

BREVARD, NORTH CAROLINA Pisgah's Private Playground

Most riders have heard of Pisgah—the steep, rooty, rocky, wet wonder-world of trails in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains is the stuff of legend. Most have also heard of Asheville, the hip university town that serves as the Southeast's answer to Boulder, Colorado. The name many riders might not recognize, however, is *Brevard*, a small mountain college town about 30 miles south of Asheville and the perfect starting point for some of North Carolina's best singletrack.

Brevard, with a population of 6,687, sits right at Pisgah National Forest's back door. There are, literally, a million acres of terrain and 200 miles of trail here—and it's all just a few pedal strokes from the

west side of town. Be forewarned that a journey into the depths of this dense forest may lead to encounters with poisonous plants and insects, and perhaps even a black bear or two. And every October the infamous "brown ice" leaf blanket covers the forest floor.

Those who venture into these woods, however, will be rewarded with fast, technical descents that rage for miles. Pinning rhododendron tunnels and negotiating root-strewn ridgeline crags are highlights, usually accompanied by "damn, we're really far out" views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Shuttle opportunities are scarce, so bring a good all-around steed that is light enough for the climbs and plush enough for root-filled descents. Grueling access climbs such as the 13-mile-long Black Mountain trail, with

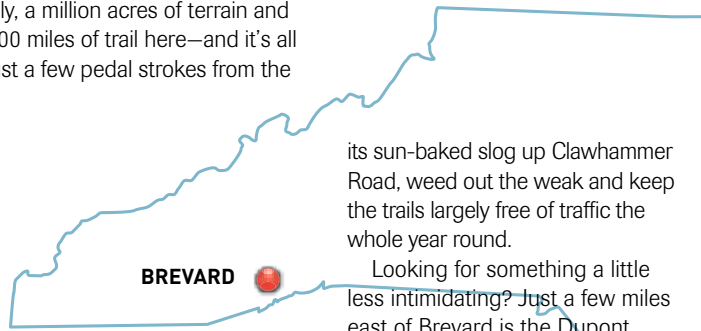


CHUCK HANEY

SOUTHERN FRONT:
ASHEVILLE MAY GET ALL THE ATTENTION, BUT BREVARD'S TRAILS ARE JUST AS GOOD AND FAR FROM THE MASSES



LYNN PILEWSKI



BREVARD

its sun-baked slog up Clawhammer Road, weed out the weak and keep the trails largely free of traffic the whole year round.

Looking for something a little less intimidating? Just a few miles east of Brevard is the Dupont State Forest, where nearly 100 miles of intermediate trails await. While Pisgah is full of big ups and downs, Dupont brims with gentler, rolling trails. It's a beautiful place, filled with massive water-

falls and eastern granite domes—mossy versions of Moab's celebrated slickrock.

Annual events like the Pisgah Mountain Bike Adventure Race give riders in the South something to brag about: two-man teams pedal for six to 12 hours over 70-plus miles with 15,000 feet of elevation gain in this completely unsupported race. If that doesn't sound hard enough, there's always the "Most Horrible Thing Ever" in February—think 36 hours and 150 miles of Pisgah pain.

Locals heading from Brevard into Pisgah generally start their rides near the Davidson River campground, which offers year-round camping with hot showers and access to the national forest right across the road for \$16 a night (828-862-5960).

While the trails of Transylvania County may sound spooky, the quiet town of Brevard is anything but that. Two bike shops sit a minute's pedal from the trailhead (hubbicycles.com,

828-884-8670; Sycamorecycles.com, 828-877-5790), as does El Chapala, a post-ride favorite, where *grande cervezas* wash down endless chips and salsa (828-877-5220).

The town is home to Brevard College, and there is a healthy music scene with a decidedly Appalachian flavor. There are also plenty of affordable hotels (Hampton Inn Brevard, 828-883-4800; Holiday Inn Express, 828-862-8900).

When you're done riding, be sure to check out the 150-foot natural waterslide at Sliding Rock, just 8 miles from town on Highway 276. Got a thing for waterfalls? There are 250 of them in the region. And stay on the lookout for Brevard's "famous" white squirrels, for which the town holds its annual, you guessed it, White Squirrel Festival.

—BRAD WALTON

MUST-RIDE

BLACK MOUNTAIN TRAIL

The Black Mountain trail pretty much sums up Brevard-area riding: 13 miles long, with 2,000 feet of climbing through a mix of forested creek bed, gravel road and steep, technical singletrack. All this climbing leads to epic views before a 4-mile ridgeline descent along rock-and-root-infested singletrack that winds through seemingly endless rhododendron tunnels.

Park at the ranger station in Brevard and turn west on Highway 276 into Pisgah National Forest. Take a right onto FR-477 road, then another right at the horse stables onto Clawhammer Road.

Sweat out the climb until you reach the Buckhorn Gap saddle and soak up the views. Continue to the right onto the Black Mountain trail, where you'll climb and climb until you reach the 4,200-foot cliff-top view. After the second summit, hang on for your reward—a rough, twisty downhill that loses 1,900 feet of elevation. Follow the white dots to stay on the Black Mountain trail all the way back to Highway 276, where you'll turn right one more time to return to your vehicle.