

Running and Walking: Descending Mortal Kombat on Raven Fork and strolling through Bryson City (right).



### Paddler's Rating

After Work: ★★★★★  
Weekends: ★★★★★  
Vacations  
Near Home: ★★★★★

### Vitals

**Pop:** 1,388 (2006 est.)  
**Median Home Price (end of 2007):** \$142,000  
**Climate:** Jan. 46/28; July 87/69; 47 inches of rain  
**Who:** Boaters, mountain bikers, upright bass players, those who blend in with the pace of a small town

**Who Knew?:** How many boater towns can make this claim?: [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com) reports that Bryson City has more females (793) than males (618).

**Dirtbag Quotient:** Get a job guiding and teaching at NOC, or at one of its restaurants; find flexible work in construction, food service, or nearby Western Carolina University

**2004 Presidential Election:** 51% Bush, 48% Kerry, 1% Other



says McClure, “bring a bunch of DVDs. There are no movies [shown] here.”

If you miss the city, Asheville’s music and arts scene is just 65 miles east.

**THE PADDLING:** Within 30 minutes of your home, you’ll be able to put on the Nantahala River. But since you’re so close, you’ll be off before every other intermediate boater in the state shows up. Also nearby are: the Class IV-V Nantahala Cascades, a short, roadside creeking spot for yo-yoing; the proving ground of the Raven Fork; and the Eternity Hole play spot on the East Fork of the Tuckasegee. Even the Ocoee is only 90 minutes away. And after American Whitewater’s negotiations with FERC in 2005, 18 dam releases per year fill up the formerly dewatered Cheoah River.

During stretches of low water, or when you desire to scale back your survival paddling, go canoe camping. The crooked, 29-mile-long Fontana Lake abuts the national park. Put in at the Tsali Recreation Area. A little farther from home, the Wild and Scenic South Fork of the New River is one of the state’s best mellow canoeing rivers.

—Mike Kord

## BRYSON CITY, NC

**THE TOWN:** As soon as you walk into the Paddler’s Pub upstairs from Relia’s Garden Restaurant, the William Nealy decor makes it clear you’re in a place where you wake up in the morning, throw a dart at the map, and pick a classic river to run—before work. Then run another after.

“It all just depends on how big you make your circle,” says Jason McClure, a 29-year-old transplant from the Ozarks who moved to Bryson City eight years ago and is now a lead instructor at the Nantahala Outdoor Center.

Bryson City is a small mountain town with an earthy bluegrass vibe located at the southern entrance to Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

As stellar as the boating is, it’s not the only game in town that will draw you here. The 12-mile Tsali Left Loop in the Nantahala National Forest is revered nationwide for its greasy-fast single track. Mountain bikers alternate trail days with hikers and horseback riders. All this will prepare you for the Tsali Challenge, a bike/paddle/run adventure race in September, or at least help you burn off the slices of My Big Fat Greek Pizza now served at NOC’s Rivers’ End Restaurant.

Before moving, urbanites, heed this advice: “If you like to go to the movies,”

## MCCALL, ID

**THE TOWN:** Many call it Boise’s playground, and those who call it home enjoy a lifelong recess. On top of wrapping around idyllic Lake Payette and being less than an hour from two of America’s best whitewater destinations, McCall is squeezed between two of Idaho’s finest ski resorts and a locally owned ski hill. Brundage Mountain, seven-and-a-half miles northwest of downtown, averages over 300 inches of snow per year. Tamarack, with 2,800



**HEIGHT OF  
AMBITION—**  
This year, go  
places you  
haven't been  
before.