



As the man in charge of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the most-visited national park in the country, the story of Superintendent Cassius Cash is an example for all of us.

Throughout his 30-year career of breaking color barriers as the first African American National Park Leader at the Smokies, Cash continues to utilize skills learned as a Boy Scout to overcome the challenges of being a black man in America. His journey began when he met Scoutmaster Henry Peabody in the Chickasaw Council, Boy Scouts of America serving Memphis, Tennessee, and the surrounding areas.

In the late 1970s, this community was still impacted by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, and race relations were in a difficult place. Mr. Peabody, a Caucasian Scout leader, recognized the importance of inclusivity and helping others less fortunate, and started a Boy Scout troop in an underprivileged housing development. He was a disciplined man, and very committed to seeing young boys of color learn life skills and lessons that would positively help them throughout their lives. Mr. Cash is one of many young men who benefitted from this Scouting experience. Cassius' passion for the outdoors grew with each Scouting and camping experience with Mr. Peabody and his fellow troop scouts. Scouting taught him leadership skills, perseverance and the value of hard work.

While he attended the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, a historical black college, the US Forest Service was recruiting for a Wildlife Biologist intern. Cash, who initially wanted to be a doctor, took a longshot, and decided to interview for the internship anyway. During his interview, which Cash describes as not going too well until he mentioned he was a Boy Scout and enjoyed being outdoors. And this simple mention became the start of his very successful career.

The Boy Scouts have a tradition of passing along sentimental memorabilia to next-generation leaders who make a difference. Before Mr. Peabody passed away in 2007, he handed down his BSA memorabilia to a fellow scoutmaster. That scoutmaster unexpectedly passed away in 2020. And in early May, Cash received an email that he couldn't have ever imagined and that was the scout leadership in Memphis voted to hand down Mr. Peabody's BSA Campaign hat and belt to him. Cash said, "This was a highly emotional and surreal moment for me; it represented a total 360-degree circle-of-life moment for me when I read the email."



"There are not many opportunities where a person gets to experience legacy firsthand. To be the inheritor of Mr. Peabody's BSA Campaign hat and belt is such a great honor for me because he touched so many boy's lives; including mine. The fact that scout leadership felt that I am deserving of this moment is humbling and, for me, is a special lifetime gift.

As the first African American to manage this park, receiving this is equivalent to standing on the shoulders of giants. In my humble opinion, Mr. Peabody was a giant,” Cash shares.

Principled, throughout his career, leading to him becoming the first person of color to be the superintendent of the Smokies, Cash has never forgotten Mr. Peabody’s actions, and has become a changemaker and teacher for the next generation.

During his time serving as the Superintendent at Boston National Historical Park and Boston African American National Historic Site, Cash, through his staff, was informed that the Battle of Bunker Hill exhibition excluded the depiction of the 30% African- and Native-American patriots that participated in the battle. Cash then took the bold step of changing the long-standing exhibit to reflect their contribution to this historic moment into the birth and founding of our nation..

More recently, watching the murder of George Floyd rocked Cassius’ soul, particularly since Cash is the son of a retired Memphis police officer. Cash decided that he had to do something in “Mr. Peabody fashion”. In 2020, he created [Smokies Hikes For Healing](#), a series of crucial conversations about systemic racism on eight (8) separate hikes in the Smokies with ten people on each hike. Cash always believed that Mr. Peabody moved his passion into action and gave today’s Scouts the most valuable thing he could provide to his community that still resonates: his priceless time! And now Cash feels, with the leadership platform he has, it is time to give his own!



“Reflecting on the days when Mr. Peabody stood tall and alone by convening his scout meetings in a predominant African-American neighborhood, this clearly demonstrated his fearlessness in what he stood for. And that’s the same fearlessness that guides me in what I do and how I do it.”

When Cassius proudly accepted the BSA campaign hat and belt, he says he believed in his heart Mr. Peabody would be proud of what he’s now doing!

Cassius’ advice to young people is to learn the benefits of being outdoors. “Being outdoors is good for the body and soul.”

Last year, Great Smoky Mountains National Park had 12.5 million visitors who enjoyed the clean air, clean water, and freedom of this beautiful park. Cash ended his interview in wanting to give further advice to young people, Cash stated, “Be true to your passion of what you want to do but flexible in your pathway of achieving it, because I now realize that I didn’t have to wear the white coat of a doctor to help people; I can even do it in a ‘green coat’.”