

Falls and Fun in Ohiopyle, PA

Written by: **Sara Mullins**

Photography by: **Lance C. Bell** and **Ted Varney**
and Courtesy of **Laurel Highlands River Tours**



In the tiny borough of Ohiopyle, Pa. (pop. 70), it's all about "The Yough." That's local lingo for the Youghiogheny River that tosses and tumbles through town, drops about 20 feet at the Ohiopyle Falls, and carves a river gorge offering spectacular scenery and some of the most popular whitewater boating in the East.

Pronounced "yaw-ki-gay-nee," the word Youghiogheny evolved from a Native American word meaning "a stream flowing in a contrary direction." Not surprisingly, the word Ohiopyle also comes from a Native American phrase literally referring to the frothy water at the Falls as "it turns very white."

continued on page 56





National Geographic Travel Editors' Best Fall Trips 2012

Great Allegheny Passage

*Cumberland, Maryland to Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania*

The 141-mile Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) rail-trail winds over the rivers and through the woods of western Maryland and south-western Pennsylvania. Built mainly on abandoned rail beds, the packed, crushed limestone route is free of motorized vehicles. A 15-mile-an-hour speed limit ensures a leisurely pace for cycling, hiking, strolling, and birding. Spend a weekend, or a full week, exploring part of the route and the historic trail towns along the way.

Extend your ride all the way to Washington, D.C. (about 334 miles total) via the historic Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Towpath. Mountainside Bike Tours specializes in custom Washington-to-Pittsburgh itineraries. Options include lodging, gourmet meals, luggage transport, and side trips to Antietam National Battlefield and Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater.

[travel.nationalgeographic.com/
travel/best-trips-fall-2012](http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/best-trips-fall-2012)



When George Washington arrived at the Falls in 1754, armed with orders to transport materials for the construction of a fort, he concluded that “the water becomes so rapid as to oblige us to come ashore” and wrote in his journal that “the Youghiogheny will never be navigable.” Undeterred, a rugged group of settlers later set up water-powered grist and saw mills, eventually establishing the town of Falls City. Soon a thriving lumber business brought workers to town. By 1871, three railroads made routine stops in town with \$1 fares from and to Pittsburgh. Four hotels, some quite posh, offered lodging to visitors attracted by the area’s natural beauty and activities popular at the time. Tourism took hold, and in 1881, the town was incorporated and renamed Ohiopyle.

By the early 1950s, efforts began to protect the popular Ferncliff Peninsula, an area nestled between the Youghiogheny River and rolling hills beyond. Its relative warmth and protected location, along with the river’s northward flow, is conducive to plant species unique in Pennsylvania. Efforts to prevent planned lumbering and the development of an amusement park at Ferncliff resulted in its purchase by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. Later purchases of adjacent properties resulted in the Conservancy’s acquisition of about 10,000 acres for a projected 18,500-acre park. In the 1960s, the state purchased the property to create the Ohiopyle State Park.

Today, Ohiopyle attracts throngs of visitors — an estimated 1.5 million per year — thanks to its unique location within the park. One of the state’s largest,

Ohiopyle State Park now encompasses more than 20,500 acres and serves as a gateway to the Laurel Highlands. The hilly, winding drive to Ohiopyle on the often narrow Route 381 offers travelers some spectacular scenery enroute.



Within the Park lies the 14-mile Youghiogheny River Gorge, where the famous Lower Yough, a Class III-IV section of whitewater that starts below the Ohiopyle Falls, runs 7 miles over boulders and rocks downstream to Bruner Run. Boating season begins in late March or Early April and runs daily until the end of October, and paddlers must be at least 12 years old. Guided trips on rafts are the most popular choice, but more intrepid paddlers can use inflatable kayaks appropriately named “duckies.” A

more low-key option is the Middle Yough scenic float that begins at Ramcat, just below Confluence, and ends just beyond Elephant Rock above Ohiopyle. Guided trips are available, or boaters can paddle themselves in duckies, canoes or kayaks.

Brett Lesnick, who works with Laurel Highlands River Tours and Outdoor Center, has noticed a shift among boaters since the company’s founder began running commercial rafting trips 50 years ago. “Ohiopyle used to be all about the biggest, best whitewater,” he says. “Lately we’ve seen a shift in visitors seeking more of a family experience.” The Middle Yough has become especially popular with this group.

Cycling has been a favorite family activity since 1986, when the trail between Ohiopyle and Confluence became

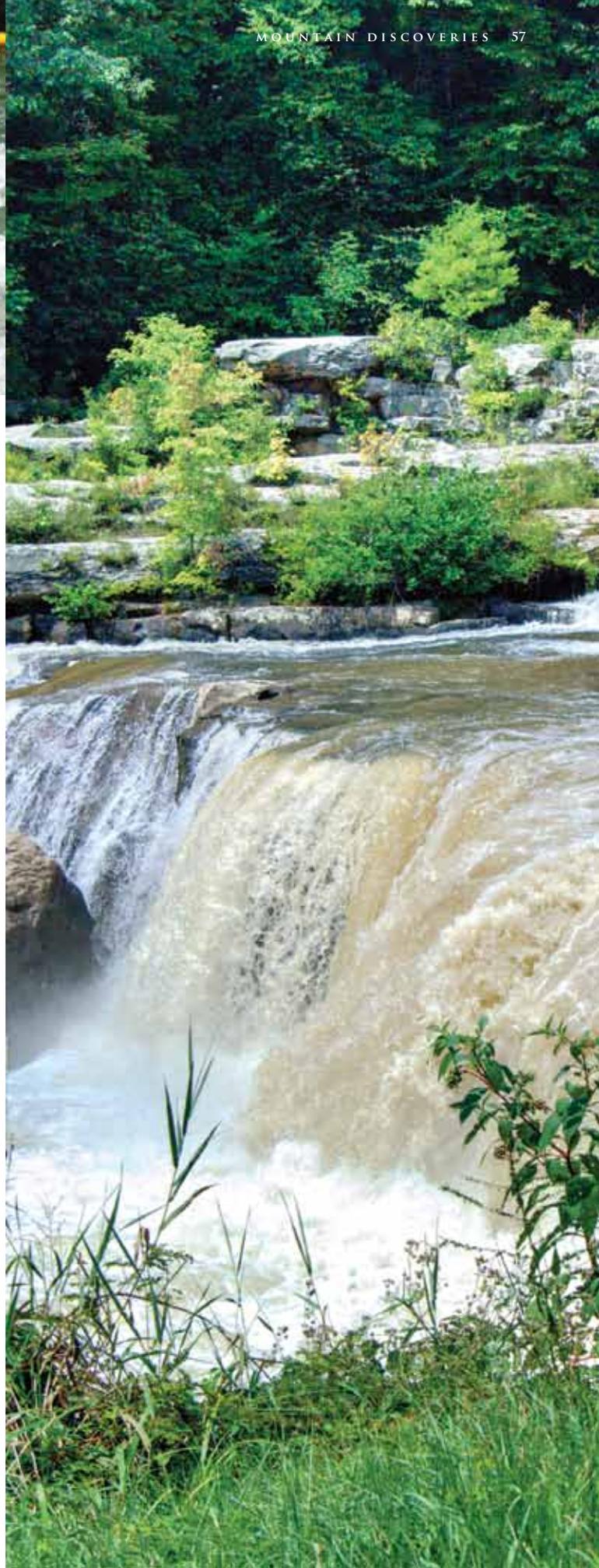


the first section of the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) to open. Ohiopyle is one of several communities along the GAP that participate in the Trail Town Program, formed to assist them and local businesses with economic initiatives. Mayor Mark McCarty, owner of the Laurel Highlands River Tours and Outdoors Center, has noticed that cyclists attracted to the Park's 27-mile portion of the GAP represent a growing number of visitors. His business and others in the Ohiopyle area offer bike shuttles and lodging for multi-day GAP rides.

Ohiopyle State Park's 79 miles of trails range in difficulty from easy paths to steep, rocky climbs requiring sturdy hiking shoes. The 100-acre Ferncliff Peninsula, now protected as a National Natural Landmark, offers some of the most leisurely walking, amenable to finding fossils and examining its rare southern plants. Seasoned hikers who can handle the tough Baughman Trail will be rewarded by a spectacular overlook of the Youghiogheny River Gorge upon reaching Baughman Rocks. About 6 miles of the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail passes through the Park, ending in Ohiopyle after a 70-mile journey from the north, just above Johnstown.

Other popular Park activities include rock climbing, mountain biking, camping, backpacking, horseback riding, wilderness trout fishing, bird watching, slipping down waterslides, and picnicking. Winter fun includes cross-country skiing, sledding and snowmobiling. Watching for wildlife, like bears, deer, otters and bobcats, is available year-round.

Many visitors prefer to stroll through town, where they can eat and drink, shop, or pick up information at



the Train Station's Visitors Center — and, of course, take a look at the Falls. The Laurel Highlands Outdoor Center offers two new activities for those looking for something a little different. The Ohiopyle Zipline Adventure Park offers a challenge course ending with a zipline ride back to the starting point. Gem mining in the Old Mill General Store allows treasure-seekers to pan for gemstones, arrow-heads or fossils.

Ohiopyle events ranging from Beer and Gear in June, Falls Day in August, the Music in the Mountains Festival during the Labor Day Weekend, a Halloween Hike, and Winterfest, keep things hopping year-round. With an average 5,000 dinners served, the Annual Buckwheat Supper fundraiser for the local fire department is a big hit, especially with old-time residents.

With so many visitors, sustainability is a priority in the Ohiopyle community and surrounding state park. The

borough and park are active participants in the Laurel Highlands Conservation Initiative (LHCI), a partnership formed to protect natural resources and promote community revitalization. Currently LCHI is working with the Pennsylvania Environmental Council to implement a master plan for Ohiopyle and the park. Components include “green” initiatives to upgrade the existing infrastructure, additional parking, safer pedestrian crossings along the often-congested Route 381, and a new, larger Visitors Center at the Park to offer educational and interpretative programs focused on the area's ecology, geology, flora and fauna. The new Visitors Center is set to open in the summer of 2014.

Note: Ohiopyle, PA is located just 35 minutes from Deep Creek Lake, Maryland area. Laurel Highlands River Tours can be reached at 1-800-4RAFTIN and their website is www.laurelhighlands.com. Also visit www.laurelhighlands.org.



- High-Speed Internet
- Cellular • Paging
- Security Systems
- Two-Way Radio
- Telephone Answering Service
- Computer Repair & Networking
 - Self Storage
 - Web Hosting
 - GPS Fleet Tracking
 - Server Co-Location
- Video Surveillance & Access Control
- Home Automation

TWR COMMUNICATIONS
 549 North Centre Street
 Cumberland, MD 21502
(301) 777-2692

<http://www.twrcommunications.com>

Advertising Art Design, Inc.
 The area's best prices for
 Business Cards, Brochures,
 Rack Cards, and Displays.
- Dynamic Web Sites -



Photography:
 Commercial & Aerial

301-759-2707
www.aad-inc.com

Luxury Cabins – Great Rates!

Mountain Suites – 1 Bedroom/1 Bath • Weekdays – 2 Nights for 1*
 • Weekends – \$199 – Add 3rd Night for only \$50* *Date restrictions apply. Expires 5/23/13

Family Suites – 2 Bedrooms/2 Baths
 • Weekdays – 2 Nights for 1*
 • Weekends – \$249 – Add 3rd Night for only \$50*
 *Date restrictions apply. Expires 5/23/13

the LODGES at Sunset Village
 A LOG CABIN SUITE HOTEL

Lots to See, Plenty to Do!



www.deepcreek.com Deep Creek Lake, MD 888-658-2063