

MISSION CROSSING

The Mission Crossing byway, which begins near the Avery County community of Cranberry, guides motorists along N.C. 194 through North Carolina's ski country and the northern range of the Roan Mountains in Pisgah National Forest before ending at Vilas in Watauga County.

First called Cranberry Forge for the iron mines believed to have been worked by American Indians, Cranberry was founded in 1850 and named for the abundant local cranberries. The mines once supplied iron to the Confederacy and are still in use today.

Just down the road **at the byway's southern end is Elk Park**, founded in 1885 and named for the elk that formerly roamed the region. It is located on the Elk River, which begins in Banner Elk. **The byway follows N.C. 194 through the Elk River Valley from Elk Park through the community of Heaton to Banner Elk.**

Banner Elk, also known as Shawneehaw, is the home of Lees-McRae College. The town was named for the Banner family, early settlers on the Elk River. Above Banner Elk is Beech Mountain,

which at 5,506 feet, is one of the region's better-known resorts. **After Banner**

Elk, the route passes through the communities of Balm and Bowers Gap before crossing into Watauga

County. The creek paralleling the road is called Craborchard Creek, which joins the Watauga River near Valle Crucis.

Shortly after passing through the community of Matney, the route begins descending into the Watauga River Valley. The

name *Watauga* is derived from the American Indian word for "beautiful water." On the left is the mission from which this route got its name. To the right is Dutch Creek, which meets with Craborchard Creek below.

The mission played an important part in the history of Valle Crucis. In 1842, Bishop Stillman Ives purchased 3,000 acres of land and founded a divinity school that became the first Anglican monastic order since the Reformation. In 1852, the divinity school and monastery were forced to disband. By 1895, Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire revived the Episcopal church's work by opening a mission school that remained in operation until World War II. The mission



Mast General Store in Valle Crucis

Shannon Hendrickson

is now operated by the Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina as a camp and conference center.

Valle Crucis, settled in 1780 by Samuel Hix, means “Valley of the Cross” and is named for the creeks that converge with the Watauga River in the form of a cross. Before leaving the valley, be sure to visit the Mast Farm Inn. The farm, established in 1812, is one of the best preserved 19th century farms in Western North Carolina and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Stop at the Mast General Store in Valle Crucis to see an authentic general store that opened in 1882. Take a right on Broadside Road to see the Mast Farm Inn and General Store Annex.

Continuing on N.C. 194 after leaving Valle Crucis, notice the unusual barn on the right while climbing out of the valley. The Baird Barn, built in the late 19th or early 20th century, is an excellent example of a transverse crib barn.

The byway ends in the community of Vilas at the intersection of N.C. 194 and U.S. 321/421 north of Boone.



Length: 17 miles
Drive Time: 45 minutes
Counties: Avery and Watauga



Note: The route is not recommended for recreational vehicles or buses.

