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**ALL PROFILES WRITTEN BY FRANK MCINTOSH**

## **KEN AND MARY JO BEVERLY**

The Beverly family has been in the Ochlocknee area since the 1840s, when Ken Beverly's great grandfather established a saw mill. By the time the family arrived, the land they eventually owned already had a stage coach line running through it and a station for coach travelers in its interior.

The stage line through the Beverly property ran from the Gulf of Mexico to Albany, crossing through Creek and Seminole territory. The coach lines, as they generally would, followed pre-existing Indian trails, paralleling river bottoms and trails that game had worked in along them.

Some of the property in the Beverly's 993-acre conservation easements in Thomas County, Ga. is land that had gone out of the family for a generation or two. When Ken saw the land back on the market, he purchased it. Asked if he had seen it on the market for a good price and gone for it, he replied, "I'm not sure I ever bought anything for a good price, but I'm glad to have it."



*Ken Beverly on part of the old coach line that runs through the easement property*

The land now will likely stay in the family for a long while. While Ken says that the hardest thing about putting in place a conservation easement is "deciding to do it," Mary Jo strongly believes in the value of protecting the land, and Ken's sons both agreed with his decision to protect the land.

Another generation of the Beverly family is definitely on board with the easement. Ken and Mary Jo's five grandsons, ages 4-9, love to visit and ride or walk the property. "Sighting for dollars" helps create an extra keenness in the lads' interest in wildlife, as they get cash rewards for wildlife spotting. "One flock of turkeys set us back \$13," Mary Jo reports. A gopher tortoise living near the main entrance road is so regularly sighted he is simply known as Mr. Gopher.

They even found an emu on the property at one point, back when folks were raising emus. "We called around to see who might have lost one," Ken reports. "A lot of people said they hadn't lost one, but they'd be happy to give us a couple." There is good deal of discussion in the family regarding what an elephant sighting would cost, but so far none has been spotted. The grandsons are also beginning to enjoy the property's archeological richness and the hunt for arrowheads and shards adds to their interest.

Among the special natural areas that the conservation easement protects are bottomland swamps along the Ochlocknee. Walking into the woods along the creek's meanders, you understand how it got its name

which means “Land of Crooked Water.” The bottomlands are home to many large cypresses, and they along with the rest of the property support much local fauna. There are many of the usual suspects like deer and raccoons, as well as foxes and some “huge” bobcats.

For a long while, the land was worked for turpentine, and Ken has a fine collection of the terra cotta resin gathering pots that were prevalent earlier in the naval stores era and also the metal trays that followed them. When the naval store economy waned, the woods were generally cleared and oftentimes lost to fire because, as Ken notes, a forest of standing fat lighter is “bad to burn.”

After the turpentine harvesting ceased, much of the area around Ochlocknee was given over to fields or pasture. Ken recalls that when he was coming along, “there weren’t that many woods. It was all in fields and everybody had hogs or cattle.”



*Large oak near site of Coach stop on property*

That is certainly changing on the Beverly property now. The property is now managed for timber across much of its range, with areas capable of supporting longleaf being managed to encourage the restoration of this once prevalent cover. More than 50 acres are enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Longleaf Restoration Program. Mary Jo says she “still gets cold thinking about the time we were out there in 17-degree weather planting pines.” The family does much of the work on the property, and Ken can wax poetic on the virtues of his John Deere 444D and its forestry package and root rake. Around 90 percent of the property is now in woodlands.

“That’s my favorite aspect of owning land,” Ken says, “Watching things evolve.”

The conservation easement crosses three separate parcels in various stages of management. Some of the land—held longer within the family—gives a good picture of the “desired end state” for working lands of this nature. Others are still being worked into shape.

“It’s a huge, forever commitment,” Ken says, “but we see the beauty of the place and get excited by the challenge.”