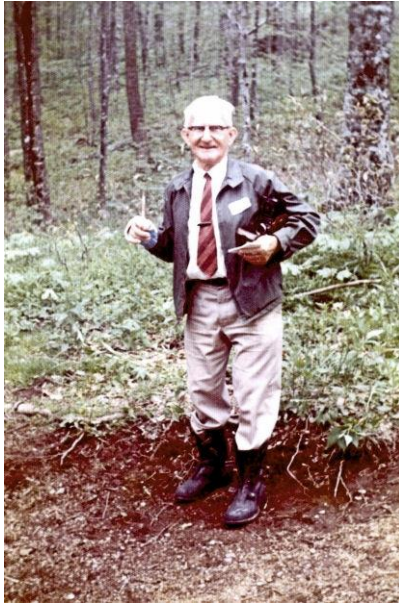


The History of the Roan Mountain Naturalists Rallies

In 1959, the vision of one German immigrant, Fred W. Behrend, led to a tradition on Roan Mountain which grows stronger every year. Hundreds of amateur and professional naturalists come to the mountain twice each year to enjoy, as one newspaper reporter recently stated, "the science, information, entertainment, and fellowship of a three-day celebration of living things in the natural laboratory of Roan Mountain."



Fred Behrend

Fred Behrend came to the U. S. in 1926 to work as a stenographer for American Bemberg in Elizabethton. Having developed an interest in birding in Germany's Black Forest, he quickly became familiar with the many species on Roan Mountain. Some residents of Carter County came to know him as "the Bird Man". "No matter what else was going on in the world, Freddy could always tell you what day which warbler arrived on Roan Mountain".

Freddy's interest in wildflowers came later, when his 10-year-old daughter, Shirley, died of bone cancer. "I couldn't hold my head up to look at the birds," he told a friend. "That's when I discovered flowers." And there were many flowers to be seen on Roan Mountain. Asa Gray, the great Harvard botanist, author of Gray's Manual said it "has the richest flora of any mountain in the U.S."

By 1959, Freddy had become news editor of the Elizabethton Star and a recognized nature photographer. He decided to embark on an ambitious project - The First Annual Carter County Wildflower Tour and Bird Walks. He asked two ETSU professors, Dr. Frank Barkley and Dr. Herman O'Dell to conduct botanical tours of the Mountain. Behrend's color slides would be the subject of a Friday night program.

Freddy continued on as director of the spring event until 1976. In 1977, when Freddy became too ill to continue this task, Dr. Lee Herndon and Dr. Gary Wallace filled in. Ardent supporter Tom Gray was director in 1978 and 1979, followed by Jim Potter in 1980, John Martin in 1981, Jim Potter again in 1982 - 84, Richard Gray (Tom's son) in 1985 and 1986, Jennifer Bauer from 1987 through 2010, then Jennifer Bauer and James Neves from 2011 through 2016, then Larry McDaniel and James Neves in 2017 and Larry McDaniel in 2018.

After seeing the spring event become so successful, in 1963, a fall event was organized, The Roan Mountain Naturalists Rally. This annual event, which is conducted the first weekend after Labor Day, quickly became as popular as the spring event, taking advantage of the many fall wildflowers that Roan Mountain has to offer. Freddy Behrend was director from its' inception in 1963 until 1976, followed by Ed Schell from 1977 until 1987, Jim Potter (ably assisted by his wife Edna Potter) from 1988 until 1992 and Gary Barrigar from 1993 until the present.

In addition, the Friends of Roan Mountain added a Winter Rally in 2007 and a Youth Rally (Xtreme Roan Adventures) in 2009. David Hall served as the director of the Winter Rally from 2009 until 2017, Richard Broadwell from 2017 until 2022 and Tracy Campbell and Jennifer Bauer in 2022. The Youth Rally Directors are Ken Turner and Larry McDaniel.

In 1997, a small group of individuals met at Roan Mountain State Park with an idea - to form an organization to support naturalists activities, including the naturalists rallies, on Roan Mountain (The stated purpose of this organization is to “foster a greater awareness and understanding of the natural, historical and cultural significance of Roan Mountain.”) This group, the Friends of Roan Mountain, has grown over the years to over 300 members, supporting the rallies and any other projects on the Roan.



Lee & Lois Herndon