Guides
in
North Carolina's 14th State Park
Part IV
By Zeb R. Denny

Firefighting, climbing, exploring, and hunting on the Pilot Mountain--all had their special brand of excitement and appeal, but the one experience that my crowd reveled in most was that of temporary and instant amateur guides and historians to those from afar who visited "our" mountain. We could point out--at least, we thought we could--all the landmarks of the 360 degrees cyclorama, which covers some 3000 square miles.

Like human beings across the world, we were eager to stand tall in the eyes of our peers and superiors. Our knowledge of the mountain and the surrounding landscape gave us an opportunity that could not be missed by many of us (others retained so much of the hillbilly reticence that they would not give a stranger the time of day). Looking back, I feel sure that, although we served some purpose, we made nuisances of ourselves in many cases.

We talked to the tourists glibly about the Saura Mountain Range directly to the east, the Sauratown Mountain humpbacked in the foreground, and the upthrust of rock that is Moore's Wall. We pointed to the small hump in the Sauratown where people found the crystalized rock formations, which we considered a great curiosity. We told the visitors all we knew, which was little enough, about the Saura Indians, from whose tribe the mountains were named.

To an especially receptive audience, we told the story of Mike, the old crippled foxhound that spent his last years hanging around

our school, which we could point out nestled in its one-roomed, unpainted splendor at the edge of the flatwoods below us. The dog, reputedly one of the best foxhounds of the area, had been after a fox in the Moore's Wall woods. To escape, the fox worked his way around a narrow ledge on the high wall. At one place in the ledge, the width narrowed to a point that a dog could not pass. But old Mike, our hero, had made a faithful attempt, pushing himself off the wall, and tumbling to the rocks below. Crippled for the rest of his life and partly abandoned by his master, he became the ward of the school children, at least during the school term. They always managed to share a portion of their lunch with him.

After imposing our dog story on the tourists--who were oftentimes from a no-more-distant city than Winston-Salem or Greensboro, but occasionally they came from Philadelphia or New York--we continued our landscape lesson around the cyclorama. Just north of the Saurus posed the little and unpretentious Brown Mountain, with pine-covered slopes and a cultivated top. Farther north we pointed to the haze-dimmed hills where Stuart, Virginia, is located. Then, farther west, we picked out the Pinnacles of Dan and Sugar Loaf north of Mount Airy, Surry County's largest city, with its buildings glinting white just behind the orchard-covered Chestnut Ridges.

We pointed out Fancy Gap, the main highway across the Blue Ridge into western Virginia and to such places as Charleston, West Virginia, and Cincinnati, Ohio. Across the northern skline, we identified Fishers' Peak, Low Gap, Foxhunters' Ridge, Roaring Gap with the road scar around its side, and Doughton's Bluff, often lost in the haze. Still further to the west, we could identify, at least on clear days, the low outlines of the Bruchios, another apple country but too far away to dis-

tinguish the orchards. The Blue Ridges north of Wilkesboro and Lenoir were too deeply buried in the blue distance for distinction.

However, toward the northwest, we could point out one gleaming section of the Ararat River, which drains the Mount Airy area. We could show the Yadkin River in three shining spots: one in the far distance while it still headed toward us on the mountain, another in the big bend where it turned south, and a final one after it had headed south, having been thwarted in its attempt to reach the sea in an easterly direction by old Jo-no-o-koo's violent upheaval some years back.

In the south we could point out the Wisson Building and the Robert E. Lee Hotel in Winston-Salem, some twenty-five miles away. We could point in the direction of Greensboro, for buildings there had been seen by way of a telescope. The villages of King and Pinnacle and the town of Pilot Mountain lay at our feet, many of their homes and buildings distinguishable at that distance.

Of course, we took delight in identifying our own farms and homes and those of our neighbors, as well as the scattered steepled churches and the ribbon-like roads that laced fields and forests and communities together in every direction.

On the mountain itself, we guided people to the Devil's Den, an opening in the rock that forms the knob and from which always came a draught of cool air. We showed them the way to the Ledge Spring, we helped women and small children over rough places, we pointed out interesting rock formation. And we tried not to miss the opportunity of showing where "Noah stepped out of the Ark."

On the east side of the knob's top is an exposed piece of granite about the size of a bedroom. In the outcropping are several indentations that sun, wind, and rain have worn out through the ages. Two

of the eroded places can be visualized by the imaginative person as footprints hollowed out by someone's stepping there before the granite cooled.

Once, as we stood idling near the east edge of the top and just below the footprinted rock, a group of fancily dressed tourists came up to view the panarama before us. After a few minutes, during which the strangers had asked many questions, one of the boys in my group realized that these strangers did not know about the tracks. He bounded up to the rock and called out,

"Looka here," he said. "Did you all know about these here tracks in the rock?"

The strangers all climbed up for a look. After some mild exclamations of feigned astonishment, one of them asked,

"But whose tracks are they?"

The boy swelled into a size appropriate to the occasion.

"Why," he said in a tone that implied everyone should already know the answer, "them's the tracks of Jesus Christ where he stopped outa the Ark."

As youngsters we used to talk about the possibility of turning the mountain into a place which everyone could enjoy. Personally, I had a secret dream that some day I would become rich, buy the mountain, open up some decent trails, and make it available to the world. I suppose our greastest pleasure in the"Pilot"came when we were sharing it with someone else.

Although it has been owned privately since it was "taken Up" from the government sometime in the mid-1800's, the mountain has "belonged" to the people who grew up accustomed to looking up from day to day and from year to year to see its majestic head held high, as if to give ~~the~~ the troubled and the insecure the assurance that "Things do not change

in a day."

As far back as 1830, so my father said, when some of the mountain people, lured by tales of the deep soils and flat fields of the mid-west, got the idea to "Westward Ho," the Pilot had already cast its spell upon its "children." As one group of emigrants climbed the Blue Ridge up the Low Gap Trail, one of the men grew sad about leaving his log cabin at the north end of the mountain. For fortitude, he began to rely heavily upon the caravan's snakebite medicine. When the emigrants reached the top of the ridge, they paused for one last backward look. When he saw the Pilot sitting there so forlorn and far away, the sad man frenzedly began turning his cart around to start back, crying and cursing, meanwhile, the day that he had decided to leave. His companions grabbed him, tied him fast to his cart, and led his ox until the caravan lost itself in the Virginia hills and there was no chance of the man's seeing the Pilot again.

Even today, when the culture of the land is earmarked by its transciency, those who have grown up under the mountain's shadow take with them wherever they go their own personal memories of it. They also are apt to have hanging in conspicious places in their homes pictures that portray the mountain's peculiar personality as it is known and felt by those particular individuals.

An "outsider" might believe that the natives would eventually grow indifferent to the wonder of the freakish bit of real estate, but they do not. Those who have made their homes there as third and fourth generation inhabitants still love "their" mountain. Their love is shown in a statement one of the older residents made recently,

"I wouldn't mind living anywhere in the world," he said, "just so long as I could still see the Pilot Mountain."

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July 02, 2016

Mr. Matt Windsor
Superintendent
Pilot Mountain State Park
1792 Park Knob Road
Pinnacle, NC 27043

Dear Mr. Windsor,
Enclosed you will find four essays that my father wrote about Pilot Mountain State Park some years ago. Some of these were published in the *State Magazine*, but I'm not sure of the dates. If I find that information, I'll send it to you. While visiting the park office last fall, I noticed that you have preserved a lot of history about the area and for that I am grateful. My brother and sister and I would like to donate these materials to the park so that people in the future can have access to this information.

My father, Zeb Denny, grew up on Black Mountain Road in the outskirts of Pilot Mountain. He went to the local schools, attended college at UNC for one year, but returned home to help on his father's tobacco farm when his father became ill. A year or so later, he was offered an athletic scholarship to High Point College (now High Point University), where he graduated in 1932. He was an

English major and taught high school English for years in Roanoke Rapids,NC. He was always writing: essays, poems, non-fiction, even novels. He loved Pilot Mountain, and he was delighted when it became a state park. We, his children, continue to revere the mountain. We have passed that love on to our children.

Thank you for your dedication to the parks in North Carolina.

Sincerely,

Flo D. Durway

Flo Denny Durway