

## **Brown Mountain Lights** <sup>[1]</sup>

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## **Brown Mountain Lights**

by Robert J. Dodge, 2006



Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway, site where Brown Mountain Lights can be seen below. Image courtesy of Flickr user Dystopos, taken December 29, 2008.

<sup>[2]</sup>Brown mountain lights are unexplained phenomena that appear low in the air under favorable atmospheric conditions, grow in size, and then linger for a few minutes before fading away. Brown Mountain is located on the [Burke](#) <sup>[3]</sup>-[Caldwell](#) <sup>[4]</sup> county line, approximately half a mile west of Wilson Creek and northwest of Morganton. The lights have been documented since 1833, prompting investigation and inspiring song and story. As few as one and as many as a dozen lights might be seen at one time. They are mostly white but occasionally show a red, blue, or yellowish tinge. The lights appear most often on clear, warm, summer evenings, beginning shortly after dark.

Although various authorities have studied the Brown Mountain Lights, no entirely satisfactory scientific explanation has been offered. The U.S. Geological Survey has suggested that the lights may be the result of refraction of headlights on trains or automobiles in the valley. The [National Geographic Society](#) <sup>[5]</sup> reports that discharges of static electricity might be the source of the lights. Folklorists credit an Indian brave searching by torchlight for his lost love.

The lights are best seen from the Lost Cove overlook on the [Blue Ridge Parkway](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, near Milepost 310 on the southeast side of the road, northeast of its junction with N.C. 181.

### **References:**

John Harden, *Tar Heel Ghosts* (1954).

Nancy Roberts, *North Carolina Ghosts and Legends* (1991).

### **Image Credit:**

"Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway, site where Brown Mountain Lights can be seen below." Photograph. Image courtesy of Flickr user Dystopos, taken December 29, 2008. Available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dystopos/3204779799/> <sup>[2]</sup> (accessed May 30, 2012).

### **Additional Resources:**

Mansfield, George Rogers. "Origin of the Brown Mountain Light of North Carolina." Geological Survey Circular 646. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior. 1971. <http://books.google.com/books?id=iP0kAQAIAAJ&pg=RA1-PA95#v=onepage&q&f=false> <sup>[7]</sup> (accessed December 17, 2013).

### **Subjects:**

[100 North Carolina Icons](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

[Folklore and Legends](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

[UNC Press](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

### **Authors:**

Dodge, Robert J. <sup>[11]</sup>

**Origin - location:**

Burke County <sup>[12]</sup>

Caldwell County <sup>[13]</sup>

**From:**

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.<sup>[14]</sup>

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[4] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/geography/caldwell>

[5] <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/>

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