

# **FWCCSP RECORD**

**Newsletter of the Friends of White Clay Creek State Park**

**Friends of White Clay Creek State Park**

**P.O. Box 9734**

**Newark, DE 19714-9734**

**[www.whiteclayfriends.org](http://www.whiteclayfriends.org)**

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**Volume 12, No. 3**

**November 2009**

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## **Membership Meeting on December 1 to Feature Rick Darke: “Watching the White Clay Valley – Insights from Four Decades of Observation”**

Join noted author, photographer, and landscape designer Rick Darke as he reflects on four decades of living in the White Clay Valley. This talk, lavishly illustrated with Rick’s beautiful photographs, will explore the Valley’s woodlands, meadows, waters, and cultural history, looking for insights and inspiration for conserving and celebrating the richness of our local landscapes.

Rick has lived in the White Clay Valley since 1970. Following twenty years on Longwood Gardens’ staff, he founded RICK DARKE LLC, an independent design firm that blends art, ecology, and cultural geography in the creation and conservation of livable landscapes. His work has been featured in the New York Times, on National Public Radio, and in numerous magazines and journals. A celebrated photographer, Rick has authored and illustrated multiple award-winning books.

The program will start at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, December 1, at the park’s Deerfield Golf and Tennis Club. This will be followed at about 8:30 pm by a brief business meeting of the Friends. The program is free and open to the general public. No reservations are required. For more information call 302-239-2471.

Deerfield is located at 507 Thompson Station Road, north of Newark. From Newark, proceed north on Paper Mill Road. At Milford Crossroads (location of Bank of America facility and Shell Station) go west on Thompson Station Road and watch for the well-marked entrance on the left.

## **Friends Leadership Surveys Members Re Trail Use**

On November 18, the leadership of the Friends issued a survey by e-mail and snail mail to all current members inviting their input on key trail use questions. Specifically, members were asked whether they supported actions by the leadership (a) to promote greater courtesy and respect toward other trail users by mountain bikers and (b) to advocate for keeping a reasonable amount of trail open for use by pedestrians only.

As of November 19, more than 100 of our 258 memberships had responded, with 142 members supporting the leadership’s actions and 5 opposed. (Note that family memberships are allowed more than one vote.) Additional responses are still being received, and the final results of the survey will be reported in the future.

### **Kids Enjoy Nature Thanks to the Friends**

This fall we have had a record number of requests for our scholarships to assist schools attending field trips at the park. The scholarship program, available since 2006, is fully funded by the Friends of White Clay Creek State Park. This fall the Friends provided six schools with scholarships, totaling \$813. The amount of scholarship awarded is based on the number of students on free or reduced price lunches. This fall 285 students were provided with a reduced field trip rate. That is almost 50% of the total number of students attending from the six schools receiving scholarships.

We have received many thank-yous from teachers who have said that their classes would not have been able to participate if it weren't for the Friends.

### **Latin American Community Center Students Learn About Nature & Visit the Park**

This fall the Friends of White Clay Creek State Park provided a scholarship fund for a park afterschool program with the Latin American Community Center (LACC). Currently the park provides weekly nature education programs for kids enrolled in the LACC afterschool program at the Wilson and Porter Road Elementary Schools. The Friends' scholarship funds have helped provide additional staff and supplies to make these programs a success. In addition, the Friends have provided field trip assistance which made an Owl Prowl Campfire program at the park possible. "The support from the Friends has made a world of difference in the program," said Nature Center Manager Angel Burns. "Each week the kids greet us excited to learn about a new nature topic!"

### **Kestrel Boxes Host Mainly Starlings**

Friends volunteers diligently monitored our American Kestrel nest boxes this year. Two of our five boxes weren't used, for unknown reasons. Unfortunately, the volunteers mostly observed European Starlings using the remaining three boxes, rather than kestrels. With equal diligence, they removed the starling nests, only to have the birds return almost immediately. Finally, one of the boxes was taken over by Tree Swallows who used it successfully, but we got no kestrels.

As reported previously, we may have inadvertently scared off a pair of kestrels very early in the nesting period. We are hoping for better luck next year.

### **Bluebird Monitoring Project 2009**

Once again, the Friends conducted a bluebird monitoring project at White Clay Creek State Park in 2009. The project includes installing new nest boxes, repairing and cleaning existing boxes, and monitoring the nesting and fledging that occurs in each box. Our team of dedicated volunteers visits each box every week from April through August. Each volunteer inspects an assigned box and records the nesting activity, bird species, and egg count. The volunteer follows the activity from nest building through the fledging stage. The data is sent to the Cornell Ornithology Lab to be used in their data base.

This year 12 volunteers monitored over 70 boxes throughout the park. Most of the boxes were used for nesting by bluebirds, more than twice that of any other species. Other birds using the boxes include tree swallows, wrens, and chickadees. We counted 234 bluebird eggs which produced 175 nestlings. From that number, 164 baby bluebirds fledged. In nature, predators always play a role. Next year, predator guards will be added to those boxes that had the higher losses. If you would like to get involved in monitoring the bluebird boxes next year, please contact Jim Ries at [dries@udel.edu](mailto:dries@udel.edu).

### **Trail Construction**

Trail construction has focused on repairing the Nature Preserve Trail that runs from the park nature center to the Pennsylvania line along the floodplain of the creek. About 20 volunteers have contributed over 200 hours of work, including 36 hours from the University of Delaware Students for the Environment Club. The primary work was filling in the wet and muddy low spots of the trail using sand recovered from deposits along the creek. If you haven't hiked this trail in a while, come and check out the improvements. We are always looking for volunteers. If you are interested in helping contact Mike Ott at 738-6652 or Joe Castagnola at 610 255-0365

### **More of Dick Robinson's Stories of the White Clay Creek Valley**

As a tribute to his memory, at the end of this newsletter we are adding more summaries of July 2005-March 2006 interviews with Eugene "Dick" Robinson that were conducted by Andrea Cassel, Ella de Courcelle, and Jan Morris. We apologize for not recognizing the contributions of Ella and Jan in the previous newsletter. A brief biography of Dick was published in the previous newsletter.

### **Hunting Schedules Are Available on Friends' Web Site**

If you are thinking about taking a hike in the park and are wondering whether there will be deer hunting occurring where you want to go, check out the schedules given on our web site – [www.WhiteClayFriends.org](http://www.WhiteClayFriends.org). On the main menu, point to News/Notices, click on Notices, and scroll down to the items about hunting in the Delaware and Pennsylvania state parks. One simple rule to remember is that there is no hunting in either park on Sundays.

Although the parks do not close for archery or muzzleloader (Penn.) hunting, a good precaution is to wear some blaze orange clothing when out in the parks during these times.

### **Calendar of Scheduled Activities**

Executive Committee Meetings: 12/14/09, 1/11/10, 2/8, 3/8 w/ Advisory Board, 4/12, 5/10, 6/14, 8/9, 9/13, 10/11, 11/8, 12/13.

Trail construction dates: 12/5/09, 3/6/10, 4/10 (Christina River cleanup), 5/1, 6/5 (National Trails Day), 7/10, 8/7, 9/10, 10/2, and Sundays during hunting season 11/7, 12/5.

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**Projects and Project Leaders**

**Adopt-a-Highway:** Dee and Dick Benson, 410-398- 4180  
**Adopt-a-Trail:** Mike Ott, 738-6652  
**Advocacy:** Andy Urquhart, 239-2471  
**Birders Guide:** Andy Urquhart, 239-2471  
**Bluebird Boxes:** Debra Chiczewski, 234-0919  
**Conservation:** Andy Urquhart, 239-2471  
**Historical Publications:** Fraser Russell, 731-4293  
**Judge Morris Support Group:** Cathy Duffus, 731-9794  
**Kestrel Boxes:** Andy Urquhart, 239-2471  
**Light Construction:** Nick McFadden, 368-6900  
**Member-led Park Programs:** Angel Burns, 368-6560

**Nature Center Exhibits:** Andy Urquhart, 239-2471  
**Nature Center Staffing:** Jim Ries, 239-1658  
**Newark Community Day:** Open  
**Oral Histories:** Fraser Russell, 731-4293  
**Park Office Plantings:** Carolyn Stoner and Jayne Fernsler, 453-8440  
**Reforestation:** Christa Stefanisko, 369-1933  
**Scholarship Funds:** Angel Burns, 368-6560  
**Trail Benches:** Andy Urquhart, 239-2471  
**Trail Improvement Work:** Mike Ott, 738-6652, and Joe Castagnola, 610-255-0365  
**Water Ice Sales:** John Schwander, 737-7901  
**Website:** Rick Hall, 831-1295, and Pat Walters

**Executive Committee**

**President:** Andy Urquhart, 239-2471, [aurqu@aol.com](mailto:aurqu@aol.com)  
**Vice-president:** Mike Ott, 738-6652, [MikeOtt52@aol.com](mailto:MikeOtt52@aol.com)  
**Secretary and Newsletter Editor:** Dick Benson, 410-398-4180, [rbenson6@comcast.net](mailto:rbenson6@comcast.net)  
**Treasurer:** Ken Daws, 737-8120, [wahkegan@hotmail.com](mailto:wahkegan@hotmail.com)  
**Membership Chair:** Lisa Wool, 562-9788, [lwool@delawareestuary.org](mailto:lwool@delawareestuary.org)  
**Projects Committee Chair:** Jim Ries, 239-1658, [dries@udel.edu](mailto:dries@udel.edu)

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**Membership Application**

**Join us!** If you are not already a member and would like to join, please return this form with your check made payable to Friends of White Clay Creek State Park. Annual dues are \$5.00 for students, \$10.00 for individuals, and \$15.00 for families. Any extra donation with your dues would be appreciated and put to good use.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Friends of White Clay Creek State Park, Inc.**  
P.O. Box 9734, Newark, DE 19714-9734

## **More of Dick Robinson's Stories of the White Clay Creek Valley**

Most of the following text compiled by Andrea Cassel of the interviews by Andrea, Ella de Courcelle, and Jan Morris with Dick Robinson is in Dick's own words. Material in brackets is added information.

### **Men's Hiking Club**

When I was a kid about 6 to 8 of the important businessmen in town formed what they called a men's hiking club. They would go to the second dam on the west side of the creek on a Sunday morning. It was a very attractive place with a large flat area. They told their wives that they were hiking, but instead they would play poker for money. Once they thought church services were over, they would go home.

### **Tweeds Mill and Dam**

Tweeds Mill was along the creek right where Wedgewood Road meets Creek Road. There was a wonderful mill there powered by water. A quarter of a mile up stream the Tweeds built their dam, then ran their mill race along the west side of the creek paralleling the creek down to the mill. It was very famous. It manufactured five products. As a sawmill it made lumber, shingles for roofing, and bark, and was a cooperage for barrel making. It also was a gristmill. It was very profitable. The Tweeds had a three-story stone mansion right on the west side of the road where Wedgewood Road comes down to Creek Road. One can still see the steps leading to their house. They were very wealthy for the community. They also had a huge tenant house up along the road.

When I was growing up there were two Tweed sisters, old maids. They never married. Us kids used to call them pixilated. They were just odd, not crazy. Once a week the sisters would go to Newark all dressed up with high collars and hats riding in a buggy. They would each go down Main Street on opposite sides of the street from Old College to the Pomeroy Railroad with a list of items to price at the stores. At the end of their walk they would prepare notes and go buy the items where they were cheapest, often only saving a penny. They were a very famous rich family in the community.

Tweeds Mill Dam is mostly washed out now. It was beautiful when I was a kid. It was hand made, no cement. It had huge boulders. Some of the boulders were mined from a small quarry along Creek Road. They found some rocks and just dug them out.

### **Well's Farm**

Well's Farm was on Well's Lane, which is off Wedgewood Road on the north side before you get to Creek Road. Walter Wells who, as a marine engineer raised the sunken SS Normandie in New York Harbor, bought the land. The story started after Hitler had invaded and captured France in WWII. The elegant and beautiful French liner, Normandie, was in New York harbor. It was seized by the U. S. government and was going to be turned into a troop ship. Unfortunately [in February, 1942] it accidentally caught fire as it was being welded. It sank and capsized at the dock. A lot of experts looked over the situation and said it could not be raised. Walter Wells, however, said it could be saved. He designed a plan that allowed for

it to be raised and salvaged. He received so much attention for his efforts that he wanted to find a quiet place to live out of the public eye. He found the seclusion he sought on a farm in the White Clay Creek Valley.

### **Cider Mill**

Duty Morrison owned a cider mill that was along White Clay Creek off Tweeds Mill [Creek] Road. Duty lived there next to the mill on an elevation to the left. He was a Newark police officer who always talked about the duty of the police to the citizens of the town; hence, his name became Duty. He would not run the cider mill himself, but hired others for that work. The most famous person to run it was George Schaen. George was very well thought of in the community. Everyone thought the world of him. In the fall it was really an experience to go down there on a Saturday when all the people and farmers would come and bring their apples to be crushed into cider.

George would run the mill during the week, but the big day was Saturday. People would line up and have their apples pressed. It was a festival type of thing. It was wonderful. People would talk and visit. It was a grand occasion with all kinds of cars and wagons with horses lined up there. A Model A Ford engine ran the mill. They had taken its frame and cut it up and set it there. They ran a shaft from it that ran a drive pulley. All the pulleys and belts would run off the main shaft. The exhaust pipe ran out of the mill. You could hear it go putt, putt, putt as you walked down toward College Avenue.

George Schaen ran the mill from the 1920s until the 40s. People would pay him for pressing the apples. He would also sell it by the barrel or in gallon glass jugs. He had a barrel of cider there and a tin cup so you could just help yourself to cider. Everyone drank from the same cup. You wouldn't do that today! At that time we would also drink water from the creek if we were camping or out in the woods.

### **Motorcycle Hill Climbs**

On the White Clay Creek about a half mile before the second dam near the millrace for Curtis Paper Mill, on the east side there was a very precipitous bank. It was on this hill that motorcycle races were held in the summer. A couple of thousand people would be there to watch.

It was quite a spectacle. They would put up advertisements on Main Street. "Come to the Hill Climb." It started at 9 a.m. People from all over would come to watch and ride cycles. Monetary prizes were given out. There was a timer at the starter of the hill and a timer at the top. Sometimes there was so much power used going up the hill that they would do a somersault.

The conclusion of race day had a special performance. The rider would come down 30 yards of flat area lickety split. He hit [a specially constructed flaming] fence. Fire, wood, sparks, smoke would fly everywhere. He would turn around, acknowledge the crowd, and ride back victorious. Several fellows did this but the name I remember is Crash Woolihan [see the hill climb article by Andrea Cassel and picture of Crash on the Friends website—under Park Info & Links click Park Area History]. It was a spectacle that impressed me as a 14-year-old boy.