

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

# Colloquy

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Cherokee Chief Jerry [Jarrett] Blythe gives President Franklin D. Roosevelt a bonnet of brown turkey feathers during the president's visit to the Cherokee Indian Reservation. (PHOTOGRAPH: AP IMAGES)

## A Grand Trip

THE 1936 VISIT OF FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT TO THE SMOKIES

“For thirty years I have been wanting to get to the Great Smoky Mountains. I have planned at least a half dozen trips to this section, but each time something happened to prevent my coming. Today I finally made it. I am not disappointed. I am delighted and thrilled. It was a grand trip.” So spoke Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the occasion of the first visit of a sitting president to the new national park. Most people are aware that President Roosevelt visited the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1940 to dedicate the Park. But few realize that this was his second trip to the Smokies; his first trip occurred in 1936.

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Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Gatlinburg, September 9, 1936 (PHOTOGRAPH BY ROSEMARY MOOREHEAD)

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Roosevelt, in the first car waving his hat, travels through Sylva, NC, on his way to Asheville. (Used with permission. Hunter Library, Western Carolina University. Online at Craft Revival: Shaping North Carolina Past and Present: <http://www.wcu.edu/craftrevival/story/train/1930s/1930sylv.html>)

The presidential party left Washington DC on the evening of September 8<sup>th</sup>, traveling overnight by special train to Knoxville. They arrived at the Southern Railway Depot in Knoxville at 9:00 am to streets packed with cheering crowds. Locals were pleased that the President chose to start his tour in Knoxville, hoping that their city would be viewed as the “correct route to follow” by tourists when visiting the Smokies. Officials also hoped the presidential visit would “give impetus” to the yet unresolved lawsuits that had hampered completion of the Park and delayed its formal dedication, give needed publicity to the scenic beauty of the new park, and prompt the federal government to build more roads for Park access.

After breakfast on the train and greetings by local dignitaries, the presidential party, including Tennessee Governor Hill McAlister, North Carolina Governor J.C.B. Ehringhaus, and Senators Kenneth McKellar and Nathan Bachman, turned westward to Broadway, travelling over the Henley Street Bridge, and down the old Sevierville Pike heading to Gatlinburg. Earlier, Colonel Starling of the Secret Service had inspected the route that the President and his party would travel from Knoxville to Gatlinburg and on to North Carolina and declared it safe. School children were let out of school to stand along the roadways and wave to the president. All the Sevier County schools were closed and the town of Sevierville was decorated in recognition of this first visit ever by a president to the county.

The President arrived in Gatlinburg at about 11:45 where he was greeted by local residents, including Harvey Oakley, the young son of Wiley Oakley. Seventy years later Harvey still remembered shaking the hand of the president as he passed through town. The *Knoxville Journal* reported that, while in Gatlinburg, Roosevelt “chatted with park officials, and amateur photographers perched on nearby poles took pictures.” One such amateur photographer was Rosemary Moorehead, a teacher at the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School, who took the photograph that illustrates the front of this *Colloquy*. She included her photo in the scrapbook that she created about her time at the Settlement School.

(The scrapbook can be viewed online at <http://www.lib.utk.edu/arrowmont/>).

After travelling through Gatlinburg, the touring party proceeded on, heading to North Carolina via the Indian Gap Highway. The first part of the trip had been in sunshine but the weather soon changed. According to *Knoxville Journal* reporter Ray Brooks, “billowing mists chased over the face of Mount LeConte. The valley grew darker and the chimney tops were barely visible through the clouds. As the ascent quickened, the mist became rain that poured in torrents.” After covering the President’s car, the motorcade travelled up the steep incline, stopping near the third tunnel because one of the buses filled with out-of-town newspapermen overheated. Cooling water from a nearby creek was added to the radiator and the ascent continued.

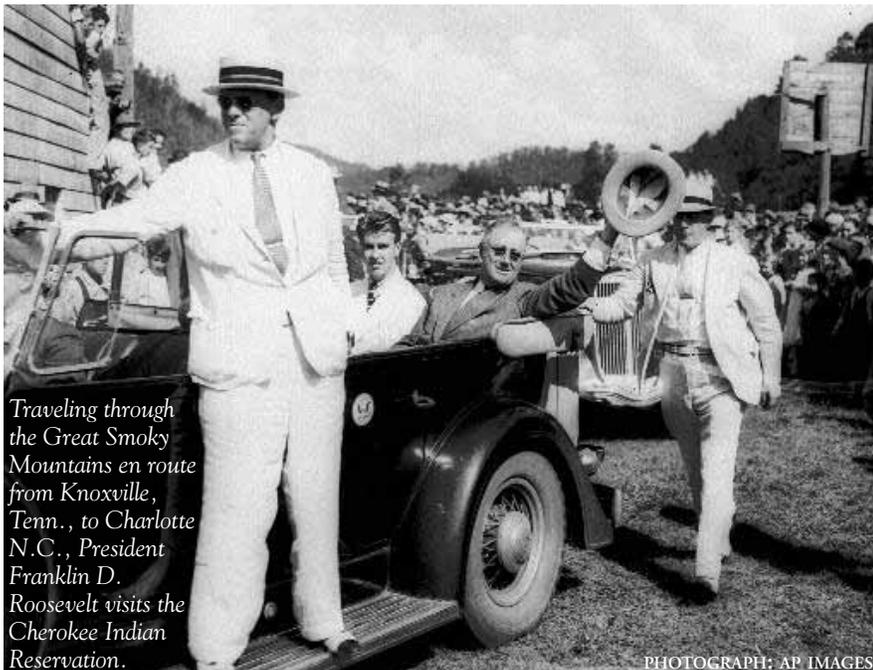
The motorcade continued to Clingmans Dome where the travellers were greeted by the manager of Knoxville’s Andrew Johnson Hotel who had earlier in the day loaded a truck with food for a picnic lunch. The menu included fried chicken, caviar and cheese sandwiches, crab salad, fruit, crackers, sardines, and soft drinks, laid out on tables and served by waiters in white coats. Although the rain came again, Roosevelt studied the view and smoked a cigarette in a short holder after lunch. Governor McAlister asked Roosevelt what he thought about the Park. The President told him that he was “very impressed by it” but he was concerned that “too many tourists will come to the park before we are ready for them.”

After the luncheon respite, the President's party left Clingmans Dome at 2:00 pm, travelling on to North Carolina. Governor McAlister was replaced in the President's car by Governor Ehringhaus. After about twenty miles, they arrived at the Cherokee Reservation. The President's car pulled over at a park in the town of Cherokee. Here the party was greeted by Chief Jarrett Blythe who performed rituals complete with the beating of drums and supplications to the sun designed to confer chieftain rank on Roosevelt, bestowing him with the honorary title Chief White Feather. As part of the presentation, the President was given a feathered headdress. Another high-ranking Cherokee, J. H. Wolf, offered Roosevelt the opportunity to shoot from a 10-foot blow-gun, a weapon used to hunt animals. Roosevelt declined the offer to try out the gun. Along with the tribal elders, several thousand Cherokee turned out to greet the President. The Secret Service had a difficult time keeping the children from climbing into the automobile. The President concluded his visit by telling the Chief that he would like to return and bring Mrs. Roosevelt.

On his way to Asheville, Roosevelt passed through several small North Carolina towns, including Dillsboro, Sylva, and Waynesville. He was greeted by crowds as he passed and he kept his hat waving in true Roosevelt fashion. After stopping in Asheville and spending the night at the Grove Park Inn, he proceeded on to Charlotte where he was to deliver a speech at the Green Pastures Rally, a gathering of dignitaries from seven Southern states (including North Carolina and Tennessee) to promote the advancement of the South in the grip of the Great Depression. Then it was back to Washington, DC.

After Roosevelt's second visit to dedicate the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1940, there has been no visit by a sitting president to the Smokies. George W. Bush planned a trip on Earth Day 2005 but was turned back by a thunderstorm, never leaving the McGee Tyson airport.

Source Note: Articles from both the *Asheville Citizen* and the *Knoxville Journal* were used in the writing of this article. The article from the September 10, 1936, *Knoxville Journal* entitled "The President Sees Smokies during Storm" by Ray Brooks was particularly useful for its detailed coverage.



Traveling through the Great Smoky Mountains en route from Knoxville, Tenn., to Charlotte N.C., President Franklin D. Roosevelt visits the Cherokee Indian Reservation.

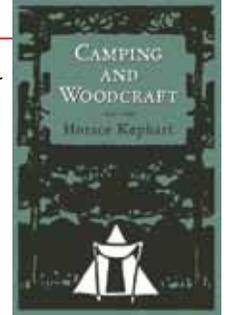
PHOTOGRAPH: AP IMAGES

## New on the Smokies Bookshelf

Horace Kephart. *Camping and Woodcraft*. Gatlinburg: Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2011. Introduction by Janet McCue and George Ellison. 888 p.

Horace Kephart's *Camping and Woodcraft*, an enduring classic among a dull crowd of unreadable and often useless outdoor field guides, has stood up well against the passage of time. It first appeared in 1906 under the title *The Handbook of Camping and Woodcraft: A Guidebook for Those Who Travel in the Wilderness*. The *Handbook* was later reissued as an expanded edition in two separate volumes—Vol. I, *Camping* in 1916, and Vol. II, *Woodcraft* in 1917. The book was a commercial success, coinciding with a rising general affluence that granted Americans greater opportunities to visit the wilderness. In 1921, the two volumes were reissued in a "Two Volumes in One" format as *Camping and Woodcraft*.

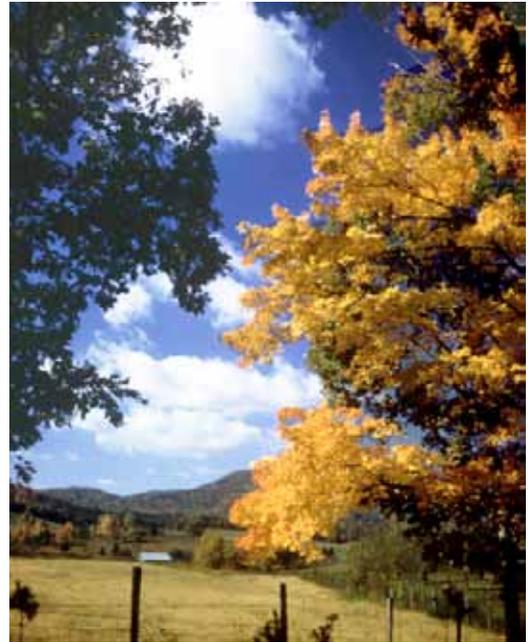
*Camping and Woodcraft* has rarely been out of print, going through several editions and impressions. The latest is a new edition published by the Great Smoky Mountains Association and released Fall 2011. The new edition is prefaced by a lengthy introductory essay by Janet McCue and George Ellison that opens new channels of Kephart scholarship. The details of Kephart's enigmatic life, particularly in the years just prior to his coming to the Smokies, have long been obscured in rumor and speculation. McCue and Ellison have delved deeply into correspondence, newspaper articles, and family records, and have emerged with a fascinating portrait of the man whose name is more closely ingrained in Smoky Mountain lore than that of any other. In addition to the expansive introduction, the new edition includes over forty recently discovered photographs taken by Kephart and his friend, photographer George Masa. Camping aficionados will want this new edition for its timeless advice on everything from building a campfire to eating well in the wilderness; those interested in Horace Kephart will want this new edition for the insightful introduction.



## You Can Be a Part of the Smokies Project

**W**e are always on the lookout for new material that we can add to the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Collection. If you have written a book or an article that you would like us to know about, please contact us at the address below. We are especially interested in acquiring manuscripts, including both written and photographic works, for the Smokies collection. Unique and rare items are added to our Special Collections where they are cataloged and preserved for future research and enjoyment. And, as with any non-profit venture, we are especially appreciative of monetary donations of any amount that allow us to process and digitize collections.

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*Wears Valley* (PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLIAM DERRIS, FROM THE WILLIAM DERRIS SLIDE COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, MS 2123)



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