

## Lore & Legends

"...an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man... an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvement or human habitation..."

- Wilderness Act, Section 2(c).

Photo Courtesy of the Asheville Convention & Visitor Bureau

# The Real Cold Mountain

Written By Mike Miller



By now many of you will have either read Charles Frazier's best-selling novel *Cold Mountain* or have seen the Oscar-winning movie by the same name starring Nicole Kidman, Jude Law and Renee Zellweger. But did you know that there really is a Cold Mountain in Haywood County, North Carolina? Although most of the novel is fictional, there are a few facts woven into the story. In the novel there is supposed to be a mountain and a town named Cold Mountain. While the town of Cold Mountain is a fictional amalgamation of many towns and communities in Haywood County, the mountain itself is very real.

You may also be surprised to know there really was a man named W.P. Inman from near Cold Mountain. He was an ancestor of the *Cold Mountain* novelist. Like his cinematic counterpart, the real W.P. "Pinkney" Inman fought and was wounded in the Civil War. He was also killed by the Home Guard as he walked home to

Haywood County in 1864 before the war ended. According to Frazier, the real Inman may even be buried somewhere near the Caldwell fork of the Pigeon River in sight of Cold Mountain — which is a fascinating tale all its own. **But for now, let's go explore the real Cold Mountain!**

At 6,030 feet, the real Cold Mountain is the pinnacle of the Shining Rock Wilderness Area, one of the few designated wilderness areas in North Carolina and the nation. One of the original wilderness areas formed by Congress in 1964, Shining Rock Wilderness Area covers 18,483 acres and is a very special place indeed. For those of you unfamiliar with wilderness areas, they are places set aside by the federal government to remain as wild as possible. Unlike National Parks and Recreation Areas, a Wilderness Area is to be as untouched as possible and visiting them is not necessarily encouraged. In fact, up until a few years ago, a permit was required to hike into the Shining Rock Wilderness Area. No mechanical vehicles or horses are allowed. The only way to travel in a Wilderness Area is by foot. Camping is only allowed in the few designated camping areas. In other words, Congress created the Wilderness Areas to try and keep a special place protected as best we can. Part of the Wilderness Act describes it best "...an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man..."

Photo By Tara Jarnett

# Day Tripping

## UNION COUNTY

### Mexico Cardenas Museum, Museum of the Alphabet

- Open Monday through Saturday, 9am - noon, 1pm - 3:30 pm
- Two museums and the same location. Mexico Cardenas Museum is full of history and is dedicated former Mexican president Larazo Cardenas. The alphabet museum depicts the history of written language.
- For details call (704) 843 -6066.

## WATAUGA COUNTY

### 20th Appalachian Summer Festival

- July 1-30, 2005 at Appalachian State University
- Music, arts, dance, theatre, special events, ranked "Top 20 events in Southeast" by South East Tourism Society
- For details visit [www.appsummer.org](http://www.appsummer.org), or call (800) 841-ARTS

## YADKIN COUNTY

### Shallowford Popcorn Farm

- 3732 Hartman Rd, Yadkinville, NC
- Come out and take a tour of our popcorn plant or visit our gift shop. We have many unique gift ideas, but most of all, we have great popcorn!
- For details call (336) 463-5938, or (800) 892-9539

## YANCEY COUNTY

### The Parkway Playhouse

- North Carolina's oldest continually running playhouse. Summer shows include The Exact Center of the Universe, My Way: A Musical Tribute to Frank Sinatra, Oliver!, Grace and Glorie, and Arsenic and Old Lace
- For details call (828) 682-4285, or email [info@parkwayplayhouse.com](mailto:info@parkwayplayhouse.com)

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Take note of the little-used word "untrammelled." Untrammelled means free and unconstrained. A Wilderness Area is, by definition, a land free and unconstrained by man. Needless to say, you will not find a t-shirt stand at the bottom of the mountain offering Jeep rides to haul you to the top. Most of the trailheads to the summit of Cold Mountain start around 3,500 feet, the hike to the 6,030 foot summit is quite steep and a challenge for even experienced hikers.

When folks ask "How do I get to Cold Mountain?" I usually have to tell them, you don't. It is best to view the mountain from afar. However, with its 6,030-foot peak there are many places from which to view Cold Mountain.

Although there is no town called Cold Mountain, the community that would come closest to being that town would be the Pigeon River valley community of Bethel. Cold Mountain soars over Bethel to the southeast and can be viewed from many places up and down the river valley.

One of the best views of Cold Mountain can be had on N.C. 215 about halfway from the town of Canton to Bethel. As N.C. 215 winds its way north alongside the Pigeon River, Cold Mountain will be the tallest mountain visible to your left. This is a good place to see the full massiveness of the mountain, from river and valley floor all the way to the summit.

At the time of this writing, Cold Mountain and the coves flanking it are still recovering from the devastating remnants of hurricanes Frances and Ivan in September, 2004. On the upper slopes of Cold Mountain, upstream from Bethel, the Cruso community received 17 inches of rain in one day. Many roads and bridges and indeed whole communities are still recovering. In fact, Highway 276 through the Bethel community is still closed and the road detoured because of a washed out bridge.

Another good place to view Cold Mountain is from along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Cold Mountain can be seen from many places along the Parkway, but some of the best are from about Milepost 412 near Wagon Gap Road and southwards. Wagon Gap Road can be reached by following Highway 276 from Bethel east to the Parkway. At the Wagon Gap Road parking area, you can pose with the Cold Mountain overlook sign with Cold Mountain in the background. You can also hike the not-too-difficult three-mile trail from the Parkway to Mt. Pisgah to get a good look at the eastern side of Cold Mountain. There are also good views near Milepost 407.

While riding along this section of the Blue Ridge Parkway near Cold Mountain you will see that you are in a much different environment than the valley floors below. Cold Mountain today exists much as it always has, a silent peaceful mountain standing over fertile valleys.

The highest elevations around Cold Mountain and the Shining Rock Wilderness Area contain an ecosystem and climate unique in the South. You can think of these highest mountain peaks above 5,000 feet as "islands" of Canadian spruce-fir forest. During the last Ice Age, the world's climate cooled significantly. Great ice sheets pushed out of eastern Canada and New England southward. Although these ice sheets never reached as far south as North Carolina, they pushed south the flora and fauna of those northern territories. North Carolina forests were covered in spruce, fir, and hardwoods such as maple, beech, and birch. As the Ice Age ended and the climate warmed again roughly 18,000 years ago, the northern spruce-fir forest retreated back north. However, on the very highest peaks of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, those peaks above 5,000-6,000 feet in elevation, the climate has remained cool enough for the northern forest to still exist. Although completely logged, except for a few isolated outcroppings, in the early 1900's some of the spruce and fir forests have come back and offer a unique experience in the South.

So get out there and see the real Cold Mountain. Experience and appreciate the unique qualities of the area. And like W.P. Inman in the novel *Cold Mountain*, you will also find your self longing to once again see that high, unreachable peak again.