



Three Good Walks in One

Hungry Mother State Park and its host town of Marion combine for explorations into nature and an inviting downtown.

Text by **LEONARD M. ADKINS** | Photos by **LEONARD M. & LAURIE ADKINS**

Marion, Virginia, provided not one, not two, but three good walks in just one day. Laurie and I started the day with an early morning 6.6-mile loop hike in Hungry Mother State Park, the name of which is derived from the story of Molly Marley. She and her daughter escaped from their Native American captors, but wandering around with only berries to eat, Molly collapsed. The

child wandered off and was eventually found by a trapper. She was so exhausted the only words she said were, “Hungry mother.” Sadly, Molly was dead when a search party found her body.

It was a 1,000-foot, 1.7-mile ascent to Molly’s Knob, but the graded trail kept the huffing and puffing to a minimum, which was definitely compensated for by the spectacular and far-ranging summit view. Directly in front is Round Top Mountain, while off to the right runs the long, level ridgeline of Walker Mountain. Forming a backdrop to the town of Marion are the soaring summits of Virginia’s two highest peaks, Mount Rogers and Whitetop Mountain.

The gradually descending CCC Trail took us through one of the longest and most lush rhododendron tunnels I’ve ever experienced (and that’s saying something here in the southern

Opened in 1929, its interior was designed to have patrons feel as if they had entered a grand Mayan temple.

WHEN YOU GO

THE WALK: A 6.6-mile hike for mountain and lake views, a one-mile downtown exploration, and a two-mile roundtrip greenway stroll.

GETTING THERE: Hungry Mother State Park is reached from I-81 Exit 47 near Marion. Drive south on US 11 for 1.3 miles, turn right onto VA 16 and continue another 4.0 miles into the park. The downtown exploration is along Marion's Main Street, and the Riverwalk Trail is reached via North Church Street from downtown.

MORE INFORMATION: "50 Hikes in Southern Virginia" features a detailed description of the state park hike; marionva.org presents information about town attractions; and hikingproject.com has a Riverwalk Trail map.



FROM FAR LEFT: "The Song of the Mountains" mural is in downtown Marion; the Middle Fork of the Hoston River is a good fishing spot; the Lincoln Theater is graced with elegant murals.



Appalachians!). The outing's remaining few miles followed a meandering route along Hungry Mother Lake. It's renowned for its abundance of bass, catfish, carp and other aquatic species, so I was surprised when I asked an angler drifting close to shore in his boat if he was having any luck and he replied, "Yeah, bad luck; haven't got a nibble yet."

Good walk #2 was a combined history and shopping tour of about one mile on downtown Marion's Main Street. Interspersed with looking at the wares in Hester's Country Store (handcrafted jewelry and barrels of old-time candy) and admiring the locally-produced pottery and the delectable craftsmanship of the baked goods in Sisters Café and Gifts, were visits to the Smyth County Museum and a tour of the Lincoln Theater.

I am familiar with the theater from "Song of the Mountains" broadcasts on PBS, but had no idea how spectacular the building is. Opened in 1929, its interior was designed to have patrons feel as if they had entered a grand Mayan temple. However, the most outstanding features are the six impressive murals by local artist Lola Poston portraying scenes of early American history.

"Song of the Mountains" host Tim White has kept the tradition alive by painting an outdoors mural depicting the town's musical heritage across from the theater. (White also created the musical heritage mural in Bristol, Tennessee.)

The history lesson continued when we checked into General Francis Marion Hotel. Although it has been renovated with modern amenities, the entire hotel, from the lobby's check-in desk to furnishings in the room, harkens back to when it was built in the 1920s.

After a delightful dinner (prime rib for me and chili-rubbed wahoo for Laurie) at Waterlilly adjacent to the hotel lobby, good walk #3 was an easy evening stroll on the Riverwalk Trail. Just a two-minute drive from the hotel, the one-mile greenway parallels the Middle Fork Holston River through forest and field. The fisherman we met on this walk was all smiles—he had caught his limit of trout.

Three Good Walks in just one day. Thank you, Marion, Virginia.

Find out more about Leonard's walking and hiking adventures at habitualhiker.com. ▲▲