

MOTOR CYCLE ADVENTURES

In The Southern
Appalachians

By Hawk Hagebak

Franklin Loop

In Partnership with



Franklin Loop

In the first quarter mile, you'll be spun through a series of wild twists and turns that don't let up until the ride ends. Taking you from farmland to a small town to the peak of a mountain, and ending only after passing through a gorge, this route offers some of the most diverse terrain in this guidebook. With lots of great roads and little traffic, you'll return to this ride again and again.



GAS

Gas is available at the start and at miles 15, 21.2, 26.1, 44.3, 63.3, and at the ride's end.

GETTING TO THE START

Begin at the intersection of US 74 and NC 28. These two roads intersect twice, so be sure to take NC 28 south from US 74. Getting there from I-40, take exit 27 south onto US 74 and follow that to the first intersection with NC 28 (near Bryson City). From the south, follow US 74 north from Murphy, NC and turn right at the second intersection with NC 28. Either way, it's the only US 74/NC 28 intersection with a Texaco. Reset your trip meter as you turn off of US 74 onto NC 28 south.

RIDE OVERVIEW

Leaving the four-lane divided US 74 in your dust, you'll find NC 28 south a quaint but very straight road. Don't be fooled; just over the first rise, the road spins into a series of wicked switchbacks and hairpin turns. These are punctuated by the scenery off to the right side of the road. One of those mountains off on your right is Wayah Bald. You'll be tearing your way up that mountain in a while. For now, concentrate on the well-banked curves of NC 28 as they lead you to Franklin.

If one of your riding buddies inexplicably exclaims, "Let's go to Jail!" don't assume that he's a candidate for the loony bin. He just might be talking about the Old Jail Cem & Mineral Museum in Franklin. Having served its time housing prisoners, this old jail now houses, sells, and displays gems and minerals, and tells the history of gem and mineral mining in the region. Open May to October, 10 am to 4 pm,

admission is free. Getting there from the ride is easy. Turn right to Main St., then take the first left and go one block. Turn left on Palmer St. and then left on Phillips St. The museum is on the left.

The ride leads you through Franklin by turning right onto Main St., then left at the first traffic light, then right onto Palmer St., which becomes the Old Murphy Highway. Follow the Old Murphy Highway to Wayah Rd., where you'll be turning right at the Phillips 66 gas station.

Wayah Rd. rolls through some pretty farm country before the trees begin to shade the road in a green canopy. It then follows Wayah Creek, climbing toward Wayah Bald. Watch for hairpin turns and sweeping curves.

At mile 35.3 you'll have reached Wayah Crest. Dual-sportbikers can turn right here onto a dirt road and follow it about seven miles to the Wayah Bald fire tower. The 360-degree views are nice, but not worth the trip unless your bike is designed for it.

Just past Wayah Crest is a big surprise. Nantahala Lake, with a shoreline stretching over 29 miles long, seems out of place way up here. But the views of the jagged mountain peaks and flat lake make a remarkably beautiful contrast you're sure to enjoy. Nantahala Lake spills down the west side of Wayah Bald and flows into the Nantahala Gorge.

You'll probably spot people fly-fishing on the Upper Nantahala before Wayah Rd. ends at US 74. Once on US 74, rafters and canoeists dominate the river and the road, so use caution. US 74 follows the Nantahala River downstream to the Nantahala Outdoor Center (NOC) at mile 62, offering

TOTAL DISTANCE

48.7 miles

TIME FRAME

1½ hours from start to finish. Add time for taking in views of Nantahala Lake and River or stopping in the gorge for food or a great cup of coffee.

adventures in rafting, canoeing, and mountain biking. If you've got time and a few bucks, give the Nantahala River a try. It's a fun raft trip on hot summer days.

Perhaps you're simply hungry. Stop at NOC's River's End Restaurant for a table with great views of the river. The tasty burgers and sandwiches will keep you coming back for more. Across the river and up the hill is Relia's Garden Restaurant, offering gourmet cuisine and a cozy, lodge-like atmosphere. If you like wine or beer with dinner, bring it. They will cork it for you, but won't sell you any.

From NOC, begin the climb out of the Nantahala Gorge. On your left at Kim's Espresso, Books & Music, you'll find more than just a cup of coffee—there are smoothies and internet access, too. Get a drink, log on, and brag about this ride you're doing!

Before US 74 turns back into a four-lane divided road, you'll pass the Nantahala Village Resort. This place is an institution in the area.

The Nantahala Village Resort is the last you'll see of the Nantahala Gorge until you return. The next intersection is US 74/NC28 north. This is not the end of the ride; that comes in just three more miles at the intersection US 74/NC28 south.

RIDE ALTERNATIVES

Visiting the Franklin Gem & Mineral Museum in the Old Jail requires leaving the planned route for a couple of blocks. To get there, turn right onto Main St., take the first left, another left onto Palmer St. then another left onto Phillips St. The Museum will be on the left. Later on, ride up the dirt road to the Wayah Bald fire tower at mile 35.3, but don't ride this dirt road unless you're on a dual-sportbike.

ROAD CONDITIONS

All these roads have clean, well-banked asphalt, and most hazards are well marked. In the town of Franklin, Main St. is one-way, heading west. To go east, take the one-way Palmer St. The ride off Wayah Rd. to the Wayah Bald fire tower is rough dirt. It's worth the ride on a dual-sport, but on any other kind of bike the views aren't worth the beating you'll take.

POINTS OF INTEREST

The curves of NC28 south, the Gem & Mineral Museum at the Old Jail in Franklin, Wayah Bald (picnic area and fire tower), Nantahala Lake and Gorge.

RESTAURANTS

The best restaurants are near the ride's end in the Nantahala Gorge. NOC's River's End Restaurant at mile 62 has river views and burgers that are as good as the scenery. Or cross the bridge over the Nantahala River at mile 62.1 to reach Relia's Garden, a gourmet restaurant situated on a hill overlooking a flower garden. Try Kim's at mile 64.6, for coffee and fruit smoothies on hot summer days, and internet access as well. Nantahala Village Resort at mile 66.1 offers breakfast, lunch, dinner, rooms, and cabins, too. This resort has proven itself to be very motorcycle-friendly.

DETAILED DIRECTIONS

MILE 0—Turn onto NC28 south. Watch for the hairpin curves in the first mile!

MILE 21.1—Turn right on Main St. in downtown Franklin. Or, take in the Franklin Gem & Mineral Museum in the Old Jail. To get there from this intersection, turn right, then take the first left, turn left onto Palmer St. and then left again onto Phillips St. The museum will be on the left.

MILE 21.2—Turn left at the first intersection.

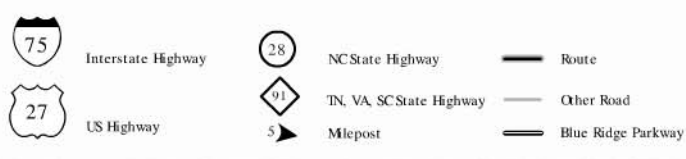
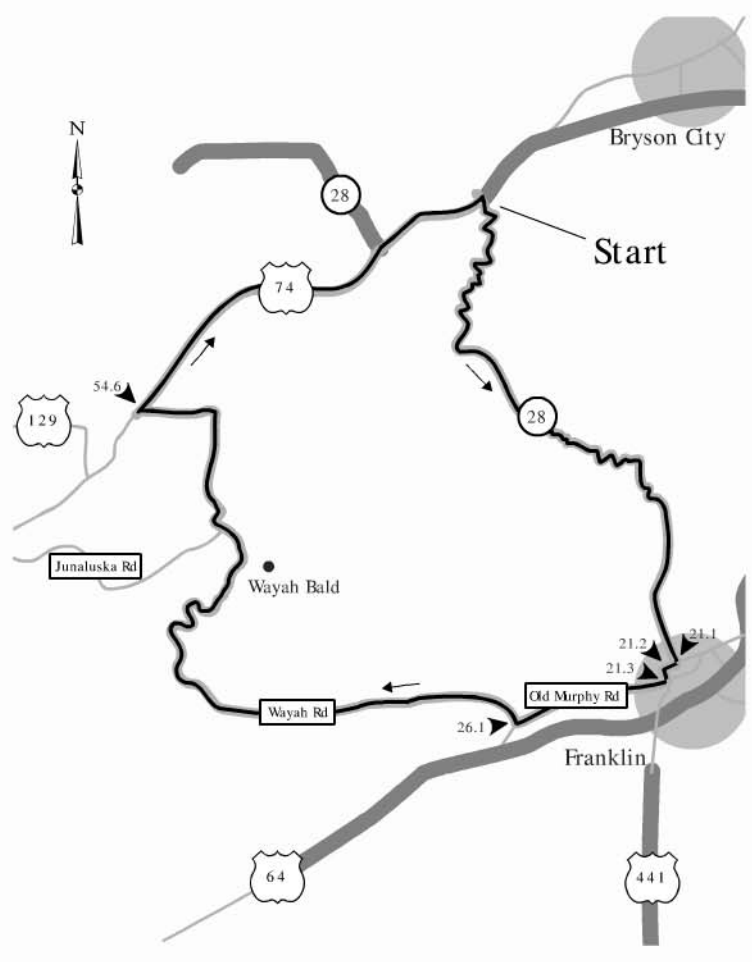
MILE 21.3—Turn right onto Palmer St., which becomes the Old Murphy Road.

MILE 26.1—Turn right onto Wayah Rd. (there's a Phillips 66 station there). The Wayah Crest Picnic Area is on the left at mile 35.5 and the "don't-do-it-without-a-dual-sportbike" dirt road leading to the Wayah Bald fire tower is just across the road. Don't miss the nice view of Nantahala Lake at mile 43.

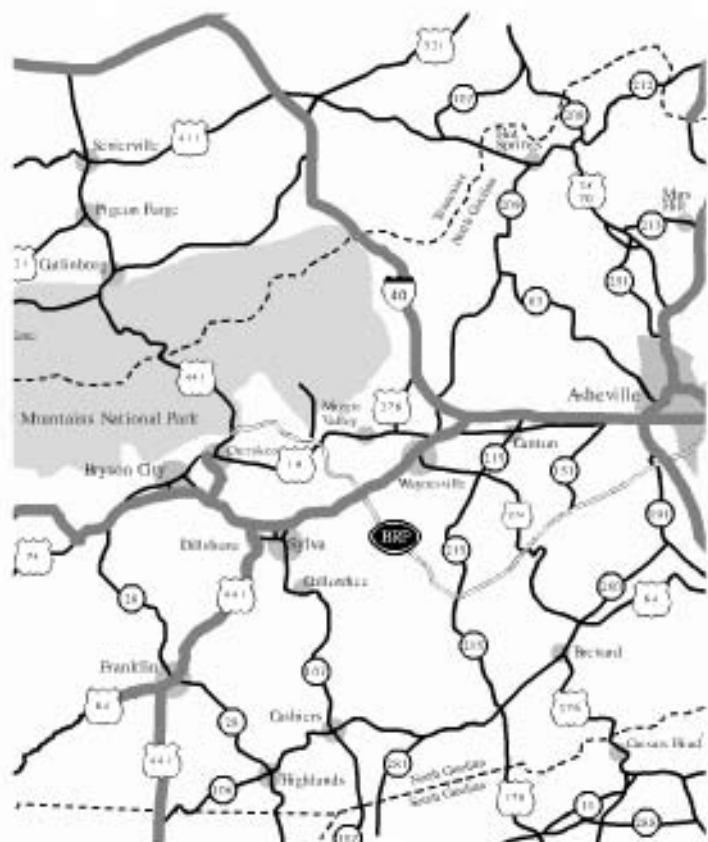
MILE 54.6—Turn right onto US 74 when Wayah Rd. ends. There's a river launch site there and a roadside river overlook just south of this intersection. At mile 62 is River's End Restaurant with tasty burgers and sandwiches with good views of the Nantahala. Across the river and up the hill is Relia's Garden Restaurant. Kim's Espresso, Books & Music is at mile 64.6, offering coffee, smoothies, and internet access. Nantahala Village Resort offers nice rooms, cabins, and a fantastic restaurant at mile 66.1.

MILE 70—The ride ends where it began. Stay on US 74 north to reach I-40, or go south to head toward Murphy.

Franklin Loop



The Far West



From Richland Balsam, the Blue Ridge Parkway's highest point, to the tourist town of Gatlinburg, these rides run the gamut. Whether you're touring the museum of the Cherokee Indian or climbing the observation tower at Clingmans Dome, it's an awesome mix of history, native culture, and astounding natural beauty.

