

Book Review: 'Back Roads...' Off The Beaten Track

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

If ever the medium was the message, the softcover travel guide, "Back Roads of the Carolinas," by Earl Thollander is a prime example.

This easy-going, hand-illustrated description of interesting out-of-the-way spots in North and South Carolina, is written by hand in easy-to-read print that one can imagine the author penning by side of the road.

Also, his 134 sketches, done on the spot as he comes upon breathtaking views or fascinating artifacts, convey the notion that leisurely travel off the main highways and into obscure villages and dirt roads is a wonderful way to go.

Each of the book's six sections, arranged geographically as he meandered across the two states, begins with a sectional map (hand-drawn, of course!) that helps the reader locate back roads that may be missing on the big state maps. He also advocates getting county maps from the state Department of Transportation.

Leafing through the 192-page book,

published in 1985 by Clarkson Potter Publishers, one feels he is reading a letter from a friend.

"Along Road 1153," he writes from Jackson County, N.C., "I draw a typical mountain home. It is Mother's Day. The family is gathered on the porch after Sunday dinner. I can hear cowbells jingling, the pleasant sound of the stream directly below me, conversation and laughter from the porch. Leftovers are finally portioned out for everybody to take home. By the time I have finished my drawing, good-byes have been said, and Ma and Pa are alone, busily cleaning up."

The picture on the facing page beautifully illustrates this scene.

Thollander took a secondary road off Hwy. 133 to find his Brunswick County subjects: Orton Plantation and Brunswicktown. He briefly

details the history of these places with some tidbits not generally known.

Many of his drawings are rich in detail, like the kitchen of Governor Charles Aycock's restored birthplace near Fremont. Here, a wealth of curious cooking implements from another age are hung and stacked around an old brick fireplace.

Others are curiosities, such as the sheet metal sign sketched near Wadesboro, an intriguing assortment of designs flanked by a big tin

woodsman; and the porcelain leech container found in the Country Doctor Museum (the only one of its kind in the nation).

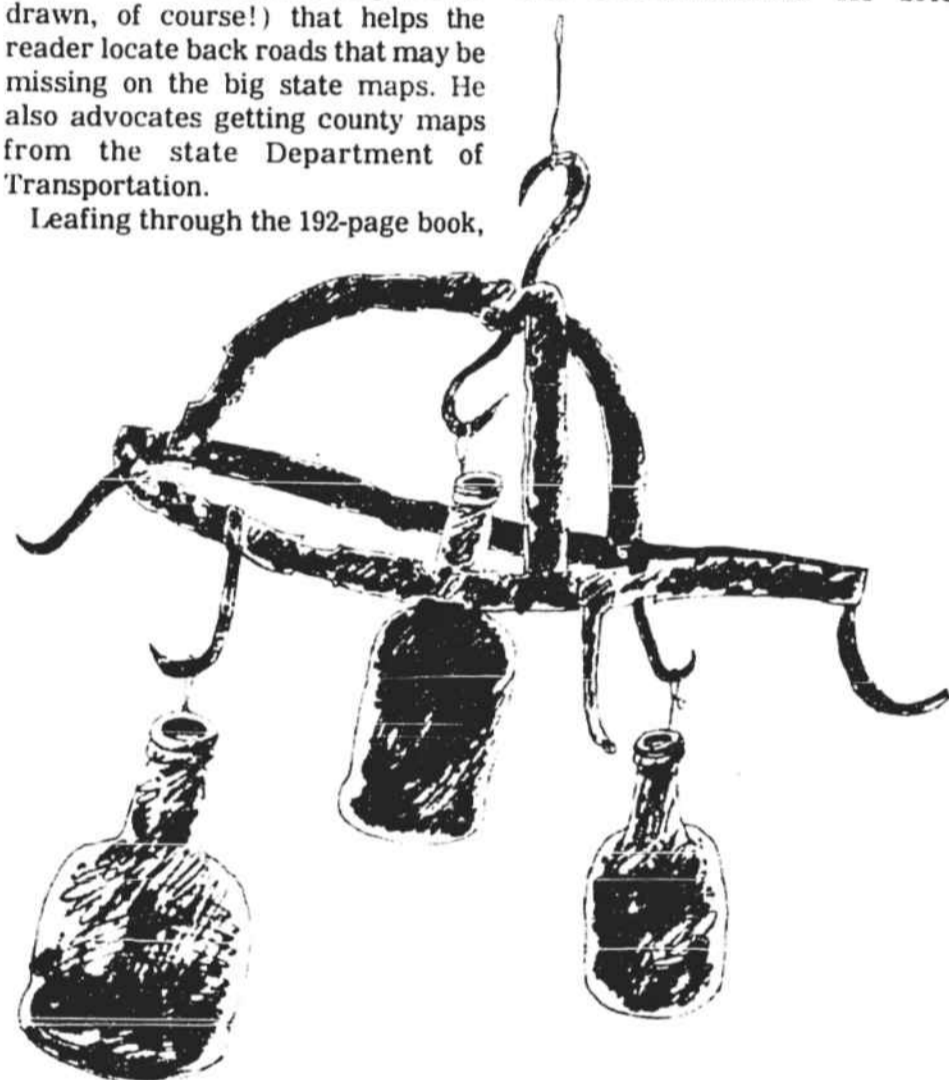
But most are pastoral or marine scenes indigenous to our area: Strawberry chapel dwarfed by a massive live oak, dripping wisteria; a tobacco barn near Asheboro; shrimp boats lined up in Oriental; and farms, swamps, streams and flowers that are abundant in our rural areas.

Thollander's affectionate, yet

historical and informational approach to each area he visits, makes the book a good companion for any traveler.

The best way to use it is to adopt his unhurried attitude as you maneuver the back roads, and to take time to examine the varied delights you can find far from the roar of traffic and the billboard-lined superhighways.

For an unusual view of two beautiful states, "Back Roads of the Carolinas" is an exceptionally entertaining guide.



A COLONIAL FOOD COOLER, once used by William Dry of Brunswicktown, sketched by Earl Thollander. Lowered into a well in his cellar, this device chilled wine to the proper temperature. It was excavated and is displayed in the visitor's center.



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