



Name: _____

The Mountains of the Blue Mist

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a magical place located on the border between North Carolina and Tennessee. It is the most visited national park in the United States, and for a good reason! These mountains are famous for the soft, blue-gray mist that hangs over them like a thick blanket. Because of this mist, the Cherokee people who lived here long ago called the area Shaconage (Shah-con-ah-ge), which means "place of the blue smoke."

Why is it "Smoky"?

Even though it looks like smoke, the "haze" you see is actually caused by the trees! The park is covered in millions of trees and plants that breathe out moisture and special oils. When this moisture meets the humid air of the mountains, it creates a blue-colored mist. This mist is part of what makes the park feel so mysterious and beautiful. Because there is so much moisture, the park is actually a temperate rainforest, which means it gets a lot of rain and stays very green.



Blue-gray mist over the Smoky Mountains

Ancient Giants

The Smoky Mountains are some of the oldest mountains on Earth. While the Rocky Mountains in the west are tall and "pointy," the Smokies are lower and more rounded. This is because they have been around for hundreds of millions of years. Over a very long time, wind and rain have slowly worn down the sharp peaks, making them smooth and covered in deep green forests. From the top of Clingmans Dome, the highest point in the park, you can see for miles and miles across the rolling mountain ridges.

The Salamander Capital of the World

One of the most amazing things about this park is the wildlife, especially the small creatures that live near the water. Great Smoky Mountains National Park is known as the "Salamander Capital of the World." There are thirty different species of salamanders living there! Some are tiny, while others, like the Hellbender, can grow to be over two feet long. They love the cool, damp mountain streams. If you look closely near a creek, you might see one hiding under a mossy rock.



Name: _____

Bears and Cades Cove

The park is also a safe home for about 1,500 black bears. That is about two bears for every square mile of the park! Black bears spend their days looking for berries, nuts, and insects to eat. A popular place to spot them is in Cades Cove. This is a wide, flat valley surrounded by mountains. In Cades Cove, you can see historic log cabins and barns where settlers lived over a hundred years ago. Today, it is a great place to see deer, turkeys, and sometimes a bear cub climbing a tree.



Bears at Cades Cove

Protecting the Park

Because so many people visit the park every year, we have to work hard to keep it healthy. This means never leaving trash behind and always keeping a safe distance from the animals. People visit to go hiking on the Appalachian Trail, splash in the waterfalls, and see the beautiful wildflowers that bloom in the spring. By taking care of the Smokies, we make sure this "place of blue smoke" stays a home for salamanders, bears, and visitors for many years to come.

1. According to the section "Why is it 'Smoky'?", what is the actual cause of the blue mist in the park?
 - A. Smoke from the historic log cabins in Cades Cove.
 - B. Moisture and oils released by the millions of trees.
 - C. Dust clouds created by the wind blowing over the peaks.
 - D. Rain falling from the clouds onto the Appalachian Trail.

2. Based on the section "Protecting the Park," what is one way visitors can help the Smokies?
 - A. by feeding the bears berries and nuts so they grow larger
 - B. by taking pieces of the historic log cabins home as souvenirs
 - C. by keeping a safe distance from animals and not leaving trash
 - D. by planting new wildflowers along the Appalachian Trail

3. This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A What can the reader conclude about the shape of the Smoky Mountains?

- A. They are the tallest and sharpest mountains in the United States.
- B. They are slowly becoming more pointed as time goes by.
- C. They look different than the Rocky Mountains because they are older.
- D. They are made of a special blue stone that makes them look smooth.

Part B Which sentence from the passage best supports the answer to Part A?

- A. "While the Rocky Mountains in the west are tall and 'pointy,' the Smokies are lower and more rounded."
- B. "Over a very long time, wind and rain have slowly worn down the sharp peaks..."
- C. "From the top of Clingmans Dome... you can see for miles and miles."
- D. "This is a wide, flat valley surrounded by mountains."

4. Read the sentence from the passage. "These mountains are famous for the soft, blue-gray mist that hangs over them like a thick blanket." What does the phrase "like a thick blanket" help the reader understand?

- A. The mist helps keep the hikers warm during the winter.
- B. The mist is made of a heavy fabric that covers the trees.
- C. The mist is spread out and covers the mountains completely.
- D. The mist is only found inside the historic log cabins.

5. According to the section "Bears and Cades Cove," why might a visitor go to Cades Cove?

- A. to see the highest point in the park, Clingmans Dome
- B. to see thirty different species of tiny salamanders
- C. to see the blue mist created by the moisture of the trees
- D. to see historic buildings and look for wildlife like deer and bears