



## **Ted Snyder - Patient, Determined Conservationist**

### **Interview by Kathy Kyle**

Ted Snyder received the CMC Distinguish Service Award at the 2012 annual meeting as lead organizer of the camporees that have taken CMC members to areas designated as mountain treasures. He has done much more. He is the man who has been instrumental in preserving some of the most beautiful land in this part of the world. Born in Cedar Mountain, he left the mountains for his undergraduate degree at the University of Chicago and then received his law degree from Duke University. He went on to serve as a judge advocate for the General Corps of the U.S. Army, had a law practice and is now a full time conservationist.

### **You were born and grew up in this area, how has the area, land changed?**

The human population has increased dramatically. With that very large areas of farm land and forest have been converted to residential uses and shopping centers.

Once common public transportation has been reduced to almost nothing.

### **When did your family first come to this area?**

My mother's paternal ancestor moved from Scotland to Plymouth, N.C. in 1770. My father's paternal ancestor moved from Pennsylvania to Greenville County, S.C. shortly after the Revolution. Records of when he arrived in this country or from what European county have not been found. The maternal lines have not been established with certainty.

### **Where did your strong devotion to conservation come from?**

As a child I walked, trailed after my father on hunts on his farm near Cedar Mountain, N.C. and later regularly hunted and fished when living at Walhalla, S.C. When growing up, my brothers and I often explored as far as we could walk in a day into the mountains back of our home. My epiphany came when my brother, John, and I made a safari to East Africa in 1966. We had engaged a "white hunter" who was an expert on birds and wildlife. We kept to no strict itinerary, but designed the safari day-to-day to take in things we had not yet viewed. We took many long walks and stalked on foot, not from the safety of vehicles. Upon our return, I joined the Sierra Club, and The Wilderness Society, primarily to take advantage of hiking trips in Western United States Wilderness. I joined the Carolina Mountain Club about the same time.

**Who were your role models? Why?**

Ernie Dickerman. Ernie showed me how to organize and lead a campaign to establish protection for wild lands. Later, when he was employed by The Wilderness Society, he taught me how to lobby on Capitol Hill. Together we wrote drafts of Wilderness bills, and organized wilderness conferences.

My uncle, Ed Hart, was for many years Chairman of the Board of the Shriner's Hospital at Greenville, S.C. From him I learned care and compassion for others, and the importance, indeed, necessity, to give back more than one gets. He also planted in me the seeds of love of books, and of fine art.

**What were some or one of the most rewarding conservation decisions you have been a part of? Why do they or it stand out?**

My first campaign was to designate the Chattooga River as a Wild and Scenic River. I was chairman of a small committee that coordinated the efforts of conservationists in North and South Carolina. I got my first experience of testifying before Congress on this project. Then I acted as chairman of the campaign to designate the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Creek as Wilderness. This was harder, and took longer. For the first time I learned to rely on experts for vital information.

I was appointed by the Sierra Club Board to a committee of myself, Allen Smith and Roger Marshall to lead its campaign to secure enactment of the Eastern Areas Wilderness Bill. This was the beginning of a string of victories to designate Wilderness in the eastern states. Starting about 1968 I led the campaign to prevent the construction of a destructive road in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. I helped conceive the idea of a monetary settlement in lieu of the road, which became crucial to our efforts. I coordinated the efforts of the conservation community until our success in 2010 with the signing of an agreement to make a cash settlement to Swain County. We stuck to the message for over 40 years, proving the meaning of determination.

**Tell about the 500 acres you conserve. How did this develop?**

As age slowed my father in managing the farm, he started planting pine plantations in old fields. After his death I took over management of the place, and completed planting all the old fields. By then I had learned a lot about responsible forestry from such close friends as Carl Holcomb, Professor of Forestry at VPI, Leon Minckler, Professor of Forestry at Syracuse, and Gordon Robinson, Forestry advisor to the Sierra Club and former Chief Forester of Southern Pacific Railroad. I instituted a management plan of thinning, using individual tree selection cutting, and always removing the worst and leaving the best. We were fortunate to engage as our consulting forester a retired

Professor of Forestry at Clemson. With his help we were able to groom our forest until today it is reputed to be the best managed commercial forest in the Upstate of South Carolina. Environmentally responsible forestry is an extremely long-term process. Our oldest plantations are over 60 years old, and still have a long way to go to maturity.

**What was the most unusual military court case you were a part of as a military attorney?**

I was an observer at one of the trials of former Korean war prisoners. That was an education in the meaning of brain-washing.

**How did you get involved with CMC?**

I Joined CMC to go on its hikes.

**How did you decide to lead Bernard's Favorite Hikes?**

Bernard and I had been friends for many years. Our mutual interest was in conservation. Bernard was a leading conservationist in Western North Carolina, and we had worked together on several conservation campaigns. We also hiked together regularly. When Bernard's list of thirteen Favorite Hikes was published in Let's Go! I immediately saw that re-leading them would be a fitting tribute to Bernard for his long years of conservation and hiking leadership. So, I volunteered at once to make a project of re-leading them.

**How did the idea of the camporees come about?**

About thirty years ago the Forest Service came out with its list of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Areas (SPNMs). For the Sierra Club I got the idea of leading a hike into each of them. There were so many it was going to take years to work through the list. In order to be more efficient, I dreamed up a way of using car-camping weekends to send a blast of hikes into clusters of nearby SPNM areas. At that time we started, no one we knew had hiked into a majority of the areas. I started the early ones with descriptions of trails based on map study. Then at the campground, leaders would volunteer and would take a group out into territory then unexplored by any of them. We didn't lose anybody. Today, we do have leaders who have hiked in all of the Mountain Treasures areas, and have scouted the trips, so there is less adrenalin spread around.

**Where do you see national conservation going in the future? How has it changed?**

There has been an evolution in conservation leadership. When I first came to the movement, conservation campaigns were organized and led by individual volunteer leaders. That has evolved until today conservation organizations are led by professional staffs and employ or have access to expert advisors. During that same time the pro-bono environmental law firm has come into being. One academic observer has said that this evolutionary change has led to the "higher-educated and privileged people doing things for their fellow citizens, rather than with them." Today the role of the conservation activist has almost disappeared. Members of conservation organizations enjoy a social relationship, and support the professional staff by writing letters on call and donating funds.

**What are some other things CMC could do to help with conservation?**

The Mountain Treasures Camporees and hikes are going to form a cadre of citizens who have visited each of North Carolina's Mountain Treasures identified by The Wilderness Society. When the preparation of the revised Forest Management Plan for the Nantahala/Pisgah National Forest gets underway, we will have knowledgeable hikers

who can provide informed analyses of each area. It is important for a hiking club to be actively engaged in protecting the wild places that provide such high value destinations. Many of the trails where CMC hikes were never constructed to environmentally responsible standards. In many cases they are just taken over from cattle and hunter trails, that came into being without any standards being considered. As these trails get heavier use, they are eroding badly and causing grievous environmental damage. As a matter of principle the Club should insist that all such trail segments be re-built to environmentally sustainable standards, and that no new trails be designated or incorporated into the National Forest or National Park trail systems unless or until they have been built or are re-built to the highest standards. While the CMC is now active in trail maintenance, the need for that activity is going to increase by a large factor. The Federal land agencies do not have enough funds to carry out proper trail maintenance, and increases in funding are unlikely. The burden of maintaining the trails we use will more and more fall on the users.

**What has been the most unusual and beautiful place you have traveled?**

There are too many such places to even begin to put one ahead of many others. On my list would be such places as the East Africa plains; the Roraima Sandstone tepuis of Venezuela and Guyana; the Redwood forests; the Great Barrier Reef; the beaches of the Cape York Peninsula; the Grand Canyon.

**What is your idea of a perfect hike?**

In mountains with big trees, lakes, cascading streams, waterfalls, flowers. A place where the rocks, plants, animals, and streams are there for their own sake, nor for your sake or for my sake. Being alone, so I can talk to them without embarrassing them.