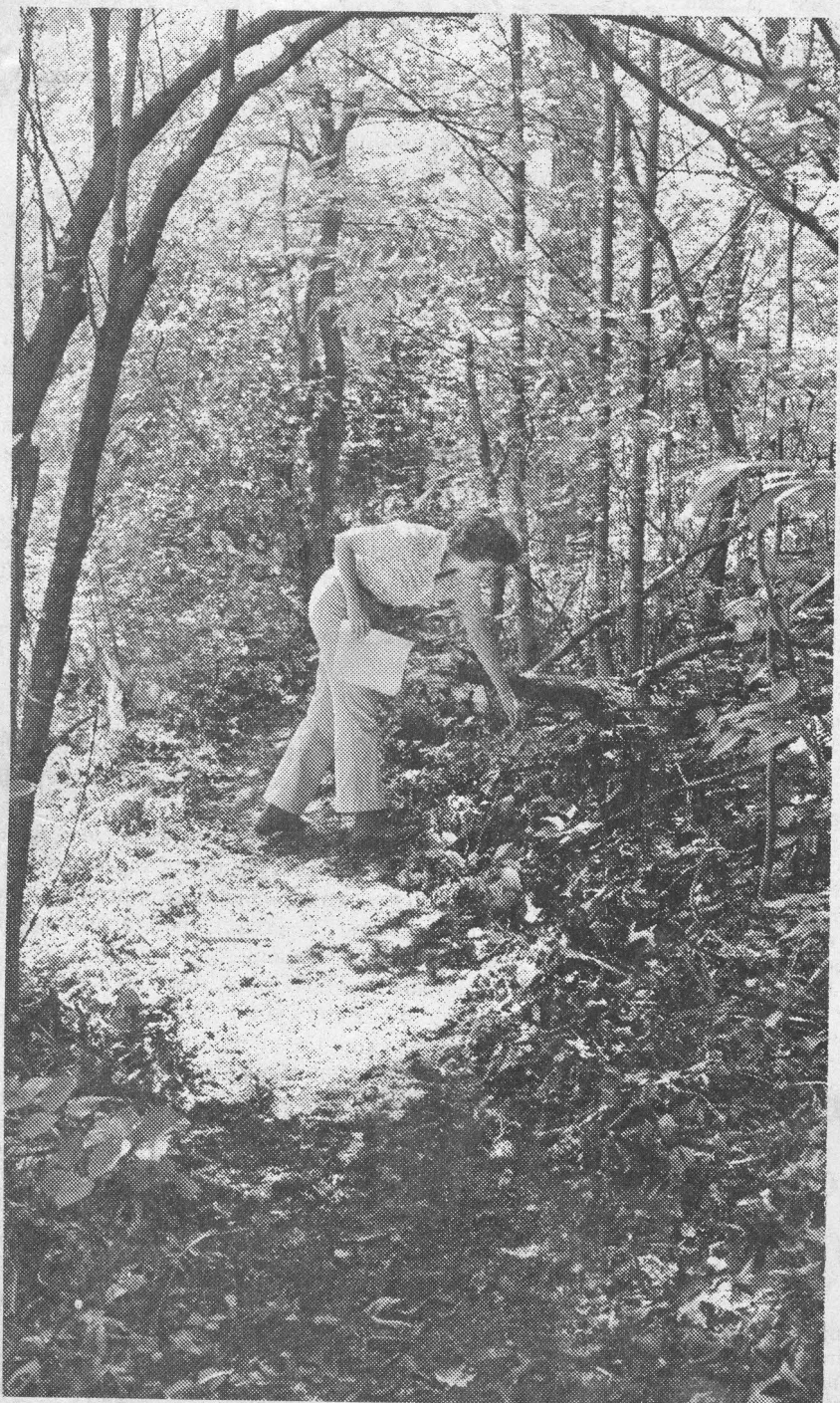




Staff photos by WILLIAM ROBERTSON

College instructor Ruby Harbison, instrumental in the establishment of the Western Piedmont Community College Nature Trail, stops to examine a plant along the way.

WPCC's nature, exercise trail enters final development stages

By WM. ROBERTSON JR.
News Herald Staff Writer

A nature trail and exercise track in the wooded area on the Western Piedmont Community College campus are in the final stages of development.

About one mile of the nature trail is completed, with another mile planned. The trail, the lake and the bog are used primarily by the science classes at the school. The trail is also open for recreational use by the community.

The nature trail was planned and built largely by biologist instructor Ruby Harbison. Work on the trail began two summers ago, with initial financial support from the Western Piedmont Foundation. The funds allowed Mrs. Harbison to spend half of her time during the first summer working on the trail, and a student worked full time. Now she and other faculty members work on the area when they have spare time.

The nature and exercise trails are in the woods between the school and Interstate 40. The area is thickly forested, and when one is on the trail, all man-made structures are out of sight. Only the slight rumble from the highway reminds the walker of the proximity of the city.

The narrow trail is covered with a bark litter, and railroad ties have been placed on the steep portions to prevent erosion. The developers of the trail plan to add signs explaining the types of trees and plants, an entrance sign and map, and guide booklets.

A shrub garden is being developed in the cleared area where the power line towers stand. When funds are available, an area will be cleared and benches erected to provide an outdoor classroom.

The outdoor study area offers numerous opportunities for the WPCC science classes. Hundreds of different plants, shrubs and trees can be observed in their natural surroundings. The larger wooded

area is an example of an oak-hickory forest, while the area west of the lake is mainly a pine forest.

In addition to the woods, the lake offers another study area. Fish, frogs, insects, plants, and microorganisms from the lake are used by the WPCC students. At one end of the lake, a bog area has been developed. A number of plants which can grow only in a bog habitat are supported.

Examples of wildlife which have been observed in the area include a fox, a wood duck, a pileated woodpecker, kingfishers and killdeer.

A trail for the handicapped is also planned. The trail will begin near the parking lot and be as level as possible. It would probably be paved to allow use of wheelchairs.

The developers of the nature trail emphasize that it is a community resource. Anyone from the area is welcome to use the trail and help in working on it is also sought. Several classes from schools and groups such as the 4-H club have used the trail. Groups seeking guided hikes on the trail may contact Mrs. Harbison at the school.

The exercise trail was built under the direction of physical education instructor Bob Benner. It is 1.6 miles long, and runs through and around the woods and over the dam to the other side of the lake.

The exercise trail includes both a track for running or walking and several exercise stations. The track is modeled after those started in Switzerland in the 1960's and now popular throughout Europe.

The purpose of the track is to increase flexibility, build muscular strength and endurance and increase cardio-respiratory endurance. Benner says this type of track is unique in offering all three types of development. Many forms of exercise only develop one of these areas.

Among the exercise stations are a balance beam, a chinning bar, poles for stepping exercises, an overhead ladder, logs for jumping exercises and a station for isometric exercises. A brief explanation of the course is now posted at the tennis court. Signs at each station describing the exercise and suggesting a number of repetitions are expected to be posted by Wednesday.

Benner says the course may be tailored to anyone's needs by varying speed on the track and the number of repetitions at each station. One should run the course from three to seven times a week for maximum effectiveness, he said.

He suggests walking through the course and doing the minimum number of repetitions at each station on the first attempt. As one's condition improves, speed and the number of repetitions may be increased. Benner also recommends that anyone over 35 should have a physical examination before working vigorously on the course.

The exercise trail is also open to the community.