



TALE OF TWO CULTURES

Pioneer and Cherokee History are Alive in the Smoky Mountains. Luke D. Hyde is fascinated by his community's history. That's one reason the native of Swain County, North Carolina, bought the Historic Calhoun House Hotel in Bryson City. "We believe the hotel was constructed in about 1904," says Hyde. "If there was an important meeting in Bryson City, it usually took place here."

The Calhoun House got its name from previous owner Granville I. Calhoun, a legendary hunter, fisher and storyteller prominently mentioned in "Our Southern Highlanders," by Horace Kephart. Kephart, a librarian turned naturalist, came to the Smokies in 1904 and built a cabin on remote Hazel Creek. As a leading literary figure in Western North Carolina, Kephart became a persuasive voice in support of establishing the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, a large portion of which is in Swain County. Each year, Kephart fans visit Hazel Creek (now part of the National Park), as well as the writer's grave in a cemetery overlooking Bryson City.

Pioneer Footprints. Swain County visitors have no trouble tracking the prints left by early Scot-Irish immigrants who settled the mountains. The National Park Service has carefully preserved many of the homesteads that are now part of the Park. Shops and artisan studios in the area are stocked with handcrafted items, the inspiration for which can be traced back from generation to generation. And if you're in charming Bryson City on a Saturday night, you can't miss the unmistakable Celtic origins in "Music in the Mountains," performed by musicians who learned their picking skills at granddaddy's knee.

Cherokee Trails. Long before the arrival of European settlers, the Cherokee established a thriving society with sophisticated politics, religion and well-developed agriculture.

When the U.S. government attempted to move the Cherokee to the West, one leader, Tsali, resisted. He and his family hid from the soldiers in the Deep Creek area but were eventually captured. Tsali was executed in 1838, in what is now Bryson City.

Today the heritage of the Cherokee is very much alive in Swain County. There is a historical marker at Tsali's execution site. You can also visit Kituhwa, a sacred Cherokee mound where you'll see Cherokee people working their gardens. The corn, beans and other crops are grown from heirloom seeds handed down for centuries. On the nearby Cherokee Reservation, visitors can tour Oconaluftee, an Indian village patterned after a Cherokee community of 1750. And the outdoor drama, Unto These Hills, tells the story of Tsali and the infamous Trail of Tears that followed.

Respect For the Land. With 87% of their county composed of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and national forest lands, Swain County folks are keenly aware of the need to preserve and protect their home. This respect for nature is deeply ingrained in the Cherokee belief system, and the resurgent "green movement" is evident throughout the community. "We try to do our part here at the Calhoun House Hotel," says Hyde. "We've installed fluorescent bulbs and energy-efficient windows. We're working with the local 4-H and extension service to implement more green features. Swain County people know we have something very special here," he goes on to say. "It's part of our history."

For more information on touring the Smokies, contact the Swain County Chamber of Commerce, 210 Main Street, P.O. Box 509, Bryson City, NC 28713; chamber@greatsmokies.com; or 800-867-9246.