A photograph of a couple standing in a lush, green forest, looking at a waterfall. The waterfall is cascading over several tiers of dark, mossy rocks. The surrounding vegetation is dense and vibrant green. The couple is seen from behind, standing on a rocky path. The man is wearing a blue polo shirt and khaki pants, and the woman is wearing a blue and yellow patterned shirt. The overall scene is serene and natural.

Couple Create Preserve for Future Generations

By Dennis Sherer

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Often, when a large tract of land is acquired, there are plans to bulldoze trees to make way for a subdivision, strip mall, or other development.

Since 1979, Jim and Faye Lacefield have purchased more than 700 acres of rugged woodlands south of Tusculum [in Colbert County], but developing the scenic vistas that dot the landscape is the furthest thing from their minds. They are purchasing it to make sure its rustic beauty remains intact for generations to come.

The couple calls their scenic tract "Cane Creek Nature Preserve." There are 15 miles of trails winding around the canyons that dot the tract near Hawk Pride Mountain. Visitors can spend an entire day gazing at waterfalls, rock formations, giant trees, and rare wildflowers.

Jim Lacefield said he and his wife love the beauty of the rugged canyon and enjoy sharing it with others. They started with 40 acres and have gradually expanded their property. "When we moved here over 30 years ago, we saw it as something we could do to protect the environment from development and make a contribution to the people of this area and people of the future," he said. "Areas like this are going to be extremely valuable to future generations as more and more land is developed."

The Lacefields placed their property into a conservation trust with the Nature Conservancy to ensure it will be protected after their death. "The ownership of the property might change someday with the Nature Conservancy taking over, but it will be protected from development forever," Lacefield stated.

Some of the yellow poplar, basswood, and cow cucumber magnolia trees growing in the canyons measure more than four feet across at the base. Lacefield said the canyon walls have helped protect the massive trees from wind. In some of the side canyons, large boulders have tumbled from the rim, blocking the entrance to loggers.

More than a dozen waterfalls can be found at the preserve, including some that are 60 feet tall.

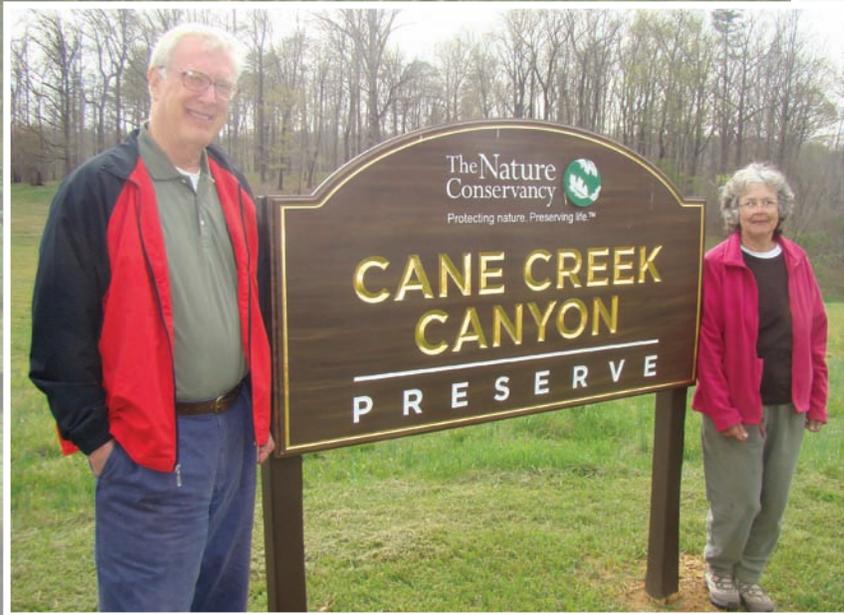
Cane Creek attracts more than 1,000 visitors from throughout the country. Many are drawn there by rare flowers that grow in the canyons. Some of the wildflowers grow on top of boulders with little soil - if any - to provide nourishment. Margie Anderton of Killen, a wildflower enthusiast, calls the nature preserve a TREASURE. "It's absolutely beautiful out there," she said. "It's hard to find any place that is any prettier."

Spring is the best time for seeing the wildflowers, according to Lacefield. One rare wildflower found at the preserve is the Alabama warbonnet (*Jamesianthus alabamensis*). Another wildflower that grows there, French's shooting star (*Dodecatheon Frenchii*), is found nowhere else in Alabama. The nearest colony of French's shooting stars to Cane Creek Canyon is more than 300 miles away in Arkansas. Biologists from several states have visited the preserve to collect DNA from the French's shooting star plants in hopes of unlocking the mystery of how the wildflowers wound up in a single canyon in northwest Alabama. So far, none have solved the puzzle.

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Landowner Jim Lacefield examines French's Shooting Star plants.



Honored as the Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award recipients for the Northwest Region in 2006, Jim and Faye Lacefield love the beauty of their rugged canyon property and enjoy sharing it with others.

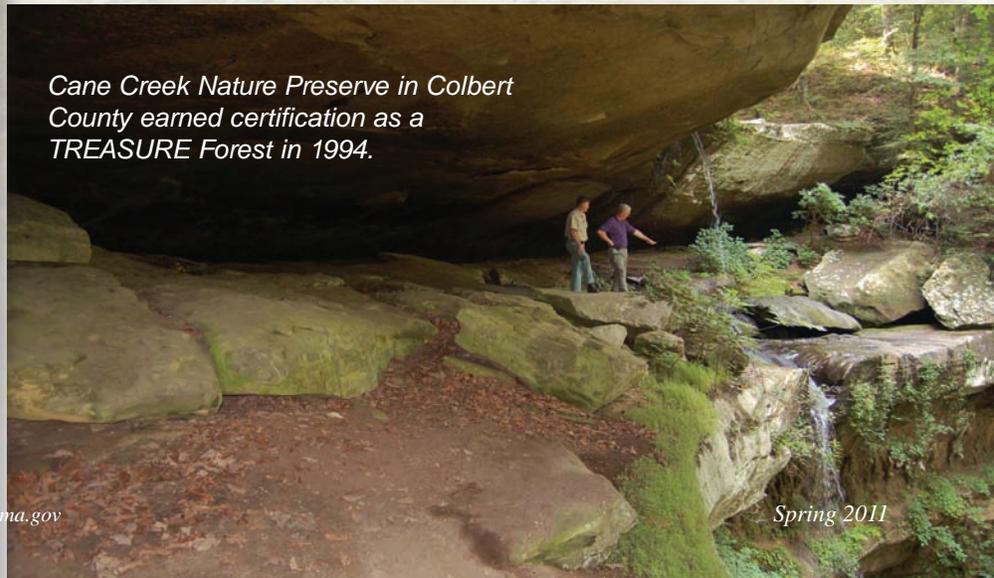
Bill Zeulke of Florence, who frequently hikes at the nature preserve, feels that Cane Creek is the perfect place to escape from the daily pressures of life and enjoy the beauty of nature only a few minutes from town. "It's a beautiful place," he stated.

Lacefield said he and his wife strive to keep the preserve in as near a natural state as possible. They have installed small bridges across some streams in the canyons, but have not paved the walking trails or built souvenir stands and other buildings commonly found at private nature preserves. Also, unlike most private preserves, Jim and Faye Lacefield do not charge admission. He said there are other canyons in Colbert County, but many are in remote areas with limited access. Cane Creek Nature Preserve

affords visitors an opportunity to tour a canyon without having to hike for miles to get there.



The entrance to the preserve is only a short walk from the Lacefields' home. Maps of the canyon trails are kept in a mailbox on the couple's porch. There also is a folder of nature guides that first-time visitors can use during a self-guided tour to learn about the biology, geography, and archeology of the preserve. They do ask that guests sign a log kept on the porch so they can keep track of visits. "We're not interested in making money off the preserve," Lacefield said. "We use it as a way of modeling what we believe in and how people should respect the land." 🌲



Cane Creek Nature Preserve in Colbert County earned certification as a TREASURE Forest in 1994.