

## Hometown Ramblings

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# Summer in Pine Mountain

The Pine Mountain scenic overlook is too enticing to pass by. I pull over and park the car in the shade. I walk toward the breathtaking view, noting the “Beware of Black Bear” sign posted along the walkway.

The temperature is 98 degrees, and the humidity hangs thick in the air. I’m still in my work clothes, navy slacks and polyester-blend shirt. The stairs to the overlook appear quite steep. I re-

turn to the car and snatch my suitcase from the trunk. Thankfully, my flip-flops are on top and easy to grab.

I laugh to myself thinking about trying to evade a bear in my flip-flops.

It is past 5 in the afternoon. I have spent the day in business meetings in three locations, with long drives in between. It is time to stretch and walk.

Eagerly, I take the stairs, following the signs to the scenic

view. There is no breeze. The sun is dazzling, the air stifling. At the top, the scenery is spectacular. The tiny town of Pineville is located in the valley, nestled comfortably amid grandiose mountains carpeted in towering trees.

I marvel at this majestic panorama. There is something peaceful, almost spiritual in this moment of quiet solitude. No wonder there is so much painted, written, and sung about Appalachia.

As I stare at the vastness of this beautiful place, I am suddenly aware of others approaching. In a few moments, a couple about my age appears with a little boy. We exchange pleasantries. I soon begin the descent and return to my car.

In the parking area, I see another sign marking the entrance for a trail to Chain Rock. It hangs ominously over the village below. In the 1930s, the city fathers decided to permanently anchor the rock to keep it from rolling down the hill.

The trail sign indicates it’s only a third of a mile. While I am intrigued about seeing the chain, I keep thinking about the possibil-

ity of meeting a black bear. I am also mindful of the possibility of poisonous snakes. It just wouldn’t be safe for me to go it alone on the trail through the woods.

I walk back toward my car and overhear the couple talking as they return from the overlook. I learn that the young boy is their grandson. They decide to take the trail to see the chain. Hmm, safety in numbers, I think, following them to the trailhead.

The trail is easy and well-marked, a downhill slope. Much of the trail is made of stones and, in some places, wooden steps have been crafted. I see benches positioned along the way and think how quaint they are, conveniently located to watch for birds and other wildlife as one maneuvers the path.

I am in a full sweat as I cautiously choose my footing. The cicadas buzz their never-ending drone, a perfect backdrop for this late afternoon excursion. The oppressive heat is undeterred by the dense brush and thick layers of oak, hickory, pine, and maple trees.

Twenty minutes into the descent, I’m concerned that the sign about the distance may have been inaccurate. My shirt is completely soaked as rivulets of perspiration pour from my head.

The young boy runs ahead to see if he can find the rock. Moments later, he calls out, “Here it is. I found it!”

All I can see is an enormous boulder blocking the view. To actually see the chain will require climbing onto the rock. For the child, a fun activity; for me and his grandparents, a challenge we’re simply not up for.

I take in the beauty of the site and the enormity of the rock, then I head back toward the car. Leaving the couple and boy behind, I begin my ascent. My pants are weighted like the rock, stuck to my legs with sweat.

The path is totally uphill. I begin in earnest, taking the first few steps two at a time, determined not to give in to the heat. The climb becomes steeper, and I have trouble breathing. Those quaint little benches I’d noticed going down are now my salvation. I take about fifteen steps, then rest in order to inhale.



My breathing is labored. The heat is unbearable. I recall news stories about heat stroke.

I fret about the flip-flops. Not only were they not a wise choice for hiking, what on earth will I do if I see a snake or a bear? Every sound I hear causes me to pause. What in the world was I thinking, taking off alone?

Twenty minutes later, I see sunlight peeking through the leaves. I’m still hundreds of steps away from reaching the top, but my spirit soars.

My body temperature is in overdrive when I finally attain the parking lot. An Appalachian Wireless employee is poking around in the back of his pickup truck, parked next to my car. He turns and sees me as I teeter out of the woods. He instantly calls out, “Ma’am, are you all right? Do you need some water?”

I smile gratefully, “Yes, if you have some. I wasn’t quite prepared for the heat today.”

He quickly pulls a chilled bottle of water from his ice-filled

cooler. I open my car, turn the ignition, and blast the air conditioner on high. I position the air vents to blow directly on my face as I drink the water, then pour some on the back of my neck. Slowly, my breathing returns to normal. I begin to cool down.

My newfound friend keeps a cautious eye on me. We chit-chat for a bit, and he ultimately gets back to his work.

I wait until the couple and little boy reappear. Sensibly, they are equipped with bottled water. I wave goodbye.

I pull onto the road, thankful to leave the bears and snakes safely behind in their scenic mountain domain.

*Bobbie Smith Bryant is a native of Calloway County. She is passionate about western Kentucky and is currently working on a commemorative history to celebrate the 2022 Calloway County Bicentennial. For more information about the author, visit [bobbiesmithbryant.com](http://bobbiesmithbryant.com). ■*