



Bearwallow: A Personal History of a Mountain Homeland

Jeremy B. Jones

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Across the Blue Ridge Mountains stretches a world both charming and complicated.

Jeremy Jones and his wife move into a small house above the creek where his family had settled 200 years prior. He takes a job alongside his former teachers in the local elementary school and sets out on a search to understand how this ancient land has shaped its people—how it shaped him. His search sends him burrowing in the past—hunting buried treasure and POW camps, unearthing Civil War graves and family feuds, exploring gated communities and tourist traps, encountering changed accents and immigrant populations, tracing Wal-Mart's sidewalks and carved-out mountains—and pondering the future. He meshes narrative and myth, geology and genealogy, fiddle tunes and local color about the briskly changing and oft-stigmatized world of his native southern Appalachians.

Somehow, these journeys continually lead him back to the mystical Bearwallow Mountain, a peak suddenly in flux.

Bearwallow: A Personal History of a Mountain Homeland Details

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From Reader Review Bearwallow: A Personal History of a Mountain Homeland for online ebook

Chuck McGrady says

I would have read a book entitled Bearwallow even without meeting the author, but I did meet him at a book fair at the local community college. I didn't know at the time how many ways our lives crossed from common friends to places, including Bearwallow. He describes the fight over water at Grand Highlands, and I was one of the participants in that fight.

The book is an introspective look at one's sense of place, and the author has deep roots in an area that we both know.

Heather says

I loved this story, especially given that I grew up very close to Fruitland/Edneyville. And I met the author at a conference recently and he's a really nice guy. In this book he does a great job of weaving his personal story with history and descriptions of the natural setting.

Thomas Tewey says

Met the author at book signing Blowing Rock Museum- book is as charming as the author. He captures life in the mountains in 21st century in a lyrical style free of sentimentality and cynicism. Shows how a sense of place still matters in the digital age -rare in a young man's memoir. Reads well out loud like most good storytellers!

Appalachia through Memoir and Song with Jeremy B. Jones
Appalachia through Memoir and Song
Jeremy B. Jones Explore the culture and history of the Blue Ridge Mountains through song and reading with Jeremy B. Jones. Performing old-time banjo tunes and reading excerpts from Bearwallow: A Personal History of a Mountain Homeland
by Jeremy B. Jones

Stephen Durrant says

A couple of years ago my daughter and her husband moved to North Carolina and bought a home on the side of Bearwallow Mountain (NOT in the Grand Highlands up on top, which neither she nor I could possibly afford)! I visited them recently and immediately was attracted not only to the beauty of the area but the richness of Appalachian culture. So when she sent this book along, I lapped it up in two sittings. No doubt my immense enjoyment of Jeremy Jones' book results from a budding attachment to the area he's describing as well as to my general interest in writings about particular places to which one feels deep attachment. Anyway, I will go back to Bearwallow Mountain and no doubt will carry this book with me--who knows, maybe I'll even find the gold that his ancestor Abraham buried near an oak tree somewhere in the forest near Edneyville . . . gee, it would be nice if my reading habit finally became financially profitable!

Matthew Wilson says

Great meditations on Appalachia by an Appalachian.

David Joy says

Jeremy Jones writes with poignant, lithe, prose. He may be looking at one spot on the mountain, but he's looked at it from every ridgeline, from every cove, from every prone position in the field. What we're left with is the multi-faceted experience that is our lives.

Karen says

This is an absolute delight! As a recent resident of this beautiful part of Appalachia, it was good to read this story of a native who left and has returned. Having read "Hillbilly Elegy" earlier this year, I found this a good companion book to that one. The former is more angry and political, but Mr. Jones' book is a love story to not only Bearwallow Mountain, but all that western North Carolina has to offer. It's also a cautionary tale of "development" or "community," as the real estate people present it. Mr. Jones, with his inviting writing style, takes the reader along with him wherever he goes - to school with his immigrant students, on his bike rides up the mountain, walking through the woods with his dogs, or experiencing his time in Honduras.

Jaime says

This was good. I think Jones did a fantastic job of weaving several different motifs throughout the book. I appreciate that he didn't just focus on the 'Appalachian' folks and incorporated some of the histories of the Cherokee as well as the migrant workers that now make up a lot of the population of the region. He does some interesting exploration into what it means to be from somewhere and what it means to develop a land. I think overall it could use a little bit more polishing. And I wish he would have dove deeper into some of the ideas he explored. But it really was quite an enjoyable read and an easy one to recommend. Great for memoir readers, readers of Southern Lit, Appalachian transplants and natives alike, and folks just wanting to know more about the region.

richard mills says

As someone who lives in the area and is fascinated by history, I enjoyed this. The reflections of life in Honduras with life in Appalachia were an interesting thread. I found the book to be a readable memoir with depth of research about the area sprinkled in reminiscent of much of Bill Bryson's works. Overall, it was a mildly entertaining read but didn't seem to really go anywhere. I got the impression that I was reading a book full of daily or selected blog entries.

Cheri says

After college Jones set out for Western Honduras, a small town set in the mountains as well, to teach young children there.

“I was in Gracias, leading fourth-graders through the cobblestone streets and across the snaking rivers, that I somehow found myself working back to Bearwallow. I began to see traces of home everywhere.”

Even at the market in Gracias, he sees his old home.

“The men driving oxen down the mountain, the women cooking over wood stoves in the hollows of Celaque – that world felt like a history lesson of Appalachia, like I’d been dropped into an alternate-universe version of the world of my grandparents.

“Here I was in another world, somewhere that seemed to spring from the mind of Gabriel Garcia Marquez – a puma wandered into town from Celaque; butterflies swooned over the flowers on the playground as children burst wildly through; a toucan rested on a tree outside my classroom as we took a vocabulary quiz – and I could think only of my bear and my mountain.”

The children’s local folk songs had him digging out similarities in Appalachian tunes, the local ghost stories reminded him of stories of his ancestors. To live in the shadow of Bearwallow he returns to teach at his old elementary school alongside his former teachers in a single-wide behind the school in Edneyville. It doesn’t take him long to ride his mountain bike to the top of Bearwallow, his mountain.

“The trees breathed with the wind and water trickled down the mountain, but everything felt still, like I’d found some secret: a whole place forgotten.”

Jones is a storyteller, mixing his memoir with myth, linking the geology in these mountains with his genealogy, past with the present, banjos and the Blue Ridge Mountains. It’s all a lovely, seamless wandering through place and time.

Lilla says

Adding this book to my every growing list of Appalachian reads. As someone who loves reading about this area, his writing did not disappoint. This memoir of a year when he returns home after living in Honduras is a study of his family’s history in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and I enjoyed the multi-faceted look at those who have inhabited that land. Jones is another author I will follow, and I hope he will write more.

Jeanette says

"Although I'm living on land my family has claimed for over two centuries, I realize that the world around me-my mountains-is a far different country from that of my grandparents. I'm on the same land but in a different world, and I'm taken with, gripped by, the notion of returning to the lost country of my grandparents. To the Appalachia of yore."

I enjoyed this book on many levels. However, I felt like the author was trying to tell too many stories. His childhood in the mountains, returning to teach ESL students at his former elementary school, immigration, his time teaching in Honduras, his genealogy in the mountains of North Carolina and the changes or developments that have occurred and are occurring in the mountain community of his youth. The author was trying to tie all these threads of stories together and then to Bearwallow Mountain but it didn't always work. Especially, with the frequent jumping around from thread to thread.

One of the threads I enjoyed the most was when he was writing about the history of the mountains and the changes that have occurred and why they have happened. Is the development bad or just the natural passage of time? The way people have lived in and used the mountains has continually changed with each generation. When farming stops being profitable what are you to do with all the land? Sod farms instead of cattle grazing land. New housing developments instead of farms.

"So we use the land for its space, for its dirt, but not much more. It's as if we don't know what else to do. We've been sustained by the land since our people have been here and now that we don't grow anything in it, we sell the land itself for sustenance. We section it off and stick signs up and watch the developments clear trees and grow more houses in ten acres than had stood in a square mile. We develop."

I also enjoyed reading the several stories of the civil war that the author wrote about.

The author had heard there was an anonymous grave of a confederate deserter at the foot of Bearwallow Mountain and went in search of it. He found the original worn headstone as well as a new, granite stone and a tattered confederate flag stuck into the ground. Ironically, it was the Sons of the Confederacy who donated the new headstone.

"While no one knows the dead boy's story, he likely was a confederate deserter who abandoned the war and his loyalty to the South, and was cut down by Edneyville men appointed to seek out and arrest Rebel deserters. So it's strange that his resting place is now adorned courtesy of groups fervently attached to the history and sacrifice of men and women to the confederate cause. He fled the confederacy, and the confederacy killed him for it. But here he lies in the woods with a fresh headstone and a Rebel flag"

I really liked so much about this book and probably would have loved it if it had not jumped around so much trying to pull so many disparate threads together into one book.

Amy1N says

This is a gorgeous book about the mountains, home, hospitality, and what it means to be defined by your place in this world. There were passages that took my breath away at the truth in them. And the last sentence had me in tears.

Keena says

This book was not necessarily what I was expecting when I first saw it on the shelf, but I really enjoyed it. My family isn't from the mountains, but we are from the foothills, and I enjoyed reading the similarities and differences. It was also surprisingly educational on history, which I wasn't expecting but thoroughly enjoyed.

I've come across mention of the Bearwallow trail a few times before and, while it was somewhere on my to-do list, after reading this book I want to go visit ASAP.

Not to mention how much I love the cover art.

Luke D. says

Very accurate picture of Appalachia.
