

NEWS FONTANA NEWS DESK

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VISIT A BIT OF SMOKY MOUNTAIN HISTORY

FONTANA, NC. – Due to the overwhelming response to last Fall’s drawdown tours to the site of the Fontana Copper Mine, Fontana Marina will offer tours this Spring and Summer to explore more Smoky Mountain history. Join historian and author Lance Holland for a guided tour of the site of the abandoned lumber town of Proctor located along the banks of Hazel Creek on the north shore of Fontana Lake in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

When *Our Southern Highlanders* author Horace Kephart arrived on Hazel Creek in 1904, he called the region “the back of beyond” and it truly was. Although rich in both timber and minerals, the area was so remote there was no way to get large quantities of heavy materials to market. In the 1890’s Taylor and Crate Lumber Company had harvested a small amount of buoyant logs and floated them down the creek with the use of splash dams to the Little Tennessee River and eventually to their sawmill at Chattanooga Tennessee. But this effort just scratched the surface of the vast forest in the Hazel Creek watershed.

By the end of 1884, Southern Railroad had completed their Murphy Branch Line to the town of Bushnell located at the confluence of the Tuckasegee and Little Tennessee Rivers, but this was still 12 mountain miles upstream from the mouth of Hazel Creek preserving the creeks “back of beyond” status. In early 1906 W.M. Ritter Lumber Company persuaded Southern Railroad to construct a spur line on down the Little T. to the mouth of Hazel Creek where Ritter would build a railroad line up the creek. Now the “back of beyond” could boom.

Ritter named his new town after Moses Proctor who with his wife Patience walked over from Cades Cove to become the first white settlers on the creek in 1829. The Fontana area went through quite a metamorphosis between 1906 and 1945. Railroading, logging, mining, and hydroelectric development made the area buzz, and then resulted in a return to “the back of beyond” status that a select group of people value very much today. More information on the Fontana region can be found in Holland’s book *FONTANA; A Pocket History of Appalachia* available at appalachianhistory.com.

The Proctor tours will depart Fontana Marina at 10:30 am each Wednesday and Saturday. Reservations are strongly suggested since boat capacity is limited to 25 participants. Reservations can be made by calling 800- 849 2258 ext 266. The trip lasts about 3 ½ hours, bring a light lunch and rain gear. Cost is \$15 for adults and \$7.50 for kids 12 and under. Group tours at other times can be arranged by calling Holland direct at 828-479-6960.