

North Carolina Scenic byways are great for cruising

BY ALAN HODGE

There's no need to take a road trip of hundreds of miles to view scenic beauty.

For just a few dollars in gas money and a couple of hours of time, anyone with a set of wheels can travel some of the nicest landscape around on one of Cleveland or Gaston counties North Carolina Scenic Byways.

The Scenic Byways system in North Carolina consists of 44 drives statewide that give residents a chance to see history, geography, and culture on a diverse group of interesting and alternate routes to busy highways. The program was started by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Scenic Byway routes vary from three to 173 miles and can be found from the Tar Heel mountains to the coast. The routes are clearly marked with the Scenic Byways logo.

One Scenic Byway is located near the base of Crowders mountain. This

eight mile stretch of road takes about 20 minutes to travel and also includes the entrance to Crowders Mountain State Park.

To access the Crowders Mountain Drive, Take Exit 10 off I-85 and follow U.S. 74/29 to Sparrow Springs Road where the route begins. Signs are posted.

While you're going past the entrance to Crowders Mountain State Park, stop and see the new visitor center there. In addition to hiking and camping, the park also offers fishing, canoeing, and organized activities lead by Park Rangers.

As Crowders Drive winds its way through the country, it becomes Pinnacle Drive and then Lake Montonia Road at the Gaston/Cleveland county line.

Upper Cleveland County also has a great Scenic Byway called South Mountain Scenery. A total of 33 miles in length, this drive includes not only Cleveland,

but portions of Rutherford and McDowell counties as well.

The South Mountain Scenery drive begins about four miles northwest through the Broad River Valley and past the South Mountains which will be on the left side of the road.

South Mountains State Park is also nearby. This popular park offers trout fishing, an 80-foot waterfall, primitive camping, hiking and picnic facilities. The park entrance is off Old N.C. 18 (SR1924) south of Morganton.

About 45 minutes southwest of Shelby, the Pacolet River Byway passes through the Tryon Thermal Belt and across the Pacolet River into South Carolina. About 10 miles long, this drive includes scenic hamlets such as Tryon and Saluda- home of the annual Coon Dogs Days festival.

Other attractions near the Pacolet River Byway are



Photo by Alan Hodge

COOL RIDE- This beautiful 1958 Chevy owned by Joe Rhinehart of Belmont would make the ideal vehicle for cruising a Scenic Byway.

Pearsons Falls Natural Heritage Site, and Saluda Station railway depot. To get to the Pacolet River Byway,

hit Hwy. 176 south to Tryon and follow it west to Saluda. Also less than an hour from Shelby is the Scenic

Byway known as the Black Mountain Rag. Thirty miles

See BYWAYS page 8

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