

Pettus

AUTOMOBILING THE MOUNTAINS IN 1910

On May 10, 1910, 19 automobiles (Buicks, White Steamers, E. M. F.s, Maxwells, Buicks and Reos) were hoisted on to freight cars of the Carolina and North-Western railroad.

The first contingent were loaded at the Chester depot. Six belonged to Chester citizens—M. A. Carpenter, D. P. Crosby, Robert Gage, J. W. Moffatt, Paul Hardin and L. B. Nichols. Nichols drove the most unusual car, an International Harvester high wheel car.

W. E. Hughes of Charleston had driven his White Steamer from Charleston to Chester in order to participate in the unusual expedition headed for Linville Gorge and Blowing Rock in the N. C. mountains.

J. Meek Smith and his E. M. F. "machine" were picked up at Clover along with Smith's passenger, S. R. Clinton. Ten more autos were added at N. C. depots. Counting the drivers and their passengers, there were 69 people in the expedition.

At all of the stations crowds of people turned out to view the loading process. The cars were unloaded at Edgemont, west of Hickory, N.C.

At Edgemont the group found a typical mountaineer of the time who played a fiddle for them. Other natives gathered to inspect the cars. The visitors offered to give any who wished a short ride. One driver found his car "loaded almost instantly with seventeen persons, including men, women, children and

babies, every available space, including the steps....” At Boone, several hundred people were given “joy rides.”

At Linville it was noted that quite a number of the mountaineers, both men and women, carried shotguns. It was explained that the guns were for defense as well as for killing game.

The steepest grades were between Linville and Blowing Rock. All of the cars went into low gear. After travelling 3 or 4 miles, a belt on the lead car broke. There was no room for the other cars to pass so all stopped. S. M. Grist wrote that “as far back as one could see, and that, by reason of the hair pin and reverse curves . . . the machines were sending up clouds of white smoke, the said smoke or steam, indicating that the engines on every car . . . were almost red-hot.” The repair process took long enough for the autos to cool off and all but two of the cars “behaved admirably” on the remaining journey to Blowing Rock.

No one was stranded. Colonel Nichols had brought along two mechanics and numerous spare parts.

Col. L. T. Nichols had planned the excursion with the object of serving both the railroad’s promotion of excursions and the development of towns located at scenic spots. About two-thirds of the party, which included a number of wives, elected to go to the top of Grandfather Mountain. They could drive their cars to a point within 2 and a half miles of the top where the cars were parked and the party then hiked to the top.