

The Columbia Union College Biological Station in Highland County, Virginia

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The first session of the Columbia Union College Biological Station began in June 1957. We started off in an Army surplus hospital ward tent. We had two teachers, a cook, and one student. Our sanitary facility was a nail keg supported on two 2x4 inch boards over a sizable hole in the ground which all four of us took turns digging. The high point of that first session was guessing how long the EverReady batteries of Elsa, the cook's, flashlight would last in the bottom of the hole where she had dropped it. It shone eerily from the hole for two and a half weeks. A rival high point was finding a beautiful iridescent melanistic copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*) on the bank of the stream behind our tent.

The Biological Station was located 2.4 km south of U.S. Route 250 at Headwaters, Highland County, Virginia. We were located in the center of a 400² m segment of the George Washington National Forest (GWNF, now George Washington and Jefferson National Forest) that crosses the valley between Shaw's Ridge to the west and Shenandoah Mountain to the east. We leased an area of ten acres of mountain meadow lying between Shaw's Fork Creek and Shaw's Fork Road. The lease from the GWNF was for 99 years subject to review and renewal every 33 years. At the end of the first 33 years I was no longer head of the Biology Department. My successor was not interested enough in field biology to keep up the facility. The Forest Service terminated the lease, the station was demolished, and the area restored to its original condition.

An initial grant of \$5,000, quickly doubled, was awarded to the project by the Columbia Union College Board of Trustees. All construction was done by students and biology staff members on weekend work bees. A ten room long ranch-style dormitory building with two double deck bunks in each room, two washroom/toilet facilities, a main dining hall/laboratory building, and two staff

houses comprised the facility. Buildings were not finished on the inside. A well was drilled to supply us with potable water. These buildings served us well during the next 20 years of my tenure there.

COLUMBIA UNION COLLEGE

Biological Station Bulletin



*Tenth Session, 1967
 June 12 to August 3*

All biology majors at Columbia Union College were required to take at least one field course during summer sessions at the field station. We regularly had 12-40 students for each six week summer session. At times were joined by a staff member from another campus department to teach a degree-required course in their specialty. The chairman of our English department especially loved to come to the field station to teach and did so almost every other year. Biology courses taught at the field station included herpetology (my specialty), entomology, ornithology, mammalogy, ecology, natural history, and occasionally, genetics, all of which we made into field courses. Contents of the 1967 summer session (12 June - 3 August) are included in Appendix 1 as an example.

Our favorite field trip areas in Virginia included Reddish Knob, Elliot Knob, Jack Mountain, and Ramsey's Draft on the east side of Shenandoah Mountain, and Allegheny Mountain. In West Virginia, we regularly visited Spruce Knob on Cheat Mountain for the virgin red spruce (*Picea rubens*) and the Cranberry Glades. It was in this spruce forest that we discovered the blue crayfish (*Cambarus monongalensis*). This locality connected the two known ranges, one near White Sulphur Springs and the other near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. At that time, only six specimens of this species had ever been found.

During the winter, we still made regular use of the field station on weekends. At least once a month the field science club of some 100 members would camp out at the station or one of the other campus groups, such as choral club or faculty club, would use the facility. At such times I would lead various hikes and other nature activities.

Field classes regularly made short-term field studies. A collection of amphibians and reptiles of 1,000 or more specimens was made over the years. It is now part of the LaSierra University Biology Department herpetological collection. An insect collection of some 100,000 specimens was also assembled, but I do not know its fate.

Our cook over the years was Ms. Ruby Rice, the college nurse. Drs John Keller, John Davidson, Anthony Futcher, and Norman Tunnell taught many summers with me at the station.

Highland County was an ideal area for a field station since the Carolinian and Hudsonian life zones overlap there. The ecological islands above the 4,000 ft level of the three major peaks in the area were like oceanic islands in their plant and animal diversity when these were compared to the lower areas.

The Columbia Union College Biological Station was a charter member of the Organization of Inland Biological

Stations, an organization initiated and sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution.

Appendix 1. Announcement, Columbia Union Biological Station, Headwaters, Virginia. 1967 Session.

"General Information

The staff of the Biological Station of Columbia Union College extends an invitation to you to enjoy a most unforgettable learning experience at our new biological field station. The Biological Station is favorably located in a mountain meadow in the Allegheny Mountains of Virginia. This area is part of the 1,544,776 acre George Washington National Forest system. It is a protected area where conservation practices are carried out by federal and state authorities. Wild turkeys and fish have been stocked in the area. Acreage has been planted in cereal grains and other grasses to provide food and cover for birds. A beautiful mountain stream runs just behind the main lodge. Birds, mammals, and wild flowers typical of the Alleghenies are abundant in the surrounding areas. Just over the mountain a magnificent region of virgin forest is accessible for study. Such areas are almost non-existent in the eastern United States.

"Location

The Biological Station is located about two hundred miles southwest of the Columbia Union College campus. It may be reached by traveling west on U.S. 250 from Staunton, Virginia, thirty miles to the village of Headwaters. In Headwaters turn south on Shaw's Fork Road two miles to the Station. When approaching from the west, travel south from Elkins, West Virginia, on U.S. 219-250, turn east on U.S. 250 where it leaves U.S. 219, proceed sixty miles from this junction to village of Headwaters, Virginia, here proceed as above to the Station.

"Accommodations

A dormitory building of ten rooms with sleeping facilities for four students in each room is provided. The rooms are equipped with bunk beds, a chest of drawers, two study tables, plain shelves, and two clothing racks. Electricity is available in all rooms. Wash rooms have hot and cold running water and shower baths. Meals are served home style in the main lodge. Well-balanced meals at reasonable rates are provided. All students living on the campus are expected to eat their meals in the dining hall. This arrangement is an important part of the field station program since it embraces the formation of friendships among both faculty and students and serves as a center for

news and important announcements. First aid supplies are always available and the College nurse is in attendance at all times. A campsite area is available for students with families who would like to live in a tent for the session. Children of married students must be tended at all times."

Information on recreation opportunities, registration procedures, expenses (tuition, living, and fees), equipment to bring (bedding, clothing, field, supplies), general

regulations (parking, attendance, pets), field trips, and tuition credits were provided in the announcement.

Courses for the 1967 session were Materials and Methods for Teaching Nature, Genetics, Herpetology, Ornithology, and Ecology of Terrestrial Vertebrates. L. Harris taught genetics and herpetology, N. Tunnell taught Ornithology and Ecology, and other staff taught the materials and methods course.