

MOTOR CYCLE

A D V E N T U R E S

IN THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS

Mountain Lake Loop

In Partnership with



home, just-like-mama-made barbecue and sweet tea. Shopping? There's lots of it. Check out the leather shop (jackets, boots, chaps) or try a more European-influenced shop and buy a Norwegian troll or choose from the many Christmas decorations available for sale year-round. After you've eaten and are all shopped out, go north from Helen's downtown area and get ready to ride.

You'll find GA 356 to be in excellent shape with plenty of curves and sweeping turns. Just a few miles down the road, Unicoi State Park has it all—lodge, restaurant, swimming pools, a lake for swimming and fishing, picnic areas, cottages, and several miles of hiking trails.

Within the state park, the road to Anna Ruby Falls twists its way through a heavy canopy of trees, ending just 3.5 miles off GA 356. The falls themselves are under the aegis of the US Forest Service. Although it's not necessary to pay the \$2 State Park entrance fee if you're entering to view the falls only, you must pay the Forest Service \$3 to park and walk the half-mile to see them. (It's confusing when you get there, too.) Cascading several hundred feet through craggy, moss-covered rocks, a glimpse of this waterfall is worth the walk.

After leaving Anna Ruby Falls, you'll pass through the remainder of Unicoi State Park. GA 356 crosses over a large earthen dam that creates a beautiful mountain lake on the northern side of the road. Exiting the park, you'll find the Blueberry Patch Restaurant, where they offer "the best biscuits in Georgia" for breakfast. They're open for lunch, too, but breakfast is their specialty.

When GA 356 ends at GA 197, you'll turn left onto GA 197. It offers a few more miles of quiet farm country

TOTAL DISTANCE

52.1 miles

TIMEFRAME

1½ hours from start to finish.
If you're so inclined, add an hour for the hike to and from Anna Ruby Falls and for time you might spend playing in Unicoi State Park.

and gently sweeping curves as you near Lake Burton. You'll appreciate the relatively fresh and clean asphalt, too.

On Lake Burton, you'll find LaPrade's. Open April through October, LaPrade's has been sitting on this quiet lake since 1925 offering country cooking, quaint little vacation cottages, and a place to dock your boat.

Several hairpin turns test you as you near US 76, which is two-lane with the occasional truck lane on long uphill climbs. Popcorn overlook on the right provides a nice view of the mountains to the north. It also has restrooms, albeit the waterless kind.

Along US 76 toward Hiwassee, notice the absence of homes and businesses. That's due in part to the Chattahoochee National Forest's Lake Burton Wildlife Management Area. Its northern boundary is US 76, making construction there impossible.

Near Hiwassee, you'll turn left onto GA 75. GA 75's sweeping curves will serve as a warm-up for the hairpin turns ahead.

Descending from Unicoi Gap, you'll see great views off to the right. This is one of those times when it's a good idea to leave the scenery viewing to your passenger, while you wrestle

through the twists and turns. The hairpin turn crossing over a little creek marks the last of the twisties, as GA 75 becomes straighter.

That "little creek" is actually the Chattahoochee River. GA 75 follows it through a series of bends and sweeping curves on your way back toward Helen, GA. The ride ends where it began, just 1.1 miles north of downtown Helen at the intersection of GA 75 and GA 356.

RIDE ALTERNATIVES

What makes loop rides so popular is the fact that you can begin and end them from the same point anywhere along the route. Let's say you just finished the Run to Highlands (p. 30) and are sitting in downtown Clayton debating whether to continue riding or go home to mow the yard. After careful consideration, you decide the grass in your front yard can get a little taller before you mow it. Great. Start this ride on US 76 and GA 197 about 20 miles east of Clayton.

Another way to pack a lot of good riding into your day is to take in the Russell-Brasstown Scenic Byway (p. 16). It'll add just an hour to your riding day and starts only 0.25 miles north of this ride's starting point, at GA 76 and GA 76 Alt.

ROAD CONDITIONS

Excellent paved and banked, this ride has few asphalt worries. Watch for a few unmarked twists and turns around Lake Burton on GA 197, and watch for deer throughout the ride.

POINTS OF INTEREST

The town of Helen, Unicoi State Park, Anna Ruby Falls, Lake Burton, Popcorn Overlook, Unicoi Gap, and the Chattahoochee River.

RESTAURANTS

Helen offers anything and everything you might ever have considered eating—German bratwurst, Momma's Barbecue and all the fast food your arteries can take. On the ride, you'll find a restaurant in the lodge at Unicoi State Park and the Blueberry Patch just past Unicoi at mile 3.4. The Blueberry Patch boasts it has the best breakfast biscuits in Georgia. LaPrade's on Lake Burton is country cooking that has been a favorite in the area since 1925.

DETAILED DIRECTIONS

MILE 0—Zero your trip meter as you turn right onto GA 356 from GA 75 just north of Helen. You'll enter Unicoi State Park at mile 1.3 where you'll find signs pointing the way to various attractions in the park, most notably Anna Ruby Falls. The Blueberry Patch Restaurant is at mile 3.4 offering a great breakfast and a decent lunch.

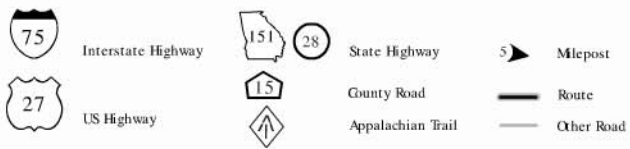
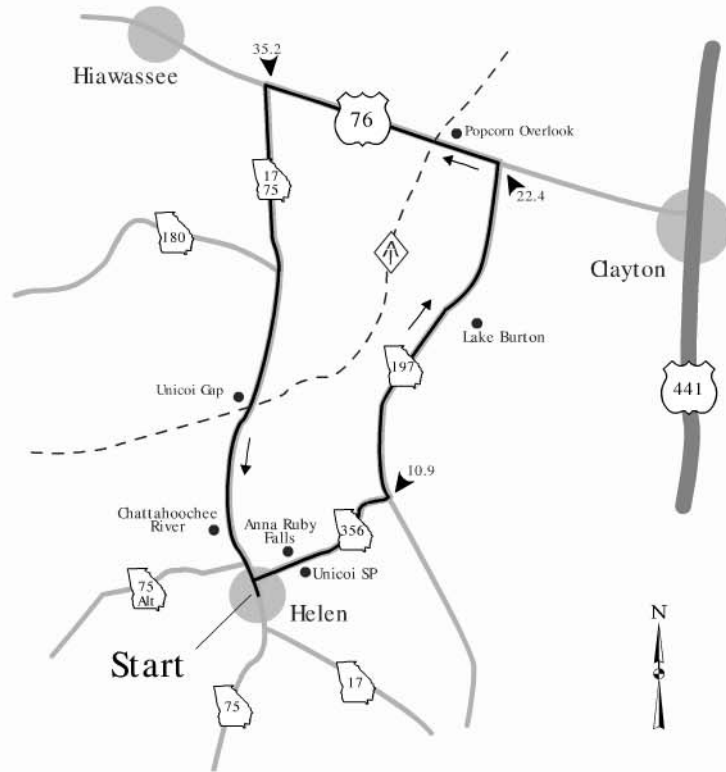
MILE 10.9—Turn left onto GA 197 when GA 356 ends. Gas is available at mile 14 and LaPrade's sits on the shore of Lake Burton at mile 16.9. Watch for unmarked twists and turns ahead.

MILE 22.4—Turn left again as GA 197 ends at US 76. Take advantage of the view offered by Popcorn overlook at mile 23.1.

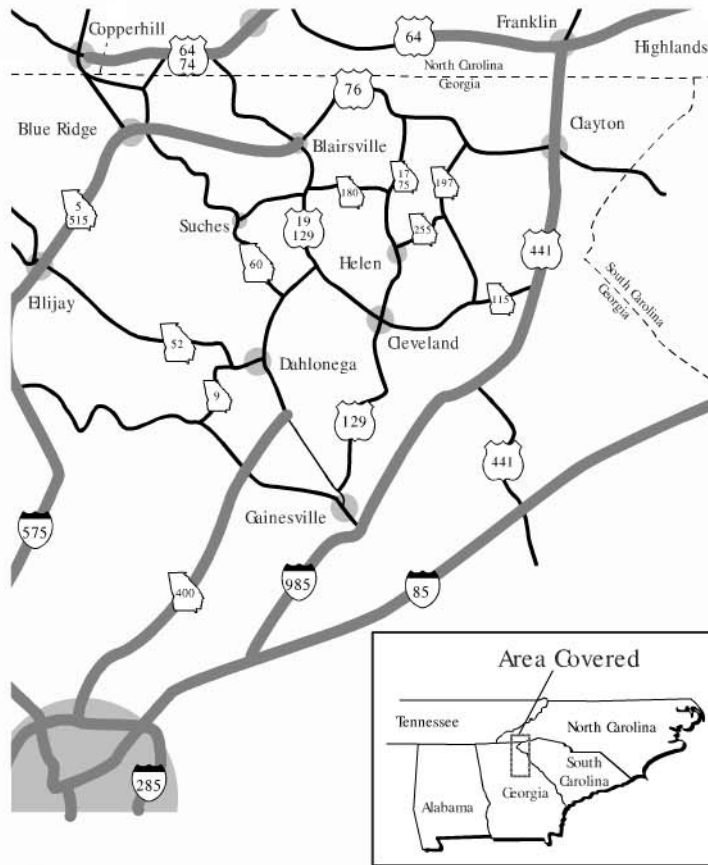
MILE 35.2—Turn left onto GA 75. There's a gas station at mile 37.1. You'll pass through Unicoi Gap at mile 44. Take in the scenic view at mile 45.6.

MILE 52.1—The ride ends where it began on GA 75 at GA 356. Continue south on GA 75 to get to downtown Helen, or stop here, open this book to the Russell-Brasstown Scenic Byway route (p. 16), and ride it.

Mountain Lake Loop



Northeast Georgia



If, like most motorcyclists, you don't have the time or the money to crate up your bike and ship it to Europe for a little riding in Bavaria, northeast Georgia may be the next best thing. In Helen, you're bound to hear polka music, smell bratwurst cooking and see folks wandering the streets dressed in classic northern European attire. Highlands, NC is the highest incorporated town east of the Mississippi and home to spectacular waterfalls. Brasstown Bald offers a fascinating museum and a 360-degree view from the top. Road conditions are superb. There's a lot to see and do, so pack some extra time into your saddlebags.