



AMADAS AND BARLOWE EXPEDITION was the first of the English voyages to Roanoke Island in the 1580s and was **one** of Sir Walter Raleigh's attempts to establish a colony in the New World.

EAGLES. John Lawson made the first mention of the bald eagle in 1709 reporting that "they prey on any living **thing** that they can catch." Naturalist William Bartram, writing in the 1770s, described the bald eagle as a coastal bird in the Carolina's ...



HENDERSON COUNTY, located in North Carolina's Mountain region, was formed from Buncombe County in 1838 ... and today **leads** the state in apple production. The county's modern economy...

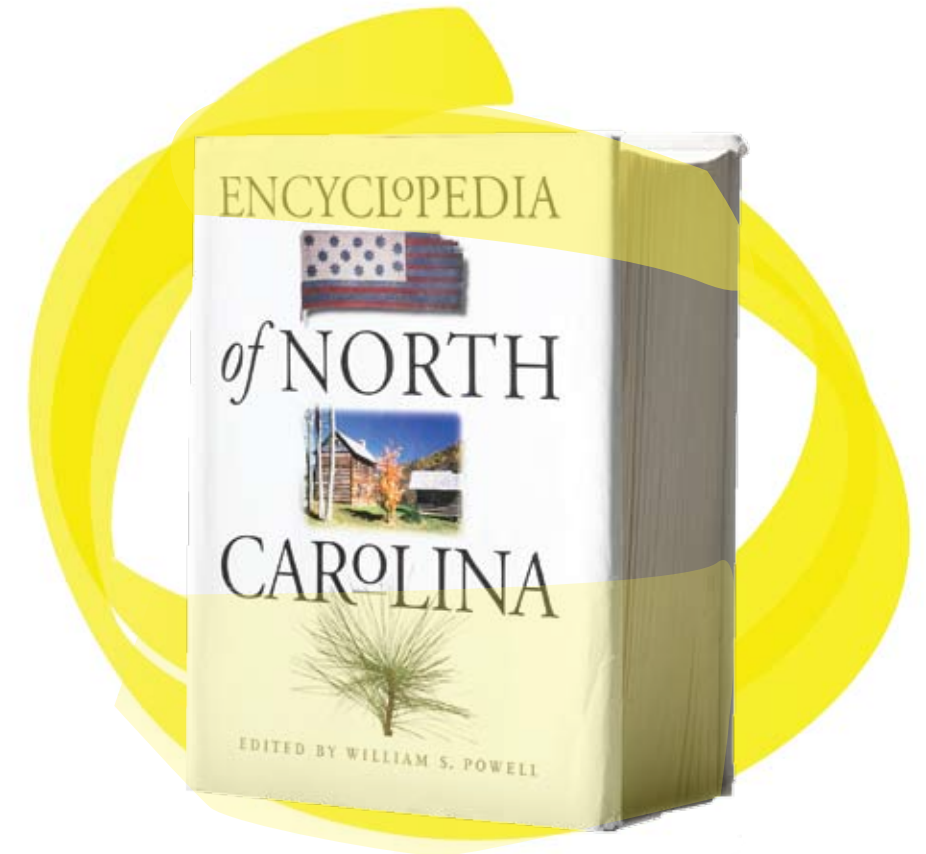


WAMPUS is the name of a semimythical creature believed to inhabit Iredell County and adjacent counties. The physical attributes of the wampus varied greatly. It was said **to** be silver or black, the size of a dog or a colt, with or without a horn, and with or without big, red eyes.

CAPE FEAR in modern-day Brunswick County projects into the Atlantic Ocean at the southeastern tip of Smith Island. The Frying Pan Shoals extend 20 miles outward from Cape Fear. Known during various eras as Cape Feare, Cape Fair, and Cape Fayre ... **another**

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Pick a word, any word. And dive down into the rabbit hole of regional knowledge. For card-carrying Carolinians, the definitive *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* tells you all you need to know about our great state.

BY JASON SMITH

Look, I've got nothing against lighthouses. I really don't. They're the Old North State's torchbearers. You think North Carolina, you think lighthouses. Think North Carolina, and you also think the Outer Banks. The Blue Ridge Parkway. First in flight. College hoops. Top-shelf examples of the things that make our state. But have you ever seen the hoofprints laid down by the devil's horse? Do you know about the yaupon? Ever heard of a wampus?

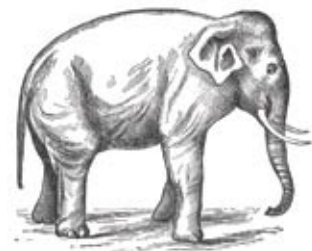
Me neither.

HADN'T, THAT IS, until I picked up the *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*: 1,300 pages of A-to-Z N.C., lovingly curated by historian William Powell. More than 500 people pitched in to research and write entries. In 2012, the State Library of North Carolina partnered with The University of North Carolina Press and put every last entry in both the *Encyclopedia* and Powell's earlier, multivolume *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* online at NCpedia.org. You can read it all there for free. And better yet, people continue to write new entries. As of this writing, NCpedia included more than 3,000 entries from more than 1,000 contributors.

The longer entries on things like furniture and Baptists and geography probably ought to be required reading for any card-carrying Carolinian. But what draws me to the *Encyclopedia* and to NCpedia.org again and again are the entries on things nobody told me about in eighth-grade N.C. history. Seems like every time I look, I find another yaupon, another wampus. I like to pick a page at random, and what I learn there inevitably makes me want to look up something else.

My mom's been known to use the word cattywampus, meaning either crooked or not situated directly across from: "The new restaurant is *cattywampus* to the post office." NCpedia.org tells me that people from the coast say cattywampus, while people from the mountains say sigoglin. (My mom, a mountain girl, is an outlier.) Either way, cattywampus and the wampus are two different things, best I can tell. The wampus was — or maybe is? — a beast living in Iredell County. Cynics say that Joseph P. Caldwell, editor of the *Statesville Landmark*, dreamed up the wampus in 1890 to sell more newspapers. But those who claimed to have seen it described it as silver (or black), the size of a dog (or a colt), with one horn (or none), and with big, red eyes (or not). Oh, and with webbed feet, or with "front paws like a lion and hind feet like a bear." The wampus made a noise like a woman in distress, they said, or like "an elephant with his head in a rain barrel."

Speaking of those, some Carolinians may have once carried elephants around in their pockets. Elephant tokens were rare and special coins associated with the early Carolina colony. They date to the late 1600s, and got their name from the full-profile image of an elephant struck onto one side of the coin. The other side read, "God preserve Carolina and the Lords



The elephant in the room: A tusk-to-tail image of an elephant identified the 1694 Carolina Elephant tokens. Antiques collectors should take care, though: Since the 1860s, plenty of fakes have been circulated.

Proprietors” — the eight English noblemen chartered by King Charles II to establish Carolina as a colony. Why an elephant? Neil Fulghum, who wrote the *Encyclopedia*'s elephant-token entry, says it was likely chosen as a reassuring message to prospective investors and settlers. The elephant marked North Carolina as a worthwhile venture and a good, strong investment.

Iron elephants, on the other hand, were Civil War-era ironclad ships like the CSS *Neuse* and the CSS *Albemarle*. You could be forgiven for not knowing that ships of this type were also called iron gophers, mud-crushers, and turtle-backs.

Know what makes you think of turtle-backs? Turtles with diamond backs. Diamondback terrapins live in brackish and marshy water down near the coast. Some old salts say that catching one is bad luck: You'll cause a wind squall to blow up.

A terrapin with that kind of rep maybe isn't one you'd want to officially appoint as North Carolina's state reptile. For that we have *Terrapene carolina carolina*, the eastern box turtle. "Box" here comes from the fact that when the turtle withdraws into his shell, he closes it tight like a box.

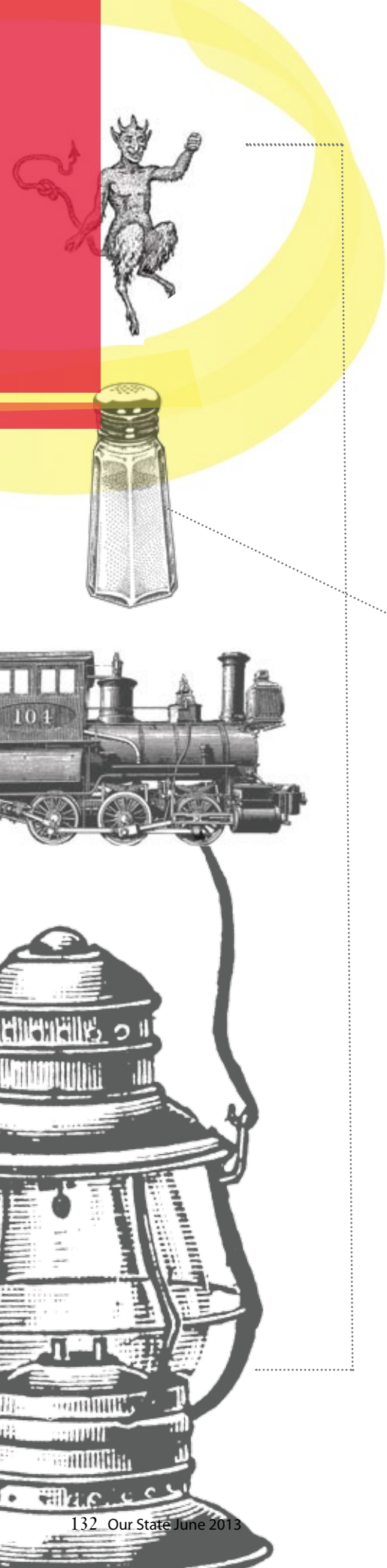
Boxing, on the other hand, was what Governor Edward Hyde and the rest of the North Carolina Council were doing in 1712 when they were supposed to be talking about the Tuscarora Indian War. At the council meeting somebody put hooch in the punch, and a short time later the punching commenced: The men "strip'd naked & boxt it fairly two & two, all the same day," wrote John Barnwell, who witnessed the whole thing. William Powell tells us in the *Encyclopedia* that "neither the outcome of the matches nor the visiting Barnwell's reaction to them are known, although it can be surmised that little official business was attended to after the boxing had begun."

YOU SEE WHAT I MEAN? One thing leads to another. Pick a page — any page — of the *Encyclopedia* just for the devil of it, just to see where it takes you. Maybe you'll learn about salt, or about German submarines, or about a machine that was built to give its operator a kick in the pants. There's enough good stuff in here to choke a horse. Hmm ...

Did someone say horses? You can find the hoofprints of the devil's horse at the edge of a wooded area near Bath. Legend has it that in 1813, one Jesse Elliott struck up a horse race with some friends on a Sunday morning around church time. As he spurred his horse, Jesse told it to "take me in a winner or take me to hell." The horse pulled up short, launched Jesse against a tree trunk, and there he lay graveyard dead. Some



Boxed in, in the box seat, out of the box — one word draws you into the ring. And we didn't even mention that the Olympic boxing gold medalist Sugar Ray Leonard hails from Wilmington.



folks said Jesse's horse belonged to the devil; some said it was the devil. At any rate, the prints the horse supposedly made are still there, and nothing grows inside them or even stays inside them. Kids who fill them with leaves and sticks on the way to school have found them empty on the way home. Scientists figure that the holes are maybe vents for underground water pockets, but Jesse Elliott might know better.

The devil's tramping ground, on the other hand, is a bare path about a foot wide that forms a 40-foot circle just outside Siler City. Nothing grows on the path. And apart from a little scrubby grass, nothing much grows inside the circle. People have tried to make that grass grow in other places, but it never takes. And anything placed in the path is gone the next morning. The story goes that the devil comes there at night to pace. (Whether and why he does or doesn't bring his horse — or become a horse for that matter — doesn't really enter into it.) The North Carolina Department of Agriculture once found that the soil around the devil's tramping ground was sterile because it contained so much salt. But the devil seems like he'd be a pretty salty sort, so as far as I'm concerned the jury's still out.

Salt was once so important to North Carolinians that we had a Salt Commissioner. A lot of our modern-day roads are based on Native-American trails that were based on animal trails that led to salt licks. And salt was one of the things handed out to placate the few dozen women who took up hatchets and axes and stormed Salisbury in March 1863. They accused Salisbury merchants and the railroad agent of hoarding flour to sell later at a higher price. When the railroad agent told them he had no flour, they busted into the depot and took 10 barrels of it, leaving him "sitting on a log blowing like a March wind."

That was a P.R. disaster for the railroad, maybe, but nothing like the real disaster that happened just outside Statesville in 1891.

A passenger train bound for Asheville plunged 60 feet off the Bostian Bridge, killing 23 people. Fifty years later, in 1941, a married couple had a flat tire just beside the tracks near the bridge. The man walked away for help, and the woman waited in the car. She heard a whistle, saw a light, and watched as a train approached. When it reached the bridge, the train plunged off. The woman heard a crash, then screams and groans. A ghost train, the locals decided. Nearly 70 years after that, one night in August 2010, some amateur ghost hunters waited near the bridge for the train. One person was killed and two others injured when what they took for the ghost train turned out to be a real one.

Another Carolina railroad ghost story comes from Maco station near Wilmington. One night in 1867, conductor Joe Baldwin was in the last car of his train when it came uncoupled from the rest. Another train bore down on Baldwin's disabled car from behind. Baldwin swung his lantern madly to signal the trailing train to stop, but to no avail. He was decapitated in the wreck, and a witness said his lantern sailed through the air and landed upright in the woods, where it continued to burn. Not long after

Take it all with a grain of salt: North Carolina literature and legend is peppered with ghost stories. There are haunted trains, historic hotels, bridges, swamps, islands, and forests. A dip into the Encyclopedia brings you face-to-face with them all.

Salt was once so important to North Carolinians that we had a Salt Commissioner.

that, people began seeing a light at night near the site of the wreck. It was old Joe Baldwin, they said, looking for his head. "Over the years," writes Bland Simpson in the *Encyclopedia*, "the Maco Light has been bright enough to fool many railroad workers into stopping their trains. To remedy the

ghost's schedule-thwarting attempts, signalmen at Maco used two lights, one red and one green.”

ONE OF THE MOST dangerous sections of railroad in the United States is the Saluda Grade, which is also far and away the steepest standard-gauge, main-line railroad in the nation. It was built in the 1870s by convict labor, and was the first large-scale project to use prisoners that way. So many of them were hurt or killed during construction that the state launched a special investigation. Things didn't get much better afterward, as the grade continued to claim the lives of train crews and laborers.

I grew up in Mills River — stomping in it, fishing in it, being baptized in it.

Most of the trains that have jumped the tracks on the Saluda Grade have done so at the aptly named Slaughter Pen Cut about halfway down Saluda Mountain. Concerning a wreck there on August 13, 1903, *The Asheville Citizen* reported that engineer J. H. Averill Jr. of Asheville “stayed on his engine with his faithful fireman, doing all he could to check the speed of the train until the engine buried him.”

WHENEVER I DRIVE down I-40 West from Chapel Hill to visit my parents near Asheville, my little four-cylinder Honda has to climb Old Fort Mountain. It doesn't seem to mind, at first, down on the lower slope where the grade isn't bad. A mile or so in, the car starts to fret a little and hunkers down. But the road keeps getting steeper, we keep slowing down, and I start to think that maybe interstate highways shouldn't be allowed to do this. After four or five more miles of jockeying for space with the big rigs in the slow lane, we claw to the top of the mountain like some squishy Triassic sea critter dragging itself onto the beach to start

a new life. We've just hoisted ourselves up the Blue Ridge escarpment, the geological feature that divides North Carolina's Piedmont from the mountains. A leading theory has it that this escarpment is what's left of the western edge of the giant geological wound that was created eons ago when North America and Africa split apart. This spot also happens to be the Eastern Continental Divide, which you can think of as the peak of a house's roof: the rivers to the east of the divide drain to the Atlantic; those to the west drain to the Gulf of Mexico. Even at this scale, water seeks its own level, and generally takes the easiest way.

I grew up in the waters of Mills River — stomping in it, fishing in it, being baptized in it, not necessarily in that order. Every July 4th we would head to North Mills River campground, which (for reasons lost to history) my extended family calls “Booger Woods.” It's not a warm river, and we'd swim til our lips were blue. Mills River empties into the French Broad, which joins the Swannanoa near Asheville and then flows north to Tennessee, where it meets up with the Holston near Knoxville to form the Tennessee, which empties into the Mississippi. The French Broad is one of only a few north-flowing rivers in the U.S. and is thought to be one of the world's oldest.

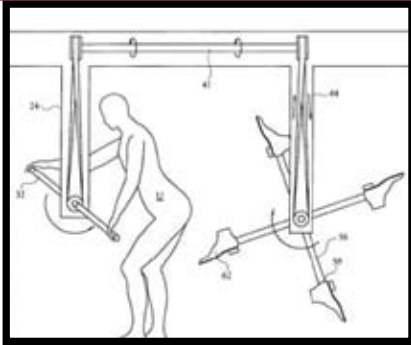
Oddly, it's older than the mountains it flows through.

Rivers also help delineate the state's Piedmont from the Coastal Plain via something called the fall line. At the fall line, the Coastal Plain's relatively soft rocks begin to be outnumbered by hard, erosion-resistant Piedmont rocks. In rivers, those harder Piedmont rocks make for rapids and waterfalls — barriers for boats trying to move upriver from east to west. These rocks, and this line, influenced where people settled and how they developed industry: When big boats could get no farther upriver, they were unloaded, their cargoes split into smaller lots and then carried over land. Near the fall line, people tapped rivers for energy to run mills and the like, and fall-line river towns rose up: Tarboro, Greenville, and Rocky Mount on the Tar; Kinston, Smithfield, and Goldsboro on the Neuse; Hillsborough on the Eno. Our fall line enters North Carolina's southern border near Rockingham, heads due north toward Troy, then makes a hard right turn to the east, where it runs between Raleigh and Smithfield before angling north-northeast into Virginia.

The Cape Fear, the Catawba, the French Broad, the Neuse, the New, the Roanoke, and the Yadkin-Pee Dee are our primary rivers. The Yadkin, which becomes the Pee Dee, has supported human settlement for more than 12,000 years, and so is sometimes called the Tigris and Euphrates of the Carolinas. “Pee Dee” may have come from the Catawba word pi'ri,



Entries in the Encyclopedia bit the high-water mark with the word “river.” A search nets you everything from the Bear River Indians to the Yadkin River Navigation Company.



which means “something good.”

There are no fewer than eight Little Rivers in the state, not counting those that are “Little” versions of larger rivers: Little Pee Dee, Little Dan, and so on. Some of our more imaginatively named rivers are the Big Swamp, the Blood, the Cashie, the Cullasaja, the Horsepasture, the Hyco, the Little Hungry, the Little Toe, the Lockwoods Folly, the Nolichucky, the Pungo, the Tallulah, the Tellico, and the Yeopim. It’s unlikely that any awards for creativity were given out to the folks who named the Black, Broad, Deep, Eastmost, Flat, Green, Middle, North, Rocky, or Valley rivers.

“A lot of folks don’t want people to know they need a kick ...”

ONE MAN WHO probably should have gotten a creativity award was Tom Haywood of Croatan. His kicking machine — a revolving, four-spoked wheel fitted with boots that would kick the user as he turned a hand crank — became a national sensation in the 1930s and ’40s. Haywood built the machine and put it out behind his house for his own use, “to perform the needed rebuke” to his conscience. But eventually so many people wanted to use it that he moved it in front of his general store on U.S. Highway 70. “A lot of folks don’t want people to know they need a kick, so they wait until I close up at night and then come

around,” Haywood told a newspaper. “Late at night I can hear the machine just a squeaking outside.” Users included several North Carolina governors, Lucille Ball, and possibly President Harry Truman. “It booted behinds free of charge for decades,” writes RoAnn Bishop on the NCPedia site. Nowadays the kicking machine lives at the North Carolina Museum of History.

Tar Heel citizens have brought plenty of other fine things into this world. We came up with miniature golf, Cheerwine, the refrigerated outdoor swimming pool, Krispy Kreme doughnuts, Bojangles’, Goody’s Headache Powder, and the primary weapon of millions of U.S. troops in World War II: the M-1 carbine semiautomatic rifle.

WHEN I WAS ABOUT 2, my parents took me to Pizza Hut. Apparently the speed of service wasn’t to my liking, so I commenced to banging my cutlery on the high chair while repeatedly shouting “I wanna go to Hardee’s.” That’s yet another Carolina contribution (Hardee’s, not toddler tantrums).

Many have eaten a Hardee’s burger; fewer have eaten dirt. But certain contingents of dirt or clay eaters, also called sandlappers, have long called North Carolina home. The technical name for the practice is geophagy, and though people have been doing it for thousands of years, it’s thought that slaves from Africa and the West Indies brought it to North Carolina. Some scientists think it may have to do with iron deficiency. Canadian researchers who tested clay from Stokes County found that the minerals it contains may help with digestion.

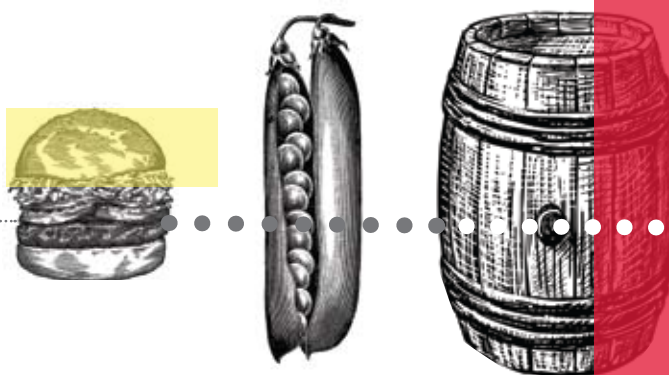
Done right, a dish of black-eyed peas evokes the soil they were grown in, and they’re grown just about everywhere in the state. The plants like heat, don’t mind drought. The *Encyclopedia* lists them as a cure for warts. Just do this: “If you rub a black-eyed pea over your wart, then throw it over your left shoulder and go away without looking back, the wart will go away.”

Also touted for removing warts, and often figuring into black-eyed pea dishes: fatback. Among the other names it goes by are salt pork, fat meat, fat pork, salt meat, seasoning meat, side meat, sowbelly, white bacon, and middling meat.

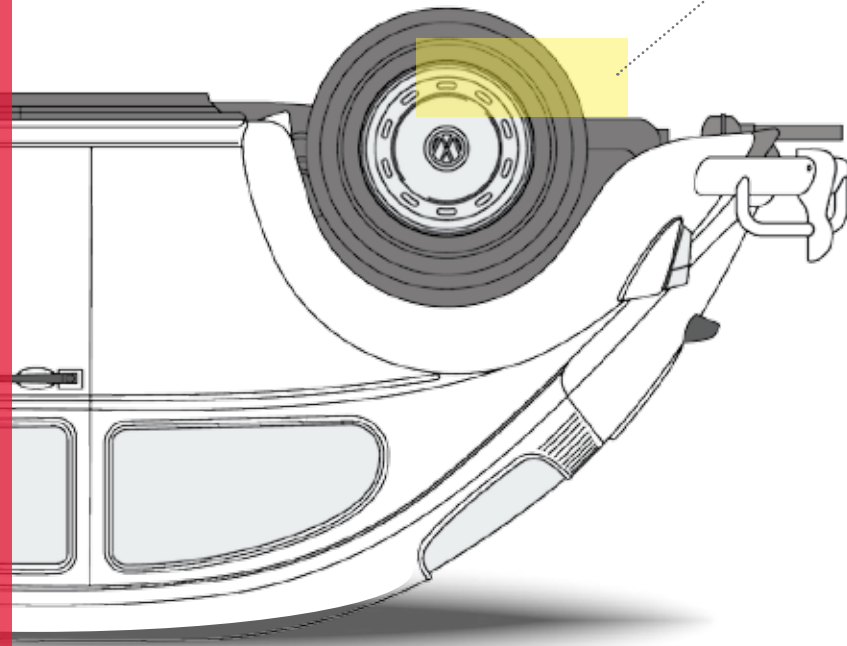
Some Tar Heel folk used to claim that if you carried a hog’s tooth in your pocket, you’d never have a toothache.

A hog’shead, on the other hand, really had nothing to do with a pig: It was a large oak barrel used to transport tobacco (though people some-

There may be more entries for food in the Encyclopedia than any other category. Go ahead. Indulge your appetite for knowledge — apples, barbecue, buttermilk, Cheerwine, grits, iced tea, okra, scuppernongs ...



“Time slowed, and one thought formed: How do we get back to the road from here?”



times used them to haul liquor, beer, molasses, and other products). Full, it weighed about half a ton. Curiously, after a heavy oak tobacco hogshead made its journey from seller's warehouse to buyer's factory, workers typically broke it up so it could be sold for scrap or firewood.

You know, I've enjoyed this little detour into some of North Carolina's quirks. But I really need to be getting on. Let me give you one more for the road.

WE USED TO HAVE ABOUT 500 miles of so-called plank roads. They were built in the mid-1800s by crews laying two rows of six- to eight-inch thick oak or pine sills end to end on a well-drained roadbed and covering them, perpendicularly, with eight-inch-wide planks. Workers poured gravel over the planks, then horse manure over that, and packed it down hard. (Today we do something similar with the waste of

the beasts that use our roads when we grind up old tires and put them in our road-paving mixtures.) The Fayetteville & Western plank road, 129 miles from end to end, was the longest wooden highway ever built in North Carolina or anywhere else.

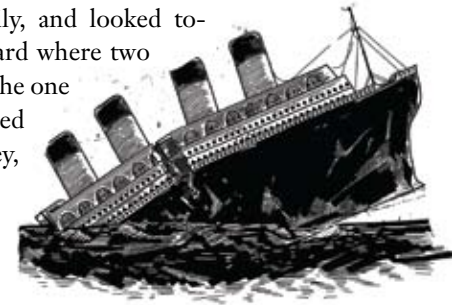
The Boys Road Patrol was responsible for road maintenance in some areas, particularly in Forsyth and Davie counties, from 1915 till about 1930. Each boy who was a member would look after the stretch of road nearest to where he lived, “dragging and ditching” it, as the General Assembly's charter to the group put it. The group's slogan was “A Boy on Every Mile.”

THERE WERE AT LEAST two boys on the eastmost mile of county road 1338, more commonly known as South Mills River Road, one spring afternoon in 1998: It was one month to the day after I was licensed to drive, and I got in my Carolina-blue '68 Beetle with my good friend Ricky and headed down the mountain to rent a movie. On one of the hills winding down to the valley my right front wheel slipped off the edge of the road. Not realizing the shoulder was so low, I casually flicked the steering wheel back

to the left. We instantly pinballed to the right, off the road and down a steep and brushy bank. My head was bouncing too much to be able to make out what was in front of us, but blurred bushes and trees slapped my side window. Time slowed, and one thought formed: How do we get back to the road from here? We plunged down the bank, took out some shrubs, missed a truck-sized satellite dish by a whisker, bounced through a yard, T-boned an aluminum storage shed, and plucked from it with our front bumper a large chest freezer, which we pushed onto the stoop of a singlewide mobile home before coming to a stop. Behind us, the storage shed fell, a house of cards, and in front of us on the mobile home's porch, a large and fairly irate woman appeared, screaming that she was having a heart attack.

I opened my door, shakily, and looked toward the far end of the yard where two little boys were playing. The one wearing only a diaper looked over at me and said, “Hey, mister. What'cha doin'?”

The **Beetle** was a loss. The rest of us were okay.



PHOTOGRAPH BY @ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/AN_HALF_TUBE

But Oscar Scott Woody wasn't so lucky: the wreck he was in took his life. It happened on April 15, 1912, which was Woody's 41st birthday. He hailed from Roxboro and was a postal clerk on board a transatlantic ocean liner called

the *R.M.S. Titanic*.

Old Quawk was another Tar Heel who met his end at sea. No one knew his real name; folks on Ocracoke Island called him Quawk because his voice resembled that of a coastal night heron or a croaker fish, depending on which version of the tale you consult. Details are sketchy, but as a bad storm was brewing one day in the late 18th- or early 19th century, Quawk is said to have put out to sea in his little fishing boat, "all the while shouting blasphemous threats toward heaven." He never made it back. For years now, the legend goes, shipwrecks and accidents at sea have been more common on Old Quawk's Day, and old-timers on Ocracoke may still warn you not to head out on the water that day. Trouble is, there's not much agreement on exactly when Old Quawk's Day is: It's either February 6 or March 16. About the only thing in the story that people can agree on is that Old Quawk was none too likeable. At any rate, if you're down at Ocracoke on either of those days, maybe it's best to stick close to shore. They don't call it the Graveyard of the Atlantic for nothing.

In World War I German submarines known as U-boats sank at least 10 Allied ships off the coast of North Carolina. That was a drop in the bucket compared to World War II, when U-boats sank so many ships off the Outer Banks that the area became known as Torpedo Junction. The U.S. government classified most of these engagements, so by and large the nation had no idea how close to home the war had come. But people on the Outer Banks knew: "We'd hear these explosions most any time of the day or



night and it would shake the houses and sometimes crack the walls," said Blanche Jolliff

of Ocracoke Village. Charles Stowe of Hatteras headed out on the water with his father one day to fish. Stowe saw a U-boat surfacing right in front of their boat. The elder Stowe's eyesight wasn't very good, and he was convinced that they were looking at just another fishing boat. "I said, 'Dad, that is a German submarine!'" recalled Charles Stowe. With the old man convinced, the Stowes skedaddled for safer waters.

I FEEL LIKE I COULD go on like this all week: There's that much good stuff in the *Encyclopedia* and on NCpedia. They're hard to walk away from. But I haven't gotten around to explaining something that I mentioned earlier: the yaupon. I won't leave you hanging. It's a red-berried, evergreen shrub in the holly family — the name comes from the Catawba word yop, which means tree — and it grows in sandy and marshy soils down near the coast. The leaves and twigs contain caffeine, and Native Americans and colonists used to make a kind of tea out of them. *Ilex vomitoria* is yaupon's scientific name, and it got that because of the role it seemed to play in Native American rituals which involved vomiting. (Yaupon was wrongly accused; the vomiting was caused by seawater and other ingredients that Native Americans added to their yaupon.) You can sometimes find dwarf cultivars of yaupon in the garden center at Lowe's. Oh, and Lowe's? Founded and headquartered right here in North Carolina ...

Okay, okay. Really now, I'll stop. 🐾

Jason Smith lives in Carrboro and is the editor of Endeavors, a research magazine published by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Encyclopedia of North Carolina. Edited by William S. Powell. The University of North Carolina Press, 1,328 pages, \$75. NCpedia: ncpedia.org

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