Unicoi Turnpike Trail

7. Coker Creek

Then – Although the Unicoi Path cut Coker Creek, the area was not heavily settled until the 18th and 19th centuries. The Unaka Mountains were the least desirable of the Cherokee lands, so Cherokees did not move into the area in significant numbers until the dissolution of the old Overhill Cherokee towns. After the Unicoi Turnpike was established as a toll road, a small number of people moved in to operate turnpike stands, with the most notable being Merony's Stand at Coker Creek. After gold was discovered at Coker Creek in the 1830's white prospectors began to pour in, despite that fact that the land was still part of the Cherokee Nation. The US Government intervened by establishing Fort Armistead at Coker Creek to deter the intruders but the strategy failed and whites continued to move in. When the Cherokee Removal got underway in 1838, Fort Armistead became a holding area for Cherokee people who were forcibly removed to the West. The promise of gold never fully materialized at Coker Creek but this high mountain community survives.

Now – Gold can still be found here by panning Coker Creek, but it is the heritage and outdoor recreation that draws people to Coker Creek today. The Unicoi Turnpike Trail runs through Coker Creek and a hiking portion of the original Unicoi Turnpike Trail is located in the Cherokee National Forest at Coker Creek. The Benton MacKaye Trail winds through here as well, with Coker Creek serving as a re-supply point. The Coker Creek Welcome Center, which sits at the junction of Hwy 68/ Joe Brown Hwy, provides restrooms, information, local crafts, and souvenirs. Community members are currently working with the Cherokee National Forest and other groups to study and preserve Fort Armistead, an important federal fort that was located on the Unicoi Turnpike.

Hwy 68/Joe Brown Hwy
www.cokercreek.org/
877-510-5765
 Note: The Coker Creek Community straddles Hwy 68 for several miles. The Coker Creek Welcome Center sits at the junction of Hwy 68/Joe Brown Hwy.