

# RANGE: of monadnocks, a unique treasure in region and as old as Appalachians

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crustal collision between the European, African and North American continents "slammed a lot together", Cooke said, creating a range of mountains that were once more massive than the Himalayas.

"It seems likely that rugged peaks rose to heights of as much as 30,000 feet. The tallest of those peaks were probably in the area of today's eastern Piedmont and Coastal Plain with lower mountains and hills sloping away toward both east and west," according to Fred Beyer in "North Carolina: The Years Before Man - A Geologic History".

Centuries of erosion have worn them down to size. Today, the range of nearly a dozen peaks extends about three miles from southern Gaston and Cleveland counties into York County, SC. Its highest peak, the Pinnacle at an elevation of 1,705 feet, marks the range's northern end.

The mighty monadnocks once marked the boundary between the hunting lands of the Catawba and Cherokee Indians and a major trading route of the Cherokees crossed Crowders Mountain, according to the park.

By 1775, the range and its surrounding area was home to thousands of settlers and in 1780, King's Mountain became a battlefield for American independence. The rich minerals found along the range have led to a miner's paradise throughout the years with a gold rush, pre-dating California's, and lithium-bearing spodumene, used today in transportation technology.

"Geologically classified as kyanite-quartzite monadnocks, only the strength of quartzite has allowed these pinnacles to withstand the wind, water and other forces that eroded less resistant peaks," according to the park.

"Heat and pressure from the continental collision more than 300 million years ago changed the original rocks of the Kings Mountain belt. The old sedimentary and volcanic rocks were metamorphosed into new rocks," according to an exhibit at Crowders Mountain State Park.

Sandstone became a much sturdier quartzite. Shale morphed into phyllite or mica schist. Conglomerate sedimentary rocks (chemically cemented pebbles and sand) became metaconglomerates. They are all



The peaks of the Kings Mountain Range appear in the distance of this photograph provided to The Herald by photographer Ellis Noell.

unique creations of a series of geologic events that shaped the range we know today.

Quartzite, one of the hardest rocks known to man, dominates the monadnock matter of the Pinnacle and Crowders Mountain in the Kings Mountain range.

"Quartzite is composed almost entirely of quartz, making it extremely resistant to weathering and erosion," according to the park.

It also seems to be resistant to the tools of man. Cooke remembers a time when excess rain was washing out part of a trail at the park. To divert the flow, they decided to break off six inches of a quartzite rock. Not so easy.

Using a jackhammer, Cooke said they "mushroomed" about three carbide drill bits and got nowhere. They called in a Bobcat ex-

cavator, which finished the job, although its hydraulics were blown in the process.

Another metamorphic rock in the range - kyanite - attracted the attention of miners in the 1960s. The story of Crowders Mountain State Park began with the threat of open-pit mining for kyanite.

Local citizens outraged over the mining, urged the state to acquire the land and establish it as a state park, which officially opened to the public in 1974. The minerals and metamorphic rocks and the story of their beginnings are preserved at the park.

Geologists suspect that millions of years of geological activity around the Piedmont area with crusts fracturing, sediments melting, magma erupting, land sliding and hot springs bubbling all led to the formation

of a complex region known as the "Kings Mountain Belt".

"The belt is well-known for its variety of mineral resources including iron ore, lithium-bearing spodumene, lead, gold, tin and lime in the form of marble," according to Beyer.

And when you stand on the Pinnacle today, you're

standing on the cross-section of layers of folded rock, once miles beneath the surface, that were thrust upward - remnants of that great collision.

Cooke added that because of the collision of the three continental plates, rocks matching ones at the park can be found as far off as Europe and North Africa.



Metamorphic rocks at Crowders Mountain State Park.

# SCHOOL: employees resign after audit highlights alleged 'misuse' of taxpayer dollars

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external (outside) auditing firm.

Finance Director Dr. David Lee outlined at the board's work session last Monday the numerous procedures in place for purchasing by cards, including the amount of expenditures in the school district that are made with their use.

Lee said that last fiscal year total purchase orders, including warehouse orders issued, was approximately \$17,000. Total expenditures by purchase order, excluding capital outlay and child nutrition, totaled \$19,369,843, total expenditures by card was \$986,193 and total expenditures by card, excluding capital outlay and child nutrition, was \$968,193.

Lee said that just over 200 cards were in use at one time, the number is down to just over 170. He justified the need for availability of a credit card when registering teachers for workshops so teachers won't have to pay out-of-pocket and wait for reimbursements. The school system has since revoked credit cards in the system's maintenance departments in Shelby and Kings Mountain and indicated that the number of credit cards available in the system will continue to decline.

Analysis of funding sources by the state auditors for the school district determined that the allegations were connected to local taxpayer funds, according to Wood in her letter to school officials.

Wood said in her letter to Boyles that the investigation was the result of a complaint through the State Auditor's Hotline concerning inappropriate activity by employees of Cleveland County Schools. It was alleged in the complaint that school district employees were using a school district procurement (credit) card to purchase items for personal use. It was also alleged that school district employees were misusing school district vehicles and equipment.

To conduct the investigation, the auditor said that the procedure was to review applicable N.C. General statutes and school district policies and procedures; examine relevant school district records and documents; and interview school district employees and management and individuals external to the school district.

The district has two Maintenance Plant Operations Divisions; one located in Shelby and one in Kings Mountain. Each division is managed by a director who reports to the assistant superintendent for operations. The Shelby plant division has a staff of 21 employees while the Kings Mountain plant employs 18 with five employees being shared by both offices.

The report identified the

Shelby division maintenance director as the person responsible for authorizing personal purchases.

State investigators suggested disciplinary action against the maintenance director and a closer look at the way the school employees spend money. The investigative report said some maintenance department employees used more than \$2500 in local funds to buy food, clothes, flowers, a higher-end camera and car supplies for personal use and also determined that the school system utilizes over 200 credit cards. The investigators cautioned that while procurement card purchases require monthly approval by a department head, the widespread use and volume of transactions increases the risk that inappropriate transactions will be approved and paid. Every employee who received a credit card must sign an Employee Procurement Card User Agreement, which safeguards and protects assets and taxpayers money, and further, the agreement requires that the user acknowledge that they cannot use the purchasing card for any illegal or personal use, the investigators said. The agreement further denotes that improper use of this card may result in revocation of the card and disciplinary action that may include termination and legal action.

The audit findings labeled internal control deficiencies contributing to employee misuse of school district assets. Several school district officials and employees told investigators that a prior unwritten practice allowed school district employees to take school assets, such as tools and other equipment, home for personal use as long as it was returned.

A bucket truck and tractor were found on school property in late March or early April 2011. Neither vehicle was included on the school district's inventory listing,

according to those interviewed by the auditors, possibly due to an incomplete equipment inventory when the three school districts merged in 2004.

An internal investigation by school officials found that the bucket truck had been parked on land owned by Shelby maintenance mechanic Hurd for two years, who admitted he had transported the bucket truck to his property to assist in clearing trees after an ice storm.

However, he said the bucket truck had become inoperable and that he had been unable to repair the truck and return it to the school district. He returned the truck in April, according to the report.

As a result of the internal investigation, the maintenance mechanic was placed on investigatory suspension, according to the report. He disputed the time the equipment was on his property. School district management could not determine where the tractor had been, who took it, or how it arrived on school district property.

The report stated that the Shelby Plant Operations director admitted authorizing the use of trailers to move an administrative assistant to a new residence and the purchase of a digital camera and providing it to others to use.

The report emphasized that school district employees did not comply with existing policies and procedures regarding adequate documentation for payments, approval of expenditures, use of purchase orders, and submission of expense reports; including no receipts or invoices to support purchase of clothing in 2007. A review of the 39 "monthly transaction log" in the maintenance department for credit card forms submitted between July 2007 and March 2011 revealed that the employee "signature" line was either left blank or signed as "same." None were reviewed or approved by the Shelby Plant operations di-

rector's supervisor, assistant superintendent for operations, or any higher level of management.

According to the state auditor's report, the unauthorized purchases totaled \$36,206.83.

The audit report said that the Credit Card User Manual requires that the principal department head is responsible for reviewing all charges and that the school district policy is that a purchase order is required for items costing more than \$500.

Without a corresponding purchase order, the report says that the Shelby Plant operations director purchased a truck bed cover (\$895.53), tires for personal vehicle (\$733.92 and \$672.90) a video camera (\$709.86), an iPad,

(\$797.33) and a digital camera (\$1,415.27).

The auditor questions failure to submit expense reports or requests for absences for professional leave and no receipts submitted for hotel and travel costs, which were paid for by the school system's credit card.

The recommendations from the state auditor:

- consider disciplinary action against individuals who misused school district assets;
- develop policies that explicitly prohibit the personal use of school district assets;
- take a complete asset inventory to provide a baseline of school district assets;
- periodically conduct unannounced physical inspections and inventories of assets to improve accounta-

bility.

• seek repayment for any unauthorized or improper purchases; initiate a training program to ensure compliance with administrative policies and procedures;

• ensure that all credit card purchases are supported by appropriate documentation and approved by the employee's supervisor.

"While we take any financial irregularity seriously, we have in this case recovered all of the personal purchases and equipment identified in this report, taken appropriate personnel action, put in place safeguards and preventative measures, and will take further steps to guard against recurrence in the future," Dr. Boyles said.

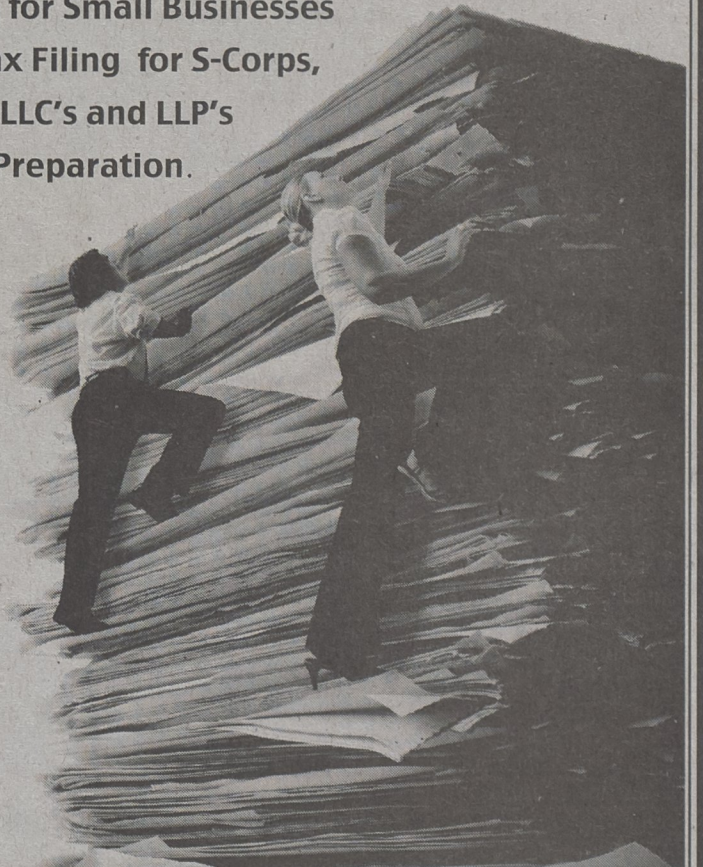
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