

View From The Top

*To enhance and preserve North Carolina's High Country State Parks—
and to protect the funding that makes them an essential element of our mountain economy.*

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 1 / Issue 1 — Winter 2012

Only Just Begun

The Friends of High Country State Parks ended its first year with a budget, a refined organizational structure, and a growing role as an advocate for NC State Parks.

Page 1

Summer Events

FHCSP showed the flag and gathered members at four park events last summer. **Page 2**



Climb Elk Knob!

Volunteers trudged up Elk Knob, and after five-plus years, a landmark state park trail is now open! **Page 3**

Stairway to Heaven



Volunteers replaced the famous ladders on Grandfather Mountain. **Page 4**

Welcome to Winter

Winter is a hot new attraction in North Carolina thanks to High Country State Parks. **Page 6**

A Storm of Support

A FHCSP event at Foothill Park helped support parks. **Page 7**

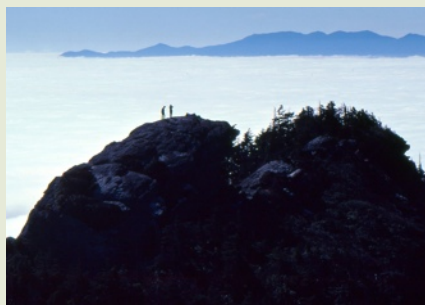


Welcome to the Summit

It's been an exciting 2011 at the Friends of High Country State Parks. A core group has gotten our new organization going and we would love for you to join us.

Individual membership is only \$10 (\$5 students). Visit our facebook page where you can also look for an announcement about a spring 2012 membership meeting. We're looking forward to ramping up our efforts to support local State Parks, and we hope you'll help.

It's imperative in these tough budgetary times that we preserve funding for existing and new State Parks. Imagine what a tragedy it would be if North



Some of the most significant and spectacular state parks and natural areas are located in northwestern North Carolina—home to the Friends of High Country State Parks. Atop Grandfather Mountain's MacRae Peak.

Carolina had not been able to acquire Elk Knob and Grandfather Mountain for public ownership?

Thanks to organizations like the Mast Store, Cove Creek Preservation and Development Inc. and Watauga County Tourism Development Authority we've

distributed brochures that convey the economic and environmental importance of our local State Parks—Elk Knob, Grandfather, New River, and Mount Jefferson, a state Natural Area.

We've helped create and publicize park events. In 2012, we want new members and donations to expand our funding so that our volunteer efforts and the money we raise can make a real difference for these critical pillars of the High Country community.

FHCSP chair Robert White says, "These remarkable natural treasures uplift our spirits, bring joy to the eye and soul, and allow reflection about the bounty and beauty of our natural settings. We welcome you to join us as we set out to support our High Country State Parks."

Visit us: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-High-Country-State-Parks/149093295149656>



A State Park “Fam Tour” for Locals!

Special “Day in the Park” familiarization events were held in each park from June to October, 2011. FHCSP designed some events and joined others to highlight recreational and educational benefits that state parks bestow on our communities.

June—Mount Jefferson SNA

At Mount Jefferson State Natural Area, the “Day in the Park” event included music by Lisa Baldwin and Dave Haney, a discussion of the pre-history and recent past of Mount Jefferson by ranger Tom Randolph, and a poetry reading by Sydney Powell, a student entrant in the park’s



poetry competition. Dereck Poindexter provided a review of natural history and botanical research at Mount Jefferson, then he led a guided hike to the summit (an awesome Mount Jefferson vista is at the top of the page). Pat Beaver of Friends of High Country State Park addressed the group and recruited new members.

July—New River SP



New River State Park’s “snout otter” mascot “Snotty” came out for the FHCSP event held during the much anticipated New River Festival (Superintendent Joe Shimel is on left). The day included free New River canoe trips and free inner tube floats at the US 221 Campground Access. Games and activities excited the kids, and there were awards for the park’s poetry contest. A costume parade and a play were held in the picnic area by Elkland School. Conservation organizations and River Girl Outfitters in Todd mounted exhibits and displays.

Early Sept.—Elk Knob SP

Elk Knob State Park’s FHCSP event took place during the popular annual community day featuring a memorable covered dish pot luck lunch. Music was provided by several groups, along with demonstrations of corn milling, corn husk doll making, weaving, frontier skills, pottery making, kid’s activities and a raffle. Horse-



drawn wagon rides were popular, as were hikes to the summit. Exhibits and displays came courtesy of the FHCSP, NC Division of Parks & Recreation, and NC Friends of State Parks.

Late Sept.—Grandfather SP

Grandfather Mountain State Park’s event was a grand



opening of the interim park office and headquarters at Grandfather View Village shopping center in Foscue. The mountain’s famous profile face looked down approvingly from above! There were kid’s activities, s’mores cooked over a campfire, treats and goodies. A pinata provided by La Paloma Mexican

grocery next door to the park office was gleefully broken open by the kids. Exhibits were on display from the FHCSP, NC Division of Air Quality, and NC Parks and Recreation.

Speaking Up For OUR Parks!

The Grandfather event featured a speech by Lewis Ledford, director of the NC Division of Parks and Recreation (right, in photo), and an address by Representative Mitch Gillespie (left), of District 85. Gillespie discussed efforts to support NC state parks during the past legislative session. Mack McLeod of the NC Recreation and Parks Association (center) presented Gillespie with the “Legislator of the Year” award for his critical role in defending the threatened NC Parks and



Recreation Trust Fund. *Thank you, Mitch!*

Come One, Climb All

\$425,000 in volunteer labor has given Elk Knob State Park a State-of-the-Art Trail to one of North Carolina's best views.

Elk Knob State Park Dedicates a New Trail



Talk About Citizen Involvement!

Give North Carolinians a new state park—as the NC legislature did with Elk Knob using funds from the State Park Trust Fund—and what do citizens and High Country residents do? They come out, grab tools, and spend 6,000 hours of their valuable volunteer time to turn the potential of a new park into a trail to one of the best views in North Carolina.

Over five and a half years, park staff members and volunteers took up Superintendent Larry Trivette's call to replace a steep and winding road to the summit with a trail that almost anyone could walk.

The result is an investment of citizen labor that deserves statewide media coverage in this time of tight budgets. How many examples can you find where citizens are so grateful for the wise use of public funds that they step

up and offer more? Elk Knob is that example. Established as a natural area in 2003 and then named a state park in 2007, Elk Knob State Park started with limited facilities. As is the case with so many NC state parks—citizen involvement helped fuel the park's establishment. A community activity area and picnic site were a few of the first facilities. A local park-area organization, the Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization (EKCHO), was formed in 2007 and orchestrates a now annual event. The trail was started in January of 2006. Until autumn 2011, the path was a work in progress with hikers ultimately veering off onto the old road for a steep final rise to the 5,520-foot summit. The trail was completed and dedicated on September 4, 2011. Trivette quoted Sir Edmund Hillary at the event (photo, upper right) and later said, "I would guess that not since the CCC days has a project like this been proposed much less attempted in North Carolina State Parks."

Trivette's comments were apt. Elk Knob amply embodies "civilian" dedication to "conservation." He was referring to the Civilian Conservation Corps legacy still seen today in Hanging Rock State Park—celebrating its 75th anniversary. The Elk Knob Trail will no doubt be celebrated as long.

Anyone would be impressed with the trail work. A gradual grade and smooth, rock-lined gravel surface (center photo, above) make it a usual sight to see local families and tourists alike taking the 1.8-mile trek to the top for a great view.

A "Who's Who" of summits encircles the mountain. North is Mount Rogers, Virginia's highest. Mount Mitchell, loftiest in the East and NC, lies south (in center of photo at very top), flanked by Sugar Mountain and Beech Mountain, streaked by snowy ski slopes (left and right at very top). Farther left lies Grandfather, and right, Roan Mountain (neither visible in the photo).



A New Leg Up for the Grandfather Trail

Five classic ladders on the Grandfather Trail came up for replacement late last fall for the first time since the late 1970s.

The newest state park in the High Country, Grandfather Mountain, was appropriated by the NC Legislature in April, 2009. One of the many responsibilities the park staff embraced was the need to establish a volunteer program so interested citizens could step in and participate. At Grandfather, perhaps the most rugged backcountry resource in the state park system, there's no more important mission than upkeep of the park's most significant visitor facility—trails. Volunteers have already assisted in trail maintenance projects at the beginning of the Daniel Boone Scout, the Nuwati Trail, the Profile Trail, the Grandfather Trail. They've even performed office work and research. The most recent volunteer trail project involved state park staff, ASU students, Outward Bound, The Boone Climbing Coalition, and the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation in one of the most quintessential trail tasks that ever gets performed on the mountain—replacing the ladders on the cliff-laced ascent to MacRae Peak.

The ladders were likely first installed when informal trail activity started after World War II by Appalachian Trail sign maker and seasonal federal park employee Clyde Smith. He had contacted Hugh Morton and was

permitted to undertake diverse trail activities. Among those were trail maintenance that likely included either installing or refurbishing the ladders. In the early 1960s, Hugh Morton photographed a family on the then log ladders (upper right; photo from the Hugh Morton archive of the North Carolina Collection, UNC Chapel Hill). Hugh Morton was a very influential

ladders were still made of logs. Johnson and volunteers quickly replaced those with more modern ladders in 1979 (shown in photo, upper left). The latest ladders (center photo above, and below) were replaced in early November. Heavier carriage bolts and deeper anchors were used than on previous ladders. Superintendent Sue McBean said, "The state park staff is grateful to all who



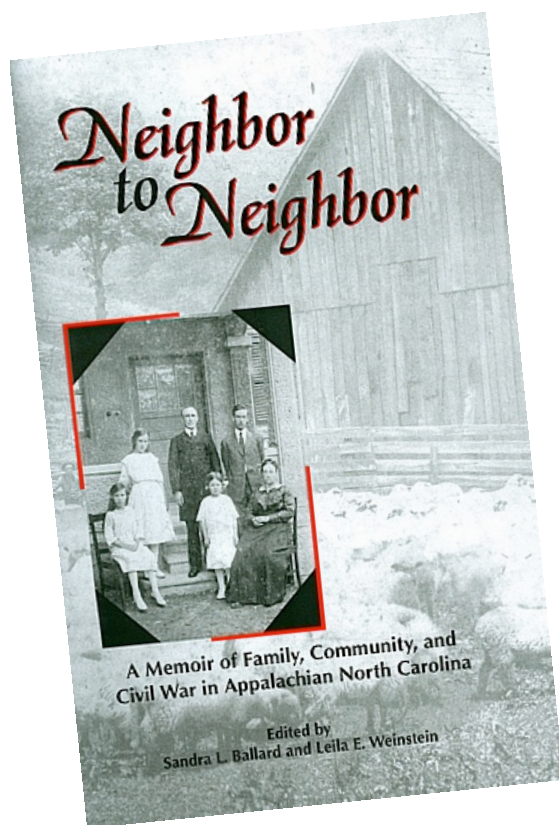
promoter of the mountain, and some of the lore, and lure, of the Grandfather Trail was established when Morton's friend John Parris, an Asheville Citizen-Times newspaper columnist, wrote an article dubbing the path "The Trail of Thirteen Ladders."

When FHCSP board member Randy Johnson approached Hugh Morton in 1977 and established the backcountry management program that continued until state park status, the

have given so generously this past year to assist in projects throughout the park. They've been valuable working partners. Hanging on the edge of a cliff to replace ladders may not be for everyone," McBean says, "but we have enough projects for every level of adventurer, including those who prefer the safety of level ground beneath their feet." Volunteers are invited to contact Ranger Andy Sicard at andy.sicard@ncdenr.gov or to call the park office at 828.963.9522.

Long Ago, But Not Far Away

Interested in a little extra insight into the storied communities that surround Elk Knob? Check out the book **Neighbor to Neighbor: A Memoir of Family, Community, and Civil War in**



Appalachian North Carolina by Sandra Ballard and Leila Weinstein, editors. Here's an intriguing overview and excerpt...

On a summer day in the 1870s, young William Wilson describes a camping trip to the barren summit of Elk Knob, now Elk Knob State Park.

We planned to reach the summit long before dark and gather a lot of wood to keep a fire through the night. It was 5:00 o'clock when we, tired and thirsty, came to a spot where we could see both sunset and sunrise. We discovered we had to go almost half a mile for water and that wood for the campfire would have to be brought some distance from the top of the mountain as the top was barren. We

worked like beavers to make ourselves comfortable for the night. We did not bring as many blankets as we needed so as many as three arranged to sleep together. While the sun shone brightly around us, we could see it was already dark down in the valley to our North and to our East in the valley of the South Fork River.

As these could be conveniently carried and as conveniently prepared, we brought only bacon, potatoes and biscuits. The potatoes were roasted in the ashes and the bacon fried in a frying pan. We had intended to eat before sunset, but the sun disappeared so suddenly we had to eat by the firelight. The Snake Mountain lies only four miles West from the Elk Knob and being three hundred feet higher, shut off the setting sun so we were disappointed. We took our turns keeping the fire going and with all that we [were] cold.

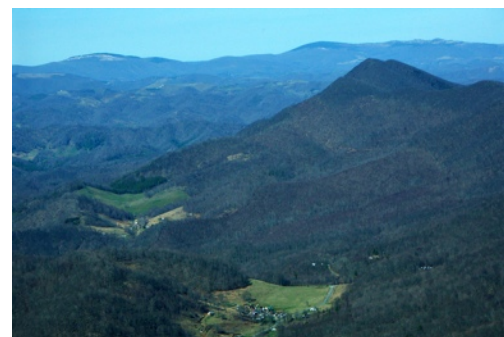
In the morning we were surprised at the suddenness of the dawn. Elk Knob rises more than 2,000 feet above the crest of the Blue Ridge and we could see it approaching far to the East. The valleys below were hidden by a canopy of fog. It was then that I got a view of mountains, hills, and valleys that I shall never forget" (pp. 67-68).

In the 1930s, William Wilson, retired from the mission field in Japan, wrote his memoirs of growing up in the north fork headwaters of the New River in Ashe County. The Wilson memoir begins with the drama of the murder of his father Col. Isaac Wilson, home on furlough, who was shot in the back while plowing the family's corn. The bulk of the memoir provides a firsthand account of how young Will's mother, Caroline Wilson, with eight children to support, survived the years in a community at war. The community of Sutherland, where the Wilsons lived, was a border neighborhood of a border county in a border state, and tensions ran high during the Civil War. While Ashe and Watauga counties were aligned with the Confederate state of NC, Union sentiment was strong; most of the Unionists in Ashe

County came from the north fork area, where partisan tensions degenerated into violence.

In one story, the young Will Wilson and his older brother traverse the paths that connected Pottertown, the Long Hope Mountain, and Elk Cross Roads—now Todd, as they moved their cattle from Sutherland to their grandfather's farm in Todd, safe from Union marauders from across the border in Tennessee.

In 2007 the Center for Appalachian Studies published Wilson's memoir, with extensive genealogical notes and an index for navigating the stories of local people



and places. Essays by historians John Inscoe and Martin Crawford put the local into regional and national perspective. FHCSP board member Patricia Beaver's essay brings the communities through the 20th and into the 21st century.

Neighbor to Neighbor is available from the Center for Appalachian Studies for \$25 (www.appstudies.appstate.edu).



High Country State Parks ...



NC's Essential Winter Recreation Resource

You'd have to live in a cave not to realize how important winter recreation, particularly downhill skiing, is to the year-round economy of northwest North Carolina. Increasingly, our state parks are part of the appeal that attracts visitors. Granted, Mount Mitchell, the East's highest peak at 6,684 feet, is also a state park and it nets more than 100 inches of annual snowfall. But the Blue Ridge Parkway needs to be open for the public to get there, and it rarely is open under "good" snow.

But Grandfather Mountain (photo at very top and center at right) and Elk Knob (center photos left and middle) are a different matter. Both are accessible from plowed public roads and both are magnets for well-equipped and experienced outdoor adventurers who look to NC's High Country for the



South's best winter sports. An article in the Holiday 2011 / 2012 issue of *Carolina Mountain Life Magazine* describes how cross country skiing, snowshoeing, winter hiking and backpacking are on the upswing here. Every winter the state's highest mountains get some deep snow. And that's where Elk Knob and Grandfather come in.

Relatively new Elk Knob State Park is gaining renown as a winter recreation area, and not just because its Web site says: "We strive to keep the park open ..." to "welcome cross country skiing and snowshoeing..." What snow fan wouldn't applaud that enlightened attitude! Grandfather has long been a snowy destination, with great views, tent platforms, and a shelter near Calloway Peak. Rangers remind, both parks are serious winter spots, so come equipped, obey the rules, review each park's Web site closely and be in touch with rangers if you have questions. For more, see www.carolinamountainlifemagazine.com



Take a Happy New Year Hike!

It's been said that whatever you do the first day of the year—you will do the rest of the year. Start 2012 with a New Year's Day hike.

Elk Knob State Park: meet January 1, 2:30 p.m. at Elk Knob Trailhead for a hike to the summit. For info: call 828-297-7261.

Grandfather Mountain State Park: meet January 1, 11 a.m. at the Boone Fork Parking Area on the Blue Ridge Parkway (Milepost 299.9) or at the Asutsi Trail on US 221 (1.8 miles south of Holloway Mountain Road/US 221 junction) if the Parkway is closed. For info: call 828-963-9522.

Mount Jefferson State Park: meet January 1, 2 p.m. at park office for a drive up and hike to Luther Rock, or a hike up the road if it's closed. For info: call 336-246-9653.

New River State Park: meet January 1, at 10:30 a.m. at US 221 Access Visitor Center to hike the Hickory Trail to the river. For info: call 336-982-2587.



After all... This is Boone.

A snowy opportunity to promote state parks and our new Friends of High Country State Parks group came about as a result of the Grandfather Mountain event. Jason Berry, manager of Footsloggers in Boone, the longstanding High Country hiking outfitter, offered the group an opportunity for a friend and fundraiser at their store in Boone on October 29th. The event was held before an ASU football game in the store

courtyard near the climbing tower and featured an outside tent. FHCSP chair Bob White

intern of the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, who "tabled" with us. Music was

by the Friends of High Country State Parks and Friends of the Mountains-To-Sea Trail. Kids' activities were provided by the four state parks in the High Country, and free hot dogs and s'mores were provided by Footsloggers. Even though it poured snow until 2 PM that day we gained many, many new members and friends and received lots of generous donations. "We really appreciate Footsloggers," White said. "This wonderful opportunity provided the backdrop for a most successful event."



Music was a big part of FHCSP events. The "Lost Faculties" played at Footsloggers (left) and Dave and Lisa entertained at Mount Jefferson.



said it was "downright cozy" by the time wind breaks were put up to keep out the blowing snow and breeze. The photo at top shows the scene, including Matt Groce, the first

provided by "The Lost Faculties," a group composed of Thomas Whyte, Bob White, and Ed Midgett. The group played inside due to the weather. There were displays

Join the Friends of High Country State Parks...

This first FHCSP newsletter is our Christmas gift to you—but the real present is our parks. The dedicated people who work at our High Country State Parks bring us spectacular scenery and rarefied recreation—and our goal at FHCSP is to support their activities and the state funding that makes their work possible.



Friends of High Country State Parks

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**1120 W. Brushy Fork Rd.
Zionville, NC 28698**

Please deliver to: