

Parkway Packed as Leaf Season Peaks

Written by Steve Frank

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It didn't take long for the tourists to return to the Blue Ridge Parkway after the reopening of the federal facilities there late last week. Coupled with the 20,000 or so who hit Banner Elk for the Woolly Worm Festival, the Parkway was awash in the peak color of leaves and overflowing with tourists taking it all in. A trek from Grandfather Mountain to Blowing Rock showed every overlook overflowing, parking out on the Parkway at places like the Moses Cone home and Price Lake. With the crowds—there in spite of overcast skies Saturday—what the season might have been without all the campgrounds, visitors centers, and other locations closed for over two weeks. Some estimates were in the tens of millions of dollars lost to areas surrounding the Parkway and Smoky Mountains. And speaking of weather, Fuzz, the woolly worm, won the Saturday races and owner, Michelle Griffin from Ansonville, NC, took the \$1000 grand prize. Fuzz is now the official predictor of the Avery County high country weather, which now calls for winter to arrive with a blast of cold and snow, then moderate, ending with above normal temps. We'll see.

The rush of tourists led to a rash of falls reported in the area. The rash of falls started Friday afternoon on Laurel Lane in Blowing Rock, a woman said to have fallen 35 feet, but her injuries were not regarded as life-threatening. Another was reported along Shulls Mill yesterday afternoon, and another in Avery County, with a woman a half-mile down a trail with a broken leg or ankle.