

Blackwater Creek Trail Walks: Come, Take a Walk With Me

By Thomas C. Tiller for Sphex February 15, 2018

This talk will be quite different from others I have done, e.g., the first congressional election and manipulation of the voting district, nuclear weapons, perspectives about dissent and loyalty in time of war, the corrosive effects of lying by public officials, and proposed amendments to the U.S. Constitution. In the one about lying I used a quote from St Augustine as an epigraph: “When disregard for the truth has been broken down or even slightly weakened, all things will remain doubtful.” In view of recent developments it was tempting to revisit some of those ideas, but in contrast his one is about a local venue I like to tell people about and will include personal observations and musings.

I greatly appreciate having the Blackwater Creek nature preserve and trails within our city and like to talk up usage whenever possible. A neighborhood path provides access to it about one-hundred yards from my backyard, so it is convenient and pleasant to take walks or bike rides there. When I do, questions about the history and original construction of the railroad that used to run through there occur, along with observations about the physical characteristics of the terrain. And many random thoughts about related things come to mind. In this paper I am inviting you to join me for a vicarious walk there. (If you don't enjoy walks or hearing about them, you have my consent to think about and discuss or question the other topics mentioned above.)

@ Trail

If I go for a walk on the Trail before Mary Frances is up in the morning or while she is away, I leave a note informing her. It says simply “@ trail.” In fact I leave similar brief but sufficient notes to her about any number of things: @ bank, @ meeting, @ fitness room, @ library, @ tennis, @ lecture, @ hardware store, etc. Likewise, I put out reminder notes to myself: car windows open, basement windows open, water new plant, laundry, etc. Certain things are repetitive enough that I started saving the notes for reuse. One day a visiting son picked up the little stack of such notes, read through them, then declared that they sum up my daily life in retirement. I prefer walking on the dirt trails but have to cross the paved one to get to them from our neighborhood. At the paved trail we will encounter some voices from the past.

A bit of history

The central portion of the paved trail was constructed on a section of the former track bed of the Virginia and Tennessee Rail Road (V&T), dating from the 1850's. Tom Ledford has done informative articles and talks about Lynchburg's railroads and Jim Elson's fine history of Lynchburg includes sections on the railroads and the nature area. And newspapers of the time include many details. The track began near Jefferson Street and the James River in Downtown Lynchburg, climbed a steep grade for the first half mile, curved through a 500-foot-long tunnel through solid rock, then proceeded on a much less steep grade to the present paved trail's Ed Page entrance near the intersection of Langhorne Road and Cranehill Drive near Halsey's Farm. From there the line extended westward toward Liberty (present-day Bedford), with stops along the way at Halsey's, Clay's Crossing and Forest Depot, and by 1855 on to Bristol. An advertised fare to Halsey's in 1853 it was 25 cents and all the way to Liberty was 75 cents. From Bristol

the line linked with a trans-Tennessee rail line to the Mississippi River, opening for Lynchburg new market areas and sources of raw materials as described by Ledford. [Ledford] The relatively level-grade track after the initial steep section was made possible by passage through the tunnel and a bridge over Blackwater Creek, along with cuts in hills and fills in valleys between the bridge and the present Langhorne Road. The cuts and fills varied to heights up to approximately 30 or more feet and depths of perhaps 50 feet.

From its founding at a ferry crossing at the James River, Lynchburg has always been concerned about transportation infrastructure. As reported in the local paper of the time, interest in a rail line from Lynchburg to the west dates at least as far back as 1828 when a meeting concerning internal improvements - turnpikes, canals and railroads - was held. Through the 1830's and '40's proponents of a Lynchburg to Tennessee rail line competed with turnpikes and canals for public and private interest and investments. Their motto became "We must have a railroad, and it must start from Lynchburg." [] After several false starts that could not be brought to fruition from the 1830's until the late 1840's, the Virginia legislature in 1848 and 49 made construction an actual possibility by approving yet another charter and subscribing enough stock along with the private investors. An 1852 newspaper report indicated that the state's commitment was for 3/5 of the incorporated capital - \$1,200,000 (\$36,163,00 in 2017 dollars) - with private investors responsible for the remaining \$800,000. (\$24,109,000 in 2017 dollars) [Lynchburg Virginian, March 29, 1852]

In mid January, 1850, Lynchburg was engaged in the high-spirited launching of that important new endeavor. The Lynchburg Virginian newspapers of January 21 and 24 that year reported on the groundbreaking ceremony for the V&T railroad and the celebratory dinner which followed on the next evening. Many toasts were offered at the dinner, attended by the governor, who travelled here by canal, and by railroad company directors and officers and other leaders. In fact, forty one toasts saluting success after decades of effort and touting the benefits eventually to be derived from the rail line were printed in the paper. [The Lynchburg Virginian] The mood of the toast makers seemed in tune with advice attributed to Chicago rebuilder Daniel H. Burnham: "Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans. Aim high and work. Remembering that a noble logical diagram once recorded will not die."

Following are some of the toasts: "Internal Improvements: Egypt's fertilizing river without its destroying floods." "The Legislature: The friends of internal improvement look anxiously to you, Neither as a spendthrift waste, Nor as a miser hoard." "The Virginia and Tennessee Rail Road: By our works we have shown our faith, and by our faith we will move mountains." "Railroads: ---- The iron bands, The proxies of men's clasping hands that bind together distant lands." "Tennessee: We welcome her to the Chesapeake, she beckons us to the father of waters." "Memphis and San Francisco -- Asia and America: The West has become the East and the East the West -- Forge the link and finish the circle." "Science: The mountains of Earth, and the lightnings (sic) of Heaven -- winds and waves yield their homage to thee." "Franklin and Arkwright,

Watts, Fitch, and Fulton – Fire, Earth, Air; the elements speak their fame – In their ennobling stir they feel themselves exalted.”, “The day we celebrate: It will have a record in other times than ours.” and “Woman: Language is not rich enough to paint her charms and gold not pure enough to purchase her love.” The following were included among the twenty-eight “volunteer toasts.”

We can hear echoes of the attitudes from Lynchburg’s citizens of more than a century and a half ago as a challenge to us in our own time. The citizens then were making their mark by “making no small plans” and by “working hard.”

The March 24, 1851, *Daily Virginian* repeated observations first printed in the *Wytheville Republican* from a recent visitor to Lynchburg. “For its population Lynchburg has exhibited a public spirit much beyond any town of the same size in the Union. “We visited the Tunnel of the Rail Road near Lynchburg – this great work is progressing rapidly to completion.... The cost of the depot and the first mile of road including the tunnel must be very heavy – yet it will be done and well done in a short time.” (It took the greater part of two years to complete the tunnel.) In addition, the city’s water works project was mentioned. The visitor also remarked that Lynchburg was noted for having wealthy tobacco men – several millionaires and a larger number with fortunes in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

When considered in light of the size of the population of Lynchburg at the time, getting the railroad built was a remarkable achievement. The 1850 census figures for the city were: white males – 2,335; white females 1,843; free black males – 223; free black

females – 268; enslaved males – 2,061; enslaved females – 1,341; total – 8071. Thus, the enslaved constituted forty-two percent of the total population. Furthermore, the six percent of the total population who were free Blacks enjoyed considerably less than total freedom as evidenced by the City’s night-watch and “a law passed requiring the courthouse bell to be rung at 9 and 9:30 p.m., at which time all slaves, free negroes and mulattos had to retire to their houses or be punished by the mayor.” [Christian, p 148]

Much of the land in Lynchburg now was part of Campbell County then. The 1850 census population of the county (including the City) was 23,245.

The tunnel through solid rock, referred to above, was done before the invention of pneumatic drills and hammers, the huge drilling worms, or dynamite available in our time. So how did they do it? Black powder, with all its volatility, was used. (This was less than two years after the famous Pheneas Gage brain injury accident involving an accidental black powder explosion during tunneling in Vermont.) And hard hand labor was employed - “Work performed by ... railroad workers [men and boys] included earth excavation, rock excavation, and the building of culverts [and use of hand carts].”

[Library of Va catalog] An ad by Chas. Scott in the *Lynchburg Virginian* of March 11, 1850, indicated who many of the laborers were: “NEGROES WANTED I wish to hire for the coming year a number of NEGRO MEN to work on the Virginia and Tennessee Rail Road near Lynchburg and also at or near Big Otter, in the county of Bedford. I will pay as much as any other responsible contractor.” No doubt enslaved persons did much of the heavy hand work on the railroad and made possible a good bit of the wealth in the City, as they did throughout the South at the time. When checking old newspapers it is

always painful to see how casually the institution of slavery was woven into society, as slavery's descendent, Jim Crow, was in later years.

There is so much more that could be said about the V&T railroad but I am going to relate just the following scenes. The Hollins Mill Road (then called Lexington turnpike) tunnel was completed August 28, 1851. W. Asbury Christian, in his history of Lynchburg, and Elson in his, tell the following story. On Feb 18, 1852, "The hills were first awaked by the scream of a locomotive whistle. On this day the 'Virginia,' the first engine on the Virginia and Tennessee road, was out 'exercising.' Great crowds gathered to witness the strange sight, for few had ever before seen a locomotive. When it started up the road the people cheered, and a wag of the town started to run after it. He saw it disappear in the tunnel, and then returned. The crowd laughed and jeered at him. He replied, 'If I didn't catch the thing, I ran it in its hole.' " [Christian, p. 153] If it didn't really happen the story is so good it should have!

It wasn't just the construction work that was dangerous. In 1852, nearly all the first locomotives purchased were blowing up. "The first was the 'Lynchburg,' which blew up about a mile from Forest and killed a man named Wood from Boston and Henry Long [of Lynchburg]." [Christian, p. 157]

Though hard to imagine in an area that is so peaceful now, in their book on Lynchburg in the Civil War, Morris and Foutz tell another story connected to the V&T railroad and the Trail – that of one sector of the "Battle of Lynchburg" on Saturday, June 18, 1864. Some of the inner defenses were established specifically to protect the V&T rail road bridge over Ivy Creek. One line of defense "terminated on the farm of Seth Halsey near

Blackwater Creek.” (A street named Halsey Road runs through the Lynchburg Ready Mix concrete operation between Langhorne and Old Forest Roads.) On the morning of the 18th, the rebels, from recently prepared earth works and artillery just beyond Blackwater Creek, repulsed Union attacks. (*Lynchburg and the Civil War*, Morris and Foutz) (See the historic-site marker in front of the Agudath Shalom Synagogue on Langhorne Road.)

One of Joe Stinnett’s excellent vignettes of news from the local paper of the Civil War years added yet another war-time scene to imagine. This original news item was from the September 15, 1863 *Daily Virginian*: “A call was made yesterday on the Militia, Public Guard, and Convalescent Soldiers ... to proceed up the Va. and Tenn. Railroad in anticipation of [a] Yankee raid. ... they were under arms by four o’clock” (*The News and Daily Advance*, Sept. 15, 2013). Imagine, if that order had not later been cancelled, seeing that crew – some probably on crutches – marching up the V & T line from the lower basin toward the tunnel!

But I don’t want to leave the impression that walks on the Blackwater Creek trails raise only thoughts about the railroad and Lynchburg’s history. There are many other pleasures to be enjoyed there.

In his history of Lynchburg, Jim Elson included a section on the 300 acre Blackwater Creek Natural Area, comprising the central portion of the paved trail, the dirt creek-side trail and the 115 acre Ruskin S. Freer Nature preserve, a project envisioned at the time of the 1076 Bicentennial, which was dedicated May 17, 1979. [Elson, pp 443,444] The

James River portion of the paved trail lies on the railroad track bed and bridges crossing Percival's Island in the James River from Lynchburg to Amherst County.

The unicorn

I think it was in 2012. For at least two months reports of sightings had been circulating among regular Blackwater Creek Trail users. Even though I was regularly on the creek trails for morning walks, I had not seen it. So one day I decided to go around dusk to one of the reported sighting locations in the Freer nature trail section. Making my way from the paved trail toward the creek, my attention was drawn to a man standing motionless and focused on something in the undergrowth. So I stopped in place and visually searched to find what he was seeing among the spicebush, autumn olive and other undergrowth. At first nothing unusual came to view; soon though there was movement and two deer became visible – not an unusual sight. I was about to move on but just at that moment saw something else move. Finally, there it was – the unicorn. Its striking white coat contrasted with the color of everything else in the woods. The special

creature moved in and out of sight as it foraged, but its ears were usually visible, showing in the openings among the scrubs. The other hiker and I watched for as long as it remained visible to us. But wait, it didn't have a horn growing out of its forehead. Oh well, maybe it was a young one and maybe they don't have a horn. Some probably think it wasn't a unicorn, but rather an albino deer. I'm pretty sure, though, that James Thurber would have recorded that it was a unicorn!

Other walkers

I enjoy seeing younger people gliding along with an effortless looking stride. Even though I know I don't move as fast as I once did, I still tend to think I'm going at a good speed when walking for exercise on the trail. But then I notice that people behind me are closing the gap between us, or if they are in front of me the gap between us is widening. Without intending to, I find that I am measuring my speed in relation to other walkers. That has led to some observations about perceived vs. actual speed.

A New Theory

How can it be,
When I go for a trail walk,
That some other, I perceive slower,
Walkers go past me?

And how *can* it be,
That, other, and I perceive slower,
Walkers, if already ahead,
Lengthen the gap between them and me?

How *can* it be,
When I think I am walking so fast,
And I think they are walking so slow,
I just can't see.

How *can* it be, I ask again,
This calls for experts to help me understand.
But Max Wertheimer's not here to lend a hand,
He who psychology's perception studies began.

And Einstein and Maxwell are not here now,
To offer a theory about curving light,
To answer my query.
So I try from my own brow.

Finally I admit that the light, curved or not,
By which I judge my speed relative to others,
Has stayed the same,
But I have changed a lot,
During a voyage of more than eight decades.

The special witness oak tree

In the woods certain trees catch my attention and are noticed and admired over and over again during repeat walks. One such for me was an oak that stood out in height and girth above any other in its sector. It was old and had witnessed and withstood a lot in its lifetime. Then one day I saw something different on the ground about the tree – something that added an almost magical quality to it – a “fairy ring” of mushrooms had sprung up around the tree. Improbably, they formed such a perfect circle that it seemed they had been placed with aid of a compass. If there were real fairies that is the kind of magic they might do! I paid even more attention to the tree.

My mother especially liked trees and she liked them best of all when they were bare of leaves, saying that was when you could tell what they are “made of” - meaning that is when one could tell what their internal character is really like. I had thought she would like to see this special tree in winter, but had not otherwise associated it with her, until one day about the time she had an illness that laid her low in her late nineties, the tree fell

during a severe wind storm. Now both of them were down at the same time and I did associate the fallen tree with her. The tree had toppled in such a way that, although most of the roots were ripped out of the ground, the ones on the side to which it had fallen were still partially in the ground. For a time, from the sustenance that could be maintained from a minimally intact root system, the downed tree made an effort to support life in a few limbs, but of course could never recover and sustain a fully viable life. On some of my walks I still pass the remnants of that tree and remember the healthy times.

Speaking of trees ... in the sections of the trail where I take most of my walks, oak (several varieties), mockernut hickory, sycamore, and tulip (yellow) poplar, walnut, locust, hornbeam, ironwood, sourwood, beech, ash, redbud, dogwood, and cucumber trees are plentiful, with American hollies, a few maples and a magnolia or two interspersed among them. Many, many of the pine trees, which probably were the first to reforest this section, are down or dying now. I especially enjoy the view of the gleaming white upper limbs of sycamore trees along the creek banks from higher trails above them,.

Thistle seed A lone thistle seed floats by. Buoyed by its attached fluff, it is riding the steady northeast airflow of this day. It has been waiting for some time for release from its mother plant and for freedom to find its place in the world.

What was she thinking?

I encountered only one person on the creek-side trail today – a woman, perhaps forty, healthy looking, with two dogs, freed of their leashes while on the dirt trails, a short distance ahead of her and wet from having frolicked in the creek. As the owner watched, one of her dogs approached me, shook - in the way dogs can - a spray of creek water all over me, then leaped on me with muddy, wet feet to offer a friendly greeting. “I hope she didn’t jump on you and get you muddy and wet.,” the owner said, willfully denying what she had just witnessed.

One particular January 24

The steep north and east-facing cliffs on the side of the trail below the Hollins Mill tunnel - cliffs altered more than 160 years ago to make way for the Virginia and Tennessee railroad track - have grown long, white beards since last month. Slow-seeping underground water, escaping through fissures in the massive stone cliff, met by days and nights of sub-freezing temperatures, gradually form icicles as cavern limestone stalactites do – some to great lengths and graceful, fantastic shapes. Some are more than eight feet long. In our climate, though, their span of existence in this form will be short.

On a winter day

A good bit of the surface of Blackwater Creek has been frozen for a few days. Now, after warmer days, much of the ice over the deeper portion of the stream has melted back with an uneven edge, leaving the Creek trimmed with a white lace near the banks.

The close hill and cello falls

Although I walk (frequently) or bike (occasionally) at times on various trails, there is one section through and around a hill close to home that I have traversed many hundreds of times. It contains several creek-side access trails, a portion of the creek-side trail and a short section of the paved trail where it cuts through what was the highest point between Jefferson St and Langhorne Road. (The elevation where Blackwater Creek joins the James River is 522', the highest point on a trail over that hill is 680', at the peak of that hill is 703', and the creek side at the base of that hill is 548'.) One of the access trails goes through a valley between that and another hill. In the valley is one of the little streams that drains water to the Creek. It is easy to imagine the scene as if one were seeing - from high above - a river flowing out of mountains and through a steep-sided canyon. That stream runs much of its course over a very rocky bed, which creates several tiny waterfalls along the way. The scale of these miniature "falls" to real falls is something like an inch to many feet. The climactic "waterfall" is considerably larger than the others. It flows over large boulders; when the flow is strong enough it falls freely into a basin naturally lined with stone. The resultant sound is mellower than the tiny falls above which produce a lighter sound. It is like the difference between the sound of Heifetz on violin and YoYo Ma on cello. I named this last one cello falls. Just at the basin of cello falls there is a short (only ten foot long) little bridge that carries the trail across the stream. And immediately on the opposite side of the bridge the bed of the stream levels and the water ponds. At that place water striders - those insects that walk on water - usually are there and doing their thing. There is a delightful little children's book - Joyful Noises: Poems For Two Voices by Paul Fleischman. The poems

in the book are constructed so that the two readers alternately speak lines, and speak a few lines in unison. I liked to read those poems with grandchildren when they were younger and I could entice them to join me. The narrators of the poems speak from the point of view of a particular insect. In one, water striders playfully tease those who ask how to walk on water as the striders do. *Water Striders* by Paul Fleischman: *
 “Whenever we’re asked if we walk on water we answer Of course. To be sure. It’s quite true. *Whenever we’re asked if we walk on it often we answer Quite often. Each day. All day through. *Should we be questioned on whether it’s easy we answer Quite easy. A snap. It’s a cinch. *Should we be told that it’s surely a miracle we reply Balderdash! Rubbish! Nonsense! *Whenever we’re asked for instructions we always say Come to the pond’s edge and do as we do. Put down one foot then put down another, resting on the thin film on the surface. Believe me, there’s no call to be nervous as long as you’re reasonably mindful that you --- ----- But by that time our student no matter how prudent has usually don’t ask me why sunk from view.”

On destiny and mortality

Speaking of insects Sometimes while walking near the Creek in a warm spring season I see swarms of what I think are mayflies. There is another children’s “poem for two” by Fleishman in which mayflies, from the perspective of their brief, one-day lifespan, speak to the rest of nature about destiny and mortality. *Mayflies* “Your moment Mayfly month Your hour Mayfly year Your trifling day Our life We’re mayflies just emerging rising from the river, born this day in May birthday **and** dying day, this particle of time this single sip of living all that we’re

allowed. We're mayflies by the millions fevered frenzied rushed no redwood's centuries to squander as we please. We're mayflies swarming, swerving, rising high then falling, courting on the wing, then mating in midair. We're mayflies laying eggs our final, frantic act. *Sun's low light's weak in haste we launch them down the stream. We're mayflies lying dying floating by the millions on the very stream from which we sprung so very long ago this morning back when we were young."

There is a variety of wildlife in that one hill section. Sightings include fish, blue herons, ducks, geese, hawks, vultures, our common small birds, deer, one raccoon in daytime, skunks, squirrels, chipmunks, groundhogs, turtles, snakes (few and mainly in spring warming time), one fox, tree cuttings as evidence of beavers, owl calls at night as evidence of their presence and of course that one unicorn.

Sounds

I enjoy the different sounds heard while walking on parts of the trail directly beside the creek.

If I am not thinking about it while walking on the creek-side trail, I become aware at first almost unconsciously of a change in the sound of the water flowing beside me. As I move forward that awareness seeps into my consciousness and my sight is drawn to the small rapids at what I think are little fall lines in the creek. If I am thinking about being near rapids as I approach the area, I consciously try to discern exactly when I can first hear them. That is something like looking for the very first instant you can see the thin, thin crescent of a new moon.

Another delightful sound is that of young children marveling about their discoveries while walking with their parents.

Yet another especially enjoyed sound is created when, after a rain has left drops on the many, many leaves of a large tree, and a breeze too high to be felt at ground level ruffles leaves at the crown of the tree. That begins a cascading effect as the leaves at each level release their raindrops to the next level, and the next and the next, and finally in a brief shower right down to the ground.

And a very delicate sound is the one created by snow flakes falling on the dead leaves of young trees (beech and hornbeam I think) that retain their leaves until spring when their new buds approach. On some days the Trail woods are silent enough to hear that.

There always are some uprooted trees which have been caught by standing trees. When the “catching tree” sways on windy days, especially if the trunks of the two are in contact with each other up high, a characteristic groaning or grinding sound is produced. Those sounds always make me think of the descriptions in sailing ship stories about the sounds produced by masts - sounds that, especially when made at night, would spook sailors.

Flight of the heron

There are two locations on the creek where I often see a blue heron. My favorite place for spotting one is near one of my regular walks – a place where the stream is straight for a hundred yards or so and then sharply bends. From time to time a heron will be standing like a statue on a log or in a shallow place in the water patiently waiting for a meal to come by. Sometimes I will stop and watch it. Occasionally while I am there the heron will decide to change locations. Its large wings produce quite a sound on liftoff and the

heron, revealing more of its blue coloring, flies upstream low over the water, gracefully rounding the next curve in the creek as it goes out of sight.

May Apple way

There are many locations throughout the Freer nature trail area where May Apple plants are abundant, and one place where that is especially so – I call it May Apple way. It is on a gentle and wooded slope. In autumn leaf drop gives the area a thick blanket of leaves which settles down under bare trees over the winter. By January and into February, especially if you walk there on a heavily clouded day, the sky is gray, the bare tree colors are brown and gray and the ground cover is brown, so the entire area seems dormant, except for the almost iridescent green moss at the base of some tree trunks. Then sometime, by late March maybe or early April, a few whitish-green, curved sprouts will start appearing, having pushed themselves up through the soil and decaying leaves. In just a few days those early sprouts are joined by many, many more. In a few weeks the sprouts spread their umbrella-like leaves and provide a green carpet for that otherwise still dormant looking section of the woods. Their fresh, tender looking green is a very welcome contrast to the winter-dull colors of bare trees and fallen leaves. They lead the woods into the coming spring season – I welcome them joyfully. Soon a few of the May Apple plants will show a delicate white blossom on the stem underneath the umbrella of leaves – a blossom which will produce a small, hard, green “may apple.” For so many plants I see only a few “apples.” If that is what seeds next year’s crop of plants, each apple must provide a huge number of seeds. Though in late winter or early spring May

apple plants carpet large sections of the ground, by early August absolutely no sign of them will remain.

Cowpasture/James River - Yadkin/Peedee River most deleted

When I walk beside Blackwater Creek thoughts often turn to my childhood, playing in a creek and river. Aware that its water is on the way to the James river and then to the Atlantic Ocean, I often think of similarity of the Cowpasture/James River here and the Yadkin/Peedee river in North and South Carolina. They are of similar lengths and both have histories as ancient Native American gathering places. Artifacts from both the Yadkin and the James have been dated to 12,000 or more years ago, When I was a child during WWII, my Dad had two gardens each year. Almost all families in our small town in North Carolina had a “victory garden” in their back yard but my family also had a another much larger garden on a plot of land beside the Yadkin river – land enriched by frequent flooding. I enjoyed planting time in the spring and finding arrow heads or points there but not hoeing/weeding time in the summer.

Mushrooms and other funguses deleted

Woodpecker bottom

There is a section of the creek-side trail that is on very low land where there are a number of dead, but still standing, trees. It seems to a favorite place of large woodpeckers. Their drumming sounds are frequently heard there and the lack of leaves on the dead trees makes sighting them much easier than when they are in live trees in leaf. Some of the woodpeckers seen there appear to be as large as chickens.

Grandson and tradition: finding competence and the path home

When he was younger, I taught one my grandsons to find the correct neighborhood path to get back to our house by using a certain rail fence. We took the neighborhood path up the hill on the opposite side of the paved trail by turning when we reached the sixth upright in the rail fence.

The mountain side

There is a place on a creek-side trail that creates the illusion of being on a mountain-side trail even though it is not at a place where the trail is at its highest point with a view to water below. This section of the Trail ascends along a rather shear bank to an area of some large boulders. The feel of being on a mountain trail is enhanced by rock strewn trail, exposed tree roots, mountain laurel and wild flowers growing there and the view of the Creek below. At many places on the trail the dirt and rocks sparkle with a some kind of glitter substance (is it silicon?) - on this section it is most abundant.

Peninsula Point at the Confluence of Ivy and Blackwater Creeks most deleted

I like to view the confluence of Blackwater Creek and Ivy Creeks at peninsula point. Thereafter they are known as Blackwater Creek, even though it appears to me that it is Blackwater that flows into Ivy. Sometimes, after a heavy local thunderstorm, the water in one of the Creeks will be very muddy from storm runoff erosion, while the other may be clear. You can tell from that where the thunderstorm was centered. Often, the bridge

near there has served as a place from which children delight in dropping “helicopter” seeds readily available nearby. One day I encountered a very out-of-place risqué happening near there, but no further description is provided here because I do not want an X-rating on my paper.

As that trail crosses the creek on that bridge and continues on toward Langhorne Road, the next prominent feature is a thicket of very tall bamboo opposite a boardwalk around a steep bank. I have seen the Blackwater Creek level rise above that boardwalk (about eight feet above its usual level) after heavy thunderstorms. Further on there is a much higher and longer boardwalk clinging to the side of a much steeper hill side.

Rocks

Of course rocks - large ones and small ones - are present throughout the trail system. A bit more than a half mile from the Ed Page entrance – at a place where railroad construction cut through the peak of a hill - the “cut” left rock walls on each side of the trail. There the walls seem to be of up thrust slabs which present many flat surfaces. On them, names, initials and dates have been chiseled over the years. Large slabs scale off from time to time so who knows how many engravings have been lost. The oldest dated ones I have found read J R Da __ August 10 1882, and JCM 4, 26, 1950. The JRDa __ one is quite close to the ground and carefully crafted and outlined with a decorative frame. J R, or JR’s commemorator, must have worked at it a long time in an uncomfortable posture.

Patterns: Nature’s Art

When the creek is low, the water clear, and the day sunny, nature’s artistic designs in the creek are highlighted. Some are created by the currents on the creek bed where the creek

flows alternately over scoured earth, sandy bottoms, pebbles, or solid rock formations. Overlaying the creek- bed patterns is a second set of patterns on the surface of the water – variously created by main-channel flow, ripples over the various bottoms, and backward swirls where the flow meets obstacles. Lighting varying from full sunlight to the bottom at some places, dappled sunlight and shadows at others, and full shade at still others, adds to the variety of the patterns. When not muddy with runoff of a recent rain, the apparent color of the water varies; on cloudy days it presents as if dull green or brown, on blue sky days as clear, sparkling or even blue. White water shows at several places where the creek bed falls. Artists, architects and designers take inspiration from nature’s patterns like these.

Train Chain Reaction Observed deleted

Ed Page / Planning Commission / erosion and streams

When I was on the School Board in the 1970’s and the Planning Commission in the 1980’s, there often were representatives of organizations monitoring the meetings. In those eighteen years no one was more persistent or effective than Ed Page – a friend of streams and valleys. If an item affecting erosion control and streams was on the Planning Commission agenda, it was likely that he would have a helpful suggestion to make. One I remember had to do with the construction of a row of small offices more or less opposite the Agudath Shalom Synagogue on Langhorne Road. He knew runoff from the construction site and paved parking lot would cause erosion and dump it into Blackwater Creek. His suggestion was to add a curbing at the offices’ parking lot around the curve

to a point where the run off could be allowed to flow down the paved road and dump over rip rap directly into the Creek. This would prevent erosion between the parking lot and the creek. The developer readily agreed. So when I see evidence in the creek of uncontrolled muddy run off from other projects, I appreciate again the effective advocate for streams and valleys - Ed Page. When I see that curbing now, in my mind it is the Ed Page memorial curbing. (Portions of that curbing are in need of repair.)

I have spared you from other subjects such as the changing course of the creek, mushrooms and fungi, snakes and similar shapes, startup of a long train, etc.

Overall, the trail is part of many of my days and provides many pleasurable experiences.

So, I'll end where I began: Bring your curiosity, imagination, powers of observation and **come, take a walk with me.**