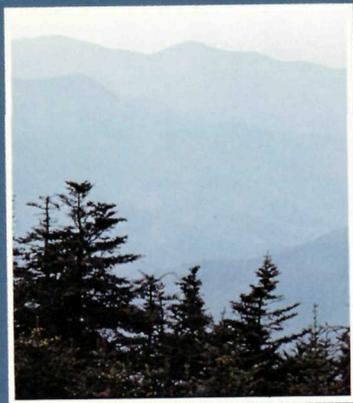
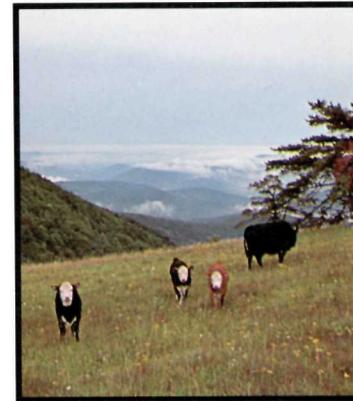


Mountains



and

Meadowlands





Mountains

and

Meadowlands

Along the

Blue Ridge

Parkway

Text and photos by

William A. Bake

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The Blue Ridge Parkway means mountains—the highest of them mantled with trees and wildflowers uniquely their own. It also means meadows—some for farming, others that beckon visitors to wander and explore. This booklet introduces both the mood and substance of the Parkway’s highest peaks and sweeping meadowlands. Though designed to be read quickly, it remains to be re-examined whenever mountains and meadowlands return to mind or presence.

An “Ocean of Woods swelled and depressed with a waving Surface like that of the great Ocean itself” wrote an early visitor as he sought a way to describe the Blue Ridge Mountains. The words were well chosen. Mantled in green, the mountains roll away into the

Rolling into the distance like “the great Ocean itself,” the Blue Ridge dips into a deep cove at Wildcat Rocks in Doughton Park (Milepost 240), then swells toward the horizon.

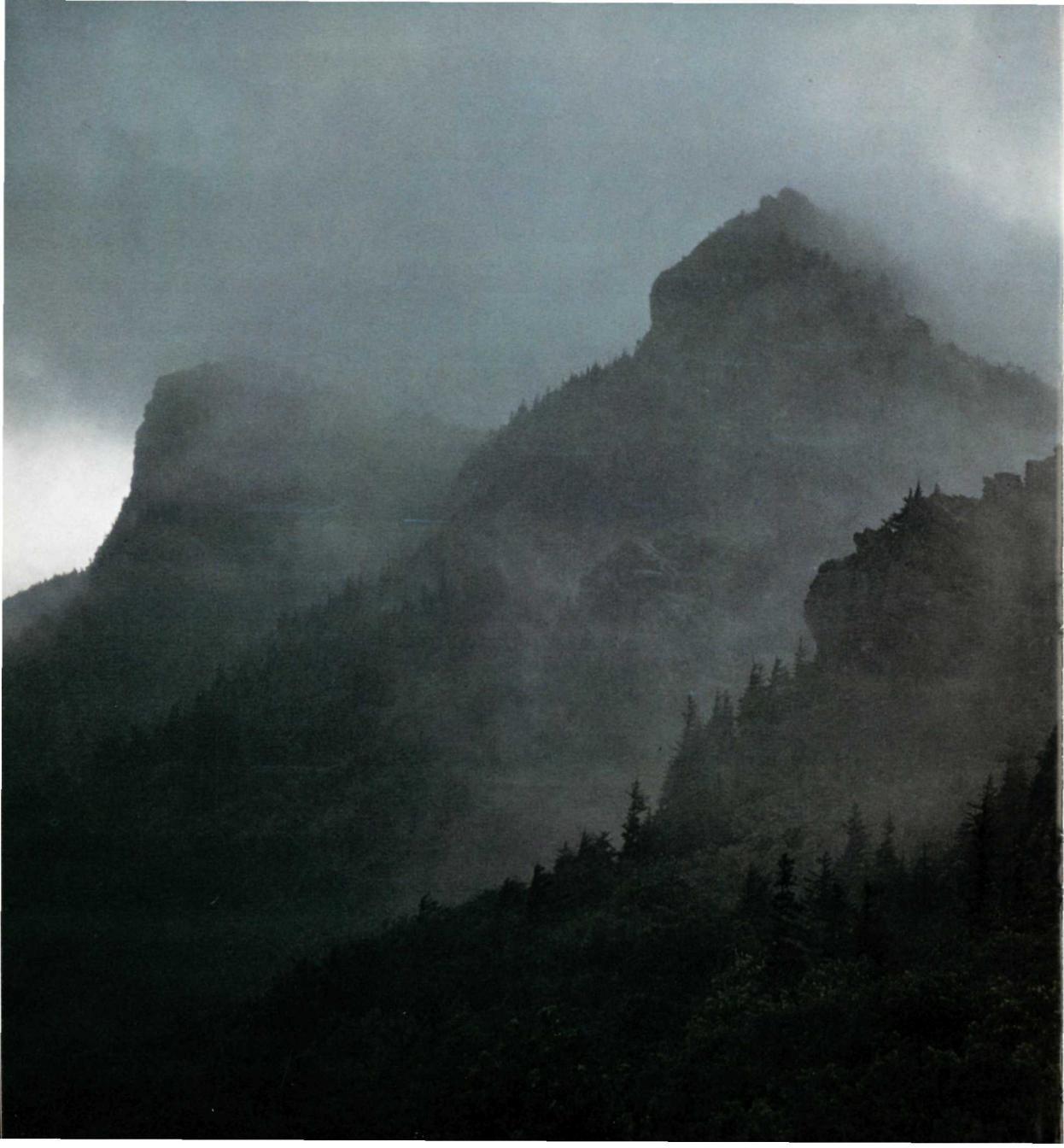
Indian pipe, a small but conspicuous saphrophyte, pushes past the clover-like leaves of wood sorrel.



distance like breakers and swells frozen in time.

Their time, in fact, began long ago, even in geologic terms. The Blue Ridge Mountains—indeed, *all* the Appalachians—are ancient mountains. Rounded in form and subdued in height, they are nevertheless a rugged lot whose wrinkles and crannies, cliffs and gorges are often hidden from easy view.

Like so many of the Earth’s mountains, the Appalachians were created in a very complex manner. It is sufficient to say, rather than going through the complexities, that what remains is a range of mountains which begins in the Canadian maritime provinces near the Atlantic and then sweeps southwestward to Alabama. In New England and



again in the South, the mountains reach their high points, topping 6,000 feet once in the North on New Hampshire's Mt. Washington and many times in North Carolina and Tennessee.

The Blue Ridge is a part of the Appalachians—actually a rather substantial part. Beginning as a single low ridge in southern Pennsylvania, it slowly rises and divides until in North Carolina it reaches a height of 5,938 feet at Grandfather Mountain. Along most of that distance, its crest is straddled by the world's greatest recreational motor roads: the Skyline Drive and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Both these roads follow the Blue Ridge Mountains faithfully until the even higher Black, Great Craggy, and Balsam Mountains beckon the Parkway southward to its conclusion near the Great Smokies.

Inspiration for a 19th-century landscape painter: a thunderstorm engulfs Grandfather Mountain in a maelstrom of swirling clouds.

Climbing through the Great Craggy Mountains, the Parkway crosses miles of forest that has been stunted by severe climatic conditions.



The Blue Ridge Parkway begins boldly. The transition between busy highway and protected parkland is abrupt and immediately obvious. Forests press in, crowding against the grassy border that edges the Parkway. The road climbs relentlessly, soon offering glimpses of valleys receding below. The mood becomes one of remoteness from the competition and guardedness of high-speed driving. The scenery commands the attention; ultimately it becomes the essence of a drive on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The transition might well be considered one of time as well as place. America's natural beauty and agricultural heritage blend harmoniously along the road. The land here remains as it was before technology turned hours into moments and before men

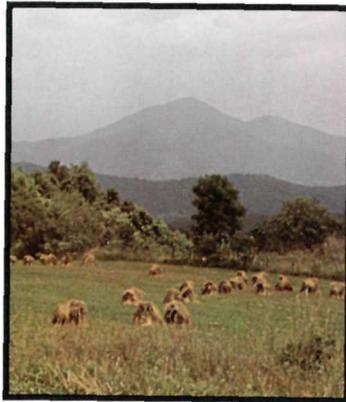
were measured in terms of economic endeavors alone.

Two major components of the Blue Ridge Parkway's character are its mountains and meadowlands. Mountains are the rule; meadows are the exception. Two centuries or more ago, however, they were even more exceptional. Before the coming of the white man, the Blue Ridge was covered with that incredibly rich and varied forest of ancient, quiet, and endless trees which met the horizon westward to the Mississippi.

Southward along the Parkway, the blend of mountains and meadowlands changes. The northern quarter of the Parkway crosses a Blue Ridge that is narrow and rugged, steep and forested. Below Roanoke, Va., the Blue Ridge becomes a gentle

A small garden fenced from rabbits and deer, a few weathered buildings, and the unending mountains—for generations of southern mountain people scenes like this at the Brinegar Cabin meant home.

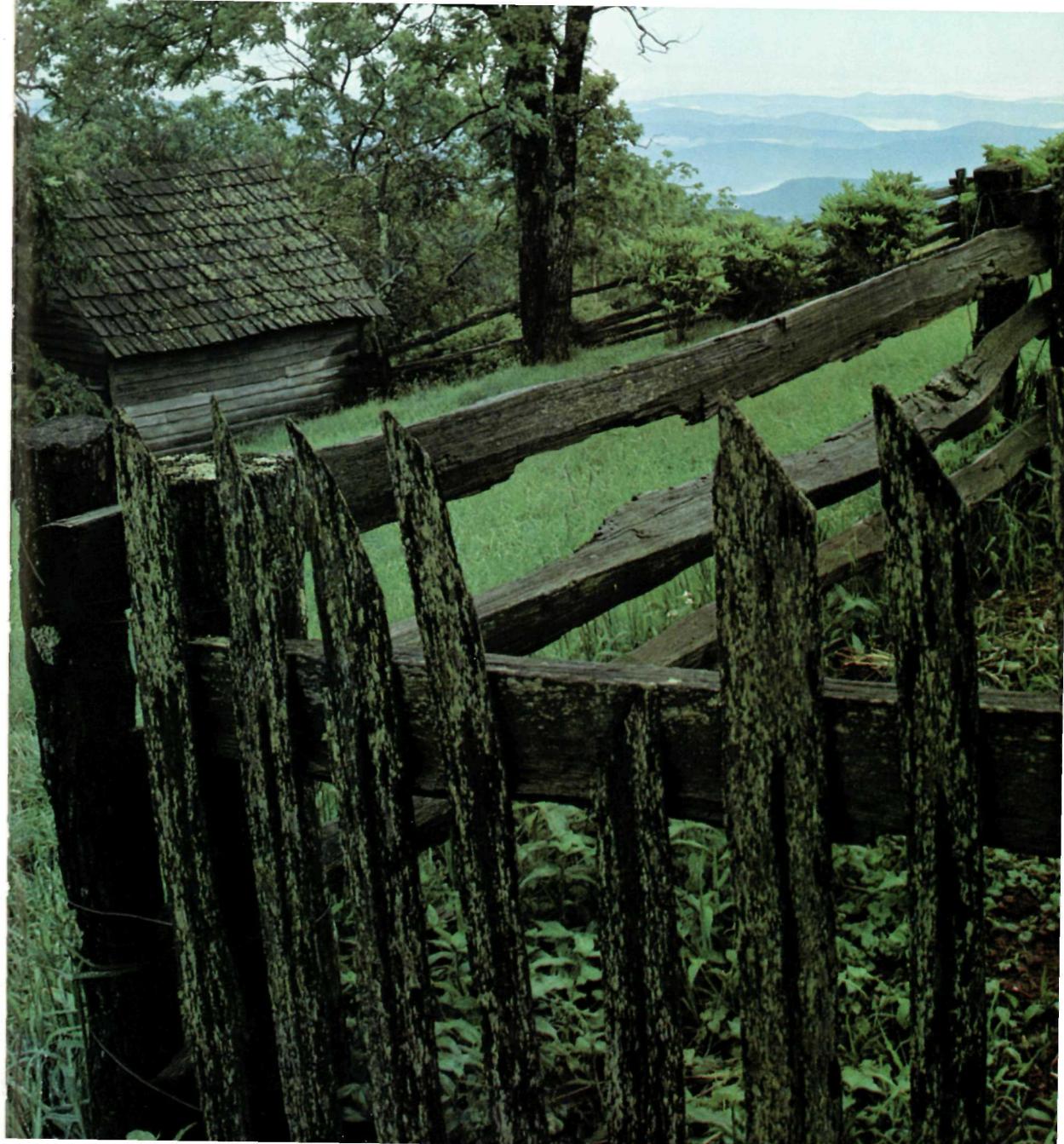
Shocks of oats symbolize another harvest.



J. M. Eden

highland with much good land for farming. There, agriculture remains an important influence on the land. For nearly half its length, the Parkway arcs across this high farming country. Below Crabtree Meadows (Milepost 339) the mountains become loftier, achieving the greatest heights found in the entire Appalachians. Wilderness predominates; thick northern evergreen forests and cloud-swept summits loom above the Parkway. Man's works dwindle in the face of solitude. In many places the panorama is much as it was in the early 1700s when that early visitor described mountains that looked like waves on the sea.

Among the Parkway's mountains and meadowlands, there are many that are typical and some



few that have distinctive features. The world of the highest peaks, those with vegetation uniquely their own, is introduced in the following pages. Meadows of several types will be visited, each because it has some distinguishing historical

Mellow evening light bathes the slopes of Mt. Pisgah, backlighting a slender Fraser fir.

or contemporary characteristic. Not everything can be explored in so short a space—the great forest covering the lower peaks is hardly mentioned, for example—but the essence of the Parkway, its mood and personality, is here.

Turkeybeard, a close relative of western beargrass, in bloom on Grandfather Mountain.





To the untrained eye, the peaks and their covering forests may seem to be endlessly repetitive. Here and there a sharp cliff or waterfall may punctuate the scene, but everything seems generally green and rounded. That sameness is one of the major deceptions of the southern mountains. The mountains change and so do their forests.

Like all aged mountains, the Appalachians were once much higher and bolder. Their present features are the result of weathering—the action of the elements on the land. Within geologically recent times, the climate was much colder. Great continental glaciers covered the land as far south as New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Snow heaped these mountains, and plants that today are familiar

Only on the heights can Fraser firs exist. Near Devils Courthouse a stand of firs occupies an outpost above lower-elevation forest.

Chance encounters like this one with a roving box turtle add interest to any Parkway visit.



M Woodbridge Williams

much farther north covered the southern Appalachians.

As the ice retreated northward, so did the plants and animals that depend upon a cold climate for survival. Animals like the varying hare (“snowshoe rabbit”) once must have lived in North Carolina and Tennessee; now they live no farther south than central Virginia. Several northern plants find their last southern outposts in the cold bogs of that area. But there are also a host of northern plants and animals that remain along the higher portions of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Knowing what they are brings the northern character of the Parkway’s highest peaks into sharp relief.

The Spruce-Fir Forest

One of the most easily recog-

nized features of the high peaks is the spruce-fir forest. Travelers driving south first see this high-elevation forest on the slopes of Grandfather Mountain, a mile off the Parkway at Milepost 306. Farther south, the road itself climbs into spruce-fir forest as it nears the Black Mountains. The Blacks, which take their name from the dark-appearing spruce-fir forest, are one of the highest ranges in the East. Most of the ridgeline exceeds 6,000 feet, and Mt. Mitchell, at 6,684 feet, is the highest point east of the Mississippi River.

Seen from a distance as a dark band of vegetation high on the mountain ridges, the forest is a mixture of Fraser fir and red spruce. Approached closely in many places southward along

Fraser firs, reaching tall for sunlight, leave a thicket of dead branches in their race for height.



the Parkway or by taking the spur road to Mt. Mitchell's summit (Milepost 355.3), the forest is a delight to the senses and a lesson in natural adaptation. The sounds of the spruce-fir forest are those of the far north and the Maine coastal forest. Northern birds make their homes here, contributing their own echoing songs from *high in the spruces or from within dense stands of firs*. The wind, too, is active, nearly always producing a hushed sound as it plays through the evergreens—a sound not unlike far-off surf. With the wind comes the fragrance of the spruce-fir forest. Drifting through the green boughs, it fills the cool air with its pungent resin-scent, then disappears only to return again. So pleasing is the fra-

grance that it becomes an indelible part of the spruce-fir forest experience.

These high forests are remnants of the ice age. As the climate warmed after the retreat of the ice sheet that once covered areas farther north, the red spruce and Fraser firs retreated to the cooler heights. Nowhere else in the South do they survive today. The very rigors of climate that force out less rugged species provide a sanctuary for these beautiful trees. Yet the survival of the Fraser fir is now contested. A tiny insect, the balsam woolly aphid, is destroying the forest. No effective counter-measures to this infestation have yet been discovered.

To the early settlers in these mountains, the spruce and firs

A victim of balsam woolly aphid infestation, a fir stands orange and lifeless near Black Balsam Knob.



were known as “balsams.” The prickly red spruce, with its angular 4-sided needles, was called “he-balsam,” and Fraser fir, with its soft, flat needles, was “she-balsam.” The name balsam remains as a colloquialism today and is used in the names of two mountain ranges that have a dark mane of spruce and fir. These ranges, located in the area well south of Asheville, are the Great Balsams and the Plott (a family name) Balsams. The Parkway reaches its highest point (6,053 feet) at Richland Balsam Mountain (Milepost 431.4). A self-guiding nature trail leads through a thick forest of spruce and fir to the summit of this 6,410-foot peak.

From within, the forest is a maze of windfalls—evidence of the violence wrought upon

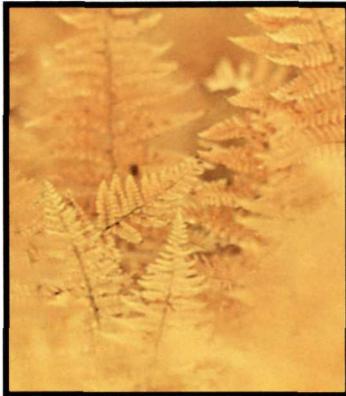
the heights by frequent storms acting upon trees weakened by disease. Moss grows everywhere, carpeting logs, slopes, and rocks. The ground underfoot is likely to feel springy and soft, a suggestion of the decay and moisture constantly working together to build a thicker veneer of soil on this rocky spine of eastern North America.

Along the trailsides and throughout the forest, ferns and wood-sorrel grow in abundance, their fronds and clover-like leaves creating patterns in the sunlight.

If there is a southern haunt for the spirit of the wilderness, it is here within the spruce-fir forest. These trees seem to shun civilization. Confined to the heights, they crowd the craggy places and take sustenance from the

Clouds constantly drift through the fir forest, playing on the imagination and creating a world far removed from the lowlands.

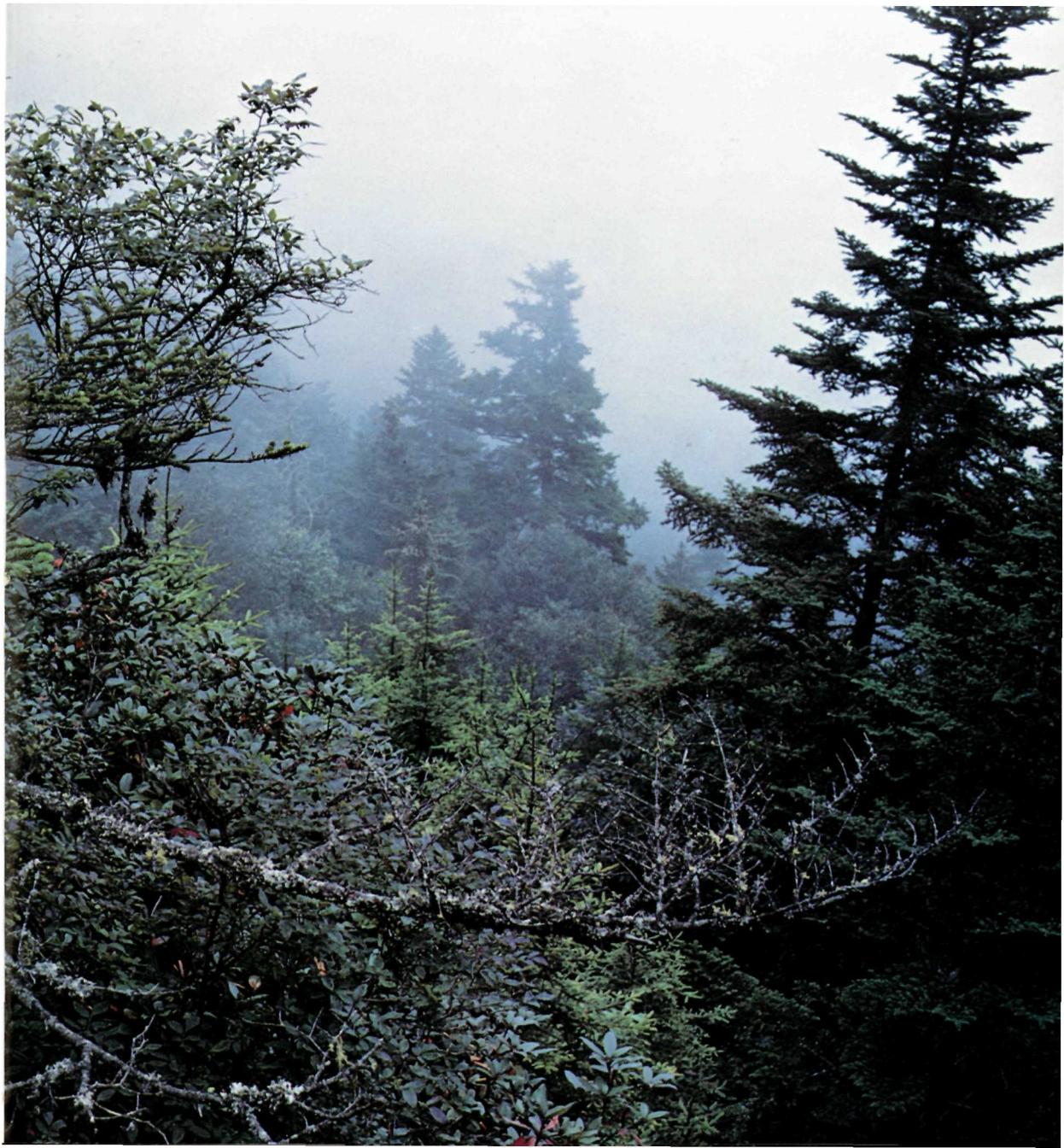
Ferns, boldly yellow in autumn, splash color along a forest trail.



Ross Chapple

moist breath of clouds washing against the slopes. The spirit is there among the firs; feeling its presence is only a matter of knowing you are alone or of hearing the wind sighing through the boughs.

If you still doubt the spirit of the wilderness in these mountains, drive to an overlook along the Parkway some clear night. Turn off your car's engine and, without any lights or sound, stand alone under the stars. Behind you, unexpectedly, a slight breeze might blow a dry leaf across the pavement. Lowland lights, a comfort at first, seem far off. Sensations—uneasy, unfamiliar—surround you. Suddenly and uncomfortably vulnerable, you turn and seek the security of your car.





High country “orchards”

In areas not occupied by the spruce-fir forest, a northern type of broadleaf forest exists. Species in this forest type, commonly called the northern hardwood forest, are the beech, birch, and red oak. Beech trees can be recognized by their smooth, gray, lichen-encrusted trunks and limbs. The birches—these are yellow birches—have shiny, yellowish bark that tends to peel in horizontal strips. The northern red oak has its distinctive traits, too: it often grows in groves of twisted and evenly spaced trees. These stunted groves are familiar in high mountains. In the Alps they are known as *Krummholz* (“crooked wood”); in the South they are called “orchards.” Prominent “orchards” along the Parkway

“Orchards” of northern red oaks, named because of the evenly spaced and stunted appearance of the trees, cover several higher peaks, including Apple Orchard Mountain, Va., shown here.

are seen atop Apple Orchard Mountain—red oak (Milepost 76.5), at the Peach Orchard—beech, yellow birch, and yellow buckeye (Milepost 363.6), at Fryingpan Gap—red oak (Milepost 409.6), and Beech Gap (Milepost 423.2).

Patterns and textures in the bark of a yellow birch create a small composition large in beauty.



The Balds

Sharing the high peaks with the spruce-fir forest is another distinctive plant community. This is the “bald”—any treeless area above 4,000 feet covered either with grass (“grass balds”) or, more commonly, with broad-leaved shrubs (“heath balds”). Often quite large and vigorous, heaths may include mountain-laurel, rhododendron, blueberries, and huckleberries. From mid- to late-June, the rich reddish-purple flowers of rhodo-

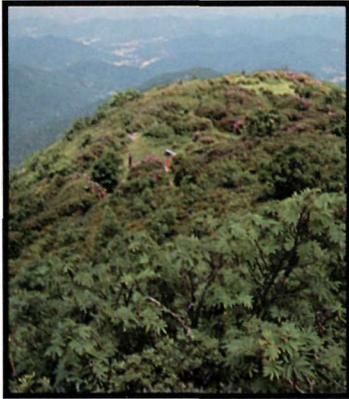
dendron transform many of the balds into spectacular natural gardens.

The balds are an obvious exception to the forest cover dominating the southern mountains. Where they occur, they make the high ridges look light green and inviting from a distance—an illusion if the balds are actually thick tangles of mountain-laurel or rhododendron interwoven into impenetrable thickets known as “laurel slicks.”

Scientists have long been intrigued by the existence of balds in an otherwise forest-covered environment. Several explanations have been offered; all of them seem reasonable. It is thought that the balds are the locations of former Indian agricultural clearings, or that they result from lightning-caused

Catawba rhododendron, pride of May and June in the southern highlands, covers thousands of acres from West Virginia to Alabama.

Craggy Gardens is an area of heath balds made accessible by paths winding through thickets of mountain-laurel and rhododendron.



fires. The presence of elk and bison seen grazing upon them and compacting the soil in frontier days gives rise to the speculation that they may have been sustained by those animals and later perpetuated by cattle. Perhaps the best explanation is that a warmer period about 2,000 years ago eliminated spruce and fir trees in many areas, creating conditions favorable to the formation of balds.

The best place along the Parkway to see heath balds is at Craggy Gardens (Milepost 364.1). Here the Great Craggy Mountains dome up into a high part of the Blue Ridge. The forest gives way to the orchards of low, twisted trees just mentioned, and then even these are gone. Except on rocky outcroppings, rhododendron and grassy



pathways cover the slopes. The feeling is that of being just below treeline.

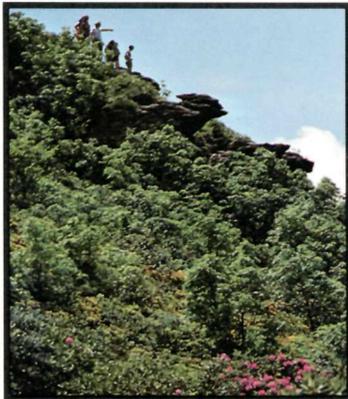
Craggy Gardens is at its most enjoyable in mid-June. Near a small visitor center, a nature trail leads up a short path into acres of flowering rhododendron. The air is cool and the mountains drop away into the blue distance. Many people may be wandering along the natural pathways, but the area seems uncrowded. Relief from the heat, humidity, and hurry of the lowlands provides added incentive to remain here.

Smaller Plants of the High Peaks

Spruce-fir forest, red-oak and beech orchards, and balds are the three plant communities that are noticeably unique to the

Exposed to the full force of winds sweeping against the high ramparts of the Blue Ridge, the west slopes of Grandfather Mountain support little more than masses of sandmyrtle, scattered wind-flagged firs, and rhododendron.

Visitors on Craggy Pinnacle (Milepost 364.1) take in a view that slides off into distant lowlands and sweeps across ranges that march to the horizon.



high peaks along the Blue Ridge Parkway. But they are not alone in distinguishing these peaks from those generally below 4,000 feet in elevation. Smaller plants, too, find sanctuary on the heights. On the rocky top of Grandfather Mountain (off the Parkway at Milepost 306) and the Devil's Courthouse (Milepost 422.4) are masses of sandmyrtle. This plant, which also grows along the Atlantic coast, here finds the conditions needed for its growth only on the highest, rockiest peaks. A combination of sandmyrtle and low, sprawling, wind-flagged firs gives these summits an alpine look. Found with the sandmyrtle are such northern plants as wood sorrel, clintonia, Canada mayflower, and bunchflower. Along with the northern plants on the high peaks are a variety



of northern birds. Blackburnian, Canada, and blackthroated blue warblers, juncos, winter wrens, brown creepers, red-breasted nuthatches, golden-crowned kinglets, and veeries are likely to be heard on high peaks along the Parkway. In the spruce-fir forest, the liquid, flutelike song of the veery and the bubbling melody of the winter wren are the hiker's constant companions.

Galax and scattered rhododendron petals grace the banks of Yellowstone Prong at Graveyard Fields.

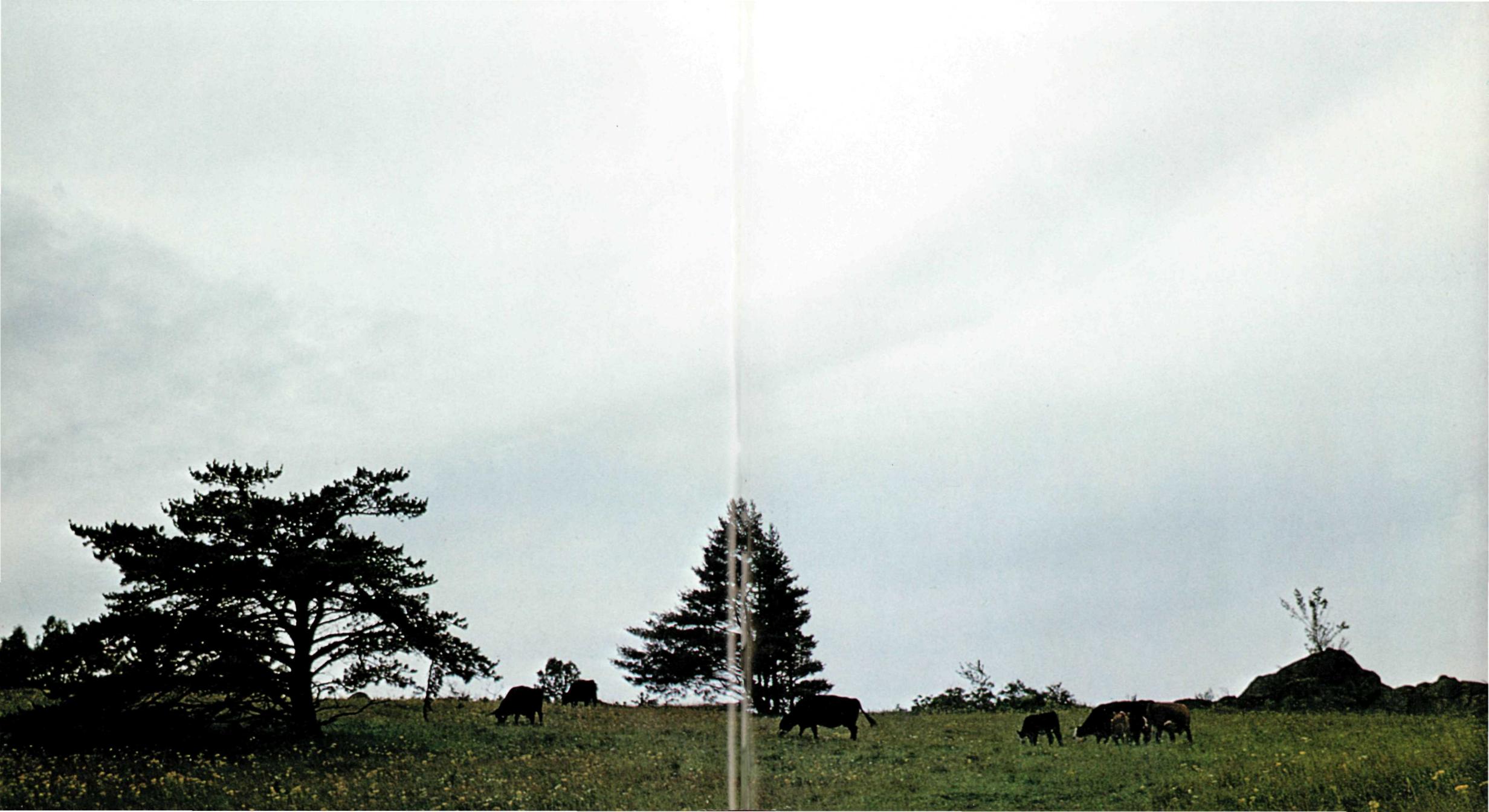
The Canada warbler is a northern species found only on the high mountains in the South.



Blue Ridge Parkway photo

It is this unusual grouping of plant and animal life that distinguishes the high peaks. Ruggedness and grandeur are present too, though not on a scale calculated to impress visitors familiar with higher mountains in the West. The beauty of the southern mountains is in their accord with the ages—their quiet composure in the face of eternity.





Meadows

and

Man

The marks of man upon the *southern mountains* are many, but of all man's creations here, the meadows are the most beautiful. Where the mountains flatten on top to form almost level highlands, there are meadows to meet the wind. The Parkway arcs across miles of them, green in spring and early summer, golden as the year deepens into autumn. Breezes, upwelling along the slopes, ripple in waves across the meadows and cool the summer grasses. Huge old shade trees, their leaves whispering in the wind, offer cool hours in soft, open places.

The sky seems closer on the meadows; closer perhaps than anywhere except on the balds. The landscape is larger, too, especially on great expanses of meadowland like those at

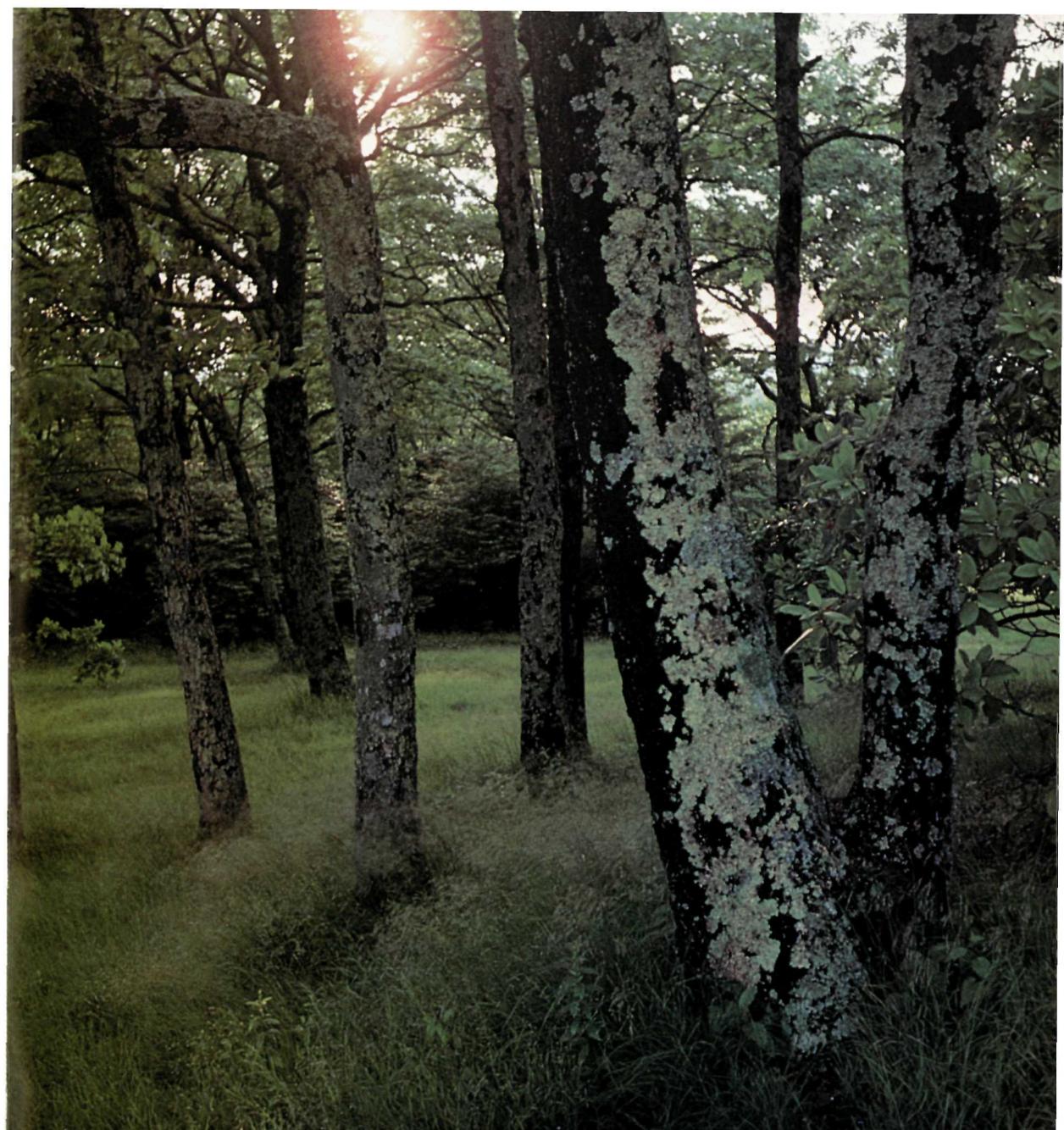
Fresh as the new summer, tall grasses and lichen-covered oaks extend an offer to spend hours alone with cool breezes and warm sunlight.

Black-eyed susans add touches of beauty on meadows near the James River.



Doughton Park. Coneflowers, clover, New Jersey tea, fly-poison, black-eyed susans, and finally asters and goldenrod speckle the grasses in a procession that matches the seasons. Meadow birds too, take to the air and sing from fences and trees. Along the grassy meadow edges, bobwhites may be heard calling one another, and distinctively V-marked meadowlarks are seen along the road. Near dens hidden among tall grasses, woodchucks sun themselves lazily or feed on green shoots.

One of the unusual and impressive meadowland experiences along the Parkway is to watch a summer thunderstorm as it forms along the Blue Ridge crest and expands to bring rain and cool wind through the grasses.





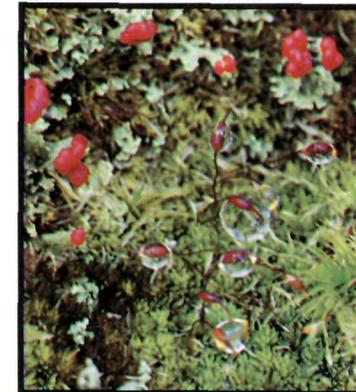
From your car, if there is lightning, watch the updrafts as they reach the level where their moisture condenses into clouds. The clouds will mushroom if the day is right, billowing into cumulus shapes within a short time. Like eddies and currents in a giant river, the clouds swirl and then descend into valleys between the peaks. Black now, the cumuli spawn forked tracers of lightning. A few glimmers of light and rumbles of thunder, and the clouds begin to expand as huge downdrafts cascade from high within them. The wind reaches you, bringing *freedom from heat and restoring the soul*. Finally rain comes, achieves a sustained crescendo, then slowly softens into a melody. The storm ends, perhaps with a shaft of sunlight cutting into far valleys or with clouds

Shafts of sunlight cut into far valleys after a thunderstorm in the Black Mountains.

forming mountain ranges of their own, ranges that tower over the Blue Ridge but soon disappear in the night wind.

During the night, water vapor in the air will collect on the cool grasses, forming dew. When morning comes, the water will begin returning to the atmosphere, and by afternoon the meadows will be reflecting heat upward, building rising currents of moist air that will condense into clouds and give birth to new rains.

Water droplets cling to tiny mosses and lichens after a shower.



Forests and Fields

Like the clouds, the meadows are temporary features on the face of the land. A few small meadows may always have existed naturally in the southern mountains, resulting from soil and slope factors not favorable

to tree growth. Most early forest openings, however, were created by *Indians for agricultural purposes* or by lightning-caused fires. When the early settlers came to the Blue Ridge, they quickly found the “old fields.” Putting them into cultivation and pasture, they cut new openings in the forest.

The forest that provided the setting for this activity still mantles the Appalachians below 4,000 feet. A source of wonder 200 years ago, it is today recovering well from indiscriminate logging and uncontrolled fire. Dominated by thick-bodied oaks and yellow-poplars and brightened by a multitude of flowering trees, it is one of the world’s most varied and vigorous forests. Along much of the Parkway, chestnut oak (not to be

Among the most beautiful of pines is the eastern white pine, a native variety planted thickly along the Parkway in many locations.



confused with the now nearly extinct American chestnut) and yellow-poplar remain the dominant natural species. Beautiful white pines, some of which were planted in abandoned farmlands, now grow close by the Parkway at many places, too.

At first this forest fell slowly. Then, in the early 1900s, mature forests by the millions of acres were logged. Almost at the same time, the American chestnut, a tree species of predominant importance in these mountains, was virtually wiped out by a man-introduced blight. By the 1920s, the southern mountains had extensive open land.

A reversal of the trend began in the 1930s. By then most of the best timber was gone, many small farms had been aban-

doned, and much land was eroded and exposed to the elements. Under the management of the U.S. Forest Service, several national forests were created in the southern Appalachians. Young trees began to grow on old fields, covering the worn landscape with a mantle of green. With government ownership and management of the land, new roads and the automobile opened the mountains to the public. In response to demands for recreational facilities in the mountains, construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway was begun; today it is nearly completed.

The Mountain People

The people who witnessed these changes were, in the beginning, not greatly different from many other Americans. Of mostly

English, Scottish, Irish, and German ancestry, they paused only briefly on the eastern seaboard before migrating down the Appalachian mountain chain from Pennsylvania. Farming and hunting in the region’s endless, haze-filled coves and hollows, they quickly created lasting ties with their surroundings. While most Americans were developing new attitudes and adapting to changing times, the mountain people continued with an isolated, subsistence way of living that we can in some ways envy today.

Few of us, however, would want to tackle the problems the mountain people took for granted. As outsiders separated by time and distance from the mountain isolation of decades ago, we can choose the best of that culture

Boiling sorghum cane squeezings into syrup is a generations-old practice still a part of life in these mountains.



Blue Ridge Parkway photo

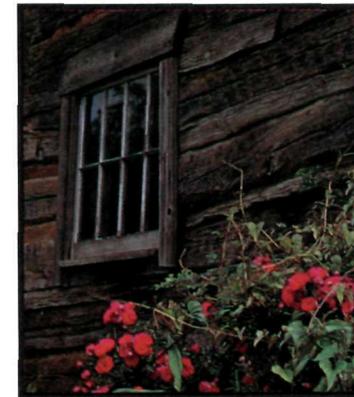


and avoid its problems. So we tend to forget that mountain women were often old by the time they were 35 and that people tended to ruin the land and be ruined in return. Instead, we remember their self-sufficiency and artistry. We remember the cultural virtues of the southern highlanders and we record the rest, hoping, perhaps that we may in some measure better our own lives.

At any rate, there is a good sampling of history along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Some of the history is intentionally recreated; the National Park Service sees to that. The rest is there because the elements haven't quite obliterated it or because it has been preserved. The early settlers raised the rough-hewn cabins which are open to visitors

Powered by an overshot millwheel, Mabry Mill grinds corn and provides Parkway visitors with a taste of hill-country history.

A detail of the Puckett Cabin, where a much-loved hill country woman spent a life in service to others.



at such places as Humpback Rocks, Peaks of Otter, Matthews Cabin at Mabry Mill, and Puckett, Smartview, and Brinegar Cabins. The places of trade that were contemporary with those cabins are preserved in the Yankee Horse logging railroad spur (extending 10 miles beginning at Milepost 34.4), the James River and Kanawha Canal (Milepost 63.6), Polly Woods Ordinary (Milepost 85.6) and Mabry Mill (Milepost 176.1).

Common to all these places is their kinship with the land. Wood, rock, and earth are the stuff and substance of the buildings. With antique tools bearing names like adze, maul, and froe, the mountain farmers cut and shaped carefully selected logs, notched them to fit tightly against

one another, and built their log houses. Taking stone from the rocky slopes they built chimneys, and with clay cut from the hills they sealed the cracks and wed the stones.

Though most of the early mountain structures have disappeared, their builders passed on a way of living, and therein lies much of their importance today. The National Park Service, recognizing that fact, attempts to staff historical areas with employees who revive the skills of the southern highlanders. Often in period dress and with tools in hand, craftsmen mill grain, weave, forge iron implements, and otherwise re-create an earlier scene.

The effort produces results that empty buildings could never hope to achieve. The difference

Wooden shingles, or "shakes," served as roofing material for generations. With the passage of time, lichens encrust the shakes.

Hands grown old draw ageless music from a dulcimer at Mabry Mill.



between hearing a dulcimer respond to the gnarled hands of someone old enough to have known it from childhood or smelling warm cornmeal as it sifts from between millers' grindstones, and walking past museum exhibits is often the key to emotionally sensing what it was like to be in the mountains 50 or more years ago. For many of us, that is the difference that counts.

Aside from the historical exhibits and activities of the National Park Service, there remain along the Parkway the farms worked by the generations of southern mountain people who were either less isolated or more closely bound to us in time. Seen along the high country on Whetstone Ridge (Mileposts 20-30) and from south of



Roanoke to near Moses H. Cone Memorial Park (Mileposts 292-295), these later farms represent the sort of rural America that succeeded in the days before agribusiness.

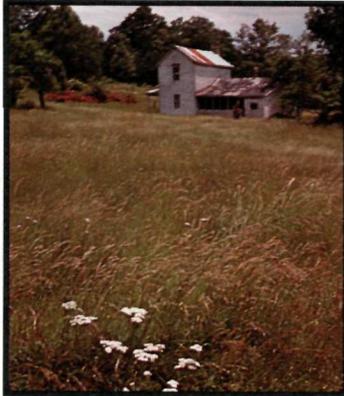
Cattle graze on high slopes, old barns stand starkly against the sky, and fence rows circle the bluffs. Farmhouses, some abandoned and now overgrown, mark time on green hillsides. The scene is as American as a 19th-century landscape painting, and is in complete contrast to modern homes and developments often seen near the Parkway.

Former Parks and Estates

Not all of the open land paralleling the Blue Ridge Parkway is the legacy of the mountain farmer. Until the 1950s, sections of land the Parkway now

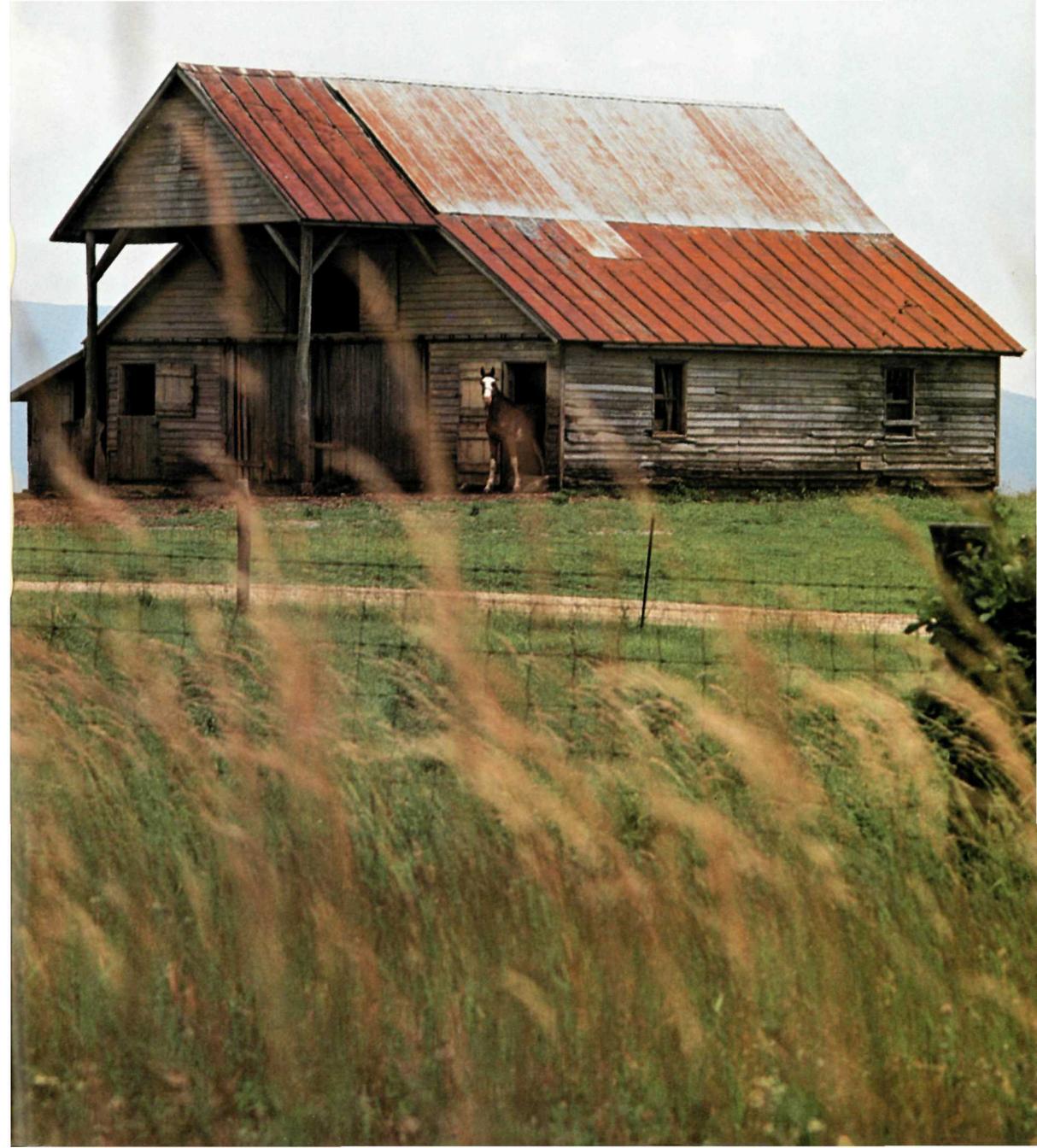
Weathered barns like this one at Whetstone Ridge, Va., mark the passing seasons along those portions of the Parkway given to agriculture.

Farmhouses, some now abandoned, serve as reminders of the time when generations lived together in a world of custom and consistency.



traverses were maintained as private estates and parks. The Moses H. Cone and Julian Price Memorial Parks (Mileposts 292 and 295) began when wealthy interests created private edens in the hills of western North Carolina. Julian Price, an insurance company executive bought the land now bearing his name in the 1930s and 1940s. Most of the slopes in that area had been logged of their once-superb forest, but Price envisioned a vacation retreat there for insurance company employees. After his death in 1946, the land was donated to the National Park Service. Today, Price Park is an area of open meadowlands and second-growth forests laced with streams and dominated by a beautiful artificial lake.

Moses H. Cone Memorial Park,



another area of extensive open land, dates from 1897. In that year, Moses H. Cone, a textile millionaire, bought the property for use as a private retreat. The manor house, now the Parkway craft center, was constructed, and the land surrounding the house was landscaped. Cone planted thousands of fruit and ornamental trees, and carriage roads—about 20 miles of them—were built through the alternating forest and meadowland of Flat Top Manor, as he named his property. Two lakes were constructed and stocked with fish. Deer, then rare in the region, were imported and freed to roam part of the land. Nearly one square mile of the estate was devoted to farming. Cone died in 1908, but by that time his magnificent estate was well along toward completion. With

On this porch, Moses Cone, his family, and guests, spent summer hours contemplating a private kingdom of orchards, fields, and lakes.

Flat Top Manor, centerpiece of Cone Memorial Park, adds a pleasant Victorian touch to the Parkway scene.

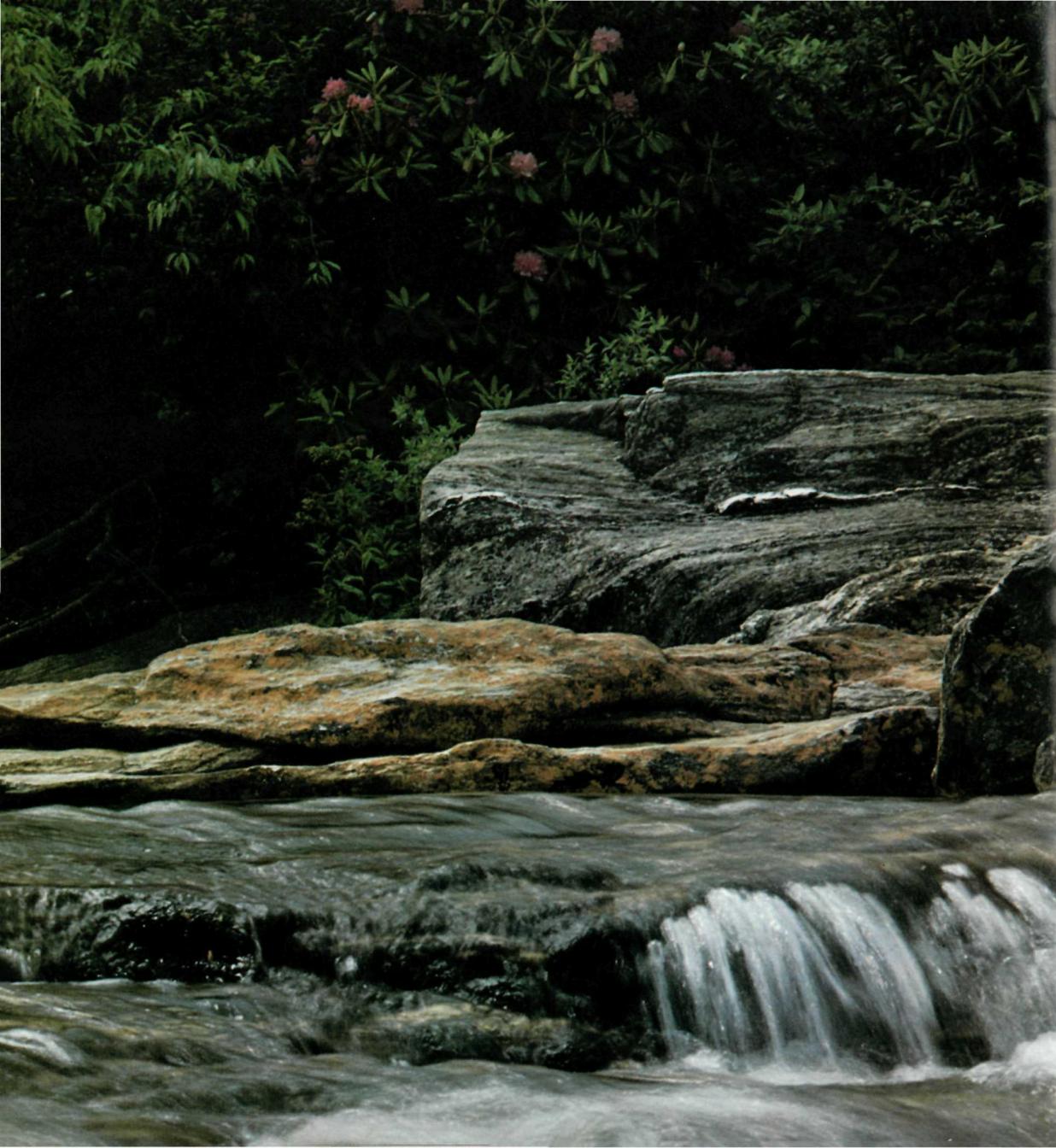


the death of his widow in the late 1940s, the land was transferred to the National Park Service. Today, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park is a recreation area where visitors can ride horseback, hike, fish, or just enjoy relaxed surroundings.

Graveyard Fields: A Legacy of Fire

Less benevolent than landscape planners, but unmercifully efficient in clearing the land, was fire. Scourging thousands of acres, fires opened the land, beginning the process that converted forest into fields and brushy areas. Particularly is this true at Graveyard Fields (Milepost 418.8), a high valley and mountainside that apparently earned its name when a severe windstorm toppled many trees. Eventually, vegetation covered





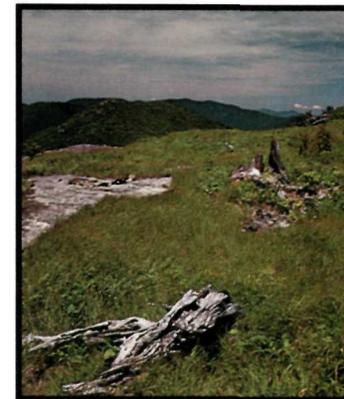
the logs, creating green mounds that resembled graves.

Until 1925, the Graveyard area and the high ridges beyond were covered with spruce, fir, and yellow birch. A great fire that year, however, reduced the forest to ashes. Forest growth is still spotty and stunted, the long-term result of fire so intense that it burned into the very topsoil. As vegetation returned, seeds germinated on a landscape of mostly mineral soil—not the thick organic soil of pre-fire days.

Laurel and rhododendron returned on north-facing slopes like those leading down into the Graveyard Fields. Below, along a small, clear creek called the Yellowstone Prong, and downstream toward a small waterfall

Yellowstone Prong tumbles past hillsides covered with rhododendron and sparse forest as it crosses the Graveyard Fields.

On Black Balsam Knob, near Milepost 420, high grasslands sweep across smooth summits. Once covered with forest, this area was burned in 1925. Only a few scattered firs occupy the slopes today.



grandly named Yellowstone Falls, a dwarf forest of serviceberry, mountain holly, and fire cherry covered the land. Near the falls view at the East Fork Overlook and southward past Graveyard Fields, the Parkway arcs through this forest. Spruce and fir have not yet begun to reclaim their former domain.

Where Yellowstone Prong meanders through open glades of oat grass and highbush blueberries, the Fields have become a family place. The setting is right for children to explore a little, throw stones in the water, or pick blueberries. At 4,900 feet, the Fields are high enough to offer relief from the heat and to encourage an hour or so of just sitting, perhaps to watch for golden eagles or ravens high overhead.

The look of the Graveyard today is not at all unpleasant. Nobody would deny the lost beauty of mossy spruce-fir forest; yet an open, high-country blueberry-and-grass glade has its own beauty. While man watches, the Fields go their way to forest. The decision to leave the scene to nature here is, after all, the best.

Set against the skyline just south of Graveyard Fields is a series of high ridges that was crossed by the fire as it blackened its way over the mountains in 1925. No more than a glance is needed to see that here is rare country for the Appalachians—miles of high, open grasslands with only sparse groupings of stunted firs. At Milepost 420, a short, unpaved side road leading to the Shining Rock Wilderness Area

Meadow flowers brighten an endless succession of fields and invite close inspection from those who appreciate nature's small rewards.

The Graveyard Fields, 50 years ago stripped of their forest by fire, have become an open, inviting place where visitors can wade in the Yellowstone Prong, pick blueberries, or just run in the warm, green grass.



M Woodbridge Williams

provides a close view of these grassy ridges. Hikers can experience the fullness of the land by taking the Art Loeb Trail where it intersects the side road.

High, open grasslands like these are so untypical that one cannot properly place their mood within the context of the Appalachians. The feeling here, at least to those who have been across the United States, is likely to seem more western—perhaps like the Black Hills of South Dakota. With peaks looking remarkably like the foothills of the Rockies folded against the horizon and what seems like boundless prairie close by, one can easily imagine a herd of bison grazing quietly in the distance.



Epilogue

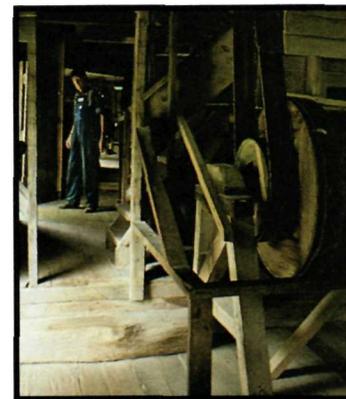
The southern mountains are more vital than they have been in the past 75 years. Man's activities involve a degree of restraint today that at least permits management of forest and parklands. Even so, subtle environmental dangers, most affecting not just the Blue Ridge Parkway but whole regions, are becoming evident as increasing populations utilize complex technologies and ever greater amounts of energy. Ultimately nature will dominate the land; whether man will co-exist or be excluded remains to be seen.

For the moment, at least, the forest, with its trees, wildflowers, shrubs, ferns, and wildlife, has returned, enfolding the region's tumbling streams and waterfalls. Meadows, the creative contribution of man to nature, comple-

ment the scene in fine contrast to the forest. The Blue Ridge Parkway, weaving together the best of forested mountains and grassy meadows, harmonizes both elements and extends the reach of man appreciatively into America's natural and rural heritage.

Ferns and firs at Mount Pisgah speak subtly of beauty and convey the sense of understatement that so characterizes the southern highlands.

At Mabry Mill, a millkeeper glances at the building's aged beams, belts, and pulleys.





As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting

our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to

assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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