

Article On 'Land Of Noonday Sun', With Franklin Dateline, Goes To Papers Over U. S.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article, bearing a Franklin dateline, is being widely published. The article, dealing with the attractions of Macon County and Southwestern North Carolina, recently was sent by the State News Bureau to the travel editors of approximately 250 newspapers and other publications over the United States.)

BY BILL SHARPE

FRANKLIN, N. C.—Nantahala, the Indians called it, "Land of the Noonday Sun," because its gorges were so narrow and deep that only at high noon did the sun penetrate their depths. The Sapphire Country, the whites call it, either because of the precious stones once mined here, or because of the color of its many small lakes.

The most rugged of the western North Carolina mountains, and largely embraced in Nantahala National Forest, the southwestern tip of the state offers a distinctive vacation land. It is characterized by dense forests and peaks crowned with azalea or rhododendron, by fast-moving streams, waterfalls and sheer cliffs.

The refreshing coolness of mountain water is everywhere. Highlands has the record rainfall for North Carolina—80 inches. On the forested slopes rise the headwaters of the Little Tennessee and its tributaries—the Tuckasegee, the Cullasaja, the Nantahala, the Hiwassee. If you didn't know this was Indian land, every landmark would remind you with the peculiarly soft, lipless names given them by the Cherokees.

US 64 from Franklin to Hendersonville is one of the most scenic routes in America. It follows the course of the Cullasaja River with its deep gorge and series of spectacular waterfalls. Whiteside Cliff, Glenn Falls, Horse Cove, the Bull Pen section and Cashiers Valley, all near Highlands, offer exceptionally rugged mountain scenery and are accessible from this highway. Along this route between Highlands and Franklin the Forest Service has developed the Van Hook Glade campground with facilities for tent or trailer camping. Cliffside Lake, adjacent to Van Hook, provides picnicking, swimming, boating and hiking facilities. At Dry Falls a trail has been built down to the falls where visitors may walk along a wide ledge of rock behind the falls and view the gorge below through the iridescent veil of water.

Near Highlands, Ammons Campground has been developed. Trails lead to the rocky bluffs near by and to Ellicott's Rock on the Chattooga River where one may rest, his hand in

North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia at once.

On the Nantahala road, a Forest development which connects US 64, six miles west of Franklin with US 19 in the Nantahala Gorge, many recreational attractions are available. At Arrowwood Glade rustic benches, tables, fireplaces, swimming pool and pure spring water have been provided to make an outing as enjoyable as possible. Here are up-to-date rearing pools where fingerling trout are raised to be transplanted into the streams of the forest. At the arboretum, more than 100 different species of the native trees and shrubs have been labeled for easy identification.

On the crest of the Nantahala mountains on the Appalachian Trail is the Wayah Crest campground, favorite camping spot of those early risers who wish to watch the sun climb into view from Wayah Bald. A spur road leads from the Nantahala road at Wayah Gap to the top of Wayah Bald at an elevation of 5,300 feet. The road is framed with masses of azalea, laurel, and rhododendron which are in bloom from June 1 to the 30th. From the Bald one may look down on the green valleys along the Tennessee river, the small white dots that are homes in Franklin, while right at hand are masses of fragrant white azalea blending to the flame colors lower on the slope. At every step a new view appears, the hazy Smokies of the Tennessee, the Blue Ridge in Georgia and North Carolina, or off to Stump House Mountain in South Carolina.

From Wayah Gap, one may continue to the Winding Stair portion of the Nantahala road, which bends and drops and curves down into the Nantahala Gorge, classed as a No. 1 sight by North Carolinians.

From Nantahala station on the river, US 19 leads to Topton and the junction of US 129. Near here a point on the highway offers a panoramic view of the Nantahala Gorge. This is a vast sweep of blue distances, towering mountains and profound valleys and gorges with streams and waterfalls.

On US 129 a road to the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest passes through secluded coves, along the shores of Lake Santeetlah and has its terminus in the glade-like parking area near the edge of the Joyce Kilmer Forest. This living memorial to the author, although available to the public, will be preserved in its natural state. The timber here is one of the few examples of the hardwood forests which covered the slopes of the Appalachians when Columbus discovered the new world.

Here popular trees, some exceeding 20 feet in circumference,

tower for more than 100 feet into the sky. Magnificent hemlocks, red oaks, and many other varieties of trees stand as worthy neighbors in the groves of poplars. Mountain flowers, ferns and mosses carpet the forest floor and one seems to hear the words drifting through leaves accompanied by the music of the brook:

"I think that I shall never see A poem lovely as a tree."

Loop trails, simple foot paths, have been constructed from the parking area to various points of interest. One trail leads into the heart of Poplar Cove, where on a natural stone boulder, at the foot of a towering hemlock, a bronze plaque has been placed commemorating this memorial to Joyce Kilmer. Another trail leads up Little Santeetlah Creek to Naked Grouper Gap on top of the Unicoi Mountains and overlooking the haunts of deer, bear, wild boar and turkey. Trails on top of the mountain lead to Stratton Bald, Haeo and Hangover Mountains, all more than 5,000 feet in elevation.

Near Rainbow Springs, on US 14, a Forest Service road leads up to the foot of Standing Indian Mountain. Lean to shelters, 12 replaces and log tables have been provided for camping or picnicking. From Deep Gap a trail leads to the top of Standing Indian, the highest mountain in the Nantahalas. The vast field of purple rhododendron is a colorful attraction when it is in bloom about June 1. The mountain overlooks the Tallulah River drainage in Georgia and one may see the

largest lakes in this valley glistening in the sun. The rock mass which resembles a standing Indian, the Indian dance ground, the caves in the side of the cliffs, all offer opportunities for exploration.

The Sapphire country now contains a number of lakes, all of them man-made, and including Fontana, Hiwassee, Chatuge, Glenville, Santeetlah.

Resorts in or near the forest include Franklin, Cashiers, Highlands, Fontana, Robbinsville, Bryson City, Cherokee, Murphy.

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