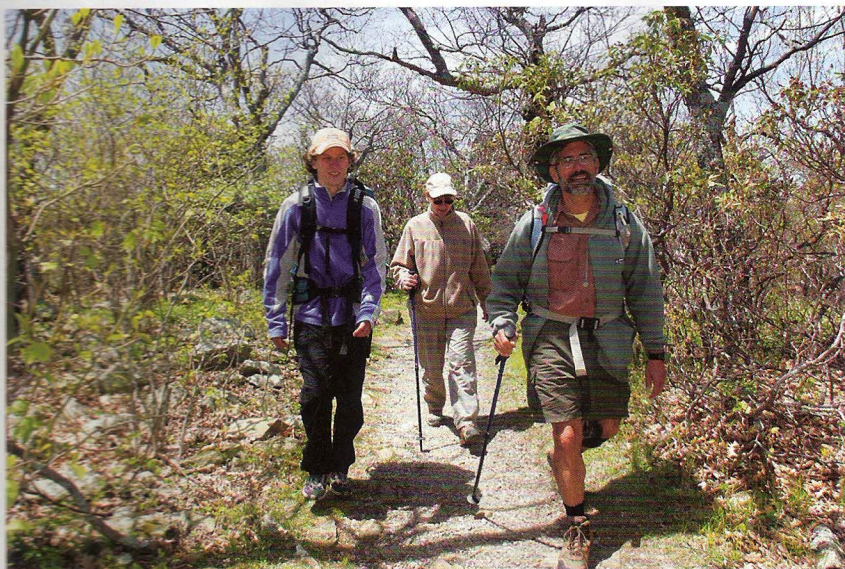


# The High Road

Skyline Drive Offers Treats For Both Soul and Sole



BY SUE EISENFELD



**LEGEND HAS IT THAT BACK IN THE 1920s, AFTER PRESIDENT HERBERT HOOVER AND HIS WIFE, LOU, BOUGHT A WEEKEND RETREAT— ALSO KNOWN as his “summer White House”—in Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains, he rode horseback one evening along the ridge of what is now Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park and remarked to his companion, “I think everybody ought to have a chance to get the views from here. I think they’re the greatest in the world.”**

Thus, the legendary drive—the narrow road that snakes 105 miles through the mountains along some of the highest points in the park—was born.

Today, Skyline Drive is the portal to the 200,000-acre Shenandoah National Park, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2011.

## **DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION**

But before there was a park, there was the drive. Workers broke ground on Skyline Drive in 1931, four years

before the park opened, using federal drought relief funds to employ nearby farmers and apple pickers who were suffering from the severe 1930 drought. In 1933, when the road became the site of the first two national park Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, CCC “boys” graded the slopes on either side of the roadway and built the sturdy stone walls that still line the road today. They also constructed overlooks and planted trees, shrubs and grass to landscape the area. The first section of





Shenandoah National Park offers rustic scenery amid rich forests that are home to scores of wildlife such as black bears, cougars and white-tailed deer.

the drive opened to visitors in 1934. By the time the park was officially dedicated in 1936, the drive had lured more visitors than any other national park in America.

The drive is also the access point to several historical structures and sites, like Rapidan Camp, Hoover's former property (also known as Camp Hoover), which is now a National Historic Landmark, and the historic Massanutten Lodge, the former home of wealthy heiress Addie Nairn Pollock who visited in 1910 and fell in love with the area.

Those interested in history can also check out the Byrd Visitor Center, which offers exhibits about the desegregation of the park in the 1930s and 1940s and the controversial acquisition of privately owned land in the 1920s and 1930s from mountain

residents, many of whom did not want to lose their homes and livelihoods.

### TRAIL MIX

If you're a day-hiker or backpacker, Skyline Drive is the trailhead for more than 60 footpaths that ascend or descend the mountain, like the undulating Hazel Mountain Trail that leads to a cave and waterfalls, or the trail up Stony Man Mountain, with its panoramic view of the picturesque patchwork of the Shenandoah Valley. The Limberlost Trail, once famous for its old-growth hemlocks, offers full handicap accessibility.

Corbin Cabin, two miles down the Corbin Cabin Cutoff Trail from Skyline Drive, is a still-standing log cabin once inhabited by a man who made a living peeling bark for the tanneries nearby, making peach and apple brandy and



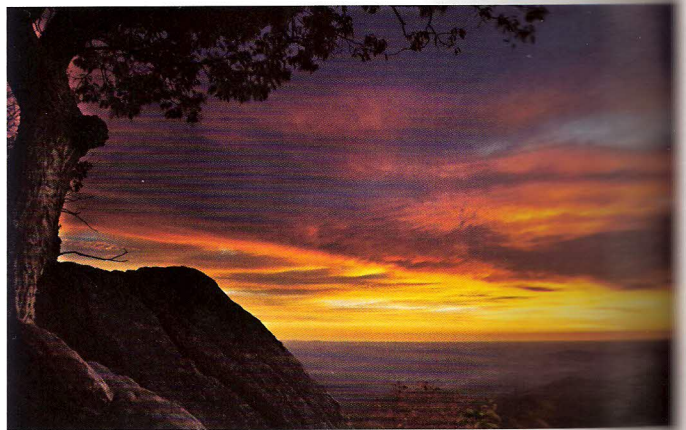
peddling eggs. It's now a rustic rental cabin operated by the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club.

If you're a car-camper—one of those who like to “pitch their tents under the stars with an open fire to cook by, with the smell of the woods, and the wind in the trees,” as President Franklin D. Roosevelt suggested in the ceremony to dedicate Shenandoah National Park in 1936—the road is the way to the park's four campgrounds, where 156,000 people spend the night each year.

### NATURALLY ACCOMMODATING

If you seek creature comforts amid inspiring views of the Shenandoah





Hikers in Shenandoah National Park will find dramatic waterfalls, while the winding curves and horizon-hugging vistas of Skyline Drive provide those who choose to see the park by automobile with vistas that President Herbert Hoover described as “the greatest in the world.”

Valley, the drive will lead you to Skyland Resort and Big Meadows Lodge.


Skyland, a collection of simple hotel rooms, cabins and a restaurant, was founded in 1888 by one of the early park promoters, George Freeman Pollock. No matter what the season, it seems this locale is 10 to 15 degrees cooler than everywhere else in the park. Even in late spring, Skyland can still be snowy.

Big Meadows, located near a large grassy meadow where visitors can catch

site of hundreds of grazing deer, was constructed from some of the dead American Chestnut trees that once proliferated throughout the area. It offers hotel rooms, a restaurant and a tap room. The rustic Lewis Mountain Cabins are available as well.

If you're an over-looker, a picnicker, a photographer or someone who wants the drive to be simply a drive, a leisurely road trip to enjoy the “matchless scenic wonders,” with landscapes that “make pictures...no camera or painter could

reproduce,” as one park planner in the 1920s said of the vision he helped bring to fruition, then Skyline Drive delivers here, too. View the blazing reds and yellows of fall, feel the cool mountain breezes, examine the geological majesty of the Appalachian Mountains and enjoy wild flowers like trillium and cardinal flower.

The drive and the park—only 90 miles from Frederick—are places where visitors, in the words of FDR, “forget the rush and the strain of all the other long weeks of the year” and can enjoy, at least for a short time, a place that is “good for their bodies and good for their souls.” 

## ► BEFORE you GO

For more information about Skyline Drive and Shenandoah National Park:  
Shenandoah National Park/National Park Service:  
[www.nps.gov/shen](http://www.nps.gov/shen) 540.999.3500

To check the status of Skyline Drive during winter months or in times of inclement weather:  
[www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/drive\\_status.htm](http://www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/drive_status.htm)  
540.999.3500, then press 1, and 1

For 75th Anniversary Celebratory Events in and around the park in 2011: [www.celebrateshenandoah.org](http://www.celebrateshenandoah.org)

For park maps, trail guides, group hikes and other information: Potomac Appalachian Trail Club  
[www.patc.net](http://www.patc.net) 703.242.0315

For books, maps and other merchandise and information related to the park: Shenandoah National Park Association  
[www.snpbooks.org](http://www.snpbooks.org) 540.999.3582