

Hill Studio  
Carlton Abbott and Partners

**Proposed Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center**  
Floyd and Patrick Counties, Virginia

Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc  
[www.brheritage.org](http://www.brheritage.org)



# **Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center Master Plan & Design Concepts Public #2**

Floyd County and Patrick County, Virginia  
Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc.  
Spring/Summer 2016

## What is Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc.?

In 2004, residents of Floyd and Patrick Counties tackled an initiative: "The Rocky Knob Project." Soon thereafter, Public Law 109-59, Subtitle G, Section 1702, project 1843, effective August 10, 2005 provided \$1.2 million for the planning and initial development of the "Rocky Knob Project on the Blue Ridge Parkway." From that initial planning group, Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc., a nonprofit corporation, was organized exclusively for charitable, educational, and scientific purposes under section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of the United States of America (or corresponding section of any future federal tax code).

**Mission:** To promote education and economic development through place-based programs related to the natural and cultural heritage of the Blue Ridge in Southwestern Virginia's Bi-County area of Floyd & Patrick Counties.

### Organizational Goals:

1. Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. will be a sustainable revenue generator, not relying on county tax subsidies to be solvent.
2. Programs and activities will foster economic development in both Patrick and Floyd Counties.
3. Programs and activities will be place-based, focusing on twentieth century natural and cultural heritage changes in the Bi-County region.
4. Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. will facilitate a functional and programmatic relationship among the towns of Floyd, Meadows of Dan, and Stuart, and the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center—with the Blue Ridge Parkway serving as a physical and visitor experience linkage.
5. Programs and activities will inform local residents and visitors alike by promoting an understanding about the cultural and natural heritage of Floyd and Patrick Counties during the period from 1900 to 2000.

### Organizational Development:

Since its inception, Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. has pursued a course of action steps to result in development of a Heritage Project on or near the Blue Ridge Parkway, in the Rocky Knob region.

# Executive Summary

The Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center is proposed as a Gateway to the vibrant cultural landscape of Virginia's Floyd and Patrick Counties. Located on a 31-acre parcel adjacent to the National Park Service's Rocky Knob Recreation Area, the facilities and landscape offer hands-on activities and experiences to users, showcasing Virginia's Highland Plateau and Piedmont. The organizational mission is to provide life-enriching experiences for visitors and economic prosperity for the residents of these two communities.

This collaborative Master Plan describes the design proposal crafted during 2014 & 15 by the Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. Board and guests, with a design team led by Hill Studio. Included here are *excerpts from* the primary *Master Plan & Design Concepts* document, which, in its entirety, includes sections that describe an analysis of the site geography and environment, a several-part phasing plan for new construction, existing and proposed buildings, a plan for the grounds, and ideas to launch people into self-guided tours or "guided wanderings" throughout the Bi-County region. The Master Plan will serve as a roadmap and compass to phase-in, build, and open the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center for business by 2020. The entire *Master Plan* document will be available at [brheritage.org](http://brheritage.org).

### General Background

The Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center is the vision of Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc., a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote education as well as economic development through visitor-involved programs related to the natural and cultural heritage of the Blue Ridge of southwestern Virginia. The organization's strategies for accomplishing this mission include:

- Establish a visitor and education center on 31 acres adjacent to the National Park Service's Rocky Knob Recreation Area. This center will act as a Gateway to a network of learning resources, business assets, and authentic experiences throughout Floyd and Patrick Counties, as well as offering on-site experiential learning opportunities, thus establishing a tourist destination area along the Blue Ridge Parkway
- Attract visitors to the region as part of a Bi-County, regional, collaborative effort to enhance the economic well-being of the residents of these counties
- Tell the story of *A Century of Change* experienced in Patrick and Floyd Counties between 1900 and 2000

Programs at the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center will address a variety of topics including the agricultural, industrial, historical, cultural, and natural heritages of the region. Yet programs and exhibits will recognize that this region is linked to the wider world and will place the Bi-County area within this larger



context. Program logistic details, including sustainable design elements, will incorporate the buildings themselves as green design demonstration tools.

The *Century of Change* focus provides an opportunity to create many unique interpretive programs that span from the log cabin stereotype of the nineteenth century to globalization in the twentieth century. Naturally, programs at the Center will touch on time periods before and after the twentieth century to give context. The Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center will introduce visitors and residents to the natural and cultural heritage of these counties by telling stories about the people and the land (past, present, and future) with an especially bright light shined on the opportunities and challenges that arose during the twentieth century. On-site exhibits, educational activities, walking trails, and other opportunities will help tell these stories. Yet more stories are made available to visitors and residents when they pass through the Center's Gateway and into the Bi-County area, with a series of visitor-designed tours ("guided wanderings") throughout the two counties. The Center will draw tourists to the site (acting as a service provider and visitor destination) then invite them to attractions and learning resources throughout the region (acting as a Gateway).

Program emphasis is dedicated to authentic experiences and life skills, rather than fabricating artificial reconstructions of attractions and experiences. The dynamic, rotating programs will include learning opportunities for students in local public, private, and home schools, and for tourists, college students doing research, corporate team-building, and other groups.

An underlying theme in the facility's program will be "sustainability." This refers to the means by which people in the region lived via self-supporting ingenuity, including the challenges and opportunities they faced with diminished resources and cultural/societal changes (arable land, jobs, and family out-migration). All facilities will serve as models for, and interpretive examples of, self-supporting, sustainable building and living practices. To the extent possible, all facilities constructed will be designed utilizing energy efficient and environmentally sustainable building and construction practices, using such adopted standards as:

- The US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for New Construction rating system
- The American Society of Landscape Architects' Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES) for sustainable design, construction and maintenance practices

The estimated \$15.9 million site and building plan is proposed to be realized with gift and additional grant funds, while being maintained and sustained by revenue generated by programs and merchandise, and phased-in over time.

The Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center *Master Plan & Design Concepts* document captures the ideas that emerged from the 2014-15 design process. Plans and ideas can change over time, however, with the advent of new trends and technologies. For this reason, this Master Plan is intended to be a living document that is continually edited and updated as new concepts arise.

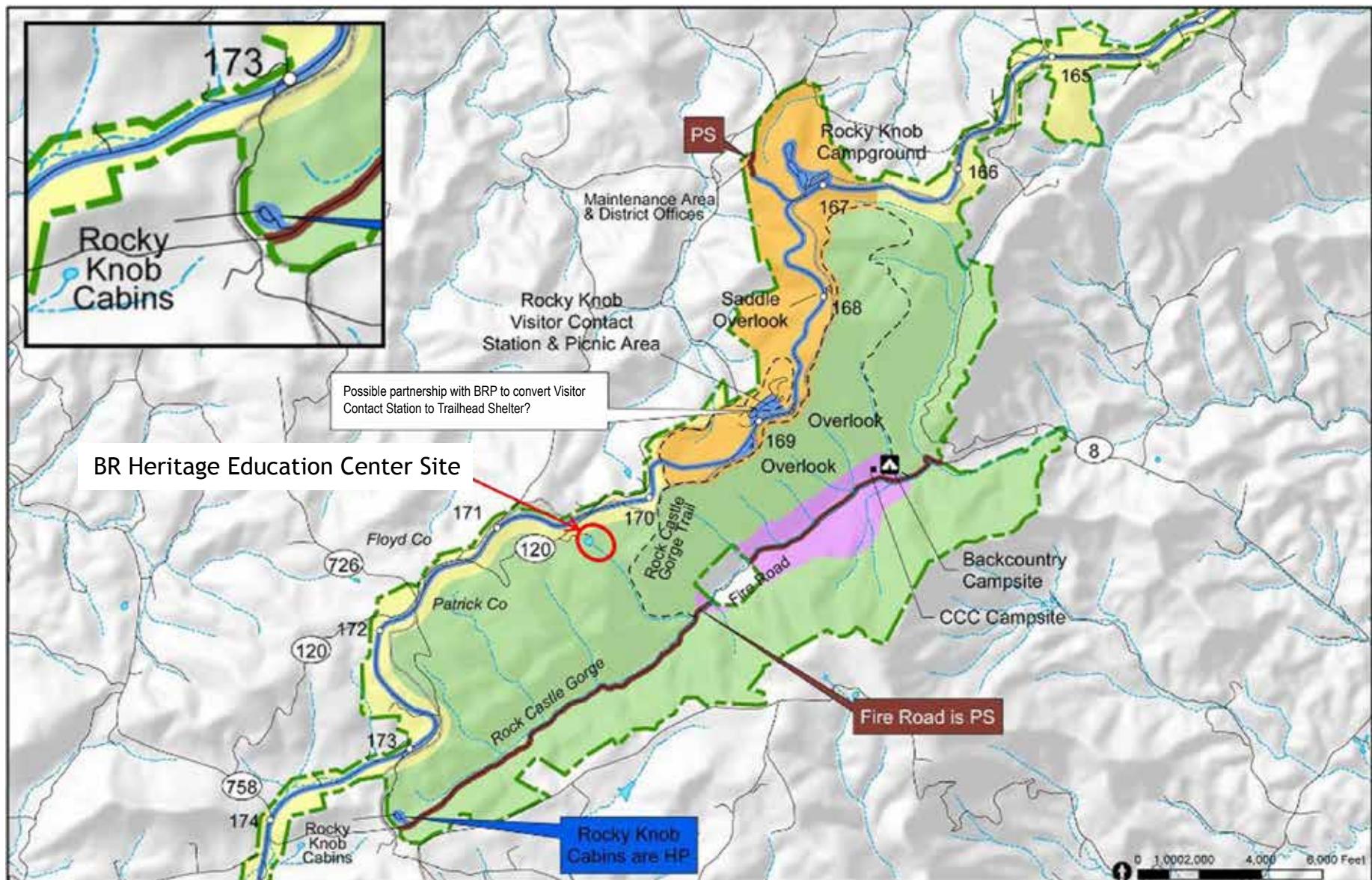
## Design Process

Inspired by the collaborative nature of the Board of Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. (made up of volunteers from both Floyd & Patrick Counties) and by the entrepreneurial spirit visible in the regional community, the design team worked with stakeholders in a series of site reconnaissance sessions and design workshops held in the project area. These multi-day sessions produced a thoroughly reviewed and honed plan for a facility tailored to the site and positioned for planned programming to launch people onto the back roads and to patronize the businesses of Floyd and Patrick Counties. Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. plans to continue the collaborative practice through design, construction, and operation of the facility, trails, existing buildings, and landscape.



Design Workshop

# Site Analysis & Site Plan



## Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center Site



Located on 31 acres in Patrick County, Virginia, the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center site is remarkably well positioned at the headwaters of Rock Castle Creek and its tributaries, adjacent to the National Park Service's Rocky Knob Recreation Area, and within a mile of the Eastern Continental Divide. The site is also located within the Highland Plateau District of the Blue Ridge Parkway, which shares two-thirds of its border.

This excerpt of the *Master Plan* describes some of the unique environmental features and related conditions found on the property. In the primary *Master Plan* document, detailed site analysis is included, and shows how the resulting design has been chosen in response to those conditions. Using carefully researched analysis material, the entire site is planned as an environmental teaching tool for the Center's diverse interpretive programming.

### Site Analysis

The aerial photo (left) shows the 31-acre site highlighted during the early spring. This photo has general topography superimposed (10-foot contour interval) as well as notes from the Blue Ridge Parkway's Land Use Maps (PLUMs).

The northern third of the property, adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway, is generally grassland and meadow. The Farmhouse is situated at the bottom of an open hill, on the northwest corner of the pond. Woodlands surround the pond and cover the remainder of the property. The Rocky Knob Recreation Area, managed by the Blue Ridge Parkway, is located all along the eastern boundary. The Pickett property, which is leased, is located on the western boundary. Some of the Rocky Knob Recreation Area (specifically, the land adjacent to the northern most section of the east border) is grazed by cattle.

The high point on the 31-acre site is along the Blue Ridge Parkway and Pickett property lines, approximately 3345 feet above sea level, with the 3345-foot peak at the northwest corner. The Farmhouse is approximately 3240 feet above sea level and the pond is 3220 feet above sea level. The low point of the property, where a stream branch exits into Rock Castle Gorge (on the southeast side) is 3180 feet above sea level.

The site is accessed by Rock Castle Gorge Road (SR #720), which winds down from the Blue Ridge Parkway and around the ridge, connecting several Highland Plateau tourist resources, including Villa Appalachia and the Rock Castle Cottage, before crossing back to the Parkway, approximately one mile west of the property.

The site features highly scenic open fields and meadows, as well as a variety of wooded slopes, with diverse understory flora.

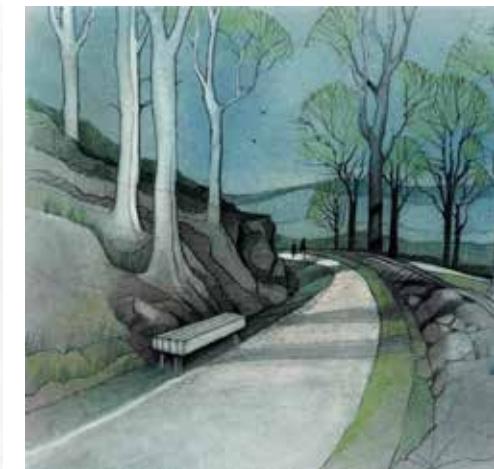
## A Sampling of Proposed Features to be Found on Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center Site



Existing Farmhouse



Lake Aquatics and Ecology

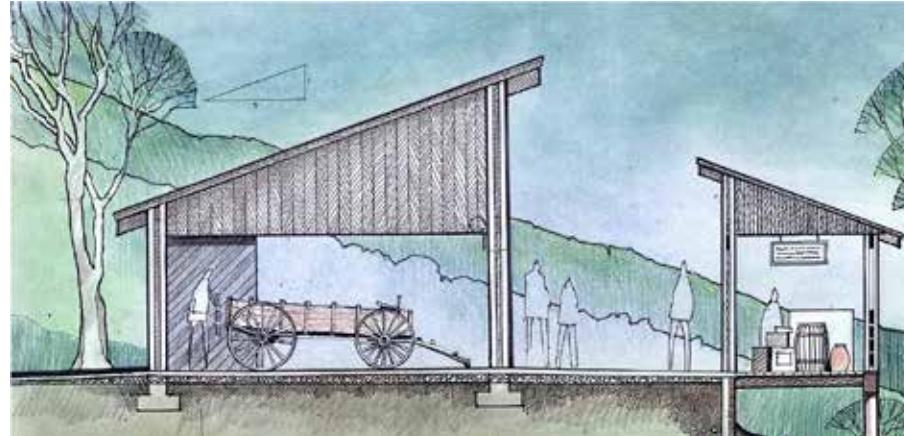


Rugged Trail section, Lower Woodland Trail

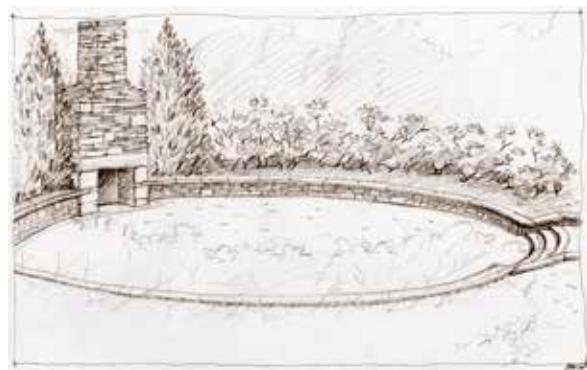


Above: Rock Castle Observatory: a high-tech tree house, where visitors can observe nature via monitoring stations connected to wildlife and underwater video cameras.

Right: Chimney Circle for teaching, presenting, and gathering.



Section through "The Barns." Sliding doors on left allow for large item transfer



Concept illustration of the Rock Castle Gorge Balcony with improved view to soaring & migrating birds, rolling terrain, and distant geologic features

## Site Plan

The placement of buildings, roadways, and trails on the site follows the Blue Ridge Parkway tradition of environmental stewardship. Facilities are located and detailed in response to the areas of the site identified as most appropriate, so that their development will cause the least possible amount of environmental stress. These facilities deserve this heightened consciousness not only because of the qualities of the site, but because the site's facilities and indeed, the site itself, will be used as teaching tools.

The Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center building will be the central facility on the site. It is placed in the lower fields above the pond, so that visitors can enter the portico/Gateway and be captivated by the framed scene of pond and wooded hills leading the eye to the vista over Rock Castle Gorge in the distance. A visitor drop-off circle, large enough for buses, is situated in front of the portico/Gateway. The circle is designed to have flagpoles in the center, visible from the Parkway.

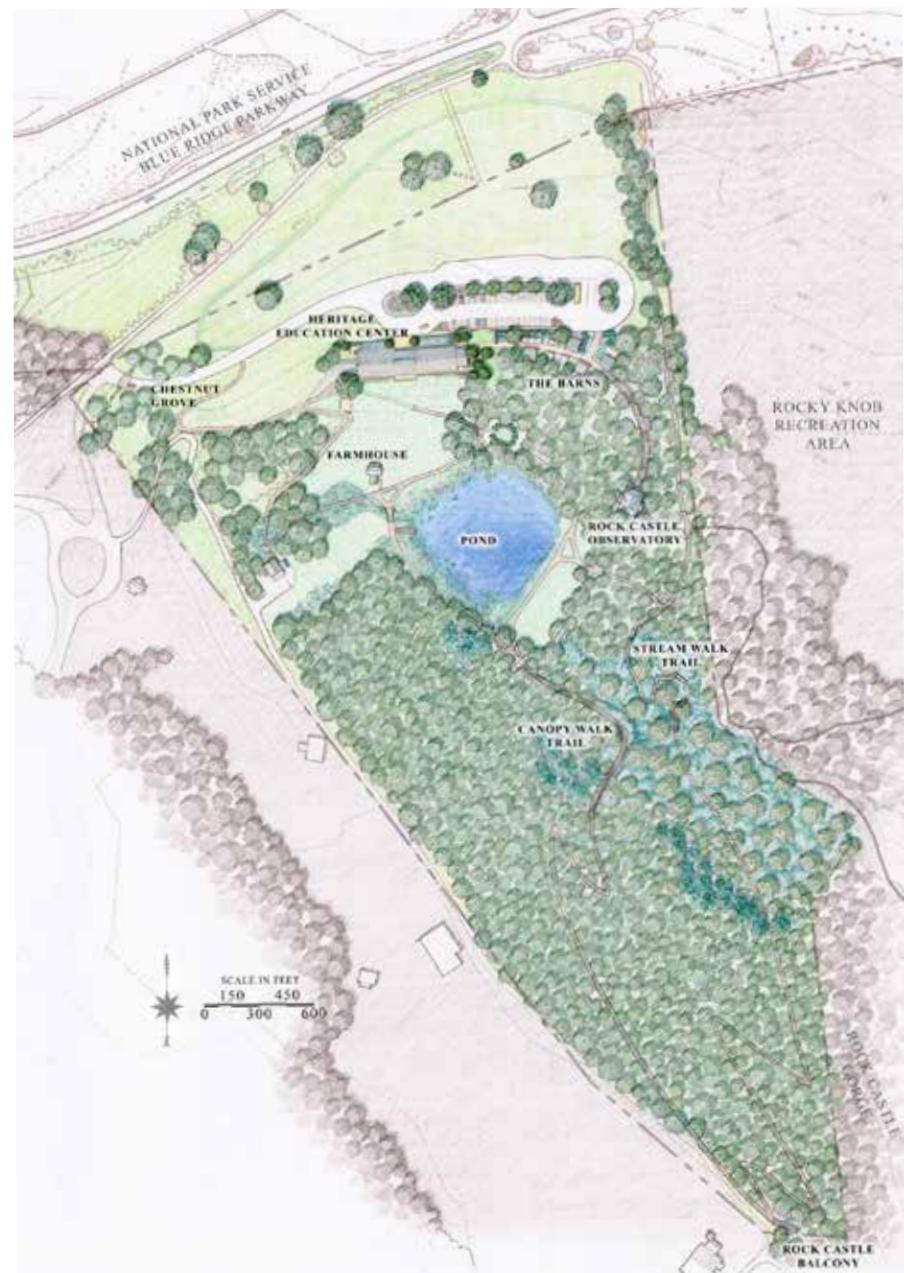
The 20-foot paved entrance road begins in the northwest corner of the site, where the Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. land abuts Rock Castle Gorge Road (#720). This switchback arrangement of travel from the Parkway allows the visitor to gradually descend into the Education Center drop-off area and/or parking lot. The access road slopes downward toward the facility with grades ranging between 5 percent and 10 percent. Straight sections of the access road are 20 feet wide. Curvatures in the access road correspond to Blue Ridge Parkway standards, widening to as much as 22 feet.

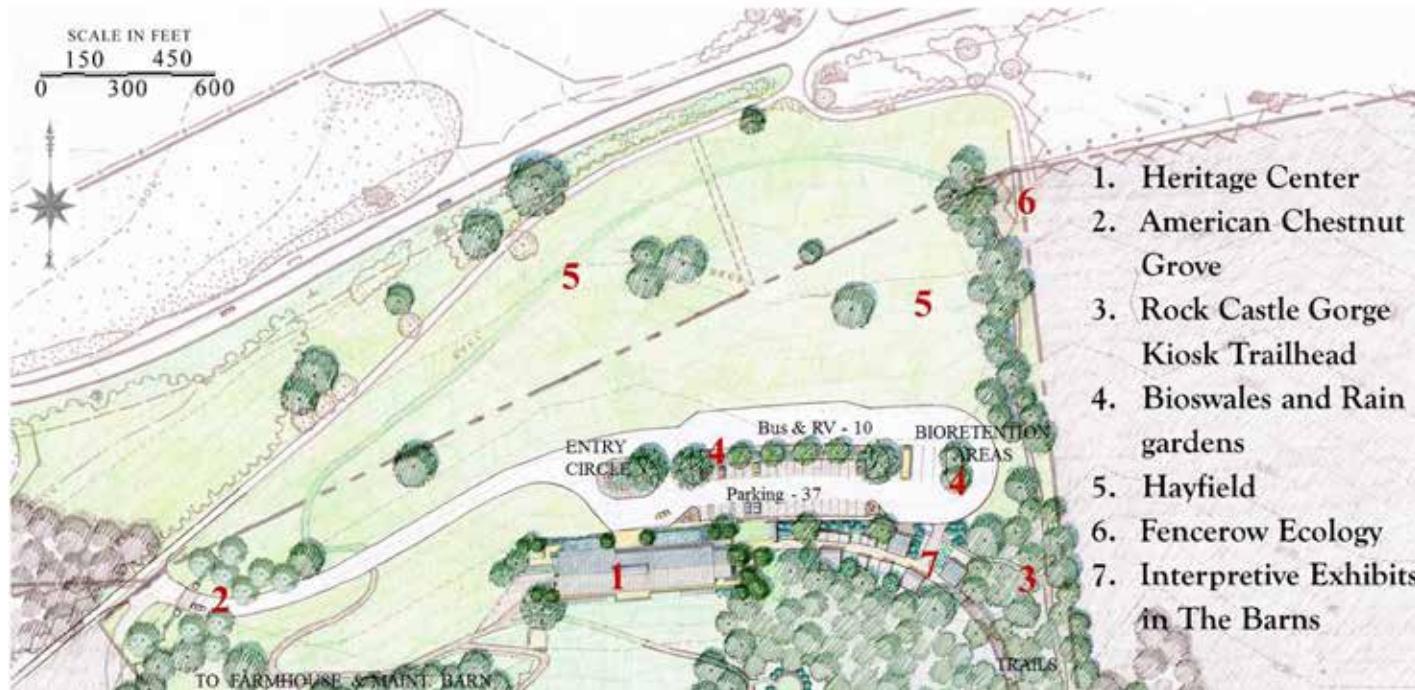
The parking area is designed to accommodate cars and buses/RVs. A circular flow pattern allows fluid movement of buses from the designated drop-off area to designated parking, and then to return for passenger pickup before exiting the site. Design of the proposed access road/parking lot includes a sub-base of aggregate with a combination surface and base course of asphalt pavement. Stormwater runoff associated with the access road/parking lot is directed to a combination of stormwater conveyance channels, bioswales, and curb/gutter.

All parking is tucked down below the crown of the hay field to be invisible from the Parkway. Thirty-three automobile spaces are set in the forward lot, as well as four handicapped spaces. Ten bus/RV spaces are at the end and return loop of the lot. A row of exhibition structures called "The Barns" are located against the car parking area, around a paved central walkway winding into the woods toward the Rocky Knob Recreation Area. A kiosk located at the border between the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center site and the NPS property directs visitors to a variety of outdoors experiences including: the Rock Castle National Scenic Trail (on NPS property); on-site trails; or the Rock Castle Observatory, a special high-tech facility for nature observation.

The siting of the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center takes full advantage of the existing farm compound, placing it as a central focus of the view and of interpretation. Beyond, a series of trails connects the woodlands with a variety

of unique touch points for visitors. This array of landscape experiences is carefully designed to introduce the visitor to the cultural and natural landscape both on and beyond the 31-acre facility. (Please see the primary *Master Plan* document Appendices for full details of the features mentioned here. See [brheritage.org](http://brheritage.org).)





# Through the Gateway

The Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center will function as the concierge desk to launch visitors into Floyd County and Patrick County. Example programs developed for this project outline the potential to move visitors from the facility into the two counties on themed tours or simple “guided wanderings.” These sample descriptions showcase potential experiences in culture, festivals, winery/brewery tastings, historic destinations, and outdoor activities offered by Floyd and Patrick county businesses and nonprofit organizations.

These sample tour packages will become self-directed driving tours during implementation of this project. The tour packages can be developed as “apps” available for download at the Center or directly from a website; or they could be designed on hardcopy maps picked up directly at the Center. As with all successful projects, visitor feedback on the tour packages will enhance their use and appeal. Also, staff knowledge of regional destinations, attractions, and hours of operation will assist customer service, directing visitors to places and businesses of interest.

The sample packages cater to different segments of the visitor population. Since visitors’ interests vary, the packages highlight a variety of attractions: artist studios, ecological farming techniques, family-oriented activities, wineries & breweries, and outdoor adventure.

The project team looked at the spectrum of potential visitors and groups to creatively develop the proposed tours through the two counties. Listed below are some of the visitor segment groups that may visit the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center:

- Young Families: husband, wife, young children. With younger children included, this group may be less inclined to venture too far off the beaten path. Keeping children entertained is the key to successful tours with this group.
- Grown Families: husband, wife, teenagers. Stimulating intellectual curiosity is important to keeping teenagers entertained. Exploring new technology or innovation is a critical component to engage this group.
- Young Adults: couples, groups of friends (20-30s). This group is likely interested in popular attractions, such as winery/ brewery tours and music heritage.
- Mature Adults: mostly couples (40+). The “weekend get-away folks” may be interested in bed and breakfasts, fine dining or special events. Generally, mature adults have more expendable income than young adults. They take the time to experience the community and typically spend money on activities such as education, culture, food, and heritage. This segment is

possibly the most eager to participate in “guided wanderings” and to discover off-beaten-path experiences.

- Empty Nesters: retirees (60s+). This group will not be in a hurry. They will be interested in a diversity of activities that are available in Patrick and Floyd Counties.

Another element to consider is how long a visitor can spend on a given tour. Some people may arrive with a lot of time on their hands, while others may just have a few hours. The final tour packages will be designed for half-day, full-day and two-day excursions, so that a wide variety of options are available.

By brainstorming the potential visitor groups, the preferences each of those groups, and the time they may spend, the project team developed concept tour outlines included on the next page. These tours could be targeted further to the segmented user groups that have been identified. In addition, some of these tours could include overnight stays by partnering with local bed and breakfasts or other lodging and dining establishments in the area.



Primitive Baptist church - Meadows of Dan



Old country store - Patrick Co.



Iron furnace - Floyd Co.



Hiking trail map - Patrick Co.

## Sample “Guided Wandering” themes

### Taste of the region

- Wood Brothers (NASCAR) Museum
- Peach Festival
- Jacksonville Center for the Arts
- Petting zoo/working farm
- Friday Night Jamboree
- Pick-your-own operations
- Farmer's Markets

### Tour for children

- Seasonal Festival(s)
- Nancy's Candy Factory
- Petting zoo/working farm
- On the Water float trip on the Little River
- Kite making & flying (BRH Education Center)
- Spikenard Bee Sanctuary

### Two-night adventurer's tour

- Buffalo Mountain Wildlife Preserve
- Rock Castle Gorge Recreational Trails
- On the Water in Floyd (canoeing, kayaking)
- Lover's Leap picnic ground & overlook
- Cycling the Blue Ridge Parkway
- Overnight camping: Fairy Stone State Park and Rocky Knob Campground

### Historic tour

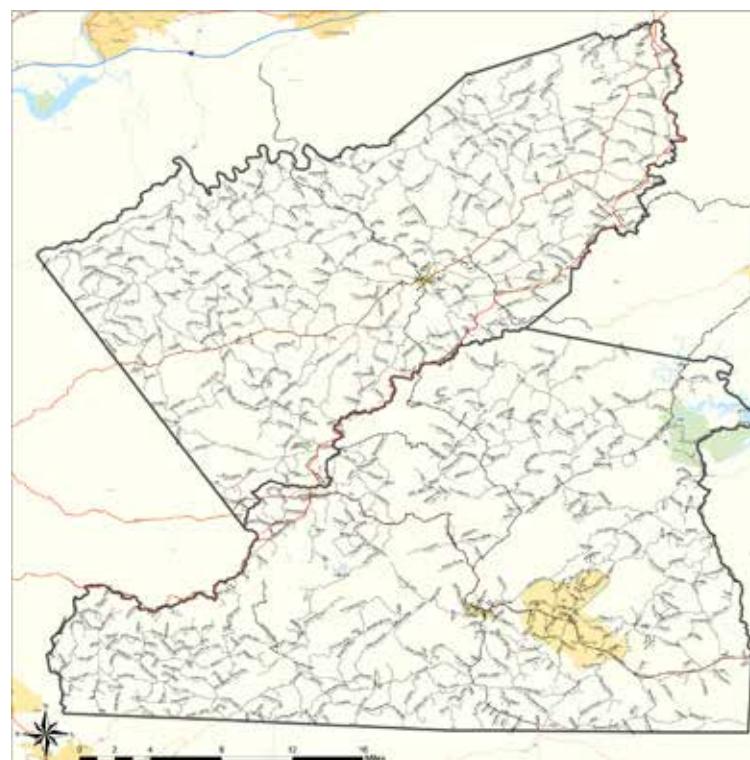
- Mabry Mill
- Reynolds Homestead
- Rock Churches
- Jack's Creek Covered Bridge
- Copper smelting furnace
- Rakes Millpond
- One-room schoolhouse
- History museums in each county

### Beverages with a kick tasting tour

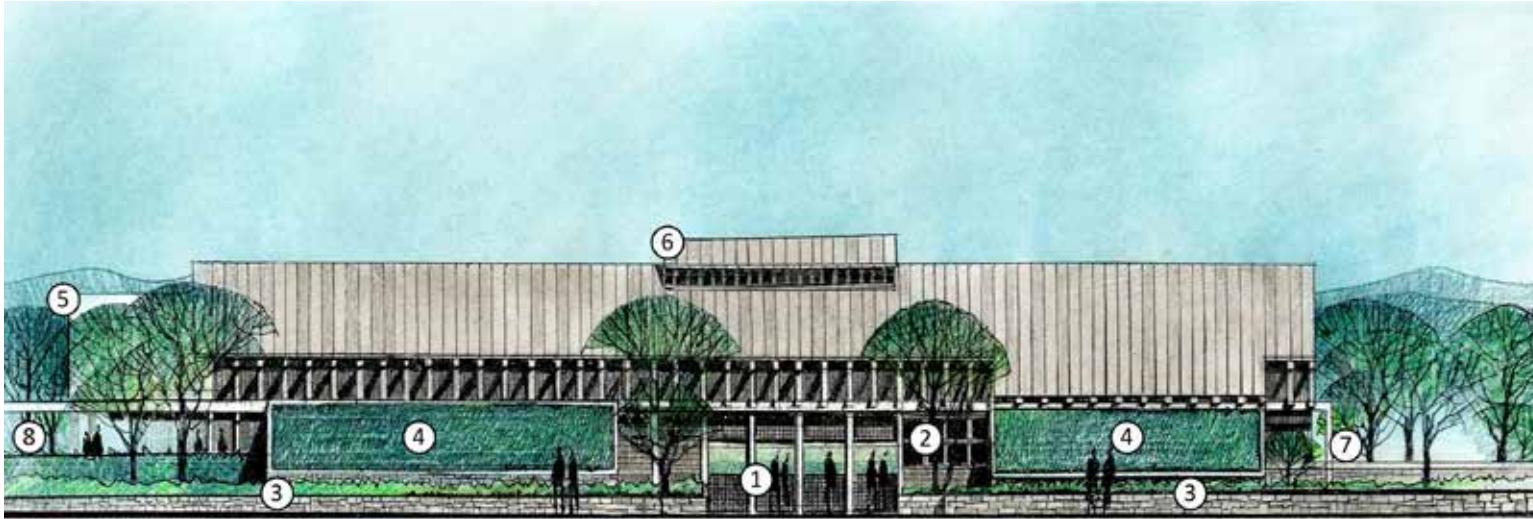
- Chateau Morrisette Winery
- Villa Appalachia Winery
- Buffalo Mountain Brewery
- Floyd's Distillery
- Stanburn Winery

### General Stores, Architecture, Handmade, Festivals, Storytelling, Music, etc.

The staff at the Heritage Education Center will keep abreast of ongoing events, gatherings, classes, exhibits, etc. in both counties and incorporate these activities into appropriate mapped tours and/or guided wanderings to suit the curiosity, schedule, and interests of the visitor requesting the information.



# Heritage Education Center Facility



**North Elevation (what visitors see from parking lot)**



**South Elevation (what visitors see from pond)**

1. Entry Plaza features closing panels for inclement weather
2. Office windows
3. Native stone seatwall
4. Grass roofs on water storage cisterns
5. Outdoor classroom/ dining area with metal roof
6. Monitor with clerestory window to day light building
7. Service access to Heritage Store & main exhibit space
8. Walkway to outdoor exhibits ("The Barns") and trails

1. Balcony overlooking pond & vistas beyond
2. Windows from classroom
3. Open access to outside terrace
4. Outdoor classroom/dining with metal roof
5. Walkway to outdoor exhibits ("The Barns") and trails
6. Trombe wall (solar gain)
7. Service access to Heritage Store & exhibit space
8. Windows to lower level office

# Diverse Interpretive Exhibits

## Primary Facility

(Please see diagram next page)

### Public Introductory Area

Visitors will enter the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center through the front portico where they will encounter the open Gateway area. Visitors will be immediately engaged by the beauty of the locally sourced building materials (stone and wood) and the panoramic view of the pond and Rock Castle Gorge beyond. A concierge or docent stationed at a mobile desk (during peak visitor times, or the staff person manning the floor from the sales counter during less-busy times) will greet visitors and will be available to answer questions or help arrange “guided wandering” tours into the Bi-County area.

This admission-free space is open to the public and intended to serve as a visitor information, public restroom, and limited service center as well as a Gateway to the Bi-County region. In its Gateway function, this area will introduce visitors to the many tourist destinations found throughout Floyd and Patrick Counties, assisted by knowledgeable, informed volunteers and staff; and includes an interactive map display of the two counties (#1), a video display area highlighting special events/festivals/opportunities (#3), plus a brochure area (#2) if visitors want to self-inform.



Above: Public Introductory Area



Right: Heritage Store

Far Right: Exhibit Area

### Lobby

The lobby links the introductory area with the Heritage Store as well as with the admission-required “formal” exhibit gallery, and provides a critical measure of security and environmental control. This function can be accomplished by one staff person centrally located at the Checkout Desk (#5)

### Exhibit Gallery

The exhibit gallery will feature exhibits on a wide variety of thematic topics interpreting the history and heritage of the region. These exhibits will be changed at regular intervals to encourage repeat visitation. Consequently, the exhibit fixtures and lighting system will need to be flexible enough that they can be reconfigured as new exhibits are developed (#7-12).

### Heritage Store

The Heritage Store is intended to interpret twentieth-century general merchandise stores as well as provide a source of income for the facility. It offers a retail outlet for locally-made items or for sale materials about the local culture. In this merging of the past with the present, interpretive programs such as tokens or “due bills” might become hands-on experiences for visitors if handed out at ticket purchase and offered for use when guests buy items from the store (#13 - 17).





## Primary Facility Exhibit Layout

- 1: In the center of the introductory area is planned a pedestal-height interactive relief map of the region to help visitors visualize the unique “lay of the land” and learn more about the region through a series of interactive displays (on exhibit rails) surrounding the map.
- 2: In the southeast corner of the space is a tour planning display showing various thematic tour routes in combination with a tourism brochure rack.
- 3: On the east wall is a large multi-screen video/graphic exhibit that dynamically promotes the culture and heritage of the region. This carefully crafted video program is designed to initiate the primary theme, *A Century of Change*, and inspire visitors to tour the region. It is also easily changed to highlight festivals, special events, etc.
- 4: A nicely detailed donor or sponsor panel.
- 5: A programmable digital sign is mounted behind the concierge/docent providing information on everything from ticket prices and special events to weather reports. Visitors purchase admission tickets to enter the exhibit gallery; however, they are free to enter the Heritage Store without a ticket.
- 6: *A Century of Change* title mural, adjacent to the open doors of the exhibit gallery, promotes the current exhibit as visitors enter the lobby. Staff is available at the desk to answer visitor's questions, process ticket sales for exhibits and other ticketed events and tours, and to check out purchases from the Heritage Store.
- 7: Inside the admission-required exhibit area is a large central display fixture consisting of tall graphic partitions and platforms. Interpretive graphic rails can be configured for between six & eight thematic exhibits. Each theme might take a space 4 feet deep by 4, 6, or 8 feet in width and contain both graphics and small objects.
- 8: In the southeast corner, a platform diorama features log cabin joinery or a Mabry Mill-style, water-power gearing exhibit.
- 9: Along the south wall a series of nine 4-foot wide graphic panels interpret either one large theme with multiple subthemes, or nine different themes.
- 10: A large glass-front exhibit case occupies the northeast corner of the exhibition area. This fixture provides an ideal place for changing exhibits containing small and/or fragile objects requiring a secure display space with good lighting.
- 11: There are a number of opportunities for flat wall-mounted interpretive graphic panels throughout the exhibition area.
- 12: The north wall features a fixture containing a series of platforms or glass-front cases staged between interchangeable, interpretive graphic panels.
- 13: In the Heritage Store, short retail fixtures are strategically placed to create window displays visible from the lobby.
- 14: A large interpretive display about country stores and their social/cultural/economic impact during the *Century of Change* is prominently displayed to catch visitor attention at the entry point.
- 15 & 16: Likewise, perimeter retail shelving and smaller retail fixtures, barrels, and crates are positioned throughout the store for displaying contemporary merchandise, merging the new with the old.
- 17: A primary feature of the store is a vignette on the west wall consisting of an authentic period-style counter with floor-to-ceiling shelving stocked with period inventory (for display only).

# Phasing Plan & Conclusion

## Phasing Plan

The planned development of the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center and Gateway has evolved over the time this Master Plan has been created. At the time of this writing, the Board members and additional volunteers and partner organizations have initiated a program of publicly-accessible, fee-free programs surrounding educating residents and visitors to the natural and historic heritage of the region. Several of these events/gatherings have been held on the site in its current state; most have been held at sites showcasing the assets of the Bi-County area, and highlighting the prime Gateway aspect of the site/facility. A brief sampling of the programs offered follows:

1. Disabled Veterans Fishing Day (held at the property's Pond) organized with many partner groups
2. "Life in Rock Castle Gorge" a round-table discussion including the families/descendants of those who once lived in The Gorge, held at the Meadows of Dan Community building
3. "Hawk Watch" – instructed raptor migration watching, on top of Buffalo Mountain
4. "The American Chestnut: An Economy for a Region" – led by Ralph Lutts, held at The Woodberry Inn

In addition to working with the Hill Studio Team on creating a Master Plan for the site, Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. volunteers have worked on some building/improvement projects to move the Master Plan forward, including:

1. Planting American chestnut saplings as a test group to research; a) if the site is conducive to chestnut growing; and b) how long the disease-susceptible chestnuts would live in the environment (educational signage included)
2. Planting disease-resistant American chestnut hybrids, in partnership with the American Chestnut Foundation
3. Trail building
4. Replacement of the Farmhouse roof
5. Preservation of the pond ecology and structural integrity
6. Securing the stones from a historic chimney to re-build as a part of the Chimney Circle

Upcoming projects include:

1. Demolition and reclamation of unusable structures in the Farmhouse area
2. Construction of a Trails Kiosk to link on-site trails to those in the Rocky Knob Recreation Area
3. Chimney Circle construction
4. Additional improvements to the Farmhouse, including exterior painting and water runoff management
5. Parking and access improvements

These activities and plans are a part of the Phase System developed by the Board and the Hill Studio Planning Team. In general, the Phasing Plan consists of four parts:

1. Immediate needs, maintenance and improvement of existing assets, and initial programming to invite local participation
2. Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center construction and site appurtenances
3. Outdoor Education (trails, pond aquatics, streamwalks, Rock Castle Balcony), Demonstration/Education structures, Farmhouse exhibit area
4. Rock Castle Observatory

## Phase 1

Implementation of Phase 1 does not require substantial fundraising, but does require volunteers; thus the programming thrust to draw interested residents and organizations into the partnership. It also incorporates the existing agreement in place between Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. and the adjacent property owner, so improvements do not require amending the agreement (the first part of which will be re-negotiated or will expire in 2017).

Phase 1 also uses the remaining funds in the Transportation Enhancement allocation by assuring the structural soundness of the Farmhouse itself, having inviting infrastructure on site to accommodate initial programming, and adaptive re-use of some structures and materials. Construction projects include the Trails Kiosk (providing an important linkage to the NPS assets) some parking improvements, and the building of rustic trails and Chimney Circle—again, to invite participation and use by residents and visitors.

## Phase 2

The Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center facility is constructed during Phase 2 – either in its entirety (including exhibit, lobby, and Heritage Store structures and all initial exhibits and inventory) or the upper level and all visitor-ready components therein only, leaving the lower level for future development/build-out. This involves significant site work and includes paved driveways and parking areas, bioswales and other rainwater runoff management systems, additional “inner loop” trail work and pond maintenance/enhancement, and (possibly) construction of “The Barns” and/or the tent pads. Ideally, completion of Phase 2 will be done at one time to take advantage of construction crew mobilization and reduce construction costs.

An alternate approach to accomplishing Phase 2 is to tailor fundraising campaign success and progress so that different funders/initiatives can focus on different subcomponents of the project:

- Utility extensions, the Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center itself and the upper floor interior finish-out
- Paved entrance road and parking, including rainwater runoff systems
- Completion of “The Barns” structures & tent pads including the exhibit materials/items and interpretive signage
- Blue Ridge Heritage Education Center lower floor, including classroom/theater furniture and AV infrastructure & equipment, plus staff amenity areas and exhibit workshop with construction equipment

## Phase 3

This phase implements the final series of trails around the property and through the woods, providing an on-site natural history interpretive experience. It also deals with further development of the Farmhouse exhibits, including the temporary animal exhibit areas, the basement refrigeration exhibit, pond exhibit improvements, wildflower meadow enhancement, and old barn/maintenance shed renovation (see pg. 43).

Some of the southernmost trail sections are in areas affected by the longer-term organizational agreement with the adjacent property owner, which expires in 2021. Work on the trail system, especially any requiring infrastructure to protect the assets the trails will interpret for visitors, can be phased, and thus can take place coincident with fundraising and grant awards.

- Remaining Rustic Trails construction
- Pond Aquatics exhibit & protection
- Streamwalk Trails
- Canopy Trail
- Rock Castle Balcony
- Farmhouse area exhibit/activity enhancements

In addition, Phase 3 will be reserved for any of those items not able to be accomplished in Phases 1 and 2 (e.g., Chimney circle, remainder of “The Barns” or items left out of the main facility’s lower level build-out).

## Phase 4

The Rock Castle Observatory is a stand-alone phase of construction. Its size, technical equipment, implementation, and program uses make it ideal for corporate funding as a STEM education element for schools & universities, and for special-use corporate team-building or get-aways, and other events/festivals. The technology proposed for this asset will improve significantly in a short period. Thus, it is logical to pursue this component of supplemental educational programming later than the other phases.

It does not, however, need to come last. If and when a sponsor is interested in funding this exciting educational and special use tool to become an asset of not only the Center but also the entire Bi-County region, focus can be changed to initiate construction. Unlike the other phases, however, it will be important to build the Observatory all at once, rather than breaking out its creation into potential sub-phases.

## Conclusion

Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. organizers have worked since 2004, beginning by asking for widespread community input on what our friends and neighbors would like to see located adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway and near Rocky Knob, reflecting the interests of both Patrick and Floyd Counties, that will also be an economic development asset to the entire region. A feasibility study was undertaken by Blue Ridge Heritage, Inc. and Virginia Tech with Clemson University, and made available for all tourism-based interests throughout the region. Since that 2007 study, the group has been working diligently to carefully adopt a mission, a site, a Business Plan, and now a Master Plan for the entire 31 acres.

Throughout this entire process, individual citizens of both counties, serving as Board representatives, have been steering, offering input, adjusting, and learning. Where they did not have the “on board” expertise, they have asked for guidance from professionals.

This iterative Master Plan, in all its components and aspects, has evolved from a team whose strengths vary. Still, each member of the team is deeply committed to the realization of the project—and each is excited to be a part of this process, primarily for personal reasons revolving around a collective love of and understanding for this region: its history, its people, its geology, its ecology, and its potential. Each person involved to this point, and many who contributed immeasurably, yet who are not currently involved, want to share the educational and economic development aspects of this project with our neighbors. Each wants to showcase the unique aspects of this part of Virginia with visitors, schoolchildren, college students, researchers, partners, and our own families, that we all might be inspired and intrigued to learn more, visit often, and preserve/sustain/enhance our diverse communities.

With your support of this Master Plan, we shall collaboratively create the asset we have carefully envisioned and developed for over a decade.