Joal Henke's
CREATIVITY TEAM



CABIN COUNTRY SERIES

The Outdoor Guide to Murphy, NC

Hike, Ride, Paddle, Climb, Fish and Hunt

Hiking, mountain biking, road cycling, climbing, bouldering, caving, kayaking, canoeing, bass and trout fishing and hunting around Murphy.

October 2026 Edition
Prepared by Joal Henke's Creativity Team | Chattanooga, Tennessee | creativityteam.org

An unofficial guide for general information only. Hours, prices, rules and businesses change. Confirm before you go. Not affiliated with any business or agency named inside.

How to use this guide

BOTTOM LINE **Murphy sits where the Hiwassee and Valley rivers meet, with the Nantahala National Forest on its doorstep.**

This guide sorts the outdoors by activity. Each page names real places and the rules that apply. Drive times are our estimates. Check a map before you go.

Activity	Start here	Size
Hiking	Panther Top Lookout Tower	2.2 miles round trip
Mountain biking	Piney Knob Trails, Murphy	13.5 to 22 miles
Road cycling	Hanging Dog Loop	25 miles
Paddling	Valley River and Hiwassee Lake	Calm water
Climbing and bouldering	Three areas on Mountain Project	4 to 14 routes each
Caving	Closed in NC national forests	See page 8
Fishing	Hiwassee Lake bass, area trout	Spring and fall best
Hunting	Mountain Zone seasons	Dates on page 10

Know before you go. Tell someone your plan. Hunting seasons overlap with hiking. Wear blaze orange in the fall.

Murphy is the Cherokee County seat. The Town of Murphy places it at the confluence of the Hiwassee and Valley rivers.

HIKING

Trails

Short walks and long ridges

From a 0.7 mile loop to a 25 mile ridge trail.

Panther Top Lookout Tower — NANTAHALA NATIONAL FOREST, NEAR MURPHY

HIKE A 2.2 mile out and back trail.

REWARD A 30 foot fire tower with 270 degree views of the mountains and Persimmon Lake.

Fires Creek Recreation Area — TUSQUITEE RANGER DISTRICT

TRAILS The Rim Trail runs 25 miles around Fires Creek and crosses high balds. The Leatherwood Loop is 0.7 miles from the Leatherwood Falls Picnic Area.

RULES Day use, sunrise to sunset. No fees. No drinking water. Camping is not allowed in marked wildlife openings.

GETTING THERE From Hayesville, go 5 miles on US 64 West. Turn right on NC 175 for 2.5 miles. Turn left on SR 1344 for 2 miles.

Cover Falls — NEAR ANDREWS

HIKE An easy to moderate 0.8 mile round trip to a waterfall.

Hanging Dog Recreation Area — ABOUT 5 MILES FROM DOWNTOWN

HIKE One mile trails with views of Hiwassee Lake. The area has a campground and a boat ramp.

Murphy River Walk — DOWNTOWN MURPHY

WALK A greenway along the Valley and Hiwassee rivers. The town lists it at 4 miles. Another visitor guide says a little over 2 miles. Several trailheads allow short loops.

Sources: Our State, USDA Forest Service, Visit Smokies, Town of Murphy.

MOUNTAIN
Biking

Four trail systems in reach
Single track from Murphy to Lake Chatuge and Fontana Lake.

Piney Knob Trails
MURPHY, OFF PINEY KNOB HILL ROAD

TRAIL Dirt single track built to IMBA standards in the town watershed. A 2021 trail record lists 13.5 miles. Visitor guides cite 15 to 22 miles. Building continues.

USES Mountain biking, hiking and leashed dogs.

KNOW Stay on marked trails. Ask the Southern Appalachian Bicycle Association (SABA) for current maps.

Ramsey Bluff at Hanging Dog
NANTAHALA NATIONAL FOREST, 5 MILES FROM MURPHY

TRAIL About 8 to 10 miles of intermediate single track, with 722 feet of climbing.

GETTING THERE From Murphy take Joe Brown Highway 5 miles to Hanging Dog Campground. The trailhead sits right of the gate on the forest road.

KNOW Condition reports on the main trail site are from 2019. Older reviews mention overgrowth and downed trees. Ask SABA first.

Jackrabbit Mountain Trails
CLAY COUNTY, NEAR HAYESVILLE

TRAIL About 14 miles along Lake Chatuge. It opened in 2011 and mixes easy loops with advanced stacked loops. Horses are not allowed.

KNOW Expect sun. Bring extra water.

Tsali Recreation Area
GRAHAM COUNTY, NEAR ROBBINSVILLE

TRAIL Four single track loops of about 4 to nearly 14 miles each, with views of Fontana Lake. Horses and bikes use the trails on different days.

Sources: Town of Murphy, National Recreation Trails, Singletracks, I Love Murphy, Visit Smokies, Our State.

ROAD

Cycling

Loops from the Murphy area

Route sheets come from the Southern Appalachian Bicycle Association.

Route	Start	Miles	Note
Hanging Dog Loop	Murphy	25	Advanced riders 2:15 to 2:30. Average riders about 2:45.
Upper Peachtree Loop	Peachtree community, near Murphy Medical Center	40	
Folk School Loop	Brasstown	15	Rolling, with 3 significant climbs.
Town Mountain and Myers Chapel Loop	Hayesville	20	
Tusquitee Road	Hayesville	20 to 30	Three routes.
Freedom Ride	Hayesville	100	

Also on two wheels

Andrews Valley Rail Tours ANDREWS TRAIN DEPOT

RIDE Electric assisted railbikes cover 4.8 miles to the 300 foot Valley River Tunnel. A passenger cart carries riders who do not want to pedal.

Cycle North Carolina MOUNTAINS RIDE

EVENT Murphy was the host city for the Mountains Ride in August 2024. The event came to Cherokee and Clay counties.

Sources: SABA road biking page, Our State, Town of Murphy. SABA lists no difficulty rating for most routes. Mileage is approximate.

PADDLING &
Tubing

Kayak, canoe and float
Calm water in town. Bigger water an hour away.

Valley River MURPHY

PADDLE Calm, beginner friendly kayaking and paddle boarding. The Payne Street Boat Ramp is a common put in. Eagles, osprey and black bears live along it.

TUBING A Murphy campground on the river mentions tubing. I could not verify tube rentals. Call before you plan on one.

Hiwassee Lake CHEROKEE COUNTY

SIZE About 22 miles long with a long shoreline.

ACCESS Three public areas are listed: Hanging Dog, Grape Creek off Joe Brown Highway and Ramsey Bluff off Hanging Dog Road. A 2012 article lists them, so confirm.

PADDLE Shaded coves reward a canoe.

Apalachia Lake WEST OF MURPHY, TVA

WATER A small, deep, cool reservoir rated Class I. It has no commercial recreation facilities and little shoreline development.

CAMP Primitive camping.

Nantahala River NANTAHALA GORGE

WATER Class II+ with one Class III rapid, 8.1 miles. Releases are dam controlled and run almost every day. The water stays near 45 degrees.

PLAN Check the release forecast on American Whitewater before you go. The take out sits behind the Nantahala Outdoor Center.

Sources: Our State, Carolina Sportsman, National Rivers Project, American Whitewater, Sherpa Guides, Visit Smokies.

CLIMBING &

Bouldering

Rock near Murphy is limited

The closest listed areas are bouldering spots outside town.

Area	Listed distance	Routes	Type
Aska Boulders	23 miles	4	Bouldering
Blood Mountain	25 miles	7	Bouldering
AT Corridor Bouldering	27 miles	14	Bouldering

Source: Mountain Project, climbing near Murphy, NC. Distances are as listed by that site and may be straight line. Check the access road, parking and landowner rules on each area page.

Rules in North Carolina national forests

- **Falcon closures.** From January 15 to August 15, climbing is prohibited in certain areas to protect nesting peregrine falcons.
- **Trails.** Creating or maintaining social trails to climbing areas is prohibited.
- **Anchors.** Existing anchors are not maintained by the Forest Service. Check gear yourself.
- **Safety.** Never climb alone. Wear a helmet. Watch for falling rock. In lightning, move away from cliff rims.

Want a bigger climbing trip? The best known North Carolina areas sit farther east. Plan a long drive and read each area page first.

Source: USDA Forest Service, climbing and caving in North Carolina.

Caving

BOTTOM LINE **Wild caving is closed in North Carolina national forests, so skip it near Murphy.**

The Forest Service prohibits caving in the Pisgah and Nantahala national forests. Closure orders cover them.

What you can see

- **Granite City and Hawkins Rockhouse.** Two features on the Nantahala Ranger District that the Forest Service does not count as caves. Confirm access with the ranger district.
- **Guided cave tours.** I could not verify a show cave within an hour of Murphy. If you want one, plan a longer drive and confirm hours first.

Check first. Closure orders can change. Ask the Nantahala Ranger District before you enter any cave or rock shelter.

Source: USDA Forest Service, climbing and caving in North Carolina.

BASS &
Trout

Lake and river fishing
Fish the lake for bass. Fish the river for trout.

Hiwassee Lake CHEROKEE COUNTY

SPECIES Striped, smallmouth, largemouth, spotted and white bass, walleye, crappie, catfish and bream. A few muskie have been reported, with none recent.

WHEN Spring and fall fish best. Summer and winter are fair. A record striper and a state record smallmouth both came in early June.

HOW Plastic baits in green and brown are popular. A canoe can reach shaded coves.

Lake Chatuge CLAY COUNTY AND GEORGIA

KNOW Spotted bass have displaced smallmouth there. Smallmouth catches are reported only on the Georgia side.

Apalachia Lake TVA

KNOW Few anglers use it. There are no commercial recreation facilities.

Trout HIWASSEE RIVER AND FIRES CREEK

GUIDE Our free Fly Fishing Near Murphy guide covers the waters, rules and hatches. Find it on the Fabulous Frog rental page at creativityteam.org/vacation-rentals.

Sources: Carolina Sportsman (2012, updated 2021), Sherpa Guides, National Rivers Project. Check North Carolina license and creel rules before you fish.

HUNTING

Mountain Zone

2026 to 2027 seasons

Cherokee County sits in the Mountain Zone for deer.

Game	Season	Dates
Deer, archery	Mountain Zone	Sept 12 to Nov 13, 2026
Deer, blackpowder	Mountain Zone	Nov 14 to Nov 27, 2026 (antlerless Nov 21 to 27)
Deer, gun	Mountain Zone	Nov 28, 2026 to Jan 1, 2027 (antlerless Nov 28)
Bear	Mountain unit	Oct 3 to Nov 21, then Dec 12 to Jan 1
Turkey, spring	Statewide	Apr 17 to May 15, 2027 (youth Apr 10 to 11)
Grouse, rabbit	Statewide	Oct 12, 2026 to Feb 28, 2027
Gray squirrel	Statewide	Oct 12 to Feb 28, plus May 17 to 31, 2027

Source: NC Wildlife Resources Commission, 2026 to 2027 season dates at a glance. Bag limits, tags, license and hunter education rules are on ncwildlife.gov.

Where hunters go

- **Fires Creek.** The Forest Service describes it as a wildlife management area. Huskins Branch Hunters Camp offers primitive camping. Hikers share the area in season.
- **Check land rules.** Public land rules differ by tract. Read the posted rules at each access.

Hikers. Wear blaze orange in deer and bear seasons. Keep dogs close.

Love the outdoors? Own a getaway nearby.

BOTTOM LINE **The best trail is the one you can reach before breakfast.**

Many guests try Murphy first, then ask what a place of their own would take. Start with how you want to use it.

Questions to answer first

- Do you want trail access from the door or a short drive?
- Do you want water frontage or a mountain view?
- Will you rent it when you are away?
- Can you reach it in winter?

Where we can help

- We are licensed in Tennessee and Georgia.
- For a home in North Carolina, we introduce you to a vetted local agent and stay in the conversation.
- **Blue Ridge and Ellijay, GA.** Mountain homes near rivers, lakes and trails.

Before you buy near public land or water

- Who owns the land next to the lot?
- Is any of the lot in a flood zone?
- What do the county and HOA say about short term rentals?
- Does the road stay open in winter?

Stay first. Then decide.

Fabulous Frog is Joal's cabin in Murphy. See it at creativityteam.org/vacation-rentals.

(423) 664-1900 | creativityteam.org/contact

Sources and credit

Verify the details you plan to rely on. Trails, rules and businesses change.

Town of Murphy, outdoor activities
Our State, 5 Ways to Dive Into Beauty in Cherokee County
Visit Smokies, Explorer's Guide to Murphy
National Recreation Trails, Piney Knob Trail System
Singletracks, Hanging Dog
I Love Murphy, mountain biking trails
SABA, road biking routes
Town of Murphy, Cycle NC Mountains Ride
USDA Forest Service, Fires Creek Recreation Area
USDA Forest Service, Fires Creek Rim Trail
USDA Forest Service, climbing and caving in North Carolina
American Whitewater, Nantahala River
National Rivers Project, Apalachia Lake
Sherpa Guides, Hiwassee Lake and River
Carolina Sportsman, Hiwassee Lake fishing
Mountain Project, climbing near Murphy, NC
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, 2026 to 2027 season dates

Joal Henke's

CREATIVITY TEAM

HELPING YOU MAKE CHATTANOOGA HOME

Get outside.

SCAN TO SEE THE CABIN PAGE

JOAL HENKE'S CREATIVITY TEAM

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kw GREATER DOWNTOWN KELLERWILLIAMS REALTY

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