

Triumph or Tragedy? Teaching about the Establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst.

– Wallace Stegner, 1983

Matt Hensley, *East Tennessee State University*

Stewart Waters, *University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

William B. Russell III, *University of Central Florida*

Joshua Kenna, *University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA, the national parks are certainly some of the most treasured eco-assets in the United States. With sixty-three Congressionally designated parks spanning nearly eighty-four million acres, their diverse biological, geographical, and historical features attract masses of visitors annually, with 237 million recreational visits recorded in 2020 alone.¹ However, the phenomenon associated with the national parks is not solely attributed to their scenic and recreational value, but also their unique educational value. Touted as “America’s largest classrooms,” the national parks can serve as a catalyst for teachers to discuss many relevant topics related to conservation, nature, history, and social issues.²

For social studies teachers in particular, teaching and learning about the national parks can provide a springboard to engage in a variety of skills and practices within the social studies disciplines.³ By engaging in learning experiences that apply disciplinary

thinking skills to evaluate documents, maps, photographs, and other multimedia, students can leverage their constructed knowledge to connect national parks to broader themes of social studies. Additionally, learning more about national parks and the public landscape can help to promote student engagement and interest in social studies, which is an increasingly important factor for social studies teachers to consider.

The purpose of this article is twofold: 1) to offer considerations for leveraging the U.S. national parks to elicit a variety of disciplinary thinking skills including, historical, geographical, and economical thinking in social studies classrooms, and 2) to demonstrate how teachers might engage their students in these different modes of disciplinary thinking by sharing an inquiry lesson idea focused on the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP). Our goal is to offer considerations for social studies teachers who are interested in teaching and learning with the national parks, and who desire to engage their students in an authentic learning experience.

National Parks vs. National Forest: What is the Difference?

For many casual tourists and people in society, the terms “national park” and “national forest” are often used interchangeably. There are, however, very distinct differences and functions between a national park and national forest. Exploring the differences between these two terms will be critically important for classroom teachers, as some national parks (like the GSMNP) are located near national forests and each location has a distinct set of rules and regulations that must be followed. To begin, a national park is heavily focused on preservation and is managed under the Department of the Interior, while a national forest focuses on a variety of uses of the natural resources to benefit larger society and is managed under the Department of Agriculture.⁴ So, while activities like hunting, logging, and cattle grazing would be illegal in a national park, they are often allowed in a national forest. The distinctions between a national park and national forest are particularly relevant in the case of the GSMNP, as early on in the park’s history, many stakeholders could not agree on how best to preserve the land (if at all). In the next section, we offer a rationale for teaching and learning with the national parks in social studies classrooms.

The Value of Teaching and Learning with the National Parks

From Sequoia and Yellowstone, to Shenandoah and GSMNP, the national parks are powerful storytellers that maintain collective memory of America's compelling efforts to protect its sublime natural landscapes and wildlife. Similar to monuments, memorials, and museums that commemorate historical figures and events, national parks are "sites of public pedagogy."⁵ That is, each national park propagates a narrative that embodies ecological, historical, and political significance, making them robust subjects for historical inquiry and interrogation. Thus, we contend that teaching with national parks can enhance students' social studies knowledge and skills acquisition, eliciting disciplinary literacy skills (e.g., historical thinking, economical thinking, geographical thinking, and civic mindedness) that promote divergent thinking and support a more sophisticated understanding of their establishment. We also contend that since national parks are established "for the benefit and enjoyment of the people," it is worthwhile for students to be knowledgeable of these federally protected public lands that they have access to as U.S. citizens. Before investigating the establishment of the GSMNP specifically, it is essential to consider the broader historical context concerning the enduring complexities and issues that have faced the national parks—namely, the fraught ideas of conservation and protecting what were once called America's "worthless lands."

The Enduring Impacts of Conservation on the National Parks

Since its genesis in 1916, the National Park Service (NPS) maintains that an essential objective of its mission is to champion a legacy of conservation by safeguarding and extending the benefits of the natural and cultural resources throughout the country and the world.⁶ From wildlife habitat restoration and waterfront clean up, to native plant gardening and educational programming, conservation is often considered to be noble and benevolent work by the general public. However, conservation has a murky history, particularly in regard to how it was leveraged in the early years of national parks. In *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American*

Conservation (2014), Karl Jacoby suggested that at the core of conservation lays a linkage between environmental crisis and social crisis.⁷ The enduring impacts of conservation efforts—namely, land acquisition—adds a layer of complexity that must be teased apart in order to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the establishment of the national parks.

The idea to establish national parks came out of the conservationist movement of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pre-dating the formation of the NPS.⁸ In 1864, then-President Lincoln signed the Yosemite Valley Grant Act, which established Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove as a protected wilderness area designated for public use.⁹ It was not until 1872, however, that Congress established Yellowstone as the country's first national park under the supervision of the U.S. Department of the Interior. This, of course, transpired following reports from expeditions of the Yellowstone area in Northwest Wyoming in years prior that documented many natural geologic wonders, such as geysers, steaming rivers, bubbling mud pools, waterfalls, canyons, and more.¹⁰ U.S. geologist Ferdinand Hayden, who had led a scientific expedition in Yellowstone in 1871 was a premier advocate for Congress to preserve the area as a national park, arguing that the lands were otherwise “worthless” in terms of their natural resources.¹¹ Accordingly, the rationale for Congress to establish national parks moving forward was to preserve scenic natural landscapes that were otherwise considered to be “worthless lands” for settlement and other economic ventures.

By 1890, the federal government had also established Sequoia National Park and Yosemite National Park (Yosemite Valley was added in 1906) in California under similar iterations of the “worthless lands” rationale.¹² Conservation efforts continued to strengthen with the passage of federal legislative acts, including the Lacey Act (1984), which protected wildlife in addition to scenery in the national parks, and the Antiquities Act (1906), which authorized the President to establish natural and historic sites as national monuments. Congress eventually formed the NPS in 1916 as federal agency housed in the Department of the Interior to formally manage all aspects of the sites within the national park system. Within two decades of its formation, the NPS championed the establishment of several national parks across the country and

started focusing more heavily on tourism as a means to make the parks more self-sufficient and uphold its conservation mission.¹³ Since its establishment over a century ago, the NPS has evolved from exclusively preserving natural scenic landscapes and wildlife to also promoting scientific research within the parks and a broader understanding of the culture and history associated with each site.¹⁴

Certainly, conservation efforts steered by the NPS are often praised for “preserving unimpaired” the natural and historic sites of the United States. In recent decades, however, historians have questioned the integrity of conservation efforts, specifically those that were pivotal in the establishment of the first national parks. For example, in *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (1999), Mark David Spence suggested that the establishment of Yellowstone in 1872 reflects the “first example of removing a native population in order to ‘preserve’ nature.”¹⁵ Spence contended that Indigenous peoples occupied the Yellowstone area and were using the lands that were deemed “worthless” for natural resources (e.g., wild game and plants), as well as for cultural ceremonies.¹⁶ Laura Watt echoed similar sentiments in *The Paradox of Preservation: Wilderness and Working Landscapes at Point Reyes National Seashore* (2016).¹⁷ Watt critiqued the decisions by Congress to establish national parks in inhabited spaces throughout the twentieth century, during which “Native inhabitants were usually forcibly removed, and new settlers prevented from claiming homesteads, so that the park’s magnificent natural scenery could be preserved unchanging to the future.”¹⁸ The enduring impact of the establishment of early national parks like Yellowstone in 1872 is that embedded in conservation efforts was the idea of maintaining the grandeur of the “natural” and “uninhabited” wilderness. However, this idea negates the reality that Indigenous peoples were already occupying and using the lands that would become national parks, thus concealing a dark history of dispossession and displacement.

The recurring pattern of establishing national parks in inhabited areas happened again in 1934 with the establishment of the GSMNP in the Appalachian Mountains of Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina. Only then, the NPS and park advocates faced a unique hurdle since the inhabitants occupying the land were private landowners and timber companies rather than Indigenous peoples

who could be legally or forcibly dispossessed or displaced more easily. In the next section, we explore the early history of the GSMNP and discuss some of the issues surrounding the formation of this national park relevant for teachers and students.

History of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) encompasses a vast territory of land that straddles the border between Tennessee and North Carolina. Before discussing an overview of how the national park came to be, it is obviously imperative to acknowledge that this land originally belonged to Indigenous people already living in the region. Specifically, much of the territory that today makes up the GSMNP once belonged to the Cherokee.¹⁹ However, this land was systemically taken from the Cherokee over time, largely culminating with the horrific forced removal of these people by President Andrew Jackson in what came to be known as the Trail of Tears.²⁰ Although the purpose of this section of the article is to examine more closely the history of how the GSMNP came to be, we would be remiss not to highlight the fact that none of this land actually “belonged” to the United States government or its citizens. For more detailed information about the Cherokee people in this region, we recommend Duane King’s edited book, *The Cherokee Indian Nation: A Troubled History* (2005).²¹

For the purposes of this article and teaching activity, we chose to focus on the formation of GSMNP for its unique history and significance in the United States. The rise of national parks really began in the early twentieth century, but most of these were developed in the Western region of the United States, preserving land that the federal government already owned.²² The idea of creating a national park in the Smokies originated from wealthy business owners, philanthropists, and car enthusiasts that desired to simultaneously have roads built in the region between Tennessee and North Carolina, as well as preserve the natural beauty of the forest.²³ However, this task was quite monumental in nature, as the land was inhabited by thousands of residents, timber companies, and would require the cooperation of state governments from both Tennessee and North Carolina.²⁴

In 1926, the federal government passed a bill to protect a minimum of 300,000 acres of land as part of the GSMNP, but with

many stipulations, including the raising of substantial funds by both Tennessee and North Carolina legislatures in order to purchase the needed land from the timber companies and private citizens that owned, operated, and lived on the existing land.²⁵ While the Tennessee and North Carolina legislatures each agreed to contribute two million dollars in funds, it still was not enough money for the park, so help was solicited from wealthy entrepreneur and known philanthropist, John D. Rockefeller Jr. His contribution of five million dollars provided the necessary financial support needed for the park to finally move forward, and the hard work began in 1929 of purchasing the land required for the GSMNP.²⁶

As we mentioned earlier, the land proposed for the GSMNP was occupied by thousands of independent land owners and timber companies. Many of these people did not want to sell their land at all, leading to condemnation lawsuits, which allows the government to “condemn” property for higher use.²⁷ Although families would be compensated for their land based on market values, many people felt this was an egregious abuse of power by the government and that no private citizen should be forced to sell their land, which in some cases had been in their families for generations. Dan Pierce posited that “most historical accounts of the park [GSMNP] tend to gloss over the removal of families from the Smokies.”²⁸ So, while many people romanticize the GSMNP now, it is important for teachers to highlight the dynamics that went into the developing of the park, including the displacement of families and the economic impact in the region.

Although court battles for property within the park would rage on for much of the 1930s, by June 15, 1934, the GSMNP officially opened to the public. Nearly six years later on September 2, 1940, then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt formally dedicated the Smokies “for the permanent enjoyment of the people.” The GSMNP is considered to be one of the most biodiverse parks in the U.S. and has maintained its rank since 1944 as the most visited national park.²⁹ Millions of visitors now come to visit the GSMNP every year and it is proudly touted as “nature’s playground” and a “living laboratory.” The overwhelming majority of support and admiration for the GSMNP in today’s society begs the important (and enduring) question for teachers and students in social studies classes to examine: Do the ends justify the means?

Inquiry into the Establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

We contend that studying the GSMNP's complex narrative can serve as a unique catalyst for students to apply many social studies skills and practices (e.g., historical thinking, geographical thinking, economical thinking, and civic mindedness). We present a critical inquiry lesson entitled "Triumph or Tragedy? The Establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park" (**Appendix A**). Guided by the National Council for the Social Studies' (NCSS) C3 Framework and Inquiry Arc, this lesson situates students to respond to the following compelling question: *Is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park a reflection of America at its best?* Students grapple with this inquiry by applying disciplinary thinking skills to interpret a variety of primary and secondary sources, including images, speeches, maps, and digital media, particularly as they complete an "Inquiry Trail Guide" (**Appendix B**) while circulating in groups through a series of "Trail Blaze Stations" (**Appendix C**) This lesson extends students' understanding of the national parks by providing contextual insight into how the establishment of the GSMNP specifically affected the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina.

Also, as previously mentioned, teaching with the national parks can serve as catalyst for teachers to discuss topics connected to history, conservation, nature, government interference, and other environmental and social issues. This lesson presents multiple opportunities for teachers to broach several of these complex issues and topics, specifically as they relate to the establishment of the GSMNP. First, the lesson's hook employs a think-pair-share activity to elicit any prior knowledge from students concerning the concept of "eminent domain." By answering a series of thought-provoking questions with a peer, students are primed to discuss whether or not they think that the expropriation of privately owned lands is an overreach of government power. Also, the Trail Blaze Station source analysis activity invites students to work in small groups to evaluate diverse perspectives regarding the GSMNP since its genesis, situating students to discuss a bevy of issues associated with establishing a national park in an already inhabited area. For example, Trail Blaze Station 2 includes images depicting

people who inhabited the GSMNP area during its pre-designation as a national park, along with a map showing formerly owned tracts of land within the current park boundary. Evaluating these primary sources might prompt students to discuss whether or not the displacement of the southern Appalachian communities in the pursuit of conservation efforts to protect the forest from lumbering was justified.

Of course, the aforementioned examples represent only a few of the opportunities for teachers to leverage this lesson to broach complex topics with their students. Certainly, the list of possible issues and topics that can be discussed during this lesson is extensive. As teachers read the lesson plan, we encourage them think about other potential issues and complex topics that can be inferred from the activities and source materials, and how they might highlight them if they were to incorporate this into their own classrooms. In the following section, we describe the recommended pedagogical approach for facilitating this lesson.

Lesson Plan Activity and Resources

The “Triumph or Tragedy?” lesson eschews mundane social studies pedagogical methods that involve rote memorization of chronological dates, events, and names, which are often used to perpetuate dominant mono-narratives about the past.³⁰ Rather, the lesson actively engages students in a process of structured inquiry via the C3 Framework’s four-dimensional Inquiry Arc. The four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc include: 1) Developing questions and planning inquiries; 2) Applying disciplinary concepts (e.g., Civics, Economics, Geography, and History) and tools; 3) Evaluating sources and using evidence; and 4) Communicating conclusions and taking informed action.³¹ Similar to the “History Labs” employed by Linda Sargent Wood, this lesson also situates students to “do history”—a practice that promotes divergent thinking by inviting learners to grapple with historical narratives, not simply memorize facts.³² For example, the four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc serve as scaffolds that aid students in evaluating primary and secondary sources conveying multiple perspectives concerning the establishment of the GSMNP. The pedagogical approach employed in this lesson aligns with the NCSS position on powerful teaching

and learning with social studies, enabling students to actualize the inquiry process and develop transferable skills for civic life as they work through the four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc.³³

Considerations for Classroom Application

We taught this lesson in an eighth-grade social studies classroom to supplement U.S. history learning standards. From the moment the students were presented with the compelling question, they were immediately invested in solving the inquiry related to the establishment of the GSMNP. We monitored the students' reactions as they worked to unpack the primary and secondary sources (e.g., maps, articles, images, and videos) at each Trail Blaze Station and answer the analytical and sourcing questions on their Inquiry Trail Guides. It was clear that the students were not simply captivated by the novelty of the lesson materials and activities. Rather, something more exciting was happening—that is, the students were actually “doing history.” Specifically, the source analysis activity enjoined them to grapple with the historical narrative concerning the establishment of the GSMNP, eliciting divergent thinking and the application of disciplinary thinking skills as they evaluated conflicting sources of evidence. By the end of the lesson, the students had appropriated sufficient knowledge to participate in a fishbowl debate, as well as craft an individual response to the compelling question that drove the lesson. From both their verbal and written responses, it was evident that the students recognized that determining whether the establishment of the GSMNP was a reflection of America at its “best” was dependent on the perspective being considered.

Conclusion

GSMNP's narrative is incredibly complex. It is important to note that the intent of this article and lesson plan is not to vilify the National Park Service or any of the boosters and advocates of the national park in the Smoky Mountains region. Rather, our focus is to situate students to practice expanding complex historical narratives by engaging in critical inquiry. It is important to note that expanding historical narratives is highly skillful work.³⁴ Interpreting conflicting primary and secondary sources and using evidence from these

sources to construct reasoned arguments are not innate skills, and require practice to achieve mastery. We recommend that teachers who are interested in incorporating national parks first decide how teaching and learning about them might occur within the context of their existing social studies curriculum.

National parks are natural monuments to the beauty of the world we live in. Similar to structural monuments, each national park embodies its own complex narrative for how it came to be and what it epitomizes. It our hope that the lesson, resources, and authentic assessments motivate, inspire, and support teachers of multiple social studies disciplines to consider the value of leveraging the national parks (and the GSMNP) as a catalyst for inquiry to promote divergent thinking and elicit student disciplinary literacy skills.. The narrative of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is often romanticized as laudable progress. However, it is important to recognize that its establishment is a critical historical event that certainly did not come without a price.

Notes

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12. Runte, *National Parks*, 65.
13. Watt, *The Paradox of Preservation*, 52.
14. Watt, *The Paradox of Preservation*, 151-161.
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16. See "Chapter 3: Before the Wilderness: Native Peoples and Yellowstone," in Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 41-54.
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18. Watt, *The Paradox of Preservation*, 13-14.
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25. Philip A. Grant Jr., "Congress and the Establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 1926-1934," in *Partnerships and Sustainability* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1995), 16-18.
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Appendix A: Lesson Plan

Triumph or Tragedy?

The Establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Lesson Overview: The purpose of this lesson is to engage students in a variety of disciplinary thinking to expand the narrative linked to the establishment of Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP).

Topic: The Establishment of GSMNP

Grades: 6-12

Time: 60-90 minutes

C3 Framework Standards:

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

D2.Civ.10.9-12. Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.

D2.Civ.6.9-12. Critique relationships among governments, civil societies, and economic markets.

D2.Geo.2.9-12. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.

D2.Geo.5.9-12. Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

D2.Eco.1.9-12. Analyze how incentives influence choices that may result in policies with a range of costs and benefits for different groups.

Objectives:

- Evaluate primary and secondary sources to construct an in-depth understanding of the historical, economical, geographical, and social effects associated with the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.
- Develop an argument supported by evidence from primary and secondary sources regarding whether or not the establishment of GSMNP is a reflection of America at its best or worst.

Essential/Compelling Question:

Is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park a reflection of America at its best?

Materials:

- Trail Blaze Stations 1-6 with primary and secondary sources (attached below)
- Inquiry Trail Guide (attached below)
- Pennies (for Fishbowl Debate)

Procedure:

Lesson Hook: The teacher will facilitate a think-pair-share to evoke student thinking about the concept of eminent domain. Students will grapple with one or all of the following questions:

- What is eminent domain?
- Is eminent domain an overreach of government power? Why or why not?
- Who determines what is “good for the people”?
- Should people have to sell their privately owned land if they do not wish to do so?
- Does progress come at a price?

Instruction:

The teacher will display the following quote: *“National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst.”*

- After giving students a few moments to reflect on the quote, the teacher will inform the students that they will be challenging the validity of this quote by learning about the establishment of GSMNP. From there, the teacher will share a brief history of the GSMNP’s establishment to provide context before presenting the following compelling/essential question: *Is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park a reflection of America at its best?*

Source Analysis Group Activity:

Students will be divided into six groups and will be given an Inquiry Trail Guide. The groups will then be assigned to one of six Trail Blaze Stations, which contain a variety of primary and secondary sources.

- Students will work together in their groups to analyze the sources at their Trail Blaze Station and respond to the corresponding questions on their Inquiry Trail Guide. Students will need between 5-7 minutes at the Trail Blaze Station.
- Students will rotate around the classroom until they have visited each of the Trail Blaze Stations and completed their Inquiry Trail Guides.

Fishbowl Debate Activity:

After the students have rotated through all six of the Trail Blaze Stations and completed the Inquiry Trail Guide, they will be divided into teams for a fishbowl

debate concerning the essential question. The teacher will randomly select between 4-6 students to enter the fishbowl in the center of the classroom. These students will be given 2-3 pennies, which determine the number of times that each student may speak while in the fishbowl. Students will be given 3-4 minutes to debate the topic for that round. Students participating in the debate will be expected to synthesize their analysis from the Trail Blaze Stations activity to support their argument during the debate.

- The teacher will facilitate the debate and help students hone in on their main points as they deliberate.
- Students who are viewing the fishbowl debate will take observation notes on a provided handout.

Conclusion: (10-15 minutes)

Students will be given an index, which they will use to independently respond to the essential question in writing.

- Students will be invited to take a stance concerning the essential question and defend it by providing detailed insights they have learned from the previous activities.

If time permits, the teacher can facilitate brief discussion activity where students will revisit their initial think-pair-share questions from the beginning of the lesson. Students will then have the opportunity to evaluate whether their initial responses concerning eminent domain have changed after learning about the establishment of GSMNP.

Appendix B: “Inquiry Trail Guide” Student Handout



INQUIRY TRAIL GUIDE Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Directions: Your task is to examine the documents at each station along the trail and record your responses to the following questions based on the documents. Refer to the Trail Blazes to make sure you are staying “on trail” and answering the designated questions for each Trail Blaze Station.

Trail
Blaze
1

1. Who is delivering the speech (Artifact #1) and for what purpose is it being delivered?
2. When and where was this speech (Artifact #1) delivered and why does it matter to know this?
3. What reason is given in the third paragraph of the speech (Artifact #1) as to why the Smokies are being conserved under the National Park Service?
4. Looking at the picture, what do you notice about the people in the background attending the dedication?
5. Do the artifacts at this station suggest that the establishment of GSMNP is a reflection of America at its best?

Trail
Blaze
2

1. When were the pictures (Artifacts #1-4) taken and why does it matter?
2. What do you notice about the people in the pictures (Artifacts #1-4)?
3. What do the pictures (Artifacts #1-4) suggest about the lifestyle and/or economy of the Smoky Mountains area?
4. What does the map (Artifact #5) show?
5. According to the map (Artifact #5), who largely owned the tracts of land in the Smoky Mountains prior to the establishment of the national park? Why might this be significant?
6. Do the artifacts at this station suggest that the establishment of GSMNP is a reflection of America at its best?

Trail
Blaze
3

1. Who wrote this and for what purpose did they write it?
2. When was it written and why does it matter to know this?
3. According to the source, who is the biggest threat to the forests in the Smoky Mountains?
4. What does the author suggest should happen to protect the forests?
5. Does this artifact suggest that the establishment of GSMNP is a reflection of America at its best?

Trail
Blaze
4

1. Who wrote this source and for what purpose was it written?
2. Who was referred to as “the father of the Park movement” and why is this person significant to the establishment of GSMNP?
3. Why did road boosters like the Knoxville Automobile Club take interest in establishing a National Park?
4. According to document, in what ways would the establishment of GSMNP be beneficial to the Smoky Mountain region?
5. Does this artifact suggest that the establishment of GSMNP is a reflection of America at its best?

Trail
Blaze
5

1. Who wrote this source and for what purpose was it written?
2. When was it written and why does it matter to know this?
3. How much money was spent in communities near GSMNP in 2020 and how many jobs were supported by this spending?
4. Since the GSMNP does not have an entrance fee, can you think what visitors might be spending their money on?
5. Does this artifact suggest that the establishment of GSMNP is a reflection of America at its best?

Trail
Blaze
6

1. Who created this video and for what purpose?
2. Who were the Walker sisters?
3. How did the Walker sisters feel about their homestead in the Smoky Mountains?
4. How did the establishment of the GSMNP impact the Walker sisters?
5. Does the Walker sisters’ story suggest that the establishment of GSMNP is a reflection of America at its best?

Appendix C: “Trail Blaze Station” Resource Packets

Trail Blaze Station 1

Artifact #1

President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s 1940 GSMNP Dedication Speech (excerpt)

...Here in the Great Smokies, we have come together to dedicate these mountains, streams, and forests, to the service of the millions of American people. We are living under governments that are proving their devotion to national parks.

...There are trees here that stood before our forefathers ever came to this continent; there are brooks that still run as clear as on the day the first pioneer cupped his hand and drank from them. In this Park, we shall conserve these trees, the pine, the red-bud, the dogwood, the azalea, the rhododendron, the trout and the thrush for the happiness of the American people.

The old frontier, that put the hard fibre in the American spirit and the long muscles on the American back, lives and will live in these untamed mountains to give to the future generations a sense of the land from which their forefathers hewed their homes.

That hewing was hard. The dangers were many. The rifle could never be far from the axe. The pioneers stood on their own feet, they shot their own game and they fought off their own enemies. In time of accident or misfortune they helped each other, and in time of Indian attack they stood by each other.

Today we no longer face Indians and hard and lonely struggles with nature—but today we have grown soft in many ways...

It is good and right that we should conserve these mountain heights of the old frontier for the benefit of the American people. But in this hour we have to safeguard a greater thing: the right of the people of this country to live as free men. Our vital task of conservation is to preserve the freedom that our forefathers won in this land, and the liberties that were proclaimed in our Declaration of Independence and embodied in our Constitution.

The winds that blow through the wide sky in these mountains, the winds that sweep from Canada to Mexico, from the Pacific to the Atlantic—have always blown on free men. We are free today. If we join together now—men and women and children—to face the common menace as a united people, we shall be free tomorrow.

So, to the free people of America, I dedicate this Park.

Description: Excerpt from FDR’s 1940 GSMNP dedication speech. Source: The American Presidency Project at <<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-dedication-great-smoky-mountains-national-park>>.

Trail Blaze Station 1

Artifact #2

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1940 GSMNP Dedication Speech Image



Description: "Image of FDR delivering his GSMNP dedication speech at Newfound Gap in Gatlinburg, TN (1940)." Source: Tennessee Virtual Archive at <<https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll18/id/947/rec/18>>.

Trail Blaze Station 2

Artifact #1 GSMNP Primary Source Image



Description: “Stump of a large tulip poplar tree cut by Little River Lumber Company on Lynn Camp Prong. Photo by Jim Shelton in 1926.” Source: National Park Service at <<https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery-item.htm?id=EEC74945-1DD8-B71C-07E83D3FE8DB0F28&gid=C42743FD-1DD8-B71C-07A2DCCEF65CCF33>>.

Trail Blaze Station 2

Artifact #2
GSMNP Primary Source Image



Description: "A boy takes corn to the mill to be ground in this 1920 photo from Cades Cove." Source: National Park Service at <<https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery-item.htm?id=EEC74945-1DD8-B71C-07E83D3FE8DB0F28&gid=C42743FD-1DD8-B71C-07A2DCCEF65CCF33>>.

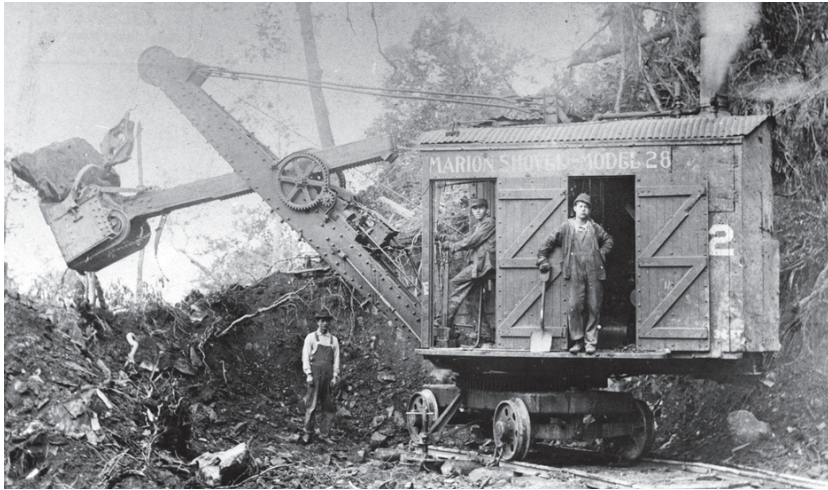
Trail Blaze Station 2
Artifact #3
GSMNP Primary Source Image



Description: “Molly McCarter Ogle rocks her daughter Mattie on the porch. This photo has become one of the most famous images created of mountain people in the Smokies. Photo taken in 1928.” Source: National Park Service at <https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/gallery-item.htm?id=EEC74945-1DD8-B71C-07E83D3FE8DB0F28&gid=C42743FD-1DD8-B71C-07A2DCCE F65CCF33>.

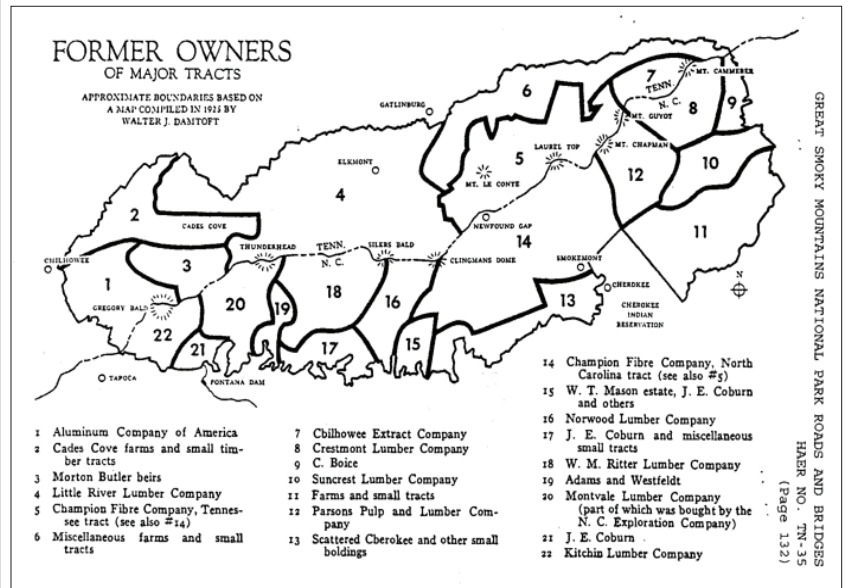
Trail Blaze Station 2

Artifact #4 GSMNP Primary Source Image



Description: "A steam shovel cuts through the Little River Gorge to lay railroad tracks for the Little River Lumber Company and Little River Railroad. Photo circa 1906." Source: National Park Service at <<https://www.nps.gov/media/photo/view.htm?id=BF57073E-1DD8-B71C-07024F4A8CA7CFD3>>.

Trail Blaze Station 2
Artifact #5
GSMNP Primary Source Map



Description: "Map from 1968 Historic American Engineering Record Report showing approximate boundaries of formerly owned tracts of land in GSMNP." Source: National Park Service Electronic Library at <<http://www.npshistory.com>>.

Trail Blaze Station 3

Artifact #1

“A National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains” Brochure by the North Carolina Park Commission (excerpt)

Anyone can see, now, the falsity of the claim, so assiduously made, that a National Forest would offer the same recreational facilities and attractions to tourists as a National Park. Do bare, cut-over mountains draw tourists? Does anyone crave to camp among such thickets and briers? No; it is the grand old aboriginal forest, with its gigantic trees, its thick moss and ferny glens, its wild flowers, its animal life, that tourists and campers love. Nobody goes out of his way to see a lumberman's slashing. The mountains denuded of forest are a pitiful sight. Look at Mount Mitchell once the premier attraction of the Appalachian country, but now fire-scarred, desolate and shorn of beauty! Nobody comes back from a trip to Mitchell without being saddened by the vandalism that ruined this scenic masterpiece of the South.

None of us oppose the work of the Forest Service. On the contrary we all see its necessity and agree that we need a greater extension of forests under Government control. But there is a practically unlimited acreage of cut-over lands in the South that is adapted to reforestation. Why should the small area of virgin forest that is left in the Smokies be destroyed?

In fact the Forest Service has abandoned the idea of acquiring the Smoky Mountain territory as a National Forest. Negotiations for its purchase for that purpose have been stopped by the Department of Agriculture in order to clear the way for its acquisition as a National Park.

There is no use, then, in talking about a National Forest in this region. But it is urgent that steps be taken at once to create a National Park in the Smokies before the lumbermen destroy the primitive forest that is its chief attraction.

The principal body of virgin timber stands in the southeastern section of the proposed park boundary. It is shaded on the sketch-map printed on the opposite page of this book, so as to direct special attention to that area.

If this big tree section be left out, the park will lose its chief scenic feature. Not only that, but North Carolina especially would suffer. If the area of virgin timber be left out, then instead of three trunk-line highways between North Carolina and Tennessee there would be only one, and the network of park roads would be principally connected with Tennessee. In such case, Asheville, Waynesville and Sylva would be cut off, and most of the tourist traffic would be deflected into Tennessee.

A glance at the map will show how important it is for North Carolina to insist on the inclusion of the big tree area in the National Park. And the country at large is vitally interested in it; for if the big trees are destroyed by the lumbermen we shall lose forever not only the forest giants themselves but all the wonderfully varied and beautiful botanical life that they, and they only, can protect and nourish.

Men and women of North Carolina! Shall the Great Smoky Mountains become a National Park or a desert?

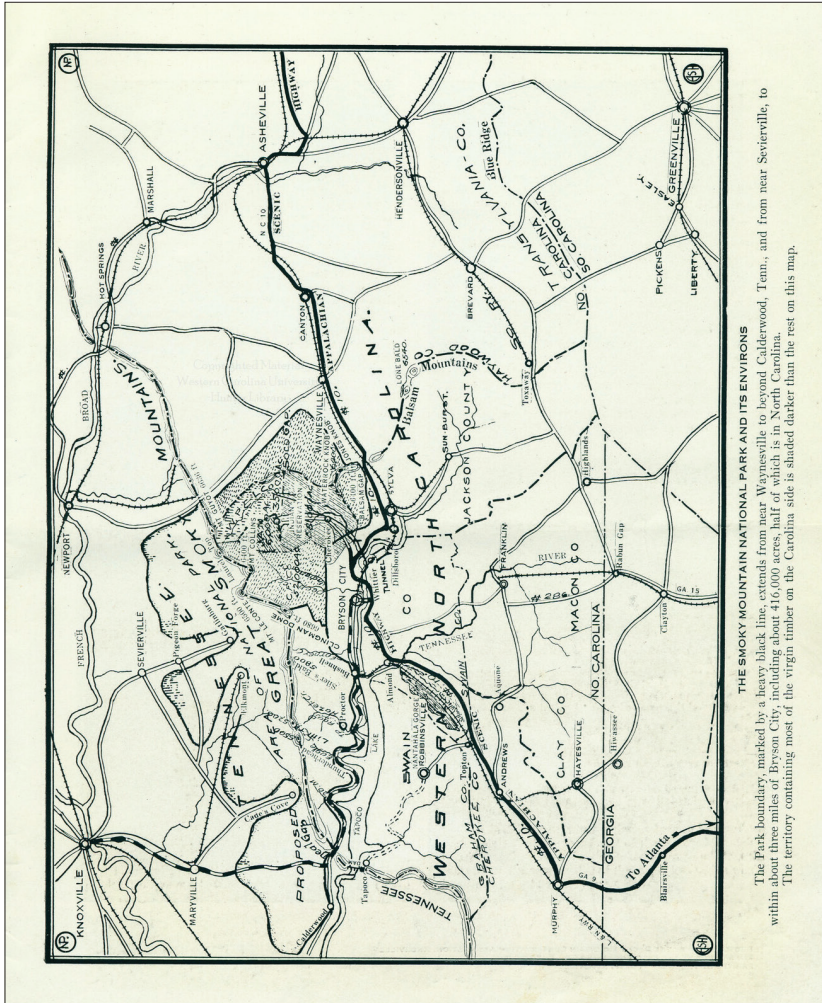


Description: “Produced by the North Carolina Park Commission, these two pages are part of a 20-page brochure that was published in 1925.” Source: Western Carolina University Southern Appalachian Digital Collections at <<https://southernappalachiandigitalcollections.org/object/17538>>.

Trail Blaze Station 3

Artifact #2

“A National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains” Brochure by the North Carolina Park Commission (excerpt)



Description: “Produced by the North Carolina Park Commission, these two pages are part of a 20-page brochure that was published in 1925.” Source: Western Carolina University Southern Appalachian Digital Collections at <<https://southernappalachiandigitalcollections.org/object/17538>>.

Trail Blaze Station 4

Artifact #1 Highways in Harmony Text

Great Smoky Mountains National Park
North Carolina, Tennessee

ROAD BOOSTERS PROMOTE A PARK

The movement to establish a national park in the Great Smoky Mountains was intimately linked to road boosterism. The so-called “father of the park movement,” Willis Davis, was not only on the board of directors of the Knoxville Automobile Club but first promoted the idea of a national park in the Smokies at an Automobile Club meeting in 1923. Members of the car club responded by creating the Smoky Mountains Conservation Association to publicize and coordinate the campaign, and elected Willis Davis as its president.



Knoxville road boosters were not alone in their desires or actions. The local campaign was part of national and regional trends taking place during the 1920s that also encouraged the creation of GRSM. Nationwide, the development of mass-produced automobiles was resulting in cheaper prices and a correlating increase in automobile ownership. During this time the need for good roads became one of the primary political and civic issues in the South. Believing that improved motorways would finally propel the region into the national economic mainstream, Southerners, including members of the Knoxville Automobile Club, advocated numerous road-building projects. Although particularly appealing to those living in the regions of Western North Carolina and East Tennessee with primitive roads, the high cost of constructing roads through the Smoky Mountains kept road building in this area at a minimum, even during the height of the “Good Roads” movement.

Along with wanting to protect the Smokies from the onslaught of loggers, Willis Davis and others so viewed the national park as a means of encouraging tourism through road development. For many park promoters tourism, road construction, and the creation of GRSM were three aspects of the same desire for economic expansion in the Smoky Mountain region.

Description: Text source describing the role of automobile booster clubs in establishing GSMNP. Source: National Park Service Park Net at <https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/hih/great_smoky_mtns/great_smoky_mtns3.htm>.

Trail Blaze Station 5

Artifact #1 National Park Service 2021 News Release

Tourism to Great Smoky Mountain National Park
creates \$1.38 Billion in Economic Benefits

Report shows visitor spending supports over 14,000 jobs in local economy

Date: June 29, 2021

Contact: Caitlin Worth

A new National Park Service (NPS) report shows that 12,095,721 visitors to Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 2020 spent \$1,024,024,000 in communities near the park. That spending supported 14,707 jobs in the local area and had a cumulative benefit to the local economy of \$1.38 billion.

“In spite of an incredibly difficult year in the world and in our neighboring communities, we are proud to have worked alongside our communities to serve visitors to this area in 2020,” said Superintendent Cash. “We remain committed to safely serving visitors in our communities and the park as they continue to explore our area and find the amazing resources the Smokies have to offer.”

The peer-reviewed visitor spending analysis was conducted by economists with the National Park Service and the U.S. Geological Survey. The report shows \$14.5 billion of direct spending by more than 237 million park visitors in communities within 60 miles of a national park. This spending supported 234,000 jobs nationally; 194,400 of those jobs are found in these gateway communities. The cumulative benefit to the U.S. economy was \$28.6 billion.

Looking at the economics of visitor spending nationally, the lodging sector had the highest direct effects, with \$5 billion in economic output. The restaurants sector was had the second greatest effects, with \$3 billion in economic output. Visitor spending on lodging supported more than 43,100 jobs and more than 45,900 jobs in restaurants. Visitor spending in the recreation industries supported more than 18,100 jobs and spending in retail supported more than 14,300 jobs.

Report authors also produce an interactive tool that enables users to explore visitor spending, jobs, labor income, value added, and output effects by sector for national, state, and local economies. Users can also view year-by-year trend data. The interactive tool and report are available on the NPS Social Science Program page on NPS.gov.

To learn more about national parks in North Carolina and Tennessee and how the National Park Service works with communities in both states to help preserve local history, conserve the environment, and provide outdoor recreation, go to www.nps.gov/TENNESSEE or www.nps.gov/NORTHCAROLINA.

Description: News release retrieved from the National Park Service. Source: National Park Service at <<https://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/news/2020-economic-impact.htm>>.

Trail Blaze Station 6

Artifact #1

Life Before the Park: The Story of the Walker Sisters

**Instructions:**

Click the link below and watch the video, “Life Before the Park.” Be sure to answer the corresponding questions on the guide.

Link to Video:

<https://www.wbir.com/article/news/local/the-walker-sisters-part-1-life-before-the-park/51-7810a986-49c9-4655-8438-21036ae561e9>

Description: Image of the seven Walker sisters who lived in GSMNP before it became a national park. Source: WBIR News Station at <<https://www.wbir.com/article/news/local/the-walker-sisters-part-1-life-before-the-park/51-7810a986-49c9-4655-8438-21036ae561e9>>.