

# Autumn getaway: Smith Mountain Lake

– By Lynn and Glenn Pribus –

The weather's cooling down and there's a hint of color in the leaves – the perfect season for a road trip. And for a perfect spot, how about Smith Mountain Lake with its 500 miles of shoreline?

The lake, created in 1966 to generate electricity, is also a recreational destination with water sports, golf courses and over-night lodging options from condos or lakeside homes to houseboats. Great fishing attracts national bass tournaments with more than 500 contestants each – the all-time heavyweight bass weighed in at 52 pounds!

This is definitely a kickback area for a mid-week retiree couple getaway or a weekend with the extended family. For lots of maps, photos and information on everything from boat rentals to a wide variety of eateries and many lodging possibilities, visit [www.smith-mountain-lake-visitor-center.com](http://www.smith-mountain-lake-visitor-center.com).

Once you arrive, Bridgewater Plaza on Route 122 – the Booker T. Washington Highway – hosts a Visitor Center replete with brochures, maps and friendly recommendations as well as rental condos, restaurants and putt-putt golf. Just across the way, Parrott Cove Boat Rentals offers runabouts, fishing boats, individual watercraft, kayaks, pontoon boats and houseboats.

## NEARBY OUTINGS

Many people are happy to park their vehicles and drop a hook in the water or enjoy a book in a hammock, but there are also interesting forays around the area.

Not far from the lake is the Booker T. Washington National Monument, preserving more than 200 acres of the plantation where he spent his enslaved youth. Stack fences zigzag their way across the landscape outlining pastures. “He was all about helping people to rise up,” ranger Janet Blanchard tells visitors at Washington's reconstructed childhood home. He attended college in Hampton, then traveled south to become the main developer and first president of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, now known as Tuskegee University. There is no admission fee and the monument is



Autumn at Smith Mountain Lake. Photo by True Bob Burns.



Left: Booker T. Washington National Monument has recreated his childhood home near Smith Mountain Lake.



Right: The Homestead Creamery has reinstated home delivery and serves ice cream at their store. Photos by Lynn Pribus.

also the site of a designated Virginia Birding Trail. For information, visit [www.nps.gov/bowa](http://www.nps.gov/bowa).

On Sept. 22, the monument will celebrate its Harvest Festival with living history programs, craft demonstrations, sheep shearing, children's activities and games, workshops, old-time music, food, drinks, ice cream, and more.

Worth a stop in passing is the

Homestead Creamery in Burnt Chimney – an old-fashioned dairy that has revived home deliveries in the region and serves up sandwiches, salads and delectable homemade ice cream on the premises.

For an afternoon of art (and gift shopping?) head for the Rocky Mount Center for the Arts and The Grainery where a former granary has been converted into a glass-blowing

studio. “It's one of the few cooperative crafts,” explains the glass artist. “You can't really blow glass alone.” There is also space for art classes and a gallery where other artists – potters, painters and weavers – display their work.

Right next door is The Artisan Center along the Crooked Road, exhibiting nearly 100 artists and au-

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# Getaway

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thors from a high school potter to a painter in her 80s. “I can’t even draw a circle,” confesses owner Mary Wray, “but we love to exhibit these people. All are Virginian — mostly from Franklin County and Roanoke.”

The Crooked Road is the marker for Virginia’s Musical Heritage Trail, which starts at the Blue Ridge Institute and Museum at Ferrum College and meanders on west for more than 250 miles. Lovers of gospel, blues and bluegrass will enjoy this route with its many musical venues including the September-May Thursday morning music jams at the Dairy Queen in Rocky Mount.

## STOPS EN ROUTE

Since Smith Mountain Lake is an easy drive of 3 to 3½ hours from Richmond, many visitors make stops along the way. Here are two of particular interest:

**The D-Day Memorial** in Bedford is a remarkable place. “This region of Virginia had troops in the 29th Infantry Division,” explains retired USAF MSgt. “Mac” McFarland. “Company A included the ‘Bedford Boys’ and there is still a Company A today. They were the only National Guard unit involved in D-Day.” Company A suffered 90 percent casualties and 22 of the 35 from Bedford died — the highest per capita loss of life in the country.

Actual sand from Normandy beaches was mixed with cement for a dramatic display portraying Omaha Beach. “The statues of individual soldiers represent valor, fidelity and sacrifice,” McFarland says. Entry fees are \$7 per adult and \$5 for ages 6-18 or with valid college ID. Guided walking tours — well worth the time — are available for a small additional fee. Golf cart tours for persons with disabilities are available at low cost. Tickets must be purchased at the Visitor Center outside the entrance. For more information: visit [www.dday.org](http://www.dday.org).

**Poplar Forest**, between Lynchburg and Bedford, was Thomas Jefferson’s personal retreat where he spent time in later life, enjoying his grandchildren and escaping public life. It was a profitable working



*Above: This statue is one of many at the D-Day Memorial in Bedford.*

*Right: Thomas Jefferson’s retreat at Poplar Forest is between Lynchburg and Smith Mountain Lake.*

*Photos by Lynn Pribus*



plantation and a considerable journey from Charlottesville with one or two overnights en route. Today, it provides a detailed look at meticulous historic restoration in progress. Workers, the guide explains, employ authentic tools and methods of the time as well as a historic mortar recipe. Some sections will be left unfinished to reveal the construction of the various layers of inner walls and flooring.

The interior walls were built of brick to be rat- and fire-proof. In fact, the walls survived a fire in 1848, although the wooden floors were lost. The property was bought by a foundation in the early 1980s and the house, which had been simply built on the ground rather than secure footings, had to be leveled, then reconstructed from the ground up. The lower level, which included the wine cellar, storage and rooms for house

servants, now has videos and other exhibits, especially on restoration techniques.

Entry fee is \$14 for adults, with various discounts for seniors, military, college students, youth and AAA. For information, visit: [www.PoplarForest.org](http://www.PoplarForest.org).

**FP**

*Lynn and Glenn Pribus travel from their home in Albemarle County near Monticello.*