



# **MOUNTAIN PASSAGES: Natural and Cultural History of (American Chronicles)**

*George Ellison*

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# MOUNTAIN PASSAGES: Natural and Cultural History of (American Chronicles)

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"I'm continually intrigued by the manner in which the natural and human histories of any given region overlap and eventually commingle. That process is ongoing, of course, anywhere one chooses to reside, but in no place I've experienced or read about is there a richer context than here in these mountains." This intriguing collection of intertwined essays results from writer George Ellison's thirty-year fascination with Western North Carolina and its Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains. Gathered into three broad sections--Natural History, Cherokees and Mountaineers--these insightful essays provide a wealth of historic detail and offer a window onto the rich cultural heritage of this stunning and oft-misunderstood part of the country. Through a diverse cast of characters including early explorers and European plant hunters, a Cherokee shaman or two, weather sharps, a hermit, a moonshiner, several writers of note, ornithologists and naturalists, we hear stories in a distinctly Appalachian tone and gain an understanding of mountain life and lore. We develop a new language fit for mountain life, speaking of balds, knobs, gaps, seeps, springheads and shoals, and begin to understand the roots of the names Crooked Arm, Deeplow Gap and the Boogerman Trail. We see the world through the eyes of the ancient Cherokees, for whom the Nantahala Gorge, for example, was a "chasm of horrors" associated with the "uktena," a mythic serpent from the dreaded Under World.

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