

### Y-12 and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park – a grand partnership, part 3

This series on the Help the Smokies project is creating considerable interest. I am aware of several other people who have indicated they enjoyed that project and who are writing about their experiences there. I look forward to getting input from any of you who want to relate your impressions of this soon-to-be 18-year effort. The relationships that have built over time and the many mentions of the sense of accomplishment that goes with this project are quite apparent in responses from all who have participated.

I mentioned Bob and Louise Presley earlier. Louise shared some of her memories with me recently. She recalled the very early part of the project and how excited Bob was about the opportunity to help the Smokies. The park had been special to them for years. And I am sure she feels close ties to the park still. The same can be said for others who have participated in the project. Somehow a sense of “ownership” for our great national park results from participating in the Help the Smokies workdays in the park.

Louise recalled that the first effort at Metcalf Bottoms was known as “Phase I” and was held on August 10, 1996. Then, the next workday was known as “Phase II” and was held on September 14, 1996. “Phase III” was held on November 9, 1996, and by then the project had grown to have a life of its own.

Gordon Fee, president of Lockheed Martin Energy Systems, recalls that the first he heard of the project was when Bob Presley came to his office wanting to solicit volunteers for a special workday in the Smokies. He recalled thinking it was a good idea and encouraging Bob to proceed. Gordon also recalls participating in the early phases of the project to check out what he had agreed to and being convinced that it was a worthwhile effort.

When I spoke to him asking for his memories of the project, he was pleased to realize that the project was still going strong and that there had been so many really good things accomplished to help the Smokies. Gordon retired in early 1997, and Robert Van Hook took over as President of LMES in April 1997. So Gordon only saw the first year of the project completed.

In my research into this project, I was able to determine that Lockheed Martin Energy Research, Inc. was formed in 1996 to manage and operate the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. So forming a volunteer effort to help the Smokies required involvement of both companies.

An appeal for help was included in a one-half page news article in the Energy Systems' News on July 25, 1996, telling about the kickoff of the special new project and asking for volunteers. Louise recalls, “We had approximately 120 people show up for the first workday at Metcalf Bottoms. Volunteers included people from Y-12, ORNL, DOE Headquarters, and some contractor employees.”

Louise continued, “One of the significant memories of the November 9, 1996, workday at Metcalf Bottoms is that was the day it snowed. Our luncheon menu for the day was hot dogs

and bowls of chili. The menu was right on target for the cold weather! I have photos of the snow falling as we were all having lunch.”

She also recalled, “One of the other memorable days was the day we prototyped the work for the picnic area at Cosby on May 15, 1999. That was the day the Park Service guys were working on a bear that had been captured in a container in the picnic area. We got to watch GSMNP Ranger Kim Delozier and his crew do their work. We all stood around the sedated bear at lunchtime, and Kim explained what and why they were doing certain procedures to tag the bear. Absolutely fascinating! I have photos of this date also.”

Do you get the idea that Louise really enjoyed her experiences with Help the Smokies? She did, and she is not the only one of us who share her memories of those special days. I vividly recall both the snow in November and the bear episode in 1999. What fun!

Louise also shared, regarding Kim Delozier, “Kim is the author of the newly published book, *Bear in the Back Seat: Adventures of a Wildlife Ranger*. It has been so well accepted that it is already on book best seller lists. He has a second book, with more stories, to be released in a couple of weeks.”

As I look back on the early days of the Help the Smokies project, I recall the National Park Service not being sure at all that the project would succeed. But as it was not costing them anything because Oak Ridge was supplying the labor and Georgia-Pacific Corporation was providing the materials needed to restore the picnic tables, they decided to try it.

As Bob Hawthorne stated earlier, the park service soon realized they had a winner in the project. They then began to build more and more trust in what we could do and to allow us to do more challenging things to improve the picnic areas and soon even other areas of the park.

The Help the Smokies project has become an example of the powerful combination of corporate sponsorship and volunteer workers and how the combination can accomplish great things together with the National Park Service. Plus, the volunteers soon take special pride in “their” park.