

# history of the smoky mountains

The Rich and Fascinating History of the Smoky Mountains

**History of the Smoky Mountains** is a story that weaves together natural wonder, ancient geology, Native American culture, early European settlement, and conservation efforts that have preserved this majestic range for future generations. Nestled along the border of Tennessee and North Carolina, the Great Smoky Mountains are not only a breathtaking natural landmark but also a region steeped in layers of history that continue to captivate historians, nature lovers, and travelers alike.

## The Geological Origins: Birth of the Smoky Mountains

Long before humans set foot in the region, the history of the Smoky Mountains began millions of years ago through dramatic geological processes. These mountains are part of the Appalachian Mountain chain, one of the oldest mountain ranges in North America. Formed over 200 million years ago during the late Paleozoic era, the range was shaped by the collision of tectonic plates that pushed up ancient rock layers.

The Smokies' distinctive misty appearance, which gives them their name, comes from the natural fog that frequently shrouds the area. This fog is created by the moisture released from the dense forests covering the mountains, a phenomenon that has intrigued visitors and locals throughout history.

## Early Inhabitants and Native American Influence

Long before European settlers arrived, the Smoky Mountains were home to Indigenous peoples, most notably the Cherokee Nation. Archaeological evidence shows that Native Americans inhabited this region for thousands of years, relying on its abundant resources for hunting, fishing, and gathering.

## The Cherokee Connection

The Cherokee called the Great Smoky Mountains "Shaconage," meaning "place of blue smoke." This name reflects the mountain's characteristic smoky haze and highlights their deep spiritual and cultural connection to the land. The Smokies were rich in game, medicinal plants, and fertile land, supporting a thriving Cherokee population.

Cherokee legends and oral histories speak of the mountains as sacred ground, with numerous ceremonial sites scattered throughout the region. Trails once used by the Cherokee for trade and travel would later become important routes for European settlers.

# European Exploration and Settlement

The 18th century marked a significant turning point in the history of the Smoky Mountains, as European explorers and settlers began to venture into the area. Early pioneers were drawn by the promise of fertile land and rich natural resources.

## Settlers and Frontier Life

Settlers from Scotland, Ireland, and Germany established small farming communities in the valleys and foothills surrounding the mountains. Life in the Smokies was challenging due to the rugged terrain and relative isolation, but these hardy pioneers adapted by developing self-sufficient homesteads.

The settlers' relationship with the land was complex. They cleared forests for agriculture, hunted local wildlife, and harvested timber. However, the mountains remained largely wild compared to other parts of the country, maintaining much of their natural beauty.

## Impact on Native Populations

Unfortunately, European settlement also led to the displacement and forced removal of the Cherokee people, most notably during the Trail of Tears in the 1830s. The tragic removal of the Cherokee was a dark chapter in the region's history but is an essential part of understanding the cultural legacy of the Smoky Mountains.

## Logging, Industry, and Environmental Challenges

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Smoky Mountains became a hotspot for logging and industrial development. Timber companies saw the vast forests as a valuable resource, leading to extensive clear-cutting that dramatically altered the landscape.

## The Logging Boom

Railroads were built to transport lumber, and entire mountain slopes were stripped of trees. This period of exploitation threatened to destroy the unique ecosystem that had flourished for centuries. The loss of old-growth forests had significant environmental consequences, including erosion and habitat loss.

## Conservation Awakens

In response to the environmental damage, a growing conservation movement emerged. Local

citizens, naturalists, and organizations recognized the need to protect the Smoky Mountains. This movement ultimately led to the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

## **The Birth of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

One of the most pivotal events in the history of the Smoky Mountains was the establishment of the national park in 1934. It is now the most visited national park in the United States, drawing millions of visitors annually.

## **Efforts to Preserve the Mountains**

The journey to park creation involved negotiations among state and federal governments, private landowners, and conservation groups like the Appalachian Mountain Club and the Sierra Club. The goal was to preserve the unique biodiversity and cultural heritage of the region.

## **Legacy of the Park**

The park protects over 500,000 acres of forest, wildlife habitat, and historic structures. It also preserves remnants of pioneer life and Cherokee history, offering visitors a glimpse into the past alongside breathtaking natural scenery.

## **Cultural and Historical Significance Today**

Today, the history of the Smoky Mountains is celebrated through museums, heritage centers, and ongoing archaeological research. The region remains a living classroom where people can learn about the intersection of natural history and human experience.

## **Preserving Traditions and Stories**

Local communities continue to honor Cherokee traditions and the legacy of early settlers through festivals, storytelling, and cultural programs. This vibrant cultural tapestry enriches the visitor experience and fosters a deeper appreciation for the mountains' past.

## **Ecotourism and Education**

The national park offers numerous educational programs and guided tours that highlight both the ecological wonders and the historical narratives of the Smoky Mountains. Whether hiking a trail, visiting a historic cabin, or attending a ranger talk, visitors are encouraged to connect with the multifaceted history of this remarkable place.

Exploring the history of the Smoky Mountains reveals a region shaped by natural forces, cultural resilience, and a commitment to preservation. As you wander through the misty forests or gaze out over rolling peaks, you're stepping into a story that spans millions of years—a story that continues to unfold with every new visitor who comes to experience the magic of the Smokies.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What are the origins of the name 'Smoky Mountains'?**

The name 'Smoky Mountains' comes from the natural fog that often hangs over the range, appearing as large smoke plumes. This fog is caused by the vegetation exhaling organic compounds that create a bluish haze.

### **Which Native American tribes originally inhabited the Smoky Mountains?**

The Cherokee were the primary Native American tribe inhabiting the Smoky Mountains region before European settlers arrived. They called the area 'Shaconage,' meaning 'place of the blue smoke.'

### **When did European settlers first explore the Smoky Mountains?**

European settlers began exploring the Smoky Mountains in the 18th century, with increased settlement occurring in the early 19th century as pioneers moved westward.

### **How did the Cherokee Nation influence the history of the Smoky Mountains?**

The Cherokee Nation had a significant influence on the Smoky Mountains' history, living off the land for centuries, cultivating crops, hunting, and trading. Their forced removal in the 1830s, known as the Trail of Tears, marked a tragic chapter in the region's history.

### **What role did logging play in the history of the Smoky Mountains?**

Logging was a major industry in the Smoky Mountains during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, leading to widespread deforestation. This environmental impact eventually led to conservation efforts and the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

### **When was the Great Smoky Mountains National Park established and why?**

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park was established in 1934 to protect the region's rich biodiversity, natural beauty, and cultural heritage from the threats of logging and development.

## **What historical significance do the old Appalachian mountain communities have?**

The Appalachian mountain communities in the Smoky Mountains reflect a unique cultural heritage, including distinct music, crafts, and traditions that have been preserved for generations, offering insight into early American pioneer life.

## **How did the Civil War affect the Smoky Mountains region?**

During the Civil War, the Smoky Mountains region was strategically important and saw skirmishes between Union and Confederate forces. The war disrupted local communities and altered the social and economic landscape of the area.

## **What archaeological findings have been discovered in the Smoky Mountains?**

Archaeologists have uncovered ancient Native American artifacts, including tools and pottery, indicating that the Smoky Mountains were inhabited for thousands of years before European settlement.

## **How has tourism influenced the history of the Smoky Mountains?**

Tourism has played a crucial role in the history of the Smoky Mountains, particularly after the establishment of the national park, transforming the region's economy from logging and agriculture to recreation and conservation-focused activities.

## **Additional Resources**

History of the Smoky Mountains: An In-Depth Exploration of America's Majestic Range

**History of the Smoky Mountains** is a narrative that intertwines natural evolution, indigenous cultures, early European settlers, and modern conservation efforts. This mountain range, part of the Appalachian Mountains and straddling the border of Tennessee and North Carolina, is renowned not only for its mist-covered peaks but also for its rich cultural and ecological heritage. Understanding the history of the Smoky Mountains offers insight into the complex relationship between humans and the environment, as well as the enduring significance of this region in American history.

## **Geological Origins and Natural Formation**

The story of the Smoky Mountains begins hundreds of millions of years ago. Geologists date the formation of this range back to the Precambrian era, approximately 200 to 300 million years ago, making it one of the oldest mountain ranges in North America. The Smokies were shaped through multiple geological events, including tectonic plate collisions that caused the uplifting of the mountains and subsequent erosion that sculpted their rounded, majestic contours.

Unlike younger mountain ranges with sharp peaks, the Smoky Mountains' smooth summits reflect their ancient lineage. The range is primarily composed of ancient metamorphic rocks such as schist and gneiss, which have withstood the test of time. This geological history laid the foundation for the diverse ecosystems that would later thrive in the region.

## **Ecological Significance Through Time**

The natural history of the Smoky Mountains is crucial to understanding their ecological richness. The region is part of the Appalachian-Blue Ridge forests, known for their biodiversity. It hosts one of the largest temperate deciduous forests in the United States and is a biodiversity hotspot, home to thousands of plant and animal species. The long evolutionary history has allowed for the development of unique species, some endemic to the area.

The frequent mist or "smoke" that gives the mountains their name is a product of the high humidity and dense vegetation that causes water vapor to condense into a blue haze. This atmospheric phenomenon has fascinated visitors and contributed to the mountains' mystique for centuries.

## **Indigenous Peoples and Early Settlers**

Long before European settlers arrived, the Smoky Mountains were inhabited by Native American tribes, particularly the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee people have a profound historical connection with the land, utilizing its resources for hunting, agriculture, and spiritual practices. Their legends and oral histories often reference the mountains, emphasizing the sacredness of the landscape.

The arrival of European settlers in the 18th century marked a significant shift in the human history of the region. Settlers were drawn by the fertile valleys and abundant natural resources. Small communities developed, relying on farming, hunting, and later, timber extraction. The settlers' presence introduced new cultural dynamics and economic activities, but also led to conflicts and displacement of indigenous populations.

## **Impact of the Logging Industry**

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, logging became a dominant industry in the Smoky Mountains. The vast old-growth forests, with towering chestnut, oak, and hemlock trees, attracted timber companies aiming to capitalize on the demand for lumber. This period saw extensive deforestation, which dramatically altered the landscape and threatened the region's ecological balance.

The environmental degradation caused by logging prompted early conservationists to advocate for the protection of the Smokies. Their efforts culminated in the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, a landmark achievement in American conservation history.

# Establishment of Great Smoky Mountains National Park

The creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1934 was a pivotal moment in the history of the Smoky Mountains. It was the result of decades of campaigning by conservationists, local communities, and government officials who recognized the need to preserve the region's natural beauty and biodiversity.

The park was officially dedicated in 1940 and quickly became one of the most visited national parks in the United States. Spanning over 500,000 acres, the park protects vast tracts of forest, diverse wildlife habitats, and numerous historic buildings and structures from early settler communities.

## Conservation Efforts and Modern Challenges

Since its establishment, the park has been a focal point for ongoing conservation efforts. Initiatives have included reforestation projects, wildlife protection programs, and the restoration of historic sites. The park's management balances the need for public access with the imperative to safeguard fragile ecosystems.

However, challenges persist. Invasive species, climate change, and increasing visitor numbers pose threats to the park's delicate environment. The history of the Smoky Mountains continues to evolve as scientists and policymakers seek sustainable solutions to preserve this treasured landscape for future generations.

## Cultural Legacy and Tourism

The history of the Smoky Mountains is not only ecological but deeply cultural. The region's heritage is preserved in the traditions, crafts, music, and folklore of the Appalachian people. The Smokies have long been a source of inspiration for artists, writers, and musicians who celebrate its natural beauty and storied past.

Tourism plays a vital role in the modern economy of the area, attracting millions of visitors annually. The park offers opportunities for hiking, wildlife viewing, and educational programs, allowing people to connect with the history and environment of the Smokies firsthand.

- **Historic Sites:** Structures such as old cabins, mills, and churches provide tangible links to the past.
- **Flora and Fauna:** Efforts to protect native species like the black bear and native trout underscore the park's conservation priorities.
- **Recreational Trails:** Trails like the Appalachian Trail traverse the park, highlighting its role in outdoor recreation history.

Through these cultural and natural assets, the Smoky Mountains remain a living testament to the interplay between humans and the environment over millennia.

The history of the Smoky Mountains is multilayered, encompassing ancient geological processes, indigenous stewardship, European settlement, industrial exploitation, and modern conservation. This complex narrative enriches our understanding of one of America's most iconic mountain ranges and underscores the importance of preserving such landscapes that hold both ecological and cultural significance.

## History Of The Smoky Mountains

**history of the smoky mountains:** A Natural History Guide to Great Smoky Mountains National Park Donald W. Linzey, 2008 The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is one of America's most beautiful and popular national parks. Located in the southern Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina, it is home to more than 100,000 species of plants and animals. The grandeur and sheer scale of the park has been captured in Donald W. Linzey's new book, *Natural History Guide to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park*. It is the most extensive volume available on the park's natural history. Written from the perspective of a naturalist who has spent over fifty years conducting research in the park, this volume not only discusses the park's plant and animal life but also explores the impact that civilization has played in altering the area's landscape. Linzey, who has been a major contributor to the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, a concentrated effort to identify every species of plant and animal living within the park, draws from this deep reservoir of research. His book provides a thorough overview of everything a visitor to the park would need to know, without complex jargon. Both casual readers and those more interested in the ecology of the Great Smoky Mountains will find this book an enlightening and educational guide. Donald W. Linzey, a wildlife biologist and ecologist, is professor of biology at Wytheville Community College in Wytheville, Virginia. He is an authority on the mammals of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and its environs.

**history of the smoky mountains:** *At Home in the Smokies* Wilma Dykeman, Jim Stokely, 1984 This colorful illustrated official handbook from the National Park Service, describes the people who settled and lived in the mountains along the Tennessee and North Carolina border. Part 1 of the handbook introduces the park and its historical sites. Part 2 presents the region's history from the days of the Cherokees to the establishment of the park in 1934 and Part 3 describes the major historical buildings found within the park.

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**history of the smoky mountains:** *At Home In The Smokies : A History Handbook For Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina and Tennessee* United States. National Park Service, Wilma Dykeman, James Stokely, 2024-04-12 Immerse Yourself in the Rich History of Great Smoky Mountains National Park with 'At Home in the Smokies' Step into the past and explore the vibrant history of Great Smoky Mountains National Park with 'At Home in the Smokies.' This comprehensive handbook, authored by the United States National Park Service in collaboration with Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, offers readers an in-depth look at the cultural, environmental, and historical significance of this beloved national treasure. Discover the Stories of the Land and Its People 'At Home in the Smokies' is more than just a history

handbook—it's a journey through time, tracing the footsteps of the people who have called the Great Smoky Mountains home for centuries. From the indigenous Cherokee tribes to the early settlers and pioneers, each chapter offers a fascinating glimpse into the lives and cultures that have shaped the landscape of the Smokies. Through vivid storytelling and meticulous research, the authors bring to life the struggles and triumphs of those who have lived in the shadow of these majestic mountains. From tales of resilience and perseverance to stories of innovation and adaptation, 'At Home in the Smokies' celebrates the rich tapestry of human history that is woven into the fabric of the park. Explore the Natural Beauty and Cultural Heritage of the Park Beyond its captivating history, 'At Home in the Smokies' also serves as a guide to the natural wonders and cultural landmarks that make Great Smoky Mountains National Park a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Readers will discover hidden waterfalls, scenic overlooks, and historic homesteads nestled among the lush forests and rolling hills of the Smokies. With detailed maps, stunning photographs, and insightful commentary, the handbook invites readers to embark on their own journey of exploration and discovery within the park. Whether hiking along the Appalachian Trail, touring historic cabins, or simply taking in the breathtaking vistas, 'At Home in the Smokies' offers something for every nature lover and history enthusiast. Why 'At Home in the Smokies' Is a Must-Read for Park Enthusiasts: Comprehensive Coverage: Gain a deep understanding of the history, culture, and natural beauty of Great Smoky Mountains National Park through this meticulously researched handbook. Engaging Narrative: Enjoy captivating storytelling that brings the past to life, with vivid descriptions and personal anecdotes that transport readers to another time and place. Practical Guide: Use the handbook as a valuable resource for planning your own adventures in the Smokies, with detailed maps, trail descriptions, and insider tips from park experts. Preserving Heritage: Celebrate the importance of conservation and heritage preservation, as 'At Home in the Smokies' highlights the efforts to protect and maintain the park for future generations. Don't miss your chance to delve into the history and beauty of Great Smoky Mountains National Park with 'At Home in the Smokies.' Whether you're a seasoned park enthusiast or a first-time visitor, this handbook is sure to deepen your appreciation for one of America's most beloved natural treasures.

**history of the smoky mountains:** *At home in the Smokies* Wilma Dykeman, James Stokely, 2025-03-02 *At Home in the Smokies* offers a captivating exploration of the intricate tapestry of life and nature within the Great Smoky Mountains. This collection beautifully marries themes of environmental preservation, cultural heritage, and the complexities of human stewardship with the land. With a range of literary styles—including narrative non-fiction, reflective essays, and poignant prose—the anthology captures the mountains' rugged beauty and the resilience of the people who call them home. The standout pieces provide vivid portrayals of both the majesty and the fragility of this unique ecosystem, inviting readers to reflect on what it means to be truly at home in nature. The anthology is curated by Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, both of whom are revered for their rich contributions to Appalachian literature and environmental advocacy. Their editorial expertise seamlessly draws together diverse voices, all of whom are deeply connected to the landscapes and communities of the Smokies. These authors collectively echo the concerns and joys of mountain life, aligning the anthology with broader literary movements such as regionalism and eco-criticism. This convergence of perspectives is paramount in elucidating the cultural and ecological significance of the Smokies, offering readers a holistic view. *At Home in the Smokies* is an invaluable addition to any bookshelf, providing an insightful journey through the diverse narratives of the Appalachian region. As it gathers a multitude of perspectives under one cover, the collection serves not just as a celebration of natural beauty but as a critical reminder of the pressing need for conservation and cultural recognition. Ideal for both literature enthusiasts and those passionate about environmental issues, this anthology encourages readers to engage with its themes deeply and personally, sparking dialogue that extends beyond the page.

**history of the smoky mountains:** *Mountain Home* Wilma Dykeman, Jim Stokely, Steve Kemp, Kent Cave, 2008-04

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Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina and Tennessee United States. National Park Service, Wilma Dykeman, James Stokely, 2024-07-27 *At Home in the Smokies: A History Handbook for Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina and Tennessee* is a comprehensive guide to the history and cultural significance of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This handbook, produced by the National Park Service with contributions from Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, provides valuable information about the park's history, natural environment, and cultural heritage. The book includes detailed accounts of the park's development, its significance to the local communities, and the various historical events that have shaped its current state. It serves as both a historical reference and a practical guide for visitors, offering insights into the park's natural beauty and historical context. *At Home in the Smokies* is an essential resource for anyone interested in the history of the Great Smoky Mountains and the broader cultural and ecological narratives of the region.

**history of the smoky mountains:** *Short History of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park* Henry I. Lix, 1958

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**history of the smoky mountains: Great Smoky Mountains Folklife** Michael Ann Williams, 2010-04-08 The Great Smoky Mountains, at the border of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina, are among the highest peaks of the southern Appalachian chain. Although this area shares much with the cultural traditions of all southern Appalachia, the folklife here has been uniquely shaped by historical events, including the Cherokee Removal of the 1830s and the creation of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park a century later. This book surveying the rich folklife of this special place in the American South offers a view of the culture as it has been defined and changed by scholars, missionaries, the federal government, tourists, and people of the region themselves. Here is an overview of the history of a beautiful landscape, one that examines the character typified by its early settlers, by the displacement of the people, and by the manner in which the folklife was discovered and defined during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here also is an examination of various folk traditions and a study of how they have changed and evolved.

**history of the smoky mountains: The Great Smoky Mountains National Park** Steve Cotham, 2006 The Great Smoky Mountains National Park has some of the highest, oldest, and most picturesque mountains and ridges in the eastern United States. One of the most biologically diverse regions in North America—with thousands of species of plant and animal life—the park was designated an International Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations in 1976 and a World Heritage Site in 1983.

**history of the smoky mountains: At Home in the Smokies** National Park Service, 2017-07-19 Excerpt from *At Home in the Smokies: A History Handbook for Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina and Tennessee* By the early 1700s, Cataloochee formed a minor portion of the great Cherokee Nation whose towns and villages extended from eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina into northern Georgia. But as time went on, and as the white settlements pushed westward from the wide eastern front, the Cherokees lost dominion over this

vast area. In 1791 at the treaty of Holston, the Cherokees gave up Cataloochee along with much of what is now East Tennessee. Five years later the state of North Carolina granted hectares acres), including all of Cataloochee, to John Gray Blount - brother to William Blount, governor of the Territory South of the Ohio River, as Tennessee was then called. Blount kept the land for speculation, but it eventually sold for less than one cent per hectare. Now that the Cherokees had relinquished the land, no one else seemed to want it. Even the famous Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury. About the Publisher Forgotten Books publishes hundreds of thousands of rare and classic books. Find more at [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com) This book is a reproduction of an important historical work. Forgotten Books uses state-of-the-art technology to digitally reconstruct the work, preserving the original format whilst repairing imperfections present in the aged copy. In rare cases, an imperfection in the original, such as a blemish or missing page, may be replicated in our edition. We do, however, repair the vast majority of imperfections successfully; any imperfections that remain are intentionally left to preserve the state of such historical works.

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**history of the smoky mountains:** *A History of Hunting in the Great Smoky Mountains* Bob Plott, 2008-09-01 Discover the history and lore of this region's legendary outdoorsmen—and their faithful dogs: "Well worth reading" (Bear Hunting Magazine). Man versus beast—it's an age-old struggle that has been part of the rugged terrain of the Great Smoky Mountains since humans first encountered the region centuries ago. Bob Plott, a descendant of the breeder of the Plott hound and an avid outdoorsman in North Carolina, takes readers on a quest back through time for a glimpse into the minds and the rifles of the region's most intrepid hunters. From the primitive weaponry and prevailing tactics of the Cherokee to the audacious rifle-toting ridge runners, and even a gruesome gang of cannibalistic rogues, these stories are truly a gripping tribute to mountain life and the adventure of the game.

**history of the smoky mountains:** **The Great Book of the Great Smoky Mountains** Pasquale De Marco, 2025-05-14 Nestled in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a place of unparalleled beauty and wonder. With its towering peaks, pristine lakes, and lush forests, the park is a haven for outdoor enthusiasts, nature lovers, and anyone seeking a respite from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. This comprehensive guidebook to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the perfect companion for your next adventure in this incredible park. With detailed information on hiking trails, camping sites, fishing spots, and more, this guidebook has everything you need to plan the perfect trip. In addition to practical information, this guidebook also provides a wealth of information on the park's history, culture, and natural resources. You'll learn about the Cherokee people who have called the Smokies home for centuries, the European settlers who arrived in the 18th century, and the conservationists who fought to protect the park in the early 20th century. You'll also learn about the park's diverse plant and animal life, and the importance of conservation in this fragile ecosystem. Whether you're a first-time visitor to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park or a seasoned hiker, this guidebook is the perfect resource for planning your next adventure. With its detailed information, beautiful photography, and engaging writing, this guidebook will help you make the most of your time in this incredible park. So come and explore the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and discover why it's one of the most beloved destinations in the United States. With this comprehensive guidebook in hand, you'll be able to experience all that the park has to offer, from its stunning scenery to its rich history and culture. If you like this book, write a review on google books!

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Opal Snyder, 1935

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