Northern Saw-whet Owl, and he installed numerous nesting boxes in the Black and Balsam mountains.



His work paid off with the first occupied box in 2016 and several more found that year and following years. Most of the occupied nest boxes produced successfully fledged young and provided important information on the habitat requirements, favored prey, and breeding success of the species in this area.

After retiring, he and his wife Marilyn moved permanently to the mountains and, along with the work on Saw-whet Owls, began searching for proof of breeding of the Hermit Thrush, a species that had only recently expanded its summer range into the Southern Appalachian Mountains. In 2011, the couple found the first nest not far from milepost 355 on the Parkway. In subsequent years, they found several more nests.

Mark was dedicated to the study of avian life along the Parkway and enjoyed nothing more than spending endless hours, both day and night, roaming along the road and adjacent trails. He loved the Parkway to his final days and his spirit will dwell there forever.

- By Marilyn Simpson

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A Parkway pollinator, the Primrose moth, sleeping in an evening primrose bloom

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"Our Blue Ridge Parkway journey began like a lot of other people's, with family vacations. We enjoyed visiting the mountains in autumn and traveling along the Parkway from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park entrance all the way to Skyline Drive, stopping at points in between to take in hikes and attractions. Some of our favorite memories are attending Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation retreats at Wild Acres, where my son made many fond memories that are still vivid 15 years later. We love to walk on the Parkway when it's closed to traffic, picnic at Mount Pisgah and Craggy Gardens, visit the Folk Art Center, and hike at Mount Mitchell. The Parkway Protector program is a great way for us to give back as a thank you for our decades of enjoyment and help protect this vital resource!"

- Frank and Donna D., Parkway Protectors

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Historic Polly Woods Ordinary at Peaks of Otter, milepost 86, in Virginia

REMEMBRANCE

Joe Epley

The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation recently lost a longtime supporter and member of the Council of Advisors, Joe Epley. A native of Forest City, N.C., he worked as a television reporter and editor in Asheville and Charlotte before transitioning into a public relations career. Among Epley's honors are election to the University of North Carolina's Journalism School Public Relations Hall of Fame and Defense Information School Hall of Fame. He was also awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the state's highest honor for noteworthy citizens. An author and historian, Epley also served on the Foundation's Board of Trustees before becoming an advisor. He captured his warm memories of the Parkway in 2009: "When I was a child back in the 1940s, I remember my favorite treat was having my father drive the family up to the Blue Ridge Parkway. I then took my children there as often as I could, and later, I gave my grandchildren the same thrill. It is one of America's great treasures."

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Debra Obenshain

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The view from Humpback Rocks at milepost 5 in Virginia. Photo by Paw Photography

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**All the trips made
on the Parkway**

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Matthew W. Wyatt Advised

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We make every effort to correctly record and display donor names, honors, memorials, and gift amounts. If an error is found in this report, please call Jordan Calaway at (866) 308-2773 ext. 245, or email her at jcalaway@brpfoundation.org

GIVING BACK

Thank you, volunteers!

We are so grateful to the individuals who advance our mission by volunteering to serve on our board of trustees or council of advisors. Each year, we celebrate those who have completed their terms. As 2023 came to a close, we honored outgoing trustees Bob Lassiter, Jim McDowell, John Mitchell, and Jennifer Zuckerman. Bob Stout joined the Abbott-Everhardt Society, a group created to recognize the contributions of past board chairs. To see a list of trustees and advisors, visit BRPFoundation.org/leadership.



(Left to right) Jennifer Zuckerman with Jason Urroz, John Mitchell, Whitney Brown, and Jim McDowell with Bob Stout



In the spring, volunteers showed their love for The Bluffs Restaurant and Doughton Park by painting flower boxes, cleaning windows, and clearing gutters before the beloved establishment welcomed diners for the season.



Before the Blue Ridge Music Center's opening last May, volunteers groomed the grounds in preparation for another season of mountain music experiences.



Boone Fork along the Parkway. Photo by Jon Bilous