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GWRRA closing and Wing Ding 43 recap



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Southern Honda Powersports and the Godfather's Lounge



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Wingpacking the Blue Ridge Parkway

**ON THE COVER:** Photo by Armen Babayan of Burbank, California, of his 2022 Gold Wing.





**W**ingpacking? Backpacking is an activity where people hike while carrying camping gear to explore an area. Bikepacking is an activity where people bicycle while carrying camping gear to explore an area. So, Wingpacking is ... well, I think you get it.

If you have read my August 2021 *Wing World* article, “Crazy About Camping,” you learned that my wife, Lisa, and I have camped together by many different means for over 40 years. What started as a joke between us whether we could still handle tent camping at our (ahem) seasoned age, turned into challenging ourselves to leave the RV at home and take a tent camping trip. For us, the Blue Ridge Parkway was the perfect place. I have ridden the entire length seven times previously, four times with Lisa. So, the challenge was to ride and camp the entire parkway.

We chose to divide the parkway roughly into thirds and do a four-day, three-night trip. What follows is a brief overview of our trip along with some tips, useful web links, and our favorite attractions that may be helpful to others who hope to ride and camp the BRP.

For those not familiar with the BRP, it is a 469-mile scenic mountain road built in the 1930s as part of FDR’s work program during the Depression. It was planned to connect Shenandoah National Park (aka Skyline Drive) in Virginia to the North Carolina side of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Construction took many decades with the final section, the Linn Cove Viaduct, completed in 1987. Most of the parkway has a speed limit of 45 mph with congested sections down to 35 mph. I believe one could run most of it at 55 mph without risking a ticket ... but you didn’t hear that from me.



## TRIP REPORT

**Day 1:** We rode from our home in eastern Tennessee north to Waynesboro, Virginia, where the BRP begins. We primarily ran Route 11 but also used Interstate 81 near major cities to save stoplight hassle. We stopped at Natural Bridge State Park where we took a short hike to the bridge and a small waterfall. It’s well worth a stop if your journey takes you nearby. That night we tent camped at Walnut Hills Campground near Staunton, Virginia. If we had decided to ride the Skyline Drive also, prior to our BRP ride as we have done in the past, we would have camped at the Loft Mountain Campground in the Shenandoah National Park instead.



# WINGPACKING

THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY By Gary L. Mace



The author at mile marker zero.

## Day 2 highlights:

- Mile marker 5 — We visited Humpback Rocks Visitor Center. This is the first place on the parkway to get a copy of the detailed map, get updates on closures, and of course use a running-water restroom. At this stop is a replica 1800s mountain farm worth the short walk.
- MM 6.1 — Humpback Rocks trailhead. This 1.8 mile round-trip hike is one of our favorite BRP hikes. It is a steep hike, and over boulders near the end, but worth the effort if you are a hiker.
- MM 112 — We were detoured off the parkway due to a closure. We rejoined the parkway at MM 136.
- MM 144 — Devil's Backbone Overlook.
- MM 176.1 — Mabry Mill. One of our favorite stops on the parkway, it is a very pretty gristmill. Also, there is an old-time sawmill and blacksmith shop. During the summer and fall you can often find demonstrations of these old-time skills if you arrive early enough.
- MM 177.7 — We exited to Route 58 and rode to the Willville Motorcycle Camp. This a great place to camp if you don't mind riding on a bit of gravel driveway and grass. This campground is for riders only and offers a communal firepit, a communal pavilion, a laid-back attitude, and a front porch where the tall tales flow easy. No credit cards accepted, so bring cash. I've met some interesting folks



## HELPFUL TIPS

**Weather:** Temperatures on the parkway can often be 15 to 20 degrees lower than the local weather stations report. So, whether you dress like an astronaut or like a pirate, be sure you have flexible attire to handle the temperature variations. Also, because these mountains force warm moist air to rise into cooler air aloft, unexpected pop-up rainstorms are common. Some of my wettest rides have been on the BRP when the weather guessers listed that day as having a 0% chance of rain. Have good rain gear. We use Olympia New Horizon two-piece suits, and they are the best we have used to date.

**Tunnels:** The parkway has many tunnels, many with turns inside the tunnel and none with lighting. It is highly recommended that you wear sunglasses that can be lowered on your nose and back up with ease as you enter and leave. Also, if you are following a rider into a tunnel, be on alert in case they grab a handful of panic once they realize they can no longer see. Finally, remember even on perfectly dry days, the roads inside some tunnels stay wet from dripping ground water.

**Detours:** Mountain roads are prone to washouts and rockslides. Periodic detours are common but usually very well-marked. But do not run low on gas because you never know when you must do unexpected extra miles. Of all the times I have ridden the entire parkway, only once could I ride the entire length with no detours.

**Mind fog:** Sometimes when the skies are a deep blue color, the temperature is a perfect 75 degrees with low humidity, you can smell the honeysuckle, you are rolling through endless sweepers almost instinctively, and your mind is in a peaceful easy place then bam! A tight right-handed spiral curve appears from nowhere. Let's hope no truck is coming if you blow that turn. It is so very easy to get lulled into complacency while riding the BRP. The best defense is frequent stops at overlooks and attractions.

**Outside, inside, outside:** I ride the BRP and other popular mountain roads a lot. I am astonished of how many riders I see making left-handed turns with their tires on or almost on the yellow line as if it some sort of track to follow. Physics is very easy on this one, folks. If your tire is on the yellow line in a left turn, your handlebars and head are in the opposing lane. Period! The best way to ride mountain roads is the outside-inside-outside technique. I usually couple that with a slightly delayed apex. If you are currently a yellow line hugger, I urge you to at least open mindedly read about outside-inside-outside and delayed apex. Taking out a F250 mirror with your face can really ruin your vacation.

**Courtesy:** All smart riders never ride beyond their comfort zone. And no reasonable rider ever expects a fellow rider to ride beyond his/her comfort zone. However, if you find yourself with no one in front of you but have collected a few riders behind you, take a hint. It is probably not your razor-sharp wit and bubbling personality that has attracted them. Be courteous. When available, use your turn signal and pull into an overlook on your side of the road to let other riders pass. Doing so makes the ride safer and more enjoyable for all.

**Critters:** Mountains are a great place to see wildlife including many deer, bear, and turkey. When they dart in front of you is not the best way to enjoy them. Scan the shoulders on both sides as you ride to try to spot them first. Early mornings and a few hours before dark are the highest risk times. I generally ride just a bit slower with my caution radar set a tad higher during these times.

**Shared roads:** The parkway has very few places with a paved shoulder. You are sharing the road with bicyclists, hikers and joggers. If you notice a cyclist coming in the opposite lane, set your caution radar to max. I've seen far too many times a car veer into my lane to avoid the cyclist because they didn't see the 10 LED lights on the front of my Gold Wing.



over the years at Willville. Since our tent was absolutely drenched from the morning rain, we were happy to learn that one of Will's two small cabins was available. We cheated just a tad and used a rustic cabin while we hung our tent to dry overnight. We made a Jambalaya camp dinner, then talked a bit with fellow riders on the front porch before turning in.

## Day 3 highlights:

- MM 188.8 — Groundhog Mountain. There is a small observation tower and an exhibit displaying various old time wood fencing.
- MM 199.5 — We exited at Route 58 to Mount Airy, North Carolina, the childhood home of Andy Griffith and the inspiration for the TV town of Mayberry. We visited the Andy Griffith Museum and Wally's Station, which has several recreated TV sets and period cars. We left "Mayberry" and rode Route 620 back to the parkway, which was quite a fun twisty ride near the end. Lisa and I commented how the relevance of Mayberry and Andy Griffith will likely be lost on future generations.
- MM 213 — Blue Ridge Music Center. Visitor center, gift shop and Roots of American Museum. It's occasionally possible to find live performances.
- MM 238.5 — Brinegar Cabin. An original 1800s cabin that was occupied until the 1930s when purchased by the park service. There are often mountain craft demonstrations during the summer.
- MM 241 — We stopped at historic Bluffs Restaurant right on the parkway for lunch. The Nashville Chicken was very good. We both also enjoyed the corn niblets with bacon. We were happy to see it had reopened after being closed several years for a closure and COVID-19.
- MM 294 — We visited the Moses Cone Manor, a historic mountain mansion now owned by the park service. If you can do a tour, it is worth it, but if not, the movie is also quite informative.
- MM 304.4 — Linn Cove Viaduct Visitor Center. We skipped this stop on this trip, but I am going to share a secret many never find. There is a hiking trail that takes you under the viaduct. Along this trail is an unmarked, barely noticeable side trail that takes you to the top of a boulder that sits right above the viaduct. Many marketing and magazine photos have been taken from this incredible view. I have taken several awesome fall foliage photos



Top: Devil's Backbone.  
Middle: Crabtree Falls Campground.  
Bottom: Mabry Mill.





Above: Mabry Mill.  
Below: Mile marker on the BRP.  
Opposite page: Mayberry.

here. But it is a bit hard to find. About .25 miles after passing under the viaduct, watch for a narrow beaten-down path on the right side of the trail that runs to the right side of a huge boulder. Some mild climbing up the boulder is required, but the payoff is worth it.

- MM 307 — Grandfather Mountain Overlook gives a good view of Grandfather Mountain. A side trip from the parkway to visit Grandfather Mountain is worth the \$24 per person fee if you have never been there and have time. Allow at least an hour at the top, more if you plan to take the incredible Grandfather Trail's 2.5 mile round trip hike. Note, you will need to leave your trailer locked up at the bottom.
- MM 334 — Little Switzerland is a neat area with a nice restaurant and some small shops. My favorite is The Swiss Shoppe for ice cream.





## ROAD TRIPS

Our GWRRA TN Chapter F often does lunch rides here.

- MM 339.5 — Crabtree Falls Campground. Here we pitched our tent for the evening. It's a very nice National Park Service campground that offers plenty of space and was very quiet. If you are a hiker, be sure to hike the 3-mile round-trip loop to Crabtree Falls. (No showers, so pack some baby wipes for a camper's bath.)

**Day 4:** We broke camp and proceeded to ride the final 130 miles of the parkway. Since we ride this section regularly as day rides from our home, we didn't make many stops, but will list some of our favorites.

- MM 355.4 — Mount Mitchell State Park is the highest point east of the Mississippi River. The summit and observation tower are 4.5 miles after leaving the BRP. Along the way you will pass Mount Mitchell Restaurant, which will come in handy should your journey place you here near chow time. This is the highest restaurant east of the Mississippi River.
- MM 367.6 — Craggy Gardens Picnic area. We stopped here because the rhododendrons normally reach full bloom peak around mid-June. We are glad we did. They were in full bloom and spectacular. We did the short hike to Craggy Flats where the blooms were the best.
- MM 382 — Folk Art Center has exhibits and sells arts and crafts from local artisans.





## ROAD TRIPS



Top: Craggy Gardens. Bottom: Graveyard Fields Waterfall.


- MM 409 — Mt. Pisgah picnic area. One of our normal picnic locations, this is also a great area to catch rhododendron blooms. There are clean restrooms here as well.
- MM 417 — Looking Glass Rock Overlook. Nice views of a bald granite mountain.
- MM 419 — Graveyard Fields Overlook. This stop has restrooms and a very short hike to a multi-tier waterfall. Also, when rhododendrons are blooming, this hike takes you through a canopy of bloom. Do not be surprised if this overlook has no parking available. It is a very popular stop.
- MM 422.4 — Devil's Courthouse. Another of our favorite short parkway hikes. One-mile round trip to a nice 270-degree-view stone observation platform.
- MM 431 — The highest point on the parkway is



marked with a two-sided sign in the overlook. Most motorcyclists wait their turn to get a photo of their motorcycle and/or group here. Courtesy hint: After you get that perfect photo, please move your bike away from the sign so others can do same.

- MM 451 — Waterrock Knob Visitor Center. The last visitor center on the parkway so your last chance to grab that BRP souvenir. Also, there is another very nice scenic hike loop here if you are not tired yet. Rumor has it, you can find the remains of a crashed airplane from this hike, but we have yet to find it.
- MM 455 — U.S. 19 and BRP intersection. Many riders end their parkway trip here if they are headed to Cherokee or Maggie Valley and do not care about riding every mile. In Maggie Valley, the Wheels Through Time Motorcycle is an absolute must do if you can.
- MM 469 — Congratulations, you did it and ran the entire Blue Ridge Parkway. From here you can turn left to go into Cherokee, North Carolina, or turn right to ride through the beautiful Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Shortly after making that right turn is a great place to see elk and a good Smoky Mountains visitor center with an excellent old farm exhibit.

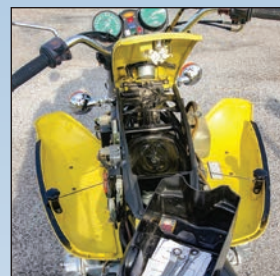
The BRP has a lot to offer. Our trip is just a sample of how we enjoy the parkway. I strongly encourage everyone to research and build a trip that fits your interests. I believe all riders, if possible, should ride the Blue Ridge Parkway at least once. Finally, here are a few web links that I suggest you review as you plan your BRP adventure.

- <https://www.nps.gov/blri/planyourvisit/roadclosures.htm> — The official park service website that shows current closures that may affect your trip.
- <http://www.willvillebikecamp.com/> — Willville Bike Camp is a great place to camp and meet other like-minded riders.
- <https://facebook.com/garylmace> — Our Facebook page is called Gary & Lisa's Motorcycling and Camping Adventures. If you have any questions, comments, or gripes regarding this article, feel free to post them on our page. Also, if you are a BRP veteran and have tips to share with others, please post those on our page as well. Our shared experiences can be of value to all fellow riders. 

# GOLDWINGS

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