

## Great Smoky Mountains – 1936

Narrator: In magnificent natural beauty of the American National Parks have gone many companies of the Civilian Conservation Corps to further projects which will guard this wealth of beauty against destruction by men and nature. It is not make work. Since it came into existence in 1916, the National Park Service has setup long-range plans for the preservation and enjoyment of the parks. And the coming of the Conservation Corps immediately presented the Service with a strong young force to put these plans into action. Atop the purple high country of North Carolina and Tennessee, lies the Great Smoky Mountains National Park – 300,000 acres of southern highlands wilderness which an act of Congress gave national park status in 1933. National parks are not built. God did that in the beginning, so work in them is directed at the preservation of their splendid features and the making of these features more comfortably accessible without disturbing natural conditions. Great Smoky, containing some of the highest peaks east of the Rockies, and nearly 200 varieties of native flora, represents a typical American region which must not be destroyed. Fire, man's best servant and worst master, can sear a timbered area for generations to come. So despite the heavy rains in the southern mountains, every precaution is necessary. Fire towers, location finders, communication lines, and firefighting apparatus – standard equipment in all national parks – will be provided here.

Emergency Conservation Work funds are speeding the task of making the Great Smokies recreationally useful to the public. It is important that the few essential roads do not mar the park. Here's one through famous Newfound Gap, one of the unique spots 5,045 feet above the sea. Sometimes retaining walls are 100 feet high. Heavy stone parapets give travelers a sense of security in high places.

Heavy machinery up in the clouds.

Sure-footed mules lead the way. Then the motor squadron.

The winds and sleet of the winter storm [...] the backs of many trees. But those which fall are set up again in the form of bridges and guard rails. Stone and rustic construction are trademarks of the Conservation Corps. For centuries fallen trees across racing streams have been the foot bridges of these Anglo-Saxon mountainfolk. Development plans in Great Smoky blend with this early custom. Nature trails are delightful features of nearly all national parks. In their construction care is taken not to harm the natural surroundings. A variety of wildflowers abound in Great Smoky and their protection is important.

In national parks, hunting is outlawed, but controlled fishing is permitted and in the streams of the southern mountain trout are plentiful. Natural spawning beds are provided.

National parks have distinguishing features. In the Great Smokies there is being preserved a record of the life and customs of some of the most interesting of the early American pioneers. Colonists, looking for a new and quiet land, pushed south and west from the Atlantic and settled in these mountains. Travel was difficult in those days and change is still slow. The southern mountainfolk retain the pure Anglo-Saxon influence in their songs, legends, and characteristics of speech. In the peaceful valleys and coves it is not unusual to find cabins and other farm buildings which were erected 200 years ago. The breadth and thickness of the timbers is mute testimony to the labor of some pioneer in erecting them. These timbers were fashioned from forest giants and only crude hand tools were available. The American educational system in the raw. Initials were carved on these desks by the children of pioneers.

One of the proposed park museums and exhibits of dramatic interest will be this old rifle known throughout the area as the Charlie Gun. This was Cherokee Indian country. In one encounter between the Indians and advancing white settlers, according to the still-prevailing legend, Charlie – an heroic Cherokee – surrendered on the promise that his haunted and harassed tribesmen would be saved from death. According to the story, he arranged for one of his companions to shoot him from ambush after his surrender, saving him from the imprisonment he had elected to endure. This is the gun which was used.

The act of Congress establishing Great Smoky Mountains National Park prohibited any direct appropriations for development until such time as certain commitments had been fulfilled by the original owners of the land. But, when the Emergency Conservation Work program was undertaken, it was found possible to assign Civilian Conservation Corps units to much of the preliminary and important work which needed to be done. At times there have been as many as 15 Conservation Corps camps in the park, with a working force of approximately 3,000 men. These burlesque signs, which enrollees near Elkmont, Tennessee chose to affix to their camp buildings, illustrate an interesting and serious phase of the Civilian Conservation Corps movement. Here are boys who were struggling in the congested areas of the large cities, most of them from New York and New Jersey. They knew their 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, their Riverside Drive and their Metropolitan Hotels, but these national institutions had not added much enjoyment to their lives. They didn't know the greater outdoors where, perhaps, the great opportunities for their future may lie. The Corps transported them physically and transformed them mentally. They're happy, healed, and saved for better days. They're paying their way with manual service and making an important contribution to the health and happiness of millions now living and still more millions of the future. In their leisure time a well-organized educational program, which is a part of the Conservation Corps movement, is using their magnificent surroundings as a university campus with inspirational venues which scarcely can be surpassed. Practical knowledge, more applicable to present day needs than any they have acquired before, is being given them. And they look to the future with high hopes and high chins.