

# The Paving of Campbell's Mountain Road



*The last unpaved mile of Campbell's Mountain Road at the top of Love*

In May of 2019, paving began on one of the last gravel roads in the Love area. There is still a mile section at the top before the project is complete but it saddens me to see “progress” coming to another old mountain roadway.

Thought to be constructed in the 1930s by men from the Civilian Conservation Corps camp in upper Sherando, Campbell's Mountain is steep but the gradient was well-planned with a winding pattern down the mountain.

Route 814 east, or Campbell's Mountain Road as it is known, is a cut-through from milepost 16 at Love Gap to Route 56 in Tyro. Narrow and steep, about a car and a half wide with no guard rails, many people wouldn't *think* of driving it even though they were born and raised here.

For four years my husband Billy was the pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Tyro which included at least three round trips a week on the bumpy, dusty road full of teeth chattering “washboards” and I travel it regularly, visiting the mountain people of Nelson. I love the breathtaking views but always keep a watchful eye on the blind curves for others driving too fast. It's not bad if you are on the “mountain side” of the road but there's not much wiggle room on the lower side!

My mother, visiting from Florida, always made me smile with her comment of “Don't you know *anyone* that lives on a hard surfaced road?” One of her most harrowing experiences on Campbell's Mountain came after we had attended a Wednesday night prayer meeting at Cornerstone Church. It was dark on the way home but a full moon was out that night, shining

brightly. We hadn't made it very far up the mountain when the headlight switch went out on my Bronco, plunging us into darkness. Now remember, it was daylight when we made the trip down Campbell's Mountain and my mom was a nervous wreck, saying the road was nothing more than a "cow path." Imagine her distress going back up the mountain in complete darkness. In her lifetime my mother was never what you'd call active but in her 70s she was positively sedentary. I knew I had a dilemma on my hands; she could never walk the five miles back to the camp where I lived, and the thought of leaving her in the Bronco by herself while I hoofed it home for some help wasn't an option either. So, I did the next best thing. I told her the moonlight was so bright that I could see the road perfectly and we were just going to drive on home and hope no one would be coming down. Traffic on Campbell's Mountain, especially that time of night, was pretty non-existent at the time so I felt safe in proceeding. I told Mom, "Just shut your eyes and we'll be home before you know it." I prayed all the way back, asking God to be with us and we made it back without meeting another vehicle. Needless to say, it was the last trip my mother ever took down Campbell's Mountain Road!

The narrow road cuts a half-hour off driving time from Love to Lynchburg and GPS unknowingly sends many 18-wheelers down the "shortcut". Very soon the truckers realize this is a BIG mistake but with nowhere to turn they continue to creep along without knowing the upcoming curves are too tight to accommodate the length of the trailer. The last semi, carrying a full load of paint products actually tumbled down the mountain. A hazmat team came and cleaned up the mess and several large wreckers were called to winch out the remains of the truck and trailer. If by some miracle they do make it to the switchback (a hairpin curve where you meet yourself coming and going) that's as far as they get.



***The hairpin curve on the "switchback"***

The five mile stretch from Love to Tyro is occupied by thirteen permanent residents; three located at the top and ten clustered at the bottom. George "B.B." Hockaday is one of the bottom ten.

Near the top of the mountain a huge rock outcropping known as Balcony Rocks (pronounced Bal-Coney by the locals) overlooks the Tyro/Massies Mill area. It was the site of end-of-the-school-year picnics

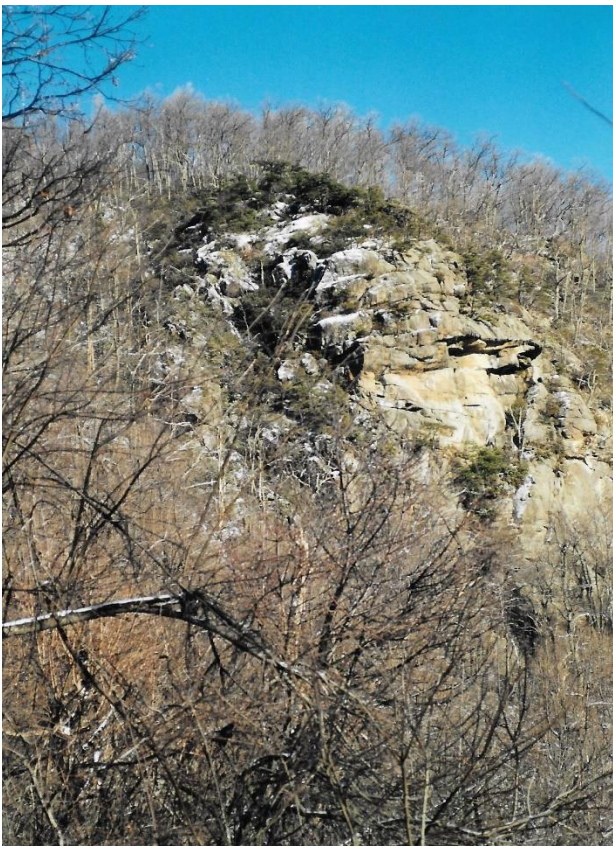
from the one-room schoolhouses located near Love in the late 1800 to early 1900s. Another landmark is the "Gum Tree," where bear hunters congregate during hunting season. The once lush old tree is nearly gone now, its trunk hollow with just a puff of leaves at the top. But I'm sure long after it has fallen the site will continue to be called the Gum Tree.



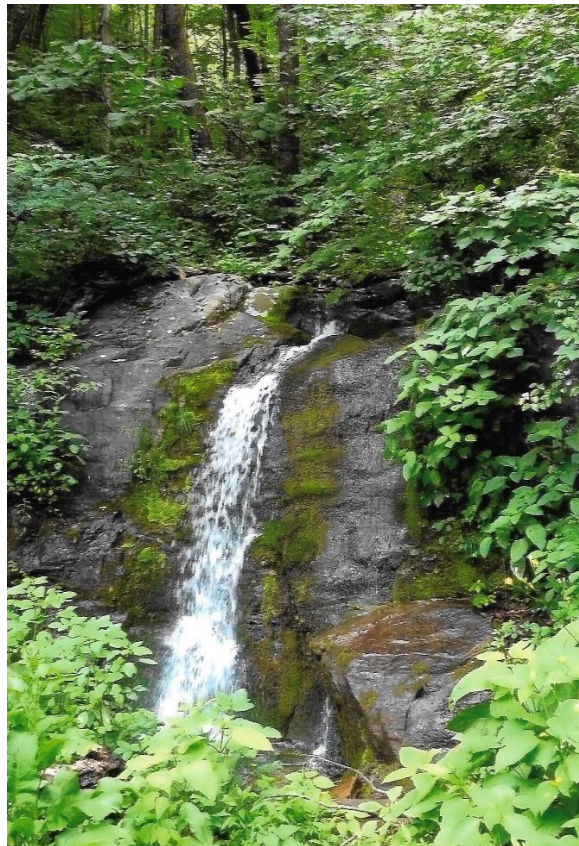
*1982; The Gum Tree still full and thriving*



*2022; Gum Tree with just a few leaves at top*



*Balcony Rocks from Campbell's Mountain Road*



*One of the cascading springs near the bottom*



***B. B. Hockaday lives at the bottom of Campbell's Mountain***

Many people who lived along the North Fork of the Tye River and later migrated to the Stuarts Draft area still want to be buried in the White Rock Cemetery near the vicinity where they were born. A funeral procession choosing to go that way has to snake its way down Campbell's Mountain with men standing at the top and bottom with walkie-talkies, halting traffic both ways until everyone reaches the bottom.

There are several mountain springs that tumble down the rocks, making their way to Campbell's Creek and ultimately to the Tye River at the junction of Routes 814 and 56. After a good rain, the cascade is abundant and I've stopped plenty of times for a dipper of the cold, clear water.

I'm sure some of the people living along the old road will appreciate the new tar and gravel surface which will alleviate dust but come winter when a layer of ice coats the road, traction for the tires will be virtually non-existent.

We'll see how that works out!

And so, yet another of the less traveled roadways goes the way of Reed's Gap and Cub Creek; being "modernized" from gravel to pavement which means less dust... but more traffic. I know I'm in the minority but give me an old gravel mountain road any day!

*Note from Lynn: On July 18, of 2022, the paving of the last mile up to Love on Campbell's Mountain Road began. The project was finalized in September 2022. Thus ends one of the last main gravel roads from Love to Tyro.*