

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS Colloquy

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Smoky Mountains Hiking Club on the Appalachian Trail near Gregory Bald

The Smoky Mountains Hiking Club The Early Years



Before there was a Great Smoky Mountains National Park there was the Appalachian Trail; and before there was an Appalachian Trail there was the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club. The movement to establish the Park and the development of the Trail (to the extent that it traces the skyline of the Smokies) are so intertwined with the earliest activities of the Club that distinctions between the three are often blurred.

The Smoky Mountains Hiking Club began inauspiciously as an informal adult hiking program organized by leaders of the YMCA boys camp in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Marshall Wilson, Assistant Boys Work Director, and George Barber, Physical Director, suggested the hike, an overnight excursion to Mount Le Conte on October 19-20, 1924.

While on Cliff Top at the summit of Mount Le Conte, enjoying the grandeur of mountain scenery, the participants reached an agreement that a club should be formed for the express purpose of sponsoring trips into the Smokies for any interested persons, especially those whose political and civic influence

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Photographs in the lead article are from the Albert "Dutch" Roth Digital Photograph Collection. Courtesy of Margaret Roth.

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Co-editors:
Anne Bridges
Russ Clement
Kenneth Wise

Correspondence and
change of address:
GSM Colloquy
152 John C. Hodges Library
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-1000
865/974-0017
865/974-9242 (fax)
Email: smokies@aztec.lib.utk.edu
Web: www.lib.utk.edu/refs/smokies/



Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, continued



*Building the
"Cabin in
the Brier"*

in the north to the highest peak in the south."

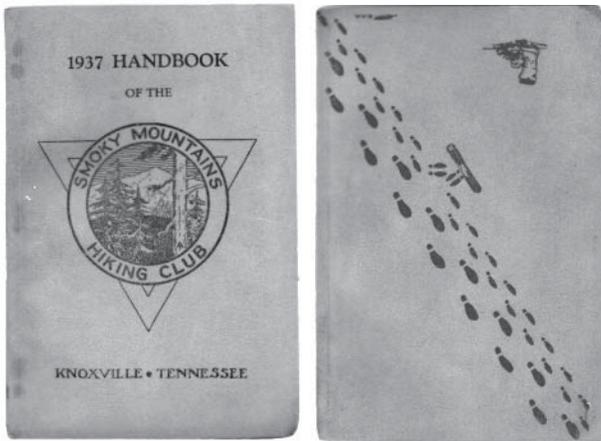
To the outside world, Knoxville photographers Jim Thompson and Albert "Dutch" Roth were perhaps the most widely recognized. Their photographs of the backcountry of the Smokies, particularly those of Jim Thompson, were used as illustrations in dozens of journals, promotional pamphlets, and government documents about this unknown and inaccessible

wilderness that Horace Kephart had once christened "the back of beyond." Other early Club members, such as Paul Adams, Harvey Broome, Carlos Campbell, Brockway Crouch, Paul Fink, and Laura Thornburgh, were active in submitting to popular journals descriptive essays extolling the scenic beauties of the Great Smokies and arguing the case for the wilderness to be set aside as a national preserve. Laura Thornburgh's widely acclaimed *The Great Smoky Mountains* became the first book-length treatise on the history and people of the mountains since Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders*. Paul Fink, who served as a Tennessee representative on the Park's nomenclature committee, published *That's Why They Call It; The Names and Lore of the Great Smokies*, a popular essay on the stories behind colorful place names found in the mountains. Fink later published *Backpacking Was the Only Way*, a journal account that includes his experiences in helping blaze the Appalachian Trail for sections of its 71 miles across the Smoky skyline. Paul Adams, who built the first lodge on Mount Le Conte and helped blaze the trail above Alum Cave Bluff, contributed *Mt. Le Conte*, a brief account of the most notable peak in the Smokies. And Harvey Broome, an exceptionally gifted writer who contributed Smoky Mountain articles regularly to *Appalachian Trailway News* and *The Living Wilderness*, later published *Out Under the Sky in the Great Smoky Mountains*, his journals of nearly forty years of hiking and camping in the Smokies. Broome's journals arguably contain some of the finest descriptions ever written about the backcountry of the Great Smokies. The volume of published work by early Club members is impressive and certainly had considerable influence in galvanizing popular support needed to overcome political resistance to the Park and the Trail.

might help support a fledging interest in establishing a national park in Tennessee. A week later, a meeting was held at the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce during which the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club was formally established. A decision was made to extend the scope of the Club's mission beyond that of the YMCA and to broaden membership eligibility. In effect, the initial tie with the "Y" was cut.



Camped at lean-to on Silers Bald



From the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection—Above: front and back covers of the Hiking Club's 1937 Handbook. Below: an elegant drawing of a trillium. Courtesy of the McClung Historical Collection.

In addition to essays and photographs by individual members, the Club also produced annual pocket-sized *Handbook* outlining the schedule of events and hikes for the upcoming year. The earliest issues of the *Handbook* contain the most detailed accounts extant of the oldest manways through the largely unexplored Smoky Mountain wilderness before the advent of the Park. The *Handbook* also announced the Club's social calendar, business transactions, membership news, and more importantly, progress on the Appalachian Trail. Blank pages in the back of old copies often contain descriptive notes about the hikes penned by owners.

Since that late October afternoon in 1924 when an enthusiastic group of hikers on Cliff Top decided to form a club dedicated to promoting "a park in the East" and "a long trail" across the skyline, the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club has undergone several transformations and adopted other agendas. But whatever the agenda, the Club has remained true to its mission to support the Great Smoky Mountains. The complete history of the Club has yet to be written, but in 1976, the Club did publish *The Golden Years of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club: 1924-1974*, an anecdotal chronology compiled largely from issues of the *Handbook*. Issues of the *Handbook* and copies of *The Golden Years of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club: 1924-1974* can be found in the both the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection at the McClung Historical Collection (see article in this *Colloquy*) and the Special Collections Library of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. More information on the current activities of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club can be found at their website: <http://www.esper.com/smhc>.

Spotlight on a Regional Collection: MCCLUNG HISTORICAL COLLECTION, KNOX COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY, KNOXVILLE

The McClung Historical Collection is the local history and genealogy collection of the Knox County Public Library. As such, they collect material of a historical nature from across East Tennessee. The Great Smoky Mountains Region is well represented in the collection by James Thompson photographs, the papers and photographs of Harvey Broome, and the papers of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club. The SMHC collection, covering the years 1929 to present, includes the minutes of the board, presidents' files, correspondence, handbooks, hike notices, photographs, and ridgerunner patrol reports. One of the artifacts that accompanies the collection is the copper box which held the record book signed by hikers to Mt. Le Conte from 1922-1924. The records portray a well organized group whose activities included advocating for the Smokies and the proposed national park, advising the Nomenclature Committee which was charged with naming the geographic locations in the Smokies, organizing hikes, and planning for the construction of a club cabin. On the social side, they hosted dinners at which they sang songs and square danced.

A Glimpse into the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection

From June 12-14, 1931, the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club hosted the 5th annual meeting of the Appalachian Trail Conference in Gatlinburg. Among the speakers was Albert "Dutch" Roth who reported on the progress of the Appalachian Trail in the Smokies. Fifty-five miles of trails had been marked, some only "casually." Some signs had been removed and others mutilated by gunshots. Work was hampered by rough terrain, inaccessibility, lack of shelters, and deep winter snows. Overall, reported Roth, "The way is rough, spectacular and beautiful in the extremes."



COMING SOON
to a Computer Near You

The images of photographer Albert "Dutch" Roth, highlighted in this Colloquy, will soon be a part the University of Tennessee Libraries' Digital Library. The photographs, over 1000 in number, will be fully searchable by keyword, places, people, and subject. We expect this to be the first of many Smokies digital collections mounted by the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Project and the Digital Library. Thanks to the Roth family for allowing us to scan and provide online access to the images. When the collection is up and running, access will be through the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Project homepage [www.lib.utk.edu/~refs/smokies] and the UT Digital Library homepage [diglib.lib.utk.edu/dlc].

ANNOUNCING:
A New Smokies Endowment

We are very pleased to announce the creation of The John E. and Mary Poitevent Redwine Endowment for the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Project. The Redwine endowment was created by Mary Jane Milligan in honor of her aunt and uncle, John E. and Mary Poitevent Redwine, and in memory of the wonderful times she spent in the Smokies as a child. Once the fund is fully endowed next January, the income earned will be used to make purchases of Smokies materials, ensuring the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Collections will grow in perpetuity.



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The University of Tennessee
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