

## REDISCOVERING OUR MOUNTAINS

# Platform on the Plateau

**Nigger Mountain is growing in popularity; autumn is a good time to try out a kaleidoscopic view.**

**By PAUL PLEASANTS**

Introduce yourself to Nigger Mountain by viewing it first from a special turn-out on the Parkway. It rises as a long, forested prominence, darkly conspicuous among its neighbors on Ashe plateau.

Then ascend it over a good graveled road, turning off between Jefferson and West Jefferson.

But don't go all the way to the top. After winding around the mountain, the road makes an extraordinarily sharp right turn, crosses a big boulder and goes into a steep climb.

### Trail to Lookout

At this place is room for parking and a little trail leads straight ahead and then to the left.

This trail suddenly emerges upon a huge rock jutting over the side of the mountain. This is the best view, and this is the place Hugh Morton stood when he made the pictures on this page.

A great part of Ashe County suddenly spreads out beneath you. Field, farm, forest and mountain intermingle

with kaleidoscopic variety, and it is the kind of place you want to visit for a while. Binoculars really pay their way here.

To the south is the rich Beaver Creek section, with West Jefferson in the middle ground. Left of the town is Mulatto Mountain. Slightly to its right and hanging close above the town is Paddy Mountain; behind Paddy are Big Bald (Black Mountain on the GS), Old Field Bald, and then, swinging to the west, Three Tops.

North of your position is the old town of Jefferson, behind it Phoenix and Little Phoenix, behind them White

### The Pictures

These three pictures, when overlapped a bit and pasted together, present the panorama you see from the rocky look-out on Nigger Mountain. Both Jeffersons are seen, as well as the mountains surrounding your platform. Hugh Morton made this in five shots—we pasted them together to make three connecting views.

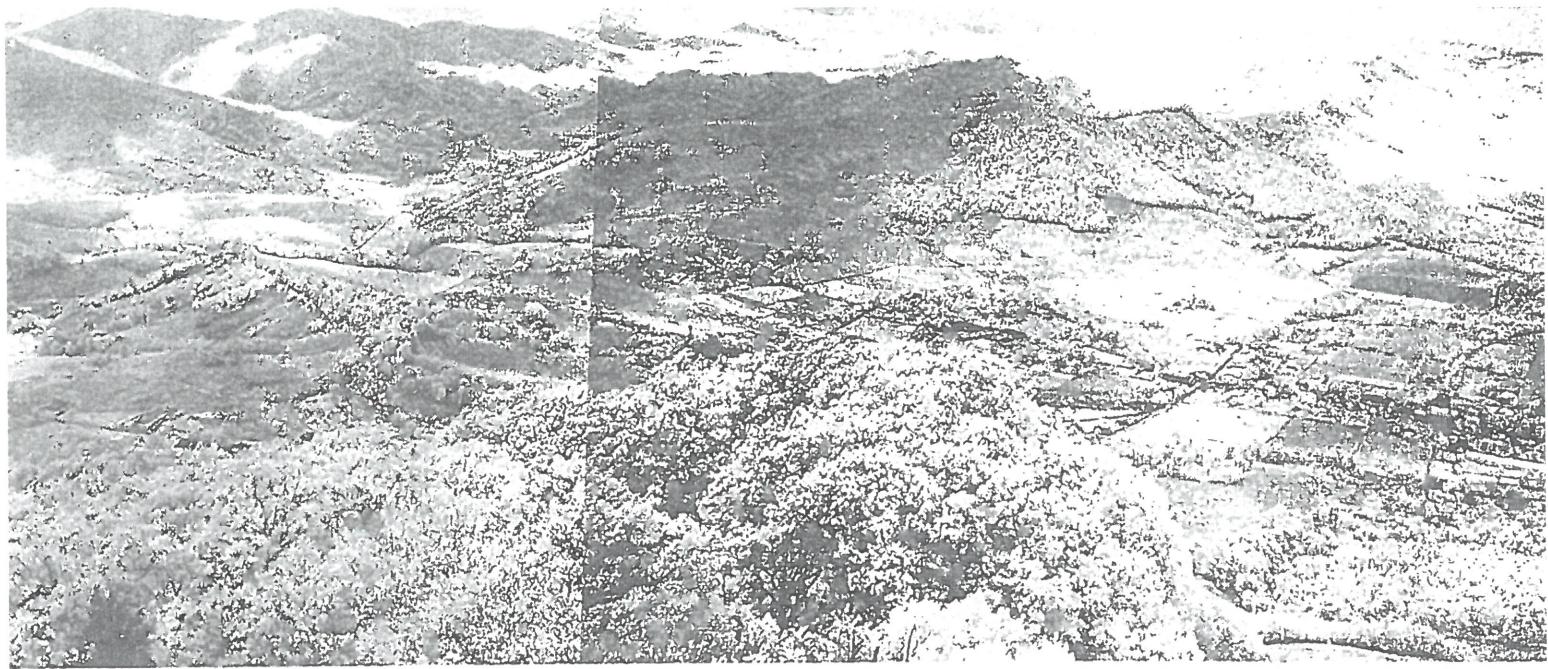
Top, in Virginia. Then swinging around further to your right you see the valley of Naked Creek, and in the far distance the Peach Bottom Mountains of Alleghany County.

### Plan State Park

Nigger is a mountain of growing popularity because of its accessibility and the view it affords of a handsome countryside. We last rediscovered it during the fall color season, which is a good time for a visit. The State Park system is developing a recreation area on the mountain, with picnic tables and fireplaces.

The road leads on up to the fire tower on top, but because of the way the land lies and the growth of trees the view here is inferior to the one just described.

There is a legend that before the Revolution the mountain was called Panther, commemorating a tragedy. A small boy and girl were reported to be travelling over the ridge from the pioneer settlement of Beaver Creek into



the community called Naked Creek. A panther attacked them and while the boy escaped the beast destroyed the girl.

#### Named for Slave

After about 1800, some land grants recorded the name as Negro, and it is said the change was made because a runaway slave from east of the Blue Ridge hid out in a cave there, was recaptured and returned to his master. One legend ascribes the name to the fact that just before the Civil War, the mountain was a "station" on the Underground Railway. Sympathizers may have concealed slaves here on their way to free territory, but the name was given the mountain long before abolition agitation. Significantly, its nearest neighbor is Mulatto Mountain, and some local people think both

mountains were named because of their shades of black.

#### Geographical Politics

The people who named the mountain did not reckon with the absurdities of racial politics. Both in popular usage and on the geographical maps, the mountain acquired its present name. At the look-out point on the Parkway, a sign pointing to "Nigger Mountain" was erected. Some northern tourists figured this was inimicable to the Advancement of something or other, and the Interior Department knuckled under by substituting a sign pointing to lesser Phoenix Mountain.

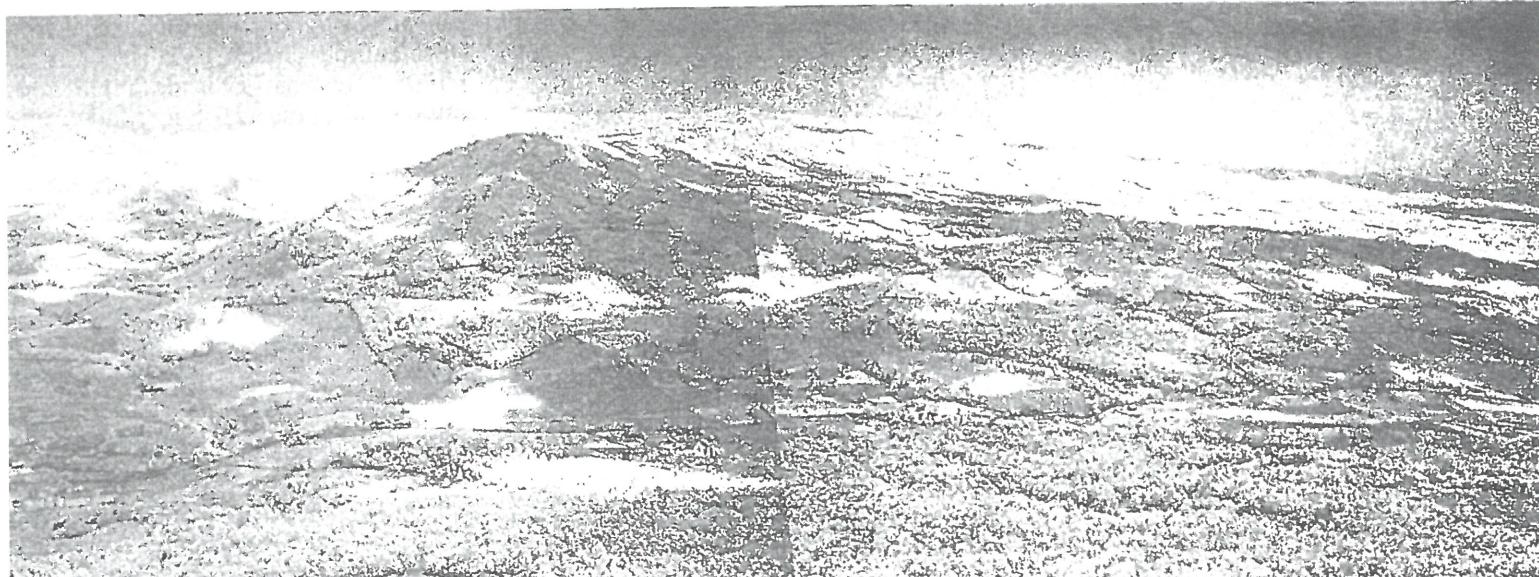
This attempt to ignore the main attraction did nothing except to make people believe the big hunk in front of them was Phoenix when really it was Nigger. Then a new sign was put

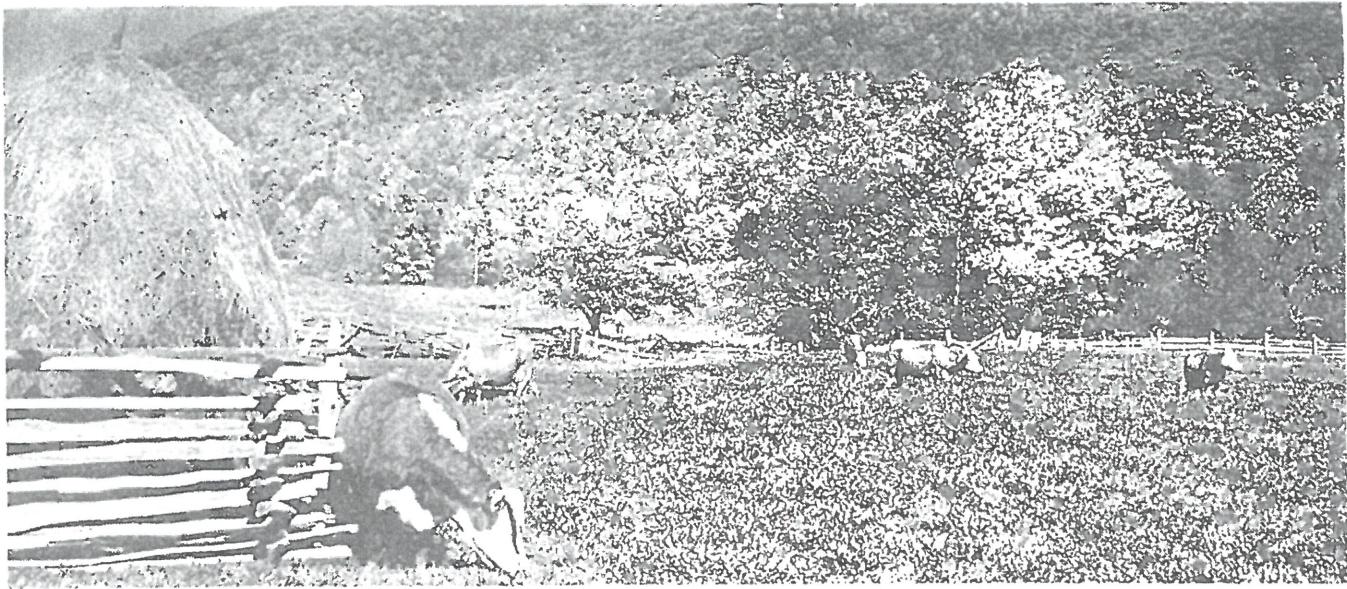
up calling the mountain "Negro Mountain," and explaining that it earned the name honorably (the "under-ground" version).

The Board of Conservation and Development, considering its plans to develop a park up there, and to avoid misunderstanding recommended that it be named Mt. Jefferson Park.

Aside from all these human experiences, the old mountain had one terrifying episode of its own.

On February 19, 1827, a tremendous roaring echoed down the valleys of Ashe, and scared the people out of their beds. When they looked up at their mountain next morning they found a large part of one side had slid off, hundreds of tons of rock gouging out a quarter-mile furrow. It is now healed over by trees.





Meadows, Cows, Haystacks, and Rail Fences Surround Mount Jefferson.

tables, fire places, and trash cans have been provided by the State Division of Parks for the benefit of the increasing number of visitors to Mount Jefferson.

As to the view from the rock on the northwestern side of Mount Jefferson, it is said by W. B. Austin, Jefferson attorney and a member of the North Carolina Board of Conservation and Development, that "this view is thought by many to have more charm and scenery than can be found anywhere in the North Carolina mountains."

In fact, viewers from this pinnacle can overlook all of Ashe County, see into East Tennessee and into Southwest Virginia and look at a large section of the northwestern part of North Carolina.

To the south is the rich Beaver Creek section with a fine view of Howard's Knob, near Boone, and the rugged peaks of Grandfather Mountain. In the middle ground is West Jefferson and to the left of

the town is Mulatto Mountain. Slightly to its right and just west of West Jefferson is Paddy Mountain. Behind Paddy Mountain are Big Bald, highest mountain in the section north of Grandfather Mountain, Old Field Bald, and then, swinging to the west, Three Tops and the Peak.

Lying below and to the north is the old town of Jefferson, where the Ashe County Courthouse is located. Behind it are Phoenix and Little Phoenix mountains. Back of them are the famous Whitetop Mountain and Mount Rogers in Virginia, with the latter said to be the highest mountain in the State of Virginia.

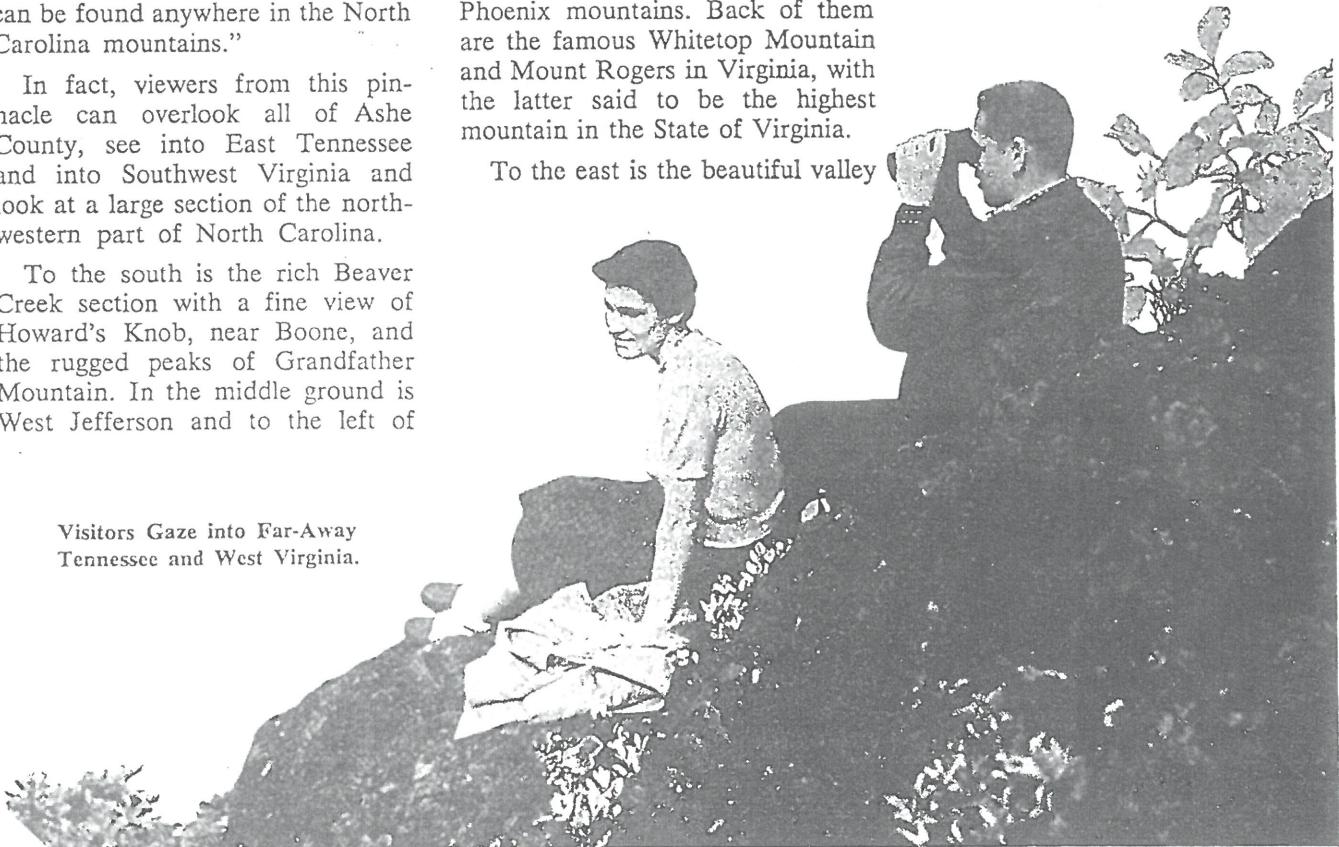
To the east is the beautiful valley

of Naked Creek with its fertile farm lands, and in the distance the Peach Bottom Mountains of Alleghany County. On clear days Pilot Mountain, located just west of Winston-Salem, can be clearly seen from the fire lookout tower atop Mount Jefferson.

To the southeast is the beautiful Blue Ridge and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Further to the southeast

[Continued on page 41]

Visitors Gaze into Far-Away Tennessee and West Virginia.



ground going. We raised enough money collecting scrap this month to build wire fence clear around the lot.

Dad says I can quit school when I am fifteen, and I am sort of anxious to, because there are a lot of things I want to learn how to do, and as my uncle says, I'm not getting any younger.

## MEET MOUNT JEFFERSON

Continued from page 15

is the valley of the Yadkin, with the Smoky Mountain range in the background.

### Legendary Names

Down through the years Ashe County people have discussed some of the reasons for Mount Jefferson being known as Negro or "Nigger" Mountain for so long a time. Paul Pleasants wrote an article some time ago in *The State Magazine* about the legends that have grown up about Mount Jefferson. In about 800 some land grants recorded the name as Negro and it is said, Pleasants ascertained, that the name was given to the mountain because a runaway slave from east of the Blue Ridge, who hid out in a cave on the north side of the mountain, was recaptured and returned to his master.

Another legend ascribed the name to the fact that just before the Civil War the mountain was a station on the famed "Underground Railway." Sympathizers may have concealed slaves on their way to a territory in the north, but the fact remains that the name was given to the mountain long before abolitionist movement began.

Significantly," Pleasants wrote, one of its nearest peaks is Mulatto Mountain. Most local people believe that the mountain was named so because of its black color probably for the same reason Mount Mitchell was first known Black Mountain."

That as it may, as Mr. Austin puts it, Mount Jefferson is unassisted for charm and scenery. One has a better right to make a statement, for it is Mr. Aus-

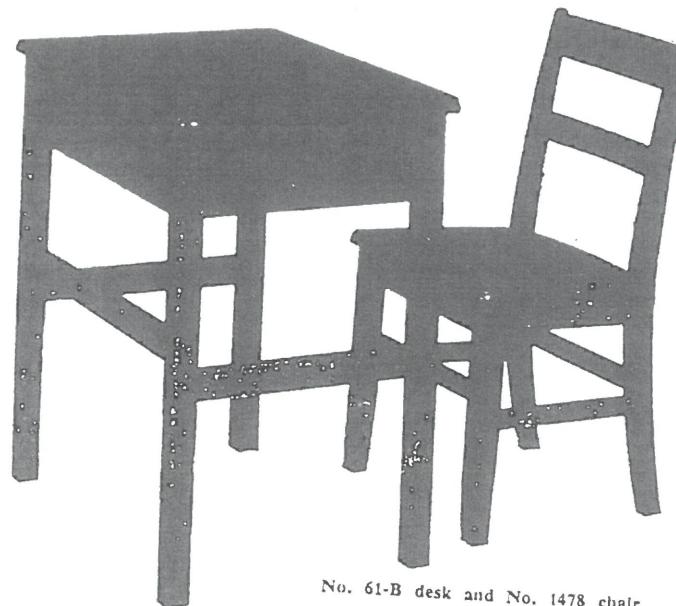
tun, who, perhaps more than any one other person, has sung the praises of Mount Jefferson and the need for the area to be converted into a state park.

"For years," Mr. Austin said, "the people of Ashe County have realized the potentialities of Mount Jefferson as a park site because of the magnificent view and because it is unique in that it is a mountain reaching an elevation of approximately 5,000 feet. Surrounded on every side by valleys and not at-

tached to any other mountain range, it thus affords an unobstructed view in every direction. This is thought by many to be unequalled anywhere in the North Carolina mountains."

### Early History

In the spring and summer of 1951 the North Carolina State Board of Conservation and Development began to give consideration to the possibility of establishing a state park on top of what was then known as Negro Mountain. At its October,



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1951, meeting in Winston-Salem the Board approved Negro, or "Nigger," Mountain as a "recreation area" with the view of making it a full-fledged state park and a part of the State Parks System as soon as funds were available.

Meanwhile, Mr. Austin points out, the part of the road leading to the park area has been hard-surfaced and the remaining part has been widened and graveled and is now maintained by the State. Some 35 picnic tables and 15 outdoor

furnaces have been erected in the park area.

The Parks Committee of the State Board of Conservation and Development, in its report recommending that "Nigger" Mountain be made a state park, felt that the name "Nigger" should not be applied to so beautiful a mountain. It therefore recommended that the name Negro, or "Nigger," be changed.

In determining a new name which it could recommend, the Parks

Committee had in mind the following facts: (1) This territory was first settled largely by people who came from the valley of Virginia. (2) A Virginian, Peter Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson's father, had surveyed the state line between North Carolina and Virginia and had located the corner of North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee on Pond Mountain, now a part of Ashe County. (3) The national forest bordering on Ashe County is named the Jefferson National Forest. (4) Finally, the proposed park is located between the towns of Jefferson and West Jefferson.

With these facts in mind, therefore, the Parks Committee, in honor of Thomas Jefferson or Peter Jefferson, and of its own motion, recommended that the park be named the Mount Jefferson State Park.

The Park Committee, Mr. Austin recalls, further stated in its recommendation that in its opinion the name of Mount Jefferson would tend to advertise, unify, and coordinate the whole section and that in time Mount Jefferson would rival Mount Mitchell as one of the greatest scenic attractions in Western North Carolina.

At its meeting in Winston-Salem in October, 1956, the State Board of Conservation and Development formally took over Mount Jefferson as an official state park.

Since that time the road to the summit has been improved and Governor Luther Hodges has set up a special fund of \$10,000 for a parking area.

"Mount Jefferson is the only state park in Western North Carolina with the exception of Mount Mitchell, and we believe that after some development and proper advertising it will soon become one of the great scenic attractions of Western North Carolina," Mr. Austin said.

And who is there to take issue with Mr. Austin about the potentialities of Mount Jefferson. In fact, and indeed, there should be placed somewhere on Mount Jefferson a plaque or something telling about the long and successful fight that "Bill" Austin led to make this unique mountain the focal point for North Carolina's newest state park.



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