

## Autumn Comes to the Cove

Autumn arrived at 7:44 a.m. today, but a prelude to the season's arrival was a trip down memory lane – and through one of nature's finest offerings. On the last day of summer, a family outing took us to Cades Cove near Townsend, Tenn., in the Great Smoky Mountains.

The feel of fall hung in the air. The high reached only 74 degrees, and a breeze became the advance guard of autumnal weather. The 11-mile Cades Cove loop road is always busy with cars, bicycles and hikers. And it was so Sunday.

To travel into Cades Cove is to take a look at America's pioneer past. Settlers first entered the Cove legally after an Indian treaty transferred the land to the State of Tennessee in 1819. By 1850, the population peaked at 685. With the soil growing tired, and new states opening in the West, many families moved out in search of more fertile frontiers. By 1860, only 269 people remained. Slowly, human numbers rose again to about 500 just before the national park was established in the late 1920s. Now, people no longer live in Cades Cove. Only their cabins, barns, rail fences, church buildings and a water mill remain as evidence of their lifestyle.

Entering the Cove Sunday, wild turkey foraged for food in a meadow. Along the way, whitetail deer, accustomed to crowds along the roadway, posed for photos.



Fall was coming, and the Cove knew it. Fields of goldenrod tipped their tops in the gentle breeze. Here and there, sycamore trees began changing their leaves from green to gold. Red spots were appearing on the leaves of black gum trees.

For those early settlers, these were signs of harvest, which meant hard work but a celebration of the bounty of the land, and a chance to share good times with neighbors. But it also meant the coming of snows and ice storms and strong, cold winds in the not-too-distant future. September was a signal to begin the preparations for winter.

As we traversed the loop through the Cove, the reminders of autumn – and how much easier life is for all of us today – were all about us. And the journey gave opportunity for gratitude to those who had blazed this trail before us.

--Beecher Hunter