



FLOWER HILL

Preserve Guide

Welcome to Flower Hill, a 10-acre nature preserve owned and managed by Triangle Land Conservancy.

For many generations, Johnston County residents have known about this place they called a “freak of nature,” where rhododendron and galax and other mountainous plants grow far from their nearest relatives. Take a walk at Flower Hill and discover what locals have treasured for many years.



Freak of Nature

Historically, families from nearby crossroads communities—Heflin, Stilley's Crossroads, Stancils Chapel and others—would picnic here in early May and enjoy the spectacular display of Catawba rhododendron in full bloom. This evergreen shrub has large flowers that range in color from deep pink to bright purple and commonly grows at higher elevations in western North Carolina. In the Coastal Plain and Piedmont it is only found on steep north-facing slopes and bluffs, such as those at Flower Hill, which maintain a moderate microclimate that enables the plant to flourish far from its typical habitat.

Flower Hill straddles the Fall Line—the dividing line between the rolling topography of the Piedmont and the gentler sprawling landscape of the Coastal Plain—and this location contributes to the area's unusual mix of plant life. The preserve's uplands are covered in an oak-hickory forest with abundant chestnut oak, which is rarely found in the eastern Piedmont. The eastern part of the slope does not contain rhododendron but rather a mixed hardwood forest with American beech and an understory of flowering dogwood and American holly.

North Carolina's easternmost stand of Catawba rhododendron maintains a foothold here on steep 40- to 80-foot bluffs overlooking Moccasin Creek, which comprises the northeastern boundary of the preserve. Wildflowers such as trout lily, Catesby's trillium, jack-in-the-pulpit and Solomon's seal also grow here and add to the showy floral display in the spring. The preserve provides a forested buffer that helps maintain water quality in Moccasin Creek, which is home to the federally listed endangered dwarf wedgemussel, a freshwater mussel that depends on clean water.

The preserve is home to the barking treefrog, the largest treefrog species in the Southeast, which is named for the male's distinctive call. The nocturnal frog inhabits treetops and breeds near bodies of water such as streams and pools. Wood duck and muskrat are often seen in the swamp at the base of the preserve's bluffs.



TLC's mission is to protect important open space—stream corridors, forests, wildlife habitat, farmland, and natural areas—to help keep our region a healthy and vibrant place to live and work. TLC is a private, nonprofit land trust serving Chatham, Durham, Johnston, Lee, Orange and Wake counties.

Since 1983, TLC has protected 10,000 acres in scores of sites across the Triangle region. These sites enhance the quality of life in the Triangle by protecting wildlife habitats, water quality, recreation areas and open space.

TLC is a member-supported non-profit organization. To support TLC or for more information, please visit our website at www.triangleland.org or contact us at:

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Photo credits:

Catawba rhododendron: Doug Nicholas
Flower Hill Trail: Sonke Johnsen
Barking treefrog: John Willson

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Visiting Flower Hill

Flower Hill is located in northeastern Johnston County, just off NC 231 near the Nash and Wilson county lines. The preserve is designated as a TLC Open Land property, meaning that it is open to the public but not intensively managed for public recreation. The preserve has an information kiosk, and the short (less than a mile) but steep Flower Hill Trail provides a path through the heart of the preserve. A loop spur trail offers views of the rhododendron bluffs. Note that the trail continues off the TLC property and is well marked. Visitors should heed all posted signs.

The preserve is heavily visited the first two weekends in May and TLC traditionally offers a hike the weekend before Mother's Day. Find more information about TLC events and outings by visiting www.triangleland.org.

Directions

GPS 35.7272, -78.2080

From Raleigh, follow US 64 East to US 264 East. Continue for about 2 miles and exit on NC 39. Turn right and follow NC 39 south for 6 miles to NC 231. Turn left and follow NC 231 east about 3 miles to Flower Hill Road. There is no parking area and we suggest parking on the right shoulder of NC 231 beyond Flower Hill Road (parking is at the visitor's own risk). Walk about one-quarter mile up Flower Hill Road to the trail entrance on the left. Be very careful on Flower Hill Road, as traffic tends to come quickly down the hill.

The Story Behind the Place

The scientific community became aware of this unique area in 1937, when famed North Carolina naturalist B.W. Wells, a botany and ecology professor at N.C. State University, visited the site with a group at the invitation of Bill Ragsdale, the county forest warden. Wells was surprised to find a large stand of Catawba rhododendron, as well as plants typically found at higher elevations, such as galax, trailing arbutus, chestnut oak and witch hazel.

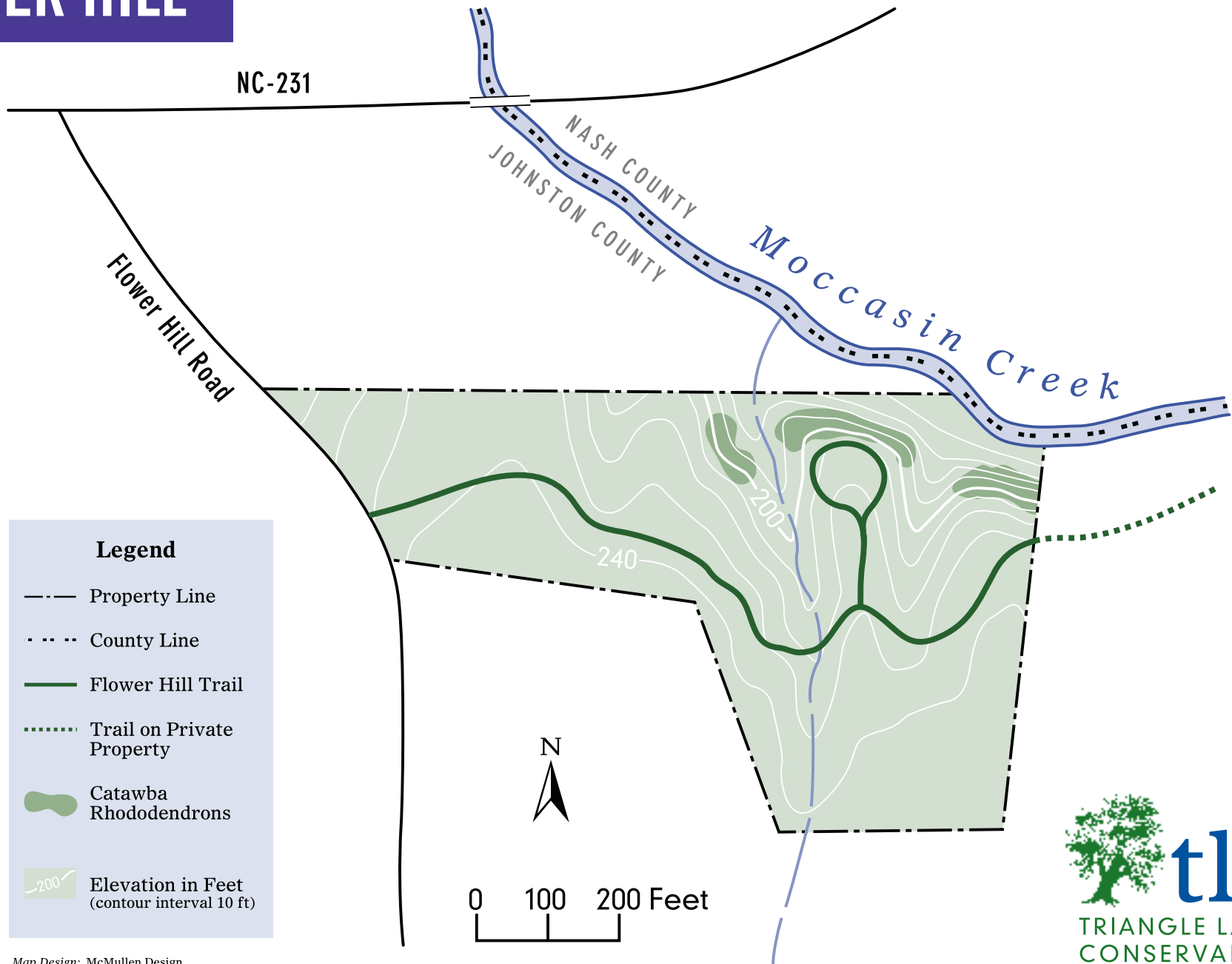
According to reporter Tom Lassiter, who accompanied the group, Wells "attributed Flower Hill's mountainous proportions to an unusual hardness of the rock formation, which had resisted erosion, and the abundant growth of mountain plants to the northern exposure of the bluffs which receive little or no sunlight."

In the late 1930s, Ragsdale leased Flower Hill, built trails and promoted the site, attracting more than 12,000 visitors over the course of three weekends in May 1937. Interest in the site declined until 1988, when concerned civic groups and other members of the Johnston County community launched a fundraising and public awareness campaign to save the natural area. In 1989, Triangle Land Conservancy purchased 10 of the 75 acres that make up this natural heritage site. TLC opened the preserve to the public in May 1993. In 1996, Hurricane Fran downed trees throughout

the preserve, creating light openings that have allowed the exotic vine wisteria to invade the natural area. TLC volunteers and staff are working to combat this invasive species that can overwhelm native vegetation.



FLOWER HILL



Legend

- Property Line
- ... County Line
- Flower Hill Trail
- Trail on Private Property
- Catawba Rhododendrons
- 200 Elevation in Feet (contour interval 10 ft)

Map Design: McMullen Design

