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ROOSEVELT AND BURROUGHS – A Holiday at Pine Knot



Theodore J. Holsten
EMERITUS MEMBER
Boone and Crockett Club

Over the past 70 years, American presidents have enjoyed vacations at Camp David, a luxurious location, to escape from the affairs of state. Theodore Roosevelt had his retreat too, at Pine Knot, a hundred miles

from Washington in the remote hills of Virginia.

In May 1905, TR's wife, Edith, purchased an unfinished farmhand's cottage and 15 acres near Keene, Virginia, 14 miles south of Charlottesville in Albemarle County. The purchase price was \$280. She named it Pine Knot because the cottage was surrounded by pine trees. Renovations were made to include a porch, two end fireplaces, and an upstairs partitioned into three small bedrooms. Two of the bedrooms were for the Roosevelt children and the other one for the president and his wife.

Between 1905 and 1908, the president made eight trips to Pine Knot where he enjoyed its remoteness. Here he could read, watch birds, and relax. He hunted turkeys for long hours, finally shooting one in the fall of 1906. He was also fond of hunting foxes with a pack of six to eight dogs, guided by a local black man who was his trusted guide and hunting companion.

Theodore Roosevelt was an enthusiastic ornithologist from an early age, and indeed, his first published work as a young man was titled *Summer Birds of the Adirondacks*. His love of birds continued throughout his life, and when he invited John Burroughs, the prominent naturalist, to vacation with him at Pine Knot, the two friends spent much time bird watching.

In his book, *Under the Maples*, Burroughs described his visit to Pine Knot and the bird identification contest he had with the president.

During my visit there we named over seventy-five species of birds and fowl; he knowing all of them but two. He taught me Bewick's wren and the prairie warbler, and I taught him the swamp sparrow and one of the rare warblers. If he had found the Lincoln sparrow again he would have been one ahead of me!

Security was not considered to be a matter of importance. Burroughs asked the president if he wasn't worried about being unprotected, without a guard of any kind, in such a remote place. Roosevelt answered, slapping his hand on his hip pocket: "I go armed, and they would have to be mighty quick to get the drop on me!" Mrs. Roosevelt, because of her concern, arranged for two Secret Service men to be on

BOOKS BY JOHN BURROUGHS RELATING TO THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Camping and Tramping with Roosevelt (1907)

Under the Maples (1921)

guard every night in the woods surrounding the home. She did not let the president know about this because he would have been irritated.

In 1911, Edith purchased 75 more acres at Pine Knot, anticipating TR's intention to run for a second full term as president. However, they never visited the property again after their last visit in May 1908. It remained with the Roosevelt family for many years and Edith authorized its use by local Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops.

After a long period of neglect, Pine Knot was restored and is now designated as an historic site maintained through the Edith and Theodore Roosevelt Pine Knot Foundation. His experiences at Pine Knot fill in some interesting, but little-known episodes in the adventurous life of Theodore Roosevelt.

Theodore J. Holsten Jr.

Roosevelt at Yellowstone with John Burroughs (1903) ■ INSET: Pine Knot around 1906

