

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS Colloquy

Spring 2012
Volume 13 • Number 1

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE LIBRARIES



RETURNING HOME WITH THE DAY'S CATCH

“Woodrow and Orville Oakley helped collect on several days and this particular afternoon the party returned with about 140 spring lizards. Orville also had some snakes, but these he preferred to carry at arm's length.”

“Museum Bill,” Wiley Oakley, and the Search for the “Quare” Salamander

ONE APRIL MORNING IN 1928, WILEY OAKLEY, A SMOKY MOUNTAIN GUIDE and self-styled “Roamin’ Man of the Mountains,” walked into the Gatlinburg Post Office intent on mailing a jar.

“What you got there, Wiley?” someone asked.

“A quare salamander that I’m sending to the Museum of Natural History in New York,” Wiley replied.

“A salamander?” questioned a mountaineer, “Hit’s nothin’ but a spring lizard and you know it.”

“Yup, hit’s a spring lizard here in these mountains, but to them fellers at the museum in New York hit’s a salamander,” said Wiley. “And whut’s more, this is a quare salamander. Why jest look at them funny spots on ‘em.”

While the fellows at the post office laughed heartily at his common spring lizard, Wiley persisted with his claim that the creature was unusual.

A year before the episode in the Gatlinburg Post Office, Wiley Oakley had been hired as a guide for George P. Engelhardt, Curator in the Department of Natural Science at the Brooklyn Museum. Engelhardt had apparently

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Red-cheeked salamander [Photo by Matthew Chatfield, Haywood County, North Carolina, July 13, 2005]

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS COLLOQUY is a newsletter published by The University of Tennessee Libraries. © 2012

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SET FOR BIGGER GAME THAN SALAMANDERS

“An ardent lover of his native mountains, Wiley Oakley always had some story in store about the Smokies, their forests, wild life, and people.”

initiated Wiley into the world of natural science and afterward the mountaineer became fascinated with salamanders. Engelhardt put him in touch with the American Museum of Natural History which supplied Wiley with jars, labels, and instructions for shipping specimens to New York. It was one

of these jars that contained the “quare” salamander.

Wiley did not have to endure the laughter from his friends’ salamander jokes for long. Within a week, a young man arrived at Andy Huff’s Mountain View Hotel and inquired of “Mr. Wiley Oakley.” The man, William G. Hassler, mentioned that Mr. Oakley had just made a valuable contribution to science by sending a rosy-cheeked salamander to the Museum in New York. Hassler was then sent by the Museum’s Department of Herpetology to bring back a colony of rosy-cheeked salamanders and anything else of interest that he might find in the Smokies. Hassler requested Wiley Oakley as his guide.

Hassler remained in the Smokies for two weeks searching for salamanders with the assistance of Wiley and two of Wiley’s young sons, Woodrow and Orville. A time or two, while working up a stream, Wiley would say, “Pehaps they’re makin’ likker up thar in the holler.” A piece of stove pipe or other rusting iron in the stream was sufficient to give Hassler the uneasy feeling they might be venturing perilously close to a moonshiner’s still.

While Hassler was fortunate not to stumble upon a still, he did experience some rather rough travel over Smoky Mountain roads, enjoyed the scenery of beautiful waterfalls, and was shown a stone on Uncle Levi Trentham’s farm that marked the location of a gold mine. The huge stone had carved, deep on its face, the imprint of a man’s hand, a bear’s foot, and two eyes which, according to Indian legend, indicated the direction to the gold mine. However much he may have been tempted to abandon his scientific inquiries and look for the gold mine, Hassler continued searching the streams for salamanders.

Though they have a tail and four small legs, the skin of salamanders is unprotected and often slimy, a characteristic that separates them from true lizards, which have dry scaly skin. Hassler, with the help of Wiley, attempted to collect a few true Smoky Mountain lizards, but not until the scientist had thoroughly convinced the mountaineer that lizards were not “pizen.”

One morning Hassler caught a three-foot black snake near a barn that stood on Wiley Oakley’s property. Wiley, however, did not appreciate the snake and insisted that Hassler carry the bag with the snake. Back in Gatlinburg, where Hassler was becoming known affectionately as “Museum Bill,” his black snake was even less appreciated. However, the snake soon became a fixture in Gatlinburg and was given the name “Blackie.” Blackie, along with 570 salamanders and several other snakes, was packed carefully in a trunk and sent to the Museum in New York. The salamanders all thrived, increasing in numbers, and living happily in one of the big ice-boxes in the museum. But poor Blackie had to be etherized [euthanized]. He was then permanently placed in a case with the inscription “*Elaphe o obsolete*. Gatlinburg, Tennessee, May 10th, 1928.”

William Hassler returned to New York and later wrote an article about his adventures in the Great Smoky Mountains. In Gatlinburg, he was remembered for several years afterward as “the feller that took the scare out of handling black-snakes.”

SOURCES:

William G. Hassler. “Salamanders of the Great Smokies,” *Natural History* 9, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1929): 95-9.

“Smoky Salamanders Sought by Science.” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* 18 August 1929: sec. C1.

[Black-and-white photos from Hassler, “Salamanders of the Great Smokies”]



WHERE LIZARDS MAKE THEMSELVES AT HOME

“Fence lizards and skinks were often seen basking in the sun on old buildings, fences, and stone piles, so the expedition stopped to look for them on this unoccupied mountain house near ‘Pant’er Creek.’”

New on the Smokies Bookshelf

 FICTION

Bennett, Jenny. *Murder at the Jumpoff*.

Canterbury House Pub, 2012.

Clay, Larry W. *Mystery Mountains: The Day the Sun Died in the Great Smoky Mountains*. PublishAmerica, 2011.

Graham, Patricia H. and Verna Crowe Humphrey. *Hillbilly Tales from the Smoky Mountains: and Other Homespun Remedies, Proverbs, and Poetry*. E-Book Time, 2011.

Graves, Paula. *Secret Identity*. Harlequin, 2012

Kirst, Karen. *The Reluctant Outlaw*. Love Inspired, 2011.

Lane, Vicki. *Under the Skin: A Full Circle Farm Mystery*. Bantam Books, 2011.

Webster, Jeanne. *Strays*. Personhood Press, 2011.

 NON-FICTION

Adkins, Leonard M. *Along the Appalachian Trail: Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee*. Arcadia Pub., 2012.

Anderson, Christine. *The Carolinas & Georgia*. Fodor's Travel Publications, 2011.

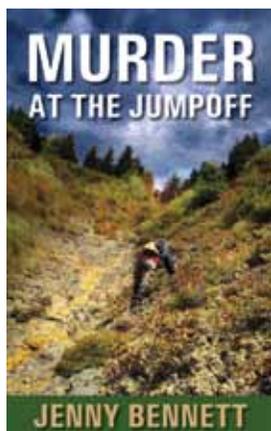
Bernstein, Danny. *Hiking North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains: Blue Ridge Parkway, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Hickory Nut Gorge, Linville Gorge, NC State Parks, Pisgah National Forest and Much More*. Milestone Press, 2012.

Kavanagh, Bill and Raymond Long. *Great Smoky Mountains Wildlife: An Introduction to Familiar Species*. Waterford Press, 2011.

Koontz, Katy. *Family Fun in the Smokies*. Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2012.

Landry, Bill. *Appalachian Tales & Heartland Adventures*. Celtic Cat Pub., 2011.

Molloy, Johnny. *Top Trails: Great Smoky Mountains National Park: Must-Do Hikes for Everyone*. Wilderness Press, 2012.



Newfont, Kathryn. *Blue Ridge Commons: Environmental Activism and Forest History in Western North Carolina*. University of Georgia Press, 2012.

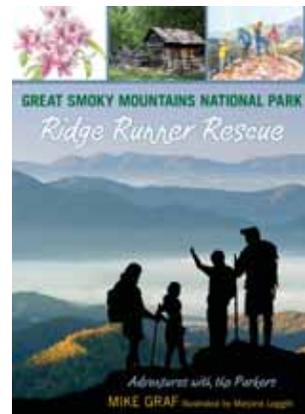
Plott, Bob. *Colorful Characters of the Great Smoky Mountains*. History Press, 2011.

 JUVENILE

Graf, Mike. *Great Smoky Mountains National Park: Ridge*

Runner Rescue (Aventures with the Parkers). FalconGuides, 2012.

Simpson, Ann Cary and Rob Simpson. *Smoky Mountain Babies*. Farcountry Press, 2011.



A Serendipitous Find

ONE OF THE EARLIEST STUDENT PUBLICATIONS associated with UT is a short-lived magazine known as the *Tennessee University Student*. Extant copies of the magazine are so rare that the UT Libraries possesses only a few issues of the first volume, published in 1888.

Last fall, a copy of the first issue of the second volume of the *Tennessee University Student* (1889) surfaced when Knoxvilleian Alix Dempster called and informed us that she had just read an interesting article about a students' spring break excursion to the Great Smoky Mountains. The issue had been preserved by UT alumnus Milton Hinshilwood among some old fraternity records.

During his student days at UT, Hinshilwood was a member of Phi Gamma Delta and later collected historical material on the fraternity. Included in his collection was material on Mac Davis, the first president of Phi Gamma Delta and the editor of the *Tennessee University Student*. It was Mac Davis's article, "Rambles in the Great Smokies," that attracted Alix Dempster's attention.

Mr. Hinshilwood was most gracious in donating the issue of the *Tennessee University Student* to the UT Libraries' Special Collections, making it a valuable addition to the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Collection. This fortunate set of events reminds us again of the important role donors and supporters play in helping us identify and acquire rare and obscure Smoky Mountain source material.

New Online Collection Featuring Photos of Early Mount Le Conte

EARLY IN 1925, A YOUNG MAN NAMED PAUL ADAMS WAS retained by Colonel David Chapman, president of the Smoky Mountain Conservation Association, to build a lodge on the summit of Mount Le Conte. The Association wished to encourage hiking and camping in the mountains as part of an overall strategy to promote the establishment of a national park in the Smokies. Adams was instructed to tear down an old tar-paper lean-to that stood near Cliff Top and build a new shelter on the north side of the summit near Basin Spring. In the company of his faithful German shepherd, Cumberland Jack, Adams spent the winter of 1925-26 on the mountain clearing the slope and constructing a 15' x 20' cabin of notched spruced and fir. Every few days, Cumberland Jack was fitted with saddle bags and sent down the mountain to Charlie Ogle's store in Gatlinburg to pick up food and supplies for the two.

A few years ago, the University of Tennessee Library acquired a small parcel of photographs from the period when Paul Adams first started work on the compound that would eventually become known as Le Conte Lodge. The photographs are part of the Ilene Jones Cornwell Papers

in the UT Libraries' Special Collections. The images include several of the Adams lodge in various stages of completion as well as the nearby Huff lodge that was built the next year. Thanks to the efforts of practicum student Lyndy Wibking the photographs are now available online as the "The Paul J. Adams Photograph Collection." [<http://www.lib.utk.edu/digitalcollections/gsm.html>]



First log cabin built on the summit of Mount Le Conte.



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