

Merging Symbols, Space and Identity in Appalachia: An Examination of the Ramp

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ABSTRACT

Over the past ten years, the ramp, a traditional Appalachian food, has invaded elite culinary circles outside its native culinary region of Appalachia. Ramps (*Allium tricoccum*) are wild leeks traditionally foraged for in the spring, and are known for their pungent smell. This unique vegetable is traditionally celebrated in Appalachia through dinners and festivals that have been widely attended by members of the community and recently, outsiders. Similarly, outside the region, the ramp has been featured on fine dining menus and has been sold in farmer's markets and grocery stores for the first time across the country. This study aims to understand not only this recent popularity, but why the ramp has emerged as representative of traditional Appalachian culture. Qualitative interviews with experts in the ramp industry, patrons of ramp festivals, and those outside of Appalachia yet involved with ramps were conducted. Participant observation at ramp festivals and analysis of questions posted on a ramp-based Facebook page corroborate our interview data set. Analysis of these data has uncovered the impact sense of place and rootedness in the Appalachian mountains has on identity creation through festival performance.

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As I drove into Richwood, West Virginia on April 21, 2012, a smell of vegetation and earthy garlic began to filter into the car. Even though the newspaper articles, books and personal accounts I had read all described this intoxicating smell in intimate detail, physically being surrounded by the Appalachian mountains, seeing the gray haze over the small town of Richwood, and feeling the palpable excitement of thousands of eager community members who had gathered in the local high school cafeteria contributed a very real, albeit complex, meaning to this pungent smell. An entire community has gathered annually for seventy-four years to dine on and celebrate one small vegetable, the ramp. Surprisingly, Richwood is just one of many communities all over Appalachia that has been holding annual dinners for nearly three quarters of a century or longer.

What is perhaps more intriguing, is that until very recently these celebratory events have largely gone unnoticed. It has only been in the last decade that these pungent provisions have found their way to fine dining menus in major urban centers including London, New York, and Seattle. The ramp, it seems, has become famous. Ramps have been sold at farmer's markets, featured in major grocery stores and have even been grown in back yards across the country.

This research seeks to investigate how ramps function as a crucial symbol of Appalachian identity. Despite their growing popularity in culinary establishments, this research illustrates that the ramp remains central to Appalachian cuisine not simply as a food item noted for its unique flavor, but because of its ability to condense meaning and capture the pride and tradition of a

region in a celebratory manner. Through qualitative interviews, participant observation at three ramp festivals, as well as the analysis of responses to questions on the social media website Facebook, the authors demonstrate that while ramps are symbolically loaded—with multiple meanings—during ramp festivals, the uniqueness of place and symbol intersect to create and reinforce Appalachian identity.

Similar studies have examined what is known as the place-based food festival (Adema 2009; Haverluk 2002; Lewis 2001; Everett and Aitchison 2008). Those works focused on the motivations behind intentionally constructed food festivals, and conclude that despite their fabricated beginnings, the festivals do construct meaning and identity for the communities involved (Everett and Aitchison 2008; Adema 2009). Place-based food festivals occur in single towns, and brand that town with the particular food they are celebrating. Ramp festivals, however, are different. They are held across an entire geographic region. In addition, ramp festivals did not emerge as an elite construction for monetary benefit, but rather multiple communities hold ramp festivals as a celebration of the emergence of spring. By studying ramp festivals, this research has the opportunity to explore new ways in which festivals, meaning and place intersect.

While there are some ramp festivals that have come to replicate other place-based food festivals, most contemporary ramp festivals have retained the smaller scale celebration of their precursors. One community celebrating the same way for 78 years is unique, but not altogether astounding, as there are much longer standing festivals such as Carnival and Mardi Gras. However, multiple communities in a cultural geographic region, independently holding festivals but collectively celebrating the ramp for this long is enthralling.

This research seeks to address three questions: What factors are influencing the celebration of ramps in Appalachia? Why have these celebrations continued through many generations? Finally, how do Appalachians create meaning for themselves and their communities through the ramp?

On the community level, ramp festivals legitimize historic and ascribed regional identity. When celebrating and consuming ramps, people are celebrating and consuming their collective heritage, while simultaneously prolonging the identities their communities wish to portray. Unlike other food festivals across the United States, the narrative of the ramp festival is one of nostalgia, whether real or imagined. It is those festivals that create that sense of continuation of history for the community that have survived and that will continue to be celebrated. Seldom does an entire region become connected with a vegetable so strongly, and the festival is a public construction and display of a community's attachment not only to the ramp, but also to what it symbolizes. It is this melding of place and symbol in separate instances throughout an entire region that makes ramps and ramp festivals so deserving of study.

In this paper, relevant literature and theories are outlined in chapter one, followed by an assessment of the purpose of this research in relation to current cultural geography studies. Chapter two describes the methods of qualitative data collection used, as well as methods of analysis as well. Finally, chapter three opens with an assessment of the ramp through history, as described by both literature as well as data collected through this research. This opening provides necessary historical context for the remainder of the results. Chapter three closes with a discussion of the data through festival and performance theories. Concluding remarks and potential areas for future research close the paper.

Regional Identity

Cultural geography has long been concerned with examining the notion of “sense of place.” Richardson describes the complex idea of place as “a curious and uneasy product of experience and symbol” (1984, 1). He is commenting on the fluidity of notions of sense of place, as they are more than simply feelings associated with specific places. A sense of place is much more than a reflection on location, since it is often developed through an intensive investment in lived experience. Sense of place can include ideas about one’s past, future aspirations, and relationships with others and physical environments—simultaneously. Without question, Wallace Stegner’s highlight of Wendell Berry’s quotation, “if you don’t know *where* you are, you don’t know *who* you are,” helps us to imagine how identity is intimately linked to place (1992, 1). At the same time, it is important to recognize that a sense of place is not simply dependent on experience, but relies on expectations of a place’s people and institutions. Space is made into place through human perceptions of experiences in places both individually, as well as in families and communities (Stegner 1992). This type of “knowing” of a place evokes memories and feelings. There is an active notion of exchange between environments and people that is dependent on placing value on these places, or as Stegner describes, a “sustainable relationship between people and earth” (1992, 9). From this perspective we can recognize how a sense of place is not only personal, but also permeable and plural.

While Berry’s quotation captures the personal relationship that we often develop to particular places, critical readers will also wonder if specific areas produce a sense of place that extends beyond the individual, and if so, how do people celebrate this shared sense of place? For communities, the link between place and identity can be constructed in a number of ways. For example, cultural geographers have employed language, music and religion to illustrate how a

regional “homeland” or localized “way of life” is demarcated (Stegner 1992). As this research demonstrates, participation in festivals and shared rituals offers an opportunity for a process of communal identity production.

A sense of place, then, situates people in time and space through the reliving of memories or experiences. It is the way people make sense of the world, and through this process, they can create individual and collective identities (Cosgrove 2000). As Annsi Paasi explains, “at a personal level regional identity/consciousness provides an answer to the question ‘where do I belong’” (2003, 479). The power of place is that it can be both a mental and material construct to which people can exercise belonging in a variety of ways.

In addition to linking identities to place, Barbara Allen (1990) describes that a collective sense of place creates regions capable of being studied. As cultural geographers have shown, a perceptual region can be just as meaningful as a formal or functional region (Allen 1990). Perceptual, or vernacular regions are the product of the ideas of space of everyday people, and they differ from intellectual regions, or areas that have been defined by scholarly research or formal analysis (Isern 2000; Jordan 1978; Zelinsky 1980). Similarly, Garri Raagmaa states, “regional identities are ‘mental’ products of societies’ interaction with their physical and social space (environment) and the mental reflection of the space in people’s mind and memories” (2002, 60). It is the complex, reflexive collective interaction between people and their environments that creates a sense of place, framing regional identity. For example, Kees Terlouw (2009) explains that shared history and cultural practices are components of regional identities. Shared histories and cultural practices occur within specific physical regions. These histories, as well as the collective remembrance of the past, structure the ways in which these communities

situate themselves today. As Stegner (1992) describes, a sense of nostalgia for real or imagined pasts creates identities, linking space and time.

Anssi Paasi (2003) (and later, Simon, Huigen & Groote 2009) add another layer of complexity when they distinguish the features that may help define a region from a regional identity. For Paasi, a regional identity or consciousness “points to the multiscale identification of people with those institutional practices, discourses and symbolisms that are expressive of the ‘structures of expectations’ that become institutionalized as parts of the process that we call a ‘region’” (Paasi 2003, 478). A region is a dynamic process that is created through both past and current ideas of what it ought to be. The construction of a regional identity does not simply involve the linking of people, place, and time, but also requires the careful consideration of the influence of the structures and institutions that create expected beliefs and values for an area. It also necessitates acknowledging that regions and regional identity are not fixed or consistent entities; rather they are continually being negotiated. Regions are dynamic, and consequently, so are the regional identities they interact with (Simon, Huigen, and Groote 2009).

Edward S. Casey expands on ideas of what a region is, transcending these distinctions between physical and cultural, describing that “a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are*, they *happen*” (Casey 1996, 27). This grants the agency of regionalism into the actions of everyday people—places do not exist without people actively creating them. The idea that places happen is especially pertinent in studies of public events such as this one. Through actions and the framing of these actions, regions are constantly created and re-created (Casey 1996; Zukin 2008). John Agnew embraces this quality of regions, explaining that they are “geographic units of both stability and change where internal and

external forces are continuously transforming and reinforcing regions in a multitude of ways” (Agnew 2000, 101).

Richard Pillsbury (1998) addresses another aspect of regional change – the people living in these areas. He explains:

Few places have maintained a stable population with little in- or out- migration over many generations to create stable ethnic homelands... the result is an exceedingly complex set of images reflecting the interplay between the past and the present, the individual and the general. Regional portraits can be little more than fleeting glimpses of rapidly changing ways of life (Pillsbury 1998, 232).

His complex assessment of regions is pertinent to the present research. The Appalachian region is constantly being created and re-created in the minds of its inhabitants and others. To combat this fleeting nature of regions, this research aims to contextualize the region through historical data on ramps and ramp festivals to demonstrate how they have remained central to the formation of identity in this region, despite flexible boundaries encompassing the area. To create meaningful conclusions about the realities of regional identities in research, Paasi suggests asking “not what regional identities are, but what people mean when they talk or write about regional identities” (2003, 481). This research does not aim to forge a symbolic connection between Appalachian identities and ramps, but instead uncover the meaning those living in the Appalachian region create through ramps and ramp festivals.

The Appalachian Region

As regions are constantly being created and re-created, it is no wonder that the boundaries of what is deemed the Appalachian region are highly contested. Definitions of the Appalachian region can be flexible, and even at times, contrasting. One way to discover or create geographic boundaries of the Appalachian region is through addressing how and where ideas of

Appalachian identity are created and by whom. Williams (1997) and Long (2009) both address regional identity in Appalachia and maintain that this identity is not from the word or label “Appalachia,” but instead, these communities maintain their identities through the physical presence of the mountains.

Conceptions of Appalachian identity are just as contested as regional boundaries. Cooper, Knotts and Livingston (2010), through phone surveys in western North Carolina, found that many people living in the Appalachian region do not actively identify themselves as being Appalachian, and those that do tend to be older and more educated. Those who have spent most of their life in the Appalachian region similarly are more apt to identify themselves as Appalachian, which is harmonious with ideas that a sense of place creates regional identity. They explain that negative stereotypes and connotations associated with the word “Appalachian” clouded and influenced respondent’s self-identification with such a charged identity (Cooper, Knotts, and Livingston 2010). Regional identification is hardly straightforward, and often contains complex motivations to include oneself or not.

Nevertheless, Williams maintains that it is the combination of mountain geography and the “bonding elements of traditional Appalachian culture” such as family, church and the land, that form the basis of Appalachian identity (1997, 218). Through his research on displaced Appalachian people, Williams found that the communities do not express these ideas bluntly, but instead through nostalgic storytelling and folk traditions (Williams 1997). Williams’ respondents indicated a sense of loss from being displaced outside of Appalachia, because of a “strong sense of identity with that place” (1997, 217). Given this, the physical areas contained in Appalachia work together with cultural “bonding elements” to solidify a sense of place and consequently, Appalachian identity (Williams 1997).

Additionally, Griffin and Thompson (2002) examine the role Appalachia's history has on current formations of regional identity. They explain that Appalachians revisit memories or pasts and redefine current regional identity by using themes of suffering and romanticism (Griffin and Thompson 2002). Through these themes, areas are demarcated as Appalachian if their inhabitants share these themes, even if those ideas were not necessarily a part of that area's past (Griffin and Thompson 2002). The re-envisioning and romanticizing of the past is a theme that came about in this research on ramps, with people highlighting that ramps are an important signifier of the area's cultural identity.

Moving away from these complex ideas of Appalachian identity does not help solidify geographic boundaries, as other elements of the region are contested as well. For example, McKnight (1997) has a relatively broad definition of the region that includes New York and Alabama, whereas the Appalachian Regional Commission defines a slightly smaller area, spanning New York to Mississippi along the Appalachian Mountains (see Figure 1) (The Appalachian Regional Commission 2013). Both McKnight (1997) and the Appalachian Regional Commission (2013), as well as Terry Jordan-Bychkov (2003) and Long (2009), include the Appalachian Mountains as an inherent aspect of the Appalachian region. Sometimes, elevation is even a signifier of the region, as many have cited an upland-lowland distinction between Appalachia and surrounding areas (Griffin and Thompson 2002; Jordan-Bychkov 2003; Long 2009; McKnight 1997). Not only are the outer borders of the Appalachian region contested, but scholars offer many sub-regions as well. Pollard (2005), in a study for the Appalachian Regional Commission, created six different configurations of sub-regions in Appalachia, and suggested the one that they felt reflected economic variables within the region most accurately. They found that physical borders within the Appalachian region such as roads, mountains or streams, are not

consistent with economic borders (Pollard 2005). Pollard (2005) therefore suggests that economic identifiers define the Appalachian region as well as its sub-regions.

These definitions also differ in how they assess what cultural factors weigh into the creation of boundaries. The Appalachian Regional Commission (2013) includes a rural, poor economy as an essential Appalachian signifier. Melinda Wagner (1982) states that the mountains produce sporadic and oddly shaped counties, mirroring what she believes are the nature-driven qualities of Appalachian culture. Barbara Shortridge (2005) only studies “central” Appalachia, and does not include Pennsylvania, New York or South Carolina in her study of Appalachian food, as she felt that food traditions were the least mixed with other regions in these areas.

A relevant way to demarcate the region through geography as well as culture is through food. Food and group identity are strongly linked, as this paper will examine a bit later. An examination of where people identify with or consume regional dishes can be beneficial in establishing a region in which we can study. In her study of regional food, Lucy Long (2009) discusses how food can become representative of a region, and can reinforce or create regional boundaries through festivals and public displays of association. Her study of Appalachia includes ramps and ramp festivals, and includes both the consumption and celebration of Appalachian food as well as the presence of the mountains. Since the biogeography of ramps and ramp festivals depend on the physical characteristics of mountains as well as the cultural practices taking place in these communities, Long’s (2009) definition of the Appalachian region is appealing for the purposes of this research (similar to the blue USDA line in Figure 1). She includes the entire state of West Virginia, and the mountainous parts of Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia (Long 2009).

As noted earlier, conversations regarding the appropriate or accurate characterization of regional identity in general, and the Appalachian region in particular, is tricky given that such definitions often are trying to capture elastic processes. As such, it is important to keep in mind that this research's ultimate goal is not an exercise designed to ultimately define Appalachian identity; rather it seeks to discover and explain how and why ramps are an important component in this identity creation process.

Ramp Biology and Harvesting

In order to assess how ramps create meaning for both individuals and communities, it is necessary to explore the ramp itself and investigate how the physical qualities of the plant may contribute to their ability to condense meaning. Ramps, *Allium tricoccum*, are wild leeks that are native to North America (Greenfield and Davis 2001). Ramps are a member of the family Liliaceae, along with garlic and leeks (Richwood Chamber of Commerce). Other common names of the ramp include ramson, rampion, hill onion, wood leek, Tennessee truffle, and confusingly, bear's garlic (Long 2009). *Allium ursinum*, known in English as bear garlic or ramson, is actually a European cousin of *Allium tricoccum*, and is native to most of Europe (Tutin 1957). However, this confusion between the two has been regarded by Jim Chamberlain, Forest Service Researcher and informant of this research, as a possible explanation for why ramps were consumed by original settlers of Appalachia (personal communication, November 2012). Many settlers of the mountains of Appalachia were of Scottish and Irish descent, and Chamberlain asserts that they were probably familiar with collecting and eating *Allium ursinum*, making the transition to eating *Allium tricoccum* easy.

Ramps are a bulbous perennial plant. In the spring, two sword-like leaves emerge from the underground bulb, measuring approximately twelve inches in height before dying off in late spring (*Foxfire 2* 1973). When young, their tender green leaves fade to a purplish tint near the bulb. Once these leaves die off, a leafless stem appears with clusters of white, or off-white flowers. These flowers bloom around June, produce and disperse seeds, and the plant's photosynthetic cycle for the year is complete at this time (Davis and Greenfield 2002).

Ramps grow best in forest habitats, or places with ample shade and rich soil. They naturally grow in moist dark wooded areas, ravines and coves (*Foxfire 2* 1973). While the native habitat of ramps spans most of eastern North America, from Mississippi to Quebec, they thrive above 2,500 feet in elevation (Jeffries 1985; United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service 2012; Hufford 2005). Not only do ramps grow more easily above 2,500 feet, many collectors and consumers claim that they have bigger bulbs and taste better if acquired from higher elevations (Hufford 2005). They grow in patches due to seeds falling and germinating near the mother plant, and they require seven to ten years to create a viable patch capable of withstanding harvest (Davis and Greenfield 2002).

Ramps are primarily collected as a food product, and are gathered in late March to early April before the bulbs fully mature and flowers appear (Bragg 2003). Historically, both Cherokee and European settlers have used the plant as a spring tonic, to cleanse the blood and heart, and as a remedy for the common cold and earaches (Hufford 2005; Long 2009; Parris 1978; Sen 2011; Williams 1995). The settlers' diet in Appalachia usually consisted of dried beans and meat during the winter, and therefore the high vitamin C content of ramps was necessary to prevent scurvy (Daugneaux 1981; Hufford 2005). Unlike other gathered greens such as dandelion and poke sallat, ramps were the first to appear in the spring, and were collected for

both food and medicinal purposes (Hufford 2005; Lipton 2002). The modern medicinal value of ramps is only just beginning to be understood, with recent research illustrating their potential pharmaceutical benefits (2000; Davis and Greenfield 2002).

Food as Symbol

Essential to the discussion of ramps and Appalachian identity are ideas about the symbolic quality of food. As Richard Wilk asserts, “food is both substance and symbol” (1999, 244). It provides energy and nourishment to our bodies, yet at the same time, our food choices reveal aspects of our identities— something as transient as if we are dieting, to a much more lasting aspect of our identity such as our heritage or ethnicity. Because we generally have the ability to choose what we eat, food can be used as a way to express one’s tastes and preferences, and can be intimately connected to personal identity (Fischler 1988). The symbolic power of food, then, can stretch from representing survivalist notions all the way to expressing connoisseurship. Far beyond being something that is simply consumed, food can be symbolically loaded, carrying and communicating complex meanings that are composed of layers of experience and choice (Counihan and Esterik 1997; Fischler 1988).

Fischler (1988) explains that throughout human history, the transformation of raw materials to cuisine situates a person in specific places and times based on available ingredients, traditions, and technology. One can create their identity through their inclusion in that cuisine, or sometimes more importantly, their detachment from those eating habits (Bessière 1998). For a modern day example, Americans generally do not identify with consuming “taboo” parts of an animal, such as the brain or heart, while many other national and regional cuisines incorporate

these foods into their daily diet. Meanwhile, caviar and champagne are often thought of as compatible delicacies that are no longer the luxury of Russian and French palettes.

Identity creation through food is especially plausible when individuals are highly involved in the process of creating and consuming food. Unfortunately, Fischler (1988) argues that the connection between personal identity and food is becoming clouded, due to popularity and prevalence of fast food or processed food. She explains that in our modern age, the dominant food system separates individuals from the processes of cultivating, cooking and preparing food, and instead, individuals have adopted roles of mere consumers of nutrients (Fischler 1988). In concert with notions of the modern mainstream food system removing the public from the processes involved with food, Hendrickson and Heffernan (2002) address the spatial disconnection between people and their food in the current dominant food system. They explain that through the globalization of food and cuisine, time and space have been compressed, and because of this, the value put on the “place” of food has decreased (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002). The geographic nature of place in relation to food has been recently studied, and many have shown that food and place are importantly linked and central to identity (Feagan 2007; Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, and Stevenson 1996).

Given the lack of knowledge of what goes into one’s food, Fischler asserts that people are “liable to lose the awareness of certainty of what one is oneself” (1988, 290). In the absence of the desire to know more fully one’s food choices, it is difficult to imagine how food can play a more intrinsic role in the process of identity formation. While this might be the case in many modern societies, this research explores a potential modern relic of historic food and place associations in Appalachian relations with the ramp. A geographic approach to understanding ramps and Appalachian identity offers the inclusion of spatial relevancy and geographic

concepts, and provides an opportunity to understand more about food and identity in the Appalachian region.

Food and Place: Creating a Cultural Connection

Food has the ability to inform others about aspects of our personal identity, though making the jump from personal identity to community, regional or even national identity requires an examination of culture. Clifford Geertz, advocating an interpretive theory of culture, states that in order to gain access to a culture's self-prescribed symbol system, we must inspect events as situated in time and space, instead of "arranging abstracted entities into unified patterns" (1973, 17). Using this idea, then, food cannot be a symbol of a culture when removed from specific times and places. Instead, food interacts with culture in a sense that it is involved in practice. As Don Mitchell (2006) and Pamela Shurmer-Smith (2002) assert, culture is not a thing that can be owned by a group of people. Rather, "culture is practiced...it is what people *do*, not what they have" (Shurmer-Smith 2002, 3). It is this distinction between possession and active engagement that separates the two constructions of culture. Ramps themselves are not a part of a culture until people engage with them.

Not only does one's choice in food reveal parts of their personal identity, but also of relationships of power, money, inclusion, and even health. Food is rarely *just* food. As Bessière asserts, "food is part of a physiological, psycho-sensorial, social and symbolic environment," and because food and cooking engages ideas of culture, one can "place the eater in a social universe and cultural order" (1998, 23-24). If we see food as symbolic of personal and collective identities, then we can begin to force our way into conversations about identity through discussions about food. What's more, by consuming food that is symbolic of ideas of tradition,

rootedness, and history, one can consume not only the food, but also what it represents. This research evaluates if and how the practices surrounding the celebration of ramps (*Allium tricoccum*) contribute to producing cultural meaning in Appalachia. Through assessing the motivations of those involved in cultural practices, the meaning gained from these practices can be uncovered. Additionally, how these communities form a sense of who they are through the act of celebrating ramps can begin to be discerned. Through celebration and consumption of food, symbolic meaning can be consumed and reproduced (Fischler 1988).

These events can be extremely complex, though, and their histories play a role in the meaning created. Shurmer-Smith (2002) contends that we should view culture as a performance of ordinary people in their relationships with each other and their environments. These performances may at times be “deliberately mystified or made artificially exclusive” (2002, 4), which is a process that can elucidate different meaning depending on your involvement within the cultural performance. As Pauline Adema (2009) addresses in the case of Gilroy, California, the self assigning of garlic as a symbol of the community through practices such as an annual festival and naming itself the “Garlic Capital of the World” transformed a material resource into a source of identity, capital and symbol. The purposeful exclusivity and construction of an event does not make these practices of Gilroy any less a part of their cultural discourse. Instead, the people of Gilroy embraced this constructed festival, and through their actions they could elucidate meaning and incorporate garlic into their identity. This is the case for other festivals, and is an idea that will be returned to when discussing ramp festivals.

Assigning food as a symbol of a specific place, such as Gilroy and Garlic, is a powerful practice. Mark Gottdiener (1997) and Adema (2006) describe symbolic theming as the deliberate construction and promotion of “mediated identities,” which result from “the unavoidable

collaboration between the city leaders and image makers seeking to differentiate a place by creating and promoting an identity, and contemporary media culture that promotes the place-identity” (2006, 16). Themed environments, Gottdiener (1997) explains, consist of both the physical areas in which the constructed social interaction occurs, as well as the products of the process of producing these spaces which themselves can convey meaning to those who use them. While deliberate construction of themed environments can produce meaningful associations between place and food, perhaps the power to forge these symbolic associations lies elsewhere. In her work on the construction of authentic spaces, Sharon Zukin (2008) describes that while the producers of space and symbols are important, the ways in which these spaces and symbols are framed truly determines the meaning created. The perception of authenticity by others creates boundaries within spaces, and brands these areas with a specific sense of place (Zukin 2011). Symbolic relationships between food and place can be constructed, though driven in new directions by everyday people through their framing of these events.

One manner through which place can *happen*, then, is through food. Food has the unique ability to be both “of a place” (i.e. – physically grown in the soil and air of a specific area), and be representative of place. Nevertheless, defining an “authentic” regional food remains a delicate exercise. Typically, regional foods emerge from the production of dishes that have been invented within the region itself (McIntosh 1995), that reflect the interaction of humans and the land in a specific area throughout history (Long 2009), or foods that have the ability to “point to aspirations in addition to nostalgia” (Engelhardt 2011, 6). Regional foods can identify what groups people think they are a part of as well as which groups they wish to associate with. However, as noted above, it is important to recognize the tendency to treat geographic

boundaries as static or rigid containers that enclose phenomena, even though most boundaries are quite porous.

An example of a food study that moves beyond the view of static regions is George H Lewis' (1989) examination of the Maine Lobster. He explains that the regionally iconic lobster was defined not by local residents, but by wealthy summer visitors who adopted the lobster as a symbol of uniqueness. The result of this symbol association was inflation of lobster prices, to the point that many Maine residents could not afford to consume this food source. Lewis (1989) explains that the symbolic status assigned to the lobster reflected the aspirations of a certain group, as well as where they came from. Ultimately, the lobster became reflective of an exercise in boundary construction, with the creation of “insiders” and “outsiders” (Lewis 1989). In this particular case, the regional food did come from the land (or water in this case) of the region, but the symbolic importance of the lobster did not spring from the consciousness of the local residents.

While it is possible to understand how place can be *perceived* by examining local food production and consumption, it is important to recognize, as Shortridge and Shortridge (1998) have, that when studying the importance of food, place *matters*. Geographic constructions of place will frequently “integrate information on food habits with other aspects of cultural variation to create a more complete profile of the people” (1998, 1). Place, then, is central to the discussion of cultural identity, with food forming just one—albeit important—component part in the process of constructing “a meaning and context” (Shortridge and Shortridge 1998, 6). This research argues that ramps are deeply embedded in the process of identity construction for many Appalachians, and that the celebration of ramps at various festivals helps to rearticulate, reaffirm and even reclaim a regional identity.

Foodways and Identity

According to Long, foodways “refers to all the activities surrounding food, as well as the ways in which people think and talk about food” including “procurement, preservation, preparation, distribution, consumption, and even cleanup” (2009, xi). If a sense of place is fostered and expressed through experience, the study of foodways might offer more opportunity to reimagine relationships than if a researcher were to focus on a single act such as consumption. Exploring the various processes in the production of a ramp festival requires consideration of how the ramp is collected, prepared, consumed and celebrated. As will be explained in more detail later, many respondents have noted that the act of gathering ramps is better than eating them, and that the community cleaning of ramps for a ramp festival is an event itself.

In their assessment of anthropological studies of food, Sidney Mintz and Christine DuBois (2002) conclude that food creates and maintains social relationships, solidifying group membership and boundaries. For example, through studying Chinese community food festivals in Vietnam, Nir Avieli asserts, “while ethnic and regional foodways are dynamic and flexible, ‘local’ and ‘ethnic’ dishes are powerful, long-term emblems of identity and spatial orientation” (2005, 283). Through the process of cooking these festive foods, Chinese communities displaced to Vietnam maintain group membership, and reinvent their regional identities in new places (Avieli 2005).

If the practices involved with acquiring, cooking and celebrating food create meaning for communities, how exactly does this meaning translate into a larger regional identity? Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell (1984) rely on performance theory to demonstrate this transition. Performance theory involves the idea of cultural performance (Turner 1984), which John MacAloon describes as “occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define

ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others” (1984, 1). In relation to food, Brown and Mussell assert that group foodways provide “the symbols and metaphors that underlie group solidarity” and produce identity through performances involving important symbols (1984, 9). The community acts of gathering, cleaning, preparing, and eventually celebrating ramps through a festival setting are all cultural performances that reinforce and reshape small and large group identities through creating and acknowledging moments of inclusion and nostalgia. Additionally, the festival is a common topic of study within the realm of cultural performance theory. Ramp festivals, then, will provide us invaluable insight into the production, performance and consumption of Appalachian regional identities.

Festivals

To understand the symbolic utility of modern ramp festivals, it is useful to examine the historic role of festivals. According to Alessandro Falassi (1987), the word festival in contemporary English can mean a multitude of things. In particular interest to this research, he attributes the word festival to the “annual celebration of a notable person or event, or the harvest of an important product” and states:

Both the social function and the symbolic meaning of the festival are closely related to a series of overt values that the community recognizes as essential to its ideology and worldview, to its social identity, its historical continuity, and to its physical survival, which is ultimately what festival celebrates (Falassi 1987, 2).

The strength of Falassi’s (1987) definition is that it allows us to imagine the power of symbols, given that they might be central not just to the process of constructing a shared worldview but to actual survival of a way of life. Festivals enable the community, as well as outsiders, to view, understand, and interact with prearranged symbols, and the values they represent.

In addition, E.O. James (1961) discusses the effect seasonality has on festivals. He explains that the changing of the seasons has such a profound effect on mankind that any festival in celebration of these changes has deeper meaning than festivals that have no seasonal dependence. Ramp festivals are one such festival that celebrate and depend on the change from winter to spring.

For ramp festivals, organizers advertise the number of years their festival has been held. With the growing recent popularity of ramp festivals, many festivals pride themselves on being around the longest in their area, therefore making that festival appear to be the most authentic. The thought of continuing a historical annual event plays an important role in the draw and appeal of ramp festivals. For example, Rodger Brown (1997), who studied various small community festivals, including one in the Appalachian Region, notes that these annual events create boundaries between people who derive meaning and identity from the festival, and those who are simply visitors. He explains, “festivals work as boundary stones, marking territory, staking claims and declaring meanings, and as historical events, cobbled from traces of the past” (Brown 1997, xix). In his assessment of the Hillbilly Festival in Appalachia, Brown (1997) discusses that mountain culture was looked down upon and even vilified in the mid-1900s by reform groups, and yet the iconographic material goods that came out of Appalachia are used to supply a sense of rootedness to those outsiders that attend the festival. Through these “cobbled” ideas of history, festivals continuously recreate identities and meaning for communities. However, I think that the ways in which festivals interact with outsiders visiting the festival is not as simple as Brown (1997) asserts. Though festivals can create boundaries, these are complex boundaries that depend upon experience and expectation. The boundaries between insider and

outsider at festivals requires further examination in each of our case studies, as membership to either group is not fixed, nor do they each create separate meaning through festival performance.

Festivals and Performance

The festival allows communities to redefine and reinvent not only their present, but also how their past is remembered and perceived by both insiders and outsiders. In order to understand how festivals create identity through cultural performance theory, the connections between festivals, symbols and identity require a closer examination. Frank Manning asserts that “celebration is performance; it is, or entails, the dramatic presentation of cultural symbols” (1983, 4). Don Handelman similarly states that events, such as festivals, are comprised of “symbols and their associations” (1990, 9). He explains, “a symbol stands for, evokes, or brings into being something else, something absent. . . . These relational qualities, between presence and absence, are those which constitute a public event as a symbol structure” (Handelman 1990, 13). Symbols have the ability or power to condense and represent abstract meaning or feeling. When events display and celebrate certain symbols, they define visibly which symbols are of value to their community. Since symbols represent complex ideas such as nostalgia and a sense of place, these events do not simply celebrate the symbol, but everything that the symbol represents.

Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (1977) note that events, such as festivals, make community connections to symbols visible not only for the community members, but also to outsiders. Intentional performance highlights the symbols that connect to communities the most, as opposed to the “more diffused, dissipated and obscured [symbols] in the everyday” (Handelman 1990, 16). Public events, such as festivals, display certain symbols intentionally, and define community values through these symbols. To both insiders and outsiders, these

celebrations reinforce community values and create a set of expectations for the community based on these values. Through annual celebration, the community and visitors are reminded of these expectations, and festivals provide a social framework in which the community is expected to exist (Zukin 2008). Festivals can reproduce historical association of the community to these symbols through continuing the practice of celebration.

Bernadette Quinn (2005) touches on this idea as well, but adds that festivals historically may have started because of that community's attachment to place. She states that even if the attachment felt by original festivalgoers is not held by current festivalgoers, the festivals can still be a significant, public representation of a community's past and their desired future (Quinn 2005). Within the Appalachian region, many ramp festivals harken to a past of community unity and attachment to the mountains. Whether or not festivalgoers genuinely feel these themes does not entirely matter. Instead, we can study that these communities chose to present ramp festivals and their symbolic associations to themselves and to others.

Cultural festivals can reproduce and legitimize a symbol for a community, and according to Robert Lavenda (1997), they can also reproduce and legitimize community identity. He explains that the feeling of home, continuity, and familiarity that one gets from attending a community-based festival form and maintain memories both for the individual and the community. More specifically, Lavenda (1997) describes the festival as a concrete space and tool that a community can actively use to promote the aspects of their identity that they value. He describes the power that festivals have within communities, not perhaps the power to change social structures, but instead to "structure people's memories and emotions" (Lavenda 1997, 5). Community celebration of a particular symbol reinforces in festivalgoers minds the associated feelings and values, and can structure how they view their own memories through structuring the

way the community perceives its past. By assigning value to a symbol, and providing a specific place and time for public celebration of these symbols and what they represent, festivals actively structure and restructure identity. Through performance, a festival creates, replicates and molds individual and community identities (Adema 2009).

Food and Place Based Festivals

Research about festivals, symbols and identity that are more specific to the kind of research we are proposing here, are the studies of food festivals and how they produce identities. Food, as discussed earlier in this paper, is more than simply nourishment. Lavenda (1997) explores what eating a meal as a community means, which is helpful in assessing the sit down meals consumed at traditional ramp festivals. He explains that the intimacy and closeness felt by a family sitting down to a meal together is simulated on a larger scale at community festivals. These community meals, through simulating family meals, can be “a metaphor for the closeness of the community” (Lavenda 1997, 44). Additionally, community meals are events that visitors can easily participate in at festivals, and allow them to be temporarily incorporated into the community. This temporary sense of belonging is a very powerful attribute of food festivals, is part of the draw of the festival for visitors, made possible by the cultural performance of enjoying food together (Lavenda 1997).

When studying food festivals, it is important to look at what role the idea of culinary tourism has in the origins and current promotion of the festival. Insun Lee and Charles Arcodia (2011) have looked at food festivals as a way to promote and celebrate not only a community’s local food, but also their identity. They argue that communities can celebrate and reinforce identity through creating and promoting food festivals meant for outsider tourism. For example,

creating a festival that highlights local restaurants can foster pride in local culinary identity. Similarly, Sally Everett and Cara Aitchison identify Cornwall, England's pasty festival as food tourism, which they define as the "conscious acknowledgement by tourists" that they are attending a festival, food trail or attraction for more than sustenance (2008, 151). Tourists are looking to glean some cultural or regional diversity both through education and consumption of regional foods (Everett and Aitchison 2008). Not only are visitors experiencing food, they are experiencing a community's unique cultural identity as well, which is an important component of successful food tourism.

Everett and Aitchison (2008) similarly note that these festivals may not only be about a community expressing their heritage or reinforcing their identity, but also for economic and social status gains. For example, Everett and Aitchison (2008) argue that food tourism renewed Cornwall's economy, and provided consistent yearly income for local businesses. Similarly, Lee and Arcodia (2011) also discuss the use of food festivals in rural areas to provide the community with a sustainable, predictable boost to local income. While the authors do assert that small towns are expressing their unique identities through these food festivals, they discuss that the festivals were started with the intention of economic gain through tourism (Lee and Arcodia 2011). Adema (2009), Lewis (2001) and Tellstrom, Gustafsson and Mossberg (2006) label these types of festivals as constructed, place-based food festivals.

While Adema (2009) in her study of the Gilroy Garlic Festival shows that this festival is an expression of Gilroy's collective identity, she labels it a place-based food festival, which means that it is not linked to an ethnic heritage of any kind (Adema 2009). Although, Adema (2009) admits that the Gilroy festival, like many other place-based food festivals, has roots in traditional American agricultural fairs. Gilroy's Garlic festival has a historic association to

American agriculture, but was intentionally constructed by festival coordinators to promote a food that does not grow inside Gilroy (Adema 2009). Similar studies have been done on an asparagus festival in Stockton, California (Lewis 2001) and the promotion of chile peppers in Pueblo, Colorado (Haverluk 2002). All three of these studies show that local elites, or those with the political, social or economic resources to construct a festival, do so for economic or social benefit. Large food festivals increase tourism and sell specific food, both of which benefit the community economically, yet the ways in which these festivals bolster the social status of a community is a bit more nuanced. The first way is through associating their community with fun, celebration and heritage (Lewis 2001; Adema 2009). Place-based food festivals also promote their communities through what Adema (2009) describes as deliberate promotion of place-and-food associations, which are commemorated and reified through food festivals. This includes deliberately assigning your community with a title, such as the “Garlic Capital of the World,” and links a community to a particular foodstuff. What Lewis (2001), Haverluk (2002) and Adema (2009) convey, however, is that these associations are mythical and invented. They have no true links to the community’s heritage, and were deliberately promoted through rationally constructed, place-based food festivals.

In this vein of invented associations, we turn to anthropological studies concerning invented traditions. Defining or determining what is a tradition is an extremely complex one. Who decides what qualifies as “tradition” for whom? How long does something have to happen before it is considered a tradition? Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) delve into the idea of tradition with a very critical eye, and have generated a lot of discussion on the artificial “authenticity” of many things we consider to be traditional in the colloquial sense of the word – stable, old, and passed on. Instead, they argue that these things we consider traditional are

deliberately and artificially made to appear old by some self-serving elite (Hobsbawm 1983). Tradition, Hobsbawm (1983) explains, can be malleable and still be a true tradition, and these should not be confused with the invented traditions he is discussing. Alain Babadzan (2000) adds to this discussion by further distinguishing between invented tradition and tradition. He states, “invented traditions...are used to fulfill purposes that are no longer traditional. The social and political order they legitimize not only lacks a prior existence but also is of a kind that owes everything to modernity” (Babadzan 2000, 141).

Updating Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), Tad Tuleja (1997) redefines who is capable of inventing traditions. Tuleja explains that regional groups and even smaller groups such as families “creatively [utilize] ‘past practices’- both inherently aged ones and deliberately aged ones- as manipulable markers of a common identity” (1997, 3). This expands upon Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1983) top-down exploitation of the idea of tradition to a larger group that could justifiably “use” their real or imagined heritage practices for some sort of benefit.

It is important to note, though, that when discussing the invented or constructed traditions, Tuleja requests that readers understand these concepts for their malleability and what they reveal about a group of people, instead of falling into focusing on the surface level negativity of the word “invention”, that “smack[s] of falsity” (1997, 4). Additionally, Anderson, in his study of imagined communities, discusses that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (2006, 6). This same premise could be taken with the studies on place-based food festivals. While they might be deliberate or for a specific purpose, it is important to understand how complex these events actually are. A trivial festival to one may be an important annual tradition to another, and on the community level, real change is occurring to their identities, invented or not.

The research on place-based food festivals has been extremely compelling, and focuses on single towns promoting real or imagined identities through food. Through the performance of these festivals, towns have associated their communities with a particular food product, and created sustainable, beneficial cultural heritage. Currently the scholarly literature lacks investigations that connect food and festival literature, especially studies that seek to move beyond single locations. Ramp events have occurred not only in one town, but instead developed at relatively the same time among many communities within the Appalachian region. The study of ramp festivals contains an issue of scale that other food festival research has not encountered. Additionally, at their outset, ramp festivals were not meant for economic benefit, but were rather a chance for the community to get together, and rarely saw outsiders in attendance. Some ramp events seem to be different than the rationally constructed, place based food festival, while some seem to follow the template shown by Lewis (2001), Haverluk (2002) and Adema (2009). Since multiple events are occurring with potentially different motivations, yet at the same time are grouped together as Appalachian cultural events, ramp festivals are unique and have yet to be fully studied as an expression of regional identity. When comparing ramp festivals to other food festivals, one must remember that ramp festivals are not simply a product of one town or community, but rather are a regional phenomenon. If rationally constructed food festivals can create, reinforce and change community identity, then what effect does a food festival with a long history of celebration throughout an entire region have on individual, community and regional identities?

CHAPTER TWO - METHODS

Methods Overview

This research aims to explore complex human dimensions such as identity, motivation and meaning regarding ramp foodways in the Appalachian region through the use of qualitative research methods. Qualitative research aspires to “produce rounded understandings on the basis of rich, contextual, and detailed data” (Mason 1996, 4). The strength of a qualitative approach is the ability to provide researchers with an opportunity to inspect social phenomenon from a variety of viewpoints. Additionally, qualitative research is comprised of a flexible set of methods and ideologies that are chosen to fit the social context in which the research is taking place (Mason 1996). David Silverman notes, one value of qualitative research is its commitment to providing deep analysis of phenomena on small scales, “to show how the (theoretically defined) elements we have identified are assembled or mutually laminated” (2003, 353).

In accordance with Denzin and Lincoln’s notion that qualitative research is inherently “multimethod in focus” (2003, 8), this project attempted to capture the three basic types of qualitative research: oral, textual, and observational. First a series of three participant observations were conducted at ramp festivals in Appalachia, for the purpose of observing and participating in these cultural events. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten respondents. Finally, the social media website Facebook was used to obtain brief responses from those following the page *Ramps! The King of Stink*. Table 1 provides an overview of these three data collection techniques.

Once data from the three methods were collected, thematic analysis yielded results from which we drew larger conclusions about the nature of identity creation and maintenance through ramps in modern Appalachian communities. These three approaches were mixed in the hopes of

capturing and connecting individual voices to a more general narrative of Appalachian identity. The Virginia Polytechnic and State University Institutional Review Board approved this study, #12-408.

Table 1 - Methodological Summary

Method	Goal	Data Type / Amount
<i>Participant Observation</i>	-Immersion into cultural events -Context -Experience	Excel spreadsheets and formal write-ups for each of the three festivals attended
<i>Interview</i>	-Personal narratives -Memories and aspirations -Rich descriptions	Voice recordings and written transcripts for the nine interviews conducted (ten respondents total)
<i>Facebook</i>	-Convenient and affordable responses to basic questions -Large sample size	Fifty responses to the set of four questions asked

Study Sites

The festivals attended were the Feast of the Ramson in Richwood, West Virginia on April 21, 2012, the Ramp and Rails Festival in Elkins, West Virginia on April 28, 2012 and the American Legion Ramp Convention in Waynesville, North Carolina on May 6, 2012. The Feast of the Ramson was located in Richwood—the self-proclaimed the ramp capital of the world—and was a traditional ramp feed consisting of a community-based dinner and local craft fair. The Ramp and Rails Festival was also a small, community festival that had been moved from its original location, Helvetia, West Virginia, two years prior. It changed logistically from a sit down ramp feed in Helvetia to an outdoor festival celebrating both ramps and the railroad running through the town, boasting ramp food vendors, crafts, and music for patrons to peruse at their own pace.

The Cosby Ramp Festival was originally chosen as the third festival, as it claimed to be the most popular ramp festival in Appalachia because of its attendance by nearly 10,000 people. The festival had been canceled in 2011 due to vandalism. Though plans and advertisements were made, the 2012 event resulted in cancellation as well. An alternate festival, the American Legion Ramp Convention in Waynesville, North Carolina was scheduled for the same date. This festival claimed to be the oldest continuously held ramp festival in America. It was a community festival with an informal, outdoor sit-down dinner, as well as music, speakers, and food and craft vendors.

Geographic location, a condensed festival calendar, and desire to observe various celebratory experiences guided festival selection. Additionally, festivals that were logistically unique of one another were chosen. For example, the inclusion of a sit down dinner, independent food vendors, craft fairs, live entertainment, beneficiaries of the festival were taken into account, and inclusion of each category was achieved through the different festivals. Geographically, it was a goal to attend festivals both inside and outside of the Appalachian region, for means of comparison between the value and meaning placed on ramps and the festivals. However, due to the small number of festivals located outside the region, and the short ramp festival season long-standing festivals in different areas within the region were given preference. This tactic was used in the hopes of obtaining detail about many different ways Appalachians use ramps to create meaning.

Participant Observation

The data collection process began with participant observation at three separate ramp festivals during the spring of 2012. Participant observation is a method that consists of

observation and active inclusion in a group over a period of time (Atkinson et al. 2004).

Atkinson et al. describe participant observation as “implicitly based on a particular *theoretical perspective* of some complexity, which prioritizes naturally occurring ‘events’ and the meanings that informants use in their interactions to make sense of these events” (2004, 168). Participant observation is not immune to researcher bias (Atkinson et al. 2004). Instead, the theories that the researcher have studied and deem to be relevant underpin the ways in which the researcher interprets events. Objective observation is not possible, but instead, researchers attempt to observe and experience theory in action.

The process of participant observation is neither passive nor obvious. It requires certain specific procedures on behalf of the researcher. Documentation of participant observation begins by mentally flagging events, taking notes at the event, and integrating both into a formal write up of the experience (Atkinson et al. 2004). These procedures are made to protect final write-ups of the observation from extreme researcher bias or jumbled memories regarding events. By incorporating these steps, the researcher has the ability to produce the most complete recollection of their experience.

Due to the ontological nature of this project’s questions, observation allows the researcher to be a part of the interactions or events that are central to the ways identity is created through ramps (Mason 1996). Participant observation puts the researcher in the event and gives experience and context to the analysis of these events. Bernard (1994) contends that participant observation allows the researcher to formulate pertinent questions in the native language for current or future interactions with patrons of that culture. These observations influenced which questions were asked in the interview section of data collection.

Data collected via participant observation included detailed descriptions of the festival scene, people, food, and behaviors. Forty individuals were approached, twenty in Elkins and twenty in Waynesville, to determine where they were from geographically, their thoughts concerning ramps, how often they attend ramp festivals, which festivals they frequent, and reasons for attending particular festivals. Participants were chosen randomly, though there was a goal of capturing a representative population of festival vendors, patrons, ticket sellers, and servers in some cases, in order to obtain a wide range of answers and opinions regarding the ramp and the festival. Questions about their hometowns and experience with ramp festivals were asked (see Appendix A), and after answering, respondents tended to freely discuss their interest and past experience with ramps. Notes were taken during the conversations, and the results were organized in a spreadsheet format. These responses factored into the formal participant observation write up for each festival. Participant observation allowed for immersion into the festival, which included eating the food and meeting the attendees. Eventually, this information informed the questions asked during interviews and on social media. Through this immersion, the research became situated in the context of these three festivals.

Interviews

The second data collection method utilized consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviewing was chosen for their unique ability to produce personal, rich descriptions of specific informant's interactions, history, motivations, personal opinions and perceived community opinions on ramps and ramp festivals. Longhurst (2003) notes that semi-structured interviews are useful in research that requires broad responses, is benefited by respondents elaborating on personal meaning, and allows for a complex answer to a question

with explanation and qualification. Interviews also give researchers the unique ability to capture respondent's memories, current opinions, and their speculations about the future, seamlessly navigating time through the thoughts of one individual (Briggs 1986). That aspect of interviewing provides context, which aids in the production of logical connections between not only one respondent's thought processes, but also between different interviews, data sources, and the relevant literature. This context reinforces the idea that the information obtained from one interview cannot be lifted out "as objective data with no strings attached," as Fontana and Frey warn (2003, 91).

In this study, interviews were used for the purpose of opening discussions that clarified and corroborated background obtained through the literature review process. Because there is a lack of written data concerning ramp festivals, interviews were important in order to obtain historical information about the festivals, the community and the area. Because no current maps exist to document spatio-temporal patterns of ramp festival locations, this information was used to compile a map of the locations of ramp festivals through time and to help inform our discussion on ramp festivals and time. Interviewing provided historical information on ramp festivals that would have been almost unattainable otherwise.

Data saturation (e.g. Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006) was a methodological goal of this study. The initial target interview number was 15, however, given logistical constraints, only nine interviews (ten respondents total) were achieved. The nine semi-structured interviews were conducted either on the phone or in person, at a place of the respondent's choosing. They were voice recorded and pictures were taken if permitted. In-person interviews were preferred by the researchers due to the more personal nature of the responses desired, though this was not always possible logistically. If this was the case, the interview was completed over the phone and

recorded through the program Google Voice. Interviews began with tailored questions concerning respondent's particular area of work or connection with ramps, and then deeper more thought provoking questions were asked, including topics such as what ramps mean to them and their communities. Notes were taken by hand during and after the interviews. The voice recordings were transcribed at a later date. Appendix B outlines examples of the questions asked and notes taken during the interviews.

Three event organizers were interviewed; two from the American Legion Ramp Convention and one from the Richwood Feast of the Ramson. Though the intent was to interview organizers of each ramp event attended, the organizers of the Elkins Ramps and Rails Festival backed out of an interview. Additionally, though it was not part of the participant observation, the Hudson Ramp Festival coordinators were desired interview targets. This is because the Hudson Ramp Festival had been held for two years, and was distinctly different in event logistics than the other festivals, as it only featured gourmet chefs from New York City who prepared food in a competition setting. The coordinators did not respond after repeated attempts. Two ramp product business owners were contacted, which produced one interview. Additionally, I obtained two interviews with academic ramp scholars, two with ramp event patrons, and two additional ramp experts outside of academia. Respondents hailed from across the Appalachian region (as defined by Long 2009), and two were non-native Appalachians currently residing in the area.

Data saturation is a frequently discussed topic in qualitative research, though sometimes is not discussed in sufficient detail to truly inform the researcher when saturation is truly achieved (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006). Researchers can assume they have reached data saturation, but can never truly know the potential outcomes of an additional interview. Guest,

Bunce and Johnson (2006) attempted critically examine the number of interviews needed to achieve data saturation in qualitative research. They conducted eighty-five interviews, and found that data saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews, with metathemes present as early as six (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006). While the authors do question how transferrable these results are, and that data saturation could have occurred at interview seven in their research, their results do yield somewhat of a numerical framework with which one can reasonably estimate the quantity of interviews needed for data saturation.

Facebook

Social media is a new and potentially valuable asset to qualitative research, as it has the ability to reach not only a large number of people quickly, but also can reach people from all of the world at the same time. For this method of data collection, responses to questions posted on the social media website, Facebook, were analyzed. This research utilized social media and the Internet to obtain recent posts, features on websites, and other pop culture information about ramps was an affordable and convenient method of obtaining information necessary, due to the very recent popularity of ramps in the culinary world. Wilson, Gosling and Graham (2012), in their assessment of Facebook use in social science research, noted that it is a unique tool that adds value to qualitative research. For example, for this research, which was limited by time as well as resources, Facebook allowed for respondents all over the United States to reply within a couple of days, at their own convenience.

With the permission and help of Anita Toth-Simpson, owner of the website and Facebook page *Ramps the King of Stink!*, a short introduction to the project and four questions were submitted to the *Ramps the King of Stink!* Facebook page (Appendix C). Toth-Simpson lives in

Maryland but is originally from West Virginia, and started her website and accompanying Facebook page to provide ramp festival information in one place. Because she lives far away from many ramp festivals, she stated that she wanted to start the page so that others could enjoy ramps even though she could not. The questions were posted with the aim of prompting followers of the page to discuss what ramps mean to them. Because the page is set up to feature posts from the administrator and not regular followers, and to give the study a bit more credibility on the site, Toth-Simpson posted the questions as the administrator. The post received fifty responses, twenty “shares” which means people posted these questions on their own personal Facebook pages, and thirty-three “likes.” Responses came from a range of “hometown” geographic locations, and many respondents listed specific ramp festivals they have attended over the years, which aids in the credibility of their responses.

Credibility is an issue that is trickier in social media than in other qualitative methods such as interviews, as a person can easily create a social media page and lie about names, ages, and hometowns, or respond to questions in a way that might not reflect true feelings or opinions. Though these potential limitations are present with social media based research, these same limitations occur in traditional surveys sent through post, email or completed in person. What does differ, though, is the visibility of other respondent’s answers. On the Facebook page, respondents can read through other answers before commenting, and are either consciously or unconsciously swayed by reading these responses.

Another way of handling the potential drawbacks of using a new, un-tested method of data collection is to not use it as primary source information, but rather use it to corroborate or dispute data gathered through other means. Market researchers have analyzed social media sites as a source of qualitative information and many have concluded that it has significant advantages

as well as significant disadvantages to the research process. Branthwaite and Patterson (2011), though discussing Social Media Monitoring (SMM), which is a passive observation of social media content, discuss the benefits and disadvantages of social media in qualitative research. They contend that social media is very different than traditional qualitative data collection methods, and discuss Facebook as a place where one can be an ideal, imagined person (Branthwaite and Patterson 2011).

Responses came from Facebook members who had already chosen to follow *Ramps! The King of Stink*. The inclusion for ramps in their social media persona indicates that ramps occupy a place in these respondent's idealized identities. This method of recruitment is noted by Wilson, Gosling and Graham (2012) as one of the three principle ways in which researchers obtain data from Facebook. These respondents publicly associated themselves with ramps, which indicates they know of ramps, are interested in ramps, or have associated their social media "self" with them for some reason. Another important drawback Branthwaite and Patterson bring up with regards to SMM, but still apply to the way that we have utilized Facebook, is the lack of ability to interpret "non-verbal feedback and subtlety" due to the lack of face to face interaction (2011, 435). Unlike the in-person interviews, Facebook responses did not provide an opportunity to take notes and observe respondents during their interaction with the questions.

Originally, these Facebook questions were meant to illicit a sort of online focus group, where responses would feed off of another to create an ongoing discussion about ramps and ramp festivals. One significant drawback of having this completed online, and on a social media site such as Facebook, is that the first response tends to set to tone, or create a template, for all other responses to follow. In this case, the first response answered questions simply and in few words. The majority of the rest of the responses followed suit.

Because of these disadvantages social media presents to the research process, it may not be a suitable replacement for traditional qualitative methods such as in person interviews or focus groups. Despite this, it is important to explore social media as a possible imagined “event” or community in which they express their idealized identities. Because it is a new and fully unexplored method, interview and participant observation data were supplemented with the responses from Facebook to verify or check what has been said in these sources, as well as other documentary sources such as newspapers and magazines. Additionally, the inclusion of new, potentially controversial data collection techniques can add to the discussion of social media in qualitative research in a new and potentially useful way.

Analysis

Interview transcripts, notes from participant observation at each festival, notes from each interview, and Facebook responses were read, re-read and coded throughout these readings. Cope (2003) describes coding as “a way of evaluating and organizing data in an effort to understand meanings in the text,” and explains that identifying categories and patterns are the basic levels of coding. Through the researcher’s first read of the data, codes are created that identify descriptive codes, or codes that simplify what is being discussed at that time (Cope 2003). Analytic codes emerge after data has been coded descriptively, and these codes begin to form categories between data sources. As Cope describes, “analytic codes emerge from a second level of coding that comes after much reflection on descriptive codes and a return to the theoretical literature” (Cope 2003, 452). Analytic coding begins to intertwine data with theory. Miles and Huberman (1994) similarly suggest data clustering for analysis of qualitative data. Using coding/clustering techniques, the investigative categories addressed were events (the

festivals), individuals (interviews), processes (creating, planning and implementing a festival, creating ramp products), and settings (the influence that place may have).

CHAPTER THREE – THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF RAMPS

Ramps Through the Ages

In order to assess what role the ramp plays in current identity formation, it is useful to understand the changing role of the ramp through time to provide context to the research results. This brief section will explore historically oriented document and literature sources as well as data from this research. They have been combined here in order to prepare the reader for the remainder of the results which deal with modern day Appalachian's relations to ramps.

Before widespread access to grocery stores, the ramp was used by Appalachians as necessary sustenance after the long winter. As discussed in the literature review, after eating only the food that they could store all winter, such as dried beans and meat, Appalachians needed greens to fend off scurvy, and "cleanse their blood" (Cavender 2006). To early settlers, the ramp was not a symbol of survival; it *was* survival.

This immediate connection to the land for survival continues to occur today. Glen Facemire, owner of the Ramp Farm, (Figure 2) and ramp expert, explains:

You know, necessity...survival...like when we canned our ramps it wasn't 'whoopie we're going to have some ramps!' like someone's attitude coming to the ramp feed or something, I mean it was food, you gotta eat something, and that was food, and we liked the ramps but it was just like we would can our deer meat (personal communication, August 12, 2012).

According to Facemire, this was common for all families in the area. The Appalachian tradition concerning ramps was not one of celebration but rather necessity. Patricia Beaver (1984) in her assessment of cultural adaptations within Appalachia with respect to the mountain environment, states that this historic interaction between the people and the land for sustenance was an important part of historic Appalachian's identities. She describes that these interactions have

helped shape local identity today, through remembrance and pride in this past connection to the land, which creates a sense of rootedness (Beaver 1984).

In addition to its role as a food source, the ramp was as an identifier or symbol of someone's status within the community. Five of the interview respondents, as well as countless newspaper and magazine articles, discuss children sent home from school, or put in the hallways after eating ramps. The smell emitting from a person who had eaten ramps a couple days before could often be overpowering in classroom settings. In order to avoid disrupting the rest of the students or the teacher, children who consumed ramps were excluded from the classroom.

Adema describes that “food taboos serve as a means of differentiating identity; how, when where, or why something is eaten or not eaten becomes a marker of group membership or exclusion” (2009, 135). This is certainly the case with ramps in 1940's and 1950's Appalachia. One interviewee, Erica Abrams-Locklear, an Appalachian scholar, noted that in her Dad's time, ramps were often looked down upon, as they were necessary for those who did not have economic means to get other greens from the grocery store (personal communication, August 6, 2012). She notes that the smell was an identifier, and ultimately led to stigmatization. The smell of ramps induced judgment in normal settings such as school, but interestingly, the community ramp festival was a place where it was okay, in fact encouraged, to eat these little pungent provisions (Locklear 2006). During festivals the meaning and symbolic importance of the ramp shifted.

The ramp's smell is generally the first characteristic that people note when conversing about them, and indeed the aroma is unquestionably unique and hard to dismiss. Many respondents highlight that the ramp's smell provides the entryway into a more complex dialogue, composed of personal stories of being kicked out of school as a kid, or the lingering smell of

ramps in homes or vehicles becoming the subject matter for jokes and jovial memories. Locklear explains, “I think there’s definitely an element of like isn’t this ludicrous that we are having this festival to celebrate this really smelly stinky thing.” She is commenting on the idea that Appalachian people chose this, of all cultural products, to symbolize and celebrate their identity. In concert with the hilarity of the smell and the ramp eating contests, Facemire builds on Locklear’s point, noting:

Of course there have been a lot of jokes about the ramps and that’s ok that’s fine.... I don’t think I’ve ever heard a joke about ginseng [*laughs*]...think about it you know, so maybe controversy breeds publicity in a lot of ways.

The pungent smell and biting taste of raw ramps has allowed for a sense of intriguing comedy that is not present in a more tame tasting morel or dandelion green. Jim Comstock, editor of the Richwood News-Leader and the West Virginia Hillbilly in the late 1950’s, felt like expressing some of his Richwood pride to the rest of the readers when he put fresh ramp juice in the printing ink for the newspaper (Springer 2005). This antic stunk up the post office so bad that Comstock almost lost mailing rights. These types of stories tend to come out when discussing ramps, however, after spending time at the festivals and conversing with those involved, it is clear that the smell of ramps is in fact laughable, and yet as the following sections illustrate, the symbolic importance of the ramp contains much more than comedy to Appalachian communities.

Recently, the sphere of consumption of ramps has expanded tremendously. Ramps have found their way into elite culinary circles, and are featured seasonally in upscale restaurants in metro areas around the United States (Davis and Greenfield 2002). Both Chamberlain, a US Forest Service Researcher, and Facemire attribute this trend to popular cooking sources like Martha Stewart and Better Homes and Gardens magazine featuring ramps in the early 1990’s (personal communication, November 13, 2012). Chamberlain explains that by featuring the ramp

in popular culture cooking shows, Martha Stewart provided the “momentum that pushed us into the foodie thing” we see today. Large grocers such as Whole Foods and Wegmans have started carrying ramps as recently as the spring of 2012, and have even hosted small events to promote the vegetable.

Additionally, the amount of ramp events being held has dramatically increased. A result of this research was the creation of a series of maps displaying the locations of ramp festivals over time (see Figure 3). As the maps illustrate, these events have increased in number since their original inception in 1934, and the spatial coverage has extended outside of the Appalachian region. For example, the Hudson Valley Ramp Festival, in its third year in 2013, is a gourmet chef cook off using ramps. Both Locklear and Facemire highlight that the popularity of the ramp has grown significantly in the past ten years. Facemire explains:

The demand is certainly beyond the supply, so the price of ramps has went up so tremendously. When I was a kid we would sell a bushel of ramps, twelve or thirteen pounds in a bushel, for about two to three dollars...now it's thirty to forty dollars.

Facemire also explained that his son, who now lives in Seattle, recently dined in the Space Needle and ordered ramps. Facemire laughed as he said “he paid about twelve dollars for a side order of two or three ramps.” Similarly, Locklear commented, “in 1999, in Baton Rouge I stumbled across ramps for something like twenty dollars a pound, which I thought was crazy.” In contrast, at the 2012 Richwood Ramp Festival, patrons paid fifteen dollars for a mess of approximately forty cooked ramps, which included ham, bacon, potatoes, beans, biscuits, dessert and a drink. While these are clearly different venues, the disparity between the price of the upscale, outside-of-Appalachia restaurant and the traditional Appalachian dinners highlights the existence of an outside demand as well as premium price for their provision.

The taste of ramps is a factor in the recent restaurant craze for ramps. Chris Dudek, a sixth generation West Virginian and young ramp collector, explains, “I like that it’s like a real unique flavor, something you can’t buy in a store, I think that’s what’s best about them” (personal communication, July 23, 2012). Facemire, when discussing his Ramp Farm business stated:

We’ve tried to get past some of the stinky, you know, and think of the nice flavors...we have promoted ramps for what they really are, good flavored eats. They’re a unique flavor and just kind of wild like so to speak, they’re just wild and they’re controversial in some ways, they’ll smell on you for 6 months and all this and that...but I think ramps is become so popular because their great flavor has sold them.

Facemire explains that the fact that the ramp is not like an onion or garlic makes them desirable, and that its unique flavor is what will likely keep their popularity going for years to come.

Chamberlain adds that while the taste or the “mystique of flavor” is a driving force, he thinks that “foodies” who seek out ramps do it simply to brag that they had something unusual and relevant to a culture that is not their own. He explains that “foodies” are asserting their culinary refinement through ramps, a plant that used to be associated with poverty in Appalachia. Much like the Maine lobster, ramps have been lifted from the contexts in which they traditionally were eaten, molded and shaped to create new meaning for new people. The framers of what the ramp symbolizes have added layers to what and for whom this vegetable symbolizes. Foodies can experience ideas of eating something local, unique and gathered from the wild, through the consumption of ramps.

This reframing of the ramp in urban restaurants has repercussions in Appalachia, as the growing commodification of ramps has threatened yields. The recent spike in the popularity of ramps outside the region has caused some harvesters to dig up ramps at alarming rates to meet demand and earn exorbitant amounts of money. It is rumored that diggers can earn around

\$30,000 in one season, simply by selling ramps outside the region. In response to the threat of the wiping out of ramps, Great Smoky Mountains National Park banned all collecting of ramps in 2002, despite the area being a source of ramps for communities in North Carolina and Tennessee for thousands of years (Davis and Greenfield 2002; Lewis 2012). They cited the increased popularity of ramp collecting as a forthcoming threat to populations. The park also sponsored a study by Rock (1996) that concluded that ramp populations could not recover quickly from harvest, which Davis and Greenfield (2002) note as a reason harvesting was banned.

Results

Analysis of the research data revealed the roles ramps occupy for Appalachians today. Using Mason's (1996) analysis technique of examining questions from different angles to uncover how they interact, the ideas that the ramp embodies for different people, and how they connect in meaningful ways were analyzed. Through thematic analysis of interview transcripts, participant observation, and Facebook results, the following themes emerged (see Table 2).

Most respondents tended to gather and freeze or pickle ramps for their own consumption, but some have decided to capitalize on their commercial potential, selling ramps and ramp-based products. Another prominent theme brought up by respondents was the ramp as something that brings their family together. Finally, when discussing the ramp, many respondents immediately told stories of their past or their community's past. These three themes are discussed in greater detail below, followed by how they could interact to create meaning and identity in Appalachia.

Table 2 - Thematic Analysis Results

Themes	Dimensions
Personal or Community Benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Monetary Profit -Food for the season or year
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reminds them of family -Excuse to get together -Family ramp dinners
Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Seasonality -Revisit past

Personal or Community Benefit

One prevalent that emerged from different data sources was the growing recognition by many Appalachians of the potential of the ramp to create economic gain whether through direct sales or by substituting the ramps for store bought vegetables. It is important to note that in cultural studies, monetary motivations are often connoted with some sort of inauthenticity or exploitation of culture. And yet, the ability to generate revenue through ramps can be an important factor in the production of individual or community identity.

On the individual scale, respondent Arthur Margraf (personal communication, February 16, 2013) produces products such as ramp vinegar and ramp barbeque sauce to sell off the Internet and at ramp festivals (see Figure 4). He explains that he stumbled into the ramp business. He was employed in the food service industry his entire life, and after moving to North

Carolina as an adult, found out that his property contained many ramp patches. He states that he did not know what they were until a neighbor informed him, and, realizing how much people liked ramps, decided to harvest them to make and sell ramp products. For Margraf, ramps quite simply were a means to earn extra income.

More formally, Glen Facemire, cited by many as the resident ramp expert and enthusiast, owns a business that sells ramp seeds and whole plants to people all over the country who would like to start their own ramp patches. Ramps are a lucrative business, as he stated that he cannot come close to keeping up with demand for the plants. He receives requests from all over the world for ramp bulbs and seeds, and notes that he has sent them to London and other international locations as well. As his business is home operated, he stated that he sells out of his supply of ramps and ramp seeds as soon as they are harvested.

Vendors selling ramp products were present at both the Waynesville Ramp Convention and the Elkins Ramps and Rails Festival. Some examples of the products sold are ramp salt (a dehydrated ramp product similar to garlic salt), ramp jelly, ramp salsa and even ramp wine (see Figure 5). In addition, at small shops that promote the sale of “Appalachian Goods” – in places just outside of Elkins, West Virginia for example—it is possible to find ramp products, as well ramp cookbooks and growing guides.

The commercial potential of the ramp also extends to fundraising efforts by local community fire departments and chambers of commerce, who host ramp dinners. For example, Nancy Leffingwell, Chamber of Commerce Director and Feast of the Ramson Director in Richwood, West Virginia, explained that because the town of Richwood is so small and lacks sufficient numbers of businesses to generate revenue, the Feast of the Ramson provides useful revenue for the Chamber of Commerce to function (personal communication, August 31, 2012).

She explained that the festival additionally promotes tourism for the area, and that calls come in from all over the eastern United States about the festival and about how to buy ramps. Without question, this attention is linked to the fact that Richwood has ascribed itself the title of “Ramp Capital of the World,” and actively brands itself with ramps. In more detail, she explained:

I think the one thing about the ramp festival is that it gets people here for a specific reason, and then when they’re here they realize we’re right on the edge of the National Forest...there’s all these things like fishing and hunting and peace and quiet....it helps promote tourism.

The Richwood Feast of the Ramson is the oldest ramp festival in West Virginia, and Leffingwell stated that the ramp is a significant contribution to the local economy, through the festival as well as roadside sales of the plant.

Richwood’s Feast of the Ramson is not the only festival that produces a profit for its community. The Waynesville Ramp Convention gives money back to those who need it in the wintertime. Roy Pressley, one of the organizers of the festival, explains that the festival “means they can come down here and enjoy themselves” and then receive the monetary benefits of the festival when they need it (personal communication, February 2, 2013). In this instance, ramps provide cultural and financial benefit to the community at the same time.

An interesting way that many respondents were benefited economically by ramps was through the act of collecting and preserving them to eat throughout the year. This practice allows one to avoid an expense, and Appalachians can collect this food and preserve it for the year. Despite the short season for collecting ramps, enthusiasts prefer to keep ramps in their freezer to eat year-round. These narratives suggest that something more than just the taste of ramps is being captured with their collection. Far more than just another food, the economic significance of ramps has both individual and collective importance.

Family

For many interviewees and social media respondents, the symbolic importance of ramps often derived from the deep connection this vegetable had to personal narratives of family tradition. For example one respondent on Facebook noted her yearly habit of hunting ramps is “kind of an excuse to get together with my parents, take a walk, and dig up ramps.” Other Facebook responses mentioned that their families got together each spring to host their own “ramp festival” or dinner, and that this event was immensely important to their family. Another Facebook respondent, stated, “we eat them every spring, it’s a BIG DEAL to eat the first batch as much of a celebration as Thanksgiving or Christmas food wise.” Another mentioned that she “will never forget those trips with my parents to ramp.”

During her interview, Locklear immediately dove into telling stories about her family, and how her dad loves ramps and actively grows them in their yard. Similarly, Glen Facemire discussed ramps in the context of his wife, parents and siblings, explaining each of their experiences with the vegetable. During Ray Rector and Roy Pressley’s interview (Figure 6), they discussed that they take their children and grandchildren up to collect ramps for the festival, and the fact that their family was involved with the festival was a source of pride (personal communication, February 6, 2013). Rector explains that his grandson has hunted ramps since the age of four. Pressley, when discussing the people who volunteer for the festival which includes his and other Legion member’s families, states “well that’s what we do here Bridgette, we’re just a big family. That’s what we try to do.”

Contrastingly, respondents such as Arthur Margraf and Madeline Pidgeon, a young Appalachian native, did not have any family memories concerning ramps (personal communication, January 28, 2013). As discussed earlier, Margraf found ramps in his yard after

moving to Appalachia, and did not go through these “rite of passage” type events such as gathering ramps and having a big family celebration. Though she grew up in Asheville, North Carolina, Pidgeon’s mother did not grow up in the Appalachian region, and though her father did, he did not pass on his knowledge or experience with them to her. She never had ramps at home, and only knew about them after attending a girl’s camp and the American Legion Festival once with her friends. Ramps do not symbolize family memories for these respondents, and neither Margraf nor Pidgeon responded with feelings of symbolic or meaningful connection to ramps in any way.

Memory

Toward the end of my interview with Rector and Pressley, Rector stopped me from leaving to tell me this story. He explained that every year, he and a group of other American Legion members travel to their spot in the mountains to dig ramps for the festival. He said that a couple years ago, he got a request from an elderly man who used to dig ramps for the festival, and that he wanted to join them. Rector mentioned that this man was very feeble, could barely walk, and that the place they go to get ramps took them along dirt fire roads straight up the mountain, and was a long, bumpy, exhausting journey. He even mentioned that they leave around 8 AM and don’t usually return until 1 AM the next morning. Despite all this, they brought him up there, even mentioning that he had to go to the bathroom in a paper cup because there was no where to get out on either side of this mountain road, but that the man was unfazed and excited. He said that when they finally got to the destination, the elderly man got out, and just stood there. Rector says he just stood there; he just wanted to be around the ramps. This

place meant so much to this man, Rector stated, “it’s just...you know... [pause] he just wanted to be there.”

Re-living an aspect of the past was a common theme among respondents. Discussing ramps brings out childhood stories, such as Anita Toth-Simpson’s story about her first experience at a ramp festival (personal communication, July 31, 2012). She was asked out on a date to one, and while she mentions she was not really interested in the man, she tasted ramps for the first time there at the Helvetia dinner and started going to the festivals ever since. She now operates the *Ramps! The King of Stink* webpage that lists all of the ramp dinners of the season, as well as other relevant ramp information. While she no longer has the opportunity to attend many ramp festivals because she moved to Maryland, her connection to the ramp remains because of her website efforts. She explains, “I missed going to the dinners, and I wanted to help other people [attend them].”

Facemire delved into stories about going out on the mountain as a kid, collecting ramps, and washing and canning them on the riverbank by his house. Similarly, Rector stated that he and his family went to the Black Camp Gap ramp gathering, the pre-cursor to the Waynesville Ramp Convention. He reminisced about being a little kid, and seeing the shacks and tents set up for the festival. All of the respondents expressed a sense of pride when discussing their histories with ramps, and recalled the memories with joy.

Revisiting memories through ramps occurs even in those who did not experience these memories personally. Locklear explains, “the whole story of the ramp I think is really appealing...I’m much more interested in the narrative of ramps than I am actually eating the ramp.” She then continues to explain how ramps are just a part of the community she grew up in, and that knowing about ramps is a specific cultural knowledge that she likes to be a part of. Chris

Dudek also mentions that he did not grow up even knowing about ramps, but feels a sense of heritage through ramps because six generations of his family were from West Virginia. Ramps can provide a connection to one's past, even if it is an imagined one.

An aspect of this sense of memory can be linked to the fact that ramps are only around for a short period of time. Ramps are inherently tied to a specific time of year, the early spring. The seasonality, alongside annual collection and celebration rituals, contributes to a distinct sense of place. Ramps are physically rooted in the mountains, and rooted in the thoughts and memories of those living there. Chamberlain explains that the association with spring, as a rite of passage each year, recalls memories of past ramp adventures. Since ramps can be pinpointed to specific times, specific types of weather, or even the smells of spring, their power to elicit recollection is especially poignant. Not surprisingly, literature on ramps reflected similar ideas. A poem by Jeff Mann (2002) published in both the *Appalachian Journal* as well as Sohn's (2005) book on Appalachian cooking affirms the significance of taste, family, seasonality, as well as the threat of modern disconnection from food sources:

It's a craving at this point.
Mid-April, the hand-lettered signs
show up on country storefronts, roadside stands.

I seize the last decent batch
from the bottom of a cooler at Capitol Market.
"You'll reek for three days!"

my grandmother used to warn,
but it's only onion apocalypse
if you eat them raw, I promise.

In the sink I shake off forest mulch,
black mountain earth, I trim off the hydra-
headed roots, dirty diaphaneity of outer skin,

then rinse the leaves, so like lilies
of the valley my mother grew once

by the Greenbrier River, within a grove
of pines. Chopped coarsely, they pop
and sizzle in the bacon fat before I add
sliced potatoes, patience, scrambled eggs,
then finally taste that earthy, spicy, garlic edge.
We love ramps because they're rare, only once a year,
taking spring's evanescence between our teeth
after months of hillside pewter, hoarfrost pasture,
paralyzed ponds, breathing gray
in and out, in and out. We love them because
ramps remember the wild asleep
beneath our skin, a rich green wild
we hungrily take in and taste again,
while another Wal-Mart goes up,
another well runs dry,
mastectomies slice off another mountaintop (Mann 2002, 343)

Discussion

Ramps are a vehicle through which sustenance, livelihood, family and memories become present and reinforced. How are these ideas connected, and how do they come to produce identity? If we observe these results in the context of culture as something that is expressed or produced, as well as analyze them against cultural performance theory and ideas about place-based food festivals, we can begin to see how ramps interact with individual and communal Appalachian identities, and how the people of Appalachia create meaning through ramps.

The act of celebrating the ramp goes far beyond generating revenue or providing a meal and entertainment for patrons. Through all aspects of the festival, involved parties are continuing, reinforcing and molding a real or imagined portion of their past, and making it available to all those in attendance. The ramp has the ability to immediately let people recall their childhood, and as long as it is still collected, celebrated, and consumed in the same place,

then one's own storied past contributes to communal identity. To illustrate how festival foodways interact with Appalachian identities, we will look at each "event" that must occur to hold a ramp festival, and how each can create meaning.

Digging

The physical act of collecting ramps is extremely time-consuming and taxing, and is an aspect of why these plants symbolize so much to those involved in the process of harvesting, cleaning and consuming them. As noted, ramps grow at high elevations in forested areas, so gaining access to them requires considerable effort, and often involves driving on unpaved roads and hiking through mountainous terrain. These trips to find ramps frequently are accompanied by camping overnight on location, as it takes a lot of time to get to the location and collect the ramps.

If the gathering of ramps is so strenuous, why do festival volunteers continue to make the long, sometimes multi-week trips just to provide ramps for a festival? Like the elderly man in Rector's story, people often have a strong emotional attachment to the foraging effort. When discussing her dad's attachment to ramps, Locklear explains:

Part of the best thing about ramps [is] the journey to get there and dig them...[it] was a big communal thing. I know from my dad's growing up here since his adolescence...that was really fun. I mean, when it was time to go dig ramps you would get together with your buddies and there would of course be some older people in the group...and it was a pretty masculine endeavor...they would cook out by the fire, and then you'd dig your fresh ramps and have some...going to get them was almost as good as actually getting them.

Similarly, Hufford (2005) and Schneider (1995) discuss that the act of going to get ramps was a meaningful experience for those involved. Hufford's article focused on how the cultural practices of collecting and cleaning ramps for ramp suppers held together communities that were frequented by "environmental, social, and economic cris[es]" (2005, 114). Similarly, Schneider

(1995), in an attempt to understand the spirit of the town of Helvetia, was invited along to hunt ramps. She explains that this immersion into the land forged a connection with and adoption of a culture that “had nothing to do with [her] own” (1995, 117). Schneider’s experience introduces the concept of belonging. Who is allowed to derive meaning from ramp festivals? If an outsider participates, do they now “belong” in ramp culture?

Respondents indicated that participating in the cultural events of hunting or cleaning ramps immerses them in the mountains, land, and community. When asked why community members continue to volunteer for such time consuming jobs, Leffingwell explained, “I think it’s something that they actually enjoy.” Usually groups of ramp diggers would include many generations, family members, and be an annual adventure that could not be re-created elsewhere. The trek up the mountain, the camp out, and the days spent digging create an experience that is dependent on place, time, and specialized or situated knowledge. Pressley explains that they have “an abundance of old people, young people, middle aged people...it’s an overall effort.” Going out to collect ramps is a way in which rituals are passed on through generations, and is an extremely meaningful “event” within the event.

While this is certainly the case with festivals like Richwood’s Feast of the Ramson and Waynesville’s Ramp Convention, Locklear, Leffingwell and Toth-Simpson all warned that other festivals had been shut down because those that would go dig ramps go too old to do so, and no young people had learned or wanted to learn to do it. Without younger community members actually participating in these ramp digs, the tradition, and the meaning associated with it, fades over time.

Cleaning

In addition to the time consuming and physically taxing act of gathering ramps, the harvest needs to be cleaned and prepared for the festival. Ramps are soaked in water, have the root ends cut off of them, and then are soaked again to remove any residual dirt (see Figures 7 and 8). Though this is a manageable task for the home cook, ramp festivals like the Richwood Feast of the Ramson require 1,200 pounds of ramps for their one-day feast. The time-consuming preparation process does not seem to be a hindrance to communities celebrating this vegetable. Instead, Leffingwell explains that much like the men going on ramp expeditions, women in the community offer to clean ramps. She explains that while cleaning, community members “sit and visit. And I think it’s just sort of a community event...that is part of the festival and that’s why they keep coming back.” The preparation involved in ramp festivals is generally unacknowledged by newspaper articles and seldom extends beyond a comment of thanks during the festival, and yet, it is a crucial part of the process. Ramp festivals create a need for thousands of pounds of clean ramps, and create this specified “visit” time for community members. For those that participate in this aspect of the festival, the ramp itself is a symbol of community and getting together, and serves to reinforce the boundaries between insiders and outsiders. The process of gathering and cleaning ramps excludes outsiders from meaningful practices in the ramp festival, and to a certain degree protects insider’s cultural heritage from potential change because the distance between those involved and those deemed “other” is maintained. In turn, these practices simultaneously create and reinforce spaces of attachment that allow a local cultural heritage to be imagined and enacted. Gathering and cleaning are occasions to find meaning, to develop bonds, to place people, and to rethink notions of attachment and identity.

At the very least, these activities reveal a commitment to the ongoing value of the ramp as a symbol of shared experience.

Sustainability

The physiology of the ramp also contributes to the meaning embodied in them. Ramps can be dug by a variety of tools such as spades, hoes, pick mattocks and other small shovels. Avid ramp diggers, however, have taken to making their own tools to best suit the digging process. Figure 2 shows Glen Facemire with his ramp-digging tool that he made by removing the head of a hammer from its base and affixing a 4-5 inch adze to the end. Similar ramp digging tools were shown to me at festivals and during interviews. Rector explained that by using this tool instead of a spade you can carefully uproot the ramps without bringing the dirt up as well. He clarifies that this takes away the step of shaking the dirt off the plants, and also prevents harvesters from pulling up too many plants at once.

Rector's concern for pulling up too many plants at once is due to the fact that harvesting ramps needs to be a careful process. Given their long growing cycle, which can take approximately seven years for a plant to mature, ramp patches can be completely wiped out in just a couple of hours, and be gone for decades afterward. According to a study done by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Cooperative Extension Center, harvesting ten percent of a mature ramp patch is the ideal rate to keep that patch viable year after year (Lewis 2012). For Rector, who coordinates a seventy-eight year old ramp festival and is dependent on ramps being available in the same spots year after year, the amount his team digs up can mean the difference between the continuation and cancellation of the festival.

Respondents Glen Facemire and Jim Chamberlain are both adamant on maintaining ramp populations for years to come. What motivates this preservationist attitude? The temporary

nature of the ramp season contributes to this. The ramp itself is around only for a fleeting amount of time, and embodies ideas about seasons, change, and time. Many respondents mentioned that God was in charge of the ramps – where they were, how many there were, and how long the season is. Due to over harvesting, populations of the plant appear to respondents to be slipping away quickly. The long growing cycle and high demand for the ramp in restaurants and grocery stores forced the Waynesville festival to find an alternate, secure source for their ramps, and the limited supply closed down other ramp festivals. Chamberlain and Facemire see this happening and are attempting to promote the plant's growth again. The ramp is elusive and fickle, and because of that it perhaps mirrors the slipping away of one's own past. If the ramp can survive and continue to provide community meaning, then the past that these respondents remember may survive too. In a festival setting, the regurgitation of these real and imagined pasts keeps them alive.

“Placed” and “Placeless” Festivals

The many ideas that the ramp embodies come together through not only one festival at one time in one place, but through a regional commitment to continuing the tradition. When discussing the Gilroy Garlic Festival, Adema (2009) explains the process of festival identity creation. She states, “through telling and retelling stories of collective history, individuals build ‘communities of memories,’ communal identity is maintained, and individuals within the community are rewarded with a sense of belonging” (Adema 2009, 137). Through ramp festivals, Appalachian festivalgoers create these “communities of memories” and prolong and expand their own memories and meaning symbolized by ramps.

The research of place-based food festivals focuses on the intentions of the original and present festival organizers, and how their intentions for that festival have affected the communities they take place in. Place-based food festivals have the ability to expose the social, political and economic past of a very small area or one community, and display which of these factors have contributed to the creation of identity through the festival. Place-based food festivals are created by an elite group of organizers, and current research about them analyzes how this power is absorbed and changed as communities hold these created festivals. Ramp festivals do not fit the ‘mold’ of place-based food festivals, as the origins and power structures of these events vary not only from the place-based food festivals, but from each other.

When interviewing ramp festival directors, such as Nancy Leffingwell, Roy Pressley and Ray Rector, the promulgation of these ramp festivals is not orchestrated by them, but instead pushed through by everyday community members. This is due to the origins of these festivals, and that the story of the community coming together at the original festivals is what drives the community to come together in the same way today. Leffingwell explains:

It’s something that happened and it just gets carried on until somebody decides not to carry it on. I guess that’s the way a lot of things [are]...why do you do some things the way your mother taught you how to do them?

Similarly, when asked about original ramp festivals, Facemire, Rector and Pressley all discussed how it just sort of happened, and was not the result of structured planning. Because of this, ramp festivals are unique and can expand the place-based food festival research through observing how various festivals were created and continued, and what the driving forces for their continuation are.

While ramp festivals originally were not intentionally created for economic or social gain, is this still the case with today’s ramp festivals? Additionally, we might ask, is the

distinction between commercialized festivals and authentic festivals a necessary one? Gillespie (1987) separates indigenous festivals and commercialized indigenous festivals through the promotion of them by chambers of commerce. Instead of distinguishing ramp festivals as commercialized or not, their connection to place should be examined. “Placed” festivals, such as Richwood and Waynesville, have been historically situated in specific places within Appalachia. They boast ideas of tradition, rootedness and the past. Conversely, festivals such as the Elkins Ramps and Rails festival, which was recently moved from a “placed” festival (Helvetia) and combined with a Railroad appreciation festival, was markedly different. There was an established goal of vendors competing for the best ramp dish—a goal that focuses exclusively on taste rather than tradition. The dishes promoted at the festival consisted of new and novel ways of cooking with the ramp, such as ramp spring rolls, ramp hamburgers, and ramp salt. Similar goals were the focus of the Hudson Valley Ramp Festival, which invited chefs from New York City to compete for the best dish containing ramps, and an almost identical festival in Chicago. When comparing Gilroy’s Garlic Festival to Coppel, Texas’s PigFest, Adema (2009) notes that PigFest failed to continue on or create meaning for the community because it was absent from the minds of Coppel’s residents before its inception. Equally important is the absence of organized digging and cleaning of ramps. The Elkins festival required vendors to access their own ramps, and did not provide the opportunity to create meaning through community involvement in the preparation of the festival. These festivals lack roots in the community, the member’s past, or the sense of place that traditional ramp festivals reinforce. These “placeless” festivals lack authentic experience, and cannot embody all of the symbolic meaning that ramps imbue in Appalachia.

While the festivals outside the region might not have collective roots interacting with ramps, does this popularity outside of the region pose a threat to the integrity and continuation of festivals inside the region? The popularity contributes to extensive harvesting of the plant, and could threaten festivals by depleting ramp populations. Before their explosive popularity, Williams describes the meaning that ramps provide for Appalachia, stating:

These wild leeks play almost no role in the local economy; they are seldom sold (except at the festivals) or served in commercial establishments. Most people outside the region don't know what ramps are, and, at least according to local belief, would not like them if they did. In a way, though, this is exactly why they are important. While some foods may be used to market and ethnic or regional group cross-culturally, the foods that are most significant within a culture are those that require a unique knowledge to procure, prepare, or consume of that insiders alone have the stomach to eat (Williams 1995, 173).

Today, more outsiders are aware of the plant than ever before, and Locklear explains that those inside the region seem protective of their cultural ramp knowledge. These boundaries between Appalachian and “other” are blurred by outsider knowledge and consumption of the plant.

In contrast, “placed” festivals reinforce community involvement in acquiring, cleaning, and cooking ramps. They become occasions for people to reflect and remember their childhoods. Nostalgia becomes both a reason and result of attendance at ramp festivals, and even the consumption of ramps outside of the festival setting. These placed festivals are not a simple commodification and production that is socially meaningless. Instead, they are opportunities for cultural sharing, and an occasion to revive a sense of pride in local communities. *Placed* ramp festivals promote what Quinn (2005) describes as a significant public representation of a community's past and their desired future. All ramp festivals have different histories, motivations, and community involvement, but on the aggregate, these festivals have persevered, and are continued by the communities that do create identity from them. Each festival provides a

venue for community identity creation, and the aggregate of these festivals allows for identity creation for the Appalachian region.

The threat that the popularity of the ramp and associated placeless festivals have on the production of identity in Appalachia lies within ideas of perception. The “other” has a hold of something that is embodied in Appalachian culture, and is shifting and modifying it to fit their purposes. In actuality, nothing outstanding is happening. The vegetable is becoming popular, and one day, another vegetable will replace it. However, to the Appalachian this potentially means the mutilation of everything that the ramp symbolizes as well. The watering down of a concentrated situated knowledge could symbolize the watering down of their childhood, of their pasts, and of their community. The ramp may be overharvested due to its recent popularity, but the real threat it has to Appalachia is unraveling its historical, powerful, chosen community identity. From this perspective, overconsumption and symbolic manipulation must be read as equally troubling.

Ginseng – A Snapshot of the Future of Ramps in Appalachia?

The future of ramps in Appalachia could perhaps be speculated on through assessment of another highly profitable, traditional Appalachian consumable resource—Ginseng. Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolium*) is a wild plant harvested for its roots, used traditionally for medicinal purposes (Price 1960). It is native to moist ravines and hollows characteristic of the Appalachian geography, and grows best below 5,000 feet in elevation (Bastone 2011). It has long been associated with Appalachia, and Bastone (2011) even links the gathering of Ginseng to Appalachia as far back as Daniel Boone, who gathered it in his time. Cavender’s (2006) study of

traditional Appalachian folk medicine cites Ginseng as being used mainly for gastrointestinal ailments.

Much like ramps, there is an extremely significant and monetarily lucrative market for Ginseng outside of the Appalachian region (Price 1960). Ginseng is often described as an important wild resource to the people of Appalachia, and one that supports a sort of informal economy (Glasmeier and Farrigan 2003). In 2005, it could be sold for approximately three-hundred dollars per pound, though the price is down from about five hundred a pound in the early 1990's (Barringer 2005). Price (1960) deemed it the most valuable wild drug in America at the time, and much of it was exported to Chinese and other Asian nations for medicine. According to Van der Voort and McGraw (2006), Ginseng has been used as a medicine for over thousands of years, and that demand and over harvesting of a Chinese variety nearly extirpated it, requiring Asian markets to turn to importing the American variety. Price (1960) describes that it first was sold to China in the early eighteenth century, making it an important cash crop to those who could harvest and export it.

Due to over-harvesting year after year, Ginseng has become much harder to find (Barringer 2005). In a 2011 New York Times article, ethnobotanist Lawrence Davis-Hollander warns that if proper precautions are not taken to protect ramps, they could meet the same demise as Ginseng—over harvested to the point that everyday residents no longer can find or use it for their own purposes (Sen 2011). Much like Lewis's (1989) assessment of the Maine Lobster, outsiders changed the symbolic associations of Ginseng with significant effects on the local resident's interactions with the food.

Given of the recent popularity of ramps outside of the Appalachian region, and the demand for them in contexts that do not necessarily create authentic regional or personal

identities, the ramp not only is in danger of over harvesting, but also of its symbolic importance becoming diluted or changed in the hands of others. Through their storied history and performances of gathering, cleaning and celebrating, ramps embody something that is uniquely Appalachian. Not only did Appalachians choose ramps to symbolize their experiences of their heritage, families and sense of place, but also they currently hold the power as the constructors and framers of these small, community based events through which they reify these connections. Depletion of ramp populations or damage to the symbolic value of ramps would be a horrible loss to ideas of Appalachian identity, and hopefully, through sustainable harvest and the passing of this “foodie” fad, the ramp can continue to be central to the formations of personal and regional identities in Appalachia.

Conclusion

While the future of ramp festivals remains unclear due to recent ramp popularity, what is apparent is that the physical act of celebrating the ramp contains many layered, complex interactions and performances that create identity for those involved. Ramps symbolize livelihood, family, and nostalgia. The sense of place reinforced through collecting and celebrating ramps in the same physical and cultural settings of past community members informs and reinforces these imagined communities. Cultural identification with the ramp on the individual level comes together in the festival setting to create what Adema described as “communities of memories” (2009, 137). Ramp festivals, through performance, synergize symbol, place and identity, and construct lasting meaning for the Appalachian region.

Appalachia is a region that is often identified with hardship, poverty and exploitation. Ramp festivals, instead, foster identification with markedly different ideas. Ramps are a storied part of Appalachia’s history. Ramp festivals matter, simply because they matter to the people of these communities. Through festivals, symbol, place and identity intersect and create meaning for those involved.

This research did not intend to empower Appalachian communities, but rather uncover how these communities use ramps to empower themselves. There are very few food items that are so central to regional identity, making the ramp an extremely unique and informative area of research. This study attempted to uncover some of the complexity involved with ramps and ramp festivals, but future research is necessary to understand more. For example, examining the ramp digging and cleaning processes revealed questions about gender and its role in the production of ramp festivals. Additionally, a large comparison of ramp festivals inside and outside the region over the course of many years could illuminate how popularity affects cultural meaning for both

Appalachians and those outside the region. In addition to the greater research conclusions about identity and ramps, this collected and preserved personal oral knowledge. Because of this study, oral and community knowledge can be collected and compiled to produce a unified history of ramp festivals that is not found in print elsewhere.

Ramps are a vegetable unlike any other, and the weight of memory, history and celebration that they carry is astounding. Through ramp festivals, Appalachians create and reinforce their real and imagined pasts, identities and futures in communal settings. These festivals occur across an entire geographical region, creating a phenomenon that hasn't been seen elsewhere. Ramp festivals embody considerable amounts of ideas, feelings and attitudes, and through continued celebration of this plant, Appalachian communities can continue to derive meaning and identity through it.

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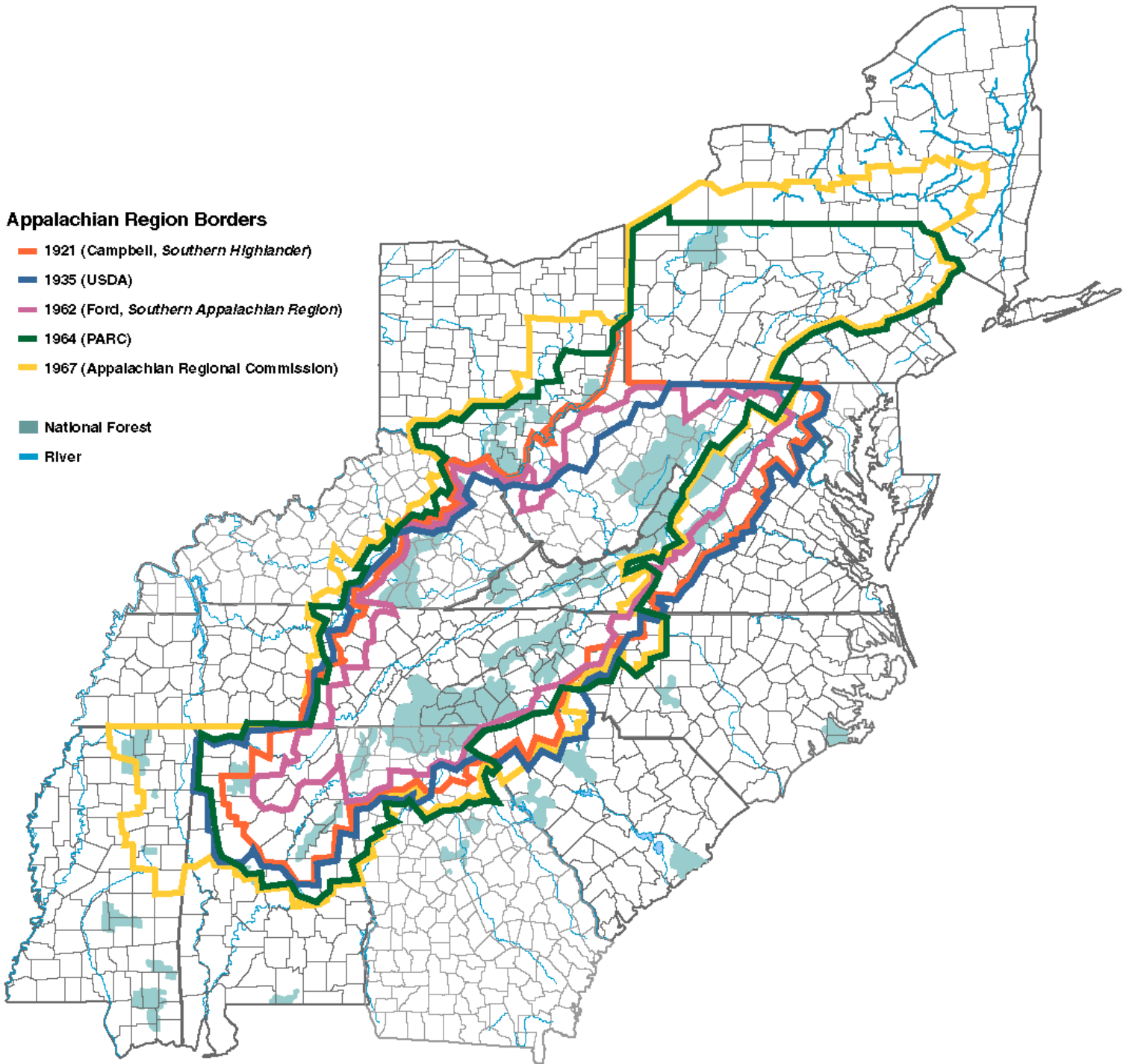
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FIGURES

Figure 1 - Map of Appalachian Region Boundaries



(Appalachian Regional Commission 2009)

Figure 2 - Glen Facemire and Homemade Ramp Digging Tool. Photographed by author.



Figure 3 - Ramp Event Locations, 1942, 1972, 1992 and 2012 Maps made by author.

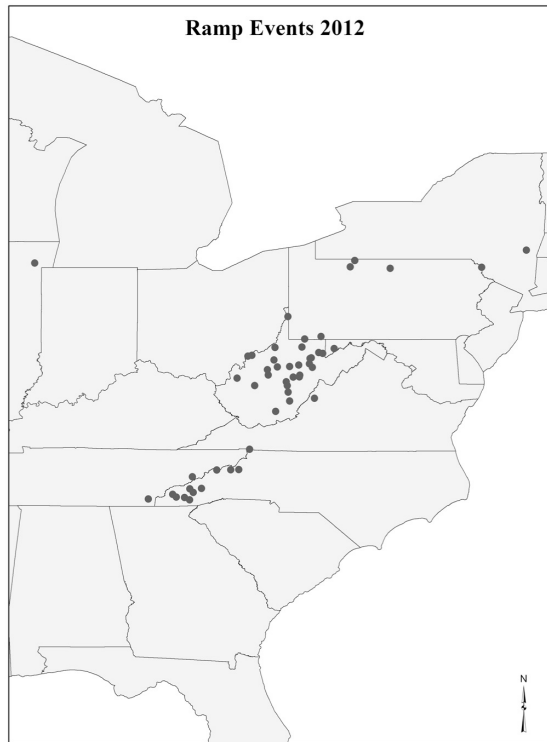
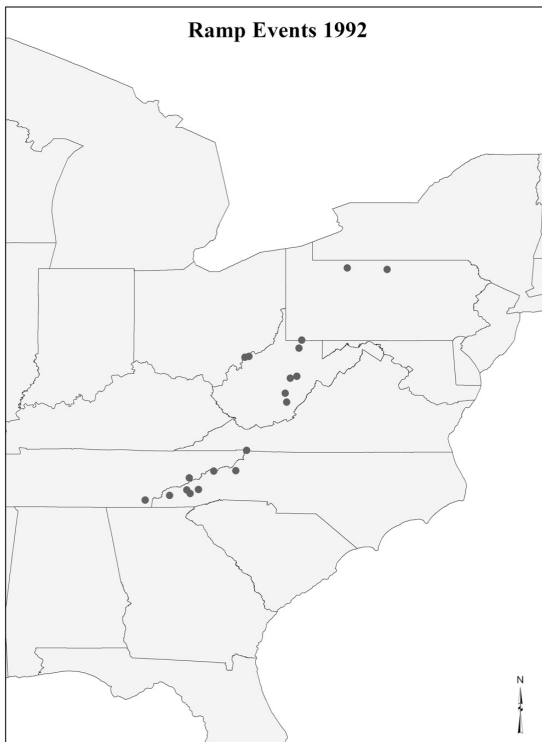
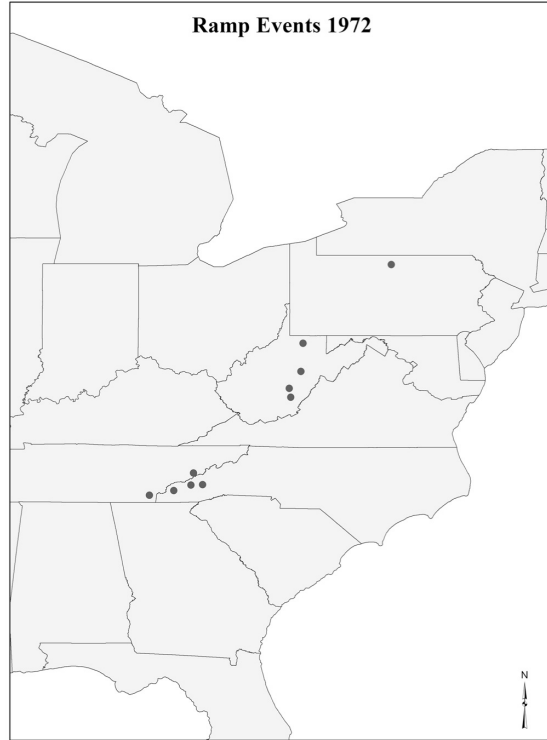


Figure 4 - Arthur Margraf Photographed by author.

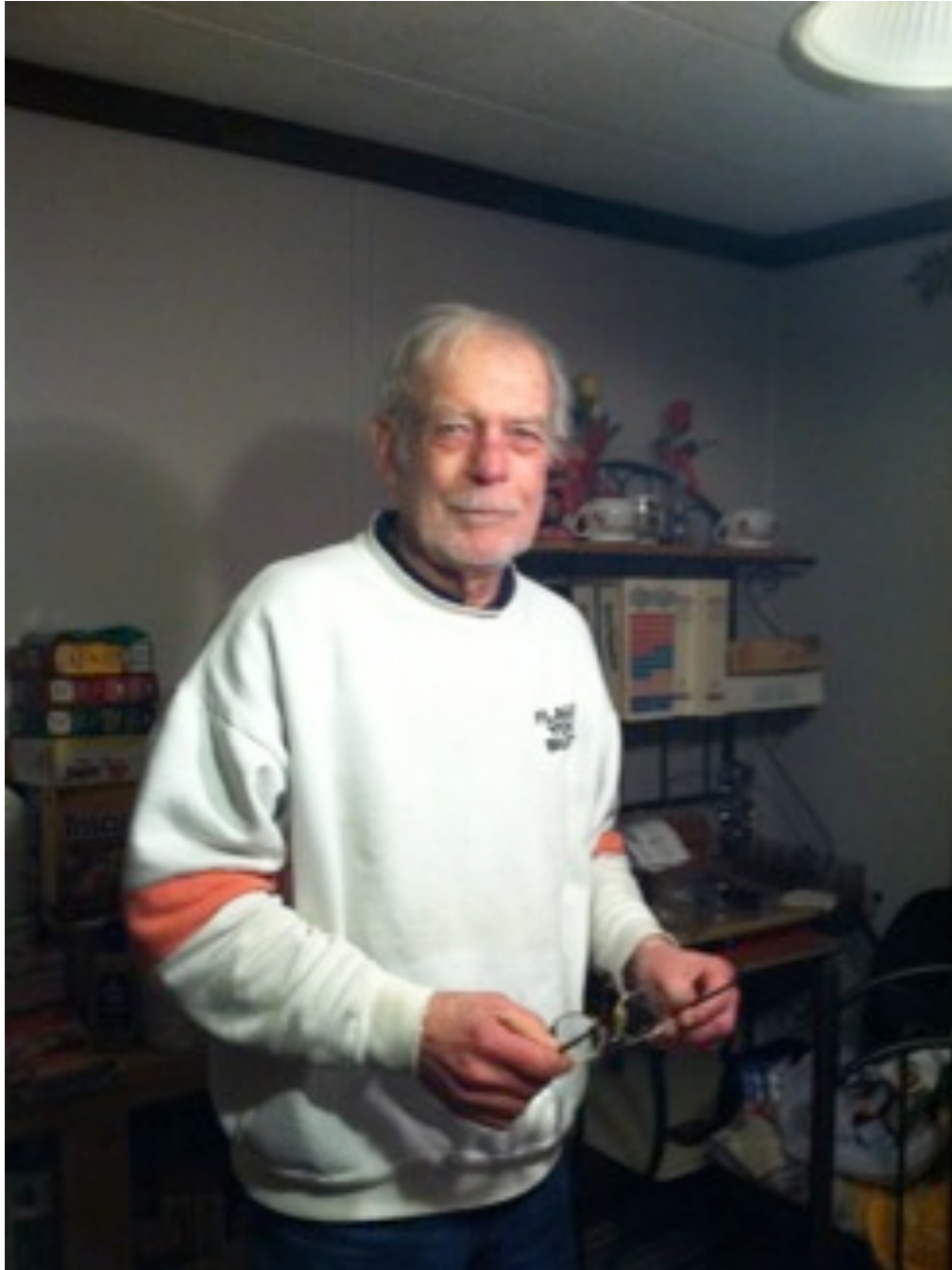


Figure 5 - Ramp Products Photographed by author.



Figure 6 - Ray Rector (Left) and Roy Pressley (Right) Photographed by author.



Figure 7 - Cleaned Ramps with Roots Photographed by author.



Figure 8 - Cleaned Ramps Photographed by author.



APPENDIX

Appendix A – Participant Observation Questions

- 1.) Where are you from, or where do you tend to call your hometown?
- 2.) Is this your first time at this ramp festival? If not, how many years have you attended?
- 3.) Have you attended any other ramp festivals?
- 4.) Do you eat ramps at home?
- 5.) Where do you get your ramps?
- 6.) How did you first hear of ramps?

Appendix B – Sample of Interview Questions and Notes

Interview with Erica Abrams-Locklear, August 6, 2012

How did you get involved with ramps?

What do you think about ramp festivals and the demand for ramps both inside and outside of Appalachia?

Ramps as status – Megan’s blog

Why did ramp festivals really start? I know you mention it as a community event in your article but is there more to this? What was the need for a community event revolving around ramps? Did it spread from town to town?

There is a lot of informal talk (newspapers, magazines) about the growing popularity of the ramp. I think that this issue is not so cut and dry, however, as ramps are simply becoming more popular across the country. Can you unpack from your observations where or among whom are ramps becoming more popular? Are there places they are becoming less popular? Is this popularity genuine in the sense that more people appreciate, like, and buy or forage for ramps or do they simply attend festivals? Or do more people simply know about them?

What have been some of the reasons people like ramps?

Why are ramps celebrated in Appalachia? Did it transition from the community events we discussed earlier or did something happen to spur festival attendance recently? Why not other Appalachian foraged foods such as morels or poke or even apple stack cake?

How did your dad learn about them?

Appalachian women’s literacies

Looked down upon – why?

Lucy – North Carolina folklore culinary tourism

Looking for roots

Contests – usually first answer – hilarity

Appalachian food fest at Biltmore

Masculine ramp foraging

Southern culture – Cherokee dig restrictions food issue this summer

Appendix C – Questions posted to Facebook

Hi Ramp Fans,

My name is Bridgette and I am a master's student at Virginia Tech, working on my thesis on ramps. The administrator for this site, Mrs. Simpson, has graciously let me ask you all a few questions for my research. I really appreciate all your opinions and thoughts on ramps.

(All responses are voluntary, and may appear in my thesis or in a published version of my research.)

- 1.) In general, where are you from?
- 2.) Are ramps a tradition for you or your family? If so, please explain how.
- 3.) What ramp festivals have you attended over the years?
- 4.) Do you actively participate in any of these festivals? (ie – digging, festival set up, cleaning ramps, cooking, serving, etc)

Feel free to leave anything else you'd like to about ramps, all information is welcome!

Thank you again, I really appreciate it!