



## TREMPER MOUND

### Reuniting the broken pieces

When we first considered the idea of preserving Tremper Mound eight years ago, it seemed an improbable if not an impossible task. The 618-acre Matthews Farm that contained most of the mound was owned by three siblings who had inherited the farm from their father. They felt a great deal of love and nostalgia for the land of their youth and they were determined to sell only to a trusted and transparent buyer. They were also of one mind that they did not want to break up the farm.

This presented what seemed to be an insurmountable obstacle. We knew it would take nearly \$2 million dollars to buy a farm of this size and we were unaware of any funding mechanism capable of such a task.

After literally years of unfruitful rumination, we discovered a new and promising funding source: the Ohio EPA's Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP). To submit a strong and competitive application, however, both the waters of Pond Creek that dissected the heart of the farm, and the one-mile length of the Scioto River that bordered the farm's eastern boundary had to be designated by EPA as "exceptional warmwater." Unfortunately, EPA hadn't assigned such a high designation to either of them.

But we were not to be so easily defeated. We knew that Pond Creek had never been formally tested by EPA inside the farm's expansive boundaries. We wondered,

"Might the water quality of Pond Creek improve in such pristine and well-forested habitats?" Furthermore, we knew sections of the Scioto River had been experiencing dramatic water quality improvement. Since EPA had not recently performed tests in the lower Scioto, we wondered if the river's water quality might also have improved. Perhaps a higher designation could be justified for both waterways if only someone with the right credentials went out and tested them?

After affirming with EPA that they was too backlogged to re-assess the waterways in the time period needed, we discovered the sobering news that very few private research companies had the expertise to perform the required tests.

We eventually settled on the plan to contract with Midwest Biodiversity Institute to perform the task - a nonprofit organization with some of the best field biologists and laboratories around. They commenced their studies of the waterways early in the summer of 2019.

As the summer wore on, the sweat on our foreheads came from more than just the summer heat. By this time the Matthews' family were equally vested in the strategy, and the success of our plan absolutely depended on these ratings.

Finally, just a few weeks before the WRRSP application deadline, the report arrived. Both Pond Creek and the Lower Scioto met the requirements of exceptional warmwater



Photo above: Old farm pasture that contains Tremper Mound, by Whitney Folsom.

designation! Greatly heartened, we finished off the lengthy applications for both WRRSP and Clean Ohio that we had begun months earlier on just a wing and a prayer. We had earlier determined a project this immense would need both funding sources.

Up until this time, saving Tremper Mound had been all about dogged persistence, attention to detail, and creative problem solving. But, unknown to us, a series of miracles were about to unfold. First came the fantastic news that our Clean Ohio grant had been awarded. A few months later, it was announced that our WRRSP application had also been accepted. We were elated!

By this time it was early 2020. The only remaining hurdle was finding a government entity in Ohio that was about to begin construction on a wastewater treatment plant and also willing to be our WRRSP sponsor. If we found such a willing partner, EPA would slightly reduce the interest rate of their construction loan over the 20-40 year loan period in return for their sponsorship of our Tremper Mound acquisition project. All we had to do is find our sponsor!

Just about that time COVID hit. Local governments were shutting down their offices all across the state and it was almost impossible to get anyone to answer the phone. After 7 months and scores of futile phone calls and emails, we were days away from giving up when the City of Warren wrote back to us with a "Yes!"

Warren will forever be a hero for the Arc of Appalachia, because in the end, it was the City of Warren, not the Arc, that saved the day for Tremper Mound.

Now is the time to share with you the not-so-small detail that the Matthews' family didn't own the entire mound, just most of it. Two additional privately-owned parcels crossed the walls that encircled the mound, each tract bounded by a farm fence and developed with a residential home. As bad news as this was for Tremper Mound, it could have been worse. Most Ohio earthworks had long ago been

flattened by the plow or buried beneath cities. We were thrilled with being able to buy even 2/3 of an earthworks. We had no plan or finances to buy the two houses, which weren't for sale in any case, and probably wouldn't be for a very long time.

Late in 2020 and prior to the actual distribution of grant monies, we received a completely unexpected phone call from the retired owners of the brick home on the northeast 2-acre corner of the mound. The couple said that they were downsizing and were poised to list the parcel on the real estate market. "Were we interested?" Although we were VERY reluctant to borrow the \$175,000 needed to buy the house, we did it anyway. We'd do about anything to piece the mound back together.

Now, the only part of the earthworks we didn't own was the 2-acre parcel on the west side of the mound - the one with an elegant 1950's 4000-square foot manor house on it. The residence sat well off the road and had a commanding view of the central mound.

Early in 2021, just a few months after our acquisition of the brick house, the manor house owners called to say that an unanticipated change in their life circumstances was prompting a sale. "Were we interested?" We were stunned and terrified but couldn't imagine turning down this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reunite Tremper Mound. This time we had to borrow the much larger sum of \$300,000, which completely drained the fund we tap for emergency loans.

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And THAT, friends, is the miraculous story of how the broken pieces of Tremper Mound - against all odds - came back together again. One mound. One owner. Whole and complete. A great deal of fund-raising and park development lies ahead, but we hold these tasks with happy and contented hearts.