

## This Day in History... June 15, 1934

# Great Smoky Mountains National Park

On June 15, 1934, Franklin Roosevelt signed legislation establishing Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Native Americans were likely hunting in the Great Smoky Mountains as many as 14,000 years ago. Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo were likely the first Europeans to visit the Smokies, in 1540 and 1567 respectively, passing through the French Broad River valley.

Europeans increasingly began exploring the Smokies during the mid 1700s. Following the French and Indian War (1754-63), tensions brewed between the native Cherokee and arriving white explorers and settlers. During the American Revolution, many Native Americans, including the Cherokee, supported the British who forbid Anglo-American colonizers from settling west of the Appalachian Mountains. Conflict continued after the war as more white settlers invaded Cherokee territory. By 1800, the Cherokee had been forced to cede the Smoky Mountains to the United States. Three decades later, the Cherokee were removed to the Indian Territory by the US government along the Trail of Tears.



*Farley's Follies Reprint of 1935*

After the establishment of frontier outposts in the 1780s, permanent white settlers began arriving a decade later. In 1801, William and John Whaley became the first-known settlers in the park's present-day Greenbrier section. The following year, William Ogle arrived and settled White Oak Flats. More people soon came and settled there, establishing the town that would later be known as Gatlinburg.

Throughout the 1800s, minor logging occurred in the Great Smoky Mountains. But the inaccessibility of the trees kept major operations out of the area for some time. However, when resources in the more accessible areas of the northeastern US and Mississippi Delta were exhausted, entrepreneurs found ways to log the Smokies. By the 1880s, logging operations were using splash dams to float logs down rivers to lumber mills for processing. Many of these operations failed after a few years when floods destroyed their systems. However, innovations in logging railroads followed, making it even

easier for businesses to destroy the Smokies' precious forest.

As logging companies cleared acres of forest, businessmen saw the Smokies as a tourist spot. Soon the Wonderland Hotel and Appalachian Club were established, drawing wealthy visitors from Knoxville to spend their summers at the mountain getaway. Among these visitors was businessman Colonel David Chapman. He, along with other members of the Appalachian Club, grew concerned over the state of the area and began lobbying for the Great Smoky Mountains to be protected as a National Park.



*Stamp from the Scenic American Landscapes Series*

Chapman was not alone in his efforts. Several others promoted the idea through newspaper and magazine articles or negotiated for the lands. Though the odds seemed stacked against them, Chapman and his supporters succeeded in making almost all the major land purchases by 1932. Two years later, the park was officially created on June 15, 1934.



*Stamp from the National Parks issue*



*From the 2018 O Beautiful sheet*

Chapman became head of the new Great Smoky Mountains Park Commission and began raising money to purchase land. He faced numerous obstacles in dealing with local, state, and Federal issues. Chapman had to convince logging companies to sell their lumber rights as well as purchase thousands of small farms and move entire towns. He faced further difficulties in dealing with the Tennessee and North Carolina governments, which often rejected the idea of spending taxpayer money on the proposed park. The first major victory came in 1926, when Congress authorized the park, but Chapman and his supporters had to raise the money to buy the land.



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