



Interview with Ashok Kudva
By Stuart English

Tell us about your life before CMC, growing up in India, education at Purdue, and working at Dupont.

I was born in India, a British colony, at the end of WW II and learned at a young age that the only thing that is constant in this world is change. My earliest memories are chanting "hail to the revolution" to support Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent independence revolution and a year later singing, "Let's go forward with developing a national constitution". While growing up in rural India with no running water or electricity, I learned the only way to progress in life is through education. My family moved to Mumbai to a home with running water and electricity, and the chance for my dream of a university education. After graduation and marriage, my wife and I were fortunate to get scholarships at Purdue University for graduate work.

Purdue provided the environment for strong academic growth as well as the enjoyment of performing arts and college sports. The university made every effort for foreign students to mingle with non-university families and become familiar with American culture.

After getting my Ph.D in chemical engineering, I was hired by DuPont in New Jersey and worked there for four years, and then transferred to Brevard in 1974 when they established R&D in the Film Manufacturing plant.

At that time, Hendersonville did not even have a MacDonald's! High Falls, Triple Falls and Bridal Veil Falls, now a part of the Dupont State Recreation Forest and Lake DERA (still owned by DuPont) were open to employees and their accompanied guests. The general public was not allowed, but employee guests (even an entire church congregation) were allowed free! After business meetings with out of town guests, I used to take them for picnic lunches at these waterfalls before they headed to the airport. Annual family picnics at Guion Farm sponsored by the Employee Recreation Association (funded by DuPont with a nominal fee for employees) promoted great employee team-building. Hiking short distances and fishing in and around the streams, and waterfalls were standard weekend jaunts for my family.

You have lived in Western North Carolina a long time. Have you always been a hiker?

No. My focus was career, family and work around the house. I did not start hiking until 2002 but ramped up after joining CMC in 2004. In my first CMC hike, led by Danny, I met Lenny Bernstein who was with me at Purdue four decades earlier!!

Working in a medical/industrial photo-imaging business also fueled my passion for amateur photography and I had a personal B&W darkroom at home from my New Jersey days. Advances in digital photography (which incidentally affected the Dupont business at Brevard) and handheld GPS technology promoted my desire to explore and document the wealth of natural beauty in our area.

Since I have known you, you have always enjoyed tough, challenging hikes. What draws you to hikes like that?

Hikes that attract me are not necessarily tough but I look for opportunities with payoffs such as travel between mountaintops with reciprocal views, waterfalls and seasonal wildflowers, historically significant landmarks and artifacts, and more time on the trails than driving.

I enjoy half-day hikes as much as full day hikes.

During your years with the Membership Committee you introduced some new ideas that are still incorporated today. Tell us about some of them.

One that I feel has advertised and illustrated our club's motto "Hike, Build Trails and Make Friends" is the CMC Display Board. The large photographs inform hikers and the general public at the ATC and other conferences.

During my six years on the Membership Committee, I continued the welcome letter for new members, overdue reminders, and quarterly statistics on growth that Lenny taught me. I purchased commercial software to execute these tasks before the new website started doing those tasks automatically.

You are also known to lead hikes with interesting history, stories, and themes. Would you talk about this aspect of your hike leading?

The placards at Newfound Gap's Rockefeller Plaza showing President Roosevelt inaugurating the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, and the Civilian Construction Corps trails inspire me... especially, as a naturalized citizen.

During the early years of my 40 years in Hendersonville, I did not take the time to study local history. Now when I lead a hike in DuPont, I am a part of the history. I personally know some of the people for whom lakes are named in the forest. And, Bill Thomas, my colleague at DuPont, spearheaded the preservation and development of Horsepasture River waterfalls and trails for generations to enjoy.

There are books and sources on the Internet for us to learn a lot about the history of the area. Leaders like Danny, Dave Wetmore, Tom Bindrim, Mike Knies, [Bruce Bente](#), and Jack Dalton are great resources and role models. Most CMC folks are interested in learning about the hike area. A hike leader is really like a tour guide who strives to meet his clients' expectations.

What are your three of your favorite hikes?

Herrin Knob- Mount Hardy-Green Knob, Pisgah National Forest : CMC Hike# 764

Devil's Courthouse- Pilot Mountain, Pisgah National Forest : CMC Hike # 620

Mount Leconte with sunset and sunrise views and an overnight stay at Leconte Lodge with a car shuttle to allow two different trails for in and out.
- not a club hike, but specially organized for CMC members

What do you see as the future of CMC and Ashok Kudva?

For CMC I see a continuing increase in membership in the 60+ age group. Hopefully, the Meet Up group will attract younger folks. Our mission, "hike, build trails, make friends" is strong. If we live by it, the public will naturally be drawn to it, and we will grow.

As I age, I recognize the need to "pre-hab" for hiking for the 70+ generation. The workshops I attended at the ATC in Cullowhee emphasized improving balance, flexibility, and strengthening core muscles. I will continue to participate in trail maintenance, continue my passion for photography and GPS technology on the trails, and hike as long as I can. My wife and I have three parents in their 90s, and we have two 5-year old grandchildren; family life is a priority in our lives, but my hiking and CMC is a close second.