

To: Friends of Old Apples
From: Tom Brown

January 7, 2019

Apple Search---2019

This year the apples found include the following: Buckeye, Pumpkin (very large yellow), Dumpling (sheepnose shaped), Big Thomas, & Maiden Blush (early ripening). Some very exciting apple finds (major finds) will be disclosed over the next two to three years.

I would like to share with you very interesting "events of long ago" which I learned of in my apple search, plus I want to tell you about a unique annual summer water adventure from the late 1970s and early 1980s.

John Weaver Jr. Stories---John is a 98 year old resident of Ashe Co., NC, who told me many interesting things about his early years. He is a former WWII soldier, rural mail carrier, and a farmer. His daughter, Shon Shatley, suggested I talk to him; "You will enjoy talking to my dad; he has an amazing memory."

The year was 1933 and young teens, John and his brother Tom strongly disliked their chore of producing firewood from wood slabs, edge log cuts from their dad's sawmill. They had to beat and beat on the slabs with an often dull axe to break them into about 15" long pieces for the stove. It was hard, frustrating work. That Christmas they received "the best Christmas gift ever." Their dad gave them a two handled cross cut saw. They were overjoyed because this would make their stove-wood chore so much easier. They placed the slabs in the saw dog and cut away all Christmas afternoon using, their "best Christmas gift ever."

John remembered his mother giving the boys Molasses and Sulfur, a home medicine/tonic, which she gave for everything: spring tonic, helping the body stay healthy, to fight off colds, etc. The mix was syrup-like and tasted a little sweet. It was typically given as 1 teaspoon of sulfur and 2 teaspoons of molasses mixed together. They took it without thinking because it was just what you had to do without asking any questions.

Their family made extra money by collecting nuts from Chestnut trees and Chinquapin bushes. The nuts were dried on the roof and in racks, then put into "little sugar bags" with salt added to keep away worms, and sold in Elkin, NC (50 miles away over poor roads). Their collecting of Chestnuts is something that we will never experience due to the fungal blight which was first detected in 1904 in the Bronx and by 1950 the American Chestnut was essentially extinct. This was the "perfect tree" which grew quickly straight and tall (up to 100 feet) and was useful for making furniture, building houses and barns, and provided a profusion of edible nuts for human and wildlife consumption. The Chestnut tree was also rot resistant. Once this tree constituted 25% of the Appalachian forest and ranged from southern Maine to northern Mississippi and included perhaps four billion trees. We should each wonder what we can experience now which will be lost to future generations. The large but shrinking glaciers we visited in British Columbia will be gone this century due to climate change.

Once John's dad had sent him to the store to get a bag of 20 penny nails (4" long); John tripped and upon landing, a nail penetrated his arm going into the left bottom of the lower arm and coming out toward the wrist. His dad, John Sr., took him to see Doc Reeves, the local physician. Doc used pliers, retrieved from the family truck, to pull out the nail while someone held John's arm. Doc Reeves' only post-treatment was to paint the wound with iodine; it did not get infected. People were resilient and tough back then.

When John was fourteen, he and his dad drove down the steep, winding Hwy. #16 to get building supplies in Wilkesboro. If John became concerned about the safety of the truck's breaks he got out and ran behind it.

John served in the Army Air Force and was at Langley Air Field awaiting deployment. Also in the same barracks was fellow Ashe County resident, Ted Caudill. Ted was always joking about everything; it was his way of coping. Back then men did not share feelings or emotions. One day John returned to the barracks to find Ted sitting on his bunk, head in hands, with a mournful look on his face. A very homesick Ted said, "I would give all that I have and everything that I will ever have, for a piece of corn bread and to hear a rooster crow."

In another Langley incident, they were out drilling while officers played golf in a slightly rough field beside them. One officer swung and a cloud of dust came up when he hit the ground. Herb Mann, a new service friend, yelled out, "Why don't you get yourself a damn plough." Herb then got a very long chewing out.

They missed Pearl Harbor when senior soldiers bumped them from an expected Hawaii deployment. John's WWII military service lasted 4 years, 7 months, and 5 days and he left with an honorable discharge.

Road Side History---Jeff Brown rode with me as we drove up into the Pike's Creek Wildlife Area (Wilkes Co., NC) where he was to show me some old apple trees. The road was fairly short and there was no evidence of human habitation except for a small number of building foundation stones at one site. I was amazed as we rounded each curve and Jeff would say, "Peters" lived here, then "Cochran" lived there, eventually pointing out locations of at least six family sites. These were not just family names; they represent hopes, dreams, misfortunes, births, marriages, and deaths. I plan to learn more of these families in the coming years.

In a different area of Wilkes County there is a "Pitch Stone", a stone on which rich pine or pine knots were burned and then the tar which oozed out of the wood was caught for many uses. The stone has a flat top and is about 3.5 by 4.0 feet in size, inclined downhill at about an 18 degree angle. Around the perimeter of the stone is cut a deep groove to catch and move the resin to a collection point. The groove's shape resembled that of a cartoon speech bubble. The tar was collected where the exit groove went to an over-hang at the bottom of the stone. Variations of the pine tar could be used for its anti-bacterial healing properties, for joint pain, to seal wooden boats, for axle grease, etc.; it was a valuable product for export to England in Colonial times. A person can drive the same road a thousand times with no inkling of the fascinating history which lies a short distance away. Your life can be made richer by learning more of the history of your home area.

State Line History---Tom Sargent told me the story of his 300 acres in Stanley Valley (Hawkins County, TN). Because of its unique state-line location there is a fascinating history related to the property. Tom acquired the property in the 1960's but the acreage originally was a land grant to James Cooper in 1784 (registered in 1787 for 50 shillings). The upper portion of this property touches the Virginia state line. It lies about 6 miles north of the 36° 30' parallel of latitude, which was specified to be the intended boundary between Carolina and Virginia in 1665 by King Charles II. At that time North Carolina and Virginia (in concept) stretched westward to the Mississippi River. Thus the property was well within the Virginia Charter area. It was also later in the Indian Reserve Territory as specified in 1763, when King George III proclaimed the territory of the Appalachians and westward to be off limits to settlement by colonists, so the British did not have to defend against Indians in sparsely settled areas. Eventually it was in various Indian treaty areas.

As colonist's settlement advanced westward it became more important to properly define the Virginia/North Carolina boundary. The first successful survey was in 1728 and went from the coast to about Danville, VA and then on to Peters Creek in Patrick County, VA. In 1749 Peter Jefferson and Joshua Fry surveyed from Peters Creek to Steep Rock Creek (now named Beaver Dam Creek in Shady Valley, TN; the "steep rock" is Backbone Rock), their survey went within 300 yards of the Steep Rock (calculated by projecting existing state lines). It is interesting to note that none of these surveys strictly used the 36° 30' parallel of latitude, at the coast the survey line started at 36° 33' (about 3.4 miles to the north) and at Steep Rock Creek they had drifted to about 6.5 miles north of 36° 30'.

With more settlement, North Carolina and Virginia wanted to define their borders even further west. Two survey teams were commissioned in 1779, the Virginia team headed by Dr. Thomas Walker and the North Carolina team by Colonel Richard Henderson. Their intention was to survey from Steep Rock Creek to the Cumberland Gap (at the western tip of current Virginia). Apparently Walker and Henderson could not find where the 1749 Jefferson/Fry survey stopped, so they chose different starting points, Henderson choosing an easy survey route through gaps north of the Iron and Holston Mountains, while Walker started further south probably near the original Jefferson/Fry survey line. As they continued west there was about a two mile gap between the survey lines. Property between these two lines was called the "Squabble State" because it represented an ill-defined jurisdictional zone concerning property ownership and tax collection. The Cooper/Sargent property was between the Walker and Henderson survey lines, in the North Carolina half of the Squabble State. When James Cooper was given a land grant in 1784, it was issued from the State of North Carolina, located in Sullivan County, its western area becoming Hawkins County in 1796.

In 1784, North Carolina proposed ceding rights to its lands west of the Appalachian Mountains to the Federal Government in an attempt to pay its Revolutionary War debts. Later they rescinded this offer when they realized that the western land could not be used to pay for its debts; but in 1790 the property was finally ceded to the Federal government. The Cooper/Sargent property was in this ceded area called the

Southwestern Territory. It was also in another area, the State of Franklin, a proposed new state, comprising twelve current northeastern Tennessee counties, including Hawkins County. Franklin existed as an extra-legal state from 1784 to 1789. In 1785 they submitted an application to become the 14th state; eventually seven states voted in favor of its statehood, but it was less than the two-thirds needed for ratification. In 1787 North Carolina reasserted its control over this area and sent in troops to take over legal and legislative functions. The previous North Carolina area west of the mountains became the state of Tennessee in 1796.

Even though the Cooper/Sargent property was then in Tennessee it was still in the Squabble State, the two-mile area between the Walker and Henderson survey lines of 1779. In 1802, Tennessee and Virginia agreed to establish a line half way between the Henderson and Walker lines as the official state boundary, the Compromise Line. This agreement did not totally settle the issue, because Virginia questioned its boundary with Tennessee in 1858, 1870, and 1887; the US Supreme Court decided in favor of Tennessee in 1893.

On a more detailed note about the Cooper/Sargent property, one of the land transfers included “a little yellow boy”, a slave named Isaac. Later Isaac was paid by one of the boundary survey teams to bring them food once a week with his mule. When Tom’s daughter, Kathy, would fish for catfish in the one-acre pond, near the cemetery, she would often wonder if the spirit of Isaac was aware of her presence.

Tom Sargent’s great grandfather was John Reed, a Confederate officer, who after the war was required to declare his allegiance to the Federal Government. Later his home was burned and his land seized by carpetbaggers because he did not have a proper deed (lost when the courthouse was burned). John went west in the land rush and received 160 acres in Oklahoma, unfortunately two years before the Dust Bowl.

The Cooper/Sargent property is owned by Tom’s daughter, Kathy Sprung and his grandson, John Donihe.

The Eastern Notch---All the research on the Tennessee/Virginia boundary has caused me to become interested in some of idiosyncrasies in this line. I would like to offer my easy, logical explanation for the “notch” in Washington Co., VA and Johnson & Sullivan Cos., TN which is about 15 miles long and appears to extend the Tennessee area, 1.5 miles into Virginia. This is simply a remnant from the Henderson/Walker line gap. When the Compromise Line of 1802 was agreed on, splitting the difference between the lines, the more northern Henderson line was retained in this isolated mountain area, keeping its two major valleys, The Laurel & Shady Valley, entirely in Tennessee rather than separating the northern 20% of the valleys with a state line.

The Laurel is bordered by the Iron Mountains to its northwest; many years ago when its iron ore was melted a gas came off, called “a bloom”. This resulted in the name for its major community, Laurel Bloomery.

Linville Gorge Adventure---If you can imagine going over 6, 8, and 15 foot waterfalls with great joy and no fear of injury, then this is the adventure I am about to describe. Linville Gorge is a wilderness area in Burke Co., NC, comprising 11,786 acres; the Linville River flows through this area, falling 2,000 feet. This descent starts with the 150 foot Linville Falls, which descends in four drops. Millions of years ago the falls were twelve miles downstream; as the Linville Falls ate its way upstream, massive stones fell into the river. I have spent many days hiking in the Gorge, enjoying its magical natural beauty and tranquility. In my 2009 newsletter, I tell about spending a night sleeping on a rock cantilevered over the river, where I observed an ant ceremony.

I had participated in many river float trips; I finally decided that it would be interesting to try to tube the Linville River through the Gorge. We explored different sections of the Gorge River, but preferred the stretch between Bynum Bluff and Babel Tower trails. My first float trip was with one other person; unfortunately I do not remember their name. As we encountered one fall after another, we were concerned about proceeding safely and walked around at least eight of these frightening drops. In subsequent years, more people participated in the river adventure, with our largest group of forty-four people. People invited friends and thus I typically only knew about half of the annual participants; an innocent time with no thoughts of liability.

Every year I would assemble a large number of used truck tubes which I had to patch. The “river tubes” were made as follows: inflate the tube 80%, cut a 17.5” disc of 3/16” thick conveyor belting and punch 14 holes into its perimeter, and then thread single strand electrical wire through the holes and around the tube. When fully inflated, the completed “river tube” looked like a mini-trampoline. The thick conveyor belting protected people’s back-sides from rock impact and allowed the user to recline in a more relaxed manner. The annual preparation of a large number of “river tubes” could take up to a month of my spare time.

Usually the float trip was on the first Saturday after the Fourth of July and we prayed for a sunny day because it could be chilly on a cloudy day. We once made an August float trip, when it was even warmer, but the river level was down and there was too much rock scraping and many hang-ups. These trips required considerable logistics, such as many trucks and trailers to transport the fully inflated tubes. Once we arrived at the rim road, we then had to position vehicles at both the starting and ending trailheads.

On the Bynum Bluff to Babel Tower section of the river there are about twelve drops (mini-waterfalls) of six feet or more. On our first Gorge float trip, I said that we walked around at least eight falls; on subsequent trips different people would get to these falls of concern and before I could shout a word of caution would safely go over. At the bottom of the numerous falls there was always a pool of water to splash into and never an unsafely placed rock. Gradually we saw that all the drops on this section of the river could be safely negotiated. Out of the approximate one hundred and sixty people who participated on the various float trips, there were no injuries. The only problem was that despite my careful patching, one tube out of fifty would lose air, requiring that the person had to leave the river and walk out to the rim road.

There was almost a continuous sound of falling water as we traveled down the river; the very longest stretch of fairly calm water was about 100 yards. My greatest impression of the float trips was their very absorbing nature; there was the constant rushing water and very frequent falls; thus it was absolutely impossible to think about anything else that day; it was a trouble-free day. You could be having bad troubles in your life, but not a single thought could be given to them that day. It was as if God had designed a perfect river water adventure for nature lovers. There was the refreshing feel of water on your body, the amazement of the isolation with nature, the constant fun challenge of figuring out the best watery path around the many large rocks, the beauty of the steep tree-covered mountain side, and the bond from an exciting group activity.

My favorite was Double Falls with an initial eight foot drop, then a sixteen foot horizontal run and finally another eight foot drop; if done just right a person could stay in their tube through both drops. This double fall was near the midpoint of the trip and we frequently stopped there for lunch. The typical fall had a broad rim which allowed you to carefully consider where you wanted to go over as opposed to being swept over.

The last falls at the Babel Tower Trail was different, being a fifteen foot drop, one where you went down without a tube because of its narrow channel which twisted left. At the end of the drop was a very deep pool of water. Also above the pool was a ledge which was about eight feet higher providing a platform from which to jump over twenty feet into the pool. This was our getting-out spot where we would start our hour plus walk up to the rim road, requiring an 843 foot elevation gain. Our after-float treat was going to a near-by local café where we could always get strawberry/rhubarb pie with ice cream to finish the meal.

Before anyone tries to duplicate this river adventure, a small, cautious group should first go on a scouting trip. In the years since our float trips there have been two major forest fires in the Linville Gorge and there could be many trees and debris in the river. Also not all sections of the river are as safe; for instance Maurice Yokley and I made a float trip from Babel Tower out the remaining portion of the Gorge. There was one spot where the river was contained in a narrow channel before a falls; Maurice got there first and was swept over. He yelled at me to avoid that falls, but I could not hear him and I too went over. At the bottom of the drop, my foot firmly wedged between two rocks. My body was held under water by the full force of the river. If my foot had not twisted and come free at the last second, then I would not be writing this now.

Final Thought---As I was returning from a Kentucky apple search trip, I stopped at a convenience store for a driving break and to get a snack. In the process of dealing with the twenty-three year old male clerk, I said "Thank you sir." His surprising reply was, "Don't call me SIR, because I am not important." I then said to him, "You are important to someone." We are all important to many people and are therefore each very special.

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Note: Some helpful background information for my State Line History section was found in the Virginia Places online article about the Virginia-Tennessee Boundary; plus additional sources elsewhere.



John Weaver, Jr.



Tom's Linville Gorge River Tube



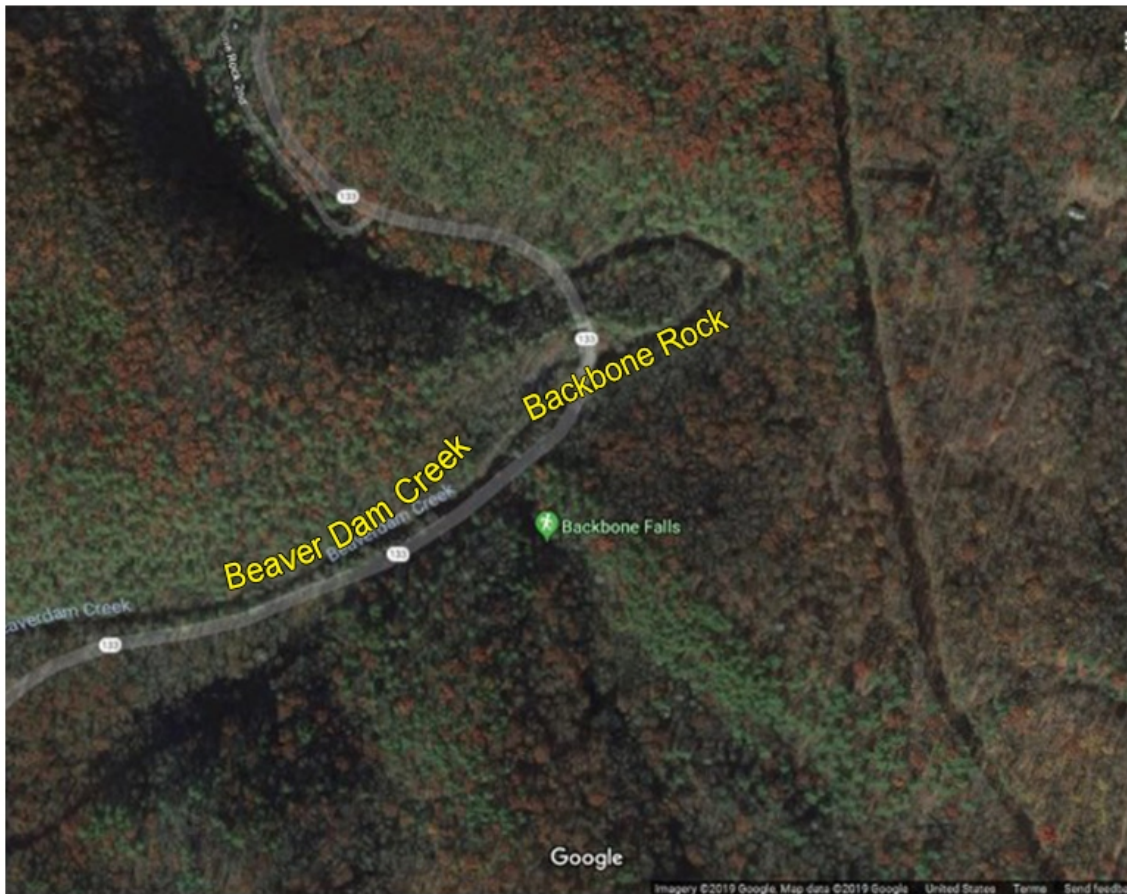
Tom Sargent and His Historic Farm (Kathy Sprung photos)



Virginia/ Tennessee State Line Notch (Source: MapQuest)



*Backbone Rock Tunnel
(Zach Vance/Johnson City Press)*



*Backbone Rock, historic Steep Rock
(Source: Google Earth)*