

A Journey Through Time

SC 11: The Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway

By Phil Sarata

The Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Highway (SC 11) is a throwback in every sense of the word. It is the Sunday afternoon drive you took with your family as a child, complete with wonderment at the many surprises you would find around every turn. It is a living reminder of how America used to travel-at a slower pace with plenty of time for sightseeing and discovery.

With 130 miles of twisting, turning asphalt, SC 11 winds its way along the southern base of the Blue Ridge Mountains through friendly, charming towns with much to offer the traveler searching for the intriguing and unique. Starting at its eastern end in Gaffney, the highway takes you on a magical tour from the modern-- the Peachoid, a water tank constructed to look like a peach-- to the aged-- c. 1909 Campbell's Bridge, the state's only remaining covered bridge, and c. 1820 Poinsett Bridge, considered the oldest standing bridge in South Carolina-- all through to its western terminus in Fair Play.

The Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway also offers its travelers the looming majesty of the low, soft hills of the Piedmont and the Blue Ridge escarpment, which will thrill the soul of the mountain lover. The pull of natural beauty is all around you. One can behold the sheer 1,000-foot rock face of Glassy Mountain, located near Campbell's Bridge, or the 200-foot cascade of Issaqueena Waterfall inside Stumphouse Tunnel Park near Walhalla. A two-minute walk will lead you to an observation deck that provides the perfect spot for viewing this tumbling behemoth. For those so inclined to match their bone, muscle and sinew against Mother Nature, the scenic highway provides access to seven state parks-like Caesars Head, Devils Fork and Oconee State Parks, just to name a few-and the Sumter National Forest, which can be entered at several points. Activities such as fishing, hiking, swimming, whitewater rafting, canoeing, kayaking, hunting and camping are available at most sights.

For lovers of history, there are a number of educational options along SC 11. Of course, the history all begins with the Cherokee Indian Nation, which covered virtually the entire area where the scenic highway meanders. In the years before white European settlers entered South Carolina's Piedmont, the proud Cherokee people were pioneers among America's indigenous populations in developing routes of trade and commerce and agricultural practices. However, all that changed just prior to the American Revolution. As the new American nation was forming, the region's first white settler, Richard Pearis, built the area's first business - a trading station and grist mill - on the falls of the Reedy River in what is now downtown Greenville. Another historical site is the Cowpens National Battlefield just inside Cherokee County near Chesnee, the scene of an American Revolution skirmish in 1781 that helped the Patriots win the South and turn the tide of the war against the British.

When visiting, be certain to bring along plenty of time. The Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Highway offers a wondrous journey to the revitalization of both your senses and your soul.

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