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Carter Woodson worked the mines in the New River Gorge before continuing his education.

Plan a Visit Southern West Virginia's New River Gorge During Black History Month

FAYETTEVILLE, W. Va., Jan. 4, 2023 - Observed every February, [Black History Month](#) traces its roots to groundbreaking historian and scholar [Dr. Carter G. Woodson](#). Before he achieved fame, Woodson shoveled coal in the mines situated deep within the forests of what is now Southern West Virginia's [New River Gorge National Park and Preserve](#).

Woodson was one of numerous black coal miners and railroad workers who left their mark in Southern West Virginia, and the many of the region's most significant landmarks and historic sites can still be explored today.

"Whenever I explore the ruins of the old coal mines or visit the noteworthy places where African-Americans once lived and worked, I am inspired, knowing the challenges they faced and overcame here," said Roger Wilson, CEO of [Adventures on the Gorge](#), a year-round resort situated adjacent to the national park. "As the New River Gorge becomes increasingly popular as a travel destination, it is important to never lose



The John Henry Monument includes the Great Bend Tunnel.

sight of the human history of this place. I laud the National Park Service for its ongoing efforts to preserve this heritage.”

One of those initiatives is an [African American Heritage Auto Tour](#), with 17 stops at sites throughout the region. The National Park Service developed the tour in partnership with [Visit Southern West Virginia](#) and the [New River Gorge Regional Development Authority](#).

Free CDs can be obtained at the [NPS Canyon Rim Visitor Center](#) near Fayetteville, W. Va., just three miles from Adventures on the Gorge (AOTG).

With year-round [cabins](#) and [adventures](#) and easy proximity to the national park and surrounding region, many Black History Month visitors make AOTG their home base.

Stops on the tour include:

- [Quinnimont Missionary Baptist Church](#) - Churches like Quinnimont Missionary Baptist Church served the spiritual needs of the growing African American community.
- [Camp Washington-Carver](#) - Built by the Civilian Conservation Corp, Camp Washington-Carver was the first 4-H camp for African American youth. The camp continues to provide the venue for events such as the Appalachian String Band Festival and Heritage Arts Camp.
- [Hawks Nest Workers Memorial and Grave Site](#). The devastating Hawks Nest Tunnel disaster killed 764 tunnel workers, many of them African American, who were stricken with silicosis, an incurable disease caused by exposure to silica dust. The Hawks Nest disaster is one of the worst industrial tragedies in United States history.
- [John Henry Park](#) - John Henry worked as a steel driver on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway in the 1870s at about the time the automated steam drill was introduced to speed up the drilling process. When Henry set out to prove that man was faster than machine, his powerful efforts eventually were retold as [The Legend of John Henry](#), a story celebrated in [ballads](#) and during [John Henry Days](#), staged the second week of July in Talcott, W. Va., home to John Henry Park.
- [Stratton High School](#) - Opened in 1919 when education was still segregated, Stratton was the region’s first all-black high school. The school continued to operate until 1967.
- [Hinton Depot](#) - Many African Americans arriving in W. Va. first passed through the historic Hinton Depot.

More About Dr. Carter G. Woodson

Born in Virginia to former slaves, [Woodson](#) and his brothers traveled to Southern West Virginia in 1892 to work alongside other African Americans in the mines.

Woodson was among thousands of African Americans from Southern and Mid-Atlantic States who settled in the region beginning in the late 1800s to work in the region’s booming coal mines and on the burgeoning Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad (C&O). Like Woodson, many of the workers were born to parents who were freed slaves. The National Park Service estimates that more than [one-quarter of the mine workers](#) in West Virginia between the booming years of 1870 and 1930 were African American.

It was backbreaking, dangerous and sometimes deadly work, but it was one of the best opportunities for unskilled workers to earn a decent living. Miners who managed to load an average of five tons of hand-picked coal

daily could earn as much as \$5 per day. For Woodson and many others, saving those hard-earned pennies allowed them to eventually pursue other career goals and establish more comfortable lives for their families.

Although he was literate - he'd taught himself to read the family Bible when he was growing up - Woodson focused on improving his reading and math skills during his years as a coal miner, successfully socking away his pay so he could attend high school. When he wasn't picking and mining coal, Woodson socialized with a growing group of other self-educated and thoughtful miners while honing the research and writing skills that would become the foundation of his career success.

After graduating from Douglass High School in Huntington, W. Va. - one of the few black high schools in the region - Woodson enrolled in Berea College in Kentucky, earning a Bachelor of Literature three years later. Woodson funded his college classes by teaching in a school for the children of African American miners in a small New River town called Winona. He would continue to teach and study his entire life.

After concluding a teaching post in the Philippines and traveling the world, he returned to the U.S. to further his studies, ultimately earning a doctorate from Harvard University in 1912. Woodson published his first book, "The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861," in 1915, and shortly after formed an association called the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) to promote the study of Black American history and culture. He spent the following years expanding the reach and focus of ASNLH while continuing to teach and publish scholarly books.

In 1926, Woodson founded the first Negro History Week, designed to devote a week to the celebration of achievements by African Americans. The idea caught on nationwide and was promoted for decades. History teachers around the country began to mark the week by teaching African-American history in their classrooms. Woodson died in 1950, but Negro History Week continued. In 1976, President Gerald Ford expanded it to Black History Month.

Where to Stay and What Else to Do

Through April 1, Adventures on the Gorge is offering [50 percent off lodging prices](#) for accommodations in its freestanding [deluxe](#) and [mountain](#) cabins. The resort's acclaimed [TreeTops Canopy Tour](#) is open throughout the winter. The resort is located about three miles from the National Park Service Canyon Rim Visitor Center and the historic and charming town of Fayetteville, which offers a selection of year-round restaurants and stores.

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About Adventures on the Gorge

Established in 2007, Adventures on the Gorge is one of the world's first adventure resorts. The resort is located on more than 250 acres adjacent to the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, and it offers more than two dozen outdoor adventures including whitewater rafting on the New and Gauley Rivers, aerial adventures, rock climbing, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, fishing, mountain biking and hiking. The resort features an array of lodging choices including deluxe multi-bedroom [rental homes](#) and [cabins](#), [hotel-style](#) cabins, [bunkhouse](#) cabins, [rustic](#) cabins, [glamping tents](#), [RV sites](#) and [campgrounds](#). In addition, the resort offers [restaurants](#), [shops](#), a [conference center](#) and a variety of [vacation packages](#).

For more information, visit the [website](#) or connect with the resort on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [TripAdvisor](#), [YouTube](#), and [Vimeo](#) and by signing up for AOTG [e-newsletter](#).



Reservations can be made [online](#) or by calling 1-855-379-8738.
[Video and Photos](#)

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