

NANTAHALA BYWAY

The Nantahala Byway's southern terminus is in the Cherokee County town of Marble, founded in 1911 and so named because it is near the state's largest marble deposit. This marble, in addition to other mineral resources found in this area, is of such high quality that it was used extensively at Arlington National Cemetery.



Whitewater Rafting on Nantahala River

From Marble, leave town and take U.S. 19/74/129 east through eight miles of farming valley to Andrews. The valley has rich soil, which was deposited by the Valley River that flows on the valley's eastern side toward the Hiawasee River in Murphy.

In Andrews, turn right onto U.S. 19 Business and drive through this early 20th century mountain town that is named for Alexander Boyd Andrews, who founded the Western North Carolina Railroad. The byway rejoins U.S. 19/74/129 north of town where the road becomes two lanes.

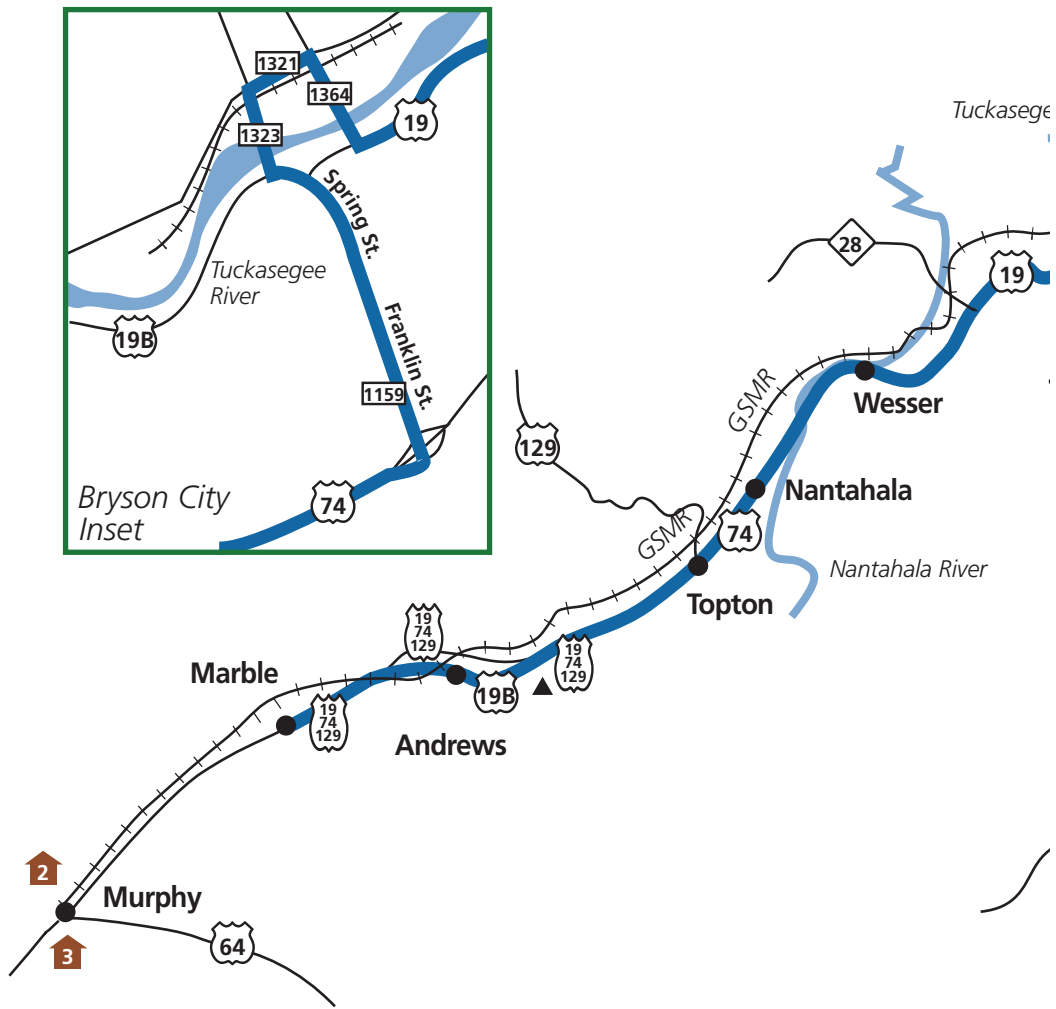
From Andrews, **travel seven miles to the community of Topton.** The Indian Lakes Scenic Byway (pg. 26) intersects at this point and runs north on U.S. 129. **For the next 20 miles, the byway passes through the Nantahala Gorge** by first crossing the Nantahala River. At the Clay/Macon County line, look for the 360-foot Camp Branch Falls just before entering

the community of Nantahala, founded in 1882. This is where the gorge's true nature begins. Notice that the U.S. Forest Service's Mountain Waters Scenic Byway merges with this byway just prior to Nantahala.

The Nantahala Gorge was called the "Land of the Midday Sun." From this phrase, the Cherokee Indians derived the name *Nantahala* because of its depth and steep walls. It is a world-class whitewater rafting location. During the warmer months, many rafting companies provide tours, while kayaking and canoeing enthusiasts enjoy the river well into the winter. Occasionally, slalom gates are visible for races held on the river. For those who prefer a less energetic ride, the main boat drop point near the southern end of the gorge provides the calmest water.

The byway occasionally provides glimpses of the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad, which snakes through the gorge paralleling U.S. 19/74. The railroad offers visitors a different perspective of the gorge. The railroad operates daily from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m., and reservations are recommended.

Continue traveling seven miles through the gorge to the community of Wesser, named for a hunter who lived here. At Wesser, the Nantahala River no

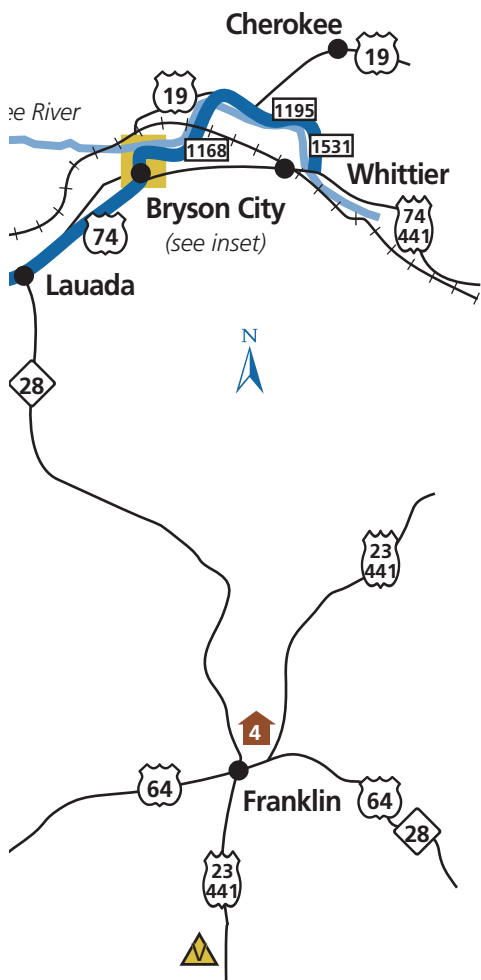


longer parallels the road. **The byway crosses the Little Tennessee River two miles north of Wesser before entering Lauada one mile later.**

From Lauada, the byway continues four miles on the four-lane divided highway portion of U.S. 19/74 to the second Bryson City exit (Exit 67). Bryson City was founded in 1887 and is the Swain County seat. It sits in a bowl formed by the Tuckasegee River and the Cowee

Mountain Range.

From the exit, turn left onto Franklin Street (S.R. 1159), also known as Spring Street and Bennet Road, and follow for about one-half mile to the stoplight at U.S. 19. Proceed onto U.S. 19 South (Main Street) and travel a short distance to Slope Street (S.R. 1323). Bear right onto Slope Street, cross the Tuckasegee River and turn right onto Gibson Avenue,



also known as Bryson Walk (S.R. 1321). Turn right again onto Everett Street (S.R. 1364) at the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad station.

In Bryson City, notice the monuments for Tsali, a Cherokee warrior who was executed in 1838 for resisting the removal of his Cherokee people from the Southern Appalachian Region, as well as Yonaguska, chief of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee who lived here in 1839.

From Everett Street, turn left at the Swain County Courthouse onto U.S. 19 North (Main Street). Follow about two miles and turn right onto Hyatt Creek Road (S.R. 1168). For the next three miles, follow Hyatt Creek Road as it parallels the Tuckasegee River just above its banks. At the stop sign, turn left to continue on Hyatt Creek Road.

Here, the byway passes through portions of tribal lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, also called the Qualla Boundary. *Qualla* is a Cherokee word meaning "old woman" after an old Cherokee woman who lived on these lands. Established in 1838, it is the largest reservation east of the Mississippi with more than 63,000 acres.

Turn right onto U.S. 19 North after crossing the Tuckasegee River. Continue on U.S. 19 for about a mile, then turn right onto Old U.S. 19 (S.R. 1195), and cross the Oconaluftee River just above its junction with the Tuckasegee River. Follow Old U.S. 19 for nearly two miles into Jackson County where the state road number changes to 1531. The byway ends one mile later in the town of Whittier at the U.S. 74 intersection. The Waterfall Byway (pg. 18) is located to the south.



Length: 43 miles
Drive Time: 1.5 hours
Counties: Cherokee, Graham, Jackson and Swain