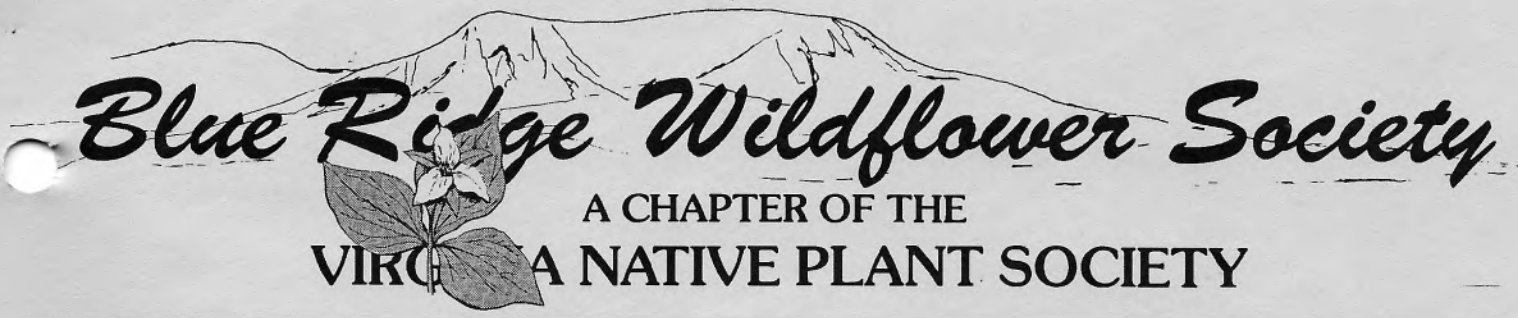




Blue Ridge Wildflower Society

A CHAPTER OF THE
VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

Vol. 21, Supplement

Summer, 2004

Sharing Knowledge

Sharing Food

Sharing Friendships

**Blue Ridge Wildflower Society's
Twentieth Anniversary**

***Special Memories From
Some of Our Charter Members***

A Brief History

Frieda Toler

On June 5, 1984, a reception and Charter meeting of the Virginia Wildflower Preservation Society was held at Virginia Western Community College. VWPS president, Mary Painter, spoke about the Society, Chapter development and growth. About twenty-five attended the meeting.

June 26, 1984, at an organizational meeting our local Chapter elected interim officers.

President	Paul James
Vice President	Rich Crites
Secretary	Frieda Toler
Treasurer	Sam Ellington

August 9, 1984, was the first General Membership Meeting and a chapter name as chosen. It was the Blue Ridge Chapter of the Virginia Wildflower Preservation Society. In November of 1988, the VWPS became the Virginia Native Plant Society.

October 14, 1984, was our first field trip and we went to the Peaks of Otter.

As historian for these twenty years, I don't want to bore you with facts but thought these dates may be of interest to you.

Pleasant Memories

Cindy Burks

I moved to Bent Mountain from Bath County in the early 1990s and soon became a volunteer at the Nature Conservancy's Bottom Creek Gorge Preserve. I first learned of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society when two other Nature Conservancy volunteers mentioned an upcoming meeting. Jenny Chapman would read a poem and introduce Emilie Owen, who would give a slide presentation. I joined BRWS that evening and have enjoyed the fellowship and wisdom of the members ever since. Special thanks to long-time members who have kept BRWS going! You've played a big part in my life for the past 11 years.

Having Fun While Learning

Dora Lee Ellington

Twenty years being a member of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society has provided wonderful times for me and others at our regular meetings, field trips and many walks as well as during the wildflower sales. It was such fun being with others who loved the

wildflowers, learning more about them, sharing their knowledge, friendship and willingness to help whenever asked.

It has been a wonderful twenty years for our BRWS; may it continue to grow and provide much happiness for many more years.

Wildflowers and Friendships

Evelyn Walke

Many years ago my husband and I became interested in wildflowers. We started going to the newly formed Blue Ridge Wildflower Society and took part in the Science Museum's spring wildflower walks and programs. In those days, the Friday night programs were held at Hollins. I especially remember one when Richie Bell, the author of *Wildflowers of North Carolina*, was the speaker and showed his beautiful pictures. That night we met Joe Hardy from Blacksburg VA. This was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. John and Joe both enjoyed photographing wildflowers. They started meeting every Wednesday afternoon (John's afternoon off) to photograph the wildflowers in the area around Blacksburg.

Paul James organized the Wildflower Society and was the guiding light in its early years. Those years and the ones that followed were full of many wonderful wildflower walks and we met delightful and interesting people. Many of the members were very knowledgeable about wildflowers. They generously shared their expertise with those of us who were anxious to learn.

Until my husband, John's, final illness in 1996, we were faithful participants in field trips, looking forward each season to rediscovering the beauty and interesting features of each individual wildflower. This is a pleasure that is denied me those days due to physical limitations.

Many thanks to all of you "Wildflower Buffs". You have made my life much richer by giving and sharing your knowledge and your friendship.

The Passing of The Years

Dorothy C. Bliss

As I reflect on the past 20 years with the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, I recall many ways in which this organization has affected my life. One of the greatest values has been

the wonderful friends I have made. Through the years we have shared our knowledge of the world of nature as we struggled up rocky slopes or sloshed through rain storms. With these friends, I have enjoyed special field trips to the Great Smoky Mountains. Remember the year the transmission broke down on my car? Each spring I look forward to our rhododendron trip along the Blue Ridge Parkway when the Catawba rhododendron makes an unforgettable display at Onion Mountain Overlook.

Thinking of the Parkway reminds me of my great disappointment—the devastating change at Thunder Ridge with the near elimination of the magnificent show of the large white trilliums intermingled with a few clusters of yellow ladyslippers, half-hidden beside a gray boulder. Each spring I would make a pilgrimage to this area for inspiration but now the former seemingly endless pink and white drifts of trilliums have been replaced by the aggressive mayapples. We can all recall areas today that are overrun with the rampant garlic mustard and we see the gradual destruction of our once majestic hemlocks by the wooly adelgid. Hopefully, solutions to some of these environmental problems will be found in the near future.

Let me not dwell on these unfortunate changes since boundless beauty remains on our mountains and in our valleys and along our woodland trails. Some of my pleasant memories include the large population of Virginia bluebells along Petits Gap Road and the challenge of counting the beautiful pink ladyslippers that grow on the wooded slopes above Bear Wallow Gap.

Nature is not static and change is inevitable. I wonder what the next twenty years will bring.

A Name is Chosen

Carolyn Bates

One of my earliest memories of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society was a discussion about what we should call this group which had such enthusiasm for the wild plants we found growing mostly in the mountains. Some were afraid "Wildflower Society" sounded too much like "little old ladies in tennis shoes" as someone put it.

Perhaps the fact that the state organization had voted to call itself the Virginia Native Plant Society gave us a sense that we could claim a serious purpose even if we called ourself the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society.

Friendships and Field Trips

Frieda Toler

When I was asked to reminisce about the twenty years of the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society, I thought, "My goodness, where will I begin?" There have been so many wonderful field trips. Work days and plant sales were fun because we enjoyed what we were doing. But most of all, are the friendships over all these years.

An early spring favorite for a field trip has always been Arcadia. By April, the bloodroot, spring beauty, hepatica and trout lily are in bloom.

Green Hill Park is great for spring flowers, also. The real show are the trillium and they are always beautiful.

The Blue Ridge Parkway south of Roanoke is the place to see dogwood, flame azalea, pinxter flower and geranium in May. Later in May and early June, the Parkway north of Roanoke will have rhododendron, firepink, fawn's breath, mountain laurel and spiderwort.

The Blue Ridge Wildflower Society has been to Sugar Grove to see the rare round-leaf Birch and to Saltville to observe both fresh water and salt water plants at the salt flats. Mount Rogers, highest elevation in Virginia, provides plants that we do not normally see here in the Roanoke Valley.

Back to the Parkway, Rakes Mill Pond is a good midseason spot for a field trip to see Turk's cap lily, Canada Lily and butterflyweed.

Blackwater Creek Trail in Lynchburg is a good area for an easy walk and a chance to see many of the favorite wildflowers. Of special interest is trout lily, *Erythronium americanum*, and green dragon, a member of the arum family, as is jack-in-the-pulpit.

The Otter Creek Dam is beautiful any time of the year. I remember one September field trip that we saw wingstem and a number of ferns and one of my favorites, bottlebrush grass, as well as several of the fall asters.

We have gone to the Duke Gardens, North Carolina, and we have been to the Smokies several times. We always enjoyed the slide presentation at Sugarlands Visitor Center given by George Beatty. We were saddened to hear he died suddenly in January, 2004.

So many people have nurtured my interest in wildflowers - Rich Crites

through his botany class at Virginia Western Community College; Sam & Dora Lee Ellington because they had a lifelong interest in plants and they were always willing to share their knowledge with me; Esther who likes to take a "vacation day" and travel the country roads. Thanks for all the shared rides with members. And, of course, to Bobby and his hunt for the perfect photographs and our travels to find them. There are too many others to mention but I am grateful to each one of them for enriching my life and helping me see the beauty of our world through plants.

Happy Memories

Dawn Gill

As a long-time member of the Virginia Native Plant Society, Blue Ridge Wildflower Society Chapter, I have many happy memories. Here are a few.

The field trips to so many different localities presented a wide range of diversity of plants seen during several seasons. Also, being out-of-doors with other kindred spirits provided opportunities to share knowledge in a safe environment. In addition to one day excursions, we had some trips out of town, such as North Carolina and the Smokies for several days.

The excellent programs provided a wealth of knowledge, often presented by expert photographers. Afterward, there was time for delicious refreshments and a chance to network and get to know each other better.

The annual meetings were well organized and best of all, a chance to get to know other members from around the state. This is how I found out about the wonderful botany class I took at Blandy, through UVA, several summers ago.

I have enjoyed this unique opportunity to participate in so many activities that involve my love of plants as well as friendships with so many members.

A Richer Life

Sandra Elder

I remember that first official meeting when Mary Painter, President of the state organization, came to Roanoke to speak to us about our new Chapter. It was exciting to be in a room filled with so many people who shared my

love for wildflowers. Many of the people there would become the cornerstones on which our chapter grew: Paul James, Rich Crites, Sam & Dora Lee Ellington, Bobby & Frieda Toler, John & Evelyn Walke and Dorothy Bliss.

After only a few field trips, it was obvious how knowledgeable my new friends were and how much they enjoyed food. Most trips were not far from a picnic area and Dora Lee & Sam always seemed to have peanut butter biscuits to share.

My first visit to the Smoky Mountain National Park was with the BRWS. What wonders there were around each bend in the road. It was my first introduction to many new and beautiful wildflowers and native trees. Standing on the summit of Clingman's Dome amid the skeletons of once healthy Fraser Fir trees, I became aware for the first time of the devastation caused by alien insects. How I wish I could have seen this mountain summit before the arrival of the balsam wooly adelgid. This experience piqued my interest in conservation.

The Blue Ridge Wildflower Society has enriched my life with beauty, knowledge and friendships.

Memories of a Dry Run Field Trip

Betty Kelly

I woke up Saturday morning to a chilly thirty-six, but sixteen people still arrived with coats and gloves to get a wildflower fix.

The leader, Butch, reported that the Dry Run trail was sort of bleak, but the crowd shouted "Let's go see if the hepatica is at its peak."

So the car pool moved on down Route 624, roadside botany sure was hard at a speed of forty-four.

Colts foot, bloodroot, and spicebush greeted us when we got out and walked, then wall rue fern, walking fern and purple cliff brake fern were spotted by Dora Lee as she gawked.

Some other flowers were closed up and rather shy, but near the end of the trail the hepatica opened up to give us a wildflower high.

It was back to the Homeplace for a delicious dinner date. The waitress waited to serve dessert until after Dora Lee had cleaned her plate.

A Seed Was Sown

Esther Atkinson

A fourth grade public school teacher took her class on a wildflower walk. It was in the spring of 1934. Being a native of Eagle Rock, Botetourt County, she knew where the flowers grew. Walking about a mile from school to the area where Craig Creek empties into the James River was a short distance for the class as most of them walked everywhere, except riding to school on the big yellow bus.

Apparently, there were plenty of trillium, jack-in-the-pulpit and other species, as each pupil had to press, glue plants to a page, identify the parts of each of the five or six flowers and put the pages into a booklet. These plants were unknown to me. Wild azaleas, multicolored violets, mountain laurel, pink ladyslippers and trailing arbutus were on the other side of the mountain and were familiar.

A seed was sown that day that flourished, creating a desire that continues today to know more about wild flowers. Today, some of the same plants can be found in this location, plus Solomon's seal, twinleaf and probably others.

The Blue Ridge Wildflower Society is a fulfillment of that learning experience years ago, helping me to learn more, enjoy more and help preserve more of the beauty of these unique plants we call wildflowers.

A Beginning, A Middle, An Unknown Future

Rich Crites

Pam asked if I would write down a few of my thoughts about our Chapter for its 20 year anniversary.

I remember the early days of meeting with Paul James at his business in downtown Roanoke and talking about the organization and its establishment. I remember Paul using his business facilities, some of his personnel and his business expertise to get the legal work and all the other requirements completed. I remember our first meeting which was held at Virginia Western, the excitement and the feeling that this should actually complement the annual Roanoke Valley Wildflower Pilgrimage. Instead of only one week

each year, there would be activities going on much of the year. Many of us were already going on Saturday or Sunday field trips, but now our excitement would spill over into the whole valley. And indeed it did.

Thousands of wild flower plants have been bought and planted by valley residents. Books have been donated to schools, special projects undertaken for trails and walkways, scholarships, slide programs, and many field trips taken locally and in surrounding states. Members of some chapters said that we had too much fun!! Maybe so, but some memorable times are etched in our minds and some very strong lasting friendships forged that will last the rest of our lives. Shared experiences of nature are sometimes the needed balance to keep us sane in this mixed-up world. We have had some good ones!

I don't know what's ahead for this chapter. It does bother me that at the meetings and other activities "gray hairs or bald" is mainly what one sees. Maybe young people are more into computers and malls. I do hope they have left room for a seed to grow!! They'll need it.

'Twas the Night Before the Test

Betty Kelly - July 7, 1999

'Twas the night before the test
And all through the class
All the students were studying
Hoping to pass.

The plant samples were passed around
with care
In hopes that Rich Crites would surely
be fair.

The classmates were looking strained
While visions of wildflowers danced in
their brains.

While Rich with his guidebook and cane
Led us on walks over the shale and
plain.

When out in the hall there arose such
a clatter

Rich sprang from his seat and said,
"Lu Bass, What's the matter?"

Then away to the hall Kenny flew like
a flash

To settle him down with a cigar from
Rich's stash.

But the evening was still young
And the words of the teacher in our
ears still rung.

When what to our wondering eyes
should appear
But 70 plant samples and the message
was clear.

With a Virginia Western teacher who
adores saprophytes
We knew in a moment it must be
Professor Crites.

More rapid than the students he
became

As he laughed and called them by
name.

Now Julie! Now Stephanie! Now
Annette and Mary,
On Bob, On Kelly, On Michelle and
Carrie.

To the top of the Peaks,
To the top of Poor Mountain,
Let's not waste any time
At the water fountain.

As dryness that came with the spring
Soon rain came and brought more
flowers with a zing.

So more field trips we took,
As we filled all the pages of our first
notebook.

Then with a twinkling of his eye,
And a crack of his cane,
We were off again
To discover what was down the lane.

As we wrote notes and turned around,
Down the road Rich went with a bound.
He was dressed in his shirt and his
shorts

And his cigar kept away the bugs, I
must report.

With a bundle of wildflowers stuck in
his bag,
He looked like his back was about to
sag.

His eyes how they twinkled, his laughter
how merry,

As he sat in the back of the class and
said, "You better know that berry!"

A wink of his eye and a twist of his
head,

Soon let us know the test was nothing
to dread.

He spoke a few words as we wrote
down the name.

"Now remember paired thorns is the
game."

We reviewed plants and more plants
for a long time.

It's funny but most of them were the
size of a dime.

And we can still hear him say as we
watched those slides so late.

"Wildflowers, aren't they great?"