

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The White Spot Trail:
Local Hiking Clubs and America's Premier Footpath

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by
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“It promises indeed a New World avenue of the Elysian Fields, with happy pedestrians to fare along its way, an unspoiled sky for its high heaven, and an unspoiled wilderness of mountainside forest and rocky crag for the beauties that hedge it on either side...Walking clubs of the various states through which the Trail will pass are doing their parts towards hastening its arrival at its journey’s end, no less than toward preserving the integrity of its intention.”¹ This description from a 1931 article published in the *Knoxville Journal* not only rhapsodized about the splendors of nature, but captured the excitement of pioneers who opened Western North Carolina to early hiking enthusiasts. Volunteers were responsible for the establishment of two hundred miles of the Appalachian Trail that runs from the Nantahala River, through the Great Smoky Mountains, to Spivey Gap, in Yancey County, North Carolina.² It was on this two-foot wide, wilderness footpath that members of the Carolina Mountain Club and Smoky Mountains Hiking Club left a legacy for millions to enjoy. Club members dedicated themselves to the Appalachian Trail in Western North Carolina while they worked in sweltering heat and knee-high snow. They pushed bicycle-odometer wheels through laurel thickets and over peaks in order to ascertain distances and collect data. In doing so, the hiking clubs opened the Southern Appalachians to generations of backpackers who desired to cross the lofty heights of the mountains and revel in one of the East’s remaining wildernesses. The clubs took a regional planner’s 1921 brainchild and turned it into an actual trail by scouting, marking, and maintaining dozens of miles of remote, mountain track. Without the determination and persistence of local hiking clubs, the Appalachian Trail would never have been completed in such a relatively short period of time.

Despite the many hours that club members logged in the high mountains, there has been little scholarship dedicated to their Appalachian Trail efforts in Western North Carolina and East

¹ “Appalachian Trail Conference,” *Knoxville Journal*, June 13, 1931.

² Appalachian Trail Conservancy, “North Carolina,” *Trail Clubs*, http://www.appalachiantrail.org/site/Trail_Clubs.html.

Tennessee. When hiking clubs are actually mentioned, it is only because they were part of the larger and more popular movement to create Great Smoky Mountains National Park. While their progress towards the park was an important event, the effect that local outdoor organizations had on the Appalachian Trail has reached much farther. Histories on the Trail are content with commenting on various milestones over the 19th century, but give scant attention to what local clubs achieved. Part of this problem may be caused due to the incredible length of the Appalachian Trail, and the different states and regions it traverses. Geographic difficulties aside, the A.T. also presents a complex undertaking for scholars because of the number of clubs involved in the 2,100 mile project, as well as the tendency for several organizations to disband and become defunct.³

A general history of tourism in Western North Carolina is appropriate to describe the zeal that the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club and Carolina Mountain Club felt for the area.

C. Brendan Martin's excellent new book, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double Edged Sword*, has a precise chapter that introduced the conflicts between hikers and auto-tourists. For example, skyline drives were considered for decades, and such development within parks has hardly been quelled because of continued demand from tourists.⁴ Martin's work is also noteworthy because it is one of the only sources that defined the Appalachian Trail as, "one of the first concerted efforts to preserve the mountain landscape for the sake of enhancing the wilderness experience."⁵ Another scholarly monograph, Richard Starnes' *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina*, detailed the differences between hiking tourists versus more traditional, blue-collar visitors who preferred the comfort of roads and

³ The terms "A.T." and "Trail" are used to refer to the Appalachian Trail.

⁴ C. Brendan Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2007), 178-183.

⁵ Martin, 179.

automobiles. Starnes duly explores the long history of tourism over three centuries which ranged from those who simply wanted to enjoy nature to the tuberculosis patients that frequented the region. Since many club members lived in close proximity to the area around the Appalachian Trail, local hikers worked tirelessly towards attracting out of state visitors. In short, there are several excellent sources that pertain to hiking's role in tourism, many of them quite recent.⁶

Although the amount of secondary material on Western North Carolina's hiking clubs is limited, historians have described what larger, more influential forces did to preserve nearby areas. Two thorough environmental histories that feature local areas are *Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America* and *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park*. Both books examine the conditions in the eastern wildlands prior to human intervention, as well as the campaigns that led towards protection of nearby mountains. Fortunately, a lot of work has been done on the National Park movement (or craze) that swept the region. The majority of this research indicated that places like Great Smoky Mountains National Park were established due to automobiles and roads, rather than the transcendental qualities of nature.⁷ Plenty of primary material has been incorporated into the story of the struggles faced by local boosters and preservationists, but little of it has been used to illustrate the evolution of the Appalachian Trail.

The personal philosophy towards wilderness that many hiking club members attached themselves to is expressed by a number of contemporary historians. Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* defines the preservationist mindset, beginning with Biblical times and culminating at the hydroelectric dam wars in the Southwest. Nash's book summarily deals with

⁶ Richard Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2005), 29-30.

⁷ Timothy Silver, *Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), 260-263.; Daniel Pierce, *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2000), 195-196.

events taking place in the American West, and there is scant mention of Great Smoky Mountains National Park or the Appalachian Trail. The Sierra Club only makes a cameo appearance and is mostly cited in regard to John Muir and the failure to protect Hetch Hetchy Valley from dam-builders.⁸ Historian Paul Sutter's fine article, " 'A Retreat From Profit': Colonization, the Appalachian Trail, and the Social Roots of Benton MacKaye's Wilderness Advocacy", grappled with the conflicting ideas of hikers, and how their favorite wild places should be utilized. A great deal of this research concentrated on the contributions that came from government and specific individuals. Unfortunately, there was little notice of hiking clubs, which became quite popular in the early twentieth century.⁹

Without the foresight of Benton MacKaye, a planner and forester from northern Massachusetts, the Appalachian Trail probably would not exist, even with the clubs' assistance. MacKaye's life and philosophy were extensively chronicled by an assortment of environmental historians. Larry Anderson, author of *Benton MacKaye: Conservationist, Planner, and Creator of the Appalachian Trail*, wrote an exhaustive biography on the A.T.'s elder statesman, and included MacKaye's opus, "A Project in Regional Planning", in the appendix. Paul Sutter has again contributed a masterful chapter on MacKaye in *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*, which discussed his contributions to the Wilderness Society, and his stalwart efforts to "control the automobile." MacKaye originally planned the Appalachian Trail as a "retreat from profit", that yoked wilderness experience with relief from the social pressures of the time, which he believed would consume heavily-industrialized America. The Appalachian Trail was not some recreational scheme for MacKaye,

⁸ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), 168-169.

⁹ Paul Sutter, " 'A Retreat From Profit': Colonization, the Appalachian Trail, and the Social Roots of Benton MacKaye's Wilderness Advocacy," *Environmental History* 4, no.4 (1999): 562-563.

but instead “compris[ed] a series of camps and stores for shelter and food,” where the modern American could seek relief from the workaday world.¹⁰

Individual hiking club members who fought against intrusion of wilderness by modern forces, like the automobile, are scarcely covered by environmental historians. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club member and Wilderness Society founder, Harvey Broome is mentioned in Paul Sutter’s *Driven Wild*. He has explained the values that many hikers associated with wilderness, as well as the impact of commercialization upon wild places.¹¹

There is a wealth of information available to describe the environmental conditions, history of tourism, and wilderness preservation that formed the background of hiking clubs’ involvement in the creation and preservation of the Appalachian Trail. However, hiking clubs are far from being extensively covered by historians. The emphasis has traditionally been on the West, which acted as an epicenter for the environmental movement for decades. The Appalachian Trail, which is the nation’s oldest long-distance footpath, has received alarmingly little treatment by historians. Hiking clubs have also rarely been written about, even though many organizations kept detailed records of their activities. It is possible that many primary sources have proved elusive for historians, and are not typically featured in archives. The Smoky Mountains Hiking Club and Carolina Mountain Club only entrusted their records to university and library special collections within the last few years, and this has proved to be a huge boon in researching the Appalachian Trail in the area.

Unbeknownst to many hiking club members, an early rift developed between Benton MacKaye, the A.T.’s visionary, and Myron Avery, an Appalachian Trail Conference chairman.

¹⁰ Larry Anderson, *Benton MacKaye: Conservationist, Planner, and Creator of the Appalachian Trail* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2002), 183-186; Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 175-193.

¹¹ Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2002), 176-181.

At one time, MacKaye and Avery were close colleagues, but differences that involved the original purpose of the Trail, as well as the failure to compromise with federal agencies split the two apart. MacKaye fought to preserve the Appalachian Trail as a social experiment that would cure many of the ills that haunted industrial society. Avery was content with the establishment of the Trail as a recreational opportunity for athletic hikers. When Avery completed his *Guide to the Southern Appalachians*, he labeled MacKaye as, “a philosopher and dreamer.” This comment does expose MacKaye’s role as the “inventor” of the A.T., but it also showcased the differences between the two men. In *The Appalachian National Scenic Trail: A Time to Be Bold*, Charles Foster noted Avery and MacKaye’s relationship as, “a remarkably successful, though not always agreeable alliance, Avery ‘the doer’ joined forces with MacKaye ‘the dreamer’ to bring about the two-thousand mile Appalachian Trail.”¹²

The first hikers that negotiated the rugged reaches of the Smokies before the advent of the Appalachian Trail were not club members, although many would later find a home within the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club or Carolina Mountain Club. As early as 1914, hikers such as D.R. Beeson, of Johnson City, Tennessee, participated in backpacking expeditions across the Smokies. On one trek, Beeson and companion C. Hodges Mathes covered a distance of one hundred and thirteen miles in only eight days. Even though the outing proved to be difficult at times, Beeson and Mathes completed the trip. These two hikers laid the preliminary groundwork for others, who later emulated the duo’s infamous walk. As a result, the area that the Appalachian Trail would cross became more popular with others who sought challenge and adventure.¹³ Other Tennessee outdoorsmen, like Harvey Broome and Paul Fink were hardy

¹² Charles H.W. Foster, *The Appalachian National Scenic Trail: A Time to Be Bold* (Harpers Ferry: Appalachian Trail Conference, 1987), 12.

¹³ D.R. Beeson, *In the Spirit of Adventure: A 1914 Smoky Mountain Hiking Journal* (Seymour, TN: Panther Press, 1994), xii-xiii.

hikers and climbers who eschewed modern conveniences in order to traverse the rugged mountains. Their epic journeys often took place off-trail and they rambled over unmapped territory in search of virgin forests, high-elevation mountain balds, and obscure peaks. Many of the spots they previously explored were later incorporated into the A.T. and became significant attractions in their own right.¹⁴

Before the arrival of the Appalachian Trail, many local hiking clubs were alternately intimidated and inspired by the formidable heights of the Smokies. In *Our Southern Highlanders*, by Horace Kephart, the author recounted meeting a lost Canadian hiker in 1906. The bewildered man planned to walk eastward to the Pigeon River, along the alpine ridges of the Smokies, but only became confused in the steep, dense terrain. Kephart warned the hiker about the conditions he would encounter, “from there onward for forty miles is an uninhabited wilderness so rough that you could not make seven miles a day in it to save your life, even if you knew the course; and there is no trail at all.”¹⁵ But even though this was considered to be “wild” by many standards, it was not some impenetrable, trackless wasteland. On D.R. Beeson’s 1914 trip across the Smokies, he dropped a camera lens, only to have it found by Paul Fink and five other backpackers a week later in the same spot. Hikers began to explore the Smokies and surrounding mountains in earnest, which naturally attracted others to the Western North Carolina wilderness. Several years passed before large hiking clubs began to organize and investigate the area, but the mountains were not entirely unappreciated before the A.T.¹⁶

¹⁴ Harvey Broome, *Out Under the Sky of the Great Smokies: A Personal Journal* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee, 2001), xvi-xviii; Paul Fink, *Backpacking Was The Only Way* (Johnson City: East Tennessee State University, 1975), 1-18.

¹⁵ Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1976), 64.

¹⁶ Carson Brewer, “Early Smokies Explorers Make Unusual Find,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, August 25, 1963, Appalachian Trail Club Bulletins 1937-1947 Folder, “Paul Fink Papers”, McClung Historical Collection (heretofore referred to as “MHC”), Knoxville, TN.

The Carolina Mountain Club was officially formed on July 16, 1923, and although they were not initially concerned with working on the Appalachian Trail, the organization later became a vital force in trail building and maintenance. Originally, the CMC was part of the Appalachian Mountain Club, the country's oldest mountaineering organization. This club was based in Boston, and most trail construction and maintenance was directed towards places like the White Mountains in New Hampshire. The CMC was charged dues from the AMC and the majority of these funds went to the development of recreational opportunities in the Northeast, which the Asheville-based club logically resented. This controversy resulted in a permanent split from the AMC in 1923.¹⁷

In its early days, the Carolina Mountain Club was dedicated to the appeasement of wealthy locals who enjoyed the tranquil surroundings found outside the city. Throughout the 1920's, the CMC maintained a number of cabins for exclusive club use. An article from the *Asheville Citizen-Times* pointed out that, "it is the definite purpose of the club to provide shelters, huts and lodges in various suitable locations for the use of members in hiking, touring, or exploring the mountain region." Cabin sites included the Big Ivy area (outside of Barnardsville), Pink Beds (near Brevard), and Balsam Gap (near Mount Mitchell.)¹⁸ Others noticed that the Carolina Mountain Club did not direct enough attention towards the Appalachian Trail project, and were more likely to enjoy their wilderness-cabin retreats, rather than blaze a trail. George Masa, a Japanese immigrant, local photographer and hiker, saw the lull in hiking activities in Asheville and observed, "they [the CMC] are sleeping, do nothing, so I am going

¹⁷ Peter Steurer, *History of the Carolina Mountain Club: Commemorating the 80th Anniversary, 1923-2003* (Asheville: Carolina Mountain Club, 2003), 1-2.

¹⁸ "Here is Hikers' Paradise: Asheville Has Incomparable Appeal For Walker," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, Undated, Box 9, Folder 1, CMC Archive, Sp. Coll., UNCA.

stirr [*sic*] up make real Mountain Club and get going.”¹⁹ Masa was tired of the sluggishness of the club and felt that the, “old Carolina Mountain Club just joke to me.” The early members of the CMC were reluctant wilderness adventurers, and it took outsiders to prod them into action.²⁰

Indeed, one of the most intriguing members of the Carolina Mountain Club was Masa, who arrived in Asheville in 1915, originally a citizen of Japan. He worked at the Grove Park Inn as a valet, and eventually started his own photography studio. Masa’s experimentation with different photographic techniques and landscapes enthralled many admirers. After a few years of hobnobbing with the social elite in Asheville, Masa explored natural areas outside of the city, and eventually met Horace Kephart.²¹ The two became excellent friends and Kephart marveled at Masa’s abilities as a record keeper and hiker:

It is astonishing that a ‘Jap’ (not even naturalized, so far as I know) should have done all this exploring and photographing and mapping, on his own hook without compensation but at his own expense, out of sheer loyalty to the Park idea and a fine sense of scenic values.²²

Masa continued his work with trail clubs, performed careful tabulation of A.T. distances, and created intricate, detailed maps by hand. He often corresponded with Myron Avery and Harvey Broome, and offered rich insight into the organization of the Trail.²³

In order to increase interest in the Appalachian Trail, George Masa and Horace Kephart voted to merge the CMC with the Carolina Appalachian Trail Club in December 1931.²⁴

Kephart was on the Board of Managers for the Southern District of the Appalachian Trail Conference and was the author of *Camping and Woodcraft* and *Our Southern Highlanders*. In

¹⁹ George Masa to Paul Fink, December 19, 1929, George Masa Correspondence 1927-1933 Folder, “Paul Fink Papers,” MHC.

²⁰ George Masa to Paul Fink, May 25, 1930, George Masa Correspondence 1927-1933 Folder, “Paul Fink Papers.” MHC.

²¹ *The Mystery of George Masa*, produced by Paul Bonesteel. 92 minutes, Bonesteel Films, 2002, DVD.

²² Horace Kephart to Paul Fink, March 13, 1931, Correspondence Horace Kephart 1919-1933 Folder, “Paul Fink Papers,” MHC.

²³ *The Mystery of George Masa*.

²⁴ Steurer, 2-3.

addition, he was an accomplished outdoorsman, known as the “Dean of American Campers” to his loyal readers. Kephart lived in the Smokies for several months on the Sugar Fork of Hazel Creek, after he left a prominent job at the St. Louis Mercantile Library. Fortunately, he was familiar with the terrain and the mountain people who lived nearby. Kephart quickly became involved in the Carolina Appalachian Trail Club, which dedicated itself to the A.T., as well as the organization of vigorous hikes in Western North Carolina. After the Carolina Appalachian Trail Club successfully merged with the Carolina Mountain Club in January 1931, more members were admitted and A.T. enthusiasts trickled in.²⁵

While the original Carolina Mountain Club was the domain of doctors, lawyers, and other prominent Asheville residents, the CATC included many more groups now fascinated by the prospect of an Appalachian Trail. Part of the increase in membership was because of decreased club dues. The amount that members had formerly paid was eight dollars, but in 1931 the dues were lowered to two dollars.²⁶ This change in the cost of membership attracted dozens of additional hikers from all walks of life. In 1942, a *New York Times* article on the CMC observed that, “the mountain club, like the mountains of this section, has no social caste. One of the hikes sponsored by the club will include physicians, business men, secretaries, sales girls, teachers, students, and tradesmen.”²⁷ Other accounts testified about new hiking converts, as well as their abilities: “moreover, it’s not necessary to be a big strong man to indulge [on a snow-covered mountain hike]. It’s not at all unusual to see a 110-pound miss, or a buxom matron, well up in front while the ‘he-men’ are puffing down below.” This new corps of devotees formed the

²⁵ Arthur Perkins to Paul Fink, January 8, 1930, Myron Avery/Appalachian Trail, 1929-1930 Folder, “Paul Fink Papers,” MHC.; Horace Kephart, *Camping and Woodcraft* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1988), vii.

²⁶ Steurer, 2-3.

²⁷ “High Trails for Hikers,” *New York Times*, March 15, 1942, pg. XX3, Box 9, Folder 1, CMC Archive, Sp. Coll., UNCA.

strong backbone of the CMC which was relied upon to maintain the Appalachian Trail in later years.²⁸

The Smoky Mountain Hiking Club was based in Knoxville, Tennessee, and also required guidance in the early days of the Appalachian Trail. The club was formed in October 1924, after a few hikers embarked on trips with the local YMCA. Outings to Mount Le Conte, the third highest point in the Smokies, were very popular with the newly-formed club. The SMHC also had a club cabin, located near Cosby, Tennessee, and a great deal of effort was directed towards the maintenance of the structure. Hike leader and writer Harvey Broome emphasized in an issue of the *Appalachian Trailway News* that, “we were not formed as an A-T club, but as an outing club to enjoy the Smokies; and that has always had our main emphasis. But of course we have supported the Trail movement.” Moreover, while the Knoxville club did not start as an Appalachian Trail-oriented group, they hiked hundreds of miles of park trails and readily admitted a wide range of members into their ranks. Women were almost always present on club outings from the very start in 1924.²⁹ This is unique because other hiking clubs, such as Reading, Pennsylvania’s Blue Mountain Eagle Climbing Club, only allowed men, “with membership further limited to one hundred ‘community leaders’ from the area.”³⁰

Hiking club members in the Southern Appalachians found a champion for hiking trails in Myron Avery. Avery was a Navy lawyer from Maine, and served seven consecutive terms as the Appalachian Trail Conference chairman. In addition to this, Avery was an inexhaustible hiker and organizer who relentlessly measured and checked A.T. mileages to confirm the clubs’

²⁸ “Carolina Mountain Club,” *Times-Herald*, March 16, 1941, Box 9, Folder 4, CMC Archive, Sp. Coll., UNCA.

²⁹ Harvey Broome, “Introducing the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club,” *Appalachian Trailway News* 9, no.2 (1948): 1.

³⁰ Ronald Foresta, “Transformation of the Appalachian Trail,” *Geographical Review* 77, no.1 (1987): 79.

progress.³¹ Although Avery hailed from the Northeast, he was extremely enthusiastic about the Smokies and surrounding areas. He joined hikers Paul Fink, Harvey Broome, and Carlos Campbell on numerous backcountry forays and found the Smokies to be, “far and away ahead of anything else in the mountain line in the eastern part of the country.” Avery enjoyed the transcendental qualities of nature, but mainly found fun and physical challenge in outdoor recreation, along with the demands of completing the A.T. project.³²

Paul Fink, a banker and self-described “woods loafer” from Jonesborough, Tennessee, was an important figure who helped in the establishment of the Appalachian Trail through the work of hiking clubs.³³ Even in his early boyhood years, Fink enjoyed hiking in East Tennessee, at places like Bald and Roan Mountain.³⁴ Fink joined the early Carolina Mountain Club, but soon left because of the lack of activity. As a result, he allied with the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club and quickly started work on Benton MacKaye’s Appalachian Trail.³⁵

Harvey Broome was another critical member of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club and was already well known by other A.T. pioneers for his legendary off-trail exploits. Although a Harvard-trained lawyer, he took trips into the Smokies since he was a boy, where he sought relief from poor health.³⁶ One companion remarked that Broome “had that uncanny ability to ‘smell out’ a dim or lost trail and keep pushing on.”³⁷ Broome was also an eloquent writer who captured the lure of the mountains in his personal journals, as well as his articles. Chief Justice William O. Douglas praised Broome’s descriptions of the Smokies and, “always rated him along

³¹ Robert A. Rubin, “The Short Brilliant Life of Myron Avery,” in *Trail Years: A History of the Appalachian Trail Conference*, ed. Robert A. Rubin (Harpers Ferry, WV: Appalachian Trail Conference, 2000), 22-28.

³² Paul Fink to Jim Thompson, August 24, 1929, Correspondence 1918-1933 Folder, “Paul Fink Papers,” MHC.

³³ “Pays Tribute to Kephart”, *Knoxville Journal*, June 14, 1931.

³⁴ Fink, *Backpacking*, 1-18.

³⁵ Anderson, 188.

³⁶ Broome, *Out Under the Sky*, xvi-xvii.

³⁷ E. Guy Frizzell, “My Friend Harvey Broome,” *Appalachian Trailway News* 29, No. 2 (1968): 21.

with Henry Thoreau and John Muir.”³⁸ The upkeep of the Appalachian Trail also commanded Broome’s attention, and he had an “unabated” interest in the project.³⁹

One of the first tasks of club members was to physically mark the Appalachian Trail. Initially, the groups experimented with attractive copper markers designed for the route. In June 1929, Appalachian Trail Conference president, Raymond Torrey, sent two hundred markers to Paul Fink for distribution along the footpath. Unfortunately, the insignia proved too desirable for “souvenir hunters” who pried them from rocks and trees.⁴⁰ In the next few years, other symbols were used, including galvanized iron markers. These were tested for durability and theft deterrence.⁴¹ But much like their copper counterparts, the diamond-shaped metal signs were damaged by unscrupulous hikers, as well as black bears, who chewed them up on occasion.⁴² Vandals also used A.T. markers for target practice, with several “mutilated almost beyond recognition by gun shots.”⁴³

Since other methods only proved problematic, club members were charged with marking the Appalachian Trail with paint blazes. The job was relatively simple, with little deviation from the procedure that Myron Avery established. After a suitable tree was chosen, rough bark was skimmed off to prepare the surface for painting. Club members took pains not to cut too deeply into the bark, as it would damage the tree.⁴⁴ A white strip of paint, “6 inches long and 2 inches wide (no more) made at the height of the eye,” was the symbol chosen for A.T. trekkers to

³⁸ Harvey Broome, *Faces of the Wilderness* (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1972), vii.

³⁹ Frizzell, “My Friend Harvey Broome,” 22.

⁴⁰ Myron Avery, *Trail Manual for the Appalachian Trail* (Washington D.C.: Appalachian Trail Conference, 1940), 21-22.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² R.B. MacMullan, “Notes on the Appalachian Trail in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee”, June 6, 1938, Box 7, Folder 12, CMC Archive, Sp. Coll., UNCA.

⁴³ A.G. Roth “Report of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club by the Appalachian Trail Conference,” Appalachian Trail Conference Program Folder, “Harvey Broome Papers,” MHC.

⁴⁴ Carlos C. Campbell, *Memories of Old Smoky: Experiences in the Great Smoky Mountains*, ed. Rebecca Campbell Arrants (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2005), 48.

follow from Georgia to Maine.⁴⁵ These white paint blazes were the most popular marker for the Trail, and are still in use today. Some local mountain residents quickly recognized the new symbol and referred to the Appalachian Trail as, “the white spot trail.”⁴⁶

The Smoky Mountains Hiking Club often took extended backpacking trips on the Appalachian Trail to collect data for guidebooks, verify past measurements, and maintain the footpath. These hikes were accomplished with primitive equipment (by modern standards), in all kinds of weather. Carlos Campbell, A.G. “Dutch” Roth, Guy Frizzell, and Jesse Bird made a thirty-one mile hike in two days in late November 1935 to confirm trail distances for a guidebook. The hikers walked through several inches of snow in the Smoky Mountains, and took turns pushing a bicycle-wheel odometer for measurements.⁴⁷

Actual trail-building on the Appalachian Trail was often performed by government agencies and not by hiking clubs. Construction of the A.T. was spearheaded by the National Park Service and Forest Service in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Pisgah National Forest.⁴⁸ For example, one wildly popular section that led from Newfound Gap to Charlies’ Bunion was completed in the fall of 1932 by National Park Service engineer Sheridan West, along with twenty-two crewmen in just a month.⁴⁹ For the newly-established National Park, the Appalachian Trail was the first development that an awaiting public enjoyed.⁵⁰

Trail work did not just come from National Park maintenance crews, though. During the fiscally-strapped 1930’s, foresters and park superintendants put Civilian Conservation Corps

⁴⁵ Avery, *Trail Manual*, 6.

⁴⁶ Martin L. Black, “The Southern Appalachian Trail,” August 14, 1939, “Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection,” Box 1, Correspondence 1939 Folder, MHC.

⁴⁷ Campbell, 49.

⁴⁸ Myron Avery, *Guide to the Southern Appalachians: The Appalachian Trail from Virginia-Tennessee Line to Mt. Oglethorpe, GA* (Washington: Appalachian Trail Conference, 1937), 55. Box 7, Folder 2, CMC Archive, Sp. Coll., UNCA.

⁴⁹ Bill Beard and James Wedekind, “Appalachian Trail: Newfound Gap to Charlies Bunion,” in *Hiking Trails of the Smokies*, ed. Don DeFoe et al. (Gatlinburg: Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2003), 57.

⁵⁰ Jerry Delaughter, *Smokies Road Guide* (Gatlinburg: Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2004), 23.

members to work on uncompleted portions of the Appalachian Trail.⁵¹ In 1937, a CCC crew cut a new section of trail through the woods near Hot Springs, North Carolina, much to the pleasure of Carolina Mountain Club Trail Chairman, Marcus Book.⁵² In effect, the government workers built the Trail, which the clubs previously blazed and marked. Clubs also performed maintenance of the A.T. on volunteer outings. Nantahala National Forest supervisor, Paul Gerrard, explained that if CCC workers constructed the A.T., then “the Trail should be easily traversable. Cairns [rock markers], paint blazes, and Appalachian Trail markers, I assume, will be installed by the local clubs.”⁵³ The Depression-era “tree army” also constructed three-sided trail shelters (or “lean-to’s”) for hikers in national forests and parks. Often, Great Smoky Mountains National Park’s administrators relied upon the CCC to build these shelters, although funding proved problematic throughout the early 1940’s.⁵⁴

The two clubs also experienced problems with the A.T. that involved non-hikers. Outside of the Smokies, the Trail passed through a nudist colony. The owners were willing to accommodate backpackers that crossed the property, with the request that they remove their clothing while hiking through that section. This bizarre requirement was discussed with the nudists, and the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club decided to relocate the Trail to another, less popular area. Other issues during the Great Depression included a family that squatted inside of a backcountry shelter after they lost their home.⁵⁵

Visiting backpackers found the clubs’ maintenance on the Trail to be sporadic. When a group of hikers tackled the Southern Appalachian portion of the A.T. in May 1938, they found

⁵¹ Foresta, 80.

⁵² “Proceedings of the Eighth Appalachian Trail Conference” (Washington: Appalachian Trail Conference, 1937), 5. “SMHC,” Box 1, Correspondence 1939 Folder, MHC.

⁵³ Paul Gerrard to Myron Avery, July 22, 1938, Box 7, Folder 12, CMC Archive, Sp. Coll., UNCA.

⁵⁴ J.R. Eakin to E. Guy Frizzell, November 28, 1941, “SMHC,” Box 1, Correspondence 1941 Folder, MHC.

⁵⁵ Campbell, 51.

excellent conditions in some parts of the Smokies. Hiker R.B MacMullan reported that, “the blazing of the trail in the Western Smokies is the finest we have encountered. One is never out of sight of a blaze or cairn, and even in the densest of fog we had no trouble sailing right along without guidebook or map.”⁵⁶ However, on other portions of the Trail, marking and maintenance were sparse. Myron Avery analyzed another section later that summer, and wrote that “the conditions reported convey the impression that there is oftentimes a failure to appreciate what the outsider expects to find in the way of a marked and maintained trail.”⁵⁷ The following summer, another party found the Trail to be in excellent condition and had a “great amount of praise for the Carolina Mountain Club.”⁵⁸ Problems with communication, along with the remote nature of the Appalachian Trail were factors that probably hindered continual upkeep and universal satisfaction for early hikers.

Despite the progress made on the Trail, friction developed between club members and A.T. administrators. Many felt the job was being completed too quickly, and the intended purpose for the footpath was obscured. Harvey Broome corresponded with Myron Avery between 1931 and 1932, and warned not to “strive feverishly” on the A.T., as it conflicted with Benton MacKaye’s original vision of a wilderness retreat. Broome stressed the importance of cooperation, and explained to the Maine organizer that, “frankly, Myron, I think you would get along better with your southern neighbors if you did not try to force things too much.”⁵⁹ The Knoxville attorney and wilderness advocate also felt as though the Trail was becoming over-developed, and that it should be more challenging for hikers. He observed that, “the rougher it

⁵⁶ R.B. MacMullan, “Notes on the Appalachian Trail in Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee,” June 6, 1938, Box 7, Folder 12, CMC Archive, Sp. Coll., UNCA.

⁵⁷ Myron Avery to Tom Duncan, August 18, 1938, “SMHC,” Box 1, Correspondence 1938 Folder, MHC.

⁵⁸ Martin L. Black, “The Southern Appalachian Trail,” August 14, 1939, “SMHC,” Box 1, Correspondence 1939 Folder, MHC.

⁵⁹ Harvey Broome to Myron Avery, September 22, 1932, “Harvey Broome Papers,” Appalachian Trail Conference, Avery, Myron H., Misc. Correspondence 1931-1932 Folder, MHC.

is, the greater its challenge to a trifle-ridden people. I don't think we should welcome the mediocre when we may have the magnificent."⁶⁰ The exchange of ideas between the two was good-natured, but Broome continued to vocalize MacKaye's wishes for the Trail (both Avery and Broome were lawyers, which probably contributed to their ardent debates.) Avery still made enormous progress on the venture, and wilderness scholar Ronald Foresta has remarked that, "more than anyone else [Avery] was responsible for the success of the trail."⁶¹

Club members had increasingly different ideas about how the Appalachian Trail should be utilized, as well as the sudden appearance of preservationist-oriented groups like the Wilderness Society. By October 1935, Paul Fink had drifted farther away from Benton MacKaye and Harvey Broome. Fink saw that their opinions after the formation of the Wilderness Society were somewhat impassioned and that the "prospectus sounded a little rabid." The Wilderness Society's ethos readily embraced the idea of unspoiled wildness, with little human intervention, and did not always cooperate with federal agencies. Fink often stayed away from the quarrels between different groups and was respected by many hikers, who sought his counsel on a variety of matters. As far as MacKaye and Broome went, Fink decided that the Wilderness Society had a caustic effect on Trail-related matters and among good friends.⁶² Inevitably, allegiances were tested when National Park planners eyed the Smokies' high country for road construction.

The areas that club members strove to protect were threatened by another divisive issue: new scenic automobile roads in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Some hikers argued the proximity of roads ruined the wilderness virtues of the Appalachian Trail through the Smokies,

⁶⁰ Harvey Broome to Myron Avery, December 15, 1931, "Harvey Broome Papers," Appalachian Trail Conference, Avery, Myron H., Misc. Correspondence 1931-1932 Folder, MHC.

⁶¹ Foresta, 79.

⁶² Paul Fink to Myron Avery, October 6, 1935, "Paul Fink Papers," Myron Avery and the Appalachian Trail, 1935-1936 Folder, MHC.

where the sounds of cars and motorcycles did not pervade. These “skyline drives” were occasionally opposed by members of the clubs, but there was surprisingly little disagreement on the subject in formal discussions between clubs and park administrators. In a bizarre turn, the Appalachian Trail Conference and Potomac Appalachian Trail Club were both in favor of a scenic drive along the western crest of the Smokies.⁶³ By January 1933, the SMHC Board of Directors met and “heartily approved” a road that would stretch westward from Newfound Gap to Cades Cove or Deals Gap. Only one member countered the construction of the new road.⁶⁴ Harvey Broome remained in opposition to additional roads through the park and commented that, “it would be sheer boorishness to put motor roads through places like this. It borders on ignorance to say that one can ‘see’ or ‘feel’ the mountains from a motor car.”⁶⁵ Appeals from Broome and other colleagues eventually convinced Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to stop construction, and the project was halted in 1935, despite majority opinion.⁶⁶

Many club members feared that the high spruce forests and sawtooth ridgelines east of Newfound Gap were the next target for road-building in 1933, and it took a pledge from Horace Albright, the National Park Service director, to relieve anxious hikers. Albright assured them that, “there will be no development by roads of that beautiful wilderness area lying east of New Found Gap.”⁶⁷ Over the next seventy-five years, numerous assaults by roads polarized public opinion between hikers and others in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. But the vast majority of additional roads were never built, due to vocal opposition by preservationists.⁶⁸

⁶³Daniel Pierce, “The Road to Nowhere: Tourism Development versus Environmentalism in the Great Smoky Mountains,” in *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Mountain South*, ed. by Richard Starnes (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2003), 204.

⁶⁴E.G. Frizzell to Arno Cammerer, January 20, 1933, “SMHC,” Box 1, Correspondence 1933 Folder, MHC.

⁶⁵Broome, “Out Under the Sky,” 36.

⁶⁶Pierce, “Road to Nowhere,” 204-205.

⁶⁷Horace Albright to E.G. Frizzell, January 23, 1933, “SMHC,” Box 1, Correspondence 1933 Folder, MHC.

⁶⁸Pierce, “Road to Nowhere,” 208-213.

The 1931 and 1937 general meetings of the Appalachian Trail Conference held in Gatlinburg, Tennessee represented a culmination of events for local trail clubs, as well as out of state organizations that travelled to the area. On June 12-14, 1931, the event gathered representatives together to address the progress made on the Trail, as well as trail marking techniques and financial business. Two hundred people from Maine to Georgia turned out for the celebration, and the Trail was hailed a success, with over half of the path completed. The southern portion was finished, with the exception of a one-mile section near Davenport Gap (near present-day Interstate 40.)⁶⁹ Most participants also enjoyed a day hike to Mount Le Conte, but Avery and a companion, along with a separate pair of hikers arrived at the Conference after a test-run on the A.T. of two hundred miles.⁷⁰ Only two months after the 1937 Gatlinburg meeting, the entire footpath from Georgia to Maine was built and ready for trekking.⁷¹

Ultimately, the land that the Appalachian Trail passed through was not an “impenetrable wilderness” as evidenced by early hikers who enjoyed the high peaks for recreation and solace. The Carolina Mountain Club and Smoky Mountains Hiking Club both started with little interest in the Appalachian Trail, but after some inducement from individuals like Masa and Kephart, the clubs started work. In addition, both clubs physically marked the route, and recorded detailed measurements that federal crews could rely upon to construct the A.T. However, when it came to the actual building of the Trail, governmental agencies provided crucial funding and labor. Unexpectedly, it was the work of the National Park Service, Forest Service, and Civilian Conservation Corps that carried out the bulk of trail-building, while club members were relegated to scouting and blazing the Appalachian Trail.

⁶⁹ Jack Bryan, “Dream Trail Now Reality; Hikers Happy,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, June 13, 1931, “Harvey Broome Papers,” Appalachian Trail Conference Folder, MHC.

⁷⁰ “Two Hikers Penetrate Fastness in Smokies,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, June 13, 1931, “Harvey Broome Papers,” Appalachian Trail Conference Folder, MHC.

⁷¹ Rubin, 50.

The skyline drives that threatened the environment along the A.T. were perceived as a surprisingly small threat to a majority of club members, and it was the opposition of individual preservationists that blocked construction in the 1930's. Club members were not always in perfect harmony, and disagreed on a variety of issues that ranged from road building to the core values of the Appalachian Trail. Favor towards skyline drives may have been popular in the 1930's, but much of it had waned by the sixties, when the environmental movement became stronger. This resistance towards road construction was probably a result of wilderness areas becoming smaller over time, as well as a heightened appreciation for the area's scenic resources.

The Appalachian Trail owed its establishment to a small team of wilderness cognoscenti, who although were involved in official club activities, worked as individuals to complete the project. Hikers like Myron Avery, Paul Fink, George Masa, Horace Kephart, and Harvey Broome were just as responsible for the success of the Appalachian Trail as the unified clubs were. Fundamentally, it was their work that ensured the A.T. provided one of the finest recreational outlets for hikers in the world. As a whole, the Carolina Mountain Club and Smoky Mountains Hiking Club represented organizations that did a great deal to further the Appalachian Trail, but individual hikers, along with government construction made Benton MacKaye's concept a reality.

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Broome, Harvey. *Out Under the Sky of the Great Smokies: A Personal Journal*. Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2001.

*Broome's descriptive, lyrical journals are highlighted in this book. Describes thoughts on wilderness in general, as well as his personal hikes into the backcountry.

Carolina Mountain Club Archive, University of North Carolina at Asheville

*Contains several *Citizen-Times* newspaper articles, letters, a full selection of *Appalachian Trailway News*, and maps. Several Appalachian Trail Conference documents written by Myron Avery are also included. The 1937 *Trail Guide to the Southern Appalachians* is also part of this collection, which is a very rare book.

Fink, Paul S., *Backpacking Was the Only Way: A Chronicle of Camping Experiences in the Southern Appalachian Mountains*. Johnson City: Research Advisor Council, East Tennessee State Univ., 1975.

*Fink's journals describe early treks to Roan Mountain, the Smokies, and the Black Mountains.

Harvey Broome Papers, McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library System, Knoxville, Tennessee.

*Although this collection contains a few articles from the Knoxville *News-Sentinel* and *Journal*, it is mostly made up of Broome's correspondence with various Appalachian Trail figures. Much of it is concentrated on the Appalachian Trail Conference, held in Gatlinburg, Tennessee in 1931 and 1937.

Kephart, Horace. *Our Southern Highlanders*. Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee, 1976.

*Kephart's best seller details mountain people in the Smokies, and the conditions of the area before the advent of the national park.

Paul Fink Papers, McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library System,
Knoxville, Tennessee.

*Paul Fink retained much of his personal correspondence concerning the Appalachian Trail. An invaluable resource, there are dozens of letters from Myron Avery, Horace Kephart, George Masa, and National Park Service officials. Recently, an eager club member reorganized the papers (unsuccessfully), and as a result, documentation must be noted by folder name and not number.

Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection, McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public
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*Two boxes of correspondence, from club presidents and the Board of Directors. This box was also “reorganized” by a well-meaning club member, so folders are labeled by year and not folder number.

Secondary Sources:

Anderson, Larry. *Benton MacKaye: Conservationist, Planner, and Creator of the Appalachian Trail*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2002.

*Anderson's book is a thorough examination of the life of Benton MacKaye. The appendix contains MacKaye's opus, *An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning*. Much attention is given towards MacKaye's work with the AT, Tennessee Valley Authority, and Wilderness Society.

Beard, Bill and James Wedekind, "Appalachian Trail: Newfound Gap to Charlies Bunion." In *Hiking Trails of the Smokies*, edited by Don DeFoe et al. Gatlinburg, TN: Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2003.

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*Campbell reminisces about the early days of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and his hiking trips that took place there. There is a chapter on selecting the route that the AT would follow, along with the methods used to mark it. Some detail is also given of the equipment used by the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club. The author also described some of the animals, plants, and weather encountered in the park.

Delauter, Jerry. *Smokies Road Guide*. Gatlinburg: Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2004.

*Basic tourism information on the Smokies. This guide mentions that the Appalachian Trail was the first park project that benefitted the public.

Foresta, Ronald. "Transformation of the Appalachian Trail." *Geographical Review* 77 (1987): 76-85.

*In this article, the author maintains that while Benton MacKaye was responsible for the completion of the AT, it had little resemblance to his original vision. Social struggles, as well as the need for cooperation with federal agencies are highlighted in this interesting article. In particular, the need for early urban dwellers to escape to the sanctity of the wilderness is examined.

Foster, Charlers H.W. *The Appalachian National Scenic Trail: A Time to Be Bold*. Harpers Ferry: Appalachian Trail Conservancy, 1987.

*His book is considered to be one of the best treatments of the history of the Appalachian Trail. Foster, a Yale professor, was on the committee for federal designation of the AT. His first-hand experience is invaluable in describing the complicated relationships that characterized local hiking clubs and other organizations with the Department of the Interior.

Fritsch, Albert, and Kristin Johannsen. *Ecotourism in Appalachia: Marketing the Mountains*.

Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2004.

*This book's title is somewhat deceiving, as one would expect it to deal solely with Appalachia. Instead, great detail is given to such tourist destinations as Alaska, Hawaii, and even Belize. These places are treated as case studies to lend context to other pieces of relevant information. The idea of tourism centered around the environment is examined, along with the crucial mistakes that have taken place in Appalachia, including tourists' perceptions of the region. *Ecotourism* offers helpful solutions to tourists who are confused with mountain culture.

Howell, Benita J. *Culture, Environment, and Conservation in the Appalachian South*. Urbana:

Univ. of Illinois Press, 2002.

*This book consists of a collection of essays that look at the human impact upon the region. One particularly interesting chapter deals with "anti-environmentalism", which is largely credited towards dispossessed mountain residents. The relationship "between nature and culture" is also recognized and the results that follow are fascinating. This book is not strictly dedicated towards the science behind the environmental history, but instead focuses on the human relationships that have been connected to the land for centuries.

Martin, C. Brendan. *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword*. Knoxville: Univ.

of Tennessee Press, 2007.

*Martin's book offers a meticulous look into the history of tourism in Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Also noteworthy for a chapter on Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Martin also points out that the Appalachian Trail was not a profit-driven venture.

“The Mystery of George Masa”. Produced by Paul Bonesteel. 92 minutes. Bonesteel Films, 2003. 1 disc.

*Recent documentary that investigates Carolina Mountain Club member George Masa. Masa was also a gifted photographer whose talents helped to preserve Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In addition to showcasing Masa’s photography, there are also several interviews with related figures, such as George Kephart, Tom Alexander, and George Ellison. Besides Masa’s landscape shots, there are numerous images of early Carolina Mountain Club outings.

Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2001.

*A crucial text for any wilderness scholar, Nash’s book describes the battles that preservationists have fought over the years. This book covers an incredible span of wilderness thought and defense, starting with Biblical passages and finishing up with more recent events that have occurred in the American Southwest. Even though Nash barely mentions the Appalachian Trail (or GSMNP), he does give excellent examples that provide a look into the policies and thoughts that dictated wilderness preservation.

Pierce, Daniel S. *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park*. Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2000.

*Details the pre-park years, as well as the struggle that local boosters faced in establishment of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The second and third chapters describe differences between those who wanted to preserve for prosperity versus nature. Horace Kephart and Paul Fink are also mentioned, which helped in my research of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club.

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*This chapter chronicles the history of road development in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, including the struggle of preservationists to stop it.

Silver, Timothy. *Mount Mitchell and the Black Mountains: An Environmental History of the Highest Peaks in Eastern America*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2007.

*Although the Appalachian Trail doesn’t run anywhere near Mount Mitchell, it was subject to many of the same dynamic forces that shaped this area within Pisgah National Forest. Silver’s book provides an intimate view and discusses the evolution of land management by state and federal agencies. Much of the information is specifically aimed towards the Black Mountains,

but there is mention of the Blue Ridge Parkway and other nearby ranges that relate to the Appalachian Trail.

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*Sutter describes MacKaye's role in the creation of the Appalachian Trail, and the differences between other A.T. visionaries.

---. *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness*

Movement. Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2002.

*He discusses the values that many Americans associated with wilderness, as well as the impact of commercialism upon wild places. Sutter also offers a detailed look into the lives of preservationists like Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, and most importantly, Benton MacKaye. Sutter's book establishes that while automobiles (and civic boosters) were essential parts of preserving National Parks, they were also the greatest threats to wilderness. He also describes the early motor home phenomenon.