

A Little Mountain Humor

The Bear Hunt

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When I lived in the Shenandoah Valley, there was an old country store with a potbellied stove, checkerboard and a wheel of cheese on the counter where you could buy a slice, have some crackers, sit down and hear the mountain stories flying like caddis flies in April. There were some real characters that came in with the tallest tales and swearin' by almighty they were true.

One such character was a mountain man everybody called "Smokey" no one knew his real name or where he really lived. One look at Smokey and you were transformed back in time; his long white beard and hair, leathered wrinkly skin, a smokey aroma that surrounded him and always grin'n from ear to ear. He was the strong silent type but when he did speak he got everybody's attention. And everyone listened when he had a story to tell. One such time he sat down with his cheese and something to sip on and began his story. There were four or five local fellows along with the owner in the store—well they fell silent, all of 'em. Smokey knew he had them all in the palm of his hand and were hangin' on every word he said. In his long, slow, southern mountain twang he began his story, and as best I can remember it went like this...

In Smokey's words, "A long time ago my granddaddy was out hunting a big ol' bear, he was a boar (male). Big, at least 900 lbs., mean and ill-tempered as they come. When he stood up he reached up 10 feet to pluck the highest fruit from a tree, he ate berries by the gallons and when he held a fish in them big ol' paws they looked like them little bitty fish you get in them little tiny cans. No doubt about it he was the biggest, meanest bear in these here parts. Do you fellas know where Devil Mountain is? It's down the road here a little piece and one side of it is sheer rock going straight up about 200 feet without nothin' grow'n on it. Well it was told by other mountain men that that big ol' bear was hangin' around the base of Devil Mountain cause there was a lotta berries there and a stream full'a trout. My granddad figured sure 'nuff that'd be the place for him to bag that bear. He grabbed up his 50 caliber long rifle (42" barrel), it was a flint lock ya know, his powder horn and possibles bag (that's a rifle man's bag with all his paraphernalia in it—flint, balls, patch cloth, grease, and anything else pertinent).



He headed off to Devil Mountain and he weren't long on the trail before he was look'n up at that great rock wall. The Indians called it a place of death and were right suspicious of it, that's probably how it become to be called "Devil Mountain." Well, anyway, he looked down and saw the biggest bear tracks he'd ever seen in his life, they were so long he couldn't hardly spit from one end to the other of one (he chewed tobacco you know), well he could hear that bear down the trail just snortin', growlin', and tearin' things up somethin awful. But he couldn't see him, then all'a sudden that bear stood up. Well granddad's hair stood straight up 'cause about 70 yards down the path there he was, the biggest meanest bear he'd ever seen. He knew he'd only have one chance at him so he concocted a plan and it went like this. That bear was right in front of the great 200' wall. Granddad picked the perfect spot beside the trail where there was a pretty good size boulder, but because of some low brush he couldn't see all that bear, so he lay down behind that boulder and waited. He knew that bear was going to come up that trail but he never did, he figured the bear musta got wind of him, he only bathed twice a year and that was once too many as far as he figured." Everyone listening was really into the story and were tell'n Smokey to come on, "What happened Smokey," they were all asking as they were glued to every word. "Well, that bear finally moved over a little and granddad got sight of part of him. Well you know that bear was in front of that rock wall so granddad figured if he took careful aim on just the right spot on that great wall he could ricochet a bullet off that wall and get that bear. Well after calculatin' the distance, figurin' elevation and testin' the wind, he picked a spot on the wall. He lay down with his rifle restin' on that boulder, then he cocked it, took real careful aim and took in a long slow deep breath an squeezed her off. There was a terrible cloud of gun powder smoke as that ol' long rifle roared to life." Everyone's urging Smokey, "What happened, what happened?" Smokey leaned back in his chair grin'n from ear to ear. "Well fellas, ya know he missed that dang wall completely."

...and that's the truth, so help me.

