

DOWN HOME SERIES

by Jadon Gibson, Contributing Writer

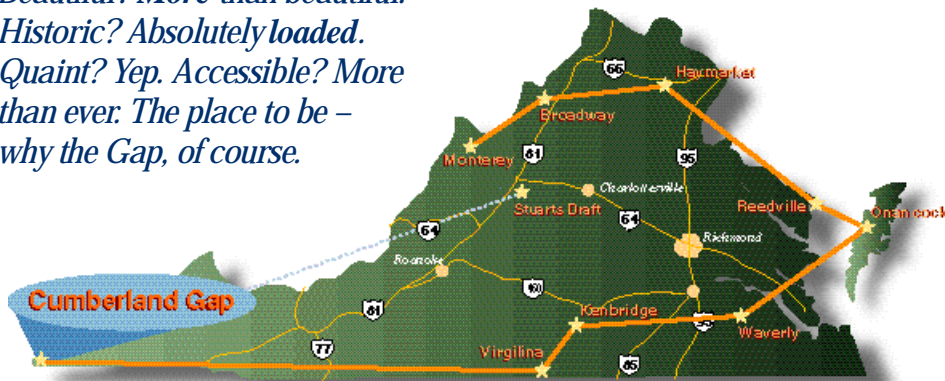
CORRECTIONS

From last month's **Down Home** article, Mr. Fraser Murray is 82, not 62 as listed. The article also named "Captain Jack" Rollins as the owner of the High Hill Mine when the owner was Joanna Baynham Gregory. "Captain Jack" worked there as a foreman. Also, the W.W. Tuck house shown is not that of former Gov. Tuck. We apologize for these errors.

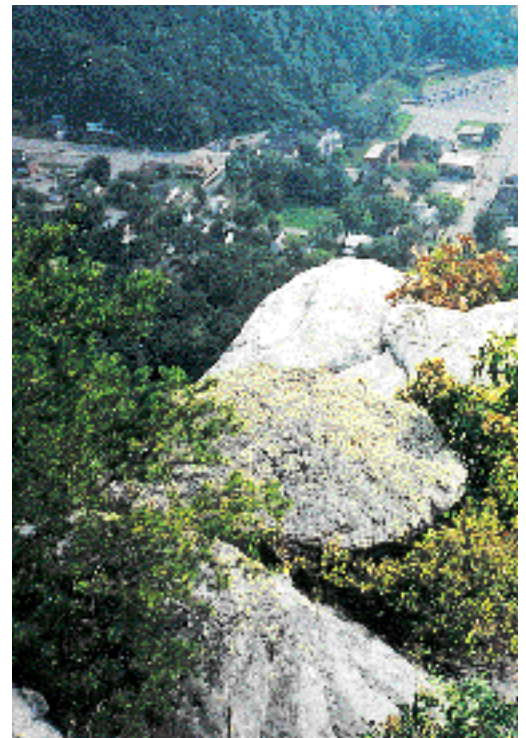
During 1998, we're making our way around Virginia, each issue visiting a small town and meeting some of the folks who make up the heart of electric co-op country. On this, our ninth stop, we'll be...

Down Home in Cumberland Gap

Beautiful? More than beautiful. Historic? Absolutely loaded. Quaint? Yep. Accessible? More than ever. The place to be – why the Gap, of course.



The Cake Box and Cookie Cabin Gift Shop (right) are housed in two of the oldest structures in Cumberland Gap. Cumberland Gap General Store owner John Ravnun (below) has "over 300 dolls and much more" in his store in the historic old town. The Tennessee portal of the \$265-million, 1.1-mile-long, Cumberland Mountain tunnel (below, right) is near the town.



Cumberland Gap, the historic pass through Cumberland Mountain, is located near where Virginia converges with Kentucky and Tennessee. The quaint town with the same name of Cumberland Gap rests a few hundred yards below the famous pass through which thousands of pioneers passed, going westward, in the 1700s. This is where Highway 58 now begins its trek across the state of Virginia to the Atlantic Ocean. Northbound and southbound motorists travel along U.S. Highway 25E, within seeing distance of Cumberland Gap.

The 1.1-mile-long, four-lane, Cumberland Mountain tunnel stretches through the mountain beneath the famous pass. The \$265-million tunnel opened for use in October of 1996 when the U. S. Park Service closed the road across the mountain and through the historic pass. Lives have already been saved and travelers don't have the lengthy waits due to accidents and inclement weather. The tunnel has helped more tourists find their way to the area, which is so rich in beautiful scenery and history. Powell Valley Electric Co-op serves much of the surrounding area.

The Appalachian Mountain chain's wilderness and its hostile Indians prohibited western expansion for three centuries after Columbus discovered North America. Hunters and explorers pushed farther into the wilds and finally, in 1750, Dr. Thomas Walker, Thomas Jefferson's guardian, documented the discovery of Cumberland Gap. Walker



JADON GIBSON PHOTOS

The town of Cumberland Gap (left) is seen from the Pinnacle atop Cumberland Mountain. A Civil War cannon remains (inset) atop the mountain, which is part of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. Mayor John Douglas, shown in front of the new Cumberland Gap Inn (above), has led efforts to broaden further the area's appeal to tourists.

and his band of men continued into the expanse that would become Kentucky, where they built the first log cabin in that state.

Cumberland Gap is one of the most identifiable places in the world, and mention of the name conjures up thoughts of Daniel Boone, pioneers, and Indians. The Gap was also considered a strategic passageway during the Civil War when it changed hands several times.

Author James Lane Allen visited the Gap in the mid-1880s and slept beneath the shadow of the Pinnacle, a large formation from which visitors can see several states.

"It was late in the afternoon when our tired horses began the long, winding, rocky climb from the valley to the brow of the pass," Allen wrote in *Harper's Magazine*. "As we stood in the passway of Cumberland Gap, amid deepening shadows of the twilight and the solemn repose of the landscape, the air grew thick with ghostly utterances — primeval sounds, undistinguishable and strange, of creatures nameless and never seen by man; the wild rush and whoops of retreating and pursuing tribes; the slow steps of watchful pioneers; the wail of dying children and the songs of homeless women; the muffled tread of routed and broken armies, all the sounds of surprise and delight, victory and defeat and hunger and pain, weariness and despair, that the human heart can utter.

"Here passed the first of all the white race

who led the way into the valley of the Cumberland; here passed that small band of fearless men who gave the Gap its name; here passed the long hunters; here rushed the armies of the Civil War; here has passed the wave of westerly emigration, whose force has spent itself only on the Pacific slopes; and here in the long future must flow backward and forward wealth beyond the dream of advance."

Alexander Arthur read Allen's article and visited Cumberland Gap, climbing to the top of Cumberland Mountain. He explored nearby valleys and was amazed at the vast mineral and natural resources in the area. Arthur returned to England and arranged the capital which would launch the rapid buildup of

Middlesboro, Kentucky, and Cumberland Gap, which is actually in Tennessee.

Cumberland Gap Mayor John Douglas and the city council are working toward capitalizing on the area's history and scenic beauty through tourism. They've worked to get adequate signs to direct tourists to the city. Counselor John Ravnum, who operates the Cumberland Gap General Store, leads periodic efforts in publishing an informational pamphlet with maps about the Cumberland Gap area. It is distributed at welcome centers and at sites which are frequented heavily by tourists.

The town has several nice shops such as the Depot Gift Shop, which was the old town railroad depot before restoration. Randolph

The Cumberland Gap Towne Hall (right) was erected in the late 1800s.



Schwartz Gift Shop, Tennyva Crafts & Country Store (named for Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia), Cumberland Gap General Store, Cumberland Gap Antique Mall, Ye Olde Four Seasons Gift Shoppe, and the Nail Keg Gift Shop all have many curiosities.

Good food can be found at Ye Olde Tea & Coffee Shoppe, Webb's Country Kitchen, and Ramada Inn in town. The old Drug Store serves tasty sandwiches and various ice cream products. Harvey Fuson makes several varieties of candy in the store window, and sells them inside. The old Drug Store is replete with old medicine bottles and gadgetry from the last century.

Visitors can rent bicycles at Cumberland Gap Outfitters to ride about the city or on a nearby mountain trail. They also have canoe rentals and dropoff and pick-up vehicles. Powell River is a short distance away.

Olde Tyme Photographs is a favorite stop for visitors to the Gap, and Ye Olde Mill, approximately 200 years old, is next door to the Cookie Cabin and the Cake Box.

Cumberland Gap is a town with a population of approximately 230 friendly citizens. Many tourists park and walk from shop to shop as everything is close and there are many points of interest.

The remains of the Iron Furnace, which was used during the Civil War, are a popular stop. The crystal-clear waters of Gap Creek rush down the rocky bed from Cudjo's Cave, except during dry periods.

The cave will be reopened for tours in the next couple of years. The National Park Service is restoring Wilderness Road across and through the Cumberland Gap mountain pass. Once complete, it will resemble the famous trail as it was in the late 1700s, when thousands of settlers passed through into Kentucky and points farther west. Visitors will be able to walk in the footsteps of Daniel Boone, George Rogers Clark and others.

Park Service planners are using old photographs from the mid to late 1800s and even older information in planning the restoration. They match current terrain features to the same sites in the old photos. In some instances they have used balloons tied with fishing line and staked at various points to get reference points. Yet they have found that much of the topography still exists with a minimum of change.

In locations where the land has changed drastically, planners are using the old photographs and other information to restore it as nearly as possible to its former appearance in order to "keep the integrity of history," in the words of one planner.

If You Go...

Virginia's Highway 58 leads to the Cumberland Gap Ramada Inn (423-869-3631), just across the state line in Tennessee. In the town, a short distance away is the two-year-old **Cumberland Gap Inn** (423-869-9172). A new **Days Inn** is located two miles away in **Middlesboro, KY** (606-248-6860), where **Best Western Inn** (606-248-5630) is also located.

Cumberland Gap borders the **Cumberland National Historical Park, which encompasses 22,000 acres in Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee** and the headquarters and visitor's center are just three miles away on the edge of Middlesboro. The center includes a museum, with free movies and other information about the area and its history.

Visitors can motor to the **Pinnacle atop Cumberland Mountain, where earthwork, trenches and cannon remain from the Civil War**. Many walking trails meander through the area, and one leads to **the point where Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee meet**. General U.S. Grant visited the area during the Civil War. Visitors can join one of the periodic four-wheel vehicle **tours to Hensley Settlement**. For nearly 30 years early in this century, it was a thriving community and is maintained by the park.

Middlesboro is the home of Middlesboro Golf Club, one of the oldest courses

in the country and home to the late Harrison Mayes, who erected large concrete crosses in many states in fulfilling his calling. A large cross is permanently lit on the mountain side on the eastern edge of Middlesboro.

Pine Mountain State Park, the oldest state park in Kentucky, is just 10 miles from Middlesboro. **High above the city of Pineville, a huge rock was chained years ago to prevent it from bounding down on the homes and buildings below**. The state park is the location of **Pine Mountain Lodge** (606-337-3066).

Harrogate, TN, is located just two miles from Cumberland Gap and is **the home of Lincoln Memorial University, which has one of the three largest Abraham Lincoln collections in the world**. Much of **Norris Lake, the largest of the TVA lakes**, also lies in Claiborne County.

Big Springs Primitive Baptist Church, the oldest church in Tennessee, still stands in Springdale, only about 15 miles from Cumberland Gap. The church was erected during the winter of 1795-96, when the area was still part of North Carolina. The church is still in good condition.

There are many other historic and scenic sights in the immediate tri-state area, including **Karlan State Park, one of Virginia's newest**.

For information about the area, **contact the Claiborne County Chamber of Commerce**, P.O. Box 332, Tazewell, TN 37879. Phone 423-626-4149.

You may also **contact Cumberland Gap City Hall**, Cumberland Gap, TN 37724. Phone 423-869-3860. ■

Historic Cumberland Gap hosts special weekends throughout the year including: Crazy Aunt Sadie's Spring Yard Sale in April; Cumberland Gap Heritage Days Folk Festival in June; Cruisin' in the Gap Classic Car Show in July; Dog Days of Summer Dog Show in August; Fall Bluegrass Jam in September; Scot-Irish-English Days & Clogging Classic in October; and Dickens of a Christmas in December. Individuals wanting more information on events or specific dates may call 423-869-8960.

Cumberland Gap could claim to be the heart of bluegrass and traditional music as many of acoustical music's greatest come from the mountain area. Hall of Fame greats Dr. Ralph Stanley, his late brother Carter

Stanley, Jim & Jesse, Jimmy Martin, and Roy Acuff, Doyle Lawson, and master fiddler Kenny Baker, to name a few, are from nearby towns.

Regular concerts with the "Best in Bluegrass" are held in the Claiborne County High School Auditorium in Tazewell, just ten miles away. Most shows are on Saturday nights, with 7 p.m. starting times. Occasional Sunday shows start at 2 p.m.

Upcoming productions include: Dave Evans & River Bend on October 10; Larry Sparks & the Lonesome Ramblers on November 7; Dr. Ralph Stanley & the Clinch Mountain Boys on Sunday, November 29, and Larry Stephenson on December 12.

The 1999 schedule includes: Chris Jones

& the Night Drivers with guest Randall Hylton on Sunday, January 10; Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver on February 6; Illrd Tyme Out on March 13; Lewis Family on Sunday, March 21; the Lynn Morris Band on April 17; Front Range on May 1; Charlie Sizemore on June 12; Russell Johnson & New Vintage on July 10; and the Gibson Brothers on August 14. The 1999 fall schedule will include Blue Highway. For more information on the musical productions, call 423-869-2444.

The Cumberland Mountain Fall Festival in nearby Middlesboro, KY, is held each October and was listed as one of the premier events in the south. The Mountain Laurel Festival, which is held each May in Pineville, KY, is the second-largest pageant in Kentucky.

There's just a lot of things to do and see in and around Cumberland Gap.

An old story of yore tells of pioneers passing through the Cumberland Mountain area and hearing a commotion not far away. Upon checking, they found Daniel Boone all by himself, rolling in the leaves and laughing in extreme merriment.

Come and visit Cumberland Gap. You'll enjoy it too. ■