

FIND TREASURES OFF THE BEATEN PATH
IN WHITE CO., TN

By Amy Davis, Herald-Citizen Staff
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SPARTA – Finding treasures off the beaten path just got a lot easier.

As far as the town of Sparta is concerned, Jody Sliger, tourism and marketing director, expects great things to come from a new state-funded Promised Land brochure that highlights points of interest throughout the Upper Cumberland area and beyond.



The project is a state-wide initiative with several different self-guided driving tour brochures being produced.

(Pictured: The White County Heritage Museum features a special music section. The particular exhibit honors bluegrass legend Lester Flatt, a native of the area).

“The Promised Land tour is one of 16 self-guided driving tours across the state,” said Sliger, coordinator of the local effort. “This one just happens to come through White County, so I was involved.”

The 514 mile Promised Land driving tour starts at the Downtown Nashville Visitor Center and winds its way eastward through several Upper Cumberland counties before reaching Cumberland County and then going back west, cutting through White County and eventually getting back to point A.

“Seven counties were involved,” Sliger said. “I had a team here in White County to gather information and photos.

“There has been just a great collaborative effort to get this in place.”

The Promised Land project was launched in October 2011 and includes the counties of Davidson, Wilson, Smith, Jackson, Putnam, Cumberland and White.

“We’ve been working on it for more than two years,” Sliger said. “It’s a huge project, and we’re very happy about this.”

And because it’s backed by the state, the project is being promoted in such media outlets as Southern Living and in the Tennessee Vacation Guide.

“So the smaller communities with limited budgets are able to build on something with the help of the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development,” Sliger said.

The goal of the project is to “get people out of the cities and into the rural areas and let them discover the hidden treasures – the cool places that the locals know about,” Sliger said.

Then, visitors who discover these off-the-beaten-path points of interest will pass the information along to friends elsewhere.

In addition to the brochures, the project has a web site, tntrailsandbyways.com which highlights all the different points of interest and events.

Following are some of the highlighted stopping points in the Sparta area:

COAL MINER RAILROAD SECTION HOUSE MUSEUM:

This fully restored section house, which showcases rail and coal mining life as it was on the mountain during the 1900 time frame, is the newest museum in White County, having opened two years ago.

“It’s one of the oldest remaining section houses in the state,” Sliger said.

She explained that a section house is where the coal mining and railroading people used to live.

“They were actually divided homes for company employees,” she said. “This one in Sparta is one of the most complete section houses anywhere in the state, so it’s a get place.”

The address is 9479 Crossville Hwy./Hwy 70, Sparta. Call (931) 935-6463 for more information.

BRIDGESTONE-FIRESTONE CENTENNIAL WILDERNESS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA:

The stop was called “The Grand Canyon of the Cumberland’s” by an early 19th century traveler.

“It has multiple hiking trails plus gorges and scenic overlooks,” Sliger said. The 10,000 acre area has nine waterfalls and is a good place for visitors to enjoy bird watching and hunting, fishing, canoeing, kayaking and cave exploring. It’s open year-round but closed to non-hunting activities during big game hunting season.

The area is located on Scott’s Gulf Road in Sparta. Call (931)-836-3552 for more information.

VIRGIN FALLS STATE NATURAL AREA:

The area is open year-round, one of its most well-known features being Virgin Falls.

“It’s a beautiful place with a good trek rated moderately difficult,” Sliger said. “So it’s not meant for the standard couch potato to attempt.”

The waterfall is located four miles in, emerging from an underground stream on the south slope of Little Chestnut Mountain.

“It drops 130 feet and then disappears back into a cave, so it’s very unique and very beautiful,” Sliger said. “The whole area is lovely.”

The area is located on Scott’s Gulf Road in Sparta. Call (931)-836-3552 for more information.

SUNSET ROCK:

A huge rock with a great view – that’s the draw of Sunset Rock.

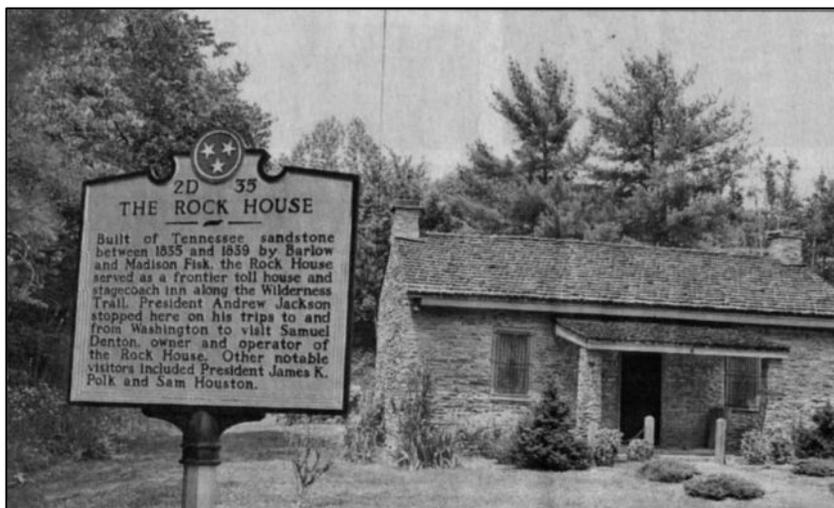
“You can stand there and see for about 50 miles,” Sliger said. “It’s a pretty place to go. And it’s an off-place. Back when I was growing up, there used to be these little off-places with picnic tables, and my mother always packed our lunches when we would go on a little day trip. Then we’d stop at one of these little roadside picnic tables because they were scattered all throughout the state.

“This is a place like that. They have picnic tables, and it’s beautiful.”

Sunset Rock is located at 5047 Crossville Highway.

THE ROCK HOUSE:

Another of Sparta’s museums is the Rock House, which was built between 1835 and



1839 by innkeeper Barlow Fiske. It was a temporary stop for former Tennessee governors such as James K. Polk, Sam Houston and Frank Clement. Andrew Jackson was another frequent visitor, stopping on trips

from Nashville to Washington.

Today, the artifacts and furnishings present the life of an early American frontier home and has been entrusted to the Daughters of the American Revolution.

(Marker 2D 35 – The Rock House: Built of Tennessee sandstone between 1835 and 1839 by Barlow and Madison Fisk, the Rock House served as a frontier toll house and stagecoach inn along the Wilderness Trail. President Andrew Jackson stopped here on his trips to and from Washington to visit Samuel Denton, owner and operator of the Rock House. Other notable visitors included President James K. Polk and Sam Houston).

The Rock House, located on Country Club Road in Sparta, opens in March on Wednesday, Fridays and Saturdays. Call (931)-836-3552 for more information.

WHITE COUNTY HERITAGE MUSEUM:

Following Sparta’s bicentennial celebration in 2006, the bicentennial committee spearheaded the formation of the White County Heritage Museum.



“When it opened, they had so many people who donated things and wanted

to display things,” Sliger said. “They ran out of room so quickly that they opened up a military museum in the American Legion building. And a lot of the artifacts they had there fit into the Coal Miner Rail Road Section House Museum.”

(Pictured: Taking a look around the White County Heritage Museum are Peggie Hurteau, curator, left, and Jody Sliger, Sparta’s tourism and marketing director).

The museum features permanent and temporary exhibits that celebrate the history of the Highland Rim region of Tennessee from pottery and music to military and railroads.

Altogether, the town has five museums, including the White County archives on the third floor of the courthouse.

“They have all the old, historic documents,” Sliger said. “I went and got a copy of my mother and father-in-law’s marriage certificate, which was really cool. They have all this old stuff, and the genealogical society has a lot of books in there. It’s a great place, and you can spend a lot of time in there.”

The museum, open Thursday through Saturday, is located at 144 S. Main St., Sparta. Call (931)-836-3552 for more information.

WHITE COUNTY MILITARY MUSEUM:

Located inside the historic American Legion Building on Liberty Square, this museum takes visitors on a trip across time through heroes and battles. It's located at 5 Maple St., Sparta. Call (931)-836-3552 for more information.

HISTORIC OLDHAM THEATRE:



It used to be an old movie theater, but today the Historic Oldham Theatre is owned by the city and rented out for special occasions.

About 20 or 30 years ago it fell into disrepair,” Sliger said of the 1930s building.

Although no longer a movie theater, the front section has been restored, and

it's used for several annual Liberty Square events.

The address is 1 Liberty Square, Sparta.

FOGLIGHT FOODHOUSE:

Some restaurants are also on the driving trail, including Foglight Foodhouse.

“One of our favorite restaurants is the Foglight Foodhouse,” Sliger said. “The only restaurants, you’ll see listed in the brochure are the destination type restaurants where people will drive for miles and miles just to go there and eat. It’s phenomenal.”

The restaurant, which features Cajun dishes, fresh seafood, steaks and nightly specials, is owned by Edward Philpot and located at 275 Powerhouse Road, Walling. Call (931)-836-3552 for more information.

*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN and surrounding areas at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>

