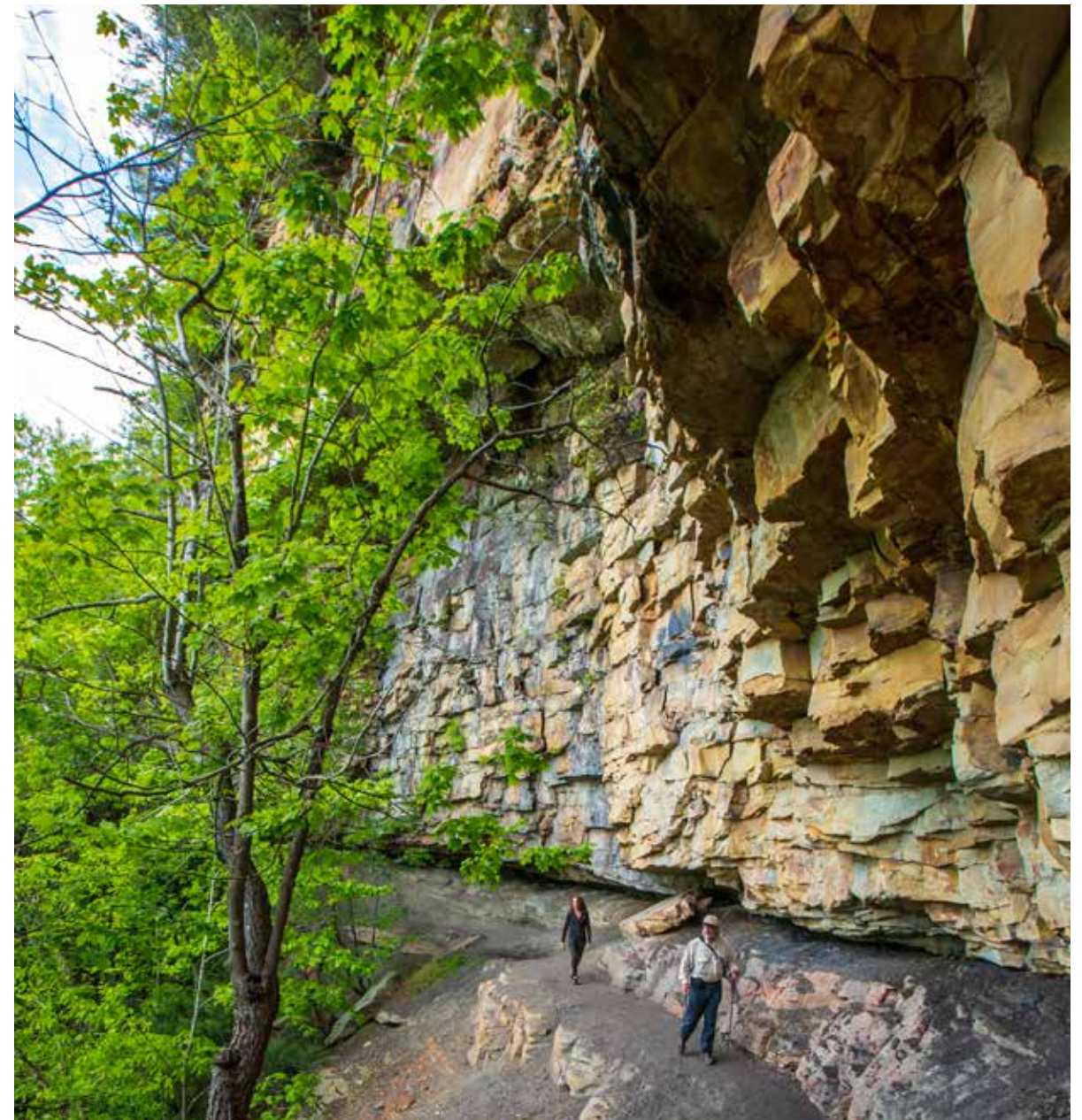




Gorge-ous!

The New River Gorge National Park and Preserve in West Virginia is America's newest national park—and it's a stunner.

Text and photos by Eric Lindberg



Spread like a patchwork quilt across 70,000 fragmented acres, the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve is America's 63rd and newest national park. More than a century ago, this West Virginia landscape

was booming with coal mining and logging. When the boom went bust by the 1950s, the camps and settlements faded into history, and nature slowly began reclaiming the land. Thanks to the status acquired in 2021 as a national park and

preserve, these ancient mountains and the New River—actually one of the world's oldest rivers, carving the longest, deepest canyon in the Appalachians—are now fully protected.

The views from atop the gorge are



Opposite page top: Spanning 1,500 feet, Sandstone Falls is the largest falls in the national park.

Opposite page bottom: The Sandstone Falls Boardwalk leads to islands and an observation deck.

This page: Hikers explore the short but steep Castle Rock Trail.



Clockwise this page: In summer, the New River Gorge often fills with fog before sunrise. Hikers enjoy the view at Diamond Point along the Endless Wall Trail. Catawba rhododendrons bloom throughout the park each May. Rafting the New River offers a wet and wild way to experience the gorge.

Opposite page bottom, from left: The 3,030-foot-long New River Gorge Bridge is the longest single-arch bridge in the Western Hemisphere. Abandoned Thurmond was once a boomtown with 15 passenger trains stopping daily.

spectacular, but to truly experience the park, get out on the trails and the river. Local companies offer rafting, rock climbing, zip-lining, mountain biking, canopy tours, guided fishing trips and a thrilling guided walk across the 24-inch-wide catwalk beneath the New River Gorge Bridge, some 360 feet above the river. More than 100 miles of trails, from meandering forest strolls to heart-pumping routes into

the gorge, immerse hikers in the rich biodiversity of the mixed hardwood ecosystem.

You'll need a car to explore the park fully. Drive down historic Fayette Station Road to the river's edge for marvelous views of the New River Gorge Bridge and rafters running rapids. Sandstone Falls, the largest waterfall on the river, can be viewed from an easy

boardwalk trail. The abandoned railroad town of Thurmond hints at the glory days of steam and coal. In spring, wildflowers and flowering dogwoods are followed by blooming rhododendrons. Each October, the changing foliage turns the forest into a brilliant autumnal medley of orange, yellow and red. It's a showcase of our newest national park you soon won't forget.

