

Seven Natural Wonders of West Virginia

Lauren Weatherford, WVU Extension Agent, Fayette and Nicholas Counties

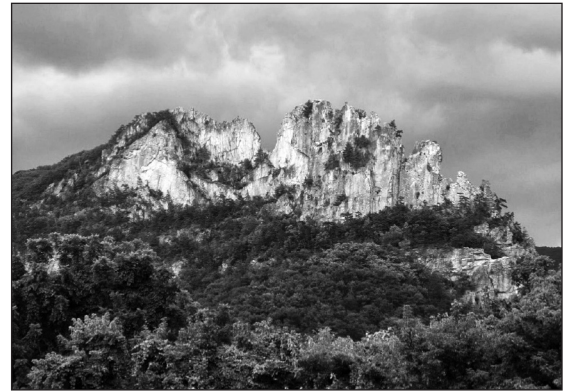
*There is
so much
to see and
do in West
Virginia's
natural
outdoors.*

There is so much to see and do in West Virginia's natural outdoors, many of which are found only in West Virginia. It is home to many natural wonders – do you know what they are?

7. Seneca Rocks

As you travel through the northeastern part of West Virginia at the intersection of Routes 33 and 55, a spectacular rock formation, towering 900 feet above the

North Fork River, suddenly appears. Seneca Rocks is one of the most famous and well photographed natural features in West Virginia. There is a visitor center located at the base of the mountain where tourists can learn interesting facts, including how the cliff was formed from an ancient ocean nearly 440 million years ago.



Seneca Rocks. (Photo credit: Mr.Schultz – Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=28528900>)

6. Ice Mountain

Did you know can find ice year-round in West Virginia? In the Eastern Panhandle there is a mountain along the North River which has towers of rocks called Raven Rocks. These rocks have small caves formed by piles of boulders. In these caves a refrigeration effect occurs where cold-air drafts allow ice to form year-round.

The Ice Mountain Preserve was created to protect this unique natural wonder. Contact the West Virginia Chapter of the Nature Conservancy for guided hiking tours.

5. Canaan Valley

Located just south of Davis, West Virginia along the Blackwater River is Canaan Valley. It is the largest wetland area in the Appalachian region and the second largest in the United States, boasting 8,400 acres. Just over a hundred years ago, the valley was home to one of the densest red spruce forests.

– continued –

Tourists visit Canaan Valley year-round to hike, bike, fish and golf in the summer, or ski, snowshoe and ice skate in the winter. There is a nature center which hosts guided tours and wildlife sightseeing events.



Sinks of Gandy. (Photo Credit: Valerius Tygart – Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2631545>)

4. Sinks of Gandy

South of Canaan Valley, Gandy Creek sinks under the earth into a large cave under Yokum Knob. The sinks form a natural tunnel which drops under the ground on one side of the knob and emerges on the other side of Randolph County Route 40 (Dry Fork Road). The tunnels are about 3,000 feet in length, ranging from 4 to 35 feet high and 40 to 100 feet wide. The creek covers the whole floor in some places but only a narrow section in others. Today, the Sinks of Gandy remains one of the most visited caves in West Virginia.

3. Dolly Sods

Located east of Canaan Valley and north of Seneca Rocks in northeastern West Virginia is the 17,371 acre Dolly Sods Wilderness. Much like Canaan Valley, the environment in Dolly Sods is more like that found in Canada.

When visiting the sods you find a stunningly beautiful but barren landscape of stunted trees, rocky surfaces with windblown boulders, grassy meadows and very old bogs. It is the highest plateau east of the Mississippi River. There are 47 miles of walking and hiking trails.

2. New River and New River Gorge

The New River is the second oldest river in the world. This ancient river, which starts in North Carolina and flows north to West Virginia, carved out the spectacular, nearly 1,000-foot New River Gorge.

There are many things to see and do in the New River Gorge area including three visitor centers in the national park, numerous hiking trails, hunting, fishing, boating and outdoor adventure opportunities with local outfitters. This area offers visitors everything from mild to wild.

1. Cranberry Glades

Located in central West Virginia at the headwaters of the Cranberry River in Pocahontas County, the Cranberry Glades is 750 acres of West Virginia's largest natural peat bogs. Glaciers helped form the bogs and some of the plants descended from seeds which took root there 10,000 years ago.

When visiting Cranberry Glades you can make a stop at the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center for in-depth information or a guided tour. This is also the starting point for the Highland Scenic Highway, a high mountain drive with remarkable views and access points to many of the hiking trails. But be careful in wintertime – drive at your own risk!

2016

Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status.

The WVU Board of Governors is the governing body of WVU. The Higher Education Policy Commission in West Virginia is responsible for developing, establishing, and overseeing the implementation of a public policy agenda for the state's four-year colleges and universities.

FH16-293

