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, this one on Plott Balsam Range.)

...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 Scott's Creek valley a few miles above Sylva. This also is a correct descriptive term.

(3) Oldfield Mountain, which is generally referred to as Oldfield Top, is only a smooth dome rising less than a hundred feet above the skyline of Plott Balsam Range. Upon which it is located. Natural clearings, of perhaps fifteen or twenty acres, on its south and west slope, give rise to the name, Oldfield. These clearings have long been a hunting ground for deer and other game.

(4) Rockstand Knob which stands at the head of Port Ridge, between the east and west forks of Campbell Creek, is reminiscent of old hunting days. No doubt the "rockstand" of the long rifle and the speed of the deadly hunter are still in use, although it was removed from its original site.

(5) Stickstone, which is a broad, flat-topped mountain overlooking the valley, is the name for the peak in the entire area, is not in the province of this article to answer. 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.

(6) Waterrock, which is more correctly used in referring to this peak was derived from the fact that its northeast 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 rancher, and in early days, woodcutters.

(7) Brother Plott. As previously indicated, this peak is only a short distance from Amos Plott Balsam. Just what was in the minds of the explorers when he so designated it is an uncertainty. It could have been a facsimile suggestion of W.D. Medford or Bill Reinhart.

(8) Enos Plott Balsam. This peak is currently known merely as Plott Balsam, the first part of the name being dropped by common usage. Most Government maps use the shorter name. This name was in honor of the 4th son of Henry Plott. Plott, of Guyot and his home, may have lodged with him for some years. He determined its elevation and recorded it as 3,003 feet, and noted "it is at the north foot of the range" (Plott Balsam Range). The peak was in view from the professor's home. It was making his observations, and covered 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.

(9) 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 the region one notable in the realm of the chase, which was the primal activity of man in wrestling his living from the earth.

No doubt some of the current accounts of bear hunting exploits are due 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 chance in which he and others were engaged, a large and ferocious bear was wounded, and in efforts to defend itself from the dogs, took refuge in a sinkhole. 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 deathly 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 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 died 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 hunting dogs, 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 dogs suffered such 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 occupation, 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 elevations to the south. In this event, "Porter Die Gap," will pose a question in the minds of many a tourist as to the meaning of such a name.

To us moderns, these hard-to-believe facts with the beasts of the forest may seem like fiction, but there are many authoritative accounts of such actual happenings. Davy Crockett in his "Reminiscences," related how he, in a night hunt, by himself, went into a rock cave 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 1880's, Zeigler and Grosscup recorded a number of bear hunting exploits. One by the redoubtable hunter and story teller, W.D. Medford, tells how, when his long rifle failed to stop the "varmit," had a knife and a rope, life-or-death encounter, and came out barely second-best.