

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS
Colloquy
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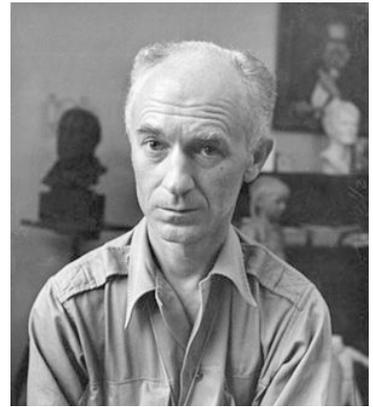
Gatlinburg, Tennessee, circa 1940.

“Just Like You’d Want a Mountain Resort to Be”

ERNIE PYLE IN GATLINBURG

Gatlinburg is a “charming little city, oozing with handicraft shops and tasteful inns and lovely stone houses and saddle horses and pretty girls in jodhpurs.” So begins the first of eleven newspaper columns penned in Autumn of 1940 by nationally well-known syndicated columnist Ernie Pyle, under the byline “The Roving Reporter.” Pyle continues his description, “Gatlinburg lies in a cup, and low wooded mountains rise on every side, and a little river runs behind the town, and the main street goes a little uphill and around a couple of bends, and it is all just like you’d want a mountain resort to be.”

By the time of his 1940 visit to Gatlinburg, Ernie Pyle had spent five years crisscrossing the United States, observing events, interviewing common people, and writing six newspaper columns each week regaling readers with stories of his adventures and observations. His columns were published in newspapers owned by the Scripps Howard Company in places like New York City, Fort Worth, Indianapolis, Albuquerque, and Knoxville. Readers in the Knoxville area followed his travels through the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*. Pyle’s regular column was a bright spot for people who had wearied of the depressing economic and international news of the day. Pyle sought out the unusual and interesting, adding details that allowed the reader to experience life as



Ernie Pyle. *Life Magazine*, 1944.
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Co-editors:
Anne Bridges
Ken Wise

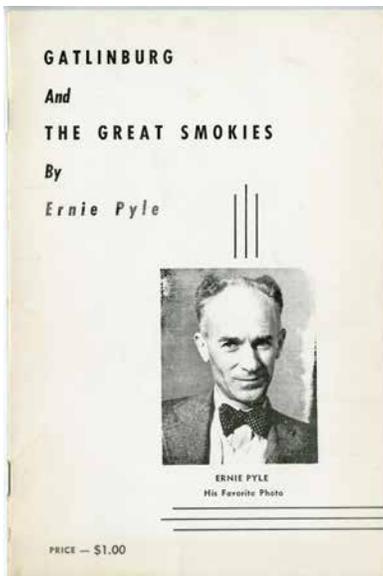
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Ernie Pyle's Gatlinburg columns were compiled into this small book.

he saw it. The craft of writing intimate portraits of places and people that Pyle honed on his travels prepared him for his subsequent, most challenging assignment, reporting as an imbedded journalist overseas with American troops during World War II. On the battlefield, Pyle became the voice of the

average soldier and, until his death from enemy fire in 1945, helped a nation understand the experiences of their loved ones fighting in Europe and Asia.

After submitting a couple of introductory columns about Gatlinburg and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Pyle decided to visit the popular tourist lodge on the summit of Mount Le Conte. Before making his climb to the lodge via the Alum Cave Trail, he sought advice from Park Ranger Harold Edwards. The ranger explained that it would take him five hours to make the climb and that it would be "the longest five and a half miles I ever walked." Pyle was no stranger to mountain climbing, but he prepared himself for a rigorous hike. He packed light, deciding not to take "sun glasses, nor a camera, nor a bottle of water, nor a ten-pound toilet kit, nor my new tuxedo. . . ." He was surprised when he easily made the climb in less than three hours.

During the hike, Pyle was astonished by the views. He realized that "there can be as much majesty and stirring beauty in Eastern Mountains as in the Rockies. Several times he stopped and surveyed his surroundings, later writing, "I don't know that I have ever seen a lovelier sight than the onward-stretching undulations of the haze-softened and color-splashed immensities of the Great Smoky Mountains."

Pyle's host on Mount Le Conte was Jack Huff, a Gatlinburg native who had been caretaker of the lodge since the time he finished high school. Jack's wife, Pauline, had come to the mountains in the 1920s as a teacher at the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School in Gatlinburg, and the two were now raising their family at the lodge. Pyle was impressed with Jack's many skills, including the construction of cabins and the weaving of curtains. Jack stayed abreast of the news of the day by listening to the radio and reading newspapers and magazines.

On Pyle's second day at the lodge, he was joined by two businessmen from Cleveland. They sat beside the fire and "waxed, you might say, a little philosophic." They told stories and solved all the problems of the world, as people will do around a fire at night. One of the businessmen declared that he did not need modern conveniences, extolling the virtues of "cold bedrooms and candlelight and straw ticks." Pyle was pleased to learn the next morning that he had "damn near froze to death, just as I did." After an excellent breakfast, Pyle hiked back down the mountain, nursing a bad knee that "creaked so loud I couldn't hear the birds sing."

In several later columns, Pyle entertained his readers with details about Gatlinburg's prominent families and businesses, including hotel owners Steve Whaley and Andy Huff, who were both competitors and friends. Andy, the father of Jack Huff, was the proprietor of the Mountain View Hotel. Andy's neighbor, known affectionately as "Uncle Steve," is described by Pyle as being "dry and droll. He's dumb like a fox. . . . He sort of halfway grins when he talks, and his humor is so left-handed you don't know half the time whether he is joking or not."

Pyle's next stop was Cades Cove, which he visited in the company of Ranger Edwards.



Mountain View Hotel, owned by Andy Huff. Jack Huff, photographer.

Even several years after the creation of the National Park, he noted that there were still nineteen families remaining in the cove. “They have cars and trucks and tractors, and a school and a store and even a post office with an R.F.D. carrier. They are still pretty much in their own world.” However, the mountain people who live on National Park lands cannot maintain an independent lifestyle and are living within “the shell of their traditional existence.” They cannot hunt, trap, or even cut down a tree. They cannot even own a gun unless the owner himself is a “trusted old-timer allowed to keep it for sentimental reasons.”

After a few more days in the Gatlinburg area, Pyle was off to a new locale, leaving behind tales of Smoky Mountain stories and characters for his nationwide

readers. Many people, he says, do not know about the new national park. He expects the Smokies will not remain a secret for long “after this mass of words which this column has fired into the air.”

Sources:

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Nichols, David, editor. *Ernie's America: The Best of Ernie Pyle's 1930s Travel Dispatches*. New York, Random House, 1989.

Knoxville News-Sentinel, October 22–November 4, 1940. (KNS is available online, from 1922 to the present, through the Knox County Public Library for patrons with a library card. Also available online to UT students and faculty and to anyone onsite at UT's libraries.)

A Good Bear Story by Ernie Pyle (*Knoxville News-Sentinel*, November 4, 1940, p. 13)

Gatlinburg, Tenn.—Uncle Steve Cole lives on at his old home place, right in the park. He is a typical mountain man of the old school—a good mountain man, the kind who lives right and does right.

I dropped in one afternoon to talk to him. Uncle Steve lit a fire, and sat down beside it and began spitting in the fireplace. He wasn't chewing tobacco, but he spit in the fireplace all the time anyhow.

Uncle Steve had killed more bears than any man in these mountains. He says so himself, and others say so too. He hasn't the remotest idea how many he has killed. But he has killed bears with muzzle-loaders, modern rifles, deadfalls, clubs, axes, and he even choked one to death with his bare hands.

I got him to tell me that story. He and a neighbor went out one night. The dogs treed a bear. The way Uncle Steve tells it would take half an hour, and that's too long for us. But the essence of it was that they built a fire, the bear finally came down the tree. Uncle Steve stood there until the bear's body was pressing on the muzzle of the gun, and then he pulled the trigger. “I figured I couldn't miss that way,” Uncle Steve laughs.

He didn't miss, but the shot didn't kill the bear. He ran 50 yards or so, and then the dogs were on him. And the first thing Uncle Steve knew the bear had clenched his great jaws right down on a dog's snoot, and was just crushing it to pieces.

Now Uncle Steve's gun was an old-fashioned, sawed-off muzzle-loading hog rifle, and he didn't have time to reload it. So to save the dog, he just rushed up to the bear

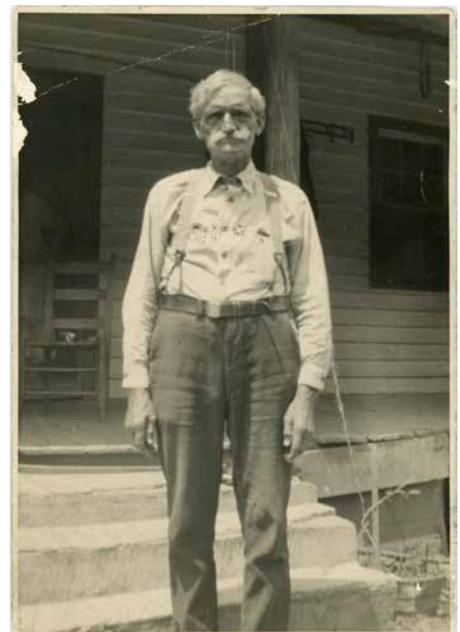
from behind, put his legs around the bear, and started prying the dog's snoot out of the bear's mouth.

“And before I knew what happened,” says Uncle Steve, “the bear let go of the dog, and got my right hand in his mouth, and began a-crunchin' and a-growlin' and a-eating on my hand.

“One long tooth went right through the palm of my hand, and another went through the back of my hand. There wasn't nothin' for me to do but reach around with my left hand for the bear's throat. I got him by the goozle and started clampin' down. Pretty soon he let go. Then I just choked him till he was deader'n 4 o'clock.” Uncle Steve spit in the fireplace.

Mrs. Cole was sitting on the bed, listening. Nobody said anything for a minute. Then Mrs. Cole chuckled and said, “Four o'clock ain't dead.”

Uncle Steve didn't dignify her quibble with an answer. He just spit in the fireplace again.



Steve Cole. Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives. (Used with permission)

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New on the Smokies Bookshelf

FICTION

Murray, Ed A. *Somewhere More Than Free*. Glacier Made Books, 2017.

Palmer, Gail. *The Midwives' Quilt: A Tale of Conflict and Intrigue in the Smoky Mountains*. Smoky Mountain Publishers, 2016.

Rash, Ron. *The Risen: A Novel*. HarperCollins, 2016.

Reid, Penny. *Grin & Beard It*. Caped Publishing, 2016.

Scarborough, Jan. *Heart to Heart*. Saddle Horse Press, 2016.

Steph, Lin. *Welcome Back*. Kensington Books, 2016.

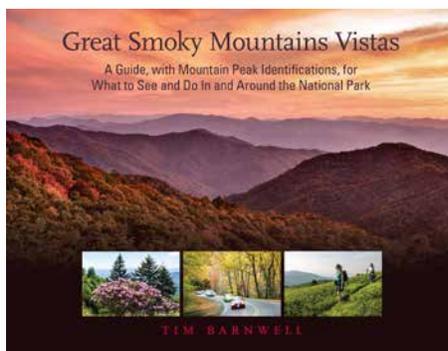
Thome, Andrea. *Walland*. Hesse Creek Media, 2016.

NON-FICTION

Bradley, Michael R. *Death in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park: Stories of Accidents and Foolhardiness in the Most Popular Park*. Lyons Press, 2016.

Barnwell, Tim. *Great Smoky Mountains Vistas: A Guide, with Mountain Peak Identifications, for What to See and Do In and Around the National Park*. Numinous Editions, 2016.

Carter, Nick. *Flyfisher's Guide to North Carolina & Georgia*. Wilderness Adventures Press, Inc., 2017.



Denson, Andrew. *Monuments to Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Context over Southern Memory*. University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Faust, Lynn. *Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs: Identification and Natural History of the Fireflies of the Eastern and Central United States and Canada*. University of Georgia Press, 2017.

Frye, Jason. *Asheville & the Great Smoky Mountains*. Avalon Ravel, 2016.

Lewis, Sara Margery. *Silent Sparks: The Wondrous World of Fireflies*. Princeton University Press, 2016.

Lix, Courtney. *No Place for the Weary Kind: Women of the Smokies*. Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2016.

Mandrell, Lee. *The Great Smoky Mountains: A Visual Journey*. Indiana University Press, 2016.

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Gilbert, Sara. *Great Smoky Mountains*. Creative Education, 2016.

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Ogintz, Eileen. *The Kid's Guide to the Great Smoky Mountains*. Globe Pequot, 2016.

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Girl in Woods. Passion River Films. 2016. DVD.

On Top of Old Smoky: New Old Time Smoky Mountain Music. Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2016. Compact disc.

