

Flower Show Recalls Smokies Trip

By LYDIA KING FREHSE
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Last week while the snow whirled about the State Fair grounds in uncertain eddies, your scribe spent an afternoon "in and around the Smokies", the spectacular display presented at the flower show by the Chrysler corporation.

Although I carried no Aladdin's lamp, a few steps through the archway of a simulated natural bridge and I had left behind the crowded city life, to enter spring-time wonderland.

Here bloom was rampant; on rhododendron, azaleas and laurel, on fire-cherry and honeysuckle.

On the wall to the right was recreated a view from the top of Clingman's Dome, carrying us back to a Sunday morning spent at this very spot.

ONCE AGAIN the sun was warm on the age-old granite as we looked down over a secluded world of valleys and mountain tops, of clear singing streams and waterfalls. We were engulfed by the odor of sun on balsam and spruce, there came up to us again the deep and earthy aroma of living green; of damp moss, of growing leaf and bud, the perfume of a million hidden wild flowers.

On that day, far below, in a world removed, our eyes followed the outline of a turkey vulture sailing over some hidden canyon and our ears could just catch the whistle of an engine pulling a toy train through the valley.

THOSE OF you who have been there, know that the Smokies harbor the greatest variety of plants of any area in our North American continent for here the flora of the north and south overlap. Here, too, is sheltered the greatest remaining remnant of our eastern hardwood forest.

Among its trees are tulip, sassafras, sweet gum, sour gum, locust, ash and oak and on through the roster of their kind until we reach some 130 species. The areas above are occupied by a balsam-spruce conifer forest and pine covers much of the abandoned low lands.

Now back in the present we followed the path past Craggy Garden Lookout and Moonshiner's Hideout with its homemade "still" to stand before Laurel Waterfall which turned the water wheel of an old grist mill.

Close by stood the miller's cottage and the song of the cardinal of the Carolina wren came tumbling down to us from a hidden taperscorder.

BUT IT WAS in the wild flower meadow spread out at the foot of the falls that your scribe lingered longest. Here a little stream meandered to make a pond before it led

under a rustic bridge.

Anyone who is at home in our Michigan beech-maple could recognize among the many plants such favorites as alum root, hepatica, may-apple, violets—yellow, white and purple, phlox; golden ragwort and foam flower.

The rose-blue bells of mertensia, so familiar in our northern gardens, bloomed in profusion. The meadow was dotted with the shiny evergreen leaves of galax so much used in the north for decorative arrangements.

Other wild flowers not found in our Michigan woods were creeping phlox, mountain rosemary, the delicate purple oxalis and a species

of knotweed (Polygonum orientale). This latter has a fine-pink flower-spike which added color to the display.

Its native climbing habit has earned for it the local name of "kiss-me-over-the-garden-gate."

NO DOUBT every botanist present looked long and hard at the display.

Its presence was announced but alas it did not appear since it did not survive the hazards of transportation and winter forcing.

On the opposite side of Laurel Falls an Appalachian trail crossed the densest display of trees and shrubs.

At its entrance was an all too realistic example of a charred area, aftermath of a fire set by a careless traveller.

FARTHER along the trail an interested crowd gathered around a Cherokee family busy with their native crafts, at home in a replica of a Oconalufee Indian village.

Located 50 miles west of Asheville, N.C., it houses a remnant of an ancient Indian culture dating back some 2,200 years.

And so on past Alum Cave Bluff and the Trading Post with its Indian craft display and back to the best of ostrich ferns guarding the Natural Bridge where we entered.

Your scribe was privileged to spend a happy half hour with Doan Ogden, landscape architect from Asheville, N. C., under whose direction the plants were gathered and the display reassembled.

The 4,500 wild flowers and ferns and 1,200 shrubs were dug in late December and early January and shipped to Detroit where they were stored in a greenhouse until the proper moment for their forcing and resetting for the show.

And so it was that we came away with a notebook half full of plant note and names, only a few of which could be included in this column.

The best and sweetest of "In and Around the Smokies" we have left unsaid for what words can imprison the wonder of spring-time?

And the gentle curve of an unfolding leaf, the frost-like texture of a petal, the fragrance of a single flower—what of these?

Of such perfection nature makes a kind of wonderment and it is this which stays long and warm in the heart.



MRS. ROBERT FREHSE
Poses in Smokies display at Flower Show

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