

THE LAST OF THE GIANTS

Once there was an old growth forest that extended from the Town of Highlands to Whiteside Mountain. An old-growth forest or as the Brits call them, ancient woodlands, is a forest that has attained great age, often with large trees or at least very old ones, and exhibits high biological diversity. It also means the forest had never been clear-cut or harvested for timber or pulp, think Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. The trees in this forest would have been hundreds of years old and big. Dr. Robert Zahner in his book, *The Mountain at the end of the Trail*, describes this incredible ecosystem. Unfortunately, this forest was reduced in the 1950's to pulp to make paper. All that remains are a few fragments. One such piece is the 22 acre Henry Wright Preserve that was protected in 1964 through the actions of Henry Wright and The Nature Conservancy. In 2001, stewardship responsibility of this stand was transferred to the Highlands Land Trust, now known as the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust.

The Henry Wright Preserve is located within a steep valley centered on a headwaters stream of the Cullasaja River. The forest is dominated by Canada Hemlock and contains a small Carolina Hemlock stand on its edge. The Hemlocks are large, averaging more than four feet in diameter. One tree in particular at the Preserve stands out, the Cheoah. This tree is nearly 159 feet tall and contains over 1564 cubic feet of wood. These measurements make it among the largest hemlock trees in the world. With the demise of larger and taller trees in the Smokies by the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid the Cheoah today is both the tallest and largest living Hemlock tree in the world.



"The Cheoah"

You have to be a hermit in western North Carolina to not know about the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and its impact on the hemlocks of the Mountains. Some predict the complete loss of both the Canada and Carolina Hemlock from our forests. The Cheoah was first treated in 2006 by arborist Will Blozan and has subsequently been treated with Safari in 2010. This last treatment actually required climbing the tree to paint the insecticide on the bark at 120 ft above the ground.

The tree is alive and well but is the last of the giants.