

Beech Mountain/Land of Oz ^[1]

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Door to the Land of Oz. Image courtesy of
by Elizabeth Scheld Glynn, 2006Flickr user [_Rockinfree](#).

^[2]

Beech Mountain ^[3] in Avery County ^[4] is the eastern United States' highest town, at 5,606 feet above sea level. Local residents share the mountain with several resort communities and Ski Beech ^[5], a popular ski resort. During the 1970s Beech Mountain was also home to the Land of Oz ^[6], a theme park that has taken its place amid the rich folklore ^[7] of the Appalachian Mountains ^[8].

Throughout the early part of the twentieth century, Beech Mountain was part of an important logging industry. While sparsely populated, it was dotted with small cabins where loggers lived during the week while they worked. Skiing came to the mountain starting in the 1930s, with students from nearby Lees-McRae College ^[9] using skis produced in the college's wood shop.



Yellow Brick Road, Land of Oz.
Image courtesy of Flickr user
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^[10] The Robbins brothers-Grover, Harry, and Spencer-purchased a large tract of land on top of the mountain in 1962. The Robbinses, who also owned Tweetsie Railroad ^[11] and the Hound Ears Resort ^[12], joined with other investors to create the Carolina Caribbean Corporation ^[13] in 1965. Carolina Caribbean planned a 10,000-acre resort with homesites for 9,000 families, an eight-slope ski resort, a summer recreation area, a golf course, and a theme park. Grover Robbins enlisted Charlotte artist and designer Jack Pentes ^[14] to develop an idea for a theme park that would draw people to the mountain during the off-season. Pentes dreamed of a place that would enchant people and allow them to escape the harsh realities of the late 1960s.

For inspiration Pentes drew upon L. Frank Baum's classic children's tale of enchantment and escape, The Wizard of Oz ^[15], having noted the similarity between gnarled beech trees on the property and the talking apple trees in the story. With the help of two fellow Charlotteans, composer Loonis McGlohon ^[16] and choreographer Alice Lamar ^[17], Pentes created the 16-acre Land of Oz theme park. When its first season ended in the fall of 1970, attendance had hit the six-figure mark. From hot air balloons and the magical cyclone to flying monkeys and happy songs, the Land of Oz allowed visitors to live every moment of the famous adventure for themselves as they walked the 55,000 bricks of the park's yellow brick road. Visitors were joined by each of the beloved characters as they visited Kansas, Munchkinland, the Wicked Witch's Castle, and the Emerald City.

In 1975 the Carolina Caribbean Corporation went bankrupt. Shortly afterward, vandals set fire to the Emerald City and stole Judy Garland ^[18]'s original dress along with other artifacts from the park's Oz museum. The Land of Oz, already hit by a lack of repeat visitors, never recovered. As the property changed hands, the park fell victim to a lack of consistent

management and poor funding, closing in 1980.

The property was purchased in 1990 by the [Emerald Mountain](#) ^[19] development corporation, which created homesites on 450 acres around the old theme park. Each fall, Emerald Mountain holds an Autumn at Oz party, where fans of the Land of Oz may take a nostalgic stroll down the yellow brick road and see remnants of the theme park that have been carefully preserved. Other artifacts from the park are on display at the [Appalachian Cultural Museum in Boone](#) ^[20].

Beech Mountain was incorporated as a town in 1981. The mountain is home to a shopping village, the 14-slope Ski Beech ski resort, and two golf courses, including one designed by [Jack Nicklaus](#) ^[21].

Reference:

Robert R. Gottfried, *The Impact of Recreational Communities on Land Prices in the Local Communities: The Case of Beech Mountain* (1981).

Additional Resources:

[Land of Oz](#) ^[6]

[Beech Mountain](#) ^[3]

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

[Avery County](#) ^[25]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press](#).^[26]

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