

NEWS RELEASE

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Local Naturalist Releases Third Hiking Guide

The much anticipated third installment of Ken Czarnomski's unique hiking guides are now available exclusively in Haywood County, NC

Maggie Valley, NC – It is with much anticipation and excitement that local naturalist Ken Czarnomski in partnership with the the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority announces the release of the third installment in a series unique local hiking guides – **The Blackrock Mountain Hiking Guide**. The partnership between Ken and the TDA came together in 2013 with an idea to create a one-of-a-kind Haywood County specific hiking guide, starting with the Purchase Knob hiking guide. The map was so popular that Ken followed up with a second, Sam's Summits Loop Trail, and now the latest: the Blackrock Mountain Hiking Guide. Located along the Balsam Ridge area of the Plott Balsams in Haywood County, the guide leads hiking enthusiasts on a 4.6 mile adventure that has the ability to be extended into as much as a 10.8 mile hike if preferred. "I have worked closely with Ken from his very first guide until now and have personally hiked with him several times. I can honestly say he is one of the most knowledgeable and dedicated naturalists in this area, who has a deep passion for our mountains. I am proud of his continued efforts to expose people to the joys of hiking," says Anna Jorstad, Communications Manager for the Haywood County TDA.

The latest guide was of particular interest to Ken due to the trail's relationship to local land conservation efforts and the special history of the Plott Balsams. Ken was first enticed by this area in the year 2000 when he visited Waterrock Knob (near to the entrance of the trailhead for Blackrock) in the height of fall on one of those exceptionally crisp "Carolina Blue" sky days. At the time, the trail to Blackrock was overgrown and unmarked, but now sixteen years later, the Blackrock Mountain trail is now maintained by the Southern Appalachian Highland Conservancy. "Two years ago, I approached Southern Appalachian Highland Conservancy for permission to map there. In 2015, they approved the effort (due to insurances, etc.). Later, they put me in touch with Bill Holman, NC Director of The Conservation Fund, who was really knowledgeable about the local conservation efforts." Once Ken got the green light to move forward with his project he began his journey to do what he loves so well – hiking, cataloging, and mapping out his beautiful guide. The map is hand drawn and illustrated by Ken himself, which includes impeccable attention to detail. He also spends a great deal of time researching the history of the area, including information on the guide about the conservation efforts of this area. "This map is important to me because I believe many people are unaware of just how crucial conservation efforts actually are. I wanted to inform people about the fact that if we want to protect our local heritage and have a land legacy in the future, conservation efforts play a major role," says Ken.

The area Ken highlighted in the guide - the Balsam Mountain Range - is home to a significant part of Haywood County heritage, the Plott Balsams. The Plott family, who settled in the area just prior to the 1790's, brought with them thoroughbred hounds of German descent. The Plotts bred the lineage and trained them to hunt large game, like black bears. The tradition of this breed has continued and Plott Hounds are now one of the most sought after big game hunting dogs in the country. The breed is also appropriately dubbed as the official state dog of North Carolina, proudly hailing from Haywood County. The history of the hound is celebrated every June at PlottFest in Maggie Valley, NC. Because of the Plott family's contribution of these great dogs, a portion of the Balsam Mountain Range was named the Plott Balsams. The new guide includes the history of the family and the dog, as well as information about the actual mountain range. This is one of the aspects that makes Ken's guides stand out from others - they include both a detailed hiking map and the intriguing history and information about the actual mountains you are exploring.

With PlottFest taking place June 18 - 19, the guides have been released just in time for the annual celebration. Guides will be available for free at the festival and can also be obtained at the Haywood County Visitor Center in Maggie Valley. "We are pleased to be offering the Blackrock Mountain map at PlottFest 2016," says Amy Spivey, co-founder of PlottFest. "The map is a great addition to our festival and an asset for visitors to the area. The maps are beautiful and informative. I appreciate that they will assist our guests as they explore the splendor of the mountains," says Amy.

For more information on the guides or to pick up your own copy of the free Blackrock Mountain Hiking Guide, stop by the Haywood County Visitor Center at 1110 Soco Rd., Maggie Valley, NC 28751.

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Welcome to Haywood County, North Carolina, boasting 46 of the most scenic miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway and authentic Appalachian history, culture, and natural experiences. Along with its picturesque beauty, Haywood County and its five towns of Maggie Valley, Waynesville, Lake Junaluska, Canton and Clyde offer year round activities and events centered around farm-fresh food, unique heritage, an eclectic music and art scene, and of course, the wildly natural great outdoors. No matter what experience you choose, we guarantee that your stay here will stay with you! For more information visit www.visitncsmokies.com or contact the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority at 800-334-9036.