

County COUPLER

Two wild, wonderful West Virginia destinations offer up the perfect pairing of outdoor adventure and small-town charm

BY BRITTANY FURBEE





YOU ARE HERE

I was born in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, but spent most of my adult life in “the big city” of Morgantown where I’ve planted my roots. But even though I’m a native West Virginian, I tend to go out-of-state when I’m ready to explore the South—until recently. In my role here at *The Local Palate*, I often find myself traveling to small towns that deliver big fun. It made me wonder if I was missing out on a small-town adventure in my own state.

I did some digging, and one place kept coming up in my research: **Pocahontas County**. It’s the third largest county in the state and home to West Virginia’s largest ski resort—but beyond that, I knew little about what there is to do there.

I found out that Pocahontas County just launched its own restaurant week in March 2025 and regular-

ly draws award-winning musicians to its beautifully restored opera house that just celebrated its 25th season. On top of that, a brand-new mountain biking trail system, poised to rival some of the best in the country, has recently opened.

What surprised me most, though, was how rarely Pocahontas is talked about in tandem with its next-door neighbor, **Greenbrier County**. Just across the county line, Greenbrier is home to the iconic West Virginia State Fair, held in Lewisburg, which is dubbed one of “America’s Coolest Small Towns” by *Frommer’s Budget Travel*.

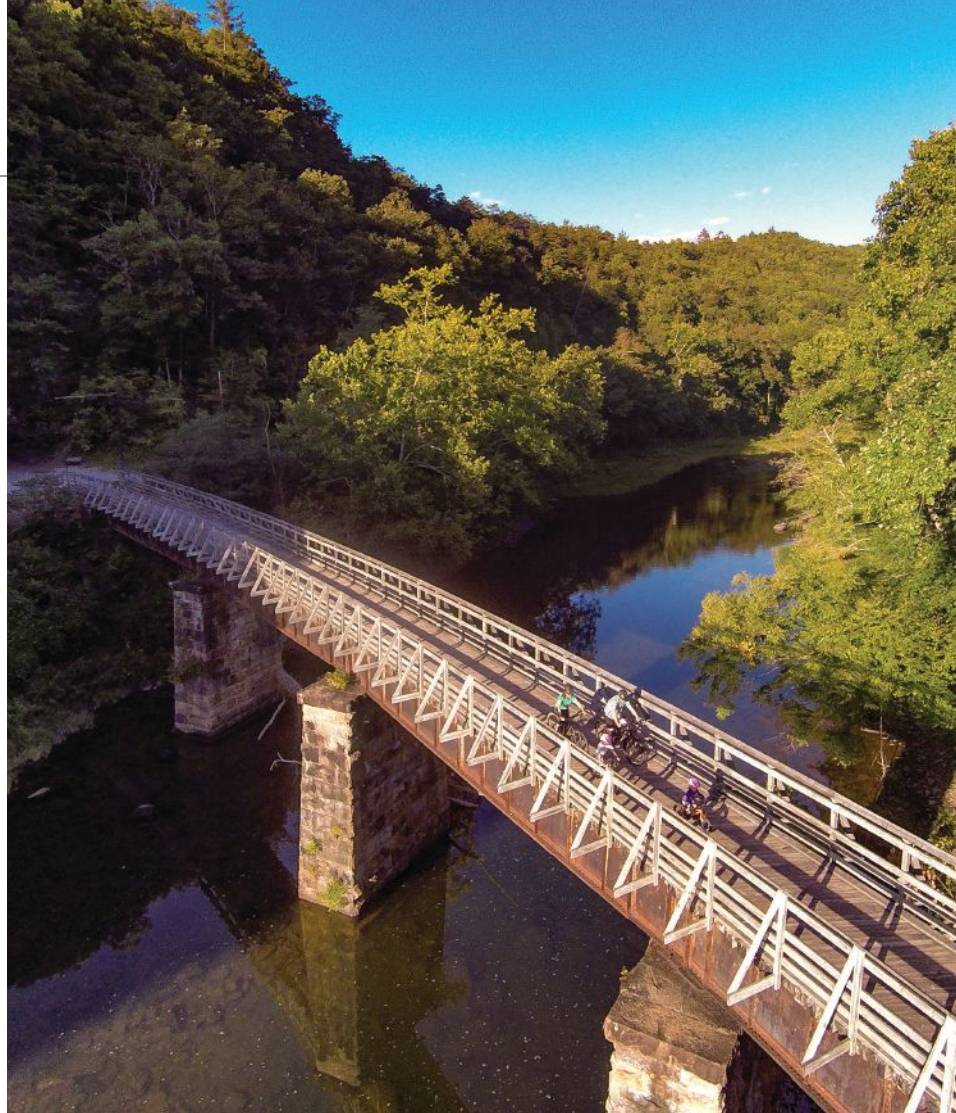
Despite being side by side and packed with adventure, charm, and culture, these two counties are seemingly overlooked by travelers. For me, that was enough reason to gas up the car, grab my favorite snacks, and head three hours south along scenic back roads to see for myself what Pocahontas and Greenbrier counties are all about.

Peek In on POCAHONTAS COUNTY

The drive into **Marlinton** is serene, offering views of the rolling hills and mountains that make up the Potomac Highlands. When you descend into the valley and cross the picturesque Greenbrier River, you're greeted by a tiny town that transports you to another era. Home to around 900 people, Marlinton was founded in 1749 by Jacob Marlin, one of the first English settlers to the area. Thanks to Marlin, the town is notorious for having a pronunciation problem, hence the tagline "there ain't no 'g' in Marlinton," which you'll see playfully sprinkled on signs throughout town.

The streets are lined with historic buildings, many of which have been restored to their former glory, like the 115-year-old **Pocahontas County Opera House**, and local businesses have propped-open doors just waiting to welcome in the next visitor. One such place is **Rivertown Café**. This charming coffee shop sits in the CJ Richardson building that formerly housed the town's hardware store. To maintain its historic charm, the owners, husband-and-wife duo Aaron Davis and Nicole Schwarz, opted to integrate the hardware store into the coffee shop's design. The walls are lined with the original shelves and bins that were used to display nuts, bolts, screws, and hardware supplies, and the original wooden checkout counter is still intact, cash register and all. Beyond the charming aesthetics, the café serves up lattes and espresso beverages that could rival any big-city coffee shop and offers a rotating menu of specials from shrimp burgers to maple-glazed pork belly bowls and a slew of sweet treats.

It's impossible to miss the **Pocahontas County Artisan Co-Op** adjacent to Rivertown Café. Located in the old Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad Depot, the sunny yellow shop features handmade artisan products from regional makers. Outside the depot you'll find a restored red-and-yellow train car that honors the location's history. Marlinton is split down the



middle by the Greenbrier River Trail, one of West Virginia's most scenic and beloved recreational trails, stretching 78 miles along the picturesque Greenbrier River. The trail follows the former path of the C&O Railroad, which once transported timber, coal, and passengers through the region. Thanks to the river trail, Marlinton is now a hub for cyclists and hikers.

One street over from the main drag, you'll find **Greenbrier Bikes**, a local bike shop that invites visitors to rent a pedal or electric bike for a day. Just five minutes down the road, mountain bikers seeking a thrill are already digging the new Monday Lick Trail System that opened in May. Boasting 27 miles of bike-optimized, multiple-use, single-track trails through the Monongahela National Forest, Monday Lick is adjacent to the Greenbrier River Trail, offering a new adrenaline-fueled experience. If speeding down a rustic trail through the mountain on two wheels isn't your thing,

the trail is also open to hikers.

Greenbrier River Trail. Opposite: Greenbank Observatory.

For a fun night out, follow the locals to **Old Mountain Tavern**. As the only bar in West Virginia selected to receive a prerelease of famed country musician Zach Bryan's *The Great American Bar Scene* album from the artist himself, the bar is adorned with tributes to Bryan, including a permanently reserved seat at the bar in case he ever drops by. Patrons can also order food from **Alfredo's Italian & Greek** next door with delivery straight to their barstool. After dinner, catch a show at the Pocahontas County Opera House. The venue's performance series welcomes acts from September through May featuring ensembles like the award-winning multi-instrumentalist group The State Birds and ALASH, known for their Tuvan throat singing.



Quiet TIME

Most travelers head to Pocahontas County for a tranquil retreat from the hustle and bustle of daily life. However, in **Green Bank**, West Virginia, radio silence isn't optional. That's due to the Green Bank Telescope, the world's largest steerable radio telescope, and a fleet of similar telescopes that call the **Green Bank Observatory** home. The observatory is nestled inside the National Radio Quiet Zone, a 13,000-square-mile region where radio interference is strictly enforced, especially within the 10-mile radius closest to the telescopes. This allows researchers to study radio waves in space without interference from everyday devices such as cell phones and microwaves.

As you pull into the observatory, you're kindly asked to power down your devices—a moot point considering you can't get a signal anyway—and invited to enjoy the science center or purchase tickets for an up-close tour of the telescopes. While waiting for the tour bus, explore the on-site exhibit hall, which details how West Virginia became the birthplace of radio astronomy, and grab lunch at the **Starlight Café** to enjoy an unobstructed view of the Green Bank Telescope, along with delicious treats like an artisan Italian sandwich and freshly made maple donuts, which are available seasonally.

When it's time to board the bus for the behind-the-gates tour of the facility, guests are asked to lock their devices in the onboard Faraday cage, an enclosure used to block certain electromagnetic fields, to ensure a radio-quiet tour. As you explore the property, you'll see seven telescopes with disks ranging in size from 130 feet across to more than 300 feet across. Of course, the grand finale is viewing the Green Bank Telescope itself. At over 485 feet tall and weighing in at 17 million pounds, it's the largest moving structure on land in the world. The telescope was completed in 2000 and remains the most accurate single dish telescope in use.

Top of the WORLD DINING

When you're ready to reconnect with the outside world, set your sights on the second highest peak in West Virginia. Smack dab in the middle of Pocahontas County is **Snowshoe Mountain**, a winter haven known for its top-tier skiing and its Top of the World mountain village. Unlike most ski resorts where the action starts at the base, Snowshoe flips the script with lodges, restaurants, and shops perched right at the summit. This high-altitude vantage point unveils stunning views of the surrounding mountains.

Snowshoe Mountain may be known for year-round outdoor adventure, but tucked just steps from the slopes is a culinary gem that's worth planning your whole trip around. Beside the Corduroy Inn you'll find **Appalachia Kitchen**, helmed by chef Scott MacGregor, a 2024 James Beard Award semifinalist for Best Chef: Southeast whose specialty is refined farm-to-table cuisine.

MacGregor sources ingredients from regional Appalachian farms whenever possible. Dishes like the mushroom toast, featuring locally foraged shiitake and morel mushrooms atop housemade focaccia, and the Mountain State trout satay showcase the flavors of the region with a modern Appalachian twist. MacGregor's commitment to sustainable Appalachian cuisine has earned the restaurant many accolades, including the Distinguished Restaurants of North America (DiRōNA) Award of Excellence in 2024 and being named one of the Best Restaurants at Ski Resorts Around North America by *OnTheSnow Magazine* in 2023. The restaurant takes a short break between the winter and summer seasons, so be sure to call ahead for reservations before planning your visit.

Graduate to GREENBRIER COUNTY

After seeing the sights in Pocahontas County, extend your stay with a getaway to neighboring Greenbrier County. Here you'll find relaxed luxury as soon as you



check in at **The Schoolhouse Hotel**. Originally built in 1912, the former White Sulphur Springs High School was purchased by the Disability Opportunity Fund in 2019 and transformed to bring modern and accessible accommodations to the region. The meticulously renovated hotel features 30 guest rooms, each individually themed around classic school subjects such as English, art, band, and geography to celebrate the building's scholastic past. The hotel also offers two dining experiences: Grab breakfast, lunch, and dinner at **The Varsity Club**, the hotel's flagship restaurant offering contemporary Southern classics and craft cocktails; or for a special treat, pull up a chair at **The Rooftop**, an open-air rooftop bar. Enjoy cocktails and small bites as you take in the views of **White Sulphur Springs** and the surrounding mountains.

America's RESORT

Just down the road is the iconic **Greenbrier Resort**, known for its natural mineral springs, unique history, and superb golfing. Established in 1778, the resort has hosted 28 US presidents,

The Schoolhouse Hotel. **Opposite:** Prime 44 West at The Greenbrier.

along with royalty, foreign dignitaries, and famous golfers and celebrities from around the world. Spend an afternoon touring the grounds by foot or opt for the horse-drawn carriage ride. For a dose of history, sign up for the on-site Bunker Tour and explore the once-secret Cold War fallout shelter beneath the resort. After working up an appetite, grab dinner at **Prime 44 West**, The Greenbrier's premier steakhouse, honoring NBA legend and West Virginia native Jerry West. The restaurant houses the largest public collection of Jerry West memorabilia, including his 1960 Olympic gold medal and various jerseys from his legendary basketball career.

Soak IT IN

For a unique relaxation and wellness retreat, spend a day at the **Pomona Salt Cave & Spa**. The centerpiece here is the enormous man-made salt cave that was constructed with more than 18,000 pounds of Himalayan salt. Sign



up for a halotherapy session in the salt cave, which is believed to aid respiratory health and reduce stress, or opt for traditional services such as a massage, facial, or foot soak. Add to the rejuvenating experience with a trip to the spa's on-site café, which has fresh and healthy options to complement a day of pampering.

Last Stop: LEWISBURG

A trip to Greenbrier County would not be complete without a visit to downtown Lewisburg. This charming walkable town features historic buildings, independent bookstores,

artisan boutiques, and cozy coffee shops. Spend a day shopping and then stop into one of the bars along the main street for a local beer or craft cocktail. When hunger strikes, grab a wood-fired pizza at **Hill & Holler**, where the crust is perfectly blistered and the toppings highlight regional ingredients. For something a bit more refined, head to **The Humble Tomato**. The stylish bistro offers handmade pastas and seasonal small plates, and is a favorite among locals.

There's so much natural beauty and adventure to explore in West Virginia. Getting lost in these mountains might have been the best way to find exactly what I didn't know I was missing.



Pocahontas County TROUT TOUR

In celebration of Pocahontas County's Bicentennial in 2021, a series of six-foot-tall trout sculptures were unveiled across the county. Each one was designed and painted by a local artist to honor one of the eight rivers that run through the region. Track down these eye-catching works of art during your visit.

Elk River

Pocahontas County Courthouse

Gauley River

Hillsboro Town Office

Greenbrier River

Green Bank Observatory

Tygart River

Durbin and Greenbrier Valley Railroad

Williams River

Huntersville Schoolhouse

Cranberry River

Pocahontas County Artisan Co-op

Shavers Fork of the Cheat

Snowshoe Mountain Village