



**Volume 6, No.1**

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## **The Future of the Roan Naturalists' Rallies**

Fall of 2001 brought with it some shocking, life changing realities. The terrorist attacks on American soil, the poor economic news and the financial crisis in Tennessee which resulted in the closing of Tennessee state parks, all gave us reason to feel anxious. Then, for those of us who care about Roan Mountain, yet another blow - Jennifer Bauer the long-time voice of Roan Mountain was transferred from Roan Mountain State Park after twenty-one years of dedicated service, to be replaced by a law enforcement ranger. It would be hard to overestimate the negative effect that Jennifer's transfer will have on Roan Mountain State Park, the community of Roan Mountain, and to Roan Mountain itself.

As you know, the Board of Directors of the Friends of Roan Mountain took a strong stand in opposition to Jennifer's transfer, writing a letter of protest to the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Commissioner, Milton Hamilton, and letters to all the area newspapers and to our membership encouraging others to join us in protest. As of this date our efforts are to no avail. Where do we go from here?

The answer is, we will continue with the Naturalists' Rallies as usual. Jennifer has generously agreed to continue as director of the Spring Rally. The Friends of Roan Mountain will assume full responsibility for the Spring Rally as well as the Fall Rally (in the past the Park has sponsored the Spring Rally, with our assistance). While the Park has agreed to provide us, as usual, with free use of the Convention Center and the use of the field to line up for trips, the Friends of Roan Mountain will have to provide all the other arrangements, including printing and mailing of the brochure and accommodations for the speakers. The Board has voted to cover the extra expenses by: charging nonmembers in the Spring just as we have for years in the Fall, and raising that charge from \$3.00 to \$4.00. We have decided to hold the Friends of Roan Mountain dues at their current rate, at least until we see if we are meeting our expenses.

The stated purpose of Friends of Roan Mountain is to "foster greater awareness and understanding of the natural, historical and cultural significance of Roan Mountain." Thanks to the Friends of Roan Mountain, we feel that we can continue to fulfill that purpose and provide quality Naturalists' Rallies on Roan Mountain.

Gary Barrigar  
President of Friends of Roan Mountain



## A VOICE FOR THE FORESTS

Cherokee Forest Voices is pleased to announce "A WALK WITH ARTHUR", a two CD album tribute to Arthur Smith (1921-1999) our friend and teacher. He was the father of conservation in Northeast Tennessee but he did more than work on causes. He kindled a love of nature in countless people who walked with him in the woods or heard him on the radio.

This album is a collection of Arthur's live broadcasts from the show "Environmental News" on public radio station WETS (89.5 FM). Arthur and friends from the State of Franklin Group of the Sierra Club founded this show in 1993. The show is now produced jointly with Tennessee Chapter Sierra Club and Cherokee Forest Voices. It was one of his favorite projects. To the end he was a dedicated writer and reader for the show. In these twenty-seven pieces he did both. Here are some of the titles: How Do I Love Thee, Forest?, The Art of the Hiking Hat, The Bear, Winter Botany, and Raven and Snowbirds.

The signature sound of the show is a pileated woodpecker, calling at the start of the show and drumming at its close. The woodpecker was Arthur's idea. Arthur's voice and example continue to protect the natural world.

Proceeds from this recording go to the Arthur Smith Memorial Fund of Cherokee Forest Voices. To order a CD please contact: Catherine Murray, Cherokee Forest Voices, 1101 Antioch Road, Johnson City, Tennessee 37604, 423-929-8163, or [cfvcatherine@worldnet.att.net](mailto:cfvcatherine@worldnet.att.net) Price: \$20.00 if picked up in person, \$24.00 if mailed.

Kristin Zimet a long time friend of Arthur's shares these words:

*Green Promises. That's what he called them. Walk with Arthur Smith in the gray winter woods, and he showed you the gleam of next Spring: tender green rosettes, new leaves cuddled in a fuzzy circle. He sought to know, every growing thing in every nook, from the high balds of Roan Mountain to the bottomlands of Big Tumbling Creek. He discovered and watched over the places graced by rare plants, from the tiniest lichen to the Gray's lily. He taught you their scent, their texture, their stories, and what they need to thrive. His lifelong fight for conservation was rooted in this: that all living communities are worthy of protection and delight.*

## Jim Potter – In Memoriam

James W. Potter, 86, died on January 26, 2002. Jim had retired from the Carter County School System after 44 years in the system. He had served as Principal at Cloudland, Hampton, and Unaka High Schools. After his retirement, he continued to support the schools and to encourage young people in the teaching profession.

His wife of 63 years, Edna Potter, and a daughter and son-in-law, Carolyn and David Williams of Surgoinsville, TN, survives Jim. Jim and Edna have three granddaughters, Judith, Robin, and Sonya. Jim was a member and elder of the Elk Park Christian Church.

Jim, or as he was sometimes know as 'Mrs. Potter's Husband', and Edna were active in the Miss Watauga Valley Pageant. They worked very hard in promoting the Pageant and in helping the young ladies that competed in it.

Jim was a veteran of World War II, having served in the U.S. Navy Seabees. He was also a former summer employee of the U.S. Forestry Department. Jim and Edna were both very active in civic, and naturalists' organizations. They had worked in both the Carter County Wildflower Tours and Bird Walks and the Roan Mountain Naturalists' Rally since their inception. They led field trips and served coffee at mid-day to the participants. Jim served as Director of the Carter County Wildflower Tours and Bird Walks in 1980 and again from 1982 - 1984. He also served as Director of the Roan Mountain Naturalists' Rally from 1988 - 1992. His wife, Edna, in all of these activities, ably assisted Jim. Jim had a great love for Roan Mountain and Carter County and the great natural beauty that it contained.

Jim loved life and believed it was to be enjoyed. In his witty way he encouraged his students and all people that he came in contact with to strive to be successful and to enjoy life. You would never see Jim without a smile and a joke to tell. He was a master of the 'one liner'. He was admired by who knew him for his enthusiasm for life and will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

Submitted by Gary Wallace

# STALKING THE SPRING HARBINGER, SKUNK CABBAGE

On February 23, 2001 I had the opportunity of accompanying Janet Brown and Ed Schell to a boggy cow pasture a few miles south of Laurel Bloomery, Tennessee, in Laurel Creek Valley to see immature skunk cabbage in one of its native habitats. Just the favor of being asked to go with these two illustrious naturalists was quite a thrill! I didn't really care what we'd be seeing!

However, the young skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) proved to be an amazingly interesting plant. Here, it thrives in boggy areas where the resident cows have tromped about leaving the inevitable cow patties and across the fence in a saturated wood lot. On first glance, there seemed to be nothing in the pasture muck but water, snow, and clumps of yellow and green grasses. Much to our delight, as our gaze began to adjust itself to the appearance of the immature skunk cabbage, we began to see many, many individuals.

Long before the last snows and frosts are gone, the curious horny hoods push through the wet soil. Blooming from February through April, the young skunk cabbage pushes its way up through the snow-covered hummocks and even into small pools to the surface. The first part to appear is the fleshy, leathery, shell-shaped spathe. The tips were quite red, but as it grows, the spathe is striped and mottled in patterns of dark and light green, deep purple, and dark red. The hood-like spathe envelopes a globular spadix on which are borne lavender-colored flowers containing both stamens and pistils. In the fall, the plant produces masses of scarlet berries.



A week or two after the first flowers are seen, the leaves appear in tightly rolled cones, yellowish-green in color. When one of the tight cones of leaves is cut, the odor greets one leaving no doubt why the name of this cabbage is preceded by the adjective skunk. According to Euell Gibbons in his book *STALKING THE HEALTHFUL HERB*, "the bruised or cut leaves smell like a skunk, the cut stem smells like a mixture of mustard and rotten, raw onions, and the flowers smell like carrion". As the newborn leaves unroll, they continue to expand and grow to become from one to two feet high and about as broad by the first of June. In some sections of the country, the plant is referred to as "elephant-ears" because of the large size.

Skunk cabbage is an Arum, closely related to the jack-in-the-pulpit. The plant has an extensive range, being found in swamps, shallow sluggish streams, and marshy places from Quebec to western Ontario and south to Missouri and Georgia.

One question we had while we identified the many red-colored tips poking their way into the pasture was "Is skunk cabbage edible"? Again, quoted from Euell Gibbons: apparently "because of its wide availability and great abundance, and its succulent, edible appearance, skunk cabbage seems to have captured the imaginations of nearly all writers of wild foods and herbal medicines, but when I read some of the things these writers have said I wondered if they were talking about the same plant I know." He goes on to relate that the recommended method of preparing the young tightly rolled leaves is boiling in two or more waters with a pinch of soda in the first to be served like other vegetables with butter, vinegar, salt and pepper.

Always willing to try new herbs and plants, Euell proceeded to experiment with the odorous skunk cabbage. The reputable authors of other wild foods books noted that "no trace of odor is given off" when cooking the cones of leaves. Crowhurst's *The Weed Cookbook*, page 131 notes "Collect the bright green, unfurled leaves in the very early spring. The unpleasant smell that they give off when bruised completely disappears when they are cooked, and there is no smell when they are cooking. Cook for about twenty minutes, changing the water at least twice and replacing with fresh, boiling salted water".]

Indeed, Euell noted, the odor "was thick, heavy and foul and continued to be given off throughout the cooking process, through the first, second and third waters, each with its recommended pinch of soda. By the time I finished cooking, the kitchen smelled as if it had been visited by an angry skunk. I aired out the place, sprayed kitchen deodorant, seasoned the vegetable and boldly sampled it. It tasted exactly like it smelled, and I certainly wouldn't describe that taste as pleasing. After chewing and swallowing one bite, I started to take another, but about then my mouth and throat began to burn as though I had taken a bit of raw Jack-in-pulpit. It really wasn't tortuous, but it was uncomfortable".



The American Indians made a palatable and nutritional breadstuff of the skunk cabbage roots. The roots are about two inches thick and about one foot long and are firmly anchored by numerous cordlike side rootlets. The roots are composed of a fairly well-defined rind or peel to which the white rootlets are attached and it has a white, starchy core. Euell relates, "I peeled the roots and cut the starchy cores in thin slices and put them to dry on clean papers in my attic. At the same time, I decided to see if the cabbage leaves improved by drying, so cut a number of the cones of tightly rolled leaves into thin slices and put them to dry on separate papers. While working with these products I was acutely aware of the skunky odor which seems to permeate every part of the plant. After a few weeks of drying the odor disappeared, and as with other arums, it seems that drying and aging dispels the biting pungency and acidity which makes them inedible in the fresh state".

He goes on to relate that he ground some of the root chips and mixed the meal half and half with wheat flour for pancakes. When the familiar burning occurred, he dried the remaining chips for a total of six months for further aging! Again, Euell notes that he ground the chips to a fine meal, mixed it half and half with wheat flour. This time there was no burning sensation at all and the flavor was pronounced, but very pleasant, a bit like cocoa. By adding butter and maple syrup, the pancakes were "unusually good".

With the dry, crisp, easily crumbled leaves that had dried for six months or so, Euell made an old-fashioned Herb-Meat Cabbage Pudding. Recipe for two people: 1 cup of

crumbled, dried skunk cabbage, 2 slices whole wheat bread, 1 medium-sized onion (minced), 1/4 cup raw rice, 1/2 cup pork sausage, a can of undiluted mushroom soup, and half a teaspoon of caraway seed. Mixed thoroughly, tied in a cloth, the mixture is boiled for about 90 minutes. Served with a sauce made of 1/2 cup soy sauce and a teaspoon of hot Chinese mustard stirred together, it was quite edible and delicious.

The American Indians used skunk cabbage in a variety of ways. The freshly dried root was used as a styptic to stop bleeding from minor cuts and scratches. Another way was to cover the dried root with boiling water and steep for a half hour producing a tea given cold 1 ounce at a time, three times a day for cough, catarrh, asthma or bronchitis. The skunky smell of this infusion would tend to repel most people and Euell notes, "the taste is pretty gruesome, even with added honey". The Indians often used this infusion to cover up the taste of other medicines. A remedy for bronchial asthma was quoted by Virginia Scully in her Treasury of American Indian Herbs: "Skunk cabbage, onion, and honey were deemed an excellent brew ... the Indians sometimes varying the formula with garlic".

In an American herbal medicinal book published in 1842, an expectorant is recommended using the powdered dried roots of skunk cabbage, of unicorn root, of lobelia seed, and of cayenne pepper combined with honey or molasses and "taken at bedtime". Skunk cabbage once won a place in the official U.S. Pharmacopoeia and is still listed in the U.S. Dispensatory. Its reputed medicinal properties are listed as emetic, stimulant, antispasmodic and narcotic. In addition, the roots and seeds were once employed as a relief for nervous troubles, for asthma and whooping cough. Overdoses will likely cause nausea, vomiting, dizziness and dimness of sight.

Lastly, to quote Euell one more time, "skunk cabbage seems to furnish a useful medicine for some complaints and is a very passable food plant for those willing to complete the lengthy processing necessary to make it edible". It is well to note in warning that green hellebore (*Veratrum viriate*), sometimes called Indian Poke is another large-leaved green plant found growing in low places often intermingled with skunk cabbage. It is very poisonous and should be avoided. Green hellebore does, however, lack the characteristic odor of skunk cabbage.

A post script to the above trip: My husband, Robert Whittemore and I went back to the pasture a week later on March 3, 2001. If anything, the protective hoods and reddish tips were in a state of disrepair appearing to have been severely trampled by the cows and not as appealing in color as they had been a week earlier. However, from the globular mass protrusions of polyp-like structures were beginning to develop.

Being a geologist, my husband was interested in the "levee" that traverses the length of the field. It is higher than the boggy parts of the field, straight and narrow. Examination found it to be hand built with rock not native to the pasture which is bordered on the hilly areas by Rome shale. The "levee" was apparently important enough to someone(s) for inserting a heavy metal culvert from which the upper bog drains. At first Bob decided it was a railroad grade, but decided it was too narrow to be that. In addition, he noted that the soil in the western portion of the field (away from the creek) was exceptionally black. With the close proximity to Laurel Bloomery, it is possible that this grade carried mine cars with ore to the forges at Laurel Bloomery (or from the forges). The Tennessee Historical Marker book [1972] notes that the first forge in the area was built about 1/2 mile north on

Laurel Fork in 1810. Later two forges were built in the area west of the town, the last in 1849. An orebank on Ackerson Creek [the topographic map calls this Atchison Branch], about 1 mile upstream, furnished ore for the furnaces until exhausted. Operations ceased about 1870.

In addition, several mining operations existed near the communities of Wills and Silver Lake southwest of Laurel Bloomery. Those operated by the Silver Lake Mining Company were closed in late 1918, while the single pocket in residual clay of the Rome formation at the Burt Hawkins Prospect 1-1/2 miles southwest of Laurel Bloomery, mined by Oscar Wills, yielded 6 short tons of manganese concentrates of chemical grade in 1941. The single pocket was refilled when the concentrate was exhausted. The Silver Lake Mine, two miles southwest of Laurel Bloomery and 300 feet west of State Highway 91 on top of a small hill rising 80 feet above the valley of Laurel Creek, shipped more than 800 long tons of manganese concentrates. The hill on which the mine is located is capped by terrace gravel beneath which is Rome shale. The old cuts have now slumped, but Stose & Schrader [1923] reported that the ore occurred in red sand near the base of the gravel, especially in troughs formed by the irregular surface of the underlying shale.

Based on this knowledge, we think that the blackness of the western portion of the boggy pasture is probably manganese dioxide. Possibly this area was used as a place to wash the ore before moving it toward Mountain City.

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Anne Whittemore serves as Treasurer of Friends of Roan Mountain. She is a homemaker who has a strong interest in wildflowers and close-up photography. Twelve of her wildflower photos were displayed last spring in the Museum of the Middle Appalachians in Saltville, Virginia. Anne, who is also treasurer of the Southern Appalachian Geological Association and of the Friends of the Gray Fossil Site, holds a life membership with and is a Fellow of the National Speleological Society.



# 2001 Roan Mountain Christmas Bird Count

The 2001 Roan Mountain CBC was held on Sunday, December 16. The total of 46 species was about average for this count. Good finds included American Black Duck, Evening Grosbeak, and Red Crossbill. The total follows:

1) Pied-billed Grebe – 1	24) Brown Creeper – 6
2) Great Blue Heron – 2	25) Red-breasted Nuthatch – 42
3) Bufflehead – 9	26) White-breasted Nuthatch – 14
4) American Black Duck – 4	27) Carolina Wren – 14
5) Mallard – 2	28) Winter Wren – 3
6) Hooded Merganser – 7	29) Golden-crowned Kinglet – 27
7) Red-shouldered Hawk – 1	30) Eastern Bluebird – 32
8) Red-tailed Hawk – 3	31) American Robin – 26
9) Ruffed Grouse – 5	32) Northern Mockingbird – 10
10) Mourning Dove – 6	33) European Starling – 144
11) Rock Dove – 12	34) Cedar Waxwing – 51
12) Belted Kingfisher – 3	35) Northern Cardinal – 21
13) Northern Flicker – 2	36) Dark-eyed Junco – 95
14) Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – 1	37) Field Sparrow – 2
15) Downy Woodpecker – 10	38) Song Sparrow – 68
16) Hairy Woodpecker – 3	39) White-throated Sparrow – 47
17) Pileated Woodpecker – 10	40) Eastern Towhee – 4
18) Eastern Phoebe – 1	41) Red Crossbill – 1
19) American Crow – 265	42) House Finch – 34
20) Blue Jay – 13	43) American Goldfinch – 157
21) Common Raven – 22	44) Evening Grosbeak – 12
22) Carolina Chickadee – 51	45) Pine Siskin – 58
23) Tufted Titmouse – 24	46) House Sparrow – 60

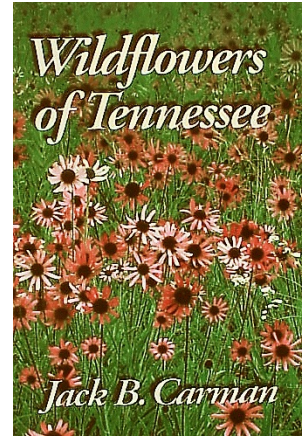


## **Report Your Bird Sightings To Friends**

Beginning with the next news letter, we will include a "Birds of Roan Mountain" article. It will have reported bird sightings from Roan Mountain which will be compiled by Larry McDaniel. Please send him any sightings you would like to have appear in the articles. You may reach Larry by e-mail at [lcmcd@preferred.com](mailto:lcmcd@preferred.com) or by phone at 423-262-0480.

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**Jack Carman will be a featured speaker at the Spring Naturalists' Rally in May.**



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