

West Virginia peaks draw experienced climbers and novices

By MICHAEL VIRTANEN
Associated Press

SENECA ROCKS, W.Va. — The pale ridge rises like the ragged fin of a prehistoric fish in a rolling green sea of low forested mountains in eastern West Virginia.

Massive and intimidating, the craggy landscape of Seneca Rocks draws serious rock climbers from Washington, Pittsburgh and elsewhere to its fiercely vertical routes. The mountaintop once hosted American combat troops training to fight in Italy's Apennine Range during World War II.

Despite its daunting appearance, guides say this is a good place to introduce novices to a challenging but manageable ascent.

"It lends itself to mellow climbing," said Adam Happensack, who led a three-some of mixed skill levels to the summit recently. "It's like the coolest exposure you'll get for this grade of climbing."

From the Monongahela National Forest Discovery Center terrace, through a binocular scope, you can watch climbers nearly a half-mile away ascend the west face. The peak rises 900 feet above a fork of the Potomac River below. Visitors can splash in the river, hike forest trails and stay in campgrounds or an old motel. The nearby hamlet has two combination general stores and restaurants.

Seneca Rocks viewed from the ground spears the sky with its gray quartzite, but becomes more intimate and breathtaking on the way to the top. You hear the birds and soft thrum of the wind through the hardwood forest, and occasional yells from climbers to partners belaying them on safety ropes.

Happensack led climbing partner Phil Brown and me up a seven-pitch patchwork of easy routes to the top, including the Skyline Traverse. Many handholds and steps were obvious jugs of rock. No pitches were rated higher than 5.4 in the Yosemite Decimal System for technical climbing that ranges from 5.1 to nearly impossible 5.15.

One well-known feature is that traverse with little more than a few steps around a rock column into a three-sided chimney with obvious holds. However, the first moves require stepping over about a 100-foot drop.

"It's like the scariest thing a beginner can get into," said Happensack, who has taken many first-timers up the route.

He cautioned that those initial footholds are worn and slippery from decades of boots and climbing shoes.

It took me a long, slow, breathless minute to follow him: testing the leaning traverse across the space, trying to grip the narrow crack on one side and fumble toward something to hold on the other with arms spread wide; trusting that the slightly smooth step below wouldn't simply slide you into space. The safety rope attached to my climbing harness was



AP Photo/Michael Virtanen

In this June 24 photo Seneca Rocks rises behind the Monongahela National Forest Discovery Center in eastern West Virginia. The crag draws serious rock climbers though guides say they also bring novices up its easier routes to the summit.



AP Photo/Michael Virtanen

In this June 25 photo climber Lindsey Enterline from Hershey, Pa., manages the safety rope belaying her partner at the start of Old Man's Route on the west face of Seneca Rocks in West Virginia. Enterline, eight months pregnant, says she chose the easy and safe route.

"I've done the route before, and it's one that I won't fall sideways — or do the traverse."

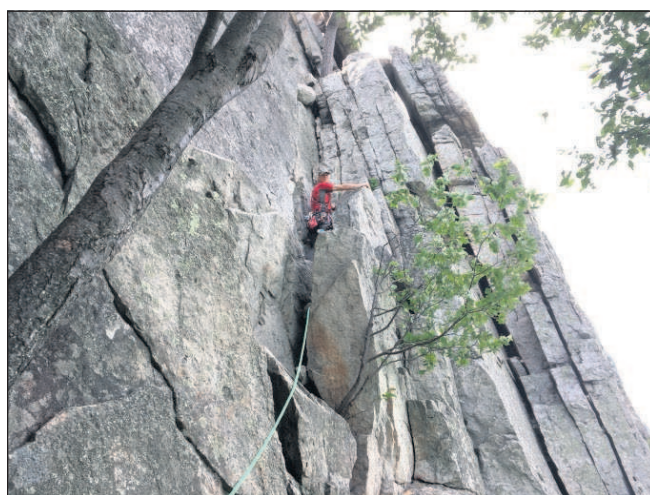
— Lindsey Enterline, pregnant climber from Hershey, Pa.

somewhat reassuring.

This is what climbers call exposure — where there would be a high risk of injury or even death from a false step without protection.

You have to trust the rope and go.

Brown, who followed me, has climbed for a decade in the Adirondacks and did this traverse once before.



AP Photo/Michael Virtanen

In this June 25 photo climber Phil Brown climbs the vertical pitch of Old Man's Route high on the west face of Seneca Rocks in West Virginia. Considered an easy climb, the route ends on the shelf near the upper tree.



AP Photo/Michael Virtanen

In this June 25 photo climber Phil Brown rappels down from Old Man's Route on the west face of Seneca Rocks in West Virginia. The crag has no hiking trail to the top so you have to either rappel or climb down.

"Wow," he said, when he joined us at the top of the chimney where Happensack belayed him. "Cool."

The next day Brown led me up Old Man's Route. Rated only 5.3 for difficulty, it consists mostly of what looks

like a giant stairway along the cliff face ending in a 50-foot vertical corner to the summit ledge.

At the base, 33-year-old Lindsey Enterline, pregnant with her first child, prepared to do it with a friend. A climber for seven years and a runner, her obstetrician told her to keep doing what she was doing but not start anything new. She'd chosen the easy route instead of the harder climb her husband and other friends from Hershey, Pennsylvania, took on.

"I've done the route before, and it's one that I won't fall sideways — or do the traverse," she said. "I just make sure it's safe. And you have to have cool trust in the people you're climbing with."

Another young woman, on her first climb, mounted the corner farther up, kept on a tight rope by the experienced partner who coached her on finding holds. She ascended with only one or two hesitations. She'd fallen farther down the mountain, but was caught on the rope and kept climbing. "I had a moment," she said with a smile.

With no trail to walk down, Seneca Rocks climbs end in rappelling on ropes threaded through a device on your harness that creates friction and slows the descent. "That was scarier than the climb up," the novice said.

Other sites that draw climbers to the state include the New River Gorge and Summersville Lake, where cliffs lean out over the water not far from the gorge.

Mix cheesy eggs, avocado for a yummy breakfast taco

By ELIZABETH KARMELE
Associated Press

Long before I knew that the origin of breakfast tacos were a hotly debated topic, I was eating them and loving them. I had my first breakfast taco many years ago in Houston and have enjoyed many more in Austin, Texas. But, I am not about to give birthright credit to any particular city in because I am fairly certain that Mexican immigrants all grew up with their mother's version of "breakfast tacos."

The beauty of the tortilla is that it makes normal fork and knife foods like scrambled eggs (and pork barbecue, steak, fish, etc.), portable. And, regardless of where you had your first breakfast taco, if you are like me, you crave them and must make them yourself at home.

I am a "no beans and no rice" kind of girl who prefers my breakfast tacos like my favorite egg sandwich but rolled, or folded over in a flour tortilla. To me, the essential ingredients must be cheesy eggs, a dash of hot sauce and cool slices of ripe avocado. I love bacon and prefer to serve it on the side where it stays crisp but feel free to add it into the eggs. Not many places add slices of avocado unless you ask for it, but for me, the avocado is what makes



AP Photo/Richard Drew

Breakfast tacos.

it a Tex-Mex breakfast taco instead of just eggs in a tortilla.

When I have tomatoes and white onions on hand, I add those to my cheesy eggs and I am one happy girl. I like breakfast tacos so much that I have been known to have them for lunch and or dinner as well.

The truth is that you can put any of your favorite cheese and egg add-ins in your breakfast taco. In Texas, the potato, egg and cheese combo reigns king as does the

classic eggs and bacon. If you are a fan of chorizo, chorizo and crispy potatoes make a perfect match especially with some blistered poblano peppers thrown in for good measure.

Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pit master at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and the author of three books, including "Taming the Flame."

BREAKFAST TACOS

Servings: 8

Start to finish: 20 minutes

- 8 slices of bacon, cut into 1/2-inch pieces and cooked, optional or serve whole slices on the side
- Kosher salt, freshly ground pepper
- 8 6-inch flour tortillas, warmed on a griddle
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
- 1 small white onion, diced
- 1 medium tomato, diced
- 8 large eggs
- 1 cup white cheddar or Monterey Jack with jalapenos, shredded
- 1 avocado, thinly sliced for serving
- Hot sauce

Cook bacon, stirring occasionally, until crisp, 10-12 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain (do not pour off fat from skillet).

Using a large non-stick skillet, add 2 tablespoons of butter and onions to skillet and cook, stirring often, until translucent and tender, 2-3 minutes. Add tomatoes and season lightly with salt and pepper. Remove skillet from heat.

Meanwhile, whisk eggs in a large bowl to blend; add the remaining 1 tablespoon of butter in the nonstick skillet over medium heat and let melt. Pour eggs in evenly over the tomatoes and onions. Cook eggs, stirring occasionally to mix in onions and tomatoes, and scraping bottom of skillet with a heatproof spatula or fork to form large curds, about 1-2 minutes. Add cheese and stir to mix in and finish cooking. Do not increase the heat to cook everything faster or the eggs may burn.

Remove eggs from heat and mix in bacon if using or serve on the side. Fill tortillas with cheesy egg mixture and top with avocado. Serve with hot sauce.

Nutrition information per serving: 354 calories; 191 calories from fat; 21 g fat (9 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 244 mg cholesterol; 428 mg sodium; 27 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 2 g sugar; 15 g protein.