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For release week of April 7, 2014

Subject: New Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina Website Launched

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Who: Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership
What: Launch of new Blue Ridge Music Trails website
When: Monday, April 7, 2014
Where: Worldwide Web

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership announces the launch of a new website, BlueRidgeMusicNC.com, in support of the Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina.

The site is designed to showcase and promote the traditional music of Western North Carolina through the Blue Ridge Music Trails (BRMT) initiative, a program of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA) in partnership with the North Carolina Arts Council (NCAC).

BlueRidgeMusicNC.com features trip planning tools, including an interactive, searchable events calendar and map, videos of traditional musicians, and interesting profiles and stories. Visitors will find in-depth information about Western North Carolina's rich traditions of bluegrass and string band music, ballad singing, fiddling, shape-note singing, gospel music, clogging, and other traditional forms of music and dance unique to the region.

The partners in the Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina program recognize the value of this music to both the cultural heritage and economic vitality of the region. A study conducted early on in the program revealed an economic impact of \$20.7 million from just 26 traditional music events within the 29-county region of the NC mountains and foothills. With more than 200 established music venues, including festivals, the extrapolated economic impact is significant. The study also showed that attendees who travel specifically for these events spend 1.85 times more than visitors to the area for other reasons, and that 99% said they would return.

The intention of the BRMT program is to further strengthen this cultural heritage asset by improving existing venues, creating new ones, and supporting the development of musicians and music related businesses. In addition, it aims to increase consumer awareness of opportunities to hear, learn about, and enjoy the unique music that was born and bred in the North Carolina mountains and foothills. The BRNHA Partnership plans to grow the website with listings for more events, festivals, and jam sessions and is actively seeking submissions.

"This website was developed based on input we received from musicians, tourism promoters, arts and cultural leaders and others who recognize how important our music is, not only to our region, but to the nation and the world," said Angie Chandler, Executive Director of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area

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Partnership. “This is a grassroots initiative, engaging folks in 29 counties and bringing them together under one brand to promote the entire region around our traditional music.”

The website launch follows the release last spring of the *Blue Ridge Music Trails of North Carolina* guidebook, produced by the North Carolina Arts Council and published by UNC Press. The book provided the foundation for the development of the Blue Ridge Music Trails project. It and an accompanying map highlight six geographical districts and help visitors find artists and major venues, explore the region, listen to live performances and extend public recognition of the state’s distinctive contributions to traditional music.

The book and map were developed by the NC Arts Council and funded by a grant from the NC Department of Transportation. The website was developed by the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership and the North Carolina Arts Council, with web design by PaleoSun and graphic design by Element Advertising.

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The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, designated by Congress and the President in November, 2003, works to protect, preserve, interpret, and develop the unique natural, historical, and cultural resources of Western North Carolina for the benefit of present and future generations, and in so doing to stimulate improved economic opportunity in the region. National Heritage Areas are locally-governed institutions that encourage residents, non-profit groups, government agencies, and private partners to work together in planning and implementing programs that preserve and celebrate America’s defining landscapes.

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