



The Ivy Creek Foundation Chronicles

Part I – The Land is Saved -- 1975-1978

The story of Ivy Creek Natural Area starts in the fall of 1975 when Elizabeth (Babs) Conant was canoeing along a familiar stretch of Ivy Creek and saw red surveyor tape along the shoreline. Over the years, Babs had come to know Ivy Creek as an oasis of peace and wild creatures. She recognized the tranquil beauty of its mix of low floodplain and high bluffs and reveled in the diversity of wildlife she would encounter as she paddled its winding course.



Fearing the worst, Babs sprung into action and persuaded David Morine from The Nature Conservancy to come see the property. It didn't take long for Morine to recognize the ecological importance of this threatened land – with its 80 acres of mixed forest and wetland, adjacent to 38 acres owned by the city with nearly 2 miles of shoreline. The reservoir, barely 10 years old, was already experiencing marked pollution, and the land surrounding it was zoned for high density residential development. On the basis of this threat and a hope that its preservation would stimulate protection of a larger area of the watershed through easements

and gifts. TNC purchased the 80-acre farm for \$175,000 using a Revolving Fund and named it the Rann Preserve (see letter below, which Babs Conant wrote to ICF on the 20th anniversary in 1999.)

With the deal sealed by December of that same year, Babs Conant did not lose any time in rallying local citizens to help clean up the property; organizing regular work days to pull out fences, tear down an old cabin, dig out the spring, clean out the barn and plant more than 100 trees. Dusty Gardner and the Charlottesville High School Ecology Club organized several fundraising events centered on tearing down the old cabin and cleaning up dumps on the land. Raising funds was a central theme in the clean up effort. The Citizen Committee sold the bricks and wood from the old house, they charged \$5.00 a load for the pig manure shoveled out of the barn, sold the haying rights, and peddled old equipment they found around the farm. All the funds raised went to the TNC Rann Preserve fund to be used to help the city and county purchase the property.

Local naturalists chipped in as well. The Charlottesville Ornithological Society started a bird count, Tom Wieboldt took on the inventory of the plants, Dave Tice from the Department of Forestry advised the group on trail building and the local chapter of the Sierra Club took on the Rann Preserve as their conservation project.

Jane and Bedford Moore of Shack Mountain, whose property abuts ICNA, played a pivotal role during this phase of the project. TNC was concerned that Rann Preserve would in short time become an island among an urban jungle. The Moore's assurance that their land would remain undeveloped was a key moment in the decision of TNC to proceed with the deal. Jane Moore went on to work steadfastly for the project as a key link to other conservation groups, with local garden clubs, and as a link to the Greer family with whom she had shared a neighborly friendship. Jane received the 1979 Conservation Award from the Garden Club of Virginia for her efforts on behalf of Ivy Creek Natural Area.

The Carr and Greer story was recognized early on as an important community history. Volunteers carefully saved paperwork they found pertaining to the family and sought out and interviewed community members who knew the Greers. So important was this connection that on July 11, 1976, the Committee sponsored an Open House for Friends and Family of the Greers.

Meanwhile TNC was working tirelessly with the City and County to obtain a federal grant from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation for the funds to buy the land for a public park. Frustrations at the slow pace of progress didn't deter the determination to make it work. On October 10, 1978 -- nearly three years to the day that Babs Conant called TNC -- the deed of transfer was official and the Ivy Creek Natural Area was born.

The incorporation of the citizen advisory committee in May of 1979 was the beginning of the organization we now know as the Ivy Creek Foundation.

A Letter sent from Elizabeth Conant to ICF on the occasion of the Foundation's 20th anniversary

To: Historian, Ivy Creek Foundation

From: Elizabeth Babbott Conant

In the 1970's, I lived with my husband in Charlottesville. We often canoed on the Rivanna Reservoir and came to know each turn of shoreline in successive seasons. One Sunday afternoon in 1975, we saw red plastic streamers on freshly cut stakes along the water's edge that signaled property for sale, about to be cut into building lots. Little did I know that that unsettling observation would lead to several years of effort to preserve a piece of land on the reservoir which is now the Ivy Creek Natural Area.

That Monday, I telephoned The Nature Conservancy in Arlington, Va., asking what might be done. They described the strategy of buying land to hold it while local communities found a way to buy it back and manage it for future generations. Dave Morine, one of their staff, came to Charlottesville and we canoed the length of the Reservoir. First, A Great Blue Heron flew over the ridge. Then we rounded the first peninsula to see a full buck break through the bushes to stand on a large rock like a Hartford Insurance Ad. Mallards flew by. Dave wondered if we had made a deal with Disney. It was magical.

By the end of the day, the Conservancy was interested in helping with the project. I called my parents. My mother offered to cash in a trust fund to provide \$150,000 for a revolving fund to buy the land, trusting that it would be returned if the City was interested. It was a lovely act of faith. I even had to sign a special set of Will Papers to clarify the money if I died before it was all settled! Using the name used for her by grandchildren, "Ranny," a new idea was born, the land changed hands, and its destiny went from development to preservation.

From that point on, one thing led to another. A small committee formed. We used Work Days to clean up the land, empty the barn, take down a shed, haul old appliances to the dump. We had conversations with neighbors. We started plant and bird inventories and had the advice of university folk from several departments.

In time, the "Rann Preserve" was a viable entity, and over the course of several years, the vision grew into Ivy Creek Natural Area, thanks to the remarkable cooperation between city, county, individuals and a raft of volunteers. The rest you know.

Being part of the effort was one of the most rewarding chapters in a full life, and I have followed your successes and contribution over the years with enormous pride and respect.

*With good wishes, and deepest gratitude;
Sincerely,
Elizabeth B. Conant, Ph.D.*



At the 1977 annual meeting of The Nature Conservancy, Elizabeth Conant received the Oak Leaf Award for “her single handed efforts to preserve a key natural area along the Ivy Creek in Charlottesville, Virginia. She organized a management committee, secured interim financing, worked to obtain BOR matching funds, and convinced the city and county to purchase the land from the Conservancy for use as a natural area park.”

Babs Conant in the mid- 1970s pulling up fencing from the former Riverview Farm

Charlottesville High School Ecology Club organized several fundraising events centered on tearing down the old cabin and cleaning up dumps on the land. The Citizen Committee sold the bricks and wood from the old house, they charged \$5.00 a load for the pig manure shoveled out of the barn, sold the haying rights, and peddled old equipment they found around the farm. All the funds raised went to the TNC Rann Preserve fund to be used to help the city and county purchase the property.



The Ivy Creek Foundation Chronicles

Part II -- The Foundation is Born -- 1979-1981

In the fall of 1975 The Nature Conservancy (TNC) contracted to buy the 80-acre Riverview Farm along Ivy Creek, which it recognized as a place of beauty and ecological integrity, as well as a good opportunity to preserve green space in a rapidly urbanizing section of Albemarle County. The local TNC Project committee, led by Babs Conant, maintained oversight of the land, upgrading the house and grounds. TNC worked with Charlottesville and Albemarle to help them procure federal funds to purchase the land as a natural area to be owned and managed jointly by the city and the county.

When Babs Conant left Charlottesville for New York State in March of 1978, she expressed her hope that the citizen group she organized and sustained would serve as an advisory committee to the city and county after the land transfer occurred. On October 30, 1978 title to the Preserve was passed to the city and county, and it became the Ivy Creek Natural Area.

True to Babs wishes, in December of 1978 Susan Schmidt - who got involved with the Preserve in 1976 when she was a graduate student at UVA - organized an effort to establish a foundation that would work with the city and county. The foundation would take on the role of raising funds and managing the new natural area. Susan worked with the city and county on development plans, while Jeff Kirwan and Peggy Sedgewick drafted by-laws. They formed technical advisory committees that would offer expertise in the development of the park as a natural area.

At a meeting on May 3, 1979, the group named a Board of Directors with wide-ranging expertise. Susan Schmidt provided continuity and a strong emphasis on environmental education, Treva Cromwell and John Pollock were officials with the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority, Francis Fife was the former mayor of Charlottesville and an active conservationist, Elizabeth Scott and Jane Moore were garden club and conservation leaders, Ben Howland was a former National Parks Service official and UVA landscape architect; Tom Bergin, Chris Crocker and Charles Beagle were UVA professors of Law, Anthropology, and Education respectively; Tim Michel was with the Piedmont Environmental Council; Bess Murray was a biologist; and James Butler, who had succeeded Conly Greer as Albemarle's Extension agent, knew the Ivy Creek property's history as a farm. Bill Cole who would be elected a few months later, was the first director of the VA chapter of TNC, which continued to be an important partner in ICNA's formation.

A significant addition to the Board was Paul Saunier, Jr., who had been recruited only months before. Paul was chosen as president of the Board for his administrative experience, diplomatic wisdom and conservationist mindset. Having recently retired from UVA administration, Paul provided one other essential asset - time and the willingness to share it - and that he did. Paul Saunier provided leadership for years to come and helped the fledgling organization become a real force in the Charlottesville-Albemarle community.

There was much to do in those early years. The first order of business was to obtain status as a public charity, enabling the Foundation to seek tax-deductible contributions to pay for planning and operating education programs, conservation projects, and construction and renovation of physical facilities. The Board approved by-laws and Articles of Incorporation and held discussions with the city and county on how best to balance natural preservation, education and passive recreation.

First ICF Board of Directors 1979-1981

Paul Saunier, Jr. – *president*

John K. Pollock- *treasurer*

Bess Murray - *secretary*

Tom Bergin

James Butler

Charles Beagle

Bill Cole

J.C. Crocker

Treva Cromwell

Francis Fife

Ben Howland

Tim Michel

Mrs. Bedford (Jane) Moore

Susan Schmidt

Mrs. Frederick Scott

Commissioning a full color logo seemed to some to be an extravagance, but one that helped establish the Foundation as a viable enterprise.

The establishment of a rudimentary system of trails was next. Using the maps created by Ben Howland and his students, old farm roads were bush-hogged to create walking paths, and board members and volunteers identified and cleared additional trails highlighting significant aspects of the natural area.

In December 1979, the Board decided to invite others to join as members, enabling broader fundraising, including a "special gifts fund" to finance special projects. In April 1980, ICF hired Michelle Mattioli as an administrative assistant and opened an office in borrowed space provided by RWSA. Michelle worked to organize the day to day operations and helped with the development of an educational program. Work/study students hired through UVA's Architecture School did much of the work on the trails as well as design work.

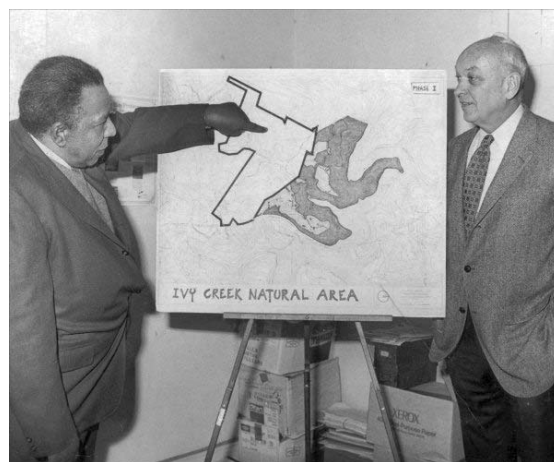
As the special gifts fund grew, the barn became a focus of renovation. Not only would it serve as the headquarters and for exhibits, but also as an important link to the unique historical development of the farm, and as a landmark that people would associate with the natural area. While arranging for the initial upgrade of the barn and trails at Ivy Creek, the Board was working with the city and county to develop plans for a parking lot and restrooms, as well as signs and other amenities paid for with funds reserved in the federal acquisition grant. Donations by local garden clubs played a critical role in the facilities development as well. The Albemarle Garden Club funded the landscaping of the parking lot; the Piedmont Garden Club donated funds for the kiosk; and the Dogwood Garden Club helped fund benches and trailheads. The Board researched and obtained permission for a composting restroom – or “clivus multrum” – which in addition to its ecological benefits, proved to be much less expensive than a traditional flush system, freeing up funds for other needs.

The Natural Area Grows

In the midst of a very busy year, the Board received an opportunity that was too good to pass up. As the Ivy Creek Natural Area took shape, there remained a threat of development all along its western border (see Conservation Battleground below.) As early as 1977, TNC had considered acquisition of the 80-acre “Fleming property” that adjoined ICNA, but legal complications blocked the purchase. As the legal problems cleared in early 1980, Bill Cole of TNC negotiated a 60 day option to buy the land, with the ultimate purchase contingent on the ability of the city and county to secure funds to buy the land back to add to the new natural area. The approval proceeded slowly, and when the option was due to expire, TNC was reluctant to invest further option money without more guarantees from the city and county.

The newly incorporated Ivy Creek Foundation stepped in, taking on the role of intermediary between TNC and local government. Using the special gifts fund, in May of 1980 ICF extended the option with Fleming, and then worked closely with the city and county to write a grant to the Commission on Outdoor Recreation for the funds to purchase the land from TNC. When the application process stalled, ICF once again extended the option.

The grant required an appropriation from both the city and county as a match, which proved to be another stumbling block. In October of 1980, the city added the 38-acre "peninsula" it owned to the natural area, but the jurisdictions were hesitant when it came to the \$50,000 in funds needed to match the grant. Again the Foundation stepped in; Board President Paul Saunier, Jr. spoke before the Albemarle Board of Supervisors on behalf of TNC, after which the county appropriated the necessary funds to secure purchase of the land.



*James Fleming and Paul Saunier, Jr.
celebrate the expansion of the natural area*

As the negotiations for the land proceeded, TNC and ICF saw the opportunity to add even more acreage with the addition of the adjoining Flamenco property. Paul Saunier negotiated with the owners to divide the land in half allowing the owners to develop the land along Lambs Rd. while selling the less developable land to TNC and thus creating a natural barrier for the park boundaries. As a result, by February 1981, TNC purchased the combined 97-acre tract next to ICNA. On May 1, title was transferred to the city and county and the Ivy Creek Natural Area became the 215-acre property it is today.

Creation of the Ivy Creek Natural Area is a textbook case for active citizen participation in the design of a conservation area. Involving public and private sectors -- as well as city, county, state and federal proposals and funding -- it represents a major success for our local conservation community.

A Conservation Battle Ground

While the relatively smooth purchase and subsequent transfer of the 80 acre Riverview Farm was proceeding, there was in Albemarle County a battle raging over development rights around the reservoir. With the creation of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir in 1966, creating both a new source of public water and a viewscape, development pressure rose precipitously in the area with a subsequent rezoning of much of the land surrounding it. However, when evidence of eutrophication of the reservoir became apparent in the early 70s, citizen groups, such as Citizens for Albemarle, spoke out urging restrictions on development within the reservoir watershed. Caught in the middle of this controversy was one development proposal that was to play a significant role in the natural area history.

When Mary Carr Greer died in December of 1973, Riverview Farm still held 160 acres. However, as part of a life estate agreement, family friend James Fleming inherited 80 of those acres. In October 1974, Fleming came before the AC Planning Commission along with two neighboring landholders with a proposal to build a Planned Unit Development (PUD) of 804 units on a 127 acre lot, 80 of which was formerly Greer land. At the time, the land was still zoned as agricultural allowing only 1 unit per 2.5 acres, but according to the Master Plan for the County the land fell within the "urban area" that allowed 2.5 units per acre and other nearby developments had been rezoned for higher densities, most notably Four Seasons.

In January 1975, the Planning Commission rejected Fleming's proposal of 6.7 units per acre and suggested that he submit a revised plan of 2.5 units per acre they felt was acceptable to the Master Plan. In February, the Board of Supervisors rejected the proposal as well. This did not sit well with the developers, and turmoil ensued including multiple lawsuits and much negative publicity. When Fleming and his partners returned in January of 1976 with a revised plan of lower density, the plan now conflicted with new ordinances instituted in the previous year and shortly afterward the Board of Supervisors imposed a moratorium on all building within a 5 mile radius of the intake pipe for the reservoir.

About this time, at Babs Conant's urging, The Nature Conservancy met with Fleming about the possibility of buying the land to add to the future natural area. The land itself would lend a critical component to the ecological integrity of the Ivy Creek Natural Area and would have the added benefit of making the former Riverview Farm intact again. While these meetings were fruitful, it wasn't until 1981, with the help of the newly formed Ivy Creek Foundation, that the idea would come to fruition with the addition of 97 ecologically valuable acres to the Ivy Creek Natural Area.

The Ivy Creek Foundation Chronicles

Part III – The Foundation Takes Shape – 1981-1993

With the acquisition of the 97-acre Fleming tract in May 1981, the boundaries of Riverview Farm were restored and the Ivy Creek Foundation could give its full attention to its role in the future management and development of the Ivy Creek Natural Area.

The City and County had already come to rely on the Ivy Creek Foundation as the principal source of planning and environmental expertise. Although funds reserved in the original federal grant awarded for the purchase of the farm would pay for the parking lot and restrooms, donations to the Foundation were necessary to cover the costs to design and construct the kiosk, develop trails, and make renovations to the barn.

Participation by the area garden clubs was critical at this phase. The Piedmont Garden Club funded the kiosk, the Dogwood Garden Club donated dozens of benches and trail posts, and the Albemarle Garden Club provided landscaping for the parking lot. Private donations allowed the Foundation to convert the old granary in the barn to a lighted and heated office out of which Foundation activities could operate. The Charlottesville Women's Club gave money to start the reference library, and volunteer training and exhibit space were now able to originate at the natural area.

It would not be until 1984 that all the necessary facilities were complete and the sign erected marking the “official” opening of the Ivy Creek Natural Area. But that was hardly the beginning of the activities at the natural area. As early as 1982, the Foundation was providing regular nature programs on wildflowers, birds, and general exploratory walks. In that same period, the Educational Services Committee, a working group of twelve headed up initially by Tim Tigner and then by Gladys Blizzard met monthly. They developed what was to become the backbone of ICF's educational efforts – the School Tour Program. Prior to her efforts at ICNA, Gladys initiated the art interpretation program for school children at the Bayly Museum. She proposed using the same inquiry technique for nature walks - a teaching technique that is still used by ICF volunteer guides today. Joe Fritz and Emory Jones led the first guide training, which brought in 12 volunteer guides in the first season. The program grew rapidly, serving 250 children in the first year and by year three served 1,500 children. Since that time, more than 200 community members have served as volunteer guides and nearly 50,000 children have taken guided walks with them.



*Bart at the Bartholomew Oak
on the 25th anniversary of ICF*

Both the public programs and the school tours could not have happened without the hard work being done on the trails. While much of the early work was done jointly by the city and county and volunteers with ICF, trail work eventually became the responsibility of the Foundation and would come to rely on the contributions of a few critical leaders.

In 1982, Ralph (Bart) Bartholomew, having retired as assistant state forester for the Virginia Department of Forestry, came to Ivy Creek to see how he could help. This was a pivotal point for the Foundation. Bart's expertise in trees and forest management, and the time he was willing to give, gave the Foundation an opportunity to improve and expand its trail system, which was especially important since the natural area had more than doubled in size. Bart would go on to monitor, supervise, train, and educate at Ivy Creek for more than 20 years. The ICF Board honored Bart's contribution with the designation of the oldest known tree at Ivy Creek as the “Bartholomew Oak” a beautiful white oak on the Red Trail up from the reservoir.

The Ivy Creek trails got another champion in 1986 when newly-arrived, retired veterinarian Bob Hammond saw ICNA as a means to help his new community. Like Bart, Bob would wear many hats at Ivy Creek including serving as President of the Board from 1993-95. The duo – Bart, reserved yet untiring, and Bob, a prodigious storyteller and task master – made an ideal team to organize the legions of volunteers needed to create and maintain the six miles of trails at Ivy Creek.

And legions came, most notably one UVA service fraternity – Alpha Phi Omega (APO). It is difficult to imagine how development and maintenance of the trails at Ivy Creek would ever have been possible if not for the young women and men of APO. From 1982 to the clean up of Hurricane Isabel in 2003, APO has worked thousands of hours on the Ivy Creek trails. The preparation and organization of work days by Bart and Bob and the well organized labor of APO (along with the critical role trail monitors play week to week) have allowed the trails to hold up under 25 years of heavy use.

The mid-1980s brought some other changes to the landscape at Ivy Creek. One major change was the creation of the Watchable Wildlife Area in 1984, funded by a grant from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and later the Quiet Observation Area across from the barn, a project coordinated by Bob Hammond. With the help of volunteers, including the Master Gardeners and APO, trees and shrubs rich in food and shelter for wildlife were planted in both areas. A level paved path passing through the Quiet Observation Area allows people with limited mobility to enjoy the peace and quiet of this special place.

In the center of the Quiet Area is a bluebird nesting box, one of eight erected in the early 1980s. In 1986 Ron and Priscilla Kingston assumed oversight of the bluebird trail. The Kingstons have doubled the number of boxes and faithfully monitored, repaired and cleaned them, and have recorded population data for the past 18 years. Six hundred bluebirds and 400 birds of other species have fledged from the 16-box bluebird trail during their watch.

School tours and trails are but two parts of the complex day to day operations of even a small organization such as ICF. Early on, the Foundation realized that at some point there would be need to be a person to coordinate all the different facets of ICF. As the reputation of the Foundation and the use of the natural area grew, the role ICF played in the community expanded as well. Michelle Mattioli served as the first administrator, helping to organize membership and education efforts in the early 1980s. In 1983, Bess Murray stepped down from the Board to become the second coordinator of Foundation operations, a role she would play for ten years. Bess's British accent became the well known "voice" of the Foundation – even more so after 1991, when she and Jeff Kirwan created the five-minute radio spot "Natural History Note" on WTJU as a service of the Ivy Creek Foundation. Bess's love of natural history (the "stuff" as she calls it) and marvelous storytelling ability can still be heard on WTJU (FM 91.1) on Saturdays at 8:00 am and Mondays at noon and 9:00 pm.



Bess Murray spoke at the 25th annual meeting

Bess also took an avid interest in the human history of the area, hosting members of the Carr and Greer families when they gathered in Charlottesville in 1990 for a family reunion. Bess along with ICF president Charlie Gleason arranged for Foundation members and the press to be present, resulting in the recording of invaluable family stories and pictures.

Bess is best known for her stories of the many escapades that have happened over the years at Ivy Creek as the audience at our recent anniversary celebration can attest. After a decade of juggling the roles of office manager, public relations director, naturalist, spokeswoman, historian, guide organizer, and too many others functions to list, Bess stepped down as coordinator and Dede Smith stepped in.

The next decade would bring some changes to the charge of the Foundation, but it still serves its primary role of protector of the natural area and education of the community, with the hope that citizens will want to protect more of our area's open space for the future.

The Ivy Creek Foundation Chronicles

Part IV - Education Comes to the Forefront - 1993-2004

In the early 1990s, under the leadership of ICF president Bob Hammond, the Foundation wrapped up much of the work on the physical infrastructure of the natural area. Having established six miles of rustic trails, plus a half mile paved trail, wildlife areas and the renovated barn, the Ivy Creek Foundation was ready to move into its predominant role over the next decade - as a leader in natural history education.

Many significant developments in the education program have been made possible by the increased availability of grant funds primarily from state and local sources. Day to day operating funds still come exclusively from membership donations, while grant funds are sought for special projects. One of the first grant-funded projects in this era was the publication of *The Wildlife Guide to Ivy Creek, Bluebirds, and the Common Wildflowers of Ivy Creek*, brochures funded by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

The Virginia Foundation for the Humanities funded an ambitious project to research and publish the history of the Carr-Greer family that owned the land as River View Farm for nearly 100 years. That effort earned Ivy Creek a place on the Virginia African-American Heritage Trail.



Children see firsthand the social structure of a honeybee colony in the Observation Beehive in the barn.

The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) gave a big boost to the Education Program at Ivy Creek when it funded a part-time Education Director for two years in the mid-1990s, enabling the Foundation to enhance training and implementation of the program. An extensive guide training notebook developed at this time enabled the Foundation to recruit more widely from the community. Improvements to the Barn exhibits enhanced the school program as well. The School Tour Program remains to this day the most important educational effort of the Ivy Creek Foundation, leading 2,000-3,000 children on guided nature walks each year.

More recently VDOF helped out the School Tour program by funding the development of an audio-visual presentation on the “Trees of Virginia” – an introduction to the identification and ecology of our native forest trees using images taken at the Ivy Creek Natural Area. Developed in conjunction with the Virginia Museum of Natural History, this highly popular program was presented to more than 300 school visitors in its first season.

“Trees of Virginia” wasn’t the first technology initiative that VDOF funded for the Ivy Creek Foundation. In 2001, VDOF awarded funds to “geo-map” the Ivy Creek and Ragged Mountain Natural Areas using the ArcView Geographic Information System. Under the supervision of ICF President John Scrivani, this effort more accurately identified the location of trails and important historic and ecological features of the natural areas, information that enables the Foundation to follow biological change over time and to provide up-to-date information to the public. One recent application of the GIS system enabled the Foundation to predict land loss to the natural area that would result from the proposal to raise the reservoir water level four feet.

Public programming took a big step forward when in 1995, Leigh Surdukowski of the Monticello Bird Club recruited twelve MBC members to lead bird walks once a month for one year. Ten years later, the “First Saturday Bird Walk” continues to draw both novice and experienced birders every month.

Collaboration with other environmental groups has become the hallmark of ICF programs. This concept is exemplified in Natural History Day, an annual event held in April each year, at which dozens of local environmental organizations come together at Ivy Creek for an afternoon of activities and information. Featuring the Virginia Native Plant Society’s annual wildflower sale, the event draws hundreds of community members each year.

One of the most significant collaborations to develop in this period was that with Brown College. A residential college at UVA, Brown sponsors an environmental writer each semester to come to Charlottesville as a visiting lecturer. Ivy Creek serves as the community connection for these writers. As a result Ivy Creek has had the privilege of hosting some of the most prominent nature writers of our time, including Wendell Berry and Barry Lopez (see list.)

**Nature writers speak at
Ivy Creek Natural Area**

Sue Hubbell
Terry Tempest Williams
Alison Hawthorne Deming
Scott Russell
Wendell Berry
Rick Bass
John Elder
Janisse Ray
Jennifer Ackerman
Gretel Ehrlich
Charles Bergman
Annick Smith
William Kittredge
Robert Michael Pyle
James Galvin
Barry Lopez

The Ivy Creek Foundation website was another pivotal development in this decade. Jack Flavin first set up the ICF website in 1996 and found a free home for it on the Monticello Avenue non-profit network. Stowe Keller assumed the management and further development of the website incorporating his impressive collection of photos taken at Ivy Creek over the years. Many of the educational brochures and other efforts described in this chapter, including an extensive section on the history of the area, can be found on the ICF website -- <http://ivycreekfoundation.org>

Education at Ivy Creek was expanded in 1995 when Dan Bieker assumed the presidency of ICF and took on a long time dream of his – to create an all season, environmentally-sensitive educational space at Ivy Creek. Well-known in the local environmental community, Bieker had been on the Ivy Creek Board for many years, established a popular PVCC course on the “Natural History of VA,” and contributed much to the management of Ivy Creek. The Foundation explored many options for such a space, including renovation of the Barn or farmhouse, but it became apparent that a new structure would ultimately serve the Foundation most efficiently.

Dan Bieker, a builder experienced in environmentally sensitive practices, was well situated to lead the task. He designed the building with a timber frame structure, geothermal heating and cooling system, thermal windows and the use of natural materials.

Then, with the blessing of key Foundation founders and the City and County, Bieker and ICF coordinator Dede Smith set out to raise the funds needed to build an environmentally sensitive building. The impressive record of the Foundation helped them to raise more than \$100,000 in cash and nearly an equal amount in donated services and materials.

The building effort was further graced by exceptional skills and generosity. While Bieker donated his own skills and time to the project, Don Charlebois was hired as a co-contractor for the project. A master craftsman, Charlebois is responsible for many of the beautiful features of the building, including the hand-carved railing, the custom cabinetry and tables, and the carved Great Horned Owl that greets visitors as they enter. Another pivotal development was when Northland Forest Products, an environmentally responsible lumber dealer, made a significant donation of lumber and specialty woods. The beautiful poplar walls and collage of woods used in the hand-made tables were made possible by this generous donation from Northland.

When the building was completed, the Rivanna Garden Club sponsored a successful proposal for the landscaping that won the prestigious Common Wealth Award. This \$5,000 award is given to one project a year in Virginia that exemplifies the values of preservation, conservation, horticulture, and education. Working from a plan donated by landscape designers Ian Robertson and Susan Viemeister, Ivy Creek stalwarts Fran Boninti and Bob Hammond set about to entice more than 20 local nurseries to donate the trees and shrubs shown in the plan and organized volunteers to prepare the soil and plant. With the dollars that were saved through plant donations, the Foundation was able to build a beautiful stonewall to frame the building – a feature that has proven to be a favorite resting stop for humans and animals alike. Since it opened in August of 1997, the building has housed hundreds of ICF programs as well as meetings and workshops for more than 50 other environmental groups, to whom it is offered free of charge.

The Education Building is one of the many contributions that Dan Bieker has made to the Ivy Creek Foundation. In the next and final chapter in this ICF history series, we will explore another – the creation of the Ragged Mountain Natural Area – as well as other significant management decisions that would ultimately change the face of Ivy Creek forever.



Robert Kirshman donated a rendering of the proposed building in 1995

Financial donations for the building came from the Perry Foundation, Charlottesville-Albemarle Community Foundation, Beirne Carter Foundation, Emily Hall Tremain Foundation, Garden Clubs of VA, Junior League of Charlottesville, Monticello Bird Club, Virginia Native Plant Society, Sierra Club, Buck Mt. Garden Club, Albemarle Garden Club, Charlottesville Garden Club, Rivanna Garden Club, Boxwood Garden Club, Monticello Garden Club, Pepsi Cola, Virginia Power, NationsBank, Crestar, Whitten families and contributions from 75 individuals.

Donations in services and materials came from Northland Forest Products, Allied Concrete, Blue Ridge Builders Supply, Buck Creek Nursery, Buckingham-Virginia Slate Corporation, Design Environs, Edible Landscaping, Gleasons, Ivy Creek Tree Nursery, Ivy Corner Garden Center, Ivy Nursery, J.W. Townsend, Lowes, Luck Stone, Murray Buckner, Native Design, Red Brook Lumber, Snows Garden Center, Southern States, Sunnyboy Nursery, The Garden Spot, Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants, Timbercreek Farm, Timbersmiths, Village Garden Center, Waynesboro Landscape and Garden Center, Weather Shield Manufacturing, William & Mary Garden Center, and Yancey Lumber Co.

COMMUNITY USE OF THE EDUCATION BUILDING

4-H / VA Cooperative Extension
 Albemarle County
 Biodiversity Committee of Albemarle BREA
 Bluebird Society
 Central Virginia Beekeepers Assn
 Charlottesville Astronomical Society
 City of Charlottesville
 Clean Virginia
 Clean Water Virginia
 Conservation Land Coalition
 Dept. of Conservation and Recreation
 Environmental Education Center
 Flora of Virginia Project
 Forest Stewardship Conference
 Garden Club of America
 Garden Clubs - local
 Izaak Walton League
 JILL/UVA
 Martha Jefferson Hospital
 Master Gardeners
 Monticello Bird Club
 National Resource Leadership Conf
 Natural History Roundtable
 Piedmont Center for Horticulture
 Piedmont Environmental Council
 Piedmont Virginia Community College
 Rivanna Conservation Society
 Rivanna Trails Foundation
 Scenic Virginia
 Senior Center
 Sierra Club - local chapter
 Sierra Club - state board
 Southern Environmental Law Center
 SPCA
 Clean Virginia
 StreamWatch
 The Nature Conservancy
 TJ Archeological Society
 TJ Planning District
 TJ Soil & Water Conservation District
 University of Virginia
 Urban Forest Council
 VA Cooperative Extension
 VA Department of Forestry
 VA Department of Mineral Resources
 VA Dept of Game and Inland Fisheries
 VA Festival of the Book
 VA Foundation for the Humanities
 VA Museum of Natural History
 VA Native Plant Society/Jefferson Chap.
 VA Native Plant Society – State Chapter
 VA Ornithological Society
 VA Stewardship Council

The Ivy Creek Foundation Chronicles

Part V: Stewardship Returns to the Table -- 1996 – 2004

In early 1996, an opportunity arose that would take the Ivy Creek Foundation back to its roots. A number of local conservationists, including Jane Heyward, Bess Murray, and Dave Tice had long hoped to protect the land surrounding the Ragged Mountain Reservoir. The 980-acre site, located just two miles south of the city, is a beautiful forest of mature oak, hickory, poplar, pine, and maple trees with two lakes and more than four miles of shoreline and is owned by the city of Charlottesville. Dan Bieker, serving at that time as ICF president, knew this site as a haven for wildlife, especially birds. Records dating back to the 1950s included such anomalies as pelican and whistling swan. Bieker also knew that the city was reviewing its park plan at the time and that the city council was particularly conservation-minded, having at its helm Mayor Kay Slaughter, an environmental lawyer. It was this impetus that prompted Dan Bieker to ask the ICF Board of Directors to consider approaching the city with a proposal to create a second natural area at this site and to allow the Ivy Creek Foundation to manage the area as they do Ivy Creek. The Board was wary because at the time the Foundation was fully engaged in the Education Building project. When Bieker agreed to spearhead the effort, the Board voted its approval.

Negotiations were complex because the land was owned by the city but it lay in the county and was leased to the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority (RWSA) as a public water supply. On August 30, 1996 ICF representatives Dan Bieker, Dede Smith, and Francis Fife met with city leaders Kay Slaughter, Leon Churchill, Judy Mueller, Satyendra Huja, and Ron Higgins, county representatives Pat Mullaney and Charlotte Humphris, and RWSA representatives Art Petrini and Gene Potter. In exchange for the natural area designation, ICF proposed to build a rustic parking lot and a kiosk, build and maintain a system of walking trails, and provide maps and other educational materials and programs as they do at Ivy Creek. ICF also proposed to provide the same sort of oversight to the Ragged Mountain site as they do at Ivy Creek and like Ivy Creek that the new park be managed jointly by the city and county parks departments along with the Ivy Creek Foundation.

On January 16, 1997, Albemarle County Parks director Pat Mullaney and assistant city manager Leon Churchill wrote a favorable report citing “Ivy Creek Foundation’s outstanding track record with the City and County for land stewardship and educational programming at the Ivy Creek Natural Area.” The project got another significant boost when the Foundation received a grant of \$15,000 from the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation to finance the parking lot and kiosk and received an offer from the Heyward Family for a 0.9 acre land donation along Reservoir Rd. for the parking lot, thus resolving a potential stumbling block.



Ragged Mountain Natural Area from the land bridge

photo by Stowe Keller

In the spring of 1997, both the city and county governments approved the project, with final approval from the Albemarle County Planning Commission which found the plan to be in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan.

The Foundation was ready to begin. The first order of business was to conduct an impact assessment of the trail path. On two occasions in the fall of 1997, a group of experts including Dan Bieker, retired forester Bart Bartholmew, research forester John Scrivani, field botanists Mo Stevens and Peggy Cornett, water resource manager Dave Hirschman, and senior planner Susan Thomas, walked the proposed path and determined that erosion could be kept to a minimum and no species would be threatened as long as the area was kept free of dogs, horses, and motorized vehicles.

Shortly thereafter, the Foundation received a grant from the Virginia Department of Forestry to hire someone to coordinate the trail building. ICF was fortunate to find Jeff Geiser, an independent landscape contractor well equipped to handle all aspects of the project. Jeff, working with Peter Clark, Peter Dutnell, Dan Bieker, and Joe Koelling, supervised well over 150 volunteers in the first year alone to build the initial four mile trail around the lower reservoir. As a master with the chain saw, Jeff was able save material costs by using fallen trees found on site to make bridges and markers to delineate the trail. RWSA and County Parks provided an invaluable service by removing a steel bridge found on site that posed an “attractive nuisance” hazard.

By the fall of 1998, the parking lot was complete and Bieker recruited Don Charlebois to help build the kiosk and create hand routed trail signs - now found throughout the natural area. Landscape designers Joan Albiston and Jessica Simms created a beautiful hand-drawn map of the area for the kiosk. On March 8, 1999 – three years after the ICF Board approved the idea and just in time for the 20th anniversary of the Ivy Creek Foundation - Ragged Mountain Natural Area opened to the public.

In the next two years, another 2.2 mile trail was added around the upper reservoir along with a half-mile spur trail onto a lovely peninsula at the beginning of the trail. In the fall of 2001, Noah Green designed and built a spur trail to the top of Round Top Mountain that offers panoramic views of the landscape below – a project for which he earned Eagle Scout rank.

The Ragged Mountain Natural Area has become a favorite destination for wilderness-style hiking close to town and a haven for some of the most interesting wildlife in our area.



1963



1994

Our natural areas become more important with time as development continues in Albemarle County. Right arrow indicates the Ivy Creek Natural Area – top arrow indicates the Route 29 corridor

RMNA would not be the last major management project for ICF. Two other significant initiatives would come before the Board in the years to follow.

In May of 1999, Rob Riordan of The Nature Conservancy became the next president of the ICF Board of Directors. Rob brought to the table an issue that was fast becoming one of the pivotal environmental issues of the day – control of invasive non-native plants. Rob, along with Board member Dick Carpenter, led the Board through a sometimes difficult discussion of how to deal with the increasing problem of invasive plant species at Ivy Creek. They gained approval for a project to remove *Ailanthus* trees and control Asiatic bittersweet along the entrance corridor of the Natural Area. While limited in scope the focus on controlling invasive species remains a priority to this day.

When John Scrivani took the reins of the Foundation in the spring of 2000, he offered his expertise for a management project that literally changed the face of Ivy Creek Natural Area. With the help of the VA Department of Forestry, The Nature Conservancy, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the City and County Parks Departments, the Foundation took on the task of converting two hayfields – one to the south of the parking lot and the other to the north of the barn - from non-native fescue fields to a native warm season grass habitat. An initial controlled burn, followed by the eradication of the fescue, allowed for the seeding of Big Bluestem, Indian Grass and Little Bluestem. These prairie style grasses, while associated today with the Midwest, have their origin in the successional grasslands of the eastern states. Once common in Virginia, native grass fields are now few and far between. While it typically takes 3 to 5 years for a stand to reach its full potential, the native prairie at Ivy Creek will benefit the environment and wildlife for many years to come. But it is their beauty, especially as their red and gold colors shine in the low winter sun that endear them to visitors to Ivy Creek.



In recent years, the Ivy Creek and Ragged Mountain Natural Areas have been recognized for their public benefit to a growing interest in the outdoors and wildlife by becoming sites on Virginia's new Birding and Wildlife Trail. In addition, ICNA has been placed on the African American Heritage Trail for its rich history.

Much has happened in the past 25 years since the Foundation was born, some of which we've chronicled this year, but much of which we didn't have space to tell. The success of the Foundation does not lie solely in the few amazing people we have highlighted in these chronicles but also in the volunteer guides, the trail monitors, the program leaders, the trainers, and of course the membership who have so generously sustained the work of the Foundation with their contributions. On behalf of the ICF Board of Directors, thank you one and all for every step you've taken to make this dream come true.



Charlottesville, VA
www.ivycreekfoundation.org