

JAMES RIVER BIKE, HIKE & PADDLE TOUR GUIDE

Table of Contents

- I. General Information
 - A. The Basics
 - B. Accommodations
 - C. Food
 - D. Bikes
 - E. Terrain
 - F. Daily Mileage
- II. The Routes
 - A. Day 1 Route - Fincastle Loop [33 Miles]
 - B. Day 2
 - Route 2A - Botetourt Explorer [16 Miles]
 - Route 2B – Blue Ridge Parkway [18 - 44 Miles]
- III. Things to Do and See
- IV. Before and After Your Tour
- V. Selected Websites
- VI. Directions



I. General Information

A. The Basics

Buchanan is located in [Botetourt County](#) in the southern part of the Shenandoah Valley. It is 30 minutes south of Lexington and 30 minutes north of Roanoke just off I-81. Buchanan is a small town on the banks of the James River and makes an excellent base for exploring the many outdoor attractions in this area. Botetourt County, founded in 1770, derived its name from Lord Botetourt, who was the Governor of Virginia from 1768-1770. The bike routes offered are not strenuous and the moderate mileages allow ample time to pursue off-the-bike activities. You can choose to canoe, kayak, or tube with Twin River Outfitters, located in Buchanan. They can outfit you with all of the equipment needed for a perfect river outing. One of Virginia's most popular destination hikes – Sharp Top Mountain at Peaks of Otter – is a short drive away on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Blue Ridge Parkway itself is a world-class biking experience, and a bike trip leaving from the Peaks of Otter is incorporated into this tour.



On this tour you'll learn about the historic and the modern James River – its geology, its cultural heritage, the natural habitat, and the economic and recreational benefits it imparts to the state of Virginia. Visit the [James River Association](#) to learn more about their important work in protecting the James. The official [Virginia Outdoors Plan](#) adopted in 2007 calls for a focus on five statewide "trunk line" trails. One of these is the [James River Heritage Trail](#) (JRHT), a braided trail for paddlers, bikers, hikers, and equestrians following the river corridor. Some of the bike routes on this tour follow this evolving trail.

B. Accommodations

[Bed & Breakfasts in Buchanan](#)

The [James River House](#) in downtown Buchanan has five rooms and is run by the owners of Twin River Outfitters, located just across the street on the banks of the James River.

The [Rhein River Inn](#) on Main Street is also in downtown Buchanan and has two very comfortable rooms.

[Additional Lodging](#)

Other lodging options are listed on the [Buchanan](#) website.



C. Food

There is no shortage of food options in and around [Buchanan](#). The [Rhein River Inn](#) serves mouth watering, home-cooked German style food. Their beer garden serves a variety of European beers and award winning Virginia wines. Other dining options are listed on the [Buchanan](#) website.

D. Bikes

No rental bikes are available. A road, touring, or hybrid bike with a wide gear range would be appropriate. All routes are paved.

E. Terrain

The terrain in the central part of Botetourt County is flatter than you might expect. The majority of the bike route mileage is aligned north-south, thus making for easier pedaling. Short sections

aligned east-west are managed with low gears. The return to Buchanan from Fincastle even features a gentle downhill grade for 6 miles!

F. Daily Mileage

Daily mileages range from 16 to 44 miles. The 16 miles route is suitable for beginning cyclist. Review the **Cue Sheets** to choose the tour route that suits you best.

II. The Routes

Day 1

Fincastle Loop – 33 Miles

This undulating valley ride is not strenuous even though there are a few hills in the middle as you approach Fincastle. An energetic beginner will enjoy this tour, if ridden at a leisurely pace. There are three main attractions along the way, not including the ever-present scenic countryside. The first is [Fincastle Vineyard and Winery](#) at Mile 11. The trek over the short unpaved road to the Winery is worth the effort.



Fincastle Winery produces wines using traditional Bordeaux small scale techniques – definitely worth a taste! The second attraction is the Town of Fincastle, the county seat of Botetourt County. Be sure to visit the [Botetourt County Historical Museum](#) behind the Courthouse. Lock your bikes outside the museum, pick-up a free copy of "Take a Tour of Fincastle Buildings", and explore Fincastle on foot. You can walk down the hill to Leonardo's Pizza & Subs if you need a bite to eat. Back on the saddle after lunch, you're enroute to the James River. It's a speedy 13 miles back to Buchanan because eight miles are downhill –enjoy! Stop to enjoy the third attraction – the [James River in Springwood](#). You might consider a short detour off the route to bike down to the Springwood public landing on the river. The last stretch of this ride is on Route 43 into Buchanan. There is some fast traffic so be careful. Bike Safely!

The three routes listed can be ridden on three different days, or all on two days. The suggested order is to bike the Fincastle Loop on Day 1. The Botetourt Explorer would be biked on the morning of Day 2. After returning to Buchanan, relax on the James River with any of the excursions offered by [Twin River Outfitters](#). We suggest the Buchanan to Arcadia run. The Blue Ridge Parkway route is also perfect for late afternoon either day as traffic on the Parkway generally decreases after 3:00 pm. Consider driving to the Peaks of Otter and either hiking Sharp Top Mountain, or biking the Parkway north of Peaks of Otter. The views at the overlooks are well worth the effort. Back at the Peaks of Otter after your adventure; enjoy dinner in their informal restaurant as you watch the sunset over Abbot Lake.

Day 2

2A Botetourt Explorer – 15 Miles (20 miles with Ridge Option)

This short loop can serve as a warm-up ride before a float on the river, or a ½ day outing for a family with young children. There are no services along the route until you return to Buchanan, so bring plenty of water and snacks. The Ridge Option, which adds 5-miles, is highly recommended because of the vistas it affords overlooking the valley to the west.

2B Blue Ridge Parkway – 18 to 44 Miles

The Peaks of Otter Lodge is a 30-minute drive from Buchanan. Consider an afternoon of biking or hiking on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Blue Ridge Parkway route is perfect for late afternoon either day as traffic on the Parkway generally decreases after 3:00 pm. Consider driving to the Peaks of Otter and either hiking Sharp Top Mountain, or biking the Parkway north of Peaks of Otter. The views at the overlooks are well worth the effort. Back at the Peaks of Otter after your adventure; enjoy dinner in their informal restaurant as you watch the sunset over Abbott Lake.



The 18 Mile tour goes from the Peaks of Otter Lodge (Elevation 2540) to Apple Orchard Mountain Overlook (Elevation 3850) - the highest point on the Parkway in Virginia. The grades up to Apple Orchard are not severe and can easily be tackled with low gears. Allow 1½ hour to reach the overlook. Obviously, the downhill return trip to Peaks of Otter will be a little quicker! If you just can't resist an 11-mile descent, then continue northbound to the James River Visitors Center (Elevation 649) – the lowest point on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Either have your support crew ready to pick you up, or be prepared for the challenge of climbing back up to Apple Orchard Mountain Overlook!



III. Things to Do and See

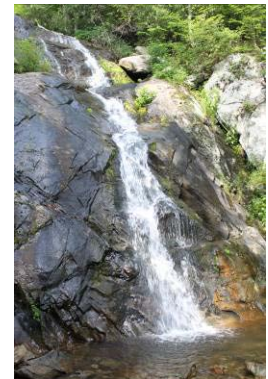
Hiking & Bird Watching

You can choose a hike of almost any length and difficulty. Several are listed on the [Botetourt Tourism Hiking](#) webpage.

Several are near the [Peaks of Otter \[Map\]](#):

[Johnson's Farm](#) A mountain farmstead; Johnson's Farm, has been completely preserved and exists today as it did in 1852. Free guided tours are available in summer months. Johnson Farm Trail is a loop, approximately two miles long. Allow two to three hours for a leisurely visit.

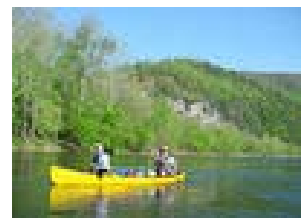
[Fallingwater Cascades](#) A short hike (2 miles RT; 1½ hours) leads to two waterfalls. Returning via the loop trail provides great views of the Blue Ridge countryside.



Several [Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail](#) routes are listed under the Peaks of Otter area.

Paddling

[Twin River Outfitters](#) offers a variety of trips on the James River. You can tube, canoe, or kayak on various sections of the river. The section we suggest is the 2½ hour float from Buchanan to Arcadia. This section is a Class I-II Beginner Level trip with some easy rapids and nice current, so you don't have to paddle continuously.



Vineyards

The [Wine Trail of Botetourt County](#) lists three vineyards open for tastings. One – [Fincastle Vineyard and Winery](#) - is located along the Fincastle route. Visit the website for location and hours of operation of all three vineyards.

IV. Selected Websites

Botetourt County www.co.botetourt.va.us
Lexington www.lexingtonvirginia.com
Natural Bridge www.naturalbridgeva.com
Peaks of Otter Lodge – www.peaksofotter.com
Peaks of Otter – NPS www.nps.gov/archive/blri/peaks.htm
Roanoke www.roanoke.gov

IV. Before & After Your Tour

You could easily spend a month exploring by bike the scenic, lightly traveled back roads that meander down and across the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. To extend your tour by a few days, consider exploring one of the bike routes outlined at [Bike the Valley](#). The Central Shenandoah Planning Commission has created web-based bicycling routes with directions and maps.

Books

The River Where America Began: A Journey along the James. Bob Deans, 2007.

Journey on the James: Three Weeks through the Heart of Virginia. Earl Swift, 2001.

Blue Ridge Parkway, Road to Discovery. Photographs by J. Scott Graham. Essays by Elizabeth C. Hunter, 2010.

V. Directions

Day 1 and Day 2: Start and End

Both of the Buchanan loops start in front of the [James River House](#) .

Disclaimer/Responsibility Statement

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