

# A turtle visits the Shining Rock

Allen Jernigan

Editor

Like a turtle, I strapped my belongings on my back and joined the ever-growing ranks of solitary back-packers. But it was without knowledge of the consequences of my actions that I assaulted the Shining Rock Wilderness Area.

Shining Rock is west of the Blue Ridge Parkway, near Brevard, N.C. Isolated, but easily accessible, it is rapidly becoming one of the region's most popular backpacking and hiking areas.

Once off the easiest trails, the terrain is rugged enough to challenge the experienced and give the novice a nightmare. I rapidly found myself slipping into the latter category.

Outfitted with enough gear to climb Mount Everest, I hoisted my pack upon my shoulders and took two steps. I stopped and realized that I had no idea where to find the trailhead.

Confused, but confident, I began to walk in circles. This continued for half an hour. Then unassumingly accepting the counsel of two young Atlanta women—who readily admitted to skinny-dipping and nude backpacking, but had the discretion to slip into bikini bottoms and damp T-shirts as I approached—I began my ascent to Shining Rock along the Art Loeb trail.

I don't know who Art Loeb was, but I suspect him of masochism. The trail that bears his name leads over a mountain innocently called Black Balsalm Knob, and struggles two or three hundred miles upward in sharp zigzags to a windswept summit.

From the mountaintop, Art Loeb leads deceptively downward along the back of a grassy ridge populated by rabbits, mice and rattlesnakes. Winding back and forth over innumerable mountains, the trail comes at last to Ivestor Gap, where a cleverly hidden spring awaits to refresh the thirsty.

The gap also boasts of an open field that pretends to be a campground. Strewn with beer cans and rusted debris, Ivestor Gap was obviously home to those less than hard-core hikers who pack in beer instead of provisions and are lucky to pack themselves back out again.

I thought seriously of camping at the gap, but having no beer—much to my regret—I moved on.

The trail splits at Ivestor Gap. The low road follows an old railroad grade over much of the distance to the summit. But ever the intrepid traveler, I took the high road.

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HEW-imposed deadline was drawing near. Raymond Dawson, a UNC vice president and a key negotiator for the University in the dispute, urged at the time of the agreement that the settlement be finalized by both the UNC Board of Governors and HEW before the Board adjourned its April meeting.

Judge Pratt's latest ruling provides that HEW give NAACP lawyers three days before accepting or rejecting any desegregation plans. No previous agreements reached between the University and HEW are to be affected by the ruling. The ruling will, however, affect two critical reports from the University which are scheduled for August and December.

But it remains unclear from the ruling

Once again the Art Loeb trail climbed another mountain over four hundred miles high. Along the way I found several stone cairns, piled there, I assumed, to mark the remains of those hikers, who being of strong mind and weaker bodies, ignored the numerous benefits of the low road.

In the face of such warnings, I chose my pace with due caution and deliberation, pausing every few steps to adjust my hip belt, sip water and save myself the trauma of complete exhaustion.

I reached a peak that should have been Shining Rock. But nothing shone there, and having heard that the mountain takes its name from a peculiar quartz formation, I searched for one in the underbush.

Disappointed, I continued onward. The trail turned abruptly around a large rock and dove into a dark forest roofed with the pink blooms of mountain laurel.

The air hung heavy with the thick scent of laurel flowers, and echoed with the buzzing of millions of bees.

Beyond the forest was Flower Gap, where a group of men from an outdoors school had a lively camp. As the lot were busily smoking a marijuana cigarette, my sudden approach startled them, they tossed it into their fire.

A half mile from Flower Gap, I made my camp at the edge of a dense forest. Recalling my Boy Scout days, I set out immediately to gather wood and build a fire. Several false starts and a burned thumb later, I had succeeded, using no paper and only a quart of Coleman fuel.

The time that elapsed as I built my fire were the last hours of daylight. I occupied myself with lighting my backpacker's stove.

The fire rapidly consumed all my firewood, and in the darkness I could find no more. Thus I cooked by the nebulous light of the cookstove and the fire's tired embers.

What was left of dinner after I knocked it off the stove deserves no comment.

Holding a small flashlight in my teeth, I splashed a little water in the dishes. Then suspending my food a foot or two off the ground in a nearby bush, I retired.

I had erected the tent between bouts with the fire. Eagerly, I crawled inside. Wrapped in my down sleeping bag, I lay me down to sleep.

I climbed Shining Rock the next morning. The summit was crowned with grand outcroppings of white quartz, wreathed all about by the branches of flowering laurel.

I fully intended to hike four or five miles

just how the Fund lawyers will influence future negotiations. The Fund has already made it clear that it will probably disagree with the UNC report scheduled for December. Spokesmen for the Fund have said that HEW is not judging UNC by the same standards used for other universities involved in desegregation disputes.

Julius Chambers, chairman of the Legal Defense Fund, said "I would assume that if the reports don't reflect the steps that need to be taken to comply with Title 6, we would point this out to the secretary." Chambers resigned from the UNC Board of Governors last year when his dispute with the Board over desegregation of the University system came into conflict with his position with the NAACP.



Staff photo by Allen Jernigan

A wayward turtle

north to Cold Mountain, but somehow I sprained my ankle. No, it wasn't quite a sprain, but that ankle was surely not in the best of health.

Limping homeward to avoid serious injury in the deep woods, I came suddenly upon a rattlesnake. He was peaceably asleep and impersonating a stick until I woke him and he became most belligerent. The creature coiled himself across the trail and shook his rattle.

I considered this an open declaration of war, and pelted the snake with rocks. He began a slow, calculated advance. I retreated out of range and searched my backpack for my trusty Saturday Night Special.

Several minutes later, the pistol was loaded and I attacked, firing six shots in a wide, but ineffective pattern. The snake advanced again, a cold reptilian look in his eyes.

Spilling shells across the trail, I reloaded. I knew a well-aimed shot was necessary. That shot struck a tree across the trail.

Desperate, I laid on the ground, and faced the animal, lizard to lizard. On a hunch, I aimed several feet to the right of the snake. The first shot hit him, as did the second, but the rest went wild.

strategically retreated. I hurried on, fearful lest he call in all his relatives for revenge.

Hours later, I reached the parking lot and my long lost automobile. It was like a home-coming. As I stretched out on top of the car, a couple aimlessly wandered by.

"Looking for the trailhead?" I asked.

They nodded, and I sagaciously pointed out the route over Black Balsalm Knob.

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