

[back to article](#)



Parks belong to America

Published: Tuesday, September 15, 2009 at 4:30 a.m.

Whether hiking up Big Glassy Mountain behind the Carl Sandburg Home, taking a scenic drive along the Blue Ridge Parkway or backpacking in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, we in this part of Southern Appalachia are extraordinarily blessed. We can get to all three national treasures within minutes, or a couple of hours at the most.

We're also fortunate to be living here now, when all three parks are offering interesting and important looks at their own history and contributions as part of their birthdays.

The Carl Sandburg Home in Flat Rock celebrated its 40th birthday last year. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park celebrated its 75th anniversary earlier this month. The Blue Ridge Parkway marks its 75th birthday next year. And the National Park system itself has loads of activities, appraisals and historic events planned as it approaches its centennial in 2016 -- yes, it's a birthday party lasting seven years.

Maybe that's understandable. Given that our government gets a bad rap for everything it tries to do -- whether paving roads or delivering health care or regulating gas mileage -- the Department of Interior is right to take pride in the products it delivers -- the great outdoors, peace and quiet, the recording and preservation of American history.

Our national parks have been called "America's best idea" not only for their majesty but also for their democracy. They are open to all, accessible to all -- living, usable tributes from Maine to Hawaii of our cultural, historical and natural heritage.

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park "is a gift of the people to the government, not a gift of the government to people," Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen said during the 75th birthday celebration. "We are the beneficiaries of that forethought."

N.C. Gov. Bev Perdue added, "My left foot is in North Carolina, my right foot is in Tennessee. And the beauty of this place is that when you are here there is no North Carolina or no Tennessee. There is only one gift from God."

No one, in other words, can claim ownership of these sites; their value is in keeping them and sharing them as a part of our national heritage. The national parks and historic sites are of the people and for the people.

There will be many opportunities to learn about and celebrate the Parkway, Smokies and national park system's birthday. Ken Burns' six-part film, "The National Parks: America's Best Idea," begins Sept. 27 on PBS.

Here in Hendersonville, the superintendents of the Great Smokies, Carl Sandburg Home and Blue Ridge Parkway will participate in a forum at 7 tonight at the Henderson County Public Library. They will give brief descriptions of the parks or historic sites they oversee and take questions from the audience.

So whether you have a question yourself, or just want to learn about these great national treasures in our own backyard, check out the forum.
