



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Blue Ridge Parkway  
[www.nps.gov/blri](http://www.nps.gov/blri)

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## Blue Ridge Parkway News Release

For Immediate Release

### ***Important Press Note Below***

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### **GRAND OPENING OF DESTINATION CENTER MARKS NEW ERA FOR BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY**

Asheville, NC (March 31, 2008) -- For the first time in its 73-year history, the Blue Ridge Parkway has a visitor center that represents its entire length, from the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in western North Carolina. The grand opening celebration of the new Blue Ridge Parkway Destination Center near Asheville, NC, (Blue Ridge Parkway milepost 384) is set for 10:15 a.m. Monday, April 14, 2008.

Assistant Secretary of the Interior Lyle Laverty, National Park Service Director Mary Bomar, North Carolina Senator Richard Burr and Congressman Heath Shuler will be among the many notable officials attending and addressing invited guests, the press, and the general public at the grand opening ceremonies. According to Park Superintendent Philip Francis, "Through its strong partnerships, unique exhibits and environmental design, the Center embraces themes central to the protection, preservation, and thoughtful promotion of the cultural and natural heritage of western North Carolina as well as the entire Blue Ridge Parkway." The celebration will continue the following Saturday, April 19, 2008, from noon – 4:00 pm with cultural entertainment and guided tours of the building's 'green' features. All programs are free and open to the public (*see entertainment schedule below*).

The Blue Ridge Parkway Destination Center was developed as a partnership between the National Park Service and the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area to promote the preservation and enjoyment of the region's unique natural and cultural resources and to promote economic development in keeping with those goals.

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“This partnership is a unique and important development in sharing resources to tell the complete story of our rich natural and cultural heritage, said Penn Dameron, Executive Director, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. “The Destination Center is also taking a leading role in preserving the land and the cultural traditions for future generations.”

The Destination Center features innovative, high-tech interactive exhibits, and the building itself reflects cutting edge energy-saving technology. Constructed to LEED® certification standards (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), the building features active/passive heating and cooling, radiant floor heating, a “green” roof and other energy efficient features.

This is the first National Park Service visitor center in the country to offer an I-Wall, a 22-foot interactive map of the entire Parkway which provides multi-media information on places to visit on and near the Parkway. Other exhibits highlight the natural and cultural diversity, economic traditions, and recreational opportunities found in western North Carolina and along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Destination Center also houses a 70-seat theater featuring a new film, “The Blue Ridge Parkway-America’s Favorite Journey.” Shown in high-definition surround sound (similar to the I-MAX experience), the 24-minute film captures a father-daughter motorcycle trip along the Parkway that incorporates Parkway history and the region’s cultural and natural sights and sounds.

Information desks are staffed by National Park Service and Blue Ridge National Heritage Area employees and volunteers who will help visitors plan their travel along the Parkway’s 469-mile long motor road and throughout the Blue Ridge region. Another Parkway partner, Eastern National, provides a retail shop in the visitor center offering books, CDs, DVDs, educational toys, apparel, and collectables. Items are carefully selected to reflect Blue Ridge Parkway and Destination Center themes with a portion of the profits supporting educational programs along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

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In addition, the Center serves as the headquarters for the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. Established by Congress in November, 2003, this organization recognizes and celebrates the natural abundance and richly varied cultural history of the North Carolina mountains and is charged with the preservation, interpretation, and development of heritage resources in the 25 westernmost counties in the state and the Quallah Boundary.

Construction of the 12,000-square foot building began in March 2006 and the Center opened “softly” on December 17, 2007. The building was designed by Lord, Aeck & Sargent Architecture of Atlanta, GA and constructed by Asheville-based Perry Bartsch Jr. Construction Company.

It is recommended that the public park at the Folk Art Center where a shuttle service will be provided to and from the Destination Center on Monday, April 14 between 9:00 am and 1:00 pm.

The Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited unit of the National Park Service, with 20 million visitors each year. The [Blue Ridge Parkway Destination Center](#) is open daily from 9 am to 5 pm except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years Day. For more information and directions go to [www.blueridgeheritage.com](#) or call the Destination Center: 828-298-5330.

***Press Note:*** *Media Alerts will be sent to all press with details of the Grand Opening program; including a press conference following the ceremonies. JPEG images of Destination Center available for download at [www.blueridgeheritage.com/aboutus/pressroom.html](#) and DVD clip for TV broadcast of Destination Center film - “The Blue Ridge Parkway-America’s Favorite Journey”- available at press conference or by request – [kdcronin@charter.net](#).*

**CELEBRATION AT THE NEW  
BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY DESTINATION CENTER  
SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 2008**

**SCHEDULE:**

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| Noon:         | Bravehearts youth Scottish dance team.   |
| 1:00 – 4 p.m. | Booksining. Author Anne Mitchell Whisnant will greet the public and autograph her book, <i>Super-Scenic Motorway, A Blue Ridge Parkway History</i> . |
| 1:00 p.m.     | Buncombe County Fox Hunters band.  |
| 2:00 p.m.     | Cole Mountain Cloggers youth dance team.   |
| 3:00 p.m.     | Buncombe County Fox Hunters band.  |
| 4:00 p.m.     | Danielle Bishop on fiddle and Seth Taylor on guitar and banjo.   |