



HONORING A GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS MAN

May 1st is Horace Kephart Day in Bryson City, North Carolina.

"Rustle out, boys! We've got to git a soon start if you want bear brains an' liver for supper." With that appetizing reveille, the gangly bear hunter roused Horace Kephart from sleep at a remote camp in the Great Smoky Mountains. The year was 1904 and the former librarian recently came to Swain County to experience frontier life among the stalwart mountaineers. In the years ahead, Kephart would pen *Our Southern Highlanders*, regarded by many as "the finest regional study ever written by an American." But even more importantly, Kephart, through a series of influential articles, would help persuade a nation to create and preserve the Great Smoky Mountains National Park—his spectacular, enduring gift to the people of his country.

Celebrating 75 Years. 2009 marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In recognition of this historic event, Swain County, in which a large portion of the Park is contained, will celebrate the first ever Horace Kephart Day on May 1st. The day will begin with a service at the author's grave in Bryson City Cemetery. In the afternoon, Kephart devotees will gather at The Historic Calhoun House Hotel for a program hosted by owner Luke Hyde and organized by the Swain County Chamber of Commerce. Libby Kephart Hargrave will read selections from her great-grandfather's works. There will also be a presentation by Park officials, and historic papers and artifacts will be displayed by Kephart scholar George Ellison and representatives of Western Carolina University.

Preserving an International Biosphere. Due to its astounding diversity of plants and animals, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was designated one of the few international biospheres in the world. "Even at the turn of the century, Horace Kephart realized what a special place this is," says hotelier, Luke Hyde. "He was determined that it be preserved in a pristine state." Following that lead, present-day residents of Swain County engage in green efforts to preserve the Park and its surrounding wild lands. At the same time, they open their doors to visitors who, like Horace Kephart, wish to unobtrusively experience the wonder of this rugged, beautiful land and its rich cultural heritage.

Following the Author's Footsteps. Kephart Day visitors will have ample opportunity to enjoy the diverse recreational opportunities offered by Swain County, from hiking to shopping to whitewater rafting. They can also walk the quiet paths that the author once trod. Pontoon boats will ferry visitors across Fontana Lake to the site of Kephart's cabin near Hazel Creek. A stone monument marks the location of Kephart's last permanent camp near Deep Creek. And, standing amid the historic buildings of downtown Bryson City, the old Bennett's Drugs marks the spot where the author once rented a room.

Horace Kephart was killed in a car crash in 1931. Sadly, he didn't live to see the establishment of the Park. "We proudly preserve this great man's memory with Horace Kephart Day," says Hyde, "but his lasting legacy is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park itself. Without his eloquent support, this national treasure might have been lost forever."

For more information on touring the Smokies, contact the Swain County Chamber of Commerce, 210 Main Street, P.O. Box 509, Bryson City, NC 28713; chamber@greatsmokies.com; or 800-867-9246.

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