

THE CREATION OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

FROM HISTORICAL TRAUMA TO HOPE AND HEALING

HISTORICAL GRIEF AND TRAUMA IS LOSS OF:

- LAND---65% of Swain County to National Park—Federal land lost 86%.
- LANGUAGE---our heritage
- IDENTITY—Federal Government attempted to erase our very existence 6000 Swain County Citizens
- CULTURE---The way we lived –A Self sufficient way of life
- SPIRITUAL BELIEF---Trust
- FAMILY VALUES---Government moved people out and attempted to erase family roots.

IN THE BEGINNING

This is a story of the Creation of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park in Swain County North Carolina is one that can never be forgotten because it tells what Swain County lost and how our citizens lost faith in our own Federal Government.

I have listened to many Swain County citizens tell how their on Dad and Mom went to their grave saying our Government will not lie to us and they will keep their promises they made to us.

Remember the people who were hurt the most were the people with the least voice.

In the mid 1770's the first white settlers came to what is now Swain County through what is now Soco Gap and settled in Swain County. Many of the early settlers built cabins, cleared land and received land grants after the Revolutionary war for their services. This occurred after the treaties with the Cherokee. In 1830's the trade trails came across the mountain from Tennessee and over the mountain to what is now Eagle Creek. As more settlers came they moved throughout most of Swain County. Early settlers, mostly English, Irish, Scottish, Dutch came to the mountain to live. Here the area was rich in resources, timber for building homes, land for farming, water in almost every hollow for drinking. Everything needed was here to live, So people started to move here from all over. There were jobs in timber, copper mining, even gold. Life was hard but good. A man could live, work and provide for his family and help provide timber and copper for our nation.

In the early 1900's railway and roads came in a big way. They came because they were needed to move the timber and copper. People also needed these resources to live. Jobs were plentiful and then the great depression hit. Times were hard on everyone but families pulled together and pulled through troubled times. No one starve or die here because of the depression.

During this time a mans word was his bond and a handshake a contract. People trusted each other and that is the way mountain folks were.

Then it was decided that a National Park was needed. The earliest suggestion for the creation of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park came around 1880. This idea credited to the Reverend C.D. Smith. People were told that you live in a beautiful place, rich with resources, some land should be saved not logged, and it should be kept as it is.

In 1926 Congress began to consider the possibility of a National Park. It took almost 14 years for this to become a reality.

The first park was bought by the Federal Government and J.D. Rockefeller, Swain County citizens helped purchase land. Some land was donated for the park and even our school children raised money to help pay for land so we could have a National Park. Most of Swain County citizens were proud their land was chosen to be used to create a National Park. In the early 1920's Alcoa Aluminum Co. owned large sections of this land, and Timber Co. owned large sections of land, the rest was owned by Swain County Citizens.

With the first National Park Swain County lost about 119,00.00 acres and around 3,000 people. Some had to leave our county just to find jobs because with the loss of that much land there were not enough jobs in Swain County, Some people just moved down closer to the river and lived there. You should know that Swain County lost with the first National Park about ¼ of our tax base about ¼ of our jobs, We lost Cemeteries, Settlements, Churches, Post Offices, Boarding Houses, Commissaries Schools, Hunting Lodges, Black Smith Shop, Grist Mills, and Saw Mills.

When President Roosevelt came to Swain County to dedicate the Park in 1934, a statement was made by President Roosevelt, that Swain County and North Carolina has given enough to the Park and no more land shall be added to the Park. This statement was heard by Preacher Clyde Johnson, George Monteith and many other people. But in 1943 another 44,000, acres was added to the National Park in Swain County. An average of \$ 7.00 was paid for a acres of land unless you owed back taxes. Then money was used to pay your taxes. If your land was condemned your money was deposited in the bank.

On November 15,1949 President H.S. Truman approved the transfer of 44,170 acres. This was in keeping with an agreement between T.V.A State of North Carolina, Swain County, and the National Park Service dated July 30, 1943.

SO LET US TALK ABOUT WHAT SWAIN COUNTY LOST

Land Lost to Swain County

- 65% to the Great Smoky Mountain National Park----217,451 acres.
- 2% to the T.V.A or Tennessee Valley Authority----7,337 acres.
- 6.5% to the U.S. Forest Service----22,296 acres.

Swain County has a 17% tax base

During World War II, T.V.A. needed more power to make electricity in Oak Ridge Tennessee, T.V.A.(people) told citizens of Swain County that we need a total of 11000 acres of land to build a dam, so Tennessee can produce more power. Power is needed to create a bomb, which will help end the war. Swain County citizen were very patriotic so they sold T.V.A the land needed to build Fontana Dam. Construction started on Fontana Dam on December 17, 1940. It was completed November 7, 1944 and power was generated January 20, 1945. You see many of the sons and husbands of these people who lived on the north shore of the Tuckasegee and the Little Tennessee river where T.V.A built the dam were off fighting the war. People knew that access to the homes would be cut off with the construction of Fontana Dam and they were told that as soon as the war is over that another road would be built down the north side of the river back to their homes. (This is part of the story that the government denies, healing can only come when the truth is told.) Why else would the people of the north shore leave part of their belongings, including furniture, cars and homes. Some people were told they can move back after the war while others were told they could not and this is final. Now we have the National Park enter the story again. T.V.A knew they did not have the money to build back U.S High Way 288 so they bought or took by condemnation the remaining 44000 acres of land left on the north shore of the river, they gave it to the National Park. ((JUDGE YATES WEBB IN FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT HAS HELD THAT THE T.V.A HAS NO LEGAL AUTHORITY TO CONDEMN LAND FOR THE T.V.A. ADDITION TO THE PARK.))

But the National Park said not to worry that as soon as the war is over and money is appropriated by congress we will construct a road back down along the river. This will provide access back to your homes, your heritage, your 1,047 graves that still remain. The people of Swain County and the descendants of the north shore are still hoping for the healing that can come when the Federal government keeps their word.

But just what did Swain County lose beside our land? We lost faith in our Federal Government, with the second National Park. (Or the second addition to the park.) We lost almost half of our work force, about half of our tax base, our way of life. We feel the National Park has tried to erase our heritage by denying what was on the North Shore. Of the more than 600 homes that once existed only two have been designated historical.

These homes, and other buildings were burned, contents kept by the National Park. Over 6000 people once lived on the North Shore of the river. (How would you feel?)

Let's talk about our heritage we lost because of the National Park.

- SETTLEMENTS----((Rhymers Ferry---Fontana---Eagle Creek---Ritter---Hazel Creek (2000 people)---Cable Branch---Fairview---West Pace Branch---Calhoun Branch-or Way Side---Jim Mitchell Branch---Harrison Herron Branch---Pilkey Creek---Ecola---Sutton Branch-or Water Tank Branch---Kirkland Branch---Chambers Creek---Buck Eye Branch---Mandy Welch Branch---Bushnell (1000 people)---Frog Town---Hoot Owl Hollow---Monteith Branch---Gunter Branch---Ginny Branch---Forney Creek (1500 people)---John Cole Branch---Gold Mine Branch---Noland Creek---Hickory Flats---Cane Break or Epps Springs---Peach Tree Creek---Lands Creek---Smoke Mount. Most of these names have been lost, the Park Service has renamed some, some just forgotten about.
- CEMETERIES---Orr---Payne---Cable #1---Proctor---Bradshaw---Higdon---Bone Valley---Hall---Cable #2---Fairview---Mitchell---Pilkey---Posey---Scott Anthony---Woody---Hoyle---Conner Styles---Noland#1---Noland #2---More than 1200 Graves Still Remain,---1,047 Graves were removed when the second Park was expanded. There are over 1000 private Cemeteries left in the back country of the Park.
- WHAT ABOUT JOBS---30 Churches---15 Saw Mills---15 Post Offices---10 Boarding Houses---25 Grocery Stores---20 Schools---9 Train Depots---15 Side Tracks---4 Ferries---2 Hunting Lodges---Doctors---Mid Wives---15 Black Smith Shops---Fruit Orchards---Grist Mills---Gas Stations---2 Copper Mines.

This was and is our heritage. Mountain folk are part of the land they worked, farmed, and existed because of the land.

SETTLEMENTS

One was Epps Springs or Cane Break on the north shore of the Tuckasegee river about four miles below Bryson City. Today we would say it is wide place on the side of the road if there was not a Fontana Lake. With the lake full of water today one would not even find it if you did not know where the settlement was.

Epps Springs N.C. Was named for Epaphroditus Everett. Since only his mother could pronounce his name he was commonly called Epp. He was the first Sheriff of Swain County, in 1871 and the first Mayor of Bryson City in 1880. Born April 4, 1830, Everett served in the Confederate Army as a lieutenant 3th Mounted Infantry. A justice of the peace 1875—1903 he was known as the marrying man. At Epps Springs there were two general stores, a hotel, railroad station, two grist mills, two schools one white and one colored, two Churches one white and one colored. The DeHart colored school was founded December 5, 1887 by former slave Ruffin DeHart and his wife Susan. This colored school and church was the only one in what is now the National Park. At the church a cemetery with 39 graves now unmarked and is now overgrown and still remains in the park. The first passenger train arrived at Epp Springs in 1886 the Richmond & Danville later became the Southern Railway on July 1, 1894. Guests would arrive by passenger train until 1924 until highway 288 was built.

Epp's son J. H. Everett, advertised in the Asheville Citizen on January 23, 1907 “Rates \$1 and 1.50 per day. Medical water of this spring are splendid for stomach and kidney diseases.

A cemetery with 21 graves south of the hotel still remains in the Park unattended. There was an Indian town and over 500 burials at Epps Springs. A swinging bridge at Epps Springs permitted kids from the south side of the river to attend school.