

Cashiers Outside

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Identify the natives by hiking with field guides

Photos by David Joy/Staff

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Although taking any hike offers a chance to get off of the couch and do something, strolling up a trail with a backpack full of field guides brings an opportunity to gain a whole new understanding of Appalachia. An old saying goes, "sometimes you can't see the forest for trees," but taking a moment to see just the tree is equally valuable.

While most hikers take a moment to examine a single piece of the natural world—whether it be a wildflower, mushroom, insect, or animal—few ever know exactly what they are seeing. This is where traveling with a field guide becomes extremely useful.

Pocket field guides can be purchased from a number of area stores, with the most popular series coming from Waterford Press. These pocket guides generally showcase the most abundant types of species, but in-depth guides can also be purchased to suit a specific interest.

Personally, I like to carry pocket field guides for trees, butterflies, mammals, birds, reptiles, and mushrooms, with a larger in-depth field guide for wildflowers. Though I occasionally cannot identify something I find, this small backpack library serves well for most occasions.

Though any hiker could stumble onto a strange fungus and think that it was an interesting to look at, carrying a field guide provides a chance to learn exactly what type of mushroom you are looking at. Often small tips only found in these guides will enable the hiker to identify the species.

For instance, this past weekend as I walked along a trail at Mull Creek I found a small up-turned mushroom that looked similar to the popular chanterelle species. However, the stalk on the mushroom seemed different. After checking a field guide I found that it looked similar to the orange-brown milky mushroom, which is known to ooze a milky liquid when cut and to smell like fish. Sure enough after cutting the mushroom and smelling the cap I was sure what I was looking at was an orange-brown milky.

Having the references at hand to identify plants and animals on a hike adds an entirely new aspect to the adventure. With field guides hikers are able gain a new perspective on wildlife.

This weekend I saw an old-man-of-the-woods mushroom, a haymaker's mushroom, a red-spotted purple butterfly, summer azures, and many other interesting species, but without a field guide I would have had no clue what they were.

Though hiking with field guides is great for

any location, one of my favorite hikes in Jackson County is up a section of the Caney Fork Creek system where two headwater streams conjoin: Mull Creek and Beechflat Creek. These two streams move into one before joining Piney Mountain Creek and Rough Butt Creek. Together these four streams serve as the headwaters for one of the largest tributaries of the Tuckaseegee River.

Accessibility to Mull and Beechflat is easily available with a large parking area located at the end of Caney Fork Road. To get there drive north on Highway 107 into Tuckaseegee and make a right onto Caney Fork Road, directly across from Moon-

shine Mini Mart and East LaPorte Park. From there stay on Caney Fork until the road dead ends at the meeting of Mull and Beechflat Creek.

This section of game-lands is made readily accessible with a system of gravel logging roads that serve as perfect walking trails. From the parking area gravel trails follow both Mull and Beechflat creeks and either hike is equally as beautiful.

No matter where you like to hike take the time to purchase a few field guides the next time you head outdoors. These small pamphlets and books are a wealth of new knowledge for kids and adults alike, and heading back to the car you'll cer-



A rabble of tiger and pipevine swallowtails gathered to suck moisture from the gravel-logging road.

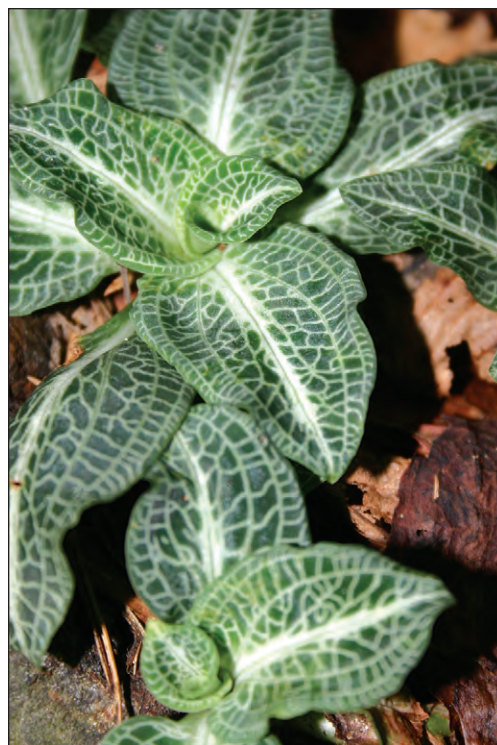
tainly have a few new species committed to memory and a better understanding of the wild around you.



A tiger spiketail dragonfly settled along the bank of Mull Creek long enough for this photo.



Above left, this smooth lepiota mushroom had a notable collar near the cap. Above right, the base leaves of this rattlesnake orchid were much more attractive than the stalk flower with few petals.



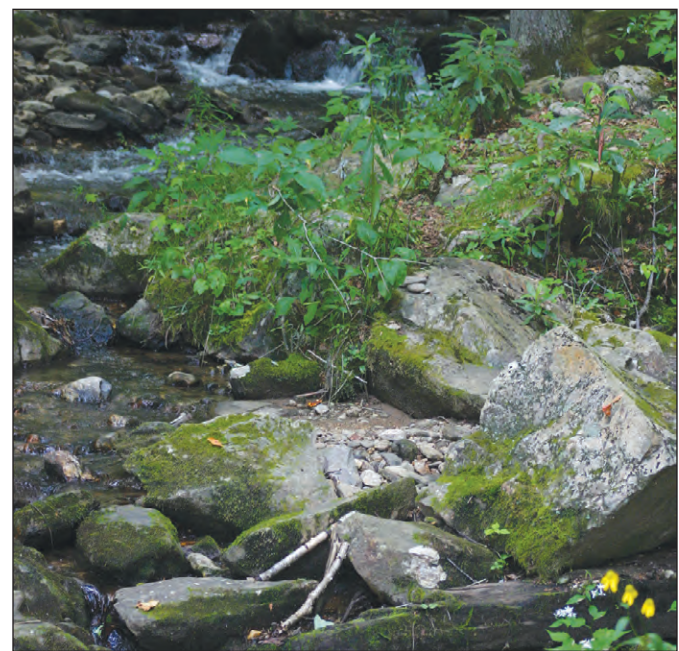
This white coral fungus looked more suited for a reef than a forest floor.



This orange-brown milky mushroom was notable by its fishy aroma.



This dusky salamander from Mull Creek marks one of the most prominent salamander species in Appalachia.



Above, Mull Creek is one of the author's favorite places to hike in Jackson County. Below, cut-leaf coneflowers are reminiscent of black-eyed susans without the trademark dark eyes.

