

Recreation and Research on Hawk Pride Mountain

By *Tilda Mims*, Forest Education Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission, Northport



Members of the Lauderdale County Alabama TREASURE Forest Association enjoyed a tour of Hawk Pride Mountain, home of Dr. John Mims (center of photo in green shirt).

Dr. John Mims of Tusculumbia began his college career studying soil science at Auburn University. Although he changed to medicine after WWII, his interest in experimenting with plant species and comparing cropland, pastureland and forestland prevailed.

He began by purchasing small pieces of land to work with and improve. He liked to sell the tracts to young couples at a reasonable price and start again. It wasn't until 1962, when he bought a tract on nearby Hawk Pride Mountain, that his family liked the land so much they didn't want him to sell it. They nicknamed it "R&R" for Recreation & Research, because he enjoyed using it to experiment with trees and soils.

"In 1962 this place looked so desolate," Dr. Mims recalls. "It was known as a moonshine area. No one came on the property except a few revenuers. I heard

that more came on the place than off. They grew a little corn and sold bits of timber here and there. There was no wildlife and very few trees that would make a log. We worked on it one acre at a time, trying to visualize what it could look like, managing each spot differently because each spot had different capabilities."

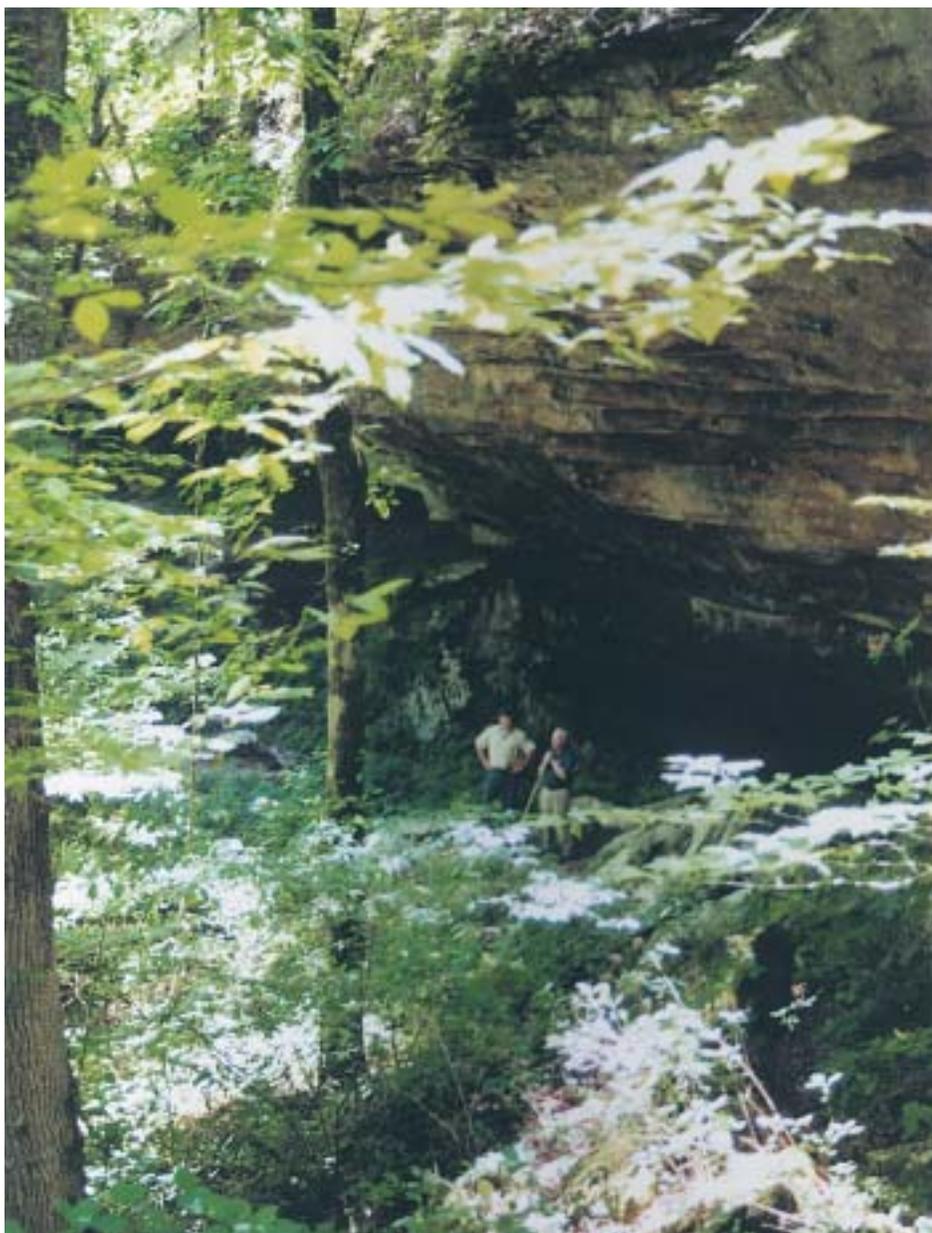
They cleaned up the land and began putting it back into production by building terraces, planting pines, and experimenting with spacing, prescribed burning, and herbicides.

Green fields of clover, oats, wheat, barley, turnip greens, bicolor and soybeans began to attract whitetail deer and other wildlife back into the area. In 1975, they introduced wild turkey by releasing three hens and two gobblers. Today it is not surprising to see 30 turkeys in a flock.

Experimenting With Seedlings

In 1989, Dr. Mims planted 100 acres of marginal cropland in Alabama Forestry Commission second generation loblolly pine. At the same time, he planted regular seedlings on better soil. The plants went through an ice storm in 1993 and a second severe storm in 1998. By then, the second-generation trees were large enough to salvage for pulpwood. At 8-10 inches dbh (diameter at breast height) the trees brought \$312 per acre when cutting every fifth row and storm-damaged trees. The regular seedlings planted on better soil had not grown as well.

He believes the difference was the genetics of improved seedlings. "We also had about five acres of 15-year-old pines harvested at the same time. They were taller and heavier but no bigger around. We got just about the same amount of



Colbert County manager Johnnie Everitt (left) and Dr. Mims explore part of Counterfeit Hollow.



Mary Mims (center) likes to entertain family and friends at the farm.



In 1975, three hens and two gobblers were released on the farm. Today it is not unusual to see 30 or more turkeys in a flock.

money for each,” he said. “We got in ten years what you normally get in fifteen.”

He advises landowners to look at each individual tract and consult with a forestry expert about thinning early. “This was a special situation when all trees were growing like mad, but in areas with genetically enhanced trees the growth was amazing.” Among other projects, he has planted more than 900 American chestnut seedlings, a variety of wildlife foods, and is experimenting with planting methods to protect trees from severe ice storms.

Preserving History

No visit to “the mountain” is complete without a trip into Counterfeit Hollow, so named because confederate soldiers made bogus money there during the Civil War. In the early 1800’s, there was a silver robbery in the area and the thieves were killed before the silver was recovered. Police investigations indicated that the loot was buried in an area similar to Counterfeit Hollow prompting years of plundering by locals. Although the silver was never recovered, many Civil War and Native American artifacts were salvaged and are displayed in museums today.

Forty years later, the original purchase has grown to nearly 1,000 acres but Hawk Pride Mountain remains the heart of this TREASURE Forest. “I take pride in all of the land I own,” says Dr. Mims, “but I am particularly proud of this area

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Dr. Mims cut the logs and laid the rocks to build this cabin.

because it has gone from a wasteland to something productive and useful. God gave us our natural resources to use, and it's our duty to use them to feed and clothe his people and let his people enjoy them."

His family's commitment to stewardship was honored in 2001 when he was named winner of the Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award for the Northwest Region.

"This place is a hobby to me. I love the soil; I love watching things grow. I was a conservationist and an environ-

mentalist before it was popular. The most rewarding thing has been seeing my neighbors doing the same things - building terraces and green fields, planting trees. I smile when I see them doing these things."

Dr. John Mims is one of the most interesting people you would ever meet. As a WWII pilot, he flew in the Pacific, Africa, Europe, and Asia. He had a rewarding medical career in Tusculmbia delivering 3,500 babies and performing 20,000 operations before he retired, and he also made missionary trips to Africa.



Whitetail deer frequent one of the many green fields.



The tree slice on the left is from Commission second-generation seedlings planted on marginal soil. The slice on the right is from a regular seedling planted on better soil.

He makes wooden furniture, puts up jelly each year, and makes some of the world's best peanut brittle.

He tells amazing stories about past events and people he has known, but his greatest joy is clearly his role as proud husband, father, and grandfather. John and Mary Mims have three children: Dr. Park Mims, an endodontist in Huntsville; Dr. Rosemary Fisk, a professor of English at Samford University in Birmingham; and daughter Emy Carlson, who completed graduate studies in education and lives with her family in Tuscaloosa.

Although stories and mementos of his colorful life will surely be passed along by future generations, his legacy on Hawk Pride Mountain will remain a living TREASURE for the family of John and Mary Mims. ☪