Photographer James Valentine, who has captured images of the natural wonders of southeastern United States for the past forty years, now focuses his attention on the original forests of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Readers perusing the photographs in this oversized book are encouraged to think about the biodiversity of the region as well as its particular mountains, meadows, balds, wildflowers, forests, waterways, and places that were considered sacred by the peoples who once lived there. As the book’s title suggests, these images feature each state in which the Southern Appalachians stand, but some of the most remarkable photographs come from the state parks and national forests of North Carolina. For example, the granite surface of Stone Mountain in Roaring Gap shines like one enormous plate of glass as it rises above the trees crowding the plain below. In an image that pours across two pages, the rippled shapes of bright autumn leaves reflected in the surface of Fairfield Lake in the Sapphire Valley mimic the short brush strokes found in Impressionist paintings.

Chris Bolgiano’s accompanying text is sparse—the longest passages are no more than a page each—but it provides fascinating details about the locations highlighted by Valentine’s photographs. Early on, readers find that a surveyor’s error made before the Civil War allowed fifty acres of virgin red spruce trees to escape the logging that devastated many other high elevation mountain ridges in West Virginia. In the preface to the chapter “Thinking like a Forest,” readers learn that the largest remnant of original forest in eastern North America lies within 100,000 acres of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, which straddles the border between Tennessee and North Carolina. Closer to the book’s end, readers discover that hundreds of Cherokees escaped the Trail of Tears by hiding on Clingman’s Dome in what is now the same national park. Photographers will also enjoy reading through Valentine’s acknowledgements, as he describes the vintage cameras, lenses, and other equipment used to produce the images of such flowers as the Carolina lily, Oconee bell, yellow lady slipper, and flame azalea in the chapter “Thinking like a Wildflower.”

The broad appeal of nature photography makes Southern Appalachian Celebration an excellent choice for public and academic libraries alike. This book would also be a useful addition to libraries with strong collections in the ecology and biodiversity of the southeastern United States.

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