



The Brown's TREASURE Forest: A Piece of Alabama History

By *Don C. East*
TREASURE Forest Owner, Clay County

In late March of 1814, General Andrew Jackson and his army marched through the wilderness along what is now known as "The Chapman Road." They were en-route to Horseshoe Bend to engage the Creek Indians in the final battle of the Creek Indian War of 1813-14. This victory signaled the beginning of the end for the Creek Nation in this area of Alabama, and two decades later they would be forced west with the other Indian tribes that lived east of the Mississippi River.

As Jackson's troops passed along the route between Fort Williams on the Coosa River and Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa River, they could not help but notice the potential of this picturesque land. Many of these soldiers would return after the Creek removals in 1836 to lay claim and settle here where a north/south ridge of the Southern Appalachian Mountains gives rise to numerous creeks and streams such as Little Hillabee, Harbuck, and Broken Arrow Creeks. Along the remnants of this same historical Chapman Road today, between the villages of Cleveland's Cross Roads (Elias) and Hackneyville, lies the TREASURE Forest of Jerry and Genelle Brown. Just as General Jackson's men were drawn to

this paradise, so were Jerry and Genelle Brown. They bought their first 54 acres of forestland here 25 years ago, shortly after their marriage. Today, they own approximately 269 acres in beautiful Tallapoosa and Clay counties.

Both Jerry and Genelle were born and raised in the area: Jerry from Hackneyville and Genelle from Sunny Level. Following high school, Jerry entered Auburn University where he received a Bachelors of Science in Agricultural Education. After 29 years in the Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserves (including a tour of the Asian Pacific Theater and Vietnam), he retired as a Colonel in 1992. Jerry worked with the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service for nine years, then returned to Auburn University to obtain his Masters Degree in Agricultural Education. Over the next 18 years he taught Agribusiness at Chambers County High School and Horticulture, Maintenance Technology, Cooperative Education and Conservation Careers at Tallapoosa/Alexander City Area Vocational School. He retired in 2001 and since then Jerry has worked part-time as a dock and shoreline structure inspector on Lake Martin for the Alabama Power Company. He says this

gives him more time to work on the TREASURE Forest that he enjoys.

Genelle went to work for Russell Mills following graduation from Benjamin Russell High School. After 25 years there, she decided it was time to spend full time taking care of the homestead and Jerry as well as to help out on the TREASURE Forest.

When Jerry and Genelle put down their roots in 1977, the property they purchased was located along the Tallapoosa-Clay County line with 49 acres and the house situated in Tallapoosa County and the other five acres in Clay County. After renovating the house, they moved in and began a lengthy program of improving the neglected and cutover timberland.

Their first projects consisted of constructing fire lanes and wildlife food plots on the property. A few years later, they conducted a pulpwood thinning operation in areas where the pines had naturally regenerated and were of excessive stand density. They also worked with the Soil Conservation Service to build and stock a one-acre fishpond on the property. In 1983 the Browns purchased an additional 120 acres of nearby timberland that had been recently clear-cut. Fortunately for them, this property

regenerated itself naturally in pines from the seeds that were in place at the time of the harvest. As usual, the downside of this free regeneration was the need to do a pre-commercial thinning a few years later. Jerry accomplished this with his handy machete and a lot of sweat labor.

At about this point, Jerry began a program of regular prescribed burns to improve the pine timber stands and to enhance the growth of grasses and herbs for the wildlife. He then formed the Hillabee Hunting Club and leased an adjacent 490 acres of forestland. The club consisted of ten families of kin or close friends and they all pitched in on weekends to help out with the wildlife food plots, construction of shooting houses, and expansion or maintenance of fire lanes and roads. Jerry and the other club members have experimented with various plantings in the numerous wildlife food plots. Over the years they have tried everything on the market including soybeans, sunflowers, clovers, peas, wheat, grain sorghum, brown top millet, chufas, BioLogic and bahia.

The club signed up with the Alabama Deer Management Assistance Program and followed this organization's recommendations on the harvesting of does and sparing the younger bucks. Deer harvested on the property are weighed, aged, and processed at a facility on the Brown home site. Since entering the Deer Management Assistance Program the property has produced a very good supply of healthy deer as well as wild turkey. Meanwhile, the club members helped Jerry and Genelle plant several varieties of wildlife support trees including Chinese chestnut, sawtooth oak,

Autumn olive, crabapple, etc. Plantings of these trees have continued over the years and some of the earlier ones are now producing heavy annual mast crops for the wildlife. By selectively leaving some wildlife openings with natural vegetation, they provided food and cover for several varieties of small game such as quail, rabbit, and dove.

The next area of improvement needed was the construction of several stream crossings on the property. Because of Harbuck and Little Hillabee Creeks, along with several branches and springs meandering through the property, the crossings were necessary in order to be able to reach all areas of the property. The crossings included fords at natural sites where there was a rock stream bottom, culverts where the soil was not suited for fords, and one major cement ford built across Harbuck Creek. Also, by maintaining the Streamside Management Zones (SMZs) along the waterways, Jerry was able to cut down on the erosion and silt deposits at these stream crossings.

As the Brown timberland was improved and started to take on the look of a model property, they became interested in the Alabama TREASURE Forest program. They were nominated and cer-



Jerry Brown uses kudzu as a high-protein wildlife food for deer. In turn, the deer help control the kudzu from spreading!

tified in 1992 as TREASURE Forest #901. Their primary objective under the TREASURE Forest program was timber production and the secondary objective was wildlife habitat improvement.

In the early 90s, the Browns were able to purchase two additional parcels of timberland, consisting of 40 acres of cut-over land and 55 acres that had been high-graded (only the biggest and best were cut, leaving the remainder). This new property was adjacent to or near the original 174 acres and the 490 acres of leased property, now making a sizable block of 759 acres for Jerry and Genelle to manage. With help from the hunting club, the Browns continued to expand the number of wildlife food plots, wildlife support tree plantings, fire lanes, and roads. Today, there is a total of 24 wildlife food plots consisting of around 40 acres and 10 miles of fire lanes and forest roads. They also opened up an additional 20 acres and left it to recover into natural wildlife vegetation such as honeysuckle, briars, partridge peas, etc.



Jerry Brown showing one of his wildlife food plots.

(Continued on page 6)

This not only benefited the deer and turkey, but also the small game such as quail, rabbit and dove. Certain desirable mast trees, such as white oaks have been fertilized to improve their productivity. Jerry and the hunt club members have installed “cam tracker” cameras on various wildlife food plots and wildlife openings in order to aid in monitoring deer health and population. Genelle also says that video taping the abundant wildlife from one of the nice shooting houses is her passion.

Now that the major improvement projects are completed and the once-neglected timberland is in a healthy state, the Browns’ future goal is to make the property even more diversified for small game and non-game wildlife. They feel they can do this while maintaining their primary deer and turkey habitat.

While most of us landowners are trying to exterminate kudzu, Jerry has purposely retained two patches of this obnoxious plant that he fertilizes and nourishes. He has found that if the kudzu is fertilized annually, the protein level is sufficiently high enough that the deer will browse it to the point that it can be kept under control to prevent further spreading. Under his wife’s direction, Jerry also planted one and a half acres of a variety of wildflowers including sunflowers, cone flowers, bee balm, partridge peas, black eyed peas, etc. And finally, the Browns have put up birdhouses for native species such as blue birds, owls, and wood ducks.

Ironically, with all their efforts in managing for deer and a considerable amount of time hunting for them, the Browns have two pet deer that have become a part of the family. These two bucks were abandoned fawns when they acquired them in 1990 and 1996. They keep the deer legally through an Alabama Department of Conservation permit. Genelle pampers the two deer and says they love sweet potatoes, eating about 40 pounds of them every few days. Both bucks progressed to heavy racked eight-pointers before their racks began digressing with age.

Meanwhile, in 2001 the Brown family continued to make improvements in their timber investment by thinning the pines on the 120-acre tract.

After a large part of the essential work had been done to put the neglected land back into production and make it

easier on the eyes, the Browns decided it was time to share their piece of paradise with others. The Alexander City Boy Scout Troop was the first group to use the property for camping, conduct hunter education courses, and take nature hikes relative to their merit badge program. Since then, the hunter education course has been expanded to include the general public and is taught four times each year. In 1998, Jerry received the Governor’s Conservation Achievement Award for Hunter Education by Governor Don Siegelman. The Browns have also held a “Step Outside” program on the property. This program is designed specifically for women and its goal is to instill an interest in outside activities such as marksmanship, skeet shooting, archery, outdoor photography, nature arts and crafts, etc. The Tallapoosa County Forestry Planning Committee/County Chapter has also used the Brown TREASURE Forest to hold two general public forestry and wildlife management tours.

In the mid 1990s while Jerry was an instructor at the Area Vocational Center in Alexander City, among other courses he taught a block entitled “Conservation Careers.” He decided it would help these students to have a taste of the outdoors through a three-day wilderness survival course. Having been through several military survival courses as a Marine officer, he knew that the diverse environment of his TREASURE Forest was a perfect place to hold such a course. With

the assistance of a fellow TREASURE Forest landowner, Jerry held a total of six of these wilderness survival courses for his students.

The Browns are heavily involved in various groups and organizations that support good stewardship of our forestland. Jerry is on the Board of Directors and is the current President of the Tallapoosa County Chapter of the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association. Genelle is also an active member of this organization, helping to organize the various meetings and activities. Jerry also serves on the Clay and Tallapoosa County Forestry Planning Committees, since their TREASURE Forest is in both counties. In addition, the Browns belong to the Alabama Forest Landowners Association, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Alabama Wildlife Federation, and the Alabama Forest Owner’s Association.

Because of their hard work the Browns were honored with the Alabama Forestry Planning Committee’s 2001 Helene Mosley Memorial Award for the state’s Northeast Region.

With the property in top shape, the Browns now have more time to enjoy the fruits of their labor. Both Jerry and Genelle feel a great sense of accomplishment when they look at the hard work that has gone into reclaiming and improving their property. Now is the time for them to sit back and enjoy the beauty of their TREASURE. 🌲



Jerry and Genelle Brown at home in Tallapoosa County.