

# GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS Colloquy

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## On Top of Le Conte

The earliest recorded modern human “improvement” found on Mount Le Conte was a rude hunter’s lean-to that once stood in the gently sloping basin just below Cliff Top. In July of 1925, Paul Adams, a 23-year-old East Tennessee mountaineer, unintentionally discovered the lean-to while stumbling around in a fir thicket searching for a spring. Adams found the old shelter rotting and fairly dilapidated, but structurally similar to another lean-to he had discovered and repaired on his first trip to Le Conte in 1918. There is no record of who built either of these early shelters. Quite conceivably they may have been the work of three hunters who visited the summit of Le Conte in 1880 and recorded their visit on a piece of slate bearing their names and a crude etching of a hunter aiming a gun at a deer pursued by a dog.

Between Adams’s first visit in 1918 and his return in 1925, at least two other camps were built on the top of Le Conte. The first was a tiny cabin, about eight feet by six, built in 1921 by Davis Brackin and his son Andy. This cabin stood in the Lily Field along the old Bear Pen Hollow Trail just southwest of Cliff Top. The second camp was a makeshift bark lean-to erected about 1922 north of and just below Cliff Top. Tradition suggests that this shelter was built by Will Ramsay and Wiley Oakley under the direction of Andy Huff as a camp for the men Huff had hired to improve the trail from Rainbow Falls to the summit of Le Conte.

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All photographs are from the  
Ilene Jones Cornwell Collection,  
UT Libraries.



*Above: Paul Jay Adams, 1975.  
(Photo by Mrs. Arnold C. Moore.)*

*Left: Smoky Mountains Hiking  
Club in front of “The House That  
Jack Built,” winter of 1929.*

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## On Top of Le Conte, continued from page 1

Adams's account of these early adventures on Mount Le Conte was later published in *Mt. LeConte* (Knoxville: Holston Printing Co., 1966), a short autobiographical report of Adam's own involvement in the early stages of the Park movement. At the time of his 1925 visit, he occupied another camp on Le Conte maintained for the convenience of rangers from the Champion Fibre Company, which owned the mountainside. This camp was a tarpaper-covered shack erected just north of Cliff Top, probably on the same site as the old bark lean-to built earlier by Ramsay and Oakley. In the summer of 1925, Adams was retained by the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association to dismantle the old tarpaper camp and build a new one nearer to the spring. It was during this period that Adams began taking photographs that chronicle the beginnings of the new camp that is now known as Le Conte Lodge.

During the winter of 1925-26, Adams built the first cabin at the new camp. It was a fifteen-by-twenty-foot structure that stood just west of the present Le Conte Lodge. The cabin was constructed of notched spruce and fir logs and fitted with a floor made of four-foot puncheons set on joists spaced two feet apart. The cracks were chinked with a mixture of clay and moss, and the roof was shingled with shakes riven from fir. The rear section of the cabin was reserved for bunks made of poles notched into the sides of the cabin walls. The cabin had one window and a door made of thin seven-foot-long puncheons opening to the inside. The building was heated by a "drum heater" stove placed near the center of the room.

Adams operated his new camp less than a year before it was taken over by Jack Huff and Will Ramsay. Huff began immediately to build the first Le Conte Lodge, a thirty-by-twenty-four-foot cabin that was soon



*Cumberland Jack in front of his kennel atop Mount Le Conte, 1925.*



*Top: Tarpaper shack on Mount Le Conte, 1924. Bottom: First log cabin built on Mount Le Conte, winter of 1925-1926.*

christened "The House That Jack Built." Huff's lodge was constructed entirely of balsam wood with the tree trunks laid lengthwise. The chinks were filled with moss from which ferns and shamrock-like wood sorrel grew all the way from the ground to the eaves. The roof was built of boards waterproofed with tarpaper and weighted with gravel.

The floor of the lodge was hard dry clay and the fireplace was made of rocks. The fireplace end of the room was bordered with board seats, and a straight-back bench extended across the room in front of the fireplace. The door, three feet wide and four feet six inches high stood opposite the fireplace. Bunk beds, sixteen upper and sixteen lower, were situated near the door of the lodge. They were made of floorboarding covered with thick layers of balsam branches and finished with blankets placed over the branches. Guests slept fully clothed, four abreast, with no separate accommodations for men and women. The fire was kept going all night with the door and all windows open, regardless of weather.

Today, all that remains of these early structures are photographs such as the ones that appear in this issue of "Colloquy." For more information on Paul Adams, see: Cornwell, Ilene Jones. "Paul Jay Adams: A Pioneering Naturalist." *The Tennessee Conservationist* 51, no. 4 (July/August 1985): 4-8.

## Recent Additions to the Manuscript Collections at UT Libraries

### A. Randolph Shields Collection, 1938-1996

A. Randolph Shields, former biology professor at Maryville College and author of several books on Cades Cove, has donated four boxes of materials from his teaching and community activities which include articles and papers written on the Great Smoky Mountains. Most materials are from or about the following organizations: the Tennessee Historical Commission, Alcoa Kiwanis, Blount County Genealogical and Historical Society, Appalachian Consortium, Southern Regional Education Board, and the Mid-Appalachian College Council, Inc. Materials include class and lecture notes, reports, publications, certificates, ledger books, maps, and correspondence. Also included are photographs and slides, primarily of Cades Cove and flora of the Great Smoky Mountains.



*Basin Spring camp, winter of 1926-1927. Paul Jay Adams with his dog, Cumberland Jack, on the right.*

*Mount Le Conte, 1926. Adams cabin on left, "The House That Jack Built" on right.*



## New on the Smokies Bookshelf

Barnes, Judy, Jolane Edwards, and Carolyn Lee Goodloe. *Coasting the Mountains*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Pub., 2001.

Boyd, Brian A. *The Great Smoky Mountains Pocket Companion*. Clayton, Ga.: Fern Creek Press, 2001.

Boyd, Brian A. *Waterfalls of the Southern Appalachians & Great Smoky Mountains*. 4th. ed. Clayton, Ga.: Fern Creek Press, 2001.

Horstman, Lisa. *The Troublesome Cub*. Gatlinburg, Tenn.: Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association, 2001.

Jolley, Harley. *The CCC in the Smokies*. Gatlinburg, Tenn.: Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association, 2001.

McHugh, Dick and Mitch Moore. *Insiders' Guide to the Great Smoky Mountains*. 2nd. ed. Guilford, Conn.: Globe Pequot Press, 2001.

Netherton, John. *Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tiny Folio Series*. Washington, D.C.: National Parks and Conservation Association, 2001.

Parce, Mead. *Twice-Told True Tales of the Blue Ridge & Great Smokies*. Enlarged ed. Asheville, N.C.: Historical Images, 2001.

Tilley, Steve and Jim Huheey. *Reptiles & Amphibians of the Smokies*. Gatlinburg, Tenn.: Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association, 2001.

## Upcoming Documentary on Photographer George Masa

Paul Bonesteel and Jami Daniels of Bonesteel Films Inc. in Asheville are completing the research phase of a documentary film project entitled "The Mystery of George Masa," a notable early Great Smoky Mountains photographer. Thus far, their work has yielded more than seven hundred still images and 150 other items, including correspondence, newspaper clippings, brochures, and papers; some of which have never been seen by other writers and researchers. Eight people who knew Masa personally are acting as consultants and interview subjects for the project, which will reveal provocative facts about Masa's life. Bonesteel and Daniels would appreciate hearing from anyone with information on Masa. You may contact them at 828-236-0300 or by e-mail at [jamisteel@aol.com](mailto:jamisteel@aol.com).

## New Manuscript Link from the Smokies Project Website

We have added to our Website links to online manuscript finding aids for Great Smoky Mountains collections across the country, from the Bancroft Library at UC Berkley to our own UT Special Collections. Go to: [www.lib.utk.edu/refs/smokies/mancolls.html](http://www.lib.utk.edu/refs/smokies/mancolls.html). If you know of other finding aids that should be included, please let us know.



*Another view of the first log cabin built on Mount Le Conte, winter of 1925-1926.*



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