

CHAPTER II “POOR BUT A GENTLEMAN STILL”: LAND AND TRADITION IN APPALACHIA

Introduction

“If there were ever historic mountains, considered as a range or as a system,” author Freeman Tilden once wrote of the Appalachians, “they are these.”⁵³ In Appalachia, the landscape reigns supreme. Abundant with mountains and meadows, dotted with family farms, the region stretches down the spine of the Appalachian Mountains like a picturesque painting from an earlier time. First used hundreds of years ago, the word “Appalachian” is derived from the Apalachee Indians that lived in the central Florida panhandle. In 1564, a French mapmaker adapted the word to describe the mountains to the north of Florida, calling them the “Montes Apalatchi.”⁵⁴ Today, Appalachia encompasses the highland regions from Maine down to northern Georgia. Included in the Appalachian mountain system are the Allegheny Mountains, the Blue Ridge, and the Great Smoky Mountains, as well the Shenandoah, the James, the New, and the Tennessee river valleys (Fig. 2).⁵⁵

Human enclaves in these mountains are simultaneously marked by isolation and community. The mountains have provided a geographic isolation that has fostered the customs, traditions, music, and family connections that have sustained Appalachia for centuries. Rural people often band together to forge a sense of community and solidarity, especially at times when the rest of America seemed to have moved on. The earliest inhabitants of the Appalachian region were Native Americans, including the Iroquois,

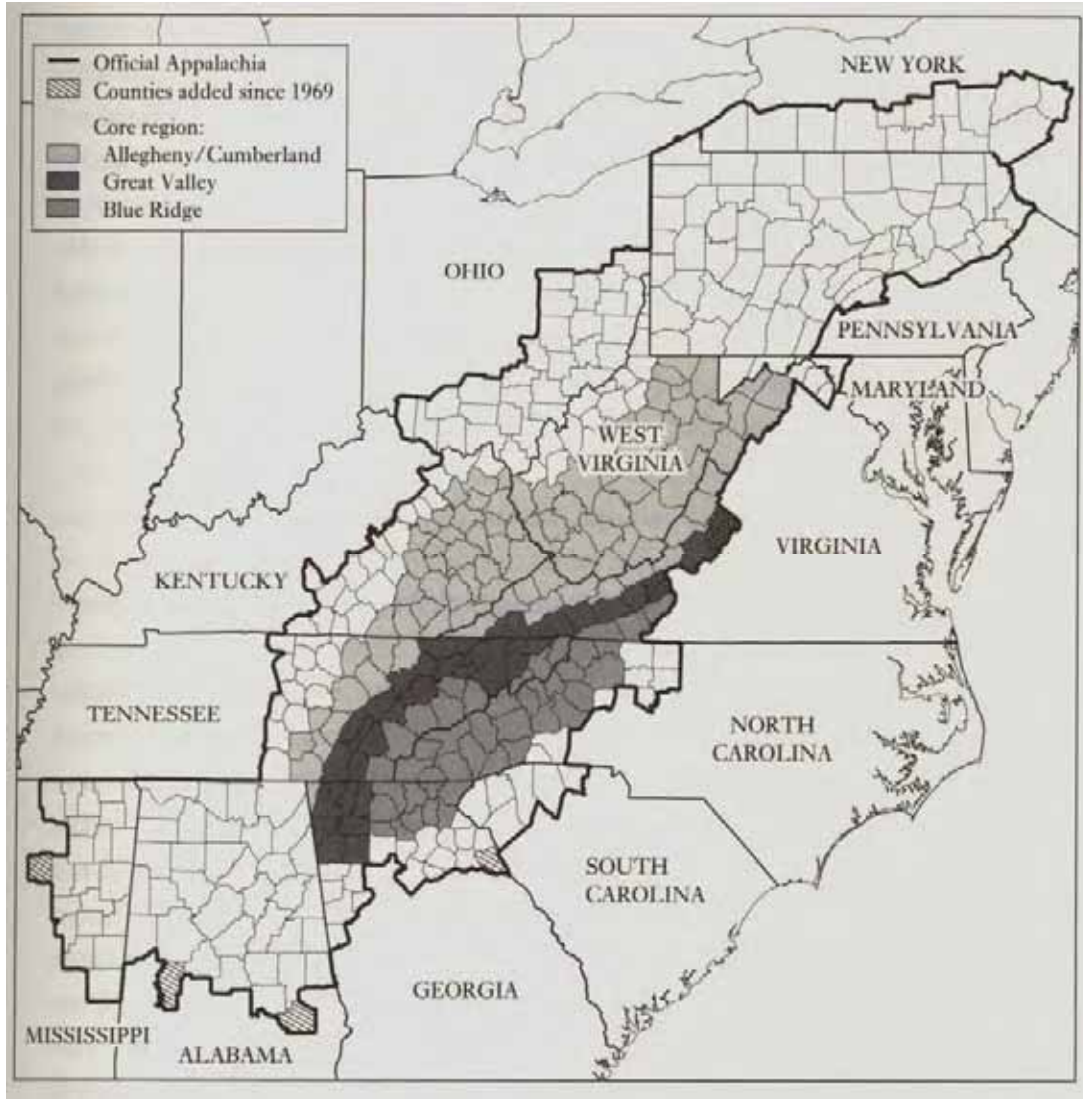


Fig. 2. Map of the Appalachian region, with the core region (as defined by a plurality of scholars) shaded. Reprinted from John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 13.

Chickasaw, Choctaw, and the dominant tribe in the South, the Cherokee. By the 19th century, Europeans were venturing into the hills, primarily English, Scottish, Irish, and Germans who were attracted to the region's fertile fields and valleys (Fig. 3). The Scotch-Irish, in particular, had a tremendous impact on shaping what might be considered the Appalachian identity, considered by other ethnic groups to value independence,

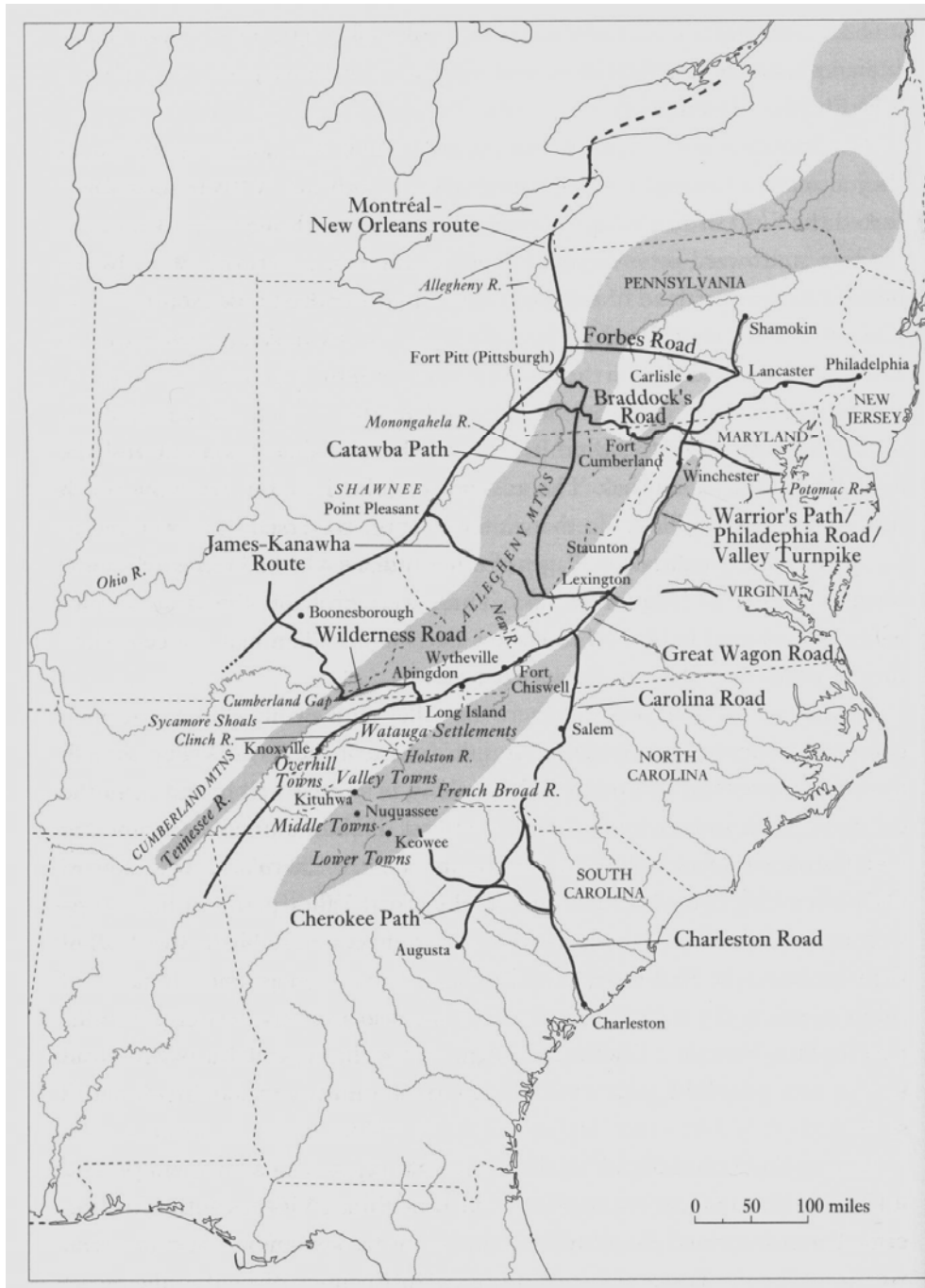


Fig. 3. A map of the main transportation routes that influenced settlement in the Appalachian region in the 18th century. Reprinted from John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 36.

resourcefulness, faith, and tradition above others. Today, about 23 million people are thought to live in the 200,000-square mile Appalachian region.⁵⁶

Appalachian residents have endured enormous strife over the past 400 years, often because of cultural clashes over land, politics, slavery, and way of life. In particular, European settlement threatened to displace the Cherokee almost from the beginning. In the first half of the 19th century, Cherokee leaders signed agreements ceding their lands to the U.S. government. In 1838 and 1839, about 16,000 members of the tribe were forced to march to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma, a grueling and difficult event that became known as the “Trail of Tears.” Yet about 1,400 Cherokees avoided this fate, hiding in the Great Smoky Mountains. Today, their descendants are known as the Eastern Band of the Cherokee and are located in an area known as the Qualla boundary, near the town of Cherokee, North Carolina.⁵⁷

African-Americans have been present in Appalachia nearly as long as white settlers. Slavery was practiced in many parts of the region, although slave-dependent plantations were far less common or far smaller than those in the low-country areas.⁵⁸ Generally, the mountain sections of the southern states were less likely to support slavery. Landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, for one, chronicled the feelings of Appalachian residents during a trip through western North Carolina in 1854. “Slavery is a great cuss,” one resident told Olmsted, “...the greatest there is in these United States. There ain’ no account of slaves up here in the West, but down in the east part of the State about Fayetteville, there’s as many as in South Carolina. That’s the reason the West and the East don’t agree in this State. People out here hates the eastern people.”⁵⁹

Once divisions over slavery erupted into the Civil War, it affected the

Appalachian region in profound ways. The Civil War was fought in many places along the mountains, most notably in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and in northern Georgia. In a sense, the first blood of the Civil War was shed in Appalachia, with abolitionist John Brown's 1859 raid on the federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. In all, an estimated 100,000 Appalachian soldiers fought in the Civil War, mostly on the side of the Confederacy.⁶⁰

After the Civil War, the Appalachian region sought to rebuild and invest in industry. Primarily, the region, especially in the Tennessee Valley, turned to coal mining, considered a more viable industry than farming. The Industrial Revolution meant that America's demand for energy was greater than ever, and the Appalachian coal seams were tapped with increasing frequency. Timber was another major industry, born out of the ample Appalachian forests, and textile and furniture manufacturers blossomed in the South as well. Although successful, these industries meant a hard life for many Appalachian residents, especially for miners who suffered from black lung disease and other ailments.⁶¹ During this time, freed blacks increasingly migrated into the mountains to get jobs in the emerging industries of railroading, mining, and logging. Cultural exchange between blacks and whites was frequent, including the adoption by whites of the African banjo and African-American folk songs such as "John Henry."⁶²

In the 20th century, as Appalachia became more dependent on government intervention for survival, such as New Deal ventures like the Tennessee Valley Authority, the region also became vulnerable to government control.⁶³ In an oft-cited example, the establishment of Shenandoah National Park on private land in western Virginia became an enduring symbol of the conflicted relationship between Appalachian landowners and

the federal government. Although the park idea was born of widespread concern about the chestnut blight that had deforested a third of the park's forests, ruining the stock for decades, many local landowners saw little value in park protection. In the decade between the 1925 congressional authorization of the park and its actual dedication in 1936, park proponents were mired in lawsuits and resistance from vocal landowners. Yet lawmakers also found many willing sellers and park enthusiasts. Citing widespread support for the park throughout the state, the Virginia government oversaw the condemnation of the land, purchasing tracts from landowners on behalf of the federal government. Some residents received hundreds or thousands of dollars for their land, often investing their newfound fortune in creating new farms in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. Certain elderly or "especially meritorious" residents were allowed to live in the park for the remainder of their lives. But others, often just poor renters or squatters, felt victimized. Ousted resident Edward Harris put his thoughts into a ballad called "The Blue Ridge Mountaineer":

In came the government people with papers in their hands,
Saying, "Old man we have taken your land.
You must vacate by April First."
I felt right then my heart would burst.⁶⁴

The bone of contention for many mountain residents, writes Darwin Lambert, author of the official administrative history of Shenandoah National Park, was not so much finding new homes, but "being pushed around or belittled or downgraded [by] those strange outsiders who wanted their land."⁶⁵ For many, fairly or not, the creation of the national park represents a time when mountain people felt they had little power or voice, which they have worked to regain ever since.

The Appalachian Landscape

The Blue Ridge Mountains, according to one account, “not only create the landscape; they also preserve it. The hills set the pace.”⁶⁶ Both the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area are located in distinctive sections of the Appalachian system: Appalachian Forest in eastern West Virginia and western Maryland and the Blue Ridge in western North Carolina. Although different, these heritage areas have both been shaped and defined by the rugged and thickly forested Appalachian landscape.

The Appalachian region can be dissected in several ways. North to south, the region is usually divided into the northern, central, and southern Appalachians. The northern Appalachians are marked by long unbroken ridges, while the central and southern Appalachians are increasingly sharper, steeper, and craggier—“ever sufficiently irregular in form and course to offer grateful contrasts,” according to an 1853 account.⁶⁷ The Appalachians include the highest summits in the East, including North Carolina’s Mount Mitchell, the highest peak in the eastern United States at 6,684 feet.⁶⁸

The Appalachians can also be divided into three physiographic regions that run in parallel belts from east to west. The easternmost belt is the famous Blue Ridge, which increases in elevation and width from north to south. To the west of the Blue Ridge lies the Ridge and Valley region, recognizable by its folded and faulted linear topography. The wide valleys in this sub-region provide some of the most fertile farmland in the Appalachian range, especially in such areas as the Great Valley, which lies between the Blue Ridge and the first of the Ridge and Valley ranges. As a major north-south trading route, the Great Valley, according to one geological report, “has tied the people of

Appalachia together more than any other physical feature save the mountains themselves.”⁶⁹ The westernmost section of Appalachia is the Appalachian Plateau, characterized by rugged, stream-cut topography.⁷⁰

The central and southern Appalachians are also characterized by two landscape features: coves and balds. Coves are level areas that are encircled by mountains, and balds are large spots on or near mountain summits that are completely bare of trees. Caves and caverns are common, and this eco-region is also a haven for forests and dense undergrowth vegetation. Trees range from common Piedmont trees such as oak, hickory, and maple to higher elevation hardwoods such as beech, white oak, and cherry and spruce-fir forests at the highest reaches. In all, the greater Blue Ridge region includes 130 tree species, 1,400 flowering herb species, 350 species of mosses and similar plants, and 2,000 species of fungi.⁷¹

Historic Context of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area

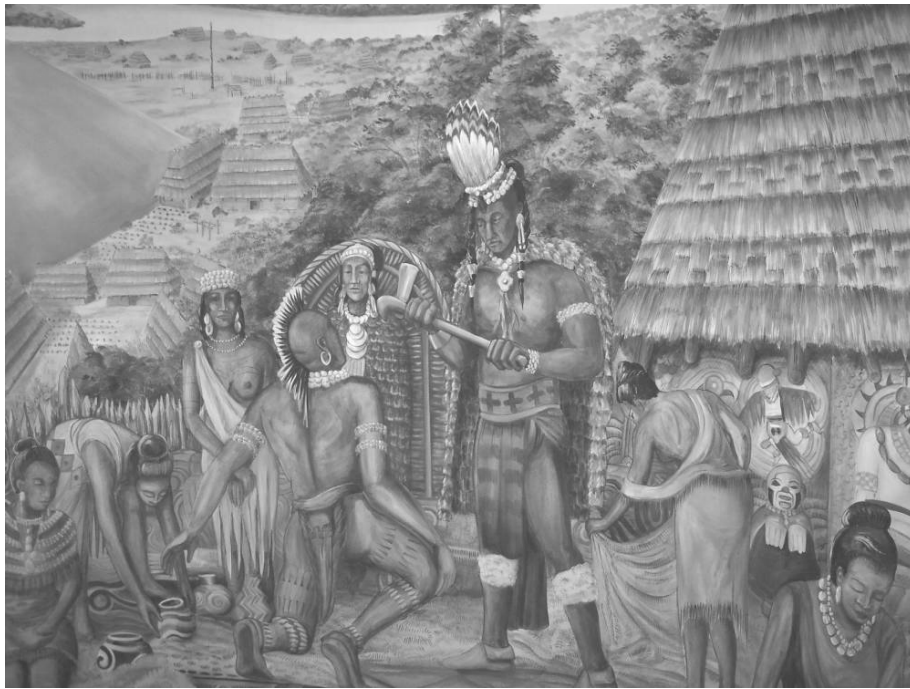
The southern Blue Ridge region was famously (and somewhat dismissively) described by writer Will Wallace Harney as “a strange land inhabited by a peculiar people.”⁷² Nineteenth-century writers and missionaries often described the region in stereotypical terms, cementing its reputation as extremely poor, isolated, and culturally backward.⁷³ The reality is more complex.

Encompassing the mountainous counties of western North Carolina, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area attempts to preserve a diverse set of sites and stories related to Appalachian history and culture. The heritage area encompasses several well-known natural destinations in western North Carolina, including the Blue Ridge Parkway and

Great Smoky Mountains National Park, towering Mount Mitchell, Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, and numerous sites related to the history of the Cherokee Nation and settlement by European immigrant groups. The culture of the region is rich in the traditions of handmade crafts, mountain music, folklore and storytelling, and Indian folkways and arts.⁷⁴

Over the course of its history, the dominant residents of the Blue Ridge region have been Cherokee Indians, which thrived in the region prior to the arrival of European settlers (Figs. 4a and 4b). Blue Ridge National Heritage Area has made preserving Cherokee heritage a priority. Historians believe that the first encounter between Cherokees and Europeans occurred when Hernando de Soto led a group of Spanish soldiers into the region around 1540. Within two centuries, the Cherokee territory stretched from northern Georgia up to southwestern Virginia, covering an area exceeding 70,000 square miles. Estimates say that about 30,000 Cherokees lived in the southern Appalachians by the turn of the 18th century, subsiding on herbs, berries, and nuts, as well as hunted meat (primarily black bear and white-tailed deer) and fish. Cherokees grew at least three varieties of corn, and they used river cane to weave baskets and build their largely wattle-and-daub dwellings.⁷⁵ In the early 1800s, a Cherokee named Sequoyah Guess created an 84-character syllabary documenting the sounds used in Cherokee speech; within months, hundreds of Cherokees had learned to read and write their language. Early Cherokee also excelled in weaving, carving, and pottery. Today, most members of the tribe practice traditional Cherokee arts and crafts, which are sold to tourists as a major source of income for modern Cherokee members.⁷⁶

Yet all was not peaceful. Conflicts between whites and Cherokees date back to the



Figs. 4a and 4b. Two exhibits—a traditional Cherokee ritual and the impact of European settlement on Cherokee life—that can be found in the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, now included in the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. Photographs by author (24 March 2005).

earliest years of European settlement. As the nation was declaring its independence in 1776, colonial militias also moved into the North Carolina mountains in one of several campaigns against the Cherokee over the next century. A year later, after soldiers laid waste to a great portion of their lands, the Cherokee nation signed the Treaty of Long Island, ceding to the whites all lands east of the Blue Ridge. Anglo-Americans moved into the former Cherokee lands quickly. The town of Asheville, still the informal capital of the Blue Ridge region, was incorporated in 1797.⁷⁷

By the 19th century, the Cherokee lifestyle varied little from that of any typical frontier settler's. Farmers grew corn, wheat, or cotton in the region's many fertile riparian areas. Cherokees also adapted to the then-modern technology of spinning wheels, looms, and plows, and many lived in log cabins. Although such advances benefited the Cherokees, in other ways their adaptation represented further destruction of their traditional way of life. "In retrospect, most Cherokees had little choice but to adopt, to some degree, the ways of the whites," writes historian Donald Edward Davis. "A century of disease, war, and famine had taken an enormous toll on the Cherokees."⁷⁸

The national heritage area also contains numerous other historic sites of regional and national significance. Chief among these is the Biltmore Estate, designed by architect Richard Morris Hunt and Frederick Law Olmsted (Fig. 5). The nation's largest private residence, the 250-room estate is considered one of Hunt's best-preserved designs, and its influence is evident in the architecture of the nearby city of Asheville. George Vanderbilt purchased the 125,000 acres in the late 19th century, envisioning a country retreat with traditional English-style gardens. Citing the rough terrain and cut-over woodlands, however, Olmsted convinced Vanderbilt that the site was better suited to a formal garden



Fig. 5. The Biltmore Estate. Photograph by author (25 March 2005).



Fig. 6. View of Grandfather Mountain in the distance, from Price Park along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Photograph by Bob Cherry, the National Park Service, available from <www.nps.gov/blri/pphtml/photogallery.html> (accessed on 21 April 2005).

near the house, opening to a more pastoral landscape beyond, and that the rest of the vast acreage should be devoted to scientific forestry. Olmsted also convinced Vanderbilt to hire Gifford Pinchot to oversee the forestry operation, which would eventually become the basis for Pisgah National Forest, known as the “cradle of forestry.” When Pinchot left after three years, eventually becoming the first director of the U.S. Forest Service, his successor at Biltmore, Carl Schenck, founded the Biltmore School of Forestry. Having helped to lay the foundation for 20th-century forestry, the Biltmore Estate was designated a national historic landmark in 1963.⁷⁹

Another central historic feature in the heritage area is the Blue Ridge Parkway. Begun in 1935 and completed in 1987, the parkway threads through numerous towns, villages, and natural sites (Fig. 6). Construction of the parkway, according to heritage area planners, “was the single most important catalyst in the development of the tourism industry in the mountains of North Carolina.”⁸⁰ Led by landscape architect Stanley Abbott, the parkway is a feat of both modern engineering and vernacular landscape planning. Abbott was careful to protect and reveal the regional landscape, working with local communities to lay out the route in the most practical, scenic, and economically viable way. Planning for the parkway, writes Linda Flint McClelland, “reflected the ideas coalescing in the 1930s about regional planning, natural resource utilization, and recreation development. The parkway also set forth a new standard of scenery preservation based on cultural history as well as natural beauty.”⁸¹ Among other notable sites, the Blue Ridge Parkway winds past Grandfather Mountain, which has been designated a Biosphere Reserve because of its biodiversity. More than 40 rare and endangered plant and animal species are found there. The mountain is so rugged that it

took engineers 20 years to figure out how to route the Blue Ridge Parkway around it. In 1987, the Linn Cove Viaduct, considered the most complicated concrete viaduct in the world, was completed around Grandfather Mountain—the last section of the parkway. The road sits 4,100 feet above sea level and stretches for 1,243 feet around the mountain.⁸²

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area is also dedicated to interpreting and preserving the unique folklore of the Blue Ridge region. Folklore in this region is distinct from other areas, according to folklorist Barbara Duncan, because of its mix of influences from both European immigrants and the Cherokee. Another unique factor, according to Duncan, is the extent to which the region's folklore has been studied. In the Blue Ridge, one can research the history not just of culture, but of cultural intervention. "Researchers in these mountains have been collecting music and folk remedies and lore since the 1880s," Duncan has said.⁸³ In Appalachia, "mountaineers," as early mountain people were called, were often characterized as having an imaginative nature, wit, humor, verbosity, and "vivid humanism," as folklore professor Dr. Judy Prozzillo Byers has written.⁸⁴ These traits lent themselves to a thriving storytelling tradition throughout the region, in which European folktales were melded with Cherokee nature stories to create memorable stories that were told and told again.⁸⁵

One of the most enduring expressions of the Appalachian folklore in the Blue Ridge heritage area is through music. The earliest settlers brought folk songs and ballads over from the British Isles, passed down from generation to generation like family histories. By the 1920s, radio had spread mountain music across the south, led by the famous Carter Family of southern Virginia. Bill Monroe, known as the father of

bluegrass, also hailed from Appalachia, paving the way for the likes of Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, and many others. As legendary musician Johnny Cash once said of the music of the Carter family, with whom he performed and to which he was related by his marriage to June Carter Cash, Appalachian folk songs always dealt with the basic emotions of life: “joy, sorrow, sickness, health, death, love, hate, leaving, staying.”⁸⁶

Historic Context of the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area

According to geologist Bill Richardson, the first real industry in West Virginia, like much of Appalachia, was timber harvesting. “The central part of Appalachia has the second largest hardwood forest in the world,” Richardson has written. “Thus in the late 1800s, armies of men came to cut the trees...[some with] stumps that were five and ten feet wide.”⁸⁷ Ecological historian Donald Edward Davis considers logging to be a major catalyst in Appalachian life. “During [the region’s] four-hundred-year history of land use...,” Davis has written, “the single greatest human activity to affect environmental and cultural change in the southern Appalachians is industrial logging.”⁸⁸

The Appalachian Forest Heritage Area interprets the West Virginia timber industry, as well as other historic and cultural themes that grew out of this forested landscape. The region represents the core upland deciduous forest region of the central Appalachians, which has been called “the defining element of the environment and the economy.”⁸⁹ This is the largest hardwood forest of its kind in the world, having regrown from the original clear-cutting with the help of sustainable forest management and protection of public lands.⁹⁰

The Appalachian Forest includes portions of three distinct physiographic regions,

as well as four watersheds – the Potomac, the Monongahela, the Kanawha, and the Little Kanawha. The eastern section is contained in the Ridge and Valley province, bordered on the west by the Allegheny Mountains and the un-glaciated Appalachian Plateau beyond. The Heritage Area encompasses 18 counties in the highlands of West Virginia and western Maryland. They include Allegany and Garrett counties in Maryland and Barbour, Braxton, Grant, Greenbrier, Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Morgan, Nicholas, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Preston, Randolph, Tucker, Upshur, and Webster in West Virginia. The only major population center in the heritage area is Cumberland, Maryland, located on the northern end of the heritage area.⁹¹

The heritage area aims to interpret the nationally significant theme of using the West Virginia forests to support the Industrial Revolution in the rest of the country. The large forest reserves were exploited just at the time of peak industrial expansion, with often devastating outcomes for the local economy and for mountain families. Furthermore, the heritage area celebrates and interprets the central Appalachian folkways, language, crafts, dance, and music that have developed over the centuries.⁹²

German, Welsh, and Scotch-Irish immigrants began settling in what is now eastern West Virginia as early as 1726. Later immigrants to the region included African-Americans and Swiss. From the first, settlers were often reluctant to buy or lease land from the large landholders that were speculating in the area, preferring instead to claim their own tract to settle.⁹³ Although obviously connected by the forests and mountains that surrounded them, these settlers also shared common experiences in the timber industry, and in “the primacy of the forest in their community life to this day,” as the authors of the heritage area’s feasibility study have written. “Settlers of the eighteenth

century instilled a culture that persists and has grown to include other ethnic groups who arrived in the later nineteenth century as the industrial revolution affected the region,” the study continues. “Ethnic identities have intermingled to form an evolved regional culture, but with many indicators of original origins.”⁹⁴

The heritage area region was at the heart of the sectionalism that led to the Civil War. Nearly all southern Appalachian states contained internal divisions, particularly between the mountainous sections and the piedmont and coastal portions. Virginia was close enough to the anti-slavery sentiments prevalent in the North that these internal divisions became insurmountable, and West Virginia seceded from Virginia and became its own state in 1863.⁹⁵ After the Civil War, it was widely thought that West Virginia’s burgeoning coal and timber industries would bolster the state’s lagging economy. By the mid-1880s, progress was slower than anticipated. “Situated near the capital of the United States,” as the West Virginia Tax Commission wrote of the state in 1884, “within the very heart of the population and wealth of this country, with a good climate, richer in materials than the same area anywhere else, with all her timber and all her coal then untouched, [the state] offered to enterprise and to capital by far the most inviting field on this continent...considering our great and peculiar advantages, this State has not progressed one half as much as she ought to have done.”⁹⁶

It was not long, however, before the boom times came. By the late 1880s, the nation had begun to prosper, and the growing cities of the East and Midwest looked to West Virginia’s significant coal seams and abundant timberlands for fuel and building materials. Technological developments also benefited the timber industry, including the development of the band sawmill and the geared locomotive. Band sawmills tripled the

capacity of older mills, and the new locomotive facilitated increased transport of logs.⁹⁷ The most successful timber operations were situated along West Virginia's waterways, including the Greenbrier, Cheat, Elk, Gauley, and Guyandot rivers, so that felled logs could be rafted out to the railheads during spring floods (Fig. 7).⁹⁸ Despite heavy logging in the region for more than a century, in the 1880s West Virginia still contained large tracts of old growth forests, often found near the headwaters of streams or in higher elevation mountain coves. The most common trees included chestnut, yellow poplar, hemlock, red oak, and basswood, as well as maple, beech, and spruce known to grow to immense proportions.⁹⁹

Intensive logging at the end of the 19th century, however, quickly depleted many areas of their old growth stands. The new industrial logging practices cleared mountainsides, removed undergrowth, and replaced diverse ecosystems with fast-growing species such as white and short-leaf pine. This led Forest Service employee R.S. Kellogg, in 1907, to write that the previous seven years had seen a 15-percent decline in hardwood lumber production and that the federal government ought to begin acquiring "the backbone of the Appalachian ranges...for the good of all interests involved." In addition to preserving forestlands, Kellogg believed that uncut forests would limit erosion and provide flood control. Tragic floods had occurred in both West Virginia and Kentucky in 1907.¹⁰⁰

As the center of human activity in West Virginia, the Appalachian coal and lumber camps offered both positive and negative experiences for workers (Fig. 8). In the early 1900s, many Appalachian landowners were forced off their lands for not paying their property taxes (which in some cases had not been collected since the Civil War).

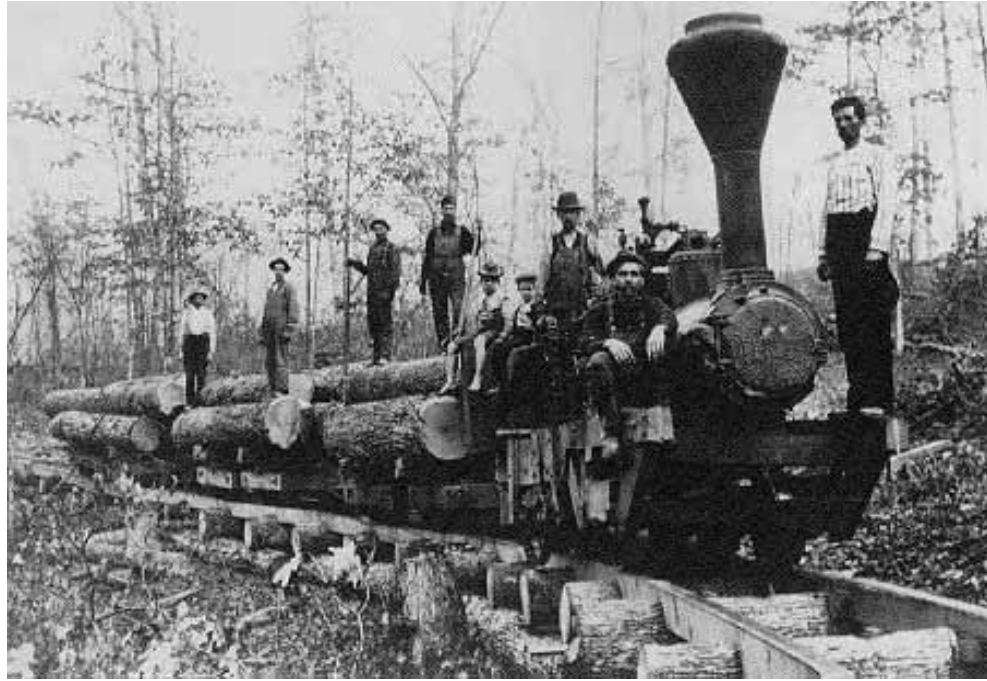


Figure 7. An early locomotive, running on wooden tracks and ties, carries lumber along the New River in West Virginia. Reprinted from New River Gorge Historical Photo Gallery, available from <www.nps.gov/neri/histgal.htm> (accessed on 4 April 2005).

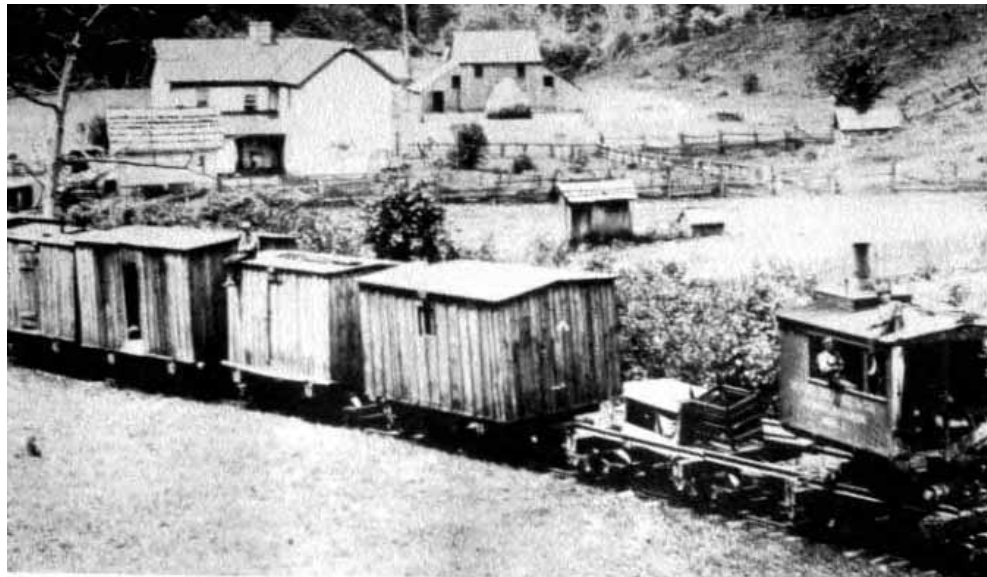


Figure 8. A mobile logging camp moves out on a log train in Randolph County, West Virginia. Reprinted from Roy Clarkson, *Tumult on the Mountains* (Parsons, W. Va.: McClain Printing Company, 1997), cited at and available from <www.unc.edu/~whisnant/appal/slides/logging/logcamp.jpg> (accessed on 4 April 2005).

Logging families would move into the lumber camps that, along with coal camps, had come to dominate many mountain areas in the central and southern Appalachians.

Although the camps provided families a home and sense of community, conditions were often sub-standard. In some camps in southern West Virginia, lumber employees worked in taxing and unsafe conditions, sometimes for less than \$1 a day.¹⁰¹

By the early decades of the 20th century, it was clear that West Virginia had not developed a sustaining economy. Many had assumed that the state's extractive industries, even though they were depleting the region's coal and timber resources, would also lead the state to become a major manufacturing center, but this never really materialized. According to one history, "West Virginia produced an abundance of wood pulp but little paper, lots of ax handles and clothespins but not much furniture, tannery products but no finished leather goods."¹⁰² Despite the technological advances of the late 19th century, the rugged terrain of eastern West Virginia has always hindered transportation and industrial development. Since the end of the lumber boom in the 1920s, this largely rural area has struggled with a loss of jobs and out-migration of young people and working families. Sixteen of the 18 counties in the heritage area are considered non-metropolitan counties, and the largest town, Cumberland, Maryland, has a population of only about 24,000 people.¹⁰³

Despite its difficult history, West Virginia's forest legacy has become an enduring point of pride for residents. Heritage area planners have developed two themes overarching heritage activities: the theme that Appalachian communities have continually been caught in "epic struggles" between development and environmental forces, and that underlying these struggles is a fierce pride in forest traditions.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

West Virginia, in many ways, has become an enduring symbol of Appalachia as a whole, for better or for worse. Appalachia, as one historian put it, was “a code word that summed up all the things that made West Virginia different from the rest of the nation, the good things as well as the bad. Intermingled with the state’s economic disadvantages, however,...was much that seemed worthy of preservation.”¹⁰⁵ This is a region that was settled by rugged individualists, torn apart by the Civil War, who made a hardscrabble living cutting timber and extracting coal. At the same time, residents were always interested in ways to protect and bolster the region’s economy, landscape, and image. Today, with the assistance of scientific forestry and public land holdings, some of West Virginia’s forests have re-grown and are today “a significant source of livelihood, production, and beauty,” according to the feasibility study for the heritage area.”¹⁰⁶

At the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, rebirth is also an important notion. The counties of western North Carolina, like eastern West Virginia and much of Appalachia, have been affected by war, ethnic strife, and poverty. Yet like much of the rest of Appalachia, the Blue Ridge region is marked by incredible natural beauty, rugged individualism, and a deep pride in local customs, crafts, and music. A 19th-century folk song, “I’m Poor but a Gentleman Still,” which can still be heard at folk festivals today, embodies both the struggles and the fortitude that characterize Appalachia:

Though poverty daily looks in at my door,
I’m hungry, I’m footsore and ill;
I can look the whole world in the face and say,
I’m poor but a gentleman still.¹⁰⁷

For both the Blue Ridge and Appalachian Forest heritage areas, organizations, individuals, and government have made significant accomplishments to interpret and preserve the region's most enduring stories, which will be examined in later chapters.¹⁰⁸