

# Hike & Drive Cades Cove

A Collection of Short Hikes to Points of Interest  
While Driving the Cades Cove Driving Loop

Cades Cove is one of the most visited locations in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It is also one of the least understood from the point of view of its History and Geology. So, before we begin to look into the points of interest in the cove, and be introduced to some of its people, let's consider what a cove is, how it got here, and how it differs from a valley.

A Cove is a geological formation commonly referred to as a "limestone window". This term is quite useful to our understanding once we grasp the idea that many hundreds of acres of land can be seen as a "window". Quite simply:

*A window is an opening in a wall surrounding a structure (a house, for example) through which we can see what is on the other side of the wall without actually entering the structure. We just look through the window.*

Think of it this way. You are standing at the end of the porch of your house looking at the wall. All you see is the wall. You move down the porch and stand in front of a window. Now you can see what is on the other side of the wall at that point. Again, the window is an opening in the wall that allows you to see what is on the other side.

So, how do we translate that into the place called Cades Cove? Without diving into technical geological terms, the mountains (the "wall") in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park are composed of a material called *Sandstone*. Beneath or underlying these mountains (on the underside of the "wall") is a material called *Limestone*. So, we have a very irregular or lumpy *wall* (mountains) laying on the earth on top of and covering vast areas of *Limestone* (the material behind, or under the wall). You can't see the limestone because the mountains are in the way. A *Sandstone wall*, (the mountains), hiding *Limestone* beneath the wall. Got it?

Good. Let's take the next step. By the plan of God, it was ordained that *erosion* would create a window, (a *hole*) in the mountains thereby exposing the *Limestone* beneath. A *window* through which the *Limestone* would be exposed. A "*Limestone Window*".

When we go to Cades Cove we will drive the Cades Cove Loop Road completely around the cove. We will be driving around the perimeter of the window, *inside the window frame*. At the West end of the cove, in the parking area for a trail to the Elijah Oliver Cabin, we will have an excellent view of the entire cove. From there we will easily see the "Limestone Window". To our right (South) you will see the main ridge of the Southern Appalachian Mountains in the National Park; Gregory Bald, Rocky Top, and Thunderhead are the prominent peaks. To our left (North), Rich Mountain, Indian Grave Gap, and Scott Mountain form the cove boundary. These are the sandstone peaks that create the edges of the window. In front of us, the long and wide-open expanse of grassland, is the "Limestone Window". This Limestone Window is why we are here. Limestone, as it weathers, produces much more fertile soil for farming than sandstone does. That's why the early settlers we are about to meet chose to settle coves rather than mountain tops. The Cherokee relied on coves as well.

Before we move on, I would like to introduce you to two other "Limestone Windows" in the immediate area, **Tuckaleechee Cove** to the North of Cades Cove and **Wear Cove** (the home of WVR) to the East.

Now, let's move on to the history, meet some of the people, and explore some of the other geology of Cades Cove. We will also explore the courage, determination, and faith of those who settle the cove in the early 1800s as well as their association with those native to the area, the Cherokee Indians.

## The Oliver Cabin



John Oliver, his wife Lucretia, and their young daughter, Mary, were the first White settlers to establish a permanent home in Cades Cove. They arrived in the cove in 1818 following John's service in the war of 1812 and built their home in 1820. We will hike to the site of their *original*<sup>1</sup> cabin, with a short side hike to one of the less visited cascades in the national park.

In the absence of a grist mill, the Olivers had to beat corn into cornmeal using only a mortar and pestle. During the early

years, Lucretia feared she would starve to death. But, thanks to the generosity of the Cherokee Indians living in the cove, who provided them with food, the Oliver family survived and prospered.

<sup>1</sup> The *actual* original John Oliver Cabin was some 50 yards behind the present cabin. (to the right of the cabin in the photo). The cabin identified as the original today is actually the *honeymoon cabin*. It was not unusual at that time for the family to build a cabin for their son(s) on the parents' property to use when the son(s) married. However generous this tradition may seem (and certainly it was), it should be noted that in so doing the labor of the son, his wife, and children remained on the parent's farm. Labor equaled survival.

## Gregory's Cave

We began our exploration of Cades Cove with a simple geological description of a cove as a "Limestone Window". To help you visualize this description I said that we would be driving around the perimeter of the cove, "...*inside*



*the window frame...*". Further, the "frame" was described as the mountains surrounding the cove. This understanding of cove structure continues to be helpful as we look at the entrance to Gregory Cave. While we are still *in* the cove, we are now at the edge of the "Limestone Window". As a result, our location now reveals the contact between the limestone floor of Cades Cove and the sandstone structure of Rich Mountain. We are at the window *frame*. It is here that water; rainwater, melting snow and ice, percolate<sup>2</sup> down through the limestone producing erosion, enlarging cracks and dissolving passages to form sinkholes, caverns, and caves. All under the control of the invisible hand of God.

According to park records, Gregory's Cave entrance is approximately 10' wide and 4' high. There is one main passage, the width of which averages 20' to 55' and about 15' high. It is 435' long. There is a

smaller passage on the right side of the main passage about 300' from the entrance. This side passage extends for about 100'.

There are many such formations in the Southern Appalachians. In this area alone we have **Bull Cave** near the National Park boundary where Rich Mountain Road leaves the park at the Ace Gap trailhead. Bull Cave, with a depth of 924 ft., is the deepest cave in Tennessee.

We also have [White Oak Sinks](#) which can be reached from the Schoolhouse Gap Trail near its junction with the Turkey Pen Ridge Trail. Of interest with respect to White Oak Sinks is that three streams flow into this large geological feature, one over a waterfall, but no visible streams flow out. Water leaving White Oak Sinks flows out underground.

<sup>2</sup>Percolation refers to the movement and filtering of fluids through porous materials. It is this process that, among other things, produces stalactites and stalagmites in caves (Think of a coffee percolator).

## The Pearl Harbor Tree

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park was established in 1934. Even so, there were a number of families who continued to live and farm in Cades Cove (and other areas of the park) after the park came into being.



Among them, the Golman Meyers family. They continued to pasture livestock and raised crops. Golman had obtained land in the Townsend area and had started the process of moving. However, in December of 1941 he was still in Cades Cove.

Golman liked keeping up with current events. He and the family were listening to their battery powered RCA radio when President Franklin D. Roosevelt interrupted the program by announcing Pearl Harbor had been attacked by Japan. Myers knew in that moment the United States was going to go to war.

With the looming threat of war and his oldest sons eligible to be drafted into the military, Golman wanted a way to memorialize the soldiers who lost

their lives in the Pearl Harbor attack. He went out behind his house and found a small sweetgum tree, no older than a year or two. Golman pulled up the tree from where it was growing and transplanted it in front of his home. He then placed an old automobile tire rim around the sapling and said, "We will remember this forever."

Golman's *monument* is indicative of the spirit of patriotism and respect shown by those living in mountains who wanted to honor those serving in the military.

## Cooper Road Trail

Cooper Road was one of three access roads to Cades Cove during the initial settlement of the cove. The other two roads were the **Rich Mountain Road** giving access to Tuckaleechee and Townsend, and the **Parsons Branch Road** giving access to areas in North Carolina.

The only portion of the Cooper Road Trail we will hike is the 0.2-mile section from the Cades Cove Loop Road to the Wet Bottom Trail junction. We will then follow the Wet Bottom Trail to the Elijah Oliver Cabin and then on to the trailhead of the Abrams Falls Trail. That having been said, I highly recommend this trail for your future



consideration. It is an excellent point-to-point hike from Cades Cove to the Abrams Creek Rangers Station and campground. It can also be part of a series of trails for various multi-day hikes.

When we reach the Wet Bottom Trail junction we will turn left (South) and continue until we intersect a gravel road that leads to the Elijah Oliver Homesite. After we explore the Elija Oliver homesite we will continue to the Abrams Falls trailhead.

## Elijah Oliver Cabin

Elijah was born to John & Lucretia Oliver in the *original* John Oliver Cabin on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1824. He died on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1905. Elijah married Mary Lawson on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1852, when Elijah was 28 years old. According to the Oliver family history, Elijah and Mary lived in the *Honeymoon Cabin* on the farm of his parents, until the beginning of the Civil War. Elijah then moved his family away from the Cove to escape attacks from Confederate supporters and rebel groups from North Carolina that frequently invaded Cades Cove. It is also likely that he, along with other young men in the cove, was escaping forced conscription into the Confederate army (see Cades Cove and the Civil War below).



Elijah returned to the cove in 1865 with his family and bought the land on which he established his farm and homestead. This is one of the few farms in the cove that has remained sufficiently intact so as to provide an accurate picture of farm life. The springhouse behind the cabin tells a very important story about early farm life. There is also a smokehouse, corn crib and barn. But, in my view, the high point is the home itself, larger than most with two stories, a separate structure under an attached roof (the kitchen), and a room on the front porch. There is also a room on the front porch for "migrant laborers". We will consider all of these things on our visit.

## Abrams Falls Trail



Neither will we hike the Abrams Falls Trail on this outing. However, do keep Abrams Creek and the Abrams Falls trail on your *Things-To-Do List*. It is a pleasant out-and-back hike to the falls, as well as the starting point for several multi-day hikes on a host of other trails at the West end of the National Park. Also, keeping with our history of residents in the cove, another John Oliver, one of the sons of the John and Lucretia Oliver you were introduced to at our first stop, built the John Oliver Lodge in Cades Cove in this location in the early 1920's. The photo shows the lodge

and a group of hikers from the Smoky Mountain Hiking Club during the time the lodge was still in use. The John Oliver Lodge was taken over by the Great Smoky Mountains National Park on Christmas day in 1937 and subsequently demolished (so much for historical value).

Long before that, the creek and falls were named after Cherokee Chief Abrams, an important ruler in the Cherokee Nation. His village was on the Little Tennessee River at the mouth of Abrams Creek. Today the area lies beneath the waters of Chilhowee Lake, one of the TVA impoundments on the Little Tennessee River.

## John Cable Grist Mill



At the trailhead for the Abrams Falls Trail, before you cross the bridge over Abrams Creek, a narrow manway leads to the left toward the ford of the Rabbit Creek Trail across Mill Creek at its confluence with Abrams Creek. Do not take the ford. Instead, as you approach Mill Creek, look for a manway to your left and follow it upstream. You will actually be following the spillway from the John Cable Mill. Keep the spillway on your right and continue until you reach the mill which is located behind the Cades Cove Visitors Center. John Cable built this mill in the early 1870s. He was also a farmer, so the mill was surrounded by his fields. Customers could ring a large bell near the mill when they wanted to call John from his fields to mill corn or wheat. Today, Cable Mill remains operational. Visitors can buy cornmeal and flour ground on the large stone grinding wheels at the mill. There are other points of interest at the Cades Cove visitor Center that you should examine. Among these are the Becky Cable House and barn. Also, a Sorghum Press, a Sorghum Boiler, Corn Crib, Blacksmith facility, and the mill race to the overshot mill wheel.

After exploring the area around the mill, we will load up to complete our drive on the Cades Cove Loop Road. Before we head out, however, if the gate is open on the gravel road that leads to the right as we leave the Visitors Center parking lot, we will take that road to the end. The trailhead to Gregory Bald (the Gregory Ridge Trail) is here. There is also the entrance to the one-way Parsons Branch Road. This is the third of the three access roads into the Cades Cove (you have seen the other two: Rich Mountain Road & Cooper Road). It is this road that provided the most direct access from North Carolina during the Civil War (See Cades Cove and the Civil War below).

## Cades Cove and the Civil War

For the most part, if confronted with the question, residents of Cades Cove sided with the Union. That said, as isolated as the cove was, and as focused as the people of the cove were on simply providing for themselves and their families, they took the position of *"having no dog in that fight"*. Nonetheless, at the time of the Civil War, it was still relatively easy to access the cove from North Carolina. One of the three roads used to connect the cove to the outside world was the Parsons Branch Road that came directly into cove at the site of John Cabel's Grist Mill, through a gap at the West end of a mountain today known as Gregory Bald.

This ease of access led to numerous "Rebel" raids on the cove out of North Carolina. It is important to understand at this point that these raids had nothing to do with capturing important military targets. Neither were the raids undertaken by large, well trained and equipped military units. To put it bluntly, these raids were conducted by those of lesser integrity looking after their own interests.

Given the frequency and sometimes violence of these raids, the Primitive Baptist Church in the cove stopped meeting during the war. Various stories surviving to this day suggest that Gregory's Cave may well have been a stop on the "Underground Railroad" during the war. If that was true, these raids may have been intended to capture and return of runaway slaves for which the "Rebels" would have been paid a bounty.

This environment makes it easier to understand why Elijah Gregory would have abandoned the cove at the start of the war. It also makes it easy to understand why the population of Cades Cove fell from over 600 to approximately 300 during the war.

There is an even more tragic story to be told. In the 1840's a farmer by the name of Russell Gregory, for whom Gregory Ridge and Gregory Bald were named, came to the cove from North Carolina.

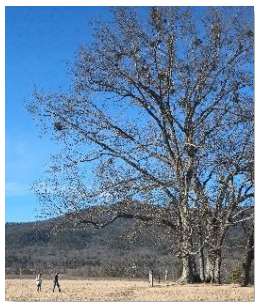
When the Civil War arrived, Russell Gregory was in his '60s. He had four sons. Walter, the youngest, joined the Union Army but died of measles in 1862. Sons Charles and John joined the Confederacy. His oldest son, Drewery, also served but I find no record indicating on which side he served.

To deal with Rebel raiding parties, residents around the Cove used children to set up as lookouts. The children would be stationed in vantage points where they could see rebels entering the Cove. They then used a series of signals to warn those living in the cove. Russell Gregory organized a home guard that one day intercepted and drove off a band of raiders. Gregory owned an old rifle, a muzzle-loader known as "Old Long Tom", that had an unmistakable sound when fired. The account says that when Gregory's Confederate Son Charles heard his father's muzzle loader in the skirmish he told members of the raiding party. The party returned, dragged Gregory from his home and killed him.

If this story is true, and there are several persistent accounts that make it clear that it is, Russell Gregory was killed by "Rebel" forces sent to his home by his son.

## **Ike LeQuire Cemetery**

There will be a number of interesting things to see after we leave the Visitor's Center on the Cades Cove Driving Loop Road. We will pass several former home sites as well as views of the mountains on the north side of the cove that we could not easily see earlier. We will also pass the Lawson home and farm, the birthplace of Elijah Oliver's wife, Mary "Polly" Lawson.



One place in particular, the Ike LeQuire Cemetery, has fascinated me since the first time I saw it. So much so that it is a regular stopping point when Marea and I bring visitors to the cove. I have heard it called other names, but that is the name given to it by Dr. Gail Palmer, the author of *Cemeteries of The Smokies*. On page 368 of her book, she writes the following:

"This is thought to be the burial site of an entire LeQuire family of husband, wife and four children. They are thought to have all died in 1918 of the flu. All graves are marked with uninscribed fieldstones."

There are over 150 known cemeteries in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Add to this an unknown number of single grave sites. When all of these graves are taken together my suspicion is that most of the gravestones are unmarked. Either they never were marked, as those in this cemetery, or the crude markings have long since worn away.

Marked or unmarked, all of these resting places have a story to tell. The more I explore these mountains, the more old walls that I follow, the more cabin sites, single graves and cemeteries I find, the more I appreciate the faith that these people exhibited. The way these people lived would not have been possible without a deep and abiding faith in God.