

NEW GUIDEBOOKS TAKE THE GUESSWORK OUT OF TRACKING DOWN
AUTHENTIC BLUE RIDGE MUSIC, DANCE, AND TRADITIONS.

Go Find It on the Mountain



Cedric Chatterley

by Miriam Sauls

It's been said that if you shake a tree in the Blue Ridge, a musician will fall out ... and most likely land on a dancer. If you have a hankering to experience the riches of our state's musicians, dancers, and traditions, a couple of grand guides will be in bookstores soon to help you find your way.

Two books, *Finding a Place in the Circle: Discovering Traditional Music and Dance along the Blue Ridge Music Trails* and the *Cherokee Heritage Trails Guidebook*, both to be published by UNC Press, were developed as part of the Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative, a project led by the North Carolina Arts Council in collaboration with arts councils in Virginia and Tennessee and an unprecedented blend of local, tribal, state, and federal agencies in the Appalachian region of the three states.

Finding a Place in the Circle, by Fred Fussell and photographer Cedric Chatterley, offers up places to hear traditional music in more than 40 towns and counties in Virginia and North Carolina. From fiddler

conventions to flea markets, barbecue joints to music festivals, city parks to mountain meadows, Fussell and Chatterley take the reader to venues where old-time music thrives and where residents of mountain communities clog, two-step, flat-foot, and buck dance. Along the way, they also point out places to eat pinto beans, liver mush, pepper catfish, and other regional delicacies.

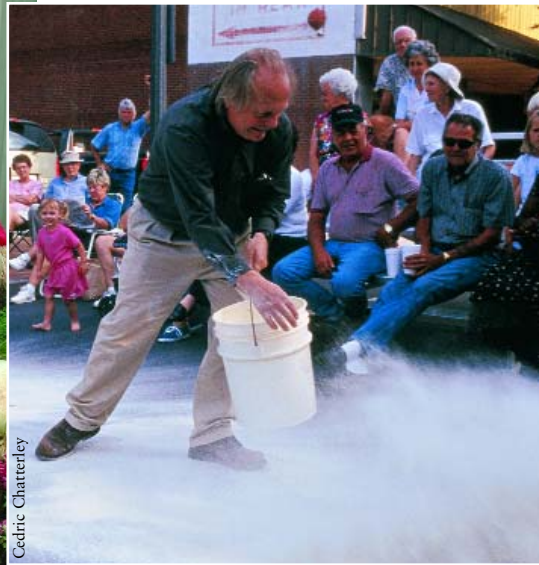
Fussell paints a picture of a tradition that is steeped in history but remains alive and well. "Throughout the region," he says in the introduction, "it's totally expected that music will be played by oneself, by one's parents and grandparents, by one's neighbors, by one's brothers and sisters, and by one's children. Players who are 90 years old play side-by-side and in tune with teenagers. And do they evermore play music out in public!

"The traditional music-makers of the Blue Ridge — be they farmers, teachers, postmen, barbers, architects, nurses — get together, socialize, tell corny jokes, eat good food, and play in community centers, in coffee shops,



Left: Stranger Malone, who recorded songs in the 1920s as a member of the stringband, The Skillet Lickers, plays bass fiddle alongside six-year-old fiddler Clay Sutton at the Bluff Mountain Music Festival in Madison County.

Nimble fingers pluck an autoharp at the Mount Airy Fiddler's Convention.



Cedric Chatterley

Left: Senior Miss Cherokee reigns as ambassador for Indian culture. Middle: Caller Joe Sam Queen spreads cornmeal in preparation for Waynesville's Mountain Street Dance. Right: Eva Wolfe weaves a river-cane basket.



Rob Amberg

in town parks. They play traditional bluegrass, old-time, and gospel music. They make their music with fine humor and with light hearts, but they're also very serious about it. They're very much aware that their music — traditional Southern Appalachian music — is distinctively Southern, distinctively Appalachian, distinctively American, and distinctively theirs — and theirs to share.”

Chatterley documents music venues and resources with a keen eye and a

penchant for connecting music to the everyday lives of the people who live in the region. His 147 color photographs include cakewalks, men pitching horseshoes, old-time molasses boilings, and coon dog races, as well as mountain people playing music. Fussell profiles musicians, young and old, some who play to live and others who live to play.

His profile of musician and instrument maker Tom Barr of Galax, Virginia, might help explain how the music has

survived. “If you go away from here on vacation somewhere, if you want to hear any good music, you have to take it with you,” says Barr. “You just can't find any music when you leave from around here. You can go over all the country, and you'll never find any decent music — unless you carry it with you. So we carry our guitars with us.”

The movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* did its part in spreading the sounds North Carolinians have cherished for centuries. That's all the more reason the guidebook will be a treasure — for these newly created aficionados as well as folks who have loved the music for years but haven't known where to find it being performed live. Now they can go to the source.

There are sidebars on topics ranging from local ballads to live radio, and Fussell also throws in some etiquette guidance for the traveler who might be tempted to join a jam session. The second commandment in his “Ten Commandments of Jamming” reads: “Thou shalt arrange thyself in a small circle so that thou mayest hear and see the other musicians. Thou shalt listen with thine ears to the songs and attempt to play in accord with the group; also, open thine eyes betimes to look about thee, lest there be some visual sign someone is endeavoring to send thee. Thou shalt play softly when

Tracking down the guidebooks

Finding a Place in the Circle (available June 2003)

Cherokee Heritage Trails Guidebook (available April 2003)

UNC Press

P.O. Box 2288

Chapel Hill, N.C. 27515-2288

(800) 848-6224

www.uncpress.unc.edu

The guidebooks will be available in bookstores in North Carolina and neighboring states, in museum shops, and along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Also check:

www.blueridgemusic.org

www.cherokeeheritagetrails.org

Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina and

Farms, Gardens and Countryside Trails of Western North Carolina

HandMade in America

P.O. Box 2089

Asheville, N.C. 28802

(800) 331-4154

www.handmadeinamerica.org

Cherokee Artist Directory 2001

Museum of the Cherokee Indian

P.O. Box 1599

Cherokee, N.C. 28719

(888) 665-7249

www.cherokeemuseum.org

someone lifteth his voice in song, when playing harmony, and when thou knowest not what thou is doing.”

Spirit of the Cherokee

“The old shaman always told us, ‘Keep your souls, your mind, your spirit, above the mountaintops, above the highest peaks of the Great Smokies,’” says Cherokee elder Jerry Wolfe, describing how a medicine man prepared boys for stickball games.

“And I thought he meant during the ball game. But later I realized he meant all the time. To take care of your body, not get dragged down low by earthly things. Keep your aspirations, your dreams, on the highest mountaintops.”

Wolfe’s voice is among the many voices that make the *Cherokee Heritage Trails Guidebook* come alive. Visitors who want to understand the cultural landscape as well as the rich history of places they visit will find the book invaluable as they explore ancient and modern Cherokee sites.

The guidebook, by Barbara Duncan and Brett Riggs, has 144 color

photographs by a variety of photographers and is organized around six hubs in North Carolina and Tennessee that are within easy driving to sites that make up the Cherokee Heritage Trails.

Cherokee, Robbinsville, Franklin, and Murphy in North Carolina and Vonore and Red Clay in Tennessee are the central locations for these explorations. From these towns, visitors will be able to locate sites of ancient towns and historical events, find places important in Cherokee myths and legends, attend contemporary festivals, identify local museums that have Cherokee holdings, and visit places where Cherokee artists share their storytelling, sports, music, arts, and crafts.

Every chapter in this book is enhanced with sidebars and quotations. An essay by Cherokee storyteller Freeman Owle poses the question: “How would I like visitors to approach the Cherokee Heritage Trails?”

He goes on to answer: “I would like for them to go back to a time when there was only the Creek and the

Choctaw and the Chickasaw and the Cherokee in this area. And to go out and just feel, and to listen to the voices of the past. We must be quiet long enough to be able to get back to that point of appreciation. Then and only then can you look around and see great mountains and their panoramic views as the Cherokee saw them thousands of years ago. Then in the silence you will begin to get a great appreciation for what you’re sitting on or standing on — the Earth itself. Be quiet long enough that you become part of it.”

Rich in resources

A core component of both guidebook projects is an exhaustive resource inventory conducted by folklorists who went into communities and asked local people what they would like to share with the public. The information was sorted according to appropriateness for inclusion in the guidebooks — regular hours, public facilities, parking, etc. Sites considered sacred or too fragile were not published.

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communities by offering sustainable economic development and by ushering in a new style of tourism that teaches visitors and residents alike the value of good stewardship of our state’s cultural resources,” says Wayne Martin, director of the N.C. Arts Council’s Folklife program and the project’s driving force. “From the very beginning we have had a commitment to listen first and foremost to ideas, needs, and issues voiced by those whose heritage is being presented to the public. If we remain true to this sense of partnership, there is no doubt that other benefits, both anticipated and serendipitous, will result from all our efforts.”


That has already been the case. U.S. Sen. John Edwards introduced legislation designating 25 western North Carolina counties as a National Heritage Area. In crafting the legislation, Edwards relied heavily on the resource inventory that grew out of the guidebook projects. “In passing this bipartisan legislation,” he said, “the Senate is recognizing what all of us in North Carolina already know — that the Blue Ridge Mountains are a national treasure.” The legislation, which recently won passage in the Senate and awaits action in the House, would provide the region with up to \$10 million over 15 years to preserve and develop the area as a historic and scenic designation.

Another byproduct of the Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative is a book especially for program planners who want to include authentic Cherokee artists in their events. The *Cherokee Artist Directory 2001* describes some of the best practicing artists of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who present programs about some aspect of Cherokee culture. More than 60 artists of all ages are included in the directory and speak to the vibrancy of Cherokee arts, crafts, history, and culture.

Educational projects have grown out of the community meeting process as well. Fourth-grade students in Ashe,

Caldwell, Surry, and Haywood counties are learning to conduct surveys, compile data, plot graphs, and have a toe-tapping good time — all around traditional music. The North Carolina Curriculum, Music and Community Project, an outgrowth of the Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative, is using local musicians and music traditions to teach state-mandated curricula. A related project, Junior Appalachian Musicians, uses local musicians in western communities to teach after-school students to play traditional music.

A further outgrowth of the Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative is a guidebook published by the nonprofit community development organization HandMade in America as a companion piece to its highly successful *Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina*. The glove-box-size book, *Farms, Gardens and Countryside Trails of Western North Carolina*, highlights an “agri-heritage” trail system through 21 counties. The half-dozen auto loop trails lead through areas rich in horticultural and agricultural heritage, presenting a variety of educational opportunities, activities, and a glimpse of the breathtaking and often whimsical beauty of nature.

“The resources being highlighted in all the guidebooks developed during this project not only tell a local story but are also a part of the American experience,” says Wayne Martin. “Our music has shaped the American music landscape for generations. And the story of the Cherokee removal is a poignant part of the American fabric. And the depth of our craft traditions and the richness of our agricultural traditions are part of a national story as well. You can find mountains in a lot of other places in our country, but the heritage we’re sharing in these books is unique to our Appalachian Mountains.” 

Miriam Sauls is a freelance writer based in Raleigh.