

Historic Background

The Bull Run Mountains are the easternmost mountains in Virginia, rising out of the Piedmont Plateau some seventeen miles east of the Blue Ridge. Although not of such national importance as the Blue Ridge, the Bull Run Mountains, ranging from 600 feet in elevation to over 1300 feet, are regionally significant. They contain the headwaters of three major watersheds, including the regionally important Occoquan. Their interesting rock formations, well developed forest and clear streams offer refreshment and solitude to a region which is currently undergoing significant change under the pressures of suburbanization.

In addition to their natural features, the mountains have considerable historic interest. The Piscataway Indians were early inhabitants, later driven out by white settlers in the 1700's. Springs along the mountains' eastern edge influenced the development of early North-South Indian trails, and traces of old roadbeds dating from early white settlement may still be found. North of Hopewell Gap was the tenant farm birthplace in 1737 of the frontier explorer, Simon Kenton. Various relics of this small farm period are still visible in the area. Among important historic structures standing today is Beverley Mill (circa 1742), a handsome five story stone building near Broad Run at Thoroughfare Gap. Agricultural prosperity during the early 19th century resulted in the

development of substantial farms and buildings which remain today.

The Manassas Gap Railroad was chartered in 1850 and, when not funded by the state, was financed and built by a group of upper Fauquier County men. In four years a group of Fauquier County farmers built a railroad from Prince William County to Strasburg; the first railroad across the Blue Ridge. The present Southern Railroad line through Thoroughfare Gap is the descendent of the Manassas Gap Railroad.

During the Civil War the Bull Run Mountains were on the periphery of several major battles. Stonewall Jackson and Jeb Stuart led famous marches through Thoroughfare Gap. However, the name and action most associated with the Bull Run Mountains is that of John Singleton Mosby who with "Mosby's Rangers" used the mountains as a staging area for guerrilla war against Union troops.

After the war and a period of general decline, the area again underwent large-scale agricultural development with the arrival in the 1930's and 40's of financially established families. Large farms were consolidated and

today they create a highly scenic and productive agricultural landscape easily viewed from the mountains.

Recent changes near the mountains have sparked serious concerns for their future. Housing threatens the mountains from the east. The completion of Interstate 66 will bring new access to the west and its present visual impact at Thoroughfare Gap is severe. Radar tower construction by the FAA on Signal Mountain, the highest peak in the range, is a visual and ecological encroachment on the mountains. Local zoning controls have given some protection to the mountains, but these will surely be inadequate to insure their long-term preservation as a natural area.

On the other hand, efforts to protect the mountains have been made recently by various groups. The Natural Area Council began to acquire land in the mountains in the early 1960s. The State's Outdoor Study Commission (1965) recommended preservation of the Bull Run Mountains. Focusing on their regional recreational potential, the 1970 and 1974 Virginia Outdoors Plans recommended the Bull Run Mountains as a state park. A State Critical Areas Study (1972) recommended critical areas designation. After a re-evaluation which now recognizes their limited potential

Beverley Mill

Although this structure is now in private conservation ownership, its visibility from Interstate 66 and frontage on the access road are additional incentives for its restoration and use. Its possibilities are manifold. The building could be used as an operating mill, local museum or interpretive center developed around an historic theme. Located on the edge of the Foundation's land, it could be the entry to the southern end of the Bull Run Mountains Natural Area. The historic link between this structure and the land beyond could be made tangible by a trail starting in this location and extending into the mountains.

The expected closing of the adjacent post office offers a chance to delete that section of frontage road from the State road system. A well-designed, controlled parking area would serve the mill. Additional site development for visitors could include picnic, rest and viewing areas. Continued efforts should be made by the Foundation and other groups toward the preservation and restoration of this valued structure and its integration with the present Virginia Outdoors Foundation holdings.

Flat Zone of Bell Tract

This part of the Foundation's most recent land acquisition falls just outside the mountain range. Thus, it lacks many of the dramatic qualities found in adjacent areas. In a low-use approach, however, this site area offers special opportunities. As a managed zone it is capable of supporting a variety of wildlife, including rabbit, fox, deer, raccoon, opossum, groundhog, squirrel, chipmunk, reptiles, pheasant, dove and many kinds of non-game birds. It should be re-emphasized that through proper management the diversity of this area can be maintained and even enhanced by selective mowing and edge maintenance, and by planting cover crops as habitat and food for birds and field animals.

Field research and programs centered on demonstrations and conservation practices could be carried out by such groups as the 4-H, FFA, scouts, ecology groups and university researchers. Plant walks, bird-watching and wildlife observation are popular day use activities well-suited to this zone. The building of open-air shelters, covered wooden camping platforms and other camping accommodations could aid the outdoor interpretive experience.

Controlled access would be from a peripheral parking lot near the site's SE corner. A trail would run to the tract's interior, eventually linking up with the Catlett's Branch Trail.

High Point—A Special Zone

Although not identified as a special use zone, this area is part of the Roland Loop Trail system and deserves special attention. Perched above Roland over steep rocky cliffs, it offers dramatic distant views to the Blue Ridge. But with this special positive experience comes the significant danger posed by the high cliffs; careful protective measures would have to be taken.

Undesignated Site Areas

Areas not designated as use zones (the majority of the property) were omitted for reasons of site constraints (topography, soils, rockiness, etc.) or for reasons of lower interpretive potential. Some of those zones are the most fragile site areas which require the protection a natural area affords, while others are areas currently relatively poor in interpretive potential but which may well become richer and more valuable in the future as time and maturity affect their character.