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TALLULAH FALLS RAILROAD ARTIFACTS WILL BE DISPLAYED IN SOCIETY'S MUSEUM THROUGH A PARTNERSHIP WITH RABUN-GAP NACOCHEE SCHOOL

We are pleased to announce that the Rabun County Historical Society and Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School have formed a partnership by which an extensive collection of Tallulah Falls Railroad (TFRR) artifacts will be displayed on a permanent basis in the Society's downtown Clayton museum.

Through this partnership, we will protect and preserve important TFRR artifacts, photos and models, while making them easily accessible to the public. Our museum exhibit will dramatically illustrate how the TFRR fundamentally altered the development of Rabun County and northeast Georgia during its 64 years of existence from 1897 to 1961.

This comprehensive range of TFRR memorabilia was collected by the late Dess Oliver, a longtime industrial arts teacher at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School and founder of the Tallulah Falls Railroad Museum operated by the school. It was Dess's dream and the hope of his family that his TFRR collection would inspire a new generation of train enthusiasts by relating a vitally important chapter in Rabun County's history. Our partnership with Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School will make Dess's vision a firm reality.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, we planned to have the TFRR exhibit ready for display this summer. Once our volunteers are able to return

safely to the museum, we intend to renovate the museum to accommodate the TFRR collection. Upon completion, we will hold a grand opening celebration for the general public.

These renovations are part of a larger plan to reorganize the Society's museum around exhibits that illustrate the major events and themes that have shaped the history of Rabun County and northeast Georgia. In addition to the TFRR, these exhibit groupings will cover the area's Cherokee heritage and Rabun County's founding; life in 19th/early 20th century Rabun County; moonshining; the logging industry; and the hydroelectric development of the Tallulah and Tugalo Rivers. Through this reorganization, it is our intention to present a more complete and vivid history of Rabun County and our region.



Dess Oliver

Photo:
The Foxfire Magazine
Fall/Winter 2000

Black Rock Mountain: Mount Rushmore Or a State Park?

As early as 1930, developers were expressing interest in beautiful Black Rock Mountain. The Clayton Tribune reported on October 9, 1930 that “capitalists” from Florida wanted to develop a commercial park and transplant Seminole Indians there. They planned to build lodges, lakes, golf links, and a “revolving beacon light that could be seen for 200 miles.”

John V. Arrendale was a local educator, county agent, and surveyor who wanted to conserve Black Rock Mountain and keep it from becoming commercialized. In the mid-1930's, Mount Rushmore was being carved in South Dakota. Mr. Arrendale's first idea was to carve a Franklin D. Roosevelt memorial in the face of the rock as they were doing in South Dakota. He was eventually convinced not to “butcher” the rock face. He came to want to preserve the mountain in its natural state to promote tourism. John V. Arrendale was unflagging in his efforts to promote this idea. He visited civic clubs, hounded political candidates, and lobbied the Georgia legislature.



John V. Arrendale
1878-1972

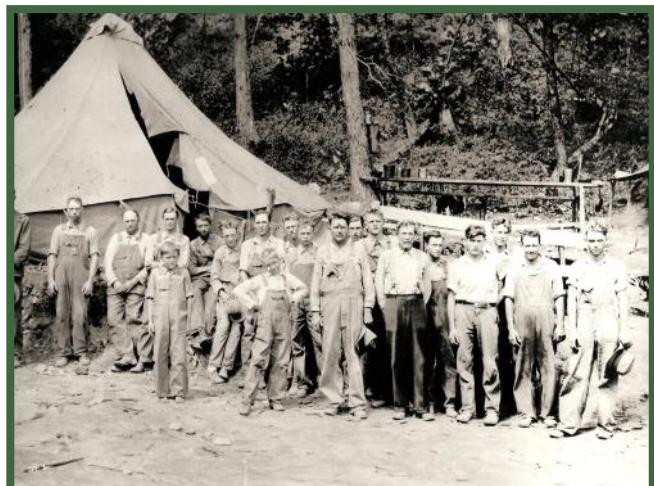
Mr. Arrendale began to acquire much of the land where the park would eventually be built in increments between 1934 and 1936. The land was



Taylor family picnic on Black Rock around 1910

deeded to Rabun County in 1938 and to the State of Georgia in January, 1939. For many years nothing was done about creating a park from this original 70 acre plot. World War Two probably was a factor in the lack of speed of development.

In 1951, a fortuitous visit by Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge speeded up the process. His local friend, Fred Derrick, asked Probate Judge Frank A. Smith to take the governor to the top of Black Rock Mountain. We can only imagine that he was impressed by the view and scared to death of the very poor, unpaved road. Within six months, the state authorized the Georgia Highway Department to pave the road to the top.



Construction workers who graded the road to the top of Black Rock Mountain in 1931

Black Rock Mountain State Park was officially established in 1952. The first superintendent was Lawrence Christian, who had previously been at Vogel State Park, but a year went by before the superintendent's residence was built. The next superintendent was Webb Short of Clayton. Campgrounds were built in 1936 and cabins in 1965.

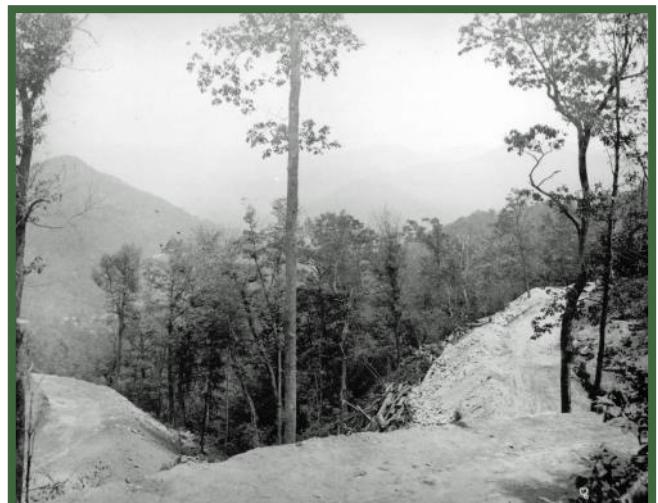


The new camping area at Black Rock Mountain State Park in 1967 with a modern comfort station and campsites with picnic tables, cast iron cooking grills and fire rings. The entire camping area is above 3,000 feet in elevation, making it a cool summer camping spot.

The park's official dedication was on September 24, 1953, with Governor Talmadge on hand. The public was invited, and they were shuttled to the mountaintop in school buses. Fifteen hundred people were served, among other things, sixty hams, 100 gallons of Brunswick stew, and 1,000 loaves of bread. Black Rock Mountain State Park was so popular that in 1954, 60,000 visitors were counted.



Mules were used to help grade the road to the top of the mountain.



The newly graded Black Rock Road in 1931



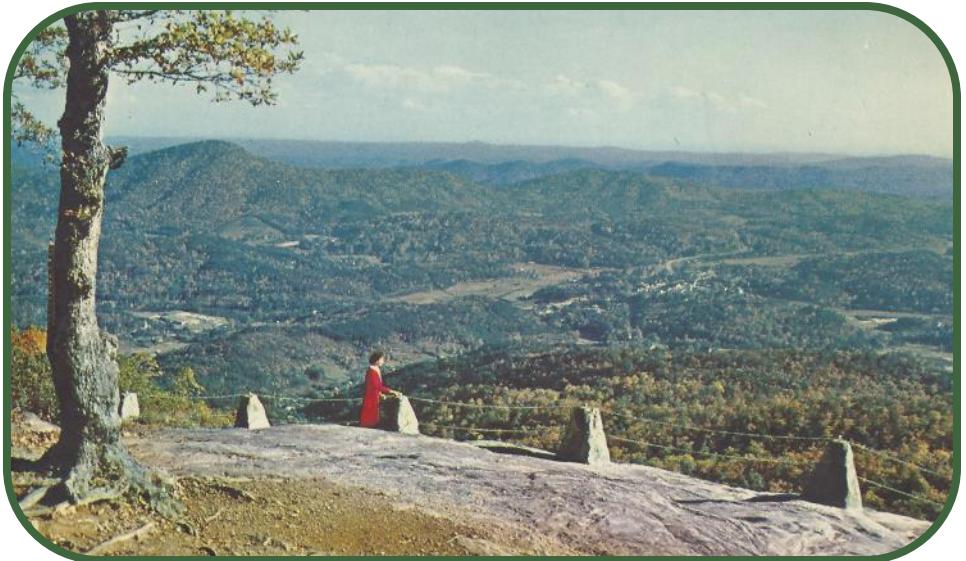
The first automobile to drive to the top of the mountain in 1931

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• Please visit our museum and research library:
Mon. and Fri. - 10:00-2:00
Saturday – 11:00-3:00
• Group tours by appointment
Our museum is currently closed to visitors due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



*A vintage postcard photo of the
Black Rock Overlook*