



The Mountains

The mountains in Western North Carolina provide some of the state's most striking scenery and are the setting for many recent popular novels, including Charles Frazier's epic *Cold Mountain*. The largest city in the western part of the state is Asheville, portrayed as "Altamont" in Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*. Outside of Asheville, the mountains are dotted with small communities steeped in Appalachian culture and traditions, relics of old-fashioned small-town life, examples of which you'll find in Joan Medlicott's Covington, Jan Karon's Mitford, and Ann B. Ross's Miss Julia novels.

Sheila Kay Adams. *My Old True Love*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin, 2004.

Narrator Arty Norton looks back on her rough life in the North Carolina mountains in the mid nineteenth-century. Set in the fictional mountain town of Sodom, N.C., Arty focuses on the years leading up to the Civil War, when her brother Hackley and their orphaned cousin Larkin are growing up. The two boys fall in love with the same girl, but romance is quickly pushed aside when the war begins. Adams, a successful folk singer, accentuates the story with passages from old mountain ballads.

Mignon F. Ballard. *Angel Whispered Danger: An Augusta Goodnight Mystery*. New York: St. Martin's, 2003.

Kate McBride expected to spend her family reunion in the fictional mountain town of Bishop's Bridge, N.C., dodging prying questions about her conspicuously absent husband and the state of their marriage. But the family is quickly distracted when the host's housekeeper falls into a ravine and whispers just before she dies that she was pushed. Kate sets out to find the killer, helped by two unlikely accomplices: the friendly ghost Augusta Goodnight and her trainee angel Penelope. Their investigation leads them into the mysterious past of Kate's uncle Ernest's quirky estate, Bramblewood.

Sally Bissell. *A Darker Justice*. New York: Random House, 2002.

Mary Crow, an Atlanta prosecutor of Cherokee ancestry, is called into action when a violent killer who appears to be targeting federal judges turns his sights on one of her friends. Mary's investigation takes her back to her hometown, the fictional mountain town Little Jump Off, N.C., where she discovers not just a single suspect but an entire group, a right-wing paramilitary organization planning violent attacks on the government. In search of clues, Mary probes the caverns and other hiding places in the rugged wilderness.

Sally Bissell. *Legacy of Masks*. New York: Bantam, 2005.

Mary Crow, a tough prosecutor from Atlanta, has just returned home to North Carolina. After an unsuccessful bid for sheriff of Pisgah County, Crow opens her own practice and sets her thoughts toward a possible romance with an old flame. Her first case comes quickly. Crow is hired to defend a wealthy local

man against charges that he killed a young girl. But the deeper she gets into the case, she becomes worried that the true killer might be the very man she was hired to protect.

Sandra Brown, *Chill Factor*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

Lily Burton was just looking for a relaxing break when she left for her cabin near remote Cleary, N.C., a fictional mountain town. But rough weather hits and she ends up snowed in, stranded in the cabin with a man named Ben Tierney, a former acquaintance to whom she offered shelter when she found him hiking nearby. Lily's husband Dutch makes it as far as the town of Cleary, but can't get through the blizzard to the cabin. His search becomes even more desperate when he learns that Ben is a suspect in several recent murders.

Fred Chappell. *I Am One of You Forever*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

Set in the North Carolina mountains in the 1940s, this novel-in-stories follows a boy named Jess through his daily life and encounters with his quirky family and neighbors. The book is a series of short pieces about the memorable characters Jess and his family encounter, and the land on which they live. Chappell is an award-winning poet and is noted for the lyricism he brings to his prose.

Mark de Castrique. *Dangerous Undertaking*. Scottsdale, Ariz.: Poisoned Pen Press, 2003.

Barry Clayton wasn't thrilled about leaving the Charlotte, N.C. police force to take over the family funeral home back in Gainesboro, a fictional town in the North Carolina mountains. But at least, he thought, he was leaving the dangers of big-city police work behind him. He was wrong. At the graveside service for a beloved local woman, her young grandson roars onto the scene with his rifle blasting, killing two mourners and wounding Barry. The shooter flees for the hills and local cops, assisted by Barry, get on the case, which boils down to a hot dispute between family members over the deceased woman's estate.

Peter T. Deutermann. *Cat Dancers*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005.

When two murderers are released on a technicality, the citizens of fictional Manceford County, N.C. are irate. Some of them are so mad that they're taking justice into their own hands. A gruesome video surfaces, showing the execution of one of the killers, and officer Cam Richter has to find the vigilantes before they kill again. Richter tracks them into the mountains of western North Carolina, home of the elusive eastern mountain lion.

Jude Deveraux. *Wild Orchids*. New York: Atria Books, 2003.

Ford Newcombe, a successful mystery writer, has moved to the fictional mountain town of Cole Creek, North Carolina to investigate a series of mysterious deaths. He enlists the help of Jackie Maxwell, whose premonitions prove to be key to the case. As they dig deeper into the stories and myths, Ford and Jackie find that the devil himself may be behind the crimes.

Pamela Duncan. *Moon Women*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2001.

The "Moon women" are three generations of women of the Moon family in western North Carolina. Ruth Ann Moon's life changes suddenly when her mother and her daughter move in with her. Her mother, the family matriarch Marvelle Moon, is beginning to show the frailties of her age, while her daughter Ashley is three months pregnant, unmarried, and just out of rehab. The novel unfolds over the course of Ashley's pregnancy as each of the women adjusts to life together, and to their changing roles in the family.

Tony Earley. *Jim the Boy*. Boston: Little, Brown, 2000.

Jim is a ten-year-old boy who lives with his mother and her brothers and is just beginning to come to grips with the adult world. The story is set in the fictional southwestern North Carolina town of Aliceville in the 1930s and follows Jim through everyday events as he struggles to understand his family, friends, and through their stories, himself. Aliceville is probably based on Rutherfordton, N.C.

Annie Flannigan. *Love and a Bad Hair Day*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.

The Hadleys and the O'Malleys had been feuding for years in Verbena, N.C., a small, fictional town in the mountains. Things look like they're beginning to thaw when Ryman O'Malley moves back to town to take over the family business, the South Winds Trav'O'Tel, famed for its all-day breakfast buffet. Jolene Hadley Corbett, whose beauty parlor is located just across the street, is determined at first to continue the feud, especially when she learns of Ryman's plans to demolish the Trav'O'Tel, a local landmark. But as she gets to know him better, her feelings turn in quite a different direction.

Elizabeth Flock. *Me & Emma*. Mira Books, 2005.

Carrie Parker, the eight-year-old narrator of this novel, does not have an easy life. She and her sister Emma live in a poor family in Toast, N.C. Their father has recently passed away and their new stepfather is abusive to both girls, becoming especially violent when drunk. Carrie's mother sees the problems, but can't afford to leave, and the girls are left with seemingly nowhere else to turn.

Charles Frazier. *Cold Mountain*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997.

Cold Mountain is the story of Inman, a deserter from the Confederate Army, and his long journey home to the mountains of North Carolina during the last year of the Civil War. The novel alternates between Inman's struggles and those of Ada, who is at home near Cold Mountain and is able to get by only with the help of Ruby, a mountain woman unafraid to fend for herself. *Cold Mountain* has been praised for its accuracy in portraying geographical and horticultural details, as well as the particulars of nineteenth-century life in the North Carolina mountains.

Gail Godwin. *Evensong*. New York: Ballantine, 1999.

Evensong, a sequel to the 1991 novel *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, continues the story of Margaret Gower, an Episcopal rector in High Balsam, N.C., a fictional community in the Blue Ridge Mountains, not far from Mountain City, based on Asheville, where Godwin grew up. Set over a four-week period in 1999, *Evensong* chronicles a difficult time in Gower's life as she questions both her marriage and her faith.

James W. Hall. *Forests of the Night*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005

Miami detective Charlotte Monroe takes off for the mountains of western North Carolina in pursuit of her daughter, who has run off with the man at number eight on the FBI's most wanted list. Charlotte and her husband quickly become entangled in a mystery that has its roots in the history of the region, and seems to be tied to the fate of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Lynne Hinton. *The Last Odd Day*. New York: Harper, 2004.

In the opening section of *The Last Odd Day*, Jean Witherspoon is struggling to cope with the death of her husband. The novel alternates between Jean's past and present. When she learns a surprising secret about her husband, Jean delves into her own history, recalling her stillborn daughter, the deaths of her siblings when she was young, and her traumatic upbringing in a poor Appalachian family.

Kay Hooper. *Hunting Fear*. New York: Bantam Books, 2004.

Lucas Jordan is a successful profiler for the FBI, using his psychic abilities to track down missing people. When a string of grisly murders hit Golden, N.C., a fictional mountain town, Lucas is called to the case. The psychopathic killer keeps Lucas guessing throughout the book, and raises the stakes when he turns his sights on people close to the detective.

Jan Karon. The Mitford Novels.

At Home in Mitford. New York: Penguin, 1994.

A Light in the Window. New York: Penguin, 1995.

In These High, Green Hills. New York: Viking, 1996.

Out to Canaan. New York: Viking 1997.

A New Song. New York: Viking, 1999.

A Common Life. New York: Penguin, 2002.

In This Mountain. New York: Viking, 2002.

The small village of Mitford, N.C., a fictional town based on Blowing Rock, is the setting for these popular novels. Father Tim Kavanagh, the village rector and aging protagonist of the books, encounters in each novel the quirky residents of the town in all of their glory. Although Father Tim is off on a different adventure in each book, the underlying theme of all is a heartfelt appreciation for the simple pleasures of small town life.

Terry Kay. *The Valley of Light*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

In the years after World War II, Noah Locke wandered from town to town, fishing, doing occasional work, and reflecting on the horrors he had seen throughout the war, especially when his unit liberated the concentration camp at Dachau. When Noah arrived in the fictional town of Bowersville, N.C. (based on the area around Hayesville), in an area known as the "Valley of Light," he was taken by the slow small-town pace and friendly residents. Noah begins to date a young widow and enters a local fishing contest with the goal of landing a mythical, elusive bass that has captivated the town for years.

Susan S. Kelly. *Even Now*. New York: Warner Books, 2001.

Hannah Marsh is excited by her family's move from Durham to fictional Rural Ridge, N.C., near Asheville. Her husband has taken a less stressful job, the scenery is beautiful, and she's looking forward to spending her free time in the garden. Hannah is surprised to find that Daintry O'Connor, a close friend from childhood is also living in the area. Hannah and Daintry had a complicated relationship growing up, and these complications only continue in adulthood as Hannah finds herself increasingly attracted to Daintry's husband.

Vicki Lane *Signs in the Blood*. New York: Dell, 2005.

Elizabeth Goodweather runs a small herb and flower farm in the fictional mountain town of Ridley Branch, N.C. Recently widowed, and with both of her children moved away, Elizabeth is feeling a little lonely and bored, but that quickly changes when she's dragged into a local mystery. When a neighbor's son is found dead, the police determine it was an accident, but the boy's mother isn't convinced. As Elizabeth pursues the case, she digs up evidence of a long ago crime that is suspiciously similar to the current mysterious death.

Joyce Lavene and Jim Lavene. The Sharyn Howard Mysteries.

Last Dance. New York: Avalon Books, 1999.

One Last Goodbye. New York: Avalon Books, 2000.

The Last to Remember. New York: Avalon Books, 2001.
Until Our Last Embrace. New York: Avalon Books, 2001.
For the Last Time. New York: Avalon Books, 2002.
Dreams Don't Last. New York: Avalon Books, 2002.
Last Fires Burning. New York: Avalon Books, 2003.
Glory's Last Victim. New York: Avalon Books, 2004.
Last Rites. New York: Avalon Books, 2004.
Last One Down. New York: Avalon Books, 2005.

Sharyn Howard is the sheriff in fictional Diamond Springs, N.C., a picturesque town in the Uwharrie Mountains. In each novel, Sharyn is on the case of a local murder that bears an eerie resemblance to, and usually proves to be connected to, a long-unsolved crime.

Sharyn McCrumb. *Ghost Rider*. New York: Dutton, 2003.

Set primarily in the North Carolina mountains, *Ghost Riders* tells three distinct stories. The interwoven tales involve Rattler, a current-day recluse and eccentric who socializes with Civil War re-enactors; Zebulon Vance, the Governor of North Carolina during the Civil War; and Malinda and Keith Blaylock, a married couple who join the Confederate army under Vance. Mixing past and present, McCrumb examines the Civil War and its legacy in the mountains of North Carolina.

Sharyn McCrumb. *The Songcatcher*. New York: Dutton, 2001.

In presenting the story of a simple English ballad, McCrumb traces the history of an American family. Lark McCoury, a popular country singer in Tennessee, is searching for a traditional song to record for her new album. The ballad, "The Rowan Stave," came to the country with her ancestor Malcolm McCoury, an 18th-century Scottish immigrant who fought in the Revolutionary War and then settled in the North Carolina mountains. The story of Lark's search for the origins of the ballad is interwoven with scenes from the past, as the song passes from one generation to the next before finally reaching her.

Joan A. Medlicott. The Covington novels.

The Ladies of Covington Send Their Love. New York: St. Martins Press, 2000.
The Gardens of Covington. New York: St. Martins Press, 2001.
From the Heart of Covington. New York: St. Martins Press, 2002.
The Spirit of Covington. New York: Atria, 2003.
At Home in Covington. New York: Atria, 2004.

Grace Singleton, Hannah Parrish, and Amelia Declose, described as women "of a certain age," were finding life a little listless in the Pennsylvania boardinghouse where they lived. When one of them inherited a run-down farmhouse in Covington, N.C., the three women jumped at the chance for change and adventure. In each of the novels the women explore the lively town of Covington while they battle illness, welcome their children and other visitors, and meet the challenges of caring for a rambling old house. Covington is a fictional town in the North Carolina mountains, not far from Mars Hill.

Robert Morgan. *Gap Creek*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin, 2000.

Gap Creek follows a newlywed couple in Appalachian North and South Carolina in the early 1900s. Julie Harmon Richards, an independent hard-working woman, narrates the story of the difficulties she and her husband face just trying to get by. Battling fierce weather, personal tragedies, and thieves, this novel details the difficulties of mountain life. Morgan gives careful attention to the details of farm work, with a particularly memorable description of the butchering of a hog. *Gap Creek* was a selection of the Oprah Book Club in January 2000.

Robert Morgan. *This Rock*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.

Set in the North Carolina mountains in the 1920s, *This Rock* continues to explore the themes and setting used by Morgan in his popular 2000 novel *Gap Creek*. The story follows the young brothers Muir and Moody Powell. Muir is earnestly committed to becoming a preacher, but finds his attempts at spreading the word frustrated by his older brother, who is much more interesting in running moonshine and gambling. As Muir struggles to understand his faith, the boys' mother fights to keep the family together in the still raw wilderness in which they live.

Scott Nicholson. *The Red Church*. New York: Kensington, 2002.

The old red church in Whispering Pines, N.C., a fictional town in the Appalachian mountains, has stood empty for twenty years, said to be haunted by the ghost of the preacher who was hung from its rafters by his own angry congregation. Now that the church has been purchased by a minister whose fiery fundamentalism echoes that of his long-ago predecessor, strange things are starting to happen in town. The story is told through the eyes of thirteen-year-old Ronnie Day, who finds life complicated enough without a haunted church, and Sheriff Frank Littlefield, who must figure out what people or forces are terrorizing his town.

Charles Price. *The Cock's Spur*. Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 2002.

In the mountains of western North Carolina in the 1880s, moonshining and cockfighting are a regular part of the rough-and-tumble life. Webb Darling, the self-proclaimed king of the moonshiners, rules the region from his hilltop cabin. In contrast to the cruel and conniving Darling is a former slave named Hamby McFee who dreams of making enough money to escape from his life in the mountains, where he still farms the same land he worked as a slave. Unfortunately, the only chance Hamby has at making enough money to leave may be to win it from Darling.

Charles Price. *Freedom's Altar*. Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 1999.

Set in the violent, lawless days just after the Civil War, this novel explores the deeply complicated questions about how the South would recover and adjust to new ideas about race and class. Daniel McFee, a former slave who had fought for the Union, has returned home to western North Carolina to become a sharecropper on land owned by his old master, Madison Curtis. Despite good intentions, both Curtis and McFee have trouble adjusting to this new relationship. It's especially hard to make any meaningful progress when the whole region is overrun with violent vigilantes all too willing to take matters into their own hands. The novel is based in part on the author's family history. *Freedom's Altar* won the 1999 Sir Walter Raleigh Award for the best novel by a North Carolinian.

Ann B. Ross. The Miss Julia Novels.

Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind. New York: William Morrow, 1999.

Miss Julia Takes Over. New York: Viking, 2001.

Miss Julia Throws a Wedding. New York: Viking, 2002.

Miss Julia Hits the Road. New York: Viking, 2003.

Miss Julia Meets Her Match. New York: Viking, 2004.

"Miss Julia" is Mrs. Wesley Lloyd Springer of Abbotsville, N.C., a fictional small town probably based on Hendersonville. Miss Julia is a proper Southern lady with a fierce independent streak who does not hesitate to speak her mind. Each book finds Miss Julia embroiled in some new scandal or adventure and reveals, in the interactions between her and the colorful residents of the town, the warm-hearted kindness underneath Miss Julia's feisty exterior.

David Schulman. *The Past is Never Dead: A Gritz Goldberg Mystery*. Winston-Salem: John F. Blair, 2004.

Gritz Goldberg is a psychiatrist in his hometown of Asheville, N.C., and is working in the same mental hospital where he once spent time as a child. Gritz becomes involved in a decades-old murder case when a local man with a heavy conscience confesses to him that the wrong man was convicted for the 1939 killing of a young woman at the Battery Park Hotel. As Gritz delves into Asheville's past, he uncovers interesting - and sometimes disturbing -- facts about some of the city's prominent citizens. Many of Schulman's characters are based on actual historical figures, including the colorful U.S. Senator Robert Rice Reynolds and the prominent anti-semitic William Dudley Pelley. In the course of chasing the down the facts of the case, Gritz learns a great deal about Asheville's Jewish community in the 1930s.

Sarah Shaber. *The Professor Simon Shaw Mysteries*.

Simon Said. New York: St. Martin's, 1997.

Snipe Hunt. New York: St. Martin's, 2000.

The Fugitive King. New York: St. Martin's, 2002.

The Bug Funeral. New York: St. Martin's, 2004.

Simon Shaw is a professor of history at historic (but fictional) Kenan College in downtown Raleigh. Dr. Shaw's specialty is historical anthropology, and this leads to his being called into action in each novel to investigate a long unsolved crime. Although Simon lives and works in contemporary Raleigh, his adventures often take him to other parts of the state. In *Snipe Hunt* Simon digs into North Carolina's maritime history while on vacation at the Outer Banks, while in *The Fugitive King* he looks into a crime in his hometown of Boone.

Mark Slouka. *God's Fool*. New York: Knopf, 2002.

Chang and Eng Bunker, the famous 19th-century conjoined twins from Siam (hence the term "Siamese twins") are the subject of this novel. The brothers' colorful life story is told from the viewpoint of Chang as they travel all over the world, from Siam to Paris to stints in P.T. Barnum's sideshows before they settle down to a quiet life in rural North Carolina. Slouka pays close attention to historical detail and portrays the brothers not as mere curiosities but as human beings, writing near the end of the novel about the close relationship between Chang and one of his sons.

Lee Smith. *Saving Grace*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.

Florida Grace Shepherd had a rough childhood. Raised by a father who was a snake-handling preacher and abused by her half-brother, she managed to escape by marrying at seventeen. Set in the fictional mountain town Scrabble Creek, N.C., the novel is enlivened by the many kind and colorful characters in Grace's life. The story follows her through to adulthood and traces her struggles in her relationships with her husband and children, and difficulty in coming to terms with her own religious faith.

Nicholas Sparks. *True Believer*. New York: Warner, 2005.

When it looks like ghosts are haunting a cemetery in Boone Creek, N.C., science writer Jeremy Marsh comes to town to investigate. Marsh expected to find a plausible explanation for the ghostly visions, but did not plan on falling for a local librarian, who also happens to be the granddaughter of the town psychic. Marsh finds himself questioning his own beliefs and must figure out how much he will let the budding romance affect his life and career.

Judith Minhorn Stacy. *Betty Sweet Tells All*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.

Four generations of Sweet women are held together by the unflappable Betty Sweet of Poplar Grove, N.C. Her daughter Maggie causes a stir by running away from her husband and family, while Betty's mother,

Mama Dean, continues to wreak havoc in the house. In the course of dealing with her wacky family, Betty's own life takes a significant turn when she begins spending time with Poplar Grove newcomer Charlie Love, who has charmed Betty with his English accent.

Judith Minhorn Stacy. *Maggie Sweet*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.

When Maggie Sweet discovers that her husband has spent the family vacation money on a pair of cemetery plots, she's not happy. With her twin daughters nearly grown and her husband pretty much on auto-pilot, Maggie reflects upon a life lived largely for others and decides that it's time to do something on her own. When an old high-school boyfriend shows up in town, Maggie finds the old flames renewed, especially as he encourages her to pursue her dream to work as a cosmetician at the local Curl & Swirl. The novel is set in the fictional western North Carolina town of Poplar Grove, possibly based on the author's hometown of Mooresville.

Thomas Wolfe. *O Lost*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000.

O Lost is the original, unedited version of the *Look Homeward, Angel*, Thomas Wolfe's classic novel about a sensitive young man growing up in pre-Depression Altamont, a fictional version of the author's hometown of Asheville. Wolfe's manuscript was cut and reshaped by the author with the help of legendary editor Maxwell Perkins. Now readers can see the raw material for themselves, including a long introductory section on protagonist Eugene Gant's ancestors in the Civil War.

Lynn York. *The Piano Teacher*. New York: Plume, 2004.

Miss Wilma, the longtime piano teacher in the fictional small town of Swan's Knob, N.C. (based on the author's hometown of Pilot Mountain), lives a life of quiet routine until her rebellious daughter Sarah shows up on her doorstep. It turns out the excitement is only beginning, as Sarah is followed by her ex-husband and her current boyfriend. When a local police officer is murdered, the attention of the town turns quickly toward the new arrivals. The story is told from several points of view, including those of Miss Wilma and of Roy Swann, an aging, affable bachelor who has had his eye on the prickly piano teacher for years.

Isabel Zuber. *Salt*. New York: Picador, 2002.

Set in the fictional mountain town of Faith, N.C. at the turn of the century, *Salt* is the story of Anna Stockton, an independent young woman who dreams of a better life away from home, and her unlikely husband, John Bayley, an older man consumed by status and greed. Zuber pays close attention to historical detail, providing a careful description of domestic life in the North Carolina mountains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is a town named Faith in Rowan County, however, the setting of Zuber's story clearly takes place much farther to the west.