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National Forests Are Overshadowing The Smokies Park

By BILL SHARPE

Overshadowed in publicity by the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests in North Carolina last year pulled far ahead of the Park in popularity, and drew over 1,800,000 visitors, most of them recreation bent.

The two forests, sections of which adjoin each other, comprise 203,111 gross acres, all of which is already under protection and practically all in various stages of development. In this territory lies not only some of the major scenic attractions of the southern Appalachians, but also recreational facilities—roads, trails, campgrounds, lakes, picnic grounds—which are attracting an increasing army of visitors. No matter how many come, however, they are swiftly swallowed up by the vastness of the forests.

Pisgah comprises several divisions which roughly run from Blowing Rock and the Tennessee line to the South Carolina line. It adjoins Nantahala in the west, which in turn joins the Smokies Park—the three areas altogether embracing 1,293,111 acres of mountain forest land, much of it in a primeval state.

The growing popularity of the National Forests is partly because they are far more accessible and better developed than the park itself. Main highways traverse many of its sections, and in addition, the often unpaved but excellent fire roads give access to beauty spots often sought but missed by the average motorist. The forests also contain 533 miles of foot and horse trails, and a score of developed recreational areas. There are excellent trout streams, well stocked, and open on specified days. The Appalachian Trail traverses both forests.

In Pisgah are such outstanding attractions as the Craggy Rhododendron Gardens, the Black Mountains, Roan Mountain, with its park-like rhododendron natural gardens, Looking-glass Rock, Hawksbill Mountain (overlooking Linville Gorge), the Pisgah Ledge, the Pink Beds of Pisgah. There are 15 public camp or picnic grounds, some of them with trailer space, and some offering swimming facilities.

Nantahala National Forest's outstanding attractions are spectacular Nantahala Gorge (Land of the Noonday Sun), and the beautiful Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest of 3,840 acres. Within or on its borders are many lakes, including Glenville, Fontana, Aquone, Hiwassee, Chatuge, Santeclah, Cheoah—all good bass waters, and all open the year around to sport fishermen. Wayah Bald, reached by motor road, affords a 360-degree view, and among other popular peaks is Standing Indian (reached by trail). The Forest has numerous recreational areas, the best developed being Arrowwood Glade and Cliffside Lake, with swimming at both.

There are ample resort accommodations in both forests.

Pisgah is a motorists' delight, because it is tapped by modern highways, including US Routes 221, 321, 25 and 70, 19 and 23, 276, as well as many N. C. highways, special forest roads and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Portions of these highways provide many scenic drives.

Hikers will find 412 miles of trails. The Appalachian Trail runs 80 miles from Waterville to US Route 19W via Snowbird Mountain, Max Patch, Hot Springs, Rich Mountain and Camp Creek Bald. Six overnight lean-to shelters are available on this stretch at about

12 mile intervals. There are other hiking trails, ranging from short walks to overnight and often rugged wilderness trips. One of the toughest is a very meagre trail into the Black Mountain Natural Area, barely accessible except to the hardiest hiker from NC 70 above Busick.

The Blue Ridge runs for 50 miles through Pisgah, with an average elevation of around 4,000 feet, the highest peak being Grandfather Mountain (5,964). The Black Mountain Range has an average elevation of 6,000 feet, and the Craggy Range, near Asheville, has an average elevation of between 5,000 and 5,500 feet, with Craggy Dome reaching 6,103. The Pisgah Ledge, lying southeast of Asheville, is dominated by Mt. Pisgah itself (5,732 feet).

Pisgah's waterfalls usually are tumbling waters, rather than sheer drops, and some of the best of them may be seen by short hikes. Some 12 are listed in the forest.

Camping generally is concentrated at the following grounds: Bent Creek, 12 miles south of Asheville; Powhatan (above Bent Creek); Tony Fork, Mt. Pisgah Road, 18 miles from Asheville; Frying Pan Gap, beyond Mt. Pisgah (over a mile high); Pink Beds, on US 276, north of Brevard (trailer space); White Pines, also on US 276; North Mills River, NC 191 south of Asheville (trailer space, swimming, too); Big Ivy, off NC 695 (swimming); Silvermine, US 25 at Hot Springs (swimming); Carolina Hemlock, NC 80 off Blue Ridge Parkway near Burnsville (trailer space, swimming).

Picnic grounds are available at these places and also at the following: Davidson River (near Brevard, swimming); Craggy Gardens, north of Asheville near Parkway; Old Fort, US 70 near Old Fort; Table Rock, off NC 181 north of Marion.

Accommodations in the Pisgah area are excellent, since the forest surrounds or borders such places as Asheville, Blowing Rock, Little Switzerland, Hendersonville, Brevard, Waynesville, Linville, and oth-

ers. Nantahala's main highways are US 64, 129, 19 and 23. Lying between the crests of the Blue Ridge and of the Great Smokies, it is cross-ridged by numerous chains which rise above the mountain plateau and connect the two major systems. These include the Coweets, the Nantahalas, the Balsams, the Tennessee Ridge, the Cheoachs, the Snowbirds and Valley River mountains.

One of the finest sights in the South is Nantahala Gorge, traversed by US 129 and 19 south from Bryson City. It is a view highly respected by photographers. Another good view is afforded by Shooting Creek Vista, on US 64 west of Chunky Gal Mountain. Other points of interest are Dry Falls, Cullasaja Falls and Bridal Veil Falls, all accessible from US 64.

Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, named for the author of "Trees", is 18 miles northwest of Robbinsville. Poplars and hemlocks 70 to 90 inches in diameter are found here. Trails lead into a forest which is just as it was 500 years ago.

Hikers can take the Appalachian Trail through the forest or use a number of others. Shelters are located at Wayah Crest, Deep Gap, Cable Gap, Wesser Creek, and Cold Springs. Camping also at Van Hook Glade, near Franklin on US 64 (trailers, too); and near the entrance to the Joyce Kilmer Forest. Picnicking at various places, including those above and at Cliffside Lake (swimming); Arrowwood Glade (swimming); Gorge, Dell, on US 129 in the Nantahala Gorge. There are 250 miles of Forest roads, 350 miles of trails.

Accommodations in the area are numerous, including those at

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In both forests (and generally in western North Carolina), the floral season runs about like this: mountain laurel—month of June, with mid-June best; purple rhododendron—June 1-15; pink rhododendron—July 1-15; azalea—June 15-July 1; autumn color—October 15.

Both Pisgah and Nantahala abound in trout waters, which are stocked regularly. Certain streams are open on specified days, with a

\$1 fee per day for fishing privileges. Schedule of opening days and regulations may be had from the Forest Service offices, or from the Wildlife Resource Commission, Raleigh, N. C.

More than 350 species of shrubs and trees are found in the forests.

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