



YOU CAN STILL GO “UP YAN” IN THE SMOKY MOUNTAINS

Walking the Mountain Trails with Horace Kephart. On a winter’s day in 1904, an erstwhile Pennsylvania librarian named Horace Kephart happened upon a “shock of fodder” walking down a narrow path in the Great Smoky Mountains. “Howdy,” greeted Kephart, prompting the bundled cornstalks to fall to the ground, thus revealing a sturdy mountain woman who harbored a distrustful glint in her eye. “My name’s Kephart and...” Before he could complete his sentence, the woman unleashed a piercing yodel/war whoop that Kephart surmised “would nearly carry half a mile.” The strange behavior puzzled the scholarly adventurer until it was later explained that the woman was undoubtedly warning her husband who was “up yan” tending his moonshine still.

Horace Kephart spent the next nine years of his life observing and recording the lives of the independent, hardworking mountain people of Swain County, North Carolina. The culmination of his work, “Our Southern Highlanders,” is regarded by many as “the finest regional study ever written by an American.” One of the more memorable characters of that book is Granville Calhoun, a legendary hunter/fisher/storyteller who, in later years, bought a hotel in Bryson City and dubbed it the Calhoun House Hotel. It’s one of many present day connections to the famed writer.

Connecting with Kephart. “You can still sense the presence of Horace Kephart,” says Luke D. Hyde, current owner of the Calhoun House. “Visitors can take a pontoon ride across Fontana Lake and visit the site of Kephart’s cabin near Hazel Creek, now part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In later years, Kephart rented a room above the old Bennett’s Drugs, one of the many historic buildings preserved in downtown Bryson City. And if you go up near Deep Creek you’ll find a stone monument that marks Kephart’s last permanent camp.”

Surprisingly, Horace Kephart’s greatest legacy may not be his outdoor articles, books on camp craft or even “Our Southern Highlanders,” but rather the Great Smoky Mountains National Park itself. “Kephart was a leading literary figure of the times,” says Hyde. “His was a very persuasive voice in support of the establishment of the Park.”

Preserving the Legacy. With 87% of the county composed of the Park and national forest lands, the people of Swain County are ever mindful of the need to preserve and protect their pristine environment. They’re active in recycling, conserving energy and maintaining the trails that Horace Kephart once walked. Efforts have also been made to preserve the mountain culture that Kephart so loved. There are 19th century cabins, barns and mills still standing in the Park, and every Saturday night in the summer, authentic mountain music rings from the platform of the old train station in Bryson City.

Horace Kephart didn’t live to see his dream of a Great Smoky Mountains National Park become a reality, but he died knowing it was assured. “Kephart was killed in a car crash in 1931,” says Luke Hyde. “Though he wasn’t born in the Southern Highlands, he’ll forever be a part of them. He’s buried in a cemetery overlooking Bryson City.”

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.