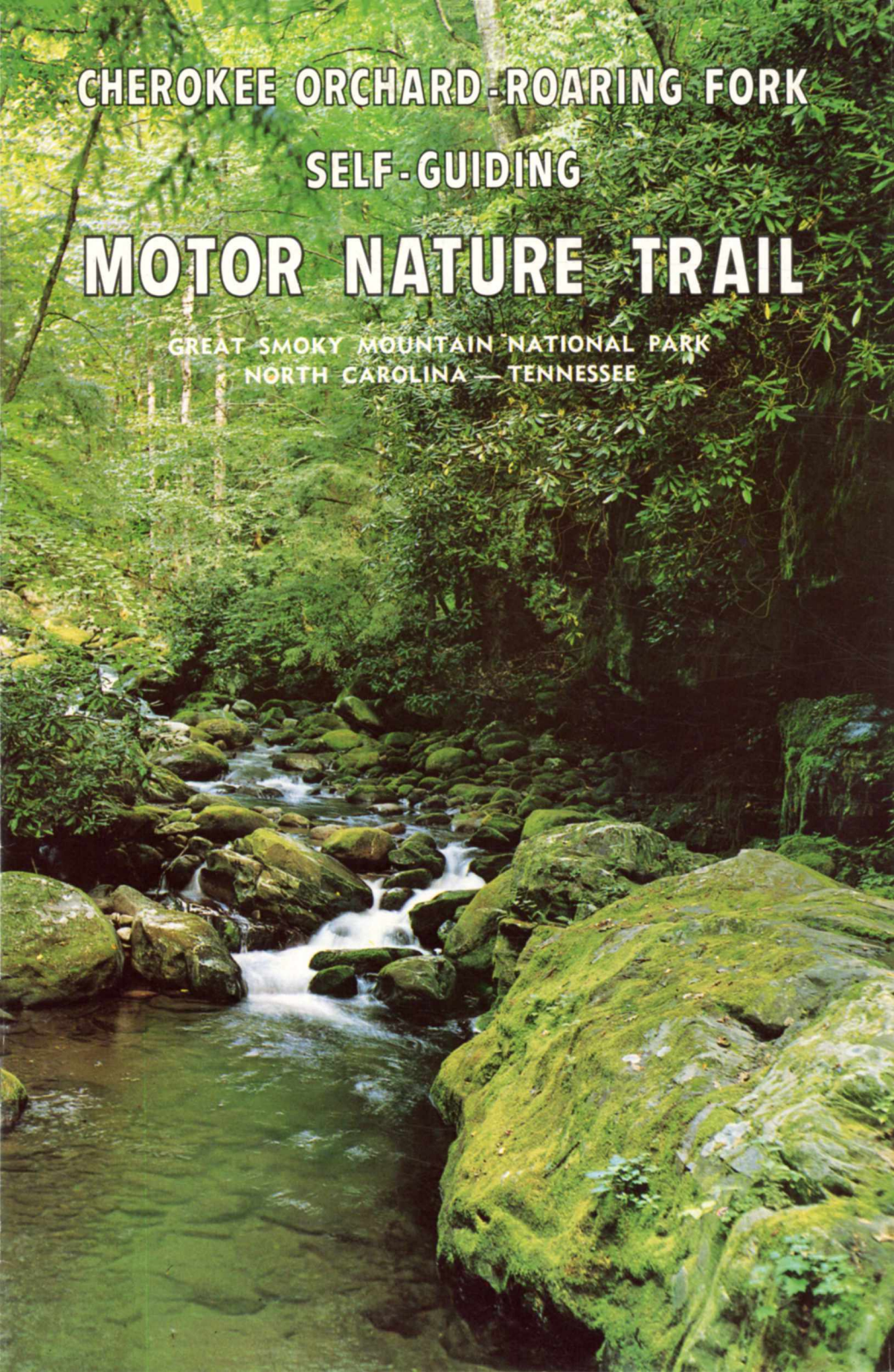


**CHEROKEE ORCHARD-ROARING FORK
SELF-GUIDING**

MOTOR NATURE TRAIL

**GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK
NORTH CAROLINA — TENNESSEE**



Introduction

This motor nature trail has been designed to give you a wilderness experience by driving through a deep forest, typical of those for which Great Smoky Mountains National Park is famous. Numbered markers along the roadway correspond to the numbered paragraphs in this leaflet.

Along the way you will pass several pioneer farmstead buildings which are being preserved to perpetuate the mountain culture, as it existed here for several generations. People lived in these buildings as recently as 1932 when Tennessee purchased the land and turned it over to the Federal Government, for inclusion in the park. Long-time residents then moved from their sloping, meager farms to places where life was perhaps a little less rugged.

The drive is one-way, narrow and in some places quite steep. The speed limit is 10 miles per hour. Stop only at parking areas or off the road. Parking spaces are extremely limited, however, so please do not occupy one longer than necessary.

1. CHEROKEE ORCHARD derives its name from the apple orchard planted here in 1920, before the Park was established. In 1931 Tennessee acquired, through purchase, 796 acres of this land and deeded it to the Federal Government for inclusion in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. For several years the Cherokee Orchard and Nursery Company managed the land and, in addition to apples, grew nursery stock for ornamental transplanting. Today the forest is rapidly reclaiming the orchard and eventually the apple trees will disappear and become part of the forest soil.



Valley View

2. AMERICAN CHESTNUT. Once abundant in the park, the American chestnut was killed by a destructive fungus that reached this area about 1928. Other trees now occupy the space left vacant as the chestnut trees disappeared. What a pity the tasty chestnuts are no longer available to us and forest animals such as squirrels, bears, and turkeys. Today remnants of these valuable trees are returning to the soil through the long, slow process of decay. Look about for old stumps and logs.

3. VALLEY VIEW. Picture stop. Blanket Mountain, 4,609 feet is the highest mountain on the skyline, and nearly ten air miles away. Cherokee Orchard, with its pattern of trees is slightly below and to the right. Winding its way through Fighting Creek Gap is Highway 73 leading to Elkmont, Townsend, and Cades Cove. On the far right is Cove Mountain rising 4,077 feet. The valley below is drained by LeConte Creek which flows into the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River in Gatlinburg.
4. PINEY MOUNTAIN VIEW. Picture stop. On the left is Huskey Gap, a low pass on the northern tip of Sugarlands Mountain. A short distance right is Fighting Creek Gap with Highway 73 winding through toward Elkmont and Cades Cove. The center skyline is Cove Mountain. Immediately to the right is Mt. Harrison and the Gatlinburg Ski Resort. Nestled in the valley of the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River is the City of Gatlinburg, 1,500 feet below where you are standing.
5. HEMLOCKS. Some of these large eastern hemlocks are several centuries old. Associated with them are maples, birches, cherries, yellow-poplars, and beeches. The variety of wildflowers is not as extensive here as under stands of deciduous trees. This is due to the ever-present dense canopy which limits necessary amounts of sunlight from penetrating to the forest floor.
6. TRAIL TO TRILLIUM GAP AND MT. LECONTE. Be alert here for pedestrians and horses who are using this trail to reach Trillium Gap and Mount LeConte. The most popular of the several trails that lead to LeConte's 6,593 foot summit is the Alum Cave Bluff Trail that begins on U.S. 441. LeConte Lodge is situated just below the summit and is operated from late April through October. It can be reached only by saddle horse or hiking.
7. The Ice Age had its effect on the climate here, although the Great Smoky Mountains were not covered by the continental ice sheet. These large boulders on either side of the roadway, called "graybacks" locally, are the result of frost-wedging. Water seeping into rocky cracks and crevices would freeze and expand, wedging loose huge boulders. Depending on the steepness of the mountain slope, they would roll downhill until something stopped them, such as a tree or shallow depression in the terrain. Boulder fields like these are quite common throughout the Park.



8. **YELLOW-POPLAR.** About a century ago trees were cut and the stumps removed so this land could be farmed to provide food for a mountaineer family. In latter years farming was discontinued and the land deserted. These yellow-poplars are one of the first trees to develop on abandoned fields. They grow rapidly and produce a good seed crop almost every year. Just imagine, a few years ago this was a cornfield!
9. **RHODODENDRON THICKETS.** Rosebay rhododendron is a native of the eastern woods and is found mostly along streams, where it forms dense thickets. White flowers appear in June. The rhododendron is a living thermometer—it does not shed its leaves in winter, but when they curl tight and point straight down, it is mighty cold.
10. **OLD SLED ROAD.** The present roadway follows an old sled road to the early settlements established along Roaring Fork. These homespun highways were difficult to travel, but offered one of the few but necessary means of communication. Each isolated family was, of necessity, self-sufficient or did without.
11. **ROARING FORK.** This clear, rushing stream is typical of the many waterways that drain the Great Smokies crest. Dropping more than 3,000 feet in five miles, Roaring Fork was a source of power for several grist mills that once operated along its banks.
12. **EPHRAIM BALES PLACE.** The Ephraim Bales family was one of the first to settle in this area and occupied these buildings until their land was included in the Park. All the buildings were constructed with materials found on the site. Note the rocky terrain. Oldtimers have said that they hoed acres of corn and never stepped on soil. The area across the road was once a cornfield. Notice how steep it is. Some fields have been measured and found to slope more than 45 degrees. The farmers must have had to hold on with one hand and hoe with the other!
13. **OLD WAGON ROAD.** With great difficulty, wagons were able to reach this point with only a light load of 300 to 400 pounds. See the rocks piled along the sides. Road work was done by hand which consisted of throwing loose boulders out of the way. After each rain a new "crop" of boulders were exposed until the roadway was nothing more than a ditch, impassable during heavy rainstorms.

14. **OLD TUB MILL.** The old grist mill on the right used the turbine type waterwheel to grind corn. The wheel position was horizontal and constructed with vanes so the water-force, hitting the vanes, would turn it to provide power to operate the millstones. Water was brought to the mill on a raised flume and directed onto the wheel with a penstock. The mill building is constructed of sawed lumber cut by a water powered sawmill located near the mouth of Roaring Fork in the present City of Gatlinburg.



Ephraim Bales Place

15. **ROCK OUTCROP.** The Great Smoky Mountains are part of the oldest mountain range in the country. Some of the rock formations are believed to be more than 600 million years old. The mountains were formed by a combination of uplift and cutting by stream erosion. Behind you Roaring Fork is slowly, but surely, cutting through the bedrock and carving its canyon deeper. Each year thousands of tons of soil and rock fragments are washed down the mountain slopes and carried away by streams. Most of this rock is a rather soft slate, which erodes easily.

16. **WATERFALLS.** Referred to as the "Place of a Thousands Drips," this waterfall is cutting into the bedrock and may eventually form a side canyon to Roaring Fork. In such moist places mosses, liverworts, and other water-loving plants find growing conditions ideal. Notice how cool and fresh it is. This is caused by the evaporation of water, which lowers the air temperature several degrees. Evaporation is the oldest known means of refrigeration.
17. **PARK BOUNDARY.** You are now leaving Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Gatlinburg is 1.5 miles ahead. We hope you have enjoyed your trip through the forest and turned back the pages of time for a little while and relived the pioneer way of life of a century ago. We also hope you have forgotten some of the cares and worries of our more "modern" age and gained some knowledge of the human and natural history that has established Great Smoky Mountains as a unit of the National Park System.

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