Shenandoah

The Lure of the Mountaintop

Mountaintops have always beckoned humans. To stand at the top—to see as far as the eye allows, to take in the vastness of our world—is to be awed and humbled and inspired all at once.

Shenandoah National Park, established in 1935 before skyscrapers and air travel were commonplace, was designed to give millions the opportunity to travel to the top. From the beginning, national park planners, capitalizing on the new popularity of motor cars, called for Shenandoah’s “greatest single feature” to be a sky-line drive on which motorists could enjoy a leisurely drive through the Blue Ridge and where they could experience the awe and inspiration of magnificent views. Construction of Skyline Drive—your road to the top—was begun even before Congress established the national park.

Today, Skyline Drive is your portal to a multitude of experiences. Discover the rich natural and cultural stories hidden in the forests and hollows of Shenandoah. Learn about the establishment of this new park in the East that would give urban residents the national park experience that had become popular in the West. Formed from over 1,000 privately owned tracts of land, Shenandoah started as a patchwork of forests, fields, orchards, and home sites. In 1976 Congress designated over 40 percent of the park as Wilderness, providing the highest level of protection to this precious resource.

Seasonal Change in Shenandoah

Spring may arrive at your home on some specific date, but here it climbs up the mountains about 100 feet per day, starting in March with blooming red maples, hepatica, and serviceberry. Chimneys and groundhogs appear above ground again. Trees won’t leaf out on peaks until late May. Wildflowers begin to bloom in April and May, and the large-flowered trillium carpets forest floors. Pink azalea blooms in late May, mountain laurel in June. Migrating birds in colorful plumage return. Each seasonal cycle in the year is different, bringing new reasons to return to the park.

Summer wears its mantle of deep greens on ridge and in hollow. Birds are nesting—catbirds, indigo buntings, and towhees. Deer fawns and bear cubs are out and about exploring and learning. Blooming wildflowers proliferate as summer progresses, covering roadides and open areas by late summer. Crop fall days bring brilliant leaf colors, usually peaking between October 10 and 25. The southward migrations of birds create. Seasons and colors change; migratory songbirds, hawks, and monarch butterflies come and go. Shenandoah’s year-round residents, deer, bears, and others, adapt to each season in turn, making each day different and exciting.

You can compare notes with those of earlier visitors by exploring Shenandoah’s rich stories in more depth. Visit Skyland Resort and tour the restored Massanutten Lodge. Plan a trip to Rapidan Camp to see the national presidential cabin and an exhibit about the Hoovers. Stop at visitor centers to see films and exhibits about even more of the park’s stories.

With more clear days and leaf-bare trees, winter is the time for distant views and the frozen sculptures tumbling waterfalls create. Seasons and colors change; migratory songbirds, hawks, and monarch butterflies come and go. Shenandoah’s year-round residents, deer, bears, and others, adapt to each season in turn, making each day different and exciting.

Shenandoah National Park
Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Shenandoah Stories

People came to the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginia for rest and recreation long before Shenandoah National Park was established. Skyland Resort has hosted weary urbanites for long stays since the late 1800s. Later, President Herbert Hoover and First Lady Lou Henry Hoover built their Rapidan Camp as a retreat to escape the stress of work and summer’s heat and humidity in the Nation’s Capital. The Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) “boys” came in the 1930s to build many rustic-style park facilities—some still serve and look today—so that everyone could retreat to the mountains for recreation and relaxation.

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One of the best ways to get to know your park is to join a ranger for a talk, hike, or tour. In spring, summer, and fall look for the schedule of ranger-led activities at entrance stations, visitor centers, and at www.nps.gov/shen.
Exploring Shenandoah with Your Map and Guide

**Skyland**

Skyline Drive is a narrow mountain road with beautiful vistas and wildflowers along the shoulders. Take a leisurely drive and pull off at some of our 75 scenic overlooks. Wild animals frequent the Drive's shoulders and may dart across the road, so observe the 35-mile-per-hour speed limit for their safety and yours. Bicyclists, other drivers, and vehicle drivers may be distracted. Bicycles and all motorized vehicles are limited to paved roads only.

Facilities are generally open spring through fall. Schedules of current hours are at entrance stations and on the park website. For information on concession services, and programs accessible to all contact the park website. Skyline Drive status and road conditions Check Skyline Drive status and road conditions at any entrance station or call 800-732-0911.

**Big Meadows**

The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) operates six cabins and visitor centers. Call PATC at 703-242-0315 or visit www.patc.net for information on concession services, and programs accessible to all. Contact PATC at www.patc.net or call 877-247-9261.

**Left Mountain**

The official park website is www.nps.gov/shen. Shenandoah National Park is one of 400 parks in the National Park System. To visit Shenandoah National Park, visit www.nps.gov/shen or call 540-999-3500, options 1,1. Luray, VA 22835-9036

**Mathews Arm/Elkwallow**

Get the Information You Need

Entrance stations, visitor centers, and other facilities provide information about ranger-led programs, backcountry camping, safety, regulations, and hours of operation. For more information for the public and for information and guides or visit the online bookstore, www.snpbooks.org. For planning ahead, visit www.nps.gov/shen, the official park website. We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. Call or check our website.

**Lewis Mountain**

Skyline Drive is a narrow mountain road with beautiful vistas and wildflowers along the shoulders. Take a leisurely drive and pull off at some of our 75 scenic overlooks. Wild animals frequent the Drive's shoulders and may dart across the road, so observe the 35-mile-per-hour speed limit for their safety and yours. Bicyclists, other drivers, and vehicle drivers may be distracted. Bicycles and all motorized vehicles are limited to paved roads only.

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