

Ivy Creek Natural Area Self Guided Trail on the White Trail

Adapted from a brochure by Bart Bartholomew 1986
Sketches by *John Snyder*



The Ivy Creek Natural Area, bordering the South Rivanna Reservoir, is located in Albemarle County on Earlysville Road two miles north of the City. ICNA includes more than 219 acres of forests, fields and streams traversed only by footpaths. Owned and maintained by the City and County, and managed by the Ivy Creek Foundation, the Natural Area is open to the public during daylight hours. This quiet wonderland is yours to enjoy. Please share it respectfully and lovingly.

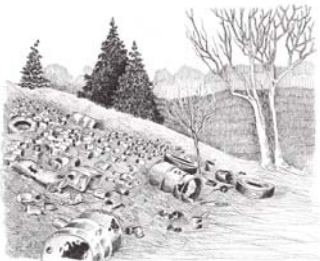
From Farm to Forest



Farming activity on the Ivy Creek Natural Area began to decrease in the late 1940s following World War II. As years passed less crops were raised and fewer cows pastured, while the forest steadily encroached on the fields and pastures. In some sections the formerly cleared fields have been completely transformed into woodlands, while in other areas the succession from field to forest is only beginning.

Starting on the Red Trail, turn left on the White Trail. As you walk this trail, look for evidence of man's activity and things of natural interest. As you pause to read the information, open your eyes and ears and "feel" nature at work.

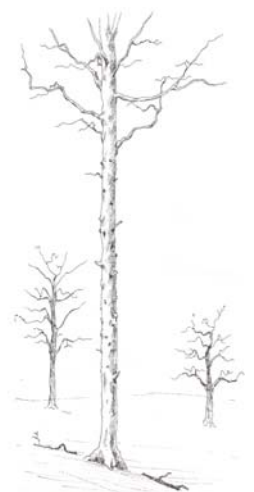
Man's Legacy (50 feet on left)



Inevitably, man marks his dwelling places by trash dumps. Here on both sides of the trail are rusty cans, broken bottles, pottery fragments, machinery parts, and other farm discards. Vines and undergrowth have mercifully camouflaged this eyesore quite well, and with the passage of time it will become practically invisible. Today, about 75% of municipal solid waste is recyclable, yet only about 35% of it gets recycled. This spot is a reminder to **REDUCE, REUSE, and RECYCLE**.

The Continuing "Web of Life" (on your right, look for a standing dead tree, called a "snag")

More than a century ago an acorn sprouted at the spot where you see this dead tree. During its life it sheltered and fed generations of birds and animals, and each fall its leaves added nutrients and organic matter to the forest soil. Soon after the tree died, new kinds of life began to feed on and break down the woody cells. Woodborers, ants, and various kinds of bacteria and fungi are a few of the organisms at work. Trees such as this play an important role in the life of the forest. Many birds and small animals will visit this tree for a meal of insects. Woodpeckers may drill a nest cavity which at a later time may be used for a squirrel den. Eventually the decayed tree will once again be part of the forest soil. A seed will sprout here and the same minerals and nutrients will be reused in this age-old cycle.



Nature's Air Conditioner (the dense forest opens up into a grove of American beech)

The atmosphere in this pleasant grove of American Beech trees is cool and inviting even in midsummer. Under the shade of large, mature trees such as these, the temperature is often ten or more degrees cooler than in the open. In this way the forest actually moderates the climate of the area. Also, the leaves manufacture food and oxygen is produced and released to the surrounding air, improving the air we breathe. We might even call trees a natural air conditioner.



And trees provide so much more. They also give us wood products, food and shelter, give off oxygen and clean our air, enrich the soil, protect our soil and water, abate noise and block the sun and wind and provide wildlife habitat.

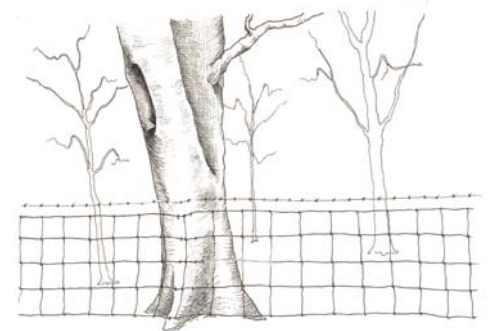
Water – The Gift of Life (past the beech grove, the trail passes along Martin's Branch)



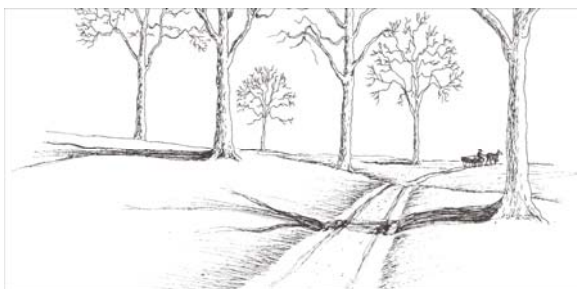
The water in the stream originates from springs in the headwaters of Martin's Branch. Literally hundreds of creatures make their home in this pool. If you stand perfectly still and look closely you may see crayfish, waterstriders, tadpoles, frogs, and even a harmless water snake all living in a special relationship with each other. Water serves like a magnet and frequently draws the larger forest residents (raccoon, opossum, fox, and deer) for a drink and perhaps a quick meal.

Clues to the Past (when the White Trail meets the Red, look for a large beech tree)

This beech tree was much smaller when the farmer used it for a fence post and stapled a new woven wire fence to its side. Each year trees grow by adding a new layer or ring of wood and bark around the surface of the trunk. During its growth, this beech has gradually engulfed the wire mesh of the fence until several inches of wood cover the wire. The fence pattern is still visible in the outer bark and the rusty wires protrude on each side. With the passage of time the exposed wires will rust away, and if the tree survives only the scarred trunk will bear witness to the fence within.



Step Into The Past (from White Trail, turn right on to the Red Trail)



This trail obviously follows an old roadbed which also served as a farm road in the past. There is also some evidence that this was originally used as a public road in the early 1800s. Imagine a heavy wagon bumping over the rocks at this very spot headed down to a road which followed Martin's Branch to Ivy Creek and to the community of Hydraulic once located at the spot where Ivy Creek joined the Rivanna River. Possibly the wagon was loaded with farm produce to go to the mill or to be sent by boat down the

Rivanna River to a market further east. Flooding of the Rivanna Reservoir has concealed all evidence of this link with our past except for the portions now preserved in the Ivy Creek Natural Area.