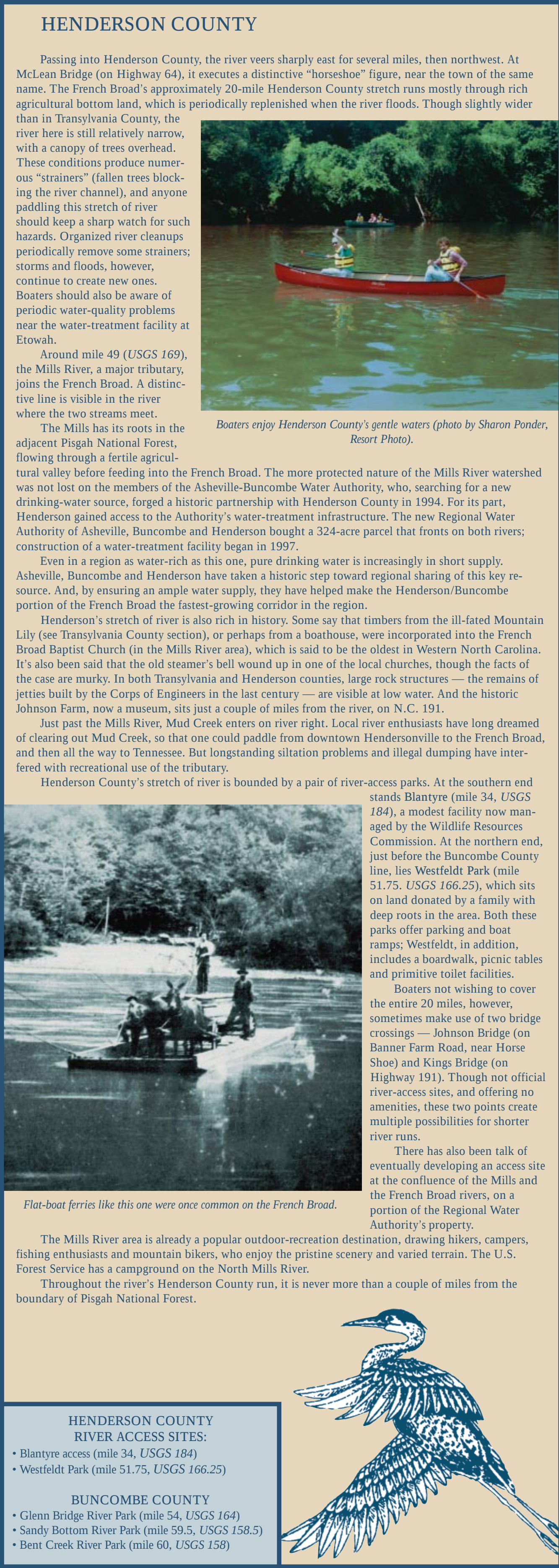
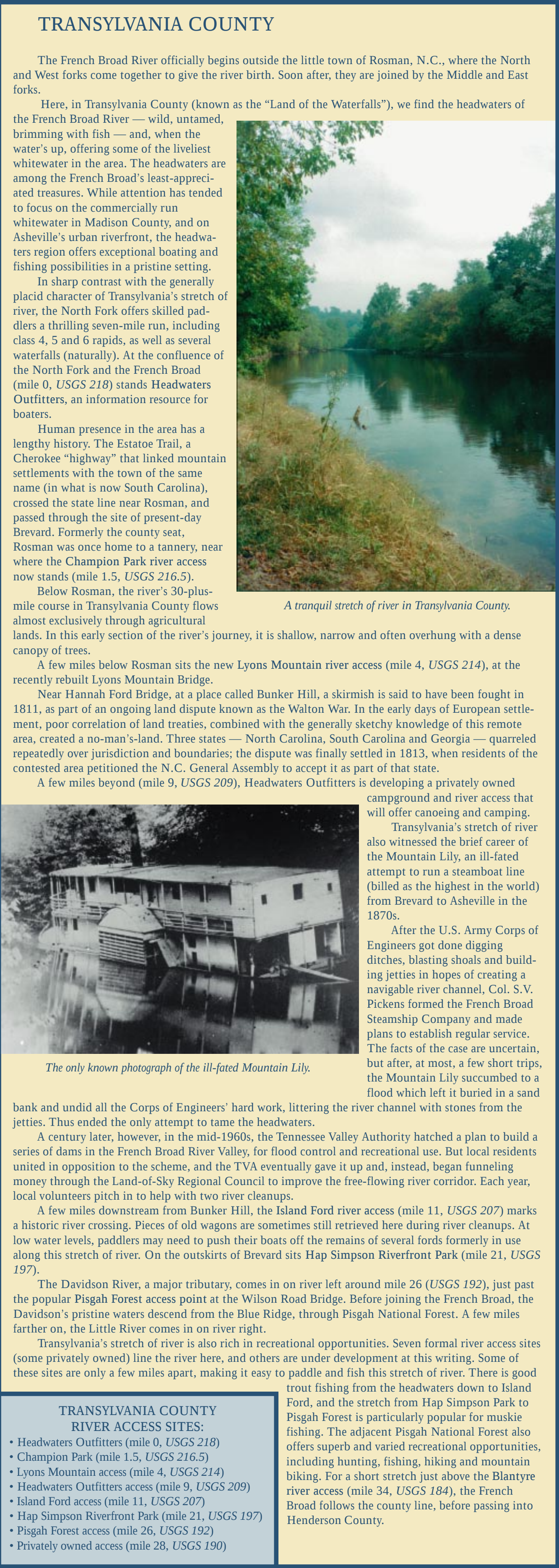
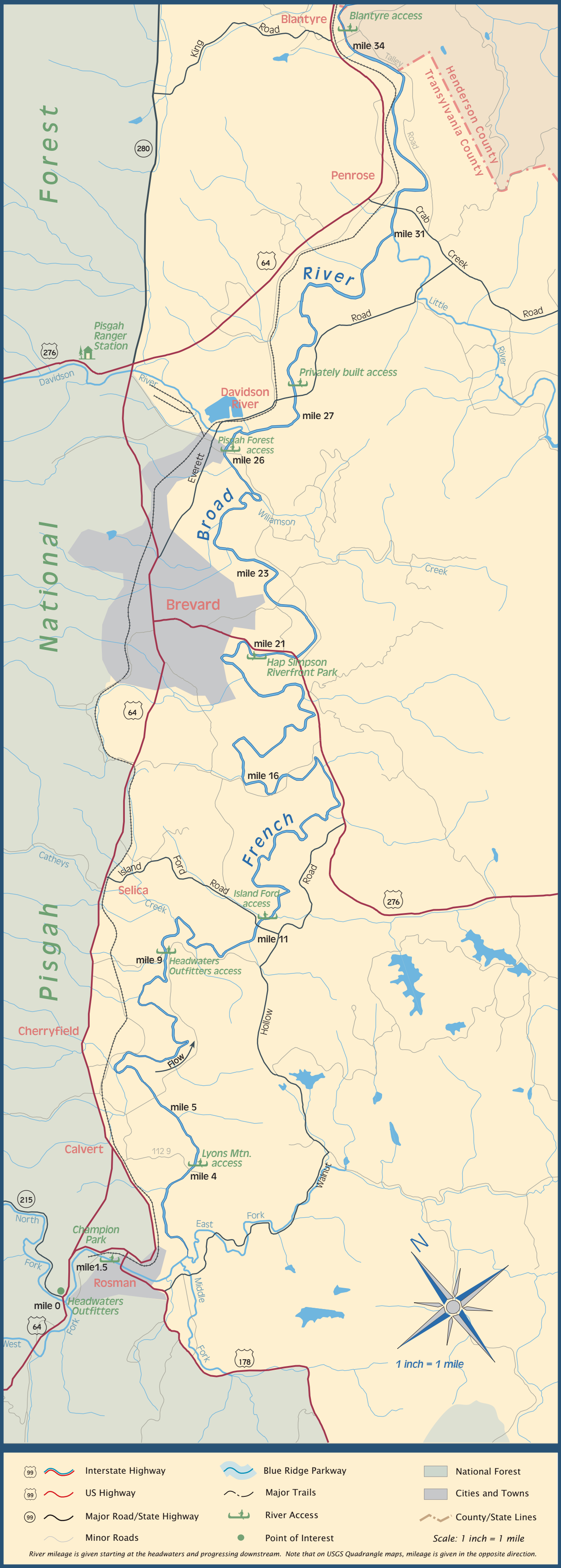
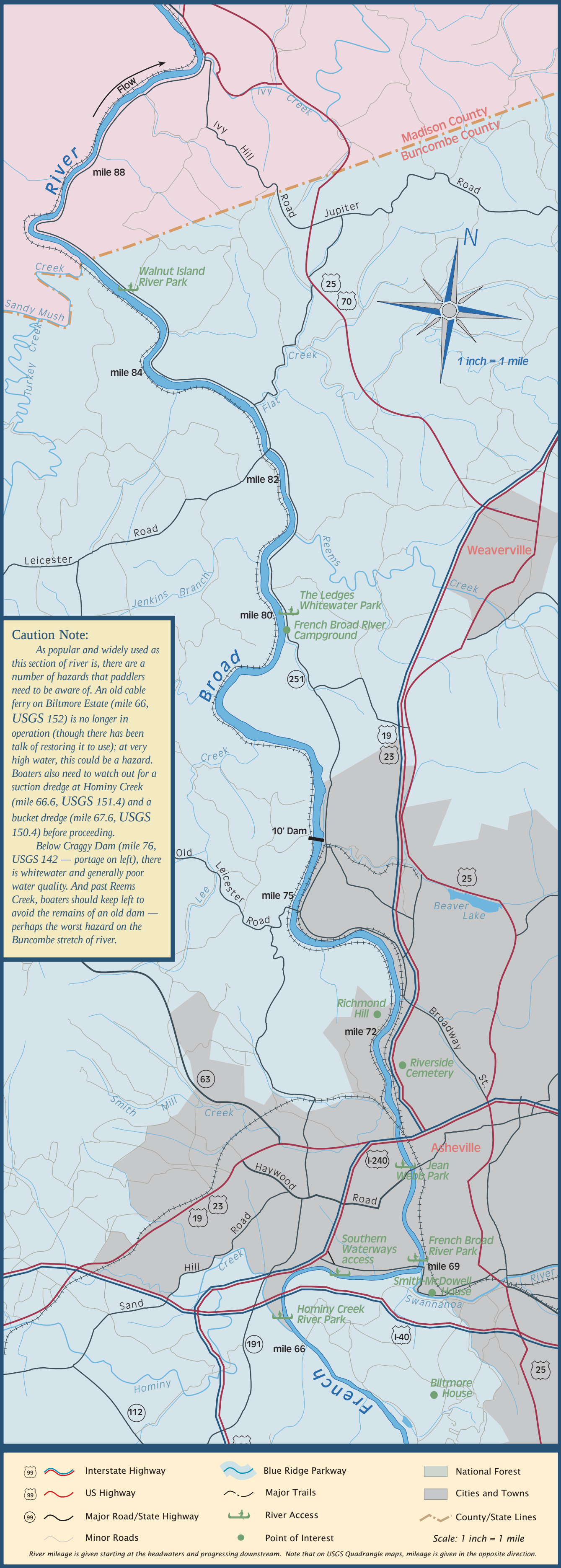






Paddlers working out at The Ledges Whitewater Park (photo by John Fletcher, Asheville Citizen-Times).



The Anything That Floats Boat Parade puts color on the water.

MADISON COUNTY

By the time it gets to Madison County (mile 87, *USGS 131*), the French Broad is substantially wider — and about to get wilder. Forsaking the relative calm of Asheville's urban riverfront, the French Broad in Madison carries more water and drops more sharply, offering manifold challenges to boaters.

Just after the river enters Madison, it veers left at Bailey Bend, named for an old Madison County family that owned land there. In the early 1920s, Jesse James Bailey served two terms as Madison County Sheriff (and, later, one as Buncombe County Sheriff), gaining a formidable reputation as a slayer of whiskey stills.

Boaters should be especially alert to a pair of dams outside the town of Marshall (*see caution note, below*). Be prepared for a lengthy portage around both of these hazards.

At Barnard, near the confluence with Big Pine Creek, the river enters Pisgah National Forest, through which it meanders for the next 34 miles, emerging just past Huff Island in Tennessee. Madison County maintains a public river access at Barnard (mile 100.5, *USGS 117.5*), named for a man who ran a stand there for drovers on the old Buncombe Turnpike. Many paddlers and commercial outfitters put in here for the whitewater run to Hot Springs (*see caution note, below*), which includes some class 3 rapids — and even, when the water's up, one class 4, Frank Bell Rapid (named for a legendary paddler who is said to have run the French Broad from its headwaters all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, around 1920).

For a shorter, gentler run, one may take out at Stackhouse (mile 105, *USGS 113*), where the Forest Service has a primitive access site (*see caution note, below*). At this writing, preliminary planning has begun for proposed improvements to the site. Amos Stackhouse built a house, store and sawmill here after the Civil War. The original home burned in the 1920s, but a grand Victorian structure he built in 1904 is still visible from the river.

Just below Stackhouse, around mile 106 (*USGS 112*), Big Laurel Creek comes in on river right. When the water's up, this wildwater stream offers a spectacular and scenic paddling adventure, including several class 5 rapids. Near the Laurel/French Broad confluence stand the ruins of Runion, an old logging community now smothered by the encroaching forest.

At Hot Springs, another lively tributary, Spring Creek, enters the French Broad. At high water, Spring Creek also offers an exciting run. Both these streams are for highly skilled and experienced boaters only, however.

Overall, recreational use of the river and its tributaries has grown dramatically in recent years. Nantahala Outdoor Center (mile 109, *USGS 109*) maintains a parking area for boaters and hikers at Hot Springs (please park in the designated area only), and many other outfitters also serve this stretch of the French Broad. But the river is still an underutilized resource in North Carolina — and even more so in Tennessee.

The little town of Hot Springs (population 535) enjoys a special place in French Broad River history. Originally known as Warm Springs, the town was already a thriving health resort by the early 1800s; the completion of the Buncombe Turnpike in 1828 drew still more people. Throughout the 19th century, a steady stream of wealthy visitors came to "take the waters" and enjoy the entertainments provided by a series of luxury hotels built adjacent to the thermal springs, along the banks of the French Broad.

During the Civil War, Warm Springs served as the headquarters of Confederate Provisional Forces under General Davis, until the town was captured by federal troops in 1863.

The 1880s saw a further rise in the town's fortunes, sparked by the arrival of the railroad in 1882. After the old Patton Hotel burned down in 1884, an even grander hostelry, the Mountain Park Hotel, was built. Among the elegant resort's multiple attractions was the first golf course in North Carolina. Around this time, the town's name was changed to Hot Springs.

The Mountain Park burned down in 1920, and the end of the sanitarium boom sent the little town into decline. But in recent years, Hot Springs has been experiencing a revival. It now boasts a number of bed-and-breakfasts, as well as expanded dining opportunities. And, after more than 40 years, the springs themselves are once again available for public enjoyment.

There's a lot to like in Hot Springs. The Appalachian Trail runs right down the main street, and the surrounding area offers abundant recreational opportunities, including camping, hiking, fishing and mountain biking, as well as paddling. In addition to the thermal baths themselves, the Hot Springs Spa also operates a private campground in Hot Springs, which offers campsites and primitive cabins right along the French Broad. About four miles downstream is the Murray Branch river access (mile 113, *USGS 105*).

About two miles farther on, at the confluence with Paint Creek, stands Paint Rock, named for the human and animal figures that formerly adorned it, said to have been painted by the Cherokee. In 1793, a blockhouse was erected here to protect early settlers from attack. Past Paint Rock, the river enters Tennessee.

MADISON COUNTY RIVER ACCESS SITES:

- Barnard access (mile 100.5, *USGS 117.5*)
- Stackhouse access (mile 105, *USGS 113*)
- Nantahala Outdoor Center access (mile 109, *USGS 109*)
- Murray Branch access (mile 113, *USGS 105*)



Whitewater excitement on the French Broad (photo courtesy NOC).



Caution Note:

Although thousands of people safely enjoy Madison's stretch of river each year, there are several significant hazards that paddlers need to be aware of. Capitola Dam (mile 92.5, *USGS 125.5*), an eight-foot structure on the outskirts of Marshall, generates power for the French Broad Electric Membership Cooperative. And Redmon Dam (mile 95, *USGS 123*), a much larger dam just beyond Marshall, serves Carolina Power & Light.

Stackhouse Road, which accesses the takeout at Stackhouse (mile 105, *USGS 113*), is a narrow, winding, gravel road that carries a significant amount of traffic — extreme caution is advised. Paddlers should also beware the iron rods (the remains of an old sluiceway) near here, which may be a hazard at low to medium water levels.

Finally, the whitewater run to Hot Springs includes a number of rapids which could be a hazard, especially to inexperienced paddlers. Anyone attempting to run the Barnard to Hot Springs stretch is strongly advised to consult with professional outfitters familiar with this section, and to scout these rapids carefully before running them.

A RIVER REBORN

The French Broad River is this historic region's lifeline, tying together dispersed communities and linking diverse natural and human-made wonders. Water source, play space, job creator and major attraction, the river is, above all, a living symbol of our common destiny.

Hikers, birders, picnickers, poets, boaters and fisherfolk can splash and play, kick back and dream, beside these flowing waters. Shoppers, students, artists and history buffs can glean tantalizing glimpses of the region's diverse heritage, illuminating its storied past and dynamic present. Increasingly, local governments are rediscovering the value of this shared resource. And visionary entrepreneurs are helping the river regain its key position in the regional economy.

Like merging streams that feed the swelling waters, this budding synergy is shaping a brave future for the French Broad and its tributaries. RiverLink, the regional nonprofit that's spearheading the river renaissance, invites you to launch your own voyage of discovery.

Historic Riches

From the rugged slopes of some of the oldest mountains on earth, the French Broad River and its tributaries descend, carving lush, fertile valleys along the winding, 117-mile corridor through Western North Carolina.

The Cherokee and their predecessors knew the river well. They named it *Aiqua* ("Long Man"), and its tributaries were his "chattering children." For thousands of years, these first inhabitants hunted the forested slopes of the French Broad River gorge, fished the river's rushing waters, and farmed and built villages amid the rich bottom land. The Swannanoa, a major tributary, was also heavily settled. Today, the remains of more than 20 archaeological sites stand mute along the riverbanks, awaiting exploration.

Hernando De Soto's expedition passed through the area in 1540, in search of gleaming gold. They never found it, and soon headed west. But in their wake came first a trickle and then a flood of other visitors.

Early European settlers dubbed the river the French Broad, because its wide waters flowed into what was then French territory to the west. In the 1780s, the first white settlers crossed the Blue Ridge: William Moore made a homestead on Hominy Creek, and Samuel Davidson farmed the rich land along the Swannanoa.

More settlers followed, drawn by the river's song. In the 1820s, the Buncombe Turnpike was built, and farmers in Kentucky and Tennessee began driving livestock through the mountains, following the river's course en route to the great ports of Charleston and Savannah, farther south. Drovers herded upward of 100,000 hogs a year along the busy road, traveling between "stands" that later grew into towns, and stagecoaches carried passengers and mail.

In the 1880s, the railroad arrived, opening the door to hordes of wealthy visitors who traveled the river corridor. One of them, George Vanderbilt, created the nation's largest private residence and first school of forestry here. Other visionaries soon followed. By the turn of the century, Asheville's Riverside Park had become the favored haunt of fashionable ladies and elegant gents. But a fire in 1915 badly damaged the park, and after the Great Flood of 1916, a battered city turned its back on the riverfront.

Today, however, the French Broad is regaining a central place in the life of this community, thanks to enhanced environmental awareness, renewed appreciation of the area's unique heritage, and increased demand for recreational space.

A Place to Play

The Cherokee called the French Broad's thrilling whitewater section *Tahkystee* ("where they race"). Today, private boaters and commercial outfitters are giving those words new meaning.

The French Broad River is a priceless recreational resource. From Champion Park in Rosman to Hominy Creek in Asheville, it is a designated North Carolina River Trail — the state's first. And much of the river's course lies within sight of national forest lands, providing opportunities for camping, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, rock climbing, fishing and hunting. A string of river access parks offer facilities for boating, fishing, picnicking, bird watching and quiet contemplation. (See map for locations. Most formal access sites include a parking area and a boat launch; some also offer picnic tables; few have restrooms.) And RiverLink's French Broad River Yacht Club, open to anyone who has been on the river even once, is opening many people's eyes to the French Broad's tremendous recreational potential.

The river is our teacher, our inspiration. It whispers to us of our shared past, and its rushing waters plunge ahead, embracing a shining future that they help create.



Riverside Park before the 1916 flood (photo courtesy of North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library).

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A WORD ABOUT SAFETY

The French Broad River is safely enjoyed by thousands of people of all ages each year. But moving water is inherently dangerous, and falling trees, rocks, flooding, dams and other artificial structures may create additional hazards.

Before launching your river adventure, make sure you have the training, equipment and information you need to enjoy a safe outing. Never go alone, and make sure someone knows about your plans. Talk to local outfitters about the stretch of river you plan to explore, and consult books (such as *Carolina Whitewater*, by Bob Benner) for detailed information. If you're planning a longer trip, be aware that camping opportunities are limited, and much of the land — including islands in the river — is privately owned.

Though quick to share its treasures, this vulnerable ecosystem also needs your help. Don't take styrofoam or glass on the river. Enjoy viewing the river corridor's abundant wildlife — but leave the animals alone. And, finally, try to honor the privacy of others you encounter in your journeying.