

Place names connected to the Bryson City Cemetery

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Although the Bryson City Cemetery is tagged with a town's name, the truth of the matter is that many of the folks buried there have roots well outside of the town limits. Indeed, it would be just as accurate to call it Swain County Cemetery, since there are people who come from the length and breadth of the anvil-shaped county of Swain buried there. This can be demonstrated by pointing to where specific individuals once lived, but it is also manifest in place names throughout the county.

One particularly unique feature of the cemetery is that there are three peaks inside the Great Smoky Mountains National Park named for individuals buried in the cemetery, and all three can be seen from the cemetery grounds.

Mt Kephart

Mt. Kephart is of course named for Horace Kephart, who is buried alongside fellow author Fiswoode Tarleton in graves donated by Bland and Jack Coburn after the two died in a 1931 car wreck. The boulder which rests on Kephart's grave was brought to the cemetery from near the former Chastain Reagan place on near the mouth of Chasteen Creek on Bradley Fork. Mt. Kephart is about 3 miles east of Newfound Gap. An unmaintained, but clear manway leaves the Boulevard Trail about 100 yards from its start at the Appalachian Trail, and proceeds directly across the top of Mt. Kephart on its way to the Jumpoff. The Jumpoff, located a short ways beyond the crest, offers a view to the east which is at once lovely and intimidating. Few places in the Smokies can accurately be called a precipice; the Jumpoff is decidedly one.



Eastward view from the Jumpoff on Mt. Kephart

Unlike the thoroughly contaminated view from Mt Kephart's crest as one looks northward to the landscape-littering lights of Pigeon Forge and Sevierville, a southwestward view from its southern flank in the gloaming reveals the faint lights of Bryson City. Surrounded by mountains and ridges bearing the fingerprints of God, they are warm lights which speak of hearth and home, of a people and place to belong. It is sadly ironic that Kephart, a gifted man who came to find himself and his "Back of beyond" in these mountains which he came to love, was apparently never again drawn to the warmth of the lights of his own family and home.



Southwesterly view in the gloaming from near Icewater Springs Shelter, on the southern flank of Mt. Kephart. The lights seen in the lower left are from Bryson City.

Coburn Knob

Coburn Knob is named for John E. (Jack) Coburn, who is buried just south of Kephart and Tarleton in the family plot which was purchased by Jack's wife, Bland. The Coburns owned more property in what is now the Park than any other single couple, holding properties ranging from Mingus and Couches Creek of Oconaluftee to the Twentymile Ridge where the Shuckstack Fire Tower is perched. One piece of land which Coburn owned prior to the original park formation was once known as Cold Springs Knob, a name validated by a delicious cold spring which issues from the south side of the mountain, right alongside the Noland Divide Trail. This was – and is – a section where the logger's ax never rang out. Coburn owned 100 acres which embraced the knob and the Cold Spring, and upon his donation of the land to the NC Park Commission, it was renamed Coburn Knob. From the northwestern end of the cemetery, Coburn knob is the highest point visible to the north (ever so slightly west of due north). A line from the cemetery grounds to its peak passes directly over the top of Sharptop.



Spring lizards in Coburn Knob's Cold Spring (there are two in the photo; can you spot both?)

Kelly Bennett Peak

Kelly Bennett Peak is named for “Doc” Kelly Edmond Bennett, an accomplished photographer, lover and long-term promoter of the place which he called home. He was by profession a druggist, but that doesn’t begin to capture the breadth of his life’s work; a small subset will be noted here. He served multiple terms in both houses of the NC State Legislature as well as town mayor. Along with Jack Coburn and seven others buried in the Bryson City Cemetery, he was an organizing member of the Bryson City Rotary Club (in 1933); he later served a term as District Governor. An avid gardener, he often sported a flower of his own growing in his lapel

The Bennett’s Drugs sign is still perched above the sidewalk on Everett Street, thanks to the caretaking of the building’s current owner and FBCC member, Ivan Gibby. Kelly Bennett Peak sits astride the western lead of the horseshoe-shaped spine which wraps around the head of Lands Creek. It takes on a distinctive shape with an almost perfectly linear slope on its right side, as viewed from Bryson City. There is no trail to the peak, but it can be reached by traveling around the ridge from the Noland Divide Trail. Doc Kelly’s grave is marked by a boulder brought to the cemetery from the Park.



**“Doc” Kelly Bennett
(courtesy of Jessie Greyer)**



Kelly Bennett Peak and Coburn Knob, seen from the northwestern section of the cemetery.

It is fitting that Kelly Bennett Peak and Coburn Knob are the highest points seen from this portion of the cemetery. If one were to select the ten most significant contributors to the history of the town, the county and beyond, both would clearly be high upon that list.



Sunset beyond Kelly Bennett Peak, seen from near Lonesome Pine overlook

There's more – much more

But peaks are just a starting point. There are over 40 geographical locations in Swain County for which the place names connected to individuals and families of those buried in the BC Cemetery (not including roads). These are features which are *entirely outside* of the city limits. A map of the county with place names marked can be seen [here](#).

There are three prominent ridges in Swain County named for families of which there are multiple representatives in the BC Cemetery – Welch, Hughes, and Hyatt.

Welch Ridge

With the exceptions of the main Smoky spine along the state line and Balsam Mountain, which defines the boundary between Swain and Haywood Counties, Welch Ridge, at over 15 miles in length, is the longest ridgeline within Swain County. It spans the distance from Silers Bald on the state line to the mouth of Hazel Creek, providing the eastern boundary of the entire Hazel Creek drainage. To go along with the ridge, there is Welch Bald (on Welch Ridge) and two different streams which go by the name Welch Branch. All of these are connected to the Welch family which settled the area near the junction of the Little Tennessee and Tuckasegee Rivers. There are more than two dozen individuals in the BC Cemetery who carry the Welch name.



Early fall morning view from Clingmans Dome of upper Forney Creek and its western wall, Welch Ridge

Hughes Ridge

The Oconaluftee area carries some of the oldest white settler names in the county for the simple reason that it was the first portion of the county opened up to legal white settlement. Among the earliest families to settle in the Ravensford area were the Hughes. Hughes Ridge divides the waters of Raven Fork from those of Oconaluftee, from Pecks Corner, about 10 miles east of Newfound Gap, all the way down to Ravensford. Approximately the first 2.5 of its approximately 12-mile length remains above 5,000 feet in elevation. There are eleven folks buried in the cemetery who bear the Hughes surname, but a number of others, including Ora Evelyn Hughes Dougherty, her daughter, Ora Lee Dougherty Sossamon, and grandson Jon Sossamon descend from the Hughes. A high point in the middle section of Hughes Ridge is Becks Bald, which is also the

headwaters for Becks Branch. The Becks were also early settlers on the Oconaluftee; there are at least 18 Becks buried in the cemetery.



SE View from near Laurel Top of rugged, handsome Hughes Ridge and the Balsams beyond

Hyatt Ridge

Hyatt Ridge heads up at the most remote section of the Smokies, at Mt Yonaguska, just east of Tricorner Knob. It roughly parallels Hughes Ridge and separates the drainages of Raven Fork and Straight Fork. According to the notes of Hiram Wilburn¹, early historian with the Park Service, it was named for “Neddy” (Edward Gaither) Hyatt, an immigrant from England born in 1740 who married Hannah Leatherwood. Among their descendants in the BC Cemetery are great-grandchildren Mary Charlotte Hyatt Bennett, Harvey Hyatt and Ute Hyatt, 2-g grandchildren Frank Hyatt, Sr, Dallas Hyatt, Zenas Hyatt and Newell Hyatt Martin. There are at least two dozen people buried in the BC Cemetery with Hyatt roots.

Over three of the approximately ten-miles long Hyatt Ridge are above 5,000 feet in elevation. The Hyatt Bald area, located a short ways south of the McGee Springs backcountry campsite, continues to show substantial evidence of the days when it was truly a bald used for summer grazing of livestock.

¹ *Origin and Significance of the Place Names in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park* (draft), Hiram Wilburn, available for viewing in the Hiram Wilburn collection, Haywood County Library, NC Room, 976.889 U.



Grassy understory in the Hyatt Bald area

Other place names

These are but a few of many examples of place names throughout the county with familial connections to those buried in the Bryson City Cemetery.

The map doesn't mark the many place names inside the city limits, including:

Branches: Hughes, Jenkins, Bryson

Hills: Bennett, Black

Streets: Battle, Beck Cove, Bennett (multiple), Black Hill, Bryson (multiple), Collins, Everett, Franklin, Fry, Fryemont, Hughes Branch, Jenkins Branch, Mitchell, Wheeler

Other: Sossamon Field, Ferguson Field

Can you name others? Please let me know (Don.Casada@friendsofthebccemetery) and we'll add them to the list.

Swain County place names with Bryson City Cemetery connections

