



Great Smoky Mountains National Park
THIRTY YEARS OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPES

Richard Mack
Foreword by Steve Kemp

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH LOVE TO KATHY, MY WIFE AND FRIEND,
WHO HAS TRAVELED MANY TRAILS WITH ME,
INCLUDING THE ONES IN THE SMOKIES.

FOREWORD

by Steve Kemp



Upon their return from the sights, the backpackers discovered the sizable bruin sorting through the contents of their five packs. When the obviously ill-mannered bipeds began shouting and hurling stones, the bear grabbed the most valuable pack and vamoosed.

Meanwhile, back in the bramble, the man with the securely locked car at the remote trailhead was growing increasingly listless. From the general vicinity of the bear, sounds of tearing nylon filled the chilly alpine air. In a foolhardy and desperate gesture, the Knoxvillelian picked up the lance-like trunk of a fallen fir tree and charged the thicket with a decidedly anxious “rebel yell.”

The very first black bear I ever saw in Great Smoky Mountains National Park was carrying a fully loaded aluminum frame backpack in its mouth and galloping directly toward me at an impressive clip. Behind the racing bruin, five frantically screaming humans were in hot pursuit. I jumped behind a large spruce tree just in time to avoid being bowled over by the big omnivore, who continued to lug the heavy pack in an ungraceful manner.

It’s not every day you see people running after a bear in the Great Smoky Mountains, or a bear so well equipped for backcountry travel, for that matter, so I fell in behind the agitated mob to see what was up. I didn’t have to wonder for long. *Ursus Americanus* immediately veered from the trail, leapt over a fallen log, and barreled into an impenetrable tangle of blackberry, witch hobble, and other shrubs. The bear halted, as did the pursuing rabble. A nearly breathless man in his early 40s shared with me, “My car keys and sleeping bag are in that pack.”

Now that explained a lot. We were, by the way, atop Mount Le Conte in late November, five to seven hard miles from the nearest road, and it was already past noon. The party’s cookstove, breakfast, and a three-pound Virginia ham were also in jeopardy.

In hindsight, it was pure and simple negligence on the part of the backpackers that led to the bear’s acquisition of the loot. An hour or so earlier, after struggling up the flanks of the 6,593-foot mountain, the hikers had unburdened themselves of their heavy loads on the porch of the famous wilderness lodge that was now closed for the season. Then, relatively unfettered, they were free to see the sights: Clifftops, Myrtle Point, perhaps even High Top.

As you’ve probably heard, bears are the very definition of opportunistic. If a bunch of hikers from Knoxville, Tennessee abandons a nylon bag containing a three-pound sugar cured ham, instant grits, dehydrated scrambled eggs, and a plastic tube of chunky peanut butter on your mountain, it’s the human equivalent of a Brinks truck accidentally dumping a bag of \$50s on your front lawn.

Upon their return from the sights, the backpackers discovered the sizable bruin sorting through the contents of their five packs. When the obviously ill-mannered bipeds began shouting and hurling stones, the bear grabbed the most valuable pack and vamoosed.

Meanwhile, back in the bramble, the man with the securely locked car at the remote trailhead was growing increasingly listless. From the general vicinity of the bear, sounds of tearing nylon filled the chilly alpine air. In a foolhardy and desperate gesture, the Knoxvillelian picked up the lance-like trunk of a fallen fir tree and charged the thicket with a decidedly anxious “rebel yell.”

Now, for a 195-pound suburban human to intimidate an adult Eastern black bear with a large stick and falsetto rebel yell is, amazingly, not outside the realm of possibilities. For the most part, bears don’t look for trouble. They are 95 percent conflict avoidance. There are no doctors or emergency rooms in bear-dom, so even a minor injury can spoil their plan for a long and fruitful existence.

That said, a wild mountain bear in late autumn in possession of a three-pound ham and side dishes is a completely different story. As the foolhardy man reached the approximate midpoint of his charge, there arose from the dense vegetation ahead a low and highly assertive growl that halted the infantry in his tracks. A dozen Dobermans growling in unison could not have been any clearer in message or intent. The rest of the party began backing away in an orderly manner as well. So impressed were we by the bruin’s prowess, the decision not to share the mountain with him that night was both quick and unanimous. In fact, not a one of us felt extremely optimistic about our likelihood of surviving that day until we had covered the many stony miles back to the trailhead and started down the road toward Gatlinburg in my little pickup. Even those in the back bed with teeth-a-chattering seemed to have a renewed appreciation for their intact flesh and the ephemeral gift called life.

That is why the Great Smoky Mountains are among my favorite places on Earth. When the wise ones in 1934 established this national park to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein...for the enjoyment of future generations,” it’s impossible that even they could imagine just how much enjoyment the park would provide. It is one of the too few places in our beloved East where coddled urbanites with uncalled hands and double mocha-lattes coursing through our veins can experience, in a stunningly un-virtual way, an environment that for 99.8 percent of human existence was the world.

Some nine million people visit Great Smoky Mountains National Park every year. More than a million traipse the trails, risking blisters, stinging nettle, and encounters with oversized omnivores for a glimpse of the elusive wild. Yet, despite the easy access and ensuing masses, there is nothing watered down about the Smoky Mountain wilderness.

For me, the landscape of the Great Smoky Mountains is the perfect blend of hospitable and inhospitable. Unfold your camping chair on the banks of the Little Pigeon River at Greenbrier. Place it on the cobbles in the shade, close enough to feel the breeze off the water and see the kingfishers flap by. Take some sparkling water, crackers, biscotti, a book, a friend. Voila, no one in a royal family has it over you in quality of life.

Or, if you are more in the mood for character-building adventure, embark on an eight-mile jaunt to the top of Thunderhead. Make sure you run out of water before you reach the summit. You will clearly recall leaving your rain gear in the back seat just as the sleet begins. You hear the crack of thunder at the same instant lightning flashes. In the clouds and driving rain it’s easy to lose the trail...



The exquisite sublimity of the Smoky Mountain landscape comes from the fact that it’s alive. While classic western landscapes bear testament to time’s stoic march, the Smokies are a riot of impatience. Every hour is different than the one before. A morning of steady rain coaxes the first pink-striped mountain laurels into bloom. Overnight, 10,000 brightly colored warblers arrive from the south. A half million emerald green mayflies hatch on Little River. Blossoms as big as birds’ nests open on the magnolia trees. Lightning starts a smoky forest fire. Hawks kettle. Tree frogs “erp.” River otter pups are born. Hoarfrost coats the evergreens.

If a team of landscape architects were to design an 800-square-mile landform for maximum abundance and diversity of life (without delving into tropical environments and related pestilence), their result would look a lot like the Great Smoky Mountains. Proudly standing over their 3-D scale model, the spokesperson for the team would use her laser pointer to indicate a lower elevation river valley and explain, “This will be a perfect place for species of trees associated with the South. Your sweet gum, black gum, silver bell, American holly, etc. On the west side of the range, on dry sunny ridges like these, you’ll see mountain laurel, Virginia pine, scarlet oak, southern red oak, chestnut oak, and pitch pines. Higher up, in the cool damp heart of the range, you’ll find the primo hardwoods—yellow buckeyes, sugar maple, basswood, northern red oak, tulip trees, and black cherry. Above them, where it’s cooler and wetter still, it’s going to look like New England. Open forests with yellow birch, American beech, pin cherry, mountain maple. Then, for the icing on the cake, above 5,000 feet, it will be mostly evergreen—red spruce and Fraser fir—with some American mountain ash and Catawba rhododendron for good measure. A bit of eastern Canada, if you will.

“All this variety in vegetation and micro-climate will be a bonanza for wildlife, too. Southern species like mocking birds and skinks will love the lowlands. Northerners like Canada warblers and bog lemmings will be on terra cognito up top. And as the seasons shift, as spring climbs the ridges or autumn descends, lots of animals, from bears to juncos, can take advantage of the available food supplies just by roaming upslope or down.”

The foundation for this bio-cornucopia is the mountains themselves. They are ancient and worn, comfortably rounded, creviced, and mossy-backed, like an old stone cottage in the woods. In profile, at sunrise, their curves are pleasingly organic, like shoulders, like hips, like the back of a mink. Some of the rock is more than a billion years old, last uplifted about 200 million years ago. Most is sandstone, siltstone, or shale. For millions of years it has been allowed to gracefully crumble, spared inundation by salty seas and scouring by mile-thick glaciers.

By comparison, the Rockies and Sierras are young and raw, jagged and capped by ice. They are like the house still under construction in the newest subdivision, soil dredged to bedrock and fresh materials sparkling in the sun. During North America’s many ice ages and intervening warm-ups, the Smokies have been an ark, offering their protected habitats to species displaced by changes in climate. When the disruptions passed, life dispersed from the range to repopulate the ravaged landscapes, like seeds from a dandelion.

Water is the other big charm on the Smokies’ bracelet. All life needs it, and in the Smokies most flora and fauna consistently get their fill.It can really pour here. Summer cloudbursts unleash landslides on steep slopes in the highlands every few years. If you stand on the banks of a flooding river you can hear rocks roll like bowling balls along the stream bottom. On the highest peaks, the average annual precipitation is about 84 inches. Even the lowlands receive something like double the precipitation of the Midwest’s “breadbasket.” Rain, dispersed relatively evenly throughout the year, plus a fairly long growing season, allows a genuine flourishing of life.



Water is also responsible for the range’s signature beauty. The Cherokee name for the Smokies is Shaconage (sha-con-a-gay), which has been translated to “blue, like smoke.” This moniker describes the sublime bluish haze that softens our views of the rounded peaks and which the very best photographers wait patiently to capture. This ethereal blue smoke is formed when water vapor combines with a variety of substances exhaled by the green forests that so thoroughly cloak the mountains. The Blue Ridge Mountains, one of the Appalachian ranges north of the Smokies, is also named for this phenomenon.

But there is another variety of water-vapor based “smoke” which I contend the Great Smokies flaunt better than any other mountains on our planet. That is the rising tendrils of cloud, the spiraling streamers born after a rain, just as the higher clouds lift. Sometimes these watery phantoms resemble a serpent raising its head to strike, the sail of a ship, a curtain dragged by the sky. They float from the rain-gorged creeks, from the damp hollows, lingering in their freshened Valhalla.

You can never tire of watching the Smokies after a rain, from the porch, from the camp chair, or from a boulder. It’s a pleasant reminder for urbanites and suburbanites alike of what isn’t laid out in spreadsheets and 10-digit codes. That out there in the verdant, mist-shrouded mountains is a lifetime’s worth of mysteries and adventures still recognizable as the world.

Thankfully, when we can’t be in the park, we have the artistry of Richard Mack’s magnificent images to remind us of these moments in this timeless place.

THIRTY YEARS OF MAKING IMAGES

by Richard Mack

In the Smokies there is a feeling of timelessness, where nature takes over, a feeling of stability and maturity. It can be seen in the fallen logs lying on the forest floor, covered with layers of thick moss and new plant growth. It can be seen in the lichen- covered rocks along the streams; in the cliffs that form the faces of places like Charlies Bunion, Alum Cave, and Chimney Tops; and even in the parking lot at Clingmans Dome, where firs and rhododendron grow out of the cracks in the rock wall and reach toward the sky. This timelessness can be experienced under a night sky filled with millions of stars, or in the forest during a full moon, when each tree and branch seems to be illuminated as if it were daytime. This maturity seeps into the valleys, especially on those mornings when clouds fill them full of moisture and give rise to the name “the great Smokies.”

Fortunately, the sheer roughness of the Great Smoky Mountains, as well as the efforts of folks working for wilderness protection, have kept roads from being constructed through a majority of the land area, creating one of the largest parkland areas in the eastern United States. To be sure, the park can be seen very nicely by motoring along the roads – but it is best explored on foot, along the streams, Quiet Walkways, and the hundreds of miles of trails. You need to get out into the park to fully experience the park. To hear the melody of the water rushing over the rocks and the chorus of the winds movements through the trees above. It is then the senses begin to absorb the beauty of the Great Smokies. It’s then its undisturbed, breathtaking, magnificence wraps around you.

I began my quest to become a landscape photographer while on my first trip to Great Smoky Mountains National Park back in 1974 with my future wife, Kathy. I was not then as intense about photography as I am now. I was just beginning my journey and in all honesty wanted to find the closest national park to my home in Illinois. I chose the Smokies and the love affair began – between me and the park and between my wife and I. Since then I have visited many of our national parks, but I continue to be drawn back to the beauty, diversity, and complexity of the Smokies. It is, after all, a park that offers everything: historic buildings and living history, magnificent streams and waterfalls, a variety of old-growth and new-growth forests, large fields and coves with abundant wildlife, and of course, those stunning vistas into “smoke” filled valleys.

I took the plunge into the depths of the Great Smokies when Kathy and I headed out on our first backpacking trip, from the top of Clingmans Dome down into Deep Creek Valley. We descended from the hot June air at the parking lot down into cool stands of Fraser firs. I remember the crisp smell of those old pines as we descended. Cool air swirled up the side of the mountain in gentle breezes, giving us respite from the heat. The sound of the wind in the pines played out above us as we hiked. We camped along the stream in the valley below and spent a few days walking the trails. In that relatively short amount of time we became enthralled with the beauty which is Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

On subsequent trips we, like many, have spent most of our time at sites along the main roads of the park. Wandering along the many Quiet Walkways, hiking the popular trails at Alum Cave Bluffs, Laurel Falls and Abrams Falls or one of the many nature trails. We have made time to backpack to places like Gregory Bald, and discovered another route down to Deep Creek. We’ve spent evenings in Cades Cove watching the deer and looking for black bear. I’ve been fortunate to see many species while exploring the park over the years -- bear, coyotes, squirrels, skunk, wild hogs, wild turkey, a plethora of birds, and hundreds of deer and elk. On one special night a great horned owl swept down silently in front of us and perched on a tree limb about eight feet away. We stared at each other for a few minutes until it silently lifted off and flew back into the woods.

I’ve seen the changes that occur over time to a park like Great Smoky Mountains. The rock slide at Alum Cave, the Fraser firs on Clingmans Dome eaten away by the Balsam Woolly Adelgid. The farms in Cades Cove, where a few descendants of the original farm families still worked the land in the 1970s and 80s. Some of their barns and sheds have rotted away and fallen down, eventually removed for safety reasons.

Each day I’ve spent in the park – either alone or with family or friends -- has been with camera equipment in hand. At first my goal was to photograph the park in black and white, capturing the landscape in the same manner other photographers had featured the mountains of the western states in stunning black & white imagery, but I soon took up shooting in color as well. How else to record the subtle hues of the sunset over the mountains, the bright colors of wildflowers in the spring.

There have been only a few times when the alarm clock went off before sunrise that I can actually say I was happy to get up and get moving. Yet, when I would arrive at the location for a morning photo shoot, the longing for my warm bed was completely gone. Many times I have arisen early to get into Cades Cove before dawn. I love walking along Sparks and Hyatt Lanes in the early morning mist, aiming my lens at the old road lined with trees or across the prairie grasses to the forests and mountainsides. There are not many folks out at that time and we all seem engrossed in our own little worlds in the soft morning light. The wildlife is still out at this time of the morning, quietly wandering the fields and lazily eating their morning meals. And it is quiet. No loud traffic going around the cove edges. No one shouting across the fields. Just me, my camera, and the natural world. I work almost without thinking about it. Seeing the shape of the trees amidst the morning fog, or quickly capturing the deer as they wander by. I tend to see in photographs, so framing each scene is second nature to me. There are times and images that take more work, where I need to walk around and view things from various angles and in different light before making a final decision on how to capture the essence of the scene. As the sunlight begins to radiate out over the horizon, I know where I want to be and what I am looking to capture in my lens. But the sun never rises the same way twice. There might be clouds, fog, or mist, which can change how each morning looks. And as the sun comes up you had better be ready to change your thought process in order to capture what actually appears before you and not what you wanted to appear. Change is inevitable in nature, no matter how much preparation and planning has gone into a shot. If I am lucky the light will be as dramatic as I had hoped. It will wrap around the trees in just the right way, nicely illuminating the eastern edges of the tree trunks with the soft light of dawn. Or, if I am looking down into the valleys from some distant vista and the morning temperature is right, there will be clouds in the valleys, waiting to grab hold of the sun’s first yellow rays. An hour after sunrise, the glory of the first light is gone, and it is time to return from whence I came for some breakfast.

Though sunrises and sunsets are spectacular, almost anytime is a great time to photograph somewhere in the park. During mid-day you can find a ridgeline where the sun etches graphic shapes, you can explore a stream shaded by the hillsides, or you can photograph wildflowers in the forests. The possibilities are endless. One afternoon I was shooting along Straight Fork Creek when it began to rain. Nothing unusual about that, so I kept working after putting rain gear on myself and the camera equipment. As I concentrated on the river I heard a crashing sound in the woods. Was it a falling tree? A bear? Then I heard it again, only closer. Whatever it was, it now had my full attention. And then out of the trees ran a wild hog. Luckily, it was fairly small and clearly as startled by me as I was by it. I quickly turned my camera around on its tripod and made a few exposures – but I was still set for a slow shutter speed and this new little friend had neither the time nor the inclination to help me out. He trotted away through the woods as fast as he had arrived. My attempt to photograph my first and only sighting of a wild hog ended up as merely a memory.

Sometimes, however, the timing is perfect. One evening in the spring of 1976, Kathy and I were out in Cades Cove near the Abrams Falls trailhead. As we came out of the woods, fog shrouded the entire little valley in that area. It was a very thick fog – allowing only a few yards of visibility. We could hear deer all around us as we walked up the side of a small hill. Then the fog lifted ever so slightly, unveiling the deer foraging on the hillside near us while still obscuring the ground below us. I lifted the camera, steadied by one of the fence posts, and began to shoot away. Each click of the shutter prompted a quizzical look from the deer, as if to say, “what are you doing?” As the fog rolled back in we waited, once again hearing but not seeing the deer. Soon it was too dark to shoot anymore. These photos are among my all-time favorites from our time in the park.

Over thirty years, many things have changed, and many others have stayed the same. The Fraser firs on Clingmans Dome have almost been destroyed by the Balsam Woolly Adelgid, yet younger trees now crowd the understory. Portions of the Alum Cave trail were inundated by a landslide during a thunderstorm. Cades Cove is no longer farmed. Logging operations cleared much of what is today parkland. Yet to the inexperienced eye, the places where lumber companies clear-cut mountainsides in the late 1800s and early 1900s are barely perceptible, a testament to both Mother Nature’s ability to regenerate and remove the scars of mankind, and to mankind itself for having the foresight to preserve this remarkable landscape. In some cases, entire species have disappeared from the area, like the buffalo and wolves, or even from the earth entirely as is the case with the passenger pigeon. But other species have been reintroduced. Elk have been returned to Cataloochee and have migrated into other areas of the park. The synchronized fireflies have been around forever, but only in the last 15 years have they become a popular treat if you are lucky enough to catch their 10-day show in early summer.

Some of these changes are reflected in this book, whether a black and white image of an old barn taken in 1976, or one of my last shots of a sunrise as seen from Newfound Gap in November 2008. I hope you will enjoy my vision of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It is a jewel in our national park system. My wish is that you will come to love, as I do, the details of the leaves, the rush of water in the streams, the colors of the landscape as it changes from season to season.



GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

“Man has created some lovely dwellings – some soul stirring literature. He has done much to alleviate physical pain. But he has not, in his cities, created a substitute for a sunset, a grove of pines, the music of the winds, the dank smell of the deep forest, or the shy beauty of the wild flower.”

HARVEY BROOME, AUTHOR OF *OUT UNDER THE SKY OF THE GREAT SMOKIES*

Because of its abundance of wildlife, Cades Cove is nicknamed “the Serengeti of the South.” All day, every day, cars and pickup trucks loaded with wildlife watchers troll the 11-mile loop, all eyes peeled for white-tailed deer, wild turkey, bear, beaver, otter, and coyote. More often than not, especially mornings and evenings, their efforts are rewarded.

The place name begs explaining. A “cove” in the southern Appalachian vernacular is a valley surrounded by mountains. “Cades” can likely be traced to “Kate,” the daughter of Cherokee Chief Abram, who lived in a village downstream from the cove beside his namesake stream. The Cherokee visited Cades Cove frequently because of the rich variety of wildlife and edible and medicinal plants.

The cove owes much of its richness to its geology. Whereas most of the Smokies bedrock is sandstone or siltstone, Cades Cove has a less acidic limestone floor. This “sweeter” soil supports a plethora of flora which is responsible for attracting wildlife, and, during the early 19th century, attracted the attention of white settlers.

The latter stole into the Cherokee-owned valley around 1820 and very

soon flourished. By 1850, 685 people lived there. Their farms produced corn, wheat, barley, cotton, and vegetables. Soon there were white-steepled churches, country stores, water-powered grist mills, an industrial iron forge, and herds of livestock that could be summered on mile-high meadows above the cove.

All of this gradually came to a close when the land was purchased for the national park, officially established in 1934. However, a variety of historic buildings have been faithfully preserved, from the John Oliver cabin (home of the first family of white settlers) to the Cable grist mill.

As a fortuitous result, visitors to Cades Cove today are treated to a rare blend of human history, wildlife viewing opportunities, and scenic splendor.













TREES & LICHEN NOVEMBER 1984

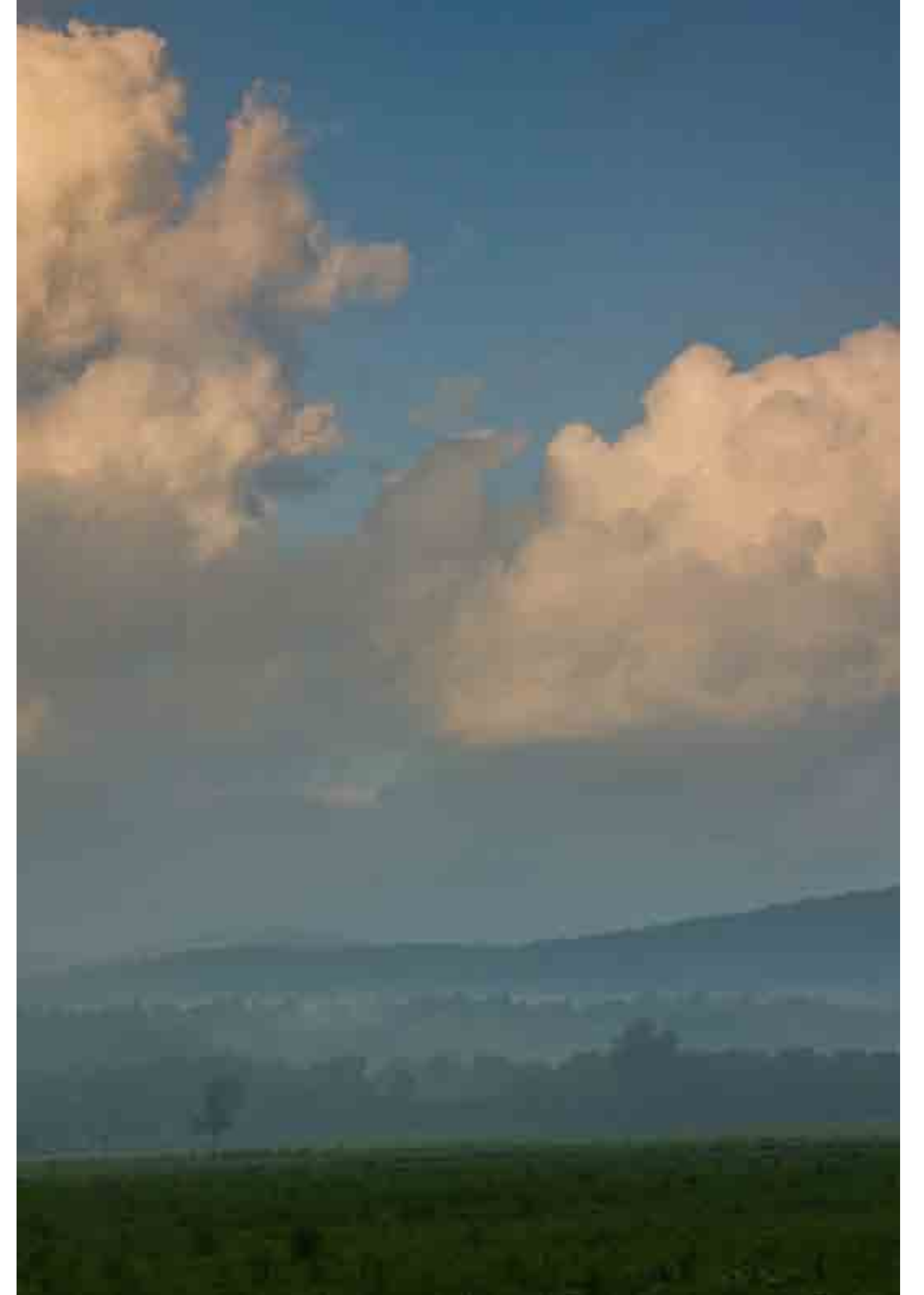
CABLE MILL HISTORIC AREA NOVEMBER 1984
WILD TURKEY JUNE 2008
COYOTE NOVEMBER 2006













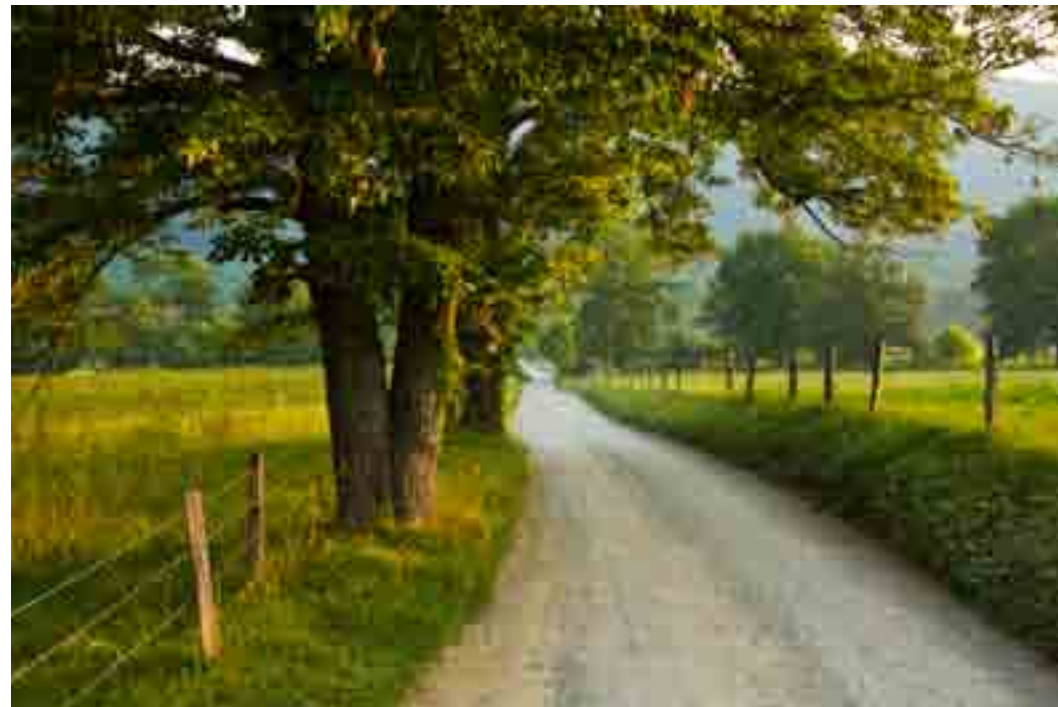
EVENING, METHODIST CHURCH JUNE 2008

FLOWERING DOGWOOD AT CARTER SHIELD'S CABIN APRIL 1986







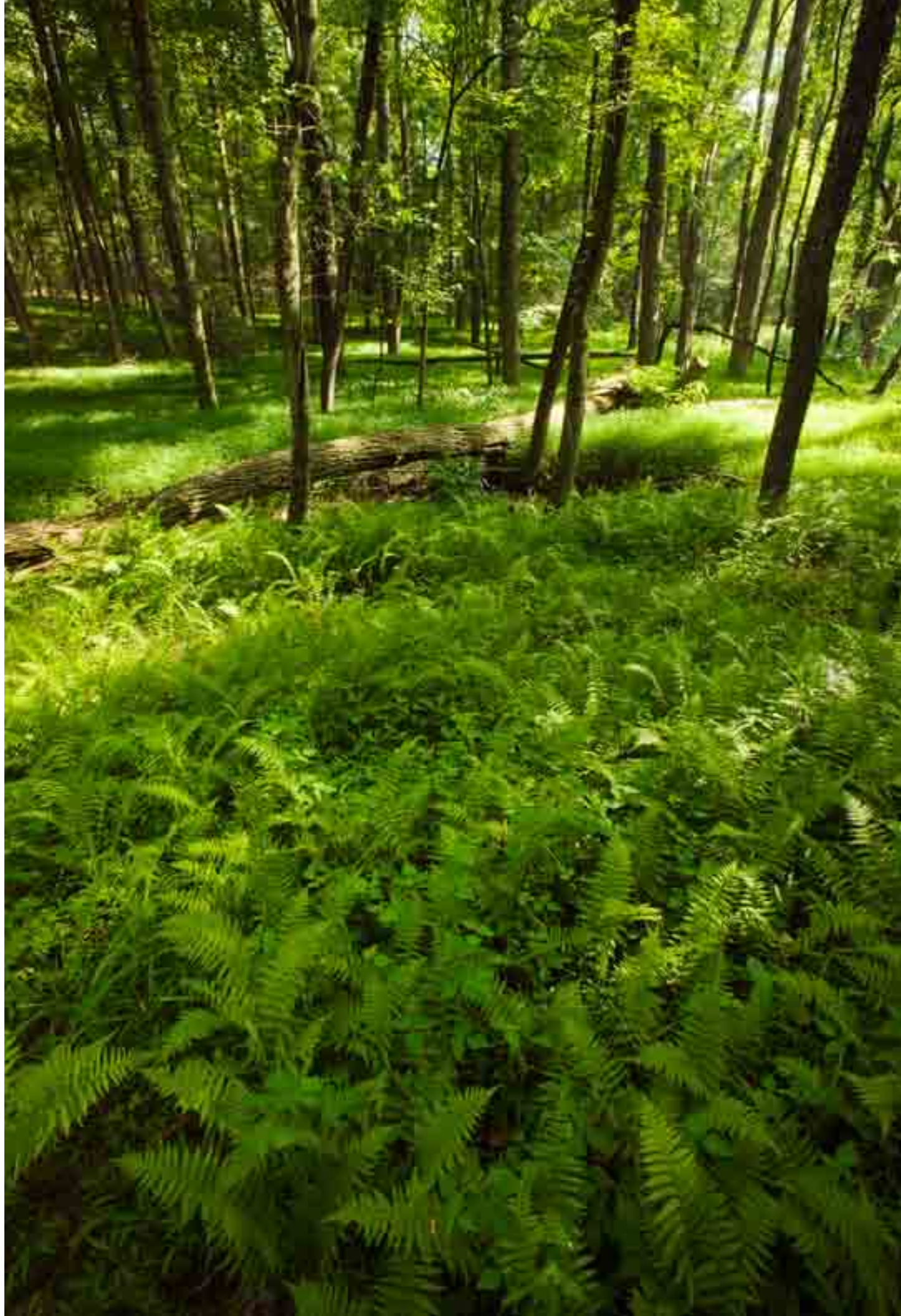




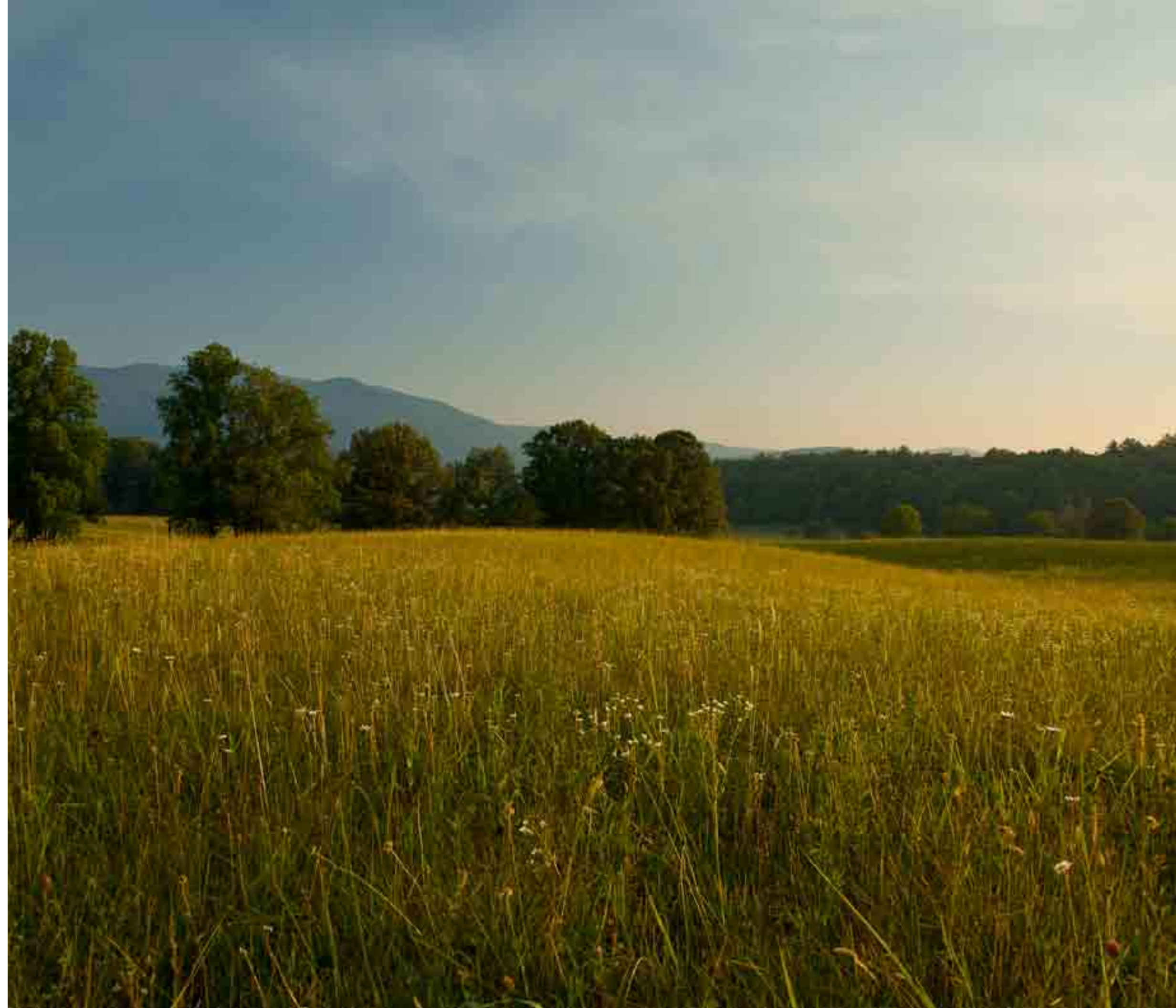




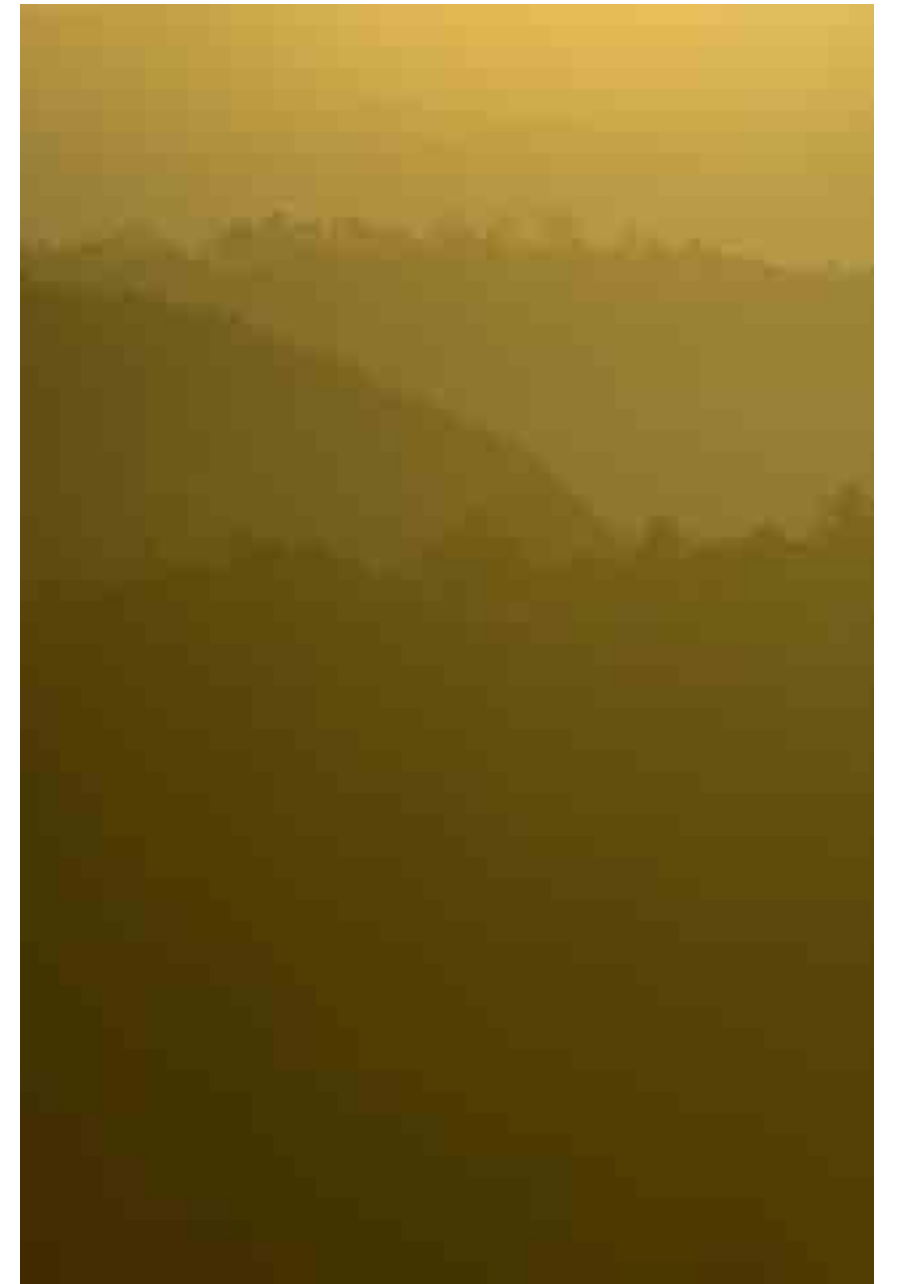




FOREST & NEW YORK FERNS *JUNE 2008*
MEADOW FIELD ALONG SPARKS LANE *JUNE 2008*









RIDGELINE, Foothills Parkway NOVEMBER 2006

EVENING ALONG SPARKS LANE NOVEMBER 2006
Overleaf EVENING BARN AND FIELDS JUNE 1991





Around 1900, something like a gold rush started along Little River. Until that time it was rural and rustic with a capital “R.” Families eked out a living on tiny, rocky farms, doing much of their trade on the barter system and growing or fabricating most of what they needed, be it cabbage, a barn, or whiskey.

The gold in these old hills was hardwood trees. When the big lumber companies had finished denuding the Northeast and upper Midwest, they pointed their steely teeth toward the Smokies.

The Little River watershed was “Ground Zero” for the timber boom in the Smokies. The hamlet of Townsend, where Little River exits the national park, was named for Col. Townsend, the head of Little River Lumber Company. It grew up around a sprawling sawmill operation. Upstream, logging railroads, splash dams, and skid roads snaked up nearly every tributary. Boomtowns, complete with company scrip (coins) and company stores, sprang from the ground at Elkmont and Tremont. Farmers traded hoes for cross-cut saws and their old economy for a new.

The national park came together about the time the timber boom played out. The land healed. Today there is nowhere lovelier than Little River Road in April or October. In spring, the magenta flowers of redbud delight the traveler at almost every curve. Dogwoods blossom too, along with lady slipper orchids, phlox, and trilliums.

In fall, the reds are furnished by dogwood and maple leaves; the golds by birches, hickories, and beech.

The waters of Little River run clear and cold from rapid to pool, over and over. Tributaries join the main stream in surprise waterfalls. Follow a branch up and you’ll find where Little River begins, at the mile-high springs where Appalachian Trail backpackers pause to draw their water.





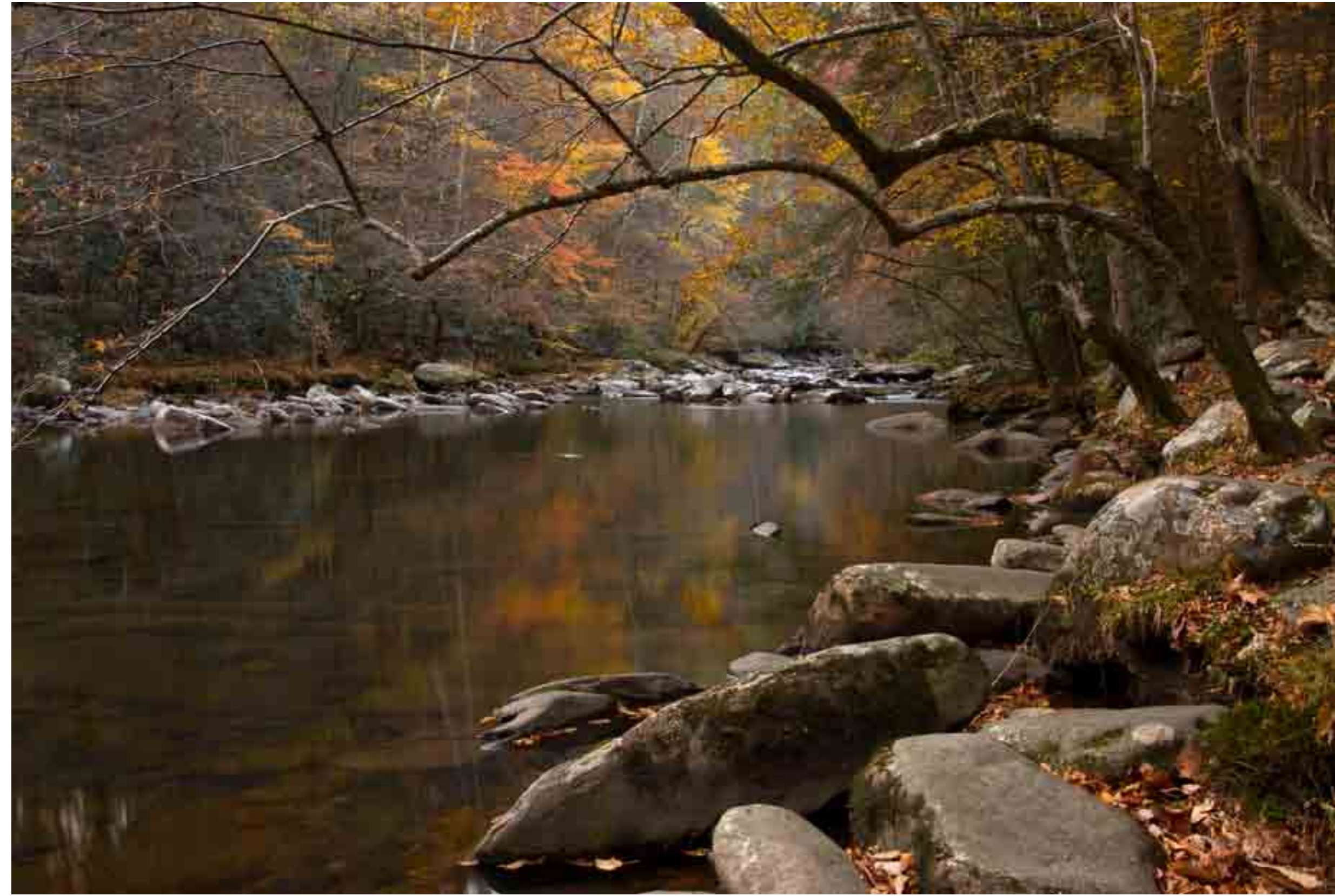


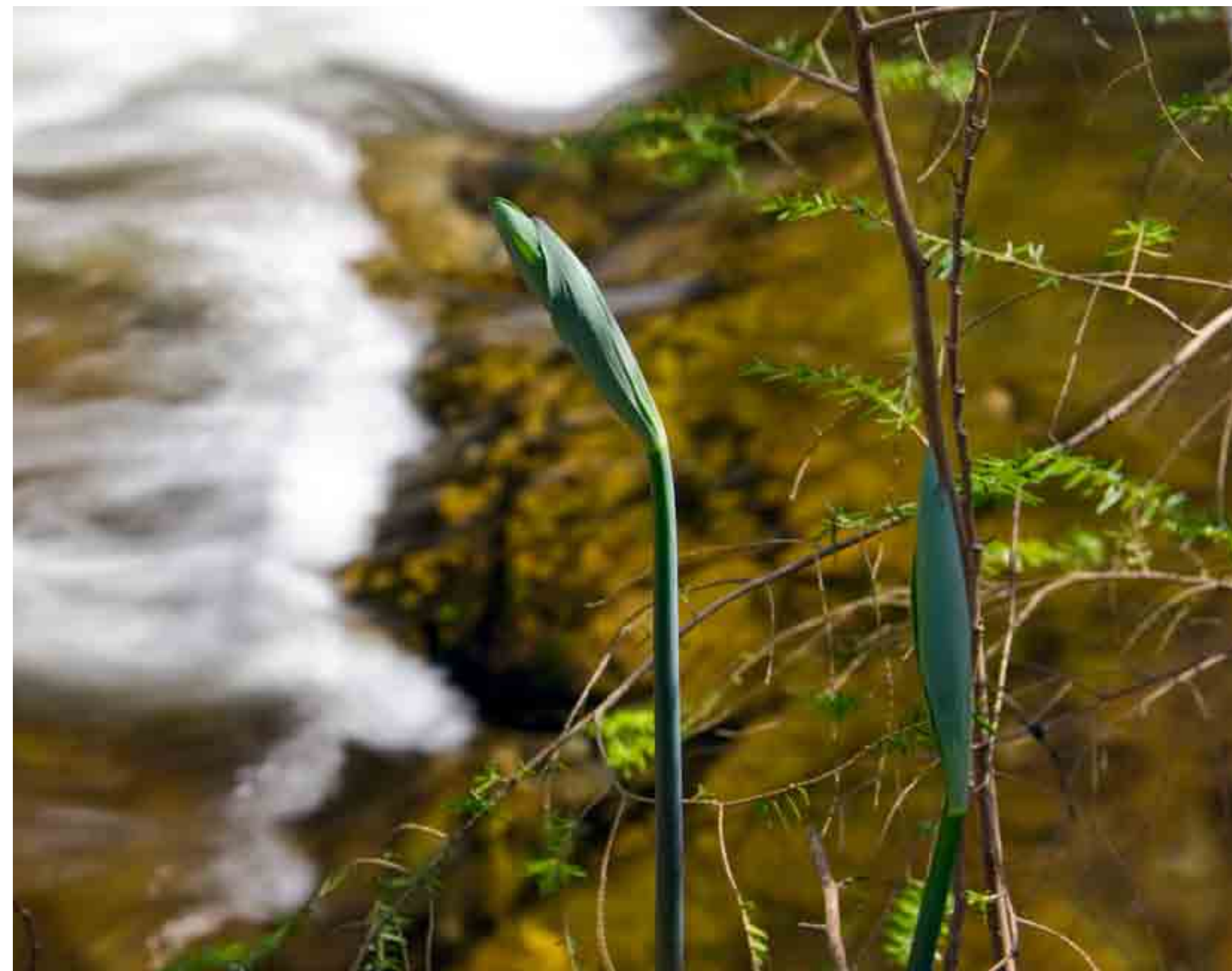




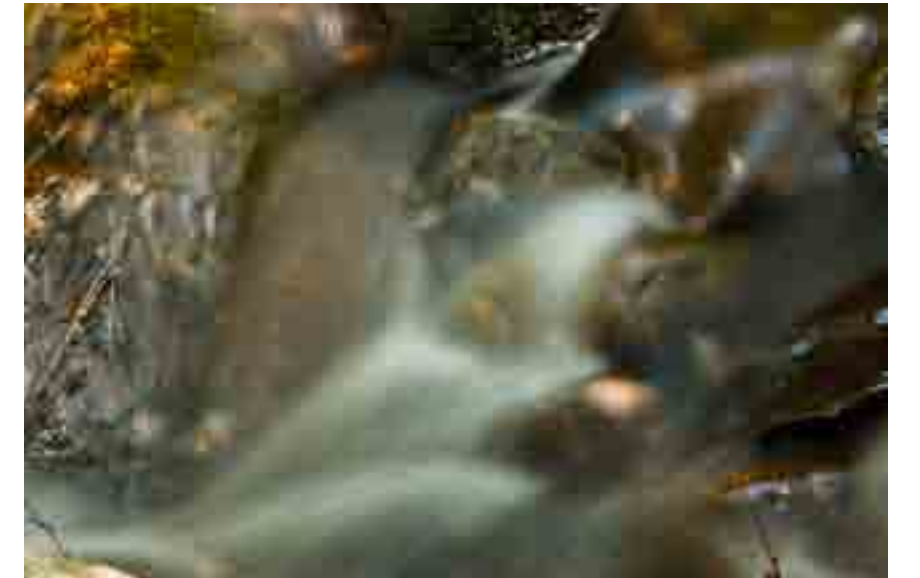


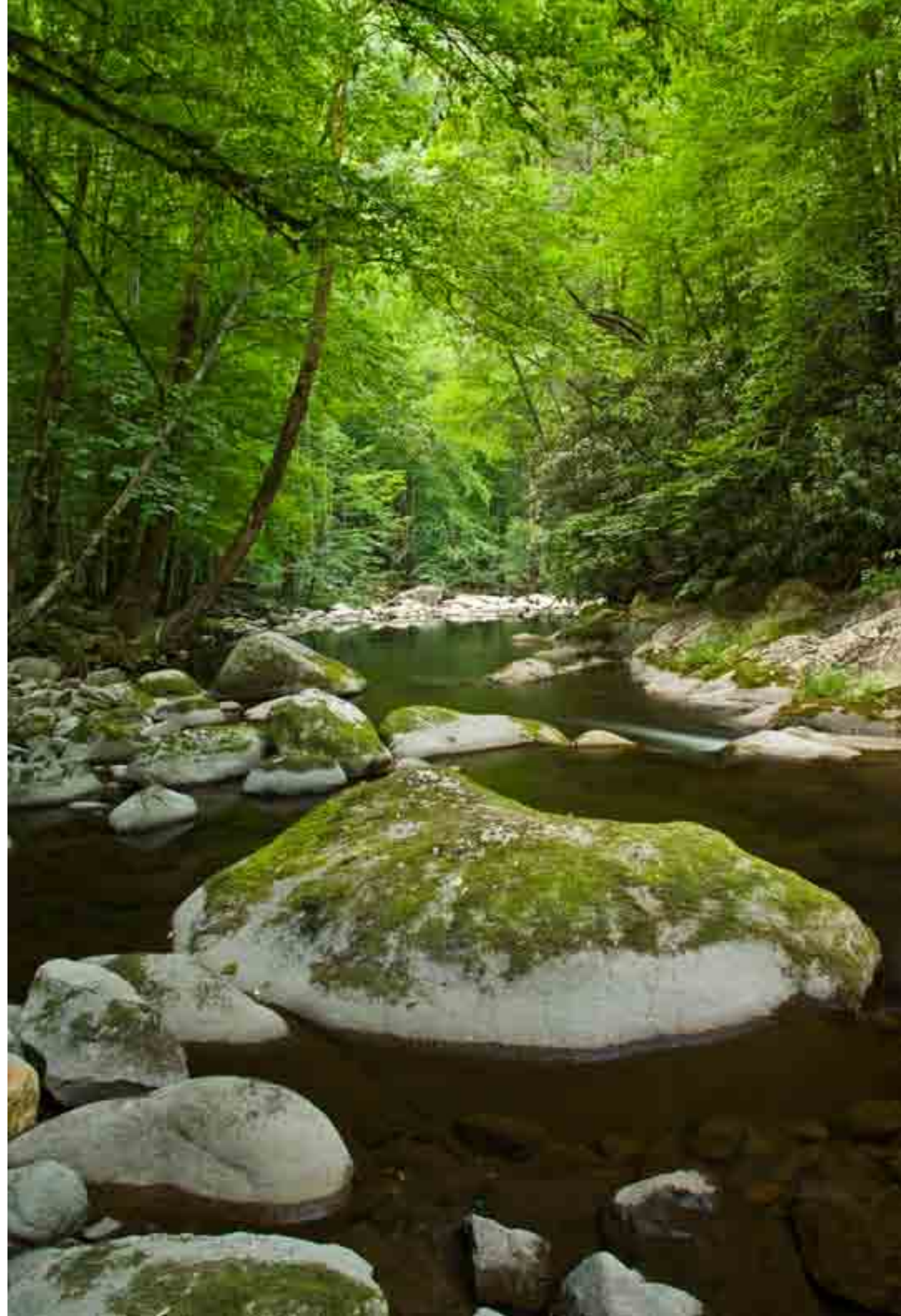












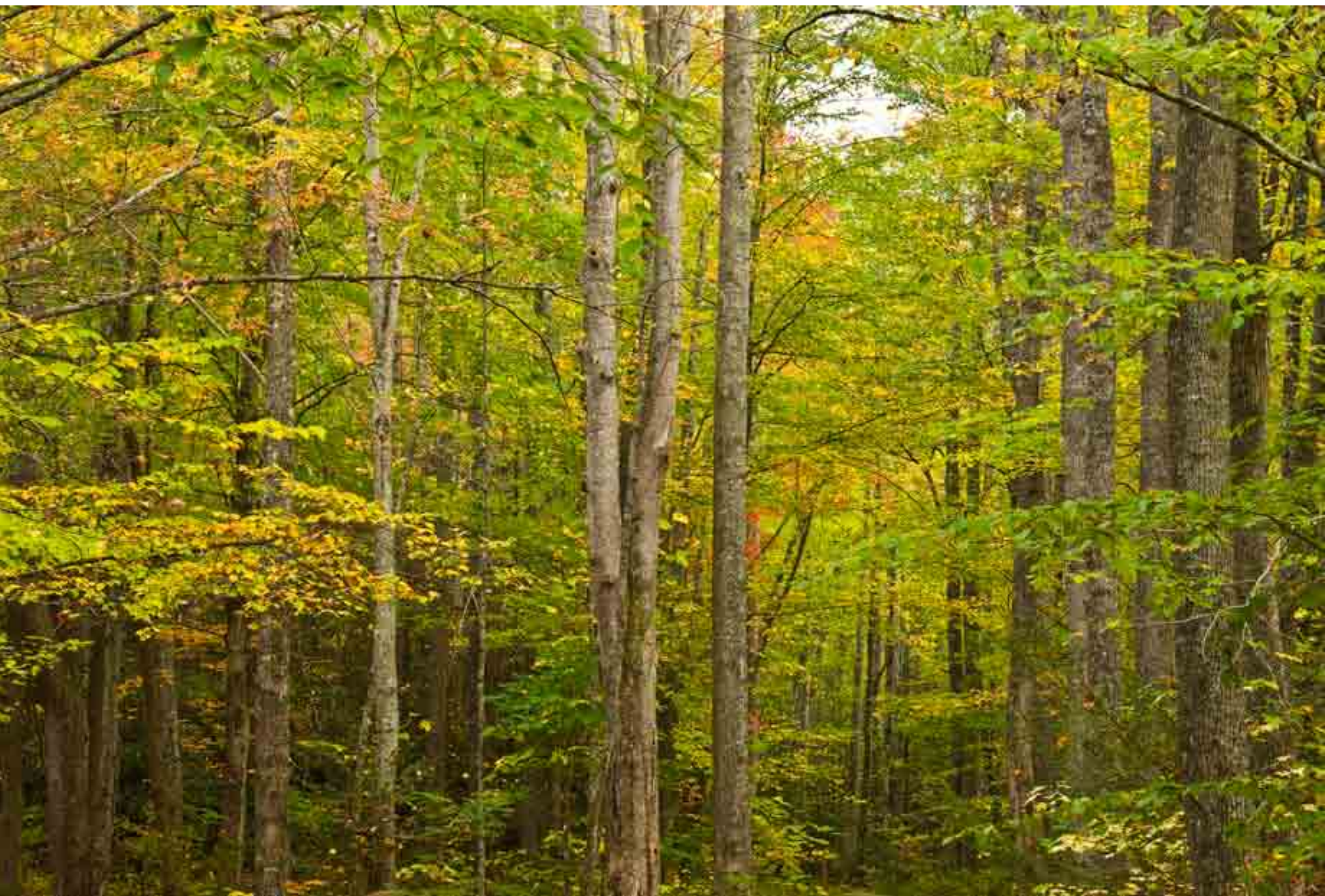
AFTERNOON, MIDDLE PRONG LITTLE RIVER JUNE 2008

FALL REFLECTIONS, MIDDLE PRONG LITTLE RIVER NOVEMBER 2006

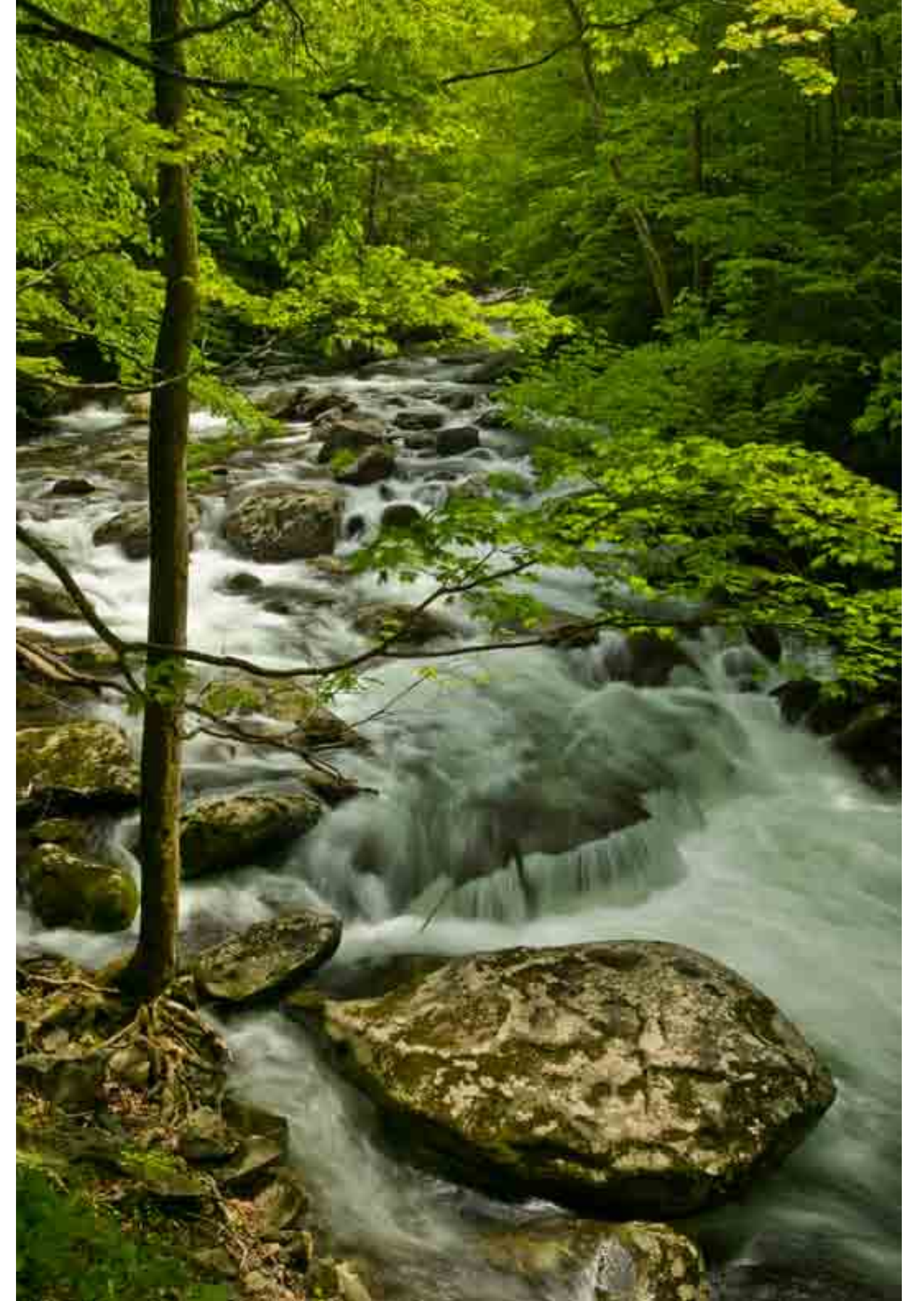




















NEWFOUND GAP ROAD

EVENING, CLINMANS DOME *JUNE 2008*

During the 19th century, the “road” across the Great Smoky Mountains was so arduous that some found it easier to remove the wheels from their wagons and simply drag the beds.

Travelers today, especially those from more horizontal landscapes, continue to find the pilgrimage from Gatlinburg, Tennessee to Newfound Gap somewhat daunting. Especially at those places where the narrow road is barely notched from the side of a Smoky Mountain, and only a low stone wall separates travelers from the abyss.

Yet therein lies the beauty. Rising from the valley of the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River, the “road over the mountain” offers view after stunning view. One of the first to be encountered is Carlos Campbell Overlook. From here, one has a grandstand view of Mt. Le Conte, rising from the verdant cove hardwood forest at its base to the Canadian Zone spruce-fir along its summit.

Farther along, travelers are treated to a view of the Chimney Tops, a favorite destination of hearty day hikers. In fact, if you study the summit closely, you’ll probably notice the tiny shapes of tired trampers scrambling up the spire.

Higher still, Morton Overlook offers one of the most famous views in the Smokies. Sunset can be especially memorable from this spot, and photographers crowd the parking area whenever one seems promising. The scene is framed by red spruce trees and looks down on the Chimney Tops, Newfound Gap Road, and more peaks and gorges on the Tennessee side. Many are the images on book covers and calendar pages that were captured from this perch.

At 5,046 feet, Newfound Gap itself sits squarely on the border of Tennessee and North Carolina. In the West, such a mountain crossing would be called a pass, in the Northeast, a notch. It was named “new-found” because the old, wheel-busting route crossed the mountains two miles to the west. The old route was a bit higher and rougher, so the park road was engineered to cross at the “new” gap.

From the gap, you have long views into both states. You also stand at an interesting crossroads. The 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail crosses U.S. 441 exactly at Newfound Gap. For thru-hikers starting in Georgia and bound for Maine, the gap marks the completion of the first eight percent of their trip.





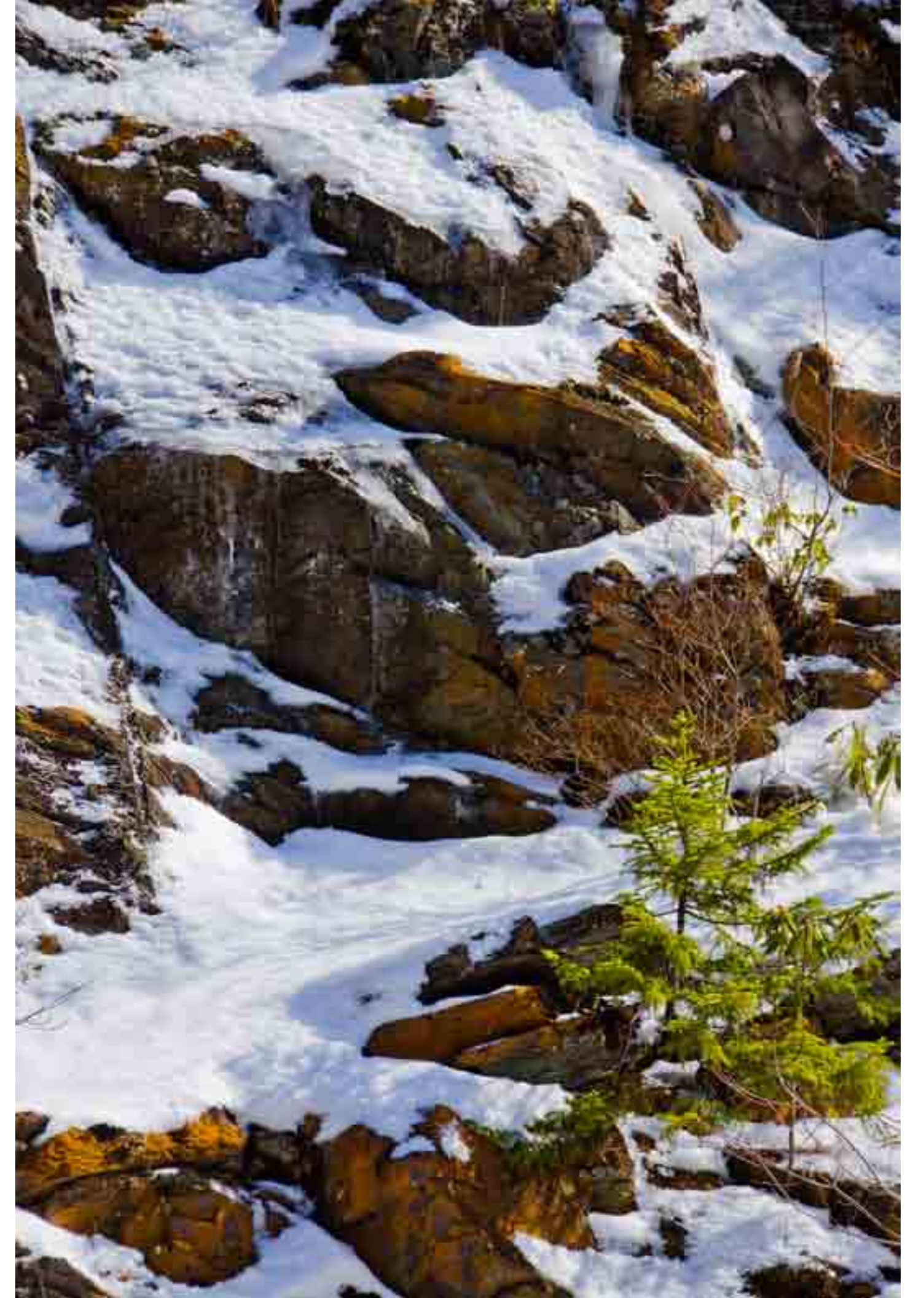






























SUNSET, NEWFOUND GAP ROAD JUNE 2008

SUNSET, WEST PRONG LITTLE PIGEON RIVER VALLEY JUNE 2008





ROCKS & LEAVES, WEST PRONG LITTLE PIGEON RIVER OCTOBER 2008

FOG & FOREST, NEWFOUND GAP OCTOBER 2008

Overleaf SUNSET, CLINGMANS DOME OCTOBER 2008





OCONALUFTEE

SUNRISE, DEEP CREEK OVERLOOK *JUNE 2008*

Although more of Great Smoky Mountains National Park lies in the state of North Carolina than Tennessee, the southern, or Carolina side of the range is often neglected by visitors. Much of the reason for the imbalance is simple geography. Traveling from the immediate north or west, the Tennessee side of the Great Smokies is the first major outcrop of the Appalachians that one encounters. Coming from the south or east, travelers first meet the Blue Ridge Mountains, which are a major destination unto themselves and a substantial barrier to reaching the south side of the Smokies.

In other words, the Carolina Smokies are mountains surrounded by mountains. Even in the heavily populated East, even in the transportation crazy 21st century, they are a long day's journey from just about everywhere.

Yet the journey is supremely worth the effort. Just by turning off the popular Blue Ridge Parkway you can have Balsam Mountain and Heintooga Ridge almost to yourself any summer or autumn day. This mile-high area offers some of the best panoramic views and cool July breezes in the southern mountains.

Even more remote is the Fontana Lake region. The very large, clear lake at the center of this area serves as the park boundary. A short boat ride takes you far off the beaten path to places like Hazel Creek and Eagle Creek, revered by anglers and rich in 19th century mountain history.

The Deep Creek area is just outside the pleasantly Mayberry-esque town of Bryson City. Deep Creek is one of the loveliest of many lovely Smoky Mountain streams. Its tributaries offer hikers a variety of glittering waterfalls to enjoy.

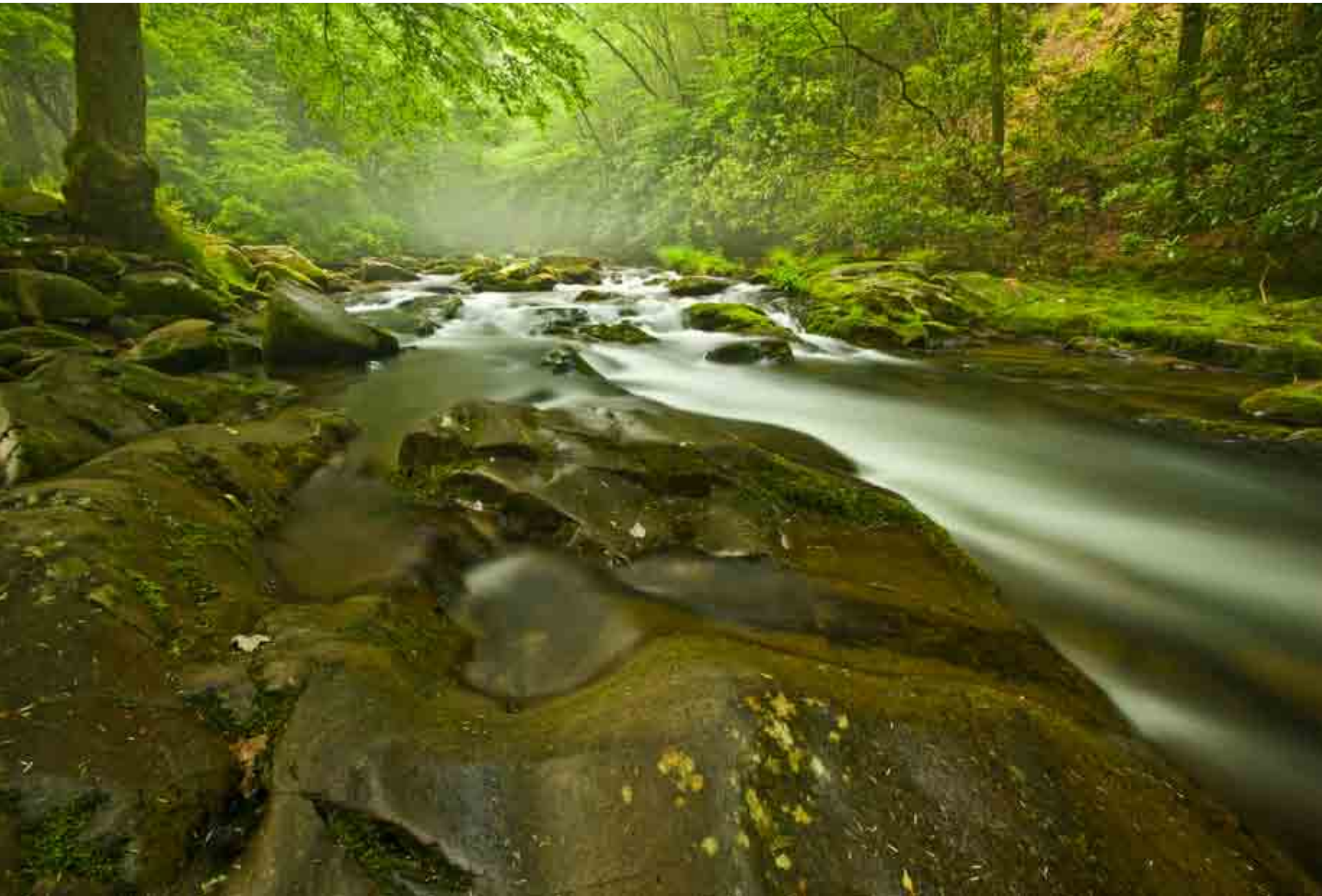
The storied Oconaluftee River runs swift and wide through the Carolina Smokies, providing haven for rainbow and brown trout. As it prepares to exit the Smoky Mountains, it wends near two sites of special historic interest. First, the Mountain Farm Museum with its precious collection of log buildings and occasional historic demonstrations, then the Cherokee Indian Reservation with its impressive American Indian museum and quality arts and crafts galleries. Together the sites relate a tantalizing story of life in mountains surrounded by mountains lived by people tenacious and ingenious enough to thrive.





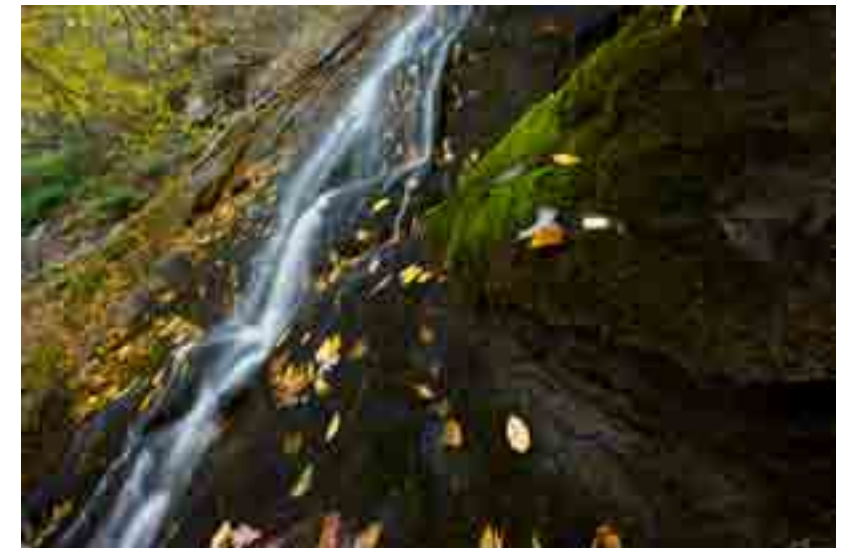






























For the most part, you don't just happen upon the Cosby or Cataloochee areas of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Getting there is almost always intentional and usually requires a certain tolerance for winding mountain roads.

Despite its reputation for an outlaw past, the Cosby area is one of the friendliest and most peaceful valleys in a part of the country that prides itself on friendly and peaceful. To be sure, a lot of liquor, both legal and illegal, was distilled in this neck of the woods at one time. But according to historians, converting bulky food crops, like corn, into concentrated form, like whiskey, was a perfectly logical economic choice for farmers living in a remote area with poor roads for transporting agricultural commodities.

Being remote also helped preserve the beauty of the east side of the Smokies. Much of the park's best old-growth forest persists in this place, so far from the centers of commerce that few of the big lumber companies ever got around to setting up shop. And even by Smoky Mountain standards, the mountains here are exceptionally steep. From Cosby Campground, the ridge-running Appalachian Trail is only a mile and a half, as the crow flies. But for wingless humans, shouldering a pack, the two-and-a-half mile ascent by trail is the very definition of grueling.

Nearby Cataloochee Valley shares remoteness with Cosby, but otherwise it is quite a different place. Whereas farmers in the Cosby vicinity were constantly challenged by rocky soils and the long shadows cast by towering ridges, Cataloochee was relatively broad and fertile. Several of Cataloochee's larger land owners became rather prosperous by growing grains and apples and raising livestock. The tourism industry was already blossoming in Cataloochee even before the park was established.

Recently, the peaceful Cataloochee Valley showed its precociousness in an entirely new way. Cataloochee was chosen as the best place to start the reintroduction of elk to the Great Smoky Mountains. Today, though they must go out of their way to do so, visitors to Cataloochee can see wild elk in the Great Smokies for the first time in more than a century.

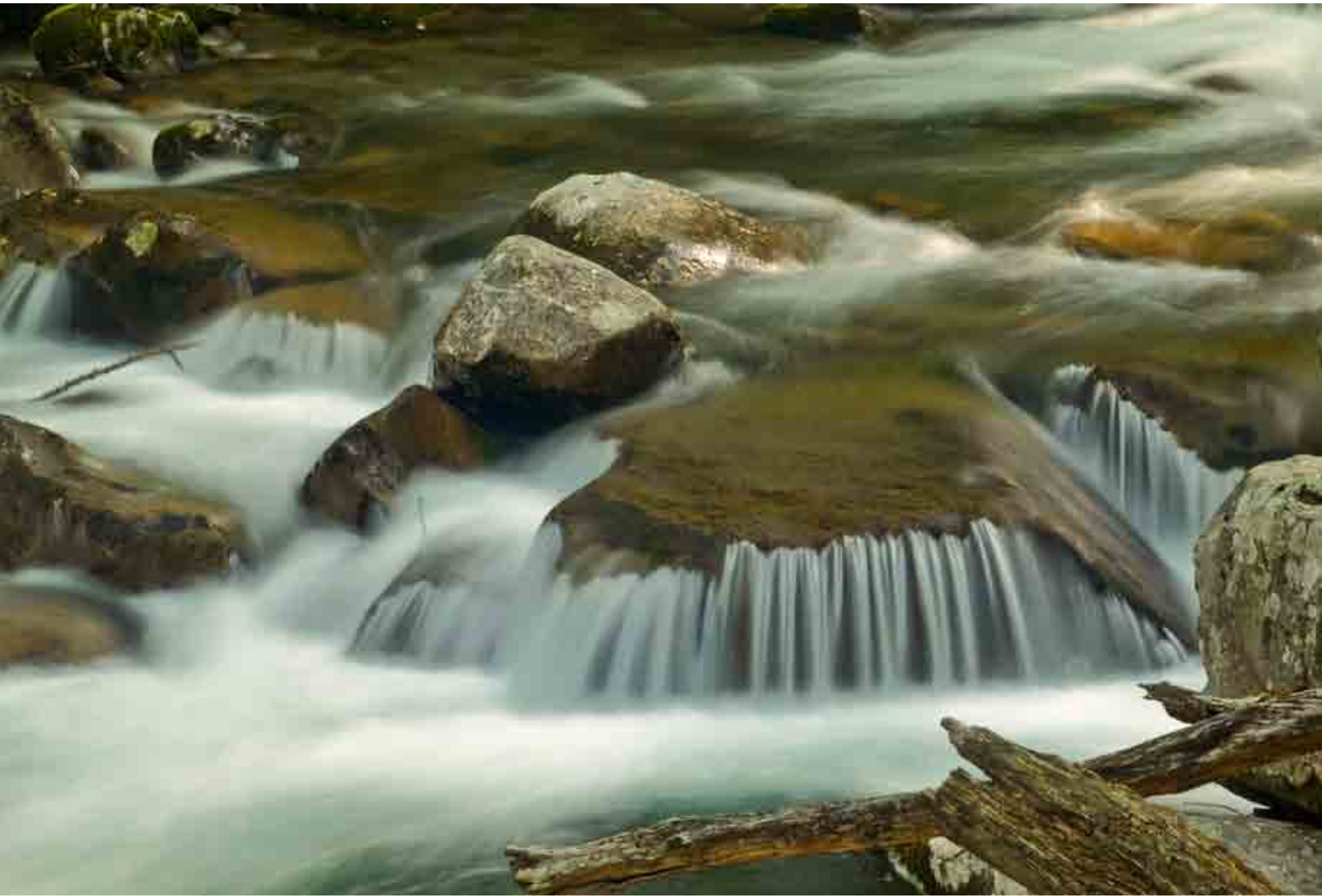














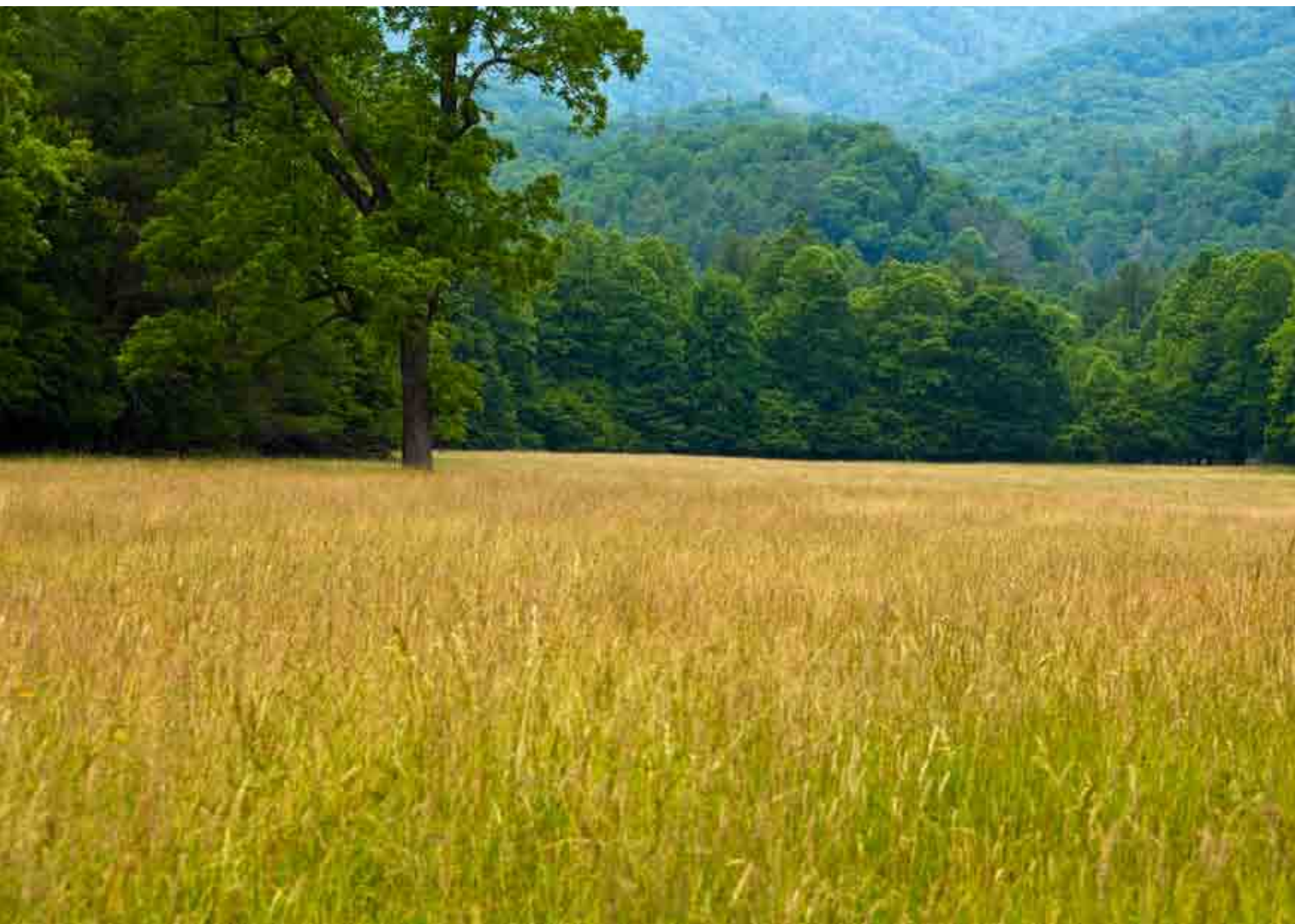


PALMER CHAPEL, CATALOOCHEE JUNE 2008



WEST SIDE, PALMER CHAPEL METHODIST CHURCH, CATALOOCHEE JUNE 2008
INTERIOR, PALMER CHAPEL METHODIST CHURCH, CATALOOCHEE JUNE 2008









The Great Smoky Mountains near Gatlinburg, including the Roaring Fork, Cherokee Orchard, and Greenbrier areas, are world-renowned for the exquisite beauty of their rivers, forests, and wildflowers. No more than two or three miles from the hubbub of downtown Gatlinburg there stand groves of 400-year-old woods and individual trees that grow larger than any others of their kind.

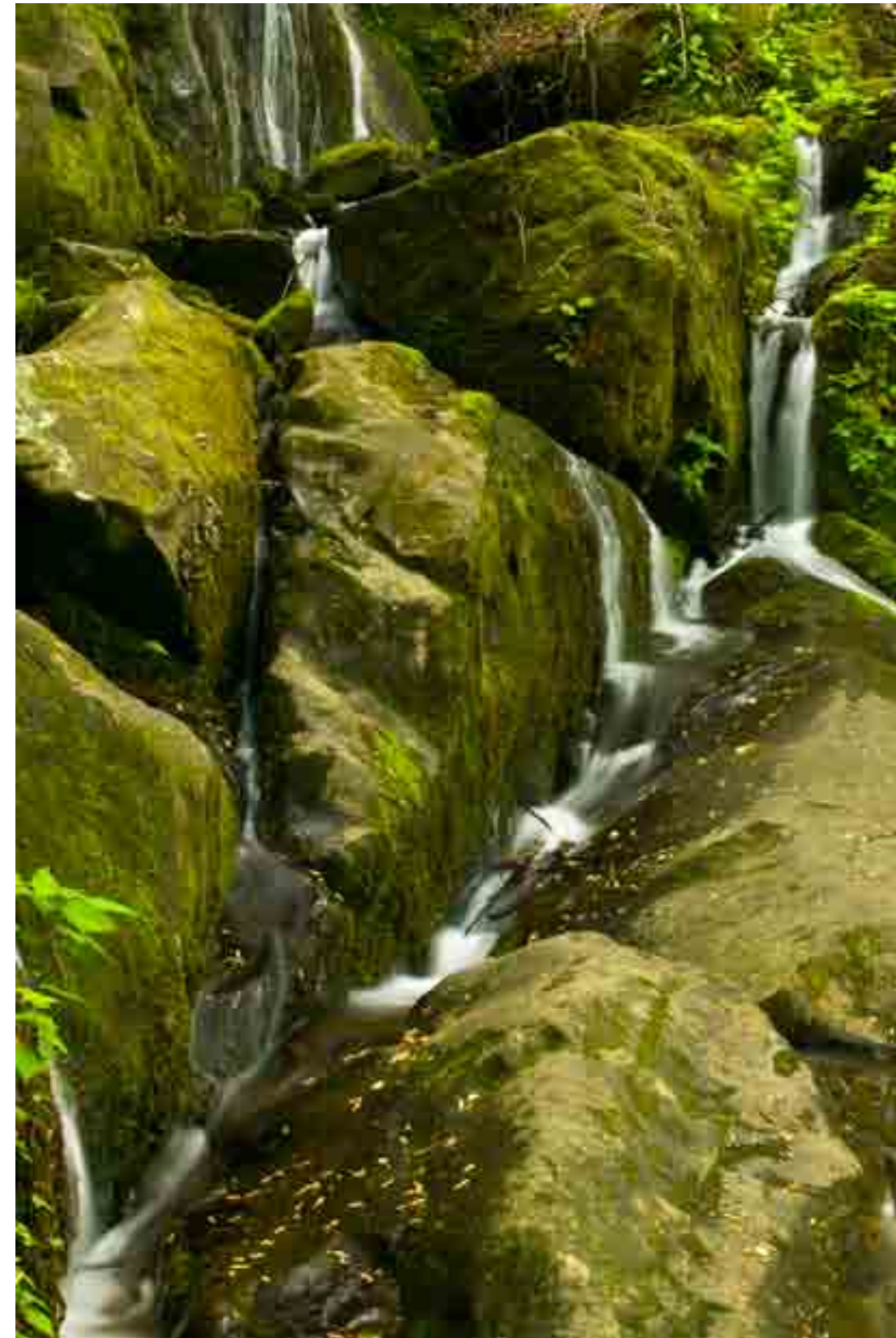
The forests of this area of the Great Smokies eluded the loggers' saw more successfully than elsewhere because of the rugged terrain. Gatlinburg's elevation is approximately 1,500 feet, but just four miles south loom the summits of peaks 5,000 feet higher. As seasoned hikers will tell you, this topography is as demanding at any mountains in the contiguous U.S.

The tempestuous rivers that plunge through this locale also define it. Roaring Fork literally roars when a thunderstorm on the flanks of Mount Le Conte raises its waters four feet in a few minutes. The Little Pigeon River through Greenbrier is just as likely to jump its banks and engulf low-lying forest.

When tenacious and clannish mountain farmers lived up in these hollows, such floods often swept away grist mills, crops, and even livestock. Out-of-control forest fires were fairly common, too. Yet families with the surnames Ogle, Whaley, Huskey, Cardwell, Reagan, and Clabo endured. They were, after all, mostly of Scotch-Irish descent, and the rocky, steep-sloped farms were places that no one else wanted very badly. They were places where people went who wanted to be left alone.

Yet even their mountain refuge was not exempt from change. When the national park was being formed in the 1920s and '30s, many had to sell their farms and leave. Old roads became hiking trails and pastures filled with wildflowers. Still, if you thumb through a local phone directory, you'll notice that many families didn't stray far. The hardscrabble heritage of Roaring Fork and Greenbrier is something they've chosen to hold onto.

















FERN BRANCH FALLS MAY 2006



LARGE WHITE TRILLIUM, PORTERS CREEK TRAIL MAY 2008







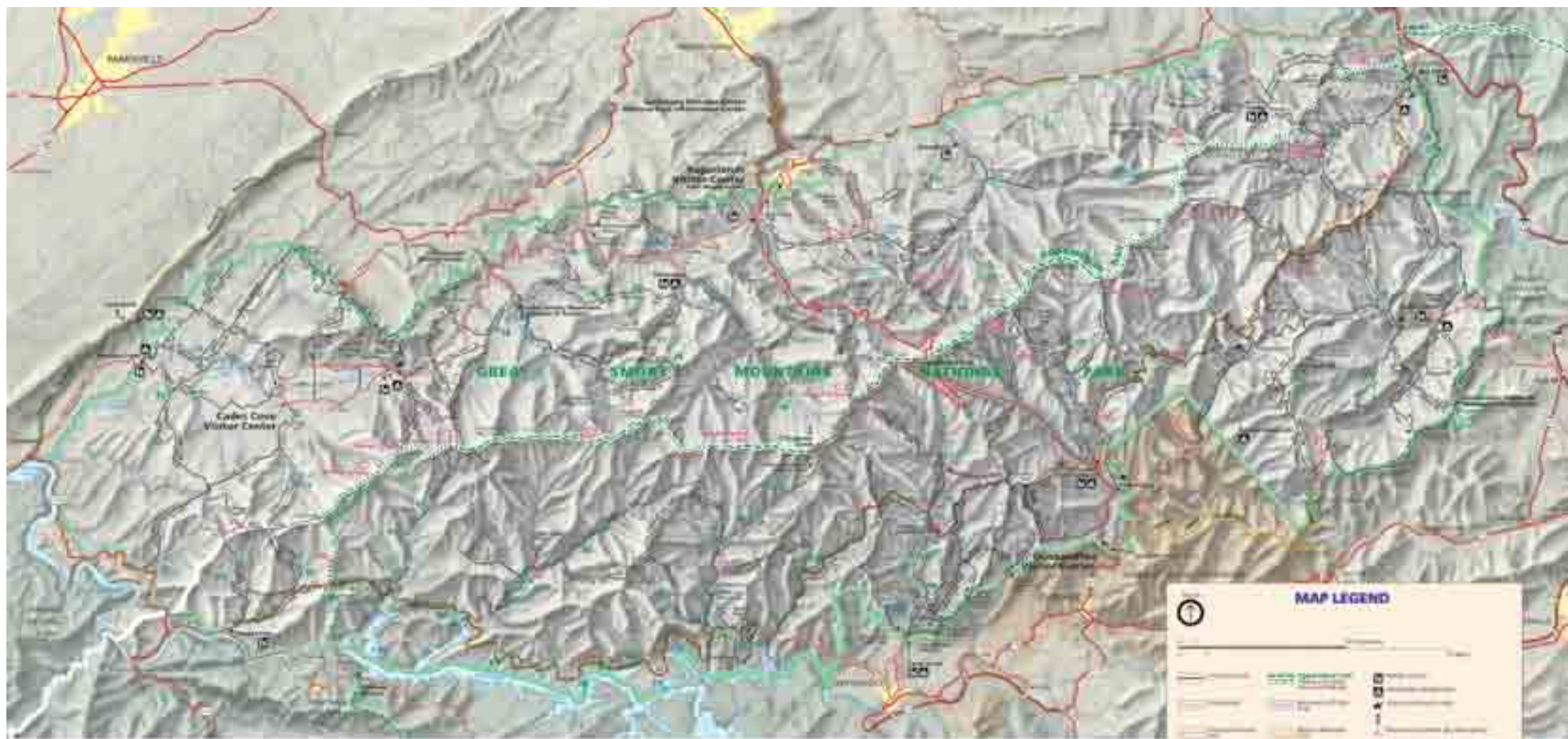


PHOTO NOTES

When I started in earnest to create this book in 2005, I quickly realized how little I really knew about the park. I had few images from winter, had never visited some parts of the park, and when I considered the “story” of the park, I realized that several “chapters” were missing from my imagery. I began to plan more in-depth trips for specific reasons, whether to explore a remote area like Cataloochee and Balsam Mountain or to capture the spring flowers or fall colors better than I had before. Between 2005 and the end of 2008 I ventured into the park at least four to six times a year. Of course, I have included some of the imagery from my earliest trips into the park, partly because they are images that can no longer be seen and are therefore part of the park’s history, and partly just because I like the images. But I confess that many of the shots which made the final edit are recent images. This is due in part to my development as a photographer; and certainly, advanced camera equipment and digital imaging have made for better quality images.

As for the technical issues about which I am always asked, I have shot with many types of cameras over the years. My earliest work was done in 35mm

film with an old Minolta SRT101, a camera given to me when I graduated high school. I have also used a Canon V 35mm camera, a Hasselblad, and a Fuji 617 Panoramic camera. As for film, I predominately used Fujichrome Velvia for color work. For black and white images I used Ilford’s Pan F or Delta to get finer grain and resolution. More recently I’ve shot digital with a Canon 1Ds, which produces 12.6MB files, and the Canon 1Ds Mark III, which gives you 21.6MB files to start with. When these are processed in Photoshop they can quickly become huge files at 400MB or more. In Photoshop I have done some digital work with the images in order to get them to the point at which I saw the image in the field. This can entail a variety of processes to bring out the best in a digital image, much like you would work with a black and white or color image in the darkroom to make it the image you envisioned when you snapped the shutter.

You can plan your photographs with minute detail, factor in where the sun will come up and at what time, figure out the phases of the moon, the season for wildflowers or wildlife, but in the end, there is a certain amount of luck involved. Maybe part of the difference between images that are sublime and those that are simply satisfactory is how often you put yourself in the right place at the right time to take advantage of not only your preparation and expectations, but what is presented by nature. Either way, it requires great effort to compile a body of images that work well together.

I had more than 6,000 images spanning thirty years of work from which to choose. A daunting task, to say the least. I believe those that were ultimately selected tell the story of the park as it has evolved during this time frame. And, of course, my hope is that I have presented an inspirational tribute to one of our greatest national treasures.

Every book is the culmination of intense work by many people. I would first like to thank my production team, which included my favorite designers--Rich Nickel and Rudi Backart. Rich and Rudi steered me down the right path on design and image selections. Rich also endured many emails, phone calls, and other communications in my search for the perfect placement of images and text, selection of images, and pre-production questions. His tireless efforts have paid off, and the visual style of this book is a tribute to his insights. Laurie Prossnitz did an excellent job of editing the text and cleaning up my grammar. Her editorial suggestions were always taken with gratitude. Also, I’d like to thank Karen Powelson and all the folks at CS Graphics, which printed this book. Their professionalism made it an almost effortless process from start to finish.

During the course of a 30-year project, you meet lots of exceptional people who are willing to give you a hand. None more so than Steve Kemp, Interpretive Products & Services Director for the Great Smoky Mountains Association. His beautifully written foreword and text fit perfectly with my idea of how this book should feel and read. He also provided encouragement and advice along the way. My only regret is that we didn’t meet sooner in the course of this project! I also want to thank Janet Rock, Botanist for Great Smoky Mountains National Park, who made sure I correctly identified the wildflowers. Janet saved me lots of time with my head in a plant- identification book! I look forward to hiking with them both on future trips to the park.

During the last three decades I have traveled to the park both by myself and with friends or relatives. Many trips since 2000 have been with my brother-in-law, Bill Gunther. Bill waits patiently as I work, reads a lot of books, and takes long walks in the area. Our conversations over meals kept me sane and grounded. His friendship is invaluable. His wife Sandy joined us on one trip, and held down the fort at home on others. Thank you.

I also called on my friend and favorite pilot Philip Prossnitz to fly me down to the Smokies as fast as possible on winter trips. Sometimes we had only a day’s notice of snow arriving in the park, and Phil was always willing to clear his schedule and gas up the plane.

Over the years, Kathy and I have hiked through the Smokies with many friends and family members. These trips were all memorable and I thank you for joining us on each and every one of them. Thanks also for being patient as I stopped to photograph along the trails.

To my daughter Sara and son Sam, we have dragged you to the park on many a vacation since you were quite young. Thanks for being such good company and for giving us the opportunity to appreciate the park’s beauty through your eyes. I remember the many times you waited while I worked, but one evening stands out, when you were about five and seven years old. I was shooting a sunset at Morton Overlook. The sun and clouds

proved muted but interesting. After returning to the car, where Kathy had kept you entertained, I was told it had been an hour since I started. I couldn’t believe it had been that long but you all assured me it had been. You wondered out loud what takes so long. A few months later the photograph sold for a book cover and you were both thrilled to have been there when it was taken. You said you finally understood what it takes and why. Now you are visiting the park by yourselves and making your own memories, which gives me great pleasure. Thanks for the memories, may we make many more.

Finally, to my wife Kathy, to whom this book is dedicated. We can’t count the number of times we have been to the park together, yet every trip brings us new adventures. You have always kept me on track personally and professionally, encouraging me when I think things are not going well. Your support and levelheadedness during this process have been priceless. I have enjoyed traveling with you down the paths in the Smokies, and in life, and look forward to many more years blazing trails together.

Thank you and peace to you all,
Richard Mack

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