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NORTH CAROLINA'S ROLE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK†

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The movement to establish a national park in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina began late in the nineteenth century. The first organized effort in this direction was undertaken by citizens of the resort town of Asheville. Under the leadership of Dr. C. P. Ambler, the Asheville Board of Trade organized the Appalachian National Park Association in November, 1899, which included prominent public figures from nearly all southeastern States. For six years, the association waged a vigorous publicity campaign and won strong support from many congressional figures, particularly two Republicans, Senator Jeter C. Pritchard of North Carolina and Representative W. P. Brownlow of Tennessee. When the association recognized the futility of seeking federal funds for a national park, it concentrated upon establishing a forest reserve and changed its name to the Appalachian National Forest Reserve Association. At that time President Theodore Roosevelt was dramatizing the conservation of natural resources and heartily endorsed the Appalachian forest reserve idea. Despite the widespread support of the movement, the association encountered serious opposition which for twelve years prevented the establishment of forest reserves in the Southern Appalachians. Among the major obstacles were the

† For an earlier movement, see Charles Dennis Smith, "The Appalachian Park Movement, 1885-1901", *The North Carolina Historical Review*, XXXVII (January, 1960), 38-65.

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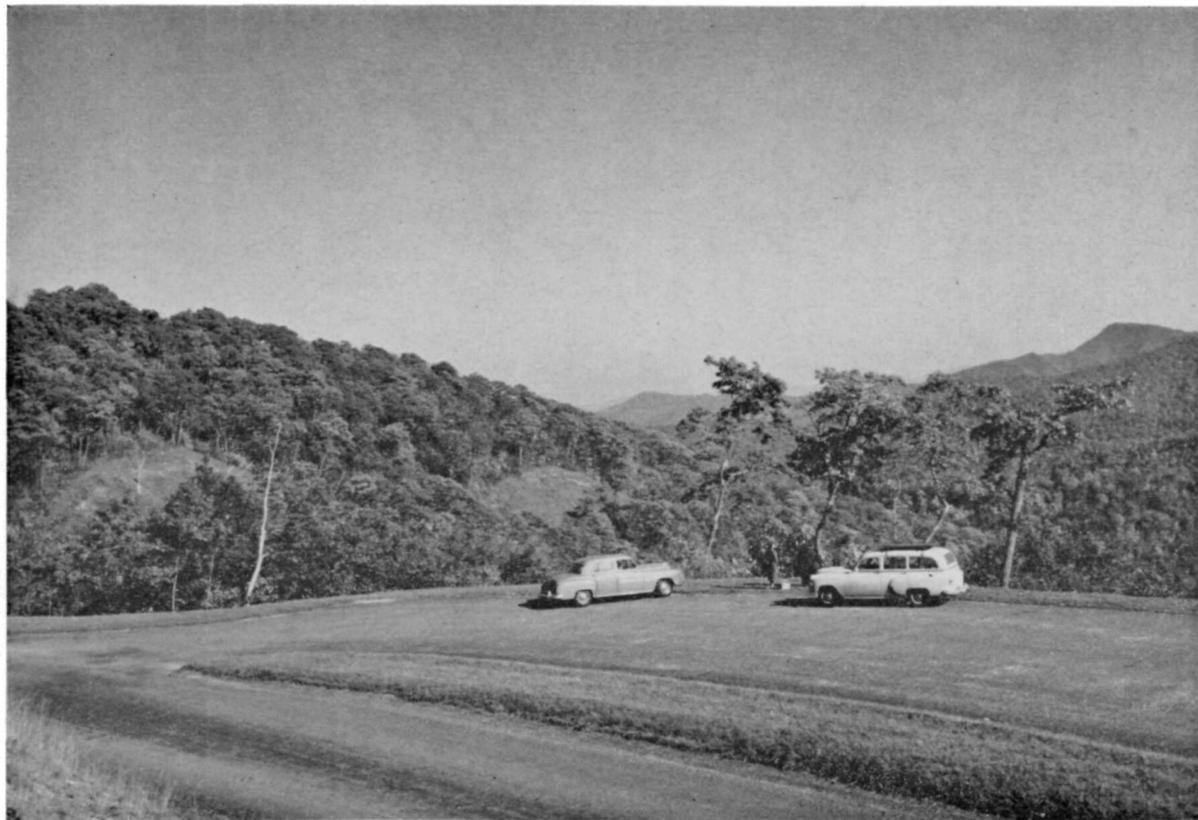
resistance of the lumbering interests, the sectional stigma of the movement, and the hostility of David Henderson and Joseph Cannon, successive Speakers of the House of Representatives. Finally, after Speaker Cannon's power had been curbed and the association had transferred its functions to the American Forestry Association to avoid the sectional stigma, Congress passed the Weeks Law in 1911 providing for the creation of national forest reserves in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and the Southern Appalachians.¹

Nevertheless, the idea of a national park in the Carolina mountains was by no means forsaken. New interest in the project came from a variety of sources. Not the least among these was the publication in 1913 of Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* and Margaret Morley's *The Carolina Mountains*. Both writers enthusiastically described the natural beauty of the Great Smoky Mountains, a lofty ridge in the Appalachians along the North Carolina-Tennessee boundary.² The "mysterious realm" of the Great Smokies, depicted by these books, was penetrated by a growing number of logging railroads during and after World War I. In the same era North Carolina witnessed a vast increase in highways and automobiles, and motorists began to skirt the Great Smokies, viewing from afar its majestic peaks covered with forests, laurel, and rhododendron. Attempting to capitalize on the future growth of the tourist travel, realtors initiated a land boom in the area in 1925 that might have been disastrous had it not been short-circuited by the timely collapse of the Florida real estate fiasco.³ This revived interest in the Great Smokies as a "glorious pleasure ground," however, coincided with the emergence of a nation-wide interest in national parks. The establishment of the National Park Serv-

¹ Minutes of the Appalachian National Park Association, 1899-1905, State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh; William Gwinn, *Uncle Joe Cannon: Archfoe of Insurgency* (New York, 1957), 134-136; Charles Washburn, *The Life of John W. Weeks* (New York, 1928), 74-81; Elizabeth S. Bowman, *Land of High Horizons* (Kingsport, Tennessee: 1938), 117-123.

² Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York, 1913), 15-16; Margaret Morley, *The Carolina Mountains* (Boston, 1913), 24-35, 239-247.

³ Cecil Brown, *The State Highway System of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1931), 100-132, 249-250; A. E. Parkins and J. R. Whitaker (eds.), *Our Natural Resources and Their Conservation* (New York, 1937), 11-13, hereinafter cited as Parkins and Whitaker, *Our Natural Resources*.



Looking north from Mile High Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway, October, 1953

*North Carolina News Bureau
photo by Gus Martin*

ice in 1916 and the organization of the National Parks Association three years later provided an additional impetus to the park movement.⁴ Amid this atmosphere State officials, congressmen, and private citizens from North Carolina and Tennessee renewed their fight for a national park in the Great Smoky Mountains.

In 1922 and 1923 several bills were introduced in Congress to provide for the establishment of national parks in various sections of the Southern Appalachians. Congress, however, adjourned without enacting any of them. In February, 1924, Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work, cognizant of the existing agitation, appointed a committee of five prominent conservationists to study lands east of the Mississippi River with a view toward determining those areas suitable for a national park. Unlike the great parks of the West which were generally carved out of the public domain, national parks in the East would have to be purchased from private owners. Nevertheless, the Secretary informed the several states of his "desire to establish a great national park east of the Mississippi River." The report of his committee, presented to Congress on December 13, 1924, mentioned favorably the Great Smokies as a possible site for such a project.⁵

In the meantime, the General Assembly of North Carolina had convened in special session in the summer of 1924 to consider Governor Cameron Morrison's program for harbor and port facilities. Speaker of the House John G. Dawson, President E. C. Brooks of North Carolina State College, and three legislators from the mountain counties, Mark Squires, Harry Nettles, and Plato Ebbs, were anxious to follow up Secretary Work's favorable attitude toward establishing a national park east of the Mississippi River. Through their influence the legislature established a "special commission for the purpose of presenting the claims of North Carolina for a national park" and appropriated \$2,500 for its expenses.

⁴ Parkins and Whitaker, *Our Natural Resources*, 11-12; Harlean James, *Romance of the National Parks* (New York, 1941), 65-69, hereinafter cited as James, *Romance of the National Parks*.

⁵ *Congressional Record*, Sixty-Seventh Congress, Third Session, LXVIII, 270; James, *Romance of the National Parks*, 86-88; *Report of the North Carolina Park Commission, 1931*, 3, hereinafter cited as *Report of Park Commission, 1931*.

The commission was composed of eleven members, five of whom were chosen by the Speaker of the House and three by the President of the Senate. In a separate resolution the presidents of North Carolina State College and the University and the Speaker were appointed to the commission.⁶

The real reason for this resolution was to insure the election of Dawson and Brooks, both of whom had manifested an especial interest in the park project. Dawson was not only largely responsible for the establishment of the commission, but was an influential figure in State politics and a resident of an eastern county. The "proper" geographical distribution of the commission's membership was considered an important factor in winning state-wide support for the park which was generally viewed as of value only to the western area. Several legislators, including Dawson, felt that Brooks ought to be placed on the commission for two main reasons. He was keenly interested in the park and possessed the *savoir-faire* necessary for the successful conduct of tedious negotiations that would be required for the acquisition of park lands. Moreover, the park advocates in the legislature realized that the purchase of these lands would probably require generous financial aid from private sources such as the Rockefellers. They believed that Brooks, as a former State Superintendent of Public Instruction well-known to Rockefeller's General Education Board, would be a valuable asset in securing a donation from the Rockefeller family.⁷

The organizational meeting of the park commission was held in the Sir Walter Hotel in Raleigh on October 8, 1924. State Senator Mark Squires of Lenoir was elected chairman and Brooks secretary. Obviously, the most pressing task of the group was to persuade federal officials of the desirability

⁶ Interview with Mr. John G. Dawson, September 7, 1956; memorandum by Mr. Harry Nettles, September 17, 1956; John G. Dawson to J. C. B. Ehringhaus, July 19, 1933, Governor's Papers, Department of Archives and History; Minutes of the Special Commission for Presenting the Claims of North Carolina for a National Park, October 8, 1924, Eugene C. Brooks Papers, Duke University, Durham, hereinafter cited as Brooks Papers. The members of the Commission were E. C. Brooks, Raleigh; John G. Dawson, Kinston; Harry Chase, Chapel Hill; Mark Squires, Lenoir; Harry Nettles, Biltmore; Plato Ebbs, Asheville; D. M. Buck, Bald Mountain; A. M. Kistler, Morganton; Frank Linney, Boone; E. S. Parker, Jr., Greensboro; and J. H. Dillard, Murphy.

⁷ Interview with Mr. John G. Dawson, September 7, 1956.

of a national park in the Great Smoky Mountains. A committee of five, including Squires, Brooks, and Dawson, was selected to plead the cause of a national park in Washington, employ publicity agents, and prepare reports for the Interior Department. They were convinced that "all North Carolina" must agree on one park site and "press it to the utmost" rather than risking everything by seeking "too much."⁸

In January, 1925, the matter of a national park in the Southern Appalachians was championed in Congress by several Southern delegations and particularly by Representative Henry W. Temple of Pennsylvania, chairman of the survey committee created by the Secretary of the Interior in 1924. The proponents of a national park in the Shenandoah region of Virginia, however, seemed to be determined to achieve their goal regardless of the claims presented by neighboring States. Over 200 Virginians led by their Governor had invaded Washington, called upon President Calvin Coolidge, and set up a permanent lobby to promote the selection of the Shenandoah site. Such strong support obviously enhanced the position of the Virginia congressmen.⁹

The North Carolina park commission immediately sensed the danger of Virginia's activities to its own cause and turned to the North Carolina congressional delegation for help. Both Senators, F. M. Simmons and Lee Overman, responded to the call, while Representatives Alfred Bulwinkle, Zebulon Weaver, Robert Doughton, and Charles Abernethy took up the cause of the Great Smokies in the House. As a member of the House Committee on the Public Lands, Abernethy in particular played a key role in the ensuing negotiations. On January 19, 1925, several members of the park commission, led by Squires and Brooks, met in Senator Simmons's office to plan their strategy. This was followed by various conferences with representatives from Tennessee and Virginia, which resulted in an agreement to place the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains sites on "equal footing" in their

⁸ Minutes of the Special Park Commission, October 8, November 19, 1924, Brooks Papers; Mark Squires to E. C. Brooks, November 13, 1924, and John G. Dawson to E. C. Brooks, December 20, 1924, Brooks Papers.

⁹ *The News and Observer* (Raleigh), January 20, 21, 1925, hereinafter cited as *The News and Observer*.

campaigns for national parks.¹⁰ Representative Temple revised his bill in accordance with this agreement. The Temple Bill, enacted into law on February 16, 1925, provided that the Secretary of the Interior should determine the boundaries and areas of the proposed national parks of the Smoky Mountains and Shenandoah regions; receive offers of land and money donations for these projects; and report his findings to Congress. The Secretary was also authorized to appoint a commission of five members to undertake the investigation. By this time the North Carolina park advocates were convinced that their hopes were nearer realization than ever before.¹¹

While the Secretary of the Interior investigated the various park sites, the North Carolina park commission intensified its campaign to win public support for the project within the State. However, one member, A. M. Kistler of Morganton, observed that "the people of the western part of the State, as a general rule, do not want the park in the Great Smokies."¹²

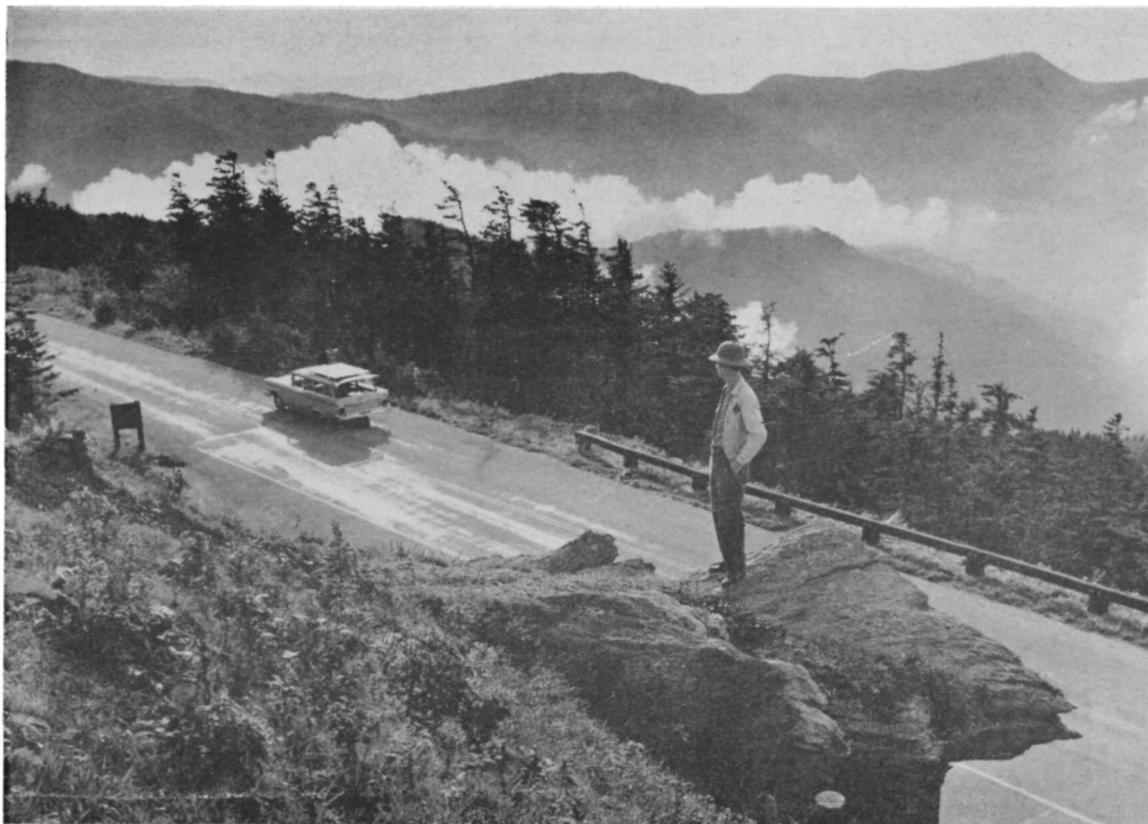
At the same time Squires, an energetic but emotional man, reported that the commission was "being played for a bunch of suckers" by the national survey group.¹³ Brooks sought to temper Squires's outbursts and to maintain harmony among the various park forces. In fact, he assumed the role of peacemaker more than once in an effort to secure a national park. In August, 1925, he conferred with Secretary Work about the "independent course" being pursued by Virginia in the interest of a Shenandoah park, despite the previous agreement to co-operate in the establishment of two parks. Brooks plainly told the Virginia delegation that its activities threatened to defeat the whole park program for the South-

¹⁰ Mark Squires to F. M. Simmons, January 8, 1925; Joseph H. Pratt to F. M. Simmons, January 20, 1925, Furnifold M. Simmons Papers, Duke University, Durham, hereinafter cited as Simmons Papers; *The News and Observer*, January 20, 21, 1925; E. C. Brooks to A. M. Kistler, January 12, 1925, and press memorandum by Senator Simmons, January 28, 1925, Brooks Papers.

¹¹ *The News and Observer*, January 29, 30, February 17, 1925; Charles Abernethy to E. C. Brooks, January 30, 1925; E. C. Brooks to Charles Abernethy, March 3, 1925; Wingrove Bathon to Mark Squires, January 28, 1925; John G. Dawson to E. C. Brooks, January 27, 1925, Brooks Papers; *House Reports*, Sixty-Eighth Congress, Second Session, I, No. 1320, 1-6.

¹² A. M. Kistler to E. C. Brooks, July 6, 1925, Brooks Papers.

¹³ Mark Squires to E. C. Brooks, July 1, 1925, Brooks Papers.



Access road to Mt. Mitchell, September, 1959

*North Carolina News Bureau
photo by Charlie Kelly*



Group of hikers rests at Andrews Bald in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, 1957

*North Carolina News Bureau
photo by Miriam Rabb*

ern Appalachians and suggested that representatives from the three interested States hold a meeting in order to iron out their differences and renew their agreement.¹⁴ At such a meeting in Richmond on September 9, 1925, he made an eloquent plea for co-operation among the proponents of the two parks, and after a full discussion, the delegates agreed to "pool their interests and work for two national parks." To promote co-operation they organized the Appalachian National Parks Association, composed of representatives from North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.¹⁵

In the meantime, the North Carolina park commission planned its campaign to collect private subscriptions and donations to purchase lands in the Great Smoky Mountains area. In 1925 the understanding was that the park site would be purchased without financial assistance from the State or federal governments. Thus, on September 2, 1925, the park commission created a holding committee for the purpose of receiving donations, called Great Smoky Mountains, Incorporated. Later, the park commission joined with its counterpart in Tennessee to employ a New York firm to assist in a fund-raising campaign with a goal of \$1,000,000 by March 1, 1926. At the same time, the North Carolina commission reorganized its publicity work under the direction of F. Roger Miller of the Asheville Board of Trade and Horace Kephart, author of *Our Southern Highlanders*.¹⁶ The publicity bureau distributed literature describing the "wonders" of the Great Smokies, published articles in newspapers and magazines to arouse public support for the project, and sponsored essay contests in the public schools on "Why I Would Like a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains." The propaganda of the bureau generally centered around the recreational advantages of such a project, its preservation of

¹⁴ E. C. Brooks to Mark Squires, August 25, 1925, Brooks Papers; interview with Mr. E. C. Brooks, Jr., July 12, 1956.

¹⁵ Joint Meeting of the North Carolina Park Commission, the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association, and the Shenandoah Park Association, September 9, 1925, E. C. Brooks to H. J. Benchoff, September 29, 1925, Brooks Papers.

¹⁶ Minutes of the Special Park Commission, September 2, October 21, 1925, Mark Squires to E. C. Brooks, December 1, 1925, Brooks Papers; *Report of Commission, 1931*, 4; Minutes of the Meeting of Great Smoky Mountains, Inc., December 15, 1925, Brooks Papers.

forests and protection of the headwaters of major streams, and its potential economic value as a tourist attraction.¹⁷

By January, 1926, only \$500,000 had actually been secured by North Carolina and Tennessee for the purchase of park lands. Squires informed Governor A. W. McLean that the opposition of the pulp and lumber interests to the park movement had "seriously embarrassed" the campaign in Asheville and complained that western North Carolina was bearing the financial burden with almost no assistance from the eastern counties. By April, 1926, the park commission reported \$450,000 in private subscriptions for its part in the \$1,000,000 goal, "assuming that Asheville would complete the Buncombe County quota." Of the amount subscribed only \$50,000 came from sections east of the mountains, an indication that the commission had not aroused the state-wide support of the park that it desired. In April, 1926, however, the State Democratic Convention included the establishment of a Great Smoky Mountains National Park as a plank in its platform. Some observers interpreted this as an indication that the State would provide an appropriation for the purchase of park lands at the next session of the legislature.¹⁸

On April 14, 1926, the Secretary of the Interior designated the approximate boundaries of national parks in the Great Smokies and Shenandoah regions on the basis of the report of his special survey commission. Representative Temple, chairman of that commission, introduced a bill in Congress for the establishment of national parks in these areas.¹⁹ In describing his bill before the House Committee on Public Lands, he declared that "the parks are to be acquired without cost to the United States Government, and to be accepted by the Secretary of the Interior, when they are turned over

¹⁷ E. C. Brooks to Plato Ebbs, October 31, 1925, E. C. Brooks to F. Roger Miller, October 27, 1925, E. C. Brooks to Mark Squires, December 19, 1925, Brooks Papers; Horace Kephart, "The Great Smoky Mountains National Park," *The High School Journal* VIII (October-November, 1925), 59-65, 69; William Gregg, "Two New National Parks?" *The Outlook*, CXXLI (December 30, 1925), 662-667; Horace Kephart, "The Last of the Eastern Wilderness," *World's Work*, LI (April, 1926), 617-636.

¹⁸ Mark Squires to A. W. McLean, January 5, 1926, Governor's Papers; *The News and Observer*, April 6, 30, 1926; Minutes of the Special Park Commission, October 21, 1925, Brooks Papers.

¹⁹ *Congressional Record*, Sixty-Ninth Congress, First Session, LXVII, 7,806; *The News and Observer*, April 10, 15, 1926.

to the United States in fee simple.”²⁰ The Great Smoky Mountains claims were ably presented to the House Committee on May 11, 1926, by Colonel David Chapman of Tennessee and by Mark Squires, Charles Abernethy, and Zebulon Weaver of North Carolina. They emphasized that the park would not only provide recreational facilities near the eastern centers of population, but would aid in forest preservation and flood control. They also made much of the fact that only one of the twenty national parks was located east of the Mississippi River. These delegates managed to secure an important change in the Temple Bill, which reduced the minimum area of land necessary for the federal government to assume “limited administration” of the park from 300,000 to 150,000 acres. However, no general development of the Great Smoky Mountains region would be undertaken by the National Park Service until “a major portion” of the 704,000 acres specified by the Secretary of the Interior had been accepted by the federal government. When the park bill reached the floor of the House, Representative Weaver spoke eloquently in its defense and presented a comprehensive statement of the advantages of such a park. He also argued that the existing agitation over the Muscle Shoals question enhanced the need for a park because in the Great Smokies “countless streams are born that contribute to the Tennessee River.” The Temple Bill with Committee amendments was passed on May 17, 1926, and signed by President Coolidge five days later. The way was now cleared for the actual establishment of national parks in both the Shenandoah and Great Smokies regions.²¹

Following the passage of the act, the North Carolina park commission was confronted with the formidable task of securing the necessary lands for the park. Its efforts to raise funds for this purpose through private subscriptions had produced a wealth of promises, but little actual cash.²² The

²⁰ *Hearings Before the Committee on Public Lands, House of Representatives, Sixty-Ninth Congress, First Session, 5*, hereinafter cited as *Hearings on Public Lands*.

²¹ *Hearings on Public Lands*, 1-18; *The News and Observer*, May 12, 1926; *Congressional Record*, Sixty-Ninth Congress, First Session, LXVII, 9,450-9,459, 9,581, 9,886.

²² Great Smoky Mountains, Inc.; Statement of Receipts and Disbursements, October 22, 1925-July 31, 1926, Brooks Papers.

commission members became convinced that a State appropriation was necessary in view of the large amount of land that would have to be acquired from hostile lumber and pulp companies. Both Squires and Brooks were keenly aware of the opposition of the "lumber interests" and clearly perceived the commission's need for additional powers and financial support to overcome this obstacle.²³ In November, 1926, Squires, Brooks, and Plato Ebbs began preparing their strategy for the forthcoming legislature. They drafted a bill increasing the powers of the park commission and providing a State appropriation of \$2,000,000 for the purchase of park lands. The bill was to be managed in the legislature by Squires and Ebbs. Brooks urged the commission's publicity director to initiate a campaign to arouse the interest of legislators from all sections of the State and suggested that more attention be given to the potential economic value of the park to the State in general.²⁴

By the opening of the General Assembly in January, 1927, prospects for a State appropriation for a national park appeared to be favorable. At this juncture Squires, who was physically ill and nervous, "conceived a bitter dislike" for Governor McLean and openly criticized him. There seemed to be some danger that Squires's behavior would endanger the passage of the park bill, but Brooks contacted the Governor and "smoothed things over" with him.²⁵ Following this episode, Squires and Brooks arranged a dinner for a delegation of park advocates including Representative Temple and A. B. Cammerer, Assistant Director of the National Park Service, who were in Raleigh to aid in the passage of the park bill. Thirty members of the legislature attended the dinner at which Temple and Cammerer expounded the advantages of a national park to the State.²⁶ By early February, 1927, the park commission had marshaled all forces necessary for the

²³ E. C. Brooks to Mark Squires, September 14, 1926, and Mark Squires to E. C. Brooks, September 14, 1926, Brooks Papers.

²⁴ *The Technician* (North Carolina State College student newspaper), March 7, 1930; E. C. Brooks to Roger Miller, November 27, 1926, Brooks Papers.

²⁵ J. D. Murphy to E. C. Brooks, January 19, 1927, E. C. Brooks to J. D. Murphy, January 24, 1927, Brooks Papers.

²⁶ E. C. Brooks to Charles Webb, February 4, 1927, Brooks Papers; *The News and Observer*, February 3, 1927.



Clingman's Dome parking overlook,
October, 1958

*North Carolina News Bureau
photo by Shafter Buchanan*

passage of the bill except the active support of Governor McLean who still remained silent on the issue. Senator Simmons had already publicly endorsed the \$2,000,000 appropriation. Finally, on February 16, 1927, Governor McLean broke his prolonged silence on the park bill with a statement strongly favoring its passage.²⁷ Several days earlier, the Secretary of the Interior, having determined the approximate size of the park, had notified McLean that North Carolina's part would consist of 225,500 acres.²⁸

The park bill passed the legislature without serious opposition although the Champion Fibre Company, one of the largest landowners in the area, had its spokesmen on hand to fight the measure.²⁹ The act provided for a "body politic and corporate under the name of 'North Carolina Park Commission'" composed of the eleven members of the existing commission. The Great Smoky Mountains, Incorporated, the holding company, was dissolved and its powers and funds transferred to the new park commission. The act authorized a State bond issue of \$2,000,000 for the purchase of specified park lands and vested the commission "with the power of eminent domain to acquire . . . and to condemn for park purposes land and other property." An important amendment to the original bill stipulated three prerequisites for the expenditure of bond funds by the commission. First, the Secretary of the Interior must have specifically designated the area to be acquired in Tennessee and North Carolina. Second, Tennessee must have made adequate financial provision for the purchase of its portion of the designated area. Third, the North Carolina Park Commission must have sufficient funds, including the \$2,000,000 authorized by the State, to acquire that portion of the park within North Carolina.³⁰

At the first meeting of the North Carolina Park Commission on March 18, 1927, Squires and Brooks were re-elected to their respective positions as chairman and secretary, and

²⁷ *The News and Observer*, January 27, February 12, 17, 1927.

²⁸ Hubert Work to A. W. McLean, February 8, 1927, Governor's Papers.

²⁹ *The News and Observer*, February 10, 1927.

³⁰ *An Act to Provide for the Acquisition of Parks and Recreational Facilities in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, February 25, 1927* (n.p., 1927), 3-16; *The News and Observer*, February 16, 1927.

Plato Ebbs became treasurer.³¹ The commission soon realized, however, that the purchase of the park lands in North Carolina and Tennessee would require approximately \$10,000,000. According to its estimates, North Carolina would need \$4,816,000 to secure its portion of the land. But the State bond issue and the private subscriptions provided about one-half the amount necessary for the park commission under the law of 1927 to proceed with the purchase of lands.³² At this juncture John D. Rockefeller, Jr., came to the commission's rescue.

In 1927 Rockefeller was approached with a request to include the Great Smoky Mountains National Park among his philanthropies. A. B. Cammerer of the National Park Service was the first person to arouse his interest in the park and had accompanied him on a camping trip in the park area. Later, Squires visited the Rockefeller offices in New York obviously for the purpose of encouraging this interest. At any rate, on February 28, 1928, Rockefeller gave \$5,000,000 from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial to promote the establishment of a national park in the Great Smokies. The gift was to be available as soon as North Carolina and Tennessee provided funds from their bond issues.³³

This financial assistance cleared the way for the North Carolina Park Commission to begin the actual work of establishing a national park. The commission organized its executive staff in the spring of 1928 and selected Verne Rhoades of Asheville as executive secretary. Rhoades set up an office in Asheville and employed a staff of foresters, surveyors, and men acquainted with land values.³⁴ In describing his activities, he later stated: "I had charge of the entire program of acquisition of land within the purchase area on the North Carolina side of the Great Smoky Mountains. This work embraced boundary surveys, title examinations, timber evalua-

³¹ Minutes of the North Carolina Park Commission, March 18, 1927, Brooks Papers.

³² *Report of Park Commission, 1931*, 4-5; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, June 30, 1927*, 131.

³³ Memorandum by Mr. Verne Rhoades, November 20, 1956; interview with Mr. John G. Dawson, September 7, 1956; *Report of Park Commission, 1931*, 5; Raymond Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr., A Portrait* (New York, 1956), 320; Beardsley Ruml to A. W. McLean, November 1, 1928, Governor's Papers.

³⁴ *Report of Park Commission, 1931*, 5.

tions, farm land valuations, ascertaining the timber stands by actual cruise, employment of necessary personnel, preparation of reports covering each individual ownership and the presentation of these reports to the Commission for consideration.”³⁵

On April 16, 1928, the commission directed Rhoades to proceed with the condemnation of land within the park area. The members of the commission generally disliked the condemnation approach for acquiring park lands, especially when it involved small farm owners. They sympathized with families forced to move off land that had been theirs for generations and were fully aware of the emotional, physical, and economic effects of such procedures. Thus, the commission employed its powers of condemnation against small farmers only as a last resort. To some residents the park was “uninvited and unwelcome”; to others it provided an opportunity to purchase farms in areas with better schools and roads. On the other hand, several large lumber and pulp companies demonstrated a spirit of defiance. They accelerated their timber-cutting activities in the park area, then held out for prices which the commission could not justify by its surveys.³⁶

Therefore, the commission was frequently forced to institute condemnation proceedings against the lumber companies' lands. Its first serious legal battle was with the Suncrest Lumber Company, which owned 32,853.53 acres within the proposed park site. The company continued to cut timber in this area and consistently rejected the commission's bids on its property. In the summer of 1928 when the commission condemned the Suncrest lands, the company tested the constitutionality of the park act of 1927, and the courts upheld its validity. Finally, in September, 1932, after prolonged and

³⁵ Memorandum by Mr. Verne Rhoades, November 29, 1956. See also “The Great Smoky Mountains National Park,” *The Wachovia*, XXIV (October, 1931), 3-16.

³⁶ Minutes of the N. C. Park Commission, April 16, 1928, Brooks Papers; memorandum by Mr. Verne Rhoades, November 20, 1956; interview with Mr. John G. Dawson, September 7, 1956; memorandum by Mr. Harry Nettles, September 17, 1956; Robert H. Woody, “Cataloochee Homecoming,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XLIX (January, 1950), 8; Irving Melbo, *Our Country's National Parks* (New York, 2 volumes, 1941), I, 139.

tedious negotiations, the Suncrest lands were purchased for \$600,000.³⁷

By July, 1929, the commission had completed the surveys and timber estimates of the park area and appraised every tract of land except the small farms located on Cataloochee Creek in Haywood County. It had halted all timber-cutting in the park area and had acquired 54,495.13 acres at a cost of \$442,576 from ninety-six individual owners. The litigation involving the commission had become so extensive by July, 1929, that Squires was employed at a salary of \$7,500 as an additional attorney to assist the Attorney General's staff. Brooks as secretary not only aided him in negotiations with landowners in an effort to reach settlements out of court, but secured additional funds from the State Budget Bureau to use for fire prevention in the park area until the lands were transferred to the National Park Service.³⁸

On February 6, 1930, the Governors of North Carolina and Tennessee delivered to the Secretary of the Interior deeds to 158,876.5 acres of land in the Great Smokies. The area then assumed "limited park status" under the congressional act of 1926. On August 28, 1930, Secretary of the Interior Ray L. Wilbur notified Governor O. Max Gardner of North Carolina that "the park is established and the United States through the National Park Service has assumed its administration and protection." He had already installed a protective force and planned to send a trained superintendent to the park within a few months.³⁹

The work of the North Carolina Park Commission was by no means completed with the transfer of this minimum area

³⁷ Report of the Activities of the North Carolina Park Commission, June 31, 1931, Governor's Papers; Minutes of the N. C. Park Commission, April 16, August 31, 1928, Report of the Executive Secretary of the North Carolina Park Commission, October 1, 1931, Brooks Papers; *North Carolina Supreme Court Reports, Fall Term, 1930*, 199-202; *Biennial Report of the Attorney General of North Carolina, 1928-1930*, 119-121.

³⁸ Report of the Activities of the N. C. Park Commission, June 31, 1931, Governor's Papers; Minutes of the N. C. Park Commission, July 11, 1929, E. C. Brooks to Mark Squires, May 1, 1930, Brooks Papers.

³⁹ Minutes of the N. C. Park Commission, February 6, 1930, Brooks Papers; *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, June 30, 1930*, 83; *The News and Observer*, February 7, 1930; Ray L. Wilbur to O. Max Gardner, August 28, 1930, Governor's Papers. Of the 158,876.5 acres transferred to the federal government in 1930, North Carolina contributed 58,622.58 acres.

to the federal government. In fact, the next three years proved to be the most difficult of its entire existence. The economic depression that settled upon the State in 1930 seriously affected the work of the commission. In the following year, the General Assembly quite naturally was concerned about questions of public finance. The activities of the commission provided a convenient target for economy-conscious legislators who had never possessed any real interest in the park project. They at first considered introducing a bill to abolish the commission, but for some reason gave up the idea.⁴⁰ All the while, Governor Gardner was receiving letters variously describing the park commission as "a racket," "confiscatory," and "a squandering of money."⁴¹ One correspondent informed the Governor that the commission agent in the vicinity of Cataloochee Creek was dishonest and sought to take advantage of the small landowners.⁴² The legislature finally enacted a bill whereby the members of the existing park commission would retire in January, 1933, and their successors would be appointed by the Governor. The act also required the State Auditor "as soon as practical" to audit all books, records, and accounts of the commission.⁴³ This action by the General Assembly of 1931 appeared to be ample evidence of its lack of faith in the commission's handling of park funds.

While the commission was under the fire of criticism, Squires and Brooks were negotiating the purchase of lands in the park area owned by the Champion Fibre Company. Vested with full powers to act for the park commission, they joined a Tennessee delegation and representatives from the Champion Fibre Company for the purpose of reaching an agreement about the sale of these lands. Horace Albright, Director of the National Park Service, acted as referee during the discussions.⁴⁴ Brooks, who was in charge of the whole

⁴⁰ E. Grover Roberson to O. Max Gardner, August 28, 1930, Governor's Papers.

⁴¹ Edwin Gaskill, "A Fight For North Carolina Integrity or To Save the Face of a Few State Agents," January 15, 1931, L. Woody to O. Max Gardner, March 12, 1931, Mrs. Ralph Lee to O. Max Gardner, March 8, 1931, Governor's Papers.

⁴² L. Woody to O. Max Gardner, March 12, 1931, Governor's Papers.

⁴³ *Public Laws and Resolutions of the State of North Carolina, 1931*, 286-287.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the N. C. Park Commission, December 14, 1929, February 16, 1931, "A Statement of the Negotiations in Washington, D. C., April 27,

procedure, rapidly led the negotiations to a satisfactory conclusion. Reuben Robertson, president of the Champion Fibre Company, later wrote him: "While we are fully aware of the fact that we accepted a price for our property far below its real value, still we feel that the negotiations as conducted by you were carried on on the highest possible plane and with consummate skill."⁴⁵ The Champion Fibre Company lands were purchased for \$3,000,000 of which North Carolina paid \$2,000,000 and Tennessee \$1,000,000.⁴⁶

By January, 1933, the commission had transferred 138,463 acres to the National Park Service. The outstanding tract within the park site to be purchased was the 32,709.57 acres owned by the Ravensford Lumber Company. But by 1933 the Interior Department had increased the minimum area of the park in North Carolina to 228,960 acres, which would necessitate additional financial resources.

This official area included 357 "different and distinct tracts of land owned by unnumbered persons."⁴⁷ The report of the park commission in 1933 described its activities during the previous biennium as follows:

In handling the acquirement of this area, it has been necessary to make numbers of surveys of individual tracts and locate disputed lines and lappages; and in order to comply with the requirements of the Federal Government, abstracts of titles in a very complete and complicated form were essential. It has been necessary to employ timber cruisers and various kinds of experts in order to determine values within the area. Further, the Commission has had to acquire mineral interests of an indefinite value and meet the argument of land owners as to consequential damages. Land has been acquired by condemnation, options, and outright purchases. In all condemnation proceedings, where the Park Commission took an appeal from the commissioners' award, the jury has awarded greater sums for the lands condemned. The appeals made by the Commission have followed only the appeals of the land owners and were made on behalf of the Commission to protect its supposed interest.⁴⁸

1931, to Secure the Property of the Champion Fibre Company," Brooks Papers; E. C. Brooks to O. Max Gardner, April 29, 1931, Governor's Papers.

⁴⁵ Reuben Robertson to E. C. Brooks, May 7, 1931, Brooks Papers.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the N. C. Park Commission, June 16, 1931, Brooks Papers.

⁴⁷ *Report of Park Commission, 1931*, 3-4. As originally contemplated, the North Carolina portion of the park would contain a minimum of 214,000 acres, and the park commission had made its financial estimates on this basis. But by 1933, the area had been increased to 228,960 acres. *Report of Park Commission, 1931*, 3-4.

⁴⁸ *Report of Park Commission, 1931*, 3.

One of the commission's depositories, the Central Bank and Trust Company of Asheville, had failed on November 20, 1930, amid the tightening economic depression. The commission, however, had its deposits of \$326,016.70 guaranteed with surety bonds and other securities. The immediate payment of one bond and the sale of securities reduced the amount due from the bank to \$122,716.35. Three companies holding other surety bonds refused to pay, whereupon the commission initiated legal action against them. The commission report concluded that in order to complete the purchase of park lands either the State or some other agency would have to provide additional funds.⁴⁹

The defensive tone of this report indicated that Brooks and Squires who wrote it were cognizant of the mounting opposition to their expenditure of park funds. At any rate, the General Assembly of 1933, convening just as the depression plunged the State to the bottom of the economic abyss, voiced loud and bitter criticism against the park commission. The legislators suggested that it was guilty of gross extravagance and "porkbarrelling."⁵⁰ The leaders of the opposition concentrated their attacks upon the loss of park funds in the defunct Asheville bank and the "enormous" legal fee paid to Mark Squires as a special attorney for the commission. State Senator W. O. Burgin introduced a bill that would have abolished the park commission and transferred its functions to the State Department of Conservation and Development. Brooks prevented the passage of this measure through his personal influence with key legislators.⁵¹

Burgin, however, continued to proclaim that "something rotten" was involved in the park project, while State Senator John Sprunt Hill demanded that the commission give a full "accounting" of its activities.⁵² The newly-elected United States Senator from North Carolina, Robert R. Reynolds of Asheville, had already requested Governor Gardner to with-

⁴⁹ *Report of Park Commission*, 6-8, 10.

⁵⁰ Harry Rotha to J. C. B. Ehringhaus, March 9, 1933; John G. Dawson to J. C. B. Ehringhaus, April 1, 1933, Governor's Papers.

⁵¹ *The News and Observer*, February 2, April 1, 1933; E. C. Brooks to A. B. Cammerer, February 2, 1933, Brooks Papers.

⁵² *The News and Observer*, February 2, April 1, 1933.

hold the reappointment of Squires to the park commission.⁵³ J. C. B. Ehringhaus, who succeeded Gardner as Governor in January, 1933, was instructed by the General Assembly to undertake an investigation of the financial transactions of the commission.⁵⁴ On April 1, 1933, John G. Dawson, a member of the park commission and a prominent figure in the State Democratic Party, wrote Governor Ehringhaus: "It would be impossible for me to say how embarrassing to me this continued talk in the General Assembly of wrong doing has been. I have taken more pride in my efforts in connection with the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park than I have ever taken in anything in all my life."⁵⁵ Harry Nettles, another active sponsor of the park movement, later declared that "petty politics replaced the commission" of which he was a member. He presumably referred to the stand taken by Senator Reynolds.⁵⁶

In accordance with the desire of the legislature, Governor Ehringhaus appointed an entirely new park commission of five members headed by W. W. Neal of Marion.⁵⁷ The members of the old commission heartily endorsed this action in view of "all the argument," but they were grieved by the attitude of the legislators.⁵⁸ Referring to the old commission, Mark Squires declared: "Appointed as we were, to please a thought deemed fanaticism and folly, we have brought the movement to a position our successors will have nothing to do. The hard work has been accomplished, the obstacles overcome, and those now our detractors have done nothing to

⁵³ Robert R. Reynolds to O. Max Gardner, December 3, 1933, Governor's Papers.

⁵⁴ *Journal of the House of Representatives of North Carolina, 1933*, 53, 114, 443, 475; *Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1933*, 579, 636. Oddly enough, at the same time, the Tennessee legislature was engaged in "a thorough house-cleaning" of its original park commission of which David Chapman, the so-called "father of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park," was the chairman. E. P. Moses to J. C. B. Ehringhaus, March 30, 1933, Governor's Papers; *House Journal of the Eighty-Sixth General Assembly of Tennessee, 1933*, 1,960.

⁵⁵ John G. Dawson to J. C. B. Ehringhaus, April 1, 1933, Governor's Papers.

⁵⁶ Memorandum by Harry Nettles, September 17, 1956.

⁵⁷ David Leroy Corbitt (ed.), *Addresses, Letters and Papers of John Christoph Blucher Ehringhaus, Governor of North Carolina, 1933-1937* (Raleigh, 1950), 447.

⁵⁸ John G. Dawson to J. C. B. Ehringhaus, July 19, 1933; J. C. B. Ehringhaus to John G. Dawson, July 24, 1933, Governor's Papers.

speed us on our way.”⁵⁹ Fully in agreement with these sentiments, Brooks insisted that the old park commission had “made the park a certainty” and that the federal government would probably finance its completion. He compared the old commission to Moses who was “permitted to stand on a high elevation and see the Promised Land” while another “was permitted to lead the people in”⁶⁰

In November, 1934, the Attorney General reported that an investigation of the financial dealings of the park commission between 1927 and 1933 had never been held.⁶¹ Nevertheless, a large quantity of testimony on the subject was presented to the Governor sometime late in 1933. In the recorded testimony of A. B. Cammerer of the National Park Service was the statement: “There has been no dissipation of funds; it has been a real magnificent project carried through very well.” Verne Rhoades, the executive secretary of the old park commission, pointed out that land had been acquired for less per acre by his agency than by the Forest Service. Others insisted that Rockefeller had been pleased with the activities of the park commission and had maintained a continuous audit of its financial transactions.⁶² In brief, the testimony indicated that the commission had demonstrated remarkable efficiency in its work and that the charges of financial mismanagement were based upon rumors largely fostered by “petty politics” and economy-conscious legislators in need of a convenient scapegoat.

At any rate, the acquisition of the remaining park lands in North Carolina became the job of the new park commission. The lack of financial resources, caused in part by the increase in park acreage and the defaults on many private subscriptions during the depression, darkened the prospects of the commission’s success. As Brooks had predicted, however, the federal government soon came to the rescue of the project. When Representative Zebulon Weaver failed to get a congressional appropriation for the park, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order on December 28,

⁵⁹ Mark Squires to E. C. Brooks, August 10, 1933, Brooks Papers.

⁶⁰ E. C. Brooks to Mark Squires, September 15, 1933, Brooks Papers.

⁶¹ *Biennial Report of the Attorney General, 1932-1934*, 99.

⁶² Testimony Re: N. C. Park Commission, 1933, Governor’s Papers.

1933, allotting \$1,550,000 from the emergency funds for land acquisition within the park area for the program of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The Rockefeller Foundation then made an additional contribution to the project. North Carolina secured most of these funds, "because of the urgency of paying the condemnation award" to the Ravensford Lumber Company and of making good its options on other lands. After a long and costly legal battle, the North Carolina Park Commission finally in 1934, secured the 32,709.57 acres owned by the Ravensford Company, thereby acquiring the last major tract in the North Carolina part of the park. With generous federal aid, the State completed its purchases of park lands by April, 1937. An additional appropriation of \$743,256.29 by Congress in the following year insured the early completion of the Tennessee portion of the project.⁶³

Amid elaborate ceremonies in Newfound Gap on September 2, 1940, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was officially dedicated by President Roosevelt. After more than forty years of crusading, North Carolina and Tennessee had acquired a park of 463,000 acres which cost nearly \$12,000,000. The Great Smokies, generally covered by a blue-gray haze resembling smoke, contained innumerable natural phenomena and beauties that were made easily accessible by trails and roads built with the aid of the Civilian Conservation Corps. As a tourist attraction, the park surpassed even the wildest dreams of its original sponsors. Within a decade after its establishment, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was being visited by almost 2,000,000 people annually, making the "last of the Eastern wilderness the most popular national park in America."⁶⁴

⁶³ *Congressional Record*, Seventy-Fifth Congress, Third Session, LXXXIII, 1,412-1,422; A. Hall Johnston to J. C. B. Ehringhaus, August 23, 1933, Governor's Papers; *The Asheville Citizen*, November 26, 1933; *Biennial Report of the Attorney General, 1932-1934*, 99; Edgar Dixon (ed.), *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Conservation* (Hyde Park, 1957), II, 32; "The Great Smoky Mountains National Park," *Science*, XCII (September 6, 1940), 212-214.

⁶⁴ *The News and Observer*, September 1, 3, 1940; *Travel Statistics: Great Smoky Mountains National Park* (Gatlinburg, Tennessee: 1956), 1-2; *The Asheville Citizen-Times*, March 26, 1950; Ross Holman, "The Great Smokies: America's Most Popular Park," *Travel*, XCI (October, 1948), 18-21; North Callahan, *Smoky Mountain Country* (New York, 1952), 214-220. The total number of visitors for 1959 was 3,162,318, slightly less than for 1958. Since 1952 the annual number of visitors has exceeded 3,000,000.