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THE HIGHEST MOUNTAINS IN VIRGINIA:

MT. ROGERS AND WHITETOP OR. . . BALSAM AND MEADOW MOUNTAINS?

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The highest elevations within the boundaries of Virginia are found in the southwestern part of the state in the Blue Ridge Mountains. This portion of the Blue Ridge, often called the Iron Mountain range, is continuous with the Unaka range of Tennessee and North Carolina. The two highest summits in the state are less than four miles apart as a crow flies (or a raven at these elevations). Together, they dominate the skyline and in many ways are very similar. They are both broadly rounded and have a much darker color on top. In early winter, the cooler temperatures cause the first frosts and snows to precipitate on the summits and causes them to appear bright white. In spring and summer, the summits show a dark verdant green atop the much lighter greens of lower elevations. Even in the fall, when the lower deciduous buckeyes, maples, beeches, and birches simply riot with color, the stable homogeneous crests stand like a somber parent with a brightly dressed adolescent. The summits almost always contrast with lower slopes.

The second highest mountain is the famous Whitetop Mountain at 5,520 feet. Whitetop has been noted on almost every map of the area since it first appeared on the Frye and Jefferson maps of 1751-1754, and later on John Mitchell's map of 1755 as "Meadow Mountain" (Figure 1). The Jefferson involved in producing the first map was Peter, Thomas Jefferson's father (Sanchez-Saavedra, 1975). In 1807, the President of William and Mary College, James Madison, produced a map of Virginia, showing Meadow Mountain misplaced slightly north of the present Whitetop and White Top Mountains west of its current location. The field on Whitetop, clearly visible from the valleys below, is covered with a thick layer of grassy plants and stands in sharp contrast to the dark spruce

Figure 1. Frye-Jefferson Map of 1751-1754 showing "Meadow Mountain", the present day Whitetop Mountain.

cap of the summit. Early snows turn this field white and the contrast is often extreme during the winter. On the John Wood map of Washington County (McKee, 1994), drawn about 1821, the mountain is shown as White Knob and was the only feature designated in the Iron Mountain range (Figure 2). The first citation of Whitetop Mountain was in a 1772 Virginia treaty with the Cherokee Indians (Broadhead, 1893; Shields, 1962). On maps later than 1821, the mountain is simply labeled Whitetop. In 1874, Edward King included an engraving (Figure 3), as one of 500 illustrations in his book about the southern states of America (King, 1874). This engraving is the earliest found that clearly shows the rounded summits of Virginia's highest peaks. Many of the first scientists to visit the area made the trip up to the Whitetop "meadow". Among them was Asa Gray of Harvard University, who visited Whitetop on his way home from the famous North Caro-

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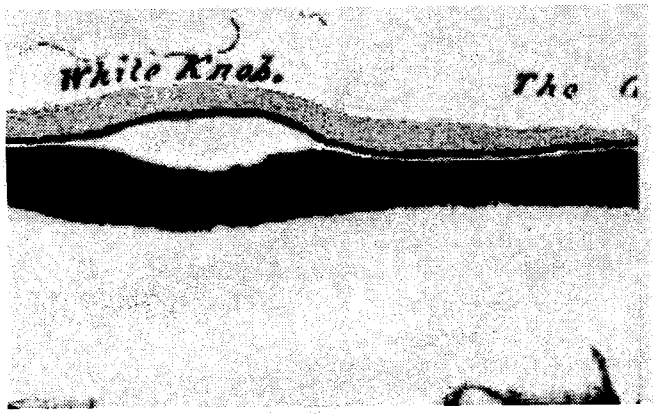

Figure 2. John Wood Map of Washington County showing "White Knob" (Whitetop Mountain).

Small and Anna Murray Vail from The New York Botanical Garden, visited both Whitetop *and* the highest mountain in Virginia at 5,729 feet. (Vail, 1892b, 1892c) They went to the highest mountain in search of a tree (Small and Vail, 1893).

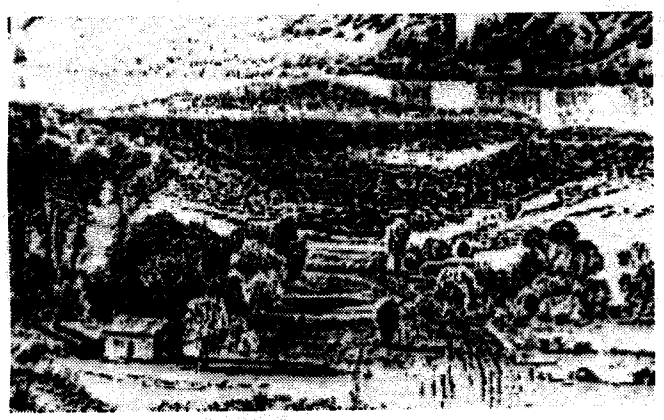

Figure 3. Whitetop Mountain (and Mount Rogers) as seen from Glade Spring. Engraving by J. Wells Champney (King, 1874).

Israel Slade, assistant to the State Geologist, described this mountain and the tree in 1840. "The Balsam Mountain, no doubt the highest in Virginia, is an interesting object . . . A dark evergreen tree is the only woody growth upon its summit--save a few scattered dwarf birch. The evergreen is a species of pine commonly called Balsam, from the fact that a viscous transparent liquid exudes and collects in blisters beneath the outer bark. The surface to a considerable distance below the summit is covered with a thick coating of moss" (Slade, Notebook No. 7, 1840). Small and Vail documented the only Virginia colony of Fraser fir (*Abies fraseri*), a southern Appalachian endemic that grows only at the highest elevations, usually 4800 feet and above (Nicholas, 1994). It has never been collected on Whitetop, even though Whitetop has been visited many times over the years by botanists, nor is it found anywhere north of this locality. Fraser fir is now widely known and loved for Christmas trees, but was originally cut for timber. To the lumbermen, fir was known as "She-Balsam" and the red spruce was called the "He-Balsam". Both these species of evergreen occur in an almost homogenous cap over the highest summit in the state. The name "Balsam" has historically been used for areas where these species occur. Balsam Mountain was placed on the Virginia map by a Danish Cartographer, Herman Böÿe in 1827 and along with White Top Mountain was prominent on the 1859 revisions (Figure 4). Arnold Henry Guyot of Princeton University used a barometer to measure the elevation of many high peaks in the southern Appalachian mountains and was rather specific about the use of this name. "Balsam mountains occur at every step from southern Virginia to Georgia. This name designates a mountain whose summit is covered with . . . *Pinus frazeri* (=*Abies fraseri*), which only grows on heights that exceed 5,000 or 6,000 feet" (Guyot, 1861).

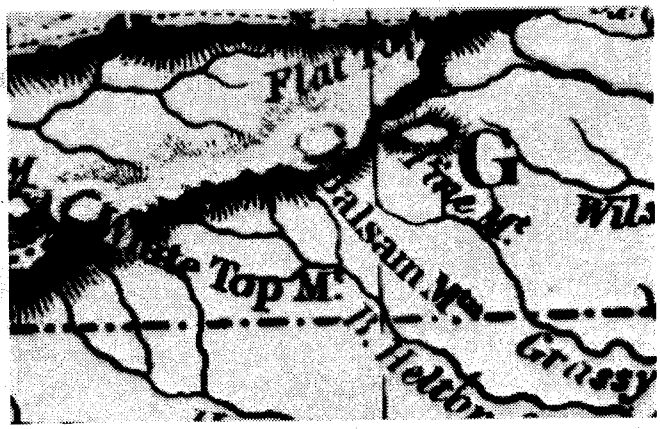

Figure 4. Herman Böÿe Map of Virginia, 1859, showing Balsam Mountain and Whitetop Mountain.

The isolation and the difficulty of the approaches to this highest "Balsam mountain" in Virginia led to it being virtually ignored until very recently. Some references (e.g. Campbell, 1969; Hanson, 1969; *Mt. Rogers Citizen*, 1970; Beetham, 1984) state that the mountain was named in 1883 by the Commonwealth of Virginia to honor William Barton Rogers, Virginia's first state geologist. As a scientist, I am in the habit of trying to verify information. While trying to pinpoint the official naming of Mt. Rogers, I came across a mystery reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes, political intrigue that would do an election year justice, and a story that spans over a century to involve several very prominent geologists and engineers that worked and lived in Virginia. Brief biographies of the people involved in the story are presented below.

William Barton Rogers (1804-1882)

William Barton Rogers has been the subject of numerous biographical works (Beetham, 1984; Bevan, 1940; Campbell, 1969; Ernst, 1974; Hotchkiss, 1882a, 1882b; Roberts, 1936; Sturgill, 1992). W. B. Rogers was a student and ultimately a professor at The College of William and Mary. His father had been a William and Mary professor, and William Barton followed in his footsteps to become an internationally known and respected authority on the geology and structure of the Appalachian mountains. William Barton often collaborated with his brother Henry Darwin Rogers in these researches, and the Rogers brothers achieved prominence in the United States and abroad for their accurate and detailed work in geology and other natural sciences.

William Barton Rogers left William and Mary in 1835 to go to the University of Virginia. He was appointed State Geologist and spent the next six years traveling widely in Vir-

ginia (which was then Virginia *and* West Virginia) to collect data about the mineral resources and geology of the area. He hired several assistants to collect field information, including Israel Slade who surveyed southwestern Virginia. Rogers first described the "natural regions" of Virginia, laying the foundations of geology and biogeography in the state. The Virginia legislature did not fund the geological surveys after 1841, but Rogers remained at the University of Virginia for about ten more years teaching natural sciences. It was at Charlottesville that Rogers became the "father of modern laboratory science". He was convinced that his students would develop further if they were required to do the experiments for themselves, rather than observing the lecturer "demonstrate" the experiment. Rogers came to understand that the University of Virginia would not support his new concept of student laboratories, and he resigned. He believed that teaching natural science without a proper appreciation of the practical side was an injustice to both the students and the professors.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology was chartered in 1859 and William Barton Rogers became president in 1862. He served two separate terms in office until poor health forced his resignation in 1881. MIT supported Rogers' educational ideals, and he built a lasting reputation. He collapsed on stage while giving the May 30, 1882 commencement address at MIT. The next day, the Richmond Dispatch announced this event with the front page by-line "A Boston Professor Drops Dead", then went on to state that he was ex-president of MIT and an old man.

Jedidiah Hotchkiss (1828-1899)

The next person that participated in this story was Jedidiah Hotchkiss. He was born in New York, but acquired a teaching job and a wife in Augusta County, Virginia. He stayed with his adopted state during the Civil War and became known as an exceptional topographic engineer and cartographer that served several well known Confederate generals. He worked for Stonewall Jackson during his most famous battles and is often considered a major contributor to his greatest successes. After the war, Hotchkiss returned to Augusta County and lived in Staunton from 1865 until his death in 1899. During this period he worked incessantly to help in the development and reconstruction of Virginia and West Virginia. He published an industrial and mineral resource journal called *The Virginias* from 1880 until 1885, and worked with Emma Savage Rogers to assemble and publish all Rogers' early papers on Virginia geology. "A Reprint of the Annual Reports and other papers on the Geology of Virginias" with copious maps and sections was published in 1884. Hotchkiss was a friend of William Barton Rogers and obviously admired the older man as a mentor and important contributor to the development of geology in Virginia. Hotchkiss traveled widely to lecture about Virginia (and Rogers), and made several trips to Boston for this purpose.

Charles Rufus Boyd (1841-1903)

The third character is much less known than Rogers and Hotchkiss. A native of Wytheville, C. R. Boyd also served with Hotchkiss in the Confederate Army as an engineer in the Stonewall Brigade. After the war he studied at the University of Virginia under Francis H. Smith, one of William Barton Rogers' former students who succeeded Rogers as natural science professor at the University (Roberts, 1942, p. 50). Boyd was a consultant in mineral resources from 1874 to 1890, traveled and wrote widely about southwestern Virginia. He corresponded and advertised in Hotchkiss' publication, *The Virginias*, and often listed himself as "State Geologist, ex officio". He published a large volume on the "Resources of Southwest Virginia" (1881) that contained an excellent map, and was contracted to publish a smaller volume on "Grayson County, Virginia" (1897). He produced and reprinted several large-scale maps of the area in 1886, 1897, 1899, and 1903. His only memorial marker is a headstone in Wytheville that might cover this page. It was broken and lying inside some other family's plot, saying just, "(CSA) C. R. Boyd."

Washington Caruthers Kerr (1827-1885)

W. C. Kerr was the state geologist of North Carolina from April 1864 until he was appointed chief of the southern division of the U.S. Geological Survey in August of 1882. He served in this position for a little over a year, but during this time set up a USGS headquarters in Bristol, Virginia, and participated in the triangulations that determined the altitudes of many high mountains in the southern Appalachian Mountains (The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, 1897). He also corresponded with Hotchkiss and published in *The Virginias* about the results of the USGS mapping efforts in Virginia. Kerr was educated at Harvard, was a corresponding member of the Appalachian Mountain Club in Boston (Appalachian Mountain Club Register, 1883). The original USGS mapping of southwestern Virginia was done under Kerr's direct supervision (Hotchkiss, 1882a).

Henry Gannett (1846-1914)

Henry Gannett was educated at Harvard and went on to a most distinguished career in geography. He was a founder and president of both the Cosmos Club and National Geographic Society and published widely about many issues including pioneering work in forest geography and irrigation. Considered the "father of American map-making", he was appointed chief geographer and topographer of the U.S. Geological Survey in July of 1882. Gannett helped organize the U.S. Board of Geographic Names (BGN) to help standardize the naming process and the use of place names in government documents. Gannett has a mountain peak named in his honor, the highest peak in the Wind River Range of Wyoming (The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, 1926).

During the previous generation, Joseph K. Roberts, a geology professor at the University of Virginia, became interested in Rogers. In 1936 he wrote an article describing the contributions of Rogers to Virginia (Roberts, 1936). In his 1942 book on geology and geologists of Virginia, Roberts revealed with a single index entry that he was the first person to recognize the problem with Mount Rogers when he stated "Balsam Mountain...Later inadvertently changed to Mt. Rogers" (Roberts, 1942).

In the *American Heritage Dictionary* "inadvertent" is defined as "not duly attentive" or "accidental, unintentional". How could this happen? Several modern references (Campbell, 1969; *Mt. Rogers Citizen*, 1970; Beetham, 1984) state very clearly that Mt. Rogers was named by the Commonwealth of Virginia to honor William Barton Rogers, the first State Geologist.

A review of several years of official Virginia records such as the "Journal of the House of Delegates" and "Journal of the Senate" and "Acts and Joint Resolutions passed by the

General Assembly" convinced me that the Commonwealth of Virginia had *not* officially named Mt. Rogers to honor William Barton Rogers (Anonymous, 1883a and b, 1884). So who did?

It is fairly easy to follow the nomenclatural history for the highest mountain in Virginia through most of the last century. As early as 1835, Joseph Martin in a *Virginia Gazetteer* knew that the "White Top Peaks of the Iron Mountain were more elevated . . . than the Peaks of Otter" (Martin, 1835). Whitetop was more accessible and better known, and it seems reasonable that the two peaks would have been lumped. However, in 1840, William Barton Rogers published a "Report of the Progress of the Geological Survey of the State of Virginia", and stated clearly that "the elevation of the Balsam and White Top Mountains, situated in the southwest angle of Grayson County . . . have the greatest altitude yet satisfactorily ascertained in Virginia . . ." (Rogers, 1840). Rogers received this information from Israel Slade, an assistant geologist who worked in Southwest Virginia for the new geological survey. The Library of Virginia Archives has both the correspondence and field notebooks that Israel Slade sent Rogers with the results of his work (Solomon, 1978). Israel Slade not only did the geological fieldwork for later reports and sections but also carried a boiling point thermometer to determine altitudes of southwest Virginia mountains. Because water has a lower boiling point at higher elevations the difference in elevation between two points may be determined by comparing the boiling points. At 2:00 p.m. on the 26th of September 1840, Slade recorded a boiling point to measure elevation for the summit of Balsam Mountain. The next day at 4:00 p.m. he determined that the South Fork of the Holston River was 3316 feet lower. He then ascended Whitetop Mountain, arriving on the summit at 11:00 p.m. and determined the difference as 3157 feet. These boiling point measurements indicated that Balsam Mountain was 159 feet higher than Whitetop. The most recent measurements put the distance at 209 feet, so Slade was within 50 feet of being correct! In a letter mailed from Wytheville and dated 31 October 1840, Slade told Rogers of his grand discovery, of the "observations made with the boiling point thermometer, I will only say they have been numerous; and I flatter myself they will not be uninteresting--as an instance, Balsam Mountain nearly 2,000 feet higher than the Peaks of Otter!" Rogers' report was republished by Jed Hotchkiss in 1884 as part of the *Geology of the Virginias*, and he even indexes Balsam Mountain on page 416.

Richard O. Currey, a geologist who had worked for the East Tennessee State University, wrote a short paper and published a map in 1859 describing his visits to the copper bearing regions of Virginia. On this map, Whitetop (5,530 feet) and Balsam Mountain (5,700 feet) stand out clearly (Curry, 1859). Jed Hotchkiss republished this material, including the map, in 1880 in *The Virginias*, with a note saying that the Civil War had obscured the importance of Currey's work.

In 1874, Jed Hotchkiss published a map of the state, distributed by the Department of Agriculture using Balsam Mountain and White Top for the two peaks. Then in 1876, the Virginia Board of Immigration published a grand summary of all sorts of information about the state and clearly said on page 15 . . . "and the Balsam Mountain in Grayson County is 5,700 feet by Guyots measurement"(Board of Immigration, 1876).

In *Johnson's New Universal Cyclopedia: A Scientific and Popular Treasury of Useful Knowledge* (Barnard, et al., 1878) under the "Virginia" entry, Jed Hotchkiss is quoted as an authority on the state. The most interesting information is a quotation: "some of the sharp, bold ridges rise to a considerable height. Elliott's Knob is nearly 4,200 feet, Warm Spring and Allegheny Mountain about 3,500 each. Two points of the Blue Ridge are said to be still higher. The Balsam Mountain in Grayson Co., 5,700 feet, and a point near the Tennessee line 5,530 feet; the Peaks of Otter are 3,993 feet and Mt. Marshall, near Front Royal, 3,369 feet." An editor of this cyclopedia was none other than Arnold Henry Guyot, the very person who was credited with determining the elevations of Balsam Mountain and Whitetop. Mount Guyot in the Great Smoky Mountains was named in his honor.

Many older local people still call the highest mountain in Virginia the Balsam Mountain or Big Balsam. It seems that the name, location, and approximate elevation of the highest mountain in Virginia were fairly well established, first by Israel Slade in 1840 and later by A. H. Guyot.

In May 1882, William Barton Rogers died. This same year, Jed Hotchkiss was introduced at a "Society of Arts" meeting in Boston as a friend and companion of Professor Rogers, and said "U.S. surveyors are now engaged in making a close and complete topographic survey of the state . . . when that survey will be finished, it will be known which is the highest peak of the Appalachian ranges in Virginia, and it has already been determined that, when it is made known, it will be given the name of Mount Rogers" (Hotchkiss, 1882a). Notice that he specifically stated Appalachian ranges. In common use, the geologists of that day considered the Blue Ridge as older Appalachians and the Valley and Ridge the new or younger Appalachians.

Meanwhile, Jed Hotchkiss was very active during 1884. He published "The Grand Natural Divisions of the Virginias." (Hotchkiss, 1884a) Discussing the Blue Ridge, he states that . . . "the surface varies in altitude . . . to 5,700 ft. in Mount Rogers, the highest peak in Virginia--heretofore called Balsam Mountain, a name given to points in the *Blue Ridge* but which we propose to hereafter call Mount Rogers, in honor of Virginias' great geologist, William Barton Rogers."

Then, two months later in an article about "the picturesque Chesapeake and Ohio Ry.", he talks about . . . "the huge mass of Elliott Knob . . . the highest of the Appalachians that has yet been measured in the Virginias." (Hotchkiss, 1884b) Elliott Knob is on Great North Mountain in Augusta County and dominates the northwestern skyline near Hotchkiss' hometown of Staunton.

In 1885, Hotchkiss reverses himself in *The Virginias* when in a different version of "The Natural Grand Divisions of Virginia" he says simply . . ." to 5,700 ft. in Balsam Mountain." (Hotchkiss, 1885) Within one year Hotchkiss has dropped Mt. Rogers for the highest mountain of the Blue Ridge in the state. Then in his *Atlas of Augusta County, Virginia* (1885) he says (referring to what is Elliott Knob) . . . "the summit of Mount Rogers, probably the highest land in the county, is 4,500 ft. above tide." In two maps included with the book, he clearly drafted Mount Rogers in larger letters over Elliott Knob. Having done these things in February of 1885, Hotchkiss followed up in 1886 by presenting an address to the Appalachian Mountain Club in Boston entitled "The Topography and Geology of the Vicinity of Mt. Rogers", and went on to give the "form of the mountain, the route to the summit, the character of the view, and other interesting facts" (Hotchkiss, 1886). He gave enough information to show that he was talking about Elliott Knob in Augusta County. In

August 1886, he drew a small map entitled "Map showing the location of Mount Rogers, Augusta County, Virginia" which is in the Library of Congress Map Collection (LeGear, 1951). So, by late 1886, Jed Hotchkiss thought he had named the highest point in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia for his friend William Barton Rogers whose work had done so much to delineate the structure of these ranges. The name was at least used locally for several years. William Alphonso Murrill, who eventually worked for the New York Botanical Garden stayed in Staunton for several years around 1895. In his book about the area (Murrill, 1919) he refers to Mount Rogers several times and even mentions that it was named for a Professor of Geology at the University of Virginia.

Concurrently, in 1886 Charles Rufus Boyd of Wytheville published a large map of the mineral resources and railroads in southwestern Virginia. Boyd was an advertiser in *The Virginias* and may have read about Hotchkiss' desire to name the highest mountain in Virginia after William Barton Rogers. The map included with Boyd's 1881 book on South West Virginia showed both Balsam Mountain and Whitetop, but they were not marked with elevations (Figure 5). On Boyd's 1886 map, Balsam Mountain is labeled "5,600 ft. EL", but on another map, produced in 1897 to accompany a book about Grayson County, Virginia, Boyd put Mt. Rogers in small letters *under* Balsam Mountain in two places, and in the text of the book mentions "Balsam *or* Mt. Rogers" and . . . that "the greatest elevation in the county is in the western end at Mt. Rogers, 5,719 feet above the sea". On an 1899 map of Smyth County, Boyd used this elevation and Mt. Rogers on the map and sections. However, on some versions and revisions of the 1886 map, Boyd positions Mt. Rogers in an area due South of Whitetop!

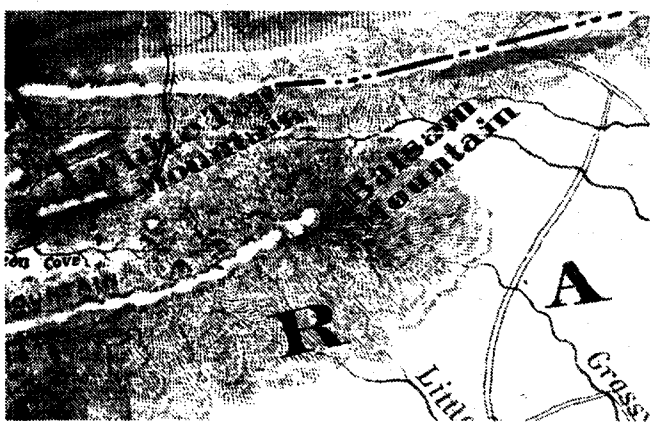

Figure 5. South West Virginia Resources Map (Boyd, 1881). Note that no elevations are given.

There were other folks at work during this time. In 1882-1883, the U.S. Geological Survey triangulated the southwestern part of Virginia (Powell, 1884 and 1885). This triangulation produced the "mysterious" tower on Mt. Rogers that was the subject of several local newspaper articles in the 1960's (Wilson, 1966; Campbell, 1969). Professors W. C. Kerr and J. H. Gore are given credit for establishing these triangulation points (Powell, 1885), and placing them on a map called "Sketch showing the progress of Triangulation in the Appalachian Region to June 30, 1886". This is included as Plate IV in the Seventh Annual Report of the USGS (Figure 6) and showed "Mt. Rogers" clearly (Figure 7) (Powell, 1887). Doctor W. C. Kerr had written a small article for *The Virginias* (more of a letter to Jed Hotchkiss) describing "Work of the Appalachian Division of the U. S. Geological Survey in 1882." He mentions that his offices were located in Bristol, Virginia, and that "primary triangulation was carried across the summits of the Blue Ridge" (Kerr, 1883). The map that first showed Mt. Rogers was probably under Kerr's direct control as he believed that " topographical work . . . must precede the geological". The subsequent topographic quadrangles were first produced by two USGS cartographers (C. C. Gardner and R. A. Kiger) in August 1886. The first, and later revisions of this quadrangle in February 1891, May 1894, 1909 and 1911 all showed *only* Mt. Rogers and Whitetop (Cliff Nelson, personal communication).

This quadrangle map was probably the one mentioned by Anna Murray Vail when she said "...and Mount Rogers...familiary known as Balsam Mountain, for the names of the United States Topographical Survey maps are not by any means the local names" (Vail, 1882a). W.H.T. Squires (1928) describes an encounter with a "native" on his trip to White Top Mountain. When Squires asked directions to Mt. Rogers, the mountaineer said... "Young man, I've been a-living here all my days, and my Pa he was born in this here valley and I ain't never heard tell of no 'Mount Rogers' as ye call it. There ain't no sech. If you air a-meanin' Balsam, thar it is, a lettle higher than White Top...Mount Rogers---." It would be impossible to express in black and white the contempt with which he uttered the last two words.Squires then graciously informed him that even though"...it is called Balsam locally, the state geologists and the government maps always note the peak as Mount Rogers." Someone in the USGS had taken Hotchkiss' 1882 suggestion to name the highest mountain in the state after Rogers seriously. So, who changed Balsam Mountain to Mt. Rogers? The original impetus came from Jed Hotchkiss, who had a Boston connection to both Gannet and Kerr. But Hotchkiss recanted, and tried to name another mountain Mt. Rogers. C. R. Boyd used Mt. Rogers for the Balsam Mountain, but only much later. Doctor W. C. Kerr of the USGS was probably aware of Hotchkiss' desire to name the highest mountain for Rogers and placed it on Balsam Mountain in Grayson County when the 1882 triangulation work was mapped. But Kerr only worked until 1883 and he died in 1885. Another map of the area dated 10 October 1884 (Johnston, 1884) showed only Balsam Mountain and Whitetop Mountain. The USGS cartographers C. C. Gardner and R. A. Kiger placed the name on the earliest USGS topographic quadrangle (Abingdon, VA-TN-NC, 1886 and subsequent editions). The name, Mt. Rogers was retained on most maps, and Balsam Mountain was excluded, until just recently.

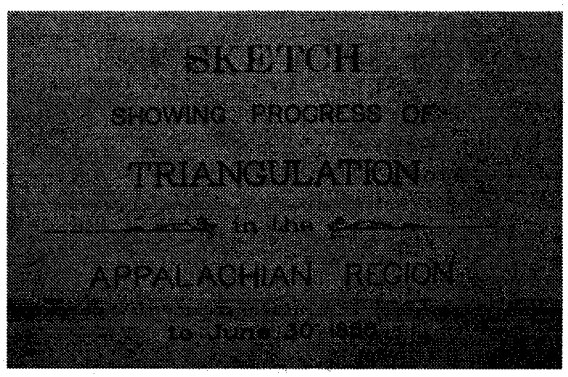

Figure 6. Caption from Sketch Map of Triangulation including the 1882-83 survey information (Powell, 1887).

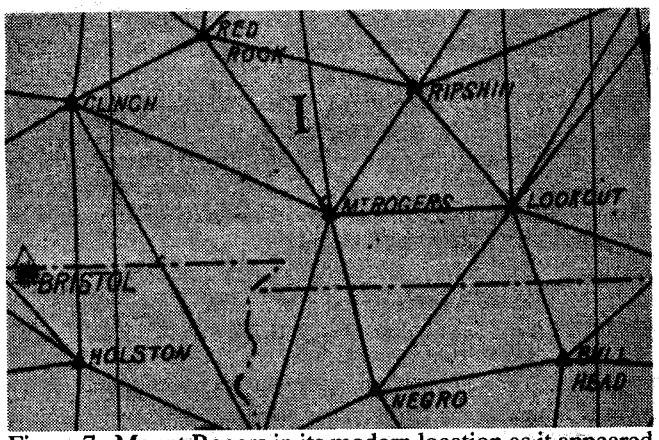

Figure 7. Mount Rogers in its modern location as it appeared on the Sketch Map (Powell, 1887). This was the first map that placed Mount Rogers on Balsam Mountain.

This haphazard process and subsequent misunderstandings have caused serious confusion over the years. Henry Gannett, the Chief Topographer of the USGS for several years, published a series of articles about the altitudes in the United States and reports on their triangulation. There were several editions of these "*Dictionaries of Altitudes*", and the pertinent entries are revealing.

2nd. Edition Dictionary of Altitudes, (Gannett, 1891)
p. 126 Elliott Knob 4,473 ft.
p. 304 Rogers, Mount, Virginia 4,473 ft.
Same mountain, two different names. Don't forget that Henry Gannett had helped found the Board of Geographic names (BGN) a year earlier, and I'm sure problems similar to this inspired his work.

Results of Primary Triangulation, (Gannett, 1894)
Rogers (Elliott Knob)
Rogers On Mount Rogers, Balsam Mountains, Grayson County
Two different mountains! This is also the first use of Balsam Mountain(s) for Virginia.

3rd Edition Dictionary of Altitudes, (Gannett,1899)
Rogers Mountain 5,719
Rogers, Mount 4,473
The first is obviously Balsam Mt. (or the current Mount Rogers), the latter is Elliott Knob in Augusta County. Two different mountains--same name.

Finally, in the:

4th Edition Dictionary of Altitudes, (Gannett, 1906)
Elliott Knob 4,473
Rogers Mountain, Grayson Co. 5,719
Almost, but not quite, the modern usage. Obviously, it was not Henry Gannett that named the mountain, and we may never know who did.

Gannett was not the only one confused. As late as 1907, Thomas Leonard Watson, one of Virginia's most productive geologists and a Professor at the University of Virginia, stated that "Stony Man and Hawks Bill, 4,031 and 4,066 feet respectively, are the highest summits of the Blue Ridge north of North Carolina" (Watson, 1907). On the 1959 Whitetop USGS topographic quadrangle production (photo revised 1978), Balsam Mountain has reappeared on the ridge running from Mt. Rogers to Elk Garden gap! There is not a single "Balsam" tree on this ridge so the name must have been recopied from a previous map. A 1994 *Virginia Explorer* issue contained an article about the Five Physiographic Provinces of Virginia (Hotchkiss' Grand Natural Divisions). The photograph that accompanied the article was obviously not Mt. Rogers, and the article speaks about the "two peaks of Balsam mountain" (Woodward, 1994). We appear to have come full circle; first Balsam Mountain was lumped with Whitetop in 1835, and now Whitetop has been lumped with Balsam Mountain. Lumping both summits as the Balsam Mountains has also occurred in scientific studies. In 1984 two biologists from William Barton Rogers' alma mater wrote "The Balsam Mountains of southwest Virginia (not to be confused with the Balsam Mountains of North Carolina) comprise the two tallest and most massive peaks in the state" (Rheinhardt and Ware, 1984). Heaven forbid anyone be confused by all this.

A. Aubrey Bodine, in his 1963 book, *The Face of Virginia* probably said it best, "I had more difficulty finding Mount Rogers, the highest point in Virginia, than any other place. It seemed that no two natives would agree on the highest ridge." Bodine then includes a photograph of Mount Rogers printed in reverse!

There has been a lot of confusion, and there is still a lot of mystery. These mountains have not been thoroughly studied. Only recently, very interesting geological finds have been reported from the area (Rankin, 1993). The biology of the mountain is very poorly known, but there are many species of rare plants and animals living here (Hoffman, 1994: Ogle, 1994). The Fraser fir on Mt. Rogers seems to have partial resistance to the parasite that is destroying fir trees throughout the Southern Appalachians (Nicholas, 1994). Wonderful discoveries are waiting to be made on these high summits.

J. P. Monroe, eulogizing William Barton Rogers in 1904, said that he possessed that rarest combination in the nature of a man--the ability to see visions and the power to make those visions real. He also said that there had never been a suitable memorial to the man. Rogers was a meticulous scientist who always kept his data and interpretations separate. Mount Rogers is a fascinating place and a very suitable memorial, but William Barton Rogers would probably not be pleased with an "inadvertent" name. It would be more appropriate for the name Mount Rogers to be officially designated by the Commonwealth of Virginia for the largest and most majestic memorial to the contributions of William Barton Rogers.

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