

1910 automobile caravan peaked at mountaintop

On May 10, 1910, workers hoisted 19 automobiles (Buicks, White Steamers, EMFs, Maxwells, Buicks and Reos) onto freight cars of the Carolina and North-Western Railroad.

The first contingent was 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 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 EMF "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, 69 people were in the expedition.

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

At Edgemont the group found a mountaineer 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 17 persons, including men, women, children and babies, every available space, including the steps. . . ." At Boone, several hundred people were given "joy rides."

The steepest grades were between Linville and Blowing Rock. All of the cars went into low gear.

After traveling 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. Col. Nichols had brought along two mechanics and numerous spare parts.

A man known as L.T. Nichols had planned the event to promote railroad 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 2½ miles of the top, where the cars were parked. The party then hiked to the top.

It was reported that because of the "high wind and low temperature they suffered considerable inconvenience, one reputable citizen asserting over and over again that he broke off icicles near the top."

The party found adequate accommodations. The Watauga Inn at Blowing Rock was praised for its food and entertainment. A Mr. McRae played his bagpipes for the assembled group in the large main room. But most were early to bed, exhausted by their arduous trip to the mountains.

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NEARBY HISTORY

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