

N O R T H C A R O L I N A ' S

High Country

M A G A Z I N E FREE

Volume 7 • Issue 2
October/November 2011

Autumn Allure

**Discovering the
Dark Sky Observatory**

**The Science of the
Brown Mountain Lights**

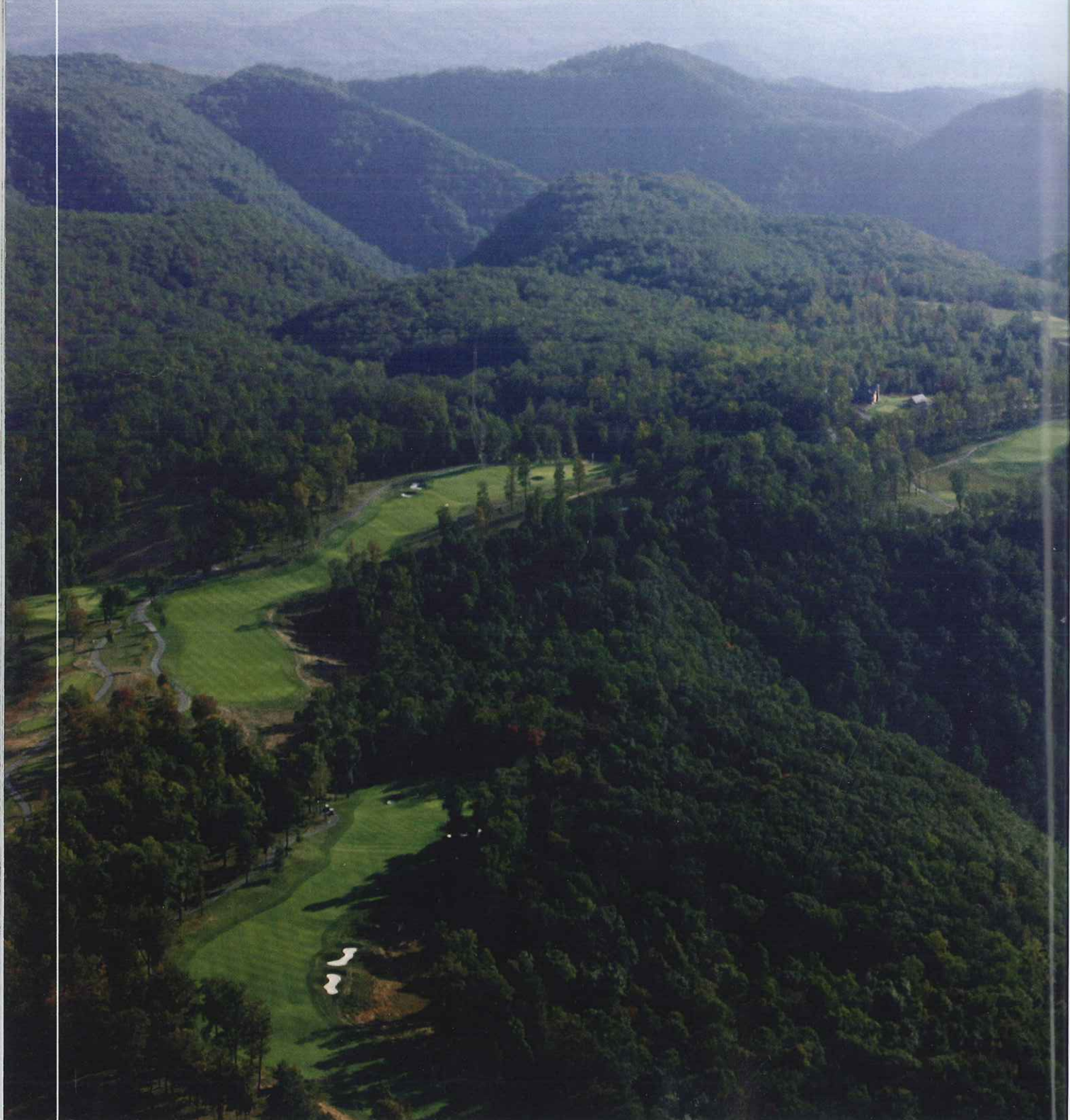
**A Photographic Journey
Through Appalachia**



PRIMLAND

A Wonderland Destination

BY HARRIS PREVOST





October means beautiful fall color in the High Country, but it also means the seasons for Watauga and Avery County golf courses are drawing to a close. Some courses close in late October, but others hang on as long as they can into November.

Many High Country golfers aren't ready to pack away their clubs, though. Several organized groups arrange winter memberships at off-the-mountain venues and they play there, weather permitting, two or three times a week. Those foothills courses work well for regular play, but there are times when something special—something really special—is in order. Such an outing can provide memorable, welcome winter rejuvenation for golfers as well as non-golfers.

Not many destinations can provide a “bucket list”-quality experience that gives you a buzz for several months, but one is not far away. It isn't in the High Country, but you feel like you are in another country. In fact this resort is larger than some countries, one of them being Bermuda. It is called Primland.

Primland is a 12,000-acre resort owned by the Primat (pronounced Prima) family—eight brothers and sisters—from Switzerland. The property was purchased by their late father Didier Primat in 1977. His vision for Primland, said the resort's vice president Steve Helms, “was for it to be developed for others to enjoy while being very environmentally conscious and striving to preserve the property's natural beauty.” The Primat family enthusiastically shares the same vision for Primland as their father.

Helms said of Primland's operations, “Mr. Primat always told us to ‘Do it right.’” Primat had the financial resources to do it right. His grandfather was a founder of Schlumberger, the largest supplier of oil field service products in the world. The company has more than 110,000 employees in 80 countries around the world.

Considered by *Forbes* as one of the world's richest men, Pri-

The magnificent Dan River Gorge encircles a high plateau called Primland, just north of Mt. Airy. God set the stage, and human inspiration took it from there.



mat began buying large tracts of land all over the world in the 1970s, and he was one of the largest landowners in France. Part of his holdings were 700 acres in Ireland that included the 15th century Guinness family castle, since sold, and an 8,000-acre shooting preserve and working farm in England. Primat had two holdings in the United States. One was 20,000 acres in Tyrrell County, N.C., next to the Outer Banks, which he sold at a bargain price to The Nature Conservancy. The other is Primland.

GOLF AT PRIMLAND

Primland is located between Meadows of Dan, Va., and Mt. Airy, N.C. A drive to the resort from Boone takes only a couple of hours; a drive across it takes over half an hour. Primland contains lowlands, highlands, the steepest of slopes and the flattest of lands. It contains woodlands and open fields, and it contains a golf course. Not just any course, but a masterpiece.

Primland's Highland Course follows the rim of the spectacular Dan River Gorge, whose winding path provides a setting like no other. *Golf Digest* named the course the best new upscale public golf course in America in 2007, and it is ranked in *Golf Digest's* and *Golf Magazine's* Top 100 courses you can play.

The Highland Course was designed by Scotsman Donald Steel, who got his inspiration from St. Andrews. He is considered by many to be the finest links course designer in the world, and Primland, although located on a high plateau, has a links feel to it. Because of the universal respect of his work, Steel has been an architectural advisor to every course in the British Open rotation. He is in a way the UK's answer to America's so-called “Open Doctor,” Rees Jones.

Steel has designed courses in 70 countries, but only four are in the United States. His other three are Cherokee Plantation (S.C.), Carnegie Abbey (R.I.) and The Vineyard (Mass.). His

major redesign of Greensboro Country Club's Farm Course was voted North Carolina's best new course by the N.C. Golf Panel in 2010.

Steel says of his Highland Course, "There is a remoteness about Primland, a sense of escape, that is special. Primland sits on top of the world, enjoying scenic views that stretch the vocabulary and with a design of the course that is very different.

"Two things stand out straightaway," he continued. "You drive well at The Highland Course or perish, and stunning views offer comfort if you don't. This course design has been a highlight of my career. Once I strode over the plateau, with views which reminded me of the highlands of Scotland, I knew this would test the mettle of golfers who want to play courses that would challenge the professionals."

The course is indeed very different, as Steel says. No hole is remotely similar to another. Steel says, "Golf is a better game played downhill than up," and only nine fairway and tee shots during a round at Primland are uphill. The course measures 7,053 yards from the tips and around 6,300 yards from the regular tees.

The first hole is a downhill dogleg par 5 that introduces you immediately to the Dan River Gorge. The green is at the edge of

the 1,200-foot deep gorge, and arising out of the depths of the gorge are two massive rock pyramids called the Pinnacles of Dan that look like they qualify as one of the seven wonders of the world. Already, golf has taken a backseat to the scenery.

If it hasn't by the conclusion of the par 3 fourth hole, where a shot straying right goes into the gorge, take your golf cart out to the end of the trail behind the green before teeing off on No. 5 and prepare to be awed. It's like playing along the rim of Linville Gorge to Table Rock and then approaching the second green at Linville Ridge. By the fifth hole, we aren't too concerned about our score; there are too many roses to smell along the way.

The downhill seventh plays to 494 yards from the back tees, but the drop in elevation makes it play shorter. As with many of Primland's tee shots, danger lurks. Go left and you are off the world, go right and you are chipping out of the woods. The approach shot from the fairway is something to behold.

Great courses have great finishing holes, and Primland is no exception. A 484-yard (back tees) par four slight dogleg right along the rim of the gorge brings our roller coaster scenic round to a spectacular landing. Hit your tee shot too far right and trees, or worse, the gorge, gets you. Too far left and heavy rough plus more trees await. The ideal shot is a slight fade to a fairway

The first hole, a dogleg right par 5, begins a scenic journey where it will be difficult for a golfer to keep his eyes on the ball.



of the
f Dan
of the

here a
out to
No. 5
nville
een at
about

is no
right
round
t and
rough
airway



The 72,000-square-foot environmentally-friendly lodge has every modern convenience you can think of, plus some you never imagined. The top of the silo houses one of the East Coast's largest private observatories.



plateau. There, a downhill shot with the gorge on one side and The Lodge on the other offer visual distractions.

The 18th green is tricky, as are all Primland's greens. They challenge your green-reading ability and your judgment of distance, yet they are very fair. It would also be fair to say that it takes more than one round at Primland to get the hang of the greens. But, hey, playing another round there is a good thing.

THE LODGE AT PRIMLAND

Golf is certainly an important part of the Primland experience, but it is only a part. Its world class 26-room lodge, only a couple of years old, is well on its way to earning five-star status. Its "rooms" aren't exactly rooms; they are more like suites with every imaginable amenity at your fingertips, plus a few you couldn't imagine. "Room" sizes range from over 500 square feet to 1,800 square feet. Prepare to be spoiled!

The 72,000-square-foot eco-friendly lodge's architectural theme combines a rustic elegance feel with a modern European influence. Didier Primat died a year before The Lodge was completed, but he lived to see its design and partial construction. At its grand opening, his son Harold, who is president of Primland, said, "This is a very important day for my family because it is a dream of my father. This was probably his vision 30 years ago when he purchased this land. This is the day the

"Primland was the dream of my father. It was his vision 30 years ago when he purchased this land. Now his dream has become reality. It is a very exciting time for all of us."

~ HAROLD PRIMAT, SON OF PRIMLAND FOUNDER DIDIER PRIMAT

dream has become reality. It is a very exciting time for all of us. We're thinking very strongly of him."

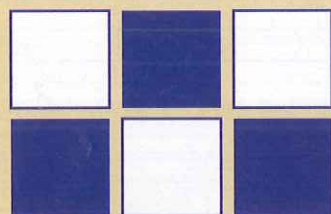
Primat's daughter, Berengere Primat Serval, said at the ceremony, "We have made every effort to meet the highest environmental standards in the design of our prized diamond lodge. We now have first-class accommodations that have been designed to world-class standards." In keeping with their environmentally conscious beliefs, all the wood used in the lodge's construction was reclaimed from other buildings.

The Lodge provides both fine and informal dining, a pub, a superb wine cellar, a movie theater, a fitness center, a recreation center and a swimming pool different from any you have ever seen. A silo-shaped observatory, a mandate from Didier Primat, helps give The Lodge a farm-like appearance. It houses one of eastern America's larger telescopes, a Celestron GCE 1400, that

enables guests to view galaxies 27 million light years away. The observatory is one of only two of its kind on the East Coast. It opens for special programs throughout the year.

And then there is the spa! The American Indian-themed, 1,800 square foot spa also has a strong European flavor. It was designed by Garance Primat, one of the daughters, who said, "We wanted to take the spa experience to new heights and give our guests a feeling that will linger as long as their memories of this very special mountain getaway. To do this, we have taken a European approach and blended it with the holistic remedies used by the Indians of America. We are able to offer a variety of massages that will renew the body amid sounds and settings that will renew the spirit."

There are four treatment rooms, a relaxation room with spectacular views of the surrounding mountains, a manicure,



Mountain Tile

Ceramic, Porcelain, Glass, Natural Stone



1852 Hwy 105, BOONE
828-265-0472

STORE HOURS

MONDAY - FRIDAY: 8AM TO 5PM
SATURDAY: 9AM TO 2PM

www.mountaintilenc.com

BOONE'S PREMIER TILE SHOWROOM



If you are not a golfer, or if you want to play golf one day and do something else the next, there are 11,500 more acres in your playground.

pedicure and hair-styling room and a women's locker room with a Turkish bath and a Spa Horizon tub, the first of its kind in the United States. A special part of the spa is the Unity Suite, complete with a Jacuzzi designed for a couple. There is even children's and early teens' spa service, which are great for birthday parties.

The spa's seven-member staff are trained by Sylvie Keo, one of France's top therapists. She worked closely with Primat on the concept and creation of the spa. Turquoise stone is found throughout The Spa. It represents to the American Indian a piece of sky fallen to earth, building a link between spiritual energy and earth energy. The Spa, which provides over 50 treatment options, is considered one the finest, if not the finest, spa between New York City and Miami.

RECREATION AT PRIMLAND

You could easily have a memorable visit at Primland without leaving the Lodge, but remember, the place has a 12,000-acre playground. Primland's summer green fees are \$200, but if you are a guest of the lodge between November 14 and the end of March (except January and the first two weeks of February when the resort is closed), green fees are *free*—the only charge is for a cart. (Note: The aerification of the greens and fairways take

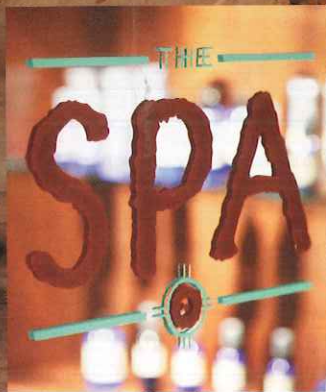
place in early November, but the course is still very playable.)

Primland's elevation is 500 to 1,800 feet lower than High Country golf courses, and that means chilly days in the High Country can be quite pleasant at Primland. If you are not a golfer, or if you want to play golf one day and do something else the next, there are still 11,500 more acres in your playground. Activities include hunting pheasant and quail (Primland has been an Orvis-endorsed wing shooting property for the past 20 years), sharpening your marksmanship with sporting clays, fishing, geocaching and tennis plus 90 miles of trails for horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking.

THE LAND

Primland is a historically significant place. It was part of a 60,000-acre land grant in 1747, made almost 30 years before the United States became a country. Over the next 150 years, tracts were sold off in smaller parcels. Some of the land was used for farming until 1910, when a lumber company became its owner. It sent logs all over the country from an Eastern Railway Company base in Mt. Airy.

In 1937, another lumber company purchased the property and moved its operations to nearby Stuart, Va., which was named after a locally born Civil War hero General J.E.B. Stu-



The 1,800-square-foot spa is considered by some the finest between New York and Miami. It was designed with an American Indian theme, and its staff were trained by one of France's top therapists. Prepare to be spoiled!

art. Timbering wasn't the only action on the property at the time. Because of its remoteness and multiple sources of water, the property became a major source of moonshine. In 1966, the Georgia Southern Development Company purchased the property and began developing it as a very low-density wilderness area with residential sites of six to 12 acres.

When Didier Primat bought the land in 1977, he started building access roads into the foothills while developing a market for whole tree chips. Within four years, the company became the largest distributor of bundled kindling in the country under the name Primwood. Primat was a wonderful steward of the

environment, and he doubled the U.S. Forest Service's best management logging guidelines at Primland. In 1986, the company changed its focus from logging to farming, and outdoor recreation activities and it selected Primland as its umbrella name.

THE VISIT

Jack and Frances Howard from Newland stayed at Primland last fall. Frances said, "It's so different from here even though they are in the mountains. We don't have the deep gorges like they do. The views are spectacular, just spectacular. Unbelievable."

Jack added, "It was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. The food was excellent. Lots of attention to detail. They take care of you. It was like we were the only people there. It was so nice we didn't want to leave. We're going back!"

Boone's Sam Adams remembers his round at Primland: "It was a unique golfing experience. The views into the gorge were



The Primland staff have incredible attention to detail. They think of everything. "They take care of you. It was like we were the only people there. It was so nice we didn't want to leave," said Jack Howard after visiting last fall.



absolutely incredible. It was an enjoyable, challenging golf course with its rolling terrain."

Tom Adams agreed. "It is a great layout, and it was in perfect condition," he said, but he remembered something else. "They have 12,000 acres to work with, and they built their parking lot underground. That tells you something right there!"

Winter rates for rooms at The Lodge begin at \$259 per room Sunday through Thursday and \$275 Friday and Saturday nights. The best deal, though, is to rent one of what Primland calls its "mountain homes." Three-bedroom rates are \$295 per night, and four-bedrooms are \$395.

If you do the math, you would realize

Hawksnest Zip Line

Longest *Zipline* course on the East Coast!

8 New *Zipline* cables, 18 total *Zipline* cables!

Seven Devils, NC
www.HawksnestZipline.com • 800.822.HAWK


Julia Tyson DDS

Family and Cosmetic Dentistry

www.juliatysondds.com

Emergencies and New Patients Accepted

WE FILE INSURANCE


 400 Shadowline Drive
 Boone • Suite 201-B
 828.265.1112



Home furnishings made from reclaimed wood, rattan, leather and more.
Unique to the High Country.
Almost everything is handmade!



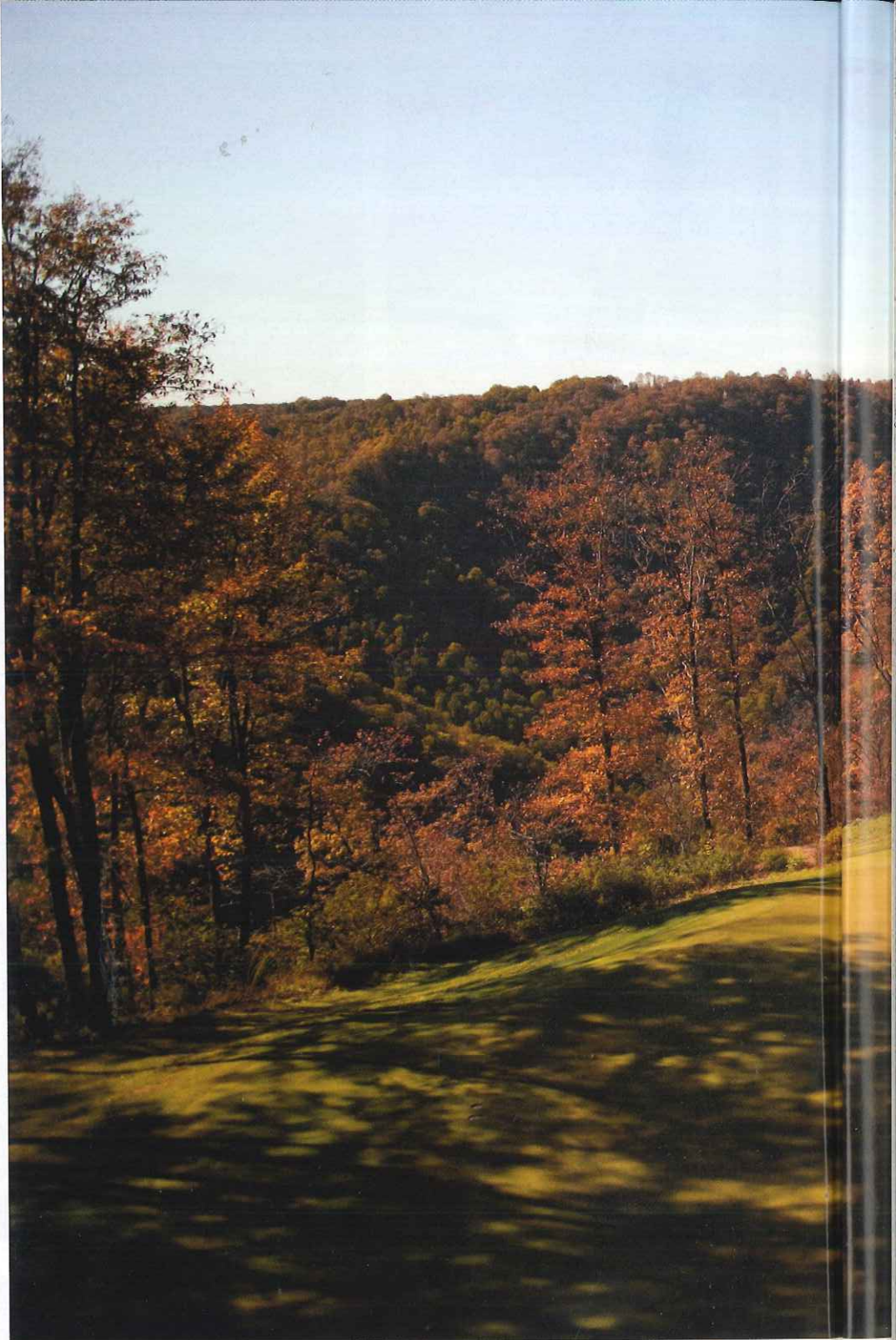
915 Main Street
Blowing Rock, NC
828-295-9033
Current Hours: Mon-Sun 10-5pm
www.RusticNC.com

*Hub of the
High Country*



- Amy's Hallmark
- AT&T
- Bath & Body Works
- Belk
- Belk Home Store
- Black Bear Books
- Blue Ridge Vision
- Bobby Dazzler Accessories
- Brushy Mt. Motorsports
- Chateau Laurinda Winery
- Claire's
- Cookies & Cream
- Dollar General
- GNC
- GameStop
- Gigi's Uniforms
- JCPenny
- Le's Nails
- Maurice's
- Old Navy
- Panera Bread
- Primo's Pizza, Pasta & Subs
- Radio Shack
- Regis Hairstyles
- Rue 21
- Sagesport
- Saslow's Jewelers
- Sears
- Shoe Dept. Encore
- South's Clothiers
- Sports Fanatic
- SuperClips
- T.J. Maxx
- Tucker's Cafe

Boone Mall
828.264.7286
1180 Blowing Rock Road



Golf and an overnight stay at Primland can be an incredible experience and an incredible deal during the winter. Check the weather forecast first for pretty weather.

the full Primland experience is yours for less than it costs to spend the night in a mid-priced chain motel located on some strip in Anytown, N.C. If you do the math, you will be calling 866-960-7746 or going online to primland.com to arrange your "bucket list" outing!

As you plan your trip, here's a good

idea to make it even more special. Allow a little more time either coming or going and include a stop in Surry County (Avery and Watauga counties were part of Surry in the 1700s) and Mt. Airy, "America's Hometown." Andy Griffith's hometown is the inspiration for Mayberry. A ride in Andy's squad car and a stop-in at



Floyd's Barber Shop, the Bluebird Diner and the Snappy Lunch will take you back down memory lane.

Music is big there, too; Mt. Airy is also Country Music star Donna Fargo's hometown. Listen to some great music at two outstanding jam sessions: Thursday night at the Andy Griffith Playhouse and Saturday morning at the historic Downtown Cinema Theatre.

The Yadkin Valley is home to some of the finest wineries in the country, one being the largest family owned winery in the state, Shelton Vineyards. There are about a dozen wineries

in and around the county. The whole town of Elkin, with its unique specialty shops, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. For more information about this part of your trip, go online to verysurry.com.

When you arrive at Primland, expect to play one of the best golf courses in the country. Expect your accommodations to be inspirational, expect your dining and recreational experiences to be memorable, expect your service to be warm and genuine, and finally, expect all your expectations to be surpassed! ♦