

## LIBERTY HILL TRAIL

Location: Southeast of John H. Kerr Dam.

Length: 1.25 miles; allow 1-1½ hours; relatively easy trail with some short climbs.

Along the Liberty Hill Trail you will encounter a unique area with natural beauty, historical significance, and modern technology all existing in harmony. You'll also see a series of numbered markers. Each numbered marker represents a point of interest that is explained in this leaflet. Take your time, follow the signs and white blazes, and enjoy your walk to the fullest.

### 1. SIGNS OF HUMAN ACTIVITY

Beginning in the early 1800's, the Jones family operated the St. Leon (tobacco) Plantation. Liberty Hill was on the western edge of the plantation, and historical accounts tell us that the Jones family used Liberty Hill for picnics, hunting, probably for its timber and, as you can see from the brick enclosure in front of you, as a final resting place for loved ones.

### 2. LISTEN!

Stop here a moment and listen to the many forest sounds. In summer, the constant and dramatic hum of the male cicada starts and stops, like turning on and off an electric light.

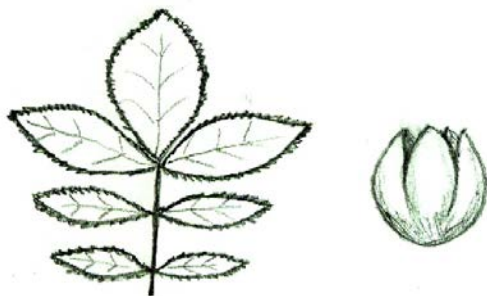
Can you hear the bark or rustle of a squirrel gathering the abundant hickory nuts? Other sounds to listen for are the tree leaves rustling in the wind, the smooth melody of the Wood Thrush, the distinct jungle scream of the Yellow Billed Cuckoo and the tapping of Woodpeckers.

### 3. HICKORY

Have you ever eaten "hickory smoked" ham or bacon? If so, you have enjoyed a favorite from our pioneer past. The large tree to the right of the numbered post is a mockernut hickory.

How do you recognize hickory? Compare the bark with the trees nearby. The bark is marked by

numerous, criss-crossing "x's". Look at the "compound leaves" (seven to nine smaller leaflets make one leaf). Another sure sign of hickory are the nuts. Squirrels have the right idea when they collect these nuts; they are truly a tasty delicacy!



Mockernut Hickory

### 4. BEWARE!

Poison Ivy is common in this area. Fortunately, it can be easily identified by its leaves that grow in threes. Poison Ivy may take the form of a climbing vine or a low sprawling shrub. Skin contact with any part of the plant often results in skin irritation, which may itch intensely. Although toxic to humans, the berries are a food for birds.



Poison Ivy

### 5. WILDLIFE, THEN AND NOW

Wildlife is one of the resources managed on the 120,000 acres of public land and water at the John H. Kerr Reservoir. Notice the wood duck nesting box on a pole across the small stream in front of you. In the early 1900's wood duck populations were extremely low due to logging

and loss of habitat and nesting areas. Thanks to wildlife restoration projects, such as nesting boxes and over wintering impoundments of water at John H. Kerr, waterfowl populations have recovered.

### 6. NATURE'S FERTILIZER

A storm has thrown one of the old giants to the forest floor. As the tree decays, energy is slowly released to run the machinery of microscopic bacteria, fungi and insects which methodically breaks the tree down, returning it to the soil.

When the decay process is complete, several years from now, the chemicals potassium, sodium, calcium, phosphorous and magnesium will remain. These chemicals will be used by plants and animals to continue the food chain and the nutrient cycle goes on.

The many different types of mushrooms and fungi that you see growing on the forest floor and on dead and weakened trees help to speed up this process of decay.

### 7. CEMETERY

If you look closely among the trees, you will see depressions in the earth. These are old grave sites, some of which have stones at the head and toe of the graves. Did you know that graves are traditionally laid out from east to west? It was once believed that facing the rising sun after death would aid in passage to the next life. Though it is not possible to say with certainty, this cemetery may have been used by the slaves of St. Leon Plantation.

### 8. SUCCESSION

After years of logging and farming, much of the land along the Roanoke River was eventually left to nature. Grasses and wildflowers were the first to take over. Then fast growing pines invaded and developed into a pine forest. Gradually, "hardwoods" (trees that lose their leaves each fall) gained a foothold in the under story and are in the process of

replacing pines. This natural process of one group of plants replacing another is called *succession*.

### 9. MR. BUGG'S ISLAND

Along this river, the Occoneechee Indians had a trading empire ranging over five hundred miles! In 1676, many of the Occoneechee Indians were massacred by Nathaniel Bacon and his men. After the massacre, Samuel Bugg, one of Bacon's men, separated from the group and floated down the Roanoke River in a canoe to the island across from you. Legend tells us that Bugg traded a rifle to a friendly Occoneechee for thousands of acres of land, including this island; which was later called *Buggs Island*.

Archeological digs have found evidence that Indians once lived on Buggs Island. These days, Bald Eagles find the island's tall trees a good place to roost between fishing expeditions.

### 10. ROCK OUTCROP

This large rock outcrop is called a "metamorphic granite formation," which is composed of feldspar (pinkish crystals), quartz (white crystals), and biotite (black crystals). This solid granite bedrock provided the necessary foundation for which the US Army Corps of Engineers used to construct the John H. Kerr Dam. This rock outcrop is mentioned as a favorite picnicking site for the Jones family in the 1840's.

### 11. DRUMMING TREES

What caused the holes in this tree and why? If you said, "Woodpeckers" you are right! The holes were made by the Yellow-bellied sapsucker! These holes harbor a variety of insects, spiders and other small creatures upon which woodpeckers and other insect eaters depend for food.

Listen and you may hear the tapping of a woodpecker going about the business of finding food. In the spring the tapping and drumming is used as a mating call. There are several species

of woodpeckers found in this area: Redheaded, Pileated, Hairy, Downy, Flicker, and Yellow-bellied sapsucker.

### 12. DAM OVERLOOK

This massive structure contains enough concrete to pave a sidewalk three feet wide and four inches deep from here to San Francisco! Enough pollution free electricity is generated to supply 55,000 homes. The 60,000 acre reservoir, (formed by the dam) along with 60,000 acres of surrounding land, receives nearly two million visitors per year.

The large building you see across the water is the powerhouse and beyond that is the relay station where electricity is sent to communities in Virginia and North Carolina.

### 13. WILDLIFE TREE

Imagine having all the food and water you could use, but no place to live! All animals need shelter. We live in houses, snakes may find their shelter in a rock pile, and box turtles carry an armored shelter wherever they go.

Shelter is what makes this tree important to wildlife. The cavities within trees like this provide a den for squirrels, opossums, owls, and quite a few other creatures of the forest.

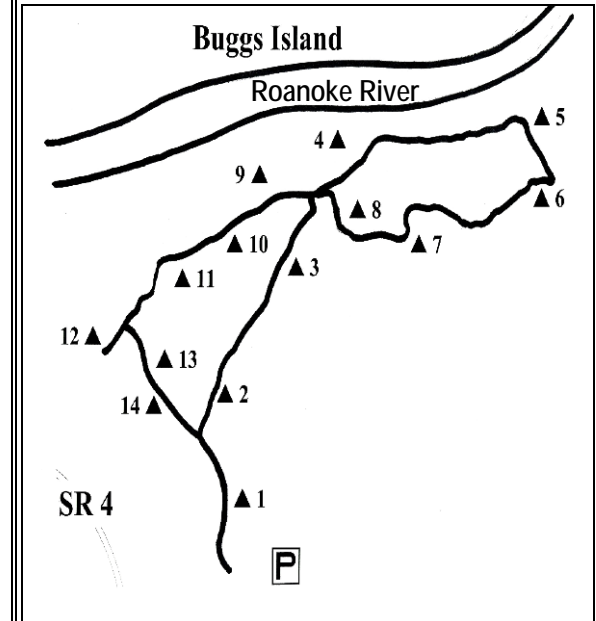
### 14. SUGAR MAPLE

The tree directly in front of you is a sugar maple. Sugar maples are normally found in cooler climates and are not native to this area. This tree is likely a descendant of a tree planted by a land owner.

Sugar maples are also prized for their shade, lumber and, naturally, sugar. Maple syrup can be produced by boiling down the sap of these trees in the early spring.

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## LIBERTY HILL NATURE & HISTORY TRAIL



### John H. Kerr Dam & Reservoir



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**

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