



## Great Smoky Mountains Hike Trip Notes April 28 - May 6, 2012

It was a challenge getting to Knoxville, base of the Great Smoky Mountains, as much because we had Tom's 77<sup>th</sup> birthday party the night before and also because the airlines don't go to Knoxville except via a circuitous route. I came through Dulles which turned out fine since there was a lovely Lufthansa Lounge there.

**Birthday!** Here's what Tom says is the funniest card he ever received. It was his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday and we are both grateful to feel young despite the higher numbers we see.



**The Greenway** - I like to arrive at a destination early and did so again, birthday party or not, and thus had all day Sunday to do as I pleased and it turned out to be an absolutely delightful day traversing the Greenway through parks and wooded areas for about 4 ½ hours. While it wasn't a top 10 hike it gave me lovely experiences all day from listening to the birds serenading me next to the babbling brooks to watching the daddies take their little kids bike-riding to seeing the old folks walking their dog on what had to be a long stretch. It was the ultimate simple but feel good day: one can't ask for more. Even the 85 degrees or the surprise blister couldn't take away my total delight at the day which left me ready for more the next day when the Timberline hike began.

**Changing Itinerary** – I suspect that whenever you do an inaugural tour/hike that things will change and change they did. In some cases as a learning experience, in some maybe because too many hands had been in the planning stage, it being too big a park to scout well ahead of time, trying to cover what some might think is too much ground by road, and then compounded by the weather which ranged from a high of 90 degrees to a low of maybe mid-50s. The driving distance was far too much and yet we all understood why. For the excellent commentary on The Great Smoky Mountains, I'll retain the original itinerary since the next tour of the Smoky Mountains might well include some of it. What we did?

Day 1 – Laurel Falls of about 3-4 miles

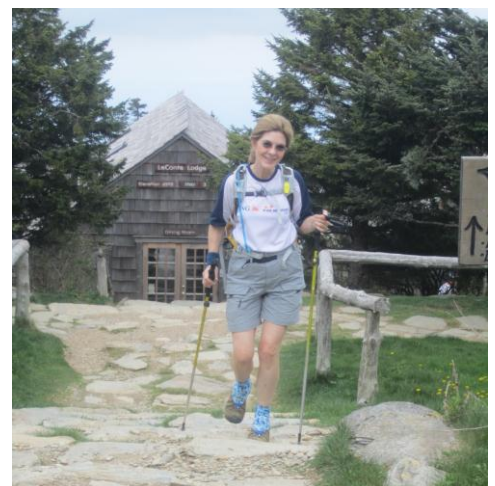
Day 2 – Rich Mountain Loop of 8 ½ miles and 1800 feet elevation

Day 3 – Indian Flats Falls of 8 miles with waterfall

Day 4 – Le Conte of 10-11 miles and 2800 feet elevation –The event of the week and pictured here

Day 5 – Kephart Cabin of 4 miles then Juney Whank Loop Trail of less than 1 mile

Day 6 – Piece of Appalachian Trail towards Charlie's Bunyon starting at border of Tenn/NC for about 2 hours



From [www.TimberTours.com](http://www.TimberTours.com) and what had been planned:

### Daily Itinerary

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Day 2	Cades Cove – Rich Mountain Loop	8.5 miles
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**Total Hiking Mileage - 49.1 miles**

Still from Timberline Adventures: *We're a group forever boasting of our unparalleled focus on the national parks and monuments of the U.S. and Canada....*



*Great Smoky Mountains National Park, one of the most remarkable and certainly the most popular of America's national parks.... timed to capture both the spring bloom in late-April. In so many ways, Great Smoky Mountains is a park dedicated to hiking and we'll be challenged by the park's 850 miles of trails to select those that will provide our hikers with a varied experience and a true sense of those features for which the park is famous. When one considers the park's proximity to so many major population centers of the eastern U.S., it's difficult to form an image of wilderness, but, under the protection and guidance of the National Park Service, wilderness survives in Great Smoky, and our hikes in Cades Cove particularly will convey that sense. The Great Smoky Mountains, though perhaps not as dramatic and in-your-face as some of our western ranges, are incredibly rugged and they will surprise you. You won't soon forget the*

*climb to Le Conte, only the third tallest of the park's peaks at 6,593', but it will be your Everest. The wilderness feel of the park is due in no small measure to its almost unbroken cover of trees, and the size, variety and, in the fall, color will astound you. Water is everywhere—creeks, streams, prongs, waterfalls, cascades—and we'll cross many, sometimes on bridges, sometimes on footlogs, and sometimes on nothing other than the soles of our boots. These are just a few of the elements that make the Smokies special.*

*We'll hike along Alum Cave Creek to and through Arch Rock, beyond Inspiration Point to the Bluffs, hopefully with an opportunity to see the peregrine falcon nesting atop these rocks (4.6 miles). Following the hike, we'll shuttle to Townsend, just outside the park's boundary, for our first of three overnights at the Highland Manor Inn.*



Here is our group doing what we do best – picnic and enjoy the scenery after some hiking.

Hotel Highland Manor Inn – 3 nights  
7766 E. Lamar Alexander Parkway, Townsend, TN 37882 Tele 865 448 2211

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Hotel Charleston Inn – 2 nights  
208 Arlington Avenue, Bryson City, NC 28713 Tele: 828 488 4644

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#### **The Great Smoky Mountains**

This has been a national park since 1934 and covers the last of the southern Appalachian forest. It's huge with over 520,000 acres and with more than 9 million visitors annually making it the highest visitation of any national park. It probably doesn't hurt that it sits within a day's drive of a very large population.

The Cherokee described these mountains as shaconage meaning blue, like smoke. The bluish mist, which clings to the mountainsides and fills the valley gives the park its name and remains among its most distinctive features. Pollution has added to it.

Among the oldest mountains in the WORLD, the Smokies teem with life. Punctuating this phenomenal biodiversity is one of the nation's largest collection of historic log buildings.

The forests range from 840 feet up to 6600 feet. It is WET with about 100" of annual rainfall in the upper reaches.

Most amazingly the park's abundance and variety of plant and animal life have earned it the United Nations designation of International Biosphere Reserve. Scientists estimate up to 100,000 different types of plants and animals live in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. When Discover Life in America was founded in 1998, fewer than 10,000 had been identified; however, researchers have added more than 6,400 new species to the park including over 900 that were previously unknown.

Noted sights include Clingman's Dome, Mount Le Conte, the sheer rock pinnacles of Chimney Tops, the 100 foot waterfall Ramsey Cascades and the scenic and historic sites at Cataloochee Valley, Cades Cove and Ocanaluftee. There are over 800 miles of hiking trails that crisscross the park so I guess I'll have to go back again to even barely touch the surface. There's said to be over 150 official hiking trails.

**Photos shown chronologically. . . .**



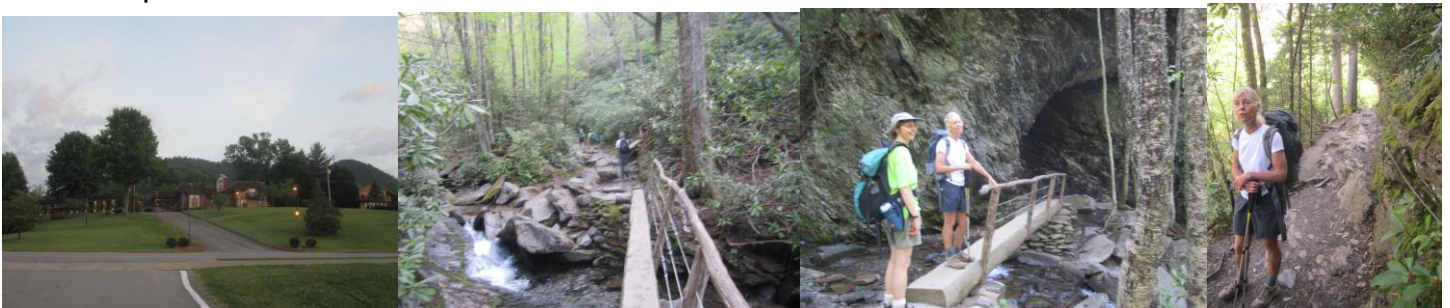
Sugarland Park was about 1 ½ miles from my hotel and then it was a Greenway connecting one park after another and generally all along a creek bed. A dog show entertained many -- me included -- then while I watched the fishermen wheel in small wide-mouth bass this little cutie appeared and made for an extreme disconnect from the fishermen. The next day it was about an hour to our first hike where we plopped ourselves down on the logs to enjoy our picnic lunch. Nothing like walk and eat. Eat and walk. Do the mountains look hazy? That's why they are called Smoky and/or Blue Ridge and I'm sorry to report that it's mostly due to pollution.



The Park has preserved some of the original homesteads and this one was from early 1800s. We would picnic in these grounds. I certainly preferred the Charleston Inn where we stayed and was amused by the little kitty that followed us everywhere. The Park is a rain forest producing 100" of rain a year and thus there were waterfalls and streams everywhere.



More streams and waterfalls where we picnicked. I told you we hiked and we ate. Over and over again. The old car carcass was left from an 1800s resort long gone but it left us junk to take pictures of and a wide path where there had been a road. We did have more days of clearing than rain and this is the sky over our Highlands Inn after dinner one night. I'm afraid the color might be granted to us due to pollution.



This is our Highlands Inn up on a hill in Townsend, Kentucky. Followed by the first of many log bridges that we were both grateful for and worried about holding up. One carried us into a cave. That's Carol on one log bridge and also on a pathway up to Le Conte.



The cliff overhand was most interesting both for its soft sand that made it challenging to get up there and for the fact that it existed in this clearing at all. Huge and it came after the bridge into a cave that took us up stone steps to another level. See the log at the end that has been carved into stairs?



Yes, that's a major drop off and probably the reason the parks has installed many steel cables as handrails. But we happily got up to the top of Le Conte maybe 2800 feet of climb to the near 6600 feet mountain. This is Gerrie and Jerry; just when you think you're superwoman for getting up the mountain then you realize that Mr. and Mrs. Gerry and Jerry did it too and they are in their 70s and Jerry has a new knee! Then see Dick and Carol, owners of Timberline Adventures or maybe we should say past owners as they've just sold to Dave and Kisa. They have however agreed to stay on a couple years and lead tours and this is one reason I signed up for an Inaugural to be sure I was with them at least one more time. They are similar age; Dick is not well but he stubbornly insists on doing everything with everyone and that's probably what's keeping him with us. He had a lot of band aids and boo-boos but never complained and was always smiling just like here.



Le Conte is along the lines of a Phantom Ranch (Grand Canyon) but UP the mountain instead of DOWN in the canyon. Hikers have it on their Bucket List. Le Conte sells t-shirts bragging on getting up there. The cabins are somewhat simpler and there are NO showers. The view can be spectacular and one feels they earned it. Le Conte facilities are quaint especially the Men's Room that says "Standing Room Only."



Gads but this was a big contraption and I'm sorry to say but I think it is a bear trap. The bronze shoes were of Ed Wright, founder of El Conte apparently. Timberline had arranged for us to have lunch in the cafeteria and while simple it was special and the oatmeal brownies were the BEST! I was pretty grateful for the coffee too.



This is just one of the many cabins and the one also used for the offices. Inside cabin #5 would sleep 5. Honest. But I wouldn't be one of them; I'd suggest if you go to book and pay for 3 or 4 fake people. I was grateful to have the Highland Inn and Charleston Inn. Here I am in front of the main building used as a cafeteria and the building with the large balcony with rocking chairs.



Coming down from the hike on the Appalachian Trail we were to find some 30 Mustangs – loud Mustangs – owned by members of the MustangMaffia.com. I'm glad they weren't at our lovely little B&B called Charleston Inn in Bryson City.



One morning it was raining rather heavy and the fog had rolled in so we went to the noted Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee and got a little shopping in too. The huge carved statue of Chief Cherokee was by an artist who has some 40 similar works around the country. Cherokee's little t-shirt shops were apparently less offensive than those of Gatlinburg. They also had their collection of bears made into art work sort of like Chicago had cows, Palm Beach had alligators and Cincinnati had Pigs.



There were many log bridges and gratefully I didn't know how loose the banisters were until we were long gone from the park and someone told me. See Dick and Carol having a picnic? I told you we hiked and ate and ate more.



More log bridges. More water. And not only did we have the Mustang rally but a Bug Festival and the picture of all the multitude of Volkswagen Beetles clues you into what was the Bug. This young gal was met on the Appalachian Trail. She'd started in Georgia one month prior and hoped to make it up to the end in Maine before the snows stopped her in her tracks. Why is she smiling? She had just come from a long awaited and needed stop when she got a shower.



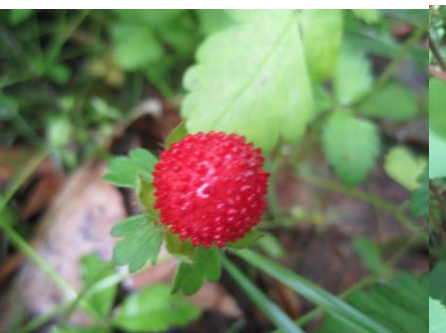
I didn't like the slippery rocks of the Appalachian trail so came down early to find this haze and view. Also to find that hiking wasn't all that good for everybody: somebody had heart failure up on top of the mountain and this is the stretcher with wheels that the rangers would go up to retrieve them. We saw the ranger with the heart defibrillator on the way up but couldn't imagine that it would take much too long for help.

**Wildflowers**

It was the season and it had been so wet that we were granted a wonderful array of wildflowers and some rather rare too. I saved them for the last and I'll give you about 1/10 of those I took.







## ***The End***

Yet it was only the end of The Great Smoky Mountains. Now I'm off planning Machu Picchu but not until I'm done with the West Virginia 50K, the Berkshires marathon and Lake George visit with Marie, up to the Hudson River Valley and famous estates, a visit to Kansas City, Stockholm's 100<sup>th</sup> Olympic Jubilee marathon and my hopeful 100<sup>th</sup>, Copenhagen, Australia's Outback Marathon around Ayres Rock and a week in Sydney with Tom, hiking in Beartooths mid-August then Canadian Rockies late August, Switzerland with Tom in September, maybe Lake Tahoe marathon if I haven't died by then, Buenos Aires with Tom plus a marathon in this city said to be like Paris, San Francisco in October followed by a week's hiking at Point Reyes National Seashore, maybe a hike in Arizona before leaving to Peru in November, the End of the World Marathon in December maybe followed by The Day After the End of the World Marathon for optimists, ending 2012 with Vienna for Christmas and New Year's with Tom and Marie. Enough? Only if I can't find a few days to wedge in another trip!

I know – when I say I want to hear from you, your first thought is: “I Hate Her.” But please don't -- my wish for all my friends is that they don't have to wait until they are 60 to see these places and then need to cram them all in while mobile.

**From others –**

**US Legal System** Any relationship to marathoning? I hope not, but . . . Charley and Barbara are my amazingly smart friends and it seems important to share this observation even though it's on a totally different subject. Here's Charley who is accompanying Barbara on her study and work missions in Italy. *San Partignano and the "communita" treatment system is why Italy keeps 112 people per 100,000 in prison and why the USA keeps 780 per 100,000 locked up. For youth (under 18) the US system is insane - the US incarceration rate for youth is 23 times that of Italy (yes statistically adjusted for proportional age distribution). Before we go bankrupt in the USA paying taxes to keep people in prison we need to study other approaches to non-violent crime and adopt the "medical" rather than "criminal" model for drug problems. Anyway - I'll leave the heavy thinking to Barbara who is writing a scholarly book about this among other things - but that is my observation after learning more about European criminal justice.*

**Diane** did Lake Perry 50K outside of Kansas City over Mother's Day weekend. Here she is with Carol and John. She claims it might even be harder than Capon Valley's 50K!



**100 Marathon Club** - From late last year, a delayed congratulations to Diane for qualifying for the 100 Marathon Club. (Could Maniacs take a lesson in logo design? This one is nice.)



**Future runner!** Denise of Palm Beach and a recent hiker with me has been having big influence on her granddaughter. Look at this prospective Olympian runner – she's flying off the ground!



**Itinerary**

**Sat Apr 28**

11:30am Depart home  
  
1:40pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#4945  
3:11pm Arrive Washington DC Dulles IAD for plane change  
4:52pm Depart Washington DC Dulles IAD via UA#5843  
6:21pm Arrive Knoxville TYS

Hotel Fairfield Inn and Suites Knoxville/Alcoa Airport – 2 nights  
126 Cusick Road, Alcoa, Tennessee 37701 Tele: 865 984 9350  
Conf#88206716 for 2 rooms – employee form required and Diana to check in others

<http://knoxville.airporthotelguide.com/map.htm>

Host hotel Holiday Inn Express/Airport  
130 Associates Blvd, Alcoa, TN 37701 Tele 865 981 9008

**Sun Apr 29**

Open See Dick and Carol?

**Mon Apr 30 – Day 1**

8:30am Meet in lobby of host hotel Holiday Inn Express/Knoxville airport – be dressed for hiking

Shuttle from the Knoxville airport area early morning and drive directly to the park.  
32 miles/50 minutes from Knoxville or 20 miles/30 minutes from airport.

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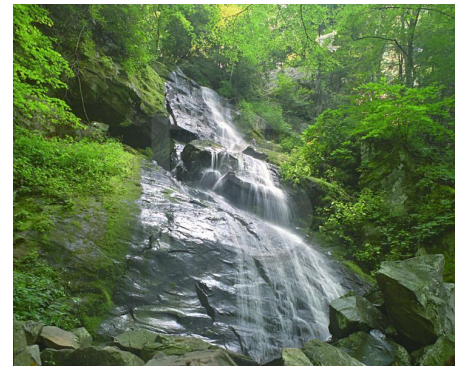
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Return to airport or hotel by 5pm

Hotel Fairfield Inn and Suites – as above – 1 night

### **Sun May 6**

Hotel has airport shuttle

1:32pm Depart Knoxville TYS via UA#4501

3:30pm Arrive Newark

From Steve 6/25/11

Wears Valley is an area just north of Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Townsend is on its west side and is the northwestern entrance to the park (the T/L tour would probably stay nights one and two in Townsend). Pigeon Forge is at the east end of Wears Valley; Gatlinburg (location for nights 3/4 of T/L tour and gateway to north/central portion of park) is due south of Pigeon Forge.

Prospective date for May trip is 5/13-5/18 or 5/20-5/25 (probably the earlier). FYI (if it matters), besides the excellent hiking on both trips, the May trip would be more a wildflower trip; the October trip fall colors (which can be amazing).

**From:** Steve Meckstroth [mailto:stevemeck@hotmail.com]  
November 07, 2011 2:44 PM

Hi Diana:

Yes, I did give Dick a draft writeup for Smoky Mountains catalog verbiage, but since I believe they/he decided not to go stay at LeConte Lodge (main reason I speculate is there are no showers there), I do not know how he has revised the last couple days of the tour and/or what he will use for catalog and website. You and Judy are more likely to get info from the office through your inquiries, so I won't bug them (redundantly) for info--the catalog should be out soon as well.

Here is what I am pretty sure about the tour--feel free to pass this on to Judy.

The tour will pickup and end in Knoxville; the pre/post tour hotel will be near the airport on the south side. The tour will stay in Townsend and Gatlinburg--two nights one place, three the other (probably three nights in Gatlinburg is my guess). We will hike several days in the Cades Cove area (Rich Mountain loop and Gregory Bald/Ridge two probable hikes), including getting to drive (and explore a little) the famous 11-mile one-way Cades Cove loop itself. The other hikes will be out of Gatlinburg and/or off of main park road from Gatlinburg up to Newfound Gap (Charlies Bunyon, a point-to-point hike up to near top of Mt. LeConte via Alum Cave Trail/Bullhead Trail/Rainbow Falls/maybe even the Boulevard, short jaunt on Clingman's Dome, maybe the Chimneys). We may also go do Ramsey Cascade in eastern Cosby section of park one day.

There will be pretty significant mileage (at least 50 miles total for six days), climbs and descents most every day, lots of lovely woods, wild flowers, and the occasional opening for big views. Lodging/food likely to be comfortable/good (neither spectacular though like some trips). Weather likely to be pretty comfortable temps but humid--rainy days not out of the question though. No big drives for this trip, most trail heads an hour or less from lodging. This trip will hit many of the highlight Smoky Mountain hikes featured in guide books so we will see a good cross section of the park, though it will only scratch the surface of the hundreds of miles of trails in the park.