

# GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

*PHOTOS FROM THE AMERICAN FORESTS  
PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION*

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**T**his year marks the centennial of the establishment of the National Park Service. What few nonhistorians realize is how closely the history of the agency is intertwined with that of the U.S. Forest Service. The ups and downs of that relationship in the first half of the twentieth century are encapsulated in the history

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of the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, long the country's most-visited national park. That relationship began before either agency existed as we know them today.

In 1899 forest preservationists organized the Appalachian National Park Association in Asheville, North Carolina, and began demanding that Congress establish the Appalachian National Park, which would include land on both sides of the Tennessee–North Carolina border and in Virginia. Gifford Pinchot, chief of the U.S. Division of Forestry—the predecessor of the Forest Service—initially backed the idea. But many local residents and lumber companies argued for a national forest, largely because it would allow logging, which was a big business in the region, to continue. By 1901 Pinchot had switched his support to a national forest. To him, a national forest meant “conservation by use”; a national park “is conservation, not use.”<sup>1</sup> The Appalachian National Park Association switched as well, changing its name in 1903 to the Appalachian National Forest Association. After nearly a dozen years of debates and failed bills, Congress passed the

Weeks Act of 1911, which allowed the purchase of private lands for creating a national forest if it protected the headwaters of navigable streams. This legislative remedy enabled establishment of national forests in the eastern United States for the first time.

But the Weeks Act also provided a new model for establishing national parks. Whereas Yellowstone and other western parks had been carved from public lands, and Acadia National Park in Maine had been converted from a national monument, an Appalachian national park could be created by buying private land and bringing it under federal management. In fact, some land purchased under the Weeks Act for a Smoky Mountains national forest in Tennessee eventually was incorporated into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Despite establishment of three eastern national forests—the Pisgah in western North Carolina in 1916, the Nantahala in southwestern North Carolina in 1920, and the Cherokee in Tennessee in 1920—the Appalachian national park idea remained very much alive. Proponents argued that a park would bring economic

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*BY JAMES G. LEWIS*

prosperity through tourism, and that even though much of the land had been logged, plenty of “primeval” forest remained—forest worth saving because of its biological diversity. Park boosters in Tennessee and North Carolina, rivals for a time, found common enemy in the Forest Service, which offered opposition at every administrative level along the way before getting Congress in 1926 to clear the way for the park, provided it was funded without federal dollars. On June 15, 1934, Congress passed another bill that allowed a combination of federal, state, and private funds to go toward purchasing land for the park, thus chartering the park. That date is recognized as the official birthday of the park; President Franklin Roosevelt dedicated the park on September 2, 1940.<sup>2</sup>

Working with both the Park Service and the Forest Service was one of the biggest advocates for both national forests and national parks, and an occasional critic of the agencies: the American Forestry Association. The oldest citizens group in North America organized to promote forest conservation, AFA formed in 1876. The Forest Service and the Appalachian National Forest Association both turned to AFA for support to get the Weeks Act passed. Boosters of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park did the same.

American Forests—in 1992 it changed its name—has a rich history and has been involved in many projects, efforts, and policy issues during its 140 years. Its photo collection, with a wide array of significant images pertaining to forestry and conservation history in the twentieth century, was created and maintained by *American Forests* magazine, which AFA launched in 1895. Not long thereafter the editors began illustrating articles with photographs to provide visual evidence for policies and ideas the organization supported, whether it was showing how forests in the East would benefit from Forest Service care or showcasing the beauty of an area under consideration for federal protection under the National Park Service. Later, editors made use of photos when criticizing an agency for a policy they opposed, such as clearcutting on national forests.

Sometimes the organization would use the site of its annual meeting to highlight a cause, which it would then promote in the magazine. Such was the case with the proposed park in the Smoky Mountains in 1934. AFA leaders scheduled its fifty-ninth annual meeting in Knoxville to introduce members to the Tennessee Valley and the work of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and to draw attention to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, for which it had long been advocating. The featured speakers at the four-day meeting represent an extraordinary gathering of figures in conservation history: in addition to Forest Service chief F. A. Silcox and Park Service director Arno B. Cammerer, there was Jay “Ding” Darling, the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist, who had recently been named chief of the U.S. Biological Survey; AFA president Henry Graves, founding dean of the Yale Forestry School and Gifford Pinchot’s successor as Forest Service chief; and Robert Marshall, who was gaining notice as an advocate for preserving wilderness, then serving as chief forester of the U.S. Indian Service. Organizers scheduled tours to TVA dam and soil control projects, then capped off the meeting with an all-day trip to Newfound Gap in the new national park. The program was set before Congress established the park in June. Most likely the magazine’s October issue was too.

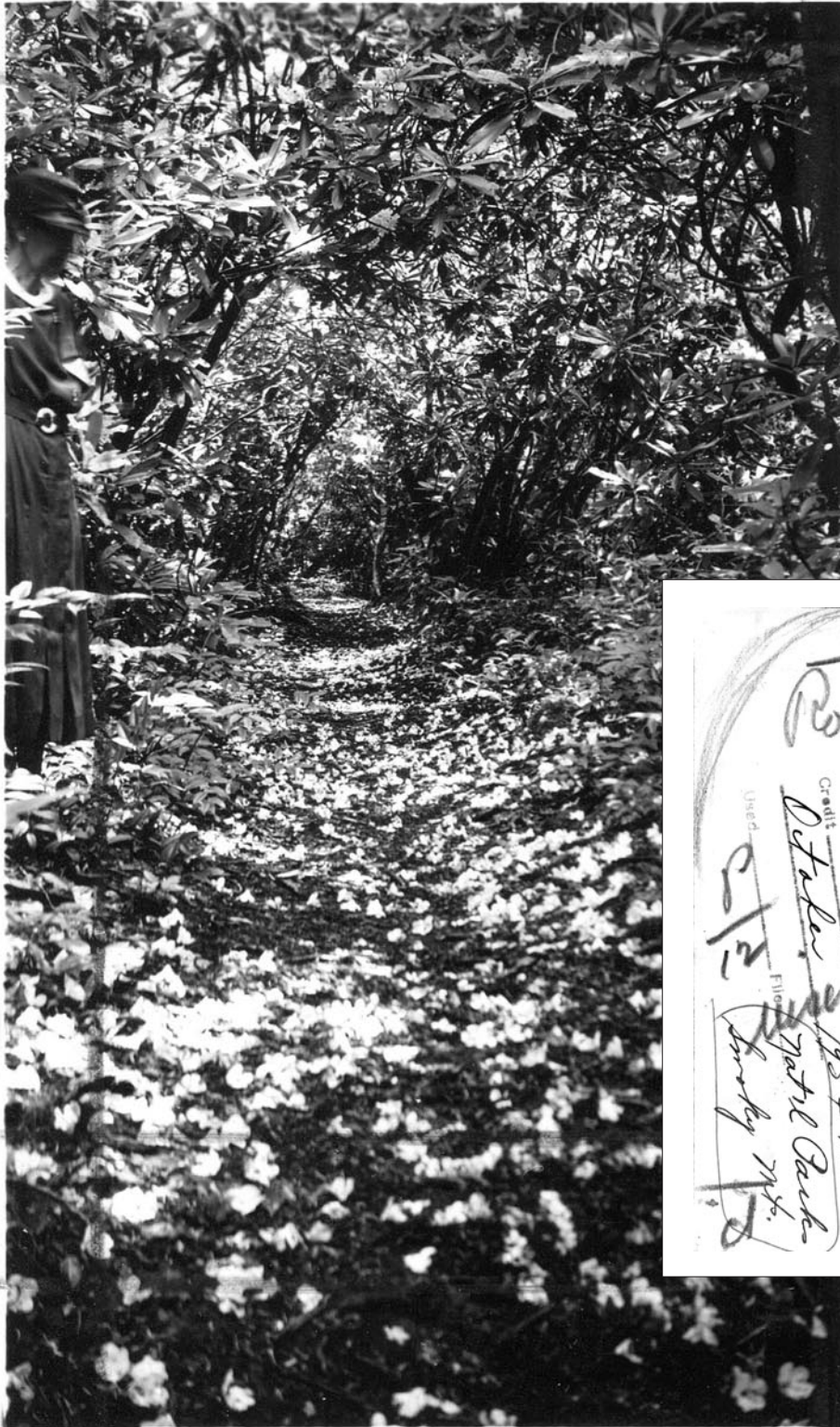
To gin up interest in the meeting, the October 1934 issue of the then-monthly magazine (it is now published quarterly) was

all about the Tennessee Valley. Aimed at a general readership, the issue had a mix of informative articles about current forest conservation practices and projects. One article urged farmers to plant fruit- and seed-bearing trees as an alternative to crop farming on hillsides; Hugh Hammond Bennett, director of the Soil Erosion Service, discussed the poor soil conditions and soil erosion in the region; the state’s national forests were described; forest management by the TVA was explained; and a “pictorial” essay illustrated the Civilian Conservation Corps’ efforts to combat soil erosion in the Tennessee Valley.

To balance such serious topics were poems in praise of trees and forests, plus illustrated essays, including one on the trees at President Andrew Jackson’s home in Nashville. Another essay was by Carlos C. Campbell, a member of the board of directors for the Smoky Mountains Conservation Association, one of several organizations leading the effort to create the national park. Campbell’s six-page “The Great Smoky Mountains National Park” summarized the history of the fight to create the park and its many highlights for tourists. He illustrated it with his own carefully curated black-and-white photographs: five photos show mountain views, two show waterfalls, two show hiking trails, and one, of the Little Pigeon River, touts fishing. Because one of the arguments put forth by boosters for the park from the outset was that the government would construct good roads in the rugged, remote region,<sup>3</sup> Campbell included a photograph of one car passing another on the Newfound Gap Highway probably to show it was accessible. That it is clearly a dirt road, though one in good condition, would not have mattered to drivers in the 1930s.

Campbell lived in Knoxville and served for more than twenty years as secretary of the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association, the group largely credited with making the park a reality. It appears that in June 1934, the same month Congress established the park, he traversed it to take photographs for his *American Forests* article. (One photo in the collection is dated June 24; the rest have the issue date of October 1934.) He later used some of the images in his history of the park, *Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains*, published in 1960 and still in print.<sup>4</sup> He supplemented the photos in his book with ones by Jim Thompson, whom the association hired as its official photographer in 1924 to provide images to help promote the cause. What follows is a sampling of images used in Campbell’s article and others he took on that 1934 trip. Many of the photos from the collection used in the article still have the grease pencil crop marks or have instructions on the back about what size they should be.

When trying to identify the photos from the collection that appeared in the article, I initially had some trouble matching them. Upon closer examination, I realized that the magazine editors had flipped some of them to make them better fit the layout. I have indicated which ones those are in the captions, which are as they appeared in the magazine. The reader is invited to contemplate what impact this may or may not have had on Campbell’s readers. The other thing I realized was that despite Campbell having taken dozens of photos to consider for the article, two of them are not in the folder. The first is a distance shot of the Greenbrier section of the park showing Old Black, Mt. Guyot, Mt. Chapman, and Woolly Tops. The other showed the two cars passing, and so I have substituted one that illustrates the general idea he wanted to convey.



An example of how the magazine editors marked up Carlos Campbell's photos for layout. The crop marks on the front of the photo indicate what portion of the image to include. On the back (below) it indicates it should be rounded off at the top like a Palladian window. This photo and one other were altered in this fashion.

→ 3 1/2" =

Rounded and

top

of the Great Lakes

"The Great Lakes"

Article: Merrill Campbell

Author: Carlos C. Campbell

Credit: 1934 issue

Used: 5/12 Shirley M. D.

File: Merrill Campbell

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Outstanding images of the Smoky Mountains in the 1920s and 1930s, including those reproduced here, may be found in AFA's folder "National Parks—Great Smoky Mountains," along with images from the 1940s and 1950s. The Forest History Society is the national repository for AFA papers and photographs. Shots of national parks and national forests, trees nominated for the National Register of Big Trees, activities in forests in the United States and other countries like logging and outdoor recreation, and important people from forest history are among the images listed online in the American Forestry Association's electronic finding aid on the Forest History Society's website at <http://bit.ly/2cux4uq>. □

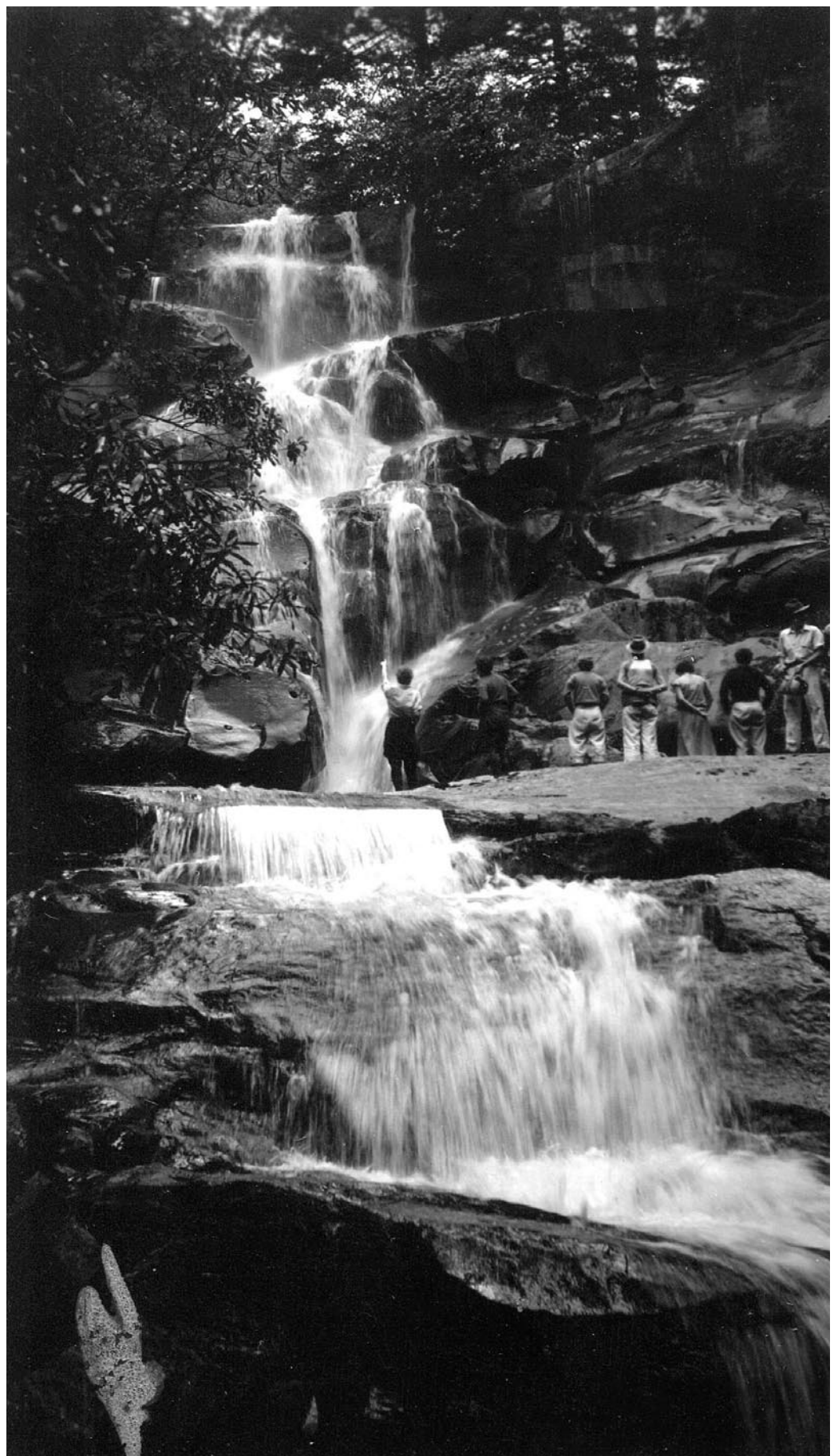
James G. Lewis is the editor of *Forest History Today* and an executive producer of the Forest History Society's new film *America's First Forest: Carl Schenck and the Asheville Experiment*.

#### NOTES

1. Michael Frome, *Strangers in High Places: The Story of the Great Smoky Mountains* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 176.
2. Daniel S. Pierce, *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 148.
3. *Ibid.*, 62–63.
4. Campbell's book included a preface by Horace Albright, director of the National Park Service from 1929 to 1933. The most recent edition was published in 2009 by the University of Tennessee Press with a new introduction in celebration of the park's seventy-fifth anniversary.



"Clingman's Dome—highest peak of all—and Mt. Kephart, in the heart of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park." This image is reversed in the magazine. The line in the lower third shows where the photo was cropped for the magazine.



*“Deep in the untouched reaches of the Park lie places of wild beauty—crystal cascades and waterfalls—numberless, and often nameless.”*



*“Fishing is not only permitted but encouraged in the National Parks—and there are more than six hundred miles of fishing streams in Smoky Mountains Park! An open invitation and compelling lure to the nimrod. This is the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River.”*

*“An inspiring panoramic view from the winding road leading from Gatlinburg into the wilderness. There is a fire tower on the summit of Greenbrier Pinnacle.” This one is reversed in the magazine and is on a page facing opposite of the Clingman’s Dome photo. It is not evident why the editors did not simply switch the two photos.*





*“Hundreds of miles of trails lure the hiker. This one, along the state line range, is a part of the Appalachian Trail—a 2,000-mile stretch from Maine to Georgia.”*



*“No matter how often one climbs LeConte, the spectacle below is always different. This time Cove Mountain peeps above the rolling, smoke-like clouds in the center background.”*

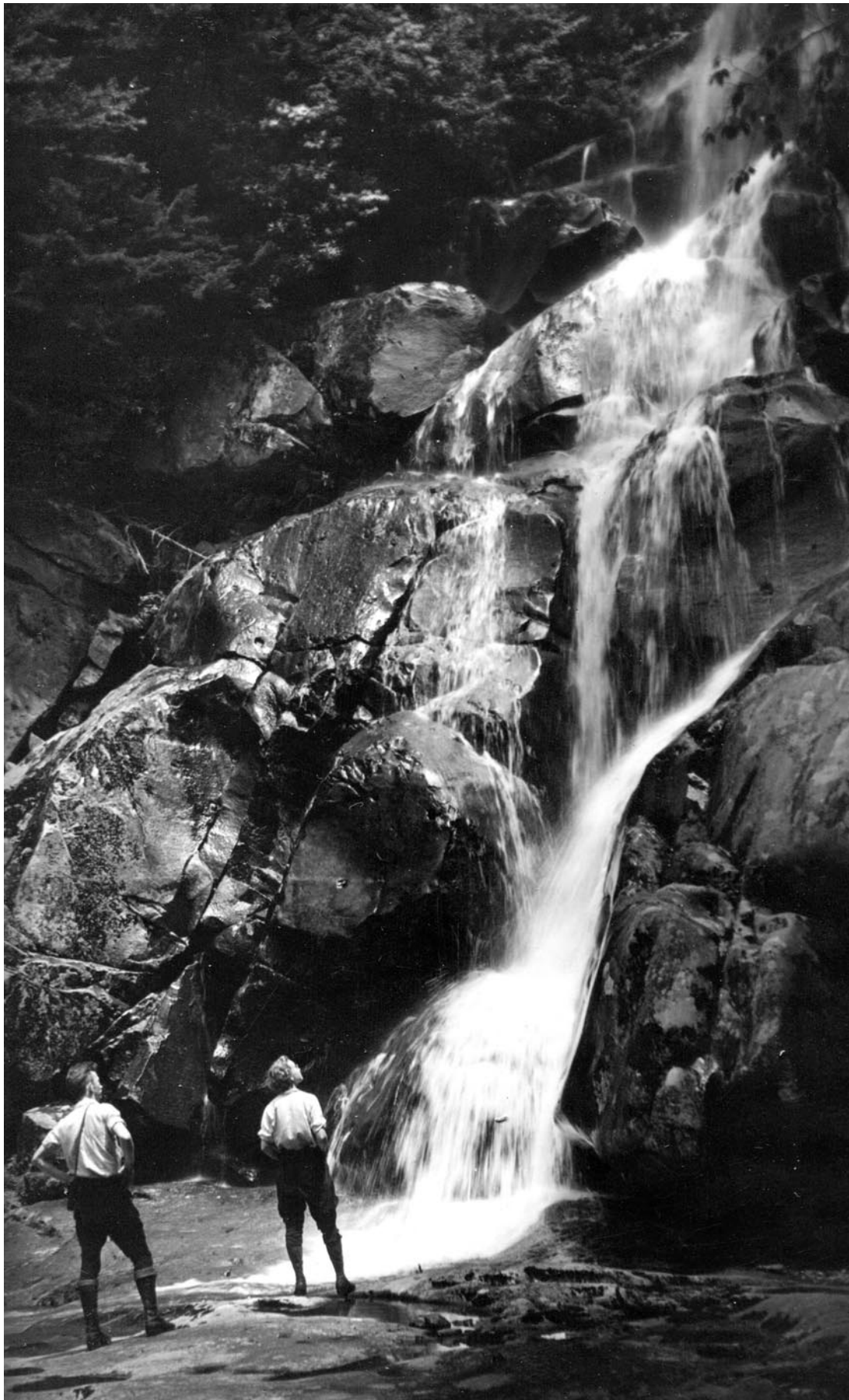
*“A Game of Peek-a-Boo in Cloudland, from the Rocky Spur Trail.”*







*“Yellow Poplar—Giant Trees of the Smokies.” This one is reversed, and on a page facing opposite of the photo of the two people looking at the waterfall. In both images, the people are facing towards the outer edge of the magazine rather than towards the middle of it, probably to give the appearance of looking off into the distance.*



*“A Lacy, Dreamy  
Waterfall in  
the Mecca for  
Nature Lovers.”*

*“A Flower-strewn Aisle through  
the Rhododendrons.”*



*“Horseshoe Bend of the Little Tennessee River,  
on the Border of the Park.”*





*“Driving through a Virgin Forest on Newfound Gap Highway.” The original photo has not yet been located. The caption information with this one indicates it was taken to show the tulip poplar tree that marked the boundary between the new park and the Cherokee Indian reservation. According to the caption, the diameter was 48 inches and estimated to be not less than 500 years old.*

*Carlos Campbell photographed the AFA gathering at Newfound Gap on October 20, 1934. This photo did not appear in the issue. The caption indicates that Park Service director Arno B. Cammerer was speaking at the time he snapped this.*

