

Pineville--Gem City of the Cumberlands--lies along one of the most historic routes in the nation. The pathway that winds through the Pine Mountain range and alongside the Cumberland River, was once a buffalo trace, and then served as the Warrior's Path for the Native Americans who traveled and camped here. Then the Daniel Boone Trace became better known as the Wilderness Road. Today U. S. Highway 25-E follows the historic route that once brought settlers into the west as they travel between Lexington, Kentucky and Knoxville, Tennessee and points south. Pineville, known originally as Cumberland Ford, was the second passageway to the West. Settlers who made their way through the Cumberland Gap (about 20 miles to the south) were fortunate to find a second natural break in the imposing mountain range at the Narrows. This verdant gap in Pine Mountain (the only one for approximately 130 miles) provided access to the bluegrass area to the north and to further westward expansion. The Narrows, voted the most scenic site in Kentucky by readers of the Louisville Courier-Journal in July, 1925, led the early settlers to the Cumberland Ford, a shallow crossing in the Cumberland River. Dr. Thomas Walker, the first white man to construct a permanent house in Kentucky, recorded in his journals the abundant game to be found here: "We killed in the journey 13 buffaloes, 8 elk, 53 bears, 20 deer, 4 wild geese, about 150 turkeys, besides small game. WE might have killed three times as much meat if we had wanted it."

Here the state's first toll road was found, and the Commonwealth's first governor, Isaac Shelby, owned a house and ferry at the Cumberland Ford, near the site of an ancient Indian burial mound (used during the Civil War to bury soldiers who fell in battle here). Where Walker camped now is found Pine Mountain State Resort Park, the first in Kentucky's acclaimed state park system. A majestic lodge, 2,500 acres of wilderness, as well as cabins, cottages, hiking trails, swimming pool, golf course, convention facilities, and special events, provide a wealth of recreational and natural activities.

Each spring brings the annual Kentucky Mountain Laurel Festival, created in 1931 to honor the memory of Dr. Thomas Walker. Concerts, grand balls, special dinners, sports tournaments, mine rescue competitions, a gala parade, crafts sales and exhibits combine to welcome the thousands of native sons and visitors who return every year on the last weekend of May for this beloved event, which culminates at the beautiful natural amphitheater, Laurel Cove, within Pine Mountain State Park, as coeds representing each college and university in the Commonwealth vie for the title Mountain Laurel Queen as they pass along the cove's reflecting pool.

A festival of another sort comes to Pine Mountain State Resort Park the last weekend of September. Some of the nation's finest folk musicians and singers perform in the Great American Dulcimer Convention, now in its 20th year. Concerts and lessons featuring the Appalachian dulcimer and the hammered dulcimer bring regulars from the eastern U.S. (and often farther) for a weekend of traditional and original music set among the autumn splendor of the Pineville area.

In its early days, Pineville continued to be the hub of commerce for a growing nation. Silent film star Pearl White (most famous for *The Perils of Pauline*) came here to film Charles Neville Buck's *A Pagan of the Hills*, one of her last features. The film had its premiere in Pineville, as did another film, *The Eternal Sea*. The 1957 film, starring Sterling Hayden, was based on the life of Pineville's Admiral John Hoskins, the WWII hero known as "the Pegleg Admiral." Hoskins' ship had charge of the hunting expedition for Amelia Earhart, and his ship, the *Memphis*, brought Lindberg back from his famous flight. Admiral Hoskins lost his leg in a battle aboard the carrier *Princeton* in the Battle of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines.

Pineville became well known across the nation on December 26, 1945, when an explosion in a coal mine at the Fourmile community left 20 men trapped inside. Heroic rescue attempts were followed by all the national radio and print media. Raging fires continued to prevent rescue of all the men trapped inside, and the mine was eventually permanently sealed. One local man, Bud Townes, was credited with saving the lives of nearly a dozen of his co-workers, as he brought them into a room in the mine and sealed the opening after leaving a message chalked onto a wall detailing their location. Townes rationed the food and water available and kept up the men's spirits with prayer and hymns. When the men were rescued and taken to the local hospital, medical personnel discovered Townes--beneath his coal dust--to be a black man and prepared to move him to the "colored ward." However, the men Townes had saved protested, and the hospital became "integrated."

Other disasters would plague Pineville, especially floods. The daughter of one of Pineville's founding

families was prevented from marrying her beau in the late 1800s because the river was "in a high tide." Undaunted, she simply married another man on her side of the river rather than wait for the waters to subside. A floodwall followed flooding in the late 40s, and a higher floodwall was erected in the 80s following a disastrous flood in 1977 that covered the city. Some disasters were man-made. Coal, which was long the life blood of local economy, also played a part in the darker history of southeastern Kentucky. During the early 1930s, coal miners were joining unions, either the United Mine Workers of America, or the National Workers Party union. Ambushes and skirmishes broke out across the coal regions, and trials of men involved in coal-related deaths in Harlan County were moved to Pineville. A flamboyant county attorney, taking offense to the presence of members of the Communist Party in Pineville, met them on the steps of the courthouse in red "long johns." Noted authors Theodore Dreiser and John Dos Passos came to Pineville to observe the conditions and treatment of miners in the NWP. Incensed locals, seeking a way to defuse the situation and get the "outside agitators" out of town, were able, by leaning matchsticks against the door of Dreiser's room in the Continental Hotel after his secretary entered (and finding them undisturbed the next morning) to charge Dreiser with breaking Pineville's moral code and sentenced him to leave the town at once.

One of Pineville's most famous claims to fame is the presence of the Chained Rock. It was in 1933 that a piece of local folklore was turned into a publicity stunt of great renown, for the accomplishments of the "Chained Rock Club" would be reported in over 6,000 daily newspapers. The story is that a couple from New Hampshire passing through Pineville wished to see the huge boulder that rested precariously above the city, prevented only by a piece of chain from rolling onto the city and destroying all in its path. When asked why the chain could not be seen, a couple of locals replied that the chain had actually corroded away and the city was in dire peril. Soon afterward, on June 24, 1933, a group of Pinevillians were able to obtain a chain from an obsolete steam shovel in Virginia and transport it up the mountain. The chain was so large (2,500-3,000 lbs.) that it had to be cut in half before a team of mules could pull it up the mountain. When the mules gave out, they were relieved by Kiwanians, Boy Scouts and members of the CCC. Atop the mountain, the chain was welded together and stretched across the abyss by the 50 husky men and the spike team of mules. Today the visitor driving through Pineville who looks up at the big rock, 200 feet long and 75 feet wide, can see the chain which "protects the city." A hiking trail within Pine Mountain State Resort Park leads to Chain Rock, which affords a magnificent view of Pineville and the surrounding area.