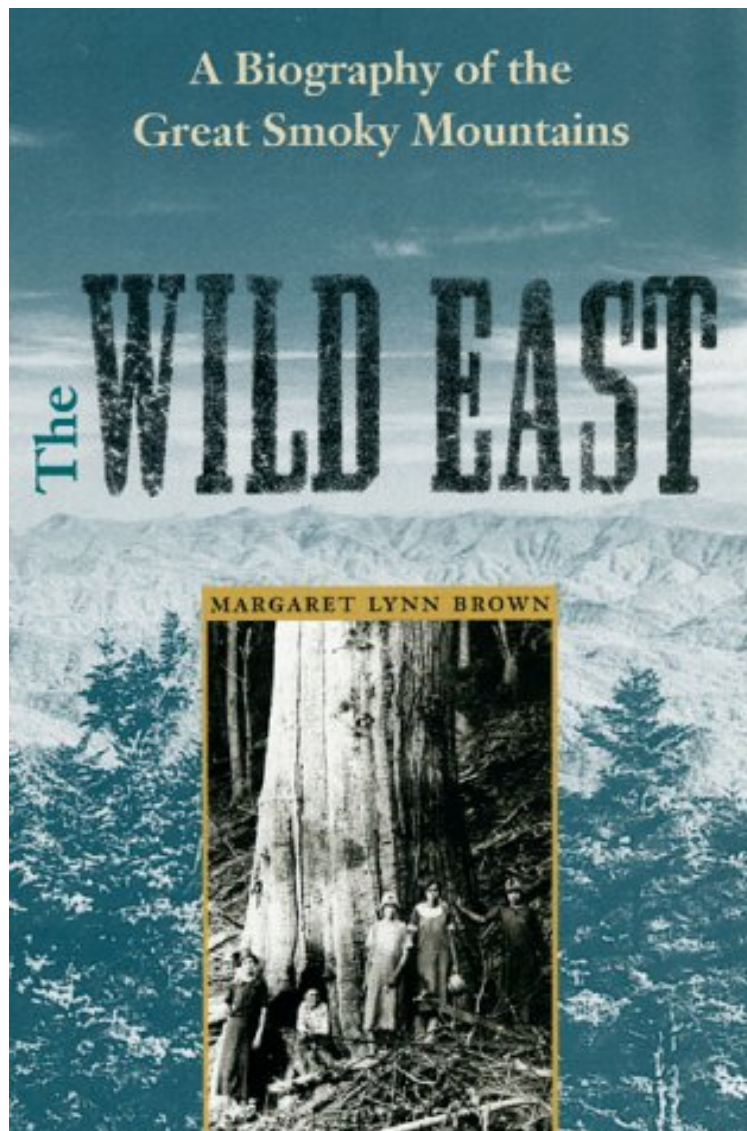


[FREE] The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains (New Perspectives on the History of the South)

The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains (New Perspectives on the History of the South)

Margaret L. Brown

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Margaret L. Brown : The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains (New Perspectives on the History of the South) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountains (New Perspectives on the History of the South):

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Recommended for fansBy A CustomerM.L. Brown's The Wild East:

A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park is the amazing story of the centerpiece of eastern wilderness. Introducing herself and her work with a refreshing and highly personal account, Brown immediately enlightens the reader as to her motivations. What proceeds is a history that is so meticulously researched that the wildness of the park seems almost suburban, making *The Wild East* simultaneously fascinating and slightly disappointing. But pathos is bound to ensue after the mythical GSMNP is taken off of its pedestal, and Brown delivers a heavy dose of reality by focusing on prior land use within the park, the contradictions of park management, and the nebulous concept of 'wilderness'. The result is an accurate account of the park's creation that de-shrouds it of some of its wild mystery, an effect that might not be enjoyed by every reader. In Brown's defense, she had few complete histories of the park to update and examine (outside of D.S. Pierce's *The Great Smokies*), and the litany of personal accounts, newspaper articles, and other histories that she unearths make for a tremendous piece of scholarship. Brown leaves no stone unturned in describing the opportunism of the Tennesseans and consternation of the North Carolinians, and she fully reviews both sides of every major argument that enveloped the park to the present. Of particular interest is her focus on making the history of park and area residents seem less like 'hillbillies' and more like average Americans of a century ago, with many personal accounts of day-to-day Appalachian life. But missing in her attempt to please everybody is a sense of the rancor and vitriol that must have surrounded the park's formation, guided by a healthy dose of eccentricity from all of the wonderful folk who gave a hand in helping or hindering the park's will to survive. Her most flagrant omission is an unbiased discussion of Horace Kephart and his contributions to both regional anthropology and the park's development; Kephart is only mentioned in passing. For a park with such a dynamic history, one might wish for a more dynamic story, with a greater sense of the conflict and character that makes the Great Smoky Mountains the centerpiece of eastern wilderness. Again, a good portion of the park was settled, and thus its status as 'wilderness' is a matter of debate. To this end Brown inexplicably addresses eminent environmental historian William Cronon on the topic of wilderness in her conclusion, which is a departure from her storyline and should have been omitted. Had she debated wilderness directly throughout the book her conclusion would not be so disjoint. An argument that Brown does develop is the issue of land management both within and around the park, with a focus on the Gatlinburg area and conflict surrounding park managers and policies. Her bear management discussion is particularly strong, as is the history of contrasting land development on the North Carolina and Tennessee sides of the park and park management of Cades' Cove. In short, despite its shortcomings, *The Wild East* is a necessary read for all GSMNP enthusiasts. Brown's honest history might make the park lose some of its luster, but will also surely create new league fans for the dynamic GSMNP.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Tells the story of the peoples of the Smokies. By Arthur Digbee. Rather than offering us a history of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Brown conceives this book as a "biography" of the Smokies. As a result, she tries to focus the story on the personal level, in terms of how people have experienced this land. Naturally, the residents of this land get top billing but visitors increasingly crowd the stage. Brown makes extensive use of oral histories, which changes the focus of this history. She sees the traditional forest economy from the standpoint of mountaineers and Cherokees, and tells us how the entry of lumber companies into the area changed that economy. Then she moves to more familiar stories around creation of the park, the damming of the Little Tennessee River by the TVA, and the growth of automobile tourism. As other reviewers have noted, she spends surprisingly little time on the role of Kephart in creation of the park, a lacuna that I cannot explain. Brown writes academic prose, but in a lively style. Though not a local, she now lives and teaches nearby and she has clearly developed a passion for this land. If you're a visitor to the Smokies and want to know more about the people of this land, this may be the best book for you.

This volume explores the social, political, and environmental changes in the Great Smoky Mountains during the 19th and 20th centuries. The author concludes that this national park, a large forested region in the eastern United States, is actually a re-created wilderness.

From the Inside Flap *The Wild East* explores the social, political, and environmental changes in the Great Smoky Mountains during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although this national park is most often portrayed as a triumph of wilderness preservation, Margaret L. Brown concludes that the largest forested region in the eastern United States is actually a re-created wilderness, a product of restoration and even manipulation of the land. Several hundred years before white settlement, Cherokees farmed and hunted this land. Between 1910 and 1920, corporate lumbermen built railroads into the most remote watersheds and removed more than 60 percent of the old-growth forest. Despite this level of human impact, early promoters of a national park represented the land as an untouched wilderness and described the people living there as pioneers. During the 1930s, landscape architects and Civilian Conservation Corps workers transformed the Smokies, building trails, campgrounds, and facilities that memorialized the rustic ideals of Roosevelt-style conservation. With the advent of the 1950s, enthusiasm for the national park system boomed again; cultural interpreters went to work to create a Ponderosa-like scene in Cades Cove, while developers in Gatlinburg emulated the designs of western ski resorts. During the 1960s, however, wilderness advocates began lobbying for a less manicured, more natural-looking landscape. In the 1970s, Brown writes, the Smokies faced many of the

consequences of these management decisions. Major crises with brook trout, black bears, and exotic species pushed park officials toward a greater regard for ecology. At the same time, scientists trained during the environmental movement foraged through the land's history seeking to re-create the look of the landscape before human settlement. Park management continues to waffle between these shifting views of wilderness, negotiating the often contradictory mission of promoting tourism and ensuring preservation.