

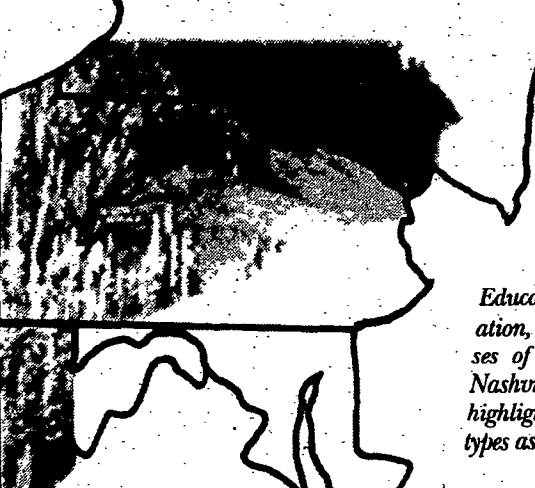


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Appalachia

Linda Heller-Hilton runs an herb farm cooperative in Kentucky's mountains.



From Nov. 8-12, Rob Cullivan, Catholic Courier staff writer, joined six other Catholic writers and one secular journalist from around the country for a press tour of southeastern Kentucky and northern Tennessee.

The tour sponsors were Appalachian Ministries Educational Resources Center, the Catholic Press Association, the Christian Appalachian Project, and the dioceses of Lexington and Covington in Kentucky and Nashville and Knoxville in Tennessee. Their aim was to highlight the region's issues as well as work to dispel stereotypes associated with Appalachia.

When a young person wants to leave rural Appalachia, a common joke there runs: "Why do you want to move to the city? People there shoot people they don't even know."

I heard a lot of jokes like that during my journey through central Appalachia, jokes that poked fun both at the people of the mountains and the people who, as the locals say, are "from off," as in "from off the mountains."

As part of a journalists group "from off" I came to the region hoping to meet some colorful, interesting people I would want to know, even if I was from the city. I was not disappointed. But first ...

A quick travel primer

Appalachia should be pronounced "Apple Latcha." No wait, "Apple Lay Cha." Or, you could say, "Apple Laysha." Then again, you could just call the region "the hills," which is what the locals say.

If you travel through Appalachia, er, the hills, keep in mind that you will often find yourself in "hollers." "Hollers" are not shouting matches between coal mine executives and union organizers. However, such arguments might take place in a holler, which is a mountain hollow or valley in which Appalachians often reside.

Finally, if you travel through Appalachia, you can start right here in your own diocese. That's right, Appalachia is actually an 11-state mountainous region that runs from southwestern New York to north-eastern Mississippi. Appalachia includes

the following counties in the Diocese of Rochester: Steuben, Schuyler, Chemung, Tompkins and Tioga.

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Daymon Morgan, a Kentucky native, is fiercely opposed to strip-mining practices that he says harm the mountains.



Herb co-op members harvest plants for sale.

Photos by Peggy Gabriel