

Ridge's Mountain  
Cultural Heritage Site Nomination

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Ridge's Mountain is one of Randolph County's best geological, ecological, and historic sites, sitting eight miles west of Asheboro, North Carolina. It is part of the Uwharrie Mountain chain, said to be the oldest mountain chain in North America. Ridge's Mountain reaches an elevation of 840 feet and is believed to be over 5 million years old. Sitting approximately two miles from Highway 64, this impressive site is home to biologically diverse and unique habitats that foster plant and animal activity not seen anywhere else in the county. With its fascinating connection to local Native American communities and its history as an eighteenth century trading post, Ridge's Mountain comprehensively connects the natural wonders of the site with its cultural significance during the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

## **I. Natural Significance**

According to the Randolph County Natural Heritage Inventory, Ridge's Mountain is one of thirteen regionally significant natural areas in the county. It provides an environment where native flora and fauna can remain undisturbed. Some of the unique features of the mountain are its Upland Pools, Upland Depression Swamp Forests, Piedmont Monadnock Forests and Basic Oak-Hickory Forests.<sup>1</sup> These natural communities provide the ecological stability that certain amphibians and other animals like "neotropical migratory songbirds"<sup>2</sup> need in order to sustain their breeding habits. Much of the soil on the mountain is basic, allowing for the growth of plants that cannot survive acidic soils. Few species are nonnative to the mountain, as the pool and forest

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<sup>1</sup> Moni C. Bates, Dr. Roy Coomans, "Randolph County Natural Heritage Inventory" ( Raleigh: The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, 1999) 112.

<sup>2</sup> "Ridge's Mountain", Piedmont Land Conservancy, accessed January 5, 2016, [http://www.piedmontland.org/sites/Ridges\\_Mountain.php](http://www.piedmontland.org/sites/Ridges_Mountain.php)

communities provide a localized site for reproduction. The Crested coral-root (*Hexalectris spicata*) is also found growing naturally on Ridge's Mountain. This species is considered significantly rare in North Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

Not only does the site harbor significant native flora and fauna, but it also acts as a connector for different networks in the area. Ridge's Mountain acts as a wilderness corridor, meaning that animals from various habitats roam freely through the area in regards to their natural activity or migration patterns.<sup>4</sup> It is important to protect these corridors because they provide for the safe and secure continuation of natural habitats and animal practices.

In 2000, the North Carolina Zoological Park and the Piedmont Land Conservancy partnered to acquire 186 acres of Ridge's Mountain.<sup>5</sup> Timbering and development threatened the mountain and its natural resources. The organizations acquired 96 more acres in 2010, including its northern peak. Through these organizations, these portions of the mountain are open to activities such as hiking, scouting, birdwatching, and climbing, making it a prime spot for eco-tourism.

Perhaps the most well-known geological feature on Ridge's Mountain is the presence of its boulders; the summit contains up to twenty acres of these boulders, with some reaching heights of fifty feet. These boulders are the largest in the region and appear on their own or stacked together to form impressive structures.<sup>6</sup> These boulders are nationally known by rock climbers.

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<sup>3</sup> "Plant Details", North Carolina Native Plant Society, accessed January 5, 2016  
[http://www.ncwildflower.org/plant\\_galleries/details/hexalectris-spicata](http://www.ncwildflower.org/plant_galleries/details/hexalectris-spicata)

<sup>4</sup> Nell Allen, "Protecting Wildlife and Building Hiking Trails", *Alive Magazine* of the NC Zoo Society, Summer 2015, 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Schlosser, "Rocks Marks the Spot," *News & Record*, May 23, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> "Randolph County Natural Heritage Inventory", 113.

Historic sites often have biological significance but it is rarer to have geological significance. The mountain itself formed from volcanic activity. While it is easy to see the large boulders, the sheer significance of the slope itself comes from years of geologic activity and change in the Earth's crust. The Earth's crust split open, filling the new gap with magma. The result was erosion-resistant gabbro, a type of igneous rock. Much of the plant and animal activity of Ridge's Mountain is rooted in its geologically significant beginnings.

## **II. Historical Significance**

Not only is the mountain significant for its abundance of natural resources, it also has a rich anthropological history. During the 1600s, the mountain was part of a major Native American trading network. A Keyauwee Indian village was situated at the bottom of the mountain along the Caraway Creek (The name Caraway is thought to derive from the name of the village, Keyauwee).<sup>7</sup> This village was flourishing with close to 500 people, ample livestock, and rolling corn fields. An English surveyor named John Lawson documented the village and the areas surrounding Ridge's Mountain. According to Lawson's journals, published in London in 1709, the mountain contained a cave that a hundred men "may fit very conveniently to dine in".<sup>8</sup> The king of the tribe was known as Keyauwee Jack. Lawson writes that Keyauwee Jack was very hospitable and friendly. The natives showed the English visitors how to make a fishhook and how to write in Lawson's journal.<sup>9</sup> Later in his visit, Lawson meets the daughter of

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<sup>7</sup> Ethel Stephens Arnett, *The Saura and Keyauwee in the Land of Guilford, Randolph, and Rockingham* (Greenboro: Media Inc. Printers and Publishers, 1975), 14.

<sup>8</sup> John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 57.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Keyauwee Jack's wife, whom she had by a former husband, and refers to her as "the beautifullest Indian I ever saw", saying she had "an air of majesty with her".<sup>10</sup> Lawson's writings while staying with the Keyauwee Indians continues to be the most vivid and detailed account of Native Americans in the area during the 1600s.

In the following century, Godfrey Ridge opened up a trading post on the mountain in the 1750s. This is where the name Ridge's Mountain originates. Ridge's trading post and tavern were located along what had previously been known as the Great Trading Path.<sup>11</sup> Pieces of a stone wall believed to be part of a stock yard or a holding pen are still visible and in tact on the incline of the mountain.<sup>12</sup> In the late 1930s, Dr. Joffre Coe, the director of Research Laboratories of Anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, led an excavation that discovered over one hundred artifacts on the mountain. Among the artifacts were glass and shell beads believed to have been traded along the the Native American trading route.<sup>13</sup> Coe's excavation also discovered a burial pit, which reinforces later archeological studies of the area and its surrounding fields in determining that a Native American burial ground sits at the base of the mountain.

Ridge's Mountain combines a unique natural experience with its rich, early-colonial history to produce a site worthy of consideration and care. It's biological and ecological communities and species are found in few other places across the county, and the accounts of local a Keyauwee village and trading post provide context to the mountain's important place in Randolph County history.

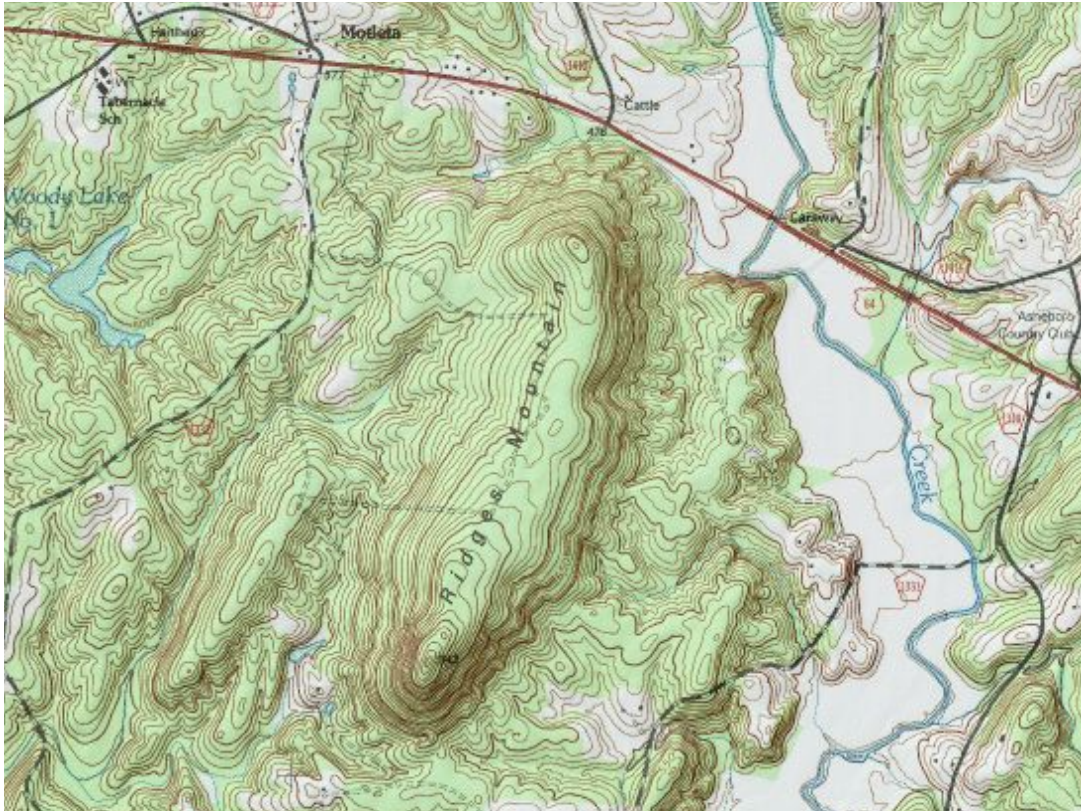
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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>11</sup> Mac Whatley, *The Architectural History of Randolph County, North Carolina* (City of Asheboro, Randolph County; North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1985), 7.

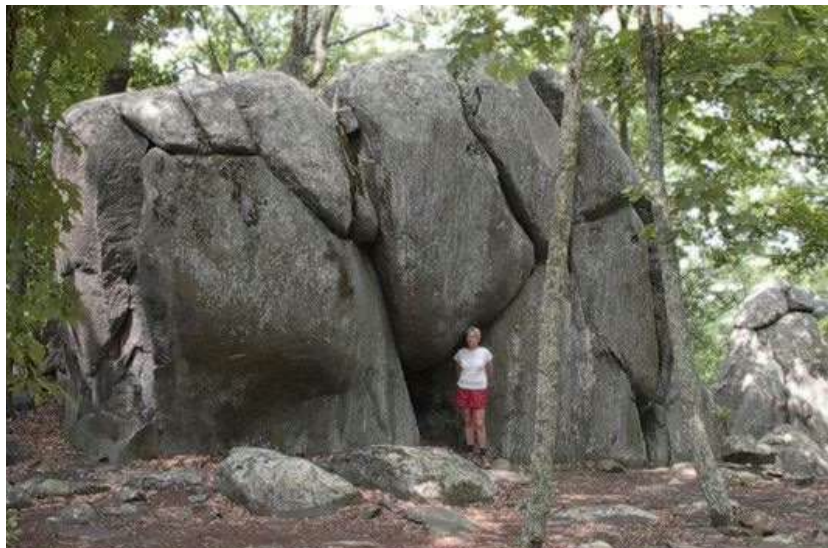
<sup>12</sup> Charles Frago, "Group Scrambles to try to Buy Mountain", *News & Record*, December 12, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Bonnie Jordan, "Sentinels of Stone Stand Silent Watch at Ridge Mountain", *High Point Enterprise*.



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Topographic map of Ridge's Mountain, with Highway 64 seen in red



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Visitors experience the boulders on Ridge's Mountain

<sup>14</sup> "Ridges Mountain Topo Map in Randolph County NC",  
<http://www.topozone.com/north-carolina/randolph-nc/summit/ridges-mountain/>

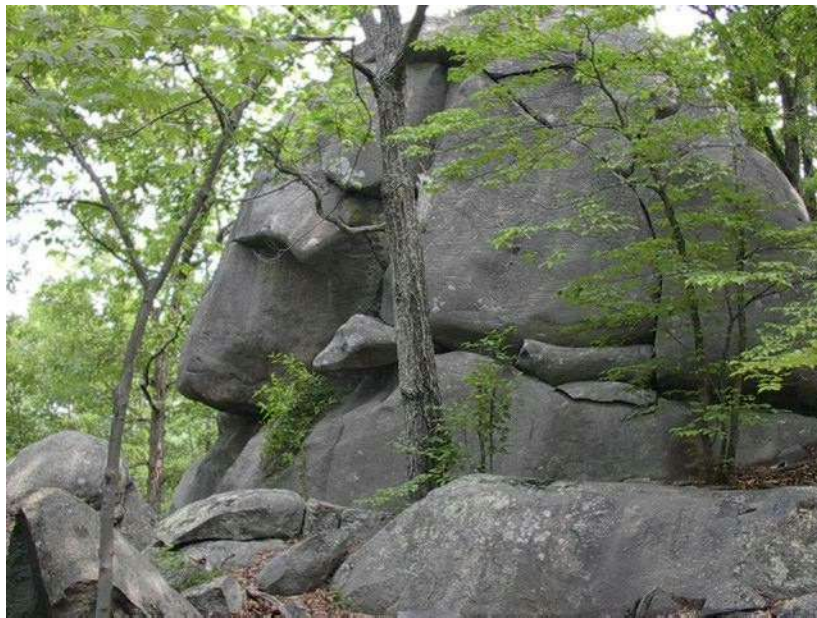
<sup>15</sup> "Ridges Mountain", <http://www.ridgesmountain.info/Print.htm>





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Needle Eye Rock



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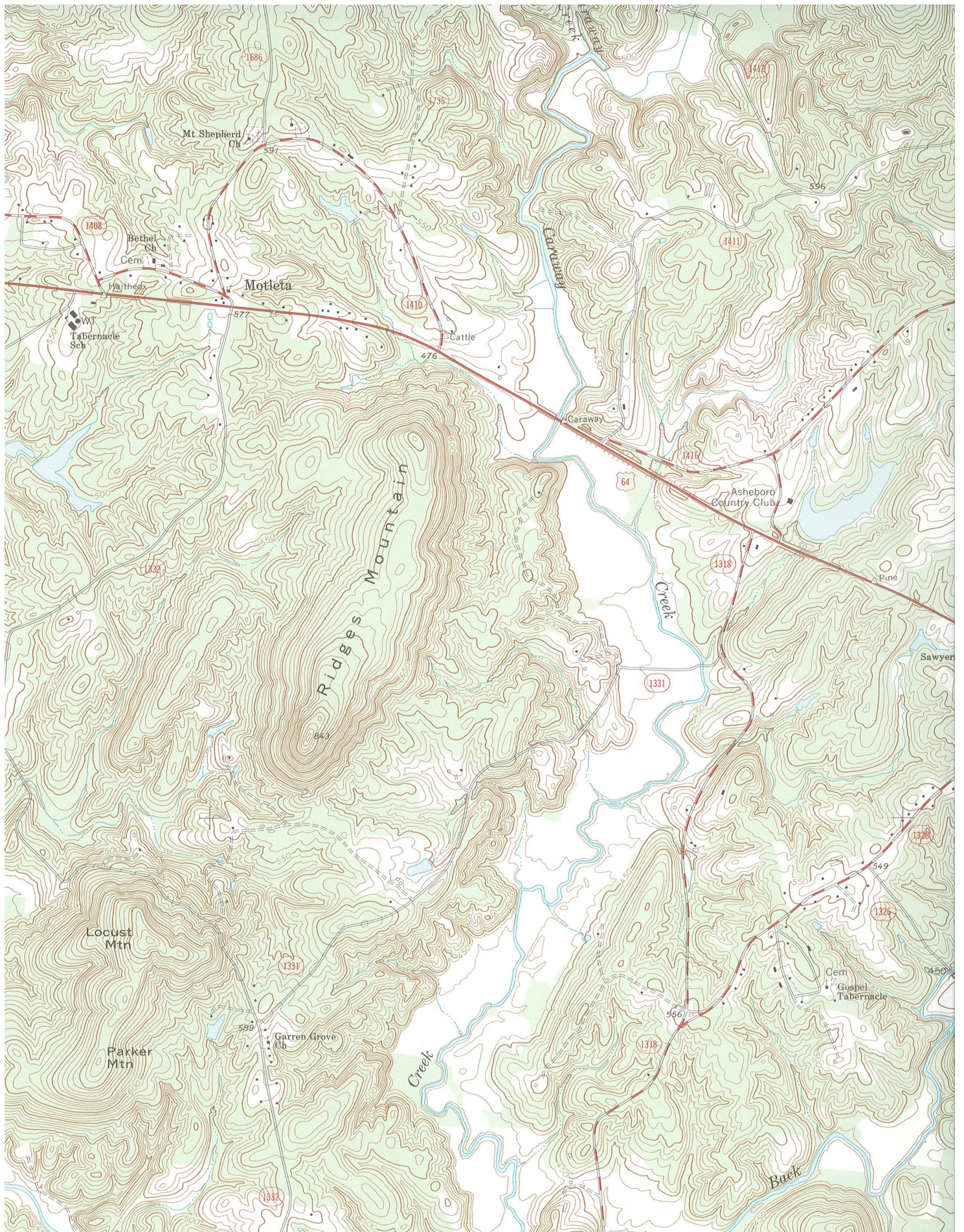
Indian Head Rock

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.









▲ Upland pool in spring, almost dried up. The grassy-looking plant is joor's sedge, (*Carex joorii*), often seen in upland pools in the Piedmont. [Source: N.C. Zoo]



◀ Upland pool in March. No fish to eat the larvae because the pond is dry in the summer, so it is a haven for breeding spotted and marbled salamanders and other amphibians. [Source: NC Zoo]





▲ A grassy glade on top of the mountain. The grass here in this dry area is mostly poverty oatgrass (*Danthonia spicata*). [Source: N.C. Zoo]



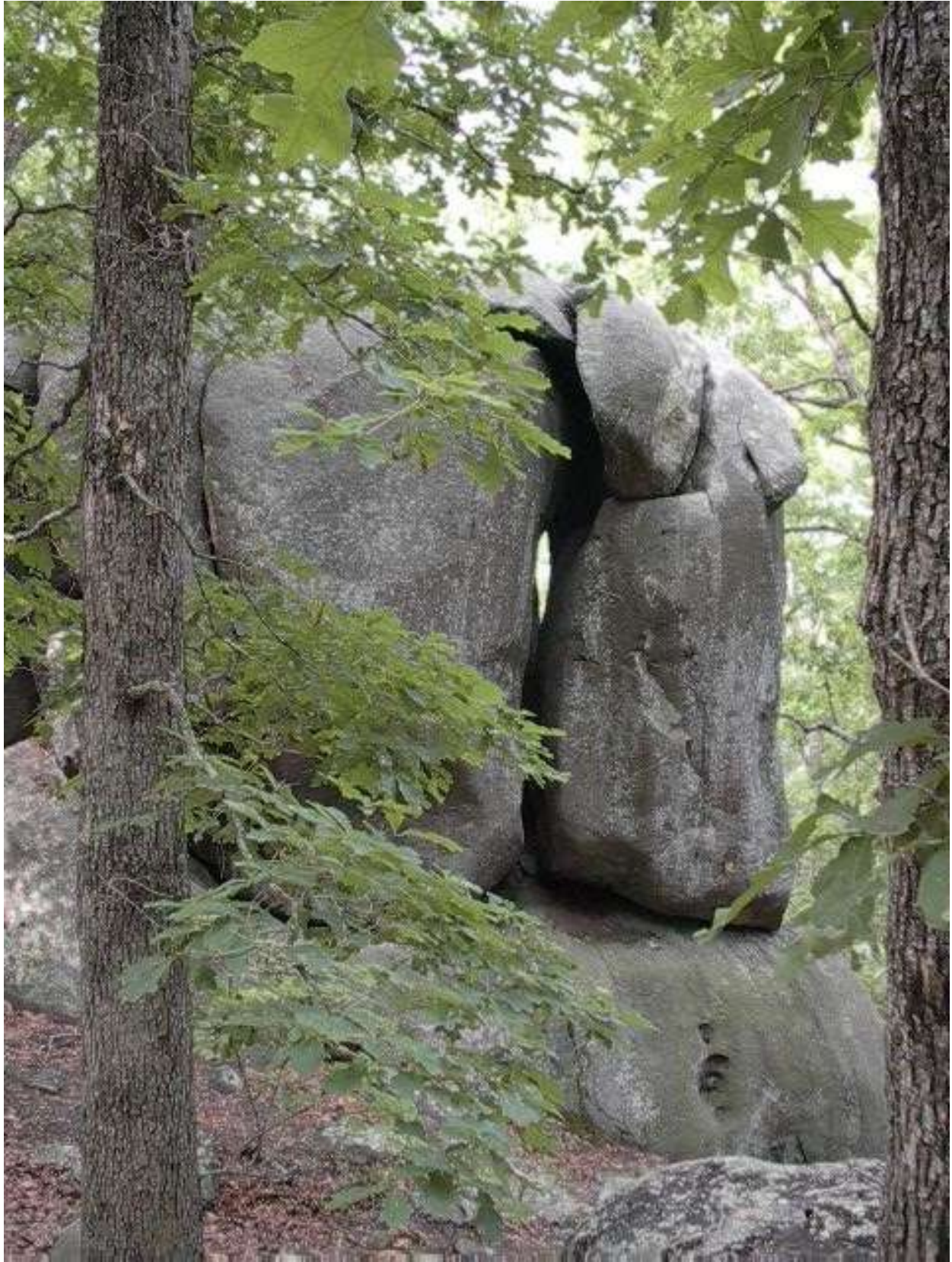
◀ Southern shagbark hickory (*Carya carolinensis*). Prefers to grow on higher pH (non-acidic) soils. Acidic soils are more common in North Carolina, but the gabbro rock of Ridge's Mountain weathers into soil that is less acidic than most and high in minerals. [Source: N.C. Zoo]





***Boulders on Ridge's  
Mountain. [Source: N.C.  
Zoo]***





***Boulders on Ridge's Mountain. [Source: <http://ridgesmountain.info/>]***





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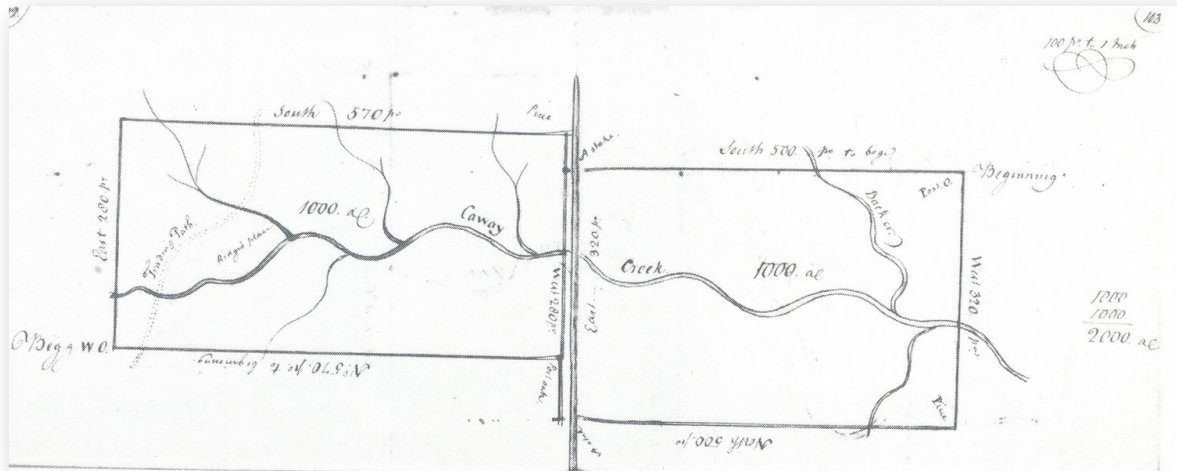


***Boulders on Ridge's Mountain. [Source: <http://ridgesmountain.info/>]***





**▲ A stone wall atop Ridge's Mountain, believed to have been part of a stockyard or holding pen. [Source: N.C. Zoo]**



**PLAT MAP:** Surveyor Henry Eustace McCulloh's plat map of the Caraway Creek area ca. 1765 showing "Ridges Place" and the trading path. The map bears the following notation: "These two tracts will be easily subdivided, as the good land lies along the creek on both sides."

Source: Whatley, L. McKay, *The Architectural History of Randolph County, North Carolina*. Asheboro, N.C.: City of Asheboro, County of Randolph and North Carolina Division of Archives and History. 1985. P. 7; citing Henry Eustace McCulloh Survey Book #1944 p. 102-103, courtesy of the Southern Historical collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.