

# Balsam Peak Names Are Descriptive

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second of two articles by H. C. Wilburn on peak names in the Plott Balsam Range in Jackson and Haywood Counties).

Under the category of descriptive names, Guyot made the following designations: (1) Rocky Face, which is the peak now generally known as Yellow Face. As viewed from the west or Soco Valley side it presents a "yellow face." From the southeast "Rocky Face" is a correct descriptive term.

(2) Black Rock Mountain, which is easily identifiable from points on the highway in Scotts Creek valley a few miles above Sylva. This also is a correct descriptive term.

(3) Oldfield Mountain, now generally referred to as Oldfield Top, is only a smooth dome rising less than a hundred feet above the flat surface of the Plott Balsam Range upon which it is located. Natural clearings of, perhaps fifteen or twenty acres, on its south and west slope, gave rise to the name, Oldfield. These fields have long been the resort of fox hunters, berry pickers and sight-seers.

(4) Rockstand Knob which stands at the head of Fork Ridge between the east and west forks of Campbell Creek, is reminiscent of old hunting days. No doubt the "crack" of the long rifle and the speeding "p a t c h e d" bullet has brought down many a "varmit" to replenish the larder and the leather of redoubtable hunters in the old days, as well as to satisfy the ambition of modern sportsmen with his high-powered rifle.

(5) Lickstone, which is a broad, flat top mountain suitable for the purpose that gave rise to its name.

The very name itself conjures up stories of a vocation long prevalent in these mountainous sections. In the days there were no roads except winding trails that could be walked or ridden on horseback, many nights were spent around camp fires by neighborhood groups, which carried in salt and two or three days supply or rations. Salt was spread on a smooth stone if one was available, and the place became a "lickstone." A smooth place on the ground might serve, in which case it was simply a "lick" prefaced by the name of some person who used it most. In other cases "boxes" were chopped out in the top of a log, and the salt poured in. This gave rise to the name, "licklog." There are many licklog gaps in the mountains. If the cattle were not already in the vicinity of the "lick" for their periodic "salting," two whoops and three hollaos usually brought them bellowing and stampeding.

Coming now to Prof. Guyot's 3rd choice of sources for names of mountains, that is, "men of note," we have in order of the highest to the lowest: (1) Amos Plott Balsam which stands at the head of Campbell's Creek, and in plain view, about four miles distant, of the site of the log cabin home of Amos Plott. Incidentally, this fine specimen of log-cabin architecture is still in use, although it was removed from its original site, re-erected and covered, a few years ago. Whether the character and the current accounts of the hunting prowess of this denizen of the primeval forests entitled him, in the estimation of Prof. Guyot, to have his name fixed to the master peak in the entire area, is not in the province of this article to an-

swer. Certain, however, it seems, his descendants, the third and fourth generations in this vicinity, and elsewhere, have no reason to differ with Guyot on either score.

The alternate name, "Waterrock Knob," which is more currently used in referring to this peak was derived from the fact that on its northwest slope, near the top, under a sheltering cliff, is a flat rock over which water constantly trickles, and has slacked the thirst of many a hunter, cattle ranger, and in later days, wood cutters.

(2) Brother Plott. As previously indicated, this peak is only a short distance from Amos Plott Balsam. Just what was in the mind of the explorer when he so designated it would be an uncertain guess. It could have been a facetious suggestion of Wid Medford or Bill Reinhart.

(3) Enos Plott Balsam. This peak is currently known merely as Plott Balsam, the first part of the name having been dropped by common usage. Most Government maps use the shorter name. This name was in honor of the 4th son of Henry Plott. Prof. Guyot visited his home, may have lodged with him for some time. He determined its elevation and recorded it as 3,002 feet, and noted that "it is at the north foot of the range" (Plott Balsam Range). The peak was in view from where the professor was making his observations, and towered over 3,000 feet above him in a distance of less than three miles. At the present time, John A. Plott owns and lives at the home of his grandfather, Enos Plott.

Not being satisfied with fixing the name, Plott, to several individual points, Professor Guyot designated the massive, 16-mile-long

range as the Plott Balsam Range. Maybe in this he was seeking to memorialize the dogs, Canine Plottiana, which, to say the least, played a considerable part in making of the region one notable in the realm of the chase, which was the primordial activity of man in wrestling his living from the earth.

No doubt some of the current accounts of bear hunting exploits related to Guyot by his loquacious assistants were some of the same ones that have come down as family legends to the present time, and which led him to fix the name of Amos Plott to the master peak of the entire Plott Balsam area. I have heard a number of times, and from different sources, the account of an incident that nearly cost the life of the redoubtable Amos Plott.

In a chase in which he and others were engaged, a large and ferocious bear was wounded, and in efforts to defend itself from the hunters and the dogs, took refuge in a sink-hole where a tree had been uprooted. Amos Plott, with drawn knife, proceeded to finish off the "varmit" in a hand-to-hand combat. As he approached the beast to make a deadly thrust the soft earth gave way at the edge of the hole, and threw the hunter off balance and into the vicious paws and fangs of the infuriated beast. But, in spite of his horrible predicament, he succeeded in sending his knife into a vital spot of the animal's body. Amos Plott escaped with his life, but was so "chewed up" and clawed that he nearly bled to death. It is related that, as he was being led and partially carried down the mountain side between two of his comrades, his

clothing became so blood-soaked and heavy that he requested that they be stripped off and replaced with the dry clothes of one of his friends.

In another account the victim was one of Amos Plott's favorite bear hounds, named, Porter. At a location still known as "Porter Die Gap," about one mile north of Amos Plott Balsam, during a bear fight, Porter, the dog, suffered such serious injuries that he died there. The name has persisted to this day in memory of a great dog and as a reminder of a dangerous, and once necessary vocation, that in these days is still considered a "he-man's" sport.

It has been noted that the Blue Ridge Parkway comes down from higher levels to the south into this gap. No doubt the name, "Porter Die Gap," will pose a question in the mind of many a tourist as to the meaning of such a name.

To us moderns these hand-to-hand contacts with the beasts of the forests may seem like fiction, but there are many authoritative accounts of such actual happenings. Davy Crockett in his "Memoirs," related how he, in a night hunt, by himself, went into a rock cave den and slew a 500-pound bear with no other weapon than his long knife.

In their book, "Heart of the Alleghany Mountains," written in the 1880s, Zeigler and Grosscup recorded a number of bear hunting exploits. One by the redoubtable hunter and story teller, Wid Medford, tells how, when his long rifle failed to stop the "varmit", had a knife-and-claw, life-or-death encounter, and came out barely second-best.