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36 Hours in Greater Cullowhee... Living Close to WCU & Loving It

**By Mary Jean Ronan Herzog (with thanks to the NYT for their travel column)
Educational Leadership and Foundations**

During a search committee meeting recently, I was struck by the ambivalent, almost embarrassed tone among faculty when the candidate asked about where to live. You certainly don't have to live in Cullowhee, was the not-so-subtle message. Lots of faculty live in Asheville, or Waynesville because of its proximity to Asheville. In other words, you can work at WCU but *live* in a really cool city and not have to deal with the inconveniences of rural living. (We lived in Buncombe County for 15 years before moving to Cullowhee, and I love Asheville -- it's a great little city.)

Rural places and people are commonly stereotyped in the media. Whether Cullowhee is really rural is debatable (compare it, for example to Kanab, Utah or Bowdle, South Dakota), and I'm not suggesting that all faculty and staff should be encouraged to live in or near Cullowhee. But living near WCU should not be presented to prospective staff and faculty as a disadvantage.

I wouldn't want a job that required a two-hour commute every day. For Marie-Line Germain, that's not a problem. In her April edition of the Faculty Forum, she praises the wonderful world of Asheville living. She knew she didn't want to live in a rural community, so for her it was a wise choice not to move to Greater Cullowhee. But, living in Cullowhee or one of the communities near WCU has great advantages.

What is there to do if you reside in Greater Cullowhee? Let me steal from the NYT travel column '36 Hours in...' and describe a few things to do when you live near WCU.

Friday:

1. **6:30 or 8:00 a.m. Exercise.** The Jackson County Recreation and Parks Department ([JCRC](#)) is a huge asset. From youth programs through senior fitness, from the [Greenways Project](#) to the [parks](#), there are opportunities for all ages. The JCRC has classes throughout the day and evening, and the low membership fee includes use of the facility and all classes. The Center is only a couple of miles from campus, and it's a new, modern facility in a beautiful setting surrounded by mountains with playgrounds, soccer and ball fields. It's right behind Cullowhee Valley School, and parents can drop their children off at school in time for the 7:55 step aerobics class. Those who attend the 6:30 yoga class meet in the dark, and they can watch the moon setting over the Plott Balsams as their sun salutation welcomes the morning light.
2. **9:00 or 10:00 a.m. Work.** (I love not commuting to work.) There are plenty of neighborhoods within a 5 mile radius of campus, as well as options for those who want to live in the country. I live in a neighborhood three minutes by car or 10 minutes by foot from my office. I appreciate this 'commute' every time I leave the house 10 minutes before my next appointment and get there on time with a few minutes to spare. The *Mad Batter* and *Cat's Nip Café* make a good quick stop for a cup of coffee and a homemade muffin for breakfast.
3. **Noon. Lunch in Cullowhee.** It's always nice to be able to go home for lunch, but there are several options if you want to eat out. Depending on your taste, and if you don't feel like driving, you might choose the *Mad Batter*, *Rolling Stone Burrito* or *Cat's Nip Café*. All these places have good, homemade food and quick service. For a different style of food, you might frequent Bob's, Subway or one of the many dining options on campus. Or you can go to downtown Cullowhee to the *Cullowhee Café*, the oldest restaurant in town at 40+ years – or Papa's Pizza, the China Dragon, or El Torrito.

4. **3:00 p.m. Slump.** Time for a walk. There are lots of walking options in Cullowhee. The entire campus is good for walking and people watching. If you walk between Killian and McKee, you'll see parents waiting for the school bus to drop their children off from Cullowhee Valley School. It reminds me of my own children – now grown – coming to my office after school, meeting their friends, doing their homework, or getting in trouble for skateboarding on the brick walks and ledges.

The Fine Art Museum in the FPAC is a good place to make a regular stop on campus walks. It's a beautiful space, and the exhibits are among the best in the region. Or, on a pretty, warm day, a short drive south from campus takes you to East LaPorte Park on the Tuckaseegee River, where people are wading, playing with their dogs or shooting baskets on the courts. Cullowhee is one of the many areas of NC that has a changing cultural landscape, and it's not uncommon to see large groups of people of color at the parks or recreation center playing ball after school and on the weekends.

5. **5:30 p.m. TGIF!** The University Club ([UClub](#)) is open for TGIF, and it's a good place to catch up on the latest campus news and speculation, or it may be one of the monthly special events like the Gourmet Microbrew Tasting or the Chili Cook-off. The UClub is open to all faculty and staff, and it's a good place to meet people from other departments. Some Fridays, my department gathers at my house for our own private TGIF. Or I may just go home, work in the yard, and get ready to go to Sylva for a book-signing at City Lights Bookstore and dinner at one of the downtown restaurants.
6. **7:00 p.m. Dinner in Sylva.** Downtown Sylva is just a few miles from campus and has an authentic and active Main Street. When we first moved to Cullowhee from Asheville, downtown Sylva (like downtown Asheville at that time) was near-death. The Sylva merchants rose to the challenge to recreate downtown when Wal-Mart came to the outskirts threatening its final demise.
7. **Dinner options:** There are several restaurants in downtown Sylva. All the restaurants on Main Street would be popular in Asheville, and if I still lived there, I would probably frequent the same ones I do now. My favorites are [Lulu's on Main](#); [Guadalupe Cafe](#) and Spring Street Café. Spring Street recently reopened, and the *Travelin' Grits Boys* are playing, so it's a good choice tonight.

After dinner, the *Signature Brew Coffee Company* is a good place to stop for a cup of freshly roasted, fair-trade coffee or herb tea and a homemade cookie from the *Mad Batter*. They have live music on some nights, at *Guadalupe* and several other places, including Papou's Wine Shop. From May to December, the first Friday is *Sylva After Dark*, and the art galleries and shops are open late for strollers who can drink a glass of wine, nibble on some munchies, and chat with friends.

Saturday:

8. **Exercise options.** At the JCRC, there's Spinning at 8:00 and Mat Pilates at 9:00. And all around there are runners running and walkers walking on tracks around the JCRC, WCU campus and adjacent roads. You might see swimmers swimming in the Tuck above the Cullowhee dam.
9. **Campus and Community Gatherings.** Most weekends have campus or Greater Cullowhee activities going on – a 5K for 'Girls on the Run,' a track meet, baseball game or litter pick-up and landscaping on Old Cullowhee Road with CuRvE and the Honors College students. For LGBT individuals and friends, groups and organizations such as Out in the Mountains and local PFLAGS, in combination with WCU student groups, provide gathering opportunities.
10. **Shopping.** Most things I need are available between Cullowhee and Dillsboro. There are far too many businesses to name them all in this short space, but you can go to the *Downtown Sylva Association* [website](#) map and the *Visit Dillsboro* [website](#) for a complete list. I'll mention a few of the typical Saturday morning shopping stops I like to make.
11. **Produce.** I start at the [Jackson County Farmer's Market](#) beside the Bridge Park in downtown Sylva. It's the place to get early greens, garlic and cut flowers, visit with friends, renew acquaintances and listen to Ian Moore, fiddler extraordinaire, singing and dancing. I also shop for produce and fresh eggs at Terry's Produce, a stand just down the street from town.

Seafood. My next stop is usually [Eric's Fresh Fish Market](#), on Mill Street, a welcome addition to living in Greater Cullowhee, with a delicious selection of fresh, frozen and smoked fish. It's only open Wednesday through Saturday, and there's usually a short line. You can order by email earlier in the week.

Baked Goods. [Annie's Naturally Bakery](#) is open for coffee and a bagel or croissant as well as lunch. Annie's has a full selection of baked goods, including breads and sweet and savory treats, and they are open every day except Sunday.

Book Lovers. There are plenty of books in Greater Cullowhee - Hunter Library, the Jackson County Library, the Friends of the Library used book store, and [City Lights Bookstore](#). City Lights, is an independent book store where you can trade your used copies for credit, buy new books or place an order and attend regularly scheduled events, readings, and signings. Treat yourself to a special outing at *Harry Alter Books* (<http://harryalterbooks.com/>) on 23/74 just north of Sylva for used scholarly and rare books.

My Saturday morning shopping over, now it's time for adventure. Below you will find tips on indoor and outdoor adventures around Cullowhee written by aficionados, from biking to gardening. As you can see there's plenty to do, and all things considered, I would have to say, *I'd rather be in Cullowhee.*

Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning Responses to This Month's Article Entitled

36 Hours in Greater Cullowhee...Living Close to WCU & Loving It

By Mary Jean Ronan Herzog

Editorial Preface: Our author this month asked specific faculty to read and comment on her article, adding their particular notes of interest. We hope you will add your comments to the dialogue.

Biking by Chris Cooper, Political Science & Public Affairs

Cullowhee is arguably the best place in the country to ride bikes. It's so good in fact that Sundog Cycling located on Caney Fork Road brings cyclists in from across the country to ride on our roads. There are scores of serious and not-so-serious cyclists who work on campus and can help you out. If you want an easy, but pretty spin, you can take off from campus, head over the Cullowhee airport (that's not the easy part), then down and wind your way next to the Tuckaseegee River toward Dillsboro. When you get to Dillsboro, just get on the opposite side of River Road and work your way back to Cullowhee. A slightly harder, but beautiful ride would have you heading over toward Caney Fork to the end and back. If you're really feeling like a bigger workout, be sure to try the Ring of Fire--a ride beginning with a grueling climb up Cullowhee Mountain and ending with an exhilarating rocket-ship ride down Tilley Creek Road. Local resident Scott Baker has been known to hit 60 MPH coming down this hill if the wind's at his back. If the 40 mile, 4700' of climbing is not enough, you can always head to the Blue Ridge Parkway through Tuckaseegee and tackle the 72 mile, 7500' of climbing aptly named Ring of Hades. Although Political Scientist Gibbs Knotts sometimes seeks out more climbing after this ride, most of us will be plenty tired.

If riding off-road is your thing, you can head right out of campus up Wayahutta Rd (which is, oddly, pronounced like "Wurryhut") towards the ATV Park where you'll find dozens of difficult, but fun trails. If you look carefully you might see Geologist Mark Lord struggling up one of those hills. If you don't mind a short drive, we're only about 30 minutes away from the renowned trails at Tsali where you might find Justin Menickelli taking a lap on the left loop.

If all of this riding takes its toll on your bike, you can just wheel it down to Motion Makers Bike Shop in Sylva where they can work on your bike and give you tips on the next hill to climb.

Activities for Children by Libby McRae, History

First, my girls, 8 and 10, go to school less than one mile from campus. Their bus ride is less than 5 minutes, and they are dropped off at my building. In their spare time, they wander to Caney Fork Creek, visit East LaPorte Park, play soccer or basketball or ride their bikes and scooters at Jackson County Recreation Center. Some afternoons, we feed the koi at NCCAT or visit the Curriculum Center at Hunter Library for children's books and puppets. There are dance, karate, and art classes in Sylva and violin, piano, fiddle and yoga classes in Cullowhee. The Jackson County Swim team practices year around. They can paint pottery in Dillsboro, learn about gardening at the Jackson County Farmer's Market, practice rolling a kayak at Reid Gym, or participate in their school's clogging team or choir or band or Girls on the Run.

In warmer weather, there are hikes galore; they see their teachers and friends at the Sylva Pool (a public pool that is very affordable). They can attend reading programs at the local library, Super Saturdays at Mark Watson Park, go to soccer, creativity, basketball, art, or theater camp. And if scheduled activities aren't your thing, they can join mine hunting for morel mushrooms or planning a woodland war between fairies and monsters.

“Surf’s Up!” WCU and Whitewater Recreation by Hal Herzog, Psychology

Western Carolina University is situated smack in the middle of the world’s best whitewater. This is not hyperbole. With a year-round paddling season, dam-controlled rivers that can be turned on with the flick of switch and levels of difficulty ranging from placid Class II to the terrifying Class V+ rapids of the Upper Raven’s Fork, Jackson County is as close to canoe/kayak heaven as it gets. No wonder [Backpacker Magazine](#) named Sylva the best town in America to raise a whitewater family.

A beginner-friendly section of the Tuckaseegee River practically flows through campus. My favorite spot on the Tuck is The Slab, a “park and play hole” that attracts kayakers from four states. While it’s an hour and a half drive for the hotdog Asheville regulars, the Slab is eleven minutes from my office door. And, yes, I have gone play-boating between classes.

Admittedly, whitewater sports are not for everyone. (One faculty member told me he quit when he realized there are two types of kayaking injuries – shoulder dislocation and death.) But if you think you might want to become a whitewater rat, I recommend taking one of the weekend courses offered by Base Camp Cullowhee or showing up at a free kayak rolling clinic that Base Camp regularly conducts in the toasty waters of Reid Gym.

Keep in mind, however, that whitewater kayaking is the crack cocaine of outdoor recreation. Pretty soon your car will smell like moldy socks and your friends’ eyes will glaze over when you launch into yet another monologue on “aerial loops,” “terminal hydraulics,” and “flat-water cartwheels.” You’ll know you are hooked when it starts to rain and you get a text message that the Upper Nanny is running, and you think, “The hell with tenure. I can finish my critical analysis of the influence of Wittgenstein on Snoop Dogg later.” Surfs up! Gotta go...

Fishing by David Claxton, Health & Human Performance

You can certainly go fishing in Asheville, but by the time you drive home, get your fishing gear, go to the river and get a hook in the water, you could already have taken home enough fish for dinner, or caught and released quite a few from the Tuckaseegee River if you lived in Cullowhee.

If you’re learning to fly fish, or just enjoy catch and release, the 4-5 miles of the delayed harvest section of the Tuck from the bridge over 107 down to the riverside park in Dillsboro is heavily stocked with trout. The river is not too big to make wading difficult, and in most places it’s wide and open, making for a good cast without getting your fly caught in the rhododendrons. You have to use a single hook and artificial lures in that section of the river, and you have to turn your fish loose, but if you want to pretend you’re starring in “A River Runs Through It”, that’s a pretty cool place to do it.

The rest of the river, from East LaPorte to the 107 bridge at the old Jack the Dipper and from Dillsboro to Fontana Lake is hatchery supported, which means you can keep up to seven fish a day. You can fly fish those waters if you want, but you can also use lures with more than one hook (although Pete Bates in NRM likens that to the use of dynamite to catch fish) or live worms or even corn (yes, yellow sweet corn right out of the can) if you want your 9-year old to have a pretty good chance of catching one just below the Cullowhee dam or somewhere else in the hatchery supported sections.

If you want to go after more “natural” trout, you can fish in the upper Tuckaseegee around Panthertown or in the streams of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Those waters require an artificial lure and a single hook, and they take a little more skill than the fish in the Tuck. But if that’s the kind of fishing you’re looking for, you can easily get to Deep Creek on the other side of Bryson City and have a fly in the water before you can get to your house in Asheville.

Here are two links about locations in Jackson County:

<http://www.flyfishingtrail.com/3/miscellaneous2.htm>

<http://travel.nytimes.com/2009/05/15/travel/escapes/15fly.html?scp=2&sq=%27cullowhee%27&st=nyt>

Hiking by Maurice Phipps, Health & Human Performance

Cullowhee is nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains next to the Great Smokies and so is surrounded by many hiking areas. Within a short time you could be in a wilderness area like Shining Rock, Ellicott Rock, recreational areas like the Nantahala National Forest, National Parks – the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway, as well as the Wild and Scenic River trails of the Chattooga or National Scenic trails like the Appalachian Trail. Don't forget the State Parks! Gorges State Park is just over the hill near Sapphire.

Closer to home we have trails in Pinnacle Park and to Black Rock both of which overlook Sylva. Just up 107, Panthertown Valley is full of cliffs, waterfalls and overlooks. Over 281 there are short and long hikes to more waterfalls like Paradise Falls (there are two), the Bonas Defeat Gorge for a more exciting challenge and Dismal Falls. Dismal Falls – we have wondered about the name as it is anything but dismal and is actually one of the most spectacular hiking experiences in the region as it is like dropping into the “Lost World” when you climb down onto the ledge beneath the massive cliff there. (Dismal Falls is recommended only with someone who knows the way.)

These are just some examples – there are many more trails and wild areas to test your hiking and navigation skills or to just enjoy a stroll. Coming soon right into Cullowhee will be the Greenway to connect with the trails we will be building on the Millennium Campus. You don't have to go far from Cullowhee to use those Hiking boots.

Back to the Farm by Vera Guise, Undergraduate Studies & Faculty Fellow, Coulter Faculty Center

I, too, lived in Asheville for over 34 years, and have been back in Cullowhee, where I grew up, for almost eight years now. At first, I was very torn about making the move, but felt I needed to be near an aging parent, who, as it turned out, was able to live at home for the remainder of his life because we made the change. I must say, I've only missed two things Asheville had to offer: a close proximity to my grandchildren and access to the fabric shops, which we now don't have because Wal-Mart pushed them all out of business before they, too, stopped carrying fabrics! Other than these two inconveniences, I haven't missed Asheville one bit, especially the increasingly hectic pace of Asheville living.

I like Mary Jean Herzog's term “Greater Cullowhee” -- local folks whose lives have been spent for multiple generations tucked in the coves and hollers would appreciate it, though Hog Back Mountain, Punkin' Town and Tilley Creek sound more like home to the “from here folks”. Two of the biggest rewards of coming back to Cullowhee for me, besides the deep gratification of caring for a parent, have been my relationship with WCU, and the satisfaction of tending the gardens my parents and their parents fed large families from, though this year it is a bittersweet undertaking to plant without my dad at my elbow telling me just how it should be done.

“Slow food” is a “growing” national trend, a term used to describe the new emphasis on growing one's own food, or buying from local farmers rather than eating food from grocery chains, food that's been grown by strangers far away and most likely stored in cold storage for long periods of time before ever reaching the local store. CSA (community supported agriculture) is also a growing trend, with local farmers offering a “share” of their harvest each week through the season for a flat annual fee—there are several CSA gardens in Greater Cullowhee! North Carolina now has an Agritourism office (<http://www.VisitNCFarms.com/>) that assists with networking among growers and promoting farming and tourism activities related to farm and rural life, and our own Jackson County Farmer's Market now sponsors annual farm tours in the county that draw people from far and wide. The NC Extension Education system, with a horticulturist, a forester, a home extension agent and a 4-H leader in every county is, in my opinion, one of our greatest government inventions. John Naisbitt, author of the Megatrends books, predicted that as life in the U.S. became more high-tech, we would yearn for more high-touch, and he was right! Every new food contamination scare you see on the news makes “home grown” more meaningful! Heritage and Agri-tourism are now the primary economic engines of our state, and places like Greater Cullowhee will increasingly become the destination vacations of all those city folks who yearn for safe, fresh food straight from the field, and a quiet place of peace under a big blue Carolina sky.

More Miscellaneous Joys of Not Commuting by Brian Gastle, English

The lack of commute is a wonderful benefit. 2 hours on the road (to and from Asheville) vs. 2 hours drinking G&Ts on my porch (or Kinser's porch, or Heffelfinger's porch, or, well, you get the point), or gardening, or reading, or writing, or really just about anything but spending 2 hours in the car in I-40, is quite nice.

And while Asheville is a small city, Sylva and Cullowhee are small towns in every sense of the term. Most of us "aren't from around here" (as they say around here) – we weren't born here nor do we have ancestral ties to the area – but the community makes this home for us: when Terry at Terry's produce congratulates Catherine on an award announced in the Herald, when I don't need to ask for extra pickles at the Cullowhee Café, when Hollifield Jewelers helps me hide the surprise present...

As for other things to do:

Catch a movie – at \$7 a ticket and \$5 for a bucket of popcorn (with a free refill) the Quinn is less expensive than virtually any other theater around. And WCU has a regular selection of first-run and foreign movies as well as other special movie events.

Volunteer – organizations like A.R.F. (<http://www.a-r-f.org> Watershed Association of the Tuckasegee (www.watnc.org/), Friends of the Library (www.fojcmf.org), and the Community Table (www.communitytable.org) offer opportunities to engage with the community.

A Note From The Editor:

We urge you to add your comments to Faculty Forum articles. It enriches the faculty dialogue about these many issues that concern us all. Comment to this article by clicking on this link then select the article under What's Hot on the top right: <https://media.wcu.edu/groups/facultyforum/>. The command requires you to use your email username and password to access the article. The Faculty Forum is a publication by and for WCU faculty, so this is our method of limiting access.

To access the article as a PDF, please select the article link at the following URL: <http://www.wcu.edu/24987.asp>.

The direct link to the main Faculty Forum Webpage is: <http://www.wcu.edu/7480.asp>.

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