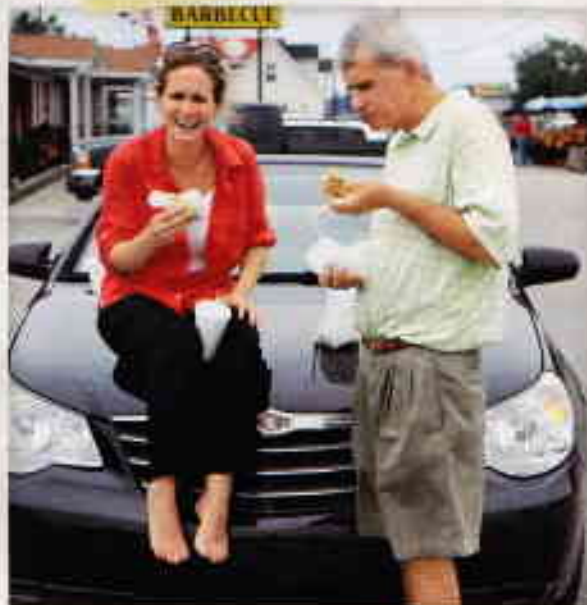


1. At Lexington BBQ, aficionados go for the Lean Brown Coarse Chopped Barbecue plate (or LBCCQ), which features the meat cooked closest to the wood coals. 2. Short Sugar's is long on happy customers. 3. What Skylight's sign doesn't say: They've guarded their corn bread recipe since 1830. 4. That's a slice of it wedged between slaw and pork. 5. At Wilber's, Charlene Langston preps a day's worth of collards. 6. Allen & Son's fried okra makes for a satisfying side. *Opposite:* Two for the 'cue: Author Frances Bailey and her dad, T. Ed.

# The Great American Father-Daughter PIG-OUT



*What does it take for a grown woman to reconnect with her dad? Two days, one sing-along Motown mix, and an appetite for barbecue—North Carolina's finest culinary art.*

WRITTEN BY FRANCES BAILEY • PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN BENYI

## **LIVING IN NORTH CAROLINA MEANS TAKING SIDES.**

You're inside the Beltline, or you're from the country. You root for the Tar Heels or the Blue Devils. But we all agree that barbecue is a way of life, and we speak of our favorite haunts in hushed, confidential tones to keep our secrets from traveling too far. Since the 19th century, Carolina barbecue has meant one thing: wood- or charcoal-smoked pork slathered in vinegar-and-pepper sauce. Well, actually, it means two things. (We take sides on barbecue, too.) A culinary divide runs straight through the middle of the state: If you live east of Raleigh, you eat eastern-style barbecue, which pulls meat from the whole hog. In western Carolina, folks go in for Lexington-style, consisting just of the fatty, moist shoulder meat accompanied by a vinegar sauce spiked

with ketchup. Even if you're a barbecue fanatic, you wouldn't bother to try the 'cue from the other side of the state. Eastern or Lexington—you eat one style, and one style only.

Unless, of course, you grew up in Raleigh, as I did, smack-dab in the middle of the barbecue divide. Folks here are tormented by having to pledge allegiance to a single kind. But we Baileys did pick a side, and we never wavered. We chose Murray's.

Going to Murray's always felt like we were doing something naughty. Its rowdy dining room (set up in a converted gas station) and sketchy crowd gave this eastern-style joint a roadhouse feel. Sometimes we'd make the 20-minute drive—far out of town, past the trailers and run-down shacks—only to find it closed, for no apparent reason. Guess it didn't need one. But Murray's was the sole place in Wake County that smoked its meat over wood, giving a fresh, juicy flavor to its eastern-style barbecued pork, chicken, and meat-and-vegetable Brunswick stew. The buns were always perfectly steamed, the hush puppies crisp and hot, and, boy, do I miss them.

Murray's is long gone, boarded up since 2004. My dad drove out for a final melancholy meal. The place was a tad too eccentric for our modernizing state. North Carolina hardly feels like the South these days. We're full of expats from elsewhere, while I'm an expat from North Carolina. For close to a decade, I've lived in New York City, where I can get dim sum for breakfast, tikka masala for lunch, and empanadas for dinner. What I can't get is Carolina barbecue.

Increasingly—and sadly—I can't get it in North Carolina, either. It's easier to find sushi or tapas in Raleigh than a pit where pigs are cooked over wood fires for hours

at a time. But there's a historic barbecue trail—24 joints in all—mapped out by Winston-Salem's North Carolina Barbecue Society. Last summer, I spent two days on the trail with T. Ed Bailey, my dad, singing to the Temptations and Four Tops mix he brought along for the ride and having all those great long talks that never seem to happen on the phone. Oh, and we also ate a lot of pork, both eastern- and Lexington-style.

Barbecue, I learned, is anything but a dying art—it's as vibrant and varied as ever. Half a dozen places

were particularly memorable, whether for the cobbler, local Cheerwine soda pop, or the tangy, smoky meat—and we celebrate them all here (turn the page for the highlights and the lowdown). But they each have a big pit to fill. Every time my father and I pulled up to our next stop, we'd say the same thing: "Will this be as good as Murray's?" Then we'd head on in, because there's only one way to find out.

*Frances Bailey is Country Living's deputy style editor and a lifelong NC State football fan.*



The Baileys chow down on Allen & Son's take-out at one of the restaurant's outdoor tables. Frances gives the hush puppies high marks.

*Last summer, I spent two days on the trail with my dad, having all those great long talks that never seem to happen on the phone.*



1. Save room for Stamey's peach cobbler—the author's favorite dessert of the trip.  
2. James Howell, a pit master and 20-year veteran of the Skylight Inn, doing what he knows best.  
3. Short Sugar's: Another reason we all need more vacation.  
4. It happens: The consequences of showing up late for barbecue.  
5. The star marks the spot on the Skylight Inn's hand-painted sign.  
6. Stoking the pit at Lexington BBQ.  
7. The Baileys dine curbside at Short Sugar's.

# THE BEST PIT STOPS

Frances Bailey and her dad, T. Ed, turned to the North Carolina Barbecue Society's 500-mile trail ([ncbbqsociety.com](http://ncbbqsociety.com)) to plan their itinerary. The route hits the (select few) BBQ joints that meet the society's rigid criteria: The pit masters must cook over wood or charcoal, make their own sauces, and have been in business for more than 15 years. We highlight the Bailey family favorites.

## Planning your trip

As a tourist, you have one advantage over native North Carolinians: You're not required to cleave to only one barbecue style. In order to pursue eats both eastern- (the whole pig, served minced with a vinegary, peppery sauce) and Lexington-style (chopped shoulder meat only, with a tomato-based "dip"), fly into **Raleigh-Durham** and head just across the barbecue border to make **Chapel Hill** your home base. Comfy places to lay your head—or pop Tums between meals—include **the Inn at Bingham School**, a 208-year-old B&B near the University of North Carolina's Research Triangle Park—perfect for walking it all off (from \$150 per night, 6720 Mebane Oaks Road; 800-566-5583, [chapel-hill-inn.com](http://chapel-hill-inn.com)). If you must de-pork, **the Siena Hotel** has its own Italian restaurant—and lets your dog stay, too (from \$119 per night, 1505 E. Franklin Street; 800-223-7379, [sienahotel.com](http://sienahotel.com)). **The Carolina Inn** feels like a plantation home, but it's not just a pretty place; this UNC-owned property donates its profits to the college library (from \$159 per night, 211 Pittsboro Street; 800-962-8519, [carolinainn.com](http://carolinainn.com)). On the BBQ trail, rule no. 1 is: **Call ahead** (most pits close on Sunday) and **start early**—some joints sell out by 10 A.M. To keep sampling all day, **stick to small portions**—and don't forget the **Wet-Naps!**



### 1. Lexington BBQ LEXINGTON

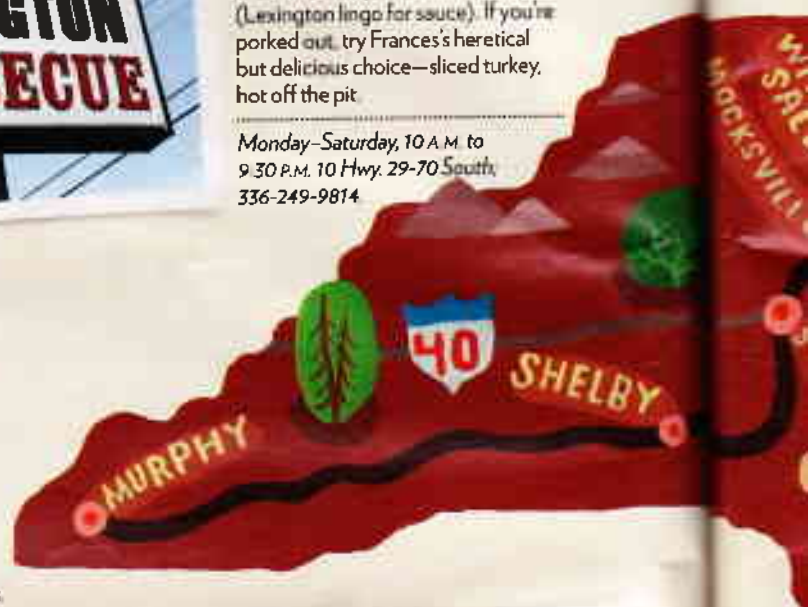
This place serves 1,200 people a day, and the lot was packed when T. Ed and Frances arrived. Pour on the dark, smoky, secret-recipe dip (Lexington lingo for sauce). If you're porked out, try Frances's heretical but delicious choice—sliced turkey, hot off the pit.

Monday–Saturday, 10 A.M. to 9:30 P.M. 10 Hwy. 29-70 South, 336-249-9814

### 6. The Skylight Inn AYDEN

Don't expect dessert at the Skylight Inn, which has worn its replica of the Capitol building since 1979. The menu: perfect pulled pork with slaw and corn bread. That's all, folks. This is purist territory.

Monday–Saturday, 10 A.M. to 6:45 P.M. 4618 Lee Street; 252-746-4113.



### 5. Wilber's GOLDSBORO

With more of a restaurant feel than most BBQ joints, this place has an outdoor pit and uses only locally raised pork. Don't miss the crisp hush puppies and Nana Pudding. Enjoy it while it lasts: when owner Wilber Shirley retires, it'll most likely become a gas-only grill.

Monday–Saturday, 6 A.M. to 9 P.M.; Sunday, 7 A.M. to 9 P.M. Hwy. 70 East, 919-778-5218, [wilbersbarbecue.com](http://wilbersbarbecue.com).

## 2. Short Sugar's REIDSVILLE

Honk if you love car-side service! Ask the staff at this fifties-style diner for extra sauce if you prefer your BBQ wet—Short Sugar's sandwiches come virtually sauce-free.

Monday–Saturday, 6 A.M. to 9 P.M.  
1328 South Scales Street,  
336-342-7487,  
shortsugarsbar-b-q.com



Short Sugar's



Allen & Son Barbecue

## 4. Allen & Son CHAPEL HILL

To go to town here, order the Stew and Q—a bowl of sloppy Brunswick stew alongside a pile of pork. Keith Allen chops the wood and makes all 15 desserts himself, including hand-churned ice cream.

Tuesday–Wednesday, 10 A.M. to 5 P.M.; Thursday–Saturday, 10 A.M. to 8 P.M., 6203 Millhouse Road; 919-942-7576



## 3. Stamey's GREENSBORO

Warner Stamey, founder of Lexington-style barbecue, opened his place in 1930 and bequeathed his skills to his grandson Chip, the current owner. You can't beat that chopped-pork and chicken combo, with a side of skinny hush puppies.

Monday–Saturday, 10 A.M. to 9 P.M.  
2206 High Point Road; 336-299-9888,  
stameys.com