

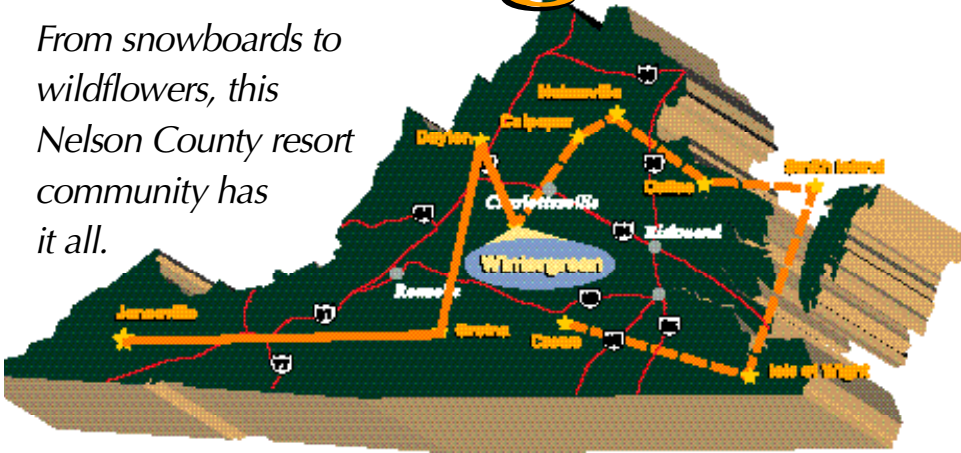
## DOWN HOME SERIES

by Nelson C. Hyde Jr.,  
Contributing Writer

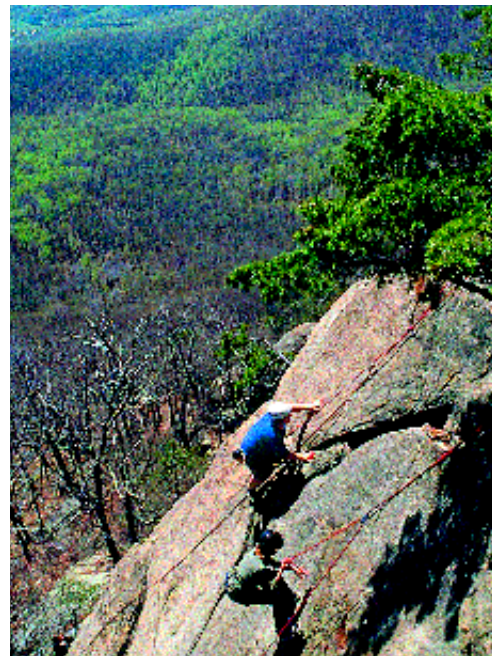
*Again in the year 2002, we're making our way around Virginia, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this year's fourth stop, we'll be ...*

# Down Home in Wintergreen

*From snowboards to  
wildflowers, this  
Nelson County resort  
community has  
it all.*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WINTERGREEN RESORT



Rock climbing for the outdoor enthusiast ...

**M**aritoni Redshaw had never been on skis when she came to the United States from her hometown of Piura, Peru. After all, Piura is only a few degrees from the equator. But in March Redshaw made a round trip from Richmond to Wintergreen Resort every day of her two-week winter vacation from Virginia Commonwealth University.

"There is no skiing in Peru," said Redshaw, as she watched other skiers head down one of the resort's 20 slopes. "I got a season pass, and now I'm coming here every day." So far, she said, she is sticking to the beginner slope.

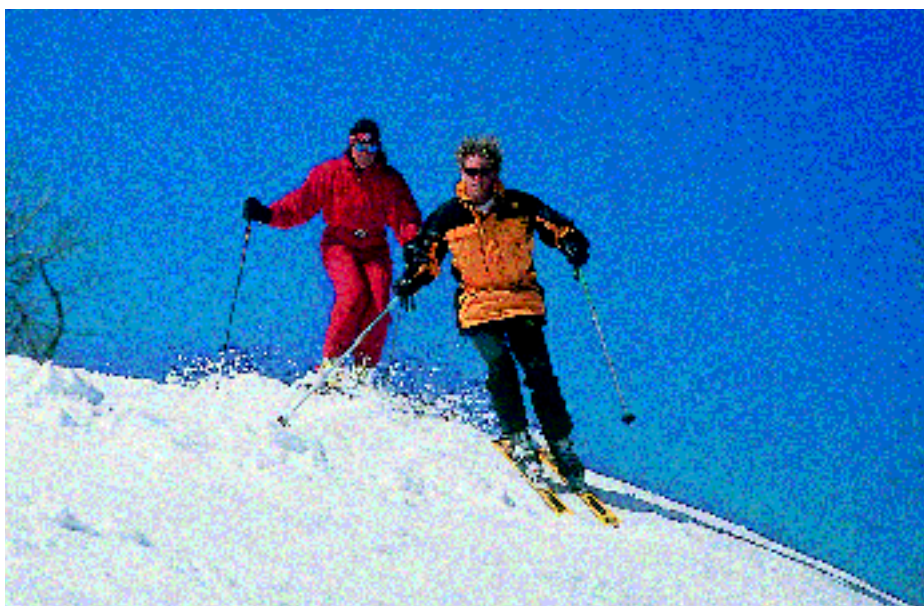
That day, with the temperature in the 30s, snow-making machines were pouring new snow onto the slopes. Yet, in another part of

Wintergreen, golfers were well into a morning round, with the thermometer registering in the 50s.

Yes, Virginia, in a sense there are two Wintergreens.

Wintergreen "on the mountain" is a multi-faceted, four-season resort high in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Stoney Creek at Wintergreen is a largely residential development around three nine-hole golf courses some 3,000 feet lower in the valley.

The mountain section of Wintergreen dates from a grant of 10,000 acres in 1794. Today's boundaries are almost identical to that tract, once known as "The Big Survey." Planning of Wintergreen began in 1972, just three years after the flood spawned by Hurricane Camille had devastated Nelson



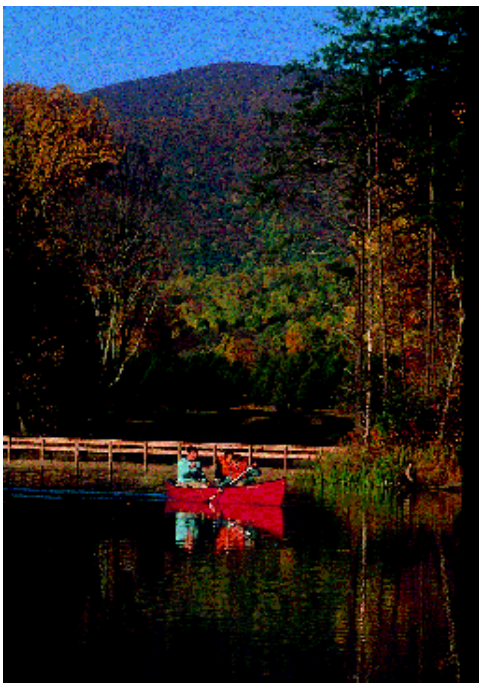
In addition to great skiing, snowboarding and snowtubing, Wintergreen offers ...



**Plush accommodations at Mountain Inn ...**

County and taken nearly 150 lives. The resort is now the county's largest employer and pays more than half of Nelson County's real estate taxes.

The ski area opened in 1975, and play began on Wintergreen's mountain golf course — Devils Knob, at more than 3,800 feet altitude — a year and a half later. Mountain Inn opened in 1980 and the Stoney Creek Golf Course in 1988. Under a 20-year development plan, new facilities continue to open. The latest, opened last winter, are The Blue Ridge Express, a high-speed, six-passenger ski lift, and The Plunge, a 10-lane tubing hill that shoots passengers on inner tubes down a 900-foot snow slide. (A mini-lift brings them back up.)



**A spa and fitness center with indoor and outdoor pools, hot tubs and steam rooms ...**

Poised at the top of The Plunge on a March day was a group from Charlottesville celebrating **John Paul Smith**'s seventh birthday. As the children clambered onto the tubes, the adults hooked the tubes together. The more weight, the more speed, they explained. "A great birthday present!" said young Smith.

Around the sports facilities on the mountain are more than 1,000 homes, visible in the winter, hidden among trees in the summer. All but 10 or 15 percent of those are second homes. At Stoney Creek, on the other hand, nearly all of the 400 or so homes are year-round, and many are retirement homes. Property owners become members of Wintergreen Partners Inc., which owns and operates the ski slopes, golf courses, tennis courts, restaurants, Wintergarden Spa, and the recreational facilities at Stoney Creek. They

**Fishing on Lake Monocan, excellent golf courses, and the list goes on and on.**

also become members of the Wintergreen Property Owners Association, which is responsible for road maintenance, snow removal, fire and rescue units, and police force.

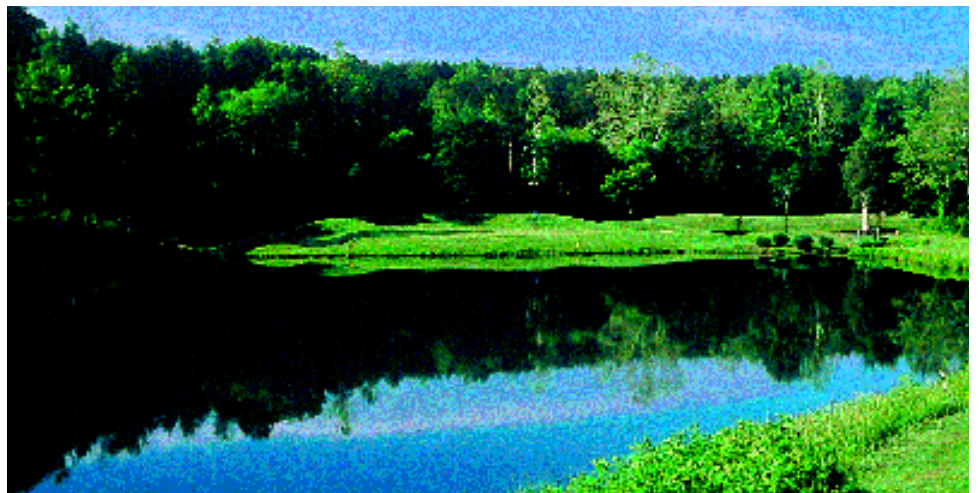
One retiree, **Jack Renard**, moved to Stoney Creek from Annapolis, Md.

"What's so great is the location is so central for people who like to ski, play golf or play tennis," he said. "It's a family-oriented place. One thing that attracted us was the caliber of the folks here. And nobody cares what you did before you came."

**Ray Smith** came to Wintergreen from Burlington, N.C., when he retired.

"We happened to be driving by and stopped to look. There's trout fishing, nature, golf — everything we liked," he said.

Renard and Smith were part of a foursome on the Stoney Creek golf course with



# If You Go...

**N**elson's County's landscape slopes, sometimes precipitously, from 4,000 feet in the Blue Ridge Mountains to an altitude of 300 feet along the James River. The 471 square miles of the county once were part of Goochland County ... and of Albemarle ... and of Amherst. Nelson itself came into being in 1807, and its historic courthouse in Lovingsston dates from 1809.

The first stop for a visitor should be **Nelson's Visitor Center** on the lower floor of the county library, located beside U.S. 29 in Lovingsston. There, the visitor will find the maps, the brochures and the personalized guidance for a tour of this picturesque rural county. There, too, directions are available to **Nelson's five apple orchards, five wineries, two motels, seven bed-and-breakfast inns and three campgrounds**, depending on the traveler's needs and interests. Telephones: (800) 282-8223 or (434) 263-5239. Or go to [www.nelsoncounty.com](http://www.nelsoncounty.com).

South of Lovingsston and about two miles off U.S. 29 is the 4,800-acre **Oak Ridge Estate**, featuring a mansion built in 1802, as well as its own railroad station, rotunda greenhouse, carriage house and a restored harness-racing track where the first races in decades were held last year, with pari-mutuel betting. Races will be held again this year in September and October. Oak Ridge also is the site of the **Nelson County Summer Festival** on the last weekend in June. Extensive renovations are continuing, and tours and special functions can be arranged by calling (434) 263-8676. Or check [www.oakridgeestate.com](http://www.oakridgeestate.com).

On the grounds of Oak Ridge is the **Orion Shotgun Sports Center**, which provides a broad range of clay-target shooting. Its programs range from individual shooting instruction to competitive events. Telephone: (434) 263-6622. See [www.executive-adventures.com](http://www.executive-adventures.com).

For fans of "John Boy" and the rest of the family on "The Waltons" television series, **Walton's Mountain Museum** is open from March through November in the community of Schuyler. The museum is in the former school building that was attended by Earl Hamner Jr., who created the television series, based largely on his Depression-era boyhood. Reproductions of sets for the series are in the museum, and there is a reunion of the cast there on the third weekend in October. Telephones: (888) 266-1981 or (434) 831-2000. And check [www.waltonmuseum.org](http://www.waltonmuseum.org).

Also in Schuyler is the **New World Stone Company**, an art gallery and sculpture garden where visitors can watch the artists working with Virginia soapstone. Telephone: (434) 831-1051.

Appropriately for a rural county, much of Nelson's appeal is in the outdoors. About a quarter of the county is in the **George Washington National Forest**, which is replete with hiking trails, including part of the Georgia-to-Maine Appalachian Trail, 25 miles of which lie in Nelson County. Much of the trail parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway along the county's western border.

On the other side of the county, the **Nelson Downriver**, an event for kayaks and canoes, takes place the first Saturday in May on the Tye, Rockfish or James River — depending on water levels. And the boats in the **James River Bateau Festival** stop over at Wingina on the James on the Monday after Father's Day each year. ■

two other retirees who found Wintergreen to their liking: **Kemp Bond** from North Carolina and **Joe Dunn** from Massachusetts.

## Not All Play

Not everyone at Wintergreen has come to play there or live there. **Rebecca Dickinson** came to work. She was one of 80 youths from Australia and New Zealand working at the resort last winter under a program called Work USA. That organization, and others like it, hold job fairs and conduct interviews in their home countries and arrange jobs in the United States. The youths receive a salary, but pay for their own air travel, rent and meals.

"Some save up a good bit of money," the 20-year-old Dickinson said. She took the opportunity to use her summer (in Australia) months to see some of this country as well. "I've been to New York, and I went to Mardi Gras," she said. "Next month, before I go home, I want to visit Boston, Chicago, Seattle and California." At Wintergreen, she was working two jobs — in the ski office and in The Gristmill, a snack bar, to raise the money. In the summer, Wintergreen employs groups of youths from the northern hemisphere, many of them from eastern Europe.

Winter sports activities center on Mountain Inn, a plush but rustic central facility that meets anyone's idea of a ski lodge with its stone counters and columns, plus a wide variety of upscale shops. In addition to the 20 ski slopes (12 lighted for night skiing) and The Plunge, the resort offers the only snowboard half-pipe in Virginia for devotees of a sport few Americans were familiar with until this year's Winter Olympics. When guests rent skis or snowboards, they can get a free beginner lesson as well. And a morning of skiing on the mountain can be paired with an afternoon round of golf at Stoney Creek for the price of a lift ticket.

Lodging is available at the inn or in the villas and condominiums (with one to seven bedrooms), which are privately owned but rented through Wintergreen Resort when their owners make them available.

The season for the winter activities usually runs from early December through March, with allowance for the whims of the weather. The 2000-2001 season was the longest and coldest ski

season ever, said **Kendall Nelson**, the resort's director of communications. Yet during the past winter, a few days were too warm to keep the slopes open. "Mother Nature is fickle," said Nelson.

And after March? The golfing pace picks up on the 27 holes at Stoney Creek, and the 18 holes at Devils Knob reopen. Tennis activity accelerates on the 19 outdoor clay courts (there are three indoor courts as well). The Wintergreen Nature Foundation, an award-winning environmental program, schedules hikes on the 30 miles of marked trails that it maintains. Swimmers, boaters, picnickers and fishermen head for the 20-acre Lake Monocan. Mountain biking, skateboarding, paintball and rock-climbing attract visitors to "Out of Bounds," the resort's adventure park. Rodes Farm Stables in Stoney Creek offer horse-related activities ranging from lessons to sunset trail rides. And The Treehouse is the central point for children's activities year-round, with hikes, storytelling, crafts and finger-painting in various age groups. In addition, the Wintergarden Spa & Fitness Center offers aerobics, indoor and outdoor pools, hot tubs, steam rooms and a full line of spa treatments.

A Spring Wildflower Symposium was scheduled this month, with a Memorial Day Country Fair, the Wintergreen Performing Arts Summer Music Festival, a 4th of July Jubilee fireworks party, an Arts and Crafts Fair, a Celtic Festival, and a Labor Day Spectacular to follow during the summer.

## Still Room to Roam

And yet, with all those activities, 6,740 of Wintergreen's 11,000 acres have been set aside as wilderness. More than 400 types of wildflowers bloom among the oaks and hickories. The environmental consciousness of the resort was demonstrated when it relocated 5,000 native plants to make way for The Plunge. "We saved thousands of native azaleas — moved them around the resort," Nelson said. And 2,000 of the resort's original 13,000 acres were given to the National Park Service.

The resort is about two hours driving time from Richmond, three hours from Washington, DC. For overnight reservations or lodging information, call (800) 266-2444. For more information, dial direct at (434) 325-2200 or visit [www.WintergreenResort.com](http://www.WintergreenResort.com). ■