

Appalachians

David Hablewitz

The weather is changing. Advertisers have replaced dog sleds and snowboards in their ads with bikinis and in-lines. Mountain Dew is back, cappuccino is out. The pressures of midterms are mounting. The last day to drop classes is close at hand. Sometimes it feels as if spring break is the only thing that keeps you going on — like a lighthouse guiding you through the college fog.

But the madness of Beach Week, complete with traffic jams, parking tickets, cheap motels, sunburns, and hangovers — just doesn't seem to do anything for relieving the stress of campus life. For once you would like to really get away from it all. Well, perhaps it's time to head for the mountains. If you're a southerner, one popular place to go is Great Smoky Mountains National Park. But with nearly 10 million visitors a year, you might as well go to Daytona. Not far from the park, however, is one of the most remote areas in the southeastern U.S. — Standing Indian Wildlife Management Area, a part of the Nantahala National Forest.

Standing Indian Mountain is locat-

ed in North Carolina, adjacent to the North Carolina — Georgia border.

The Appalachian Trail (AT) spends 30 miles of its 2,000-mile journey weaving its way through the Standing Indian Wildlife Management Area. In fact, it contains the longest stretch of the Appalachian Trail not crossed by a highway.

This region is rich with Cherokee Indian lore. Legends say the mountain got its name when a winged beast attacked a nearby Native American village and carried off a child. The Great Spirit responded to the villagers' prayers by destroying the beast with a bolt of lightning and punished the warrior sentinel who failed to give warning by turning him to stone where he stood on the mountain. The bolt shattered the mountain and destroyed the trees, leaving nothing but a treeless rocky summit and exposed cliffs, much as it still appears today.

The focal point of this ancient legend is still the main attraction of this area today. Many spur trails and loops connect with the AT, which leads to the summit and provides a wide selection of hikes that take from one day to more than a week. There are five shelters along this section of trail, and



there's a campground with facilities at Whiteoak Bottoms near the northern end of the area. The Backcountry Information Center here can provide you with more detailed information about trail and water-source conditions.

Whiteoak Bottoms can be an ideal base camp for many choice day hikes or the perfect place to begin one of the best loop trips anywhere along the Appalachian Trail. The Long Branch Trail will take you from 3,400 feet at the