

----Trail Notes----

On November 16, 1968 a group of interested persons met at Cumberland Mountain State Park near Crossville, Tennessee for the purpose of exchanging ideas on a proposed scenic hiking trail to extend the entire length of the Cumberland Mountain chain or Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee from the vicinity of Chattanooga to Cumberland Gap near Middlesboro, Kentucky.

Those attending the meeting were: Evan Means, Tod Haydon, and Dean and Marian Reed of Oak Ridge; Arthur Harrison and Roy Hall of Crossville; James E. Bell, Bob Rourk and John Rhinehart of Knoxville; Ted Dungjen of Calhoun; Carl Leather, Mack S. Prichard, and Robert D. Brown of Nashville.

A number of views were expressed by these participants. Mr. Haydon, for example, warned of the need for reasonable access to and from the proposed trail at sufficiently frequent intervals along its length to encourage its use by nature lovers, bird-watchers, and others who wish to take relatively short hikes. Adequate access for maintenance and emergencies must also be provided, he added. It was generally agreed that short branch trails leading to good motor roads and spaced at not more than ten-mile intervals along the main trail are desirable.

Mr. Haydon also suggested that a short segment of the proposed scenic trail be designated as a pilot operation. Here the techniques of exploring and selecting the most scenic and feasible route, finding and contacting landowners, securing the owners' permission for use of a scenic corridor, and building and maintaining the trail and shelters could be tried out and perfected. These techniques would then be applied successively to other segments of the trail until the whole is completed.

In this regard, Mr. Harrison whose family owns Brady Mountain and Hatfield Mountain, both near Crossville, felt that permission for such use without charge would readily be granted by the owners of the Harrison estate if they could be reasonably assured that the trail would be used with due regard for fire safety and cleanliness. He also felt that permission for construction of an Adirondack-type shelter would also be granted.

Mr. Harrison then raised the question of the landowners' liability in case of accident resulting in injury using the trail under the owner's permission. Mr. Means was of the opinion that in Tennessee landowners are absolved of any responsibility for persons using the owners' land for recreational purposes if the owners are not operating the land as commercial recreational facilities charging fees for such use or profiting from such use in some way.

Mr. Means discussed other proposals made for similar trails along the crest of Cumberland Mountain from Bruce Gap to Cumberland Gap. He strongly felt that this trail could be made a physical reality by the spring of 1969.

Mr. Means also pointed out that Walden's Ridge would form the most natural route for the segment of the proposed trail extending from Caryville to the vicinity of Harriman. This conclusion was supported by the suggestion made in absentia by geologist Robert A. Miller: "This part of Walden's Ridge forms the eastern escarpment of the Cumberland Plateau. It has more interesting structures than the higher mountains immediately to the west; it is not defaced by strip mines as are the latter; it provides a more level and unbroken avenue for a footpath, and it is probably more scenic by virtue of its narrowness and the sharp gradients to either side."

Mr. Miller's suggested route would turn off Walden's Ridge at Emory Gap near Harriman and follow the Emory River to the mouth of the Obed, thence up the gorges of the Obed and Daddy's Creek to the mouth of Yellow Creek. It would follow Yellow Creek up onto the Crab Orchard Mountain and proceed along the crest of the latter to Crab Orchard Gap. There it would cross Highway 70 and I-40, ascend Haley Mountain, traverse Black Mountain and full length of Brady Mountain along its crest and at the top of Dorton Knob, here descending into Devilstep Hollow and climbing the escarpment on the western side of Sequatchie Valley where it would follow this rim to the vicinity of Tip Top. Somewhere along the latter segment, a loop trail could lead off to Falls Creek Falls State Park and, possibly, into Scott's Gulf or along Spring Creek and return past Rose Cave to the main trail. The latter would then cross Sequatchie Valley to show fully the size and character of this unusual breached anticlinal valley. The trail would continue down the eastern rim of the valley to Prentice Cooper State Forest where it would descend Suck Creek and follow for some distance the gorge of the Tennessee River.

Mr. Prichard reviewed a proposed 2237 mile system of trails proposed in 1965 by The Tennessee Conservation Department to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. (See enclosure). He further suggested the desirability of tying the proposed Cumberland Scenic Trail in with other proposed trails in the area such as the John Muir Trail from Pickett State Park and Forest to Morgan State Forest, The Trail of the Lonesome Pine along the crest of Clinch Mountain, The Trail of Tears, and a trail connecting Marion Franklin State Park, Falls Creek Falls State Park, Bledsoe State Forest, Cumberland Mountain State Park, Catoosa Game Management Area, the Sgt. York Trail, and Pickett Forest State Park.

It was unanimously agreed that the route suggested by Mr. Miller including the northern extension along Cumberland Mountain would be adopted as the tentative route for the proposed Cumberland Scenic Trail. It was also noted that a segment from Grassy Cove to Mount Roosevelt Forest might be an alternative to one along Black, Haley, and Crab Orchard Mountains, while one to Byrd Mountain and thence along the Tennessee Valley Divide might be an alternative to that down the Emory River and along Walden's Ridge northeast or Emory Gap.

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During the afternoon, following adjournment of the meeting, Mess'rs. Prichard, Leathers, and Brown, and Mr. and Mrs. Eric Schindler, visiting conservationists from Switzerland, hiked about four miles from Highway 68 at the northern entrance to Grassy Cove up along the crest of Brady Mountain to within a mile or so of Dorton Knob. Outcrops of huge boulders and interesting rock formations including sandstone monoliths, weathered pillars, tables, overhangs, and an unusual "whaleback" escarpment along the Grassy Cove side of the highest part of the crest were found. Both the eastern and western edges of the Cumberland Plateau could be seen with Scott's Gulf and even the distant Short Mountain discernable to the west. A white strip of Hale's Bar Lake and the high, light blue Great Smoky Mountains were clearly in view far to the east. At sunset, Dorton Knob, Hinch Mountain, and Bear Den Mountain loomed darkly silhouetted against a fiery southwestern sky.

---Bob Brown