

# JOHN BURROUGHS - THE GRAND OLD MAN OF NATURE

## Biographical Sketch

- John Burroughs - Born April 3, 1837 in the Catskill Mountains, near Roxbury, New York, Delaware County, New York.
- Dies March 29, 1921 near Roxbury, New York.

## Background and Career

John Burroughs was an American naturalist and essayist important in the evolution of the U.S. conservation movement. According to biographers at the American Memory project at the Library of Congress, John Burroughs was the most important practitioner after Thoreau of that especially American literary genre, the nature essay. By the turn of the century he had become a virtual cultural institution in his own right: the Grand Old Man of Nature at a time when the American romance with the idea of nature, and the American conservation movement, had come fully into their own.

He continued to publish, and grew interested in the poetry of Walt Whitman, whom he frequently defended in literary arguments and later met during a period when Burroughs and his wife were separated. Whitman would become a life-long friend of the Burroughs', and vainly attempted to reconcile the two.

Whitman encouraged Burroughs to develop his nature writing, and Burroughs' work in turn improved Whitman's own perceptions of nature.

In 1867, Burroughs published *Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person*, the first biography and critical work on the poet, extensively revised and edited by Whitman himself.

Four years later, *Wake-Robin* was published and became a huge bestseller. As industrialism was solidifying its grasp, readers wanted to be reminded that some of the nature they had never sufficiently appreciated was still around. Burroughs had found his niche, and created the nature essay. Later he was invited to be a leader of a college nature club which eventually became known as "The Wake Robin Club".

In 1874, he bought a small farm in West Park, NY (now part of the Town of Esopus), and devoted himself completely to his writing.

Later, he bought some land nearby and in the fall of 1894, began work with his son Julian Burroughs (1878-December 15, 1954) on an Adirondack-style cabin that would be called "Slab-sides." At Slabsides he wrote, grew a large field of celery, and entertained visitors, including students from local Vassar College. Burroughs also renovated an old farmhouse near his birthplace and called it "Woodchuck Lodge." This became his summer residence until his death.

## Contributions to Camping and Woodcraft

Burroughs accompanied many personalities of the time in his later years, including Theodore Roosevelt (*Camping and Tramping with Roosevelt* -1906), John Muir, Henry Ford (who gave him an automobile, one of the first in the Hudson Valley - became known as the Road Gypsies), Harvey Firestone, and Thomas Edison. Most notably, in 1899, he participated in E. H. Harriman's expedition to Alaska.

*The Nature Fakers* - In the 1903 Burroughs wrote an article attacking, among others, William J. Long, Jack London, and Charles Roberts. He accused Long of being a counterfeit natural-

ist, and substituting sentimentalism for science. Also caught in the battle was the leader of the nature/adventure genre Ernest Thompson Seton. Seton, however, proved his skills as a naturalist and eventually enlisted Burroughs and Roosevelt as members of the Board of Directors of the Woodcraft League of America.

## Burrough's Legacy

Many of Burroughs' essays first appeared in popular magazines. Twenty-three volumes of these essays, published between 1871 and 1922, are usually considered to make up the "Writings of John Burroughs" of which collected editions have been offered in numbered sets by at least three publishers.

He is best-known for his observations on birds, flowers and rural scenes, but his essay topics also range to religion and literature. Burroughs was a staunch defender of Whitman and Henry David Thoreau, who were then unpopular because of their perceived literary excesses.

**Many of Burrough's writings have become available on-line through such groups as Project Gutenberg, the Catskills Archive and the Burroughs Association.**

## Bibliography - Included among many others

- *Wake Robin* (1871)
- *Winter Sunshine* (1875)
- *Signs and Seasons* (1886)
- *Songs of Nature* (1901)
- *Far and Near* (1904)
- *Ways of Nature* (1905)
- *Camping and Tramping with Roosevelt* (1906)
- *Time and Change* (1912)

## Resources

• *The Nature Fakers: Wildlife, Science and Sentiment* by Ralph H. Lutts

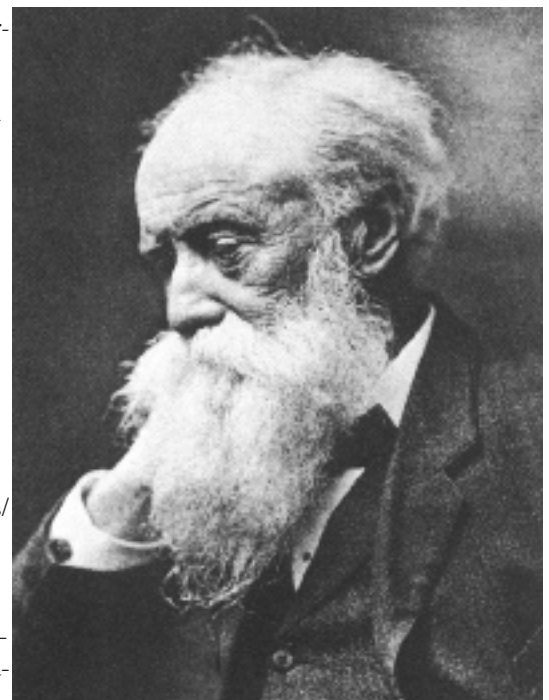
• *The Chief: Ernest Thompson Seton and the Changing West* by H. Allen Anderson

• <http://www.johnburroughs.org/>

• [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Burroughs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Burroughs)

• <http://www.ecotopia.org/ehof/burroughs/>

• <http://re-search.amnh.org/burroughs/>  
- The John Burroughs Association.



# Horace Kephart - Dean of American Camping

## Biographical Sketch

- Horace Sowers Kephart born 1862 in East Salem, Pennsylvania
- Kephart dies in an automobile accident April 2, 1931 near Ela NC.

## Background and Early Career

Horace Kephart achieved success in two careers. Trained as a librarian, Kephart achieved national recognition during his years as director of the Mercantile Library in St. Louis, Missouri, from 1890 to 1903. While living in what was already one of the largest cities in the nation, Kephart began indulging in outdoor life through camping and hunting trips. As his passion for the outdoors increased, Kephart began to write articles about the subject. Kephart developed 10 years of experience writing about excursions centered on Arkansas and Missouri. Eventually he succumbed to what he later called "nervous exhaustion" and concluded that urban life was a major contributor to his problems. He left his career as a librarian and decided to move to western North Carolina.

In 1904, at the age of 42, Kephart arrived in western North Carolina to begin his life anew. He chose a simple lifestyle and "nature-as-healer" approach. At the same time, he immersed himself in his new natural environment and took an immediate interest in the history and culture of the people. Drawing on his library background, much of his understanding of the region came through readings on the topic to which he added his personal observations. During his lifetime, Kephart emerged as a recognized authority on the cultural and natural history of the region. He wrote hundreds of articles during his lifetime, but became especially renowned for his classic works *Our Southern Highlanders* and *Camping and Woodcraft*. These two books are still in print and remain popular. *Camping and Woodcraft* remains a standard for practical advice on outdoor activities, even after almost one hundred years. The narrative style of *Our Southern Highlanders* crafts the natural environment and social theories of his time into the lives of the people, cultural developments and adaptation to a region.

## Contribution Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Despite a stereotype of Appalachia that often continues today, neither the history nor the culture of western North Carolina has been stagnant. Kephart arrived at a critical period of change for the region. Railroads had pierced the mountains of western North Carolina in the 1880s and in their wake came large-scale industrial development, especially in the logging industry and mining.

Kephart, who was personally modest and rarely sought the limelight, nevertheless used his abilities and reputation on behalf of the movement to create a Great Smoky Mountains National Park. As a unique and recognized personification concerning the cultural and natural studies on the Great Smokies region, he was influential in convincing individuals on both the local and national levels of the need for such a park. Kephart's arguments on behalf of a park were thoughtful and pragmatic as well as appealing to the love and appreciation of nature. Acknowledging that the Great Smoky Mountains contributed to his mental and physical recovery after 1904 and describing the economic poten-

tial of a national park, he campaigned vigorously to preserve the last major stands of forests in the East.

## Kephart's Legacy

While Kephart's life was cut short by an automobile accident in 1931, it had become apparent in his lifetime that a national park would be a reality. Two months before his death the U.S. Geological Board recognized Kephart's contribution by naming a peak within the park Mount Kephart, an honor previously bestowed only after an individual's death. In the ensuing years, Kephart's major works have remained in print and articles appear on a routine basis about his contributions to camping, regional history, and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In addition, significant interest in Kephart the person continues, and several biographical studies have been produced.

A complete on-line exhibit is available at <http://www.wcu.edu/library/digitalcoll/kephart/horacekephart/timeline.htm>. This is a showcase of the many items housed at the Hunter Library and Mountain Heritage Center at Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

## Bibliography

- *Our Southern Highlanders*
- *Camping and Woodcraft; A Handbook for Vacation Campers and for Travelers*
- *Camp Cookery*
- *Recreation Library: The Camper's Manual For the Novice and Expert.*

Edited historic works as well -

- *In the Old West* - Relates the days of Kit Carson and the Mountain Men. A classic of western Americana by the Englishman, George Frederick Ruxton.
- *Hunting in the Yellowstone or on the Trail of the Wapiti with Texas Jack in the Land of Geysers* by Earl Of Dunraven



Wrote regularly for *Forest and Stream* and *Outing* magazines

## Resources

- <http://www.alibris.com>
- <http://www.abebooks.com>
- <http://www.bookfinder.com/>
- Introduction by Jim Casada to the 1988 *Camping and Woodcraft*.