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## NEARBY

# Wild, Wet and Untamed

*Giles County, on the western edge of the state, is an outdoor sanctuary featuring the New River, the Jefferson National Forest and a few stunning natural landmarks, including the palisades at Eggleston. JOE TENNIS jumped into a raft to check out the summer splendors of what one local outfitter calls "the motherland." By Joe Tennis | Photography by Jeff Greenough*

BY **JOE TENNIS**

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### Slideshow



**Towns: Giles County and surrounding area**

### Image/Picture



Pembroke was one of them, and today it's considered the county's headquarters for river recreation. It's where you'll find Moody's New River's Edge, Hash's Tangent Outfitters, and the New River Canoe Livery, along with a collection of businesses (Canoe the New and New River Outdoor Company, to name two), all operated by husband-and-wife Britt and Leigh Stoudenmire. "We have folks that come in and do guided fishing trips," Leigh Stoudenmire says. "The New River is one of the best for smallmouth bass. Right where we are, it is loaded."

The most well-known address in Pembroke is the Mountain Lake Resort Hotel. Located seven miles from U.S. 460, and ringed by a thick forest of hemlocks, the actual "mountain lake" is tiny and occupies a bowl inside Salt Pond Mountain at an elevation of 3,875 feet. It's one of only two natural freshwater lakes in Virginia. (Bald Knob, the tallest point in Giles County at 4,361 feet, is near the lake and can be reached by a short hiking trail.)

Various hotels have graced the Mountain Lake shoreline since 1857. The current stone structure—of 1936 vintage and offering modern accommodations without television—was featured in the 1987 movie *Dirty Dancing*, a coming-of-age classic starring Jennifer Grey and Patrick Swayze. A British reality show inspired by the movie, *The Time of Your Life*, was filmed on location at Mountain Lake as recently as June 2008 but has not been shown in the United States. The taping of the show was "insane," says Emily Woodall, the managing director of the nonprofit Mountain Lake Conservancy. "I'd walk out of my office, and there would be half-naked British girls dancing."

Mountain Lake still lures visitors looking for the time of their lives, especially during the hotel's "Dirty Dancing" weekends. Hotel general manager H.M. "Buzz" Scanland Jr. says guests also want to see the lake they saw on-screen. Unfortunately, there isn't much lake to see. The lake is fed by several springs, and its water level rises with rainfall. But drought conditions in recent years have dramatically shrunk the body of water. The water level "has been up and down since 1999," Scanland says. "Three years ago, it started down and has not recovered. The lake just totally went down." Dropping to its lowest point in 100 years during October 2008, the lake was little more than a silt hole—a murky mess only about 15 feet by 15 feet, far down from its full pool of about 50 acres, Woodall says. "It looked like a huge crater."

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 Rothesay

*home & garden*  
**Spirits of the James River Plantations Progressive Ghost Tour**  
 Sep 4, 2010 - Oct 30, 2010  
 Piney Grove at Southall's Plantation - 1790

*art & exhibitions*  
**30 Years of Giving Back: A Retrospective by Dr. W. Baxter Perkinson Jr.**  
 Sep 3, 2010 - Oct 31, 2010  
 The Gallery at UNOS

*art & exhibitions*  
**Songs for Harper Lee**  
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 Skylight Studios

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