



SWINGING BRIDGE
NATURE PRESERVE

Bluffton College
Bluffton, Ohio

HISTORY

Bluffton College is located in Bluffton, Ohio, a town of 3,000 on Interstate 75 between Lima and Findlay near the intersection of I-75 and US 30. Towns along Interstate 75 - which extends from Toledo south to Cincinnati - are becoming fused into a strip city, an elongated metropolitan region. Within a generation the Bluffton area may become the point where an expanding Lima and Findlay meet and become intermeshed. Thus this location becomes significant for a demonstration of imaginative college use of natural resources in the context of community planning.

As early as 1964 the college began to think of using its farm for teaching purposes. The National Audubon Society made a study of the land in 1965 and offered a plan to develop a complete nature center. During the summer of 1966 the Kettering Fund of Dayton, Ohio, gave \$75,000 to Bluffton College to spend in strengthening its program in teacher education. A portion of this gift provided the stimulus to make the carefully laid plans a reality. The Soil and Water Conservation Service of Allen County designed and supervised the building of a lake.

In the midst of an urbanizing area Bluffton College has set aside woodland, stream and meadow for five specific purposes:

1. Sanctuary for protection of wildlife and native plants.
2. Field laboratories for training students in ecology, botany, zoology and conservation.
3. A means of making the appreciation of natural processes part of its teacher education program so that future teachers may share it with coming generations.
4. Opportunity for school children from surrounding counties to study the natural world under the guidance of trained naturalists.
5. Establish an area where people of all ages can come to learn, enjoy and appreciate the natural beauty which is a part of our vanishing heritage.



HABITATS FOR TEACHING

Swinging Bridge Nature Preserve includes a rich variety of habitats for nature study and other areas for outdoor education. Among these are:

1. An eight-acre lake with marshes and island.
2. Riley Creek and flood plain wooded with black walnut, black ash, shellbark hickory, sugar maple and others.
3. Twenty acres of woodland with a wide variety of trees and shrubs.
4. An old orchard and a black walnut grove.
5. A small plot planted to white pine.
6. An area devoted to a large variety of native trees and shrubs.
7. A continuously expanding area devoted to the study of plant succession.
8. Thirty acres of cropland on which conservation techniques are practiced.
9. A farmyard with farm buildings, farm animals, farm house and garden.

EDUCATIONAL USES

The following compatible uses are currently programmed:

1. Interpretative hikes, farm tours and self-guided walks along nature trails.
2. Observation and study of conservation practices of natural resources including wildlife, soil and water.
3. Observation and study of native birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, trees, shrubs, flowering plants and others.
4. Group meetings concerned with outdoor education, conservation, natural history, Ohio history, social and natural science, nature crafts, nature photography, sketching and writing.
5. Students who are interested in learning to interact with children and youth can gain valuable experience through working with school programs at the nature center.

HIKES AND TOURS

Swinging Bridge Nature Preserve has four nature trails which can be hiked and enjoyed by the public. Tours for school groups, church groups and others can be arranged with the director. These tours can be directed to meet the needs of the group, covering such areas as seasonal hikes featuring spring flowers, birds, summer wildflowers, autumn tree hikes, winter hikes, soil conservation, wildlife conservation, farm site tours and pond and marsh study.

A series of films, lectures, workshops and special tours are offered as a part of the nature center program to those people who are members of Swinging Bridge Nature Preserve.

LAND LABORATORY USE

Because many types of land area are not available for serious study, the use of this area for an outdoor laboratory will grow in importance. Study areas for which the land laboratory is especially valuable are: ecology, nature study, identification of plants and animals, natural history of waterfowl, land birds, wild mammals, reptiles, insects and population studies of plant and animal communities.



LAKE, MARSH AND STREAM

The eight-acre lake attracts ducks, geese and other waterfowl. The marsh area is developing into a biotic community where aquatic plants, insects, fish, frogs, toads and smaller organisms are abundant. Riley Creek adds a different dimension to the type of animal and plant life found in aquatic situations. Elementary children find the area fascinating, while student teachers and other adults use this area for their own enjoyment as well as in preparation for helping others become aware of their natural environment. Observation of lake, marsh and stream life are an important part of the outdoor education program, along with special ecological studies.

SANCTUARY

Swinging Bridge Nature Preserve provides a sanctuary for a variety of trees, shrubs, wild



flowering plants, mammals, reptiles, waterfowl and other birds. The uniqueness of this sanctuary is that both the flora and fauna can be readily observed, enjoyed and studied by persons of all ages either individually or on guided tours.

EDUCATION BUILDING

This facility provides for orientation sessions, showing of films, nature exhibits, lectures, discussions, preparation of exhibits and projects, office and meetings of groups devoted to conservation, farming, scouting, outdoor education, etc.

DER HOF

A renovated farmstead with its house built in 1854 by Swiss settlers in the community now serves as a conference or retreat center. It contains facilities for accommodating small groups on weekends and at other scheduled times. A wide variety of domestic animals are kept in the barnyard area, which is adjacent to the house. Just north of Der Hof across Riley Creek lies the College Cabin which is used as a picnic area. The two areas are connected by a 100-foot swinging bridge. Persons of all ages find the bridge an interesting attraction.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Swinging Bridge Nature Preserve lies one-half mile north, and one-fourth mile west of the college campus.

Tours for Swinging Bridge Nature Preserve or reservations for Der Hof conference center may be arranged by mail or telephone.

Don Ernst 419-358-~~2175~~1186

No camping facilities are available at the nature preserve, but the staff can recommend camping areas in the vicinity.

ADDRESS

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SWINGING BRIDGE NATURE PRESERVE

"To stimulate awareness and understanding of our natural environment among school and other groups of all ages, by providing learning opportunities that cannot be duplicated indoors, and to help develop a sense of awareness, wonder and responsibility for the preservation and wise use of our natural resources."

