

Destination: Virginia



For a spring excursion through the countryside, nothing can top the Huckleberry Trail. The tranquil rail-trail wends through the southwestern foothills of Virginia's Appalachian Mountains, following a pastoral path for 5.76 miles from Blacksburg to Christiansburg. The northern trailhead is just across the street from the public library in the casual, college town of Blacksburg. Pale-green leaves canopy this residential section of the paved trail. University students from Virginia Tech, seniors bringing home shopping, people walking dogs, the occasional jogger or bicyclist—these are your companions on this residential strip where, when a warm breeze picks up, you'll find yourself showered with pink and white dogwood petals.

Just beyond the neighborhood, the Huckleberry quickly dips into Talbot Park, the first of many "pocket parks" designed by the Friends of the Huckleberry as trailside rest stops. A mile into the trail you can watch a lacrosse match on the university's sports field before hooking a hard right into a hilly, wooded section. From there the trail suddenly enters a panorama of cornfields and cow pastures. This portion of the trail diverges from the route of the Norfolk

Southern rail line, but a short tunnel under a farm vehicle access road and a brief uphill sweep brings the trail back to the rail corridor.

Along the ridge beside U.S. 460, trees and overgrowth buffer the sound of passing cars. But what is most notable along this bucolic section is the intoxicating scent of country springtime: the powdery sweetness of honeysuckle mingled with the buttery essence of dandelions. Near Mile 3, the trail dips down toward the retirement community of Warm Hearth Village. Friends of the Huckleberry placed mile markers every quarter-mile in this section to aid senior trail-users. On the steeper sections, paved pull-off areas are available for wheelchair users—or anyone else who needs a rest.

Agriculture gives way to the area's mining history as the trail nears Christiansburg. At Mile 4, the trail coasts past Coal Miners Heritage Park, where beds of daffodils surround old coal mining equipment, and a bridge over an active Norfolk Southern rail line reminds trail users of the area's industrial heritage.

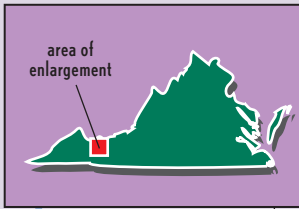
The trail is noticeably cooler as it passes through the shade and cool stone of a steep cut in the hillside at Mile 5. Beyond the cut, the trail flows into the gently rolling, lightly wooded



terrain where the trail earned its name. In the early 1900s, corps cadets attending the military school at what is now Virginia Tech would hop off the cars here as the Norfolk Southern train made its slow progression uphill. The boys picked wild blueberries—or huckleberries—and then hopped back aboard the train.

The path follows a small creek through the woods, then meanders across a broad meadow. Leaving the rail corridor, the trail makes a winding, steep ascent to the Christiansburg trailhead at the New River Valley Mall. At the hilltop, the vista of the Huckleberry Trail is laid out before you, beckoning you to follow the peaceful pathway all over again.

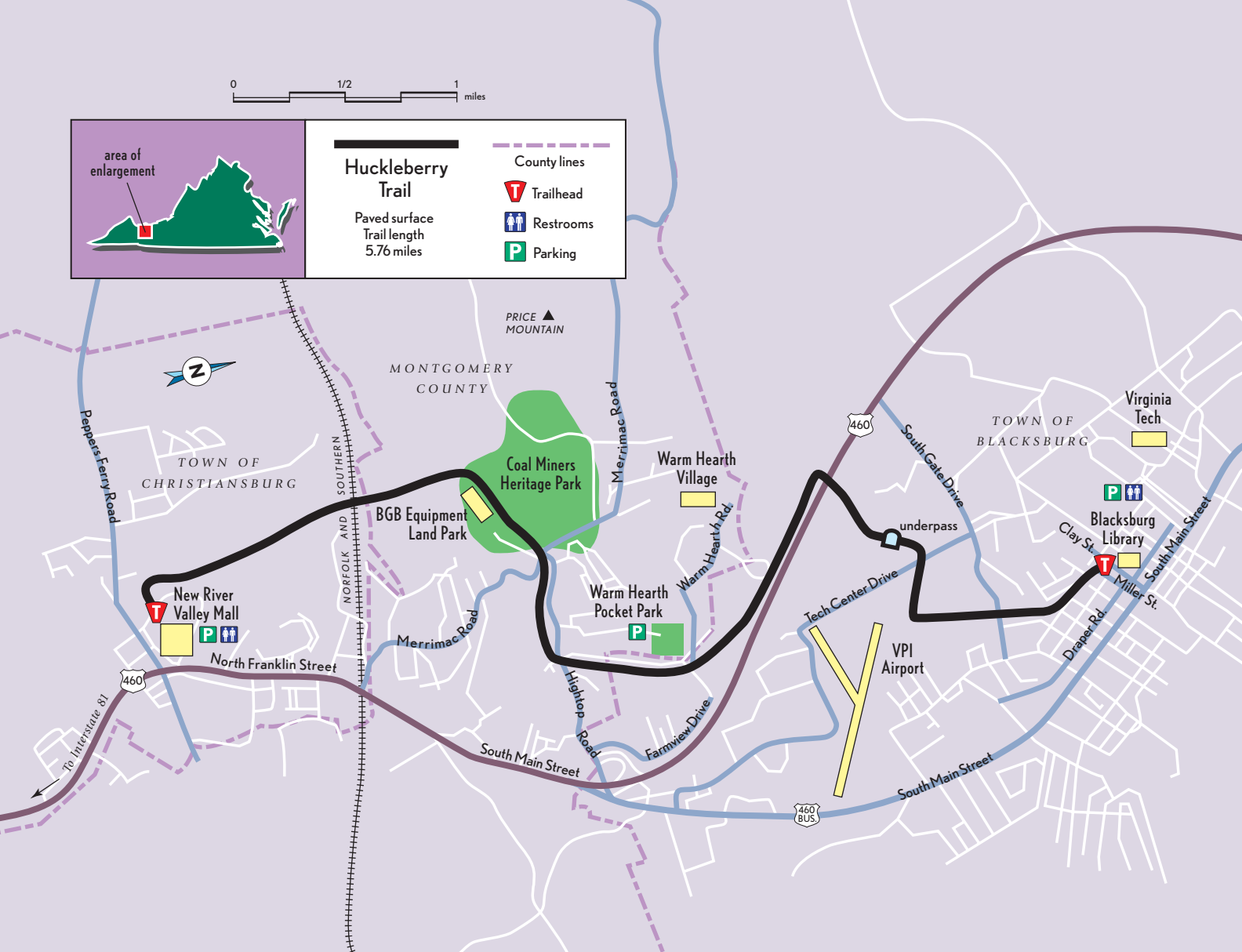
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Huckleberry Trail

Paved surface
Trail length
5.76 miles

- County lines
- Trailhead
- Restrooms
- Parking



Area Attractions. Virginia's outdoor life is robust. Rail-trail hop from the Huckleberry to the 57-mile New River Trail State Park (www.dcr.state.va.us/parks/newriver.htm), or spend a day in the nearby Jefferson National Forest (www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/) hiking the Appalachian Trail. Head approximately 55 miles north on I-81 to take in a national historic landmark—and natural wonder—Natural Bridge (www.naturalbridgeva.com).

Accommodations and Dining. Because it is a university town, Blacksburg has both chain eateries and local establishments to shelter and feed the weary, hungry trail user. The Comfort Inn (3705 S. Main Street) and Ramada Limited Blacksburg (3503 Holiday Lane) are typical options. Camping is allowed in the Jefferson National Forest. Those seeking more luxurious accommodations might enjoy The Oaks Inn in Christiansburg (www.bbhost.com/theoaksinn), a Queen Anne/Victorian-style bed-and-breakfast, or The Inn at Hans Meadow bed-and-breakfast (www.theinnathansmeadow.com), a 154-year-old mansion, also in Christiansburg. Don't leave Blacksburg without stopping in at Bogen's Steakhouse (622 N. Main Street, 540-953-2233) for a Huckleberry Trail Hamburger.

Getting There. Roanoke Regional Airport (www.roanokeregionalairport.com) is 38 miles from Blacksburg. It serves Atlanta, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati, and Charlotte, N.C., through a variety of major airlines.

To reach the Blacksburg Library trailhead at Miller Street, where parking is free and ample, take I-81 to Exit 118B and merge onto U.S. 460 West. This exit connects directly to the Christiansburg Bypass. Follow the signs for Blacksburg/Virginia Tech. From the bypass, take the Business U.S. 460/South Main Street exit to the right. Turn left onto Miller Street.

For More Information. Visit the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce (www.montgomerycc.org) for more information on both Blacksburg and Christiansburg.