

MOUNTAINS

Kephart, 'a student, first, last, and always'



Word from the Smokies
Arthur "Butch" McDade
USA TODAY NETWORK

In early 2009, during the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Libby Kephart Hargrave, the great-granddaughter of noted Smoky Mountain writer Horace Kephart, offered a complete manuscript of an unpublished novel, written in the 1920s by her ancestor, to the director of Great Smoky Mountains Association for possible publication.

The novel, entitled "Smoky Mountain Magic," was published by the association in the middle of that year and became available to the public. Its publication during the 75th anniversary of the park was auspicious since Horace Kephart had worked diligently for the establishment of the national park in the Smokies, and the belated publication of "Smoky Mountain Magic," his one and only full-length novel, essentially completed his major works.

Kephart, a former distinguished librarian in St. Louis, came to the pre-national park Smokies in 1904 after a series of personal and professional setbacks, and he lived the last quarter century of his life among the mountaineers of the Carolina Smokies.

After an initial period spent in a remote cabin on Hazel Creek in the mountains, Kephart moved to a boarding house in Bryson City, where he lived as a writer until his death in an automobile crash in April 1931. In addition to his novel, "Smoky Mountain Magic," Kephart wrote several nonfiction books, two of which — "Camping and Woodcraft" (1906) and "Our Southern Highlanders" (1913) — are still in print today, over a century after their initial publications. He also wrote dozens of magazine articles, essays, and booklets about the outdoor life and the Smokies from an office overlooking the Tuckaseegee River in his adoptive hometown, ultimately earning him the sobriquet of "Dean of American Camping."

Hargrave's fortuitous submission of her great-grandfather's novel for publication in 2009 essentially ushered in a decade-long renaissance of new media about her ancestor's life and literary works, including the production of her own comprehensive DVD documentary released in 2017 entitled "An American Legend — Horace Kephart, His Life and Legacy." For several decades prior to Hargrave's biographical documentary, the published interpretation of Horace Kephart's literary and personal life had



Horace Kephart in an iconic portrait taken by his friend and fellow park-advocate George Masa. Mount Kephart in the Smokies is named after the author in honor of his work to support of the creation of the national park.

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generally been in the form of two biographical introductions by the late George Ellison and Jim Casada in two University of Tennessee Press facsimile reprints of "Camping and Woodcraft" and "Our Southern Highlanders." Both Ellison's and Casada's biographical sketches are excellent, but due to space limitations, the full range of Kephart's life couldn't be fully explored.

Continuing the revival in Horace Kephart's works, in 2019 the first full-length biography in book form about Horace Kephart's life was published by Great Smoky Mountains Association under the title of "Back of Beyond: A Horace Kephart Biography." Written by the aforementioned George Ellison and librarian Janet McCue — who together penned an introduction to the 2011 Great

Smoky Mountains Association reprint of "Camping and Woodcraft" — the full biography provides a detailed examination not only of Horace Kephart but also his wife, Laura, and their children. It is an important document in the story of Horace Kephart and won the prestigious Thomas Wolfe Memorial Literary Award.

Complementing Ellison and McCue's biography is the 2020 publication of previously unpublished writings by Horace Kephart in an excellent book entitled "Horace Kephart: Writings," edited and introduced by George Frizzell and Mae Miller Claxton of Western Carolina University. Frizzell and Claxton say in their introduction that they wanted to show the wide range of Horace Kephart's life-long writings, not just his

well-known books. In that regard they "edited the letters, articles, unpublished manuscripts, photographs, and many other texts demonstrating Kephart's proficiency as an outdoor writer and advocate for Great Smoky Mountains National Park." In that endeavor they succeeded mightily.

Their edited work is a truly compelling compilation of Kephart writings drawn from the span of his entire life, many of which are not well known. The 707-page book includes notable thematic chapters titled "Camping and Woodcraft," "Guns," "Southern Appalachian Culture," "Fiction," "Scouting," "Park and Trail," and "Family and Friends," with chapter introductions written by Frizzell, Claxton, and other Kephart scholars. An important component of the edited work is Frizzell's comprehensive bibliography of Horace Kephart's published writings. Also included is Kephart's revealing autobiographical piece entitled "Horace Kephart, By Himself," first published in 1922 in the North Carolina Library Bulletin. Frizzell and Claxton also include a little-known 1959 essay entitled "Horace Kephart, A Personal Glimpse" by Clarence Miller, a librarian friend of Kephart from his St. Louis days.

Frizzell and Claxton relate that Horace Kephart's widow, Laura Mack Kephart, once described her late husband as an intellectual with a formidable knowledge of many subjects. They quote her as saying that her husband was "a student, first, last, and always." In "Horace Kephart: Writings," Frizzell and Claxton show just how true her statement is.

"Horace Kephart: Writings" is an excellent addition to the previous books on the subject and serves as a particularly valuable companion to Ellison and McCue's full-length biography. Both books have helped to spur an ongoing revival of interest in Kephart, and McCue is currently working with the Asheville-based filmmaker Paul Bonesteel on an additional forthcoming biography of the photographer George Masa, another champion of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and a close friend of Kephart's. "Back of Beyond" is available in the Great Smoky Mountains Association web store at SmokiesInformation.org and in all park bookstores.

Arthur "Butch" McDade is a retired Great Smoky Mountains National Park ranger and the author of "Old Smoky Mountain Days" and "The Natural Arches of the Big South Fork." Additionally, he's a contributing writer to the "Encyclopedia of Appalachia" and has written over 50 magazine articles for a variety of periodicals. He now works at Pi-guey Forge Public Library.

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Meisner, founding member of the Eagles, dies at 77

Randy Meisner, a founding member of the Eagles who added high harmonies to such favorites as "Take It Easy" and "The Best of My Love" and stepped out front for the waltz-time ballad "Take It to the Limit," has died, the band said Thursday.

Meisner died Wednesday night in Los Angeles of complications from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, the Eagles said in a statement. He was 77.

The bassist had endured numerous afflictions in recent years and personal tragedy in 2016 when his wife, Lana Rae Meisner, accidentally shot herself and died. Meanwhile, Randy Meisner had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and had severe issues with alcohol, according to court records and comments made during a 2015 hearing in which a

judge ordered Meisner to receive constant medical care.

Called "the sweetest man in the music business" by former bandmate Don Felder, the baby-faced Meisner joined Don Henley, Glenn Frey and Bernie Leaton in the early 1970s to form a quintessential Los Angeles band and one of the most popular acts in history.

Prince Harry loses part of lawsuit but will get his day in court

Prince Harry's lawsuit accusing the publisher of The Sun tabloid of unlawful snooping on him can go to trial, but not on allegations of phone hacking, a High Court judge ruled Thursday.

The case also cannot deal with a claim that newspaper executives made a secret settlement pact with the royal family, the judge ruled.

The Duke of Sussex alleged the publisher of The Sun and the now-defunct

News Of The World hacked his phone, employed investigators and used deception to unlawfully gather information on him dating back two decades.

News Group Newspapers, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch, argued that the suit should be thrown out because the claims were brought after the six-year limitation to do so expired.

Justice Timothy Fancourt said Harry was well enough aware of a phone hacking scandal that roiled Britain more than a decade ago that he could have brought his own case sooner. But the younger son of King Charles III can proceed on allegations about other unlawful information gathering, such as hiring private investigators to dig up dirt on him, the judge ruled.

Japanese pop star pursuing career in US announces he's gay

Japanese pop star Shinjiro Atae said

he is gay in an emotional announcement at a fan event that was warmly welcomed in a country where the government does not recognize LGBTQ+ equality.

"What I'm going to tell you now may not be something you expect or hope to hear. Perhaps some of you may need time to understand," Atae told fans at the event in Tokyo on Wednesday.

"For years, I struggled to accept a part of myself. ... But now after all I have been through, I finally have the courage to open up to you about something," he said. "I am a gay man."

Atae performed for 15 years in the hugely popular group AAA before it went on a hiatus in 2020. He's been based in Los Angeles lately and is pursuing a solo career in the United States.

Atae's revelation comes at a time of increased awareness and support for the rights of LGBTQ+ people in Japan.

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