

Blue Ridge Hiking Company: Hiking with the Pros

In 2003, 21-year-old Jennifer Pharr Davis set out to walk the Appalachian Trail. She completed that iconic trail hike that runs 2,175 miles from Maine to Georgia, and the experience was life changing. She went on to hike Mt. Kilmanjaro and the Pacific Crest Trail and more. In 2008, she was called back to the trail and again made the full trek, this time setting the Women's Appalachian Trail record by completing the hike in 57 days. And in 2011, she achieved the Overall Appalachian Trail record, completing the trail hike in 46 days, 11 hours, 20 minutes, averaging 47 miles per day. (This record was broken only in 2015 by Scott Jurek, who beat her record by 3 hours, 12 minutes.)



She's hiked all over the world, and has hiked in all 50 states in the U.S. with her husband, Brew Davis, and daughter, Charley.

Author, Lecturer, Entrepreneur

Pharr Davis wrote *Becoming Odyssa: Adventures on the Appalachian Trail* and *Called Again: A*

Story of Love and Triumph about her adventures. She's also written three hiking and outdoor guides, and the Forward to the book husband Brew Davis wrote, *46 Days: Keeping Up With Jennifer Pharr Davis on the Appalachian Trail*. The team has co-written another book that is due for release in March, 2017 called, *Families on Foot: Urban Walks to Backyard Treks and National Park Adventures*.

She's also a frequent lecturer, and while her work and travels take her all over the world, her love the Blue Ridge Mountains and its environs haven't swayed, and she makes her home in Asheville, North Carolina, in the midst of the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains.

In 2008, Pharr-Davis founded Blue Ridge Hiking Company, to share her love of the outdoors with others.

"We can help at whatever level it takes to get people out on the trail," she says. "We really want to just see people outdoors, and make sure they stay safe while enjoying themselves."

With her company, she brings together a team of guides who lead hikes or help in planning hikes of any distance or duration. Guides accompany on anything from a half-day hike to a week-long trip. They work with individuals, couples, families and groups to customize hikes. Some people want help in pulling a trip together, while some will hire a guide to accompany them for part of, or for the entire trip. They'll get to know what you're looking for in your hike, and understand your experience level. They'll want to know any special interests, such as birding or botany.

Clinics and classes help prepare hikers for longer journeys, including a full or partial hike of the Appalachian Trail. Blue Ridge Hiking Company can help with routes, gear, planning meals, camp sites, replenishing supplies, and whatever else you need to know. With "Smart Start," a guide can accompany you on the first 24 hours of your longer hike. They'll make sure you know how to handle your tent and other gear and just get you off to a good start.

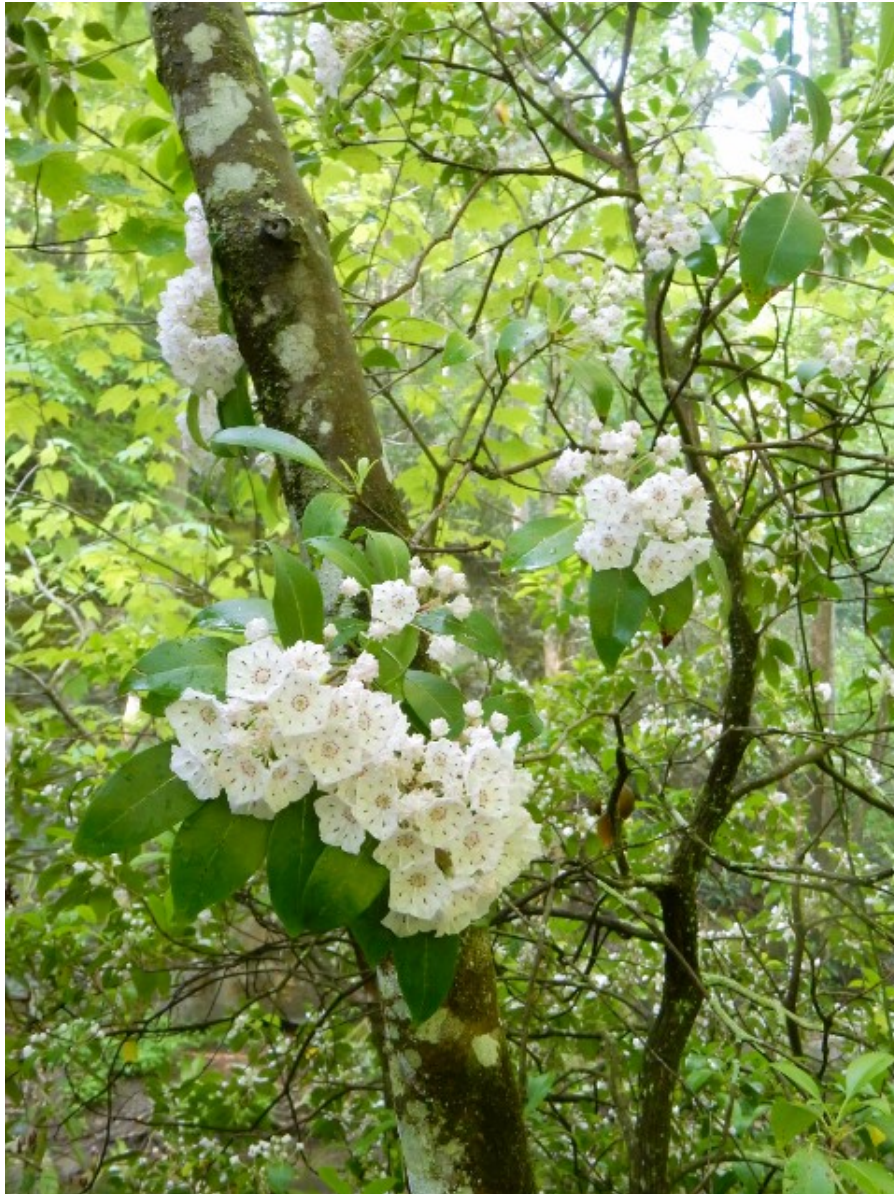
A Hike in the Pisgah National Forest

Hiking opportunities abound in the Asheville area, and I chatted with Pharr Davis about her company and making arrangements for a guided hike. She was out of town during my Asheville visit, so I joined Macon York and Kaitlyn Brighton, both guides with Blue Ridge Hiking Company.





With just a brief time before I had to leave town, we opt for a close-in and short hike to Catawba Falls in Pisgah National Forest. Just 20 miles from Asheville, the area is one of the most popular. Pisgah National Forest surrounds Asheville and its' 500,000-plus acres is beautiful and rugged, and includes rivers, waterfalls, as well as hundreds of miles of trails. The Forest is home to more than 100 native trees, 1,400 flowering plants, 500 moss and fern species, and fungi. There's hard wood forest, spruce, fir, pine and oak, and hemlock. Animal life is diverse and plentiful.



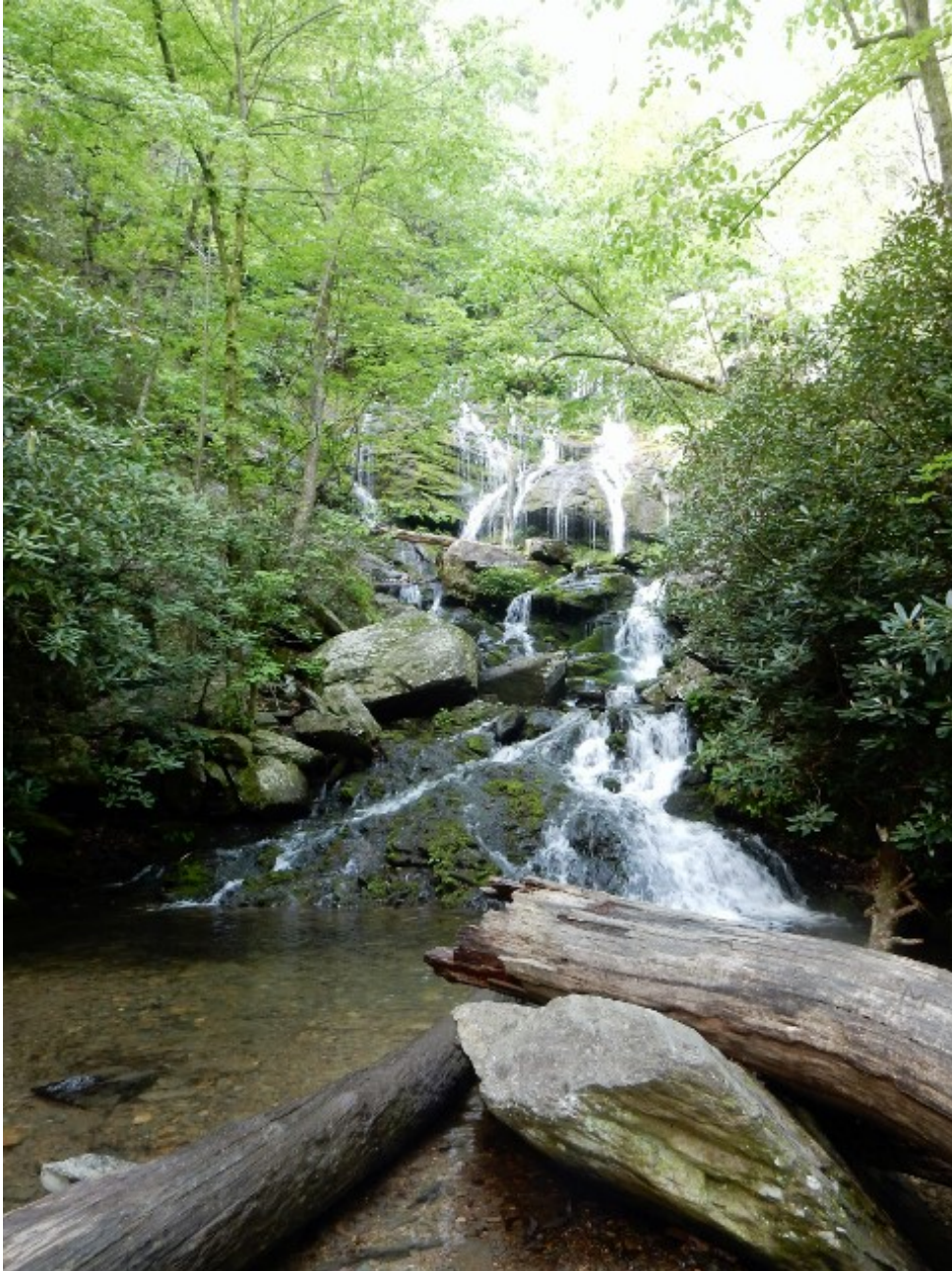
Both Macon and Kaitlyn have completed solo hikes of the Appalachian Trail and they brought expertise and a great energy to my hike. I was regaled with some of their stories of that time. Their tales of the challenges and beauty of their trips are stories of accomplishment and growth. I enjoyed hearing about these two women's separate, solo experiences hiking the Appalachian Trail (or the "A.T.", as they've earned the right to call it).

Of her time on the Trail, Macon said, "There's such a sense of community; people talk and help. If anything happens on the AT, there's a great support network." It's clear too they have a lot of respect for Pharr-Davis and enjoy their work as Blue Ridge Hiking Company. And mostly, they enjoy the opportunity to be outdoors in this beautiful region of the country.

The hike is easy-going and peaceful. We stop to enjoy a bit of installation art, reminding us that we're not here alone.



On the trail, we come across hemlock and mountain laurel, stinging nettles, spiky artichoke, and wild rhubarb, and much more. The waterfalls are a treat.



Hiking, solo or with others lands you firmly in the present. It's not lost on me that the passages of the two women I'm walking with are similar to my own transitions from one stage of life to the next. I appreciate that this stage has lead me to a moment where the three of us sit on boulders in front of Catawba Falls, sharing a few stories and snapping a few photos before heading back to the trail head.



Asheville, North Carolina is a vibrant urban center that consistently rates as a top travel destination in the States. But a visit to Asheville isn't complete without a walk in the woods.

For More:

- Blue Ridge Hiking Company, <http://blueridgehikingco.com/>
- Jennifer Pharr Davis, book and lecture information, <http://jenniferpharrdavis.com/>
- Explore Asheville, <https://www.exploreasheville.com/>

- Pisgah National Forest, <http://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/nfsnc/recarea/?recid=48114>

- Photos by Nancy Zaffaro, except as captioned.