

How They Named the Western Maryland Mountains

Part II — Evitt's & Meadow Mountain

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Cumberland was a bustling gateway to the West when Thomas Jefferson McKaig arrived in 1826, equipped with a college education but only \$1.25 in his pocket. He would become a prominent lawyer and state legislator.

Before settling in with the establishment, though, young McKaig had a little adventure on Evitts (“EE-vits”) Mountain, in what is now Rocky Gap State Park. George Hughes, an old settler, told him that a hermit had lived on the mountain many years before. According to Hughes, the man’s name was Evert; he was an English native and the first white settler in the area. Apparently disappointed in love, he sought the wilderness and built a cabin high on the mountain, dying sometime before 1750.

Intrigued by the story of someone who braved the wilderness so early, McKaig decided to hire a guide and find the man’s homesite. On or near the mountaintop, they found two acres that had been cleared and cultivated. Apple, pear, and plum trees were growing there; so were many English strawberry plants. The searchers also found a stone chimney, apparently the remnant of a cabin.

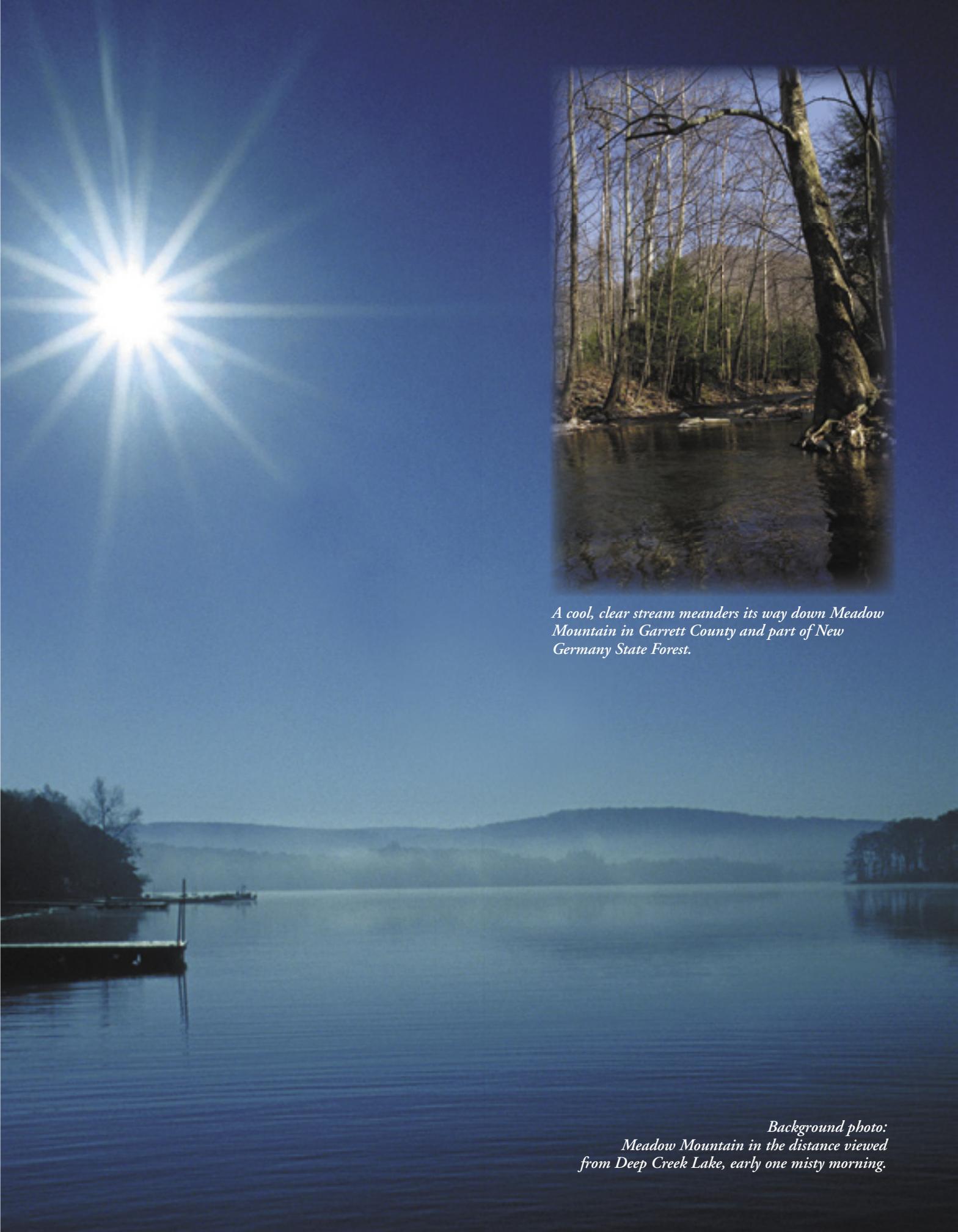
McKaig later told the story to J. Thomas Scharf, who used it in his 1882 *History of Western Maryland*. Scharf suggested that “Evitts” is a corrupted form of “Evert.” That may be true, but many old references support something closer to “Evitts” as the early name of the mountain and nearby Evitts Creek. A history of the Ohio Company quotes a 1743 reference to “Evetts Creek” and a 1745 reference to “Everts Creek.” Charles Mason, of the famous Mason-Dixon surveying team, mentioned “Evert’s Mountain” in his 1766 journal, and a 1795 map said “Evits.” While the apostrophe kept appearing and disappearing—and still does—the second “t” eventually returned to stay. Different pioneer accents may have led to different spellings, and spelling was then a hit-or-miss effort in any case. There is general agreement that the mountain and creek were named for the hermit.

If you’re visiting Rocky Gap State Park and ready for a fairly strenuous hike, you may want to get a park map and follow it to what is believed to be the hermit’s homesite. A sign there marks a clearing, with low stone walls nearby and an old stone well or cistern. The stone remains, though, could be from later use. Charles (“Buddy”) Morgan, maintenance chief of the state park, lived in the area as a boy in the 1960s. He recalls the remnant of an apple orchard and a decaying, shed-like structure at the site. He said that “a little bit” of a foundation is still there, “but the leaves and stuff are covering it up.” The park has never sponsored an archeological dig at the site. Ed Hanna, who heads the Western Maryland chapter of the Archeological Society of Maryland, said his group might seek a permit to do survey work there. “I’d love to get up there and pursue that,” he remarked.

The hermit undoubtedly had splendid views from his mountain, although there was no lake below it when he lived there. Later settlers farmed extensively at the foot of the mountain, growing corn, wheat, and rye. Cattle and horses grazed where the lake is now.

The State of Maryland started building Rocky Gap State Park in the 1960s, eventually adding a lake of about 240 acres. Edward Habeeb (“ha-BEEB”), a Lebanese-born florist whose shop was in the area, was the main mover and shaker in the founding of Rocky Gap; so it seemed appropriate to name the lake for him. At the 1976 lake dedication ceremony, according to the *Cumberland Sunday Times*, “officials praised the 80-year-old local businessman as one of the most beloved and dedicated civic leaders in the history of Western Maryland.” Mr. Habeeb, overwhelmed by emotion, had to ask a friend to read his formal remarks. He found it hard to believe “that you have bestowed this great honor upon me.”

Meshach Browning, a famous Maryland hunter of the early 1800s, lived and hunted in the mountains west of



A cool, clear stream meanders its way down Meadow Mountain in Garrett County and part of New Germany State Forest.

*Background photo:
Meadow Mountain in the distance viewed
from Deep Creek Lake, early one misty morning.*



Evitt's Mountain stretches along Lake Habeeb and beyond.

Cumberland. Meadow Mountain was one of his favorites. In his 1859 book, *Forty-Four Years of the Life of a Hunter*, Browning said the mountain, which runs between Frostburg and Grantsville, was named for “the once beautiful glade on its western slope.” Jack Caruthers of Grantsville, a longtime student of local history, says Browning meant Little Meadows, where General Edward Braddock camped on his march to Fort Duquesne in 1755. (Surveyor Charles Mason referred to “little Meadow Mountain” in his 1760s journal.)

While he enjoyed the challenge of hunting, Meshach Browning also had 11 children to feed, and he sold extra meat to supplement the income from his farm and gristmill. He often went off on long hunts, leaving the home place in the hands of his wife Mary. She was, he said, “the best miller on the place.”

On one hunt in the Meadow Mountain area, Browning and his two dogs had a fierce fight with a large bear, who died with groans like “those of a strong man in the last agonies.” The hunter soon pursued another bear, which suddenly turned around and started toward him. The bear “came as close as I wished him to be,” Browning wrote. “I was prepared for him, and told him to stop, which he did, when I took a fair aim at him, and fired. He ran but a few steps, and fell dead.”

Browning had so many close encounters with bears that it’s a wonder he himself wasn’t badly mauled. One of his sons, John Lynn, was not so fortunate. According to attorney Jacob Brown, in his 1896 book *Brown's Miscellaneous Writings*, the younger Browning had “a maimed hand from a terrible cut from a butcher knife in a life-and-death struggle with a bear” on Meadow Mountain.

In the cold and icy February of 1849, Jacob Brown saw another drama related to the mountain. Brown had gone to a hotel on the National Road to take one of the regular stagecoaches to Cumberland, but arrived too late to find one. Soon, though, a coach caravan arrived, bearing General Zachary Taylor, then President-Elect of the United States. Taylor, often called “Old Zach” or “Old Rough and Ready,” was on his way to Washington, D.C., for his inauguration. Jacob Brown hitched a ride to Cumberland on a coach in Taylor’s party.

After a grand dinner at the hotel, Brown wrote years later, “the caravan started down a spur of Meadow Mountain.” But the road was a sheet of ice, “and the stages just danced and waltzed on the polished road, first on the one side of the road and then on the other, with every sign of an immediate capsizing.” General Taylor’s coach headed the procession, while Thomas Shriver of Cumberland was in a coach well behind him. Shriver, a prominent member of

the Whig Party that had elected Taylor, wanted to be sure his man arrived in Washington in one piece. He kept pushing his bare head outside his coach window “to see whether the Presidential car was still upon wheels or otherwise.” Meanwhile, General Taylor kept thrusting his head outside because he was entranced by the scenery.

To Shriver’s great relief, the coaches made it safely over the icy mountains. Approaching Cumberland, they reached “the Narrows” mountain gap at twilight. “The General assumed authority and ordered a halt,” Brown wrote, “and out he would and did get, in the storm and snow, and looked at the giddy heights on either side of Will’s Creek till he was content.” Many famous people traveled the National Road over the years. Few, though, enjoyed the trip as much as Old Rough and Ready did.

Rocky Gap State Park, where Evitts Mountain begins, offers hiking, swimming, boating, fishing, and camping. From I-68: take Exit 50 and follow the short roads to Lake Habeeb. Call (301) 722-1480, or see www.dnr.state.md.us, for the park.

New Germany State Park, adjacent to Meadow Mountain, features the above activities plus skiing. From I-68: Take Exit 22; go south on Chestnut Ridge Rd. about 3 miles; turn left onto New Germany Rd.; go two miles to the park entrance on left. Call (301) 895-5453, or see www.dnr.state.md.us.

Special thanks to Alicia Norris, Rocky Gap State Park staff; Bill Cihlar, former manager of that park; and Larry Maxim, Forest Manager of the Savage River State Forest, for helpful background information.



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