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By: Elizabeth Skene Harper

Abstract

In the early 1930s, a group of hiking enthusiasts from Knoxville, Tennessee, believed no group of persons anywhere would profit more from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park than they. Their club, the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, dedicated itself to bringing a Smokies national park to fruition and developing the Appalachian Trail. During the interwar era, hiking clubs formed across the nation and were integral to generating widespread citizen support for national parks and other wilderness areas. Women were part of the hiking club movement from the beginning and provided invaluable, although often invisible, labor. This article highlights the women in the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club during the 1920s and 1930s who contributed immeasurably to the club's activities. When we study this movement through an interdisciplinary framework of sociability and connective labor, set against the unique cultural and economic conditions of the New Deal and Great Depression era, we see the value of these women's efforts despite being subjected to gender-based notions of skill and ability. Without their contributions, the club would not have sustained its successful and wide-reaching advocacy.

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“THE LADIES MERELY BREATHED DEEPLY”: WOMEN’S INVISIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SMOKY MOUNTAINS HIKING CLUB

BY ELIZABETH SKENE HARPER

In the early 1930s, a group of hiking enthusiasts from Knoxville, Tennessee, believed no group of persons anywhere would profit more from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park than they. Their club, the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, dedicated itself to bringing a Smokies national park to fruition and developing the Appalachian Trail. During the interwar era, hiking clubs formed across the nation and were integral to generating wide-spread citizen support for national parks and other wilderness areas. Women were part of the hiking club movement from the beginning and provided invaluable, although often invisible, labor. This article highlights the women in the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club during the 1920s and 1930s who contributed immeasurably to the club’s activities. When we study this movement through an interdisciplinary framework of sociability and connective labor, set against the unique cultural and economic conditions of the New Deal and Great Depression era, we see the value of these women’s efforts despite being subjected to gender-based notions of skill and ability. Without their contributions, the club would not have sustained its successful and wide-reaching advocacy.

Introduction

Harriett Fowlkes admitted that she did not like the designation of “veteran” hiker. Yet, at a time when she could no longer hike the Smoky Mountains as frequently as she once had, she wrote on her application that she wanted to be “classed as one of the experienced hikers in the days gone by.”¹ Thus, in 1938, Fowlkes became the first female “veteran hiker” of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club (SMHC). Her application demonstrated that she had met the club’s rigorous guidelines for that honor: for at least three consecutive years, she had joined no fewer than 25 percent of the club’s scheduled hikes; she had hiked a minimum distance of three hundred miles, hiked three-fourths of the Appalachian Trail (AT) within the

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Figure 1: Hikers at Three Forks Labor Day, 1933. Left to right: Carlos Campbell, Mabel Abercrombie, Dent Frizzell, Mrs. W. E. Trainer, Hugh Hoss, Carolyn Hogue, Bob McGinn, Elvie Manley, Guy Frizzell, Mrs. Carlos Campbell, Dr. S. Marcovitch, A. G. "Dutch" Roth (photo by Mabel Abercrombie, courtesy of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park).



Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP), and had climbed eleven specific Smokies peaks (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1937).²

Fowlkes, a home economics teacher at Knoxville High School in her early twenties, could have qualified for the honor between 1932 and 1934, but perhaps it was not until the 1937 club hoped that "some of the girls will soon qualify for membership" that she decided to put forward her qualifications (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1937, 62). These credentials, however, did not take into account the tremendous amount of behind-the-scenes work she contributed. An active member of SMHC, Fowlkes was part of a group of hiking enthusiasts from Knoxville, Tennessee, who promoted a Smokies national park and helped develop the Appalachian Trail. Although the GSMNP is now protected on a federal level, it was, like many national parks, largely the result of grassroots citizen activism. Indeed, without the work of Fowlkes and other female club members, the SMHC would not have achieved its sustained level of effectiveness.

Twentieth-century wilderness protection and conservation efforts in the United States are well-documented and often sentimentalized subjects. And yet not much has changed since 1981 when Stephen R. Fox, John Muir's biographer, remarked that "as yet, historians have no idea of where to locate amateur conservation in the context of American reform history" (1981,

351). Since then, important scholarship has been written on conservation gains, particularly in the Smokies, yet most historians routinely gloss over the interwar era when defining modern environmentalism (Sutter 2001).³ Furthermore, absent from the historical record is the crucial yet invisible role of women, particularly Appalachian women such as Fowlkes and her fellow female club members, and their contributions in these early movements.

Scholarship on the achievements of women in the natural world largely focuses on pioneers and groundbreakers.⁴ As in any mass movement, looking solely at forerunners obscures the full story, particularly rendering invisible the women in the background, where they typically worked as “supporters and helpmeets” (Fox 1981, 341). And, although the work performed by women in these movements did not bring them personal or professional prestige, amateurs comprised “the heart and soul” of the American conservation movement (Fox 1981, 334). Beyond her status as SMHC’s first female veteran hiker, Fowlkes served as vice president of the club and on its board of directors; she also frequently led or supervised hikes and was a vacation camp supervisor. Her work, like the efforts of many other women, “has been rendered all but invisible by conservation historians”; nevertheless, it was the work of these women that “transformed the crusade from an elite male enterprise into a widely based movement” (Merchant 1984, 57).

In this article, we glimpse the substantial and necessary work done by everyday Southern Appalachian women in creating what became the nation’s most visited national park, the GSMNP, and the world’s longest hiking-only footpath—the Appalachian Trail. Doing so touches on numerous gaps in the literature: the role of women in amateur conservation movements, the work of hiking clubs in the South, interwar conservation efforts, and the invisible labor performed by women in these organizations. The labor of some of SMHC’s most active women will be analyzed through an interdisciplinary framework of sociability and connective labor. This framework brings to light “a body of un(der)-acknowledged, often immaterial work being carried out by women to support and sustain contemporary social movements” (Boler et al. 2014, 450).

Despite being largely invisible, the women’s work was crucial, and illustrates Carolyn Merchant’s (1984) assertion that “although only the most prominent women appear in recent historical studies, without the input of women in nearly every locale in the country, conservation gains in the early decades of the century would have been fewer and far less spectacular” (57).

Connective Labor and Sociability

The ways women contributed to SMHC, both innumerable and varied, sustained the club’s high level of activity and advocacy, often through

sociability and connective roles. Arlene Kaplan Daniels frames sociability as the work of creating an “ambience that encourages others to attend and participate in the activity” (1985, 363). Furthermore, Daniels outlines two important characteristics of this invisible work: its taken-for-granted nature and the implicit assumptions that the work is trivial and, therefore, something that women are particularly good at (1985). A 2011 study of the Occupy Wall Street movement refers to this type of devalued, gender-divided work as “connective labor” (Boler et al. 2014, 439). Boler et al. (2014) describe connective labor as the “gender-specific forms of invisible labor that catalyze, fuel, and sustain this and other such social movements” (439). While their analysis looks at social media and other new technologies as sites of labor, their three-role framework can also be applied to the era under consideration in this essay (Boler et al. 2014). The first role is the admin, a person who takes responsibility for the logistics of information dissemination. The second role, the documentarian, is characterized as a person who feels a personal responsibility to support others’ learning and participation. Lastly, “most notable, yet least visible,” is the connector (Boler et al. 2014, 448). Like Daniels’s sociability role, the connector is focused on networking and community-building. These roles are not necessarily ones that women, especially the club’s women in the 1930s, sought out for themselves; rather, they fell into these roles because women are seen as inherently more caring than men and have been assigned that social position through institutions, culture, and laws (Wilkerson 2019).

Women are also inclined to undervalue the importance of this type of supporting, background work. In her study of female civic leaders in the 1970s, Daniels found that women often emphasized that their work happened in the background, accepting the implication that their work is less important than that of the publicly visible members, ignoring the importance of “creating esprit and commitment among workers for a cause” (1985, 371). Yet, in the case of the SMHC, fellowship and solidarity were the sources of the club’s effectiveness. In 1931, Paul Fink remarked that the SMHC offered “no formality, no high-hattedness, but a real welcome to a group of wholesome trail-followers, bound together by the tie of mutual fondness for all of Nature’s charms, and for those of Smoky in particular” (quoted in Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1931, 8). Without the women maintaining and growing the membership rolls, planning square dances and educational talks, and other acts of community care, the club’s driving forces of loyalty and determination would have been weaker.

Amateur Conservation and Women’s Participation

In the 1930s, government policy shifted from conservation to promoting the recreational use of federal and state parks, in addition to supporting

New Deal public works projects such as playgrounds, tennis courts, and swimming pools (Cross 1990). In July 1935, the *New York Times* reported an increase in hiking and recreation, thanks in large part to Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) projects (Mettler 1998). It was this “federal reckoning” that became a signature feature of interwar conservation, and it was in the 1920s and 1930s that Americans began to know and define their ideas about nature through leisure rather than labor (Sutter 2001, 290). Anne Whisnant explains that “wilderness advocates set their sights firmly on the interwar fascination with nature-oriented recreation and park tourism, developments they pegged as direct expressions of twentieth-century consumerism” (2006, 49).

To fully understand the context of how the SMHC treated white women, it is also necessary to understand that other groups, such as Native Americans and African Americans, were more completely excluded from club activities. Carolyn Merchant, in her 2003 presidential address to the American Society for Environmental History, emphasized that “boundaries created by natural-resource regulations restricted opportunities for people of color, while protecting white power and privilege” (2003, 386). Undeniably, “uninhabited wilderness had to be created before it could be preserved” (Spence 1999, 4).

In the East, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 enabled the violent and forced removal of most Cherokee Indians from the Smoky Mountains. Those who remained purchased a small portion of their lands—now known as the Qualla Boundary, which still exists in western North Carolina (Finger 1984). Nearly a hundred years later, the 1927 SMHC handbook disparagingly informed their members:

Should one expect to find conditions on the Reservation such as are often pictured on Western Reservations, I fear he would be disappointed. For these Cherokees, for the most part, wear the ordinary clothing, such as white people, and the younger ones speak as good English as most white people. The authorities of the school say, however, that the great majority of the Indians are living scattered back in the hills in little cabins, each family tilling a small patch of garden land, where they hold on to a great many of their ancient customs of habit and dress. (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1927, 54)

At the same time, in the South, formerly enslaved African Americans were exploited under Jim Crow through “state-sanctioned violence, lynch law, disfranchisement, and unequal sharecropping contracts” (Trotter 2019, 47).

Another factor that shaped recreational use of the Smoky Mountains was the tension caused by tourists and white settlers. After the involuntary

relocation of Cherokee Indians in 1838, white Americans settled the coves and hillsides and later became a barrier to securing land for the park. Many people harbored—and still harbor—bitterness toward the federal government for removing them from family lands to provide recreational activities to outsiders (Starnes 2005). Residents commonly used arson as retaliation against powerful individuals or institutions. These fires were the most serious threat that the GSMNP and other regional parks faced (Pierce 2000). During the 1930s, the three southern parks—Shenandoah, Great Smoky Mountains, and Mammoth Cave—had dramatically higher rates of arson than did the rest of the park systems (Gregg 2013).

Amateur Conservation Efforts

Amateur organizations such as SMHC were instrumental in gaining popular, broad-based support for conservation efforts. Their activism “demonstrated that individual actions were tied to larger environmental actions and outcomes” (Taylor 2016, 29). Escaping to the wilderness served many purposes for these clubs. Benton MacKaye, a forester and later an honorary SMHC member, lamented that “the ability to cope with nature directly—unshielded by the weakening wall of civilization—is one of the admitted needs of modern times” when describing his vision for what became the Appalachian Trail (1921, 325). Similar groups included the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), formed in 1876 to explore and preserve the White Mountains in New Hampshire; and the Carolina Mountain Club, a spin-off of the AMC that was formed in 1923 (Appalachian Mountain Club 2009; Carolina Mountain Club 2019). Beyond hiking, the meetings, dances, meals, and companionship these clubs provided were “almost as important as the act of walking itself” (Chamberlin 2016, 111). More precisely, sociability work was the foundation that club activities rested on.

Work and Leisure for Women in the 1930s

In the 1930s, white women were broadening their horizons, both in terms of labor and leisure activities. For the club members living in the urban area of Knoxville, the workday rhythm of an increasingly industrialized world reinforced leisure as a distinct realm of activity (Peiss 1986). The service and manufacturing sectors, along with the clerical and sales sectors, provided work for almost all urban working-class women in 1930 (Helmbold 1982). While women’s foray into the workplace was initially resisted, it was gradually embraced as women were “perceived as compliant, cheerful, and non-competitive for male positions” (Wichroski 1994, 33). This power and gender dynamic carried beyond the workplace into community and civic life, relegating women to similarly subordinate positions in their volunteer work. Nonetheless, as independent wage earners,

young women found a sense of autonomy and challenged the boundaries of domesticity; moreover, mobilization for suffrage and temperance encouraged new levels of women's participation in public life (Peiss 1986). Having a job gave young women a sense of self-respect as self-supporting persons as well as pride in their work skills and abilities, and afforded them the gratification of moving in a public world rather than being confined to the private world of home and family (Helmbold 1982).

By the turn of the century, southern women had established a legacy of activism. Building on the success of missionary societies and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, women's clubs "mushroomed" in the 1880s, and, by 1900, "the list of things that women's clubs were doing or trying to do in the South was staggering" (Scott 1984, 217). Appalachian women also participated in labor agitation in the coalfields and in textile mills. The women of the SMHC undoubtedly heard about the young women who led the 1929 textile factory strike in Elizabethton, Tennessee, 115 miles to their east. Participation in public work and political struggles allowed the women on strike to "push against traditional constraints even as it created new vulnerabilities" (Hall 1986, 382). However, few of these female activists have been remembered. As Jessica Wilkerson found in her research on Appalachian women's labor activism in the 1960s and 1970s, "if [these women] only made fleeting appearances in Appalachian history, they have been virtually invisible in twentieth-century American history" (2019, 3–4).

The policies and economic necessities of the Great Depression empowered women to challenge and subvert cultural expectations and gave them freedoms they would not otherwise have had: to engage in activities outside the home—in the workforce, politics, social reform, fine arts, and culture (Scott 1984; Ware 1982). Young women, married or not, were obligated to behave as adults, as "partners in the struggle for survival in a way the culture has not acknowledged for well over a century" (Evans 1989, 197). For women coming of age during this time, participation in clubs offered a welcome respite from economic worries and cultural upheavals. *Life* magazine devoted a 1938 issue to "The Youth Problem" and concluded that "by and large, U.S. youths today are a sober lot" (quoted in Ware 1982, 55). Many women delayed or forewent marriage altogether. Meridel Le Sueur, a single mother in the 1930s and later an activist and advocate for the working class, explained the despair of young women: "The man is helpless now. He cannot provide. . . . So they live alone. Get what fun they can. The life risk is too horrible now. Defeat is too clearly written on it" (quoted in Evans 1989, 200). Many young women found a reprieve from these conditions in SMHC, even if the roles they were assigned reinforced the same power dynamics and gender-based assumptions they faced in the workforce.

Women's Participation in Leisure and Conservation

North American women have a long history of participation in botany, hiking, and other outdoor pursuits. These women, however, were in the minority and almost exclusively from well-to-do white families. Although women had few opportunities for leisure, especially vigorous outdoor activities, sport was so central to late-Victorian leisure that women "could not be totally excluded from the cult of athleticism" (Cross 1990, 146). It was also during this time that upper-middle-class women in the Northeast helped spread the romantic ideals of the wilderness through essays and poems in nationally distributed journals (Spence 1999).

Camps for girls at the time intended to train them in the womanly and motherly arts of sewing, decorating, and cooking (Cross 1990). The number of all-girl summer camps increased significantly in the early 1900s; by 1910, forty-one camps for girls had been organized (Eells 1986). It was not until then that hiking for girls came into fashion, helping them to become resourceful and self-reliant (Cross 1990). Camp Fire Girls of America was started in 1910 as a sister organization to the Boy Scouts of America, and seventeen young women attended the first camp that year (Thrope 2011). According to the 1915 Camp Fire Girls handbook, the purpose of the organization was to help "girls and women to develop the home spirit and make it dominate the entire community" (Camp Fire Girls 1915, 7). While most of the tasks focused on home and health, the guidelines for success included the following advice: "Use the out-of-doors. Go on a tramp at least once a month. Have a fire" (Camp Fire Girls 1915, 12).

The growing acceptance of hiking and camping as permissible activities for women is reflected in the popular culture of the time, even though this encouragement focused on women overcoming perceived physical and mental weaknesses. In the late 1800s, Addison Richard's tale, "A Forest Story," featured women on a mixed-gender camping trip. Their guide says that if women "take care of themselves and don't lose the trail they get along well enough. . . . The women has [*sic*] got more grit than men, after all" (quoted in Aron 1999, 166). One Mrs. C. C. Field, in her 1921 letter to the editor in *Outdoor Life*, addressed "the women who stay at home," promising "the more you tramp over fallen logs, rocks, and hills, the more poise and balance you acquire, and (softly) the more slender you become" (1921, 436). Mrs. A. T. Nydegger, writing about "Women and the Great Outdoors" in *Outdoor Life* in 1923, applauded the women who have the "courage and will-power" to break with convention by roughing it, and asked: "Do we envy the great rocking-chair brigade with its highly exciting fancywork, bridge and gossip? Not on your life!" (1923, 425). *Ladies Home Journal* in 1931 advised that "the right vacation often matches you against

something hard to do. . . . Camp in a hut high up on a mountain with no soft food or civilized luxuries except what you pack up the trail yourself on your back" (quoted in Aron 1999, 254).

Although men dominated the leadership of conservation organizations, women embarked on strenuous outdoor expeditions and participated in groups such as the Sierra Club from the turn of the century onward (Taylor 1997). In 1863, nine of the twelve original members of the Alpine Club of Williamstown, Massachusetts, were women (Chamberlin 2016). Women were admitted to the Appalachian Mountain Club at its second regular meeting in 1876, with the acknowledgment that "there are few climbs or mountain expeditions from which a vigorous woman need shrink" (Fox 1981, 341). By 1929, more women than men had become members of the National Parks Association (Merchant 1984). Despite these gains, women were often limited to "secondary roles as secretaries or newsletter editors rather than leaders," yet their advocacy propelled these groups to success (Chamberlin 2016, 197).

About the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club

Women were members of the SMHC from the club's first days and were integral to organizing and sustaining the club. In October of 1924, a group of hikers from Knoxville climbed Mount Le Conte on a trip sponsored by the Knoxville YMCA. Harvey Broome wrote about the hike in the club's twenty-fifth anniversary booklet: "A photograph of the group made thereon [Mount Le Conte] chronicles our Club's beginnings more graphically than any words or reference to the calendar. Many of the men wore ordinary business suits, nearly all wore neckties and the little round hats of that day; and the girls wore sailor blouses and knickers" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1949, 4). The hikers, agreeing that "such outings were so enjoyable and inspiring," formed the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1932, 7). In 1934, an article in the handbook reflecting on the hike those "sturdy and adventurous Knoxvilleans" had made ten years prior remarked that "twenty strong drew their panting breaths" atop Mount Le Conte (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1934, 9). That is, "all but two, for we suppose the ladies merely breathed deeply" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1934, 9). Despite joining eighteen men on a hike that handbooks a few years later noted for its "undisputed roughness" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1928, 17) and for being "extremely rough and steep" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1931, 32), Besse Geagley and Louise Smith were set apart as "ladies" who would not deign to huffing and puffing.

An article on the "Spiritual Value of the Outdoors" by Benton MacKaye in the 1932 SMHC handbook summed up the philosophy of the club:

Figure 2: Photograph taken from the twentieth-anniversary handbook showing some of the hikers on the club's first hike, October 1924 (photo by Jim Thompson, courtesy of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club).



FIRST HIKE—October, 1924—Some of the party which paused on Cliff Top of Mount LeConte to discuss organization. Left to right: Charley Barber, Frank Wilson (seated), Baxter Gass, Guy Barber, Charley Kane, Charley Lester, Marshall Wilson, Louise Smith, Caesar Stair, Douglas Smith, Besse Geagley, George Barber, W. H. McCroskey and Carlos Campbell. Also on the trip were T. S. McKinney, A. L. Chavannes, Neal Spahr, Hugh White, Jim Eslinger (guide), and Jim Thompson, who snapped the picture.

“Now that we have the tools, let them free us for the ultimate experience—a living in attunement with the permanent rather than in lockstep with the passing” (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1932, 10). In the same program, Horace M. Albright, director of the National Park Service (NPS), gave the club his blessing. He observed that they were ones who knew that “vigorous physical exercise results in a blissful state of peace and rest around the campfire that nothing else can include,” and closed by saying, “so may the tribe of the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club grow and prosper” (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1932, 9). Paul Fink, a 2019 Appalachian Trail Hall of Fame inductee, asked in 1931, “Just what is this charm that lures us from the city’s streets to the primeval wilderness?” and offered several reasons (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1931, 7). These included “an atavistic trace of the old pioneer spirit that actuated our forefathers to leave the comparative comforts of their cabins” and the “exigencies of a complex modern life” (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1931, 7). One might assume that “old pioneer spirit” was also shared by the forefathers’ wives and daughters, despite being omitted from Fink’s remark.

The club organized monthly hikes during their first year; in 1926, they began publishing annual handbooks, and hikes took place twice monthly.

In addition to a detailed program of hikes, the handbooks included the club's code of ethics, a letter from the club president, a bibliography of books on topics such as "stories and songs of mountain folk," guidance on food and clothing, a map of the Smokies, and articles on various topics (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1932, 60). A note to new members in the 1934 handbook, written to make sure they "feel welcome and at home," highlighted that, in addition to the Sunday hikes, the club offered "overnight trips; a mountain literature meeting; a fish fry; a week's vacation camp; and a series of educational discussions on the Great Smokies and related subjects" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1934, 10). These educational and entertainment activities required both sociability and connective labor, and their prominence in each year's handbook of activities harkens back to Chamberlin's (2016) assertion that these activities were "almost as important as the act of walking itself" (111).

Even if their responsibilities skewed toward being secretaries or socialites, SMHC women were truly just as strong and hearty as the club's men. The club hiked the Smokies years before GSMNP existed, meaning there were no improved trails—if there were trails at all—and very few amenities, such as trail shelters. Carlos Campbell wrote of an early trip up Mount Chapman with a small group that included Mabel Joyner and Harriet Fowlkes. As the only hiker that day who had been in that part of the Smokies before, he explained, "the others were innocently depending upon me to guide them on the correct route—no trail, mind you" (Campbell and Campbell Arrants 2005, 45).

Camping and hiking equipment at that time consisted of heavy canvas tents, canned food, and little in the way of effectively waterproofed fabric. Few hikers owned sleeping bags and instead carried heavy wool blankets. This did not deter them, and yet the women's hardiness was used to downplay the difficulty of the hikes. In preparation for a two-and-a-half-day trip up Mount Le Conte via Alum Cave in 1930, Fink advised hikers on packing:

Take a canteen (2 if you have them) and food for 5 meals. Select a variety. Take candle lantern or flashlight, without fail, and don't start without blankets and a poncho or tent. This is imperative for everyone, man or woman. Round trip hiking distance 20 long, hard miles. Trail extremely rough, through overhanging laurel, in many places. Elevation over 6000 feet most of the way. Cost of transportation approximately \$2.50 each. Only the seasoned and properly equipped hiker should start. (Several experienced girl hikers have made it.) (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1930, 51)

Club members were ardent supporters of the proposed Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Appalachian Trail. The club's dedication

to the Smokies went beyond fondness and became a kind of possessive idolization. In the 1933 handbook, the club said they had "done all in our power to secure a National Park" but recognized that "we developed a sense of proprietorship that may, unless we are wary, cause us to view our relations with the National Park Service with a selfish and distorted purpose" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1933, 11).

One way the club assisted the park effort was providing counsel on trails and nomenclature. According to the 1929 handbook, they believed that their efforts in the "locating and routing of new trails" would help to "lay the nucleus of a trail system in the Smokies equal to any other mountain playground" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1929, 61). In August of 1937, the NPS superintendent wrote to the club explaining that "I will be very glad to receive any comment your Club desires to make concerning Mr. Avery's recommendation that the trail from New Found Gap to Clingmans Dome be relocated on the north side of the mountain" and closing the letter: "With deep appreciation of your fine cooperation."⁵ The frequent communication and collaboration between the club and the NPS is indicative of the clout and respect the club had garnered, and while correspondence was sometimes addressed to the club generally, any correspondence sent on behalf of the club was always from its male members.

Club members organized Appalachian Trail conferences, regularly met with other regional hiking groups, and frequently hosted organizations that shared their vision. The October 1934 minutes noted the receipt of a "very lovely letter" from Colonel Graves, president of the American Forestry Association, thanking the club for their assistance when the association held its annual meeting in Knoxville.⁶

The club built a cabin in the Greenbrier section of GSMNP as well. The park donated lumber from other cabins, and the club held a "cabin raisin'" on April 21 and 22, 1934 (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1944, 22). The club held its first "vacation camp" at the cabin in 1934 (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1934, 35). The club handbook for that year explained: "Let us state right here, we do expect many of the girls, and wives of members, to participate. This is one of the main reasons for planning a camp-hike instead of a more strenuous hike," presuming that women were not prepared for or inclined to hike (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1934, 35). The following year, 1935, the handbook described the success of the first year's camp and asked: "Do the girls go? Why, honey-chile, there were more of the gals [last year] dan whar de lads. So, you girls make your plans to be right there" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1935, 39). Harriett Fowlkes served as the associate superintendent of the club's first vacation camp in 1934 at their Greenbrier cabin.⁷

While the Great Depression certainly affected the club and its members, it did not dampen their enthusiasm or productivity. On February 2, 1933,

Figure 3: Elvie Manley and Henry Duncan working on the Greenbrier cabin, 1934 (photo by Herbert Webster, courtesy of the Herbert M. Webster Photograph Collection, University of Tennessee Libraries).



club president E. G. Frizzell wrote to members after the club's money was lost in a bank failure: "Yes, it is true. Our funds were in the East Tennessee National Bank too."⁸ To pay for the year's handbook, he asked members to pay their dues soon, writing that "*THIS* seems to be the time for you to show your love for, and loyalty to, the Club."⁹ Whatever the monetary results of his pleas, the 1934 handbook boasted that "although we have had little or no money in the treasury, due to our funds being tied by bank failures, our section of the Appalachian Trail clearing program was carried through as scheduled" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1934, 7). They credited the "bull-dog tenacity and unquenchable enthusiasm of a relatively small number of loyal members" for this achievement (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1934, 7).

Work Done by SMHC Women

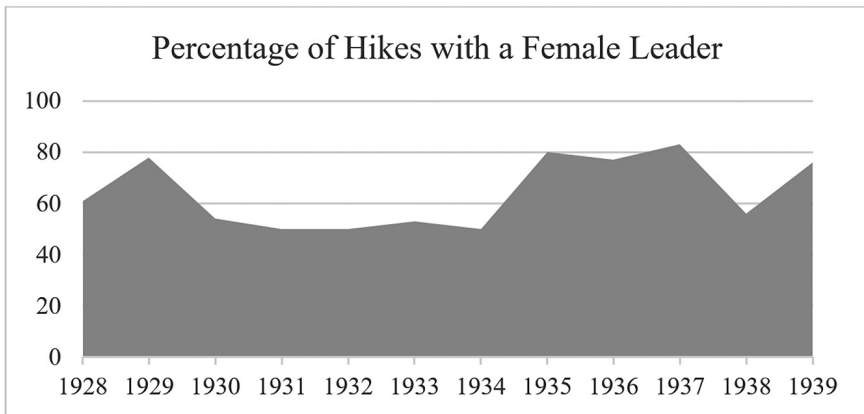
While typically only male club members garnered public accolades for their contributions, scores of women participated in SMHC. The club elected its first female officers in 1927—Elsie Wayland as secretary and Florence Arp as one of three vice presidents. Between 1924 and 1939, women

routinely served on the board of directors or as officers in all roles except for president (Jesse Dempster would be the first, in 1961). For eight of its first fourteen years, the club had a female secretary, and a woman served as membership secretary every year from the time the position was introduced in 1931 through at least 1939. Until 1950, membership was explicitly limited to “any reputable white person” (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1934, 52).¹⁰

Not all of the work the women did was invisible. The organized hikes, the most fundamental club activity, were frequently led by women. The 1936 handbook referred to leading hikes as “a serious business” and listed some of the “many obligations and arduous duties” of the hike leader (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1936, 71). Between 1928 (the first year there were hike leaders) and 1939, women led at least half of the year’s hikes, with five years having female leadership of 70 percent or more. Hikes usually had two leaders who were responsible for knowing the trail in advance, arranging lodging, and coordinating transportation. On the hike, one leader would lead the party while the other, referred to as “the sweep” by club members, followed to keep the group together. The plan for the hike, including route or lunch-site information, would be communicated by the leader before the hike started.

Women also served as hike supervisors, a role introduced in 1931. During this period, hike supervisors were sometimes responsible for a single month’s worth of hikes, or sometimes a season’s worth, making it hard to quantify. This role carried more authority than that of the hike leader. Hike

Figure 4: This chart was created by tabulating the hikes that had at least one female hike leader, as advertised in the annual handbooks, 1928–1939.



supervisors were responsible for ensuring that hike leaders were properly trained, coordinating changes in hike leadership, and ensuring that club activities went forward as planned and advertised (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1931). After each organized hike, the leader was required to send the club secretary a hike report, detailing the members and visitors on the hike and including any suggestions for improving the hike for subsequent years. These reports helped inform the brief hike descriptions that were in each year's handbook. Each hike had a brief description in the handbook. These accounts are among some of the earliest written descriptions of many of the old pioneer trails found throughout the mountains (Bridges, Clement, and Wise 2014). The secretary's work helped not only to document and archive club activities (documentarian) but also to improve the information disseminated for future years (admin) (Boler et al. 2014). This work—secretarial duties and preparing reports as hike leaders—harkens back to the observation by Boler et al. (2014) that women predominately held “an acute awareness of one's responsibility to support others' learning and participation” (448). Even when women held official roles, their work and participation in club activities remained largely unnoted—by society then and by historians since. However, there are additional hints in club records of the abundance of invisible and indispensable labor they performed. As with any research into the lives and activities of women, one often needs to read between the lines, piece together scattered hints, and use the social constructs of the era to infer a deeper understanding.

Glimpses of the importance of sociability surface frequently. For example, a club member in 1930 said they should have more opportunities, according to the handbook, “to get together and get better acquainted” (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1930, 9). Hence, Clara Hamlet and Margaret Broome planned a “Winter get-together meet” for members to “make cider, play games, [and] hear snappy talks on books” (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1930, 13). Women also worked on behalf of the club at the annual Appalachian Trail conferences. In 1934, Benton MacKaye wrote to Willis Roos of the Green Mountain Club in Rutland, Vermont, regarding that year's conference: “A small (too small) contingent is going from here to represent the vigorous and enthusiastic Smoky Mountains Hiking Club. The[y] are Guy Frizzell, the President, and Mrs. Frizzell, and three members of the Executive Committee—the Misses Willie V. Cooper, Dorothy Haasis, and Harriet Foulkes [*sic*]. They are all my close good friends and I'm anxious to have them as well cared for in New England as they've cared for me down here.”¹¹

Three years later, George Barber, chairman of the 1937 Appalachian Trail Conference Reservations Committee, wrote to Guy Frizzell, General Conference Chairman. After the record-setting conference, which welcomed

people from sixteen states and the District of Columbia, he wanted to “pay especial tribute to Miss Besse and Miss Sewell for the wonderful work they did.”¹² He declared that he was “absolutely sure if it had not been for them staying behind the counter for two days that the results would have been quite different than they were.”¹³ He concluded the letter by saying: “If I am ever again appointed chairman of a committee I want to ask that these two ladies serve on that committee.”¹⁴ At this conference, Besse Geagley, who was on the club’s founding hike in 1924, served on the reservations committee; Meta Schwoegel and Dorothy Haasis on the reception committee; and Evelyn Welch on the exhibits committee.¹⁵ Thus, it is evident that while men remained firmly in charge, many women were contributing the necessary support.

At the same time that they filled important roles, the women were also referred to diminutively by men affiliated with the club. One example of this duality—major contribution but dismissive language—is the treatment of Mabel Abercrombie. Abercrombie lived in Atlanta until moving to Knoxville for a job with the Tennessee Valley Authority’s (TVA) forestry division in 1934. Abercrombie took numerous photographs of the Smokies on club hikes, and many of them are now part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park archives. In 1936, at the age of twenty-three, Abercrombie joined the Communist Party and began organizing for five-day workweeks and paid vacations; she was later investigated by the FBI (Purcell 2009). Prior to this, Abercrombie became friends with Benton MacKaye, who said she knew what “wilderness really means,” yet gave her the nickname “child” because of her age and youthful looks (Purcell 2009, 19). This duality appears again in materials addressed to SMHC membership secretary Elvie Manley. Manley often received applications and other correspondence addressing her as “Half-Pint.”¹⁶ Manley was one of many women who helped construct the Greenbrier cabin where the annual vacation camp was held. Lastly, in writing about the club’s early days for the twentieth-anniversary handbook, Harvey Broome reassured readers that “we got some gals in our club, and purty uns, too” (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1944, 13). These interactions, although likely not intended maliciously, nevertheless served to maintain power and gender dynamics.

Additional examples of sociability and connective labor can be found in every aspect of SMHC club history. Committees staffed by women included the hikes and booklet committee, the trail-marking committee, the cabin grounds committee, the social committee, the history committee, and the steering committee. In 1932, the board placed four women (Dorothy Haasis, Mary Coleman, Mamie Lee Ragain, and Ella Luttrell) in charge of devising a

way to send out hike reminders to the membership. At the club's thirty-fifth anniversary jubilation in October 1959, members put on a pageant telling the club's history. The narrator highlighted the first officers and presidents (all men for the club's first three years), but noted that "two other names in that list deserve special mention because they have never received recognition commensurate with their valuable contributions; they are Besse Geagley and Carlos C. Campbell."¹⁷ Geagley was one of two women on the club's founding hike in 1924; the other was Louise Smith, who designed the club logo that is still in use today (Stefanick 1999). Other unrecognized women who made major contributions include Margaret Broome, who served in many roles, including chairman of the handbook committee, handbook editor, hike leader, hike supervisor, and as a member of the board of directors. She was also the sister of Harvey Broome, a co-founder of the Wilderness Society, and she was married to Robert Howes, who managed the TVA's Land Between the Lakes project. The two were introduced by Benton MacKaye (Foresta 2013). Helen Northrup, who served on the trail-marking committee in 1930, suggested having paid advertisements in the 1931 handbook to help defray the entertainment costs for the 1931 Appalachian Trail Conference.¹⁸ Northrup, moreover, was part of a small group who wrote a "Preliminary Guide to the Greenbrier-Brushy Mountain Nature Trail" for park leadership in 1937.¹⁹

Figure 5: Albert Gordon "Dutch" Roth's membership card, 1932. The card features the logo designed by Louise Smith and is signed by secretary Dorothy Haasis (courtesy of the A. G. "Dutch" and Margaret Ann Roth Collection, University of Tennessee Libraries).

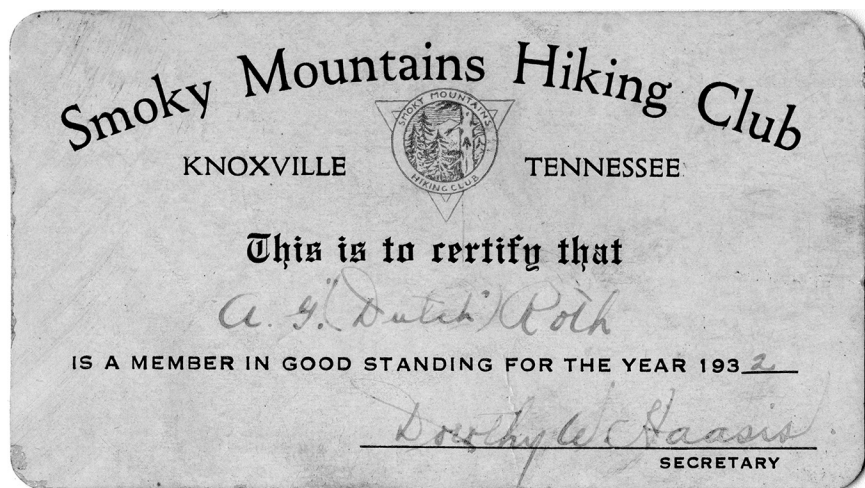


Figure 6: Hikers at Hall's Cabin on the state line above Fremont, Tennessee, February 1932. Top row: Dorothy Trainer, Mable Joyner, Harriett Fowlkes. On ground: Fred Shulley, unknown man, G. B. Shirley, Mrs. W. E. Trainer (photo by A. G. "Dutch" Roth, courtesy of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park).



Conclusion

Uncovering the important contributions of women to the national park movement is imperative to understanding the importance and breadth of amateur conservation activism. This article adds to a growing body of work highlighting how women's activism in Appalachia is "compelling

us to reconsider the meaning and scope of the American women's movement" (Wilkerson 2019, 15). The activism of the women of the SMHC was quiet, unrecognized, and underappreciated. The work of sociability, one of the primary contributions of the women of the SMHC, has not been given serious consideration, undoubtedly because it was shaped by the social organization of work and gender (Daniels 1985). Furthermore, the women's connective labor organizing, promoting, and educating has been similarly overlooked. While the work itself took place largely unnoticed, their connective labor resulted in "the collectively built friendships and networks that have the ability to sustain and strengthen" a movement (Boler et al. 2014, 452).

Harvey Broome's remarks that the two women on the SMHC's first hike, who, after ascending nearly three thousand feet over the course of eleven strenuous miles, "merely breathed deeply" (as opposed to the men who "drew their panting breaths") is an apt metaphor (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1934, 9). Although it illustrates the club's sense of camaraderie and playfulness, it remains an underhanded remark that devalued the tireless labor of these women: their labor hiking hard miles in hobnail boots, their labor blazing new trails, their labor as secretaries keeping the club functioning smoothly, their labor as hike leaders guiding groups through the wilderness, their labor building "th' cabin in th' Briar" (Smoky Mountains Hiking Club 1936, 35), and all the invisible labor they performed on behalf of the club in its early years. There were no club activities that women were not integrally involved in. Without the depth and variety of their involvement, the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club's achievements, to recall Merchant's words, would be "fewer and far less spectacular" (1984, 57).

Notes

1. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library, Knoxville, Tennessee, Board minutes, 1929–1956, BDMIN Box 1.

2. The Smoky Mountains Hiking Club annual handbooks and schedule of hikes are referred to extensively throughout this paper. They are available online through the digital collections of the University of Tennessee Knoxville Special Collections, <http://digital.lib.utk.edu/collections/islandora/>.

3. For examples of recent scholarship in this area, see Mittlefehldt (2013), Gregg (2013), Newfont (2012), and Sutter (2002).

4. For examples, see Lix (2016), LaBastille (1980), and Montgomery (2014).

5. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection, letter from J. R. Eakin to Marshall Wilson, August 10, 1937, Correspondence, 1929–1964, COR Box 1.

6. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection. Board Minutes, 1929–1956, BDMIN Box 1.

7. A. G. "Dutch" and Margaret Ann Roth Papers, MS.3334, Vacation camp journal, Box 73, Folder 17, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.

8. Roth papers, letter from E. G. Frizzell to Club Members, February 21, 1933, Box 73, Folder 14.

9. Ibid.

10. This phrase appears in every handbook between 1926 and 1949.

11. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection, letter from Benton MacKaye to Willis Rose, June 21, 1934, Correspondence, 1929–1964, COR Box 1.

12. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection, letter from George Barber to E. Guy Frizzell, July 8, 1937, Correspondence, 1929–1964, COR Box 1.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection, The Appalachian Trail Conference program, 1937, COR Box 1.

16. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library, Knoxville, Tennessee. Board Minutes, 1929–1956, BDMIN Box 1.

17. Harvey Broome Papers. Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection. Knox County Public Library, Knoxville, Tennessee. "Once upon a Mountain," 35th Anniversary Jubilee script.

18. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection, Smoky Mountain Hiking Club Board Minutes, 1929–1956, BDMIN Box 1.

19. Smoky Mountains Hiking Club Collection. Preliminary Guide to the Greenbrier-Brushy Mountain Nature Trail, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. 1937. Correspondence, 1929–1964, COR Box 1.

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