

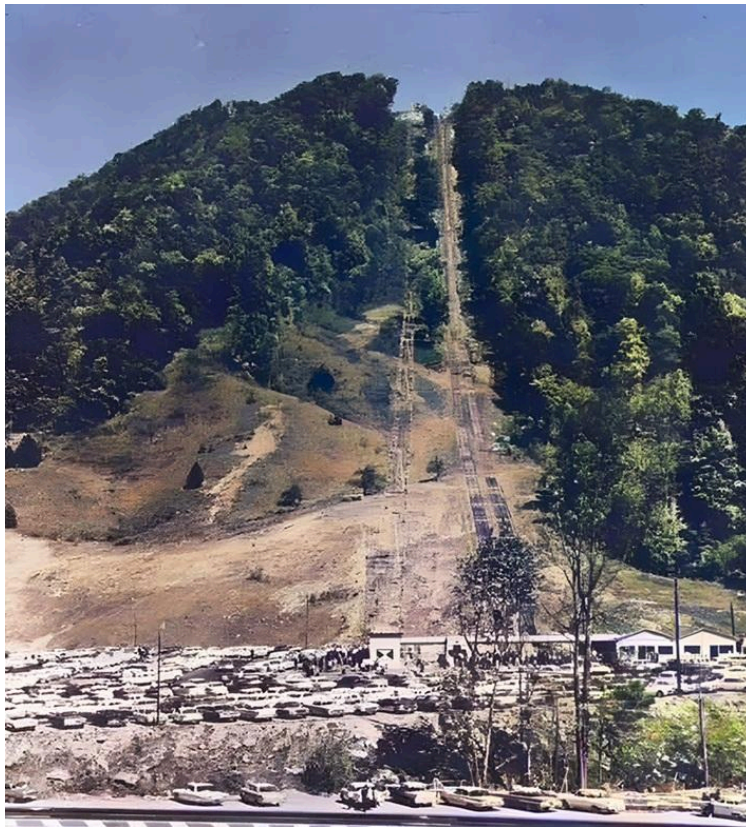


Ghost Town in the Sky

High atop Buck Mountain in Maggie Valley, North Carolina, sits a silent, windswept relic of classic Appalachian tourism: Ghost Town in the Sky. Conceived by developer R. B. Coburn, this premier Wild West-themed amusement park opened on May 1, 1961, and quickly became one of Western North Carolina's most popular family destinations.



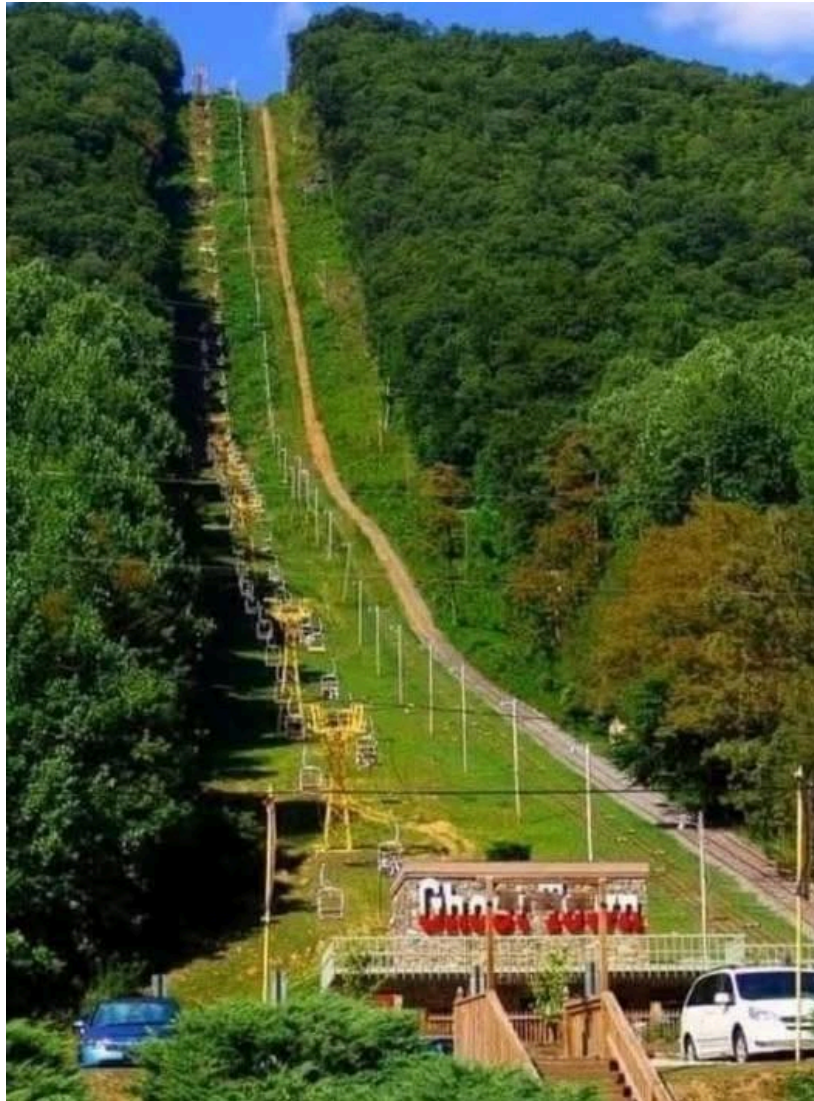
Entrance, 1961, the opening year
[Enhanced]



Entrance, 1963, after chairlift was added

[Enhanced]

Getting to the park was an adventure in itself. The entrance and ticket booth sat at an elevation of 3,150 feet along U.S. Highway 19, but the actual attraction was perched a thousand feet higher, at 4,650 feet. To reach the summit, visitors boarded either a 3,370-foot double-seat chairlift or a funicular incline railway.



Entrance, during the glory years

Once at the top, guests stepped into “Western Town,” a meticulous, full-scale replica of a frontier outpost with more than forty buildings. The heart of the park was its live entertainment. Hourly staged gunfights, saloon shows, and street performances captivated audiences. Over the decades, stars such as Burt Reynolds who worked as a stuntman and Dan Blocker who made a guest appearance.



Main Street, during the glory years

The park's original 1961 performance troupe featured a local talent named Herbert "Cowboy" Coward, who played the character "Grandpappy." Coward's distinctive look later caught Hollywood's eye, leading to his casting as the iconic toothless mountain man in the 1972 classic film *Deliverance*.

Growth

Through the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, Ghost Town was an economic powerhouse, attracting roughly half a million visitors each season. However, as cultural tastes shifted away from traditional Westerns and attendance began to dip. In an effort to gain attendance, the park added the "Red Devil" roller coaster. Despite that thrill-ride upgrade, maintaining aging infrastructure on the mountain became an uphill battle.

Decline

The turning point came on July 16, 2002, when a major chairlift malfunction stranded passengers in midair for hours during a torrential downpour. Shaken by the incident and mounting maintenance costs, Coburn closed the park and put the property up for sale.



Entrance, now



Main Street, now

What followed was a turbulent cycle of brief revivals and bankruptcies. A group of investors bought the park and spent \$38 million renovating it for a 2007 reopening, but those efforts were derailed by a massive mudslide on February 5, 2010.

The End

Later attempts to resurrect the park—including a 2012 rebranding as “Ghost Town Village” by local businesswoman Alaska Presley and a 2018 push by Ghost Town Adventures—collapsed under the weight of modernization costs, vandalism, and neglect.

Today, the mountain sits quiet. Empty storefronts and rusting roller coaster tracks remain isolated on the ridge—a ghost town in every sense of the word.

[- Echoes of Time Article List -](#)

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Editorial Note

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