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Footprints Across the South: Bartram's Trail Revisited

James Kautz

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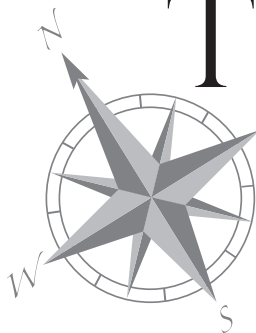
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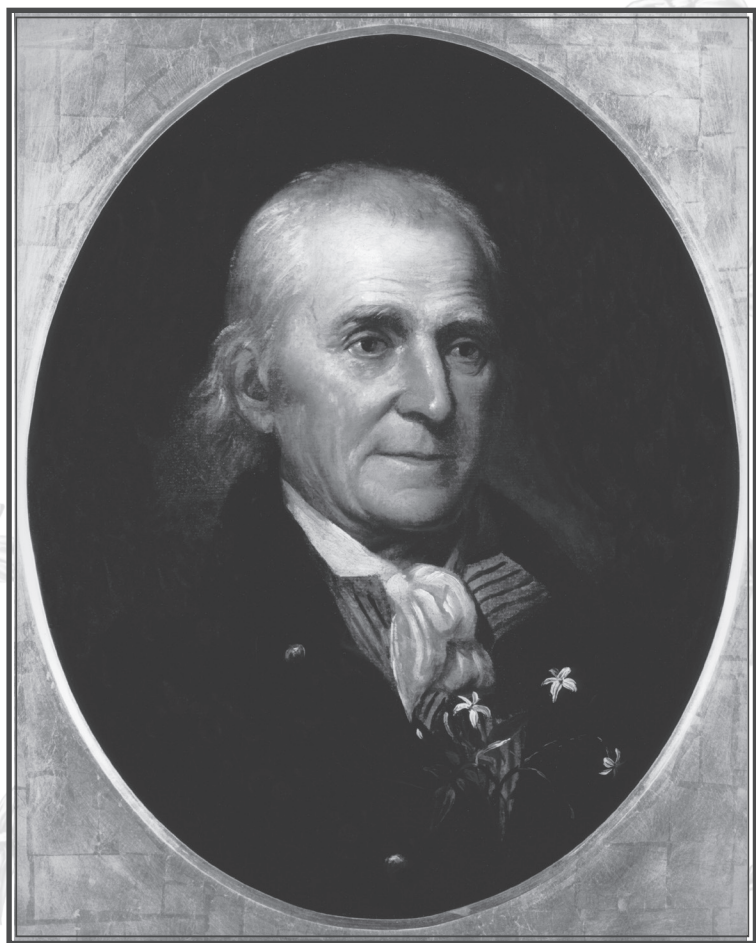
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FOOTPRINTS ACROSS THE SOUTH
BARTRAM'S
TRAIL



Revisited



FOOTPRINTS ACROSS THE SOUTH
BARTRAM'S
TRAIL



Revisited

by JAMES KAUTZ



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*T*his book is dedicated to
*M*aria *G*reene.

*W*ife, fellow saunterer, and irreplaceable home base, her stories of
*S*outhern life enrich my understanding and appreciation of my adopted land.

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* Maps by Brad Sanders.

** Used with permission of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Acknowledgments

Multitudes of gracious people have aided me along my journey. Many of them are mentioned in this book. Several went far beyond what I expected.

My patient and gracious wife, Maria Greene, has been a companion and champion of my work. She has shared with me stories from her girlhood home on the loamy slopes above Gum Swamp in Middle Georgia and these have enriched my understanding of the folk who followed Bartram into the heartland of the Southeast. Her son Tyler Turk, my stepson, has wandered with me along byways, cast his lures into streams that Bartram fished, and with adolescent frankness reminded me that there is more to life than following a pioneer across seven states.

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Brad Sanders, passionate follower of Bartram and author of a valuable guidebook to his travels, counseled and guided me. His maps have become part of this book.

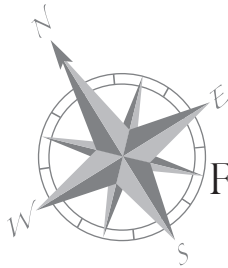
Zelda White scoured my text (when she edited our work during my years at the Georgia Division of Aging Services, we called it “Zeldarizing”), reminding me of the proper use of the Oxford comma and straightening errant syntax.

Melissa White and other librarians of the Cobb County Public Library brought me scores of books through Interlibrary Loans.

Without the faith that Dr. Laura Dabundo, Director of the Kennesaw State University Press, had in this work and the wise counsel and editing of Dr. Laura McGrath, this book could not have seen much light of day.

Thanks, fellow travelers.





FINDING BARTRAM'S TRAIL

Water draining from the belly of my canoe dripped onto the windshield as I drove up the mountain. The day of paddling had been a nice retreat from the bureaucratic canyons of downtown Atlanta. Three of us, an Alabamian, a Texan, and I, had guided our solo canoes through the waves of the Nantahala under clear October skies.

At the end of the trip, we straightened our legs, hoisted our boats onto the racks of our vehicles, and packed our gear. My colleagues left for their homes, but I wanted one more cool, quiet night in the mountains.

“Bartram 4,” said the hand-lettered wooden plaque on the key chain. Pulling a duffel bag from the back of my truck, I crossed the gravel parking lot, walked down the wooden steps of Nantahala Outdoor Center’s “Base Camp,” and opened the door of Room 4 in the Bartram cabin. A bare bulb hung from the ceiling. Grey, plastic-covered mattresses lay on the double-deck bunks nailed to shellacked plywood walls. One window. A space heater. Four coat hooks on the wall. A broom in the corner.

I unrolled my sleeping bag and flopped on the bunk. My left leg cramped in a perverse celebration of its freedom from the thigh strap of my canoe. *I'd better walk.* In the loft of the outfitter's store, behind the T-shirts and paddling gear, I found the book display. There, along with guides to the Appalachian Trail, books on camping, and stories of the Cherokees, I read black letters on the green spine of a paperback: *The Travels of William Bartram.*

Michael Frome's *Strangers in High Places* had introduced me to Bartram several years before. I recalled that Bartram was a pioneering botanist who traveled in the 1770s from Philadelphia to the edge of the Smokies and wrote



Footprints across the South

about this region's trees and Cherokee inhabitants. Since then, I had seen historical markers of the "Bartram Trail"—one in Georgia near a rusting mobile home beside a clear-cut forest, another in a Baton Rouge subdivision, and one near the canoe put-in on the Nantahala.

Maybe I ought to know more about you, Mr. Bartram, if I'm going to sleep in your cabin tonight, I thought. I gave the clerk a ten dollar bill. She slipped the book into a brown paper bag and handed me my change. I walked back across the river and tossed the sack on my bunk.

A warm shower refreshed me. In the kitchen above the bathhouse I opened a package of seasoned noodles, stirred in a can of tuna, heated it on a stove, and chatted with a couple of Londoners overnighiting at Base Camp as a respite from their through-hiking along the Appalachian Trail.

Then, when darkness had wrapped the complex in a quiet envelope, I crawled into my sleeping bag, propped my head on my duffel, and thumbed through *Travels*. Scattered through the pages of text were drawings: a turtle, flowers, and an arresting portrait of a Creek Indian chief who, despite his tonsure, feathers, and the gorget hung around his neck, looked like a professor I once knew. I delighted in Bartram's description of the "Vale of Cowee," a two-hundred-year-old description of the valley of the Little Tennessee River that I had followed to reach the Nantahala. A few pages farther, I read how, a dozen or so miles from my bunk, the botanist had crossed the Nantahala and met Cherokee Chief Atakullakulla and his entourage.

I switched off the light, dozed off into the cool darkness, and saw Bartram eating hard biscuits, dried meat, and moldy cheese. I'd cooked packaged food on a gas stove. He slept on skins spread on a mattress of hemlock needles. My synthetic-filled sleeping bag lay on a soft bed in a tight room. He talked with a red-skinned diplomat on horseback. My companions had been paddlers from Texas and Alabama and hikers from England. I imagined him standing, bewildered, beside the Class III rapid known as Nantahala Falls, watching yellow rafts full of overweight Americans plunging through white water.

In the quiet of the North Carolina forest, I saw the expanse of a continent, not in miles but in years. America the Developed paraded through my dreams and I awoke, an artifact in an affluent land. And I was curious. *Where did Bartram travel? What do those places look like today? Could I find a grove of hemlocks that he saw? Or would it be clear-cut? What chemicals run through the stream where he marveled over tiny golden fish? What is left of his world? And what has replaced it?*

I knew that the children and grandchildren of the Cherokees and Muscogees who had helped him along his path had walked the "Trail of Tears." But what else had changed? How? And why?



And so my quest began.

I chose not to try to reconstruct Bartram's journey. Others had debated which mountain he crossed or where he saw the "Great Buffalo Lick," and I would learn from their books and articles. But my goal would be to see, understand, and describe places and people of a nation that had traveled more than two centuries into Bartram's future.

Maps of eight southeastern states, Charleston, Baton Rouge, and dozens of other places covered the passenger seat of my truck. Charts of the St. Johns River in Florida guided me. Books on archaeology, ecology, and sociology made their way to my desk. So did works on Bartram's geography and personality. I waded through swamps and snagged my pants legs on briars. Bald eagles, ospreys, and egrets rode the currents above me, manatees passed beneath my keel, and alligators gave me a wary eye. Live oaks provided respite on sultry days in Florida and Georgia; logs in the North Carolina mountains warmed me. Chiggers from a longleaf forest burrowed under my skin, keeping me awake for nights. Descendants of Wrightsborough, a village where Bartram spent a few nights, welcomed me.

Parking lots and subdivisions surround ancient mounds. Acres of tomatoes grow where a trader and his Cherokee wife served Bartram barbecued venison and strawberries. A 450-foot-tall state capitol looks down on industrial complexes that cover his most western pathways.

Although a few places—Martin Creek Falls in the Georgia mountains is a rare example—resemble the scenes Bartram described, most spots underscore Wendell Berry's observation "that it is no longer possible to imagine how this country looked in the beginning, before the white people drove their plows into it" ("A Native Hill" 15).

Along the way, I have asked myself, *Why Bartram? Why start with him? Why* has this man, a ne'er-do-well for the first three decades of his life, sparked my interest and the admiration of thousands of others for two centuries? He was not the first European to reach the remote places of the Southeast. Conquistadors, missionaries, gold-seekers, traders, farmers, planters, and herdsmen preceded him. He was not even the first naturalist on the frontier. But, while history and nature buffs have not established a "Mark Catesby Trail," a "Conquistador Trail," a "Missionary Trail," or a "Gold-Quest Trail" across six states, they have marked the Bartram Trail.

Some are drawn to Bartram by their love of the plants he was the first to identify, others for his sympathetic description of the Indians. Many find in his writings a sensitivity toward nature's intricacies, a passion for what we now speak of as "ecology."

His vigor and stamina are marvels. He went into Alabama and Louisiana in a steaming summer. He penetrated dark wildernesses in rugged mountains,



ate fish seasoned with the juice of wild oranges, and awoke to a wolf stealing his stash of leftover supper. He could, when necessary, slug a pursuing alligator with his paddle. He could also enter a friendly conversation with a gun-toting Indian who had sworn to kill the next white man he saw.

Bartram's place in history is part of my attraction to him. He attended the American Southland on the day of the nation's birth pangs. Son of King George's Royal Botanist, he left his home in Philadelphia when the colonies were smarting under the stress of English tyranny. By the time he returned almost four years later, his countrymen—some of them personal friends—had signed the Declaration of Independence and were engaged in combat with British armies on the very ground he had explored. With eloquence, he described the mountain streams, minuscule darters, and the towns of two nations of Native Americans only a few years before European Americans began to believe that their "manifest destiny" gave them license to transform the continent from wilderness and pastures into urban sprawl.

Above all, his vision and sense of wonder intrigue me. As any scientist should, he saw the little things: roots, stems, and petioles. He dissected a turtle and examined its viscera. He sketched fish scales and described soaring birds, giant snakes, and alligator nests. We learn from his writings the architecture of a Cherokee council house and the layout of Creek towns. But Bartram saw more than the physical pieces of the New World. Panoramas of the fields, forests, skies, and streams breathed the holy into his soul while the prospect of a burgeoning nation wrenched from him passionate prayers for the Creator's guidance and forgiveness. His "wondrous kind of floundering eloquence" led Thomas Carlyle to propose that *Travels* is "a kind of biblical article" (Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 8 July 1851).

William Bartram was a "saunterer." In his essay "Walking," Henry David Thoreau says that the word "saunter" came from the French "sainte terre" (Holy Land). Children in France said of pilgrims walking the lanes of Europe on their ways to the Sainte Terre, "There goes a Sainte-Terrer," a Saunterer, a Holy-Lander. A saunterer is one who wanders, but not aimlessly. He walks into wildness, ever westward, toward the frontier. His quest is nature; his discovery is the emptiness of "civilization." "For every walk is a sort of crusade," writes Thoreau, "preached by some Peter the Hermit in us, to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the Infidels."

Admittedly, Bartram's wanderings provided him a livelihood. And, yes, he sometimes was a Chamber-of-Commerce-type promoter. But it is the mind and spirit of the saunterer, revealed in dozens of pages throughout his *Travels*, that have sealed his fame and attracted latter-day saunterers to follow him.



Bartram lifted his voice in praise to a Divine Force that cares about the earth. And he took moral lessons from fish swimming in a subtropical spring basin. He was a poet, an American Wordsworth on horseback. Bartram knew that

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

(William Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned")

While followers of Bartram's trail open themselves to such impulses, they also find themselves in a culture whose driving forces have no clue about what "vernal woods" may teach. The humus of mainstream America is corporations. Its flowers are profits. The twenty-first-century saunterer will encounter those who, caught in the web of the multinational economy, have somehow come to believe that the streams, forests, and roadsides are no more than disposal systems for whatever they wish to discard.



Over the past three decades, a tireless group of volunteers, funded by donations and small grants, has laid out the "Bartram Trail." Drawn on maps, marked by metal signs beside highways and city streets and by blazes on trees, the trail follows the overall pathway of the eighteenth-century naturalist. Francis Harper's edition of Bartram's *Travels* led the way, identifying most of Bartram's sites and species. More recently, Brad Sanders has given detailed directions to Bartram's locations and present-day sites along the trail. Charles D. Spornick, Alan R. Cattier, and Robert J. Greene have published a guide for outdoor enthusiasts and history buffs that follows Bartram's path. Others have documented the plants and animals that Bartram identified. The professional and avocational botanists are more qualified than I to discuss the whereabouts of these species and to describe them in modern science's terms.

This book is a view of the early twenty-first-century landscapes along Bartram's trail. I have met the people who live there, seen and smelled the industries that have sunk their steel and concrete roots into the soil of his venues. This is the story of the America that grew around the Bartram Trail.



More on William Bartram and the Bartram Trail

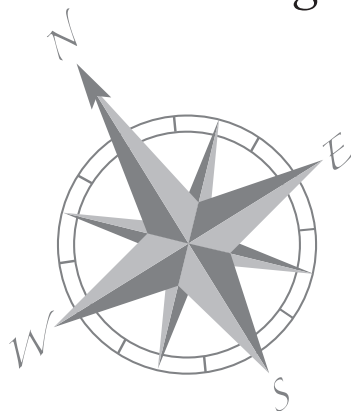
- Bartram Trail Conference. <<http://www.bartramtrail.org>>. This website lists recent publications about Bartram, research tracing Bartram's route, and information about the Bartram Trail Conference.
- Cashin, Edward J. *William Bartram and the American Revolution on the Southern Frontier*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2000. Cashin's book sets Bartram's travels within the backdrop of the political and military activities of the Revolutionary period.
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- Oeland, Glen. "A Naturalist's Vision of Frontier America: William Bartram." *National Geographic* Mar. 2001: 104-125. This article provides an illustrated review of Bartram's exploration and his impact on botany and conservationism in the United States.
- Sanders, Brad. *Guide to William Bartram's Travel*. Athens: Fevertree, 2002. Sanders's well-illustrated tracing of Bartram's journeys features synopses of Bartram's activities, maps, and descriptions of twentieth-century sites along and near his routes.
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- Slaughter, Thomas P. *The Natures of John and William Bartram*. New York: Knopf, 1996. *Natures* is an analytical study of the minds and relationship of William Bartram and his father.
- Spornick, Charles D., Alan R. Cattier, and Robert J. Greene. *An Outdoor Guide to Bartram's Travels*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2003. This book is a guide to foot, horseback, and canoe travel along the areas explored by Bartram.
- Waselkov, Gregory A. and Kathryn E. Holland Braund. *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1995. This text contains descriptions and analyses of William Bartram's writings concerning the American Indians, including *Travels* and correspondence.

Note on Citations of Bartram's Writings

Numerous editions of Bartram are on the bookshelves. Throughout this book, I have used Bartram's original page numbers, as noted in Harper, to identify the locations of his words.



*T*ravels from Charleston to Southeast and
Northeast Georgia



Chronological Notes

In March 1773, William Bartram set out from Philadelphia on a sailing ship bound for Charleston, South Carolina. Dr. John Fothergill of London and others had recognized his skills and knowledge in botanical research and drawing. Fothergill had provided him funds for his exploration of the little-known American Southeast and for the collection of plants.

After about two weeks in Charleston, Bartram sailed to Savannah. During the latter half of April, he explored the islands and coastline of Georgia, as far west as the Okefenokee Swamp. At some point over the following three years he returned to this area, ascending the Altamaha River. However, his chronology is unclear (see Harper's *The Travels of William Bartram: Naturalist's Edition* 346).

He rode north to Augusta in early May to join the officials and surveyors who were setting the boundaries of the New Purchase, land ceded by the Creeks and Cherokees. He spent more than two months exploring the northeastern Georgia hills that lie southwest of the Savannah River from Augusta to Athens.

During this time, the British government imposed the Tea Act on the colonies, and Virginia formed its Committee of Correspondence, a group that included Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Richard Henry Lee, Francis Lightfoot Lee, and others who would be instrumental in the American Revolution.

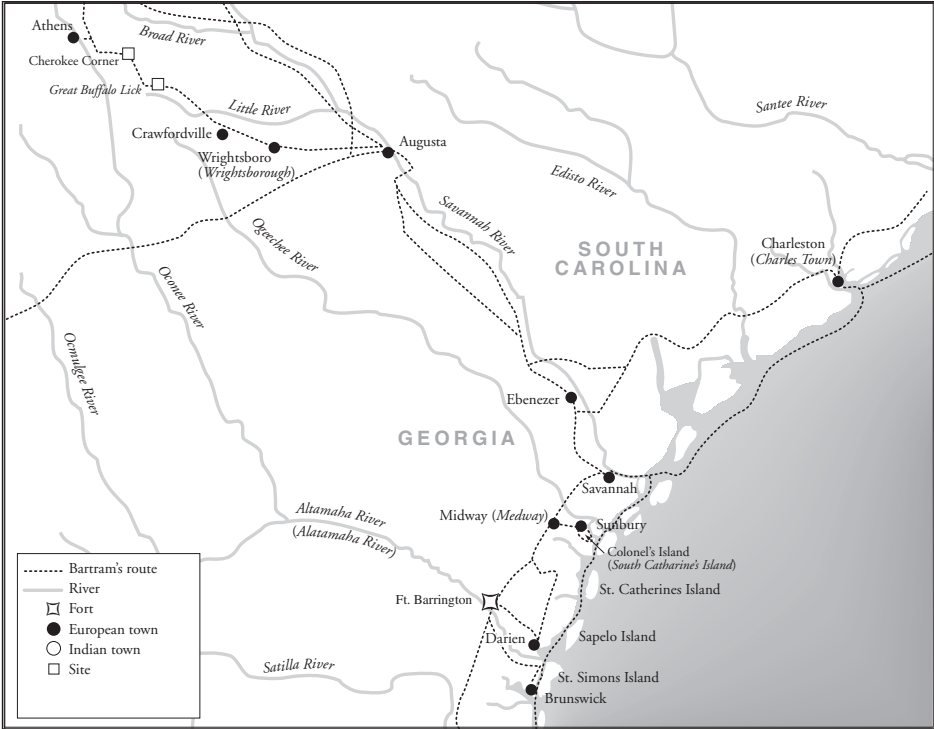
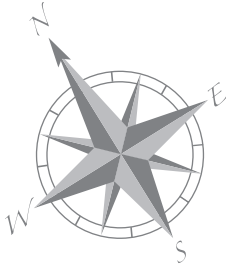


Figure 1. Map of Bartram's Travels from Charleston to Southeast and Northeast Georgia (1773)



CHARLESTON

March winds lost their bite after the *Charleston Packet* rounded Hatteras. As the brigantine sailed past Sullivan's Island, William Bartram stood on the quarterdeck, shed his wool jacket, and let the South Carolina morning sun warm his shoulders. This Philadelphian, son of the Royal Botanist, looked across the sparkling waters of Charleston's harbor to the warehouses, homes, and churches of the South's greatest city. Beyond the wharves and spires, the eye of his anticipation may have seen alligators in Florida, rhododendrons in the Cherokee Mountains, and the great "sire of waters" far to the west.

Captain Wright guided the ship to a berth among the flotilla of other craft along the busy wharf. With his dufflebag and trunk, the lean thirty-four-year-old made his way through streets busy with longshoremen, merchants, and slaves to the home of Thomas Lamboll.

It was 1773. Seven years before, Carolinians had joined with other colonists in opposing the Stamp Act. Back in Virginia and Boston, Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams were writing inflammatory treatises opposing British tyranny. The Boston Massacre was three years past and the Tea Party nine months ahead—a good time for a pacifist Quaker naturalist to set out on a journey to observe and collect specimens across the American Southeast.

Behind Billy Bartram were more than cold winds and wars. Years of uncertainty and failure, including a bankrupt mercantile business and a nonproductive plantation, marred his past. While his father despaired Billy's fortune, the son now had a plan and financial backing for botanical exploration. His sponsor, Dr. John Fothergill of London, had interests in furnishing his gardens and in finding plants that would be useful in medicine. Bartram's chests

were filled with drawing instruments and containers for the specimens he would send to Philadelphia and England.

From Charleston he could ride west into the mountains, explore the coastal plain of Georgia, and press into the wetlands and savannas of Florida. Government officials and experienced soldiers here could advise him and provide contacts among the Indians and the far-flung network of traders as far west as Louisiana. He had come to know men and women with botanical interests and political savvy during his travels with his father eight years earlier and through correspondence. They welcomed him to the city and readied him to step off into territory scarcely known to his fellow countrymen. Charleston would also be his place of respite during the winter of 1774-75.

Bartram's "Charlestown" was robust, the third largest port in the nation, surpassed only by Boston and Philadelphia. P. C. Coker III says it offered 109 direct sailings to London in 1770, more than any other American port. The brick Royal Exchange and Customs House, two-story residences with lush gardens, and the Charleston Museum had recently joined the churches, courthouse, beef and fish markets, and 115 taverns, says historian Edward Cashin.

The seaport continues to dominate the first impressions of the millions who arrive every year in this city to tour, conduct business, or enjoy arts at the Spoleto Festival. A driver topping the overpass on Interstate 26, west of the city, looks down on four port facilities scattered along the banks of the Wando and Cooper rivers. Industrial cranes rise along the docks like oversized steel blue herons. Stacks of shipping containers stand in wide parking lots. Up the Cooper River, at the edge of the port, a massive paper mill belches smoke and steam.

More than twenty-three million tons of freight passed through in 2001. On the East Coast, only New York/New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Baltimore led Charleston in freight volume. The South Carolina State Ports Authority reports that more than 281,000 jobs and \$23 billion in annual economic impact depend on trade through its terminals.

The city races to stay ahead of its nearest competitor harbors, Savannah and Brunswick, Georgia. By the year 2010, almost half of containerized cargo will be carried on ships capable of drawing more than forty feet of water. To accommodate them, the port must expand its capacity. When the Corps of Engineers completes its current project of deepening and widening the channels, the inner harbor will be forty-five feet deep and the entrance channel forty-seven feet, three times the depth of the channel that Bartram's packet sailed. Loading facilities are also being upgraded to accommodate the larger craft. The ports have recently added the latest models of cranes, some rising more than 250 feet above the quays, to unload container ships.

From the Charleston Museum I walk down Calhoun Street toward the river and Liberty Square Park. Families lead children from a parking garage to the Imax theater and the South Carolina Aquarium. I skirt the crowd of tourists waiting outside the Fort Sumter Visitor Education Center for a ferry ride out to the historic fort. From the sea wall I look into the black water, knowing that somewhere beneath the surface lie pilings of the largest Revolutionary period wharf, if the dredging of recent years has not torn them away.

The park stands on the site of Gadsden's Wharf. Under construction when Bartram arrived and in operation by the time he ended his journeys, it was, for its time, an engineering marvel. Its unique feature, a stone lock, could hold a ship at the same level for loading and unloading, ignoring the rising and falling of the tides. A wooden derrick mounted on the wharf could extend its arm over the hold of a ship and, with ropes attached to a massive wheel, haul barrels from vessels.

Standing by the chain-link fence of the Columbus Street Terminal two hundred yards north of the park, I watch mammoth arms of mechanical leviathans, heirs of Gadsden's crane, extend across a ship, cables lowered to a clutch of giant metal boxes. An engine roars and the cables go taut. The containers bearing the names Yang Ming and Hanjin and COSCO—companies based in Korea, Taiwan, and China—rise and swing gently as the crane pivots to deposit them on the wharf. A diesel-belching lift hoists the boxes and carries them to join the rows of containers, stacked four layers high, in a seventy-eight-acre lot.

The port receives finished products from Asia and Europe: automobiles, fabrics, wine. From its wharves, wood, frozen chicken, and fish leave for foreign markets. The tonnage and diversity of the imports have increased over the centuries since Bartram arrived, but the patterns remain remarkably the same. In the 1770s, agricultural products (rice and indigo) dominated the exports, followed by deerskins, timber, and naval stores. Incoming ships unloaded dinnerware, cloth, and wine.

Freight and itinerant botanists were but a part of the cargo that arrived on Charleston's wharves in 1773. The most enduring—and infamous—shipments were human. Edward Cashin says that, in that year and the previous one, sixty-five vessels brought 10,000 slaves. These people came from Africa and the Caribbean, destined to strain under the whips of rice growers in the Carolinas. Rice planters put a premium on slaves from West Africa—Congo-Angola, Ghana, Sierra Leone—where the cultivation of rice was already established. While the growers had land and other capital, they were relatively inexperienced in the production of the grain. Peter H. Wood says that West African and Caribbean slaves brought with them not only the energy required to plant, cultivate, and harvest the crop but also their knowledge and skills.

Footprints across the South

The first U.S. census in 1790 found more than 100,000 slaves in South Carolina. Almost half were in Charleston County. By 1860, South Carolina's slave population had swelled to more than 400,000. Charleston, which was becoming urbanized, had fewer than 40,000. When slavery was abolished, however, many black people left the plantations and moved to the city. In 2000, more than 100,000 residents of Charleston County, a third of its people, were black.

The most visible of today's African Americans are the basket makers who sit at the entrances to the two-block-long market and others who maintain locations along Meeting Street, south of Broad. These women carry on a three-hundred-year-old tradition, weaving baskets from the grasses of the marshes and longleaf pine needles. On the plantations, the baskets were used for storage and for carrying crops and shellfish. In recent years, collectors have recognized "sweetgrass baskets" as an art form. Well-crafted specimens sell for more than fifty dollars. Fine pieces may bring hundreds. If I want to score points with my wife Maria, a sure gift is a basket from Charleston.

The center of sweetgrass basket making is U.S. Highway 17, across the Cooper River, north of the suburb of Mount Pleasant. Along a ten-mile stretch of the busy highway, basket makers display the fruits of their labor in small, wooden huts, beckoning passing motorists to stop, look, and buy.

Mildred Harrell joins more than a score of women who set up their displays in Charleston. She comes from Mount Pleasant to sit along the sidewalk beside the U.S. Courthouse at Meeting and Broad, her products surrounding her on the pavement and hung from the black wrought iron fence behind her. Huddled behind a shield of cardboard on a blustery December day, she works sweetgrass, pine needles, and sprigs of white chinaberry balls into Christmas decorations.

"Where do you get the grass and longleaf needles?" I ask.

"They hard to find now," she says. "We get some from around Mount Pleasant. But they built so many houses along the marshes; we can't get to the bulrushes. And they's not as many pines as they used to be. We go down to Georgia and Florida to get the bulrushes."

I wonder if environmental impact studies on prospective marsh-front subdivisions explain that some of the nation's rare artisans will have to drive their pickups four hundred miles to gather resources they once took home over the handlebars of their bicycles.

Basket making is only one of the plantation-born skills that survive among African Americans of Charleston. Philip Simmons is master of another. When Maria saw one of his posters and learned that he had a showing on a day we were in Charleston, she put the event at the top of our itinerary. A gerontologist with an affinity for old people, she has decorated her office



with drawings and photos of them. "I want to meet Philip Simmons and get a signed poster," she said.

We find him in the parish house of the St. John's Reformed Episcopal Church. Jewelry, inspired by his ornamental wrought iron designs, lies on tables, for sale.

"Mr. Simmons went out for some soup," a sturdy matron of the church tells us when we enter. "But he'll be right back."

We browse among the displays for a half-hour, talking with the lady, before a wiry man crosses the room to greet us, his shoulders barely stooped, his walk slow, but steady. The grip of his right hand reveals the power of seven decades of gripping iron, hammers, and tongs. A gentle smile never leaves his lined, mahogany face.

We sit with him in a corner of the room and he tells us he was born on Daniel Island on June 9, 1912, but moved to Charleston as a boy. He attended school, but his most important education came from his uncle, a blacksmith in a shop near the wharf at the foot of Calhoun Street, he says. In 1938, he began working ornamental iron. More than five hundred decorative pieces of his work grace balconies, gates, and window grills across the city.

Maria and he chat about grandchildren, old people, and his faith before he asks, "Would you like to see my double heart gates?"

We had admired them when we parked our car, but Maria says, "We'd love to see them with you."

Over flagstone pavers Simmons leads us through the garden behind the church to the wall separating the churchyard from Menotti Street. His smile broadens as he points out the double gate, six feet tall, that he designed and whose construction he supervised. On each gate, vertical bars of black iron frame a heart composed of bands that curve toward the center like the petals of a black tulip. He poses for a picture with Maria, and we walk back to the church hall.

Skilled African Americans are fewer in Charleston than in earlier years, I learn from Dr. Bernard Powers, a historian at Charleston College: "Until the twentieth century, African Americans dominated the skilled crafts of Charleston. They learned the trades on the plantation, then, as free people, used their skills to build the city. Over the last decades, large numbers of educated African Americans have moved away. They enter professions in other cities, then move back to Charleston in their retirement years. We have a small black middle class. White artisans have taken the place of the post-plantation black craftsmen."

As I scan the streets of the business district, I recall Powers's observation. Most professionals are white. And among the crews that restore and maintain the old houses in the South-of-Broad district I find only a handful of African Americans. They are the men carrying bricks and scraping paint for white carpenters, painters, and masons.

Puzzled over how, after fifty years of integration and civil rights activity, the lot of black Southerners could have declined, I seek out one of Charleston's experienced African American leaders. Bill Saunders meets me in his paneled office on the second floor of a frame building on Rivers Street in North Charleston, the headquarters of the Committee on Better Racial Assurance (COBRA). He founded the organization and continues to lead it. Around us are African art and memorabilia of his half-century of activism. In one frame hangs a black-and-white photograph of Saunders and two women. I recognize Rosa Parks, the woman who, by refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, launched protests across the South in the 1960s. But the other woman in the picture is not familiar to me. I ask Bill about her.

"That's Septima Clark," he says. "She was fired from the school system for being a member of the NAACP. In 1956, South Carolina had a law that a public employee couldn't belong to the NAACP."

"Just belonging to the NAACP! I didn't know that," I say, then recall that 1956 was a year of fear and rebellion in the white communities of the South. "Brown" had won a victory over "Board of Education" in the Supreme Court two years before and, only eight years earlier, South Carolinian Strom Thurmond had been the Dixiecrats' candidate for president.

"We've come a long way since then," I mused.

"Not so far as you think," he says quickly, the voice of experience correcting my naive liberalism as we enter a conversation that reveals the frustrations of the man's struggle.

Bill Saunders returned from the Korean War with an injury and memories of discrimination in a bus station. "We went into a bus station," he says. "My platoon and me. And I drank from the 'Whites Only' fountain. It was 1952. A police officer got on me and hassled me. But my buddies didn't do a thing. Wouldn't stand up for me."

Once he resettled in Charleston, he got involved in voter registration and other activities.

"White people labeled me a 'communist,'" he recalls.

Then, five aides at the hospital of the Medical University of South Carolina were fired for protesting low wages. It was in 1968, the year Martin Luther King Jr. was gunned down in the midst of his activities supporting low-paid sanitation workers in Memphis. Saunders and Otis Robinson, a Black Muslim, organized the workers at the hospital of the Medical University of South Carolina. Salaries were the issue. So was dignity. The State did not pay the minimum wage. Nurse aides, orderlies, and others worked hard but lived in poverty. Saunders and Robinson gathered 500 employees, white and black.

After a strike that lasted 113 days, the hospital rehired the five, agreed to pay the blue- and pink-collar staff ten percent more than minimum wage, and established a human affairs commission.

From this grassroots beginning, Bill became respected in the struggle for the rights of African Americans in South Carolina. His district elected him to the South Carolina Public Service Commission in 1994, and he became its chairman six years later.

Community development and positive treatment of blacks remain high on his agenda. COBRA's mission statement is "We Shall Not Always Plant While Others Reap."

On the day I meet him, Saunders is angry. A few weeks before, the police had conducted a drug search at Stratford High School. Early in the morning, just after the black students got off their buses but before most local white kids arrived, officers came with drawn guns and dogs. They forced students to kneel or lie on their stomachs and handcuffed those who did not immediately comply. Police didn't find any drugs or nab any offenders.

"My granddaughter is a student there," he says. "She's on the student council. It's the kind of police activity that black people have a lot of experience with. Singling us out. Without respect. It happens in our neighborhoods all the time."

"We don't need civil rights until we have human rights," he continues, his thoughts and words racing. "Black people need to be treated like human beings."

"Integration of the schools took a lot away from us. I don't agree with integration. America needed integration of the schools. Black people didn't. They needed equal schools. With black teachers. Black teachers in black schools had discipline. They'd discipline the hell out of you."

"And the black economic system was destroyed by integration. We have few black businessmen. Black people work for white corporations."

"From the 1950s until the middle '70s, good, vital changes took place in the U.S.—especially in the South. But from the time of the election of Reagan, we've gone backward, except that white women have made great gains. Charleston is no different from before. Nothing good is happening. The highways split the black community. We are allowed to own property until the white powers want it back." As Saunders speaks, I recall stories I had heard of Gullah communities being taken over for subdivisions and resorts. Neighborhoods of these descendants of slaves are frequent targets for developers along the South Carolina and Georgia coast.

While Philip Simmons's medium is iron, Bill Saunders's is society. His skills have been refined in a crucible of human interactions over half a century and pounded on the anvil of confrontations and negotiations. And while the youthful energy of his early days of protest may have softened to a refined, philosophical

discourse, the man remains angry. I leave without illusions: a white guy can see only the vaguest outlines of what Bill's experience has crafted.

The eight mile drive from the COBRA office in North Charleston to downtown Charleston defines segregation. North Charleston is a community of industrial complexes, small, frame houses, and seedy strip malls where boys wearing do-rags and other prison fashions hang out. Lots left vacant by defunct factories spread over acres. Crime rates are high (in 2002, 166 crimes per thousand residents).

Drive south, toward the tip of the peninsula, cross under the viaducts that carry Interstate 26 and U.S. 17, and enter the Charleston that tourists and vacationers love. Orderliness. Not sterile, NASA-like hygiene, but a welcoming, comfortable regularity. The modern traveler finds an atmosphere, not of shipping and industry, but of a Southern cosmopolitan city. No one seems to hurry in this town, working hard to maintain a balance between commerce and beauty, industry and tourism.

A large, brick railroad depot has become a brightly lit tourist welcome center. Across the street, the Charleston Museum boasts of being the oldest museum in the nation. On its lawn is a replica of the Hunley, the Confederate submarine that sank in Charleston's harbor in 1864 after bringing down the USS Housatonic. Across the street, the Joseph Manigault House portrays in brick and white-painted columns the splendor of the early 1800s, when rice was king and planters had mansions in the city near the sea.

Downtown has escaped the fate of many cities. Department stores and boutiques alongside antique dealers, art galleries, and locally owned cafes occupy old, brick buildings. Doormen in uniforms wait at curbs under hotel awnings. It is a real downtown, the old-fashioned kind where locals and tourists stroll, shop, and eat, having little fear of being accosted by muggers or panhandlers.

South of downtown, on the tip of the peninsula, houses built in the Colonial and Antebellum periods draw tourists and wealthy home buyers to the area known as "South-of-Broad." Broad Street is the border between commercial downtown and the city's oldest historic district, and the intersection of Broad and Meeting Streets is its gateway.

On his walk to the Lambolls' house, Bartram passed through the city square which lay at this intersection. St. Michael's Anglican Church stood on the southeast corner. Across Meeting Street, on the southwest corner, was the treasury building. Diagonally across the square was the Statehouse. The beef market filled the northeast corner.

Charlestonians know this place as the "Four Corners of Law." St. Michael's changed little over the centuries, still occupies its site, but the U.S. Courthouse has

replaced the treasury building and the Charleston County Judicial Center occupies the old Statehouse property. City Hall stands on the site of the meat market.

South of Broad, by city regulation, owners maintain their buildings in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century styles. Two- and three-story houses, brick and cypress, rise beside shaded, narrow sidewalks. Five million tourists a year walk or ride through, gazing at plaques fixed to the outer walls of the buildings that tell them when the houses were built, by whom, and who lived there: John C. Calhoun's massive brick mansion; the Heyward-Washington House, now a museum, where President George Washington lived a week in May 1791, entertaining the area's patriots and business champions and welding together the Southern Hemisphere of the new nation; the Lamboll House, now a bed-and-breakfast inn.

Horses and mules pull carriages filled with tourists through the streets. Drivers, some dressed in Confederate uniforms, grey with a red sash, tell stories of the city. You are lucky if you get to tour South-of-Broad in one of these carts. In fact, you are a lottery winner.

Maria and I park in one of the city's parking decks and walk to a street north of the old market. Horses, harnessed to large wagons equipped with benches, hang their heads and wait in a queue to roll us through the city for an hour. We tell the ticket seller we want a ride through the historic district to the Battery (White Point Park at the tip of the peninsula).

"We're sorry, but the routes of the tours are determined by a lottery," she says, using a well-rehearsed monologue to explain that, to keep areas from being congested by carriages, the city has established a system for allotting routes. "We use three routes; two go south, one goes north. When the carriage leaves, it will pass by that corner," she says. "The worker there will give the driver a token. That will tell him where he can go. But they are all good tours."

Feeling lucky, we buy two seats on a black wagon with red wheels and climb aboard, sitting behind a driver who wears a floppy-brimmed felt hat. For ten minutes we wait in the late morning sun, entertained by the passing crowds and shrouded by aromas wafting from the horse, until the driver flicks the reins across the steed's flanks and we roll forward to the corner where a round-faced, black lady hands the teamster a small token. The wagon rolls again and turns. Northward, away from the Battery.

Maria looks at me with a frown and shakes her head, muttering something about my luck and advising me not to waste our money on lottery tickets when we return to Georgia.

Our ride takes us past the College of Charleston, a shaded, serious-looking campus, and down streets lined with nineteenth-century, gentry-restored houses.

Footprints across the South

And we learn that Charlestonians of earlier generations built their houses with their short sides facing the streets. Something to do with taxes. Many structures are held together by iron rods bolted to large steel plates. Something to do with earthquakes. And then the tour is over. The carriage rolls to a stop at the end of the queue to await another load and the next lottery token.

Having missed our ride through old city, and not willing to risk another randomly selected ride through Neverland, we take to our feet. We walk to Broad, then stroll up and down the narrow streets, pausing under shade trees for relief from the heat. We find the houses of John Stuart, the colonial Indian superintendent and friend of Bartram, and Thomas Lamboll. Well preserved and maintained, they hint at the wealth of Colonial Charleston.

South-of-Broad is pleasant and historic, but totally devoid of watering holes. All 115 of the Colonial-period taverns have disappeared from the Colonial district. So we trudge down to the Battery and along the sea wall. We find, north of Broad, a tourist-oriented bar along a street cobbled with rocks taken from the ballast chambers of sailing ships.

Ghost tours open another eye on old Charleston. On a windy evening before Christmas, my son John and his wife Terry accompany Maria, Tyler, and me on one of these ventures. We meet the guide and fellow travelers at an art gallery just south of the old market and follow him to cemeteries, houses, and churches. But not in the old Colonial district. The city fathers and residents of the oldest historic homes don't allow such shenanigans around their neighborhoods.

During our walk, we hear the story of an image, not visible to the naked eye, appearing on a photograph taken in a cemetery several decades ago. The guide leads us to believe the figure was the ghost of a woman kneeling over the grave of her dear departed. We learn that Death Heads on tombstones mark graves of ancient citizens who died of the plague, malaria, or yellow fever, and that such stones abound in the city. And we hear of the ghost of a former resident of a house that is now Poogan's Porch Restaurant (famous for its breakfasts). Outside Mills House, a historic hotel now owned by the InterContinental Hotels Group Holiday Inns, we hear that Robert E. Lee bunked here in 1862. Ronald Reagan and Garth Brooks also took lodging there, but not with the general.

On another day, I return alone to the Lamboll House, passing the Jacob Motte House, built by a prominent Huguenot merchant around 1731. A short, sturdy carpenter carries lumber from the house to his truck. He's one of the dozens of craftsmen at work restoring and maintaining the old houses. By day, they park pickups in spots where Mercedes, BMWs, and Jags sit at night. I notice that the house is for sale and ask him: "How much do they want for this place?"

"I dunno," he answers with a smile and a nasal, upstate, Cracker accent, "but it's prob'ly way up there."

On the corner of King and Lamboll Streets, I find the Lamboll House, where Bartram lodged with the family of Judge Thomas Lamboll. I doubt Bartram would recognize it. An owner added piazzas in about 1845, but the white-painted, three-story Georgian remains impressive.

Emerson Read, a realtor, bought the place in 1965. He and his wife live there, but use the third floor as a bed-and-breakfast inn. Heart pine floors in the living room remain from the original building, as do fireplaces and mantels, but the kitchen has been added (kitchens normally were outbuildings in the Colonial period).

Worn, wooden stairs creak as I climb to the second floor where an Audubon folio, open to the American aninga and Frigate pelican, lies on a mahogany table. From a window on the third floor I look south, toward the Battery and the bay. Lamboll once owned acreage out on the point. It was an island then; the Lambolls reached their garden by boat. The city long ago filled in the marsh and connected the island with the peninsula so that tourists could hold hands and walk amongst the Civil War cannons and feed the sea gulls.

A Victorian/Italianate mansion, built in the 1850s, blocks the view to the north. Read tells me it is taller than his house because the ceilings are higher. It has 10,000 to 12,000 square feet of living area and is on the market for \$6 million. Sensing my gasp, he says that small houses (2,200 square feet) in the area now sell for more than \$1.5 million.

"I see the Jacob Motte house is for sale. What are they asking?"

"About 1.4 million," he tells me. It's a three-story, with five bedrooms and three-and-a-half baths." As the carpenter had said, "it's . . . way up there."

"And the John C. Calhoun Mansion?"

"Six-and-a-half million. Six bedrooms. Five-and-a-half baths. Twenty-thousand square feet. Elevators. Been on the market a long time."

"Who buys these places?" I ask.

"Yankees," he replies without hesitation. "They're buying up property for two-and-a-half million that sold for \$750,000 a few years ago. They like to come down here for long vacations, or just weekends. Even in the summer, Charleston is cooler than the big cities along the coast of New York. And in the winter, the weather is very pleasant. Plus, we have a slower pace and a lot of art and music here in Charleston. They come here for a good life."

Prosperous folks have owned second homes in Charleston for centuries. Eighteenth century planters built here, as near the sea breeze as they could, to

escape the heat, mosquitoes, and malaria that engulfed their rice plantations inland and along the tidal marshes. "One does not boast in Charleston of having the most beautiful house," it was said in the 1790s, "but the coolest."

I dawdle on the second floor, looking beyond, as best I can, the clutter of the Reads' daily living. Did Polly Lamboll play Handel and Bach on a harpsichord? Did she wear a silk brocaded gown with fringe and hip panniers, those bulges below the waist that look like great, silk parentheses? Were the tables graced by wares such as I'd seen in the museum: porcelains from China, glass from England, and dinnerware carrying the now-familiar Chinese "blue plate" design? And did a servant pour Bartram a cup of claret from a giant glass bottle from France?

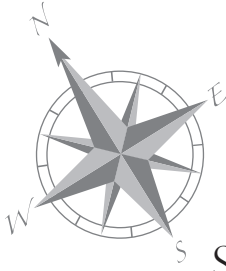
To get a feel for the wealth and opulence South-of-Broad in 1773, we visit the Heyward-Washington House. Its paint was still fresh when Bartram walked past this home in his week of preparation, before he set off for Georgia.

Rice planter Daniel Heyward built the brick house in 1772 as a town house for his son, Thomas. The Charleston Museum bought it in 1929 and has preserved and restored it to open a window on the life of the well-heeled South Carolinian of the period. Delft tiles frame the fireplaces and bright paints, customary in Colonial homes, decorate the walls. Heart pine floors, worn by thousands of shoes over the course of America's life, groan gently beneath my soles. Imported china and goblets sit amid candles on a dark table. Large, graceful cabinets line the walls.

The kitchen house and gardens lie behind the house. Current material culture intrudes but little into this place. Granted, the hams and sausages hanging on the wall of the kitchen are plastic, a red rubber hose lies coiled on the ground beside an iron standpipe, and a yellow nylon cord stretches between stakes to align the bricks workers are replacing in a walkway. Across the garden wall, a satellite dish on a neighbor's garage gathers signals from orbiting high-tech hardware. Otherwise, the authenticity of the eighteenth century prevails. Bartram would have known every plant along its brick pathways. Nothing of recent origin grows here. The ladies of the city's garden club assure that. Sculptured hedges of boxwood frame beds of dianthus. Lavender grows between a China rose and a green rose. Basil, parsley, sage, and rosemary fill another bed.

The Heyward-Washington House and its garden are the right place to begin following Bartram across the modern Southland. Eighteenth-century herbs and artifacts of the colonizers rest amidst the trappings of the age of technological communication. They sit in a city whose current cultures range from the opulent and leisured to the racially and economically disadvantaged,

strata of a nation more than 225 years old, still struggling to find justice and to balance industry and a healthy environment. From here, Billy and I set forth, heading farther south to the coast of Georgia along a trail of hope, discovery, disappointment, and wonder.



A TALE OF TWO CITIES: SAVANNAH AND SUNBURY

Savannah, Georgia. Since before “Hard Hearted Hannah” or the steamy television soap opera or *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, Savannah has been a synonym for “Southern.” The city oozes the hospitality, slow pace, and exquisite beauty that Americans associate with “The South.” It has refused to purge the city squares from its eighteenth-century layout and maintains large neighborhoods of antebellum homes. Upon this foundation, a society not too different from the plantation culture sustains itself with balls, concerts, and fine arts. Nowhere else along Bartram’s route can one see so well preserved an old Southern American urban landscape.

Bartram hadn’t lingered in Charleston. Knowing that the flora of western Carolina were not yet in bloom, he bade his supporters well and headed south. One day on a boat brought him to Savannah, the little, forty-year-old capital of the colony of Georgia. General James Oglethorpe, its founder, had laid out a grid of streets and squares in the approved fashion of the day. An English city on a bluff twenty feet above the marshes.

Ships carrying goods to and from Savannah ply thirty-six miles of currents, passing Tybee Island and salty wetlands to reach the city. Stout wooden wharves and cobblestone walkways have replaced the crude docks and muddy paths of the Colonial city. Hotels hug the riverbank. Bars, restaurants, and souvenir shops line the waterfront, drawing business largely from the more than five million tourists who pass through the city each year. Across the river, connected by a water taxi, a resort hotel towers over a golf course on low-lying Hutchinson Island.

Black water of the Savannah River, darkened by rich vegetation along its route from the Appalachians, eddies around the bulkheads a few feet from the

bench where I sit with my souvlaki and bottled water, bought from a Greek restaurant in a hundred-year-old brick building along the waterfront. A cleat under my foot holds a sturdy line of the *Georgia Queen*. Gleaming white, with red trim, designed to carry six hundred tourists on harbor cruises, she's a replica of the sternwheelers that once carried cargo along the rivers of the South. It is a surreal scene: a historic waterfront, preserved for tourists to get the feel of early America, looks out on technological, industrial, multinational commerce.

Down river, a massive freighter steams against the current. Ballast water pours from her belly and stacks of containers rise above her deck. She looks top-heavy; I wonder how she can negotiate a stormy ocean. Two tugs guide her to a slip beyond the Talmadge Memorial Bridge that hangs from suspension cables far above the river. The cranes that await her cargo rise almost four hundred feet above the wharves and stretch steel arms and cables across twenty-two stacks of containers.

Furniture, toys, steel, rubber, clothing, plastic goods, and cars arrive in Savannah. Georgia kaolin, wood pulp, chicken, cotton, agricultural machinery, and granite leave, bound for ports around the world. It's a lucrative business for the state. *Georgia Trend* magazine says Savannah's "marine machine creates more than \$1.8 billion in personal income" and \$585 million in state and local tax receipts each year (Costello 95).

The ships and the river are at the heart of an environmental controversy. To compete with Charleston, the Georgia Port Authority wants to deepen the channel to accommodate future generations of mega-freighters. Environmentalists remind the state and federal agencies that the natural depth of the channel is eighteen feet and that each time the channel has been dredged deeper salt water has crept closer to the city. They point out that when salt water intrudes freshwater, fish and other animals lose valuable habitat and disappear or dwindle in numbers. Striped bass can't conduct their usual mating routines because earlier dredging has deprived them of their spawning grounds, so the state has for several years stocked them into the river. The Coastal Environmental Organization of Georgia says that harbor activities also threaten the shortnosed sturgeon, an endangered species.

In the spring of 2004, under a partnership with The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers raised the gates of dams along the river to mimic the natural spring flow patterns of the river. The Conservancy thinks that such dam water management may restore habitat for fish, birds, and other aquatic life along this river. If the project is successful, it will be a model for other waterways across the nation.

Environmentalists are also concerned that deepening the harbor may imperil drinking water. If the channel is deeper, they say, salt water may seep

A Tale of Two Cities: Savannah and Sunbury

into the Floridan aquifer, the underground water supply for many of the towns and cities in southern Georgia.

Away from the river, the Southern graciousness of the historic district snuffs out the mix of industry and tourism. While none of the buildings of Bartram's Savannah remain, Christ Church (Episcopal), the oldest church in the state, occupies its old site a few blocks from the waterfront. Its original building, first occupied in 1750, burned in the Great Fire of 1796. Fewer than forty years before Bartram arrived, John Wesley was its rector. Here he established the first Sunday School in America and then returned to England where, after his conversion experience, he founded Methodism. Great live oaks and azaleas decorate the square's grass lawns and walkways; it remains, as most of the squares of Savannah, a calm, shady sanctuary.

Farther south, the Colonial Park Cemetery covers almost an acre of land that lay on the outskirts of the Colonial city. Its occupants are a Who's Who of Georgia. Lachlan McIntosh, Revolutionary general and friend and host of Bartram, rests here, as do others that Bartram may have known: Button Gwinnett, Nathaniel Greene, Joseph Habersham. Counties across the state bear their names.

Up and down the streets of the old city stand two- and three-story houses, built after the fire of 1819. They rise directly from the sidewalks. No front lawns to mow here, just steps that lead to second story entrances. Among the largest of the homes is a grand, brick Italianate mansion once owned by songwriter Johnny Mercer. (It has a lawn.) Tourists line up to peek inside. They come not humming bars of "Moon River" or "Blues in the Night" but with curiosity about the sordid mystery of the famous murder that took place within its walls. Some time after the Mercers, it became the house of Jim Williams, the antique dealer and central character in John Berendt's 1994 book, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. Tourism in the city skyrocketed after the book and movie.

Not far south and west, however, the city turns dingy. Boarded windows on old, three-story houses, tall weeds in what is left of lawns, shabby grocery stores and laundromats near housing projects. Beyond this ring of squalor lie fifty-year-old suburbs of well-kept houses on shady lots. Then, near the malls and franchise stores out on Abercorn Street, newer subdivisions with few trees. Within minutes, a driver can pass from the shaded, leisurely old city into a stereotypical, modern American suburbia. Historic, calming pedestrian squares and narrow, tree-lined streets give way to four- and six-lane boulevards and steaming parking lots.



Footprints across the South

“After resting and a little recreation for a few days in Savanna,” Bartram writes, “and having in the meantime purchased a good horse, and equipping myself for a journey southward, I set off early in the morning for Sunbury, a seaport town” (*Travels* 5). He was on his way into sparsely settled islands and coastal plains where plants flowered, the land where he and his father had discovered previously unknown species.

As I head south on U.S. 17, I reach deep into the bag of my imagination to find some tool that will let me feel a bit of the excitement that a naturalist from Philadelphia must have felt. But for miles I see nothing he would recognize. Concrete, brick, and billboards outweigh the grass, trees, and flowers. Overhead, blades of large helicopters thud against the air, transporting men and equipment to and from Fort Stewart, home of the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized), a heavily armed, swift-moving fighting force that led much of the assault on Iraq. Camouflaged military vehicles run the road.

Traffic lights slow me—twenty-nine of them in the thirty miles from Savannah to Midway. And almost as many gasoline stations. Mobile home dealers (three), McDonald’s (two), and Wal-Mart (one). Three railroads pass under the highway.

Eventually, about fifteen miles out of Savannah, forests appear. For a half-mile along each side of the Ogeechee River, tupelo and cypress trees root in wetlands. Then, within the next mile, suburbia returns in the form of Richmond Hill.

Nice name, Richmond Hill, evoking rolling English land owned by dukes and earls. Nothing resembling a hill shows up here, however, and the closest to a duke or earl was Henry Ford. In the 1930s, Ford began to buy up land in Bryan County, establishing here a planned community on land where slaves had tilled the land and planted rice and cotton.

Bryan County has become a bedroom community for those seeking suburban refuge from Savannah. Since 1960, its population has quadrupled. More than 23,000 persons now live in its 400 square miles. Growth has prompted a water war. In 2002, Richmond Hill applied to the state’s Environmental Protection Division (EPD), seeking permission to drill a new well. The city wanted to tap the salty lower Floridan aquifer, a giant underground reservoir layered with both fresh and salty water, and draw out and desalinate more than a million gallons a day.

Environmentalists responded that too little is known about the aquifer. The state agency denied the request. It had capped withdrawals from the upper Floridan since 1997, when it recognized that industrial pumping over decades had caused salt contamination of coastal wells in Georgia and South Carolina. Richmond Hill looked for other options but continued to press the state. In the fall of 2002, EPD struck a deal with the city. Richmond Hill could drill the lower aquifer but had to manage its water supply and safeguard the aquifer.

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Water has become an issue across Georgia. Urban development in the Atlanta area and along the coast sucks enormous quantities of water from streams and pools deep under the surface. Over recent years, the state has tussled with Alabama and Florida over the use of water from the Flint and Chattahoochee. Greenskeepers want it for their bentgrass. Suburbanites take it for their zoysia and fescue. Farmers in South Georgia need to irrigate. Oystermen in Apalachicola Bay say their oysters need a proper mix of fresh and salt water and that the upstream use of water hurts their harvests. Commercial fishermen in the Altamaha basin find their catches reduced because reservoirs that supply Atlanta's suburbs reduce and regulate the flow of freshwater.

Bartram would have puzzled over the idea that water would become scarce in Georgia. Even twenty-five years ago, most Georgians scoffed at the notion. But the quickening shift of people into cities and burbs has made this seemingly abundant fluid into a commodity.



Bartram rode through Midway and turned toward Sunbury on the coast. When he passed south of the Ogeechee he was entering a land ripe for botanizing.

Sunbury was, in his eye, a “rising city” (*Travels* 9), well set to become a major port in the emerging colony. “Beautifully situated on the main” and protected by islands, “. . . the harbor is capacious and safe, and has water enough for ships of great burthen” (*Travels* 5-7).

The town was less than fifteen years old when Bartram visited in 1773. About a thousand people lived in raised cottage homes set along an orderly grid of streets. An additional thousand—most of them slaves—lived on island rice plantations. Warehouses lined the busy wharf. The company of Spalding and Kelsall, whose Florida trading posts served as Bartram's bases when he traveled into the heart of Florida, owned one of the stores along the waterfront.

And it was a rich town. Reconstruction-era historian Charles C. Jones writes, “at the outbreak of the Revolutionary war the parish of St. John possessed nearly one-third the wealth of the entire province” (172).

Bartram writes of visiting with “a circle of genteel and polite ladies and gentlemen.” While he doesn't tell us their names, they could have included Lyman Hall and Button Gwinnett, signers of the Declaration of Independence. In its ninety year history, three signers of the Declaration, four Georgia governors, three U.S. Senators, and the first U.S. ambassador to China and Japan lived in Sunbury. Paul McIlvaine surmised that Sunbury “probably produced more famous people per square foot of real estate than any other town in America” (5). If the town's social prominence awed Bartram, he doesn't mention it. Instead,

he describes in detail the flora and fauna of the area, giving special attention to an island he mistakenly calls “South Catharine” (*Travels* Introduction). Because he says that he “forded a narrow shoal,” his biographers think that the island was Bermuda Island, later known as Colonels Island. “South Catharine” (St. Catherines) could not have been reached except by boat, but a mere tidal creek separates Colonels Island from the mainland.

On the island, he found plantations set among longleaf and other varieties of pines, oaks, magnolias, dogwoods and a wealth of other plants. He excavated from a shell mound a nearly complete clay pot of Indian origin and describes its basketweave design. His list of mammals consumes half a page, and his description of the osprey and bald eagle is a mini-essay on the political affairs of the world of birds. The eagle, he writes, is “an execrable tyrant” that “supports his assumed dignity and grandeur by rapine and violence, extorting unreasonable tribute and subsidy from all the feathered nations.” On the other hand, the osprey (Bartram uses the names “*falco piscatorius*, or fishing-hawk”) is a “princely bird” that “subsists entirely on fish which he takes himself, scorning to live and grow fat on the dear earned labours of another; he also contributes liberally to the support of the bald eagle.” (Was Bartram reflecting the conversation of the previous evening, when he sat with champions of liberty in a home in Sunbury? Was the osprey a metaphor for a hard-working colonist, the eagle for King George III? If so, Bartram may have shared Benjamin Franklin’s consternation over the choice of the eagle as a symbol of America.)

Sunbury didn’t rise to the heights Bartram expected, however. His predictions for Sunbury are as off base as several other of his forecasts of urban growth. While I would follow this man into mosquito-infested swamps to find a plant or animal, I would not want him picking my stocks. The town’s “rise” peaked about two decades after Bartram’s visit. Its lifespan was less than a century. Simply having a “capacious and safe” harbor was not enough to guarantee success. Although Savannah, only twenty eight miles away, was twice the distance from the open sea, it was a political hub. And Savannah was closer to the cotton and tobacco plantations, which overtook rice as export products early in the 1800s. Mosquitoes also had a role in Sunbury’s demise; malaria and yellow fever epidemics frequently swept the lowland. Then, in 1804, a hurricane tore down houses and docks and left townspeople dead.

A Swedish ship carried a load of cotton out of Sunbury in 1814 and made history as the last major export vessel to visit the port. The government left a customs collector in an office in the town, but, according to Jones, “for many years prior to his death the office was a mere sinecure. Subsequently a Surveyor

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was appointed by the General government whose principal duty was to sign blank reports and draw his quarterly salary” (220).

Another hurricane struck in 1824. The government closed the post office in 1841. After that, Sunbury’s only moment in history was a hostile visit by the federal armies of General William Sherman, which overran a Confederate picket post, burned the church as a fire signal to troops offshore, and landed troops for the invasion of Savannah.

In 1878, Jones wrote,

Without trade, destitute of communications, and visited more and more each season with fevers, Sunbury, for nearly thirty years, has ceased to exist save in name. Its squares, lots, streets, and lanes have been converted into a cornfield. Even the bricks of the ancient chimneys have been carted away. No sails whiten the blue waters of Midway river save those of a miserable little craft employed by its owner in conveying terrapins to Savannah. The old cemetery is so overgrown with trees and brambles that the graves of the dead can scarcely be located after the most diligent search. . . . Only the bold Bermuda [grass] covered bluff and the beautiful river with the green island slumbering in its embrace . . . remind us of this lost town. . . . Strange that a town of such repute, and with the confines of a young and prosperous commonwealth, should have so utterly faded from the face of the earth! (221f)

By the end of the twentieth century, the historic cemetery, shaded by moss-hung oaks and surrounded by a handful of modern ranch houses, was the sole above-ground trace of “the rising port.” A lone shrimp boat rests at the wharf, a few feet from a seafood restaurant in the shadows of a condominium complex—thirty-six units, complete with two elevators, a swimming pool, and spa. When its residents look out to St. Catherines Sound and the ocean beyond, they see spectacular sunrises. But, to know they are living in a once-proud port city, they will have to read a history book or the brochure from nearby Fort Morris State Historic Site.

Southeast of Sunbury, a banner hangs across the road near the spot where Bartram waded the marsh to Colonels Island. It welcomes fishermen to the annual King Mackerel Festival. Beyond it, at a fork in the road, a historical marker lists Revolutionary War officers who once owned plantations on this land.

From the Yellow Bluff Fish Camp, I follow an air conditioning service truck over sandy washboard roads that wind through forests of young pines, oaks, and black gums. A horse farm, surrounded by a white plastic fence, has

replaced the colonels' plantations. Along the seaward margin of the island, plush modern houses fill the remnants of the forest where Bartram found "deer . . . tyger, wolf and bear," along with a "large ground-rat, more than twice the size of the common Norway rat." Each house has picture window views across the sound to St. Catherines and the Atlantic and a dock that stretches the length of a football field into water deep enough to carry its owner's sport fishing and pleasure boat berthed at its far end. Near a quiet community of comfortable weekend homes, a middle-aged woman dressed in a white T-shirt and olive shorts walks briskly down the center of the paved road that leads to a cluster of luxurious homes on the southern shore.

The wild, pristine wilderness that Bartram explored disappeared from the island two centuries ago. Plantations drove out most of the snakes and large game. Sightings of ospreys and eagles are subjects of conversation around the kitchen tables of the houses in the fishing camps.

Bartram accompanied several of Sunbury's "polite inhabitants" to "a very large and well constructed place of worship" in Midway. He "heard a very excellent sermon delivered by [the church's] pious and venerable pastor, the Reverend --- - Osgood." Bartram doesn't detail the minister's sermon or discuss his theology. However, it is probably safe to guess that what he heard was unlike the preaching in more recent houses of worship in the area.

Osgood's sermon, if it was like other Puritan preaching of the day, was eloquent, systematically laid out, comforting, but challenging, emphasizing duty and gentility. Samuel S. Hill, historian of Southern American religion, says, "The building of a holy community was central in the Puritan program. Christian responsibility was thought to comprehend the creation of a Christian civilization. Accordingly these ardent Christians worked for the rule of God over the civil realm no less than the ecclesiastical" (58).

Twenty years later, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists began to dominate the religious landscape of the South. Their numbers grew, especially among the middle and poorer classes, leaving the gentry in the Episcopal churches and draining the Puritan Congregationalists of membership. Over the past fifty years, Pentecostals and other groups of conservative Christians have drawn throngs of believers. Most Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals shun the formality of the Episcopalians and Puritans. Participating in rituals is not what their religion is about.

Within the doors of "Free For All" and "Jesus World Ministries," small, storefront congregations along the highway between Midway and Fort Stewart, worshipers raise their hands and energetically clap to guitar music blaring over amplifiers. Preachers—some are women, an unusual quality in the South—exhort

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their audiences to turn away from sin and turn to Jesus to avoid the fires of hell. Darwin is anathema here. So are abortion and homosexuality.

Following the tradition of The Great Awakening that was sweeping the South at the time of Bartram's travels and has marked popular culture there for the past two centuries, religion is a highly personal matter. Members are "born again," usually in an emotional upswelling. The Holy Spirit moves and each worshiper responds uniquely. Worship is individual, active, sweaty. Individuality does not shut out love, however. The worshipers hug and talk long after the final prayer. On their ways to heaven, these brothers and sisters march together.

Except for the ancient church building and the historic cemetery, Midway does not stand out from other rural Georgia crossroads. U.S. Highway 17, following the old trail that Bartram rode, splits the village from north to south. The road once bore the weight of much of the traffic that hugged the east coast from Virginia to Florida. Through travelers and trucks now roar down Interstate 95, leaving local traffic to roll at a more leisurely pace past the town's health care center, gift shop, and convenience stores.

Though interstate travelers make it to Florida more rapidly than those on U.S. 17, they miss Ida Mae and Joe's Truck Stop, which is their loss. For four decades, Ida Mae and Joe's has been filling the bellies of truckers and travelers in a white building with a pink, steep-pitched roof. While the big rigs now go to massive truck plazas along the interstate, the restaurant draws a crowd of locals and blue-highway drivers who enjoy the corn bread, chicken, meatloaf, and other Southern fare.

From my plastic-covered chair in the little, white-walled cafe, I searched the black print on the whiteboard beside the front door for a bit less cholesterol and more fiber than I had eaten during my previous two days of gorging on Savannah's fried seafood. I picked beans, stewed apples, and a double order of the broccoli and cheese. My nutritionist would be proud, I figured. When the waitress set the plate on my table I looked for a broccoli and cheese casserole, a popular dish across Georgia. Instead, I found nuggets of broccoli and cheese, rolled in a corn batter. Golden brown. Fried. Not the meal I dutifully planned, but Southern cuisine at its best.

I pulled out of Ida Mae and Joe's crushed-shell parking lot and drove a few hundred feet to the old church. Originally built in the 1750s, the current structure is the fourth used by the congregation. Its present site is a few feet from the spot where Bartram went to hear the "very excellent sermon." (When the highway was widened, the church was moved about fifty feet in order to spare its venerable, historic cemetery.)

In 1778, the British burned the church Bartram visited. It was an understandable target for the Redcoats: members of the congregation led the

movement for independence in Georgia. Its walls echoed the debates and heard the decisions to resist the Crown. On its ruins, the Puritans built the current, New England-style house of worship in 1792.

Massive oaks shade the front yard, and black shutters offset the brilliant white paint on its clapboard siding. A large, double door gives access to the ground floor, while a single door to its left leads to the balcony where slaves sat to worship.

The pulpit is central on the raised podium. Hard, white pews, each with a door, provide the seating. Overhead, the rail of the slave balcony curves from the sides of the church to the back. The building has never been modernized by the addition of heating or artificial lights.

Standing in its doorway, I look across the old Sunbury road and see White's Auto Care, built in the style of roadside service stations of the 1950s. An old Gulf Oil sign hangs over the pump island; cars in various stages of disrepair grace its driveway. According to the faded blue letters painted on its walls, it sells belts, hoses, brakes, tuneups, and window tinting.

Four lanes of U.S. 17 divide the church from its ancient cemetery. Turbulence from cars ruffles my hair as I stand on the road shoulder and wait to cross. An iron gate in the plastered brick wall groans in rusty resistance to my push. Then I stand amidst grey stone markers, raised brick tombs, and marble monuments in one of the oldest graveyards in the state. Near an ancient oak lies James Screven, a hero of the American Revolution. A county not far away is named for him. General Daniel Stewart is also buried here. As a boy, Stewart served in the Revolution under Francis Marion ("The Swamp Fox") and Thomas Sumter. He distinguished himself during the Indian Wars that followed the Revolution. The nearby army base bears his name. The body of the Reverend Mister John Osgood also rests here, near the wall closest to the church. A marker tells me that he preached his last sermon on May 5, 1773. I figure that was about three weeks after Bartram heard him.

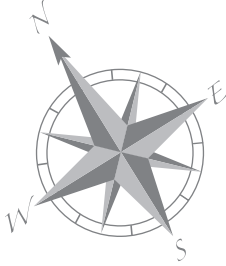
This is a serene place, holy in its own way. Cedars, magnolias, and oaks set a quiet tone that overcomes the sight of the ramshackle car shop and the sounds of the highway. It's the South. Traditional. Historical. Proud.

But outside the creaking, rusty graveyard gate, stereotypes of the South—slow, unchanging, backward—don't work. Over the full expanse of its history, the South has adapted. Within the first fifty years of Georgia's existence, towns thrived, then died, and were replaced by cities with different economies. Planters switched crops in response to new demands. Then, for almost a century after the Civil War, change came slowly. Over the past half-century, however, the South has developed new economies and cultures. While agriculture remained a base for more than two hundred years, industry, commerce, and tourism are rapidly replacing it. Democrat

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politicians become Republicans. Schools are integrated. Black men and women are professionals (albeit not as frequently as their white counterparts). Children born in rural communities move to cities, building a structure of new values on the foundation of their small-town principles and customs.

Perhaps no period of Georgia's history saw more change than the time of Bartram's travels. Migrants from Europe and slaves from the Caribbean and Africa filled the new colony, clearing land, establishing homesteads and plantations. When the explorer left Sunbury and Midway to botanize areas in the southeast corner of Georgia, he rode through a land on the cusp of a social, technological, and political revolution.



“O ALATAMAHA!”

I've taken a table beside a picture window at Mud Cat Charlie's, a couple of miles south of Darien, Georgia. From here I can watch dark green water swirl toward the Atlantic, eight miles away, and see the wind ripple the heads of the marsh grass on Broughton Island. Charlestonian Henry Laurens, friend of the Bartrams, owned the piece of marsh across the South Altamaha River in the middle and late 1700s. It's a key spot for someone following Bartram. He spent a lot of time here, botanizing, resting, and visiting with the Scottish Highlanders who had settled here a generation before.

The scene inside Mud Cat's is lively. I turn away from the river and marsh to watch the Friday lunchtime scene. Construction men, officers from the wildlife refuge, and sport fishermen come and go. Six men and women, whose windbreakers bear the logo of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Brunswick some nine miles south, joke as they wait for their order. At the bar, a middle-aged blond flirts with a lean, muscular man with a face lined like the older Clint Eastwood. A white-haired couple, wearing pastel cotton sweaters and slacks, greets a young woman and little girl at the door. They take a table on the glass-enclosed deck overlooking the marsh.

People of means and leisure, owners of boats and houses on the wooded hammocks, are gathering for the weekend. Many of them know someone at a nearby table. Tomorrow most of the men will take their boats into the bays to fish for speckled trout and redfish or offshore for king mackerel and tuna.

These people are part of the migration to the country that Kathleen Russell described when I talked with her earlier in the day. “I know it's a strange thing to say in a town that is almost as old as the state, but McIntosh County really is

the ‘last frontier.’” She sat behind a desk in her corner office of the *Darien News*. Outside her door were the pressroom and tables where her small staff assembles the fourteen pages and packs them for weekly delivery. Not the stereotypical gruff, harried editor, Kathleen is relaxed, has time, and shares it with a smile. “I mean,” she explains, “the county is not built up, but very quickly developers are buying property and putting in subdivisions and condos.”

Darien sits on a natural terrace at the Atlantic end of the Altamaha River. The river, which drains about one-fourth of the state, splits into a half-dozen channels a few miles above the town, leaving a patchwork of islands that look, from the air, like a cubist painting in shades of gold, green, and blue. U.S. Highway 17 crosses the Darien River, one of the Altamaha’s branches, on the south edge of town. Small shops, banks, and restaurants line the thoroughfare that once carried the trucks and tourists from the cities of the Northeast to Florida and back. Interstate 95, a bit more than a mile west of the town, has drained this traffic, leaving a quaint fishing village and the restored Colonial Fort King George.

Bartram spent time here during the spring and fall of 1773 and again toward the close of his travels in 1776. Lachlan McIntosh, later a Revolutionary war general, hosted him. McIntosh owned and managed important properties. He and the Macgilivarys, Mohrs, and Mackays sheltered, equipped, and regaled Bartram with the rhetoric of Highlanders ready to do battle with King George. Bartram called them “the generous and true sons of liberty” (*Travels* 48).

James Oglethorpe, founder of the colony of Georgia, brought the fierce warriors to his new colony in the 1730s and ’40s to bolster its southern border against the Spanish. Three decades before Bartram arrived, they routed the Spaniards and established a tartan of rice and indigo plantations, largely on islands in the Altamaha delta. Remnants of their irrigation canals, filled with cattails and rice, still cross the marshes. Sawmills, powered by the waters of rising and falling tides, cut pines and cypresses into boards for houses and ships.

Descendants of these Highlanders remain in McIntosh County, but Russell says that people from Atlanta are moving here at an increasing pace. She runs through a litany of new subdivisions, most of them called “plantations.” Developers are gobbling up the northern half of the county near South Newport, where Donald McIntosh, a “venerable greyheaded Caledonian” gave Bartram refuge from a “tremendous thunder storm” on his first journey southward from Savannah (*Travels* 13).

After she orients me to the life, economy, and dreams of her county, Kathleen walks me to my car and I drive around the town. The grid of streets that

Oglethorpe laid out for Darien in 1736 remains. A handful of two-story houses and churches, built in the town's heyday as a lumber city, surrounds Columbus and Vernon squares.

Gray beards of Spanish moss hang from live oaks that spread green big-tops above neatly mowed grass in Vernon Square. The square was the commercial hub of Darien from 1870 to 1910, when the town was a leading exporter of pine timber. The banks and other commercial establishments are gone, but St. Andrews Episcopal Church, chartered in 1843, remains. Federal troops burned it in 1863, but the faithful rebuilt it. Its white, board-and-batten siding and steeply pitched roof identify it as Episcopal from five blocks away.

On the riverfront, a well-kept park with a boardwalk separates the river from the stubs of walls built of tabby, a mixture of fired oyster shells, lime, and sand. These ruins of nineteenth-century shops and warehouses recall the decades of Darien's prominence as a seaport, when steam-powered mills sliced pine and cypress cut from the forests along the Altamaha and floated to the harbor. Local historian Buddy Sullivan says that in the early half of the nineteenth century the mills churned out 40,000 board feet per day.

A few yards up river, entrepreneurs, backed by government grants, have transformed an old shrimp house and dock into a restaurant with floating piers for pleasure craft. It's part of the town's plan to attract tourists.

Manufactured and mobile homes, with an occasional faux-tabby house, stud dusty lots in the northern outskirts of Darien, out on U.S. 17 and State Road 99. The narrow highway winds between massive live oaks and passes old Victorian cottages and two-story frame houses in Ridgeville ("The Ridge"), listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Across Doboy Sound, Hog Hammock, a community of Gullah/Geechee people who have lived there for three centuries, shares Sapelo Island's 16,000 acres with the Sapelo Island Reserve, the R. J. Reynolds Plantation (since 1950 the home of the University of Georgia's Marine Institute), and the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve. Bartram went there in the island's wilder days, accompanying a party of locals for "fishing and fowling." There he encountered a rattlesnake so remarkable that he gives more than a page to the serpent and his advocacy to spare its life (*Travels* 268-70).

By 8:30 in the morning, cars, trucks and SUVs pack the narrow parking lots and road to the Sapelo ferry landing. Their drivers have gone to work on the island. The ferry makes two trips a day, each way, and space is limited. Try and get to the island on a whim, at the last minute, without a reservation, and you are likely to stand on the wharf, watching the wake of the departing *Sapelo Queen* as she heads across the sound.

Footprints across the South

Arrows by the highway point to the Tolomato subdivision. Narrow, paved streets curve through forests of oak and pine, occasionally dividing into two lanes to allow the roots of live oak trees to stretch beneath the asphalt. These are young trees compared with the massive oaks that the residents of Ridgeville protect. Behind a low, serpentine, faux-tabby wall that edges the right-of-way, lie golf courses, swimming pools, and tennis courts.

Tolomato is built around the ruins of a sugar refinery and rum distillery that ran here in the early 1800s. Two- and three-story houses under construction join large homes where landscapers manicure lawns and plant palms and shrubs. Marsh frontage is the first to go. Premium locations have decks and screened porches that give their owners a place to watch the sun rise over the gold-tinted marshes that separate Sapelo and St. Catherines Islands from the mainland.

Southerland Bluff Plantation sprawls across a woodland where, at the beginning of the Revolution, a shipyard shaped live oak timbers into gunboats and frigates for the Continental Navy. A British blockade in 1778 halted the work, but the bluff remained a stop for ships sailing the inland waterway in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A half-acre lot overlooking the twelfth fairway had recently sold for \$54,500. Another lot “with beautiful oaks overlooking the sixteenth fairway” was still available for \$65,000. But I find no visible trace of the old shipping facilities or shipyard.

Twenty-first-century colonizers are not lured to McIntosh County by free land for farming, as had been the original European colonists. Nor do beaches bring them, as the sand and surf located on the barrier islands is government owned. Rather, they come here for sea breezes in shady woodlands. The retirees with NASDAQ portfolios who migrate here, and the affluent businessmen and lawyers whose weekend dwellings fill the oak and palmetto hammocks, have bought golfing, boating, and solitude.

For them, McIntosh County may be the “frontier” that Katherine Russell thinks it is. But when Bartram rode its tracks, it had passed its day as a Colonial frontier and was already well-peopled and politically influential. Bands of wandering Native Americans caught fish and shellfish here 110 centuries before. Some of them settled to raise crops. They left middens of shells and bones around the outskirts of their villages. Someone—the guesses range from tenth-century Norsemen to seventeenth-century Spanish—built a fortified village on Creighton Island, south of Shellman Bluff.

"O Alatomaha!"



Figure 2. William Bartram. *Franklinia alatamaha* (*Franklinia altamaha*). n.d. Engraving, Bartram Journal. Plate. Trenchard, sc.

Footprints across the South

In the 1720s, the British built (then abandoned) Fort King George to guard the entrance to the Altamaha River at a site overlooking the marsh and the Darien River, now at the easternmost point of Darien. Later, they established Fort Barrington, a dozen miles up river from the marshes, to guard Darien's western flank. Near the fort, on a sandy plain, Bartram and his father found a species of *Gordonia*, a camellia-like shrub which he named *Franklinia altamaha*. William planted a specimen in his garden in Philadelphia, where it thrives and is the ancestor to all known examples of the plant. Two hundred years have passed since the last *Franklinia* was seen in the wild.



The Altamaha River made Darien. Its sediments fertilized the marsh islands; its flow cut a harbor deep enough to allow the passage of ships. And this stream enthralled Bartram:

How gently flow thy peaceful floods, O Alatomaha! How
sublimely rise to view, on thy elevated shores, yon Magnolian
groves, from whose tops the surrounding expanse is perfumed, by
clouds of incense, blended with the exhaling alm of the Liquid-
amber, and odours continually arising from circumambient
aromatic groves of Illicium, Myrica, Laurus, and Bignonia.
(*Travels* 48)

He thought the headwaters of the river lay in “the Cherokee mountains, near the head of Tugilo” (*Travels* 52). That is a stretch. The maps of his day may have misled him. A better point of reference is Stone Mountain, the landmark bulge of granite on the eastern edge of metropolitan Atlanta, now a theme park and monument to the Confederacy. Rain falling on Stone Mountain and on the east side of Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson Airport makes its way through Georgia red clay and runs more than 400 miles to the Atlantic. The Yellow, South, and Ocmulgee rivers pick up sediments and wastes from subdivisions, Macon, and the Robins Air Force Base. Fertilizers from fields along the Oconee River ride the currents to join these waters near Lumber City, a hundred miles by river upstream of Darien.

More than thirty percent of Georgia's \$80 million commercial and \$350 million recreational fisheries are based on the Altamaha. Less visible, but no less important, are the rare, threatened, and endangered animals and plants, including mussels and small fish, that call the Altamaha watershed home. Seven such species are not found anywhere else in the world. For this reason, the Nature Conservancy has established the Altamaha River Biosphere Reserve as one of its “Last Great Places on Earth.”



In 2002, American Rivers, a national organization that advocates "for healthy rivers, abundant fish and wildlife, and thriving river communities," listed the Altamaha as the seventh most endangered river in the nation. Due to the building of dams and power plants on Atlanta-area streams that feed the Altamaha, the organization predicts the river will experience "loss of important habitat areas, reduced populations of aquatic species, increased pollutant concentrations, and reduced recreational opportunities. This loss of freshwater flow has particularly profound consequences for the ecology at the mouth of the river."

James Holland has taken on the job of keeping watch over this chunk of the earth. He is the Altamaha Riverkeeper. From the window of his office in a small, frame house in Darien he can keep an eye on the marshes that surround the lowest end of the Altamaha River and see shrimp nets, fixed to the booms of white boats, rock gently as a stiff north wind rocks the waters of the harbor. Maps hanging from his walls show the extent of his interests: fourteen thousand square miles of territory surrounding seeps, swamps, and streams that feed the river.

A tall, robust man of the sea, Holland is an ex-Marine who gave up the corporate life three decades ago to trap crabs in the bays that caress the islands along Georgia's southern coastline. His face is lined by tough days fighting tides under the hot southern sun. On his feet are high, brown leather boots. His thick fingers rifle through papers on his desk and bring out charts that show water flow and salinity records over the past ten years. Though he attended school only through the ninth grade, he quotes scientific studies like a professor of marine biology. On a given day, he may be flying over Gum Swamp, two hundred river-miles upstream in Dodge County, directing a photography crew looking for evidence of logging that promotes erosion or diverts streams. Or, with the help of the Southern Environmental Law Center and the Turner Environmental Law Clinic, he may be in a courtroom, pleading his case against a dam near Atlanta that will rob the river of water and natural nutrients.

James has been the Riverkeeper since 1999. He earned the job after years of environmental activism. As a crab fisherman, he watched his profits shrink as his catches, and those of his fellow watermen, dwindled. Some years were better than others, but overall, the numbers and weight of the hard-shelled, blue delicacies kept declining.

Some blamed overfishing. Holland listened to the scientists and heard them say that water quality and quantity were the culprits.

"The counties and cities upstream have dammed the river in so many places," he tells me. "That puts less fresh water in the marshes where the fish and crabs lay their eggs and the larvae and fry grow. The female lays her eggs on the bottom and the male fertilizes them. The tide comes in and they rise into the water and

float upstream. Then, when the tide goes out, they lie on the bottom until the next high tide, when they rise again and float farther upstream. But the activities upstream make this process near impossible.

“The cities build dams and the timber people cut the forests and drain the wetlands. They plant pines in place of the hardwoods along the banks of the streams. All this together means that, when rains come, a heavy flow of water comes down from the cut-over forests. It’s like flushing a toilet. Whoosh. The fresh water pushes out into the bays. The young sea animals get out into the saltwater. When the fresh water recedes, they can’t find their way back into the marsh and they die or get eaten.”

He speaks of numerous threats to the quality of the river and its life, of runoff from timber plantations and farm fields, and of more than a hundred permits allowing treated sewage, discharge from paper and pulp operations, and other pollutants dumped into the river. Fish kills happen each summer. A parasite, triggered by pollution, turns the blood of adult blue crabs into a milky soup.

The Altamaha Riverkeeper and allies have successfully defended the river in courts, blocking or stalling the building of dams near Atlanta, king-sized marinas along the coast, and sprawling subdivisions in the hammocks that crown the islands of the Georgia marshland.

In the autumn of 1773, Bartram borrowed “a neat light cypress canoe” from the Laurens plantation on Broughton Island, stocked it, and paddled up the Altamaha “fifty miles above the white settlements” before he wearied of pressing against the current and turned to float back to Darien. But Bartram had no GPS. Not even a chronometer. His distance estimates are notoriously flawed. Perhaps in the fall, when its flow subsides from spring floods, a strong man, if he left Darien on an incoming tide, could paddle fifty miles up the Altamaha.

However far he went, today one must go farther and look hard to find remnants of the environment he saw. He describes “mostly a forest of the great long-leaved pine, the earth covered with grass, interspersed with an infinite variety of herbaceous plants, and embellished with extensive savannas, always green, sparkling with ponds of water, and ornamented with clumps of evergreen, and other trees and shrubs” (*Travels* 30). To see forests of longleaf along this river requires a trip of a bit more than one hundred miles upstream to the Moody Forest, near Baxley.

I’m too old to paddle that stretch against the current. Or maybe just too soft. I take the highway. Seventy-five miles of two-lane, fast becoming four-lane. Artifacts of the wood industry surround me as I approach Baxley. Stacks of lumber. Piles of pulp wood. Steaming, smoking kilns. Trucks haul farm-grown pine logs and, occasionally, hardwoods along the highway. Baxley



became a timber city around the turn of the twentieth century. Its population swelled 132 percent between 1890 and 1910, when the big logging companies rolled in. Once known as the "Turpentine Capital of the World," it continues to host an annual "Tree Fest."

Moody Forest covers about 3,500 acres fifteen miles north of the town. The Nature Conservancy, along with the state, owns it. They and local author Janisse Ray struggled to add the tract to the list of preserves that the Conservancy holds throughout the world. In the millennium year, they outbid seven timber companies, paying \$8.25 million, part of it raised from the State of Georgia's wildlife car tag funds.

Why would rational and sane people, along with a financially conservative state government, want this land so badly? For some, the answer is in biology. A longleaf forest is not just a collection of a species of trees. It is a complex ecosystem. And that complexity motivates scientists.

Others cherish these forests for their beauty. Greens, browns, and golds spread through rolling plains, open and inviting. Tall, slender trunks hold gnarled branches that, in turn, grasp long needles and cast a calm shade over the low, bending blades of grass.

Some push to conserve the longleaf flats because they have taken as their life's work the ethics of Father Thomas Berry:

Trees have tree rights, insects have insect rights, rivers have river rights, mountains have mountain rights. So too with the entire range of beings throughout the universe. All rights are limited and relative. So too with humans. We have human rights. We have rights to the nourishment and shelter we need. We have rights to habitat. But we have no rights to deprive other species of their proper habitat. (5)

For environmentally sensitive children of the South, the reason is primal: longleaf forests are heritage, far older and more universal than antebellum mansions or a flag with a star-filled St. Andrew's cross. In pine flats, "you can see how south Georgia used to be, before all the old longleaf pine forests that were our sublimity and our majesty were cut," writes Ray in *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (13).

The longleaf pine community once stretched from southeastern Virginia to eastern Texas. It decorated as many as ninety million acres. Fewer than fourteen percent of this acreage remains, and a tiny fragment of that is old-growth forest. The Nature Conservancy reports that "less than 3 percent of the forest remains and what is left is disappearing at a rate of 100,000 acres per year."

Wholesale, widespread destruction swept the southern forests over the last 120 years. Humans had dabbled with the trees earlier, of course. Red men girdled

trees, burnt them, and planted small fields. White and black men came, two-by-two, one man on each end of a crosscut blade. They felled great trees and floated them down the Altamaha to Darien to build houses and ships. But these were mere skirmishes. The blitzkrieg on the forests came after the Civil War when corporations brought crews and mules and oxen to drag out the prized pines by the millions of board feet. And when they moved on, they left the land bare, save for an occasional sapling or a tangle of briars.

Pines grow still in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont. Slash and loblolly stand in sterile, simplistic rows on tree farms. When, after twenty or thirty years, they have reached a size large enough for pulpwood or two-by-fours, monster machines belching diesel exhaust grasp them just above their roots and, with a calamitous whack, shear them. Roaring steel “draggers” pull them to a central pile, where another machine wraps its arms around five or six dead trees, strips their remaining limbs, and lifts them onto the bed of a long truck that carries them to stacks in lumberyards beside the railroads. Acres of trees can be clearcut between sunrise and sunset by three men and their diesel-steel-hydraulic assistants.

The operation leaves shallow stumps, a few scrawny blackjack oaks, and small mountains of brush. “Ugly” is an adjective inadequate to describe a clearcut. Hear Janisse Ray:

If you clear a forest, you'd better pray continuously. While you're pushing a road through and rigging the cables and moving between trees on the dozer, you'd better be talking to God. While you're cruising timber and marking trees with a blue slash, be praying; and pray while you're peddling the chips and logs and writing Friday's checks and paying the diesel bill—even if it's under your breath, a rustling at the lips. If you're manning the saw head or the scissors, snipping the trees off at the ground, going from one to another, approaching them brusquely and laying them down, I'd say, pray extra hard; and pray hard when you're hauling them away. God doesn't like a clearcut. It makes his heart turn cold, makes him wince and wonder what went wrong with his creation, and sets him to thinking about what spoils the child.

(Ecology of a Cracker Childhood 123)

So the Nature Conservancy bought the Moody forest to spare it from the hungry machines and to preserve and nurture it. Sounds easy. Keep out the cutters and the strewers of trash and, in time, the Earth will do its thing and the forest will be something that Bartram would recognize. Fences and gates. And a watchman.

As with most areas long corrupted by neglect or abuse, the task is not that simple or easy. To understand the difficulty faced by those who would restore such a place, it is necessary to recognize that a longleaf forest is more than a collection of trees. It is a delicately balanced home for more than a score of plant, bird, and reptile species that depend on each other for their lives—an ecosystem. Tortoises, snakes, spiders, and salamanders contribute to each others' lives under a carpet of wiregrass beneath the longleaf canopy.

The Earth's atmosphere plays the protagonist in the drama of the forest. To reach its best health, the floor of the forest must burn every few years. Nature sends bolts of lightning to lick the pines and wiregrass with flames. Bartram witnessed a pivotal event in a longleaf forest's life cycle when he saw lightning turn a tree into a torch near Darien (*Travels* 13-14).

The Moody family had maintained the forest, protected it from wide scale timber operations, for over a hundred years. Although a wide right-of-way for high-tension power lines cuts through the tract, longleaf and slash pines cover as many as 350 of its acres. Some of these trees are over 300 years old. Canopies of the oldest of them shaded the wiregrass carpet when Bartram paddled his boat up the Altamaha.

Maybe the family loved this land too much, protected it too well. As they resisted cutting, they also shielded the forest from fire. Not that fire protection was entirely the choice of the Moodys. Forest fire is denied by law, custom, and Smokey the Bear. The longleafs, and the accompanying blackjack oaks, grew, but they are not as large as they would be if fire had occasionally scorched the earth, burning away the litter of pine needles that cover its floor and encouraging the birth of new stands of wiregrass.

On an autumn day, Alison McGee, Southeast Georgia Conservation Manager for the Conservancy, guides me around Moody and explains the difficulty of restoring the natural order. As her SUV rolls along a shaded lane behind the Moody Cemetery, a buck deer herds two does into the cover of a stand of slash pines, planted a decade before on a parcel cut when a member of the family found it necessary to sell some timber in order to pay taxes on the property.

We bounce over the track, barely wide enough for two wheels, across the power right-of-way. False foxglove (Bartram's *Gerardia*) reigns in full bloom. Alison is out of the car the moment we park in a grassy opening where tall pines support the tent of a bright blue sky. Before I can grab my camera and walk around the vehicle, she is fondling the frail flowers of a clump of wiregrass. "It's sterile," she says. "We burnt it too late. Natural burns occur in the summer or fall. If that happens, the grass germinates. We can't burn in the summer; there's still too much fuel on the forest floor because it's been protected from fire. A summer fire would burn too hot and damage the forest. Look here."

She walks to the base of a great tree and stoops. Her hand passes over a mound of earth that rises gently about eighteen inches above the surface of the forest floor, then wipes away the duff: rust-colored pine needles that dress the forest's floor. Running her slender fingers through the loose soil beneath the duff, she says, "These are roots of the tree." She's touching a web of beige fibers. "If we burn when the forest is dry and the air is hot, the duff will burn the roots and damage the tree. We have to get rid of most of the duff before we can encourage a more natural fire." She says that a graduate student is writing a thesis on the subject of how to reduce the duff. Meanwhile, the organization will continue to light controlled burns in the winter, on days after rain, when the air is humid and the wind calm.

As we stroll over the hills, we stop beside the opening of a burrow, a foot across, home of a gopher tortoise and the myriad spiders and small reptiles and amphibians who follow him. Bartram was the first to identify this tortoise when he saw one a few miles down the Altamaha.

Twenty-five feet up a large pine towering over the burrow is a hole where a red-cockaded woodpecker, an endangered species, has dug his den. The bark below the cavity is glossy, coated with resin that drains from the hole. Alison tells me that the sap makes it impossible for snakes to reach the den and raid young woodpeckers. This bird, about the size of a cardinal, once lived in the forests from Florida to New Jersey and Maryland and as far west as Texas and Oklahoma. Settlers in Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee knew them. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that only about 5,000 groups of red-cockaded woodpeckers, or 12,500 birds, now live from Florida to Virginia and west to southeast Oklahoma and eastern Texas. Its range is about one percent of its original territory. Unlike the Carolina parakeet or the red wolf, which early farmers considered pests, the woodpecker neared extinction for the simple reason that builders and lumbermen coveted his longleaf home and cut it in large numbers.

Brown water fills a bog on a slope below the burrow and den tree. In the center of a soggy pocket fifteen or twenty feet across grow clumps of pitcher plants, the *Sarracenia* that Bartram marveled over (*Travels* xviii). Alison tells me that these individual plants are not as healthy as those that live in a fully natural longleaf environment. Too much shade, the result of too few fires, has dwarfed them. Still, they are delightfully sensuous and mysterious, their hooded tops ready to attract unwary insects, their throaty stems waiting to receive and trap them. And under the care of Alison and her colleagues, they will regain their rightful vitality.



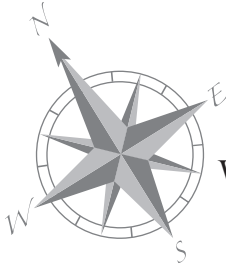
Figure 3. William Bartram. *Sarracenia purpurea* L. (Pitcher plant). n.d. Pen and ink drawing. Elements, frontis.

Longleaf forests hold more than what I see. Somewhere beneath the wiregrass and the duff crawl flatwoods salamanders. The bog hides striped newts and Carolina and dusky gopher frogs. Flitting behind some branches is a Bachman's sparrow. Alison hears it, but I don't see it. I'd like to see an eastern indigo snake and a Florida pine snake, maybe even an eastern diamondback rattler—at a distance.

Alison loves the longleaf forest, knows every trail, tree, and woodpecker den on the site. As we walk, she notes bracken fern, smilax, and Saint-John's-wort. We drive deeper into the tract, where she knows of a cluster of Altamaha grit sandstone. "Larger outcroppings of the sandstone are full of life," she says. "At Broxton Rocks [another Conservancy site], we have creeping morning glory, which is endangered in Georgia. Eastern wood rats love to hang out in these rocks."

But Moody Forest is home to more than longleaf. We drive downward on a winding track into the Altamaha bottoms. Briers and twigs scratch the side of the SUV before we park on the edge of a ten-foot bluff. "A month ago, the river was up to here," says Alison, pointing to the edge of the bluff. Cypress and tupelos root in the black soil. Some are over six hundred years old. We walk down, toward acres of cypress knees. The bases of some trees extend more than ten feet in diameter, narrowing in an inverted funnel, their straight trunks surmounted by canopies of feathery leaves that darken the soggy forest floor. In most cypress forests, trees of this size would be seen only as stumps, memories of earlier grandeur. Moody's trees are intact, worth thousands of dollars if milled. They are priceless standing here in a primeval forest, dark and moist, untouched by saws and greed. Fruit of tupelos, soft and oval like small calamato olives, their skins tough, dark purple, splash in the tea-colored water. Frogs scurry for cover. A toad the size of my smallest fingernail hops over fallen leaves.

Restoring natural order to an ecosystem that has been disturbed by human intervention, even when that intervention has been to protect the land from tree cutting and fire, is a long-term, painstaking venture. Step-by-step, experiment-by-experiment, the Nature Conservancy plans to work with the forest. The goal is to help Moody regain, over decades, the health it deserves and allow it to join the ranks of the scattered other longleaf forests of which Janisse Ray writes, "Nothing is more beautiful, nothing more mysterious, nothing more breathtaking, nothing more surreal" (*Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* 14).



WRIGHTSBOROUGH, 2002

“They’ll be jumping over that coop to your right and heading down the pasture over by the woods,” bellows a voice with a gravelly, fully Southern good-ol’ boy twang. “At least, that’s the plan.”

I’m seated on a bale of hay on a farm wagon, part of a train of tractors, heavy farm trucks, and flat-beds. We’ve stopped in a broad, grassy pasture. The announcement comes from a black box, a loudspeaker set in the tall, green grass near the crest of the hill.

“What’s a coop?” I ask the man with a full, sunburned face who sits beside me on a bale of hay.

“It’s one of those wooden fences the horses jump over,” he says, lifting his plastic cup to point toward the triangular structure that breaks the tree-lined barbed wire fence.

I climb down and walk through knee-high grass, dodging land mines of fire ant mounds. As I train my camera on the wooden gap in the fence row, I hear the bellowing of hounds following fox scent that had been dragged over the field to provide the festive spectacle. A red jacket atop a shining roan glides over the coop. A column of dogs follows in a cacophony of yelping, then mounted men and women in red and black jackets, reins relaxed. The horses gallop along the edge of the woodland, their hooves clipping the turf in an occasional tribute to gravity.

“Hey! These guys can ride!” says the pudgy woman who swings her video camera quickly to the left, following the spectacle down the pasture.

When a horn sends two notes into the clear, autumn air, riders rein in their mounts in a copse of trees at the far end of the field. The horses impatiently tromp the soft soil while white, brown, and black hounds circle them, whipping

the air with their rope-like tails. This “Opening Meet” of the Belle Meade Hunt runs on land that William Bartram visited in the middle of May 1773. The wagons and their loads of spectators are the “Tally Ho Ride.”

Bartram had cut short his exploration around the mouth of the Altamaha to ride to Augusta to observe a crucial conference of Creeks, Cherokees, and the Colonial government. It was an opportunity for the explorer to meet leaders of the tribes whose lands he planned to wander and study.

When he arrived in Augusta and learned that the Indian delegations had delayed, he went some thirty-five miles farther west to Wrightsborough, on the edge of European settlement. A few days after the conference, he returned to the town, this time in the company of a party of military officers, land surveyors, Indians, and entrepreneurs surveying the land the Crown had acquired from the Creeks and Cherokees.

Bartram says Wrightsborough was a “pleasant town,” “founded by Jos. Mattock, Esq of the sect called Quakers; this public spirited man having obtained, for himself and his followers, a district, comprehending upwards of forty thousand acres of land” (*Travels* 35-37). Governor Wright had deeded them an area of magnificent forests, rich soil, and well-drained hillsides on the edge of the “Fall Line” of Georgia. Streams “murmuring in the hollow rocks . . . Groves, presenting to view their prolific Boosom, beautifully decorated with the sorounding flowery hill & verdant lawns; all gay & Fragrant defuses a lovely & fruitfull Scenery all around” (*Report to Dr. John Fothergill* 442). The massive trees Bartram saw have long since yielded to axes and saws, leaving mere pockets of woodlands that are beginning to show the yellows and reds of a Georgia autumn. Sprawling pecan groves have replaced the cultivated fruit trees—apple, pear, and peach—that delighted Bartram. And today nearly a thousand riders and spectators have succeeded the Quaker farmers.

At noon, on the long, narrow front lawn of an old white frame house, riders in black britches and tall, polished boots had walked their slender chestnuts, sinuous palominos, and giant blacks with plaited tails and manes to line two sides of the field. They fixed their eyes on a pony leading a riderless gray horse that bounds over a coop, followed by the hounds and a group of red-jacketed riders.

In his strong, proud flanks, the gray embodies the uniqueness of this day. This had been Master James Wilson’s mount. Today, his granddaughter leads her on the first Opening Meet that Wilson missed in the thirty-six years of the hunt. Master James had died seven months before, hit by a truck as he crossed a highway in his golf cart. His family and colleagues have made today’s hunt a tribute to his vision and tireless development of fox hunting on the hills of McDuffie County.

In 1966, Wilson brought together seven other fox hunters at his home outside of Thomson. Within two years they were breeding dogs and organizing the hunt. Over the next three decades, Belle Meade grew into a nationally recognized hunt that draws riders and spectators from across the world.

Hunters circle around the pack to hear the “Blessing of the Hounds,” solemn in the presence of the riderless gray and its back-facing black boots. The dogs, wagging their tails, surround James’s son, Epp, who kneels on the grass in the middle of the circle.

“Bless, O Lord, rider and horse, and hounds that run, in their running, and shield them from danger to life and limb,” prays Father Edward Frank, a Roman Catholic priest from Augusta who has participated in the hunt almost from its beginning. Dressed in his long, red jacket, a yellow scarf around his neck and a surplice over his breast, he pleads, “Bless the foxes who partake in the chase, that they may run straight and true and may find their destiny in thee.”

But the day is more James Wilson’s than the horses’, hounds’ or foxes’.

Wilson family roots in the county go back six generations. Among James’s ancestors is Thomas Watson, one of those of whom Bartram said, “They Plant Wheat, Barley, Flax, Hemp, Oates, corn, Cotton, Indigo, Breed Cattle, Sheep, and Make Very good Butter & Cheese” (*Report to Dr. John Fothergill* 442).

Now the prayers are done. As riders and dogs assemble in a grove, spectators climb aboard their wagons and trucks. I’ve been told that most any wagon would accept me. “Just ask them. They’ll be glad to have you,” Epp had said. I walk down the row of trucks and wagons, looking for a crew.

“You looking for a ride?” asks Larry Lendman, a building contractor from nearby Thomson. A member of the hunt, he usually rides after the hounds, but today has chosen to drive an oversized pickup pulling a farm trailer. “You can join my group.”

My fellow travelers are related to a locally owned bank: lawyers, accountants, bankers, and their wives. They have loaded the rig with hay bales and coolers. A smiling, silver-haired lady in blue jeans offers me a red drink named for a notorious Queen of England as our trailer pulls into the queue of wagons. By mid-afternoon, the wagon is a rolling tailgate party. We are eating sandwiches of thin-sliced, spicy roast pork, dipping chips in salsa, and washing down the food with cold beer and wine.

Mindful of the comforts of their guests and the need to keep the soil free of non-fox scents, the Belle Meade Hunt folks have contracted with a Jiffy-Jon company to tow a trailer carrying portable toilets along the hunt route. Wherever the feast roves, there go the twelve blue and yellow fiberglass outhouses.

At the far end of the hunt course, on the side of a steep hill leading down to Little Creek, the wagons stop. "This is the Rock Dam," says Larry. "We rebuilt it last year after a flood washed it out."

I follow the crowd down the sloping roadway through a pine and oak forest and look down to an old dam built of rust-brown boulders. A trickle of water spills over the center of the rock structure. Curious spectators walk across the dam. Three girls from a sorority wagon walk on the beach of silt downstream. They are flirting with two slender young men who have carried bottles of beer to the creekside.

"Is this Mattock's Dam?" I ask one of the Belle Meade Hunt members.

"Who was Mattock?"

I explain the history briefly, telling her that Joseph Mattock ran a mill.

"We just call it the Rock Dam. My aunt would know. She knows all about the history of the county."

I ask others on the ride what they know of Colonial Wrightsborough but give up the quest after talking with a couple of dozen. Except for Epp and members of his family, no one knows a shred of the rich history of Wrightsborough. Riding through fields and forests of a new millennium, they are unconnected to and unsupported by the labors and conflicts of the past. They know that the Rock Dam is old. But how old? Built by what hands? What happened to the Quaker men whose industry and sweat built the dam? What principles led those men and women, six generations back, to oppose the political winds of their day to the extent that they would forsake their land, orchards, and mills?

Early in the hunt, the riders are aloof from the wagons. They rest their horses in the shade of the trees or jump leisurely over coops while awaiting the next "drag" and chase. Toward the close of the day, however, they mingle with spectators, chatting around tables where champagne is served at the end of a tree-bordered pasture while the hounds mill about, begging for leftover meat scraps from the picnics.

The sun is low and the air growing cold as the wagons pull away from the festive field. But the champagne has warmed the hearts and loosened the tongues. A pair of hunters rides alongside the wagon.

"Do you have any water?" asks the man.

Someone hands him and his companion cold bottles from a cooler. His companion, wearing a tight-fitting black jacket, her blonde hair pulled into a bun under her velvet-covered helmet, kibitzes with a lawyer and an account executive.

"Have you seen a fox today?" asks the lawyer, whimsically.

The chic rider laughs, "Not a one. Someone saw one last December."

“You’re the chief fox!” says the exec. The men laugh; their wives sit on the hay bales, pale, vengeful smiles pasted on their faces, while the horsewoman blushes, grins, and rides on.

Red foxes are rare now on the hills of Wrightsborough, but, occasionally, the hounds scare up a coyote.

Barbecue, catered on the lawn of the Bowdre-Rees-Knox house, ends the day. A ticket-taker directs us to a long table laden with pork, potato salad, beans, slaw, and thick-sliced bread. Styrofoam cups hold syrupy iced tea, Georgia’s official liquid accompaniment to barbecue. In the living room of the two-hundred-year-old stone raised cottage men sit on sofas and chairs sipping bourbon beside a crackling fire and watching a video of the blessing of the hounds and the chase.

I see it wherever I go looking for Bartram’s tracks: the American absorption in the pursuit of pleasure. Bass boats, motor homes, whitewater raft outfitters. The Academy of Leisure Sciences estimates that leisure easily accounts for over one trillion dollars a year, or about a third of all consumer spending, and is America’s number one economic activity. We take for granted a level of slack time and of money for play that Wrightsborough’s hard-working Quakers could not have imagined.



There is more to Wrightsborough than a fox hunt, however. I find the historic township with Dot Jones, long a prime mover of The Wrightsboro Foundation and promoter of tourism in McDuffie County. On a warm April morning, when the Georgia countryside is coming alive, Dot drives me across the Interstate north of Thomson, past a small airport, a country club, and a sewage treatment plant on Mattock Creek. Pale green leaf buds brighten the pecan groves.

Scars of old road beds, cut deep by stagecoaches and wagons, lead out from the paved road. “That’s the old Savannah road,” says Dot, pointing to a well-worn dirt road on our left. “My great-grandfather drove the stagecoach on that road.”

She turns into a short, gravel driveway that ends abruptly at a weathered tombstone in the yard of the Wrightsboro Methodist Church. The Foundation maintains the church house and watches over the surrounding historic district.

Dot compiled a book that contains studies of the history of the church and records of the community written by the late, local historian Pearl Baker. She knows the facts and feels the history. To her, the church, tombstones, and meager remnants of old buildings are more than flotsam left by the tides of social change. This hillside is Georgia’s heritage.

“This was an educated community of family farmers, even after the Quakers left. Some of the leading families of Atlanta came from here,” she says as we

ramble through the cemetery behind the church to a plot beneath a massive oak. “These are Massengales and Candles”—names in the aristocracy of Atlanta.

“Behind those trees was the girls’ academy; the boys’ academy was over that way,” she says, pointing north through the second-growth forest that covers the rolling hills.

Walking up the steps to the porch that spans the north end of the white church house, she pulls a key from her pocket and slips it into the lock on the heavy wooden door. Late morning light through the windows reflects from the white-painted broad pine planks of the interior walls and illuminates the dark wooden pews. An old pump organ and a piano flank the podium.

“The last church on this land was the Wrightsboro Methodist Church,” she tells me. “According to Pearl, the original Quaker church was here. But it burned some time before 1773. The Indians may have burned it. So, the Quakers built a meetinghouse across Mattock’s Creek from the old mill site.”

She leads me from the church to Fish Trap Road, a twenty-five-foot-wide crease worn into the earth that marks a main street of the abandoned town. We walk the muddy corridor past the unmarked lots of the Quaker town, then double back across the blacktop road and find our way over a spring branch, dodging poison ivy vines. On a hill that overlooks Middle Creek, we walk around a sturdy stone foundation. “This may have been the fort built by Colonel Barnard in 1774 to protect the frontier,” she tells me.

Along the way, she spins stories of how the Quakers from North Carolina obtained a land grant to these fertile hills in 1768, and of Indian attacks in the early years of the settlement: “the Quakers wouldn’t take up arms against the king. The revolutionaries opposed them bitterly . . . after the revolution, the Quakers moved away to east Tennessee, Ohio, and beyond . . . in 1799 the Georgia legislature abolished the Quaker control of the township and deeded it to a new set of trustees. That’s when they changed the name to Wrightsboro.”

Only the church, cemetery, an old, unpainted general store, and the foundation of a nineteenth-century building remain. Four goats browse in the pen beside the shed that stands near one of the two modern white frame houses.

We return to Dot’s car. “Now I want to show you the second oldest house in Georgia,” she says. We drive past forests, pastures, and tree farms and turn onto a muddy country road. There, in an isolated quarter of the county, the Rock House has stood for more than two hundred years, surrounded by a lawn carved from the forest. Over the past two decades, the Foundation has used funds from small grants to restore this house built by Thomas Ansley in 1785.

He styled it after the homes of his native Delaware River Valley in Pennsylvania. Granite rocks dragged from nearby fields on the “Fall Line,”

are mortared into foot-thick walls and whitewashed on the inside. White oak beams form lintels above the doors and fireplaces. Heart pine flooring, sawn from longleaf pines on the ridges, creaks beneath our steps. Pine walls divide the house into four rooms. A wooden staircase leads to a loft.

Ansley's frontier was harsh and wild. Creek Indians, chafing over the expansion of colonists into their lands just a dozen years earlier, threatened. Rough-hewn settlers from Virginia and the Carolinas, hard-drinking and lawless, were no less menacing. Perhaps this house, with its thick walls and deep, fireplace-warmed basement, served not only as a dwelling but also as a fortress and cache for vital, perishable supplies and deer hides traded by Creeks. I imagine the Rock House as the "rock" of the early frontier settlement. It is also heritage. The great-great grandmother of President Jimmy Carter, Ann Ansley Carter, descended from Thomas Ansley.

For those who see the Old South as Tara-style, antebellum, Greek Revival houses of plantation-land Georgia or as the town houses of Savannah and Charleston, the Rock House gives notice of the diversity of the state and its early settlers. This building is a survivor of the *old* Old South, worthy of more protection and visitation than the Foundation can afford.



On a pleasant, sunny Sunday morning in May, Maria and I drive across the state to McDuffie County. Bartram's horse had carried him to Wrightsborough down a wagon road that was hardly more than the ancient Indian trading path; we speed along Interstate 20. At the Thomson exit, we pass the sprawling Dudley Nursery, a wholesale outfit that has replaced, in horticultural history, the farms and orchards of the Colonial Quakers.

Up the state highway about a mile, a small sign points to the right, beckoning us to the Blind Willie Festival. Each spring, blues aficionados gather on a grassy hillside to celebrate the heritage of the South's original music, played in honor of Blind Willie McTell. Guitarist and singer Blind Willie, born in nearby Thomson, played the blues in Atlanta and across the state in the 1920s through the '50s. He left behind a legacy of commercial recordings. The Library of Congress holds a collection of his music.

But we turn left and drive to the gravel lot across from the old Methodist church. An unseasonably cool wind sweeps across the cemetery at Wrightsborough as we watch a family of six walk to the church. "We didn't dress right," says Maria, observing the mother's dress and the father's suit and tie. "Church clothes. I should've known better than to listen to you," she

Footprints across the South

jokes, looking at my denim shirt and khakis and patting her black slacks while recalling the controversies over women wearing pants in her home church in rural middle Georgia. As we stroll around the cemetery reading faded inscriptions on ancient tombstones, Maria finds solace when she sees arriving women wearing slacks and men with no ties.

We find places on an old, painted pew. Maria thumbs through the old Methodist hymnal and notes that the songs are familiar from her childhood Baptist church in Middle Georgia. I recall reading that all Southern religion is, at its heart, Baptist.

As the pews fill, a man walks down the aisle and places a bouquet of flowers, cut from his wife's garden, on the small table behind the pulpit. Women walk down the aisles, handing out printed programs.

By eleven o'clock, more than a hundred people have taken their places. In a Quaker meeting such as Bartram attended here, the congregation sat quietly. No one passed out programs. Silence was broken only when the Spirit moved. But this is not a Quaker meeting. People eagerly greet one another across the aisles and benches as the pianist begins a prelude of hymns that have endured since the nineteenth century.

Southern Protestants sing. They sing in harmony. They sing with conviction. They enjoy the lyrics that blend a sense of place with their spiritual heritage. "The Church in the Wildwood" opens the service:

From the church in the valley By the wildwood,
When day fades away into night,
I would fain from this spot of my childhood
Wing my way to the mansions of light.

Later, after a prayer, the pianist announces "In the Garden" and the worshipers sing,

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses.
And the voice I hear
Falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.

Memory sings to memory, and where memory loses the scent, nostalgia and faith take up the hunt.

A young physician from the nearby town of Thomson mounts the pulpit. Tall, slender, scholarly, dressed simply in a blue blazer over khaki slacks, he tells the congregation, "Our destiny demands that we consider our heritage."

"The faith of Wrightsborough is what made America great," he says, weaving the story of the Israelite king Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah into a homily that provides a subtle but clear warning: A nation that strays from its heritage of faith is doomed.

The pianist plays a Joplinesque version of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” while the congregation fills wooden plates with ten- and twenty-dollar bills.

Bartram is on the agenda. The guest speaker, Dr. Edward Cashin, a historian from nearby Augusta State University, spins the tale of the botanist’s visit to Wrightsborough. He stands easily behind the dark wooden pulpit, relaxed beneath his shock of white hair, a gentle smile on his face. His speech is informal, chatty, the lively overflow of years of piecing together the history of the American Revolution in the South and writing dozens of books and articles.

“We think of Wrightsborough as quiet, safe, and pastoral. But it was a dangerous place when Bartram rode out here. The trees along the narrow roads held many perils. Worthless ruffians had settled out beyond Wrightsborough, in land that still belonged to the Creeks. The Indians were angry.”

The congregation sits quietly and listens intently.

“More than once the Creeks attacked and plundered the settlement. In 1773, the Indians were particularly upset. The Cherokees to the north had gotten themselves into debt to the British. To pay off their debts they had agreed to give up land to the settlers. The problem was that some of the land didn’t belong to the Cherokees; it was Creek land. That was the reason for the conference in Augusta that Bartram was to attend. The Creeks, the Cherokees, and His Majesty’s government needed to work out a land dispute.”

Cashin paints a picture of the land survey that followed the conference: “Quite an impressive event. Probably the most important thing that ever happened in Wrightsborough. Ninety or so men, surveyors, soldiers, wealthy colonists, Indian chiefs and braves, came together at Wrightsborough and headed northwest, marking the boundary of the new cession of land.”

Quietly, almost as an aside, he tells a story. “A couple of Cherokee braves from the survey group took Bartram fishing up where the Tugaloo River comes into the Savannah River. Then, when the survey was over, Bartram headed back to Savannah and the young men started home to the North Carolina mountains. The Indians stopped at a farm house, built out in the territory where no white settlements were authorized, and asked for some food. The housewife had brought out milk and something to eat when her husband appeared in the doorway, leveled his gun, and blasted one of the braves. He struck the other visitor with his musket butt and finished him off with an axe.”

A teenaged boy in the third row stops whispering to his brother and leans toward Cashin.

“Bartram never mentioned the murders. Why not? He knew the victims. He had to have known about the killing. The incident riled the Indians so much that

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war almost broke out. But Bartram wasn't writing about war. He was painting pictures of nature, of the goodness of man, of a land full of beauty and wonder."

For a few moments, in the minds of the congregation, Wrightsborough is more than an idyllic, nostalgic woodland, a place to find one's roots. It is a focal point of the American Revolution and a crossroads on the trail of a solitary wanderer from Philadelphia.

When echoes of the final hymn have fallen, the congregation resumes the joyous buzzing, deferred from the moment before the first hymn. Family and old friends are here. Children have grown taller, the belts of middle-aged men are longer, stretched tighter, than they were last May. A silver-haired matriarch, walking with the help of a cane, is alone at this homecoming for the first time in thirty years. An old man's pallor shows the signs of illness and decline. A brown-haired young woman in a loose-fitting dress hugs an older woman. They laugh as they talk about the young woman bringing a new heir to next year's event.

Quickly the friends spill through the wide doors and onto the porch and grounds, retrieving containers from their cars: casserole dishes, fried chicken covered with aluminum foil, salads, cakes. They set them on the plywood tables that rest on weathered sawhorses behind the meeting house where large roots bulge through the dark soil of the cemetery. The homecoming buffet is laid out between ancestors' graves.

Lines form quickly on both sides of the table. People meet and chat as they juggle heavy-laden paper plates and find places to sit on low concrete walls surrounding the final resting places of ancient ancestors.

By 1:30, only the clean-up team and a few stragglers remain in the churchyard. We drive from the parking lot and down the road, past the shady pecan groves and pastures where cattle graze behind barbed wire fences. Every half mile or so, a coop punctuates the strands of wire.



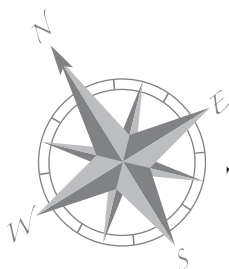
The following April, when abundant rains have loaded Middle Creek with fresh water, Dot Jones guides Maria, Brad Sanders, and me back to the Rock Dam. Brad sets up his tripod and camera to capture the cascade of water, rust-tinted by the runoff from upstream fields, that rushes over the granite rocks.

The original builders slid boulders into a natural shoal, fitting them into place until their structure rose twenty feet above the swirling pool at its base. Recent repairs have used smaller stones; a concrete cap seals the crest.

"This is Mattock's Dam," Dot tells us, filling in the information that my fox hunt guides missed.

“Joseph Mattock ran the mill here.” She points out the mill race across the creek and tells us that the mill was set on a shallow hill beside the steep, tree-covered banks fifty yards below the dam.

I imagine walls of raw pine boards, the wheel, the pond, the Quaker farmers bringing their corn to be ground to meal. And Bartram, fresh to the colony, looking for brothers and sisters in his native faith and finding them around this mill.



THE GREAT BUFFALO LICK

Light from my lantern reflects off droplets clinging to the tips of the pale green leaves of early April. Off and on all day, a gray sky had soaked the fields and forests of northeast Georgia. Draped in a poncho, I had poked around brambles and cemeteries and in the late afternoon had returned to my campsite in the A. H. Stephens State Park.

The park spreads across a hill on the northern edge of Crawfordville, Georgia, a town now retired from a brief career of historic importance. I search for a grocery store but find only a couple of defunct cafes and closed antique shops. Beyond the railroad trestle, I turn in front of Liberty Hall and pass a display of Confederate flags hanging in front of Ruffin's, manufacturer of flags.

A. H. Stephens, scholar, lawyer, vice president of the Confederacy, and governor of Georgia, lived in Liberty Hall. His pale yellow house is large and impressive but modest compared to Greek Revival antebellum homes. A broad lawn in front surrounds a tall, marble statue. Preserved and restored barns and other outbuildings in the lot behind the house display the working parts of the plantation. Farther behind, on a thousand acres of Stephens's land, tall pines spread their canopies above the campground, surrounding a white wooden fire tower that resembles a lighthouse more than a forest lookout.

Earlier in the day, when I set up my tent and stretched a blue tarp over the picnic table, I'd had my choice of any of the twenty-five campsites, each with a gray limestone gravel parking pad. The campground host was the only other occupant. By evening, three RVs are my only neighbors.

I scrounge some dead pine limbs from the floor of the forest and take out my knife to shave the wet wood into kindling. With my hand axe, I split a couple

of sticks of wood I had bought from the park office. Memories of Second Class Scout test (start a fire using no more than two matches) warm me until my fire blazes and gives me the illusion of warmth and comfort. After a supper of noodles, tuna, and canned fruit, I open my camp chair under the tarp, set a bottle of cold beer and a bowl of dry-roasted peanuts on the bench of the picnic table, and prepare to fill a yellow pad with notes from my day of exploring the area of Bartram's Great Buffalo Lick.

A woman's voice breaks the monotony of drops splashing on the campground floor. "Barney! Barney, come here!" she is calling from the open door of the silvery motor home parked on the gravel in the next campsite.

The black and white terrier trots, nose to the ground, toward my chair. He approaches me cautiously, sniffs my hand, and wags the stump of his tail.

"Hey, Barney," I speak gently. "Come here, little guy."

He licks the salt from my fingers while my neighbor continues to call, the pitch of her voice rising in frustration.

I pull my poncho over my head, wrap my arms around Barney's wet fur and carry him across the pine straw to his owner. Her tall, slender frame reaches the top of the doorway. She wears her silver hair in a long pony tail that falls over the cowl of her light blue sweater. Wire-rimmed glasses perch on her angular nose. I had seen her earlier, walking her dog along the asphalt roadway near the bathhouse.

I lift Barney to her waiting hands.

"Thank you," she says. "He's too friendly. Goes to anyone. I'll lose him that way some day."

"You're welcome," I say. "I needed the company."

"We made you get out in the rain. I'm sorry."

She rubs Barney with a towel. "Won't you come in? I have some hot water for tea."

"Tea would feel real good right now," I answer.

As I hang my poncho across the support rod of her awning, she extends long fingers and says, "I'm Jane Bascom. From Michigan."

"Jim Kautz. From Atlanta."

She pulls a sack of scones from a cabinet above the stove, sets it beside a variety pack of tea bags on the table, and pours steaming water into a mug.

"I just have herbal tea."

I select a bag, unroll the string, and drop it into my mug as she motions for me to sit in a chair beside the table.

Jane had spent thirty years as a speech and drama professor, teaching in colleges in the upper Midwest. When her husband died two years before, she bought her motor home and began prowling the back roads, setting up camp in state parks,

RV courts, and the Arizona desert. She is heading back to visit her daughter and grandchildren in Michigan before launching a summer trip in western Canada.

We talk of life on small campuses, of academic freedom, of testing the edges of tradition in conservative environments.

Loosening the band around her pony tail, she shakes her head, lets her hair fall down her back. She appears younger than her years.

“What are you doing here, the only tent camper in a soggy campground in Georgia?” she asks.

“Do you know of William Bartram?”

“The Bartram Trail,” she says, repeating the reply I had learned to expect from those who ask about my project.

I tell her briefly of Bartram’s travels and of my plan for a book that describes the places Bartram went.

“From what point of view?” she asks, as she squeezes drops of tea from the bag and lays it on a paper towel.

“A question from a literary professional,” I answer. “I’m still trying to find that. Right now, I am gathering information, visiting the corridor along his route.”

“I gather he came here,” she says.

“Pretty close to here.” I explain that Bartram had tagged along with a survey party from Augusta through the land to the northwest and to the Savannah River above Elberton.

“Bartram says it was about ‘the middle of the month of May.’ Actually, it was mid-June. ‘[V]egetation, in perfection, appeared with all her attractive charms, breathing fragrance every where,’ he says (*Travels* 34). Along the way he collected specimens and seeds and took notes on the lay of the land and the health of the plant life.”

She smiles at the description of fragrance filling this land, now covered with the monotony of pines planted in rows, and her eyes widen. “A survey?”

“It was 1773. The Cherokees had run up some nasty debts; they’d bought more goods than they could pay for with deer hides. So the colonial government called together a large conference in Augusta and they cut a deal. For the forgiveness of their debts they’d give up some land to the colony.”

“And the survey was to mark the land.”

“Right. The Indians had a pretty good idea where the boundary was. A ridge here, a stream there and, in one case, a big tree. Both sides needed a survey to make sure of the line of what was called the ‘New Purchase’.”

“And what have you found here?” she asks. “I’ve driven past pine trees and pastures and towns that may once have had one horse. This is really rural, unpopulated country. And the way they leave the forests that they’ve cut!”

I think of the clear cuts I had seen that afternoon. Stalks of trees, denuded of branches, in bleak isolation among heaps of gray, tangled limbs and abandoned deer stands are the desolate heirs to the forests that enamored Bartram.

“Bartram described this forest as ‘the most magnificent . . . [he] had ever seen . . . , thinly planted by nature with the most stately forest trees.’ Black oaks, tulip poplars, black walnuts, sycamores, hickories, beeches, elms, and sweet gums towered above the survey party that staked a line through these hills. He was so impressed that he feared he would lose his credibility. I mean, writing of black oaks that ‘measured eight, nine, ten and eleven feet diameter five feet above the ground’ He said they measured several trees with a girth of over thirty feet (*Travels* 37). Who would believe him?”

I crunch a scone and give her a short history of the area, mentioning the migration of the “Crackers” (the Indians called them “Virginians,” but they were from the Carolinas as well as Virginia) who flooded into Georgia after the 1773 survey and established small farms, towns, and churches.

“Alexander Stephens is a good example. His grandfather moved here from Pennsylvania in 1784 and established a homestead. Like so many others from the north, they built their farm into a plantation. The culture they established included a strong educational program for whites and hard work for slaves. Stephens was quite well educated and brilliant.

“Not all of the settlers were civil and educated, however. Many were rough. Violent. They farmed here, but only a few knew anything about conserving the land. Most of them drained the soil of its fertility with corn and cotton, then moved on.

“At first, some of the trees that captivated Bartram were cut to provide for farm land. Then, just after the Civil War, serious lumbering began. I’d guess that by 1890 the last of the big trees was gone.”

“For someone’s mantel in Boston,” she muses.

“Yes, and for furniture and ornate crown molding in Baltimore and New York. The largest tree I saw today was less than three feet in diameter. It stood in the front lawn of an antebellum house up in Philomath.”

We finish our tea while Barney curls up on the bed.

“What route are you taking when you leave here?” I ask.

“Up to Athens, then to North Carolina.”

“Good trip. I think you’ll enjoy it. You’ll be following Bartram. Tomorrow you’ll go right past the Great Buffalo Lick.”

“Buffalo? As in American bison?”

“The same.”

“And you’re telling me Bartram saw buffalo here?”

“No. Just the place where the buffalo had licked clay from the ground. By Bartram’s time cattle and deer were licking it.”

I tell her she’ll be passing close to the route of the 1773 survey, then driving almost on top of his trail into the Little Tennessee River Valley in North Carolina. She pulls an atlas from the driver’s compartment and hands me a highlighting pen. I mark her map. Clayton, Georgia, Franklin, North Carolina. A circle around Wayah Bald. A Bartram route. Then, with my black ballpoint, I draw a line east of Georgia Highway 22 across to where the Tugaloo runs into the Savannah River.

“The survey line,” I say. “The New Purchase.”

She vows to buy a copy of *Travels* in Athens and asks me if I’d like another cup of tea.

“It’s been a long day. I’d best go to my tent.”

She nods and looks down. I thank her for the tea, scones, and conversation.

Rain has drowned my campfire when I return to my campsite. I put my pad in my old gray attaché case, pour my stale beer on the ground, and crawl into the sleeping bag in my tent.

At daybreak, a brisk north wind blows white clouds through patches of blue sky above the tops of the pines. After a cup of coffee and bowl of granola, I roll my sleeping bag, tent, and tarp, pack the truck, and head for the shower. Jane is rolling up her awning. She waves and greets me.

“Heading north,” she says. “To find Buffalo Lick.”

“Good luck.”

Barney lounges at the end of a leash tied to a tree.

When I return from the bathhouse, the gravel where Jane’s motor home had sat is empty and dry. She is back on the road. I wonder what she will see as she drives Route 22 and U.S. 78 into Athens. She’ll notice the miles of young pines, the scattered pastures, and the mailboxes beside the driveways that mark the presence of lonely residences hidden in woodlands. At Philomath, she’ll pass the Georgia Pacific wood lot and think of the decades of lumber and pulp wood stripped from the forests.

Philomath was once the seat of Oglethorpe County. Governor Stephens gave it its name, “Love of Learning,” a tribute to the academy that once stood there. Three Greek Revival houses, one built in 1833, serve as reminders of the days when the town built its wealth on the sweat of slaves who plowed and picked the cotton in fields now planted in pine. Small houses, mobile homes, and a rundown convenience store now outnumber the mansions.

Until 1998, a spot near Philomath had been known as Bartram’s “Great Buffalo Lick.” Two other places near Union Point vied for the honor, but the

Philomath site became favored by those who marked the Bartram Trail. There was no way Jane would find the lick. I would never have seen it had Brad Sanders not led me there.



Brad meets me in Athens early one Sunday morning. A teacher of graphic arts at the Cedar Shoals High School on the outskirts of Athens, his *Guide to William Bartram's Travels* is a "must have" book for those seeking Bartram sites. In the parking lot of the Home Depot, Brad steps out of his beige pick-up, rigged with a matching fiberglass cap and a kayak rack. Tall, slender, with a full head of curly, auburn hair, he greets me with a smile and a warm handshake.

We skirt the vast University of Georgia campus. Along Broad Street the sidewalks are deserted, as are the bars, restaurants, and boutiques in century-old buildings. Students "sleep in" on Sundays. Our route drops into the valley of the North Oconee River, past the restored remnants of textile mills with old brick and stone walls.

"Athens was once the heart of a major cotton industry. The river provided the energy for the mills," Brad explains as we pull into the parking lot of one of the many parks that dot Athens and Clarke County. We walk along the paved bicycle path that stretches along the greenway beside the river. Beneath a railroad trestle, now abandoned, he says, "Bartram likely rode to this spot in 1773. He probably followed the trading path that later became the railroad."

"But this is not the survey route, is it?"

"No. This was a side trip. We'll drive down the Great Ridge where the surveyors and Indians marked the boundary of the New Purchase."

In the eastern suburbs of Athens we pass old neighborhoods of small frame houses, new subdivisions scattered over rolling hills, and carloads of worshipers filling the parking lot of the St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church. Brad notes that our road follows a ridge, the route of the survey.

Pointing into a woodland near the Clarke-Oglethorpe County line, Brad tells me that "Cherokee Corner" is a short distance to the north. A bronze plaque embedded in a rock cairn beside the highway says the spot was pivotal on the boundary between the Creeks and Cherokees. A historical marker a few hundred yards west along U.S. 78 says the Bartram Trail came near here. Close by, beside the clear, trickling waters of Moss Creek, concrete picnic tables surround a crumbling fireplace in a park that appears unused.

Along the road from Crawford to Stephens, broad, green pastures surrounded by young forests cover the hills like green swells on an inland sea. A brick house presides over the shining roofs of white buildings as long as football fields.

“That’s my parents’ chicken farm,” says Brad. “I grew up in that house.”

“You lived on the Bartram Trail?”

“Right on his path. Some time along the way I learned that Bartram walked with Creeks, Cherokees, and the officers of King George in fields and forests I wandered as a boy.”

“And you’ve made Bartram a lifelong passion.”

“He’s the joy of my life.”

We drive across a blacktop road that becomes gravel before it reaches Highway 22 and park beside a logging road in a pine plantation. As we walk over rough gravel laid down for trucks hauling logs four years ago, seed pods of beggar lice paste themselves to our jeans, hoping we’ll transport their DNA to another field.

“This is the Buffalo Lick. Dr. Louis DeVorsey brought us here,” says Brad. “He is a University of Georgia geographer who painstakingly researched the location of the lick. He found through research of old maps and land deeds that the lick was somewhere within a few hundred feet of this spot.”

We stand in a clearing littered with brush piles and empty oil cans left behind by the loggers. Less than a quarter mile away, a box on stilts stands fifteen feet over the logging road. It is deer season. We hope no hunter is in the deer stand or that, if he is, he can distinguish us from his prey.

We are on ground sacred to those who follow Bartram. The survey party lingered here, preparing several routes for the surveyors. Bartram observed great trees, a cane swamp, meadows on “an immense plain.” Of the “three or four acres” known as the Buffalo Lick he says:

The earth . . . is an almost white or cenereous coloured tenacious fattish clay which all kinds of cattle lick into great caves, pursuing the delicious vein. It is the common opinion of the inhabitants, that this clay is impregnated with saline vapours, arising from fossil salts deep in the earth; but I could discover nothing saline in its taste, but I imagined an insipid sweetness. Horned cattle, horses, and deer, are immoderately fond of it, insomuch that their excrement, which almost totally covers the earth to some distance round this place, appears to be perfect clay; which, when dried by the sun and air, is almost as hard as brick. (*Travels* 39)

Gone is the clay that Bartram saw on the surface, licked bare and eroded into Buffalo Creek after centuries of farming. Perhaps the soil of the lick was kaolin, abundant in the land south of here, a mineral that is still used as a folk remedy for stomach and intestinal distress. Hidden in the kitchen cabinets of small frame houses across Georgia is a jar of “clay.”

The idea of buffalo roaming the hills of northern Georgia caught me by surprise when I first read Bartram's account. From the legends of Daniel Boone, I knew the beasts had lived in Kentucky and Ohio. But I didn't recall learning that the great bison ranged in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. My textbooks had not let me in on that piece of science and history. I had, unfortunately, received this part of my education from those great American educational sources, the movie theater and the television screen. When it came to bison, I imagined prairies—not forests on Georgia's red clay hills—and Sioux and Cheyenne hunters with flowing black hair riding ponies and shooting bison with arrows and bullets.

My schools didn't mention that James Oglethorpe, the first governor of Georgia, listed buffalo as native to the colony. As late as 1739, explorers reported seeing and eating buffalo in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain. One report claimed several herds of sixty or more. Apparently, at the time of European settlement, the animals were expanding their territory, crossing the Appalachians into Virginia and wandering down the Piedmont and Coastal Plain. They multiplied and thrived as far as northern Florida. By 1770, however, they had been killed off. Only the names of licks and a few obscure notes in the yellowed journals and letters of early colonists remain.

Georgia is a spacious, beautiful, and diverse state. Beaches, marshes, and hammocks line its coast. Piney flats and farms roll upward through the Piedmont to bulging mountains covered with dark hemlocks, pines, and hardwoods. People from every corner of the earth, showing the skin, hair, and bone structures of every race, live here. Vast rural areas encompass towns, great cities, and sprawling suburbs. Still, the natural diversity known by the earliest European settlers has dribbled away before the advance of timber barons, industry, and multinational commerce.

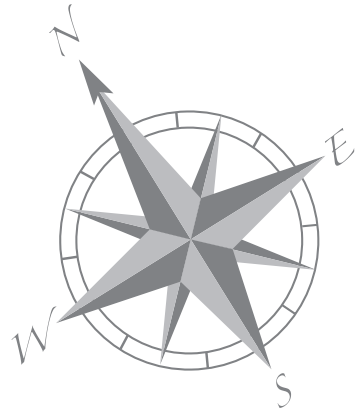
Ecologists ponder, with serious concern, the loss of biodiversity. In *Invasive Species in a Changing World*, Harold A. Mooney and Richard J. Hobbs speak of "a massive biotic homogenization of the Earth's surfaces" (xii). We hear arguments about the value of snail darters, obscure mosses, and rare microbes, usually hidden in remote mountain streams or Brazilian rainforests. But diversity comes in larger packages too—snorting, aristocratic American bison or stealthy panthers in Georgia swamps, for example.

Georgia has lost not only the grandeur of forests whose trees measured thirty feet, but also stately, woolly beasts. Buffalo once deigned to extend their empire into the American Southland. Until we Europeans, hungry for land and equipped with technology, conquered the wilderness, the land had its own dynamic.

The Great Buffalo Lick

A great curtain dropped when our ancestors moved in. Trees planted in rows have replaced the oak and chestnut forests. Even the small towns are losing their uniqueness—their own diversity—as national chains, their buildings and striped parking lots identical to those in the next town, replace locally owned businesses. And we, who thrive on diversity, search for it by surfing satellite channels on our televisions, buying cruise ship tickets, and roaming the blue roads in our SUVs and silver motor homes.

*T*ravels in Florida



Chronological Notes

Bartram spent late summer, fall, and winter of 1773 and 1774 in southern South Carolina, Savannah, and the area of Darien. He shipped a trunk and box to Spalding and Kelsall's Lower Store, a few miles south of Palatka, Florida, in August.

In March 1774 he began his trip to Florida, exploring St. Simons and Cumberland Islands along the way. At Cow Ford (modern Jacksonville) in mid-April, he bought a small boat and began his fruitful—and sometimes frightening—journeys into the heart of Florida. Between April and early November, his base of operations was the Lower Store. From here, he made two excursions up the St. Johns River, reaching as far south as the area of DeLand. He also recorded trips to the Alachua Savannah (on the outskirts of modern Gainesville) and Manatee Spring, at the mouth of the Suwannee River near the Gulf of Mexico. After a leisurely trip through Darien and Sunbury, he returned to Charleston in late March 1775.

Revolutionary sentiments in the colonies were building toward open hostility during this period. On December 16, 1773, patriots protesting the Tea Act dumped tea into Boston Harbor. The Crown imposed “the Intolerable Acts” upon the colonists and built up the numbers of Redcoat troops in America. Colonists boycotted British goods. In September and October 1774, as Bartram explored Florida, the First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia. The British parliament declared the American colonies to be in a state of rebellion on February 9, 1775, and on March 23, Patrick Henry gave his “liberty or death” speech in Richmond.

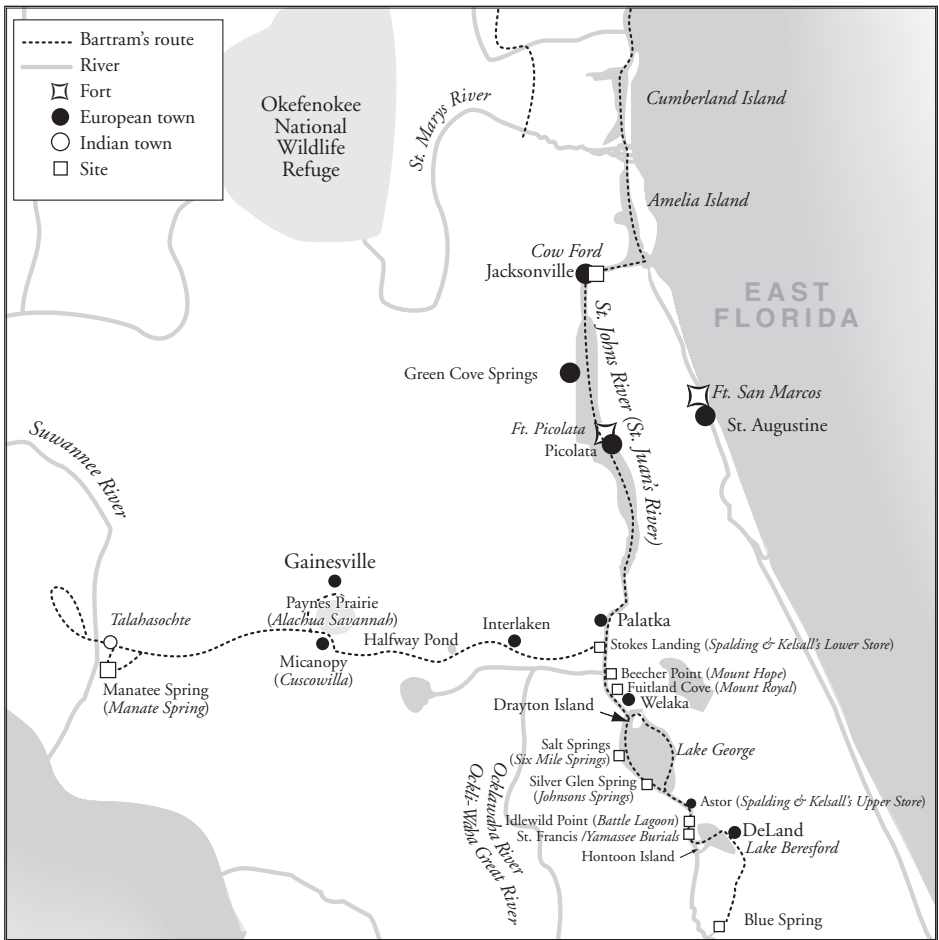
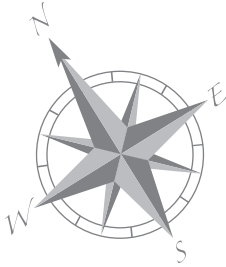


Figure 4. Map of Bartram's Travels in Florida (1773-1775)



BARTRAM'S FLORIDA

Winter took one good shot at the Southeast in 2002. My stepson Tyler and I tried to escape it by following William Bartram to Florida. But it found us.

Anyone who wants to understand Bartram's journeys will wander the St. Johns River from Jacksonville to Orange City and from Palatka to Gainesville and Suwannee. It was in this northern half of Florida that Bartram had his famous adventures with alligators, marveled over a vast prairie, and wrote the lyrical description of a spring that became Coleridge's "Xanadu."

Bartram, in his *Travels*, seems to merge two trips into the St. Johns River basin into a single exploration. Both journeys came in 1774, one from April to June, the other in August and September. In addition, he twice traveled west with trading parties: once to the area of modern Gainesville and later to the Gulf Coast, at the mouth of the Suwannee River.

To get from Georgia to Florida, Bartram hitched a ride on a packet boat heading to the Spalding and Kelsall trading post near present-day Palatka. At "Cow Ford," just a few blocks from what is now Jacksonville's Alltel Stadium, he bought a small sailboat to explore the forests, meadows, and bogs of northeastern Florida.

Bartram knew the St. Johns well, though his memories of it must have been mixed when he sailed in 1774. His journey with his father nine years before had acquainted him with the terrain and plant life, and his attempt to start a plantation gave him an appreciation for the difficulties of living in the subtropical environment.

I know that covering his itinerary will take me to Florida several times and that I will explore his route in the steamy, insect-swarmed seasons, as he did. Still I might make a first run at understanding Bartram's Florida—and the Florida that has replaced it—in cool, pleasant weather. Based on my promise

that we'll fish while on the trip, 11-year-old Tyler agrees to accompany me during his winter vacation.

A cold rain falls on Marietta on the second day of 2002. At six in the morning, Tyler settles into the passenger seat to finish his night's sleep, and I ease down the driveway. The Weather Channel says a storm will hit Atlanta later, but we plan to get out of town before the roads become slick and Atlanta drivers press their panic buttons. If we can make it to South Georgia, we will be safe. In Florida, we will be comfortable. Maybe.

By 7:15, near the Griffin exit, we see flurries. Five miles later, snow covers the pines. By the time we reach Macon, we are passing snowy fields. When we stop for coffee and conversation with Maria's parents on their farm in Dodge County, a once-in-a-decade snow blankets the stand of pines behind the barn.

We drive east and south in the rain, happy that we can find a warm welcome with Maria's sister Janet and her family in Brunswick. We'll be in the Sunshine State tomorrow.

In the morning, the clouds are breaking up, but the air is polar. Gusts of wind shake our truck, and I remain unconvinced that Florida can be bitterly cold. Years of hype by the state's boosters have won the day; I have no idea that tonight will bring a rare camping experience.

South of Jacksonville, we rise above the St. Johns River on the six-lane Buckman Bridge. The river is three miles wide here, whipped into whitecaps by the northerly winds. I chill at Billy Bartram's words: "My little vessel being furnished with a good sail, and having fishing tackle, a neat light fusee, powder and ball, I found myself well equipped, for my voyage, about one hundred miles to the trading house" (*Travels* 74). This broad river dwarfed him in a craft so small he could paddle it into shallow lagoons.

We turn off the interstate and head up the St. Johns to Picolata, where Bartram failed to earn his fortune as a planter. He found his place in the world slowly and rather late in life. His shopkeeping business in North Carolina failed. At Picolata, in his mid-twenties, he tried his hand at planting indigo. But his land was not suitable, his slaves were unskilled or lazy, and his house was unsuitable for the weather. Within a year, this venture failed and he returned, despondent, to Philadelphia.

Bartram nearly starved to death here. Prosperity has found recent settlers, however. Affluence shines from large, Greek Revival houses that overlook the broad river in this suburb, heralding the wealth of St. Johns County where the U.S. Census Bureau found that the median household income of the residents was \$42,857 in the year 2000, 53% higher than the national median. Spreading live oaks, their branches draped with Spanish moss, surround houses in gated

subdivisions along the “William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway” near the Bartram Trail High School.

Dark clouds scud through patches of blue above the oaks and pines that front the river at Picolata. Tyler pulls on his green parka and wraps against the wind as we step over tangled roots that drink from the black mud in the palmetto glade along the river bank. A historic-site marker in the front yard of a large white plantation-style house says that a Spanish fort, built in 1700, once guarded the river crossing along the trail that led to the Gulf Coast. Bartram knew this fort, but when he returned in 1774, he found “To [his] disappointment . . . , the fort dismantled and deserted” (*Travels* 80). Enough remained for him to describe its walls and thirty-foot tower, built of coquina stone. By 1939, when Francis Harper searched for Bartram’s trail, time and the river had removed its vestiges.

We drive east to the coast, where arctic air is pouring across the dunes at better than twenty miles an hour. The wind pushes away the clouds but leaves a chill. Perhaps we should drive inland, I think, and avoid the rawness of the open coast. But the romantic idea of staying on the beach and fishing the salt water overrides judgment.

“The wind will lay tonight,” I say with less conviction than hope as we unroll the little dome tent onto a sandy campsite at Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area. Tyler tosses enough gear on it to keep it from blowing into the surrounding shrubs while we rig the fiberglass poles and drive stakes into the sand. We pile sleeping bags and air mattresses inside to ensure that our shelter will not blow away.

Tyler bolts down a sandwich, grabs his fishing rod and a lure, and crosses the wooden walkway that leads to the beach. Wind that carries his lure well into the foaming surf wears out his persistence. He returns, dismantles his tackle, and says, “It’s rough over there. I got one bite, but I don’t think I’ll catch anything.” Tyler always gets at least “one bite.”

“Must be *really* rough,” I answer, thinking of how few times I had seen him defer fishing for any reason.

We drive into nearby Flagler Beach, a small and wonderfully underdeveloped town slipped between the Intercoastal Waterway and the Atlantic dunes. Tyler spots the public fishing pier and asks, “Can we fish tomorrow? After the wind lays?”

“Yes, we’ll fish tomorrow morning. This afternoon, let’s drive inland a bit, to where Bartram saw bass swimming alongside salt water fish.” Perhaps, I hope, away from the ocean the weather will be a bit more hospitable. And we may find a nice campsite in the Ocala National Forest for the coming two nights.

West of Ormond Beach we drive past strip malls and unpretentious subdivisions, inhabited largely by retirees. The Calvary Assembly of God stands

near the Chabad Lubavitch Synagogue. Where vast forests of longleaf pines stood in Bartram's day, slender, blackened trunks rise twenty feet above the sparse growth of palmetto and young pines.

"The fires of 1998," I tell Tyler. "Do you remember seeing them on television?"

"Yes," he replies. "So this is what it looks like." His face is grim.

During May, June, and July of 1998, in the midst of a drought, forest fires scorched almost a half-million acres in Florida. Lightning strikes started some of the fires; arsonists set others. Flagler and Volusia Counties were hit hardest.

The fires began in the first week of June. By July 2, they had forced the evacuation of 40,000 people. Winds at speeds of 20 miles per hour were blowing embers half a mile in front of the main fire line as over 1,300 firefighters faced the raging flames. All of Flagler County was under a mandatory evacuation order, about 190 miles of I-95 were closed, and NASCAR officials postponed the Pepsi 400 race.

By mid-July, when rains quelled the fires, 170,000 acres had burned, 97 homes had been destroyed and 354 damaged in two counties. Volusia County officials estimated losses at \$1.9 million to commercial and residential structures and \$60 to \$70 million in timber.

The wildfires of Florida in 1998 are a nasty tribute to environmental negligence. And to the hunger for quick profits. The conflagrations swept across miles of slash pine plantations. Slash pines, also called "slough pines," grow naturally in lowlands where water is plentiful, but are not as adapted to fires as are the longleafs that naturally inhabited the area. Moreover, in the absence of regular burns, the bed of the plantation is thick with flammable needles. But slash pines grow faster than native longleafs, and are, therefore, more attractive to farmers. Plant slash pines and harvest in twenty years; plant longleafs and bequeath them to your grandchildren.

We cross the St. Johns River at Astor, looking for the spot where Bartram "took up [his] quarters for several weeks" at the Upper Store, and are soon in the scrub of the Ocala National Forest on the uplands of Central Florida. Looking for a place to camp the following nights, we drive to recreation areas operated by contractors of the Forest Service. At their visitor centers we ask if we may drive through the tent sites.

"Lay this pass on your dashboard," says the clerk at Salt Springs. "And be back in ten minutes."

"May we get out to go to the bathroom?" asks Tyler.

"Just be back in ten minutes," she says with a humorless, scolding face.

"She's a retired fifth grade teacher," I quip.

Despite the unfriendly welcome, we pick Salt Springs. With its boat rental beside the clear Salt Springs Run, it's a perfect location for a boy whose T-shirt

says: "Chicks Dig Me; Fish Fear Me." It is also ideal for an old guy looking for the footprints of William Bartram.

"We'll be back tomorrow," I tell the attendant as we check out, exactly ten minutes later. She looks over her glasses and retrieves the pass without a smile. At a shop across the road, beside an RV park, I buy Tyler a Coke, get myself a cup of coffee that tastes as if it had steeped in the carafe since daybreak, and drive back to the coast.

We hope to find conditions more pleasant at Gamble Rogers in the twilight, but wind sweeps the campground, pounding the sides of our little tent and sending up a roar from the Atlantic.

Supper is red beans and rice with chunks of turkey sausage, cooked behind the windscreen of our propane stove. We scoop generous helpings onto our plates and jump in the truck to eat them away from the cold blasts still rolling in from somewhere north of Toledo. After a few adolescent jokes about the effects of beans within a small tent, Tyler digs through his bag and finds his portable TV. Failing to tune in some cartoons, he settles for a weather report from a Jacksonville station. A pretty, bright-eyed weathercaster tells us we will have near-record cold tonight but that tomorrow will warm into the 50s.

"You can't trust a weather girl who fits on a three-inch screen," I tell him.

He grins and searches for another channel.

There is not much to do in a near-vacant campground. We could go to the Crabtrap Bar, but I suggest we crawl into the tent and try to sleep. We rig for cold: tent flaps zipped, air pads covered by a space blanket, watch caps pulled over our ears, sleeping bags zipped to our noses. Throughout the night, gusts knock the sides of the tent into our heads. When we crawl out at dawn, the air is frigid and the wind no weaker than the night before.

"The little weather girl was right," says Tyler.

"I want some coffee, and I don't want to try to brew it in this wind," I grunt.

"I want a donut and I don't want to camp another night like this."

We drive to the locked gate. Tyler's numb fingers fumble with the combination and eventually open the lock. I turn the truck south, taking the road along the dunes to the town of Ormond Beach. There, on the street fronting the ocean, we find our donut shop.

It is a law of nature that the time needed to consume a couple of donuts and drink coffee and hot chocolate in a warm room increases four and a half minutes for every degree the thermometer falls below forty degrees. We dare not break this law. From our little table, we watch customers blow through the glass door. With the exception of a tall woman with short red hair and the only smile that has come through the door, everyone has something to say about the

cold. The cheery woman—a real estate agent, it turns out—holds that it really isn't *that* cold and that by noon it will be a wonderfully pleasant day. Everyone else shares thoughts along the line of "I thought I'd get away from weather like this when I moved to Florida." The realtor maintains her professional sophistry, however, and convinces us that we'll be standing in the sun catching fish by lunchtime.

We find a tackle store, buy some bait, and drive to a tidewater creek where we dangle dead shrimp under Styrofoam bobbers for about an hour, then spend another hour on the pier. By noon, having felt no tugs on our lines except those made by the surf and seeing more experienced local fisher-people leave their posts to take refuge from the cold, we climb into the truck, buy coffee and hot chocolate, and begin the drive to Salt Springs. Perhaps tomorrow the red-haired realtor will be right. But we won't be here to find out.

Two hundred yards from our tent is a jammed-tight cluster of scores of other travel trailers and motor homes. Tents are less in vogue than the aluminum and plastic land yachts. Only four other campers inhabit the twenty-site tenting area. But our tent rests on a soft bed of pine straw and the winds are gentler, the air clear and cool. Tall pines tower above us and the tenting area is quiet. For the first time in three days, we relax.

A short distance down a tree-lined pathway from our campsite is a narrow canal. Its dark, clear waters lead to the lake that forms the upper end of the six mile run to Lake George. Tyler, sullen after our night of wind and cold and day of bad fishing, is restored to his usual liveliness by the nearness of clear, calm water. He rigs his rod and scurries down the path.

In a half-hour, he is back, muttering that the changing weather has driven the fish away. "I only got two bites."

"Two bites! That's one more than you got in the surf."

He grins.

I convince him to walk with me to the spring head, reminding him that Bartram saw "innumerable bands of fish . . . some clothed in the most brilliant colours" (*Travels* 165). As we follow a winding path that leads through marshy wetlands to the edge of the springs, I wonder what is left of the scene that Bartram described after his visit in May 1774. Would we recognize the "bason" and the "swelling green knoll"? Would we see schools of fish?

The place matches his description: a hill rises to the west; water boils up through rock vents into a "bason" of clear water where bass, bluegill, and catfish gracefully cruise. Mullet plumb the depths of the springs and, as Bartram had observed, rise lazily to continue their browsing around the pool. We stroll the sidewalk that encircles the old concrete walls around the spring head, fascinated

by the colors of the water and the slow, ceaseless, ever-changing patterns of schools of fish. For the young angler, it is a field school.

Back at the campsite, we open the bundles of wood and light a fire. Bean and cheese burritos warm our bellies. We slide into our sleeping bags; by nine o'clock, we are asleep.

Dawn has not penetrated the longleaf canopies when Tyler stirs, ready to fish. We light a lantern, crack ice off the water in the bucket, eat breakfast, and drive around Salt Springs Run to the marina. Dense fog carpets the broad, shallow lake that gathers the waters of the spring before they flow down a narrow stream and into Lake George. In our fiberglass skiff, we slalom at idle speed through a maze of bass boats spaced about fifty feet apart in the open water.

"Is there a fishing tournament?" Tyler asks. But it is just an ordinary Saturday morning on a popular fishing hole.

We find an open area and let the boat drift on the calm waters while we cast our plastic worms through the wide-bladed eel grass that waves in the gentle currents three feet beneath the surface. Occasionally a fish bumps a lure, but none strike or run with the bait.

When the sun has burned away the fog, we watch the other anglers. None is catching fish. Under the shadows of a flotilla, no bass is so foolish as to strike a lure. Leaving the crowd, we motor the six miles to Lake George, casting into the grasses that line the banks. Bartram entered this "pellucid stream, sailing over the heads of innumerable squadrons of fish, which, although many feet deep in the water, were distinctly to be seen" (*Travels* 160). We find the stream "pellucid," but see no fish.

Away from the bustle of the marina, wilderness surrounds us. Grasses and cattails grow along the shore, swaying in the wake of an occasional boat. Beyond them, pines, palms, black gums, and live oaks draped with Spanish moss have overtaken the "green meadows" that Bartram saw. The numerous alligators he described are gone or in hiding; we see only one in our slow journey up and down the run. A sole otter, some five feet long, arches his slick brown body, diving and resurfacing along the bank searching for food. He scatters a pair of moor hens. Egrets and herons preside over the banks; an osprey keeps watch from a branch of a dead tree.

When we weary of our fruitless efforts at fishing, we return the boat to its slip, talk with other fishermen who tell of great catches "last week" and "this time last year," and drive to our camp.

We take another stroll to the springs. The day is warm. A gray-haired man accompanies a frail woman wrapped in a dark-brown suede jacket. He supports her on the side opposite her quad cane. Tyler and two children from Orlando are the only kids.

Two couples—they look to be in their seventies—sit at a picnic table beside the outlet of the basin. As I study the signboard that tells the history of Salt Springs, I overhear their conversation. One couple is from Michigan, the other from Washington State. Florida in the winter is a meeting place where Yankees and Midwesterners congregate around campgrounds, RV parks, and marinas. They cook their favorite dishes and share them, along with tales of grandchildren and lifelong jobs on the assembly lines or in offices of corporations. Worries about the future of retirement plans dot their conversations. If service in World War II is mentioned, the details and the battles are missing, and conversation quickly turns to life on the road, the next park, or highway construction delays.

The interpretive sign along a path beside the springhead says Indians lived at Salt Springs as early as 10,000 years ago. It tells of Spaniards and the Seminoles and of the Civil War but holds no word of Bartram's visit. Nor does any brochure at the campground office describe his journeys or quote from his description. Do visitors to Salt Springs know that a botanist from Philadelphia traveled here at the time of our nation's birth and wrote vivid descriptions of the trees, flowers, and fish? Only the few who have read about Bartram could know of his deep attraction to the place or the contribution his word pictures made to literature around the world. When I had asked the marina operator if he had heard of Bartram's writing on the springs, he responded with a question: "What did he say?" I quoted Bartram's description of the fish. He mumbled something about how remarkable the explorer's maps were. I gathered that he would probably not be impressed that his boat dock sat along the banks of "Alph, the sacred river" that "ran through caverns measureless to man" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan").

While looking through the brochures in the park office, I asked the clerk, "Do you have anything about William Bartram's exploration of Salt Springs?"

"Who was he?" she answered.

I explained his significance and told her what he said about the springs.

"I don't make the brochures," she said.

I cringed when Tyler asked her, "Are you really a retired teacher?"

The park's silence about Bartram is more remarkable when one considers that he loved this place, spent the best part of a day here, and described its flora and fauna lavishly, drawing morals on war and peace from the behavior of the schools of fish.

After supper, wrapped in warm jackets, we share the light of our lantern to read. Tyler sits on a stool near the fire. I'm on the bench of the picnic table, reading Tony Grooms's *Bombingham*, a novel of a black teen and his family in

Birmingham during the civil rights strife. Tyler's finishing a book about a black boy growing up in North Carolina in the sixties. We have selected our books independently; I doubt that Tyler knows the subject of my book.

He sits beside me and says, "Listen to this," then reads a paragraph telling of a family and a community in conflict, finding ways to deal with a cauldron of hatred. Then I tell him the story of *Bombingham*. Two states, differing communities, matching experiences. We look into the fire and talk of Indian wars, slavery, and Jim Crow laws. I pull my copy of Bartram's *Travels* from my bag, open it to the Salt Springs pages, and say, "I think what Bartram says about this place has something to do with race relations":

innumerable bands of fish are seen, some clothed in the most brilliant colours; the voracious crocodile stretched along at full length, as the great trunk of a tree in size, the devouring garfish, inimical trout, and all the varieties of gilded painted bream, the barbed catfish, dreaded sting-ray, skate and flounder, spotted bass, sheeps head and ominous drum; all in their separate bands and communities, with free and unsuspecting intercourse performing their evolutions: there are no signs of enmity, no attempt to devour each other; the different bands seem peaceably and complaisantly to move a little aside, as it were to make room for others to pass by. (*Travels* 166-67)

A man of peace, a Quaker, living in a country whose peoples knew violence and political strife, Bartram watched this show through the lenses of his experience. While he was a young man, French and Indian forces had fought Colonial and British forces. He knew of scalping. His own grandfather had been killed by Indians on the frontier. Weeks before he left Georgia to travel to Florida, settlers on the Georgia frontier murdered Indians a few miles from his camp. Indians and whites each sought revenge for ongoing killing across the Southeast. Bartram himself had escaped death at the hands of a renegade Creek who, the day before meeting the botanist in a Georgia forest, had stolen a gun and vowed to kill the next white man he saw. In this murky world the explorer sat on the soft grass above the "bason" and mused that this "paradise" of silver, black, and red fish reflected nature "before the fall."

We fold our books, bank the fire, turn out the lantern, and crawl into our sleeping bags.

Whooshes of a south wind in the pines awaken us early on Sunday morning. The air is balmy. No ice crusts the water in the bucket. Heavy clouds lie above the tops of the trees. I nudge Tyler. "Rain is on its way. Let's pack before we have wet gear."

We strike our tent, roll our sleeping bags, and quickly load the truck. A drop splatters on the windshield as we pull out of the campground. We drive north on State Road 19 in pounding rain. An empty log truck sends a spray of water across the road. A bridge rises before us. Beside the road, a sign says: "Cross Florida Barge Canal." I slow the truck and peer over the rail. Below, black water lies in a wide, arrow-straight ditch between scrub growth that clings to raw banks.

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' website describes the canal project as "a high-level lock barge canal from the St. Johns River to the Gulf of Mexico with a 'project depth' of 12 feet and minimum bottom width of 150 feet, with five locks 84 feet wide and 600 feet long, two earth dams, and necessary canal crossings. Length of project is about 107 miles." It is a dead enterprise with an uncertain afterlife.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt opened the project ceremonially when he detonated a charge of explosives in 1935. Designed as a Depression-era effort, the venture brought men from across the Southeast to dig with shovels. Within ten months the government had spent \$5.5 million, the budget was drained, and digging stopped with only three percent of the canal finished.

Commercial interests, led by power companies wanting to bring coal from Tennessee and Kentucky across the Gulf of Mexico and Florida, pressed for completion. They argued that the cost of providing the energy for Florida's future would be cut if they could avoid shipping coal around the southern end of the peninsula. A canal through the wilderness was a small price to pay for lights and air conditioning, they argued. Congress responded. In 1964 the Corps began construction in earnest. Within four years, the Rodman Dam had inundated 9,000 acres of wild, productive floodplain forest along sixteen miles of the Ocklawaha River. Fish searched for nesting grounds where panthers once made their dens.

Bartram did not travel the Ocklawaha. He sailed past its mouth and rode across its upper reaches. It deserves attention, however, because its less-spoiled sections provide a rare glimpse of the land the explorer knew and because its story demonstrates the way America has treated the earth Bartram knew at the beginning of the nation's history. It also shows a victory of environmental advocacy.

The idea of a canal across Florida is not a twentieth-century dream, and the Corps was not the first to push aside the earth and trees of Florida to create a shortcut to the Gulf. According to the Archaeological and Historical Conservancy of Florida, about 1,700 years ago Native Americans used handmade tools of wood and shell to dig out millions of yards of sand and soil and build a seven-mile long canal with complicated lock systems near Lake Okeechobee

(the “Ortona Canal”). Centuries later, King Philip II of Spain and Presidents John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson proposed a cross-Florida waterway.

The Cross Florida Barge Canal ran into the unyielding bedrock of awakening environmental concern in the 1960s, however. Environmentalists, led by Marjorie Carr Harris of Micanopy, pressed the federal government to shut down the project. They were unable to stop the Rodman Dam but succeeded before the Eureka Dam, which would have destroyed twenty miles of river and floodplain, was complete. Congress and President George H. W. Bush “deauthorized” the project in 1990. By then, \$62 million in state and federal funds had been used.

The former canal lands are now the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway, which allows wildlife to reclaim some of its territory and provides the public an opportunity for a 110-mile long, 75,000-acre stretch of outdoor pleasure.

Lake Ocklawaha is now the center of the environmental storm. Its 9,000 acres of water, impounded by the Rodman Dam, holds largemouth bass that attract hundreds of fishermen to plunk lures over the drowned stumps and roots that once supported giant cypresses and black gum trees. And, although the free-flowing Ocklawaha River was also renowned for good fishing, the anglers and fishing-related businesses think lake fishing is better for their sport.

Rodman Dam is low, the lake shallow. Set alongside the great dams of the Rocky Mountains or the Tennessee Valley, you’d hardly notice it. Four steel gates, about fifteen feet high, and a mile-long mound of earth stand between a lake and a river. Stumps, water hyacinth, and hydrilla (the latest exotic plant to assault the waterways of Florida) cover the surface like a green and brown patchwork quilt.

At a boat ramp not far from the dam, a sport fisherman has backed his glittering blue bass boat off its trailer. He cranks the engine of his matching blue truck and drives the trailer out from under the boat, leaving it bobbing in the dark lake and spreading a wake of water and plant stems along the concrete ramp. On this sportsman’s boat is a seventy-five-horsepower outboard, fish-finding sonar, and a trolling motor. A tall, blue tackle box holds his lures; three rods jiggle in brackets attached to the blue console holding a steering wheel above a blue padded seat.

I look over the water and observe, “This lake looks tough. Lots of plants and stumps.”

“There’s prettier lakes,” he says. “But this one’s got great bass. If you can find them. Record’s seventeen pounds.” I hold off on telling him that Bartram watched his companions use cane poles, twenty inches of stout line, and handmade lures to catch bass that ranged up to thirty pounds (*Travels* 108).

“I’ve heard they’re talking about taking out the dam.”

“Jeb Bush and the tree huggers want the dam removed, but a lot of legislators listen to us,” he says, explaining that he is a member of a national fishing club that has lobbied to keep the lake.

Except for the lake, the Ocklawaha is a land of refuge and fascination. A subtropical jungle, a “magic kingdom” built by natural forces over thousands of years, it is suitable for Tarzan. In fact, some of the *Tarzan* episodes were filmed in the upper reaches of the river, near Silver Springs. It winds more than a hundred miles from Lake Griffin, in the center of the state, and drains the sand ridges and pine stands that Bartram called “the forests of Cuscowilla,” getting an extra push from the waters of Silver Springs.

Early one autumn morning, not far downstream from the dam, I follow Forest Service roads to the dark, rich banks of the river. Dark green trees reflect on the water. Two marsh hens dive beneath the surface, escaping my camera. A pileated woodpecker hops up a tree on the opposite bank and the water, browned by tannin from tree roots, moves slowly toward the St. Johns. This is a remnant of the river that Sidney Lanier called the “sweetest water-lane in the world, a lane which runs more than a hundred and fifty miles of pure delight betwixt hedgerows of oaks and cypresses and palms and bays and magnolias” (39).

Sitting on the back porch of his century-old, two-story cypress house on the banks of the St. Johns River, Norman Moody describes the river he knew as a child and young man. A man of the river, his family has lived on the St. Johns since his great-grandfather’s migration from Georgia after the Civil War. He has called islands and bridge tenders’ houses home, and he fished the river until an illness that struck him in his seventies caused him to think twice before going out on a boat.

He spins stories of the river he calls “Ahkwaha,” memories of days fishing its cypress swamps before the dam. Tales of getting lost among the cypress knees in a side channel. Visions of heavy stringers of bass, bream, and catfish. Drawing upon the images his father and grandfather passed along, he recalls not only productive fishing holes but steamboats that plied the stream.

“Tourists came to see the wilderness,” he said. “They’d ride the sidewheelers up from Jacksonville. In Palatka, they boarded sternwheelers. Rich Yankees, politicians. General Lee came here. He was an old man. And Grant, too. At night, the crew would build a fire of fat wood in a big pan on the front of the boat. That was to light the river. It winds a lot, you know. And there are lots of snags. Sometimes the passengers would help the crew push the boat away from the banks, around the bends.”

Norman’s take on the value of the lake differs from the bass-boat sportsman I met at the boat ramp. He deplors the Cross Florida Barge Canal and the dam.

“Every year the legislature votes on taking out the dam. Each year they get closer to giving the money to take it out. But they never do it.”

“If they do, will the river be the same?” I ask.

“I don’t think so,” he says, echoing the thoughts of others I’ve talked with. “Too much damage has been done. It can never be the same. But it would be better than that dam.”

Some environmental activists claim that many trees will grow back naturally and that others can be planted. Still, how long will it be before an oak can spread its crown to shade the stream and the eagle can find a high perch?

An argument against removing the dam has to do with the pollution of the sediment behind the dam. “You have to go way upstream to understand,” says Thad Hart of the Corps of Engineers. “Study the reports on Silver Springs. The water running out of Silver Springs looks sparkling clear and clean, but it is loaded with nitrogen.”

“And this is not a natural occurrence?” I asked.

“Springs carry far less nitrogen, normally. An average load of nitrate is .02 milligrams per liter of water. At 1.0 milligrams, the ecological value of the water goes into a decline. Silver Springs is above 1.0. Over eight hundred tons of nitrate every year flow out of the springs.”

“Why? How did this happen?”

“Usually excess nitrogen comes from overfertilizing. Maybe orange groves, farms. Scientists are studying it.”

“And what does this have to do with the health of the Ocklawaha?”

“Nitrogen promotes plant growth, such as algae blooms. When the plants die, the water is depleted of oxygen as the algae rot and are consumed by bacteria. Fish suffocate. The sediment at the bottom of Lake Ocklawaha is filled with nitrogen and other chemicals. If they open the dam and it rushes out of the lake, the nitrogen build-up will damage the river all the way to Jacksonville in a few weeks.”

Indeed, proponents of the lake say that it spares the St. Johns by removing seventy-five percent of the nitrogen from the river. Opponents say, “Hey! Wait a minute! You had major fish kills several times in the last few years because of low oxygen levels in the lake. About two million fish died in September and October 2000.”

Dam or no dam, the canal is an eyesore in one of the nation’s most alluring settings. But the assault on the beauty of the river and its surroundings pales before the ecological disturbance it has caused. The floodplain now covered with the water of the lake could again provide a cypress forest and habitat for declining species. Swallow-tailed kites, Cooper’s hawks, and indigo snakes could find refuge along the free-flowing banks of the Ocklawaha. Manatees, now

Footprints across the South

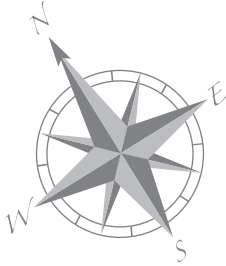
stopped by the locks and dam, could make their way to the warm waters of the springs, as they did for millennia before the building of the structures.

The environmental history of the ancient Ortona Canal provides a ray of hope. There, over centuries, the trees, fish, and reptiles returned. So well did the earth do her work that archaeologists could find the marks left by the canal only with the help of aerial photography and remote sensing devices. Perhaps, given better policies and many decades, the earth can likewise hide the Cross Florida Barge Canal's scars upon its face.

Until this happens, the project will remain one of the more obvious examples of W. B. Clapham's observation: "Never before in human history have the linkages between the environmental and social domains been less constant. Automation, new chemicals, population growth and a kaleidoscope of technological innovations bring change at a rate faster than ever before" (7).

Tyler has been asleep for two hours when we pull into our driveway in Marietta on Sunday afternoon. The sky is clear and the air warm. All that is left of the Great Winter Storm of 2002 are some snapshots Maria had taken before the two inches of snow melted.

My excursions into Bartram's Florida had only begun. On other trips, in other seasons, I would explore the Alachua Savannah and the valley of the St. Johns River, searching for Bartram's monumental mounds, roaring gators, and thirty-pound bass.



FROM WACCA PILATKA

Traders had a ramshackle post and Indians and soldiers camped beside the muddy ferry slip where William Bartram had arrived in April 1774. He had sailed on a “handsome pleasure boat” from Cumberland Island, landing near Amelia Island and making his way to this place, where he found “a neat little sailboat . . . for which [he] paid three guineas” (*Travels* 73). But that was 228 years before I got there and found iron lamp posts and a historical marker standing above a sea wall that protects the parking lot of the Duval County Courthouse. The marker reads:

SITE OF COW FORD: This narrow part of the St. Johns River, near a clear freshwater spring was a crossing point for Indians and early travelers. The Indian name Wacca Pilatka, meaning ‘Cow’s Crossing,’ was shortened by the English to Cow Ford, and Jacksonville was known by this name for many years. This crossing was used by the English when they made an old Timucuan Indian Trail into King’s Road.

Jacksonville sprawls around Cow Ford. Mountainous structures, the Alltel Stadium and the Veterans Memorial Arena, rise behind the courthouse. Their history embodies the dynamics and economics of American cities. In 1994 and 1995, the city demolished the fifty-year-old Gator Bowl and built the Jacksonville Municipal Stadium. Less than twenty months passed between the first swing of the wrecking ball and the opening kickoff of the Jacksonville Jaguars’ initial game. Within two years, Alltel had bought the naming rights to the stadium.

The arena has a shorter history. In 1960, the city built the Jacksonville Coliseum. Forty-three years later, the mayor and his son pushed a button,

igniting 275 pounds of explosives that turned the “old” structure to rubble and dust. In its place rose the arena.

In the glare of reflections on glass and steel, letters and logos on massive towers surrounding the old ford notify the modern traveler that Adam’s Mark, SunTrust, Modis, Wachovia, and CSX now live at the port where Bartram pushed his little boat into the current and nosed its bow upstream into the depths of Florida. Travelers to this city—at least those whose portfolios or expense accounts can stand it—may now dwell in luxury high above the roar of traffic, their accommodations a far stretch from Bartram’s shelter of a sail attached to a fallen giant tree beside the river. Not many blocks from the city’s glittering heart, factories, vacant lots, housing projects, and modest neighborhoods fan out toward affluent suburbs.

Bartram had planned to travel with a young man to the Spalding and Kelsall stores up the river, but he says that his companion deserted him before they set out. His thoughts on the departure of “the young man [his] fellow traveller,” reveal Bartram’s motives for his journey:

His leaving me, however, I did not greatly regret. . . . Our views were probably totally opposite; he, a young mechanic on his adventures, seemed to be actuated by no other motives, than either to establish himself, in some well inhabited part of the country, where, by following his occupation, he might be enabled to procure without much toil and danger, the necessaries and conveniences of life; or by industry and frugality, perhaps establish his fortune. Whilst I, continually impelled by a restless spirit of curiosity, in pursuit of new productions of nature, my chief happiness consisted in tracing and admiring the infinite power, majesty and perfection of the great Almighty Creator, and in the contemplation, that through divine aid and permission, I might be instrumental in discovering, and introducing into my native country, some original productions of nature, which might become useful to society. (*Travels* 73)

We don’t know what happened to the young man, but modern Jacksonville would have suited him well. A city of industry and commerce, until the 1920s it was the largest city in the state. It remains a center of finance, housing major insurance, investment, and computer technology firms. More than a million people live in Jacksonville’s metropolitan area, said to be the geographically largest urban area in America.

The backbone of this population is South Georgians, attracted to the city by its industries. Years of hard farming had leached the nutrients from the Georgia

soil, and rampant cutting in the early decades of the twentieth century had left forests good for nothing but collecting turpentine. Weary farm folk, following the Crackers who moved into Florida in the 1800s, came to Jacksonville seeking relief from deep poverty.

Novelist Harry Crews was one of these refugees. Crews lived his childhood on a hardscrabble farm in Bacon County, Georgia until, in the late 1940s, his stepfather discharged a shotgun over his mother's head. She packed a few belongings and moved Harry and his brother to Jacksonville where she rented a row house and got a job at the King Edward tobacco factory. In his autobiography, *A Childhood: The Biography of A Place*, Crews describes his Jacksonville neighborhood:

I knew absolutely, without knowing how I knew it, that something called the Springfield Section of Jacksonville was where all of us from Bacon County went, when we had to go, when our people and our place could no longer sustain us. . . . I had spent a lifetime hearing about the city. Jacksonville came up in conversations like the weather . . . Everybody had to do it. Sooner or later everybody ended up in the Springfield Section, and once they were there, they loved it and hated it at the same time, loved it because it was hope, hated it because it was not home. (128)

Crews recalls the comments of displaced farmers who had exchanged the agricultural frustrations of Georgia for labor in the city: "walk out the front door every morning of your life and see right across the road that it's five or six other front doors looking dead at you" (129).

People in South Georgia continue to look to the Florida city. Jacksonville International Airport provides them contact with the world beyond, and, when they need medical attention for cancer or advanced vascular disease, they often find it in the hospitals on the St. Johns River.

Georgia and Florida have been connected in Jacksonville in other ways, but none is as spectacular as the annual meeting of the football teams of the University of Georgia and the University of Florida. The game has been held in Jacksonville every year since 1933, save 1994 and '95, while Alltel Stadium was under construction.

But it is not athletics that make the event remarkable; it's the weekend's reputation as "The World's Largest Outdoor Cocktail Party." Throughout the last Friday in October, red flags with black "G"s flutter from several thousand cars, SUVs, and pickups heading south down Interstate 95. By evening, motor homes, many of them painted red and black, cram the parking lots around the stadium. Nearby, enterprising concessionaires hawk food, beer, and entertainment under tents and from the windows of trucks and trailers.

Buses unload the Redcoat Marching Band into the lobby of a hotel. The musicians drop their luggage into their rooms and scurry to The Jacksonville Landing, just a few blocks upstream from ancient Cow Ford, to join the revelers in screams of “Hunker Down, Hairy Dawg” while blue-and-orange-clad Gator fans jostle for space in the crowded streets and plazas.

By game time on Saturday, most of the fans are bleary-eyed and hoarse, lining the streets around the stadium for a glimpse of the arriving teams and screaming encouragement to their champions and obscenities to the rivals. Then 80,000 of them will file past turnstiles and ticket-takers and cover the teal seats with orange and blue or red and black and continue their bacchanalia until the last whistle has blown.



Loosing the rope of his boat from the wharf, Bartram hoists his sail and glides out into water that has flowed 310 miles from Lake Hell 'n Blazes. He would cover all but the upper seventy-five of those miles.

A greener, more placid world reflects on the water of the St. Johns upstream of Jacksonville. Yet, for its beauty, it is hardly the land Bartram knew. Forests of “majestic Live Oaks, glorious Magnolias and the fragrant Orange” remain only in scattered trees shading luxury houses. “The rustling clouds of Ephemera” (mayflies) dodge speeding wave runners (*Travels* 81).

Some thirty-five miles up the river, Green Cove Springs spreads along a low bluff in a bend of the western shore. U.S. Highway 17 follows Palmetto Avenue past banks, shops, and fast-food restaurants in this town of 5,300 people.

I first heard of Green Cove Springs when my father decided to take a leisurely drive home from a vacation in Tampa in the '50s. “Let’s go to St. Augustine,” he said. “And we can go through Green Cove Springs. That’s where my ship is in mothballs.”

We drove to the port where the Navy had constructed thirteen piers. There, behind tall, chain-link fences lay a rusting flotilla of gray warriors, some 600 ships awaiting the acetylene torches of scrap cutters. Most of these ships had been built between 1942 and 1945. They had ferried armies and war planes across two oceans. Men in blue denim had made their homes on these floating hulks and dodged bombs, torpedoes, and Kamikaze raids. Some of the ships had carried warriors to the beaches of Normandy. Others had steamed daringly close to Leyte and Iwo Jima. Then, in an instant, under the mushroom plume, they had become obsolete. Tug boats had guided them past Jacksonville and shoved them into their final berths.

“Do you see number 66?” asked my mother. Her fly-paper memory retained the number of Dad’s ship.

“The Enright was a small one. A destroyer escort. It’ll be hard to see her,” said my father.

The little ship was hidden somewhere in the jungle of bobbing antennae. We never saw her; perhaps Ecuador had already bought the Enright and named her “Veinticinco De Julio.”

The home of the “mothball fleet” has become Clay County Port and Reynolds Industrial Park, a 1,500-acre manufacturing mecca sprawled around the Navy piers and airstrip.

Ghosts of two renowned, creative men may haunt the shore across the river from the naval graveyard. Though they lived in different centuries, they share characters and histories. Both spent their youths in agonizing quests for their vocations. Their fathers set them up in businesses for which they had no heart. And they disappointed the old men. Neither succeeded in agriculture along the St. Johns, but the voices and views of Florida stirred them. In their individual, romantic ways, they drew power from the river and the trees, flowers, and people who inhabit it. Both are remembered for their portraits of its beauty and mystery. William Bartram described the river and its life in lyric prose, Frederick “Fritz” Delius in orchestral music.

William and John Bartram were wrapping up their exploration of the wild country upriver in 1765. Over the previous decade, William had listened to the counsel of his father. He had tried to establish himself in a suitable trade but had only succeeded in leaving a stack of debts in North Carolina. Then, dejected and dazed, he joined his father for an expedition into Florida. What would he do now that the expedition was coming to an end? He liked to draw animals and plants. He had learned a great deal about both from his father. But how could he make a living by drawing sparrows, turtles, and lantana? And was drawing a “vocation”?

Maybe farming was for him. The British Crown had just acquired Florida from the Spanish. Land grants would be easy to get for a man whose family was well-connected. Farming would be hard work, but he had worked in his father’s gardens and fields at Kingsessing. And planting would put him near the land, in touch with the leaves and the flowers he loved.

“I’ll come back here,” William had told his father as they passed the old fort at Picolata. “I’ll plant on some acres beside the river. Indigo. There’s a market for the dye. And I can ship down the river and send my indigo to England.”

The elder Bartram made the arrangements. With the help of Henry Laurens of Charleston, they obtained the land and bought slaves, seed, and tools. Then, in the summer of 1766, less than a year later, excessive rain ruined his garden

and his health and crops failed. Laurens helped him pack out and return to his despairing father in Philadelphia. An experienced coastal planter, Laurens said Bartram's land was bad. "The house, or rather hovel, that he lives in, is extremely confined, not proof against the weather," he said (Slaughter 159). Laurens also judged the swamp and marsh too narrow, the environment unhealthy, and the slaves unskilled and lazy.

More than a century later, Fritz Delius followed a similar path. While his experience was not as disastrous as Bartram's, he hardly succeeded in agriculture. Born in Yorkshire, England, the son of a wealthy wool merchant, he neglected his wool business. His father, frustrated with Frederick's ineptitude in merchandising, sent him to manage his orange plantation at Solano Grove. The young man arrived on the banks of the St. Johns, about five miles south of Bartram's plantation, in 1884 and moved into a little Cracker cottage. But his heart was not in orange production. He dreamed of music. The natural beauty of Florida engrossed him. So did the rich, harmonic vocal improvisations of the local blacks. He bought a piano, studied with an organist in Jacksonville, and absorbed himself in music, neglecting his father's business.

In 1885, he wrote the first draft of "Appalachia," a musical reflection of his experiences in Florida. The tone paintings, named for the old Native American word for North America, wrap variations on an old African American song in the natural subtropical splendor of the Deep South. "Dixie," "Yankee Doodle," and society waltzes find their places in his composition, alongside a twilight song of former slaves on the plantation. He left Florida that same year, but the St. Johns was embedded in his soul as he studied with Edvard Grieg in Leipzig and drafted the "Florida Suite" in 1887. The suite paints a musical day at Solano Grove: bird calls, flowing water, songs of men born in slavery and emancipated a bit more than two decades earlier.

Delius went on to compose in Europe. His works cover not only the placid, romantic scenes of Florida but also the turmoil of a continent at war. He died in 1934. His cottage has been moved to the campus of Jacksonville University. Oaks, palmettos, and the remnants of a few orange trees shade a bronze plaque on a coquina stone monument at the site of Solano Grove.

County Road 13 runs south out of Jacksonville about a mile east of Delius's grove. Now known as "The Bartram Scenic Highway," it begins in the suburbs as a four-lane boulevard. At Switzerland, near the site of a plantation where Bartram overnighted, it becomes a two-lane road shaded by gigantic oaks and black gums. Looking through the trees and palmettos, a driver catches an occasional glimpse of reflections on the river. Large houses, many under construction, intrude upon the view. Boats hang suspended from hoists at the end of long piers that point

into the river from manicured lawns. Farther south, beyond Picolata, prestigious houses are fewer. Boats on trailers rest on St. Augustine grass lawns beside one-story homes and RVs jam the grounds of fishing camps.

Seminole Electric's power plant dominates the skyline. Smoke from coal fires sends clouds from a 675-foot stack. Two cone-shaped cooling towers, rising 450 feet above the flat plain along the river, throw steam into the air. Cables transmit electricity to homes, businesses, and factories. This is the heart of the grid for about ten percent of Florida's power consumers.

Potatoes rule a five mile strip stretching along the east bank of the river from Federal Point to Hastings. By January, men on tractors have plowed, disked, and planted 18,000 acres of gray-beige loamy soil with russet potatoes. Most of the crop will become potato chips, some of them processed and bagged in a factory beside Highway 207 and called "Bull Chips." An additional 17,000 acres of the loose ground is planted for onions and cabbage.

East of Hastings, a yellow crop duster soars over high-tension power lines and dips low, laying out a chartreuse cloud of poison, then roars back over trees, circles, drops again toward the field, and ejects another short burst of pesticide.

Hastings is the remnant of an old Florida town, the kind that fared better and looked sharper in the 1950s. Many of its faded flat-roofed buildings, paint peeling from their stucco walls, are abandoned, their windows boarded. The potato salad days of the village are decades past. What remains is a hardware store, a deli, a Dollar General, and a Tractor Supply store, along with the First Baptist Church and a couple of convenience stores.

Palatka, across the river, has fared better, but not much. Florida's tourism and industrial booms have passed it by. Its days of wealth, when steamboats from upriver met seagoing schooners at its docks, have drifted into a lazy, comfortable life that is just beginning to give way to modern development. Shells of large hotels and other stately buildings stand along the streets near the waterfront.

Colorfully painted two-story houses look out across a public boat launch and the mile-wide sparkling river. The Presbyterian church, organized in 1856, provides a graceful air of permanence. A brick street runs between it and a well-maintained riverside park. Near this spot, Bartram sailed up to "an Indian settlement, or village" of "eight or ten habitations, in a row, or street, fronting the water." He watched naked youngsters, "up to their hips in the water, fishing with rods and lines, whilst others, younger, were diverting themselves in shooting frogs with bows and arrows." Women hoed corn and "elderly people reclined on skins spread on the ground, under the cool shade of spreading Oaks and Palms." The Indians grew corn, sweet potatoes, peas, squash, melons, and tobacco on several hundred acres of cleared land near a well-husbanded orange grove. (*Travels* 92)

Footprints across the South

On a hill overlooking a broad cove, like the site of the Indians' groves, the Florida Furniture plant has gone out of business. Its forlorn brick building sits on the spot where the Wilson Cypress Company once milled millions of board feet of cypress for export to the North. When the cypress forest had been decimated, Wilson, like Florida Furniture, folded its tents.

Such fickle winds of fortune have turned downtown Palatka into a relic of finer days, a zone to be passed through on the way to the suburban commercial strip. Two men and a woman, dressed in thrift-shop clothes, wait for a bus on a bench in front of deserted stores, a tattoo gallery, and a loan office. Grass grows through cracks in the sidewalk outside a boarded-up red brick building, the quintessential Coca-Cola bottling plant of the 1950s.

Downtown is a candidate for redevelopment, for antique shops and other tourist-beckoning businesses, like those found along the restored main street of nearby DeLand. And local leaders are pushing to establish a riverboat, a floating entertainment center. But Palatka's second coming has yet to happen.

Still, there is Angel's, Florida's oldest diner, set in a refurbished railroad dining car on the main thoroughfare in 1932. Don and Carla Aycock, my students in their college days who live on the outskirts of Palatka, take me there one morning during a visit. The decor is 1950s. Forty-five-RPM records hang on the walls below the ceiling, recalling those sacred moments of the Eisenhower era "when things were good, before the hippies and Rock n' Roll turned America upside down." Families eat here alongside couples who arrive on motorcycles and wear black Harley-Davidson T-shirts.

The pancakes I order are light and fluffy, but Carla says that the sausage gravy that soaks her biscuits is from a can.

"At least we know they're not made with the same grease they used in 1932," says Don, reflecting a local joke.

Angel's is one of those places where campaigning politicians stop to meet the locals and solicit votes and where news reporters come to interview folks about their takes on the politicians. Fortunately, neither the politicians nor the reporters are here during our breakfast.

Across the street stands the Larimer Arts Center, formerly a library. The quotations engraved in the cornices above the second-story windows ("Ignorance Breeds Crime" and "Knowledge is Power") lead me to wonder what was going on in Palatka in the days when the city's leaders chose those slogans.

Palatka's past includes two American legends. Around 1940, in his waning years, Babe Ruth instructed baseball players here. More recently, in the early '50s, a young preacher stood in the pulpit of the Peniel Baptist Church, on the southern end of town, near the place where Bartram had made his base at

Spalding and Kelsall's Lower Store. While a devout Christian, Billy Graham, his hosts learned, had never been baptized. Peniel's members took care of that. They baptized and ordained Graham and, thus, found their place in the history of American religion.

Out on State Highway 19, Palatka follows the trend of urban sprawl and the demise of locally owned businesses. Chains and franchises line the four-lane road: a Wal-Mart Supercenter, a Pizza Hut, and a Rex Video stand just around the corner from the K-Mart, Publix, and Chili's.

While the cypress cutters and many manufacturers have folded, Georgia-Pacific, which makes paper and plywood in massive plants near Palatka, is the economic engine of Putnam County. Almost two out of ten of the county's workers draw their paychecks from these operations. The industries, particularly the paper mill, are not without their issues, however. Paper manufacturing uses abundant quantities of water and, if the process is not carefully controlled, dumps toxic stuff into the streams. Under environmental scrutiny, Georgia-Pacific has introduced technology to reduce both its use of ground water and its emissions.



After a couple of weeks in and around Palatka, I've come to think of this region as "the last of old Florida." Other Floridas have developed and taken the spotlight: the retirement meccas of Miami, St. Petersburg, and West Palm Beach; the fun-and-sun destinations like Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, or Key West; and the commercial powerhouses Tampa and Jacksonville. Palatka, on the other hand, is a twenty-first-century version of the Florida first populated and developed by Europeans. Surrounded by forests, farms, groves, and swamps, its people are largely blue-collar and its businesses, until a few years ago, small and hometown owned.

Palatka balances on the edge of change, about to be wrapped in the expanding culture of Jacksonville and the McWorld of international corporations and franchises. Rumors of more large chains—Home Depot, Lowe's, and others—coming to Palatka have stirred hope, fear, and resentment. Those who have dominated the commerce of the town see a threat. So do those who value local ownership and the service it brings. Others think that the newcomers will buoy the economy and open the way for improvements of the town's life. In late 2002, the *Palatka Daily News* ran a series of editorials urging "balance" and "planning for growth." Cooperation of city and county governments in infrastructure planning headed the editor's agenda, followed by the need for improved and expanded water and sewer systems, highways, and schools.

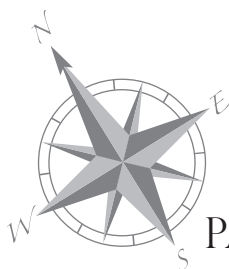
Bartram came to Spalding and Kelsall's when the European cash and credit economy was beginning to touch the peninsula. From these beginnings grew

Footprints across the South

the industries of citrus, timber, and tourism. The town's fortunes rose and fell like waves from the wake of a passing barge. Railroads replaced steamboats; frosts killed the groves; forests had no more to give. Now, almost inevitably and despite local opposition, an old, locally controlled economy is about to end in the multinationalizing of yet another community.



Bartram's journey into Florida was only beginning when he left the Lower Store a few miles south of downtown Palatka. Ahead were battles with alligators, fierce storms, and a wolf that raided his breakfast. He would make camp in a graveyard, marvel over a monumental Indian mound, and spend days in an "Elysian field."



SAINT JOHNS RIVER: PALATKA TO LAKE GEORGE

I rise early, pour a cup of coffee and stand by the glass doors that look across Don and Carla's back lawn. Wind whips the beards of Spanish moss on the oaks out by the lake. Carla has set out a variety of cereals and some juices and is walking on her treadmill. Don looks up from his computer in the sun porch beside the kitchen, sees my long-handle shirt and grins. "Polypro underwear? This is Florida, man."

"Hey," I reply, "have you looked at the thermometer this morning? It says thirty degrees. Want to come along?"

"I think I'll leave the shivering on the river to you," he answers as he steps from his study, pours a cup of coffee, and sits at the dining table. "I'm finishing a book. Hardest part, finishing. Except for starting."

Don and Carla are among the few old friends I have kept up with along my wandering career path. They were among the best students I taught at Louisiana College. When Don launched his Ph.D. trek and I moved to Tennessee, we had to work to stay in touch. Don is a theologian, writer, and pastor, Carla a teacher of math. Fortunately for me, they now live four miles from Stokes Landing (Bartram's base at Spalding and Kelsall's Lower Store) and generously opened their home to me for a couple of long periods of research.

I gather my lunch, thermos, and jacket, pull on a black watch cap, and leave Don to his book. I still have time to swing into Palatka's new Wal-Mart Supercenter and pick up some gloves before I meet David Girardin.

By the time I arrive at the boat ramp, the motor vessel *Welaka*, tied to a dock, bobs on the wind-driven waves. Black lettering on her aluminum hull declares: "St. Johns River Water Management District."

A slender man dressed in jeans and a jacket and wearing a baseball cap steps over the gunwale and walks up the pier.

“David Girardin,” he says, grasping my hand. “It’s good finally to meet you.”

“The face behind the e-mails,” I say. “Thanks for taking me along.”

He carries my dry bag down the pier while I pull on insulated boots and gather the rest of my gear. The sun is already warming the enclosed cabin of the boat as David spreads aerial photographs and maps on the table that he and his colleagues normally use for bottling and treating samples of water, plants, and mollusks from the river on their regular surveillance trips. He points out the sites I’d told him I wanted to see, places Bartram described that are hard to reach by land.

“Where is Wilson’s Cove?” I ask, recalling what I’d read about the Wilson Cypress Company. He turns the boat south and points to a vine-covered jetty that runs into the river from the west bank.

“Under that water are the ruins of barges and work boats. Snags everywhere. We stay out of that area.”

“Hold on,” he says, turning the wheel toward the river channel, “I’m going to kick it into high.”

We speed across a mile of water, into the river that flows westward toward Palatka in a sweeping curve. I look toward the bank at the wooden steps that lead to the Burger King. Bartram coasted his boat past this place. About a mile upstream, across from Devil’s Elbow, he furled his sail, anchored, and climbed the bluff to visit the rotting Utopia of Charlota.

Charlota, or Rollestown, was the 1767 venture of Denys Rolle, a wealthy member of parliament. His dream: load a ship with hookers, pickpockets, and paupers from the streets of London, give them plows, sacks of seeds, and tracts to clear on his 80,000 palmetto-choked land grant on the St. Johns bluffs, and they will become model citizens. Productive. Responsible. Paying back their debts. By August of 1768, his indigo and cotton “farmers” had instead run off to St. Augustine. In Bartram’s words,

from an ill-concerted plan, in its infant establishment, negligence, or extreme parsimony, in sending proper recruits, and other necessaries, together with a bad choice of citizens, the settlement by degrees grew weaker, and at length totally fell to the ground. Those of them who escaped the constant contagious fevers, fled the dreaded place, betaking themselves for subsistence, to the more fruitful and populous regions of Georgia and Carolina.

He found most of the buildings in ruins. “The remaining old habitations,” he wrote, “are mouldering to earth except the mansion house, which is a large frame

building, of Cypress wood, yet in tolerable repair, and inhabited by an overseer and his family" (*Travels* 94).

Rollestown survived a while longer, powered by slaves. Rolle was selling chickens, goats, and cattle and sending indigo, cotton, and turpentine to England. Then, when England gave Florida over to the Spanish in 1783, Rolle left for the Bahamas.

Today a small power plant dominates the bleak, colorless area with its overgrown roadside park and a historical marker that mentions Rollestown. I wonder how long it has been since this spot showed any natural beauty.

Down the highway, the Burger King thrives. It boasts of being the only fast food restaurant on the water. Only its location is unique; a Whopper in Rollestown is identical to a Whopper in Atlanta or Baltimore.

Farther south, the wake of our boat washes the bulkheads of large houses on the bluffs. Then, just as I become accustomed to the ride, David cuts the engine and turns left toward a small new pier beside a wooded bank. The site is remarkably undeveloped.

"This is Murphy's Island," he tells me.

"And there are no houses?"

"The Water Management District bought the island several years ago." I recall that Bill Belleville in his book *River of Lakes* says that the St. Johns may be one of the most protected rivers in Florida. About fifty thousand acres of state parks, forests and reserves surround it.

We walk along mowed pathways past a large, rusting steel boom lying in the brush beside the river. The shells from an ancient midden crunch beneath my boots. Here the Water Management District maintains a small campground. It is a quiet, hospitable place with no trash on the ground.

"Why was it you wanted to come here?" asks David.

"Before he left for Florida, Bartram had shipped a chest of his belongings to Spalding's Lower Store, over at Stokes Landing. The traders were keeping it for him, waiting for his arrival. But just before he left Georgia, the government did something to aggravate the Indians," I said as we walked past the fire pit in the campground. "The traders brought all their valuables, including Bartram's box, to Murphy's Island and buried them. When he arrived in Florida, the turmoil had subsided and Bartram came over here to retrieve his goods."

"It's still a refuge," David says as we return to the pier.

A bald eagle, his head still brown with juvenile plumage, soars over the bow as we continue upstream toward the low drawbridge that spans the river at Buffalo Bluff. David twists the dial on his radio, picks up his microphone, and speaks a few words to the bridge tender. The tender has already seen us; by the

time David puts down the microphone, the span is beginning to rise. We pass beneath the Southern Coast Line rails and head toward Stokes Landing.

Located on a rare strip of dry ground on the west bank of the river, Spalding and Kelsall's Lower Store was an outpost of Colonial entrepreneurs in the 1770s. The company ran packet boats to and from Savannah and Sunbury to this post where Seminoles traded skins for guns, whisky, and cloth.

It was here that Bartram watched a war party of Seminoles take a little R and R from their attacks on the Choctaws. The Indians camped outside the "pallisadoes" of the trading post. Over several days, they and the traders consumed most of twenty kegs—about a hundred gallons—of rum while a bevy of mischievous Indian women "without distinction" tricked them into repurchasing their own booze. Bartram calls the event "one of the most ludicrous bacchanalian scenes that is possible to be conceived" (*Travels* 255–63).

The landing is quieter today. Groves of oaks shade a small house with a rusting metal roof. Grass and weeds grow among the buildings of a deserted shipyard. In the glassy green water of the harbor, the unfinished superstructure of a sixty-foot boat is rusting, its waterline covered with barnacles. Close to the bank, a small trawler rests on the mud of the river bottom, well on its way to joining the sunken debris of Spalding's docks.

David turns the wheel, guns the engine, and we reenter the channel. The next stop on my map is Beecher Point, the "Mount Hope" of John and William Bartram. But first my pilot has other things to show me. He slows the boat to idle near the east bank and spreads plastic sacks of nuts and cut vegetables on the broad dashboard. "I snack all day. Used to eat whatever I wanted to, but now it's these. Do you see all that growth jutting out into the water?" he asks, pointing to the edge of a shallow cove where steel rods rise a foot above the surface of the water. "Those vines are covering sunken barges from the cypress works."

This is where the cypress lumber industry got its start late in the 1800s, says local historian Brian Michaels. The lumber companies used "pullboats" to yank the timber out of the swamps. Cables on "donkeys," steam engine-powered winches, pulled the timber to the river. Some of the cables were a mile long. Crews lived on houseboats—one for the superintendent and his family, one for white crewmen, and another for black workers.

They floated rafts of logs down the river, connected them, and towed them to the mill in Palatka. The rafts reaching the mill were more than 150 feet long. At their peak in 1913, the operations brought in over a billion board feet of lumber.

Some of those trees had been growing a thousand years when Bartram saw them. Norman Moody told me of seeing cypress stumps in the swamps that measured over twelve feet across.

Saint Johns River: Palatka to Lake George

“They girdled the trees,” he said. “Then they’d come back in about a year, after the trees died and dried out, and cut them. If they didn’t do that,” he said, “the trees wouldn’t float.”

And when they had cut all the big trees, they left their equipment and barges to rot on the river banks. The cypresses are slowly growing back, spreading their feathery crowns above the wetlands of the St. Johns basin.

Somewhere beneath us, in the channel, the ruins of the *USS Columbine* lie buried in the mud. On the night of May 23, 1864, Captain J. J. Dickison’s Confederate cavalry landed a shot squarely on the helm of the *Columbine*, a Union tugboat, then burned it to the water line.

We make another unscheduled stop. David slows the engine and turns into an inlet along the east bank. “This is Welaka Springs,” he says as we move at idle speed until our bow rests among the roots of palmettos and vines that cling to the sandy banks. Eight gallons of water push up every second from an opening four feet beneath the surface. That’s enough to flush a toilet and have enough left over to wash your hands. Although Silver Springs runs eight hundred times faster, Welaka Springs is a reminder that five dozen major springs and countless other smaller ones pour water from the depths of the earth into the St. Johns.

When I drive to the town of Welaka the next day, I find a village resting quietly under shady oaks on a bluff about ten feet above the river’s surface. A convenience store is the busiest of the handful of shops spaced lazily along a score of streets. A cafe, pharmacy, and small pizzeria share the town with a boat dealer, hair salon, and funeral home. Baptists have two churches here; Methodists have one.

Since 1900, Welaka Landing Boat Shop has worked on wooden boats along the street that tops the river bluff. The twelve-foot wood and glass doors of the shop are open. Looking through them I can see the blue and silver surface of the river beyond the glass wall on the other end of the building. A breeze off the river carries the aroma of glue, shellac, and paint into the street.

Inside the work area jammed with boats in various states of repair, a shipwright brushes white paint on the hull of a 1950-model Chris-Craft. Keel-up on sawhorses stands a launch built in the 1920s, its firm, dark-brown wooden ribs exposed as a craftsman fits planks on its hull. Despite the sawdust covering of the floor and the crowding of several boats into the work room, the whole operation has an air of class and careful workmanship. Bartram found no such professional help when storms pommelled his boat along the St. Johns. Plantation workers repaired it for him.

From Welaka, David turns the boat to cross the river under the watchful eyes of soaring ospreys. These hawks build their nests not only in the bare limbs of tall trees but also on almost every channel marker along this stretch of the river.

Footprints across the South

“Do you want to go up the Ocklawaha?” David asked.

“Wouldn’t miss it!”

At the mouth of the river, we idle into a world of green, brown, and blue. Moss-draped oaks, black gums, and a few small cypresses reflect on water the color of dark German beer. Two anhingas, “snake birds,” perched on bare, low branches guard the mouth of the river that Bartram called “Ockli-Waha Great River” (*Travels* 182). A bald eagle soars, and a juvenile little blue heron, white with a small blue patch, stands on a raft of water lilies beside the bank, ignoring us as we glide past.

We cross to Beecher Point, “Mount Hope” to John and William Bartram. When the father and son traveled up the river in 1765, an orange grove covered the point. Nine years later, when William returned, the grove was cleared, the land planted in indigo.

Leisure living has usurped agriculture. A large sign on a pier reads, “River Bend Villas.” Two- and three-story beige stucco buildings surround a lawn with palm trees and a swimming pool.

I returned to Beecher Point on a Tuesday in April and found a handful of cars in the parking lots. A silver-haired woman lies on a lounge chair beside the pool. On the pier, a retired couple loads an ice chest and fishing rods onto their pontoon boat.

“Do you live here year round?” I ask.

“Oh, no. We’re from Ohio,” answers the lady, a smile on her tanned face. “We come here in January. Next week, we’re going home.”

They tell me that they own one of the sixty-two units in the complex and that a boat slip comes with each unit.

“Most of the people are snowbirds,” says the man as he loosens a yellow nylon rope from the cleat on the dock. “It’s pretty busy on weekends and between Thanksgiving and March. Most of us are from Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio,” he says. “We rent out the condo in the summer. They do a good job of keeping the place up. We get lots of renters in the summer.”

On the road to the point, a block from the resort, a realtor is selling five lots, unimproved, with waterfront access to Mud Creek Cove. The smallest of the lots is 100 feet by 930 feet. That’s one-fifth of an acre. And it costs \$140,000. The largest, a bit more than a quarter-acre, is listed at \$200,000. Orange growers and indigo farmers need not apply.

We cruise through Little Lake George and slow at a point by Fruitland Cove. John and William Bartram, who knew this place as Mount Royal, dodged a large rattlesnake sunning itself and walked to a mound here. Judging by the large live oaks rooted in it, John concluded that the mound was “very ancient.” Bones were scattered on its surface.

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What the Bartrams could not have seen without shoveling away layers of yellow and red sand were the exquisite square sheets of copper, one of them eleven inches square and decorated with geometric designs, buried in the mound. As scientists, they would have wondered where they came from. Were they beaten and decorated here at Mount Royal or carried from Ohio or North Georgia? Nor did they know of the abundance of polished stone chisels, axes, and celts that lay in red ochre-colored layers throughout the mound, remnants of the powerful Timucuan people who once controlled most of Florida. Clarence B. Moore, also a Philadelphian, discovered these artifacts during the winter and spring of 1893.

Moore's published report, quoted by Jerald T. Milanich (*Famous Florida Sites: Mount Royal and Crystal River*), brings shudders to modern archaeologists: "Where these mounds [across Florida] have not been leveled to the base, the fault has not been ours" (2). A twenty-first-century archaeologist would dig sparingly, sampling the site by digging small square pits and trenches and leaving large portions of it for future excavators with better techniques and would publish a record that would allow a virtual reconstruction of the mound.

Moore steamed away on his rented boat, carrying with him museum-quality artifacts and leaving a shredded mound. When he and later archaeologists pieced together their findings, they concluded that Mount Royal thrived as a major capital and ritual site of the Timucuan from around AD 1050 to 1300. Kings or lords ruled the Timucuan. Ruling families buried deceased family members in the mound, layering it ever upward.

In 1973, the mound was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the State of Florida bought the acre of land where it rests. Eight years later, the U.S. Department of the Interior gave \$10,000 to fence off the tract and the owner restored its height and contours.

Beside the mound, a pale blue, mildew-covered, plywood lean-to shades a display. Glass panes, smeared with the droppings of insects, shield faded photographs and yellowed typewritten sheets that describe the mound and the ancients who built it.

Northward from the mound, the Bartrams saw a "fine straight avenue," sixty yards broad, leading to a pond about a mile away. William describes a great orange grove: "The glittering water pond, plays on the sight, through the dark grove, like a brilliant diamond." When he returned in 1774, the grove was gone. A planter had cleared it for indigo, corn, and cotton, then left. "It appeared like a desert, to a great extent, and terminated, on the land side, by frightful thickets, and open Pine forests" (*Travels* 100).

Across America, over generations, the practice of exploiting land has persisted. Even after we have filled most corners of our continent, many

Americans continue to think of the land as expendable and their abuse of it as inconsequential. Why else dump our dung and insecticides into the streams, throw trash along our streets, and scalp mountain tops?

On his night at Mount Royal, Bartram fell asleep thinking of the custom of using land without regard for its long-term well-being. And, as the sun rose and the animal world awoke, he prayed an eloquent expression of spiritual sensitivity to man's role in the earth:

My heart and voice unite with yours, in sincere homage to the great Creator, the universal sovereign . . . O universal Father! Look down upon us we beseech thee, with an eye of pity and compassion, and grant that universal peace and love, may prevail in the earth, even that divine harmony, which fills the heavens, thy glorious habitation.

And O sovereign Lord! Since it has pleased thee to endue man with power, and pre-eminence, here on earth, and establish his dominion over all creatures, may we look up to thee, that our understanding may be so illuminated with wisdom and our hearts warmed and animated, with a due sense of charity, that we may be enabled to do thy will and perform our duty towards those submitted to our service, and protection, and be merciful to them even as we hope for mercy. (*Travels* 101)

Daybreak had worked its magic on Bartram. "Dawn and sunset," writes Father Thomas Berry, "are the mystical moments of the diurnal cycle, the moments with the numinous dimension of the universe reveals itself with special intimacy" (18). To Bartram, however, the revelation brought more than a sense of the holy. Environmental morality, the interaction of man and Earth, under the watchful eye of the Creator, became clear to him.

Mount Royal did not remain a "desert." Today manicured lawns surround houses that sell for as much as a million dollars in the Mount Royal Air Park subdivision. A grass air strip runs directly across the Timucuan "fine straight avenue." A resident piloting his light plane may glide over the oaks and palms, activate runway lights, land, and taxi down William Bartram Drive to the driveway of his home. Signs on Indian Mound Road at the entrance of the subdivision notify newcomers: "Airplanes have the right-of-way from this point."

America has treated the temples of Timucuans, Creeks, and Cherokees as shelves of a supercenter. If you can afford it, buy it, use it, and dispose of it. An example, from another ceremonial site visited by Bartram, is the struggle at the Ocmulgee National Monument. Over the past decade, a debate over land sacred

to the Creeks has raged in Macon, Georgia. At issue is a set of eight mounds on a plateau beside the Ocmulgee River and in a wetland below it.

Bartram writes of the mounds as “the famous Oakmulge fields, where are yet conspicuous very wonderful remains of the power and grandeur of the ancients of this part of America, in the ruins of a capital town and settlement, as vast artificial hills, terraces” (*Travels* 381).

In 1936, Congress authorized two thousand acres to be set aside to create Ocmulgee National Monument. Local citizens raised funds to purchase several hundred acres. Today, the park consists of 702 acres surrounding seven earthen ceremonial mounds. Beneath its soil lie artifacts of several cultures ranging from nomadic tribes to agrarian Mississippians. A wide variety of plant and wildlife species, including black bears, alligators, bobcats, and wood storks, make their homes here. Migrating birds find refuge within its trees and swamps.

Excavations on the area known as The Macon Plateau, conducted in the 1930s as a public works project, uncovered plowed fields, house remains, and burials in some of the mounds. Following the dig, the mounds were restored, along with an earth lodge that the archaeologists had discovered. In 1999, the federal government declared the area a “Traditional Cultural Property.”

To the Muscogeas (Creeks), the land was more than property. So important to them was this place that, when they ceded all their lands east of the Ocmulgee in the Treaty of 1805, they negotiated with the government that they could keep a fifteen-square-mile pocket that included the mounds on the Macon Plateau and the nearby Lamar sites. Their intention was to preserve their sacred land so that they might return to it for ceremonies.

Events and politics over the following decades prevented their return, however. In the years following their cession, the Indians, who had sided with the British during the Revolution, found themselves unwelcome in a land now filled with farmers and planters. Still, the Muscogeas hold spiritual ties to this tract that they consider their spiritual birthplace, a kind of Bethlehem, Jerusalem, or Mecca of the Creeks.

Most religions hold to sacred spaces—a hill in Jerusalem, a mountain in Tibet, *Sipapu* holes in kivas in New Mexico. Mainstream American traditions, however, tend to ignore sacred space. Moving about has been our history and way of life. We leave behind the turf that meant something to us and establish—reinvent—ourselves all over again. Plymouth Rock may be the nearest place Americans hold as sacred, and, perhaps, the site of the World Trade Center will assume this role for a generation of Americans. Generally, however, the concept of sacred space is lost on us.

It certainly was lost on a civic leader of Macon when he told me, concerning the Ocmulgee Mounds, “There are mounds on every creek in Georgia. We can’t hold up progress because somebody thinks a mound is important.”

He was talking about the plan to build a highway across the wetlands between the Macon Plateau mounds and the Lamar Mounds, a couple of miles east. The road would gouge the land the government promised the Creeks in the treaty. At issue is the Fall Line Freeway, designed to connect Augusta, Macon and Columbus—cities built at the rocky shoals of the Savannah, Ocmulgee, and Chattahoochee rivers, roughly Bartram’s route along the Creek trading path.

The freeway is not the first threat to the site. In the 1840s, a railroad line sliced through a burial mound. Out of sight behind the trees on the southwestern edge of the park, truck engines roar down Interstate 16, the freeway cut through the park in 1960. Now, the State Department of Transportation is examining the impacts of the proposed route and several alternatives, but Macon’s business community holds hard to the desire to bring the road into the city at a location that, it says, will best serve its financial interests. So intense has been their push for the highway that the National Parks Conservation Association named Ocmulgee among “America’s Ten Most Endangered National Parks in 2003.”

Bandelier, Mesa Verde, Montezuma’s Well, and scores of other places holy to the peoples of the Southwest benefit from federal protection, largely due to the continuous presence of tribes who are heirs to the people who built them. But most sacred spaces of the displaced eastern tribes have suffered under the onslaught of development.

David noses the *Welaka* south, into the current. About a mile up river, Lake George opens before us, six miles wide, fourteen miles long, covering 46,000 acres. Bartram called it a “little ocean,” so large and awesome when beaten by a wind that he says that his boat was “at once diminished to a nut-shell, on the swelling seas . . .” (*Travels* 101). From Georgetown, at the northeastern edge of the lake, David and I can see only a shadowy blue mirage of the trees, Bartram’s “misty fringed horizon,” on the southern shoreline.

Georgetown displays a contrast to the affluence of the Mount Royal Air Park. Neat, small houses nestle beneath oak trees along short roads leading from the highway to the edge of the river. Rusting mobile homes sit on cluttered lots around the Drayton Island Ferry slip. Small boats nuzzle a muddy, overgrown bank lined with old, wooden boathouses and wharves near Porky’s Marina and Restaurant. Along the roads that lead in and out of the town, billboards and signs advertise marinas: Lunker Lodge, Bass World, Anglers’ Paradise. The names are more reminiscent than descriptive; the St. Johns has lost much of its glory as the

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bass capital of the world due to lower water quality. Still, it's a pleasant place to launch a boat and angle for the fish that remain.

A ferry runs between Georgetown and Drayton Island, but Herb Hiller, one of the handful who live on the island, usually visits the mainland in his own boat. On an April morning months after my trip with David, when storm clouds threaten, Herb meets me at Stillwater Basin, a serene little community where small boats berth in slips covered by a galvanized steel roof. Skillfully, he pilots his broad-beamed fiberglass Carolina Skiff, capable of carrying large loads of vegetables, cheese, and staples, through dark swells and whitecaps and guides us to his pier that extends more than a hundred yards into the lake.

Herb is a writer and editor, publishing regularly in travel magazines. A few years ago, he wrote, "Cruising [the St. Johns] river you're back beyond brochure-slick Florida. You're in Florida 125 years ago, before the coastal railroads, before the resorts, before the theme parks and billboards."

A decade or more ago, Herb was researching bed and breakfast inns in Florida and booked a room in an antebellum inn on Drayton. "The woman who ran the inn was about to put it on the market. So I bought it and moved here from Miami." We are walking through a small orange grove, toward a tree-shaded lane that leads from the house to the single road that winds along the spine of the island. "I like it here because it is quiet. So quiet." His voice, soft and mellow, reflects the feeling he has for the place. The chirping of tree frogs and distant rolls of thunder are the only sounds beyond his words. Rain begins before we can return to his house. Large, scattered drops dampen our T-shirts. A thunder clap shakes the steps to the back porch as we climb them, and the rain begins in earnest.

At lunch, before our walk, we had sat around a low table on the screened veranda eating the rich whole wheat sourdough bread that Herb had baked that morning, slicing cheese and enjoying the salad that Herb's wife Mary Lee had made from greens grown in the garden. As the wind churned the lake and bent the limbs of the sturdy oaks along the waterfront, Herb, Mary Lee, and neighbor Lisa Grant spun stories of life on the island.

Water. A boater, marooned overnight in the lake, clung to a channel marker, watching the eyes of a dozen curious alligators.

Wind and fire. On the morning of my visit, the wind had blown a limb from a tree. It fell across a power line. Sparks ignited the dry forest. "Did the fire department come over on the ferry?" I asked. "We are the fire department," says Lisa. We have a pumper truck. My husband, a few neighbors, and I put out the fire."

Serpents. No one can write of Bartram, who devotes more than a dozen pages to stories of the serpents he saw on his journeys, without a snake story.

Lisa supplies one. "Last week," she says, "we found a six-foot rattlesnake in the pump house. It was threatening Butch, our dog. We hated to kill it, but Butch is more important."

The tales are told casually, with interest but no great excitement, as anecdotes of the routines of the life that a few folks have accepted on a remote island that Bartram called "Isle Edelano." Then again, they could have been yarns to discourage invasion of the privacy the residents cherish.

Even with the careful guarding of Drayton, it is no longer the Edelano Bartram knew. When he camped here on his trip south with the traders, he found great trees and the mounds of ancient villages alongside the fields left vacant by the departing Indians years before his arrival. Lantana such as he saw still grows there, as do the yellow hibiscus he knew. And stately oaks still shade much of the island. But in the centuries between Bartram and Herb Hiller, citrus growers cut the forest and planted groves. Along the fringe of the island, black wooden posts rise above the waves of Lake George, remnants of long piers that once supported loads of fruit on their way to steamboats.

Nature has recycled the island twice: first, after the departure of the Indians, when Bartram saw it, and now, after the fall of the citrus industry.

On my cruise with David Girardin, we had skirted Drayton, passing along its southern tip heading for Rocky Point, across the river west of the island. David is a bit surprised at Bartram's description: slabs of rock, "an aggregate composition or concrete of sand, shells and calcareous cement; of a dark grey or dusky colour . . . hard and firm enough for buildings . . .," that rose two to three feet above the surface (*Travels* 169).

"Very few rocks are found along the lower St. Johns," he says. "And those are usually associated with springs."

He nuzzles the bow close to what appears to be dark brown rock on the point and idles the engine. I grab a steel pipe and poke the hard surface. It crumbles.

"Peat," says David.

Nowhere on Rocky Point did we find the "horizontal slabs or flat masses of rocks, rising out of the lake two or three feet above its surface." Oral tradition along the lake says that the rock was mined for buildings. When, and by whom, the locals couldn't say.

Lake George is fishing country. Though no longer in its glory, the Saint Johns continues to draw throngs of anglers. From the southern end of the lake comes one of Bartram's big-fish stories.

On his southward trip, he and the traders he accompanied camped at Cedar Point, where the St. Johns flows into the big lake. Bartram had wandered into the forests to botanize. "On my return," he writes, "I found some of my

companions fishing for trout [largemouth bass], round about the edges of the floating nymphaea.”

“As the method of taking these fish is curious and singular, I shall just mention it,” he continues. “Two people are in a little canoe, one sitting in the stern to steer, and the other near the bow, having a rod ten or twelve feet in length.” Stout line tied to the end of the rod holds three hooks covered with deer hair and some feathers. The whole of the artificial bait was “nearly as large as one’s fist.” While the paddler keeps the boat near the shore, the angler in the bow shakes the bob near the floating weeds, dipping it to the surface now and then, “when the unfortunate cheated trout instantly springs from under the weeds, and seizes the supposed prey.” These bass, says our explorer, “frequently weigh fifteen, twenty and thirty pounds, and are delicious food” (*Travels* 108-09).

In the annals of record keeping in Florida, no one has logged a bass larger than 17.27 pounds, although Frederick Friebe, fishing in Big Fish Lake in Pasco County in 1923 claimed to have landed one that weighed over 20 pounds. On the other hand, Bartram may have guessed high; he wasn’t carrying scales when he saw the gigantic Florida bass.

What interests me more than the size of Bartram’s fish, however, is the method he describes. On a hot July day in 1958, in the days before the Army Corps of Engineers cut a channel and drained the biodiverse wetland, Jack Martin took me fishing in one of the many streams of the Kissimmee River not far from Orlando. We slid his little aluminum boat from its trailer, attached a nine-and-one-half horsepower motor on its transom, and putted out to a narrow stream.

“Have you ever dabbled for bass?” asked Jack.

“Never heard of it,” I replied.

“Well, watch me. Then I’ll let you do it.”

I sat in the stern, maneuvering a paddle, while Jack leaned over the bow of the boat, extending a twelve-foot-long fiberglass pole over the water. On the end of his short line dangled a fuzzy fly of deer hair and feathers, with a strip of pork rind hooked on for good measure. As I paddled, he shook the bait at the edge of the swamp grass. The water exploded. Jack lifted a one-pounder into the boat, grinned, then turned to repeat the action.

By noon, we had a stringer of bass. We stood on a rare high spot on the shore, opened a camp stove, and fried the fish, along with a mess of hush puppies.

“How’d you learn to dabble?” I asked.

“Been doin’ it all my life,” he answered.

Bartram doesn’t say who invented dabling, but the traders probably learned the method from the Indians and passed it along to the Crackers.

Footprints across the South

David and I don't cross the vastness of Lake George to visit the place of Bartram's fishermen. Instead, he turns the boat north, skirting Drayton Island along its western shore, and I sit back and enjoy the green landscapes and stately houses. By mid-afternoon, we are back at the Palatka boat ramp.

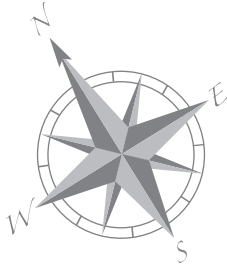
I had traveled key territory in the Bartram itinerary and had witnessed it from his point of view or at least from his physical angle, a boat on the river. The riverside suburbia, largely on the river's east bank, was hardly the Florida he described. Life within the river and in the skies above it struggles against the pressures of lower water quantity and quality and invasive species. Fortunately, on most of the west bank and south of Drayton, forests, preserved by the Ocala National Forest and the Water District, are in the process of restoring themselves to the diversity and tree mass of the 1770s.

"South of Lake George," David tells me, "the river is different. Narrower, with less development."

"And better fishing?" I ask.

"No guarantees."

"I'll give it a try."



IN THE LAND OF THE OWL

A great horned owl shares the campground with Don and me. It is only the owl and us. We're sitting on the screened porch of the one-room cabin we have rented in the Hontoon Island State Park, eating red beans and rice after a day of exploring and fishing along the St. Johns River; the owl is somewhere in a tree, calling to the full moon rising over Lake Beresford. His booming, throaty hoots resonate through the live oaks.

Don spikes a chunk of sausage and stops midway to his mouth. "Wasn't that totem an owl?" he asks, thinking of the two carved replicas we had seen at the ferry landing.

"The big one was. The smaller one was an otter," I reply. We sit in silence and listen to the echo of the owl clan of the Timucua who once lived here and across the river on the mainland. At the river's edge of their main village, where we parked our cars, they set a wood-carved owl, a sacred billboard that told all who passed along the St. Johns, "We are the Owl People. This is our place." The Timucua set up the totem more than five hundred years ago, before the Spanish and the French battered them with disease, war, and economic change. Before their remaining fragile families slipped into the mists of Florida's wetlands and forests.

By the time John and William Bartram passed this way, Timucuan palisades, huts, and hearths lay under the roots of saw palmettos. The bulging eyes of their totem peered up at the keel of the Philadelphia naturalists' boat from the mud of the river bottom and remained hidden until a dredge, making way for a marina, pulled up the carving in 1955.

Don and I have come to Hontoon to retreat into the solitude of forests of palms and oaks with twisted trunks and hanging moss. And to be on the river.

Early that morning we had driven from Palatka to Lake Beresford, Bartram's "beautiful Long Lake" (*Travels* 144), just a river-bend away from Hontoon. We loaded food, cameras, and fishing tackle into a rented boat at a marina on the northern tip of the lake, a half-mile from the ruins of Lord Beresford's plantation where Bartram rested.

Beresford owned a "vast body of land," (*Travels* 144) says Bartram. It extended along the lake and into the hills near the present-day city of DeLand. Its "high ridges fit for the culture of Corn, Indigo, cotton, Batatas, &c." were under cultivation, with the low marshland, which Bartram thought would do well for rice, sugar cane, and indigo, left undeveloped.

Bill Belleville, on the voyage down the entire length of the St. Johns that he documents in *River of Lakes*, poked his kayak into "the thick subtropical jungle" (*Travels* 144) along the eastern bank of Lake Beresford and found indigo growing wild. Under the canopy of a massive live oak, he uncovered a brick, likely an artifact of the plantation house Bartram visited.

A light wind ripples the lake under a brilliant blue sky. It's a good day to be on the water with an old friend. We ride down the shoreline, toward the opening of the lake into the river, passing houses and piers where military tugboats and barges were built during World War II. *The Beresford Lady*, a restaurant on a concrete-hulled sidewheel paddleboat, ties up here. The boat is ninety feet long, double decked, diesel powered, and air conditioned, with a Victorian interior, reminiscent of the late nineteenth century, when steam-driven paddleboats carried tourists to and from Jacksonville and packed oranges and other produce from the plantations along the lake and river.

Richard Knuebel and his family built her on the site. On evening cruises down the St. Johns, her passengers dine "country-style" on turkey, beef and noodles, and a spread of Southern-cooked vegetables while viewing the moon rising over swamps, streams, and birds along the river.

"Somewhere here," I tell Don, pointing in the direction of *The Lady*, "Bartram took refuge from a ferocious storm that flattened all but the main house of the plantation. He was on Hontoon Island when the storm hit. The 'high forests' on the island [bent] to the blast, and the sturdy limbs of the trees [cracked]" (*Travels* 142). He says he couldn't keep the boat in the river. Blew in here, beached his boat in the reeds, watched it fill with water. His box floated but stayed in the boat."

"He hadn't kept up with the forecasts from NOAA," Don quips.

"We take a lot for granted, don't we? After the storm, Bartram sailed across the lake to the plantation and salvaged and dried his books and most of his collection of plant specimens."

At the mouth of Lake Beresford, where its waters marry with those of the river, a sign advises, “Manatee Zone—Idle Speed.” I cut the throttle. Immediately ahead, a manatee rolls, its fluke rising slowly out of the water, then disappears into the river. On the high ground to our right, opposite Hontoon Island, pleasant houses and two marinas border the water. An eagle on his perch above them watches us glide down the river.

At the Florida Highway 44 bridge, fishermen and women sit on folding chairs atop the bulkhead of a small recreation area beside the bridge, their long cane and fiberglass poles extending out over the river. Red and white corks bob on the surface. Two men in a Corps of Engineers airboat spray an herbicide on the water hyacinth around the bridge and park. The hyacinth is a pretty little plant. It floats on green pods the size of duck eggs and puts out a lavender flower.

Bartram didn’t see water hyacinths. Not one. The aquatic botanical rascals showed up a century after his visit. Actually, they didn’t just show up. They came invited. In 1884, Mrs. W. F. Fuller visited New Orleans for the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition. When she fell in love with a plant from the Amazon that floated in a pond and displayed colorful flowers, she brought back a few for the water garden of her extravagantly landscaped home six miles upstream of Palatka.

Somehow, the water hyacinth escaped. Now everyone in Florida could enjoy its beauty. Within a decade, the plants covered an estimated 78,000 square miles up and down the St. Johns and its tributaries. Ship owners screamed. The tough-skinned plants were clogging their paddlewheels.

Hyacinth spreads relentlessly, choking waterways, clogging water system intakes, and limiting boat traffic. By shading and crowding out native aquatic plants, it reduces biological diversity in the river and ponds. Large rafts of water hyacinth can reduce fish populations. The spiral of death works like this: when a plant dies, it drops to the bottom (one acre of hyacinth can deposit about 500 tons of decaying plant material each year), and the nutrients that the plant had absorbed are released back into the water. Certain species of fish cannot tolerate the higher levels of nutrients. They die or swim away to more favorable waters.

Governments tried poisoning the hyacinths, but the herbicides killed every plant they touched. They launched a small fleet of boats to scoop the weeds from the water. The boats brought in piles of herbage and dumped them in fields where they rotted and sent out a repulsive stench.

Next they introduced hyacinth-eating weevils and fungus. Still, the hyacinth spread. It can double its area of coverage in six to eighteen days. By 1960, 188 square miles of Florida’s waterways were clogged. That’s over five billion of the little plants covering an area the size of Columbus, Ohio.

Since then, the Corps, by using more specific and effective herbicides, has reduced the hyacinth's coverage to approximately thirty-one square miles. The 1994 discovery in the upper Amazon of an insect, *Thrypticus*, a natural enemy of the plant, may lead to a new method of control. But before they turn it loose, the scientists will have to figure out whether *Thrypticus* might become an uncontrolled invader all on its own, like Mrs. Fuller's pretty water plant, a gift that keeps on giving whether we want it or not.

What would the Bartrams think of the unforeseen, destructive force of imported plants? They were leaders in the earliest days of the intercontinental plant trade who made their livings and their reputations from the discovery and shipping of new species. Although none of the plants they exported to Europe appear to have made it to the most-hated invasives lists, would such sensitive, foresighted naturalists have been pleased that they promoted a business that has brought kudzu, hydrilla, and water hyacinth into the American landscape?

Below the park, another marina sits on the bank to our right, its slips filled with shiny sports boats and party barges. Houseboats and small pontoon craft are vessels of choice along this stretch of river. Beyond the "No Wake" zone, we rev the engine and head for St. Francis, a Bartram campsite. Well marked on our fishing map on the west bank of the river, this site was briefly a thriving port. After the Civil War, Dr. L. H. Harris moved from New England to this place, then known as "Old Town." His town supported a post office, general store, and *The Florida Facts*, a weekly newspaper. Wharves and a spacious warehouse stood on a long, ten-foot-high shell midden along the river. Behind them, sand roads led to residences, a sanitarium, and a health resort. Citrus trees grew on the higher western ground.

Residents of the area brought logs and citrus by ox-drawn wagons to St. Francis for shipping on the river. Steamboats brought goods and supplies for settlements throughout north Lake County until the development of railroads caused travel and shipping on the St. Johns to fade. With the passing of ship commerce and the devastating freeze of 1894, St. Francis slipped away. In 1909, the post office closed and the hotel burned. No traces of Dr. Harris's entrepreneurial dream remain, save rutted, slough-pocked sand roads that wind through palmetto, cypresses, and live oaks where bobcats, bears, and deer prowl.

On a dark, steamy evening 120 years before St. Francis's fleeting flirtation with civilization, Bartram pulled his boat onto a midden. He climbed the bank, which he calls "a high perpendicular bluff." As he gathered firewood, he noticed that the surface was "very uneven, by means of little mounts and ridges." In the morning, he looked around and "found [he] had taken up [his] lodging on the

border of an ancient burial ground; sepulchres or tumuli of the Yamasees, who were here slain by the Creeks in the last decisive battle" (*Travels* 138).

We see no high ground along the river, only wetlands where the trees appear to be less than fifty years old. Then, about a half-mile up the dead river, Don says, "There's the bluff." Ahead of us, a gray stump of land, about five feet high, juts into the narrow stream like an aborted causeway. This rise, the only high ground in this section of the river, is no more than thirty feet long and twenty feet wide. Its surface is hard-beaten, with pathways leading from a jeep track to the edge of the water. A blue-and-white beer carton lies on its surface, near a wine glass half full of blush.

As we glide past the "bluff," we spot a large soft-shelled tortoise lying on the hardpan. She looks at us but doesn't move. I fumble in my dry bag and pull out my camera, then turn the boat and idle slowly back toward her. She stirs, waddles to the edge, and slides into the water. A dozen eggs that look like undersized ping pong balls roll in after her.

Soft-shelled tortoises normally lay eggs on dry land, where they are supposed to stay until they hatch. The eggs on the St. Francis "bluff" were destined for failure. Even if we had not disturbed her attempt at propagation, her eggs would certainly have met an early fate at the hands of a fisherman or connoisseur of fine Cracklin' Rosie. Perhaps it's a Darwinian experiment. "They're not noted for their intelligence," a biologist later tells me. "We found one last week laying her eggs on the state highway."

Don and I examine the little high ground more closely. A foot beneath the hard-packed soil lies a layer of shells. Bill Dreggors, a local historian, says that Lake County crews dredged the midden to pave roads. Time and Dr. Harris have also eradicated the Indian graves. A twenty-first-century traveler would awaken to say, "I found I had taken up my lodging in a heap of beer cans emptied by four-wheeler drivers who had come to hunt or carouse." Cans, bottles, and a few empty pizza boxes litter the palmetto and oak hammock of St. Francis. In a small clearing lies a recliner, decomposing in a fully reclined position. Once gray, mildew is turning it green. Wendell Berry's "ubiquitous man Friday of all our woods" has been here. "He is the true American pioneer, perfectly at rest in his assumption that he is the first and last whose inheritance and fate this place will ever be" ("A Native Hill" 19-20).

Some eight miles down the river, we come to Idlewilde Point at the entrance to Stagger Mud Lake. Of all the places Bartram described, this one has attracted the most attention, hands down. Somewhere on this "little lagoon" he saw what may be the world's record number of alligators per acre. They attacked his boat and tried to rob him of his food. Two large bull gators fought to a muddy finish (*Travels* 118-30).

It was springtime. Alligator testosterone was raging. Hundreds of alligators were trying to assure that their own personal DNA made it into the gene pool for one more round. At the same time, fish were migrating down the river. At the narrows of the river, just outside Stagger Mud Lake, Bartram saw pods of alligators lined up, plated elbow to elbow, to gather fish into their waiting jaws.

The river here is about 130 yards across. Envisioning the raft of alligators gobbling the passing fish in this tranquil spot taxes the imagination. Besides the purring of our motor, the only activity is two sport fishermen anchored along Idlewilde Point fishing for bream, their rods resting on the gunwales of their boat. The scene is not different when we return in the spring, searching in earnest for active alligators.

Where is Bartram's "promontory?" We see flat palmetto wetland, no higher than a foot above the river's surface. The map shows a place called "Bower's Bluff" a short distance north of the inlet to the lagoon. But there is no bluff, only more wetland.

Did Bartram see shell mounds that had been cut away for road material? Or has a changing river course washed them out? My bet is on the dredging and scraping of the shells. We pause alongside the channel marker, our boat rocking on gentle swells off Lake Dexter, and imagine a steam-powered dredge plundering the banks. They dredged paradise to pave a parking lot.

The deflowering of America, the sacking of the environment, has extended over centuries. Early Indians burned fields for crops and hunting. After a season or two, however, they moved on and life returned, almost to its pristine, primitive state. Then came Europeans, deep-plowing where forests had stood and draining wetlands for rice fields. Mechanized timber operations increased the rate of destruction. And when earth-gobbling machinery moved in, the resource-hungry nation took, at first, a few shell banks and middens, then cut deep, wide canals and fenced the rivers with bulkheads. Next came the grading and paving of pastures and forests for malls and parking lots, the dumping of pollutants, and the over-fertilizing. It has been all so gradual, so step-by-step. What started as a spark has risen to a firestorm, with the population pressure on attractive areas such as Florida and the technological ability to move not only banks of shell but rocks of mountains. Forests and savannas have withdrawn into a few reserves held in trust by government authorities that arrived, in many cases, too late and must fight daily the encroachment of developers and agribusiness.

Wetlands protection and clean water legislation has slowed the degrading of lowlands, but the destruction of natural features continues as developers find ways to elude regulations. More recently, a Supreme Court decision has loosened the reins of federal enforcement, permitting more mistreatment of wetlands.

We ride past the fishermen and enter the lagoon slowly, careful not to ground the engine in shallow water. The western shoreline is flat. Small cypresses with young, slender stalks—mere ghosts of the mighty, ten-to-twelve-foot giants girdled and cut in the late nineteenth century—spread their feathery crowns into the blue sky and reach their roots into the peat. Black gums flank them. Beyond, on a rise, taller trees dominate the horizon. Our minds drift in the primeval world of greens and blues that surrounds us. *Pistia* (water lettuce) and *Nymphaea* (water chinquapin), descendants of the plants Bartram describes here, frame the shoreline of the inlet.

“Bartram fished the water lettuce and caught more than he needed for supper,” I say.

“That was in the spring,” says Don. “And two hundred years ago. Before the nitrogen and the hyacinth.”

“Hope, Preacher. Believe and hope,” I proclaim.

We look for fishing spots on the far end of the lagoon. We also watch for alligators sunning themselves on a cool day. None appear. The tone of the engine changes and the stench of sulfur, released from our engine’s churning of the boggy mud on the lagoon’s floor, assaults our nostrils. Behind the boat, a cloud of dark brown mud rises to the surface. I push the trim button, tilting the engine until the propeller runs just beneath the surface, and put the engine in reverse. We’ve come this far to find Bartram’s haunts, but we have no desire to join him for a night on the flats of Stagger Mud Lake, even if no alligators appear.

Retracing our morning’s journey, we pass party barges and houseboats coming down the river. In a shady spot, beneath spreading oaks, we cast for bass. An electronic buzz breaks the stillness. Don gropes for his cell phone in his tackle box.

“Hello.” Long pause. “I’m not interested. Thank you.”

Don pushes a button and returns the phone to his tackle box.

“Telemarketer. You won’t believe what they were offering,” he says, smiling wanly. “Three days and two nights, free, in Orlando.”

“Why fish when you can see Mickey Mouse?”

We eat a snack and continue searching for bass in mouths of the side streams, called “dead rivers,” and deep holes beneath spreading oaks. Still, no fish.

“We can catch some bream,” says Don, confidently.

He grew up in the low country of southern Louisiana and has fished around the St. Johns for several years. I trust his judgment. We tie the boat to a marina’s wharf, buy some crickets and minnows, and head out into the river around Hontoon Island. Don pulls a couple of lightweight rigs out of his tackle box while the boat glides slowly through the manatee zone.

Footprints across the South

“Over there. Let’s start there,” Don advises, pointing toward a little cove fringed by water lilies. I kill the engine. Don drops a hook with a minnow into the water, up against the lily pads. His bobber sinks and he responds by pulling a fat bluegill into the boat. Then another. My cricket still has attracted nothing.

We move. Up the river, under a spreading live oak, another fish takes Don’s bait. I change to a minnow and begin to get bites. My bobber swirls and dips, but I miss the fish.

“Gotta be quick,” says Don. “They hit and run.”

By four o’clock, we’ve traveled along ten miles of river where we have seen no buildings and few signs of human intrusion. We have caught and released a dozen nice bream. In the evening, we might find some bass to rival the monstrous fish that Bartram saw here. But the last shuttle to Hontoon leaves the pier at five, so we cross back over Lake Beresford, passing a few die-hard anglers in the middle of the lake, and return the boat.

At Hontoon Landing, a pontoon boat powered by an electric motor shuttles campers, hikers, and other visitors across 130 yards of river to the island park. We load our sleeping bags, food, and cooking gear on the ferry, then cart it on wheelbarrows to a waiting van that takes us to the cabin. In a palm and oak hammock are six one-room rustic cabins, each furnished with bunk beds, a ceiling fan, a light, and electrical outlets. Outside each are a picnic table and fire ring. Nearby is a twelve-site campground and a bathhouse with hot showers and toilets.

“It’s like camping with a roof over your head,” says Jim Murphy, the park employee who drives us.

“Looks like we have it all to ourselves,” says Don.

“Next week it’ll be full. Every cabin and campsite is reserved.”

“For Thanksgiving?”

“Our busiest weekend,” says Jim. “Folks bring turkey fryers. Some of them wrap the turkey in foil and bury it in a bed of coals and cook it all day. It’s a big family weekend. All the sites are reserved eleven months ahead.”

We sleep well. The owl keeps us company. In the morning we eat our breakfast, pack our gear, and walk the nature trail. Soft morning light lingers. Massive oaks, their crooked, gnarled trunks covered with ferns, cast long shadows across the palmettos and forest floor, giving the place a primeval aura. A mere dollop of imagination sees saber-toothed tigers lurking in the low shrubs and, out in the thickets, giant armadillos and mastodons.

At the end of the trail rises a twelve-foot-high shell midden. A mile back on the island, this dumping ground of hundreds of generations of Indians looks like middens Bartram saw. Snail shells, barely the size of a thumbnail, crunch

beneath our tread, telling us that a great village once existed on this high ground beside the Hontoon Dead River.

We hike back along the trail, through a hammock where the Timucua once hunted and planted corn. Squirrels, downy woodpeckers, and sparrows scatter ahead of us. We call the park office on Don's cell phone, drag our gear from the cabin, and load our baggage into the white van. At the ferry slip, the owl totem stares at us blankly. He has watched so many come and go.

On the drive back to Palatka, we stop at Astor, where the St. Johns narrows and passes under the drawbridge and where Bartram took refuge at Spalding and Kelsall's Upper Store. His observations of a "genteel, well-bred," but forlorn trader and his beautiful, crafty "Siminole" wife led him to write intriguing paragraphs on the charming guile of the native women (*Travels* 112). It's easy to imagine a made-for-TV movie about this couple.

A hundred years later, William Astor, grandson of John Jacob Astor I, built a hotel here. It drew tourists until it burned in 1928, but it is the trading post tradition that remains. Modern enterprises, most of them catering to the fishing and vacation crowd, have replaced Spalding's emporium in the village that calls itself "The Jewel of the St. Johns River." Signs advertise the trade goods of the twenty-first century: gasoline, groceries, pizza. Marinas charge five dollars per foot per month to berth. A boat shop occupies a large metal building at the water's edge. Pleasure boats and fishing craft, most made of fiberglass, are tied to a wharf near a bait and tackle shop where fishing guides hang out. Beside a barber shop, used refrigerators sit on the shell-paved lot of a ramshackle TV repair shop and a furniture store. At a gas station I can buy ice, a cold drink, or candy and stock up on cash at an ATM in the corner. The Blackwater Inn and Blair's Jungle Den offer lodging. The Seminoles that Bartram knew have vanished, replaced by Crackers, transient snowbirds, and recently-settled Yankee retirees.

Bartram's export business has taken two twists here, one botanical, the other aquatic. East of Astor and along U.S. 17, eight-foot-tall frames hold black tents of saran shade cloth. Beneath these shelters, crews of Latino workers cultivate acres of leatherleaf fern for the floral markets.

After heavy freezes hit their citrus groves in the mid-1970s, landowners looked for new agricultural products that would thrive on their flat, fertile soil. Ferns caught their imagination. At first, they planted under the shade of the oaks, then sheltered their plants with lathe screens before turning to plastic. More than 200 growers, most of them clustered around Pierson, east of Lake George, plant and harvest the foliage. About eighty percent of all cut greens produced in the United States come from this area. Annual gross sales are estimated at \$110 million.

Footprints across the South

Feritrust Cooperative has over 350 acres in production. In a large, white building beside a rail spur, once used as a citrus shed, ferns are processed for distribution to florists across the nation. They'll join blossoms of roses, gladiolus, or chrysanthemums, be displayed for a few days in a funeral parlor or living room, then find their way to dumps and compost piles.

Had Bartram seen leatherleaf fern, he would have told his readers that "*Rumohra adiantiformis* grows here in abundance." But he could not have seen them in his travels along the St. Johns. Bill Keebler, an owner of the co-op, tells me they are from Central America. "But they grow well here. We're far enough north that we don't have extreme humidity, and far enough south that we have few freezes."

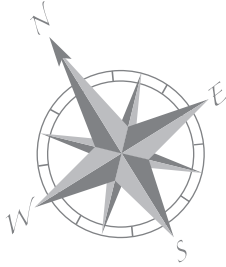
Bill Keebler. A latter day Fothergill, I muse as I drive north to Palatka. Importing plants, cultivating them for pleasure and profit.

Not far away, a new venture came to life in the summer of 2003 with the importation of beluga sturgeons from fish farms near the Caspian Sea. Miami businessman Mark Zaslavsky and others established Sturgeon AquaFarms near Pierson. They are investing \$5.4 million in indoor and outdoor tanks for breeding, nurturing, and growing sturgeons, along with technology for raising the fish for meat and caviar. Zaslavsky anticipates producing 160 tons of sturgeon meat and thirty-five thousand pounds of caviar per year.

By suppertime, we are back at Don's home, telling stories as only fishermen and saunterers can. We muse over the two-century shift from subsistence farming, hunting, and fishing to plantations and now to agriculture and aquaculture operations that use technology to supply luxury items for decoration and gourmet palates.

"What's on your agenda for tomorrow?" asks Carla as we finish our pot roast, potatoes, and salad.

"Amazing crystal fountains' and 'ebullitions.'"



AMAZING CRYSTAL FOUNTAINS

*M*y fascination with clear water bubbling up from the depths of the earth began when two cousins led me from the porch of Uncle Sam and Aunt Bessie's old log home down a rutted path toward the dusty road. Roy carried in a can on his shoulder the precious produce of the cow he had milked. Clarence pushed open the timber door of a small, unpainted house. Rusty hinges creaked and let a shaft of light fall across a sparkling little pool of clear water.

Roy walked down a rough-hewn plank and set his burden in the water. A salamander scurried under a smooth rock below the surface. Clarence reached for a dipper, dark blue with white specks, which hung from a nail beside the door. He dipped it in the pool, sloshed out the water, then refilled it and offered me a drink. I sipped gently, unsure what this was, then gulped the clean, cold liquid and let it run down my chin.

To a boy from Washington, D.C., visiting his kinfolk deep in the mountains of Virginia, water bubbling from sand was a wonder. This, to me, was a spring until I encountered the springs of Florida—No trickling, bubbling brooks here. Many of Florida's springs push thousands of gallons of water each minute into deep, clear, broad basins larger than the neighborhood swimming pool. When Ponce de Leon sought "the fountain of youth" in Florida, he had a lot of candidates. The state has over 600 springs. More than a third of the nation's largest springs (geologists call them first- and second-magnitude) boil out of the limestone beneath Florida's heartland.

I saw them first as a teenager in my quests for entertainment and recreation. At Silver Springs, near Ocala, my family rode with other tourists in glass-bottom

boats and watched great schools of dark blue catfish lounge beneath us. Bream and bass seemed close enough to touch.

At Weeki Wachee Springs, lithe young women wearing shiny “fish tails” that transformed them into mermaids put on shows for audiences seated in an underwater, glass-fronted theater. Long hair billowed around their heads. They drew air from hoses that frothed white bubbles into the blue water, then dived gracefully into the depths. One of them swam close to the glass. I was sure she was also fifteen and that she wanted to meet me. But I never saw her again.

Later, a group of kids from my grandfather’s church took me to a spring near Plant City. We swam with other teens in the cool water, surrounded by small fish that nibbled at our legs.

Even as a youngster, however, the enchantment of the springs seemed greater than glass-bottom boats and mermaids. Ancient waters flowed up from pits in the thick shelves of rock, carrying glittering particles of shell and sand. At seventy-two degrees year round, they felt cold in the heat of a Florida summer afternoon and warm in the winter.

Years later, I read Bartram’s *Travels*. To him, the springs of Florida were sources of fascination and awe. Holy places. Salt Springs (Six-Mile Springs, to Bartram) was an “enchanted and amazing crystal fountain,” an “Elisian spring.” Silver Glen Springs—Bartram calls it “Johnson Springs” in his report to his sponsor, Dr. John Fothergill—was a “vast Fountain.” And Blue Spring, south of DeLand, was a “vast . . . admirable fountain of warm or rather hot mineral water . . . perfectly diaphanous” whose taste and smell Bartram found offensive (*Travels* 92-3).

Salt Springs

When William Bartram sailed his little boat up the “Six-Mile Run” in May 1774, he was returning to a place he had visited some ten years before with his father, drawn back by biodiversity. This spring, which “incessantly threw up, from dark, rocky caverns below, tons of water every minute, forming a bason [basin],” was an “amazing ebullition, where the waters are thrown up in such abundance and amazing force, as to jet and swell up two or three feet above the common surface” (*Travels* 105-107). Samuel Taylor Coleridge seems to have drawn imagery for “Kubla Khan” from Bartram’s poetic description of this spring. Salt Springs becomes Xanadu where, under Coleridge’s pen,

. . . did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

Seated on a green knoll above “the head of the crystal bason,” partially surrounded by an orange grove “with Palms and Magnolias interspersed,” he caught the aroma of *Illisium floridanum*, a species that he was the first to identify (*Travels* 105, 362). He describes waters from under the earth, pushing sand and shells into the basin, then surging through a bed of rocks and into the run.

But the aromatic, floral setting and the force and pleasant colors of the spring were not all that intrigued him. He drifted from scientific observer to social commentator, noting that fish and alligators, natural enemies, live in the basin of the springs in harmony. Somewhere else, in a river or Lake George, they would be predator and prey. Here, in the flow of the springs, they move about “peaceably and complaisantly,” moving aside, “as it were to make room for others to pass” (*Travels* 107). An enviable contrast to his world of rage and conflict.

Salt Springs, now in the heart of the Ocala National Forest, is about six miles west of Lake George, a thirty-minute drive south of Palatka. The springs remain, as do colonies of various fish, but the cycles of the earth and human intervention have left their marks.

For decades, the springs have not been as forceful as those Bartram described. In 1939, Francis Harper found “half a dozen ‘boils’ arising in a basin about 40 yards in width.” He reported that “after nearly two centuries of disintegration, the limestone rocks no longer project above the water, as reported by both Bartrams” and that “the ebullition of the waters no longer has its pristine force, gushing out ‘two or three feet above the common surface’” (*Travels* 166). Visiting Salt Springs during the drought of 2002, Tyler and I saw only gentle ripples of water rising to the surface from the limestone caverns.

I asked Larry Battoe, a scientist with the St. Johns River Water Management District, about the reduced water flow. I had read speculation that the pumping of water for irrigation had decreased the force of the water. Larry pulled a stack of books from the shelves and we thumbed through them. On the page of one study a graph showed the flow that scientists had measured. The line on the graph rose and fell. The flow of the spring, measured over seven decades, has fluctuated from 54 to 134 cubic feet per second. The peak flow during those years came in December 1985.

“I don’t see any trend there, do you?” he asked. “Maybe Bartram was here at a time of heavy rains that replenished the aquifer.”

“Looks random to me,” I replied, recalling that Bartram was pounded by heavy storms he called hurricanes.

Where Bartram sat in an orange grove and watched the spring and its fish, the Forest Service has built a large concrete block shower room and tourist shop.

Picnic tables sit beneath the oaks and pines. Pathways wind down to the stone and concrete walls that enclose the springs in a square.

Silver Glen Springs

Bartram thought the “vast Fountain” at Johnson Spring (now Silver Glen Springs) “in every respect like the other great Spring that [he] visited before [Salt Springs]” (*Report to Dr. John Fothergill* 502). It wasn’t. And it isn’t. But the eighteenth-century naturalist can be excused for not knowing what later scientists have found. Three or four openings pump out about sixty-five million gallons a day in an average year, while the nine vents at Salt Springs pour out fifty-two million. And only a keen clairvoyant would have known in 1774 that Silver Glen would become a sort of floating tailgate party every warm weekend.

On a November morning a man whose midsection fills a “Recreation Resource Management” T-shirt rakes the small live oak leaves and acorns from the sand path to the welcome station. His radio, sitting on a golf cart, plays country music. We walk up a wooden ramp to a little office where he sells me an entrance pass for three dollars.

“Not many folks here,” I observe.

“Just a few houseboaters,” he says. “The crowds come in the summer.”

I had mixed feelings about the timing of my visit. Was I seeing the “real” Silver Glen, or should I have come on a summer holiday? An aerial photograph of the place on the Fourth of July 2002 shows the spring run looking like the parking lot of a shopping mall at Christmas, except the pavement is blue and green and the vehicles are boats. Bill Belleville describes the recreational attraction: “weekends and holidays transform the spring into a floating, gunnel-to-gunnel bacchanalia where the *raison d’être* seems to be showing off one’s boat, playing music at impressively high decibel levels, getting half naked, and entering a state where you can’t much tell a bullhead from a Budweiser—and don’t much care, anyway” (111-12).

Five-hundred boats, ranging from rubber rafts to 50-foot houseboats, once crammed into the waterway, announces a website that touts the “Comaraudary” of the fiesta at Silver Glen. The same page, featuring hard-driving party music, protests that “Lake County just placed a new ordinance in affect [sic] not allowing anyone to possess alcohol in the Silver Glen run.” Another website, sponsored by the “Silver Glen Boating Preservation Society,” claims that law enforcement officials “have even been known to hide in the trees with binoculars and/or night vision glasses to peer into your cabins/homes/bedrooms under the premise of ‘good police work’ looking for someone drinking a glass of wine in their cabins.” It says that the American Civil Liberties Union is interested in their cause.

On this much quieter day, the attendant, employed by a company that contracts to operate recreation sites for the Ocala National Forest, hands me a receipt and I walk the winding path down to the spring. An earth and shell mound, some twelve feet high, rises on my left, covered by small trees. White signs on wooden posts advise that, if I take any archaeological materials from the mound, I'll be in big trouble with the law. I look in vain for something that will tell me if the mound has been excavated and what has been found. Later I learn from Florida's Bureau of Archaeological Research that this is one of three mounds that circle the spring. Native Americans built the mound, but, since it has not been excavated, its significance and the story it contains remain hidden under sand and shells.

I return to the parking lot and follow a trail across shell middens, refuse heaps from hundreds of years ago, and wind through a hammock of palmetto, oaks, and small cypress trees—an easy two-mile walk to Lake George. The Forest Service has cleared a small area on the bank of the lake. I sit on a bench under deep shade and watch the clear, dark water lap against logs while gray beards of Spanish moss swing in the gentle breeze. Bartram, camping near this spot, seasoned fish heads with the juice of oranges. During the night, a wolf stole his leftovers and the traveler thanked God that the thieving canine left him unscathed.

From here, Lake George appeared to Bartram as a “little ocean” (*Travels* 157f). In fact, it measures about seventy-two square miles, larger than Washington, D.C. All this water. A state full of water, surrounded on three sides by an ocean and a gulf, permeated by streams and springs. Almost twelve thousand square miles of Florida are covered by water. Only Alaska and Michigan have more water surface. Yet I keep hearing that water is an issue here. Both the quality and quantity of the state's water is deteriorating. How many people can live on the peninsula? Where will they get their water if they continue to move into the state at the rate seen over the past five decades? Water experts and politicians speak of “sustainability.” I recall the 1950s, when my grandfather asked me to wash my car under the grapefruit tree in his backyard in Lakeland. “We have a water shortage,” he said. “Give the tree the water from your car washing.”

Bartram commented on the trees, flowers, fish, fowl, and reptiles of the region. He analyzed the agricultural value of land. And he sighed eloquently over the environmental damage that European settlement had caused, even in the wee hours of America's morning. But he never mentioned water as an issue. Why should he? How could he predict that water would be used for more than a habitat for fish and alligators and for the irrigation of fields of rice or indigo? Cities, lawns, swimming pools, groves, ferneries, and eel farms all suck water from the aquifers. Georgia-Pacific uses about five million gallons of ground water a year to produce paper.

He foresaw a thousand or so farmers, along with slaves, coming to plant indigo, rice, sugar, and some corn and sweet potatoes. The state's population grew by only a few hundred thousand in the first century after he visited. Since 1950, however, it has erupted from 2.7 million to 16 million. More than three-fourths of the increase has come from migration into the state. In addition, 37 million visit Central Florida each year, bathing, drinking, and washing their cars.

I return through the oaks and palms, skirt the mound, and visit the spring one more time. The vents push pillows of water, sending ripples across the surface of the basin. The pool shimmers in greens and blues, surrounded by grassy slopes and park land.

Blue Spring

The prospect of seeing manatees swimming in a clear spring in a subtropical jungle has intrigued Maria enough to get her into the shower before sunrise. Last evening, in the quiet ocean-side town of Flagler Beach, we had enjoyed strolling the boardwalk, watching surfers ride cresting waves, and eating a dinner of fried seafood. We would gladly linger a few more hours there, but the forecast says storms will bombard Central Florida today and we want to get to Blue Spring before they hit.

A light drizzle dampens us as we pack the car. We go to the donut shop in Ormond Beach, drive down Interstate 4 across the state to Orange City, and follow the state park signs through residential areas and past a city park. Just across the Seaboard Coast Line tracks is the entrance to Blue Spring State Park. John and William Bartram rowed their boat into the spring. William later rode a horse four miles from the Beresford plantation to Blue Spring.

It is early November, the time when manatees begin their migration into the spring run where they will spend the winter, sheltered from the chilled water of the St. Johns. Lettering on a wooden plank hanging on the park's fee booth says "No Manatees Today," but we pay our \$4 entrance fee and hope the big aquatic mammals haven't read the sign. Scuba divers in the parking lot struggle into their tight-fitting wet suits and hoist their gear to their shoulders. We follow them down the boardwalk trail, past a sign pointing to the "Head Spring."

I sniff the air. "A hint of sulfur," I comment, thinking of Bartram's vivid description of the pungent smell: "This tepid water," he says, "has a most disagreeable taste, brassy and vitriolic, and very offensive to the smell, much like bilge water or the washings of a gun-barrel, and is smelt at a great distance" (*Travels* 145).

We smell nothing to match that.

Four women climb the steps out of the water, towel their white hair and wrap themselves in terry robes. A lean elderly man, his head sheathed in a white latex cap, glides smoothly through the water, swimming laps.

“Any manatees in there with you?” Maria asks.

He stops swimming and treads water.

“Not today,” he says. “There’s one who stays here year-round. But I haven’t seen her today.” Graceful scissors kicks bring him to the steps. “She’s a large female. She was injured several years ago. They took her to Sea World. They nursed her back to health, then brought her here. She had gotten to like people, so she decided to stay here. They named her ‘Georgia.’”

“So, she’s prettier than most manatees,” says Maria.

“Let me guess,” he says. “You are from Georgia.”

“Right in the heart of it,” she says, smiling.

The swimmer laughs and tells us that Georgia has borne two calves since she got here. “They named one of them ‘Peaches.’”

We thank the swimmer and walk up the boardwalk to the head of the spring. The boardwalk stands on the steep, palm- and palmetto-covered banks that rise ten feet above the surface of the basin. Blue sky and green trees reflect on the clear water. An otter rolls near a log on the far bank of the pool, a hundred feet away from us. Broad-bellied, dark blue catfish rise occasionally to break the surface, then sink to their resting places on the bottom.

Divers with yellow tanks strapped to their backs swim to the boil. They place their breathing tubes into their mouths, plunge nine feet to the edge of the limestone hole, then disappear into the depths of the spring. Bubbles from their lungs highlight the spring’s flow. To a pair of onlookers standing with their dry feet on a boardwalk, the flow looks unimpressively gentle. Just a slight rise in the surface of the pool, waters spreading gracefully toward the banks. But seventy-one thousand gallons of water push out of a single opening every minute. I imagine that it takes powerful swimming to get into the cave where these guys are going.

We stroll the half-mile wooden pathway that parallels the spring run to its junction with the St. Johns River, past a two-story white house built on a great shell midden near the mouth of the spring run. We learn from a sign that the Thursby family, original owners of the house, were orange growers and operated a pier here in the 1880s and 1890s.

A father, mother, and three children stand on a platform over the water, their attention focused on a swirling wave across the waterway. We walk down the ramp and stand behind them.

“Manatees?” I ask.

“Two of them,” says the man in a bright red jacket.

A broad, gray tail breaks the surface at the edge of the lilies and water hyacinths. We know that Jacques Cousteau came here in 1971 to film the aquatic mammals who struggle to survive against the assaults of boat propellers and

deteriorating water quality. His film *The Forgotten Mermaids* alerted the nation to the threats to manatees' survival. Now we are seeing them for the first time.

"Do you live around here?" asks Maria.

"Wisconsin," the mother answers. "We came to Disney World and heard about this place."

"Glad to know someone who visits Disney gets up here to see the 'Real Florida,'" I say, quoting the Florida State Parks tag line. "What's the weather like in Wisconsin today?"

"It's snowing," says the man, chuckling.

We watch the manatees prowl for food along the far bank. They disappear as the skies grow darker and the rain turns from mist to heavy drizzle.

"Do you want to go on the ecotour?" I ask Maria.

"Yes, if the boat is covered."

"Beats standing in the rain or staying in the car or shops all day. And we'll learn something."

We walk toward the wooden pier, built over the stumps of the wharves where paddlewheel steamboats loaded Thursby's oranges and passengers. At a rustic, wooden kiosk we pay our passage and descend the aluminum gangway to the pontoon boat where a handful of fellow travelers are seated around plastic tables under the canvas shelter.

"We're waiting on a group," tour guide Rebecca Keith tells us as she walks toward the helm. "As soon as they get here, we're leaving. A big storm is coming. Maybe we'll beat it."

We look at the canvas covering and wonder how much rain will blow under it. The temperature is mild, around seventy degrees, but wind and rain could make us a bit uncomfortable.

Sixteen people walk from the parking lot and down the ramp. Most are over sixty. They carry an ice chest and large white plastic sacks filled with Styrofoam boxes. Cameras and binoculars swing from their necks; all wear a badge identifying them as participants in a birding conference.

Rebecca pushes the throttle and steers the boat across the St. Johns and upstream. The journey has scarcely begun when she sets the engine to idle and glides slowly toward a waterfowl dipping its head into a shallow bed of lilies. As the passengers crowd the rail on the port side, snapping pictures through the rain, she tells us this white bird with a pale blue spot is an immature little blue heron and that the blue patch will expand until its plumage becomes the cerulean blue of an adult.

Conversations grow louder, their buzz drowning Rebecca's voice. She turns up the volume on her speakers and returns the boat to mainstream. Anhingas,

“snake-birds,” males with black, velvety plumes and females with brown necks and breasts, perch on tree branches, their spear-like beaks poised to skewer a passing fish or frog. The rumble of voices grows to a roar when our guide spots an osprey gripping a branch above the river, a small fish clutched in his claws. Rebecca increases the volume of her speakers until a piercing electronic squeal sends an alarm to the osprey. The osprey maintains his grip on both limb and fish, but ducks his head and twitches, clearly perturbed by the lunchtime intrusion.

Great blue herons, egrets, and moor hens watch us pass. Alligators and turtles are conspicuously by their absence.

“We’ll be lucky to see a gator,” says Rebecca. “Too cold, overcast.”

For a time, the wind drives a cold rain under the shelter of the canvas and the crowd clusters in the center of the boat, pulling jackets and plastic rain coats around their necks. But the weather cannot dampen the birders’ enthusiasm when one of their keen-eyed colleagues spots a downy woodpecker. Rebecca cuts the engine; the birders listen, identifying calls of three small birds somewhere in the groves along the river before their hubbub drowns the chirping.

We enter a peaceful cove where red maples, their roots spread wide into the wet humus, garnish the wetland with their autumn foliage. Unfortunately, someone has found a way to blemish this piece of wilderness. On a forested bank, barely a foot above the shoreline, stands a tribute to ugliness. An enterprising fellow, exhibiting more evidence of hard work than taste, skill, or care, has towed a barge, mounted on pontoons, to this serene backwater.

“Last year, during the high water, this guy floated that thing into that clearing,” says Rebecca. It sits on the soft earth, surrounded by black gums and cypresses. Rising from the bed of the barge is the frame of a two-story house. Black insulating boards shroud it, interrupted by windows, set catawampus. State and county agencies are mobilizing to force the clueless builder to remove the outrage. Fortunately, most of the land in this area is owned by the state and is protected from such distortions.

Shortly before we reenter the river, Rebecca slows the boat and points out a vine that drapes from a tree like a tangle of green cables twisted around a power pole after a hurricane. Yellowish-green melons, shaped like softballs deformed by a power hitter’s bat, hang from bare vines a dozen feet above the swamp floor.

“I want you to see an Okeechobee gourd vine. It’s an endangered species. This is one of the four remaining habitats for this gourd,” she tells us. “Its other habitats have been turned into farmland.” She says the Okeechobee gourd was the “wild squash . . . curious to behold . . . climbing over the lofty limbs of the trees,” that Bartram saw near Lake Dexter, some twenty miles downstream (*Travels* 137).

“Thank you. You gave us a good trip in the middle of some sorry weather,” I tell Rebecca after the boat is tied to the dock. “Are you a biologist or naturalist by training?”

“Most of what I know I learned after I got here. I wanted a job outdoors, in a place like this, with the water and the birds. So, I moved here from Charleston, South Carolina, a few years ago and learned all I could on the river.”

The rain has slackened to a drizzle when we return to Blue Spring. We walk along the boardwalk to a platform where an old man leans on his cane beside a slender woman whose curly, black-and-gray hair reaches her shoulders. They fix their eyes on five manatees lounging just beneath the surface. One is a massive cow with two calves, each about five feet long. A large white scar near her great crescent flap of a tail betrays the injury that she suffered when the propeller of a boat struck her.

“Georgia, Peaches, and the new calf,” guesses Maria.

The manatees glide calmly, their noses on the bottom of the run, brushing each other gently, occasionally emerging to sniff air, then cruising up the stream. Sensing the cold front that will blow in behind the rain, they have moved into their winter home, where the water is warm enough throughout the season to make them comfortable. More than a hundred will return here over the next few weeks and will linger until the river warms in March.

The old man turns, leaning on his cane. “We’ve been coming here all week,” he says. “Haven’t seen a manatee until today.”

“This is ‘opening day’ of manatee season at Blue Spring,” I whisper to Maria. “And we are lucky enough to have tickets.”

I watch a pair of the mammals frolic midstream, rolling their bulky bodies in the clear water. “God’s recreation,” I say.

“What?” Maria puzzles.

“Psalm 104, I think. Where the psalmist talks of creation and of the sea. ‘There is leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.’ The ancient Hebrew poet thought that God made a sea beast just to play in the sea.”

“No other use? Just God’s sport? No niche in the environment, no place in the food chain?”

“Just for His enjoyment.”

“Or Hers.”

The rain resumes and the wind turns to blow from the north. Maria pulls up the hood of her poncho while she continues to track a mother manatee and her calf.

“Cold?” I ask.

“Uh-huh.”

“Ready to go get some soup?”

Amazing Crystal Fountains

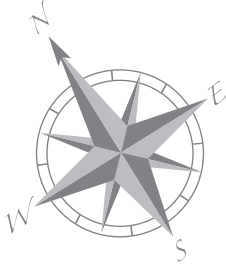
“Wait! Look how they nuzzle. That calf sort of glides over his mother’s back and they swim along together.” Her face is bright; her eyes see more than mine. “Yes. I am ready for some soup.”

But as we walk along the run toward the car, she stops again, takes a long look back at the spring run, squeezes my hand, then says, “OK. Let’s go.”



*The Great Alachua-Savanna, in East Florida, above the mists on a clear day.
From a sketch by the author, taken in 1765, and from the Journal of J. Bartram.*

Figure 5. William Bartram. Great Alachua-Savanna, East Florida.
n.d. Pen and ink sketch.



ALACHUA SAVANNA

Herd of sprightly deer, squadrons of the beautiful, fleet Siminole horse, flocks of turkeys, civilized communities of the sonorous, watchful crane, mix together, appearing happy and contented in the enjoyment of peace, 'till disturbed and affrighted by the warrior man. Behold yonder, coming upon them through the darkened groves, sneakingly and unawares, the naked red warrior, invading the Elysian fields and green plains of Alachua. (Travels 188)

So, what will we do with well-used “Elysian fields”?

The “fields,” known by Bartram as the “great Alachua Savanna,” now appear on maps and websites as Paynes Prairie. The flat bowl of grass, shrubs, and herbs, spread over eighteen thousand acres, more than twenty-eight square miles, bounds the southern edge of Gainesville, Florida.

Mammoths and bison have munched lush grass here, as have Spanish cattle and horses. Humans have enjoyed and exploited the prairie for about twelve thousand years. Highways cross it, and drainage ditches cut it. Giant alligators lounge on dark, mud banks between tall grass and deep sinkholes. And the State of Florida, through several agencies, works to restore it to the condition that led Bartram to exclaim, “how the mind is agitated and bewildered, at being thus, as it were, placed on the borders of a new world! On the first view of such an amazing display of the wisdom and power of the supreme author

of nature, the mind for a moment seems suspended, and impressed with awe” (*Travels* 189).

He spared no eloquence in writing of the plants and animals: “unlimited, varied, and truly astonishing native wild scenes of landscape and perspective.” No other single landscape on his journeys, from North Carolina mountain views to the swirling “grand sire of waters” in Louisiana, brought as much poetic ink from his pen. Two dozen pages of *Travels* give us his take on this place. He even gives us a map, the only one in his book (*Travels* 184-208).

Considering that he found it a natural wonder, it is surprising that Bartram had the idea that the broad, fertile basin could be “peopled and cultivated after the manner of the civilized countries of Europe” and support a population of “one hundred thousand human inhabitants, besides millions of domestic animals . . . at some future day one of the most populous and delightful seats on earth” (*Travels* 251).

Did Bartram actually want to see planters and gardeners turn this “new world” into a township? Or was he caught up in the spirit of his age, seeing Florida, a warm and fertile land recently brought into the British Empire, as a prime parcel? His countrymen, seeking prosperity and freedom, could expand their holdings and thrive in a place like this.

Americans now struggle with the dilemma of balancing the competing goals of environmental preservation and economic development. Clear streams or abundant coal? Forest habitats or fine-grained lumber? Clean air or cheap power? Perhaps we can allow Bartram to share the uncertainty that we harbor. Men of his age had not yet witnessed the irreversibility of environmental damage. A huge, largely uncharted land lay before them—a land that many thought God had given them for a better life.

Bartram traveled to Alachua from Spalding and Kelsall’s Lower Store on the St. Johns River, tagging along with a group of traders, emissaries of entrepreneurs eager to establish trading posts, including one at Cuscowilla. They were the leading edge of British exploitation of Florida. Industry would follow. And tourism.

Each day’s travel brought him to a different ecosystem. Along this stretch of the trading path he saw diverse trees and shrubs along with lizards, snakes, and birds, including the scrub jay. And at his first campsite, beside Halfway Pond, he observed “armies of fish pursuing their pilgrimage to the grand pellucid fountain,” gar, trout (bass), catfish, bream (*Travels* 175).

Halfway Pond now goes by the name Cowpen Lake. It nestles, along with dozens of other lakes and ponds, in rolling hills of grass west of Interlachen, surrounded by modest retirement and vacation homes. In late 2002, the lakes

around Interlachen are below their normal pools. By contrast, lakes ten miles to the south are brimming. “That shows that the aquifers still have water,” Thad Hart of the Corps of Engineers tells me. “Those lakes with the bare banks depend largely on rainwater. Even with the heavy rains of the fall of 2002, we are in a drought. But the lakes drain into the aquifers and the aquifers fill the lower lakes.”

Bartram spoke more poetically of the connection between Halfway Pond and the lower lakes. “Armies of fish,” he said, pursue

their pilgrimage to the grand pellucid fountain, and when here arrived, all quiet and peaceable, encircle the little cerulean hemisphere, descend into the dark caverns of the earth; where probably they are separated from each other, by innumerable paths, or secret rocky avenues . . . and . . . after many days absence from the surface of the world, emerge again from the dreary vaults, and appear exulting in gladness and sporting in the transparent waters of some far distant lake. (*Travels* 175)

As Bartram and his colleagues broke camp at Halfway Pond, choruses of “musical savanna cranes” filled the morning air. “Shrill tuneful songs of the wood thrush, and the soothing love lays of the amorous cuckoo” delighted him as the little caravan moved westward (*Travels* 179, 181). After passing through forests and sand ridges and skirting ponds, they came to a “fine fruitful Orange grove; which magnificently adorns the banks of [a vast and beautiful] lake.” Here, he thought, “is a fine situation for a capital town” (*Travels* 180). Bartram’s descriptions are better than his predictions. Hawthorne, a village where an east-west highway, U.S. 301, and two railroads intersect, is the town nearest his “fine situation.”

On the afternoon of their second day of travel, the group arrived at Cuscowilla, located on a sandy ridge south of the Alachua Savanna, far enough from a little lake to avoid the summer stench of dead fish and reptiles. The chief of the village, known as The Cowkeeper, received them. Sitting around a low table with the tribe’s leaders, they drank a ceremonial beverage, “the Thin drink.” When The Cowkeeper learned of Bartram’s business, he gave him “unlimited permission to travel over the country for the purpose of collecting flowers, medicinal plants, &c.” and named him “Puc Puggy or the flower hunter” (*Travels* 185).

The trading group made its camp a few miles northwest of Cuscowilla, on the edge of the savanna. On the following evening, they sealed their trade agreement with the Indians, who regaled them with a feast of barbecued beef, freshly butchered from the Cowkeeper’s herd out on the savanna.

Puc Puggy says nothing of the flowers he collected but much of what he saw in his “travel over the country.” Over the next three days, he and the traders

explored the perimeter of the savanna and examined the opening of the Great Sink before returning to the Lower Store on the St. Johns River. It was during this ride that he identified the “black wolf,” now known as the red wolf.

As with the orange groves farther east, Bartram envisioned development into “one of the most populous and delightful seats on earth,” a center of agribusiness (*Travels* 251). The last census found over 200,000 residents in Alachua County, but these folks had not come to cultivate or herd. They were, quite largely, participants in the economy of the University of Florida.

Had Puc Puggy known the strange natural history of the prairie, he may not have proposed the influx of Europeans. He thought that the rising and falling of the lakes were seasonal: they filled in the winter, dried up in the summer. According to Lars Anderson, who pieced together the story of the basin in *Paynes Prairie: A History of the Great Savanna*, the savanna has a habit of filling with water, and then, after a few years, draining itself. In 1867, the prairie flooded, killing cattle and sheep grazing there. Four years later, it began to flood again. By 1873, water covered pastures, roads, and homesteads.

The flooding occurred when the Great Sink somehow became plugged. Located on the north edge of the prairie, this large, natural drainage hole has survived the various uses of the area. Except for a pipe and the remnants of a dock, a modern observer sees what Bartram describes:

a group of rocky hills almost surround a large bason, which is the general receptacle of the water, draining from every part of the vast savanna, by lateral conduits winding about, and one after another joining the main creek or general conductor, which at length delivers them into this sink; where they descend by slow degrees, through rock caverns, into the bowels of the earth, whence they are carried by secret subterraneous channels into other receptacles and basons.

Bartram’s description continues:

In and about the Great Sink, are to be seen incredible numbers of crocodiles, some of which are of an enormous size . . . and at this time they are so abundant, that, if permitted by them I could walk over any part of the bason and river upon their heads, which slowly float and turn about like knotty chunks or logs of wood, except then they plunge or shoot forward to bat off their associates, pressing too close to each other, or taking up fish, which continually crowd in upon them from the river and creeks . . . especially the great trout, mudfish, catfish and the various species of bream. (*Travels* 203-205)

The dark water flows swiftly. The gators are large and numerous, though not as abundant as in Bartram's description. Twenty or more lounge in the mud on the autumn day I visit the prairie in the company of the biennial meeting of the Bartram Trail Conference.

How did the Great Sink clog? Local lore says that tourists and picnickers had been throwing logs into it, amusing themselves by watching the hole suck the debris down. Or perhaps it was a natural phenomenon, the collapse of the limestone around the hole's opening. Whatever the cause, water reached a depth of as much as ten feet. The state legislature designated the former (and future) prairie a navigable body of water. In 1883 the Alachua Steam Navigation and Canal Company launched the steamer "Chacala" and two barges to carry cotton and produce across the new lake. A dock at Alachua Sink connected the boat traffic with the Florida Southern Railroad, which ran between Gainesville and the wharves at Palatka.

The water level began to drop in 1891. By the following year, Paynes Prairie was a wet grassland covered with dead fish. Following the flood, the Camp Ranch cut canals into the savanna, draining its water to use the land for grazing. By 1931 dikes and ditches traversed the prairie. This was not the first time the prairie had been used for cattle. Francisco Menéndez Marqués established La Chua Ranch here in 1640, naming it for the Great Sink (he understood the Potano Indian word for the sink as "chua," meaning "jug"). Using Potano labor, he built a large hacienda on the north end of the prairie, between the old Spanish road and the Great Sink. His cattle grazed the forests in the winters and in the summers fed on the lush grass of the savanna. Potano cowboys herded the fat cattle to St. Augustine for slaughter.

After Creeks from Georgia attacked La Chua in September 1704, the Spanish Army, in need of the protein resources it provided, took over the ranch. Around 1750, the Spanish left the area to Ahaya and his band of Creek immigrants from the hills of Georgia. Ahaya rounded up the stray cattle and grazed them on the prairie, earning him the name "Cowkeeper."

Beginning in 1957, the Gainesville Garden Club, led by Marjorie Carr, began to educate the public about the importance of Paynes Prairie. Their efforts resulted in the state's purchase of a 17,346-acre tract in the basin and surrounding uplands. With the outlay of \$5.1 million, the Alachua Savanna became a state preserve in 1970.

The question remained: What should the state do with the area? Proposals included flooding the prairie to make a recreational lake with campsites surrounding it. Tourists and fishermen would come; land values would rise. The state, according to Anderson, did not consider flooding an option. Rather, it decided to restore the prairie to the ecosystem Bartram had described.

Footprints across the South

Earth, along with people and organizations, is making a go of reclaiming a place of beauty, wonder, and biodiversity. From the observation tower near the visitor center on the south rim of the prairie, visitors can occasionally glimpse Spanish horses, descended from the six mares and one stallion turned loose in 1985. A bald eagle wheels in his lazy ride on thermals above Interstate 75 before turning to glide toward his nest. Grass now fills the savanna, along with shrubs and small trees.

As in most places where humans have left their imprints on the earth, however, our marks frustrate environmental restoration. Canals, dikes, and major highways have permanently changed the landscape. U.S. 441 and Interstate 75 seriously corrupt the ecosystem by preventing movement of small animals that need to migrate over the course of the seasons. Environmentalists and highway administrators found that thousands of animals from more than 80 species were killed every year along the two-mile section of U.S. 441 that cuts across the prairie, smashed flat by tires and desiccated by the sun. Most were frogs, turtles, and snakes attempting to cross the road to mate and to forage for food.

Florida Department of Transportation engineers designed a system of forty-two-inch-high barrier walls and eight underpasses (an “ecopassage”). At the top of the wall is a six-inch “lip,” such as those used in zoos. Snakes, frogs, alligators, and other animals that manage to scale the smooth vertical surface of the wall stop when they reach the lip, fall back to the floor of the wetland, and find their way to one of the underpasses.

Other impediments to restoration are harder to overcome, perhaps impossible. The Carolina parakeet is extinct. A single ivory-billed woodpecker living in a swamp in Arkansas, about seven hundred miles from Alachua, is the sole known remnant of its species. The “black wolf” and the Florida panther are rare and missing from the savanna; with effort, they might be restored if local opposition did not stand in the way.

In 1975 the state reintroduced bison. Their numbers had increased to about thirty five when a suspected brucellosis epidemic infected cattle in the area. The state reluctantly destroyed the herd. Today, the prairie managers continue to try to establish bison. In 2001 they were searching for a suitable bull to introduce to the pasturing cows. Exotic animals—such as the nine-banded armadillo and plants like elephant ear, Chinese tallow, and chinaberry—have moved in; eradicating them is a daunting challenge. Discharges from the Main Street Wastewater Treatment Plant and the Kelly Generating Plant in Gainesville flow through Sweetwater Branch and a canal and enter the prairie.

The land surrounding Paynes Prairie has taken on the look and feel of the present. North of the ruins of Rancho La Chua, barely two blocks from the

Great Sink, lies a subdivision of single-story concrete block houses. A few are neatly kept, with manicured lawns and gardens of poinsettias and hibiscus. At others, discarded refrigerators, rusting bikes, and abandoned charcoal grills spill from carports onto bare yards. Where Bartram's companions chased deer and turkeys, pet pit bulls snarl.

The site of Cuscowilla, where Bartram drank the thin drink and ate roasted beef, hides in fields and woodlands outside Micanopy (pronounced *mih-ka-no'-pi*), a town that looks like Florida in the 1920s. Modest houses stand along the grid of Micanopy's thirty streets. Moss hangs from the arches of live oak trees in the median of Chokolka Boulevard in the center of the little town. Virtually all the shops in the narrow, two-story buildings along the boulevard cater to tourists and antique hunters. An old mansion is a bed-and-breakfast inn.

Two miles northwest of Micanopy, a narrow road, entered through an iron pipe gate, passes the fee booth of Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, winds beneath arched branches of monumental live oak trees, and leads to the edge of the savanna. There, a small wooden sign proclaims, "Puc Puggy Campground"—a state park camping area tucked in a pine flat, populated by trailers and recreational vehicles.

This is about as close as a modern traveler can pitch a tent and get a hot shower in a place where the Colonial botanist made his bed. The campground is likely very near the site of Bartram's camp. I set my tent on a pad of soft ground. Pines hold in the humid air. A wild orange tree grows at the edge of the clearing near my campsite. *Bartram seasoned his fish with the juice of the wild oranges*, I recall.

Damp with sweat from the mere labor of setting up a tent and a tarp, I shower, pull on khakis and a knit shirt, and leave for the reception that will kick off the Bartram Trail Conference tonight in Gainesville. I see no others around the campground who are doing the same. I had imagined that folks who follow Bartram are addicted to sleeping near alligators and under clouds of mosquitoes. But I'd never attended one of these meetings before and I am wrong. Though several of them, I found later, are indeed outdoors enthusiasts, tonight they have dodged the balmy autumn air and are staying in hotels.

I drive past Micanopy and toward the interstate where the Cafe Risque presides over the entrance ramp. I'd seen their sensuous billboards every twenty-five miles down the interstate, beginning above the Georgia line. The place looks like a 1950s Stuckey's store, white, one story, with a steep-pitched roof. A dozen over-the-road trucks stand on the gravel in back; pickups, sedans, and sports cars line the driveway.

I recall that, on his first evening camping on what would become the Puc Puggy Campground, Bartram and the chief traders visited Cuscowilla for a ceremonial barbecue, leaving the drovers minding the camp. Bartram writes,

Our companions, whom we left at the camp, were impatient for our return, having been out horse hunting in the plains and groves during our absence. They soon left us, on a visit to the town, having there some female friends, with whom they were anxious to renew their acquaintance. The Siminole girls are by no means destitute of charms to please the rougher sex: the white traders, are fully sensible how greatly it is for their advantage to gain their affections and friendship in matters of trade and commerce; and if their love and esteem for each other is sincere, and upon principles of reciprocity, there are but few instances of their neglecting or betraying the interests and views of their temporary husbands. (*Travels* 194-95)

I doubt that the modern-day traders know they are maintaining an ancient tradition.

Bartram's ride around the savanna took him west, across the routes of U.S. 441 and Interstate 75. Turning north, then east, he and the traders rode through the hills where Gainesville now stands. He passed, best I can tell, near the intersection of Williston Road and U.S. 441 where the Budget Inn, complete with microwaves and little refrigerators at a low price, has replaced the "delightful groves of *Æsculus pavia*, *Prunus Caroliniana*, a most beautiful evergreen, decorated with racemes of sweet, white blossom" described by Bartram (*Travels* 198).

Bivens Arm, a small lake surrounded by a nature preserve and park owned by the City of Gainesville, lies a few blocks away and drains into the savanna. Paths and raised timber walkways skirt the wetlands at the edge of dry forest. A banded water snake glides among cypress, tupelo, and elephant ear on the water's edge. The care with which the park is laid out and maintained, its nearness to the city, and the signs instructing children in the ecology of the swamp, all speak of the influence of environmentalists in this university city.

Less than a mile north, the campus of the University of Florida sprawls over 2,000 acres: more than nine hundred buildings, plus large chunks of open spaces; a golf course; athletic fields; plots where cows and bulls graze outside the animal sheds of the veterinary school; Lake Alice, where alligators watch students and faculty; and, hidden in a thick forest near the Levin College of Law, a mound that stood on the edge of a city a thousand years ago. A historical marker beside the law school's parking lot describes an "aboriginal burial mound," "built about A.D. 1000 by Alachua tradition peoples, ancestors to the Potano Indians who lived in Alachua County in the 16th and 17th centuries."

The university's older buildings are red brick, Collegiate Gothic style with steep tiled roofs. Shaded walkways connect them with boxy parking garages

and modern structures. It's a city of more than forty-six thousand students and thousands of faculty, one of the five largest universities in America. Buses thunder through the campus, carrying students to remote residence halls and academic buildings.

Towering above it all is the Ben Hill Griffin Stadium, home of the Gator football team, a dominating force in the Southeastern Conference. On six or seven Saturdays each year, eighty-four thousand fans jam the coliseum they call "the Swamp," where, university boosters claim, "only Gators come out alive."

Shorts, tank-tops, and day packs meet an unofficial dress code most days of the year along University Avenue, on the northern edge of the campus. Bookstores, restaurants, and copying centers line the sidewalks. Students fill the eateries by noon, speaking of coursework, exams, and football. In the evening, the rap, rock, and jazz blaring from speakers in the bars drowns their conversations. It is a lively campus, academic, but not too serious.

On the southwestern corner of the campus, across Lake Alice and near the offices of research corporations that ring the university, Powell Hall houses the Florida Museum of Natural History's Education and Exhibition Center. Bones of dinosaurs surround a replica of limestone caves. A prehistoric tropical forest looms at the end of a corridor. And Bartram is there. His word paintings of the Alachua Savanna hang in frames along one hall.

Indeed, Bartram is a cottage industry around Gainesville. Brochures describe his travels and quote his writings. Scholars study him and the flora and fauna he discovered. Garden club members and birders prowl the savanna, looking for species he listed.

Through-travelers, folks speeding south toward the world of Disney, miss the quiet grandeur of the savanna, however. My mother, father, brother, and I overlooked it on our 1950s drives to visit my grandparents in Tampa. Hot air rushed through the rolled-down windows as we counted the miles left in our two-day journey. From the highway, the prairie looked like a Midwestern scene with palmetto added. Brahma cattle grazing on flat ground. A place to get past.

Folks around the area know better. One of them, Thomas Peter Bennett, the Museum of Natural History's director from 1986 to 1996, found the prairie a place to celebrate. He wrote,

On my birthday I treated myself
and did something I have often wanted to do but have not
because of X, Y or Z.

With the 200th birthday of *Travels* on my mind
*The attention of a traveller, as he said, should be particularly
turned to Nature,*

Footprints across the South

wondering whether his visions
were still pristine romantic landscape scenes
or desecrated pollution sites, ecologically dead,
with map and a paperback version of *Travels*,
I left on my birth morning in a sunroofed Subaru
to celebrate Bartram in Alachua County...
Bartram's vision was altered only
by automobiles traveling at highway speed,
I drove on, with sideway glances, and like Bartram
surveyed *the extensive Alachua Savanna*,
a level, green plain, and scarcely a tree or bush; encircled with
high sloping hills,
covered with waving forests,
Power poles and a four-lane highway
had changed the scene from a pastoral Bartram vision to a
Futurist impression.

I turned and entered the Prairie Preserve and could scarcely
believe what I saw:

a bounding roe, just as in Bartram's account,
He views rapid approaches, rises up, lifts aloft
his antlered head, erects the white flag
and fetching a shrill whistle, says to his fleet
"follow"; he bounds off. They knew their safety here.

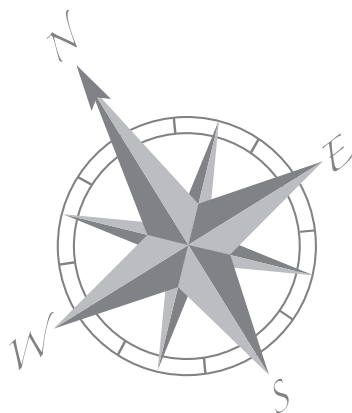
A Bartram vision unchanged.

(A Celebration on the 200th Anniversary of Bartram's Travels 1791)

Ah, here's what we can do with a well-used "Elysian fields." Bennett and others who quietly, even worshipfully, pass through the Alachua Savanna with open eyes and *Travels* in hand know what Aldo Leopold meant when he proposed changing "the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it" (204).

Twenty-first-century Americans have many options—cut trees, blast mountains, flood prairies, build towers, pave pastures, dig canals—but none of these projects is a mandate.

*T*ravels into Western North Carolina



Chronological Notes

Intending to explore as far west as the Overhill Settlements of the Cherokees, south of the current Knoxville, Tennessee, Bartram left Charleston in late April 1775. His itinerary took him through the present Clemson University area and across the Oconee Mountains in western South Carolina. He crossed the Chattooga River and passed the ruins of Stekoa, near the current Clayton, Georgia. At the eastern continental divide, he entered the valley of the Little Tennessee River, exploring for several days in late May. He proceeded into the Nantahala Mountains, but cut his trip westward short after three days, returning to Cowee and then to Georgia.

On April 19, a few days before Bartram departed Charleston for the “Cherokee Mountains,” Minutemen fired on Redcoats in Concord, Massachusetts. On the day he crossed the Savannah River into South Carolina, the Second Continental Congress convened and began preparations for coordinated military action against the British, and eighty-three Green Mountain Boys captured Fort Ticonderoga in New York. Rumors of the British stirring of the Indians against the colonials were sweeping the Southeast.

British troops began the occupation of Boston on May 25 and on June 15, a week before Bartram left on his journey to the Mississippi, George Washington was elected commander in chief of the Continental Army.

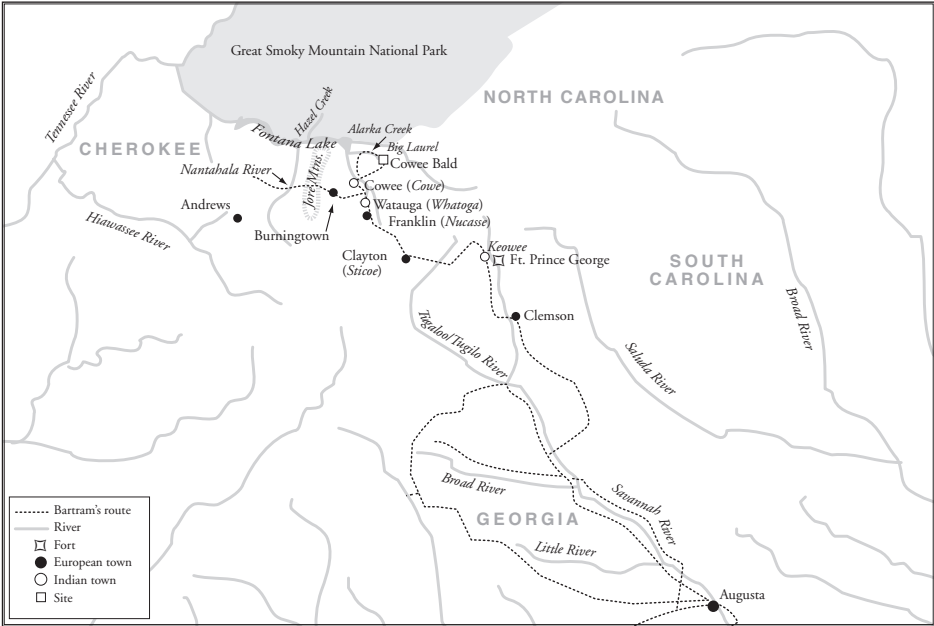
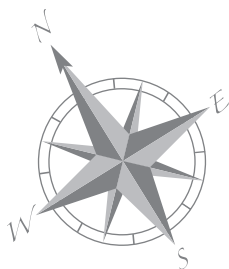


Figure 6. Map of Bartram's Travels into Western North Carolina (1775)



THE VALE OF COWEE

“*W*hen Bartram rode through here in 1775, he had only a rancid chunk of cheese left in his saddlebag,” I tell Maria as we drive into North Carolina and enter the valley of the Little Tennessee River. “But we’ll eat chicken-fried steaks and thick gravy at the Downtowner.”

“I’m holding you to that,” she answers, reminding me of my habit of frugal dining.

Through the years, on hiking, camping, or canoeing trips, I’d gone out of my way to join the farmers and businessmen of Macon County at the Downtowner Cafe in Franklin, North Carolina, for breakfast or lunch. It was one of those cafes at the heart of small Southern towns, where I could treat myself to a stack of pancakes or a plate of tall white biscuits drowned in the sawmill gravy that has bred miles of cholesterol-laden veins.

A half-hour later, we stand puzzled under a faded red awning, reading neon-green, blue, and pink chalk lettering on a small blackboard. The special of the day, says the board, is creamy Vidalia onion soup and Italian chicken salad on pita. It also says that this is now the Frog and Owl Kitchen: A Mountain Bistro.

“Where’s the Downtowner?” I ask a man leaving the building through the plate glass door.

“Downtowner? Never heard of it,” he says as he zips his Atlanta Braves jacket.

Curiosity overcomes grief. We enter the door and find the walls have morphed from off-white to dark green. Broad-shaded fixtures, hung from tracks on the ceiling, cast soft light on framed prints and pen and ink drawings, fit for bistros in Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles. I recall that the Downtowner was decorated with photos and prints of the Smokies.

Gone are the counter, the booths, and the denim-jacketed farmers with John Deere caps. Women outnumber men five to one. Silver-haired couples, well dressed and silent, sit at most tables.

Our waiter, a skinny boy wearing a black shirt and pants, a goatee, and a ball cap with the name "The Frog and Owl" in shades of green and orange stitching, moves quickly and efficiently, but with an air of relaxed hospitality. He lists the "specials" (ragout, Italian chicken on pita with black olives and bean sprouts, and something that features arugula) and struggles to describe tabouleh to the women at the table beside us.

Ladies upward from thirty, dressed in designer sweaters, muted-toned skirts and blouses covered with dark tattersall blazers. Huggers and smilers, they pass gift-wrapped packages toward the woman with pink cheeks and softly-curved blonde hair. She pulls the ribbon from a package, spreads the white tissue, and opens her mouth as her fingers lift a silvery Christmas ornament. "Oooh! How perfect."

I turn to Maria and ask, in my best curmudgeonly tone: "How could they do this?"

"It's a birthday party," she says.

"No. I mean how could they do away with the old cafe?"

"Hey! It's a fine restaurant," she argues. "The food tastes great, the waiter is friendly, and your heart will thank you that you ate the pasta and chicken instead of gravy!" Then, with her characteristic honesty and a smile, she adds, "But I'd still like a plate of fried chicken and thick gravy on mashed potatoes."

"True daughter of the South!"

Still grouching as I visit a pipe shop down the street, I ask the owner what had happened to the Downtowner and where we can get a breakfast like it served.

"Went out of business. Couldn't compete with Hardee's. You can get biscuits and pancakes out at the Sunset, out on State 28 North." He shows me a Peterson bent and adds, "I miss the cafe, too."

Those of us who live in cities see bulldozers level houses in a day and skyscrapers grow like weeds. We seek mountain coves largely because we need to see some stability, to feel some sense of our grandparents' simpler lives. But, while change is not as rapid in the backcountry, it is happening. And although the replacement of a cafe by a bistro is a minor alteration compared with all that has passed through this valley since Bartram rode his horse into the American frontier, it is a clear snapshot of the latest wave.

This valley of the upper Little Tennessee River hosted the southwestern edge of the American Revolution, bade a forced farewell to the Cherokees who skillfully farmed its rich soil, and welcomed a wave of hardy Scots-Irish in the early 1800s. A railroad came and went. Giant trees vanished before the

loggers' engines. Then, in the twentieth century, a swelling tide of retirees and other refugees from cities, seeking a quiet life in a temperate climate, flecked the mountainsides with four-bedroom, three-bath "cabins." Construction has replaced farming as the major source of income, and a software company employs more than four hundred.

Although Bartram spent less than a week in "the Vale of Cowee" on his way to the Overhill Settlements of the Cherokees, his descriptions of the area and its people provide a rich insight into the frontier in the final moments before the burgeoning new nation changed it forever.

He entered the valley at the eastern continental divide at Mountain City, Georgia, forded a "delightful brook, the water of the Tanase" (the Little Tennessee River), and looked out on "the opening of the extensive and fruitful vale of Cowee" (*Travels* 345). The bottomland and the network of side valleys remain "fruitful"; truck farmers grow tomatoes and cabbages in its rich soil. Sleek cattle feed on thick grass in pastures cupped in the hands of tree-covered hills.

North Carolina's Bartram Trail runs over the mountains to the east, paralleling his actual path. Near Franklin, it descends to the river, more closely following Bartram. The trail society has also designated a stretch of the river as a canoe trail. A plywood signboard beside the river, supported by sturdy pine lumber, is bare, stripped of any maps, notices, or descriptions it once held, but graffiti on the blank board inform us that "Stephanie Lowery Been Here," along with "Micki, Kim and George, 2000."

Across the highway, near an outlet store of a company that dominates the mobile home market of Appalachia, a shop displays chimineas and garish yard art imported from Mexico. Down the road is an upscale feed and seed store.

Somewhere along this stretch of river, Bartram, hungry and soggy after being caught in a thunderstorm on the previous day, spotted a trader paddling a canoe across the river. "G'on to my house yonder," says the paddler in a nasal, Anglo-Saxon twang. "I'll be there in a bit."

The trader was one of the three Europeans Bartram mentions in the valley of the Little Tennessee. With his Cherokee wife, he lodged the weary botanist overnight, entertaining him "with the most perfect civility." The housewife, says Bartram, was "a very agreeable good woman," who treated them to cream and strawberries in the evening and, the following morning, with "excellent coffee, relished with bucanned venison, hot corn cakes, excellent butter and cheese" (*Travels* 349).

When he rode to the crests of the mountains around Cowee, Bartram saw, up and down the river, smoke from the cooking fires of dozens of towns in this Cherokee heartland. Farmers planted beans and corn in little hills of rich soil;

hunters brought deer, rabbit, and turkeys from the forests. At the peak of their strength, Cherokees controlled an area “more than twice the size of England and immeasurably richer in natural resources,” says Christopher Camuto (5).

In 1760, the political turmoil of Europeans at war sucked them into a downward spiral. Their troubles began when, in alliance with the French, they ambushed Colonel Archibald Montgomery’s troops and sent them scurrying back into South Carolina. A year later, Colonel James Grant led a two-mile-long column of 2,800 men over the mountains of northern Georgia and down the valley of the Little Tennessee. Grant overcame the Cherokees in the Second Battle of Echoe and burned the towns of the valley. Siding with the British in 1776, they came under attack by the armies of the American Revolution.

Camuto calculates that the Cherokees, battered and surrounded by a growing number of white settlers, ceded “nearly 120,000 square miles of land between 1721 and 1835, when the fraudulent treaty of New Echota was imposed on the tribe prior to their removal” (5).

In 1818, Jacob Siler and William Brittain, a pair of entrepreneurs from Buncombe County, set up a lean-to where Cartoogechaye Creek enters the Little Tennessee River. Legend says that, three days after their arrival, Cherokee Chief Santeetlah came with a party of men and demanded that they leave. “The Council of Chiefs has sold all of this land to the white men,” Siler told the chief.

Siler and Brittain stayed, established a store, and welcomed a modest influx of white settlers who moved to the valleys after the Cherokees gave up their Little Tennessee River settlements in the Treaty of Washington of 1819 and moved farther into the mountains. By 1830, Macon and Cherokee counties held 5,333 farmers and merchants, largely Scots-Irish and English, along with a few African Americans who came to the valley as free people or slaves.

Growth was gradual until the late twentieth century. Then, between 1990 and 2000, Macon County’s population swelled almost 27 percent. Nearly half of those living in the county in 2000 were born in another state. Many are retirees; one in four residents of Macon County is over 65, a higher proportion of seniors than in Florida.

A woman with an English accent stands behind the counter of the attractive stone welcome center on the southern edge of Franklin, counseling travelers. A war bride from World War II London, she and her American husband lived some thirty years in Florida. Twenty-one years ago, after two break-ins at their Miami home, they moved to Macon County. The piano tuner we met in a restaurant and the owner of a tobacco and tea shop on Main Street echo her story of frustration with city life and the desire to retreat to the relative calm of the valley.

Some longtime Macon Countians claim that the newcomers from New England and Florida give the locals problems. “They expect instant change; they

won't accept the traditional ways of doing business," said one. "They are rude," said another. On the other hand, newcomer activists say, "We have to get those locals out of office."

White, affluent retirees are not the only population migrating to the valley. In late September, when red tomatoes cover the ground in the fields near Prentiss Bridge, a farm truck stands in the parking lot of a white metal packing house. Men with brown skin and straight, black hair climb down from the weathered plywood shelter on the bed of the truck. Their leader, speaking with a heavy Mexican accent, discusses with the farm's owner where the men will work the final days of the harvest. Hispanics, the fastest growing population group in the county, outnumber African Americans.

"They came here first as migrants, working the truck farms," a Macon Countian told me. "Now they are permanent. They own several restaurants and grocery stores. I went to the driver's license office last week and was the only English-speaking person in line. I asked the officer if it was like this every day. He told me it was."

Franklin, the seat of Macon County, was established in the early nineteenth century on a hill above the ancient site of Nikwasi (Bartram's "Nucasse"). Narrow two-story buildings stand brick-to-brick along Main Street, reflecting small-town architecture of the early 1900s. A gazebo, a bell tower and garden, a statue of a Confederate soldier, and a modern brick county courthouse flank the corners of the town square. The old jail houses a gem and mineral museum.

A few feet from the square lies Reverend Jesse Pendergrass's general store. Built in 1904, the store provides a nostalgic setting for the Macon County Historical Society's museum. Though its iron door latch resists easy opening, the staff offer a friendly welcome. Relics and photographs of the county's history, displays of old books, and items for sale have replaced the dry goods in the original glass and dark-stained wood display cases. In the back room at a long table, its dark walnut wood marked by the work of a hundred years, sit three women searching through newspapers to gather stories and obituaries to add to the file cabinets that line the walls. Genealogy is the leading agenda of the historical society. Family trees wrap around county history like a vine.

Beyond Main Street, roads wind up the hills to the west, connecting large old houses, modest bungalows, and a hospital with the town center. Strip malls, roadside shops, and motels line the five arteries that connect within the city limits. To the east, above the four-lane divided highway that bends around the town, builders have gouged sides of mountains to level them for motels and shopping areas.

From the central business district, I follow a mobile magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) truck to where the highway dips toward the bridge over the Little Tennessee River. Here, a passerby with a keen eye can see the Nikwasi mound, sole remnant of a once-prominent Cherokee town. Legend says the Indians who built the mound maintained a sacred fire on the mound and considered it “the Center” of the world.

Nikwasi sat on the left bank of the Little Tennessee, below its confluence with the Cullasaja River. Its houses and fields once covered 100 acres of the valley around the ancient mound until the armies of Colonel Grant burned the village, along with others in the valley in 1761. Bartram rode through the charcoal of Nikwasi’s ruins.

Across the Southeast, plows have leveled ceremonial mounds and dams have flooded whole villages. The Macon County Historical Society saved Nikwasi from this destiny when it purchased the mound in 1948 and deeded it in trust to the town of Franklin. The mound stands as the lone jewel in a small, well-kept, grassy park in the median of a divided highway, surrounded by Betsy’s School of Dance, the Manna Food Bank, an air-conditioning shop, and the empty building of a defunct auto dealer.

From Nikwasi, Bartram rode three miles down the river and found himself trapped in a maze of the fields of Watauga (“Whatoga”). He writes,

the road carried me winding about through their little plantations of Corn, Beans, &c. up to the councilhouse, which was a very large dome or rotunda, situated on the top of an ancient artificial mound, and here my route terminated; all before me and on every side appeared little plantations of young Corn, Beans, &c. divided from each other by narrow strips or borders of grass, which marked the bounds of each one’s property, their habitation standing in the midst: finding no common high road to lead me through the town, I was now at a stand how to proceed farther, when observing an Indian man at the door of his habitation, three or four hundred yards from me, beckoning me to come to him, I ventured to ride through their lots, being careful to do no injury to the young plants, the rising hopes of their labour and industry, crossed a little grassy vale watered by a silver stream . . . then ascended a green hill to the house, where I was cheerfully welcomed at the door and led in by the chief. (*Travels* 350)

Bartram’s description of Watauga fits what archaeologists know of Cherokee towns. According to H. Trawick Ward and R. P. Stephen Davis, the Cherokees lived in “loosely clustered villages” surrounded by small farmsteads (271).

When the City of Franklin built the Porters Bend Dam in 1925, it covered Watauga's fields with the waters of Lake Emory. It was the Roaring Twenties, when increasing numbers of families were driving their new automobiles across the nation on a growing network of highways. As the wealthy sought resorts, Franklin intended to get its share of the action by enhancing the recreational attractiveness of the area. At the same time, corporate loggers in the Smokies needed electrical power. The lake and power plant seemed an ideal project.

The lake's developers never realized the fishing and golfing mecca. Immediately after the dam's construction, millions of tons of soil eroded from the heavily logged mountains into Lake Emory. Mining, animal use, and other development along the upstream banks of the river added to the sediment that clogged the waterway. Only three years after its construction, the lake proved non-productive for power generation. At the same time, the Great Depression pulled the plug on tourism. When Franklin put the project up for sale, Nantahala Power bought it. Today its dark green waters wind through hills cut by subdivision streets named Czonka, Camelot, and Memory Lane. Conservationists affiliated with the nonprofit American Rivers organization point to the Emory Dam and its seven-mile lake as an example of "how a hydropower and recreational development plan without proper environmental considerations can turn into a fiscal and natural disaster."

The lake provides at least one benefit, however. Paul Carlson of the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee says, "Lake Emory captures tons of silt that would damage the ecology of the river downstream. When silt builds up among the rocks of mountain streams it clogs the spawning grounds of trout and smaller fish. Until we can prevent upstream erosion, the dam is a blessing."

Following his visit with the chief of Watauga, Bartram rode to Cowee, the capital of the Middle Settlements of the Cherokee, some six miles down the river. Tyler and I follow him one June afternoon. We slide our canoe into the river at Jerry Anselmo's "Great Smokey Mountain Fish Camp," then maneuver through rock fish-traps and shoals that span the river. The sparkling waters of the Little Tennessee nourish giant oaks, sycamores, and beeches. Floating in their shade, Tyler works spinner baits, coaxing smallmouth bass from their lairs, until we spot the mouth of Cowee Creek on the right and get our first view of the ancient town site. The creek's waters bear a dingy runoff from a recent rain and ripple over a gravel bar, mixing with the deep jade river beneath the yellow-green boughs of a tulip poplar. Flowing from Cowee Mountain to the north, the Creek runs through foothills then cuts six feet into the rich bottomland soil that once hosted Cherokee corn, beans, and squash.

We slide our canoe over smooth, round gravel and onto the muddy shore. Tyler jumps out and ties the painter to a root while I unwind my stiff legs and shuffle our duffel to the front of the canoe.

Families of Cowee lived in this field when Bartram arrived. It was a suburb of the original town of Cowee, which sat some 400 yards downstream, across the river. By 1775 the community of a hundred houses and gardens had expanded to both sides of the river.

Bartram considered “the great vale of Cowe . . . one of the most charming natural mountainous landscapes perhaps any where to be seen; ridges of hills rising grand and sublimely above one another and beyond another, some boldly and majestically advancing into the verdant plain, their feet bathed with the silver flood of the Tanase” (*Travels* 353). According to a legend collected by the anthropologist James Mooney about a hundred years after Bartram, a Shawano warrior agreed. The man had been a prisoner here, but had escaped to his people in the north. After the tribes made peace, he returned to the area on a hunting trip. “While standing on a hill overlooking the valley,” Mooney writes, “[the warrior] saw several Cherokee on an opposite hill, and called out to them, ‘Do you still own Cowee?’ They shouted in reply, ‘Yes; we own it yet.’ Back came the answer from the Shawano, who wanted to encourage them not to sell any more of their lands, ‘Well, it’s the best town of the Cherokee. It’s a good country; hold on to it’” (378).

At the center of the main town, the residents of Cowee had built their log meeting place, “a large rotunda, capable of accommodating several hundred people; it stands on top of an ancient artificial mound of earth, of about twenty feet perpendicular, and the rotunda on the top of it being above thirty feet more, gives the whole fabric an elevation of about sixty feet from the common surface of the ground” (*Travels* 367).

Tree trunk posts supported a roof of cross beams and lathe on which bark and earth had been placed to provide protection from the rain. Almost nightly, villagers and their guests sat on bleacher-style benches covered with mats of grass and bark to enjoy dances, songs, and storytelling.

On the night their chief invited Bartram into the councilhouse, Cowee’s people were preparing for a ball game with a neighboring town. Girls dressed in “clean white robes and ornamented with beads, bracelets and a profusion of gay ribbands” sang and moved “slowly round and round” (*Travels* 370). A whoop interrupted their dance as the ball team, dressed with silver beads, entered briskly, carrying their rackets and waving plumes as they sang and danced for their cheering townspeople.

If they lived until 1838, when the armies of President Martin Van Buren herded the tribe along the Trail of Tears, the dancers of Cowee would have been around 80 years old. The babies in arms that night were sixty-five.

Of Cowee, only the mound and name remain. Surrounded by a half-mile of bottom land in a sweeping bend of the river, the mound rises above a natural rock outcropping that slopes from the foothills of the Nantahalas. Hay grows knee-high over it and the surrounding fields; corn covers the field to its east. Across the river, in the flood plain, carpenters drive nails into the timber frame of a large house that will be drowned by Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

At our campsite—an open shelter with a corrugated metal roof, two wooden tables and a fire ring—we gather firewood from the grass beneath abandoned apple trees on the hills above the field.

“Are these trees left from the Indian orchards?” Tyler wonders.

“I’d like to know that, too,” I answer. “There’s too much we don’t know. Too much we’ll never understand.”

We tend our small fire and talk of Indians who hunted, farmed, and built a mound a thousand years ago, of Spanish seekers of gold in the sixteenth century, and of the army of colonials that destroyed Cowee and thirty-five sister towns up and down the Little Tennessee in 1776, a year after Bartram’s visit.

Over the years since Bartram’s visit, farms and mica, kaolin, and corundum mines have dotted the surrounding hills. Electricity came to Cowee in the 1920s, as power lines were stretched to serve the lumber industry. In addition to a few historic buildings and tidy, modest homes, the valley holds only a handful of churches, convenience stores, and struggling roadside shops. In 2001, the Cowee-West’s Mill Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Until late in the twentieth century, most of the settlements in the valley—Cowee, Iotla, Burningtown—had their own general stores and post offices. One by one, they folded as supermarkets opened in Franklin and the postal service closed its small offices.

“The closing of the stores, post offices, and little schools has changed the definition of the community,” says Merritt Fouts, a lifelong resident of Iotla and Burningtown. “When I was a boy and someone talked of ‘my community,’ he meant Iotla, Cowee, or Burningtown. Now it is the county and Franklin.”

Oral histories and memoirs continue to bear witness to those days not so long ago. In *Tablequah*, a memoir of her youth, Virginia Ramsey Brunner describes “S. T. Ramsey & Son, General Merchandise,” the store her grandfather and father operated two miles up Tellico Creek from the Little Tennessee River, seven miles from Cowee:

An oversized key shifted the tumblers in the lock permitting the double-reinforced door to admit entrance to a shadowy interior. Instantly, a memorable mix of distinctive smells met the nose. Kerosene (called coal oil by locals who used

it for lighting their homes), coffee's exotic aroma, fatback, plug tobacco, pepper, leather from shoes and harness, lard in a large tub, cinnamon and cloves from the spice shelf and the elusive whiff of chocolate or mint from the candy jars when a top was lifted. (71)

Fabrics, lace, and spools of thread filled shelves along with crocks, cooking pots, pocket knives, and flyswatters. Bib overalls and shoes were there, as were tools and harnesses and nails and medicines for man and beast. Food items that couldn't be produced in the pastures, farms, and gardens could be purchased: baking soda, canned salmon, spices.

Rickman's Store, on a back road less than a mile from the school, was Cowee's emporium. Thomas Milton Rickman bought the "John Hall Store" in 1924. During their first years there, he and his wife lived in rooms above the store, furnished with an oil stove, wooden table and chairs, and a straw tick mattress. He bartered thread for eggs and, in hard times, extended credit that would never be repaid. Neighbors say that after he sold his store he walked to it daily from his home up the road until a short time before his death at age 92.

A family bought Rickman's Store in 1996. For six years, they maintained it as a place for tourists to buy honey, preserves, and country-style crafts from the sagging general store shelves and sturdy oak cases and to fantasize a simpler life. When the new owners sold out, they left a forlorn hull where once a community gathered for gossip, politics, and horse trading.

Tourists visit Cowee, but not in the large numbers that flock to the town of Highlands on the eastern edge of the county. Few businesses cater to them. Cowee Creek Pottery, located in an old house at West Mill, was one of the few that did until the potter left in 2003. Burly cats lounged on the sales counter and prowled stealthily among the colorful, artistic bowls, mugs, and pitchers, glazed and fired in a kiln behind the two-story store building at Cowee Creek.

Ruby mines once drew tourists. Today, only three provide a sedentary expedition for a shrinking cohort of twenty-first-century prospectors who sit on benches and wash buckets of dirt in search of nuggets of rubies and other gems. Perry's Water Gardens on Cowee Creek Road welcomes visitors to the fourteen acres of ponds where over 170 varieties of water lilies and lotuses grow. Perry's ships plants to outlets across the nation.

Undaunted by the decline, Jerry Anselmo promotes tourism. A successful restaurateur in Mandeville, Louisiana, north of New Orleans, Jerry was traveling through the valley in the early 1990s when he rented a canoe, fell in love with Cowee, and established the fish camp. National outdoor magazines have featured his fishing excursions, which run fifteen miles of river from Emory Dam to Lake Fontana.

The Snow Hill Inn also catered to tourists. Until Sheila Lucius fell ill in 2002, she and her husband Dave kept the Snow Hill Inn on a hillside overlooking the valleys of the Little Tennessee and Cowee Creek. Of all the bed-and-breakfast innkeepers we have met, they were doubtless the most attentive. On a warm Friday evening, Dave meets Maria and me on the columned veranda and leads us through the two-story white building.

“This was originally the Cowee School,” he tells us as we climb carpeted stairs that creak beneath our feet. “The second floor was an open auditorium. Upper grades had classes here,” he gestures to his right, “and where we are standing was the proscenium stage.”

Late in the evening, a full moon creeps around the northern slope of Lyle Knob and fills our room with silver light. We sleep deeply until a cool morning breeze carries the songs of a score of birds from the gardens below our window. As we eat fruit and sugary french toast, hummingbirds suck nectar from blossoms, separated from us by thin panes of glass.

On Sunday morning, we sit on the veranda and watch a gentle rain, welcome relief from the drought of four summers, moisten the valley. The sound of familiar hymns rolls softly over the hills from speakers on the roof of the Cowee Baptist Church.

I visited the church on a Sunday in late September 2001, parking on the asphalt lot with pickup trucks, family sedans, SUVs, and sports cars. Following men in blazers and well-dressed women and children, I entered the double white doors and found a seat on a padded velvet pew. Soft light filtered through stained-glass windows and fell on hymnals in the racks. Worshipers emerged from Sunday School, chatting across the pews while commercially recorded music filled the sanctuary. When the audiotape stopped, the pianist and organist played settings of popular hymns while the choir filed into a loft in front of the curtained baptismal pool. After more hymns, prayers, a sermon for children, and the passing of the offering plates, the pastor rose to the pulpit.

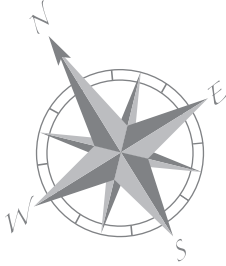
I noted that the printed order of worship said he intended to preach on the subject of “Hope after Devastation.” Expecting wisdom relating to the attacks on New York and Washington some three weeks earlier, I listened intently as the pastor read from the book of Lamentations and narrated the story of Jeremiah, who preached in Jerusalem in the wake of the havoc wrought by the vicious Babylonian armies six centuries before Jesus. His words of grief and instruction might provide insights for an understanding of America in the weeks following the terrorism. But the sermon did not mention America or its grief. *Have the families of Cowee already walked beyond the devastation? Do they need no guidance on dealing with America’s losses?* I wondered. Perhaps the good reverend felt that he can’t compete with Fox News for bringing “Hope after Devastation.”

Footprints across the South

After the sermon, a young man walked the aisle to join the church, and the “Deacon of the Week” pronounced the Benediction. The people chatted, gathered their belongings, and headed for the door. With dignity and order, the Baptists of Cowee had accomplished their weekly spiritual quest and left to eat dinners of ham, roast beef, or fried chicken. It was Sunday morning in the South.

I had driven to the place where the river and highway bend around the Cowee Mound. I walked to the riverbank and let my soul find an evening in 1761. Across the stream, elders, women, and children moan as they walk through their fields and file up the path to the crest of the mound and enter the councilhouse. Yesterday, an army of white men with muskets had marched from the sunrise side of the mountains and littered the fields of Echoe with the bloody bodies of Cherokee men. A white man from the sunrise side of the mountains, I am left outside to guess what the elders in the smoky rotunda are saying. Are they weeping? Telling stories of the bear, the raven, and the eagle? Puzzled? Frightened? Do they speak of evil and evildoers? Of revenge? Of peace?

Below me the river runs, clean and deep, under a swinging bridge and toward the west.



ON ALARKA CREEK

Gentle waves rock the houseboat and lap the rocky shore fifty feet away. I feel my body sink into the webbing of the patio lounge as the mental bugs of the past week slip through the deck planks and into the cold blue water of Fontana Lake. I shell a peanut and sip from a bottle of Dinkel Aker I brought in the ice chest. Maria smears herself with suntan oil and stretches out on a towel in the sun while Tyler baits his hook with a wad of bread hulled from a hot dog bun and casts it toward two massive carp he sees swimming near the bank.

Forty feet of clear water float the pontoons on a cove in the Alarka Creek arm of the lake. Hemlocks weave a mesh of gnarled roots in the steep slope of Jackson Line Mountain and deep green mountains rise in waves in every direction. It is easy to understand why Maria's sister, Susan, Susan's husband, Stephen, and daughter Sarah make weekly retreats to this floating refuge.

"Got one," yells Tyler.

I rub my eyes and sit up from my recliner. Tyler's rod bends in a semicircle; his reel whines as the bronze carp thrashes the water ten feet from the shore. With Stephen's help, he lands and releases the fish, laughing and shouting. He washes the slime from his hands and baits his hook for a try at the second fish, still circling near the houseboat.

"Have a nice nap?" asks Maria from her station beside the charcoal grill.

"Oh, yes! Great nap." I rub my eyes, pick up my copy of Bartram's *Travels*, and watch a boatload of young women motor down the lake. They laugh and wave at the two young men on jet-skis who circle them.

"You know," I say, "it was just a few miles up Alarka Creek where Bartram saw the Cherokee girls."

Footprints across the South

“Uh, huh,” she replies as she spears a piece of chicken, turns it, and sips her margarita. “I guess you’re going to tell me about it.” Maria has grown accustomed to hearing Bartram tales.

I step to her side and explain, “After months of roaring alligators, ‘persecuting mosquitos’ and dinners of putrid fish he was due a pleasant social encounter. He almost found it across the mountain ridge from Cowee.”

She closes the lid on the gas grill.

“Almost?”

“One of the traders at Cowee told him about ‘some curious scenes amongst the hills.’ The description intrigued him. So, in the afternoon, they rode up over Cowee Bald and down into the little valley at the source of Alarka Creek.”

Maria returns to her towel. I sit beside her.

“Listen to this,” I say, opening my book:

companies of young, innocent Cherokee virgins, some busily gathering the rich fragrant fruit, others having already filled their baskets lay reclined under the shade of floriferous and fragrant native bowers . . . , disclosing their beauties to the fluttering breeze, and bathing their limbs in the cool fleeting streams; whilst other parties, more gay and libertine, were yet collecting strawberries or wantonly chasing their companions, tantalising them, staining their lips and cheeks with the rich fruit. (*Travels* 357)

This sylvan scene of primitive innocence was enchanting, and perhaps too enticing for hearty young men long to continue as idle spectators.

“Let me see that book.” She reads phrases aloud:

nature prevailing over reason, we wished at least to have a more active part in their delicious sports . . . we cautiously made our approaches . . . we meant no other than an innocent frolic . . . warmed and excited . . . pursued and gained ground on a group of them . . . peeping through the bushes . . . decently advanced to meet us, half unveiling their blooming faces, incarnated with the modest maiden blush and with the native innocence and cheerfulness, presented their little baskets, merrily telling us their fruit was ripe and sound.

We accepted a basket, sat down and regaled ourselves on the delicious fruit, encircled by the whole assembly of the innocently jocose sylvan nymphs. . . . (*Travels* 357)

“Strawberries!” says Maria, laughing. “Cosmo would rewrite the ending.”



Those who map Bartram's travels dispute the venue of the Cherokee maidens, but the most likely place is a meadow high on the northwest slope of Cowee Bald, the headwaters of Alarka Creek. A blacktop road, winding through two miles of rolling farm land in Cowee Valley, then rising toward the mountains from the valley of the Little Tennessee River, covers the track they followed.

Cowee Mountain appears round and soft as I view it from the road beside the tan stone Cowee School. It is hard to imagine that its slopes intimidated an army fourteen years before Bartram's journey. Edward Cashin, historian of the Revolutionary period in the South, says this crossing tested the will and energy of Lt. Colonel James Grant's army in 1761. The colonel feared for his troops' lives as they climbed the mountain that Grant thought "one of the highest and perhaps steepest in America." The army crossed the ridge, descended into the valley of the Tuckasegee, and devastated the Cherokee villages.

On the steep, single-lane Forest Service road that covers the ruts of the ancient mountain track, Cowee's ruggedness becomes real. Cabin driveways spring right and left along the road as it ascends through switchbacks to Leatherman Gap, turns along the back of Raven Mountain, and ends at a gate a half mile from the peak of the bald, more than 3,000 feet above the valley.

I park in a pull-off and walk the last half mile to the bald. A "bald" is a mountain peak covered with grass and shrubs. Balds may be vestiges of early human impact upon the natural terrain. Burned by Indians, these peaks remained treeless after Cherokees and whites herded their cows to them for summer pastures.

From this barren crest, Bartram and his guide looked out on the valley of the Little Tennessee and saw

the enchanting Vale of Keowe, perhaps as celebrated for fertility, fruitfulness and beautiful prospects as the Fields of Pharsalia or the Vale of Tempe: the town, the elevated peaks of the Jore mountains, a very distant prospect of the Jore village in a beautiful lawn, lifted up many thousand feet higher than our present situation, besides a view of many other villages and settlements on the sides of the mountains, at various distances and elevations; the silver rivulets gliding by them and snow white cataracts glimmering on the sides of lofty hills; the bold promontories of the Jore mountain stepping into the Tanase river, whilst his foaming waters rushed between them. (*Travels* 354-55)

On my October trip to Bartram's vantage point, a Forest Service fire tower provides a spectacular view. A cold front has cleared the air and painted the sky the color the people in these parts call "Carolina Blue." The "vale" lies in a soft green band across the entire southern panorama. Beyond its fields rise the rugged

Nantahalas—the Jore Mountains—topped by the rock tower on Wayah Bald. The sun setting behind the Smokies casts golden-green light across the scrub oaks, rhododendron, and ferns that are overtaking the ancient bald. I look in vain for smoke rising from Cherokee villages that once dotted the valley floor.

Cowee Bald is hardly the pristine vantage described by Bartram. A pickup and a panel truck have parked on the lane. Technicians work inside concrete block buildings, connecting cables to the disks and antennas that capture the signals of cell phones and bounce them to other peaks. Conversations that move a multinational economy connect on this crest.

In my truck I follow Bartram and his companion down the northwest slopes of the mountain to Alarka Creek in Big Laurel. They had tended the horses that the trader bred and shipped annually to Charleston. Then, somewhere in these glades, they had witnessed the recreational activities of the “sylvan nymphs.”

In Big Laurel, the cold waters of Alarka Creek, its rocky bed barely ten feet wide, curve around an open meadow filled with strawberry plants and grasses surrounded by tangles of rhododendron—“laurel” in the local vernacular. It’s a rare sight: a place along Bartram’s trail that comes close to its eighteenth-century appearance.

The creek glides gently through wooded glades in a broad upland valley, then crashes five hundred feet in less than a half-mile in a spectacular waterfall, swelling into a deep pool above the settlement of Alarka and rolling lazily through grassy fields and woodlands. Small farms and gardens that embrace houses and log barns border the stream before it flows beneath a four-lane highway, drops through pools, and stops abruptly in the sluggish, jade backwater of Fontana Lake about a dozen air-miles from its source.

Fontana greets the clear waters with tangles of logs. Plastic sacks, red and white fishing bobbers, and bottles left behind by those who sport in the lake lie trapped in the flotsam below a stony driveway that leads to Tony Sherrill’s marina. Fishing boats berth in the floating piers that cling by cables to two barges. One barge provides a home for Tony and his family; the other supports a shop selling bait, tackle, ice, and a few grocery items. A corrugated fiberglass roof shelters refrigerators, gasoline pumps, and tanks that hold bait minnows.

Cars and trucks crunch over the loose rocks of the drive. Boaters park near the dock to unload bags of food and drinks that they shuttle out to houseboats. These floating cabins have their territories, spaced evenly along the wooded banks, moored to trees, stumps, and rocks by long, heavy ropes that the boat owners lengthen and shorten as the lake rises and falls.

This lake where people play has an intriguing history. It also has changed forever the ecology of the valley. The narrow Fontana gorge of the Little

Tennessee, saddled between the Smokies and the Nantahala Mountains, was an ideal place to build a dam. The Tuckasegee, Nantahala, and Little Tennessee Rivers, along with numerous mountain creeks, charge over rocky shoals and converge at Fontana. These streams collect the abundant rainfall that soaks the surrounding mountains. Eighty-seven inches of rain and snow fall on nearby Clingman's Dome each year, twenty-four inches more precipitation than New Orleans and twenty-seven more than the proverbially socked-in Olympic Mountains. Places in Macon County, in the headwaters of the Little Tennessee, get upwards of sixty inches of rain and snow a year.

Demand for aluminum led to the construction of the dam. Production of this lightweight metal, used to build the Corsairs and B-29s that wreaked devastation on Germany and Japan in World War II, required massive amounts of electricity. Fontana spun the abundant waters of western North Carolina through turbines and sent their precious energy through high-tension wires across the mountains to Alcoa, a sprawling factory and company town in Blount County, Tennessee.

The Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) purchased 15,000 acres of land along the river in the 1930s. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) bought an additional 55,000 acres, relocated more than 1,300 families, and poured almost three million cubic yards of concrete to create the lake, which inundated 11,800 acres of private land. It built the dam, the tallest in the eastern United States at 480 feet, in record-breaking time by using technologically advanced materials and processes and by working crews around the clock. Blue-gray clouds of limestone dust hung endlessly up and down the valley as men drove machines, drilled holes, and detonated dynamite. In November 1944, nine months before the end of World War II, Vice President Truman attended the ceremony marking the completion of the project. He praised the workers, who had been paid from fifty cents to \$1.25 an hour, for their contribution to the war effort.

About six years later, a brochure arrived in my grandfather's mailbox. It offered him an opportunity to buy a house in "Fontana Village." This resort, a transformation of the town built by TVA to house 5,000 construction workers at the dam, promised relaxation through golfing, fishing, and hiking in the Great Smoky Mountains. Grandpa laughed, but the village's proximity to the Smokies and the lake continues to attract visitors to its cabins, inn, and restaurants.

By spring's end, when rain and melting snow have filled its pool, the lake is a twenty-nine-mile-long emerald, bending and turning through mountains protected by the Nantahala National Forest and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It provides, however, a poor habitat for fish. Seventy to ninety species of fish lived in the river before the dam was built; fewer than two dozen

adapted to the reservoir. Insects, mussels, and other small animals lost their habitat when it was flooded.

Beginning each September, TVA draws down the lake to generate power and to accommodate the prodigious winter runoff. In the winter, it becomes what Christopher Camuto describes as

a lake where a river should be. Not a lake, really, but a reservoir drawn down this time of year for flood control. . . . The draw down reveals the artificiality of the arrangement—a hundred feet of caked earth exposed between the summer shoreline and the autumn surface of the water, creek bank vegetation left high and dry, false islands turned back into peninsulas, and ugly barren troughs hundreds of yards wide dwarfing the mouths of the big rivers that stall in muddy channels, ignominious ends of the Tuckasegee and Nanatahala rivers. (123)

Water quality is another concern. Although many of the 150 houseboats berthed along the shores of the lake have always collected or treated their waste water and disposed of it safely, some flushed their toilets directly into the lake. The resulting pollution disturbed fishermen and houseboat owners, but jet skiers became most concerned when they learned that the human waste tends to stay near the surface, which is exactly the water they plow.

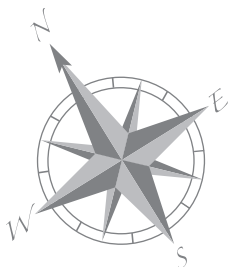
TVA and marina operator Tony Sherrill began working on a solution in 2000. Tony researched solutions on other lakes and built a vessel with a 250-gallon storage tank. TVA helped with some surplus materials and a little grant money. The barge goes to the boathouses, pumps their wastewater into its tank, and discharges it into a 3,000 gallon septic tank at the marina. In 2002, Swain and Graham Counties passed ordinances requiring all houseboats to be equipped with holding tanks for their wastewater and to have all plumbing piped into the holding tanks. Houseboat owners must enter a written contract with their marina operator to pump out their holding tanks. North Carolina Governor Mike Easley signed a law in June 2005 that would further protect the lake from sewage.

Fontana provides a lesson in tradeoffs. Tradeoffs are nothing new: freedom of movement versus secure, comfortable shelters; war or taxation without representation; a good night's sleep swapped for seeing the final play of Monday night football. As technology and the harnessing of massive quantities of energy have given us the ability to make major changes in our living space, however, the stakes of our decisions have become higher. What is the value of a mountain gorge compared with national defense? A species of fish for a roll of aluminum foil? A wetland stopover for migrating birds or an air-conditioned house?

The stakes seem always to exceed the predictions. When Fontana was built, planners thought that the cost would be a few rarely seen fish and mussels and a hundred or so displaced families who were not living too well anyway. Few anticipated the overwhelming loss of biodiversity and the loading of a lake with human waste.



Our day on the houseboat ends as shadows move quickly to darken the lake as the sun sets behind Shuckstack Mountain. Faint sounds of music and laughter tell of parties on houseboats across the Alarka impoundment. We eat our chicken and potato salad and pile our wet swim suits and gear into Stephen's aluminum boat for the ride to the landing. The motor purrs gently as it pushes us across the glassy water under the ghostlike bats that pursue their evening meal in the dusky sky.



BURNINGTOWN

*B*artram spent a few days at Cowee, waiting for “a guide and protector to the Overhill towns”—the westernmost settlements of the Cherokees, in the valley of the Tennessee River. His helper never arrived. Bartram “resolved to pursue the journey alone, though against the advice of the traders; the Overhill Indians being in an ill humour with the whites, the consequence of some late skirmishes between them and the frontier Virginians” (*Travels* 359).

With Patrick Galahan, the trader at Cowee, he rode up Rose Creek and crossed Saldeer Gap into Burningtown. Fog hung over the Little Tennessee valley and clouds covered the mountains the Cherokees called *Jore*—a name derived from *Iyorre*, the Cherokee word that appears on maps and street signs in Macon County as Iotla.

Oaks, hickories, and chestnuts sprouted tiny leaves along the trail. Cherokee women and children watched curiously from their work among the pale green shoots of corn that peeked through the dark soil.

Widespread Cherokee agriculture in the valley of Burningtown was about a year from its end. In the summer of 1776, seeking to quiet the threat from an alliance of British and Indians on their western flank, an army of Georgians and Carolinians discharged their muskets into Cherokee defenders and torched their cabins. The surviving Cherokees retreated to the hills and most fields of Burningtown Valley lay fallow until, in the early years of the next century, a wave of white settlers built new log homes and tilled the fields again.

Late in August, 222 years after Bartram, Maria and I drive to Lower Burningtown on a rainy Sunday morning. The Macon County Airport spreads across the ruins of the Cherokee town of Iyorre in a broad valley at the foot

of Trimont Ridge and Wayah Bald. Houses and barns surround grassy valleys where a few horses and cows browse along the fences of garden plots. Forests top the steep hills. Along the narrow paved road in Upper Burningtown, goats and a donkey pick grass from fields behind barbed wire. The houses are smaller, less well kept, as the road nears its end where a gate of brown four-inch pipe blocks the trail into the Nantahala National Forest. An unpainted wood garage that sags over a pile of furniture, rusting bicycles, and auto parts stands near the place where Galahan bid Bartram farewell.

We've come to Burningtown to meet with some newfound friends at the Burningtown Baptist Church. Following the church's signs, we cross Burningtown Creek and turn beside an abandoned store building. A gravel lane leads past a shallow dam of rocks that forms a pool where the church immerses new believers. There, in a grove of hemlocks and hardwoods at the foot of a cemetery on a grassy hill, stands the dignified single-story white building. Water falling over round rocks and smooth pebbles speaks to us as we park our car and walk across the lot. For residents of traffic-snarled, smog-laden Atlanta, the Burningtown church and its setting are John Keats's "unravish'd bride of quietness, / . . . foster-child of silence and slow time" ("Ode on a Grecian Urn").

Baptists formed a congregation near this place in 1839, the year after the Cherokee Removal. They built their first permanent meeting house on the crest of the cemetery hill. By the end of the century, the church numbered over 150 members and, in 1925, the church moved its building to the creekside.

Late-arriving worshipers find spaces for their cars and pick-up trucks on the grass around the blacktopped parking lot. Children, young parents, and elders fill the pews. Conversation buzzes over the notes of the piano prelude. On a table in front of the pulpit, a colorful, well-arranged bouquet in a glass vase brightens the sanctuary.

"Someone in the church did that arrangement," I whisper to Maria.

"No, it's from a florist," she guesses.

"But those are flowers from a local garden."

"Then someone with a local garden arranges flowers professionally. It's gorgeous."

At eleven o'clock, Pastor Jim Kinard rises from a pew and walks to the pulpit. He begins a relaxed and friendly conversation with his flock, then announces the "Hymn of Fellowship." As the organist and pianist strike the opening chords of "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms," the people leave their pews and mix warmly with each other, gripping hands, greeting, conversing.

"The service today will be unusual," says Jim when the congregants have returned to their places. He tells us that a visiting minister, a man whose mission is inviting Jews to accept *Yeshua* (Jesus) as the Messiah, will preach.

Mounting the rostrum, a yarmulke pinned to the back of his thick white hair, the preacher ceremoniously pulls a prayer shawl around his shoulders. He weaves a lesson around the shawl, describing it as a symbol of the Word of God. "I am wrapped about in the Word," he tells us. "Elijah's shawl fell on Elisha, giving him miraculous powers and authority. When a woman touched the hem of Jesus' shawl, she was healed." He goes on to draw lessons for Christians and for modern life.

Worship closes with a hymn that carries the invitation of the church when sinners are asked to repent and believers to recommit themselves to Jesus. Central to Baptist tradition is the lifelong struggle with individual sins. Nothing in their religious life shows this more than the "Hymn of Invitation" or "Hymn of Response." Whether a city church with a liturgy or a congregation deep in the hills engaging in more spontaneous worship, at the close of their Sunday meetings, most Southern Baptist churches offer an invitation.

While Baptists often form warm, family-like fellowships with each other, faith, for them, is highly personal. No priest brings their concerns to the Lord for them. God speaks through His ministers, but the relationship of man and woman to Jesus is individual. So is interpretation of Scripture.

Bartram would have found this service foreign to the meetings of his Society of Friends. Quakers sit quietly or speak calmly and briefly. As a man reared to cherish peace and accord, he may have cringed at the preacher's conclusion that the attacks of September 11, 2001, were God's sentence on his people.

The Baptist theology of God revealing Himself and His will in Scripture may also have been strange to Bartram's personal views. Though quite knowledgeable of the Bible, the naturalist found divine mystery revealed more in nature than in ancient scriptures of Hebrew and Greek. Leaves of an oak, heads of pink joe-pye blossoms bobbing in the wind beside a spring branch, or sparkling rocks in a creek bed spoke to Bartram. If he had ever sung, "I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice," he would have been thinking of the voice he heard in the cry of a sandhill crane or the chirping of a Bachman's sparrow.

Baptist theology also stands far apart from the spirituality of the Cherokees. While Native Americans somehow grafted their religions with the theology of the Roman Catholics, Methodists, and Baptists who sent missionaries into their villages, they found eternal guidance in tales and chants. The bear, the rabbit, and the buzzard revealed the mysteries of the universe through stories told by holy men. Healing came with the help of herbs and sacred formulas, not through repentance and commitment in response to the Holy Spirit and sacred scripture. Still, an eighteenth-century Cherokee observing the gathering in Burningtown would have found familiar and wholesome the Baptists' sense of interdependence and community.

When the hymn is over and a benediction spoken, we join the queue of worshipers who pass through the front door to greet the ministers. Outside on the porch, Merritt Fouts finds us. Chatting with Merritt is our primary reason for going to Burningtown. Small-framed, with sparse gray hair and a wide mouth that plays into a wry smile, he makes us instantly welcome. He and his wife Lucille invite us to dinner. We follow them and their daughter and son-in-law, Sharon and George Taylor, up the road to a brick home that looks down on a mountain cove. Sharon heads the Rural Land Protection Program of the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee, a job that takes her into the homes of the landowners of the Little Tennessee River Valley, where she promotes conservation of land and rural values. George works in forest management, researching ruffed grouse in the Nantahala Mountains.

These people and others who dwell along the streams and mountainsides in the backcountry of the Appalachians fail to meet the standards set by *Li'l Abner* and *Deliverance*. Although pockets of hard-living folks still inhabit the mountains, the majority are educated, purposeful, and hardworking. Children who have moved to the cities along both coasts return frequently, respecting the mountain people who gave them educations and blessings as they moved to work in far-flung professions and industries.

Merritt and Lucille have stayed in Burningtown, living on the farm where Lucille was born and reared. She is a sixth-generation resident of the county. Merritt's family came here a few years after Lucille's. His boyhood home was in the Iotla (he pronounces it "Eye-ola") community, across the ridge to the east of Burningtown. After service in the military, he returned, got his degree from Western Carolina University in three years, and taught school in Hayesville and Franklin. Before he retired to work his garden, deliver Meals-on-Wheels to seniors, and to serve as an ombudsman for nursing home residents, he had successful stints as principal of the Cowee and Cartoogechaye schools in Macon County. During his years as an educator, he led a group of Macon Countians to Denmark, where they demonstrated their skills in the old-time art of the Appalachian dance form called clogging.

Merritt's most recent claim to fame is *The Burningtown News*, a weekly feature sent by e-mail to more than 300 computers every Sunday morning. The chatty column documents the births of babies, the harvest of the first tomato of the season, and visits of out-of-town guests. Color photographs of apple trees in blossom, wildflowers in the meadow, and the autumn "surp (syrup) making" circle the globe through electronic magic. Someone described him as "Burningtown's Garrison Keillor," but Merritt does not wear red socks, and Garrison is not on speaking terms with LeLoos Bulfinch and the other Little People of the Nantahalas.

According to Merritt, LeLoos is Chief of The Luchorpan Tribe who lives with his wife Cellini and others of his people in caves near the spring on the mountain above Merritt's house. And, although Merritt is the only person known to have met them, he makes a convincing case for their existence. Merritt says he first encountered LeLoos and Cellini as he worked, with his young dog Shaggy by his side, to drain a swamp near the spring:

It was the summer of 1998. It was one of the hottest summers on record down here on Lower Burningtown. Of course we don't have any records except in the minds of the people. That is the best record of all. Who can argue with you? No one can tell me, "No it is not the hottest," if they do not know what the record is in my head.

The only problem with this kind of recording is that each year is the hottest one on record, but it's the best we can do down here. Ain't nobody got the time to run around with a little piece of paper writing the temperature down. We don't have but one thermometer. It is nailed to a post and we can't take it down to carry around with us.

We'd lose the piece of paper fore the next year anyway so the best method is the head method.

After working in the heat and hassling with the controls of a backhoe, Merritt lay down for a nap. When he awoke,

there beside me and putting cold compresses on my head was the most beautiful (Outside LF [Lucille]) woman I had ever seen. She had on a gorgeous red dress, but it was not made from silk. She had long blond hair and beautiful blue eyes. . . . The strange thing was, that she was no more'n 15 inches tall. . . . Then I heard a man's voice on my left saying, "He's gonna be all right I believe. Seems as if he is coming around."

Merritt opened one eye and saw "a little man not more than 18-20 inches tall. He had long hair and a long beard. He was wearing a hat and clothing which looked to have come from animal skin. I then opened both eyes and sat up. The small woman was on my right and the small man on the left. They were standing up and only reached my shoulders."

Assured that Merritt was well, the two rescuers disappeared. At times of their choosing, they continue to meet him. He has learned that they had come to North Carolina from Scandinavia, by way of Vinland, in the tenth century. At the time, they were belligerent people searching for people to fight. Luchorpanns have given up their barbarous ways, however, and now appear to Big People only

when Big People are in danger of losing their lives. The fact that Bartram does not report on the time the Luchorpan saved the botanist's life is a matter of consternation for LeLoos.

Cherokee myths also speak of "Little People" who live beneath the surface of the mountains. Merritt says he had never heard of the Cherokees' Little People until I mentioned them to him. He asked LeLoos if he had ever met any of them, but the Luchorpan said that he had not, which may confirm the theory that they are one and the same. Such are these lands, so remote and rugged, that an *elan vital*, lying deeper than the surface, has revealed itself to those who work its soil.

Tales of the Luchorpan may be the most creative feature of *The Burningtown News*, but the electronic sheet gives more bytes to stories of everyday life in the valley. One day late in June, the *News* broadcast details of work on the cane patch, a community effort that begins with planting in April and ends with a harvest in October and an all-day "surp making" event:

I arrived at the patch on Tuesday afternoon around 1:30. Marshall was just beginning the ninth (last row). That was the row I had last week so there wasn't much to have to do to it this time, but I fell right in there to help him. What a thrill it was to be out there hoeing cane in 85-90 degree weather. Sweat was pouring off both of us. About all I could do was think about next winter when the snow was on the ground and me eating biscuits and surp. That cooled me off about 5 degrees. Then I thought about the icebergs in Alaska which took me down another 4 or 5 degrees. If I had kept on thinking about the coldest places on earth, I might have frozen to death.

It didn't take us long to get through that row and then we went to the house. I had to go on down to the garbage dump and then came on back home.

The cane patch is laid by now. Jim put fertilizer on it Tuesday afternoon and sprayed it on Wednesday afternoon. Marshall said we would not have to do anything else except get the morning glories out of it if any come up.



Merritt, George, and I sit in the living room, in front of the television set whose screen remains dark. Laughter from the kitchen lets us know that Lucille, Sharon, and Maria are getting well acquainted and enjoying the final dinner preparations. Lucille appears in the doorway and invites us to the table. White hair surrounds her sunny face. She has set a table with mountain cuisine: tender

beef roast, casseroles of vegetables she picked from the garden, hot rolls covered by a white napkin.

Sharon had described her mother as “less gregarious than [her] father,” but, after the kitchen work is done, Lucille joins us in the wide living room and shares stories of life in Burningtown. Her family operated the mill that once was the economic and social center of Burningtown. She trained in cosmetology, raised two daughters with Merritt, and worked as a florist.

“Worked as a florist?” I say, turning my head toward Maria and smiling. She grins in response. “Then I’ll bet I won an argument. That was your bouquet in church, wasn’t it?”

A shy smile crosses Lucille’s face as she admits that it was her work.

“The dahlias were from my garden,” she says, gesturing toward the plot across the driveway that splits the broad lawn that slopes down from the house. “I cut some leaves from a hosta.”

“And did a very artful job of it,” says Maria.

Here is a family that would have sheltered and fed Bartram. He would have felt at home here and written glowingly of their appreciation of their place on the edge of the wild mountains.

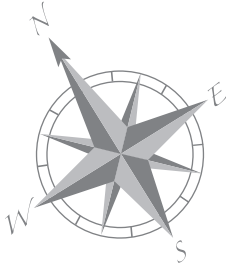
Merritt is more than a retired educator, community volunteer, and droll editor. He represents an important feature on the American landscape, a gentle wave on a bay of the national sea. But if I ever ask Merritt whether he thinks of himself as part of a movement or even as a representative of one, I expect a flat denial. Community-building for him is not a job or an obligation. It is a natural outgrowth of his life, no less spontaneous than a lobe of lichen clinging to a boulder on the mountain above his spring.

Merritt, Lucille, Sharon, and George are among a handful of people, scattered across America, who have bowed their backs over the plow that maintains communities and values that support human life and natural environments. Their efforts are local, microscopic in contrast to “regime changing,” replacing the World Trade Center, or merging mega-corporations. They never make cable news headlines. The only front pages they may occasionally grace are in local weeklies.

These people certainly would not see themselves as part of what Morris Berman has called a “monastic class.” In *The Twilight of American Culture*, Berman recalls that religious recluses preserved classical literature and ideas during the Dark Ages. He sees an America overwhelmed by “the culture of McWorld, in which everything is drowned in the universal solvent of kitsch and consumerism” and thinks the only way that traditional, core American values may be preserved is through a new wave of “monks” who will work quietly and out of sight (6).

Footprints across the South

Merritt and others in Lower Burningtown are not recluses. They have not cut themselves off from American culture. They communicate by e-mail, find treatment in the operating rooms of hospitals, and eat at the Sunset Cafe. They enjoy the benefits of the power grids that reached their communities after the middle of the twentieth century. But, by quietly maintaining and propagating interest in families, traditional crafts, and sustainable environments, they contribute immensely to the richness of America and to its future.



“A WORLD OF MOUNTAINS PILED UPON MOUNTAINS”

Standing on the crest of the Jore Mountains, the lonely naturalist took a deep breath and turned slowly in his saddle, scanning the view. Among the peaks he saw in the massif we know as the Great Smoky Mountains was Kuwahi, the “Mulberry Place” known to the Cherokees as the councilhouse of the bears, where the White Bear chief presided. To the left rose Tsistu’yī, the “Rabbit Place,” where the rabbits had their councilhouse. It would be about a hundred years before maps named them after Europeans: Clingman’s Dome, Gregory Bald. A land of mystery, the Smokies were the Cherokee Garden of Eden. Their majesty silenced everything except Bartram’s soul. “I beheld with rapture and astonishment a sublimely awful scene of power and magnificence, a world of mountains piled upon mountains,” he later wrote (*Travels* 362).

A stone tower, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps on Wayah Bald, gives easy access to the spot where he may have stood that day. Travelers can walk an asphalt path in mid-summer and climb the tower to look down on soft clusters of rhododendron blossoms, great pompons in shades of pink and lilac. Raising their eyes to look at the horizon, they can, on clear autumn days, see the distant ridges of the Smokies, Balsams, and Cowee Mountain.

On too many days, however, they see only a world of shadowy mountains wrapped in haze. Except under the rarest of skies, when the winds of a cold front rustle the leaves of the Southland, layers of smog cover the peaks, turning them into blue-gray ghosts of their majestic selves. Over the years since Bartram beheld them with rapture, timber companies have stripped the forests, miners opened sealed layers of rock, farms and towns appeared and vanished.

As have thousands of others, I tried to find the pristine, primeval America in the backcountry of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Weekend day hikes and backpack trips took me to rare pockets of virgin forest, glistening waterfalls, and high vistas. I heard bears sniffing the edges of my tent, watched shiny salamanders slide into streams, and exposed rolls of film in the flame azalea thickets of Gregory Bald. But the story of the twentieth-century Smokies unfolded itself most clearly during “The Great Crossing.”

“The Great Crossing” was the four-day, three-night hike that my sons James and John took with me in 1984. Sturdy lads of twelve and thirteen, their legs and backs toughened by day hikes, soccer games, and chases through the neighborhood, they were more fit than I to climb the North Carolina trails and descend into Tennessee.

On a Monday morning in June, we got a ride from Maryville, Tennessee, following a winding highway that tested our ability to hold a breakfast of bacon, eggs, and biscuits in our churning stomachs. We parked beside Fontana Dam at the head of the trail to the Lost Cove backcountry campsite, pulled our backpacks from the trunk, and hoisted them to our shoulders. Loaded with a three-man tent, sleeping bags, a one-burner stove and fuel, food, and a change of clothes, we told our anxious driver, “See you Thursday at Cades Cove!” and plodded up the path.

The trail once supported a railroad bed. Later, the Army Corps of Engineers practiced mountain road construction along its rolling pathway. Hiking easily, disturbed only by the usual summer freshet, we crossed the hills on Fontana’s north shore. At the designated campsite, where Eagle Creek flows into the lake, we dropped our packs and set up our tent. A swim in the little inlet cooled our bodies and washed most of the day’s sweat from our backs.

John drew a pan of water from the rushing creek. I mixed drops of iodine with it. He asked, “Why can’t we drink the water straight from the creek? I mean, how could this water, so far back in the mountains, be polluted?”

“That’s what I used to think,” I said, recalling the time I was sickened by water from a spring high on a mountain ridge. We talked of microbes and parasites and drank the sour mixture, wondering how the mountain water would taste, free of iodine.

“Tomorrow we hike up Eagle Creek,” I told the boys as we looked over the topographic map I carried in a plastic, zip-up sheath. “*The Sierra Club Hiker’s Guide* says there are lots of fords. The first is the deepest. After that, it should be easy.”

The guidebook was right. Almost. It failed to say that the trail crosses the rushing stream eighteen times—we counted—in the first five miles. At the first crossing, John struggled to keep his pack out of the water as he stubbed his

"A World of Mountains Piled upon Mountains"

toes on unseen rocks beneath the swirling current. Weary and wet, muttering about the Chamber of Commerce trail description, we dropped our loads on a bed of hemlock needles in the late afternoon, set up the tent, and cooked our freeze-dried supper.

Soggy socks and damp T-shirts hung from sticks around the campfire. I pulled the map from its case and opened the trail guide. "The good news: no more fords. We leave Eagle Creek behind. The bad news: we have to climb 2,700 feet tomorrow."

"Doesn't sound bad. We've hiked more than that in a day," said James.

"Not with full packs," I said, poking the fire. "And the last 1,500 feet are almost straight up."

The crackle of burning logs was the only sound in the campsite.

Our trail was gentle for the first hour. Shallow slopes rose on both sides of the wide trail. Hemlocks and tulip poplars shaded us. Laurel blossoms lit our way.

The trail began to rise, skirting the side of Mount Squires. While we sat on a log to let my heart slow, James poked the leaves with his walking stick and hit something hard. He scraped the mud, found a heavy iron spike and wiped it clean.

"This was a railroad bed," John speculated, "way up here."

"This spike once held a rail to a crosstie of one of the railroads that hauled black walnut, chestnut, and oak from the heart of the mountains," I told them.

Although I had read about the corporate logging and the rail lines that pierced the heart of the Smokies, James's iron spike and John's quick analysis were my epiphany. We had hiked hard for more than two days to reach this place. Few spots in the Smokies are more remote. Yet we cradled in our hands the rusting testimony of the stripping of hundreds of years of tree growth. We had thought of this forest as primitive. Now we had an iron reminder that, only half a century before, it was gouged and burned.

Centuries before Bartram, Native Americans burned patches of forests to make room for crops. Still, when he arrived, Bartram saw "magnificent high forests, extensive green fields, meadows and lawns." The earliest white settlers who moved into Macon and Swain Counties four decades later cut trees for houses, barns, and fences. They damaged the land only slightly with their hand axes, crosscut saws, and wooden and cast iron plows.

By 1900, however, the population of the Southern Appalachians numbered 318,000. When their farming techniques exposed the ground to erosion and they cleared forests to gain more crop land, they opened wounds that could not heal. As they moved from eroded farms to forest land to establish new homesteads, they systematically released the ancient, deep humus from the lower slopes of the mountains.

About a hundred small sawmills operated in the area around the Smokies in 1884. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, several large lumber and paper companies began cutting walnut and cherry and other trees in the mountains. The heavy-duty devastation of Bartram's "magnificent high forests" came in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Then, in 1901, Horace B. Ayres and William W. Ashe examined 10,000 square miles from Virginia to northern Georgia.

They reported to federal agencies on the "forest conditions" of the Southern Appalachians. Most of the area was original forest, they said, populated with 137 species of trees: "For the most part the lower slopes had been only selectively cut for the most valuable species and the upper slopes were pristine. . . ." (Camuto 251).

They saw the land in board feet and cost per acre. The mountainsides around Cataloochee would yield 161,280 board feet per acre; "fifty cents an acre is considered a good price for mountain land." (Camuto 251) Millions of board feet of valuable lumber were "wasting away" on the stump, they said.

The lumber didn't "waste away" for long. Eight large companies bought land in the Smokies. Employing bands of men from the area, they cut into the deepest recesses of the mountains. Railroads snaked along cuts on edges of steep slopes. Skidders, systems of cables run by steam-powered boilers, pulled the logs down the hills, ripping up smaller trees in their paths. Splash dams on small creeks stored enough water to float logs. When the ponds were full, the lumbermen broke the dams and the water propelled the woody harvest downstream. The dams were rebuilt for another load of logs and the cycle continued. By 1925, the corporate timber companies increased their wealth by cutting seven billion board-feet of lumber out of the forests each year, shipping most of it to the lumber-hungry markets of the Northeast. Hemlocks and spruce went to local mills to be ground and processed into paper.

Cutting was only part of the damage. Sparks from the boilers and railroads set fires that moved rapidly across the fallen limbs left by the stumps of massive trees. Floods followed the fires, washing deep layers of topsoil into the creeks, killing fish.

While a few large timber companies flourished, the people of Appalachia did not. For their grueling work in the logging camps, loggers received no more than ninety cents a day—usually in scrip which could be spent only in company stores—plus lodgings and meals. Bunkhouses were frame shacks, moved from one camp to another across the rugged ridges. Michael Frome says that, in some camps, the logger "packed his own bedroll and blankets, was not permitted to talk at meals in the cookhouse. He worked as long as it was light enough to work, continually facing the threat of accident and loss of life or limb. Despite all the legend and lore, the man with the crosscut saw . . . was cheap and expendable" (164).

"A World of Mountains Piled upon Mountains"

Duane Oliver collected memories of the Ritter Company's operation at Proctor, on Hazel Creek, in the first decades of the twentieth century. Proctor was a tiny pioneer settlement of a few log cabins, a small store, and a post office when Ritter's operation turned it into a "modern town with a considerable number of up-to-date houses, streets, sewers, board sidewalks, picket fences, running water, telephones and electric lights" (79). The company built a large school, churches, a movie theater, and a pool hall. "The economy, almost overnight, changed from one of self-sufficiency, subsistence and barter to one where there was a considerable amount of 'real' money," writes Oliver (79).

Although the residents of Hazel Creek, enjoying the temporary gains, did not protest the stripping of the forests, they recognized that the mountains would never be the same. Thousands of buckeyes up to 125 feet tall, along with chestnut, oak, and hemlock almost as lofty, splashed down the creeks and into the waiting jaws of the sawmill to be loaded onto waiting trains and carried to New York, Boston, and Chicago. The largest poplar, felled in 1919, measured six to seven feet in diameter and rose fifty-four feet to its first limb and 190 feet above its roots. Ritter got 18,000 board feet from this single tree.

And then it was over. After eighteen years, the company moved on to other forests, taking with it some of its workers, leaving others grieving over the loss of a way of life, a source of income, and many friends. Proctor was a ghost town in an eroding ruin of a magnificent forest.

When the mountain families were removed from the mountain coves, they lost a way of life. According to Margaret Lynn Brown,

the loss of the bountiful old-growth forest eliminated the means for traditional subsistence life. Although wage employment and consumer goods surely pulled mountain people away from subsistence, the loss of the forest made it impossible to return. Daughters forgot which herbs their mothers hunted in the woods ... Sons did not carry on the tradition of bear hunting, because the mountains supported fewer bears. Environmental catastrophe, from this perspective, also brought death to communities, as deforestation, a decrease in farm size, and an end to woodland pasture accompanied the loss of the forest. (71)

As a result of the feverish stripping of the mountains, the area covered by virgin stands of timber, scattered across the Southern Appalachians, can now be numbered in a few square miles. The most accessible example is the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, a stand of ancient hemlocks and poplars, some over 400 years old, 100 feet tall, and up to 20 feet in circumference that the loggers didn't reach before the Great Depression quieted their saws.

Footprints across the South

Logging, fires, and the erosion that followed are not the only destructive forces that have plagued the southern highlands. The haze that hangs over the mountains contains more than the fog exuded from vegetation that gave the Smokies their name. Rain in the park is ten times more acidic than unpolluted precipitation. These acids undermine soil fertility, pollute stream water, and can make trees more vulnerable to stresses of all kinds, including insect pests, disease, and cold. In addition, they endanger brook trout, the native species that the Park Service has worked hard to restore following the devastation of the 1920s and '30s.

Breathing the air can be harmful to hikers. Air quality is unhealthy one out of three days in the summer. During the summer of 1999, ozone pollution in the Smokies violated federal health standards on fifty-two days; skies were dirtier on the Appalachian Trail than in Washington, D.C. Visibility on some "clear" days was measured in feet instead of miles.

For years Southerners laid the blame on the power plants and factories of the Midwest. Big, industrial, and far away, they pumped out tons of pollutants that rocketed along the jet stream and hung up when they crossed "our" mountains. As it turns out, a latter-day, industrial Sherman is not entirely the culprit. The South has defiled its own mountains. Extensive investigations over a decade found that old coal-fired power plants and vehicles in the Southeast cause most of the smog and acid rain in the Smokies and surrounding areas. Atlanta's drivers and other Southerners air conditioning their homes and office towers were not only polluting their own air but also the mountains to the north where they take refuge from summer's heat.

The big surprise polluter, however, was the pork industry. Hog farming in distant counties in North Carolina and Kentucky emits large quantities of ammonia into the air, gassy sludge that rides the winds that blow across North Carolina in the summer.

Agricultural valleys have been damaged as have the mountains and their air. Farmers cut trees growing along the creek sides and riverbanks to use every square foot for grazing, row crops, and truck farms. As the rivers flooded after major rains along the "Tanase," their waters gouged banks that were no longer protected by the roots of walnuts, oaks, and sycamores. Chunks of alluvial soil dropped into the streams and washed over rocks, plugging with minute particles of silt crevices that once were the nursery of fish and covering the eggs of trout and tiny darters, and bringing a silent, unseen death. In addition, mines opened the earth, permitting acids to flow unhindered into the creeks and rivers. Power companies met the demand for electricity by damming the Little Tennessee and Tuckasegee Rivers.

"A World of Mountains Piled upon Mountains"

The arrival of large numbers of residents and vacationers, who often build their houses to gain vistas of the broad valleys and wooded peaks, has studded the mountainsides with houses and small subdivisions that are visible for miles. To each of the dwellings a road is carved into the rocks and soils. Not only is the appearance of the mountains scarred by such developments, the stability of the forests is also injured.

As a result of the development over the centuries, wildlife within the streams and along their banks has shrunk in numbers. Some species hang on by slender threads. Two shellfish, the little-wing pearly mussel and the Appalachian elktoe are listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The spotfin chub is considered a threatened species. Other species that depend on the wetlands along the valley floors are threatened or endangered.

While building, lumbering, and mining have whacked away the mountainsides and altered the flows of the rivers, other forces, some of them microscopic, have crept along the leaves and roots of plants, wiping out large communities of trees. Parasite and fungus infections, introduced unknowingly on imported plants, have gobbled up several of the most important species in the Southern Appalachians.

Until recently, the most devastating outrage in the southern mountains was the chestnut blight. Known as "the queen of the eastern American forest," the chestnuts rose, unhampered by insect enemies, to heights of a hundred feet. Their wide-spreading crowns shaded vast forest groves, parks, and lawns. Chestnut lumber—lightweight, easy to split, resistant to decay—provided frames, milled banisters, and fine furniture for thousands of homes. These trees provided strong fiber for telegraph poles, railroad ties, shingles, paneling, and musical instruments. Cherokees and Europeans joined the deer, squirrels, and chipmunks in eating their large, sweet nuts.

Death came as a result of a fungus that arrived in America on nursery stock imported from Asia around 1904. By the 1920s it had spread from New York to the Southern Appalachians. Reddish brown ghosts of the great trees lay across the floor of the southern forests by the 1950s.

Those of us who came along too late know the taste of an American chestnut only from descriptions in songs and stories. And, to see the high arching shade of a grove of these "queens," we are left with a few faded black-and-white photographs.

Other diseases from afar ravage the forests of the Appalachians. Dogwoods are disappearing from the Southland as a result of a fungus that may have been introduced with imported Chinese dogwood trees in the late 1970s. Sightseers will miss the beauty of their large, white blossoms brightening the southern

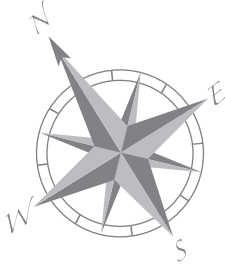
forests each spring. More important, the forest will lack an important resource, as the leaves of the dogwood provide richness for the soil, and their berries an important source of high-protein fruit for birds.

From Europe has come the balsam woolly adelgid, a tiny sucking insect related to aphids that has attacked and killed mountainsides of Fraser firs throughout the Southeast. Trees on the once-lush dark peaks of Mount Mitchell, Mount Sterling, and Clingman's Dome began dying in the 1970s; by the end of the century, their gray trunks spike the sky, long-since bereft of foliage, leaving the peaks looking like a battlefield after an artillery barrage. Ninety percent of the Fraser firs in the Smokies have died and, by 2000, the insect was attacking Christmas tree farms along the Appalachian slopes.

More recently, the hemlock woolly adelgid arrived on shrubs from China or Japan. This insect attacks and kills hemlock trees. It appeared in Virginia in the 1950s, then near Fontana Dam and Cades Cove in 2000. Within a few months, it was found in more than forty different locations in the Smokies and, by 2002, had appeared in northern Georgia.

Although the mountain forest has regrown, "ecologists do not know how long it will take to create an old-growth forest, and they no longer feel certain that these forests will recapture the diversity they supported before corporate logging. The beech groves or beech gaps that once prospered on Newfound Gap, for example, never returned," writes Margaret Lynn Brown. Only half the species diversity and one-third of the canopy have returned to the Smokies. "If anything, both richness and cover appear to be decreasing," she says (66).

Bartram's world of mountains continues to inspire and impress visitors and residents in the Vale of Cowee and Jore Mountains. That wild habitats and stunning views remain is a tribute not only to the persistence of the earth but also to thousands of individuals whose concerns reach beyond their own comfort and financial well-being. The hills of western North Carolina are full of them. Theirs is a story of uphill battles against armies of financial interests, political forces, and even nature itself.



“AND BE MERCIFUL TO THEM”

Sweat soaks the T-shirt of the muscular mountain man as he fastens a cable to the trunk of a slender walnut tree. “Let ’er go!” he yells over the chug of the idling front-end loader that has dragged the tree to the riverbank. Branches splash as the swirling waters of the Little Tennessee River catch and press them into the muddy bank. The tree is joining a tangle of logs and limbs as the latest revetment in the bank restoration efforts of The Little Tennessee Watershed Association. In time, this conservation effort may to some degree return the stream to its previous condition.

When Bartram followed “the rapid Tanase gliding through as a vast serpent rushing after his prey,” he found “Azalea, Kalmia, Rhodendron, Philadelphus, &c. beautifying his now elevated shores, and painting the coves with a rich and cheerful scenery” (*Travels* 346–48).

Doug Johnson, the association’s stream bank expert, steps away from the backhoe to explain how farm practices have changed the river. He explains the effects of aggressive cutting and tilling, of sedimentation, of the harm to the life of the river.

“And, how do these cut trees help?” I ask.

“We bundle them together and anchor them. They protect the bank from further erosion and then, over time, they catch sediment and restore the bank. When we are done setting the revetment, we’ll plant trees along the river. Their roots will restore the natural order and complete the conservation.”

Doug and his revetment builders are soldiers in armies of volunteer groups and official agencies that have worked in the thickets and streams of the Southern Appalachians to assure healthy forests, clean water, and lively wetlands. Led by visionary activists who believe in the precious vitality of the

highlands, they have restored ravaged mountains and conserved land and life up and down the ridges and valley. Over the past seventy-five years they have committed lifetimes to their chosen projects. Many have worked with one hand on a grubbing hoe and the other on a typewriter or computer keyboard, planting trees and raising millions of dollars.

The boulder-strewn road they have traveled has risen before them, steep and rutted. Whether citizens' groups or state or federal agencies, they have grappled with the interests of politicians, businessmen, and corporations. Scarce funds, social values, and the mysterious obstinance of nature have bogged them down but not prevented them from reaching significant goals.

Names on a map offer clues to the work of those who tended the birth of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Through-hikers on the Appalachian Trail along the crest of the Smokies follow a broad trail to the crags of Mount Cammerer, named for Arno Cammerer, director of the National Park Service during crucial days of the fight to establish the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Farther on, they cross Mount Chapman. Colonel David Chapman, a wholesale druggist from Knoxville, led Tennessee's effort to establish the park. Near the center of the park, at 6,217 feet, they may camp at Icewater Springs on the eastern slopes of Mount Kephart, named for writer Horace Kephart whose turn-of-the-century *Our Southern Highlanders* and sheaves of articles about the Smokies stirred interest in the mountains and, by association, the park. Farther west, beyond Clingman's Dome and Thunderhead, they cross Mount Squires, bearing the memory of North Carolina State Senator Mark Squires, a lawyer from Lenoir who rallied North Carolina support for the park and argued its case before state and federal officials.

The vast park in the Smokies is the keystone of the many efforts to conserve the southern mountains. Early in the twentieth century, as they watched the corporate loggers plunder the slopes of the mountains, foresters and civic boosters around the base of the Smokies thought it important that land be set aside and protected from exploitation.

Michael Frome (*Strangers in High Places*) tells the stories of the writers, advocates, and citizens whose fifty years of efforts brought a national park into being. The Reverend C. D. Smith of Franklin floated the idea of a park in the Southern Appalachians in the 1880s. Others on the North Carolina and Tennessee sides of the mountains moved the dream forward. By 1925, businesses and private individuals were raising money to purchase land. School children in Knoxville pooled pennies, nickels, and dimes to donate \$1,391.72. In 1926, President Calvin Coolidge signed the law that established the park. Congress promised no money, however, and advocates in both states raised funds for land

purchases. John D. Rockefeller Jr. pledged up to \$5 million in 1928 if the local boosters could match his gift. Eventually, the people and governments of North Carolina and Tennessee contributed \$4 million. President Franklin D. Roosevelt saw to it that the federal government gave \$3.5 million. And the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial Fund contributed \$3.5 million.

On Labor Day 1940, President Roosevelt rode in a motorcade through the steamy Tennessee River valley from Chattanooga and into the chilly air of the gap to dedicate the park. And the nation noticed. By the 1960s, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was drawing more visitors than any other national park. In 1999, more than ten million visitors prowled the roads and pathways of the park, fifty-five percent more than showed up in Yellowstone and Yosemite combined.

The fund-raising is not done. A collection box stands on a post beside a one-lane gravel road in the Cataloochee Valley. Lettering on its face asks for donations for projects in the park. The box belongs to the organization "Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park." On an evening in June, our family drives into the remote valley on the eastern edge of the park.

Cataloochee is the least-visited section of the park accessible by road, which is the reason I've been coming here for more than a quarter of a century. No Dollywood attractions bring tourists, and the campground is relatively primitive by national park standards. But what Cataloochee lacks in amenities, it makes up for in serenity. A church building, an old school, houses maintained almost in the condition of the 1960s, the last years of their habitation, sit in grassy fields surrounded by steep, wooded mountains. Hikes through these hills lead past ruined farmsteads, cemeteries, and thick-walled stone apple houses.

This evening, we've come here not to hike but to watch elk. Driving to the end of a pasture, we park near several cars and pickups, pull an ice chest from the back of our car, and walk through the grass at the edge of the field. Two hundred feet up the slope, four wild turkeys stretch their necks to peer over the grass, then resume their feeding.

Tyler spreads a poncho on the ground. Maria lays out wedges of cheese, bagel chips, and grapes on it. As we munch, Maria points toward a dark, shadowy shape under an apple tree two hundred yards up the pasture. "Is that an elk?" she asks. I pull binoculars from my day pack and slowly sweep the rim of the field. A massive bull elk is browsing on the grass. Around his neck is a brown collar. A tag on his ear bears the number "2." He is one of about fifty elk who have found a home in the Smokies over the past two years.

Elk once roamed as far south as Georgia. Bartram reported seeing elk bones near the Savannah River (*Travels* 322), but the herds had disappeared before the flintlocks of the European settlers. They had disappeared from the Smokies

not long after his visit in 1775. In February 2001, the Park Service transferred two dozen elk from the Land Between the Lakes in western Kentucky and released them into the Cataloochee Valley. A few of the cows gave birth that year. Another herd of elk was imported from Canada in 2002. Few deaths have occurred. With the birth of more calves, the herd appears to be thriving.

Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park assisted the Park Service in bringing the elk back. Besides the reintroduction of elk in the Smokies, the group has donated funds to stop the ravages of the hemlock woolly adelgid, restored a log cabin, and conducted conferences.

But the health and beauty of the Smokies require more than local action. North Carolina's legislature and governor passed stringent clean air legislation and Atlanta strains to bring its smog emissions under control. Georgia Power has cut its contribution to the smog by reducing its plants' nitrogen oxide emissions by eighty-five percent throughout the smog-producing summer months, and factories in Georgia are under tighter laws on emissions into the air. These measures will reduce the wheezing of North Carolinians and Georgians. They will also give the trees of the Southern Appalachians more breathing room.



While the creation, restoration, and enhancement of the big park draws national attention, smaller efforts quietly save chunks of wild habitat and beauty. In the Little Tennessee River Greenway in Franklin, thirty miles from the southern edge of the national park, families stroll through sun-drenched fields of grasses and planted seedlings. A jogger passes them in the shade of oaks hanging over boulders on a bluff. His feet thud on the plank floor of a vintage steel suspension bridge that crosses the river. The walkers step onto a timber overlook, watching deep green currents move slowly from the Georgia mountains beside the path Bartram rode on his way to Watauga and Cowee.

Local environmentalists who dreamed of the Little Tennessee River Restoration and Greenway Project found support from Duke Power, the State Department of Transportation, city and county governments, and local businesses. Grants and donations flowed together. The Watershed Association set revetments on the banks of the river along the greenway.

The greenway and the revetments don't stand alone as environmental projects along Bartram's "Tanase." Five miles upstream of Franklin, a young woman, her dark hair pulled into a ponytail, parks her car in the driveway of a small house that looks out over pastures to the winding banks of the Little Tennessee River. Her hiking boots, jeans, and loose-fitting blouse give her a more casual look, but serious business brings her to the little farm. She walks on well-worn stepping

stones toward the front porch, passing gladioluses and head-high hydrangea bushes whose white blossoms bounce in the summer breeze. Mounting rock steps, she greets the frail, white-haired woman with stooped shoulders who stands behind a screen door.

"Good morning," she says, a broad smile lighting her face as she greets the homeowner by name. "Remember me? Sharon Taylor. From the Land Trust. I called yesterday."

"Sure, I remember you. You're Merritt's daughter. And I knew all of your grandparents."

They sit on rocking chairs on the front porch and talk of life in the valley. The old lady knows Sharon's father and knew her grandfather, as well. They've eaten barbecue together, attended the same funerals, stood around bubbling vats of sorghum.

Sharon heads the Rural Land Protection Program of the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee. Her job has taken her into the homes of the owners of all 120 tracts that lie along the river that the locals call "The Little T." Born and reared in the valley, Sharon has an education and experience in forestry and a zeal to preserve the land to which she has returned.

An old mule rolling in the dust across the road amuses them as they sip sweet iced tea. But today is not a social visit. Sharon explains the importance of maintaining the rural community and historic sites in the valley and lays out the alternatives offered by the Land Trust while her hostess listens, nodding her head.

The Land Trust focuses its attention squarely on Bartram's "Vale of Cowe," the entire valley, from the Georgia line to the tailwaters of Fontana Lake. It works with private landowners, citizen groups, and local governments to "help identify, preserve and manage important heritage lands in the area."

Sharon Taylor and Paul Carlson, Executive Director of the Franklin-based group, have their work cut out for them. Carlson, a professional forester with experience in Ecuador and the United States before he came to the Land Trust, says, "Macon County is under the greatest pressure of any county in Western North Carolina in terms of population growth." Higher land values and increased property tax assessments have followed in the wake of the immigration. Attracted by developers' lucrative offers, owners sell their land for subdivisions and other projects. The cycle of development and taxation exerts increasing pressure on the rich natural diversity of the area.

A major strategy of the organization is the creation of conservation easements that preserve natural or historic sites and afford tax benefits to landowners. Owners convey the development rights to their land to the Land Trust. Sharon explains that officials of the Land Trust periodically inspect the properties to assure that the owners' wishes are being followed. The landowners receive a tax

benefit: the development potential of their property is deducted from the tax value of their land, thus reducing their estate and property taxes.

“This land goes back five generations in my family,” says the old woman. “My brother Bart owns the woods. Mine is the pasture and this house. When we are gone, we want the place to stay as it is. We’re with you.”

Beyond the enlistment of landowners who have agreed to easements, the Land Trust has enjoyed other successes. With funds granted by the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund and the Lyndhurst Foundation, the organization purchased and restored the Tessentee Farm, a tract some ten miles upstream of Franklin. Bartram had lodged with a trader and his Cherokee wife not far away from Tessentee. Armies camped here in 1760 and 1776. Today, under the Land Trust, birds and waterfowl migrating to and from the valleys of the Tennessee and Ohio rivers find food and haven.

Another tract became the property of the trust following a dispute between the community and an entrepreneur. In 1999, a developer bought a piece of land with 2,700 feet of riverfront. Situated near two roads leading to Franklin less than four miles away, it seemed a perfect location for cabins and a campground. What he didn’t see, as he stood on a wooded bluff and looked out across the grass growing on his thirty-six acres, were the powerful concerns of the people of the valley. Residents cherish the fact that the river is one of the cleanest and least developed in Southern Appalachia. When they learned that the RV park’s wastewater-treatment system would pump almost 27,000 gallons of treated sewage into the river every day, they feared that the park would set a deadly precedent for more development and the pollution that usually accompanies it.

More than 200 people attended a Department of Environment and Natural Resources hearing on the proposal. Fifty people spoke against granting a permit for the water treatment plant. Biologists said the plant would further endanger the spotfin chub, Appalachian elktoe mussel, and little-wing pearly mussel that reside in the river.

Despite the concerns, the state announced it would grant the permit. The Land Trust persisted. In a last-ditch attempt to save this fragile wetland from development, Sharon approached the developer. With no money and very little hope, she asked him, “Will you sell this land to the trust for \$300,000?” When he agreed to the offer, the Land Trust was faced with negotiating a deal and finding more than a quarter of a million dollars. Holding only loans, pledges, and the cash donated in a rapid fund-raising effort, they closed the deal.

Restoration began within weeks. Crews of volunteers moved the farm road from along the river to the toe of the bluff. They eradicated invasive exotics such as multiflora rose and privet. Where the road crossed the route of salamanders

that move between the river and the bluffs, they built a bridge that permits the little amphibians to migrate.

Far downstream, where the river spreads its cold waters into Fontana Lake, is the crown jewel of the wetlands the Land Trust wants to conserve. I stumbled onto this stretch of beautiful wildness when a canoeing buddy told me about a shortcut from the Nantahala to Franklin. Following his directions, I found myself driving a winding gravel track that passed through forested hills and into pastures in the river bottom. I stopped at a well-beaten clearing under hemlock trees where fishermen camp to wade into the river, seeking smallmouth bass, rock bass, and rainbow trout. The river dropped swiftly over rocky shoals, frothing into white water. A great blue heron rose from the opposite bank, sharing the sky with an osprey soaring leisurely overhead, searching for fish. Near my feet, gentle waves lapped the silt where empty mussel shells glistened beside the tracks of a raccoon who had feasted on them the night before. Resuming my drive, I watched cattle munch rich grass in pastures in the bottoms. The only houses were on the mountainsides, away from the river.

Later I learned that this is the "Needmore Tract," a rare, biodiverse environment that surrounds twenty-six miles of river frontage. Carlson calls it a "veritable Noah's Ark of life." A series of power companies owned these 4,500 acres for almost a hundred years with plans to build a dam. They found the dam unnecessary but held the land, unintentionally preserving its wildness.

In 1999, when Duke Energy wanted to sell the land, local citizens, the Land Trust, and the Nature Conservancy began to raise public awareness of the potential impact the sale would have upon the rural, forest, and river environments. Duke Energy struck a deal with the Conservancy. They sold land to the organization, and the state then purchased the tract in January 2004. Within a month, volunteers came in pickups to carry away trash and rusting appliances discarded in the thickets and along the banks of the stream, and, in the spring, barbecues and picnics celebrated the passing of a key environment into the public trust.



As environmentalists toil on the land and in the courts, the earth persistently and quietly presses its own rights. As Margaret Lynn Brown has shown, those who wrestle the Southern Appalachian environment have seen nature raise its own fist of protest, thwarting the "best laid plans" of professional foresters and fishery experts. The rainbow trout blunder is an example.

When brook trout nearly disappeared from the Smokies after corporate logging silted the streams, the champions of the national park pressed for

the release of rainbow trout. The park gladly imported the rainbows from the American West. Businessmen in North Carolina and Tennessee were pleased: trout bring fishermen; fishermen bring money.

Rainbows took well to the pools and waterfalls of the mountains. In fact, they took too well. The native brookies did not compete well with the newcomers. Soon brookies survived only in the uppermost sections of the streams. The imported species was driving them out. In the last years of the twentieth century, the National Park Service experimented with costly projects to protect the brook trout. To bolster the brook trout population in the mountains, the Park Service brought in fish from streams in the central Appalachians only to find that the stocked trout are of another subspecies and do not do as well in the Smokies as the native brookies.

If fish chromosomes aren't frustrating enough, look toward the conflicts between forest management and tourism interests. I became aware of the "Smokey the Bear" debate around a campfire in the mid-1960s. Jan (my first wife) and I had pulled a pop-up trailer from St. Joseph, Missouri, to the Chimneys Campground in the heart of the Smokies. There, under towering hemlocks, black bears ambled up the grass along the asphalt driveways, knocking lids from trash cans and probing the contents for fast food. At night, as we gathered with folks from neighboring tents, we heard kids claim to have sighted "Smokey."

Grownups were just as excited. "We saw two bears on the highway, near Alum Cave parking lot," said a man from Kentucky.

"Well, we saw four," said Harvey from Virginia, not to be outdone, "two big ones and a mother and cub. Between the loop tunnel and the next tunnel. Myrtis fed them potato chips."

A ranger who had stopped during his evening stroll through the campground gently told Harvey and Myrtis that feeding the bears was not only dangerous to people but to the wildlife. "They become panhandlers," he said. "They lose their fear of humans and develop a preference for people-food. They cluster along the roads, picnic areas, and campgrounds, looking for handouts and garbage. Every year, we have to take several people to the hospital to get stitched up when a bear claws or bites them."

Park managers began trapping the bears and relocating them deep in the forest. And, thereby, bears became an ecological, political, and economic issue for the Park Service in the 1980s. Tourists who drove U.S. Highway 441 to the crest of the Smokies with the goal of seeing black bears "up close and personal" began to ask, "Where are the bears?" Tourist-related businesspeople echoed the concern. "People come to the park to see the bears," they boomed.

"And Be Merciful to Them"

Animal management won out. The Park Service now conducts an aggressive campaign, trapping bears that panhandle and transporting them into the deep recesses of the park. Many of the bears, memories of easy living and refined sugar imbedded in their brains, hasten back to the human side of the mountains, however. One has been trucked as far away as Kentucky and has returned to the park to forage on the scraps left by unwary campers and picnickers.

A similar controversy has pitted wilderness purists against business interests. Promoters advertise easy drives to the doorsteps of pioneer cabins, houses, and churches in the pastures of Cades Cove. When environmentalists argued that natural forces should be allowed to return the park to its primeval state, tourism prevailed. On an eleven-mile loop road, sightseers drive bumper-to-bumper, counting deer and turkeys grazing in the fields.



Restoration of wilderness and the cleansing of streams are not the only goals of environmentalists in Bartram's "Cherokee Mountains." Some have a vision of wise, productive use of the land and its resources. About halfway up Cowee Mountain, a small wooden sign marks the location of an environmental experiment. Here, at Waldee Forest, Walton Smith followed his convictions and showed how a forest could be salvaged, managed, and used for multiple purposes.

Waldee's 150 acres rest along the ancient Indian trail that crosses Leatherman Gap, the route from Cowee to the Tuckasegee Valley, the road a British army traveled in 1761 to war against the Cherokees, and the path Bartram and the young trader from Cowee followed on their trip made famous by the frolicking Cherokee maidens.

White pines, yellow poplars, and oaks rise among old rock terraces. The trees are the legacy of Walton Smith; the terraces are artifacts of the determined, sweaty effort of the Leatherman family who farmed the steep slopes for a century, beginning in 1850.

On an August afternoon, Walton's son Ramsay leads Maria and me through the two-story house that his father built from rocks and lumber found on the old homeplace. His mother, Dee, greets us on a rooftop terrace where a cool breeze rises out of the valley, crosses the lawn below, and continues up the mountain to Cowee Bald. A gleaming smile and white hair light her copper-colored face. She is an heir of the Cherokee women Bartram described as "tall, slender, erect and of a delicate frame, their features formed with perfect symmetry, their countenance cheerful and friendly, and they move with a becoming grace and dignity" (*Travels* 484).

We sit on comfortable wooden chairs around a picnic table, beneath eaves of a moss-encrusted wood-shake roof, to hear Dee spin the epic of Waldee. Dee's

connection with this mountain began in 1850, when her great grandfather, a German immigrant, built a two-story frame house on the spot where we are sitting and began removing the trees, building terraces, and planting apple trees and row crops on the gentler slopes. The farmers hauled their corn and apples across the mountains to the east, selling them at Walhalla, South Carolina. It was a three-week trip along the same track that Bartram rode into the “Cherokee Mountains.”

Dee went to a business college in Athens, Georgia, then took a job as a secretary for the Forest Service in Franklin. “A young ranger,” she says, her dark eyes twinkling, “was making the rounds, dating the mountain girls, ‘playing the field.’”

The ranger was Walton Smith. He could have pursued the family banking business in Charlotte, but his passion was the outdoors, not finance. Besides, the Depression had wrecked the bank. He worked his way through North Carolina State University using his skills in taxidermy. After he graduated, the Forest Service employed him to scout the mountains for timber and to find the best places for fire towers. “He’ll ask you out, date you a few times, then move on to someone else,” Dee’s friends told her. On a wintry evening in 1935, a young man in a uniform appeared at the door of Dee’s boarding house. A boy found Dee and told her, “They’s a government man here to see you.”

“Oh, my,” she thought. “Someone has come to tell me I’ve lost my job.”

Walton Smith leaned jauntily with one hand on the door frame. “Would you care to go to a picture show with me tonight?” he asked.

She expected that, after two dates, her friends’ predictions would be proven true. Instead, he appeared one evening at her home in the mountains and asked her for a third date. Three weeks later, he asked her to marry him. “He wasn’t in love with me. He was in love with this mountain,” Dee grins.

During stints in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Wisconsin, Walton became an expert in forest products. When the Forest Service moved him to its experiment station in Asheville, the couple renewed their love affair with the farm and the mountain. They built a cabin from chestnut logs, with hard maple floors, a stone fireplace, and water piped from a spring up the mountain.

Properly managed, he thought, the old farm place could become a model forest. In his retirement, Dee and Walton moved to the mountain. He planted white pines and let the yellow poplars grow. Although the wood products industry had little regard for poplar, Walton convinced corporations that it is a valuable resource. A visit to a home supply store, where poplar lumber (sometimes called “white wood”) is well-represented and most plywood contains a core of poplar, shows the results of his effort.

Walton believed in selective cutting as opposed to clear-cutting. His convictions led him to oppose the Forest Service’s policies of “even-aged forest”

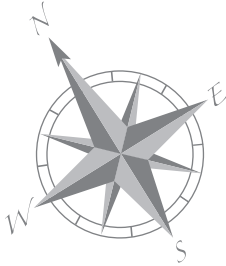
management. When he learned, in the early '80s, that the service planned to sell mixed hardwood (cherry, poplar, oak) on a nearby tract called "Little Laurel" and to permit clear-cutting, he led a movement of citizen action. Along with the Western North Carolina Alliance, he became a spokesman for "responsible forest management." Forests should be cut selectively, he said, allowing large, healthy trees to reach their full potential while other trees are harvested. He believed not in a policy that promoted free growth, but in the wise human use of forests, sustainable forests. His "Green Papers" circulated amongst forestry and environmental leaders. His words reached the ears and eyes of decision makers. The Forest Service reversed its policy; "uneven-aged forests" prevailed.

Waldee became a demonstration tract for Walton's theory. Using machinery that made little impact on the forest floor, he harvested lower-grade trees and left the best to reach their maximum potential. He planted seedlings to grow into trees that others would cut and mill into useful products. After he died in 1996 at the age of 86, Dee and their son Ramsay continued to work toward Walton Smith's goals. Steve Lerner, writing at the time of Smith's death, named him among the world's "eco-Pioneers." Smith's contribution, says Lerner, was "demonstrating that homeowners can improve the environmental quality and economic value of their land by practicing a sustainable method of forestry" (7).

Had William Bartram encountered Walton Smith, they would, I imagine, have enjoyed long conversations about the use of America's natural wealth, for Bartram came not only to praise the botanical treasures of the land but also to find good uses for them.



"Here on earth God's work must truly be our own," said President John F. Kennedy. If he was right, those who toil on riverbanks and in the forests, working against societal forces to conserve and restore the biological and cultural jewels of the Southern Appalachians, are the human expression of the divine mercy that Bartram begged for in his prayer at Mount Royal (*Travels* 100-101). In the face of the obstacles that long-term abuse and neglect place in their way, their efforts to restore the mountains have, overall, seen success. Roots cling to slopes once scorched and eroded. Flame azaleas bloom on Gregory Bald and Turk's-cap lilies on Siler's Bald. Elk roam. And fish and fowl join the salamanders enjoying the clear water of Bartram's "Tanase" (Doug, Sharon, and Paul's "Little Tennessee"). The "pristine forest" that James, John, and I sought in the Smokies during our "Great Crossing" was a legacy of fifty years of their hard work to liberate the "power and magnificence" of the mountains.



IN THE “DREARY MOUNTAINS”

*C*louds veil the trees in Burningtown Gap on an October morning, soaking the blades of grass in the open meadow where Cherokee cowherds once fattened their cattle. Gnarled limbs coated with pale green lichen grip four apples high above roots set by a farmer on a cool morning in an age long past.

Three pickup trucks, dog pens in their beds, stand along the edges of the ancient pasture. Two hunters carrying rifles and wearing orange caps walk down the mountain and disappear into tangles of laurel and dog-hobble. A young man with a three-day growth of beard stands beside his truck, holding a T-shaped antenna. Wires lead from the contraption to buttons stuck in his ears. I say hello and ask him how he is.

Thinking I asked, “What are you hunting?” he removes a plug from his left ear and says, “Bear.” The word is closer to “bar” but raspy, spoken from deep in his throat, a sound my vocal chords cannot imitate. It’s the dialect of Appalachia, maintained in mountain hollows by the descendants of the Anglo-Saxon yeomen and their families who migrated here in the 1800s and nurture their heritage in their language and Celtic-based mountain music.

He tells me that they turned loose their hounds around six-thirty and that the dogs have located a bear.

“How do you know?” I ask.

“All the dogs got radios on their collars,” he says. “We track ’em with these antennas. When three or four hounds git to the same place, we know they got a bar treed.”

“I don’t hear any barking,” I say, thinking of the sounds of the hounds on coon hunts in the rolling hills of northwest Missouri.

"Thar way over, crosst two ridges. Cain't hyar 'em from hyar."

"Think you'll get him?"

"Hard ta say. Come up hyar every day. Get one or two in a week."

I recall what a resident of Macon County told me: "Never plan any construction work during bear season. The carpenter or well digger will tell you he'll be here 'next Monday morning,' but he won't show up until after bear season."

I thank him for the lesson, wish him luck, and join Ralph Preston and Gary Kauffman for a walk along a trail. Ralph, a video producer and photographer who lives in the Cowee community, has arranged this outing. We've asked Gary, chief biologist for the Nantahala Forest Service, to escort us.

"How did the apple trees get here?" I ask Gary. "Were there houses and farms up here?"

"People who herded cattle on the balds in the summer most likely planted them." He points to a small stand of trees at the edge of the meadow. "White pines are also not native at these elevations."

"So," I ask, "what did this gap look like when Bartram crossed it?" recalling that the botanist-explorer from Philadelphia urged his horse into this gap along the Nantahalas.

"Probably more grass than now," he answered. "The grazing kept down the growth of trees and shrubs. So it was sunnier, more open. Lots of wildflowers. But the plant communities haven't changed much up here."

Bartram had ridden up here from Cowee, through the valley of Burningtown, on his way to the Overhill Villages. The Nantahalas challenged Bartram's body and grappled with his soul. Rarely in his *Travels* does he reveal adverse feelings. Yet his memories of these mountains abound with dark images: "I was left again wandering alone in the dreary mountains," in a "situation [not] entirely agreeable." The forest was dark, the trail steep and rocky. He later wrote, "I could not help comparing my present situation in some degree to Nebuchadnezzar's when expelled from the society of men, and constrained to roam in the mountains and wilderness, there to herd and feed with the wild beasts of the forest" (*Travels* 360).

He recalls "wearisome ascents" that left him "over heated and tired." A brook is "noisy." He feels "shut up by stupendous rocky hills on each side" and sits down for lunch "beneath a high frowning promontory" (*Travels* 359-61). This is not the Bartram who sings paeans at the rising of the sun over Florida's Lake George and presses forward after a restless night of "persecuting mosquitoes" and roaring alligators.

Hikers find many ways to describe the ruggedness of these mountains. Eddie Nickens, writing in *Backpacker*, says, "the scramble up Wayah Bald is on a grade fit for a mountain goat, or at least a hiker with younger knees. In this 11-mile stretch the trail climbs 5,000 feet and descends another two grand" (82). From

the head of the valley of Burningtown Creek to the crest of Burningtown Gap, the trail rises 1,657 feet in less than two miles. So remote, craggy, and dense are the Nantahalas that Eric Rudolph, the religious zealot who confessed to bombing Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park and two abortion clinics, was able to elude 250 FBI and other agents, their bloodhounds, and a small squadron of helicopters for five years.

At Burningtown Gap, Bartram's fading spirit healed. He rode to the highest peak—some say it was Wayah Bald, others say Wine Spring Bald—and looked across the panorama of mountains.



The yellow raft spins to the left and comes close to the rock face that rises above a swirling eddy. A man balances his muscular, lean body on the stern, his feet wedged solidly beneath the seat in front of him while his father, son, and daughter glance at the water crashing into a foaming pool below them. Boulders funnel the river into a narrow, swirling, roaring stream. *This is the big one*, thinks the boy. *The one we've been waiting for.* Forcing the blade of his paddle into the eddy, the younger man leans backwards, over the side, and pulls hard. Grandfather and grandson feel the raft groan and shift and plunge their paddles into the current when the stern man yells, "Now! Paddle!" The girl grips the grommet in the middle of the craft. Her eyes bulge as they ride over the drop toward the deep, green water below.

As the raft bounces onto the surface of the pool, the family shouts with one voice. They raise their paddles above their heads in a gesture of victory and look at the photographer on the right bank who has captured their moment on the river. At the foot of the falls, four young men in kayaks push back into the current to resume their play.

The "dreary" Nantahalas now attract a sizeable vacation crowd. Highways have opened much of the area to the masses. Some come to retire or vacation in secluded mountain cottages and luxurious houses around Nantahala Lake. Thousands more descend on the Nantahala River for water sports. Aside from the cities of Bartram's travels, this may be the most visited spot along his route.

The family and the kayakers are among the 200,000 people who test their skills and endurance and enjoy the Nantahala River each year. Most of these are thrill-seeking families, church groups, and summer campers who rent inflatable rafts. But a large number of masterful paddlers take to the river in kayaks and canoes.

Bartram may not have seen the section of the river that has become a recreational mecca. Descending the trail from Burningtown Gap on his way to

visit the Overhill Settlements near the Tennessee River, he probably crossed the Nantahala near Aquone, not far below the Nantahala Dam, well upstream of the paddlers' paradise. He then followed a trail that took him over Old Road Gap and into the area of Andrews. His route led him to cross "a large creek or river, where this high forest ended on [his] left hand, the trees became more scattered and insensibly united with a grassy glade or lawn bordering on the river; on the opposite bank of which appeared a very extensive forest, consisting entirely of the Hemlock spruce . . . almost encircled by distant ridges of lofty hills" (*Travels* 364).

According to popular lore, the name *Nantahala* comes from a Cherokee phrase meaning "land of the noonday sun." Canoeists and kayakers have tried to befriend the wild river by calling it, affectionately, "the Nanty" or "the Nanny." An earth and concrete dam ten miles upstream controls whitewater recreation on the river. Nantahala Power and Light built the Nantahala Hydroelectric Project in 1942. For forty years, power schedules determined when the plant would run, with no regard for downstream interests. Paddlers faced unpredictable water releases. A hopeful canoeist, dreaming of a day dodging boulders covered by tons of thrashing, rolling water, could drive mountain roads all morning only to arrive at a shallow, gentle stream, cut off from its source by the gods of the power grid. Since 1983, when the electric company began using a more predictable generating schedule, recreational use of the river has grown.

Icy waters released from the dam flow through generators and into conduits that return water to the river. Between the dam and the mouths of these pipes, the river bed carries little water. At the spot where Bartram crossed the "large creek or river," it often trickles through pools where grasses and small trees grow in the silt of gravel bars.

Shortly after I bought my new solo canoe, I signed on with a Georgia Canoeing Association trip. Although we were meeting at the put-in at eleven o'clock, I left Atlanta before dawn, drove through the summer fog that cloaked the north Georgia mountains, and arrived at the put-in well ahead of my colleagues. In the cool air, beside the slow moving stream, I drank hot coffee from my thermos and ate the sausage biscuit I had bought in Andrews.

Then, around ten o'clock, a faraway computer flipped a switch. Generators in a concrete building up on Lambert Mountain began to turn. Water flowed through tunnels and giant pipes. Within a few minutes, the river was "on"; the current increased and water began to rise into the little bay where paddlers would soon line up to slip their kayaks and canoes into the stream. The parking lot filled with pickups, cars, and SUVs. Kayakers, rubber skirts flapping from their waists, hoisted their boats to their shoulders, picked up their paddles, and walked to the stone-and-mortar walls of the put-in.

The moment a whitewater boater settles into his craft and grasps the paddle, fear, awe, and anticipation move blood faster through the veins. Senses grow keen. Knees and hips feel the thrust of water from beneath the hull. Eyes see details. With an easy stroke I turned the bow into the current. The surge of the river carried me over rocks that had, an hour before, stood six inches above the surface. My speed increased. Skirting rocks in midstream, I felt the irresistible flow pull me into Patton's Run, where the river turns ninety degrees and drops over robust, humped boulders. Riotous, spinning waves crested over my bow and filled my canoe almost to the gunwales. Water rose to my thighs; I struggled to control the yawing boat, beached on a gravel bar, and dumped my load of water. I had passed my initiation to the river.

On whitewater rivers, notable rapids have names. Patton's Run is named for Charlie Patton. No one in the canoeing association knows how Charlie lost his arm, but they do know that he was a postal carrier from Bryson City and that, in the 1960s, he was famous for negotiating the Nantahala "single handedly."

Some stretches, like "Little SOB Rapid," are dubbed for their effects on paddlers, others for their prominent features ("Whirlpool"), and a few, such as the "Quarry Rapids," less imaginatively, for their location. Even rocks may have names. One broad, flat-faced boulder on the Nantahala is known as "Billboard." Names enable river-runners to talk about the river: "I hit 'Pop'N'Run' too far to the right and got caught in the hydraulic." "Dave took a swim at 'Edge of the World.'" The monikers also mark the intimacy of paddlers with their fields of dreams.

At the far end of the eight-mile run, at Wesser Falls, the river funnels through a narrow canyon bounded by sheer rock walls. Sharp-edged rocks, dynamited into the river when the railroad was built, litter the bottom. Consequently, Wesser is not normally on paddlers' itineraries. One occasionally hears a legend of someone who ran it in a kayak or decked canoe, but the anger of this behemoth rapid is avoided by most. Nantahala Falls, also known as Lesser Wesser, gets the attention.

Classified as a Class III rapid, Nantahala Falls drops out of a broad, sluggish pool about half the size of a football field. The river picks up speed as it flows by a flat-faced boulder, compresses between rocky banks, and shoves boats toward the left bank. The current increases, passes rocks, and swirls through eddies until it narrows in a churning eight-foot fall, humps over more boulders, and enters a deep pool.

On a summer weekend, a dozen kayakers nose their crafts into the white water below Lesser Wesser, practicing maneuvers and rolls. They dodge armadas of rafts that plunge over the falls filled with screaming kids and their parents or camp counselors. On the right bank, crowds dressed in shorts and T-shirts stand along a split-rail fence watching the spectacle and cheering for those

who execute the currents well or sighing loudly when a raft or canoe brushes a boulder in midstream and sends its human cargo headlong into the pool below the falls. Photographers, employed by rafting outfitters, capture lasting memories of the run and sell them to once-a-year adventurers who emerge from the valley of the “noonday sun.”

The river itself has scarcely been altered by humans and their machines. Much of the riverside remains walled by large hemlocks, boulders, and pebble beaches. Its preservation owes much to Percy Ferebee, owner of a rock quarry on the river’s western bank, who gave five thousand acres to the federal government in 1971. This donation made the U.S. Forest Service the primary landowner along the river. A Forest Service recreational area along the river is named in his memory.

By 1980, recreational use of the narrow, eight-mile-long valley approached 90,000 users per year. Yellow and blue rubber rafts, unloaded from trucks and buses near the conduit from the dam, filled the river with families, college students, church groups, and summer campers. Kayaks and canoes snaked through the maze of rafts. Road traffic swelled. Roots along the river banks caught an increasing number of tennis shoes, plastic sandwich wrappers, and soda bottles.

In response, the Forest Service activated a management plan in 1984. They limited commercial users and established guidelines to restrict daily use. In 2001, they tightened the restrictions.

Private boaters have not escaped regulation. The Forest Service agency began charging them a fee in 1997. Paddlers in kayaks or canoes pay a dollar and clip a waterproof bracelet to their wrists or life vests. The Forest Service claims they use the money to improve facilities along the river—restrooms and changing rooms and river access ramps—and many paddlers have accepted the fees as a contribution to the well-being of the river. “It’s our share for what we enjoy,” they say. But vocal members of the recreational paddling community have conducted running verbal battles with the government since the plan to charge a fee was announced. “It’s double taxation,” say some. “The Forest Service doesn’t own the rivers, the people do.”

On scraps of land not owned by the Forest Service, campgrounds, a barbecue shack, and paddle sport shops, along with a handful of houses and mobile homes, intrude upon the wilderness. Cars, trucks, and buses roll close to the stream on U.S. 19/74 for the entire eight miles of the stretch normally used for boating. The Great Smoky Mountains Railroad runs a sightseeing train along the left bank.

The Nantahala Outdoor Center is the largest of the commercial establishments along the river. Recreational paddlers Payson and Aurelia Kennedy and Horace Holden founded the NOC in 1972. They operated a small convenience store and

motel on the right bank, hard by the highway below Lesser Wesser. Over the past thirty years, NOC has expanded into a mecca for paddlers, hikers, and off-road cyclists. If the river were a shopping mall, NOC would be the anchor store.

"Rhinos," athletes who have trained with the NOC-affiliated Nantahala Racing Club, are well known in the circles of world-class competition. They have competed in every World Championships and Olympic Games since 1972; Scott Strausbaugh and Joe Jacobi won Olympic gold in the '92 Barcelona Games.

Each spring, the Georgia Canoeing Association gathers at the river to sponsor the Southeastern U.S. Slalom and Wild Water Championship Races. On Thursdays before the races, a small cadre of club members begins setting up the slalom course. Ferrying wires and cords across the raging current above and below Lesser Wesser, they string twenty-five "gates" through which racers must pass. About half the gates are designed to direct paddlers upstream. The course is a test of paddlers' ability to weave down the river, alternately paddling swiftly through downstream currents and straining to propel upstream, pivoting around the dangling plastic pipes.

By Friday evening, most of the volunteers and paddlers have arrived—an extended family. Cars, vans, pickups, and SUVs, garish kayaks and canoes fastened to roof racks, crunch the gravel of the parking lot. Old friends gather around tables set up under tents, catching up on "family" gossip, bragging about conquests of vicious rapids, and recalling their last trip together on rivers in Tennessee or Georgia or North Carolina.

"Did you get over that twisted knee you got on Bull Sluice?"

"I'm doing fine. I only wear my leg brace when I walk."

By dawn on Saturday, the family is complete: graying, bearded men, dark-haired women in parkas and jeans, slender teens. Lean, muscular youths, wiry twelve-year-old girls and balding men pull numbered bibs over their paddle jackets and carry their boats upstream to the starting line. A master plumber works alongside a computer programmer to enter names on forms stored on a laptop. Volunteer judges gather around a professor of psychometrics who stands beside a plywood tote board to offer instructions on hand signals and scoring rules. After the orientation, they scatter along the wooded, rocky banks of the river to their posts, find rounded boulders for seats beside the gates, and await the first racer.

Among the rocks along the bank below Lesser Wesser, the sturdy men and women of the safety crew hold thick nylon rescue ropes and carry first aid kits. Trained and practiced in river rescue, this team retrieves from the water any hapless contestant who washes over the falls or pops from a canoe or kayak in the deep hole at the end of the rapid. Paddlers call these accidents "swimming,"

but that is too tame a word to describe the perils of plunging into convulsing, frigid water surrounded by boulders as large as minivans.

By 9:00 the radio communications have been tested, the stopwatches readied. A young man wearing a bright purple helmet paddles his fuchsia kayak to the starter's station in the pool above the falls. A seventy-year-old veteran of thirty-three races grasps the strap on the stern of the "yak." The timer, seated on the stump of a hemlock tree, punches the stopwatch as the starter releases his grip and shouts, "Go!" A paddle blade grips the water. The races have begun.

The objective of the slalom is simple: get from the starting line to the finish line as quickly as possible. While you are at it, pass through all of the gates. Oh, and pass through the gates in the correct direction. If the poles on the gate are green-striped, enter them from the upstream side; if the stripes are red, enter from downstream. And one more thing: don't touch a gate pole. Not with your paddle, your helmet, your shoulder, your boat, or anything else you may have with you down the course. If you touch a gate, the scorer will add five seconds to your finishing time; if you miss it, fifty seconds.

By the end of the day, three dozen racers in kayaks, decked canoes, and open solo canoes will have slashed through the white currents, artfully dodged gate poles, and grunted through the upstream gates to the encouraging shouts of spectators crying "Up, up, up!" Another bunch of boaters will have competed in the Wildwater Race, paddling the eight miles from the put-in to Lesser Wesser.

On Saturday evening the "family" comes together for dinner and the awarding of the first day's trophies. Competitors and volunteers wash down their barbecue with iced tea or beer while lampooning and praising would-be champions of white water. A member of the course construction crew finds himself scratching a reddening patch on his forearm—a commemorative badge left by a cluster of three shiny leaves on a vine that grows on a tree beside Gate 14.

More racers will test their skills Sunday morning. Then, after the final awards are given, the tents struck, the gates and wires withdrawn, the clan will scatter to Conyers, Savannah, and Atlanta. They'll meet again on the banks of other rivers to paddle. But nothing in the tribe's year matches the "potlatch" of the Southeasterns.



A historical marker alongside the highway not far from Patton's Run says that, near this place, Bartram met Cherokee Chief Atakullakulla. The exact spot of the meeting is debated. Almost certainly, he was miles from this place when he encountered the Cherokee party and "turned off from the path to make way, a token of respect" (*Travels* 365).

Atakullakulla, also known as "The Little Carpenter," was a Cherokee leader respected not only across the breadth of his nation but also by the British and colonists. He had been credited with saving the life of John Stuart, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and was instrumental in all the major negotiations of treaties with his people since 1730. Now he was on his way to Charleston to meet with Stuart.

The meeting was pleasant. Bartram demonstrated his skills in the art of diplomacy, assuring the chief that he came from the "tribe of white men of Pennsylvania" and that "we were united in love and friendship, and that the name of Ata-cul-culla was dear to his white brothers of Pennsylvania" (*Travels* 365).

Bartram proceeded into the mountains but, a day later, reconsidered and turned back. Some think he was weary of traveling in the rugged mountains and thought he had sampled their botany adequately. Others suggest that he was depressed by the loneliness of the long and arduous journey in the dark forests. Or perhaps he thought twice about the political prospects of arriving in the Overhill Villages before the completion of a treaty between the settlers and the Cherokees.

But Ian Marshall thinks that Bartram may have based his decision on broad ethical principles. Marshall thinks that the botanist, by withdrawing from Cherokee land, had taken a step toward what we now call "ecology," a recognition of the interdependence of life: "welcoming and cherishing the encounters with the berrying Cherokee women, the singing hunter, the noble Attakullakulla [*sic*], maybe Bartram came to recognize his common bond with the Cherokee, not just their shared humanity but their shared love for the natural world. And maybe in respect of that bond he decided to give ground. Or rather, not to take it" (49). Whatever his reason, Bartram returned to Cowee, went on to South Carolina and Georgia, and linked up with a group of entrepreneurs heading for Alabama.

Had he gone a day's ride farther, he would have traveled near the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. This preserve, remarkable in the twenty-first century for its rare stands of hemlocks and poplars the rampant timber industry never reached, would likely not have rated a footnote in his *Travels*, for its vegetation would not have been unusual to him.

Today, however, it is one of the few spots in the eastern United States where one can get an image of the land almost as it appeared in the late 1700s. Here, in a protected wilderness, stand hemlocks and poplars, some over 400 years old, 100 feet tall, and up to 20 feet in circumference, that the loggers didn't reach before the Great Depression quieted their saws. Set well back in the Snowbird Mountains near Robbinsville, North Carolina, the Kilmer Forest (named for the poet whose verse "Trees" is memorized by thousands of school children) covers

Footprints across the South

3,800 acres. Paths and hiking trails cross clear, rushing streams and provide a view of a near-pristine forest.

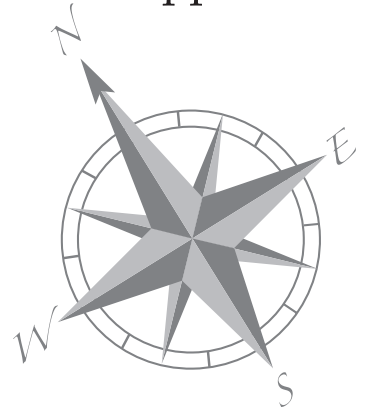
Missing from Kilmer are the canopies of massive chestnut trees that once rose one hundred feet above the soft humus. These titans of the forest now lie prone across the forest floor, clad in moss, killed in the 1920s.

On his last day of westward trekking, Bartram entered the area now inhabited by a small band of Native Americans known as the Snowbird Cherokees. The Snowbird portion of the North Carolina Cherokee Reservation is a series of tracts in Graham County, North Carolina. The 1980 census counted about 380 Snowbird Cherokees here and around Andrews.

In times of war, such as the middle 1700s and early 1800s, Cherokees may have fled from the bottomlands into the more mountainous areas for refuge; the Snowbird region may have served as one of those refuge areas. In this harsh land, no more than six percent of which is considered suitable for agriculture, the Indians had little competition from white farmers in the 1800s. They were able, through the help of sympathetic whites, to purchase small tracts. (By law, Indians were not allowed to buy land themselves.)

In small houses beside roads that wind around man-made, power-generating lakes bordered by boat docks, campgrounds, and luxurious vacation homes, the Snowbird Cherokees continue their traditions. And each spring, under brush arbors, they gather for the "Trail of Tears Singing."

*T*ravels to the Mississippi River



Chronological Notes

*B*artram spent the first three weeks of June 1775 exploring around the Broad and Savannah Rivers in northeastern Georgia. Then, on June 22, he joined a party of traders for a journey into the Creek territory in Alabama. Beginning at Fort Charlotte, not far from Augusta, they passed through present-day Macon, Georgia, and traveled near the current sites of Columbus, Georgia, and Montgomery, Alabama.

By late July, Bartram was exploring the wetlands of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta of Alabama, where he contracted a serious illness. Early September saw him making brief visits in Pensacola and Mobile, then traveling to the Pearl River, along the Louisiana-Mississippi border, where he spent several weeks recuperating from his fever.

A small boat took Bartram across lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas in mid-October. He arrived on the banks of the Mississippi River at Bayou Manchac and went north to Baton Rouge. In late October and early November, he explored areas around Baton Rouge, including the French territory across the river in Pointe Coupee.

While Bartram explored the Savannah River valley, British and Colonial troops met in the Battle of Bunker Hill. Less than three weeks after he left Fort Charlotte, revolutionary troops took it from the British. During his exploration of Baton Rouge, Americans waged war in Canada.

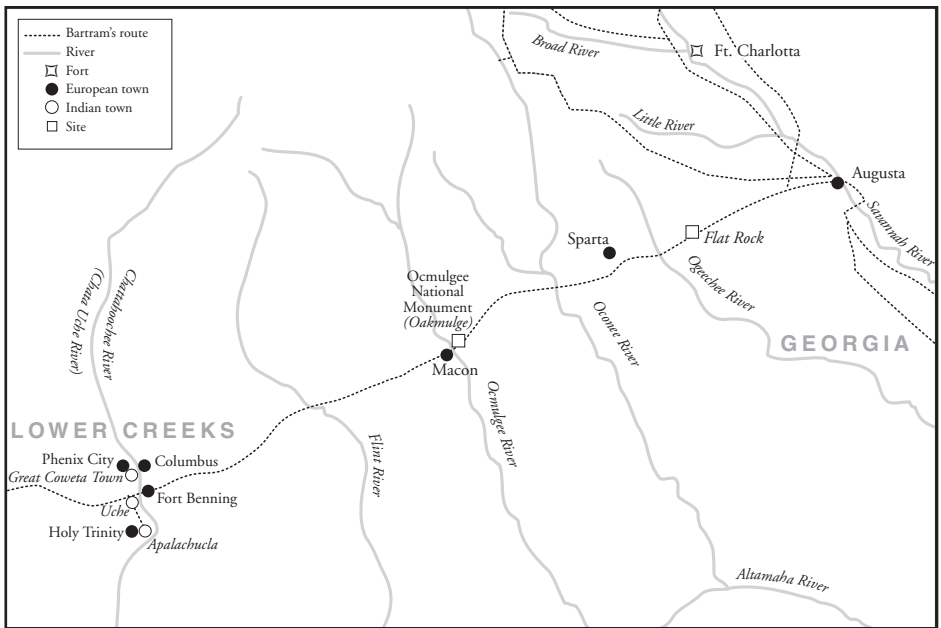
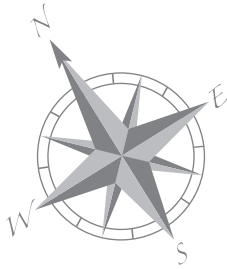


Figure 7. Map of Bartram's Travel from the Savannah River to the Chattahoochee River (1775)



“PLEASANT GRASSY OPEN PLAINS” AND BOARDED WINDOWS

*“Dusk, suggesting the almost imperceptible procession of giant trees,
settled with a purple haze about the cane.” — Jean Toomer, Cane*

For his trip to the westernmost reaches of the British Empire, Bartram traveled with a group of “adventurers,” entrepreneurs restless to launch their quests for fortune. They gathered at Fort Charlotte, on the north bank of the Savannah River northeast of Washington, Georgia, in late June 1775. Indian traders from Augusta joined them as they camped at Flat Rock. The caravan of twenty men and sixty horses followed the well-worn Upper Creek trading path through forests and grasslands along the Fall Line, near places now known as Sparta, Milledgeville, and Macon, Georgia (*Travels* 377).

Of the land that would become Hancock County, he reports, “There is some very good land on the gradual descents of the ridges and their bottoms bordering on creeks” (*Travels* 378f). His party found “pleasant grassy open plains to spread [their] beds upon, environed with extensive Cane meadows, affording the best of food for [their] quadrupeds.” He describes grasses, varieties of flowers, sandy soil, gravelly ridges, and rock outcroppings on the highest hills.

And that is about all Bartram contributes to our knowledge of Hancock County. The story of this place hardly rates a sentence in a book about him except for the fact that its history mirrors the story of many communities scattered across rural Middle and South Georgia and reflects the struggles of the white and black people of the South to enter the modern economy and social structure. As with every town, county, and nation, however, its history is unique—and spicy.

Hancock County and its seat, Sparta, caught my attention in 1998 when I saw along nearly vacant streets vintage two- and three-story houses looking out over sidewalks where grass sprouted through cracks. Of the nearly fifty fine old houses, about fifteen had been maintained or were under restoration. Boards covered windows, and paint peeled from the siding and finely-milled bric-a-brac of the remainder. Scrub thickets grew over ruined foundations of luxurious homes left behind by wealthy families who had died or fled. Many of the venerable buildings were what one expects in a Southern town: an ornate brick courthouse; an old hotel, now used for apartments; white-sided mansions with verandas and columns set on rock foundations.

A rough fence enclosed the unmown lawn of the antebellum Pendleton-Graves House in Sparta. Yellow plastic playground toys stood in an overgrown side yard and a pogo stick reclined against the front steps. Though faded and in need of repair, the house's grandeur remained in the spires above bay windows on the second floor and ornate millwork framing its long veranda. Its barn, with a rose-shaped ventilator carved in wood by a local craftsman, was a showpiece in itself.

Up the street, tall weeds choked the brick frame of the abandoned garment factory. Dinginess clouded the plate glass windows of closed shops along Broad Street. Inside, dust and cobwebs covered trash and abandoned furniture. In the few remaining businesses, white proprietors and clerks served black customers.

What tides flowed over this place to raise its boats to sail seas of wealth only to leave them stranded on such a desolate bar? I wondered. I learned that racism, politics, and the effects of incest were behind Hancock County's demise.

Hancock County's first human inhabitants arrived in the Archaic period, some 10,000 years ago. Then, around 500 BC, a nation of Native Americans established a religious and political center on the western edge of the county. Five structures, the Shoulderbone Mounds, hidden along Whitten Creek near the Oconee River, stand as a reminder of its prominence.

By 1775, when Bartram passed through, Creek villages dotted the hills. For the swelling tide of European immigrants, however, Georgia was lush and ripe for settlement. After the Revolution, waves of immigrants from Virginia and North Carolina would clear the forests and grasslands and plant rich bottom lands and fragile hills in cotton. "Sandhillers" and "Crackers" pressed into the territory of the Creeks, forcing them, cession-by-cession, into poverty and retreat beyond the Chattahoochee River.

Except for the area along the coastline and up the Savannah River to Augusta and Wrightsborough, the state was inhabited largely by a rough, unruly breed. Towns were small and far between, roads only slightly more than Indian trading

"Pleasant Grassy Open Plains" and Boarded Windows

paths, accommodations for travelers dismal and grimy. Yet, a plantation economy burgeoned and a handful of men, employing masses of slaves, grew wealthy.

Bartram's footprints in Georgia were less than twenty years old when Eli Whitney crafted the first commercial cotton gin. Hancock County was among the areas that benefited from the fast, cheap method of preparing cotton for market. One account says that the first cotton produced for sale in the county was sold in 1796. By 1800, Hancock was the most populous county in the state and well known as a leading producer of the fiber. Over a third of its residents were slaves. Ten years later, almost half its people were black.

Forrest Shivers (*The Land Between: A History of Hancock County, Georgia to 1940*) says that in the 1840s, when cotton had stripped the nutrients from the soil of many parts of Georgia, planters in Hancock launched agricultural reforms. The *Savannah Journal & Courier* judged that "no county in Georgia can produce more intelligence and refinement than Hancock and its agricultural skill and energy are preeminent" (Shivers 67). A visitor from South Carolina wrote that Sparta was "a Modern Mecca" and that its farms and craftsmen were making it independent of the outside world.

Leading the agricultural revolution was David Dickson. The soil of his plantation was not remarkable. Dickson's edge was management and science. He divided his slaves into small work groups. Overseeing each team was a slave who maintained constant, consistent work. Dickson also developed innovative land practices. He rotated cotton with corn and winter grass, plowed deep and in contours, and spread plant compost and manure on the fields. Terraces black men built on his land remain as green monuments on the slopes in the eastern areas of the county. The result was world-beating productivity. When other planters were selling out and moving to Alabama, Dickson and his neighbors were shipping hundreds of bales of cotton to the cotton-hungry markets. In his time, he was known as "The Prince of Georgia Farmers."

David Dickson's fame over the twelve decades since his death has more to do with race relations than with agriculture. When he died in 1885, he left the majority of his fortune, including over \$300,000 and most of his 15,000 acres, to his daughter, Amanda America Dickson. Amanda was born in 1849 to Julia, a slave of David's mother. Raised as her father's princess, living in the house he built for his "outside family," when she inherited his wealth she became the largest landowner in Hancock County and the wealthiest black woman in the South.

The bequest brought down vigorous protest from Dickson's family and others in the state. Could a black woman be a landowner? Could she hold hundreds of thousands of dollars? Amanda took her case to the Georgia Supreme Court, which ruled that property rights were equal for black as well as white citizens.

David Dickson had led Hancock County not only to its recognition as an agricultural model but also as the site of an important legal precedent.

Although Sherman's army looted and burned plantations surrounding Sparta on its March to the Sea, the town was spared. Sparta lacked industry; the Yankees saw little reason to devastate it. Prosperity returned to the county following the war. Plantations gave way to small farms and sharecropping, but the completion of a rail line gave the area a boost. Cotton, timber, granite, and textile manufacturing enabled many residents to gain considerable affluence. The Neo-Greek Revival and Victorian mansions now idle along Broad Street are wistful reminders of these years.

Poverty fell rapidly on Hancock, however, and the boll weevil tolled the final bell. In 1922, two years after the pest arrived, only 710 bales went to market. Worldwide depressions, the absence of large industry in the county, and the concentration of wealth in the pockets of a few white people and little in the hands of the black majority made recovery from the death of King Cotton virtually impossible.

At this moment of disaster, on the falling edge of Hancock's last financial success, Jean Toomer traveled to Sparta. Coming from a politically well-connected family in Washington, D.C., he served as interim principal of the Sparta Agricultural and Industrial Institute for two months in the fall of 1921. Two years later, he published *Cane*, a book of poems and short stories that celebrated the bleak but dynamic life of Southern blacks.

In 1922, he wrote, "A visit to Georgia last fall was the starting point of almost everything of worth that I have done. I heard folk-songs come from the lips of Negro peasants. I saw the rich dusk beauty that I had heard many false accounts about, and of which till then, I was somewhat skeptical. And a deep part of my nature, a part that I had repressed, sprang suddenly to life and responded to them" (2).



"Why hasn't Hancock County rebounded with the 'New South'?" I asked around Sparta. Several residents responded, "If you want to understand what has happened here, get John Rozier's book." Rozier, a journalist with roots and a deep interest in the county, traces the county's difficulties in the late twentieth century to the era of John McCown (*Black Boss: Political Revolution in a Georgia County*).

When McCown moved to Sparta in 1966, three of every four residents were black, but whites ran the county. Signs above the water fountains in the old courthouse read "White" and "Colored." Schools were segregated, though the Supreme Court had outlawed the practice twelve years before.

"Pleasant Grassy Open Plains" and Boarded Windows

McCown was thirty-two years old when he drove into Hancock. Born and reared in South Carolina, he had experience in the U.S. Air Force, a convincing manner, and a dream. By 1968, his political machine had taken control of the county courthouse and, at the time of his death in an airplane crash in 1976, he was known across the nation.

McCown's messianic idea was to fight the war on poverty by educating and training rural blacks and establishing industries that would enable them to stay in their communities rather than move to the ghettos of the cities. He used federal funds and large grants from the Ford Foundation to fund his East Central Committee for Opportunity (ECCO) projects: a catfish farm, a concrete block plant, a housing project, and a nightclub.

For some, ECCO was an innovative experiment of the Great Society, a beacon of hope for descendants of slaves and sharecroppers writhing in a web of despair. Others thought of the projects as radical, fraudulent schemes that could only disrupt the uneasy peace between blacks and whites.

ECCO dominated Hancock and its government. McCown hired cronies and pressured his enemies out of office. As blacks assumed the reins of power, race relations moved from paternalism to separation and hostility. When black leaders took over the school system, white citizens established a private academy. After three decades, the public schools of Hancock County remain virtually all black.

Business investors shunned the county. "No one with capital wants to invest it where it may be insecure," writes Rozier. "Prospective manufacturers feared their plants and goods might be held hostage in a community subject to the erratic control of one man" (191-92).

The night McCown left the Academy Lounge, alcohol swirling through his bloodstream, and piloted his plane into the woods not far from his airstrip, federal investigators were close to indicting him for fraud. Investigation records detail alleged kickback schemes. After McCown's death, five of his associates pled guilty to reduced charges (but later professed their innocence, saying that they had entered the pleas to avoid the extreme hardship and expense of a lengthy trial). Some Hancock County residents say his management practices set the pattern for government corruption that continues in the county.

By the late years of the twentieth century, the county's fame was not measured in bales of cotton but in its rates of poverty, unemployment, and teen pregnancy. In 2000, its unemployment rate was almost three times higher than the state's average and the average weekly wage was a bit over half the statewide average. Food stamps, aid to families, and Medicaid payments were almost double the state average. Unwed mothers bore eight of every ten babies

in the county. Only fifteen of the state's 159 counties had worse scores on the ACT. Hancock's last industry, Florida Furniture, shut down in early 2001.

County leaders looked for help. They tried to woo Creek tribes in Oklahoma to move to Hancock, establish a reservation, and build a hotel and casino. When Showtime aired *A House Divided*, a drama based on the life of Amanda America Dickson, some Hancock Countians hoped that Sparta would draw tourists. Others thought that maybe the state would help. Governor Roy Barnes, using a grant from a fund established with part of Georgia's share of the tobacco settlement, promised the return of industry and jobs to the county. The Saint-Gobain company received a healthy deal from the state. It opened a factory in 2002 in a new single-story brick building at the far end of the Hancock Industrial Park where scrub trees and weeds cover the vacant lots. The original plan was to employ two hundred people. "I haven't seen the jobs out there," a community leader told me. "Maybe a few dozen, that's all." During three trips to Sparta, I never saw more than twenty-seven vehicles in the Saint-Gobain parking lot. Only six sported Hancock County tags. Within the plant, a few dozen employees decorate cosmetic and perfume bottles for Estée Lauder and Ralph Lauren.

Failure and discouragement in Hancock County are as easy to spot as the rusty car behind an unpainted Greek Revival mansion on Broad Street. Finding hope requires a quest.

Robert Louis Ingram Jr.

At nine o'clock in the morning, a dozen cars and pickup trucks stand along the curbs that surround the elegant, Second Empire brick courthouse, leaving plenty of spaces for my truck. I climb stone steps and open a tall wooden door beneath a lintel that reads "1881." Dark brown floor boards groan as I tread the vast hall where a lone black man, dressed neatly in a blue shirt and khaki pants, sits on a wooden bench beneath a bulletin board. A young black woman steps out of the police department office, fills a plastic water mug from the drinking fountain, and returns to her office.

Globe lights and fluorescent bulbs shine on the walls of the long, broad, conspicuously stark hall. A bulletin board bearing official government notices, a few job announcements from the Central State Hospital in Milledgeville, and an unframed map of the county are the extent of the decoration. Missing are memorabilia or county-promoting displays seen in most courthouses. No scenes of the countryside, descriptions of the county's history, or portraits of notables. Are memories too controversial or bitter for public display? A portrait of David Dickson, of Edith Ingram (the first black probate judge elected in the post-Reconstruction South), or of the Glen Mary Plantation would each have its

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friends and foes in the courthouse of a people who tiptoe along a tightwire of race relations—better to keep the walls barren and the portraits of the county's Confederate heroes buried in a dusty cellar.

A man, middle-aged and sturdily built with salt-and-pepper hair framing a mahogany face, walks across the room, greeting a couple leaving the probate judge's office. He wears a shiny, gray shirt, open at the collar, black slacks, and black sandals with no socks. A delicate gold chain hangs loosely around his neck. He turns to meet me, smiles, and reaches out his right hand. "I'm Robert Ingram."

He leads me into the office marked by a plastic sign that reads "Probate Judge Edith J. Ingram" and asks a young woman if we might meet in the back room. She smiles, opens a door, and clears a table in a room filled with wooden file drawers and official-looking pasteboard boxes on shelves. A green light on a fax machine blinks.

Ingram's soft, deep voice bears memories of the '60s and the days when McCown turned the county upside down. "You know, it's a myth that John McCown registered the black voters. We'd already registered by the time he arrived," he begins. "We'd go up to them on the streets and ask, 'Are you registered to vote?' I still remember the fear on their faces. 'No,' they said. 'Well, come with me, let's get you registered.' We'd go up to the registrar's office." He gestures to the upper floor of the courthouse. "They registered," he says, "but they were shaking and trembling the whole time. It was a new thing for them. They didn't know what would come.

"In the first election when a black person ran, we knew we'd won a seat on the school board. But the election officials said the white candidate had won. We had to threaten them and ask for a recount. When the votes were recounted, our candidate won. That was my grandfather, Wilkins Hunt, the first black elected to the school board. I don't know what they [the white leaders] were thinking. I guess, that we'd just go along."

I recall the words of Booker T. Washington:

I am convinced that the most harmful effect of the practice to which the people in certain sections of the South have felt themselves compelled to resort, in order to get rid of the force of the Negroes' ballot, is not wholly in the wrong done to the Negro, but in the permanent injury to the morals of the white man. The wrong to the Negro is temporary, but to the morals of the white man the injury is permanent. (165f)

Ingram continues. "When I came back from Viet Nam in 1970, I was crazy. I'd do anything. I'd been in Hell already. I joined up with John McCown.

“McCown had the right idea: Build industries where uneducated blacks could work and make a living and increase the wealth of the black community. Give them something to encourage them to stay here instead of going to the ghettos in the cities.

“The white community opposed us every step of the way. They boycotted McCown’s industries. Builders went to Sandersville to get blocks when they could have bought them here. Local fish restaurants wouldn’t buy our catfish. There was an ‘all or none’ attitude. They didn’t want to accept McCown’s idea because they didn’t want progress under his leadership. The struggle blinded whites who did not want to see McCown succeed.”

The fax machine whirs. The young woman from the judge’s office opens the door and excuses herself. She pulls sheets of paper from the cradle of the machine and leaves.

“But the plan didn’t end with McCown’s death. The opposition didn’t, either,” Ingram explains. “Recently, we opened a skating rink. The idea was to give the kids something to do and teach them how to run a business. We got a state grant and built the place. We hired young people. They were responsible for the details of running the rink. And it was going well. The kids learned to keep the books, maintain the place. Then the whites started a letter-writing campaign. They told the state that ‘they have torn up the floor.’ An inspector came down from Atlanta and looked it over. He couldn’t find anything wrong. But that’s the way it goes.”

“What will it take to get Hancock County on its feet?” I ask.

“It’s going to be up to the next generation,” he answers. “There’s too much bad blood, suspicion. Maybe when the kids take over who were not part of the struggle in the ’70s, they can get something done.”

Meanwhile, he has counseled his own children to get the best education they can and find a job elsewhere, but he thinks his daughter will return to teach special education. His son works at the correctional facility on the edge of town.

“We won’t strengthen until we concretely go after small industry that this county can support. We have a low level of skills and education. Big industry doesn’t want to invest here. We may never get industry. Maybe recreation, fishing, and residential ‘plantations’ are our only hope,” he says, and tells me about a large development planned nearby. Weekenders and retirees will pay big money to live in a quiet forested area and play golf, he says. “But how much money . . . how many jobs . . . can come from golf courses and big houses?”

We thank the staff for their courtesy and enter the courthouse hall. Ingram goes to his job as tax appraiser, leaving me alone in the great foyer thinking, *He faced death and drugs in Viet Nam and found his lifelong battle in Hancock County,*

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Georgia. Time and frustration have dulled his optimism and zeal, but only a bit. I saw no despair, just deferred hope.

William and Sally

I drive south of town on Linton Road, past the overgrown campus of the defunct hospital and beyond the all-white John Hancock Academy, out toward the Country Folks Restaurant. Colleagues had taken me there on my first trip to Sparta. I had returned on later trips to eat chicken or catfish, Southern-seasoned vegetables, and cornbread and wash them down with Georgia-style sweet tea. It had always been a busy place. Construction workers, linemen, and staff of the hospital had filled the room under the glass eyes of taxidermied deer, turkey, and bass.

As I return to my truck, a faded blue Buick pulls into the lot and stops beneath the shade of a tree. The driver, a woman with white hair, slowly gets out of the car. She is short and stooped, but she walks with sure steps to open the door for her passenger, helps him pull his legs to the ground, then removes a walker from the back seat and places it before him. He reaches out and lifts himself to lean on the aluminum bar.

"How're y'all," I ask. "May I help?"

The woman smiles, "No, thank you. We're slow. But we'll make it. Jake is ninety-four and I'm ten years younger."

"Lived here all your life?" I ask.

"Except when I went to college. I was a school teacher."

I ask if they have any children or grandchildren living nearby who can help them out.

"They all moved away. We'd move away, too, if we weren't so old. All the white folks who can are moving away."

"And the black people?" I ask. "Are they moving out?"

"Lots of them," she answers.

Sisters

Not all of the people in the county have given up. Two sisters, Lillie Webb and Della Smith, have dreams. I find Lillie in a storefront building on Broad Street in Sparta on a day when a north wind pushes leaves along the broken sidewalk. The sign above the entrance reads "Center for Community Development." I turn the knob on a glass door that opens with a groan.

Dust covers a handful of household items on shelves in the front window, remnants of the items on sale in the thrift shop that the organization once operated here. A half-dozen computer stations sit on ramshackle desks behind cases filled with a collection of books. Old furniture, more books, and business equipment fill the back of the room. The sole occupant sits before a computer screen that glares blue light across piles of papers and books.

"I'm looking for Lillie Webb," I tell the small woman with a bronze face outlined by wavy black hair.

She smiles and says, "You found her."

I explain my interest in Hancock County and ask her what her organization is doing about the poverty, schools, and unemployment.

"From 1987 to '93, we majored on protecting the environment," she says. "Then we formed the Center for Community Development. You have to have a sustainable community before you can have industrial development. People have to be healthy and educated before you can have jobs."

She explains that the county has suffered from "industrial redlining" because "the community is 80% black." She talks about self-value. "People need to have work that they want to do, that uses their creativity. We lack spiritual grounding. Real power is tapping into the 'God power' that is in all of us. God created. And God told us to love him and love our neighbors. That is what it means to be created in the image of God. To create in love.

"If we do that, we don't have to look to the commissioners or to big business to fix our lives. We have given our power away. For instance, people count on the schools to educate their children. We are looking for government to solve our problems."

Once more I ask what the organization is doing. She tells me that the funding is running out. A foundation that once provided support has stopped giving to them.

"We still have a little of the last \$37,000 grant. I'm working part time."

Della Smith shares her sister's concerns. But her life in the corporate world shows in her approach to thinking of Hancock County. Early in 2003, she moved from Arizona back to the community she left three decades earlier to attend Clark College in Atlanta.

A gentle smile lights her face as she sits behind her desk in a brick house facing the courthouse square and talks of her childhood on the Rives Plantation. Her eyes twinkle when she talks of collecting eggs from the hen house, milking the cows, and snapping beans for dinner.

"From the time I was about eight until I was at least sixteen, I lived off and on with my grandmother on the plantation," she explains. "I recall being the one to ring the yard bell for the field hands to come eat lunch.

"My grandmother was a wonderful, loving woman. Loved by the entire community. She made quilts and gave them to neighbors. And clothing for women that did not have as much as she did. She took food that we grew or raised on the farm to poor families. Eggs, vegetables, chickens, meat, or whatever they needed. You would have enjoyed getting to know her.

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"I would often help her carry the food that was prepared in the kitchen over to the big house to serve my grandfather."

"Your grandfather was white?" I asked.

"Leon Rives. Heir to the plantation. The land had been in the family since the eighteenth century. My grandmother was born to him after his wife died," she explained.

"Another Amanda America in Hancock County."

"Yes," she says, then shakes her head. "But without the riches."

"When I'd go with my grandmother to clean my grandfather's house or to take food, I saw books, fine furniture, orderliness. I dreamed of living that way."

She worked in Atlanta, met her husband, and, when his job took them to Phoenix, found work in 1979 with the fledgling Intel Corporation. By the end of the century, she was working with the top universities to increase the pool of female and minority engineers for Intel, a job she continues while she lives in Sparta.

In her early years with Intel, a friend advised her to buy all the company stock she could afford. "For years it was 'save, save, save.' Then I woke up and saw what I had in the stock." A smile, almost apologetic, comes over her face as she says, "And it was 'spend, spend, spend.'"

But her spending was not random or wasteful. She bought a house in Phoenix and property in Hancock County. And she donated to charities. "I wanted to give back to the community," she says.

In 2003, her daughter was completing her graduate degree in engineering at Stanford and marrying. Her father was seriously ill; he would not last through the summer. Over the years on her visits home she had heard her parents discuss their concerns over the political and social issues. She returned to Sparta and, borrowing a page from her grandmother's book, resolved to help her neighbors.

"There's so much potential. There is also much despair. People here feel beaten down. When I have brought in speakers to the school, the kids show no hope, no dreams. Most of the adults don't vote. Whites seldom run for public office.

"The divisions in the community are not just black and white. It's between the haves and the have-nots. If people think you have more, they will fight you rather than work with you."

Della's dream is still looking for a blueprint. "I'm looking for the right thing to help the community. If we could form a non-profit. Start boys and girls clubs to supplement public education. We have to improve the infrastructure and the educational system. Given the skills levels of local people, new developments will employ locals for menial jobs only."

In the summer of 2004, a flower sprouted in the garden of Della's indecision and dead-end efforts. The county would soon vote on its commissioners. Believing the current officers to be ineffective, if not corrupt, Della helped pull together a coalition of white and black citizens. They recruited an African American, a retired minister, to head their ticket as candidate for chair of the commission.

Throughout the fall, they battled through bitter debates, charges, and countercharges. When the ballots were counted, the reform group had won, but with the election, the struggle to bring new directions and accountability to government was only beginning. As executive assistant to the new chair, Della found herself in the hot seat of controversy. The departing administration had drained large sums from the county's coffers, ordering new vehicles and purchasing items that the new commission would have to pay for. Zoning, which was linked to the issue of protecting the countryside from irresponsible landfill operations, dominated commission meetings. The dream of finding new direction for the beleaguered county became clouded; Della spent long days confronting criticism.

Seated at her desk in a tiny office in the courthouse, she looks up from stacks of bills and newspaper articles and asserts, "I could walk away from this. But I promised the chairman I would help him, and I will. I am a woman of faith. I know God has a plan for me. He will see me through."

Brother Curt

When Curtis Kedley, a brother with the Catholic Glenmary Home Missioners, arrived in Sparta, people asked why he, a white man, would intentionally move to the town. That was 1993. He continued to live there for ten years, until his Glenmary Society moved him to Kentucky. His task was race relations. Working with local Protestant ministers, he founded the Hancock County Human Relations Council.

I met with Brother Curt in the small house he rented on Hamilton Street. The heat of a Georgia summer afternoon drifted through open windows. A small man, balding, experienced in social work and rural ministry, he spoke of frustration and slow progress. Yet he held hope for the county. "We've made progress. Small victories. People coming together at the grassroots, finding each other, learning about the life and values of the other race.

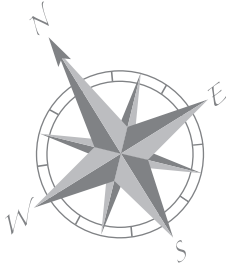
"Still, there is so much mistrust. Decades of ill will and memories don't go away quickly. You know, integration is hard to achieve when the white community is such a minority. I think that is a major factor in the problems here. White people still have most of the money, operate the larger businesses. But they don't have the political power.

"The people of Hancock County are still learning that grants and government programs cannot save them. The solution must come from within."

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Struggles of whites and blacks in Hancock County across two centuries are putting to the test the creed that Martin Luther King Jr. stated in his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964: "I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality."



WAR TOWNS; PEACE TOWNS

Traffic slows near the end of Interstate 185, a few miles south of downtown Columbus, Georgia, and forms two lanes. Cars and trucks crawl toward a two-story-high arched canopy where a shining bayonet, the insignia of the Army Infantry School, points heavenward. I open my wallet to show my driver's license to a guard. He waves me past. And that is it. I'm on Fort Benning, one of the U.S. Army's most important and historic training posts. No one asks me where I am going or why I am here. I am free to drive along forest-lined roads past military training fields, small houses, and a bowling alley.

Guided only by a small map and instructions that direct me to Building Six, I lose my way and find myself in the heart of the garrison. Streets around the officers' quarters have the look of an ideal American subdivision; shady boulevards, green spaces, and running paths surround neighborhoods where George Patton, Dwight Eisenhower, and Colin Powell have lived.

Somewhere in this maze, Indians had for centuries trod their major east-west trading path. Bartram followed their trail on his southwestward journey. Early in July 1775, he crossed the river a few miles downstream of Fort Benning. The river was shallower then; it would be more than a century before the Army Corps of Engineers would blast away the shoals for the passage of steamboats to Columbus and 150 years before a dam raised the river level.

The men of the Indian town of "Uche" helped the traders in his party by ferrying their goods across the river in canoes while Bartram and his comrades swam with the horses. The traders reloaded their horses and took some refreshment. Bartram rode a few miles south with them to the town of Apalachucla, where they stayed for about a week or so.

Established in 1918 as Camp Benning, the Army expanded the post in the mid-1930s as a Great Depression federal work project. When the war in Europe broke out, the Army sent the First Infantry Division to the fort and established the Officer Candidate School and Airborne training here. Over 600,000 soldiers trained at Fort Benning during the Second World War.

Along my way, I pass Ridgway Hall, an imposing two-story building whose architecture would be prized as the central administrative building of a university. Ridgway Hall housed the School of the Americas from 1984 until 2000. Congress closed the school after a decade of nonviolent protest by those who called it “the School of the Assassins.” Like most institutions in our complex democracy, the school’s value will be debated and shrouded in the mysteries of historical interpretation. Supporters of the school heaped praise upon it, claiming the United States had built relationships and trained fighters that kept Communism out of our hemisphere.

Opponents had a different take on the school. Its graduates, they said, learned torture and terrorism, then went home to murder educators, union organizers, student leaders, and religious workers in Central and South America. Most notorious in the school’s alumni directory is Manuel Noriega, the dictator of Panama who moonlighted as a drug dealer and now resides in a U.S. federal penitentiary serving a forty-year sentence for racketeering, drug trafficking, and money laundering.

Although Congress ended “the School of the Americas,” it continued to fund the education and training of civilian, military, and law enforcement students from Latin American nations through the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation in the same building. And protesters continue their watch on the activities of the institute.

Christopher Hamilton, the cultural resource manager at Fort Benning, has invited me to his office. Chris’s job is to protect the stuff left behind by Indians, settlers, planters, and the U.S. Army. Will a new building or the renovation of an old one disturb an ancient site? If sherds or stone tools turn up in a trench for a water line, should there be a full-fledged excavation or small test? And he is an educator, explaining the history and prehistory of the land within the post. He played a leading role in the publication of *Fort Benning: The Land and the People*, written by Sharyn Kane and Richard Keeton.

In his office, surrounded by shelves of archaeological reports and Army manuals, he talks of traces of human occupation on the 182,000 acres. People have lived along the Chattahoochee since early in the human settlement of North America. For at least 11,000 years before Bartram crossed the river, a succession of groups found game, seeds, and fish here and later farmed the fertile fields. They grew corn

and beans, carved artistic works from stone, and decorated pottery vessels. Copper from the Great Lakes and obsidian from the Rocky Mountains passed along the trade routes. At least a century before Spanish explorers trod the valley, Native Americans had developed a complete agricultural system and organized towns with chieftains and a hierarchy of priests as part of the Mississippian Culture, which left impressive mounds across the eastern half of the country.

Chris has offered to take me to a couple of sites. Cautious within his role as guardian of cultural resources, he asks me, "You're not planning to excavate or look for artifacts, are you?" He's thinking of the swarms of pothunters who have pillaged these lands for decades, removing pottery, bones, and stone tools, and leaving holes that destroy evidence and frustrate researchers.

Nostalgic for my ten years of archaeological work, I tell him, "I'd love to dig again, but only with a qualified excavation. Got anything planned?"

He smiles, tells me that no digs are in the works, then begins to manipulate electronic maps on his computer. Red shading shows areas of Benning that are protected or of interest to archaeologists. Most of them are along the river, others sprinkled along streams. We plan our excursion.

His computer beeps. He opens his e-mail and reads. "Hmmm," he grunts, lifts the receiver of his phone and punches keys. "I'd love to have him in the group," he says to the person on the other end of the line. "I'll call him today and invite him to the next meeting."

As he talks, I remember my years in government and the difficulty of getting the right people into the right room to make the right decisions. Did the men of Uchee sit around a fire, I wonder, and pass a smoldering pipe, debating who should be invited to a counsel of war or peace?

"Yellow Bow hunted along those creeks. He knows the land," says a burly, squat fellow whose feather droops over his left ear.

"But Yellow Bow is a coward in war," replies the tall, lean man on his right. "He would give up our land for the fur of a beaver."

"We need to hear from Tall Deer. His father was from Tallassee."

"And, what about Weeping Crow? The Red Sticks will be as the wolf who crouches if we leave him out."

Chris hangs up, ending my musing.

"Dealing with bureaucracy?" I ask.

"You got it."

As we return to the map on the monitor, the phone rings. Chris listens for a moment, then says, "I'll have it to you by the end of the day."

Replacing the receiver in its cradle, he turns to me. "Looks like we won't be able to go anywhere. I'll be in the office completing a report." He hands me a book

and a map, showing me how to get to the Uchee Creek Recreation Area across the river. He tells me that his office has put up some educational displays there.

Down Dixie Road, toward the river, I see machines used to train men to drop, laden with parachutes, guns, and gear, from airplanes, and I pass establishments that provide off-hours entertainment for field-toughened soldiers: the Benning Brew Pub, a movie complex, a Subway sandwich shop. This is not your father's military post, with its Spartan PX.

On the bluff above the airfield, I look down on concrete strips that spread across two square miles of bottomland. Hangars, a control tower, and operations buildings, their white paint weathered to a motley gray, press against the rise of the hills to the east. Camps of Paleo-Indians, villages, and farmsteads lie beneath the runways. Women ground corn, wove baskets, and molded pots on this ground. Men sat cross-legged or on logs, draping a deer hide over their knees, forcing a sharpened antler into a crack in a node of flint, napping a blade, shaping a spear point, arrowhead, or fishhook. Did a lodge stand there, where converging airstrips enclose a grassy triangle? Two hundred years ago, could I have heard the shouts of young men throwing spears at a rolling stone, playing a game of chunky?

Across the Chattahoochee bridge, on the Alabama side of the river, the Army has built the Uchee Creek Recreation Area. On grounds that were the suburbs of the Uchee town, asphalt streets and parking lots surround a campground. A "country store" and boat ramp stand at the edge of the Uchee Creek. The softball field, with its chain-link backstop and aluminum bleachers, would puzzle the Uchees. They played their ball games with sticks and a deer-hide ball. No bases or foul lines. Any place on the field was fair territory for the aggressive swing of a stick that might catch an opponent's head as well as the soaring ball.

Under the trees near the campground, a series of signboards tell of the town and archaeological work. As I read the illustrated legends, a garbage truck roars its diesel engine, lifts huge steel bins, dumps them, and drives away to some distant landfill—a midden for some future generation of archaeologists to explore.

Uchee houses, according to Bartram and later visitors, were large and neat, plastered with red clay, roofed with cypress shingles. Bartram judged the city "the largest, most compact and best situated Indian town [he] ever saw" (*Travels* 388).

Despite their hospitality, orderliness, and industry in 1775, the Uchees and their fellow Indians were just two generations from their ultimate relocation. Sixty years after Bartram's visit, they were living uneasily on farmsteads under the promises of a government that had already broken treaties. Overpopulation by white squatters and Indians who had migrated from Georgia had driven them to poverty. Hunger and disease wracked their villages and farms. Joel Martin

cites a Georgia newspaper that described their plight as “a most melancholy and affecting spectacle . . . poverty and wretchedness, devastation and ruin” (163), an American version, perhaps, of the scenes of Somali babies with flies crawling on their sunken faces.

On a hill a half-dozen miles north of the Uchee town stands a monument to the Muscogee Trail of Tears. Here at Fort Mitchell, the site of the corral, is the Chattahoochee Indian Heritage Center. Above a marble pedestal surrounded by grass and small trees, twenty-five-foot tall bronze flames probe the sky. Bronze plaques planted in concrete slabs surround a plaza. They bear the names of 8,522 Muscogee (Creek) Indians enrolled in the special census of 1832, the final, written memory of a proud and productive people who lived in cities and villages up and down the nearby Chattahoochee River.

Five years after the census, the army and its contractors rounded up these children and grandchildren of those who had welcomed Bartram, then loaded them—some in shackles—on steamboats bound for Mobile. From there, soldiers drove them to the treeless flatlands of Oklahoma.

At the end of a narrow road that leads from the bronze flames, down the hill and toward the river, a construction crew unloads building materials from a tractor-trailer truck. Behind them stand the palisades of a reconstructed Fort Mitchell, almost complete. Tall pine posts of the stockade, shiny and fresh, sharpened to points at their tops, are reminders of the human pen. Workmen look up at my car, then resume their labor. When their work is completed, school children will file off buses and listen to their teachers tell the story of the Trail of Tears. Some of the boys will wander into the surrounding fields and scuff their sneakers in the dirt, looking for arrowheads. They won't find any. The cities and towns of the Creeks lay in the fertile valleys to the south.

The youngsters would have a hard time knowing that. Historical markers along Highway 165 tell of events and characters from the Civil War. A sign commemorates Bartram's journey but says, erroneously, that he was the Royal Botanist. No marker reminds a traveler that once-proud Indian towns lie buried beneath the fields and forests along the valley. Indeed, across Alabama, few historic site signs tell the story of the vast nation that once dominated it. Of the 643 markers set by the Alabama Historical Commission, 74 mention the Cherokees, Creeks, and Choctaws who once lived here. Most of those markers tell of massacres or victories of white armies. Only a handful give a brief reference to a mound or city of the Indians; none provides a clue that the Indians were any more than an impediment to European expansion.

South of Fort Mitchell, on a gentle rise, Holy Trinity borders the vast bottomland where Bartram sojourned with the Apalachucla. Alabama is a strange

place to find the name “Holy Trinity.” Religious names like Salem, Mt. Carmel, and Ebenezer dot the map and “Shiloh” shows up four times. Pious Baptists, Methodists, and Lutherans, expressing their conviction that this was a new Promised Land, left these names from the Old Testament on the landscape.

But “Holy Trinity” is so, well, *Catholic*. And for good reason. In 1917, Father Thomas Augustine Judge and a group of lay volunteers of the “Missionary Cenacle Apostolate” established here a center to reintroduce Alabama to Catholicism (a Spanish mission failed miserably in the late 1600s), a bold move at the time when the Ku Klux Klan, as anti-Catholic as it was racist, was experiencing a renewal.

The group opened a church and a school that reached out to the families of former slaves and established a high school seminary for young men studying for the priesthood. They built preschool and elementary school facilities in the early 1970s. The seminary moved to Virginia and the schools closed, but the shrine known as Father Judge’s Chapel remains alongside the Blessed Trinity Shrine Retreat and the St. Joseph’s Church.

I drive up a long lane, past the church and a couple of small houses. The door of a brick, single-story structure opens, and a tall, slender young man greets me, a pleasant smile on his face. A black goatee and mustache suggest that he is not out of touch with the fashion of the college campus. His clothes are modest: a cotton shirt and jeans.

“I’m Mario Sacasa,” he says, extending his right hand. “May I help you? Are you looking for someone in particular?” His tone is welcoming, with no hint that I have intruded on a holy place or a sanctuary.

I tell him that I am tracing the steps of William Bartram. He asks who Bartram was, and I tell him of the journey, of the visit to the town and ruins beside the river. His eyes widen when I tell him that my quest is to know what life is like in the places Bartram visited.

“I’ll tell you what I can about Holy Trinity. If we can find Father Berry, he can tell you more.”

Mario leads me into a tidy foyer where hallways extend past the closed office doors to a dining hall and meeting room. He describes youth retreats where animated music punctuates silence and prayer, and gatherings of adult Catholics from across the eastern United States who study and pray here.

“They come from as far as New Jersey,” he says.

“Does the ministry to black people continue?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says, “but we now find many Latinos as well.”

Voices of men roll up the corridor.

“Father Berry is here,” says Mario. “He can tell you more.”

He introduces me to Father Dennis Berry. The tall, slender priest, dressed in khakis and a plaid shirt, knows about the fort and Spanish mission and recalls that a monk from their order discovered the ruins in the 1950s. But Bartram is news to them, as is the story the explorer told about the desecration of the Apalachucla town.

“The old town was evacuated about twenty years ago by the general consent of the inhabitants,” writes Bartram. Overcome by floods and disease, “they grew timorous and dejected, apprehending themselves to be haunted and possessed with vengeful spirits, on account of human blood that had been undeservedly spilt in this old town” (*Travels* 389).

He explains that Apalachucla was “the mother town or capital of the Creek or Muscogulge confederacy: sacred to peace; no captives are put to death or human blood spilt here. And when a general peace is proposed, deputies from all the towns in the confederacy assemble at this capital, in order to deliberate upon a subject of so high importance for the prosperity of the commonwealth” (*Travels* 389).

Bartram continues: “about fifty or sixty years ago,” however, white traders, warned by their “temporary wives” of an uprising, had sought refuge in the “Peace Town.” But, “whilst the chiefs were assembled in council, deliberating on ways and means to protect them, the Indians in multitudes surrounded the house and set fire to it; they all, to the number of eighteen or twenty, perished with the house in the flames” (*Travels* 390).

Bartram, a naturalist, not a historian or journalist, omits some details that we might like to know. What happened to the “temporary wives”? And what, we wonder, so infuriated the men of Apalachucla that they would violate not only the lives of the traders but also their own canons?

We can guess the cause of the uprising and massacre. Early in the eighteenth century, before African slave trade became more lucrative and less onerous than trade in red men, English traders—aided by Indians from Georgia—enslaved Creeks from the area now known as Alabama and Mississippi. We know the Indians resisted. It is possible that the people of Apalachucla may have seen the traders they incinerated as accessories in the crime of dragging young men to the plantations of Charleston. If anger over slave trade lay beneath the Apalachuclas’ rebellion, here, on the grounds of Holy Trinity, occurred one of the first uprisings for justice in the fledgling European-dominated America—a Colonial version of the struggle for human rights that took place in the 1960s in nearby Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma.



About thirty minutes north of Holy Trinity and Apalachucla, a “War Town,” after two centuries and a calamitous struggle, has turned to peace. Phenix City, Alabama, perches on the western bluffs of the Chattahoochee and works to overcome its reputation for lawlessness. Hulks of factory buildings and cotton mills stand abandoned along the river. Small frame houses on the streets surrounding the courthouse give way to substantial brick homes in outlying subdivisions. Strip malls, discount stores, and auto dealerships line the highways that lead north and west toward Opelika, Auburn, and Montgomery. Churches of all sizes, ages, and denominations beckon worshippers.

Phenix City stands near the ruins of “the great Coweta town.” Bartram says Coweta “is called the bloody town, where the Micos chiefs and warriors assemble when a general war is proposed, and here captives and state malefactors are put to death” (*Travels* 389). Although the bluffs of the river passed into white hands, the town became bloodier. *The Saturday Evening Post* brought Phenix City to my eyes in 1954. A teenager notices pictures and headlines about a “Sin City.” And, from what the *Post* said, the town lived up to this moniker and had for more than a century.

Margaret Anne Barnes (*The Tragedy and the Triumph of Phenix City, Alabama*) and Alan Grady (*When Good Men Do Nothing: The Assassination of Albert Patterson*) tell the story, beginning with the years of liquor trafficking and prostitution in a county of ruffians that led a minister to call it “Sodom” in 1833. Its tradition of lawlessness began when the Chattahoochee formed the boundary between white territory and Indian country. Debauchery and the rule of brute strength prevailed in the earliest years of white settlement and persisted into the next century. In 1915, Alabama’s prohibition law gave the town’s rum-running entrepreneurs the opportunity to parlay their whiskey trade into a lucrative enterprise. They benefited more after the Prohibition Amendment to the U.S. Constitution went into effect in 1920.

Over the years, state officials tried on a few occasions to curb the vice, but the bootleggers prevailed through payoffs and rigged elections. Toughs ran the town. Beatings, killings, and house burnings went unprosecuted or never came to trial.

By the time prohibition was repealed in 1933, the skills of Phenix City’s ruffians had been honed and they had expanded their vice operations into gambling. A lottery, known as “The Bug,” was illegal. So were slot machines. But the gamblers bought the politicians, courts, and law enforcement. Now they were ready for the new opportunity opened by the swelling numbers of soldiers being trained across the river at Fort Benning. Lured by girls, gaming, and drink, troopers piled into taxis to be whisked to the bars on the Alabama

bluffs. When they protested loaded dice, marked cards, or the interruption of pleasure by pimps, they faced the gun butts, chains, and spiked brass knuckles of the vice lords' bullies.

Barnes says that Phenix City enterprises stripped two million dollars from soldiers' pockets in 1940 and that, by the end of the war, the take totaled \$100 million, funding a well-oiled political machine that strengthened its grip on the county and gained notoriety across the nation. Local citizens seldom protested. Their politicians reminded them that no other industry was bringing in big bucks to the little town. And most of the victims of the system were outsiders.

Community opposition to the corruption and vice renewed in the late 1940s, however, when Hugh Bentley returned from the war and became alarmed at what he saw. A Sunday school teacher who owned a retail store in Columbus, he gathered a few friends, rallied support from ministers, and formed the Russell Betterment Association in 1951. Guided by attorney Albert Patterson, the organization drew attention to Phenix City's corruption but found it impossible to unseat the machine's candidates in rigged elections. Murders continued to go uninvestigated. Deputy Sheriff Albert Fuller organized a prostitution ring, stocking bars and brothels with young girls he recruited from farms and the streets of the town. Hoyt Shepherd, a prominent gambling lord, was acquitted of shooting an opponent. The man had to be shot, Shepherd and his witnesses said. He had attacked Shepherd with a two-and-a-half-inch knife. Then, in January 1952, someone bombed Bentley's house. Patterson's office burned the following month. Local law enforcement officials wrung their hands. There was no evidence.

Later that year, when Bentley and his allies watched for fraud at a Phenix City poll in an important election, thugs attacked them. Pictures of their bloodied faces appeared in newspapers across the nation. Still, state and local authorities stalled. And worse lay ahead.

Frustrated over the failure of their efforts to reform Phenix City through legal processes, Patterson entered the 1954 Democratic primary for state attorney general. Bentley and others fanned across the state, developing grassroots support for their champion. On the morning after the election, newspapers announced that Patterson had won out over the machine candidate by a narrow margin. When the Democratic Party put out its final tally, however, it declared that Patterson had lost. Newspapers and the Russell Betterment Association screamed. An investigation found that party officials had revised the tally sheets before sending them to Montgomery for final certification. Patterson was declared the victor.

A state grand jury called to investigate the vote fraud expected to hear Albert Patterson on June 19, 1954. He had promised to bring important evidence that would lead to indictments. Around nine o'clock on the evening of June 18, Patterson left his office, walked across a small parking lot to his car, and opened its door. Reports of three shots echoed from the brick walls of the surrounding buildings, and the attorney general-elect of Alabama lay dead.

Governor Gordon Persons declared martial law. Adjutant General Walter J. Hannah and National Guardsmen replaced local elected law enforcement officials. They filled jail cells and crammed a parking lot with confiscated gambling equipment. By the end of the year, a local grand jury, viewing evidence gathered by Hannah's investigators, had indicted 141 people on 734 counts.

As the National Guard loosened the grip of the gangsters, state-appointed prosecutors found witnesses to the Patterson murder. Though evidence often conflicted and witnesses seldom agreed, the jury convicted Albert Fuller of the murder. Two politicians were indicted but not convicted.

In *The Tragedy and the Triumph*, Barnes summarizes the events poetically, reflecting the facts as well as the legends that have grown up around what is known as "the Great Cleanup":

The bloody history of "Sin City" was over. The law-abiding people of Phenix City, led by a Sunday School teacher, a lawyer and a general, had prevailed. The three of them had not been comrades-in-arms as such, fighting side by side. They had confronted and fought the enemy separately and successively. As one exhausted his effort and failed, the next took up arms for the battle until at last the enemy was vanquished. (Prologue)

Almost fifty years after the "cleanup" of Phenix City, I drive north of the town's center along a shaded highway, past quiet subdivisions and grocery stores, and into a long, paved driveway that loops around carefully landscaped gardens of camellias, azaleas, and giant oaks. Joyce Downing, one of the community's senior pillars, agrees to tell me about the days of terror and the years that have followed.

Elegantly dressed in a pink suit, Joyce invites me in and leads me through a large kitchen and into the living room. Books fill shelves; paintings hang on the walls. We sit on comfortable, satin-covered sofas, facing each other across a mahogany coffee table.

"Would you like something to drink? A Coke or some water?" she asks.

I choose the water. Through the picture window I enjoy a view of the spacious lawn while she goes to the kitchen and returns with a tall tumbler filled with ice and water.

Joyce recalls a town strangely divided. A lawless element, whose members had in large part migrated to the town to conduct their treachery, remained separate from the general citizenry. "There were two different societies in Phenix City. The churches and the schools ran the way they should. [Grady says that the racketeers actually participated in the churches and contributed to them.] We heard that 'evil things' were going on. But our parents told us to stay away from 'those places.' And we did. Youth groups at the churches kept us busy. We had swimming parties and ice cream socials. We kids stuck together and stayed away from the bars. We rode our bicycles and roller skated on the streets."

"Did any of the boys slip away and go down there to see what was going on?" I ask.

"If they did, we never found out about it. If someone 'went bad,' we didn't have anything to do with him. Our parents saw to it that the crime elements didn't get us down. We had a normal life."

When Joyce returned to Phenix City from college and married Lemuel Downing, the political machine was well established and Bentley's opposition to it was growing. Lemuel ran a successful business, placing cigarette machines in restaurants, service stations, and country stores. A candidate for office, supported by the betterment association, came to him with a marketing strategy. "I'll pay you to put matchbooks with my name on them in your cigarette machines," he offered. Lemuel agreed. Within weeks, the candidate was increasing his name recognition. The political machine, sensing a threat, sent a messenger to young Downing. Unless Downing withdrew the matchbooks, he said, the liquor distributors would stop supplying the stores that housed his vending machines. Under pressure, Lemuel sold his business.

During the "Great Cleanup," he served on the grand jury and later turned his attention to industrial development in Russell County. His efforts paid off. Corporations found Phenix City a place ripe for investment.

Citizens began to trust their public officials, says Joyce. A new school, city hall, and waterworks were built. "The whole city came together. People felt like they had control. They had faith in the police department. There was a rekindling of community feeling. Civic clubs started. Columbus and Phenix City began working together. Businessmen established shops, and my husband started a bank."

As we walk through the den on our way to the kitchen door, Joyce leads me to a corner beside the fireplace. There, in a dark wood frame, hangs a Russell County Commission resolution naming a street in the Russell County Industrial Park in honor of Lemuel Downing. Beyond her pride in her husband's role in the resurgence of Phenix City, she sees the proclamation as a symbol, a sign that a town can struggle with lawless greed and come out sound and peaceful.

Footprints across the South

Although Phenix City rose on the ashes of Bartram's "bloody town" of Coweta, its violence was not comparable to the Creek town's. Muscogees entered war deliberately and with ritual. War Towns went to battle with the concurrence of those who lived in the Peace Towns. Indeed, Peace Towns contributed warriors to the armies. Bartram and others affirmed that the Muskogees, while at times brutal in war and in slaveholding, had a culture of order and justice. "If we consider them with respect to their private character or in a moral view," Bartram wrote some years after his journey, "they must, I think, claim our approbation, if we divest ourselves of prejudice and think freely. As moral men they certainly stand in no need of European civilization" (*Travels* 489f).

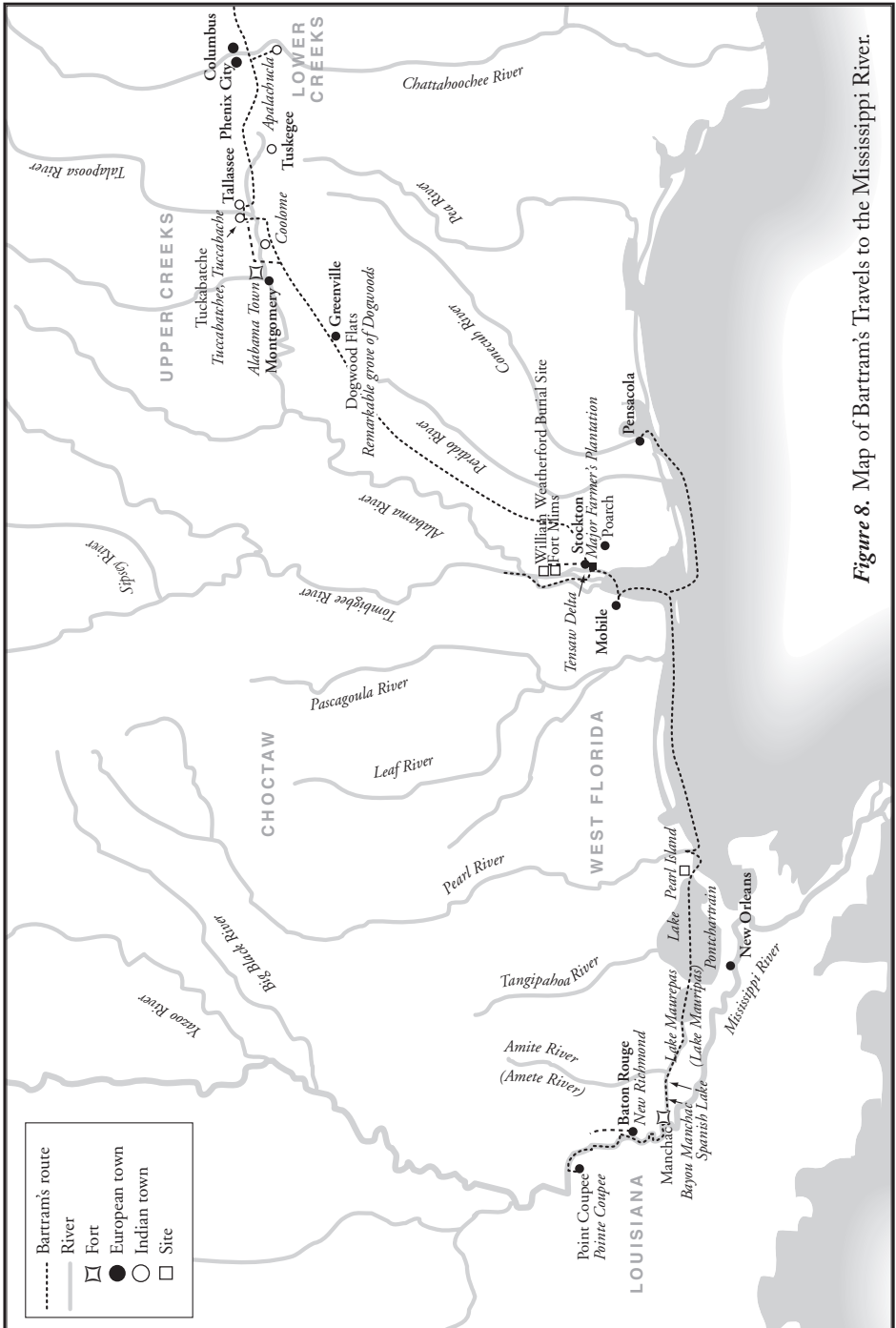
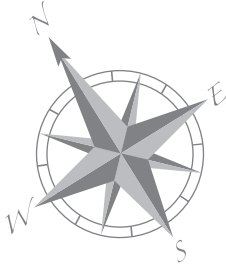


Figure 8. Map of Bartram's Travels to the Mississippi River.



THE NATION

July 13th we left the Apalachucla town, and three days journey brought us to Talasse, a town on the Tallapoose river, North East great branch of the Alabama or Mobile river, having passed over a vast level plain country of expansive savannas, groves, Cane swamps and open Pine forests, watered by innumerable rivulets and brooks tributary to Apalachucla and Mobile. (Travels 396)

So began Bartram's trip to southern Alabama. Still traveling with the traders, he crossed open plains and high forests with abundant trees, shrubs, and grape vines. On his journey southwest and on his return along the same route, he visited towns of the confederation he called "The Nation."

Here was a land dominated by tribes and chiefdoms who knew themselves as "Muscogulge." The English, through a series of misunderstandings and abbreviations (and, likely, a lack of concern for the preferences of the Indians) called them "Creeks." Historian and Bartram scholar Kathryn Braund (*Deerskins and Duffles*) says that Creek oral tradition tells of these people drifting in from the west and incorporating native populations into their ranks. The diverse tribes, speaking different languages, had become a confederation by the time of their contact with Europeans. They shared a common culture, linked by a network of related clans, and claimed and defended certain lands as their own.

In 1775, a few trading posts punctuated the territory, trading tools, guns, whiskey, and other Atlantic Coast goods for Creek deerskins. French and Spanish outposts and forts lay in ruins. Within twenty years of Bartram's visit,

white settlers began to establish themselves in the lush fields. Their numbers would swell by the first decade of the nineteenth century. In 1814, the Nation would be defeated, and by 1840 scarcely a trace of the Creeks would remain.

I followed Bartram's general route, driving from Holy Trinity along Russell County Road 22, then along U.S. 80. The big rigs and through-travelers are north of here, their tires whining across Interstate 85 until, close to Tuskegee, they cross the Creek trading route and the Federal Road.

These back roads lead through a few hamlets and open country with the typical Deep South landscape of rolling pastures and pine plantations. This is the northeastern tip of Alabama's "black belt," a term that Booker T. Washington said

was first used to designate a part of the country which was distinguished by the colour of the soil. The part of the country possessing this thick, dark, and naturally rich soil was, of course, the part of the South where the slaves were most profitable, and consequently they were taken there in the largest numbers. Later and especially since the war, the term seems to be used wholly in a political sense—that is, to designate the counties where the black people outnumber the white. (68)

A full century later, the 2000 census found that eighty-five percent of the population of Macon County was "Black or African American." That is more than triple the proportion of African Americans living in the state of Alabama and almost seven times the national percentage.

Although the black population has dwindled a bit in recent years, as people have migrated out of the area, it continues to dominate. African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and Pentecostal churches, such as the "Pure Gospel Holiness" congregation, center communities of small frame houses. Grocers and mechanics shops are few and widely scattered. Poverty is evident. In 1999, almost a third of the families had incomes below the national poverty line.

On a five-acre tract beside an asbestos-sided house, tiny A-frame coops are homes of fighting roosters. Cords bind the colorful fowl to stakes driven into the dark soil beside each coop. These birds are bred to battle, but their owner keeps them out of reach of one another until they are loosed in a ring, surrounded by cheering bettors, to fight to the death.

Not far off the trading path is Tuskegee, the seat of Macon County. For a small town in a remote spot within the Black Belt, Tuskegee has accumulated more than its share of fame. Four experiments, three of them noble, one shameful, put the place on the map.

The first experiment was in educating former slaves. In 1881, a group of white and black citizens of the area asked Booker T. Washington, a young

teacher from Virginia, to serve as the first principal of the Normal School for Colored Teachers. Born in slavery, he had struggled to educate himself while working in a coal mine in West Virginia and at the Hampton Institute in his native state. Under Washington's leadership, the school opened on July 4 in "a rather dilapidated shanty near the coloured Methodist church" (110). The state had provided two thousand dollars, but small donations from local white and black citizens, and loans and grants from New Englanders, provided the bulk of the funding. Before building its own quarters, the school used chicken coops and stables as classrooms. Students learned academic subjects and trades, working the fields to grow food for their own tables and building classrooms and dormitories. Washington's work paid off and gained him fame. The school became Tuskegee Institute. Now Tuskegee University, it offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Almost 2,900 students enrolled in 2001.

Within Tuskegee's walls, George Washington Carver conducted experiments that would have fascinated Bartram. Carver, born to slaves in Missouri near the end of the Civil War, had accepted a position as an instructor at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1896. Witnessing the poverty of his people, he applied his knowledge as a chemist and botanist to develop 325 products from peanuts, 108 applications for sweet potatoes, and 75 products derived from pecans—all locally grown plants, well known to the black farmers in the fields of Alabama. Adhesives, bleach, buttermilk, and plastics came from his laboratory, but were never successful in the open market.

Popular lore gives Carver more credit than he earned. School children are left with the impression that he invented peanut butter. In fact, others, including the Kelloggs of Michigan, had been producing peanut butter since the 1890s. His legacy is strongest on two fronts. The most tangible is agriculture. He found ways to restore the soils of Alabama, depleted by a century of growing only cotton, corn, and tobacco. Peanuts and sweet potatoes, rotated with other crops, enrich the soil.

According to Gene Adair (*George Washington Carver*), he also contributed to the nation's sense that black people can be creative and productive. An entertaining speaker, he drew attention and acclaim from Congress and social groups. Although this fame may have been grounded partly in the nation's need to assuage its guilt over slavery, the image of an ex-slave, working in a remote laboratory to create new products, inspired blacks to achieve and whites to put aside some of their biases.

Like Bartram, Carver was an artist whose subjects were, largely, plants. Over seventy of Carver's paintings and drawings, most of them painted using pigments he extracted from the soil of Alabama, rest in a store room on the Tuskegee

campus. The U.S. Park Service, which operates the George Washington Carver Museum there, has placed them in rooms where light cannot damage them, awaiting funds for their conservation and preservation.

What would Bartram make of a black artist and scientist? Bartram gave little attention to the slaves. Would he be surprised that the eye and hand of a black man could create lifelike images of roses? Slaves rowed boats for him and labored in the fields of his doomed plantation in Florida. But, while he held the Indians in high regard and thought they could be “civilized,” he had little to say about the future of the slaves.

Were he to have met the tall, slender black man who wore a flower in his lapel, would Bartram have found that they were bound by their interest in the value of plants to humanity and their skill in artistically portraying nature’s intricacies and beauty, and that they also shared the view that the plants that consumed their professional interests revealed the Divine?

Quoting from one of his speeches, Carver might have told Bartram: “We get closer to God as we get more intimately and understandingly acquainted with the things he has created.”

“I’d like to hear what you think of something I wrote,” I imagine Bartram replying. “[M]y chief happiness,” quotes the Colonial explorer from his *Travels*, “consisted in tracing and admiring the infinite power, majesty and perfection of the great Almighty Creator, and in the contemplation, that through divine aid and permission, I might be instrumental in discovering, and introducing into my native country, some original productions of nature, which might become useful to society” (73-74).

And the old chemist would have stood, run his fingers through his short-cropped hair, and said, “I think, Mr. Bartram, that we are brothers.”

The third experiment at Tuskegee came in the early years of World War II. In July 1941, an aviation cadet class began its training on a small airfield near the campus. By the end of the war, almost a thousand pilots had graduated at Tuskegee Army Air Field, receiving commissions and pilot wings.

The record of the Tuskegee Airmen is remarkable. One group, the 99th Fighter Squadron, flew 200 bomber escort missions over Europe without losing a single bomber to enemy aircraft. According to their website, the Airmen had another more lasting and significant contribution. They say that their record of skill and professionalism assisted President Harry Truman when, in 1948, he directed equality of treatment and opportunity in all of the United States Armed Forces. This order, in time, led to the end of racial segregation in the military forces and was, by their reckoning, the first step toward racial integration in the United States.

President Bill Clinton called the fourth experiment “wrong—deeply, profoundly, morally wrong. It was an outrage to our commitment to integrity and equality for all our citizens. . . . clearly racist.” He was speaking of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. Between 1932 and 1972, the U.S. Public Health Service observed 399 black men in the late stages of syphilis. These men, for the most part illiterate sharecroppers from Macon County, were never told what disease they were suffering from or of its seriousness. Informed that they were being treated for “bad blood,” their doctors had no intention of curing them of syphilis at all. Rather, they were documenting the end-stage ravages of the disease. Even when penicillin became the drug of choice for syphilis in 1947, researchers did not offer it to the subjects, and the men were never given the choice of quitting the study.

After a 1972 front-page *New York Times* story about the Tuskegee Study caused a public outcry, the Public Health Service ended the project. The government compensated the participating men, and in 1997 President Clinton apologized on behalf of the nation.

Viewed together, the Tuskegee experiments show the best and worst of America’s treatment of African Americans. The idea of educating emancipated slaves in the Black Belt sprang from a coalition of black and white leaders in Alabama. Alabamians of both races supported the effort. George Washington Carver and the Tuskegee Airmen demonstrated to the nation the value of a people with the skills to realize their dreams. On the other hand, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study manifested the underlying racism of a nation that struggled to provide for the human rights of all its people.



Bartram visited the towns of “Talasee,” “Tuccabache,” and “Coolome” along the Tallapoosa River. These towns now lie abandoned under pastures and row crops northeast of the present city of Montgomery and dams impede the river’s flow, making it, in the eyes of American Rivers, the ninth most “endangered” river in the nation in 2003. The danger, says the environmental group, is in the heavy use of the river’s water by Georgia and Alabama: “Although Alabama Power Company’s R. L. Harris dam already has transformed a section of the Tallapoosa River into an ecological desert, more dams could be on the way as the sprawling Atlanta metro area seeks to develop municipal water supplies in the river’s pristine headwaters.”

As early as 1844, manufacturers were damming the shoals where the river plummets, directing water to power their mills. Tallassee, a compact, serene town that crowns the 200-foot-high western bluffs above the granite boulders in the river, became a mill town. A bell rang from the mill’s roof at 4:30 every morning

except Sunday, awakening the workers to report to their jobs at 6:00. With the exception of the last two years of the Civil War, when the mill buildings turned out carbines for the Confederate Army, the making of cotton and woolen goods was the life of Tallassee. Then, in 1971, the mill closed. The roof, neglected, collapsed a decade later. A lumber company stripped the building of its heavy beams, but the vine-covered rock behemoth continues its silent vigil across the shoals and the Thurlow Dam.

The use of water for power demonstrates the sweeping change that technology brought to the land. For the Creeks and their predecessors who lived in the old towns of Talasse (Talasi) and Tuccabache (Tuckabatchee), downstream, the river was a source of life. They gathered protein from the animals within it and watched it replenish the fertility of their farmland with each spring's flood.

With the coming of European engineering, the river became a source of energy, amplifying the labor of humans a hundredfold, and bringing wealth to the community. And the life of the river began to pass away. Those of us intrigued by the challenge of paddling a canoe or kayak through whitewater grieve the loss of a free-flowing stream that American Whitewater says "was once similar to Great Falls of the Potomac." More significant, however, is the death of aquatic species that depend upon fresh, flowing water and that perished when deep, still water invaded their homes.

The Chamber of Commerce sees the lakes differently. As recreation sites, they make the area more attractive for business. "They add to the quality of life here," a community leader in Tallassee told me. "Businesses want to locate where there are educated, skilled workers, near the interstates, where they can have a quiet, peaceful life in beautiful surroundings. We have it all."

A few miles farther down the road, the ruins of Tuckabatchee lie buried under cultivated fields and pastures where herds of cattle munch grass and pecan trees spread their branches. Once the largest town in the Southeast (some say the second largest in America), Tuckabatchee was a capital of The Nation. Tecumseh, the Shawnee leader from Ohio, visited here, stirring Creeks to join his confederacy to oppose the westward expansion of the white settlers and their foreign culture.

Despite its importance, no historic marker recalls Tuckabatchee. A modern explorer who knows the story, however, can imagine the scene of the 1770s. In the valley of the Muscogulges, the only impediment in the river is a stone fish trap. Corn and tobacco grow on the vast bottomland. Near the river bluffs, smoke rises from wattle and daub huts, bearing the aroma of nuts and venison roasting. Women till gardens and children play along the edges of the river. No bottles, cans, or plastic bags lie beside the footpaths beaten into the black soil.



John Hall waggles a map above his head while three dozen members of the Bartram Trail Conference, outfitted to paddle in drizzle, look on and listen. As head naturalist of the Alabama Museum of Natural History, John has led many such trips. A scholar, Bartram reenactor, and showman, he delights in stirring school children and other Alabamians to learn the state's natural history and, particularly, to know William Bartram.

The Sunday morning event is the climax of a weekend meeting of the conference. Every two years, people from across the nation gather to hear presentations about Bartram. The meeting mixes scholarship, photography, and a bit of poetry with travelogues, good-natured banter, and social hours. On Saturday, Mark Dauber showed photographs and described the Federal Road through south-central Alabama; Kathryn Braund, president of the conference, unraveled the mysteries of the eagle-tail standard that Creek diplomats and priests carried; and Brad Sanders, author and photographer, displayed views of communities of Cahaba or Shoals lilies.

No theater seats and lectures today, however. We've driven from Montgomery to the banks of the Tallapoosa River, a few miles south of Wetumpka, to drift along the river, paralleling the route Bartram took on his visit to the Creek town he called Alabama.

A quiet, quaint little town on the bottomland of the Coosa River, Wetumpka is drowsing on a Sunday morning. Sawmills and furniture factories are idle. Within vintage two-story houses, bungalows, and mobile homes, folks are reading the paper or dressing for church. On its outskirts, fast food places, convenience stores, and a Wal-Mart Supercenter already line the highway from Montgomery. The center's layout matches other Super Wally Worlds and the products are the same. I buy a pack of pipe cleaners (same brand I buy in Atlanta), eyeglass cleaning supplies (same as Franklin, North Carolina), and trail mix (no different from the pack I found in Palatka, Florida). As the national retailers, sniffing the inpouring of refugees from nearby Montgomery, move in, they'll enable McWorld to overcome the county's agrarian, forest-product, small-town uniqueness. And a score of venerable, local businesses will turn out their lights forever.

John has told us to be ready to put our canoes and kayaks into the river at 9:00. By quarter 'til nine, vehicles line the broad gravel road that leads to the river's edge. Brad Sanders, Chuck Spornick, and Bob Greene have already unloaded their kayaks when two pickups roll down the road towing canoe

trailers. In short order, we slide our boats into the dark water. The first paddlers glide across the hundred yards of river effortlessly, waiting for the later arrivals to launch their canoes.

The Tallapoosa flows between high bluffs of clay and alluvial soil. Where farmers have cleared the trees to the edge of the river, the banks have worn away, spilling chunks of clay and brown dirt, to be washed away the next time the water rises. It is a strange economy: cut the trees to plow twenty feet closer to the river, then lose the land to erosion.

By the end of the seven-mile trip, the canoes spread along more than a half mile of the river. Boaters dig their paddles into the sluggish current. But the rain has stopped and only a light headwind slows their progress to the takeout at Fort Toulouse.

After a box lunch served in a pavilion at the park, we hear the archaeology of the site. Nomadic bands of hunters camped here around 5000 BC. About 1,600 years ago, Indians established large hunting base camps between the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers. Farming communities during the Mississippian stage, beginning around AD 1000, built compact villages surrounded by a palisade with bastions, a dry moat, and several large mounds topped with ceremonial temples.

Seeking to check the growing influence of the British, the French constructed a fort in 1717 and named it for the Compté de Toulouse. The fort was also known as the "Post of the Alabama," named after the tribe who lived here. A small garrison of twenty to fifty French Marines manned the fort and traded in European glass beads, guns, ribbons, and household items.

By 1775, when Bartram passed through, the fort had fallen into ruins and was covered by undergrowth, "where are to be seen traces of the ancient French fortress Thoulouse; here are yet lying, half buried in the earth, a few pieces of ordnance, four and six pounders. . . two or three very large Apple trees." The Indians remained. Bartram knew their town as "Alabama." He thought highly of the location: "This is perhaps one of the most eligible situations for a city in the world, a level plain between the conflux of two majestic rivers" (*Travels* 447).

After Andrew Jackson defeated the hostile Creek faction at Horseshoe Bend in 1814, he went to the site and ordered the construction of Fort Jackson. He gathered the Indians here to sign the Treaty of Fort Jackson, an agreement that opened twenty-three million acres of land to American settlers and isolated the Creeks from further influence from the British center at Pensacola.

Bartram's prediction of a city never became a reality. Alabama set its capital in Montgomery, the fort again fell into ruins, and the site returned to farmland until the historical commission took over.

After listening to a travel author, the group breaks up. Most wander across the lawn and enter the palisades of the restored French fort. Smoke rises from the chimney of a white cabin. Inside, in a pot that hangs above the glowing coals of a wood fire, a commission archaeologist has brewed “the black drink.” No one has a question about what the drink is; readers of Bartram know that the Muscogulges and their relatives as far south as Florida drank “a decoction or infusion of the leaves and tender shoots of the Cassine”—yaupon, *Ilex vomitoria* (*Travels* 451). During his stay at Attasse, not far up river from the Alabama town, servants entered the councilhouse bearing “very large conch shells full of black drink, advancing with slow, uniform and steady steps, their eyes or countenances lifted up, singing very low but sweetly.” They approached the king and his guests, bowed and presented their shells, “one to the king and the other to the chief of the white people.” Ceremoniously, the men drank until the brew was gone, then brought out their pipes and tobacco (*Travels* 452).

We latter-day imbibers take the black drink in small doses out of respect for the tradition that the Indians, in preparation for battle, drank enough of the brew that they vomited, purging their systems and, perhaps, their souls. I take one swallow, then another.

“How much of this stuff do you have to drink to vomit?” I ask.

“Do you want to vomit?” the archaeologist grins. “It takes a lot of it to make you retch. And you have to want to do it. It’s really not that potent. But a good source of caffeine.”

I get a refill and savor the brew. It tastes a lot like lapsang souchong tea, but a conch shell may add bouquet.



Bartram followed the Alabama River and again took to the trading path that would soon become the Federal Road. When he passed through Coolome he was on the edge of the land that would become Montgomery.

Alabama’s Capitol crowns a hill that rises gently out of the valley, about 150 feet higher than Coolome. A zoo, abandoned and rusting industries, and transportation terminals lie on the river bottom between the site of Coolome and the city. In contrast to this bleakness, the crest of the hill gleams with buildings of white marble and glass, interrupted by older brick structures and connected by one-way streets. This is the Capitol complex, architecturally balanced around the Greek Revival Capitol building, reconstructed in 1851. On its front porch, Confederate President Jefferson Davis was inaugurated in February of 1861.

Down the broad boulevard to the west stands a small two-story house of worship, close enough to the capitol that fringes of the crowd that heard Jefferson Davis pledge to lead the new confederacy might have stood on its ground. The grand, shining structures of the government compound dwarf and almost hide it. But history will not let this church be lost any more than it will the big house on the hill.

Originally, the congregation was the Second Colored Baptist Church, started in 1877 by a handful of former slaves. Six years later, the church laid the foundation of a new building in a new location, using bricks discarded by the city in its paving of streets. White citizens protested the establishment of a “colored church” so near the seat of power. Had they foreseen a seamstress from Montgomery or the bright, eloquent young preacher from Atlanta, they might have been more exercised.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a crowded city bus to make room for a white passenger. She was arrested and jailed. Three days later local black leaders met at the church, now named for its location on Dexter Avenue, and formed the Montgomery Improvement Association to spearhead a boycott and negotiate with the bus company. They named the church’s new minister, Martin Luther King Jr., president.

The boycott showed that a black community could unite in resistance to segregation and focused a national spotlight on King. From the pulpit of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Dr. King proclaimed the philosophy of non-violent struggle:

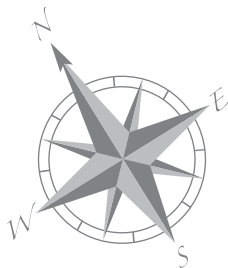
As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using only the weapon of love. Let no man pull you so low as to hate him. Always avoid violence. If you succumb to the temptation of using violence in your struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and your chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos. (“Paul’s Letter to American Christians”)

This little church, out of place among the surrounding architecture, may be considered the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement. American society changed forever after the boycott, the campaign for the integration of public places, and the battle for voting rights that grew out of them.



Swept away before unyielding waves of white settlers and international traders of the nineteenth century, the confederation of the Muscogee “Nation,” displaced and almost destroyed, is a vague memory. The government of the new

nation that eradicated the Creeks now spends billions of dollars and thousands of lives in efforts of “nation building” in remote parts of the world. And the segregated, stratified society that moved into “the Nation’s” fields and forests seeks to construct a new confederation in which peoples of all nations and races may share in the benefits of the land.



RED STICKS AND WILDERNESS

Following Billy Bartram through southern Alabama can be a trip on a freeway. From Montgomery to Mobile, Interstate 65 closely parallels his route along the Creek trading path that later became the Federal Road. A traveler looking for his footprints need turn only a few miles west and wander the blacktop roads through the pine plantations and pastures. For the details, however, I needed a local guide.

Annie Crenshaw drives me west of Greenville, Alabama, down roads that wind along a ridge. A historian and sixth-generation resident of Butler County, pride in her state and county buoys her. Her ancestor, Judge Anderson Crenshaw, established his plantation on the ridges and creek bottoms in 1822. His holdings once covered about 20,000 acres, and a look at a map from the turn of the century tells me that his descendants covered The Ridge. Annie shows me homes owned by members of the family. We pass remnants of the Federal Road—deep ruts in an oak forest here, asphalt pavement there—that hide memories of Indian traders, settlers with wagons and mules, and troops of Andrew Jackson's Tennesseans.

“Bartram was impressed by the size of the trees here,” Annie reminds me. “No stands of old forests remain, but I want to show you a couple of beauties.” She pulls into the driveway of an art studio in an outbuilding of the old “dogtrot” house Janis Odom has restored. Thick limbs of a massive white oak, its roots embedded under the stone terraces of a garden, arch over us. This tree, an official state “heritage tree,” and its companion oak shade about ten thousand square feet of gardens. Janis tells me that state foresters have tested the trees and find them to be at least two hundred years old. Other foresters say they may well have lived four hundred years.

“So, this tree may have been more than a hundred years old when Bartram passed by here,” I observe.

“And such trees covered the whole ridge,” says Annie sadly.

We stroll through the garden. Azaleas are budding. Annie and Janis chat about neighbors and the community—who has died, who is sick, an upcoming event. When Janis asks me about Bartram, I tell her that he passed by here on his way to Mobile and Louisiana.

“Just over there, on the Federal Road,” says Annie, whose mother traced Bartram’s route through the county, motioning toward the east.

“He rode by the Cambrian Ridge Golf Course,” I say. Janis raises an eyebrow. “But he was two hundred years early for his tee time.” Annie had shown me the links earlier in the afternoon. Cambrian Ridge is the most vertical golf course I have seen. Its twenty-seven fairways climb up and down a steep ridge just a few yards west of Bartram’s trail. A golf course review says, “Will need your ‘A’ game to shoot in the 70s” on these links. “The range is pretty, but gives you no sense of how far you are hitting the ball due to elevation changes” (Barlow).

Speaking of such recreational features, a Chamber of Commerce employee had told me, “We have the kind of place that attracts new industry to the area. They like our people and our environment.” She nodded toward a conference room behind her office where four Korean men are talking with two local men wearing white shirts, suits, and ties.

“They were from the HWASHIN Company,” Annie filled me in as we left the old rail depot that houses the Chamber. “They manufacture parts for Hyundai. Hyundai is building its first American factory in Montgomery. HWASHIN wanted to locate nearby. Just yesterday they completed the deal to move here. They say they’ll bring 400 jobs to the county.”

The economy of the area has struggled since the days when Annie’s forebears and their slaves grew cotton for export on one of the several vast cotton plantations. Later, textile industries and lumbering ruled. But cotton planting went downhill as the fertility of the land played out and cheap foreign labor drew textile manufacturing overseas. Over the decade of the 1990s, timber industries barely supported the people of Butler County. Between 1990 and 2000, the county suffered a loss of population. Only two out of three adults had graduated from high school, and household income was two-thirds the national median. One in five families lived in poverty. Salvation will come, they hope, in the form of a Korean plant.

We drive out to Pine Flat, passing large, well-kept houses, old plantation manors, and run-down shanties. Annie tells me that this is where Bartram saw the “very remarkable grove of Dog wood trees . . . which continued nine or ten miles unalterable” (*Travels* 401). The flat is a narrow tabletop ridge, some ten square

miles of open fields and a few woodlands. On three sides, steep hills drop into tree-covered creek bottoms about a hundred feet below. But the dogwoods vanished generations ago as planters made room for cotton.



Figure 9. William Bartram. *Cornus florida* (American dogwood). n.d. Pen and ink sketch. Original sketch and proof. Tanner, sc..

Footprints across the South

Names of forts—Deposit, Dale, Mims, Madison, Bell, and more—dot maps of south-central Alabama. Each recalls the bloody decades after Bartram passed through. He traveled in a time of relative peace, when the French had lost their foothold and the British confined their activity to the coastlines. The great wave of settlers from the east coast and Europe was still dammed behind boundaries in the Georgia Piedmont. Cotton was not even crown prince.

Within a generation, white settlers had pressed into the hills and valleys, searching for agricultural prosperity. As some Muscogees continued trade with the invaders and married their men, others, the Red Sticks, agitated by the loss of farming and hunting land and pressures to fit into the white culture, took up arms.

Hostilities reached a crescendo when the United States began to battle the British in the War of 1812. Joel Martin lays the source of the animosity on the radically different values of the Creeks and the European Americans. Europeans had a “gaze of development,” a tradition of looking at land as swamps to be drained, fields to be cleared and planted, towns to be established. He contends that, though Bartram was sensitive to the Indians and to nature, he and others “unhesitatingly applied the old vision to the new land. They never saw Muskogee’s fields and streams in the ways that the Muskogees saw them, animated with a thousand nonhuman spirits. . . . From the European and euro-American perspective, the land was aching for development” (93).

When Tecumseh, a Shawnee whose mother had lived with the Creeks, stirred them into a religious passion, the Red Sticks went to war. William Weatherford, “The Red Eagle,” rose to prominence as their most visible and successful leader. Initially reluctant to join with the Red Sticks, he emerged as a warrior following the attack at Burnt Corn. Throughout the battles of the fall and winter of 1813 and 1814, he gained a reputation for fearlessness and cunning, and, after the defeat at Horseshoe Bend, he rode into Jackson’s camp, suing for peace and fair treatment of his people.

Ultimately, Weatherford succeeded in gaining only time and promises, most of which were eventually broken. He and a few other Creeks were allowed to remain in Alabama, but most lost their land and were driven to Oklahoma twenty-three years later. His remains lie under rock cairns, surrounded by tall oaks, a stately cedar, and well-pruned shrubs in a small park on the edge of the Mobile-Tensaw delta.

The Creek War broke out after a party of white militiamen fired on Creek traders and warriors at Burnt Corn Creek in July 1813. The Red Sticks retaliated by attacking Fort Mims, a plantation with a stockade beside a ferry crossing of the Alabama River. On August 30, 1813, a band of several hundred Creeks attacked. Militiamen, sent a few days earlier, were hungover. The fort’s commander, warned

by a slave that Indians were surrounding the fort, had not put them on alert. A gate, wedged open by a mound of sand, allowed the Indians easy access.

The historical marker at the site calls this the “most brutal massacre in American history . . . all but about 36 of some 550 in the fort were killed.” Another sign says about 350 died. A website gives the number killed as 516. The discrepancies may result from the capture of slaves and from contemporary exaggeration and propaganda.

Whatever the body count, the massacre stirred Tennesseans, Georgians, and others. A Nashville newspaper blared that the Creeks “have supplied us with a pretext for a dismemberment of their country.” By the following March, Andrew Jackson’s army had rallied to the “pretext” and the dismemberment was well under way. At Tohopeka, or Horseshoe Bend, on the Tallapoosa River, the European Americans and their Creek, Choctaw, and Cherokee allies defeated the final 900 Red Sticks. In August, Jackson imposed the Treaty of Fort Jackson, which required some twenty-three million acres to be ceded to the United States.

Fort Mims lies peacefully in a grove of trees at the end of a narrow road leading past a fish camp. Boats on trailers sit beside small houses and mobile homes. Women walk the roads for exercise while men wash their boats and talk of fishing the web of streams nearby. A gravel path winds through the Alabama Historical Commission site, leading to small markers that outline the palisades and buildings of the little fort and relate the story of the battle. Alone in the shade, I walk the interpretive path, met only by a gray hognose snake sunning himself.



Amidst the ruined forts and heroes’ graves, twenty-five miles east of Red Eagle’s monument, a sign stands beside a two-lane asphalt road. In a circle of yellow, red letters proclaim “Poarch Creek Indians.” A black and red feather hangs from the left side of the circle; a black and white feather hangs on the right. They symbolize ancient traditions of war and peace. Behind the sign, a cluster of modern buildings and a subdivision of small houses break the monotony of the flat fields.

I park my car in a paved lot in front of the most elaborate building in the complex and walk up a flight of steps to a spacious reception area. The woman behind the desk is tall and lean. Straight black hair frames an angular face. I look into her dark eyes and try to find the Muscogulge women that Bartram described. I see, as did he, her “brow high and arched; the eye large [and] black” but she is not “remarkably short of stature” and her “visage” is not round (*Travels* 484). Two centuries of intermarriage with English, Scots, and Irish separate

the receptionist from Bartram's models and, although she comes closer to his description than any other person I see on the reservation, the European DNA has made its way into her lineage.

"I'm looking for Eddie Tullis," I say.

"His office is in the building across the street," she replies with a smile. "This is the health center."

I drive across an asphalt street, park between a pickup truck and a sedan in a lot beside a one-story office building, and search for the office of the Tribal Chairman. A secretary appears in the doorway of her office and says "Mr. Tullis will see you now." She leads me down a bright hallway to a corner office where a smiling man with short, graying hair stands in the open doorway. Blueprints and folders lie on a table in front of his desk. Aerial maps and photographs hang on the walls; others lean in frames on the legs of the chairs against the far wall. Except for pictures and symbols of Indian culture, the office has the feel of a regional planning center.

"You have been a busy man," I say as we shake hands and I think of what I have read about the nearest thing to a "chief" the Poarch have. A Navy veteran and factory worker in Pensacola when he worked in the 1964 campaign of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, he began his pilgrimage on behalf of the rights of the Poarch Band of the Creeks in 1970. He continued working at Monsanto for thirty years while he and others strove for the recognition of his people.

"In 1970, we had to prove we existed," he says. "That took more than ten years. In 1984, the tribe was recognized by the federal government." His drawl is pure Alabama, soft and melodic. He speaks of broken treaties, acts of Congress, and protracted legal contests stretching over 150 years.

"Now that we have won the recognition, we have a bigger job to do. We work more now for community development. In the 1950s and '60s the leaders of the tribe realized that we had a considerable out-migration. Economics drove our people to migratory work. I can take you to little communities in South Carolina, Florida, and even Wisconsin where our people have settled. They went first to work in the groves and orchards, then settled there. My own family moved across the state line into Florida so I could go to school. Until 1946, we had only five family schools here in Escambia County.

"We have been establishing industries here so our children can stay here and earn a living. We now have six enterprises."

When Alabamians speak of the Poarch, they mention only the casino and the tribe's drive to open more gambling halls elsewhere in the state. But the tribe also owns a metal works, a motel, and Perdido River Farms. On the tribal land are a pecan orchard, catfish ponds, and row crops. The herd of sleek Black Angus cattle grazing in a pasture across the road belongs to the tribe.

“We’re planting trees. Only longleaf pines. No loblolly or slash pines. The longleaf pines don’t grow as fast, but they are the native trees. We plan to create a wildlife reserve on our property. Hunting is a big business in South Alabama.”

We talk about the longleaf forests. He recognizes the intricacy of their environment. “Like the shaker turtles,” he says.

“The gopher tortoise?”

“Yes. We use their shells for ceremonial shakers. They’re hard to find these days. They live in the longleaf forests, and the longleafs, in great numbers, are gone.”

According to scholars, Bartram “discovered” the gopher tortoise. But much of what white men consider “discoveries” was long known to the Native Americans.

I ask him about the community behind the tribal headquarters.

“The tribe owns 105 houses on the reservation. Those are mostly for senior citizens,” he says. “A few years ago, we saw that the young people had moved away. The elders were living in old frame houses and trailers around the backcountry. Their houses were in sorry condition and they had no one to help them or care for them. We built the houses and encouraged them to move here, where they’d be close to the clinic.”

He walks around his desk and lifts a framed color aerial photograph showing a narrow road running through green fields. “This is where we are right now. It was taken about ten years ago. I want to get another picture that shows what we’ve done here.”

“To be a member of the Poarch Tribe,” says Eddie, “a person must be at least quarter blood Creek. There are other groups recognized by the state. But we are the only one that is federally recognized.”

“How did your ancestors stay here when the others were sent to Oklahoma?”

“Some of the Creeks were friendly to the U.S. government. They fought alongside the white troops in the War of 1812, and President Jackson remembered them from their service at the Battle of New Orleans. When the government sent most of the Creeks on the Trail of Tears, it let some of us stay. Those who had actively fought with the United States were permitted a land grant of one square mile.”

In 1836, Congress passed a law allowing some of the Creeks to set aside 640 acres as reservations. Eventually, in 1985, slightly less than 230 acres were declared a reservation.

“We’re beginning to interest our educated youth in history,” says Eddie. “So far, little research has been done.” He darts through a list of battles and treaties: Burnt Corn, Fort Mims, Horseshoe Bend, and more, claiming that roadside markers and history books “don’t get it right.” “It may be that the data

is not there,” he says, “but I am hoping that we can interest some of our young people in educating themselves as historians and digging into the old records and tell our story.”

Nina Gale Thrower is the tribe’s historian. She meets me in her office in an old school building, converted to a museum and offices. Sitting on a sofa covered with beige plastic and surrounded by shelves of books, she gives me her own take on Poarch history.

“Fort Mims was a setup,” she says. “The government wanted us to attack so they could justify a war and drive us out. Why else would they send Beasley [to command the fort]? He was a drunkard. Incompetent. An inspector had already found that the gate couldn’t be closed. But Beasley didn’t fix it. The Red Sticks gave Jackson just what he wanted: a massacre.”

Her disdain for government goes deeper and extends farther up the road of history. “We [the ancestors of the Poarch] were White Sticks. We fought alongside the Tennesseans. We were promised land. But only a few White Sticks got any land. Most of them were driven off to Oklahoma with the rest of the Creeks. That’s government for you: use you, then let you go. It took us more than 150 years in the courts to get the little bit of land we have here.”

Academic historians point out that the designation “White Stick” is a very recent name, adopted as a kind of shorthand to speak of those Creeks who did not rise up against the whites. Whatever the name, Nina Gayle Thrower’s argument is clear: the Creeks who allied with Jackson did not get fair treatment.

Nearby Atmore is anything but an Indian town. Although the number of Creeks in Escambia County has increased due to the reservation, the 2000 census found fewer than 1,200 “American Indian and Alaska Native” people. That’s three out of every hundred.

The town wakes early. Children wait for school buses at seven-thirty; at eight o’clock, shopkeepers open their shops along South Main and down Nashville Street. But it remains a dreamy place, its homes and churches shaded by large oaks, magnolias, and longleaf pines. Seldom do more than two cars wait at a traffic signal.

For breakfast, I find Sutton’s Restaurant in the Greyhound station. A sign says it has been serving since 1946. From its dingy tan walls and the tattered, plastic cushions on the chairs, I suspect that the place hasn’t changed much since then. I slip into a booth beside a window, order a scrambled egg, bacon, a biscuit, grits, and decaffeinated coffee, and scan the room. The fact that only four tables are filled at breakfast time concerns me, but not as much as the health department notice that blares in large, black numerals that the place earned a seventy-nine rating on its last inspection.

The waitress returns, concern on her face. “We’re out of decaf, honey,” she says. “Will reg’lar be OK?”

“Sure,” I answer, suspecting that they ran out of decaf five years ago.

She brings my coffee. “Cream and sugar, honey?”

“No, thanks, darlin’. Black.”

The bacon, covered by only a bit of molten grease, looks all right, but the scrambled egg is a fried egg served sunny side down. I stick my fork under the puddle of butter that decorates the center of a pile of grits, take a taste, and rake the oily mass to the edge of the plate. The biscuit will be all I eat.

As I finish my coffee, I look across the street and railroad tracks. A twenty-by-thirty-foot American flag flies above the tiny Amtrak depot. Slightly faded, it lofts in the gentle breeze, rising and falling slowly from the upraised extended ladder of an old fire truck. Yellow ribbons, similar to those on trees and the backstop of the baseball field at the city park, hang from the narrow columns of the depot. The “Coalition of the Willing” has been fighting only two days in Iraq, but the town is showing its support quietly and firmly.

I pay my check at a window beside the lunch counter and turn to look at the large composite photograph hanging in a frame beside the door. Below pictures of people visiting the Viet Nam Memorial in Washington are charcoal rubbings of names from the wall.

“Can you tell me about this?” I ask a man wearing a ball cap.

“It’s our boys who died in Viet Nam,” he says. “We had a lot of soldiers and Marines lost over there.”

“Looks like a group went up to visit the memorial.”

“Yes. But that was years ago. Now we have another bunch of boys in Iraq. And a couple of girls, too.”

Towns like this, patriotic and economically strapped, are recruiting grounds for a large number of our nation’s men and women in camouflage.

I walk beside him to his white pickup truck.

“What do people do for a living in Atmore?” I ask.

“Mostly work in the factories. Used to be a lot of farming and tree cutting. But now it’s mainly manufacturing.”

“I see that K-Mart is closing down,” I say.

“Yeah. They came in here years ago. All the stores downtown closed up. Now their company has financial troubles, so they shut down and leave us with nothing.”



Tan, silt-stained water eddies around the put-in where four men, following Bartram into the Tensaw Delta, are launching canoes and kayaks. A woodpecker hammers on a tree out in the swamp. Tree frogs chirp. A swirl in the water tells us that a garfish has been watching the procession and is moving out of the way.

“Bartram’s forest sounded about like what we are hearing,” says Keith Gauldin, who manages the Bartram Canoe Trail for the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and has volunteered to lead this trip for the Bartram Trail Conference. “Except he would have heard passenger pigeons and red wolves. Maybe Carolina parakeets.” The green, yellow, and orange parakeets, the only native parrot of the United States, were driven to extinction when they took a liking to the seeds of many kinds of fruit and grain crops and deforestation reduced their habitat. Bartram saw them in the cypresses along the St. Johns River, not far from where the last flock, thirty birds, was spotted in 1920.

Beside the dock, slick with wet silt from high water, Verne Kennedy, my friend and colleague of outdoor ventures for more than thirty-five years, sits in his kayak, struggling to tighten his paddling skirt. Downstream a few yards, nails hold a diamond-shaped yellow trail sign to a tupelo gum tree. Beneath it hang three rectangular markers for three trails.

Under the shade of a broad-brimmed straw hat, Keith guides his green canoe into midstream. “We’re taking the Globe Creek Trail,” he says. “One of you lead. I want to know if the signs keep you on the trail.” Keith has paddled all one hundred miles of the network of canoe trails, fixing the signs where curving, splitting streams might lead a paddler astray. His chain saw has opened paths past fallen trees.

The naming of these trails for Bartram is not casual. Following his trip to Mobile with the traders and “adventurers,” the explorer “set off from Mobile up the river in a trading boat, and was landed at Taensa bluff, the seat of Major Farmer . . . to spend some days in his family.” In “a light canoe” (probably a dugout, not much more than a log with a hole carved out), he continued his voyage up the river, finding the wax tree, and “well cultivated plantations, on the fertile islands.” He discovered here the *Oenothera grandiflora* (evening primrose) and described it in vivid detail (*Travels* 405-06).



Figure 10. William Bartram. *Oenothera grandiflora* (Evening primrose). n.d. Engraving, colored. Bartram Journal Plate. Trenchard, sc..

Thinking of Bartram's adventure into this delta in a dugout, Brad Sanders remarks, "Bartram was a real man. He came here in July and paddled a dugout canoe upstream for several days." The wisdom of Brad's observation hits us later, when we enter Globe Creek. Until now, we have floated with the current, guiding our boats around tight bends and negotiating trees that have fallen across the water since Keith's last chainsaw expedition. In Globe Creek's wide water, however, the current is slight and a south wind presses against our bows. Even in our lightweight, well-designed modern craft, shaped to cut the surface and remain stable, we struggle; Bartram paddled in slack water, fighting the current on his way northward and, almost certainly, the south wind on his descent. Occasionally, when I think of his traveling through steamy, insect-swarmed Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana in July and August, I have thought him a bit daft or, perhaps, compulsive. But in the end, I take it that he had an unusual commitment to his mission. And yes, Brad, Bartram was "a real man."

We face one hazard unknown to Bartram. Though he may have passed an occasional trading boat, he never contended with the power boats of the "No Hard Hat Bream Tournament" that churn Tensaw Lake the day we paddle it. A hundred or more bass boats had launched that day from the Upper Bryant and Hubbard's landings. Throughout the morning, we paddle by men and women who flip worms and crickets into the water beside tangles of limbs, hoping to lure bluegills, sunfish, and shellcrackers onto their hooks. Finding no fish under one tree, the anglers gun their engines and rush to another favored hole, sending wakes crashing against the shores and rocking our boats.

We paddle along low banks covered with young trees and shrubs left behind by timber cutters who exploited the delta into the early part of the twentieth century and continue to cut small tracts. An occasional large bald cypress extends its roots into the mud and raises its knees, but today's "large" cypress measures about five feet in diameter above the spread of its root system—small, compared to the eight- to twelve-foot columns Bartram reported. During our eight-mile trip, we see a couple of dozen of the grand trees.

In the 1950s, various Alabama agencies began to acquire land along the river system of the delta. By 2000, the state and federal governments owned about one hundred thousand acres. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources began planning and building the water trails in 2000 and officially opened them to the public in 2003. In 2004, they installed floating platforms for camping.

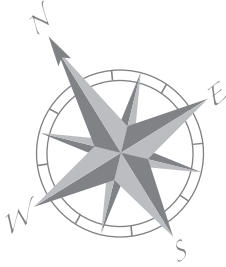
Biologists, bird watchers, and outdoor enthusiasts consider the Mobile-Tensaw Delta a treasure. For millennia, waters of the Coosa, Tallapoosa, Black Warrior, Tombigbee, and Alabama rivers have met here. Roots catch rich soils

drained from Georgia, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama to create a ten-mile-wide swath of marsh, cypress-tupelo swamp, and bottomland hardwood where prowl forty mammal species, including black bears, along with 126 species of fish, 60 of reptiles, and 30 of amphibians.

As we round a bend in Globe Creek, a swallow-tailed kite circles above the trees. Black feathers outline its white belly and the undersides of its wings, and a forked tail spreads abruptly as it dips and soars in search of insects. This raptor is a visitor; it spends the winters in South America and finds its nesting place here in the delta. The range of swallow-tailed kites once extended up the Mississippi valley as far as Minnesota. By the early 1900s, its numbers had plummeted, due largely to the cutting of trees. Today, it is rarely seen outside Florida.

Restoration of the habitat of the kite and other species has become a project in Alabama. The state sets aside a portion of the interest collected from offshore oil leases and places it in the Forever Wild Land Trust. A good label, "Forever Wild." It names a dream of land that can be restored somewhat to the nature Bartram found before commercial timber cutting began.

Cypresses may once again tower in abundant numbers and deer, bear, and migratory birds may someday find refuge in the thickets. Wildness may come. But restoration of anything that resembles the forests that Bartram knew won't happen quickly. Seeds dropped from the big cypresses will sprout in the mud of the rising and falling rivers. If the wakes of power boats don't dig the soil from their roots and the timber interests can be kept at bay, they'll slowly grow into straight shafts with flat, spreading crowns. Their trunks will thicken and arch their branches over wide areas of wax trees. And Evan and Connor, my critter-fascinated grandsons, will, in their senior years, find the wildness that Keith and his colleagues labor to restore.



THE SIRE OF RIVERS

“Should be a good day for sailing,” I say as John steps down from the cab of his truck. Burly, with the hands of a welder and the smile of a bartender—both professions of his varied past—he answers, “Any day’s good for sailing. The wind looks good, if it doesn’t turn out of the east.”

On a spring morning, we’ve rendezvoused with John and Carolyn McGoogan at a service station on the east edge of Baton Rouge. We follow their boat trailer, swinging along narrow roads that wind through forests of pine, live oak, and ash. Past French Settlement, we turn onto a gravel driveway and stop at a public landing on the Amite River.

Old hands at sailing, they need no help sliding the eighteen-foot craft off its trailer. Becky (my wife at the time) and I busy ourselves transferring a couple of small gear bags and plastic sacks filled with food and drinks from the cars to the cockpit of the boat.

“Want some help with the mast?” I ask, but too late. John’s thick, broad shoulders are already bulging beneath his shirt as he raises the shiny aluminum pole and locks it into place.

As Carolyn stows the gear and goodies, I walk across the gravel to a pickup truck where two men are tying their green bateau to a rusty trailer. Their dark hands are thick and lined, their faces covered by days’ growth of black whiskers. Strands of thick, oily hair that look like the tail feathers of a crow reach from beneath their ball caps and over the dingy collars of their T-shirts.

“Catch any?” I ask.

The short, stocky man reaches over the gunwales of the boat and opens an ice chest, revealing a load of large, blue-gray catfish and silvery buffalo.

“Do you run trot lines?” I guess, thinking it would be difficult, even on a good day, to pull that many fish from the river using rod and reel.

“Bout twenty,” he says. “Don’t you boys go pullin’ any of ’em.” His face tells me he isn’t joking.

“Thanks,” I say. “We’ll leave your trot lines in the water.” I return to the sailboat. John cranks the five-horse engine. The little motor purrs and churns the dark brown water as we back away from the pier and turn downstream. Carolyn pulls a bottle from a cabinet beneath her seat and pours John an inch of amber liquid.

“John’s got to have his rum when he sails. Makes him think he’s still in the Caribbean. Would you like some?” The couple had returned a few months before from a year of island hopping. Carolyn had taken an appointment as superintendent of the Louisiana Training Institute in Baker—a state facility for juvenile offenders—and John had landed a job with the undersecretary of the Department of Corrections, where we worked together.

A ski boat breezes past, ignoring the “No Wake Zone” sign and sloshing waves against the bulkheads lining the banks. Behind these low timber walls, houses, some of them the size of a suburban home, most three- or four-room cabins, serve as fishing camps for weekend getaways. A handful poise on creosote pilings, raised above the floods that swell the river almost every spring. The rest stand on slabs or blocks. In an annual ritual, TV reporters interview their owners, recording their acid complaints that the state should do more flood control. A dam at Pathview and another on the Comite would do just fine, they say.

The river broadens. John kills the motor, hoists the main sail, and we tack. It’s hard work. When the boat approaches a shore, John turns abruptly while Carolyn guides the spar to let the sail fill as we head across the river. We hear a whining engine behind us and look back to see a cigarette boat speeding down the stream, oblivious to our craft.

“Damn fool,” grunts John as he steers toward the right bank. Carolyn lowers the sail in time to slow us as we rush toward a stump. Becky squeals as a snake drops from a branch a few feet away. The speed boat roars past, sloshing our craft against a tangle of branches and vines.

After an hour, we see the mouth of the river and the open water of Lake Maurepas. But the river turns tightly here and a southeast wind is in our faces. Waves pound the shore and jostle the young cypresses.

“Lower the sail and crank the engine,” shouts John. “We can’t make it into the lake.” We don’t have room to tack, and the engine won’t push through the breakers. Carolyn quickly furls the sail and I pull the engine rope. John tacks close to a thicket of dark brown, slender stumps on the left bank, then turns the helm hard starboard and we come about, facing upstream.

As we sail back up the Amite, my reading of Bartram is ten years into the future. I am unaware that I am retracing his voyage of the autumn of 1775 (he writes that it was 1777, but his chronology is often wrong). He was recovering from a fever he had contracted while in the Alabama delta. Feverish, his eyes draining “a most painful defluxion of pellucid, corrosive water” (*Travels* 418), he had traveled from Mobile, taking a four- or five-week break at “Pearl island” to treat his ailment. Still plagued by poor eyesight, he boarded “a handsome large boat with three Negroes to navigate her,” coasted along the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, through Pass Manchac, and into Lake “Mauripas” (Maurepas). On the northwest shore of the lake, the boat entered the “Amete” and carried him up the “Iberville” (now Bayou Manchac). No speeding boats threatened them. At the traders’ warehouses, possibly at Alligator Bayou, he alighted and took to foot.

A road near the northern bank of the bayou led him westward “under the shadow of a grand forest,” and he emerged on the Mississippi. Briskly, he walked to the banks of the river, where he “stood for a time as it were fascinated by the magnificence of the great sire of rivers” (*Travels* 427).

He had followed the British route to the Mississippi. Spain held New Orleans and the land some seventy miles north to Bayou Manchac. This made the south bank of Bayou Manchac an international border. At the time, it was a peaceful boundary. Four years later, Don Bernardo de Galvez would lead his army across the bayou, fire a few cannon balls into the fort at Baton Rouge (called New Richmond in 1775), and claim the region for Spain. The Spanish would hold it until 1810, when the United States annexed it.

The trip took several days by water, but a journey by land would have required a detour to the north, skirting marshes and crossing dozens of streams. Since the building of Interstates 10 and 12, the distance can be covered in a matter of three hours.

Along the Amite, the large trees are gone, cut away for prized cypress lumber, but, except for the fishing camps, an occasional restaurant, and the traffic of motorboats, the river looks much as Bartram knew it. Dense forests, shady and filled with vicious mosquitoes, hug its banks. Alligators lounge on logs along the banks or lie prone in the water, their snouts and eyes breaking the surface like three dark-green tennis balls floating in a triangular formation. Snowy egrets stand awkwardly on tree branches or stride slowly through the shallows at the river’s edge, washed by the wakes of skiers and bass boats.

Oh, and did I mention the canals that divert water from the swamps? And the plastic sheets, half-inflated basketballs, and sherds of vinyl siding that hang in the trees?



Twenty years later, when I am tracking Bartram, sport fishing hamlets still nestle between the river and the swamps along the Amite. No dams have been built, but the Corps of Engineers, hearing the complaints and eager to slosh their dredges, is considering “all reasonable measures to provide flood damage reductions and improve environmental conditions.”

A modern traveler following Bayou Manchac from the Amite to the Mississippi finds that the stream, no longer flooded by overflows of the big river, is shallow and filled with young cypress trees. Bartram’s road is shredded by a maze of highways and subdivisions and cut by Interstate 10 and the Airline Highway (U.S. 61). But Spanish Lake and its swamps, extending across 13,000 acres about 7 miles south of the bayou, provide a lonely pocket of undeveloped land and a memory of the earth Bartram knew. Tupelo and a few old-growth cypresses, one of them 700 years old, with five-foot tall knees, shoot upward from shallow water along Alligator Bayou, surrounded by wax myrtle.

Spanish Lake barely escaped the bulldozers and dredges that eat the wetlands of Louisiana. In the early 1990s a group of local citizens, led by environmentalists Frank Bonifay and Jim Ragland, fought off a waste incinerator company and an airport development project. When they saw a logging crew clear-cut sixty acres of the swamp, they began their advocacy with the goal of permanently protecting the area. Using their own money to buy 350 acres of the swamp, they established Bluff Swamp Wildlife Refuge and Botanical Gardens, then led Ascension Parish to purchase 901 acres and donate it to their nonprofit group.

On a cool autumn afternoon, I drive south from Baton Rouge on Nicholson Drive, turn onto Bayou Paul Lane and follow a gravel road along Bayou Manchac. Inside the unpainted cypress bait shop of Alligator Bayou Tours, set near a concrete control structure where Alligator Bayou empties into Bayou Manchac, a pet nutria scampers across the rough wood floor. One terrarium holds a young alligator. In another, a pair of rat snakes lounge. The nutria sniffs my socks as Lisa, the attendant, explains that there won’t be an evening ecotour. “We have a twenty-person minimum,” she says gently. “I’m sorry. We don’t run the tour unless we have enough people.”

“Then I’ll rent a canoe,” I say.

I complete a form, swearing that I will return the canoe unscathed and not hold the company liable for snake bites and the like, and pay my rental for two hours. Lisa leads me to the front porch, hands me a flotation vest, and opens a large wooden locker. “You may pick out a paddle,” she says.

A small fleet of fiberglass canoes lie keels-up beside a boat ramp. I turn one over and push it into the pale green duckweed that floats on the water. Wind has pushed rafts of the pale green plant into the lagoon. It surrounds the boat and clings to the paddle. Rounding a bend where a great blue heron watches my sluggish progress, I find that the opening to Cypress Flats is clear of duckweed but that the wind is now running straight over my bow. I kneel in the center of the canoe, hoping to catch less wind, but I drive a winding course. J-strokes and ruddering can't keep me moving straight ahead. While the whitewater of the Appalachians and Arkansas can be tough, and I found the headwinds on the Bartram canoe trail challenging, the duckweed and wind in my face on Alligator Bayou beats me. I feel a long way from my chiropractor.

I turn the boat, putting the wind to my back, and steady the craft. Relaxed for the first time in this suburban wilderness, I enjoy the low evening sun and the shadows of cypresses spared from becoming timbers and flower bed mulch. The first frog of the evening croaks a greeting and, as I paddle down the bayou toward the duckweed bed, the heron steps to a branch and gives me a look. I think he winks, nods, says, "Good decision. You'd never have made it to the lake and back by dark."



Seven blue tractors stand on the crest of the east levee where the Mississippi River makes a broad right turn around Manchac Point and flows west for five miles. The machines face north, toward Baton Rouge, their rotary mowers behind them like tails of iron beavers. If Andrew Jackson had not cut off Bayou Manchac from the river in 1814 for strategic reasons and the Corps of Engineers had not built the serpentine levee of earth, stone, and concrete in the early years of the twentieth century, the spot where the mowers stand would have been on the southern bank of the bayou. But the bayou no longer connects with the river. The nearest it gets is 700 feet. And, at this point, it is difficult to call it a bayou. It's more of a cypress slough.

Those of us whose experience with creeks and rivers comes from tramping the uplands have to orient ourselves to a different order of nature when we get to the Mississippi delta. We are accustomed to spring branches emptying into creeks and creeks into rivers. But bayous in this part of Louisiana flow *out* of the river, not into it.

Sediment from more than 1,245,000 square miles of mountains, forests, farmland, and cities swirl in the river and pass Bayou Manchac. Until the levees were built, waves of this juice, with its organic treasure, sloshed outward into the network of bayous and made their way to the Gulf of Mexico through the deep,

ancient Atchafalaya River or smaller, slow-moving streams. The delta dispersed water from New York, Georgia, Montana, and eighteen other states, as well as two Canadian provinces, through about 6,000 square miles of wetlands along 125 miles of coast in Louisiana. For more than 10,000 years, Bayou Manchac flowed out of the river, winding southeast through stands of Southern magnolias, tulip trees, and walnuts until it emptied into the Amite. From there, its waters went to the Gulf via Lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain, and Borgne. Now, cut off from its main source, the bayou is an unfortunate disowned child of the “sire of rivers.”

Bartram’s description of the river and its banks portrays their wildness:

it is not expansion of surface alone that strikes us with ideas of magnificence, the altitude, and theatrical ascents of its pensile banks, the steady course of the mighty flood, the trees, high forests, even every particular object, as well as societies, bear the stamp of superiority and excellence; all unite or combine in exhibiting a prospect of the grand sublime. The banks of the river at Manchac, though frequently overflowed by the vernal inundations, are about fifty feet perpendicular height above the surface of the water . . . and these precipices being an accumulation of the sediment of muddy waters, annually brought down with the floods, of a light loamy consistence, are continually cracking and parting, present to view deep yawning chasms, in time split off, as the active perpetual current undermines, and the mighty masses of earth tumble headlong into the river, whose impetuous current sweeps away and lodges them elsewhere. (*Travels* 427f)

The duration of Bartram’s trip up the river from Manchac to New Richmond (now Baton Rouge) also testifies to the river’s power. He and a “gentleman” got into a boat rowed by slaves to ascend the river. While the distance from Bayou Manchac to Baton Rouge is only fifteen miles (not the “more than forty miles” reported by Bartram), the trip required two days, including rest stops at an Indian village and several plantations.

Even with its levees, the magnificence of the river at Manchac fascinates now as it did on the autumn day when Bartram marveled over it. He had seen other great rivers, but none brought out as much ink from his nib as the Mississippi. Above Jacksonville, for example, the St. Johns is wider than the “great sire.” But its flow is limp. His “mighty Altamaha” is narrower and sluggish compared to the deep, turbid, dark waters of the Mississippi. River pilots work hard for their pay at Manchac Point, avoiding sand bars and finding the currents to push their tows of a dozen or more barges up the stream.

Though the river's power endures, the scene isn't quite right. Levees crunch the river and curb its passion to spread across the floodplains. The Corps of Engineers calls the system of levees and floodgates and diversion canals "improvement of the Mississippi River." Not having a house washed away several times in each generation is, of course, more civil than facing an unbound, feral river. That the levee system is an "improvement" of the Mississippi is subject to debate, however. How do you improve upon a wild, twisting river that has cut its way from the bogs of Lake Itasca in Minnesota and gathered the waters of the Rockies, Appalachians, and Ozarks to spread its nourishing broth to trees, grasses, oysters, and shrimp across an area bigger than the state of Connecticut?

As with most human interventions in the earth's systems, the channeling of the Mississippi, along with other projects in the Louisiana lowlands, has brought losses. While the riverbanks are secure, the vast wetlands have been slipping away. The river, forced to stay within the bounds that the nation chose for it, carries its load of decayed hemlock needles from the Smokies, grass from Iowa, and maple leaves from Pennsylvania into the Gulf of Mexico. There, the organic goodies sink to the bottom of the sea, their opportunity for replenishing and fertilizing land gone. Wetlands are the losers. No longer able to add the rich deposits to their mass and fertility, they wash away.

I first learned of the distress of the wetlands in the late 1980s. I owned a fishing camp, a tiny house consisting of two rooms and a bath. It stood precariously on creosote stilts beside Bayou Petite Caillou, a stream that runs south from Houma and empties into the Gulf through Bay Cocodrie and Bay Chaland. The camp, with its asbestos siding and rusting, red-painted corrugated tin roof, wasn't much to look at. But it gave me a nice retreat from my job in the bureaucracy of Baton Rouge. Best of all, in my little blue aluminum boat, I had access to some of the best fishing in America.

On Friday evenings the locals, mostly Cajuns, gathered with weekend fisherfolk at Terry and Rosalie Lapeyrou's store and bar on Robinson Canal. Terry and Rosalie almost always cooked a cauldron of gumbo, jambalaya, or redfish stew and laid out loaves of white bread. Guests brought cakes, slaw, or salad. Beer flowed along with an occasional Bloody Mary. The conversations, carried on over the rumble of laughter and the music from a jukebox, ranged from fishing to sex, with a few stories of grandchildren thrown in for good measure.

One evening, a Cajun woman, her face lined by decades in the sun, brought her scrapbook. Knowing my interest in the area and its environment, she turned past snapshots of family reunions to a page of faded black and white pictures. In a couple of the prints I could discern a pasture where scrawny cows munched on lush grass behind a barbed-wire fence.

“You know where dat is?” she asked. “Jus’ guess.”

I took a leap and named a place up the road, near Chauvin.

“Aw, no, cher,” she said. “Dat’s d’bayou where you been fishing at.”

The pasture, she said, was near Cocodrie. Over the years, saltwater has covered it. Presumably, forever. If you know the shallow channels, you can drive your boat over the former grazing land to reach Little Cocodrie Bayou and connect to a long, narrow inlet behind the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium research center.

Levees can’t carry the full responsibility for the loss of marshes, however. During the early and middle years of the twentieth century, oil companies made their mark. To shorten routes to the drilling rigs in the bays and tidal bayous, they cut canals. These straight ditches, some more than a hundred feet wide with hard, shiny banks, make islands of peninsulas. Work boats speed along them, taking crews to the rigs. Small tugs push barges. Their wakes grind away at the banks of soil and ancient shells. Not only do the canals give oil workers access to the marshes, they also provide a route for more sea water to intrude. Grasses and small shrubs, accustomed to brackish water and springtime washings of fresh water, tremble and die. With roots no longer holding the soil, the islands erode. One old-timer told of the day he drove his boat to his camp out in the marsh after a hurricane. It was demolished, he said. Where the little house had been was a pile of splintered lumber under a *floton*.

“What is a floton?” I asked.

“It’s a floating marsh,” he explained, “a mat of soil and grass floating out in the marsh.”

The breaking away of the flotons has increased, he said, over the past couple of decades. A Louisiana government website says that coastal Louisiana vanishes at the rate of one acre every thirty-five minutes. Estimates of the total loss since 1930 range up to 1,900 square miles of wetlands.

What really matters about the marshes of south Louisiana is not so much the land that is lost but the life: plants and animals, many unseen without microscopes; tiny mollusks, useless to humans but vital to birds, mammals, and fish; ducks, mink, muskrats, otters, and ocean life. This network of tidal bayous is one of the most prolific maternity wards and nurseries of the gulf, Caribbean, and South Atlantic. Trout, flounder, red drum, shrimp, and oysters spawn in the shallow waters, depending on just the right mixture of salt and fresh water. Their offspring grow seaworthy here, then migrate out to the Gulf on the fast-flowing tides of spring. No better snapshot of this activity is found than on a *paupier*.

Scattered across the marshes of Terrebonne Parish, in spots where the tides move swiftly through deep holes in the bayous, nets dangle from tall frames

made of welded pipes that stand on wooden platforms. In the springtime, when the maturing shrimp migrate out of the marshes in great numbers, men ride their bateaus out to these *paupiers* for all-night vigils. They lower the nets into the water until the bar holding them stretches parallel to the surface of the bayou, bending and groaning at the tug of the current. Periodically, after a few beers and a snack of vienna sausage or a bologna sandwich, they raise the net and extract a load of shrimp. Before dawn, when the tide has turned, the shrimpers load their baskets and coolers into their boats and make their way home or to a seafood shop. Tons of the succulent crustaceans make it past the *paupiers*, of course, and become prey for trawlers, food for the fish that roam the bays and Gulf, and the mamas and papas of next year's shrimp.

Louisiana took note of the wetlands. In October 2003, voters approved three amendments to the state's constitution that would fund restoration projects. The plan is to divert water from the Mississippi through the levees, reintroducing water into the lowlands in a process mimicking the natural overflow of the river. Sediments would deposit material in the marshes and nourish vegetation.

The plan may work, if federal financial support flows to the ambitious project. But it has come too late to help New Orleans. Surges of water pushed by Hurricane Katrina broke sea walls and levees that protect the city from floods. Water rose rapidly, turning the Crescent City into a bay of water, sewage, flotsam, and vermin. Panic and death followed. Environmentalists were quick to note that the lost marshes could have reduced the storm's effects. Indeed, some of them, including Joe Suhayda, an oceanographer at Louisiana State University, pointed out the relationship between the wetlands and the safety of New Orleans as early as 2002. On Bill Moyers's *NOW* (National Public Broadcasting), he predicted quite accurately the disaster that Katrina left behind. Suhayda said that the wetlands reduced storm surges, but that now the water in the bays that replaced the marshes actually adds to hurricanes' power.



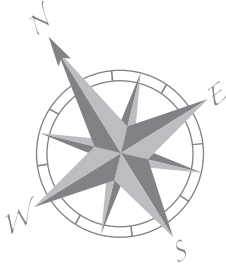
Effects of other technological mistakes and environmental meddling, as well as corporate greed and carelessness, surround Bayou Manchac. From a few miles south of the bayou to the outskirts of New Orleans, locals know the border of the river as "the chemical corridor." Environmentalists have tagged it "cancer alley," reflecting the high incidence of cancers and stillbirths that they blame on the toxic byproducts of the chemical manufacturers. Stories of wind-borne fumes and smoke spilling from vents and chimneys of factories abound, as do reports of asthma, stillbirths, miscarriages, neurological diseases, and cancers.

In the 1980s, Chris Gaudet, a pharmacist practicing in St. Gabriel, publicized what she called an unusually high rate of breast cancer and miscarriages in her area. Studies of the allegations resulted in mixed conclusions about the link between the chemicals and the diseases, but the suspicions continue. At the same time, the Superfund for cleanup of toxic waste sites focused on several plots along the river where chemicals were dumped. In 1998, the Borden company agreed to a settlement of Environmental Protection Agency charges that they had defiled the air, soil, and groundwater in the area. They paid a fine of \$3.6 million and said they would clean up the ground water and donate \$400,000 to buy equipment for local emergency response units.

More recently, a manufacturer of atrazine, an agricultural weed killer produced at a plant in St. Gabriel at the rate of seventy million pounds a year, found itself embroiled in a controversy over the safety of its product. It was bad enough that frogs exposed to runoffs of the chemical from farm fields have been found to suffer reproductive abnormalities. Now it appears that workers at the plant have a rate of prostate cancer fourteen times as great as other men.

Such stories are rampant along the river. While farmers in Missouri talk about the weather and commuters in Atlanta complain about the traffic, dinner table conversations from Baton Rouge to New Orleans often revolve around facts and rumors of pollution. Residents speak of Superfund sites—Cleve Reber, Bayou Sorrell, Old Inger—as they do of reprobate neighbors. They can be excused if they can't pronounce the polysyllabic names of the chemicals that companies dumped and left in the soil along "the great sire of rivers." When they balance the risks against their need for family income, they often stifle their fears and continue to vote for the politicians who give the industries massive tax breaks. Caught up in the complexities of the global economy, they live simple lives, prizing their small houses, big-screen TVs, and fishing boats. And they live in a wasteland that has replaced the grand forests and wild swamps that met the first Europeans to visit their broad valley.

What hope exists is in the efforts of people like Chris Gaudet, sounding the alarm, and Jim Ragland and Frank Bonifay, acting upon their concerns for the environment and leading government officials to promote ecological reforms.



AT THE EDGE OF THE EMPIRE

Baton Rouge was clothed in flowers, like a bride—no, much more so; like a greenhouse. For we were in the absolute South now—no modifications, no compromises, no halfway measures. The magnolia trees in the Capitol grounds were lovely and fragrant, with their dense rich foliage and huge snowball blossoms . . . And there was a tropical sun overhead, and a tropical swelter in the air.

— Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, 1882

I lived in Baton Rouge for ten years, beginning slightly after the bicentennial of Bartram's visit and overlapping the centennial of Mark Twain's reminiscent trip down the Mississippi. During that time, I enjoyed the flowers and foliage and endured the swelter that brings a light sweat at 6:30 in the morning on the trip to pick up the *Morning Advocate* at the curb. The people were helpful and warm, the cultural events adequate, and the fun abundant.

But, having lived in more than half the Southern states and traveled through them all, I can't say that the Baton Rouge I knew was "the absolute South." At least not the "Old South" that Twain described. Returning at the turn of the twenty-first century, he would recognize only a few features of the city. Bartram would have a much harder time. Of the sites Bartram explored, only Jacksonville has outdone Baton Rouge in erasing the frontier outpost character that greeted Bartram. Charleston and Savannah retain remnants of their Colonial past and the seaports that put them on Bartram's itinerary. But Baton Rouge has only the river and one plantation house (Magnolia Mound, built five years after his visit)

to recall the town he knew. Otherwise, the city sprawls east and south of a hub created by a diverse economy, shrouding its Colonial past.

Bartram spent three weeks in the area of “Batonrouge.” When he arrived here, on the western edge of the British Empire, a few plantations skirted the fort of New Richmond. He lodged with a planter. Historians think this was William Dunbar, a wealthy man with scientific interests of his own, but from Bartram’s writings we only know about a mysterious “arborescent aromatic vine,” “a new and beautiful species of Verbena” (*Travels* 436), and plants under cultivation in gardens and fields: Tube-rose, Scotch grass (imported from the West Indies), and humble plant, which he suggests was an invasive species. Yet, despite the lack of detail in Bartram’s description, Baton Rouge is a fitting place to end the quest for the social and environmental changes that have occurred in the South since he crossed it. Resting at the western end of Bartram’s trail, and the western edge of England’s holdings in America, the city’s economy and culture embody much of what the South has become.

At the close of the seventeenth century, the French called the place Baton Rouge, “Red Stick,” after the bloodstained ceremonial post that the Indians had erected on the banks of the river. Since then, it has evolved from an outpost fortress into the seat of Louisiana’s government and petro-industry.

From the pinnacle of the Louisiana capitol building, I enjoy a panorama. The legislature is not in session. Spaces in the parking lot, surrounded by lawns and gardens, are open. I climb forty-eight steps, each step named for a state of the Union at the time it was built, and stand on a broad patio where the names of Alaska and Hawaii are engraved. Governor Huey P. Long had the white art deco skyscraper built in 1932. It is the tallest of any capitol in the nation.

Through heavy, ornate bronze doors, I enter a softly lit rotunda with a bronze map of the state in its center. An elevator carries me swiftly past floors that house the governor’s offices and other state bureaucracies. Its doors open on a drab room on the twenty-seventh floor, where another elevator runs the final three floors to the observation deck, 450 feet above the green lawns and massive live oak trees of the capitol grounds.

To the west, almost straight down from the top of the tower, two tugboats push three dozen barges up the churning, turbid waters of the Mississippi. Moored on the far bank, about a half mile away, empty barges lie idle. Beyond them, Interstate 10 stretches like an arrow through the flat fields of sugar plantations and across the vast Atchafalaya swamps.

Around the northern arch of the city, steam and smoke rise from the massive Exxon refinery. A rusted-out, abandoned aluminum plant and other factories hug the river. Behind them, away from the river, spreads a grid of narrow streets

through neighborhoods of white frame houses. Southern University, perched on a bluff where the “red stick” once stood, overlooks Devil’s Swamp, a wetland the city uses as a landfill.

On the shallow hills flanking the river south of the State Capitol, shady residential neighborhoods and strip malls surround the government and financial center of the city. Beyond them, Tiger Stadium dominates the red tile roofs of Louisiana State University. Farther out, where Bartram visited with Indians displaced from Alabama, homes with columns and high-pitched roofs sit on vast, flat lawns of St. Augustine grass surrounded by meandering bayous.

Throughout the city, live oak trees still bend their branches toward the ground along boulevards and the lawns of homes in neighborhoods and estates. “Urban pioneers” have preserved the Garden District and restored houses in Beauregard Town and Spanish Town. Beneath Interstate 10, egrets roost on the branches of cypress trees in City Park Lake. Cyclists on the bike path circling the lake pedal past elephant ear plants at the water’s edge and admire opulent houses along the sparkling waters.

The “Little Sham Castle”

From a bluff at the end of tree-shaded North Boulevard, the Old State Capitol, built in 1849, looks down on the river. When Mark Twain last passed by, the state was restoring it from the damage caused when Union soldiers quartered their horses in its atrium and scorched it when a cooking fire got out of hand. Twain thought the castle-like structure was the “ugliest thing on the Mississippi” and offered the opinion that

Sir Walter Scott is probably responsible for the capitol building; for it is not conceivable that this little sham castle would ever have been built if he had not run the people mad, a couple of generations ago, with his medieval romances It is pathetic enough that a whitewashed castle, with turrets and things—materials all ungenthine within and without, pretending to be what they are not—should ever have been built in this otherwise honorable place; but it is much more pathetic to see this architectural falsehood undergoing restoration and perpetuation in our day, when it would have been so easy to let dynamite finish what a charitable fire began, then devote this restoration money to the building of something genuine. (244)

Mark Twain’s eloquence could not sway the politicians. The refurbished building, surrounded by magnolias and oaks, is a tourist spot. Within it, spiral staircases and wood-floored legislative chambers reflect rays of light from arched

stained glass windows. In the office where Huey Long and his brother Earl held court, I think I smell cigar smoke.

On the river, downhill from the old building's western entrance, gray gun turrets, stacks, and the mast of the USS Kidd rise above the levee. A steel frame holds the World War II destroyer upright on the river mud. Turning my eyes to the left, I see Catfish Town.

The Legend of Catfish Town

Once upon a time, floods poured water into low spots along the river. Then, when the river slid back into its banks, fish became trapped in shallow pools. Men and boys waded in and grappled with the slithering, shiny critters. They filled baskets and took them home to fry.

When the levees were built, the river stayed within its banks. Companies built warehouses beside the river, near the railroad. But the people of the town did not forget the wonderful days of fishing. They named the warehouse area "Catfish Town."

Years later, the town built its docks and rail yards elsewhere. The long, narrow brick buildings stood forlorn, their heavy wooden doors locked. Grass grew between the cobblestones; vines crept along the loading docks.

Then a very wise man, the mayor of the town, thought: "The city can buy Catfish Town. We will turn it into a mall, filled with shops and restaurants. Pittsburgh did this with its waterfront. And Baltimore. Even San Antonio, whose river was not much more than a ditch."

"People will come from far and wide," said the city's bankers, "to see this marvel. They will drink beer and wine and dance beside our river. They will bring money."

And so it was that the city raised millions of dollars. And when they had gotten enough money, they began to clean up Catfish Town. People of the town rented spaces in the buildings. They brought stoves for cooking gumbo and alligator sauce piquant and ovens for baking pizza. And they put them in a courtyard, indoors.

On the first day of July 1984, headlines said, "It's A New Day." Kegs of beer and loads of shrimp arrived on trucks. T-shirts were hung on racks and souvenirs displayed on shelves. Then, on America's 208th birthday, townspeople drove and walked to the open plaza. In late afternoon, as the hot sun beamed over the shiny, new rooftops of the old buildings, they stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the plaza paved with bricks. Mothers and fathers drank beer from plastic cups and the children ate ice cream. A band played Cajun music. And all the town was happy.

Two U.S. senators came. A man introduced them. He said that they had helped get money from the federal government. The senators said that Catfish

Town was a wonderful example of how federal and local governments can work together. And the people of the town clapped and cheered.

Then the man introduced a small, balding man who wore the black garment and stiff white collar of a priest. The bishop said, "Let us pray." For several minutes he told God about Catfish Town and about the people who worked hard "to make this day possible." A boy with curly red hair nudged his father and whispered, "Doesn't God know everything?" His dad whispered that they'd talk about it later, and the boy hushed. And then the bishop said, in a slow, soft voice, "God bless America . . . ; God bless Baton Rouge . . . ; and God Bless Catfish Town. Amen."

People smiled and nodded. But a few snickered and said, "Who will come to this place? Why would they come?" But most said, "God bless Catfish Town." And they bought jambalaya and fried chicken and beer and danced late into the night.

For months, people shopped at Catfish Town. Couples went to the rooftop of a restaurant on the levee to slurp raw oysters and drink beer. Office workers ate lunch in the food court.

Hard times came to Baton Rouge when oil prices dropped. People stopped going to Catfish Town. The shops closed, the restaurants, too. After three years, the newspaper said that Catfish Town was in financial trouble. It had cost almost \$20 million but was never more than two-thirds rented out. And a bank that had lent money to the place wanted to be paid. Catfish Town closed.

Six years passed. A business named Jazz Enterprises bought eleven buildings and ten acres. They paid only \$3.25 million. The next year, 1994, they built a hotel and a fancy walkway out to the river. It was shiny and pretty. At the end of the walkway, on the river, they berthed a big boat, shaped like a Mississippi River gambling boat. They named it the "Argosy Casino."

The boy with curly red hair grew up and moved away. One day, he asked his father if God had blessed Catfish Town. His Dad told him that God works in mysterious ways.

Gov'ment

One in every five of the 200,000 people in Baton Rouge who go to work every day is heading for a government job, most with the State of Louisiana. I worked with a number of these people. Most want to get things done. They want the state hospitals to treat people well, the elders to have a good life, and the prisons to be safe and secure. They work hard in a tough political environment.

Among the many enterprises of the state are ten general hospitals. These are full-blown, complete health care centers with emergency rooms, maternity wards, coronary care, and the like. In addition, they have well-baby clinics. It's a tradition, unique in America, that began in 1735 when Jean Louis, a sailor,

bequeathed his savings to establish the first charity hospital in New Orleans. Since then, the state has opened nine more hospitals. And, on almost every day since 1735, they've been in financial trouble.

Pat O'Connor, an old friend and political scientist, has labored for decades in the state's health care system. His perennial quest: trying to find ways to keep Louisiana's hospitals solvent and providing quality care. Pat's job keeps him busy bringing information and options to the politicians who dabble with strategies for providing these services to the uninsured people of the state. Should the hospitals be privatized? Run by the university? Operated by a state agency? Shut down? For 250 years, leaders have grappled with the issues.

When Pat retires, he'll continue what now occupies him on evenings and weekends. It's Bartram-like work, with roots, stamens, pistils. He trades his bureaucrat's white shirt and tie for jeans and a floppy-brimmed hat. For thirty years he has gathered specimens of iris from the bogs and low forests of the state. The amended soil in his backyard is filled with clumps of them. Pat cross-pollinates the flowers and has developed more than a dozen new varieties.

This horticulture is a work of love and a contribution not only to the world of botany but to Pat's sanity. Politicians often turn Pat's well-researched proposals for strengthening the hospital system into mulch; but each spring, in his backyard, his garden experiments bloom, satisfyingly, on slender, green stalks.

Pat and his fellow employees work in an environment where "small-government-spend-as-little-as-you-can" legislators perennially tussle with social reformers and demagogues who want as much state service as taxes will buy. And they do it in a state where scandals reach legendary proportions.

Corruption is a venerable tradition and a fine art in Louisiana befitting a state, a pundit once noted, whose founding fathers include pirate Jean Lafitte. Most memorable among the political rascals have been the powerful Huey P. Long, his brother Earl, and Edwin Edwards, the "Silver Fox" of the late twentieth century. Occasional side trips into order and reform serve only to highlight the riotous missteps of the politicians who have earned the state its reputation as the "northernmost banana republic."

Governors wield extraordinary power in Louisiana. Gathering taxes into the state coffers, they distribute favors to fiscally-strapped parishes and communities across the bayous, prairies, and piney woods.

A larger-than-life statue of Huey Pierce Long rises above his grave on the spacious, oak-shaded lawn in front of the State Capitol grounds. Self-proclaimed "Kingfish" of Louisiana, he was governor from 1928 to 1932 and U.S. Senator from 1930 until 1935. Long's shadow extends beyond the capitol grounds. He maneuvered the development of Louisiana State University into a major

institution. Highways, bridges, schools, and hospitals, funded by taxes on the oil industry, maintain his memory across the city and the state.

Decades later, stories of “Huey” fill the Baton Rouge air like the sounds of spring peepers in a swamp. A frequently told tale has to do with football and the circus. Huey was caught up in developing the LSU football team. In 1934, after an expansion of the stadium, Long predicted record crowds at the games. When he learned that the advance sales for the opening game were lagging, he checked around. He found that Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus was scheduled to be in Baton Rouge the same day.

Huey called John Ringling North, owner of the circus. Explaining the conflict in scheduling, Long asked North to reschedule the circus. North turned him down. Then the senator explained, “We have a dip law here in Louisiana. Animals that cross the state line must be dipped and then placed in quarantine for three weeks.”

North moved the circus to New Orleans for that night.

Folks in Baton Rouge tell these stories with an air of glee and, as with all legends, a sense that they are explaining their culture. Having long since concluded that deals and trickery are standard fare amongst politicians and that the public can do little to reverse the trend, they use the politicians as butts of jokes (“Hide your wallets and your sister; the legislature is in town.”) and anecdotes:

When Huey was planning to build the Airline Highway, he went to the governor of Mississippi. Asked him to kick in a few million to help build a bridge over the Mississippi at Baton Rouge. The governor of Mississippi said, “Why should the State of Mississippi fund a bridge in Louisiana?” Huey said, “Cause if you don’t he’p out, we’ll have to build the bridge so low that oceangoing ships can’t go any farther up the river. Mississippi will be shut out from having a seaport.” The Mississippi governor refused, so Huey had the bridge built low to the water, an’ best Mississippi can do is get barge freight.

Some politicians join the frivolity. In 1975, when Edwin Edwards was running for the second of his four terms as governor, a reporter confronted him about unscrupulous paybacks to friends and supporters. “You don’t have to worry about that for my second term,” Edwards quipped. “I paid them all back during my first term.” Another Edwin legend has him saying, when discussing his prospects for election, “The only way I won’t be elected is if they find me in bed with a live boy or a dead girl.”

Besides tales of his alleged abuse of the powers of his office, the “Fast Eddie” Edwards legends include stories of womanizing and high-stakes gambling.

During one of his federal racketeering trails in the 1980s, prosecutors revealed that he gambled in Las Vegas under the name “T. Wong.” Corruption related to the gambling industry in Louisiana closed his political career when a federal court convicted him in 2000 for shaking down New Orleans casinos that were seeking licenses to operate. In 2002, he began serving a ten-year sentence in a federal penitentiary.

Government became fairly stable—if less interesting—during some administrations in the 1980s and into the new millennium. The Foster administration had a positive impact on the city by consolidating state offices in the downtown area and replacing dilapidated buildings with modern ones. The old business district is slowly coming back to life. Although the vintage Kresge Building and other shops along Third Street remain vacant, with cemetery fern (*Pteris vittata*) clinging to the mortar between the bricks of the second-story walls, restaurants and night spots fill the spaces where pharmacies, boutiques, and men’s stores once formed the city’s shopping district.

Education

Yellow buildings, topped with red tile roofs, surround the quadrangle at the heart of Louisiana State University. A ten-minute drive from the State Capitol, the campus stretches across two miles of land that once was a plantation on the Mississippi levee.

LSU began in 1877 as a little military academy in the center of the state with hardly more than a squad of cadets. By 2002, almost 1,300 faculty and 32,000 students from every state and over 120 countries were circulating through these buildings and grounds. Many of the students seek an education; others come to partake of the legendary good times.

The Princeton Review gave LSU top billing in its 2000 ranking of top party schools. *Playboy* ranked it number four in 2002. Beer flows in a steady stream through the taps at taverns and restaurants just outside the main campus gate. Heavy kegs arrive at frat houses on Friday and leave empty on Monday mornings.

When I studied at LSU, a number of serious students spent late hours with me in the Middleton Library and in computer labs, tapping the big databases and taking notes. With its history of petroleum resources, the state has funded a bountiful supply of energy research. From the beer to the big research grants, the university injects more than a half-billion dollars into the Baton Rouge economy each year.

For a large number of Louisianians, LSU exists for what happens at 7:30 p.m. on autumn Saturdays in Tiger Stadium. Close to 100,000 people walk past the cage of a Bengal tiger named Mike and file through the turnstiles into the stadium known as “Death Valley.” When there is a home game, a pep rally spirit

consumes the entire town. Conversations are more animated. Never assume that a car will stop for a red light; he may be on his way to a tailgate party.

I learned early in my days in the city that being a rabid Tiger fan has nothing to do with being a student or alumnus. Many Exxon employees who wouldn't be able to direct you to the student center claim the Tigers as "their team." Call them during a game and you get their answering machines.

As the Tigers prowl the south side of town, the Jaguars roam on the north. Southern University sprawls over a river bluff near the airport. Begun in New Orleans as a Reconstruction-era school to educate emancipated slaves and their children, the school originally followed the Tuskegee and Hampton model. Tinsmithing, carpentry, and agriculture had places alongside elementary, secondary, and a few college-level courses. Students fresh from plantation sharecropper houses learned English, Latin, and mathematics.

When the school relocated from New Orleans in 1914, it continued its home economics and industrial arts offerings and added two years of college courses. By 1930 it had become a four-year college and then expanded to university status. Today, Southern offers bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees, with more than four hundred faculty instructing almost 9,000 students. While Southern is a historically black institution that the African American community looks to with pride, more than three hundred of its students are white.

Industry

The night watchman was puzzled. Wind was rushing out of the hole that the ice plant in Shreveport had drilled for a water well. He struck a match, expecting the wind to blow it out. Instead, the wind roared into flame. The story, passed along for 130 years, doesn't say what happened to the watchman or how the fire was put out, but it does recall that the discovery of natural gas beneath the crust of Louisiana in 1870 began an industry that has grown into the state's major asset.

At first, gas was not much more than a curiosity. The ice plant piped it to its factory and used it for lighting, but no one exploited the gas field commercially for another thirty years. By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the quest for petroleum had swept the state. In 1901, drillers brought in the first commercial oil in the state. National firms converged. In 1909, the Standard Oil refinery (Exxon, today) in Baton Rouge went on stream. It remains, in terms of capacity, among the largest oil refineries on the North American continent. A year later, Louisiana's first long-distance oil pipeline was transporting crude oil from the northwestern corner of the state to the Baton Rouge plant.

Standard Oil was just the beginning. Not far downstream from the place where Bartram stood, fascinated by the magnificence of the "great sire of rivers," processing plants that use petroleum stand fence-to-fence along the banks of

the river. Shining pipes, elevated above the highways, reach from factories and depots into the holds of oceangoing ships on the river. By day, the scenery along the River Road from Baton Rouge to New Orleans is a strange mixture of plantations, small frame houses, and steam rising from stacks. After dark, the view is surreal. Orange light reflects from the clouds, and flares of discarded gases shoot into the air.

More than sixty million tons of cargo, much of it petroleum and products made from petroleum, along with agricultural products, flowed in and out of the Port of Baton Rouge in 2002. The port ranked tenth in the nation that year.

People

Thousands have poured into the city over the past century, attracted by jobs in industry, government, and the universities. They arrive when the petro economy is good, then pack their moving vans when oil prices sink. During the oil depression of the late 1980s, truck rental companies were paying people to drive trucks from North Carolina and Georgia to Louisiana. Most of the city's working population, however, came from small towns and farms in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Two of these people, Cotton and Duckye Duhon, lived in the little white stucco two-bedroom next to my cypress-sided cottage in the Garden District. Cotton had grown up in St. James Parish, along the river, south of Baton Rouge. His bulbous, florid nose and the slight glaze in his eyes told of years of drinking. "When I was a boy, my mother would fix me a cherry bounce," he told me. "Wild cherries, water, sugar, wine, and white lighting, soaked for six weeks. She'd pour it over ice."

When Cotton finished high school, he looked for a job in Baton Rouge. He found one with Standard Oil and remained at the refinery until he retired. In his thirties, after his mother died, he met Duckye. Since moving to the city from Mississippi, she had been a hairdresser, then had a long career in the Western Union office. Both had retired on solid company pensions.

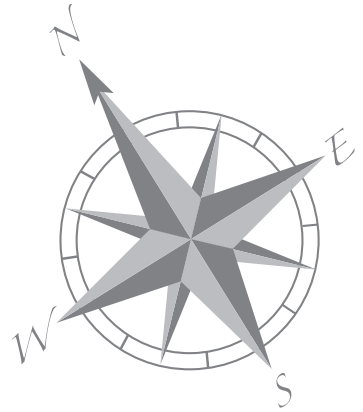
They followed LSU football closely, even named their dog "Tiger." In their younger years, Cotton and Duckye had bought LSU season tickets, but as they aged and the cost of the tickets rose, they resorted to radio and television. They knew all the players' names, qualifications, and records, their hometowns and family histories. Twenty years after the team integrated, Cotton still spoke with nostalgia about the days when the Tigers were all "white boys from Louisiana."

As the city has grown, downsides of urban development have shown up. Residents are beginning to sound like Atlantans, complaining about the traffic congestion and air pollution. And they have outgrown their sewer system. After

a federal judge ordered them to stop fouling the river, the city and parish planned a massive sewage improvement project that will cost more than \$400 million.

Whether from the peak of the State Capitol or in the neighborhoods, Bartram's New Richmond and Twain's "absolute South . . . no modifications, no compromises, no halfway measures" is hard to find. The Southland, long reluctant to shed its rural garments, has a twenty-first-century, cosmopolitan wardrobe. Baton Rouge is one of the cities in the vanguard of the changes. Industry, education, and communication have made it so. The slate of the historical past has been wiped almost clean by a universal "American" way of life.

*E*nd of the Trail

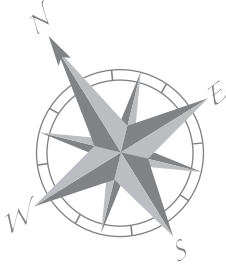


Chronological Notes

*B*y early January 1776, Bartram had retraced his steps across Alabama and Georgia and arrived in Augusta. Over the spring and summer, he further explored the Georgia coast and may have supplied intelligence on British military activities to his friend, General Lachlan McIntosh. He crossed South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland during the fall of 1776 and arrived at home in Philadelphia early in January 1777.

Meanwhile, the Revolution turned from protest, diplomacy, and skirmishes to organized warfare on several fronts. While the Redcoats failed to take Charleston in June 1776, they prevailed in New York, occupying the city on September 15. Militias of revolutionary South Carolinians and Georgians clashed with British armies during this period.

As Bartram traveled north, George Washington crossed the Delaware, beat the British at Trenton, New Jersey, and overcame a British force at Princeton, some forty-five miles northeast of the traveler's Philadelphia home.



LOOKING BACK

A dozen miles upstream of the place where Bartram forded the “delightful [Chattooga] river” (*Travels* 338), the U.S. Forest Service has for three decades placed a stretch of the stream off limits to kayaks and canoes. In April 2005, heeding the appeals of the American Whitewater Association for access for paddle sports, the chief of the service announced, “After careful consideration of the record . . . I am reversing the Regional Forester’s decision to continue to exclude boating on the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River above Highway 28.”

Members of the Georgia Canoeing Association (GCA) received e-mail rejoicing in the decision. “Chattooga Headwaters Access Granted!” Twenty-one more miles of the prized river would soon be open to paddlers as well as the fishermen who had drifted flies on its waters in search of notable trout.

I expected a flurry of “Hurrah” messages, along with a few blasts at the government agency for taking so long to “do the right thing.” Instead, we received a lengthy post from GCA member Debra Berry that said, in part, “Here’s a question: What is in the best interest of the RIVER? Not paddlers but the rivers. Farmers used to leave a field fallow, not plow it. They were taking care of the resources. Why can’t we do the same?”

She tells me that she is not related to Wendell Berry and has not read his work. Her idea closely follows his thoughts, however. He cites Revelation 4:11 to claim that “God created all things for his pleasure” and writes, “We have an obligation to preserve God’s pleasure in all things, and surely this means not only that we must not misuse or abuse anything, but also that there must be some

things and some places that by common agreement we do not use at all, but leave wild” (“Economy and Pleasure” 214).

Debra had set her foot into a nest of copperheads. Her opinions drew angry responses. “These are ‘our’ rivers,” wrote one paddler. “We should be able to use them as we see fit as long as our use doesn’t substantially affect the rights of others.”

Another said,

If this river is not being utilized by someone than [sic] the government could very well step in and state that since no one is using it than [sic] what is the point of maintaining the protective status. If things aren’t used they tend to be out of mind. What would everyone rather? Some kayakers and fishermen using the river or no one ever using it and the government for some reason deciding that they need to sell it for potential development.

Amid the clamor of paddlers who chided Debra, one voice of moderation, reflecting a concern that paddlers would disturb fishermen, wrote, “It’s too bad we’ll deprive anglers of an outstanding experience. Their testimonials of fishing the headwaters . . . are really compelling, particularly the solitude aspects which the [Wild and Scenic Rivers Act] is designed to provide. I hate to take that away from them.”

Within a week the listserv resumed its usual fare of trip announcements, notices of canoes and kayaks for sale, and an occasional story of an accidental drowning. But for a few days we had been part of a dialog rarely heard but badly needed. Someone had dared suggest that doing nothing with a piece of real estate may be more responsible than plunging into it.

Bartram walked, rode, paddled, and sailed the Southeast at a time when this discussion would have sounded absurd. Settlers pressed the boundaries set by the Crown and filtered into Indian territories. Less than thirty years after he returned to his home in Philadelphia—twelve years after he published *Travels*—the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory. Shortly after, Meriwether Lewis, preparing for his expedition with William Clark that would open settlement and exploitation of the American West, studied navigation from the city’s astronomers and cartographers.

Bartram himself contributed to the spirit of expansion. His reports of useful plants, abundant animal life, and rich soils informed those seeking to make a place in the New World. It is hard to deny that Bartram shared what Joel Martin calls the European “gaze of development.” His prayer for mercy uttered upon his viewing of the degradation of Mount Royal is a rare example of his awareness of the effects of careless human impact on an open land (*Travels* 100). Otherwise, he promoted planting and city building across the Southeast.

With or without Bartram's prompting, our continent would have become a destination for men, women, corporations, and governments who would exploit and corrupt its forests, streams, and fields. In most cases, it was only after major devastation had occurred that caring people rose up to insist on protecting the land. For example, the establishment of New York's Adirondack Forest Preserve in 1894 followed corporate loggers' stripping of most of its timber and jeopardizing its waters. Across most of the Southeast, recovering from war and less able and willing to halt the axes and saws, environmental intervention came even later. Native species suffered; some became extinct within a few years, and others were driven to refuge in tiny pockets of preserved land. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park was protected in 1940, after its mountainsides had been cleared of a large portion of their unique vegetation.

Where the work of the Nature Conservancy, the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee, environmental groups in Florida, Alabama's Tensaw Delta project, and other governmental and private groups has taken hold, centuries of care will be needed to bring the earth back to a semblance of what Bartram saw in the moment of America's birth. I figure that the seventh generation of my grandchildren's progeny might be the first in my lineage to see a forest of trees such as Bartram described near Cherokee Corner in Georgia: "the most stately forest trees . . . many of the black oaks measured eight, nine, ten, and eleven feet diameter five feet above the ground" (*Travels* 37). And then in a few, chosen places. And only if Debra's values and Walton Smith's forestry techniques prevail.



Social changes, some that showed up in Bartram's view, others that did not, have also swept the world he explored. Bartram observed plants and animals. He described the physical features, houses, farms, towns, and cultures of the Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles. Yet the human feature of the region that was destined to become its most pivotal got little of his attention.

A modern traveler across the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana sees numerous communities of African Americans. Indeed, in some rural counties along Bartram's trail the black population dwarfs the white.

Though Bartram saw the ancestors of the black southerners, he seldom mentions them in *Travels* and does not describe them or their cultures. Historian Edward Cashin cites an unpublished "passionate antislavery appeal to the American people, warning that the perpetuation of such injustice would forfeit the continuing blessings of Providence upon this country" (120). Bartram described "Four stout negro slaves" manned the boat that took him from Georgia

to Florida, three navigated his boat from Pearl Island to Manchac, and three more rowed him and his companion up the Mississippi (*Travels* 70, 423, 429). A group of slaves traveling on a path in a “desolate place” in North Carolina frightened him. Thinking them “a predatory band” who had attacked travelers in this place, he passed nervously through the group and suffered no harm (*Travels* 471-72).

In South Carolina, he met a planter and herder who owned “a considerable family of black people” and who said he treated them well because “the better they are fed, clothed, and treated, the more service and profit we may expect to derive from their labour.” Bartram saw the slaves on this plantation as “comparatively of a gigantic stature, fat and muscular.” Deep in the forest “the sooty sons of Africa forgetting their bondage, in chorus sing the virtues and beneficence of their master in songs of their own composition” (*Travels* 311-12).

He describes other slaves as “miserable,” “naked,” and “compelled to labour in the swamps and low lands” where water moccasins frighten them (*Travels* 273). He gives considerably more ink to the snakes than the slaves, however, and leaves the modern reader straining to see more through the eyes of this keen observer.

His near-silence in *Travels* may have been due to the fact that the great influx of slaves into the lands beyond the rice plantations of South Carolina and coastal Georgia began about two decades after his travels. Also, Bartram may not have considered observation of the slaves to be part of his mission. He described Indians because they dominated large segments of the land that was opening to white settlement and because his readers held diverse opinions about the treatment of native populations. What place would the Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles have in the world of farms and cities that Bartram envisioned across the South? Bartram argued for fair treatment and respect for their ways of life and thought that the Native Americans, when taught the ways of the white man, could live alongside the new population.

The government would ignore his sentiments. The Indians would be overrun, impoverished, and displaced, their presence remembered only by names of rivers and towns, a few historical markers, and an occasional expression of shame.

Bartram’s “slaves” would, however, become a major force in the centuries that followed. Their treatment and the slave economy sparked a war that devastated the South. They have struggled for six generations to overturn the laws and customs that continued to entrap them once they were emancipated. Along the way, black entrepreneurs have emerged, as have doctors, scientists, educators, writers, and leaders of business, commerce, and government. African Americans contributed to the South by building homes, courthouses, and bridges while seldom reaping either wealth or reputation from their labors. Terraces built by David Dickson’s slaves remain across the hills of eastern

Hancock County, Georgia. The songs that Bartram heard in the fields of South Carolina evolved into gospel music, the blues, and jazz. A stroll through the Georgia Music Hall of Fame in Macon, Georgia (across the river from the “Oakmulge Old Fields” and mounds Bartram described) reveals the richness and diversity of their musical contribution to America. Memories of “Little Richard,” Jessye Norman, Ray Charles, Blind Willie McTell, and Lena Horne line the halls and alcoves of the neon-lit museum.

Still, the Southern states and communities struggle to cope with the heritage of three centuries of slavery. Poverty, with its attendant poor health care and crime, pervades rural counties as well as large neighborhoods in cities and towns. White children in many communities continue to attend private, segregated schools. Stereotypes cloud the eyes of many persons of all races and slurs continue to roll through the lips of otherwise circumspect white citizens. Young African Americans flock from the impoverished hinterlands and seek opportunities in Charleston, Atlanta, Birmingham, and other cities. A people so easy to overlook in the 1770s have come, in fact, to define much about the South.



Near Bartram’s “ancient famous town of Sticoe” (*Travels* 345), now the northern Georgia town of Clayton, machinery has flattened a peak. Up Highway 441, on the outskirts of Franklin, North Carolina, rugged mountainsides have become parking lots for a car dealership, a Wal-Mart, and hotels.

Mountains are not the only victims of leveling in the South, however. Southern culture also shows signs of flattening as national and multinational influences grade away pinnacles of unique institutions, customs, and traits.

The leveling had begun when Bartram rode into the Cherokee Mountains to find Irish traders in backcountry valleys. Already, the Indians had become clients of European trade. They didn’t know it, but they were in the early stages of forgetting their herbal remedies, their skills of fabricating their own clothes and tools, and their ancient language.

By the middle of the twentieth century, small family-owned shops were closing in the face of corporate, big-box emporiums. Truck farmers along the Little Tennessee form cooperatives in hopes of marketing their succulent tomatoes in competition with international cartels. Puffy biscuits and sawmill gravy are hard to find; Big Macs and tacos are not. Mountain kids rap while their peers on the bayous sit with their fingers on joysticks and their eyes glued to moving images on a tube. And good-ol’-boys who have forgotten their granddaddy’s recipe for ‘shine buy six packs of brews from a company in St. Louis.

Footprints across the South

Not all has been lost or leveled, however. Basket weavers continue their centuries-long art in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina (though they must now travel a hundred miles to find their materials). Cajuns pole pirogues into the marshes to set traps for muskrats and minks. Fiddles scream out lively jigs of Celtic origins in the coves of the Appalachians. Housewives peddle their dark strawberry preserves alongside jars of sourwood honey and boiled peanuts at roadside stands. And Merritt Fouts sends his *Burningtown News* across the ether every Sunday morning.

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