

Mountain SUMMER

magazine



2022

A special publication of

Times  Courier

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Kids and their dogs play in the shoals on Clear Creek

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A view of Carters Lake

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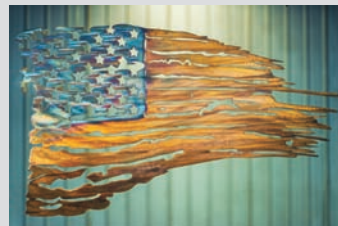
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Welcome to the mountains ...

Gilmer County is famous for our fall season. We have apples and our Apple Festival which have made a name for the county which is known far and wide. But, as many visitors have discovered, our summer season is filled with lots of fun and adventure, especially when it comes to our outdoors and our vineyards.

To help guide you, we present you with our second annual Mountain Summer magazine, written, assembled and published by the staff of the *Times-Courier*.

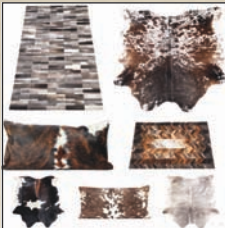
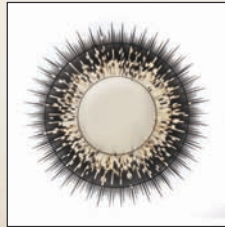
We first began talking about this magazine when we noticed the tourism in our county

and towns was growing into other seasons. No longer were people visiting Gilmer County just in the fall to pick apples and enjoy our changing seasons. We have become a viable destination throughout the year.

Summer in the mountains is about hiking through the forests, splashing through cool mountain streams, enjoying our summer breezes, boating on Carters Lake, riding down our rivers in your preferred mode of floatation and relaxing at one of our wine tasting rooms.

It is also about good food and cheer. Enjoying our slower pace on a back porch. Seeing a play

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made up of local actors. Listening to small bands play their songs and some covers. Shopping in our unique mountain stores.

Whatever you enjoy, we are sure you can find it here in our mountains.

First off, we have a story about the mushrooms being grown in Gilmer County. If agritourism is your thing, we have another crop being added to our wealth of produce.

Looking for the picturesque spot to visit? Read about the best hiking spots in the area and our waterfalls.

Thinking about camping or enjoying a

campfire? We have tips on fighting off the bugs and some campfire recipes to enjoy.

Fishing is also a popular activity. We give you the inside scoop from some of our guides.

And, of course, we have a golf course and various ways to enjoy our local waters.

We would like to thank all our advertisers for joining us in this venture. We encourage you to look over their ads and see what our local business community has to offer you.

Thank you for reading.

Andy Ashurst, Publisher
Times-Courier

Background photo by Whitney Sherrill

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MUSHROOM BOOM

Ellijay Mushrooms producing gourmet crop many logs at a time

By Michael Andrews
Mountain Life Editor

Gilmer County has long been known as Georgia's Apple Capital. More recently, grapes have thrived in local vineyards.

Now, Ellijay is becoming known for another crop — gourmet mushrooms grown organically at a local farm.

High on a hilltop in the Flat Branch community, Ellijay Mushrooms has been steadily growing its crop production and customer base since the first harvest in 2018.

The 36-acre farm is part of more than 150 total acres where the American Dhamma Society is centered and hosts meditation retreats.

"Buddhist monks and nuns come from all over the world to meditate on top of the mountain," said Howard Berk, Ellijay Mushrooms president.

Growing a good reputation

Berk began growing mushrooms commercially after a 17-year IT career. He answered an ad in an Atlanta newspaper to help start a farmers market in Chamblee, which eventually led to 2 Fun-Guys, an online business through which Berk and partner,

➤ **Page 8**



Howard Berk, Ellijay Mushrooms president, left, shows Georgia Agricultural Commissioner Gary W. Black around one of the Ellijay Mushrooms greenhouses.



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Todd Pittard, sell mushroom logs and growing kits.

“My partners in Ellijay (Megan Cai and Amanda Liu) found me through that,” Berk said.

The shiitake and oyster mushrooms grown in Ellijay are sold to an array of individual customers and commercial clients, which includes several metro Atlanta and Gilmer County restaurants.

So why do the north Georgia mountains and mushrooms mix so well? Berk said the answer is in the water.

“Mushrooms are 92 percent water. It’s the main ingredient. We say that we have the Rolls-Royce of mushrooms

due to our mountain water. It’s the differentiator,” he added. “You can tell the difference in our mushrooms in taste and cooking with them.”

The company didn’t have a firm client list established when it started almost four years ago. Its good and growing reputation has been built by word of mouth and pounding the pavement, Berk noted.

Today, Ellijay Mushrooms can be found at Whole Foods markets, as well as several other Atlanta area natural food stores and farmers markets. They’re also available directly from the company on its website (EllijayMushrooms.com).

“We support a lot of our local farmers. We sell them mushrooms at a discount so they can make money for their farms, and they sell them at different farmers

markets in and around Atlanta,” Berk said.

Ellijay restaurants that use the mushrooms in their menus include The Shack, River Street Tavern, Emily’s and The Roof.

River Street Tavern co-owner Brad Simmons said the locally-sourced shiitakes are a popular addition to his restaurant’s signature Tavern Burger, which also features Ellijay-grown beef from Bear Creek Cattle Company.

“It’s a great product. We use them on anything that someone wants to add mushrooms to,” he added.

Having the mushroom farm just minutes from the downtown tavern has made for a great partnership, Simmons noted.

“The best part is it’s a local source that we can use year-round. They deliver to us whenever we need it. If we use more than we thought we would, they get to

► Page 10





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Ellijay Mushrooms are grown in double layered greenhouses, above, which provide the right amount of heat and shade for the 'shrooms to thrive on moistened logs. At right, Howard Berk checks on emerging shiitake mushrooms growing in one of the farm's greenhouses.



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Gourmet shiitake, left, and oyster, right, mushrooms are grown at the Ellijay Mushrooms farm in the Flat Branch area of the county.

► *Ellijay Mushrooms, from page 9*

us right on the fly,” he added.

From one log to many

Berk, who grew up in Ohio and has lived in the Atlanta area since 1996, had experience growing fresh food before trying his hand at mushrooms.

“When I got on a health kick and lost 25 pounds, I really got a better relationship with food,” he said.

Berk started out growing

summer garden crops like tomatoes and squash, but his home gardening suffered from too much shade.

That’s where mushrooms came in.

“It was just by circumstance. (I went from) one mushroom log to growing lots of mushrooms every week,” he said. “All the different kinds of mushrooms intrigued me, but the health benefits really turned my

brain on and motivated me to learn more about them and how to grow them.”

Oysters are generally a firm fungi with a mild, sweet taste, while shiitakes are a more savory, meaty variety of mushroom. Both offer ample protein, antioxidants and other nutrients, Berk noted.

At the Ellijay farm, they grow on a few thousand moistened logs inside 120-foot-long double-layered greenhouses, which provide the type of temperature and shade the ‘shrooms need to thrive.

“The sun would take all the moisture out, and you wouldn’t have much luck,” Berk said. “We keep our logs dormant till they’re ready to be put on the shelf, then we water them for X amount of days so the mushrooms can keep coming out and growing.”

Looking ahead

The Ellijay Mushrooms team is currently working to open a farm store and education center, which will offer tours to customers.

“We want people to come see what we do,” Berk said. “Ever since my kids were in elementary school, I’ve focused on education and

teaching kids where food comes from. We’re going to do the same here.”

The Ellijay farm is one of four Georgia mushroom producers recently selected for a crop-boosting program led by the mycology division at Kennesaw State University.

“We will be receiving a 40-foot smart container,” Berk said. “The Ph.D. students wrote a software program for them to optimize the growth and yield of whatever we’re growing. It will be fine-tuned so we eventually get better production than we have now.”

Plans are in the early stages for a facility to be built on the farm where grow logs will be constructed using agricultural biomass.

“We’re in the process of buying equipment to make our own logs. We’ll end up using all this excess biomass, like sawdust, from Georgia farms. Being out in the middle of nowhere, we’re facing some challenges with resources like power. Gov. Kemp’s rural development team has been out here helping us try to figure out resources and ways to get this facility built,” Berk said.



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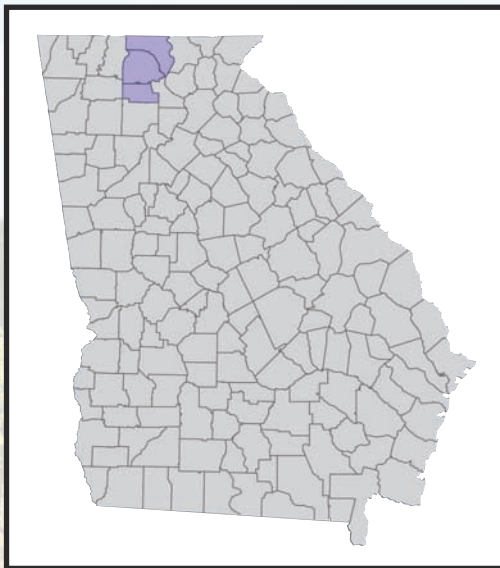
The North Georgia Mountains have always been known as a place to escape for breathtaking views and to enjoy the simple pleasures in life. Our growing number of wineries and vineyards in Mountain Wine Country offer that, and so much more.

With 17 area tasting rooms nestled among the stunning landscape of North Georgia, the area surrounding Ellijay is a wine-lovers dream. Three new tasting rooms opened in the last year (including Hard Cider), and four more are scheduled to open this year and into 2023. Ellijay is becoming THE destination for wine travel in the southeastern United States.

The tasting rooms here are unpretentious, welcoming and offer a wide variety of experiences. Our wineries all have something different to offer from private barrel-room tastings, special events, food trucks, music and concerts, lodging options and much more. You can even take part in the crush this fall!

We encourage you to contact our Pick Ellijay team at pickellijay.com or come to one of our Visitor Centers in Ellijay to get maps and suggestions on vineyards that might appeal to you. Book a trip with one of our transportation companies who will collect your group at your rental cabin or hotel and transport you to the vineyards safely, while you sit back and take in the views.

We invite you to come up, rent a cabin, enjoy our many dining choices, tour our wineries, and discover Mountain Wine Country!



Distance to Ellijay from:

- Chattanooga, TN - 67 miles
- Atlanta, GA - 78 miles
- Athens, GA - 96 miles
- Asheville, NC - 151 miles
- Charlotte, NC - 266 miles



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➤ *Mountain Wine Country continued next 2 pages*

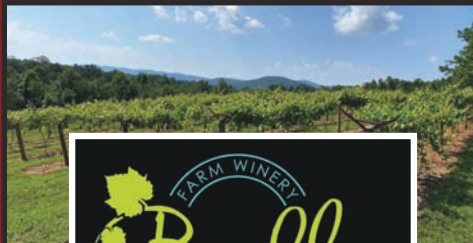
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By Robbie Bills
Sports Editor

Few golf courses in Georgia offer the gorgeous sprawling views on display at Whitepath.

The 18-hole course is nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and has been a golfing destination for 34 years.

Those in search of a flat tract with fairways as wide as a battleship is long will have to look elsewhere. However, if elevated tee boxes, constant elevation changes and a course that rewards careful shot consideration piques your interest, then look no farther.

Whitepath is managed by Gilmer County under the supervision of director of golf Mike Brumby, who has held the position for nine years.



"I hear it every day," Brumby began, "I see people from Florida, New York, and we've had groups in from Montana and they absolutely loved it. A lot of our tee boxes are elevated; they (golfers) are up and they're hitting down. A lot of people think they're hitting it 500 yards and it makes them feel good. Hole number one, three, six, eight, 10 ... they're all looking down with a view."

Because Whitepath is in a heavily-wooded area, it offers an environment not found at most courses. It's a tranquil setting that enables golfers to relax and enjoy the round.

"People love the views and the condition of the course, but it's also the wildlife," Brumby said. "They'll see deer and turkeys, and some people

normally don't see that. The course is spread out over 7 miles, and you don't have holes running parallel to each other. When you're out there, you're by yourself and you don't see people. It's peaceful and quiet."

Whitepath is 6,139 yards long from the back tees and par is 72. What Whitepath lacks in length it more than makes up for when it comes to placing shots, especially off the tee.

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Hole 1

Brumby has a simple piece of advice for those new to the course looking to grip it and rip it.

“Keep the driver in the bag, hit it where you can see it, and you’ll score,” he said.

“This isn’t a long course, it’s a tight course. People see a green just around the corner and say, ‘I can hit it that far.’ But if you don’t hit it straight, it’s gone.”

There are multiple blind shots and doglegs on the course. Players missing the fairway to either side on any hole will be punished with an ensuing shot from the woods or on unfavorable terrain. When you manage to keep the ball in the fairway, your next target will be Whitepath’s dime-sized greens.

“What protects the course is the size of the greens because they’re very small,” Brumby said. “Hole No. 5 is the easiest hole on the golf course. It’s a 240-yard par four, but the green is so small. If you hit it in the middle of every green, then you’re going to have a chance to make the putt.”

Hole No. 10 exemplifies what the course is all about. The par five, 531-yard hole offers an elevated tee box with a visible landing area. If you hap-

pen to be a regular player who is a big hitter and also manages to possess tour player accuracy, you might be tempted to forgo the landing area and go long.

If the high-risk strategy pays off, chances are you will still be left with a blind second shot toward a green that is surrounded by four bunkers.

“I hear people say it all the time, ‘That hole killed me’ because they hit a driver and don’t play the hole how it’s designed to be played,” Brumby said. “I’ve sold memberships just based on people seeing that hole. From the tee box, you’re looking at Rich Mountain and they love it.”

Holes 14, 15 and 16 are another hallmark of the course and are a par five, four and three, respectively. Hole 14 begins with another daunting elevated tee shot. Much of hole 15 is a lake with a fairway along the right side that narrows as it creeps toward the green. Hole 16 is 230 yards, and if you do not hit the green with your tee shot, coming up short is your best bet.

“The men’s group have a thing going that if you get through those three holes at even par, you get something after the round. That’s like their Amen Corner (which is famously found at

Augusta National). Hole 15 is the hardest hole out here.”

The course is in prime shape and business has been “booming,” according to Brumby. When weather cooperates, weekend tee times are booked solid until 2:30 p.m. The flow of golfers continues steadily after the early rush.

Brumby noted it is not uncommon to see out-of-towners make a day out of golfing and shopping. A foursome often arrives to play a round while their significant others head into downtown Ellijay.

“The course is helping everybody, not just us,” Brumby said. “That’s what you want to see and hear.”

Off the course, Whitepath offers typical amenities such as a driving range and practice putting green for any needed tune-ups ahead of your round. The course features a pro shop that is 11 years old and stocked with apparel, balls, tees, snacks and drinks.

The course opened an event center last spring that is adjacent to the pro shop. It features plenty of seating at tables and bars with TVs lining the walls. It is a prime spot to kick back before or after a round and is available for rent. ☒

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Summertime treats

The following raspberry lemonade pie recipe is easy to make and is refreshing and delicious:

14 oz can sweetened condensed milk
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6 oz frozen lemonade concentrate
12 oz raspberries, fresh or frozen
Graham cracker crust (see below)

Gently fold together the whipped topping and sweetened condensed milk. Mix in the lemonade. Crush the raspberries and add them to the other ingredients. Pour into crust and refrigerate or freeze until firm. It works well to make the pie the night before you serve it.

If you prefer a different flavor combination for your dessert, you can easily change out the fruit or use limeade or orange juice concentrate instead of the lemonade.

For the crust, you can use either a store-bought one or make your own by doing the following:



Pulverize 12 graham crackers into a fine powder. Mix with two tablespoons white sugar and one tablespoon packed brown sugar. Add a 1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon if desired. Melt one stick of butter. Combine all ingredients well with a fork and firmly press the mixture onto the bottom and sides of an ungreased 9-inch pie pan. To ensure the crust is sturdy, bake at 375 degrees for seven minutes.



Homemade ice cream sandwiches are a perfect choice for a hot summer day. Simply bake or purchase your favorite cookies and then chill them in the freezer for at least 30 minutes so they harden. Squish a scoop of ice cream between two cookies and then roll the edges of the sandwich in mini chocolate chips, sprinkles or a mix of cinnamon and sugar. Eat right away or freeze for later.

Trying to beat the heat this summer? Why not turn your favorite smoothie flavor into a mouthwatering popsicle? The top of the two-tone popsicle at right is made from freshly blended kiwi. That portion of the treat was allowed to freeze and then a layer of blended banana, raspberry and plain Greek yogurt mixed with a splash of milk was added and allowed to freeze as well. The solid color popsicles underneath it are a blend of strawberry, orange juice and plain Greek yogurt.



These simple fruit popsicles let you skip the blending step. Simply put rounds of kiwi or half a banana on a skewer and freeze. When hardened, dip in melted chocolate. Top with crushed peanuts if desired. Strawberries, pineapple and mango are great, refreshing choices for making whole fruit popsicles as well.

➤ Page 20

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A fun summer-themed treat does not have to be a dessert to be enticing. Try making healthy snacks more appealing to kids by presenting them in exciting shapes. The palm tree at right is made from Granny Smith apple slices, grapes and pretzel sticks. There are so many possibilities for having fun with food. Can you imagine turning strips of banana into an airplane soaring over yogurt clouds or envision orange slices and celery as a cheerful flower? Next time mealtime rolls around, get your creative juices flowing and turn your child's plate into a canvas.





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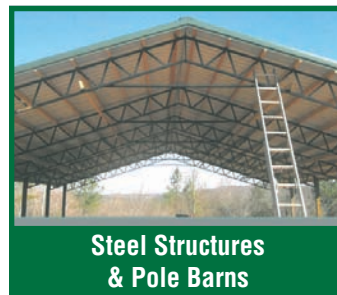
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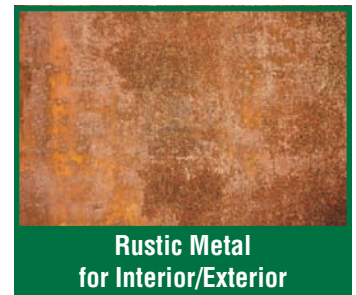
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Be prepared

A list of the 10 essentials for hiking

By Whitney Sherrill
Contributing writer

Even if you are only planning on being in the woods for a couple of hours, be prepared to deal with delays or emergency situations. Here are a few essentials that you or someone in your group should carry on a day hike.

1. Navigation: A GPS can be useful but should not be used as a replacement for a map and compass and knowing how to use them. While navigating in the

woods, you do not want to be solely dependent on the battery life of your GPS or its ability to lock onto a satellite.

Before setting out on the trail, it is always a good idea to let someone know where you are going and to give them a copy of your itinerary. Keep in mind that some local trails are remote and cellphone coverage is spotty at best.

2. Sunscreen, sunglasses and insect repellent: These items can go a long way to

ensuring that you remain a happy camper.

3. Appropriate clothing: When engaged in outdoor activities, dressing in layers can increase your versatility and comfort. Since weather conditions can change quickly, be sure to carry a raincoat and an extra warm layer. While hiking, avoid wearing clothing made out of cotton because it takes a long time to dry. Instead, wear wool or synthetic fabrics, which are designed to dry quickly and draw sweat

away from your body. It is also important to wear sturdy shoes with good support and tread, and it never hurts to pack an extra pair of socks in case a steam crossing proves to be a little deeper than you expected.

4. Illumination: Carrying a headlight or flashlight with fresh batteries is always a good idea in case it takes you longer to return to your car than you originally planned.

5. First-aid kit: While this is one item you hope

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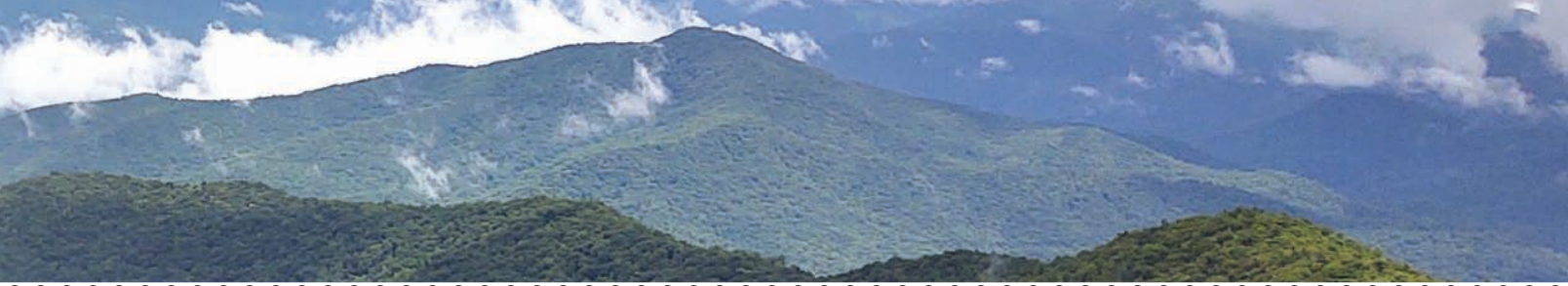
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never to use on the trail, a first-aid kit is an essential part of any hiking trip. Adjust the contents of your kit to fit the specific needs of your group and your outing.

6. Fire: When going into the backcountry, be aware that many areas in the Appalachians have burning restrictions due to dry weather conditions or fragile ecosystems. It is always a good idea to check on local regulations before you plan to have a campfire. Still, when hiking, it is wise to carry at

least two fire sources, such as a lighter, waterproof matches or flint and steel, in case of an emergency situation. If you do start a fire, follow Leave No Trace principles — keep the fire small and build it in an existing fire ring. Campfires can be fun, but it is easy for them to get out of hand or for them to scar the landscape if they are not properly handled.

7. Repair kit: Taking a small amount of duct tape and a knife or multitool allows you to deal with a wide

range of unforeseen equipment problems that may arise during your hike.

8. Food: Carry enough food for your planned outing and a little extra in case you are delayed. A good rule of thumb is to carry one-and-a-half to two pounds of food per day you are on the trail. Always remember to be mindful of your natural surroundings. Do not feed wildlife and always pack out your garbage and leftovers.

9. Hydration: Always carry a water bottle or bladder

when taking part in outdoor activities, and be intentional about regularly consuming fluids. You should also be equipped with a water filter or other means of purification, since mountain stream water often contains bacteria or parasites that make it unsafe to drink straight from the source.

10. Shelter: In case you run into bad weather or unexpected delays, it is a good idea to carry some form of shelter, such as a small tarp or emergency blanket. ❏



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Try your hand at geocaching

By Whitney Sherrill
Contributing writer

Just within a 20-mile radius of Elizajay, you can search for 188 hidden items known as geocaches, according to the website www.geocaching.com. To find them, all you need is a GPS, sharp eyes and a sense of adventure.

Geocaching is a high-tech, outdoor treasure hunt in which participants use GPS equipment to locate hidden containers called geocaches.

The outdoor recreational activity originated with a single cache in Oregon in 2000 and has since grown to encompass more than 3 million worldwide. On websites like www.geocaching.com, you can search for coordinates for geocaches in a specific geographical area and record your finds.

Depending on surrounding buildings and trees, a GPS will lead you to within a few feet of a geocache. From there, the search depends on clues provided online, keen vision and oftentimes a bit of outside the box thinking. Caches can be hidden in a wide variety of places, such as under bushes, in hollow stumps and in storm drains.

Many caches are hidden in public places, but geocachers try to be stealthy with their searching so as not to attract the attention of “Muggles,” a term borrowed from the popular Harry Potter series that in this context describes nongeocachers.

After locating a geocache, participants can log the find on their online profile and search for the coordinates of more caches. Geocaching websites track a variety of statistics relating to a user's found caches, and www.geocaching.com ranks the difficulty of each geocaches on two five-point scales that measure terrain and how hard it is to find the hidden cache.

Just because a geocache is located in a relatively easy to get to location, however, does not mean it will be simple to find. Some caches require the seeker to decode clues before obtaining coordinates or locate a series of points in order to complete a puzzle.

The caches themselves come in many shapes and sizes. Some are housed in large waterproof containers, such as buckets or surplus military ammunition cans. Others are only large enough to hold a small logbook for geocachers

to sign. These “micro” caches are often creatively designed to look like common objects — a pinecone, screw or wad of gum — but contain a secret compartment just large enough for a tightly rolled log sheet.

Larger caches often contain various prizes, such as small toys, key chains, books, ornaments or office supplies. Known as swag, these items typically have little intrinsic value but help to heighten the treasure hunting aspect of the game. When they encounter swag, geocachers are encouraged to take something out of the box and put something back in of equal or lesser value as an exchange.

Sometimes amidst the swag, participants will find special items called Travel Bugs or Geocoins. They are specially tagged with a tracking number that allows for their location to be logged and followed online. When they find one of these “trackables,” geocachers are encouraged to log the item online and move it along to a new location so it can continue its journey. Many Travel Bugs have a specific goal, such as visiting every European country or retracing all of Route 66.



Reminiscent of scavenger hunts and hide-and-seek, this game is popular among people of all ages and is a worthwhile, low-cost activity for families to do together.

If the hidden caches in the local area whet your appetite, rest assured there are many more waiting to be found. You can log some caches on your next road trip to another state or on an

excursion in another country.

You can also exercise your creativity by trying your hand at creating caches and posting their coordinates for others to find.

If you decide to take up this hobby or happen to stumble upon a geocache, always remember to put a cache back exactly where you found it so that the next person can enjoy it as well. ☒

Geocaches can take on many forms from large canisters that hold prizes known as "swag" to tiny containers just big enough to hold a slip of paper that serves as a logbook.

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Paddle, tube, boat or fish ...

There's plenty to do in the waters of Gilmer County

By Michael Andrews
Mountain Life Editor

Plentiful recreation options lie in the waters of Gilmer County where the Cartecay and Ellijay Rivers meet to form the Coosawattee River, which flows into Carters Lake.

"We have a water trail, although it's not been officially recognized yet. It includes all of the Ellijay, Cartecay and Coosawattee Rivers all the way into Carters Lake," said fly fisherman Dave Teffeteller about the Coosawattee Watershed Water Trail.

The blue trail includes almost 60 miles of water, Teffeteller noted.

Of the three rivers, most of the water recreation happens along the nearly 20-mile-long Cartecay, which is known for its moderate whitewater rapids and ample scenery.

"Probably 95 percent of the river traffic is on the Cartecay between Lower Cartecay Road and Mulkey Road," Teffeteller said.

A mix of whitewater adventure and "lazy river" relaxation makes the Cartecay a very popular destination for tubers, kayakers and canoers.



Tubers enjoy a lazy stretch of the Cartecay River.

“It’s a moderate whitewater river, which has a lot of appeal,” said Teffeteller. “High water is desirable for people who are skilled kayakers. With moderate water flow, it’s adequate for families to take children tubing on.”

Those natural features have also made the Cartecay a “home river” for Team River Runner. The Atlanta-based nonprofit teaches military veterans how to paddle a kayak before embarking on group excursions down the river.

“First we get them familiar about safely getting in and out of the kayak and how to roll (it) up. After that, we take them to a moving river like the Cartecay,” said Mike Hurndon,

a Team River Runner instructor.

“The section from Lower Cartecay (Road) to down below Blackberry Falls is a great beginner to beginner plus river. You’ve got the absolute perfect features with rapids and waves. You can teach people, and they can learn on it without too many overt hazards and consequences.”

The Cartecay’s many signature areas include class II and above rapids like the S-Turn, Blackberry Falls and the tricky Mr. Twister.

“Anybody that travels the Cartecay knows Mr. Twister,” said Hurndon, who’s assisted fellow Team River Runner members in clearing downed trees from several areas of

the Cartecay including the tricky Mr. Twister.

Cheyenne Carver, owner of Ellijay River Outfitters, said tubing is one of the most popular recreation options offered by her river excursion company.

“People really like the tubing, which is a little more laid back. I prefer kayaking myself, but it’s a little more work having to paddle. If you’re looking for something just to chill out and relax, tubing down the river is the thing,” Carver said.

The Cartecay’s rapids and more languid stretches make for two different tubing trips.

“Our three-mile trip, which takes

➤ **Page 36**



- Approximately 57.5 miles of Blue Trail
- From headwaters to Gulf of Mexico - approx. 800 miles

Courtesy Dave Teffeteller



Area waterfalls and swimming holes

Boulder-filled Holly Creek is a great place to splash around on a hot day and combines well with a hike crisscrossing Emery Creek to a series of waterfalls.

By Whitney Sherrill
Contributing writer

One of the best ways to beat the summer heat is to indulge your senses with a trip to a local waterway. North Georgia is home to a wide range of options from still mountain lakes to winding streams.

Grab your bathing suit and camera and get ready for a splash-splashing good time at these destinations.

Holly Creek

One of the area's best sections of creek for swimming can be found within the nearly 37,000-acre Cohutta Wilderness. This outdoor lover's paradise is home to numerous trails for day hikes and multiday backpacking treks alike.

The wide, cold waters of Holly Creek feature beckoning swimming holes and stunning rock formations. Even if you have no interest in hiking, this is a worthwhile destination to add to your summer to-do list.

The boulder-studded stream can be reached by walking only a few yards from the Holly Creek parking area. Bring a picnic lunch and your sunscreen, but please show respect for the picturesque locale and future visitors by packing out your trash.

To reach the creek, travel Highway 52 West out of Ellijay. Continue just over nine miles and then take a right on Conasauga Lake Road. Continue to Forest Service 18 and park in the Holly Creek parking area.

Emery Creek

If the grandeur of Holly Creek captures your imagination, be sure to make plans to take a walk on the wild side and visit the five waterfalls along Emery Creek. The cascades range in height from about 15 to 60 feet and can be accessed via an approximately 6-mile out-and-back trail that also leaves from the Holly Creek parking area in the Cohuttas.

As this footpath crisscrosses its way up the Emery Creek drainage,

hikers encounter more than a dozen stream crossings of all shapes and sizes, so choose your footwear for the trip carefully. Your feet will get wet on this trail. You may try to balance on rocks for the first crossing or two, but it's only a matter of time before you find yourself sloshing through the refreshing water. Wear hiking sandals or just enjoy the feeling of water in your boots as you walk.

For the hike, continue upstream from the parking area to where Holly Creek converges with Emery Creek. This is the most challenging of the trail's creek crossings. From there, a 2.3-mile walk through the forest will bring you to a short spur trail leading to the first waterfall. A well-worn path to the right leads around to the top of the falls where visitors will encounter a second, smaller waterfall and a wading pool.

While most people turn around here and head back to the parking lot, if your legs still have a little extra

► [Page 32](#)



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The cascading beauty of Amicalola Falls is pictured above. Below are two of the smaller waterfalls waiting to be explored along the trail to Long Creek Falls.



► **Waterfalls**, from page 30

energy, do yourself a favor and take a left when you return to the main trail. Follow the footpath up for another 0.7 miles. As you near the top, you will see glimpses of three more waterfalls through the trees. The trail takes you near the fifth drop, and a narrow path dropping off to the left will take you to the base of the fourth waterfall. After enjoying the secluded spot, retrace your steps to the trailhead.

There are several first-come, first-camp primitive campsites along the route, so consider turning the trip into a backpacking adventure.

Long Creek Falls

One of the area's most popular waterfalls is Long Creek Falls. The cascade can be reached by parking where the Appalachian Trail and Benton MacKaye Trail cross Forest Service 58. Follow these footpaths north for 0.9 miles to reach a short spur trail to the waterfall. The juncture is marked by a sign post and a series of blue blazes. This out-and-back hike is a good kid-friendly option for families, as well as hikers with dogs.

As you walk, keep an eye out for small, unmarked side trails to two other cascades. The first you encounter leads to a waterfall with a wide pool at the bottom. A small sandy area offers a great

place to sit and soak your feet in the chilly stream. The second side trail requires a steep scramble but provides a nice view of a rocky cascade that has a different character from the other, more open waterfalls along the route.

Fall Branch Falls

This is one of the area's most impressive cascades, and it is also one of the most accessible. The 60-foot tiered waterfall can be reached by walking northward about half a mile on the Benton MacKaye Trail from where it intersects Rock Creek Road out of Cherry Log.

Amicalola Falls

And don't forget about Amicalola Falls. Even if you've visited the state park that bears the same name numerous times, you may appreciate the power of the falls in a whole new way this summer after a heavy rain. Located about 20 miles east of Ellijay, the cascade measures a towering 729 feet.

Both the base of the waterfall and a viewing platform midway up are wheelchair and stroller accessible. You can also stand on an observation platform that allows you to peer over the startlingly abrupt lip of the top of the falls. If you are feeling particularly spunky, test your legs by climbing the 604-stairs that cling to the rugged hillside alongside

the tumbling waters.

Take a dip in a lake

Mountain streams that will rob your breath with their chilly temperature and natural beauty are not the only local places that offer a chance to cool off during the heat of summer.

The 17-acre lake at Fort Mountain State Park offers a sandy beach, as does the Harris Branch area at Carters Lake. The latter 3,200-acre manmade body of water also has boat ramps open for public use at Damsite, Doll Mountain, Wodroring Branch, Ridgeway and the re-regulation pool.

Another worthwhile backcountry destination is Lake Conasauga, Georgia's highest lake at an elevation of 3,150 feet. Basic campsites are available alongside the 19-acre

spring-fed waterway, which is located on Forest Service Road 68 in the Chattahoochee National Forest.

Exercise caution when you visit

Keep in mind that right after a heavy storm will not be the best time to attempt a waterfall hike with numerous stream crossings. Even on a day without rain, beware of swiftly flowing water. Rocks both above and below the surface can be quite slippery. Consider putting your keys, phone and camera in a dry bag before setting out.

Also, remember that many of these waterfalls are in remote, hard-to-reach places. Avoid injury by refraining from climbing on or around the falls. Not only will this practice keep you safe, but it will likewise protect the fragile natural environment around the stream. ❧



Pictured above is the second waterfall on the inviting Emery Creek Trail. Below, visitors enjoy the beach at Fort Mountain State Park's lake.



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A beginner's guide for how to play pickleball



Jim and Dawn Callaway, foreground, face off against Thomas Glanton and Joshua Ghobadpoor in an evening game of pickleball on one of the four courts at Ellijay's River Park.

By Whitney Sherrill
Contributing writer

In the world of sports, pickleball is a relative newcomer, but it is quickly gaining in popularity.

In the 2021 article “Pickleball: The racquet sport experiencing a pandemic boom,” BBC correspondent Jane O'Brien reported, “According to the Sport and Fitness Industry Association, pickleball participation grew by a whopping 21.3 percent last year as Americans looked for new ways to stay active during the pandemic. That figure is part of a five-year trend that has seen pickleball evolve from its origins as a backyard knockabout game to a sport with Olympic aspirations.”

The birthplace of the game is on Bainbridge Island in Washington. In the summer of 1965, Joel Pritchard and Bill Bell could not find a full set of badminton equipment with which

to keep their kids entertained, so they started trying to come up with a new game using what they had on hand. They lowered the badminton net and began improvising with table tennis paddles and a Wiffle ball. Eventually, they fabricated larger paddles made out of plywood. The next weekend,

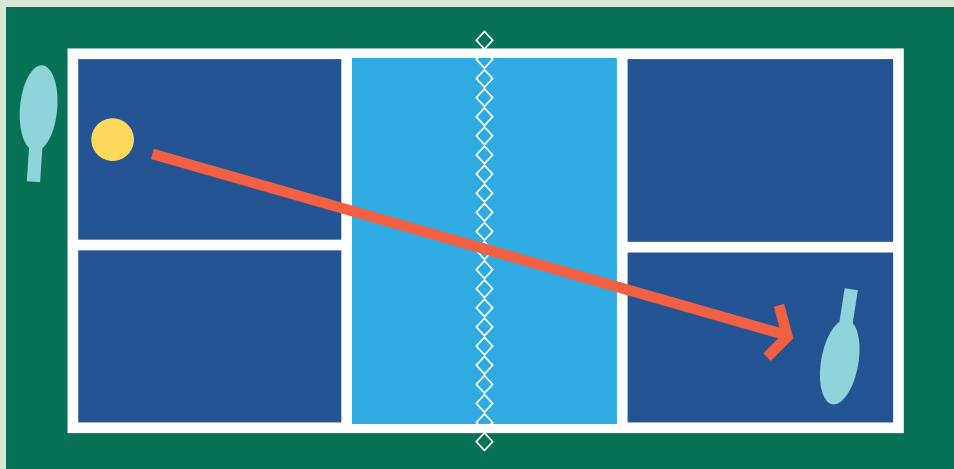
Serves must be made underhanded from behind the baseline. Drop serves are allowed. On the serve, the ball must pass diagonally across the court and land in the rectangle catty-corner from where the serve originated. The receiving team must let the ball bounce before hitting it back. The team that

served must also let the ball bounce on their side once it is returned, but after the requirements of this initial two-bounce rule have been met, players can volley the ball whether it has bounced or is in the air. The ball can only bounce once on a side to remain in play.

On both sides of the net, there is a seven-foot area dubbed “the kitchen,” it serves as a nonvolley zone. Players cannot hit the ball within that area.

Points are only scored by the serving team. Games are typically played to 11 points and players must win by two.

For more extensive rules for advanced play, visit usapickleball.org. 🏓



This diagram shows the basic layout of a pickleball court. The light blue area bisected by the net in the center represents the “kitchen” or nonvolley zone. Serves must pass diagonally across the court and bounce in the opposite corner before being returned.

their friend, Barney McCallum, helped develop official rules for the new sport.

Pickleball can be played as doubles — most common — or singles on the same court. Players use wooden paddles to hit a hard plastic ball dotted with holes over a net dividing a 20-by-44 foot court.



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Members and friends of veteran-helping nonprofit Team River Runner get ready to head down the Cartecay River.



► Paddle, tube, boat or fish, from page 29

out at Blackberry Falls at Stegall Mill, is more of an all day kind of thing,” Carver said. “We also have a 1-mile trip, which is about 45 minutes and really calm. That’s more of a family-friendly ride because there are no rapids on that stretch. Any and all ages go on that one.”

Tubing has long been a popular activity on the Cartecay, but that’s been especially true since the COVID pandemic started, Carver confirmed.

“Last year and this year have been busy, but not quite as much as 2020 was,” she added. “I think (the pandemic) caused more people to come here because a lot of the places you would

come during summer were closed, like Disney and a lot of beaches. I think everyone kind of flocked here and discovered Ellijay. Now they keep coming back.”

The 49-mile Coosawattee is also traveled by tubers and paddlers, albeit less than the Cartecay. The Georgia River Network used the Coosawattee, which has Class 1 and Class 2 shoals, as a route in its 2009 Paddle Georgia event.

Three county-maintained public access areas provide rivergoers entry and exit from the Cartecay and, later, the Coosawattee.

Cartecay access areas are on Mulkey Road and Canoe Launch Road (off Highway 52 East near the Gilmer

County Animal Shelter). The Coosawattee takeout is located on the lower end of River Park, shortly before the river starts to curb toward Legion Road.

The takeout in the park just off South Main Street offers the last of that kind of access point until Carters Lake, which begins several miles downstream. The journey on to Carters Lake is for advanced paddlers, Teffeteller noted.

Each of Gilmer County’s rivers passes through private property. If the three aforementioned takeout areas aren’t used, there’s a good chance that you’re entering or exiting on some of that private property.

“There’s no outfitters or public access to the Ellijay (River) at this point. You can go down it, but (people) usually get out at the River Park takeout,” said Teffeteller.

In Murray County, Carters Dam impounds the Coosawattee to form Carters Lake. Much of the lake property, which spans 3,200 surface acres, actually lies inside Gilmer County.

The scenic 450-foot-deep lake owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is another prime summer destination for water adventurers.

“(Visitors) can kayak, tube or paddle board. Waterskiing is very popular here, and kayaking has also become very popular over the past few years,” said Chief Park Ranger Allen Earhart.

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the lake with a variety of fish including several types of bass, as well as crappie, walleye, striper, bream and catfish.

“We’re renowned for our striper and spotted bass,” Earhart said. “The DNR manages all the fishing regulations here, and you’re able to fish in all the different locations we have.”

“We all fish together on Carters Lake every weekend,” said Ellijay’s Brian Watkins, who’s been catching fish on the lake since he was kid.

Last year, Watkins’ 12-year-old son, Chandler, reeled in a record-breaking white crappie during a family fishing trip to Carters Lake. In 2020, the young fisherman came close to setting a record for a striper he

also caught at the lake, his dad said.

“He got a 31-pounder and I think the lake record is 36. Carters has some big striper in it. It’s a trophy striper lake,” Watkins added.

A recent project at Carters Lake used discarded Christmas trees, which were collected by local community beautification group Keep Gilmer Beautiful, to improve conditions for both fish and those who aspire to catch them from the lake’s banks.

The trees were weighted down and put into the lake to provide habitat for smaller fish. That, in turn, brings more fish closer to the surface, Earhart noted.

“Bank fishing is kind of a limited factor for Carters



The takeout area at Ellijay’s River Park is the last public access point until the Cossawatee River reaches Carters Lake.

Lake. Most everybody who comes out here to fish is fishing from a boat,” he said. “The trees provide the cover for these smaller fish, and will grow algae, which will provide nutrients for fish, invertebrates and the food chain all the way up.”

Carters Lake visitors can fish boat, kayak and fish in the same general areas.

Camping is also available at the Woodring Branch and Doll Mountain Campgrounds.

“The only place on our lake that has any restricted access is around the dam and our beach area. Everything else is full range. We do recommend wearing a life jacket anywhere on the lake,” Earhart said. ❄

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Local fishing offers unique experience

By **Robbie Bills**
Sports Editor

There is no shortage of outdoor summer activities in Gilmer County.

Where else is a better place to ride trails than in Georgia's Mountain Biking Capital? Maybe one is looking for a challenging round in the mountains at Whitepath Golf Course? Local vineyards and apple houses are always popular destinations, and hunting opportunities are abundant.

Fishing continues to be a great way to unplug from the stress and noise of everyday life to enjoy the outdoors with family and friends.

Whether one is looking to wade in a stream or cast a lure into a lake from a boat, there are local guides available to ensure it is an experience to remember.

The *Times-Courier* discussed what Gilmer has to offer anglers with Eric Crowley, who owns and operates Lake and Stream Guide Service. Crowley has

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been fishing since he was a boy and started guiding locally in 2005.

“Fishing has always been a lifelong hobby. It’s something that I’ve always done and I’ve set different goals and different tactics and it’s always been a challenge for me,” Crowley said. “I travel and fish all over the world. With guiding, I get to do something I love and be outside every day.”

Much like the fishing experience in Gilmer, each trip is unique. Tours are catered to the specific individual or group whether it is for a seasoned angler, novice or first timer.

“Regardless of their experience, we try to find something for them,” Crowley said. “For people who have never fished before, we’re not

going to try and put them on a fish that is too challenging or too difficult to successfully target and catch. We want people turning the handle, putting fish in the boat and taking pictures.

“Guys come up from Florida who haven’t done much freshwater fishing. I had a lady who grew up in Marathon in the Florida Keys, and she came up here and caught her first largemouth bass and was so excited. People are coming here for that north Georgia experience.”

Walleye, striped bass, rainbow trout, yellow perch and large and smallmouth bass are just some of the available targets in Gilmer. Over the years, guided tours have explored Carters Lake, Lake

► Page 40



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► **Local fishing, from page 39**

Blue Ridge, Lake Nottley, as well as local rivers and streams for trout.

Crowley noted that he tries to “show people something different every day.”

In regard to the unique experience Gilmer offers, Crowley said, “Our lakes here are so deep. Lakes and freshwater fisheries in a place like Florida are very shallow. Deep lakes in Texas are 20- to 25-feet; Carters Lake is 450-feet deep.

“Plus, we have the species. We have stripped bass, walleye and trout in our lakes and most people are used to bass or brim fishing in a lake. We’re about as far south as you can be to catch a walleye or rainbow trout. Those are the types of fish people want to come up here and target that they can’t target at home.”

During his time as a guide, Crowley has introduced fishing to people for the first time who are now passing it on to the next generation.

“I have had kids who fished with me when they were 10-years old and now they’re 26 bringing their kids. That’s kind of neat,” he said.

“Everything is so different here. When you take people out, they’re looking at mountains, not buildings. There’s not too many places left where you can fish like this.”

Crowley noted that guided fishing trips are not limited to those visiting Ellijay. Many locals have used guide services as a convenience to cut out the hassle that sometimes comes with fishing.

“I have a bunch of guys from Ellijay who have sold their boat or have been looking to buy a boat but didn’t because it’s cheaper to hire me 12 times per year,” Crowley said. “It’s cheaper than it is to own a boat, store it and take care of it.”

Nonlocal clientele varies from day to day and arrives from all walks of life. Guides take much of the guesswork out of fishing with their expertise.

“Of course, there are tourists; that’s probably 50 to 60 percent of my business, and people from out of state. There are also families that come up here looking for activities.

“I have another group of guys who come up from Atlanta. They don’t have time to learn rivers or go spend days on the water trying to figure out what the fish are doing. These are guys with big corporate jobs who want to come up here and spend a day where their cellphones don’t work.”

For more information about local fishing and guided trips, visit [Ellijay fishing.com](http://Ellijayfishing.com). ☒





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Recommended picnic spots to enjoy this summer

Looking for a place to take your kids or that special someone for a bit of al fresco dining? Gilmer and its environs offer a wealth of opportunities for such experiences. Here are a few ideas for some local sites where you can enjoy a picnic.



◆ **Dinner and a view:** The West Overlook at Fort Mountain State Park (top right) provides sweeping views of the Chatsworth area and is a great spot to sit and enjoy a meal. The park also has picnic pavilions, including the one pictured below, and there is a convenient roadside picnic area (bottom left) shortly before reaching the park entrance on Highway 52 West.

◆ **Picnic in the park:** Both the pastoral setting of Harrison Park (shown below with its nostalgic white barn) and the shaded benches of Ellijay's River Park (pictured at far right) are inviting locales.

◆ **Lakeside relaxation:** The tranquil shores of area lakes offer a serene setting for an outdoors meal. Make plans to explore Lake Conasauga, Carters Lake and the lake at Fort Mountain State Park.

◆ **Mountain waterfalls:** Stretch your legs and satisfy your taste buds by packing a picnic lunch next time you visit a local waterfall. Pictured opposite is Long Creek Falls, which is accessible via a 2-mile round-trip hike on the Appalachian Trail. Below is the water feature at the roadside Barnes Creek Picnic Area located on Old CCC Camp Road in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest on the route to Lake Conasauga. For more waterfall destinations, see story on page 30. ☒





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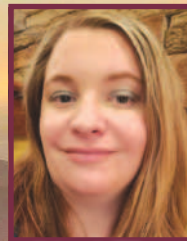
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Summer special events

A variety of festivals and special events happen around Gilmer County in the summertime. Live music, good food, fun rides and fireworks are among the awaiting attractions! (The events included below may not be held on the same day(s) each year, which is why exact dates are not provided.)

JUNE

Holla Yella Music Festival — Two-day music fest featuring national and regional touring acts, with an emphasis on Americana and rock sounds. At White Path Creek Farms, 1211 Old Northcutt Road, Ellijay.

Blue Ridge Mountains Wine and Jazz Festival — Enjoy live jazz and other music while sampling some of

the area vineyards' best wines. At White Path Creek Farms,



1211 Old Northcutt Road, Ellijay.

Plein Air: Art in the Mountains — Presented by Gilmer Arts and the Gilmer Chamber, this outdoor painting event covers the county each summer as visiting artists come to town to paint in a variety of scenic outdoor locations. Concludes with a live auction of art created over the weekend at the George Link Jr. Gilmer Arts Playhouse, 135 Dalton Street, Ellijay.

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Ellijay Up In Smoke — Barbecue cookoff competition with live music, vendors and kids' activities. At the Lions Club Fairgrounds, 1729 South Main Street, Ellijay.



JULY

July Fourth festivities — Celebrate Independence Day with a parade through downtown Ellijay, and stick around for the city's firework display at dark. Held around downtown Ellijay and town square area.



AUGUST

Gilmer County Fair — The annual county fair features an array of rides and ribbon-winning exhibit competitions that include quilts, agriculture, arts and crafts and other categories. It's also Gilmer's longest running summer event. At the Lions Club Fairgrounds, 1729 South Main Street, Ellijay.

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER

Movies in the Park — Bring a comfy chair or blanket and enjoy a series of outdoor movies



at downtown Ellijay's scenic Harrison Park, 75 McCutchen Street.

Ellijay Bacon Fest — Led by downtown Ellijay's The Shack, vendors from local restaurants will be cooking up their best bacon dishes for festivalgoers. Event benefits the Gilmer Community Food Pantry. At River Park, South Main Street, Ellijay.

ONGOING

George Link Jr. Gilmer Arts Playhouse — An ongoing series of concerts, community theater productions and other special events can be enjoyed at this Dalton Street

venue, which is within walking distance of the downtown Ellijay square. ❖

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Summertime tips to keep bugs away

By Whitney Sherrill
Contributing writer

Nothing can disturb the magic of a dusky summer evening like the buzz of a mosquito in your ear. Instead of retreating inside and missing out on the beauty of the season, try putting into practice these suggestions to help you avoid feeling bugged this summer when insects come around:

- ◆ Wear long sleeves and pants, especially around dusk, and avoid perfumes and fragrances from scented soaps as they can attract bugs. When planning your ward-

robe for an outdoor event, keep in mind that bees can be attracted to bright clothing, especially floral prints.

- ◆ When applying insect repellent, spray it on your clothing instead of directly to skin in order to avoid irritation. Be aware, however, that products containing DEET can damage synthetic fabrics, such as rayon or the polymers on your rain jacket that make it waterproof and breathable. It will not damage natural fibers like cotton and wool. Follow package instructions carefully and avoid spraying the repel-

lent near your eyes and mouth.

- ◆ You can also try making a natural insect repellent by diluting a few drops of essential oil with a carrier oil. Common fragrances believed to help keep mosquitos at bay include lemon, eucalyptus, citronella and lavender.

- ◆ Be proactive and cut down on mosquito populations near your home by removing areas of stagnant water from your property.

- ◆ Avoid walking in tall grass to reduce your chances of picking up ticks. Wearing lighter color

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clothing makes it easier to spot them. When you come back inside after a walk, check yourself thoroughly for unwelcome hitchhikers and take a shower.

- ◆ If pests are invading your yard, you can save money and avoid using harsh chemicals by making your own deterrents from natural products.

One option is a garlic spray. To make, puree two bulbs of garlic and soak them in water overnight. Strain and then add a squirt of mild liquid soap and a pint of water. To use, add a couple tablespoons of this concentrated garlic mixture to a spray bottle filled with water. Test on a small

area of your plants and then wait a couple of days before applying over a large area. If damage occurs to the leaves, dilute the spray further.

You can also consider including companion plants, such as basil, nasturtium, lemongrass, lavender and marigolds, in your garden as they can naturally deter or distract pesky insects while attracting helpful pollinators.

- ◆ To discourage ants from joining your picnic, keep your food — particularly sweet items like fruit and sugary drinks — in tightly sealed containers and wipe your tablecloth with lemon juice, which will make it harder for the

bugs to communicate with one another.

You can also offer a distraction for the ant colony by placing sugar water away from your picnic spot so they will check it out instead of your meal.

Always be considerate and clean up dropped food and spills before you leave a picnic site so those who follow after you will not find a horde of ants already invading the area when they arrive.

- ◆ Make sure your pets are protected from bugs too. Keep them up-to-date on flea and tick repellent, as well as heartworm prevention. ☒

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