



Virginia Highlands Festival
335 Cummings Street
Abingdon, VA 24210

Contact: Becky Caldwell, Executive Director
Office: (276) 623-5266
info@vahighlandsfestival.org

High-resolution photos may be downloaded from the
website or requested via email

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**THE VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS FESTIVAL PRESENTS
OUTDOOR ADVENTURES
FESTIVAL DATES: FRIDAY, JULY 28-SUNDAY, AUGUST 6, 2017**

ABINGDON, Va./July 10, 2017– Leap into your own outdoor adventure at the 69th annual Virginia Highlands Festival July 28-August 6. The whole family can wade in a creek to discover the diverse life within our streams or see hawks fly over their heads. Hikers can choose from several hikes, or less active adults can learn why a panel of hikers love the Appalachian Trail or why mussels are being raised at a fish hatchery. There's an outdoor adventure for everyone at this year's Festival.

“Those of us who live in this area know what treasures the Appalachian Trail, the Virginia Creeper Trail, and the Mt. Rogers Recreation Area are, as well as Damascus and the Channels State Forest. We try to share the ‘hidden treasures’ of these places with our Festival visitors,” said Outdoors Chair Merry Jennings.

Bike the beauty of the Virginia Creeper Trail with the Virginia Creeper Trail Club. Spend a morning learning about living raptors or an evening star-gazing and listening to owls at Sugar Hollow Park. Snorkel in a mountain stream to see trout and crawfish underwater. Try thirty different varieties of edible plants. Hear about the near death of American Chestnut trees and their rebirth. Visit a farm that raises hops for area breweries, or take a stroll through a local vineyard and winery.

More than a dozen outdoor adventures await, so go to the vahighlandsfestival.org website to learn more about all of them. Several require advanced registration, but most are free. If the variety seems overwhelming, try these three thematic adventures:

1. A Day in Damascus

The Festival presents a “Day in Damascus” on Wednesday, August 2, with several activities. Start the day in Damascus with author Bunny Medeiros for a leisurely stroll through the Friendliest Town on the Appalachian Trail—Damascus. Discover the story of how Damascus became a tourist destination along with reflections of the town's history. Get to know this

gateway to Mt. Rogers National Recreational Area, its miles of trails, and what makes this small community so unique.

Later that evening, thru-hikers will share their experiences about walking the 2,190 miles of the Appalachian Trail. Ranging in age from their 20s to 80s, Peter Morgan, Ed Morgan, Laura Blankenship, Judith Foster, and Collins Chew will share pictures, talk informally, and answer questions. Chew, a chemical engineer, wrote about the geology of the trail in *Underfoot* and walked it in segments. Artist Peter Morgan hiked it in 2000 after graduation from college. Others who have connections to the trail are invited to share their experiences too. The group will share their AT memories at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon at 7 PM

2. Birds of a Feather

Join our feathered friends at these bird-themed events:

On Sunday, July 30, from 9-11 PM stargaze with the owls. Join other “night owls” for this unique experience at Sugar Hollow Park in Bristol. Meet at the Frisbee Golf field for a brief talk about owl biology followed by calling and (hopefully) observing resident owls in the park, followed by stargazing—identifying planets, stars, and other interesting objects in the night sky. Hosted by the Bristol Virginia Parks and Recreation Department.

On Thursday, August 3, at 10 a.m see hawks fly overhead in an interactive event with living raptors. Wings to Soar from Trenton, Georgia presents a raptor education program and live demonstration at Pleasant View United Methodist Church, west of Abingdon. The group utilizes music, video, humor, and live hawks and owls to provide an exciting educational and entertaining experience for the entire family.

3. Wet and Wild

Friday, July 28, from 10 a.m.-noon at White’s Mill learn how to catch and identify tiny creatures like the stonefly, mayfly, and water penny living stream beds and learn what these tell us about the health of our streams. Cathy Landy, a certified trainer from Save Our Streams, will lead the workshop, and April Grace, an educator with the Upper Tennessee River Roundtable will lead a pollution prevention game and a session for educators to learn techniques for teaching about watersheds and pollution prevention. The event is free, but you must register by Thursday, July 27 by calling 276-628-1600.

Saturday, August 5, from 10 a.m.-noon at the Buller Fish Hatchery (near Marion, VA) learn about freshwater mussels and their important role in keeping our waterways clean. The Virginia Aquatic Wildlife Conservation Center will take participants on a tour to see how biologists produce these rare and imperiled species of freshwater mussels for release back into the wild. The event is free, but space is extremely limited. Register in advance by calling 276-783-2125 or email jim2carrie@embarqmail.com.

Download our Brochure

Why wait? Grab onto this last bit of your summer vacation! Take the stress out of planning your trip to the Festival by visiting www.vahighlandsfestival.org to access the Festival’s full schedule and tickets. Download a complete detailed brochure of all Outdoor programs in the Events section of the Festival website.

About the Virginia Highlands Festival: Founded in 1948, the Virginia Highlands Festival is an annual, ten-day event devoted to the celebration of Southwest Virginia’s heritage and rich

Appalachian tradition. Held in historic Abingdon, Virginia, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Festival attracts thousands of visitors each year. The Festival was selected as the “Best Art Event” by the readers of *Virginia Living* magazine in 2017 (the sixth year in a row), recognized as a Top 20 Event by the Southeastern Tourism Society and has been consistently named as one of the American Bus Association’s Top 100 Tourist Attractions over the past four decades. In 2017, the 69th Virginia Highlands Festival will run from July 28-Aug 6 (Antiques Market July 29- Aug 6) and feature live concerts, a juried arts and crafts show, and an antique market, as well as workshops, lectures and tours. To learn more about the Virginia Highlands Festival and this year’s events, please visit <http://www.vahighlandsfestival.org/>.