

# GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS Colloquy

Spring 2014  
Volume 15 • Number 1

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE LIBRARIES



At Double Spring Gap on the Appalachian Trail. Pictured, among others, are conservationist Harvey Broome, one of the founders of the Wilderness Society; George Barber, a charter member of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club; and "Dutch" Roth, another photographer whose work records the Smokies prior to creation of the Park. *All photographs: Herbert M. Webster Digital Photograph Collection. University of Tennessee Libraries.*

## The Smokies through a New Lens

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF HERBERT M. WEBSTER

On October 19, 1924, Marshall Wilson and George Barber, directors of a YMCA camp on Little Pigeon Island in Gatlinburg, organized an informal overnight excursion to the summit of Mount Le Conte, hiking up and returning by way of a rudimentary trace following Le Conte Creek to Rainbow Falls. The experience of this overnight adventure provided the inspiration and impetus for the formation of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club which was formally organized the following year.

Within a year of the YMCA trip, a group of young campers from a boys' camp sponsored by a Knoxville Rotary Club left from Little Pigeon Island on July 4th and followed the same course up the creek by Rainbow Falls for their own overnight excursion to the summit of Le Conte. The boys were to spend the night in a small tar-paper cabin that stood just below Cliff Top. That evening, they ventured out to Cliff Top and climbed a shaky-looking pole tower that had been abandoned by surveyors, then returned to the cabin and bedded down for the night on boughs of balsam with a blanket for cover.



A Smoky Mountain still. *From Corn in a Jar: Moonshining in the Great Smoky Mountains.* See review, page 3.

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**GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS COLLOQUY** is a newsletter published by The University of Tennessee Libraries. © 2013

Co-editors:  
Anne Bridges  
Ken Wise

Correspondence and change of address:

**GSM COLLOQUY**  
120-A John C. Hodges Library  
The University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, TN 37996-1000  
865/974-0288  
Email: [smokies@utk.edu](mailto:smokies@utk.edu)  
Web: [library.utk.edu/smokies/](http://library.utk.edu/smokies/)

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Among the campers was a sixteen-year old from Fountain City, near Knoxville, named Herbert Webster. He carried with him a small box camera, a harbinger for the beginning of a lifelong avocation of photographing the Great Smoky Mountains.

Webster returned to Mount Le Conte the next summer and camped in a small balsam lodge built the previous winter by Paul Adams. Adams's

lodge was the first building that was later expanded into the Le Conte Lodge compound. The next year Webster returned again to Mount Le Conte, this time venturing out to Myrtle Point to enjoy the sunrise over the main Smoky divide. He descended by way of the old Bearpen Hollow Trail, another steep rudimentary course that provided access to Le Conte from the south side.

Within a few years, Herbert Webster was visiting the mountains regularly, venturing into the backcountry with many of those whose names are synonymous with early twentieth century exploration of the Smokies—Dutch Roth, Jim Thompson, Carlos Campbell, Guy Frizzell, Wiley Oakley, and Harvey Broome—and capturing on film the vanishing way of life of the mountaineer, the Smoky Mountain backcountry, and his own adventures in the wilderness. Many of these hikers, moreover, were instrumental in following up on that first YMCA excursion to Le Conte that engendered the idea of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club.

Webster's photographic excursions into the mountains coincided fortuitously with the transition period between the time the Smokies were, as Horace Kephart called them, a "terra incognita" and the beginnings of the formation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. At that time extensive tracts of the Smokies backcountry were still pristine wilderness, rarely visited by any except the occasional bear hunter, as yet untouched by the lumber companies stripping bare the lower slopes with their practice of clear-cutting. Webster captured not only the log cabins



and barns found scattered among the mountain hollows, but took lasting images of Drinkwater Pool, Dry Sluice Gap, and Three Forks, once familiar landmarks to the early explorers of the mountains but now places virtually unknown to all but a few visitors to the Smoky backcountry. Many of Webster's photographs included images of Greenbrier and Ravenfork, sections of the Smokies that subsequently were set aside as wilderness areas. Following his close association with the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, Webster recorded on film the club's progress in building the well-known "cabin in th' brier," assembled from the remains of abandoned pioneer log cabins scattered throughout Porters Flat.

In one sense, Herbert Webster's photography chronicles the end of the era of the Smoky mountaineer and the beginning of the invasion of the outside forces of the national park movement. He shared a penchant for wilderness exploration with others who chronicled the Smoky Mountains through their photography, particularly Dutch Roth and Jim Thompson. The Great Smoky Mountains Regional Project has recently made five hundred of Webster's images available through The Herbert M. Webster Photograph Collection, online at <http://digital.lib.utk.edu/webster>. The images in this collection rank with those of George Masa, Dutch Roth, and the Thompson Brothers as an enduring record of early mountain life in the Great Smoky Mountains.



ABOVE: Self-portrait taken at odd-shaped tree near Strattons Bald.

TOP RIGHT: Trail to Gregory by way of Gregory Ridge. Hikers crossing the foot bridge.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Undershot mill at Cherokee Orchard.

## New on the Smokies Bookshelf

Pierce, Daniel S. *Corn in a Jar: Moonshining in the Great Smoky Mountains*. Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2013.

From the stereotypical image of the violent and secretive mountaineer working his black magic in the hidden hollows of the Great Smoky Mountains to the heroic persona of modern-day Popcorn Sutton, nothing has captured the American imagination like moonshining. Daniel Pierce, professor of history at the University of North Carolina, Asheville and author of *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park*, has blown away the smoke surrounding this iconic figure, producing a short scholarly treatise on moonshiners, placing them in a proper historical context.



Children guarding moonshine.

According to Pierce, there were several changes in the homebrewed spirits industry. The 19th century mountaineers made whiskey in a traditional process much like their ancestors both in this country and from the British Isles. Corn, a readily available cultivated grain in the New World, became the key ingredient. Until 1862 when an excise tax was placed on whiskey, the process of making liquor was legal. It provided a ready and vital income to mountain families. After the introduction of the excise tax, the production process did not change but now it was illegal. Most corn whiskey was

still brewed in small family operations although there were a few larger facilities. By 1870s and 1880s efforts by the federal government to destroy the stills had intensified, although within the Smokies higher demand was stimulated by the arrival of the lumber camps.

With the advent of Prohibition in 1919, the creation and selling of illegal whiskey became a big business, with producers and middle men all profiting from whiskey of any quality and at any cost. With the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 and the formation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park a year later, the production of illegal whiskey slowed but did not completely die out. The mid-twentieth century saw the popularization of the moonshiner as he outran the federal agents in his souped-up automobile. In fact, the customization of vehicles that could outrun pursuers while safely carrying large quantities of illegal liquor became a subsidiary industry in the region just outside the Smokies. Interest in moonshine and the independent characters who created it peaked again in the early twenty-first century with the publicity accorded to and subsequent death of Popcorn Sutton of Cocke County. With the recent legalization of corn whiskey production in Tennessee, moonshine has finally become part of the mainstream popular culture.

Anyone interested in mountain life and both the real and fictionalized moonshiners will enjoy this book.



### NON-FICTION

Chase-Raper, Past Alta. *The Pastor's Ponderings*. WestBow-Press, 2013.

DeLozier, Kim. *Bear in the Back Seat: Adventures of a Wildlife Ranger in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park*, n.p., 2013.

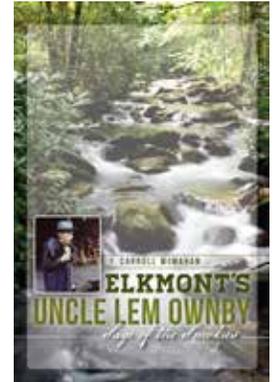
Firsch, Nate. *Great Smoky Mountains National Park* (Preserving America). Creative Entertainment, 2013.

Houk, Rose. *Smoky Mountain Elk: Return of the Native*. Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2013.

Lendemer, James Colin, Richard Clinton Harris, and Erin Anne Tripp. *The Lichens and Allied Fungi of Great Smoky Mountains National Park*. NY Botanical Press, 2013. *Memoirs of the NY Botanical Garden*, v. 104.

McMahan, F. Carroll. *Elkmont's Uncle Lem Ownby: Sage of the Smokies*. History Press, 2013.

Parins, James W. *Literacy and Intellectual Life in the Cherokee Nation, 1820-1906*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2013.



### FOLKLORE

Palmer, Gail. *Smoky Mountain Tales, volume II: Feuds, Murder & Mayhem*. CreateSpace, 2013.

### FICTION

Bledsoe, Alex. *Wisp of a Thing*. Tor, 2013.

Cook, J.J. *That Old Flame of Mine*. Berkley Prime Crime, 2013.

Graves, Paula. *Murder in the Smokies*. Harlequin, 2013.

Graves, Paula. *The Smoky Mountain Mist*. Harlequin, 2013.

Graves, Paula. *Smoky Ridge Curse*. Harlequin, 2013.

Kirst, Karen. *His Mountain Miss*. Love Inspired Books, 2013.

Ledford, Deborah J. *Crescendo*. Second Wind Pub., 2013.

Robbins, Sandra. *Beyond these Hills*. Harvest House, 2013.

Sims, Janice. *This Winter Night*. Harlequin, 2013.

### JUVENILE

Fiest, D. *The Lost Campsite of the Smokies*. D. Feist, 2013.

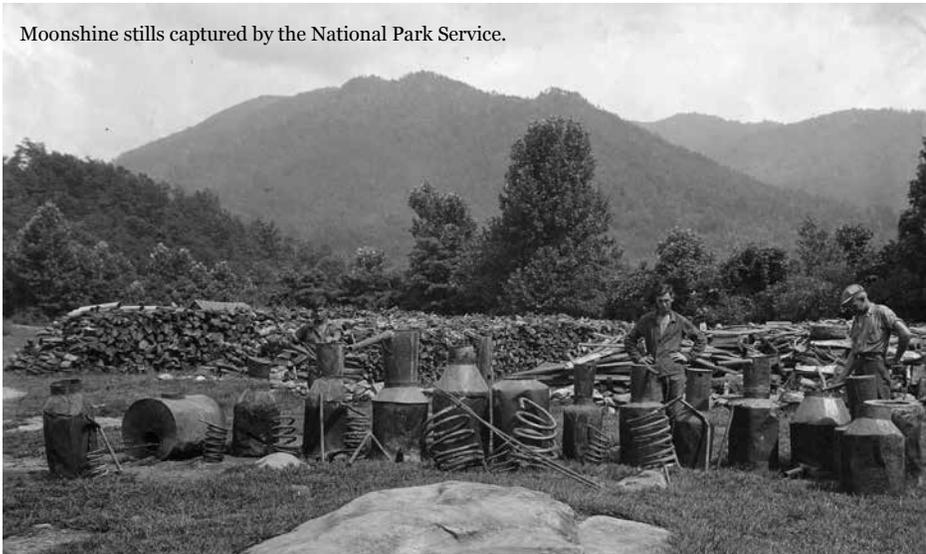
Landry, Bill and Simon Mendez. *Buddy: Dog of the Smoky Mountains*. Celtic Cat Publishing, 2013.

### MUSIC

*The Sounds of the Great Smoky Mountains*. Allegro Corporation, 2013. CD.

*Through the Great Smoky Mountains: A Musical Journey*. Allegro Corporation, 2013. CD.

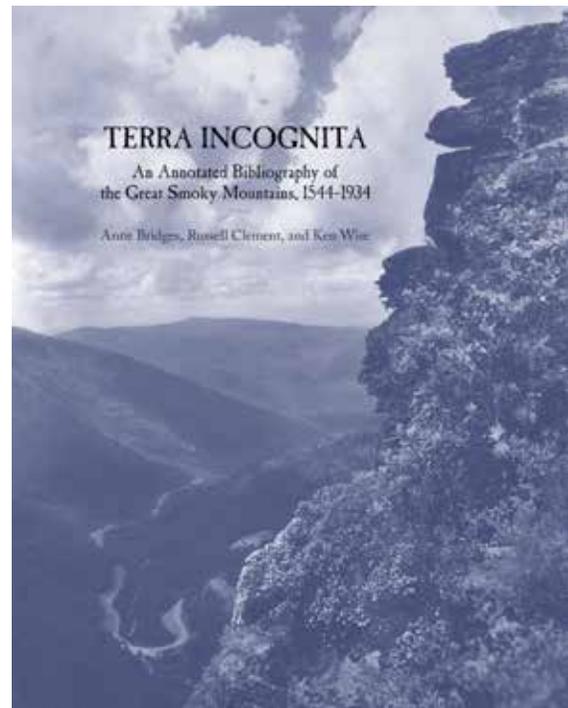
Moonshine stills captured by the National Park Service.



## *Terra Incognita* Now Available

The long awaited *Terra Incognita: An Annotated Bibliography of the Great Smoky Mountains, 1544-1934*, is now available for purchase from University of Tennessee Press. *Terra Incognita* traces the writings on the Great Smoky Mountains from the earliest map documenting the De Soto expedition in the 16th century to those instrumental in the creation of the national park. It includes published works on mountain life, early exploration, economic development, recreation, literature, music, and the Cherokee. Each section is accompanied by an introductory essay. The bibliography is the culmination of many years of work by editors Anne Bridges, Russell Clement and Ken Wise. For ordering information, visit: <http://utpress.org>.

Interested in published works from 1935 to present?  
Go to Database of the Smokies (DOTS): [dots.lib.utk.edu](http://dots.lib.utk.edu).



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The University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, TN 37996-1000