

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

Colloquy

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Did Horace Kephart set foot on Mount Kephart?

The photograph of Horace Kephart which accompanies this article is widely thought to have been taken on Mount Kephart in the Great Smoky Mountains. The photographer is, without question, Kephart's friend and well-known Smokies photographer George Masa. In a strange circumstance, there have been two peaks in the Smokies named Mount Kephart. But Horace Kephart, celebrated North Carolina author and outdoorsman, probably never set foot on either.

On October 3, 1928, Horace Kephart was honored by the United States Geographic Board for his efforts in the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park by having his name affixed to a peak on the main Smoky divide 2 ½ miles northeast of Clingmans Dome. For thirty years prior, this peak had been known as Mount Collins; and prior to that as Meigs Post. On the same date, the Geographic Board announced the naming of another peak on the Smoky divide eight miles northeast of Clingmans Dome, designating it as Mount Collins.

(continued on page 2)

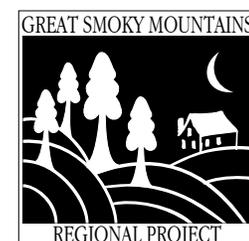


Myron Avery measuring the Appalachian Trail. There are more than 800 miles of trails in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. (ALBERT "DUTCH" ROTH DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION)

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Did Horace Kephart set foot on Mount Kephart? *continued*

On Sunday June 9, 1929, Charlie Conner, a native Smoky mountaineer, accompanied an exploration party sponsored by the *Asheville Times* three miles southwest along the Smoky divide from a base camp at Indian Gap to the recently-named Mount Kephart. The occasion for the trip was to place a marker commemorating the Geographic Board's decision to officially name the peak in honor of Horace Kephart. Six days later, Conner led the *Times* party northeast along the divide to the newly named Mount Collins. Their immediate destination was a ridge on the north face of Mount Collins known as the Jump-Off, a remarkable vantage point that affords the traveler a superb view east along the meander of the Smoky divide as far as Mount Guyot.

From the Jump-Off, the *Times* party could gaze along the Sawteeth, a section of the Smoky divide that gets its name from the jagged little peaks that line the narrow ridgeline at fairly regular intervals of about fifty yards. The peaks range in various heights from a few feet to nearly a hundred. Early travelers who managed to reach the Sawteeth remarked that it was practically impossible to climb over the "teeth," making it necessary to go below them along steep cliffs. Loose slate and crumbling rocks made climbing the ridge perilous. The mountain drops off almost perpendicular in many places for hundreds of feet on both sides. In short, the Sawteeth stood as a formidable barrier to anyone attempting to approach Mount Collins from the east.

Charlie Conner, who had some familiarity with this part of the Smokies, advised the *Times* party against attempting the Sawtooth from the west, recommending instead an approach from the vicinity of Enloe Creek. Under Conner's guidance, the party traveled for two days to an old camp on Enloe Creek only to find it occupied by Horace Kephart, who had arrived the day before. They found Kephart sitting comfortably under a beech tree smoking. He explained that he felt lazy and contented. "I like to sit around camp like this," he said. "What little inspiration I get comes to me on minutes like this." Encamped with Kephart was his friend, photographer George Masa.



Little Greenbrier Cemetery and School. There are 170 documented cemeteries in the Smokies. (ALBERT "DUTCH" ROTH DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION)

In the evening all gathered around Kephart's campfire exchanging stores of adventures in the mountains. Kephart confessed that he had never been to Mount Kephart but was hoping to go later in the summer. Moreover, he had not been on the Smoky divide at any point as far east as Mount Collins, but was planning to visit Mount Guyot within the next few days.

On Wednesday, June 19, George Masa, his guide Walter Beck, and camera-bearer Emmitt Reagen attempted to reach the Sawteeth from Enloe Creek. After becoming confused and straying off onto Hughes Ridge, the three lost considerable time and returned to camp without reaching their destination. As a result of the difficulty, Masa concluded that this was not a suitable route for Kephart, then 67 years old, to reach the Sawteeth. Kephart and Masa broke camp the next day, announcing their intention of proceeding to Three Forks and from there to Mount Guyot. Before leaving Enloe Creek, Masa mentioned the possibility of later trying the Sawteeth from Bradley Fork.

Despite skepticism and warning from Beck on the danger of the proposed route, the *Times* party attempted on the next day to assault the Sawteeth by the same route Masa had attempted and failed. They managed to advance as far as Laurel Top. Then, late in the day they turned down into North Carolina. After spending the night in the balsam zone, the party started back toward Enloe Creek, passing on the way an old camp near Bradley Fork which Conner identified as the Washout Branch Camp.

On Tuesday, June 25, the *Times* party broke camp at Enloe Creek and ventured nine miles to Three Forks, a well-known camp occasionally used as a base from which to attempt Mount Guyot. They found the camp crowded with a party of surveyors, but nothing of Kephart and Masa. If Masa had surmised that the Sawteeth from Enloe Creek was out of the question for the 67-year old Kephart, he may well have been convinced that Mount Guyot from Three Forks would be equally daunting and thus abandoned the camp.

Abrams Creek. The mouth of Abrams Creek has the lowest elevation in the Smokies, 840 feet. (THOMPSON BROTHERS DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION)



What is known, however, is that later in the year Charlie Conner returned to the Washout Branch Camp accompanying Kephart and Masa. Conner had been retained to lead the two men to the Sawteeth by the route that the *Times* party had descended. In an interview several years afterward, Conner mentioned that he and Masa climbed to the Sawteeth from the Washout Camp but Kephart did not accompany them. The two men apparently traveled west toward Mount Collins. The only other record of the trip is photographs taken by Masa of two wooden tombstones of ancient origin which he identified as being in the vicinity of a rocky protrusion later known as Charlies Bunion. When Conner and Masa returned to the Washout Camp, the guide gave an account of their trip to Kephart, who had remained behind.

By the end of 1929, it was clear that Horace Kephart had yet to visit either Mount Kephart or Mount Collins. By April 2, 1931, Kephart was dead, killed in an automobile accident. During the interim, controversy with North Carolinians over the naming of Mount Kephart forced the Geographic Board to consider restoring the name Mount Collins to its original place at Meigs Post. In January 1931, and "under the terms of a joint agreement between authorized representatives of North Carolina and Tennessee, approved by Mr. Kephart," the name Mount Kephart was transferred to the peak eight miles northeast of Clingmans Dome and the name Mount Collins restored to the peak 2 ½ miles from the Dome.

If Kephart visited his namesake during the year prior to his death, it would therefore have been to the peak 2 ½ miles northeast of Clingmans Dome, the current Mount Collins. But there is no evidence that he ever ventured there. If he had the strength and stamina at his age to visit the peak eight miles northeast of Clingmans, the current Mount Kephart, he would have done so without the assistance of Charlie Conner who did not return to this part of the Smoky divide until several years afterward. There is no evidence that he made this hike either.

Whether before or after the Geographic Board exchanged the place names, it is unlikely that Horace Kephart ever set foot on a peak in the Smokies named Mount Kephart. And thus the setting of George Masa's photograph of Horace Kephart remains a mystery.

REFERENCES

Sixth Report of the United States Geographic Board 1890 to 1932, Washington D.C. 1933.

"*Times'* Explorers Tell Experiences in Great Smokies," *Asheville Times*, July 5 - July 21, 1929.

"Smoky Peak, Charlies Bunion, Got Name in 1929, but Charlie Had Nary a Bunion," *Knoxville Journal*, June 5, 1938.

"Mountains Hold Secret of Lost Graveyard," *Knoxville Journal*, June 13, 1935.

"After Ten Years, 'Charlie' Visits 'Charlies Bunion'," *Knoxville Journal*, April 1, 1941.

"Tales from the Woods"



Recommended hiking equipment. From "Tales from the Woods."

In the late 1950s, Albert "Dutch" Roth compiled a journal entitled "Tales from the Woods," documenting his many years hiking with the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, an organization that he helped found in 1924. The journal is filled with reports of individual hikes, details on the formation of the Appalachian Trail, and general hiking advice, all illustrated with drawings and photographs, mostly taken by Dutch himself. In the early years, the hiking and camping were rough. The trails were either ill-formed or non-existent and even getting to the trailhead could be a challenge. Typical of Roth's humorous and understated entries is this one entitled "Cold and Cloudy":

In June 1929, one of my Buddies and I started on a hike to Clingmans Dome, highest peak in the Smokies. We left town early Saturday morning and drove as far as we could into Cades Cove, then we started hiking. The more we hiked the colder it got. The atmosphere got so cloudy, that we couldn't even see the mountain, let alone climb it. But we knew it was still there somewhere. However, the weather got so cold that we were forced to stop at a logger's hut about a mile from the top of Gregory Bald. There we remained over night. This old hut wasn't the Ritz by any means, but it sure looked good to us. Just roll up in a blanket, use a boot for a pillow and you will be surprised how well you can sleep, after being in the cold all day. The next day we came back to our cars.

The journal joins the Roth photographs as part of the University of Tennessee Digital Library. Christina Hewgley, a graduate student in UT's School of Information Sciences, digitized the journal as part of a practicum experience, under the guidance of the Smokies Project directors and the staff of the Digital Library. The original journal, a gift from the Roth family, is part of a larger collection of Roth photographs and documents in the UT Libraries' Special Collections. You can find the links to both the journal and the photographs at: <http://www.lib.utk.edu/digitalcollections/gsm.html>. For more on Dutch Roth, his journal, and photographs, see: Don Williams, "The Life, Legs, and Legacy of Photographer Albert "Dutch" Roth." *Smokies Life Magazine*, v 4, no. 1 (2010): 20-33.

Whenever we speak of the good old days, or times that we used to know, it brings back memories of the good times that we had then, of the days when we really hiked with no trails or paved roads to go over... Like many an explorer, and being hiking enthusiasts, we wanted to see what was in those mountains and why. So on December 11, 1924, eight of us went on our first hike as a club.

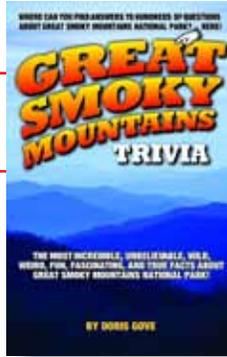
From "Tales from the Woods." Dutch Roth writing about the impetus for the founding of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club.

New on the Smokies Bookshelf

Doris Gove. *Great Smoky Mountains Trivia*. Helena, MT: Riverbend Publishing, 2010. 142 p.

How many cemeteries are there in the Smokies? (p. 43)
 What is the lowest elevation in the Smokies? (p. 52)
 How many miles of trails are in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park? (p. 129)

The answers appear in this Colloquy.



These questions and many more are posed and answered by Doris Gove, Knoxville environmental writer. Gove packs an amazing amount of information into a slim volume. This book has sections on the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Mountain Culture, Geology and Geography, Plants, Animals, Cades Cove, Newfound Gap Road and Clingmans Dome, and Activities and Adventures. Each section contains the questions that might occur to visitors to the national park, whether curious children or adults.

As well as short factual answers, Gove provides colorful stories about mountain residents like the Walker Sisters, details about unique mountain features, like cantilevered barns, and the basics for making the most famous of mountain products, moonshine. Children will especially enjoy the information about the many animals that call the Smokies home. Even veteran Smokies aficionados will find something new to enjoy in this book.

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Thanks for your interest and support.

~Anne Bridges and Ken Wise



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