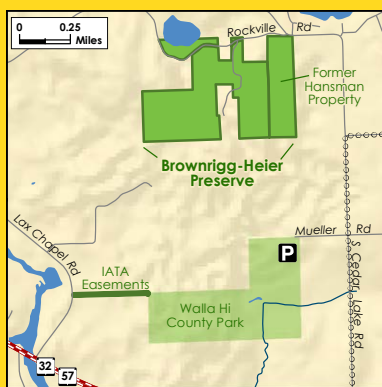


Family, Legacy, and the Creation of the Brownrigg — Heier Preserve

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In December 2015, John and Nancy Brownrigg — along with their daughter and her husband, Deb and Tom Heier — closed a deal with the IATA that would transition ownership of the family's land in Manitowoc County to the Alliance. No ordinary land acquisition, the plot of over 130 acres lies in the geologically rich Walla Hi region of Wisconsin, a corridor long hoped to be the future home of a Trail segment. What's more, in a decision framed by the declining health of John Brownrigg, the family chose to donate their plot in return for nothing more than peace of mind — confidence knowing the land's beauty would be nurtured in trustworthy hands for generations to come.

A chance discovery of a remarkable place.

Despite belonging to a region with such geological significance, the Brownriggs came upon their land almost by accident. In 1993, John was phasing into retirement after a career with Sheboygan Paint Company. Having always held a deep admiration for the outdoors, he and Nancy intended to settle down in a more remote and natural area. While driving outside of Kiel one afternoon, Nancy happened to spot a faded, nearly overgrown for-sale sign beside the road. They pulled up an abandoned logging road, soon to become their driveway, and parked at the end, the spot of their future home.

For a family that spent weekends hiking in Kettle Moraine State Forest, it's no coincidence they found this hidden property familiar and strikingly beautiful. As part of the Walla Hi region, it features extraordinary examples of topography left over after the recession of the Wisconsin Glacier, not to mention being part of more than 1,000 acres of contiguous forest. To walk the land is to skirt some of the deepest kettles in the state and to climb lofty moraines to catch breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape.

Soon after discovering the property, the Brownriggs contacted its owner and purchased two parcels. The serenity of the land made such an impression on them in the coming years, however, that they ended up purchasing additional parcels until their property encompassed over 140 acres.

A spirit of conservation grew up alongside the Brownriggs' appreciation for their new land. The more time they spent hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing in their woods, made up of southern mesic forest and a converted pine plantation, the more they had the sense that it should always remain as is. The landscape was too remarkable, the wildlife too abundant to one day be shaped into a housing development.

Caring for the land. Caring for family.

A trip up the Brownrigg's driveway will reveal not just one home, but two. The second belongs to John and Nancy's daughter, Deb, and her husband, Tom, who came to share the



John and Nancy Brownrigg.

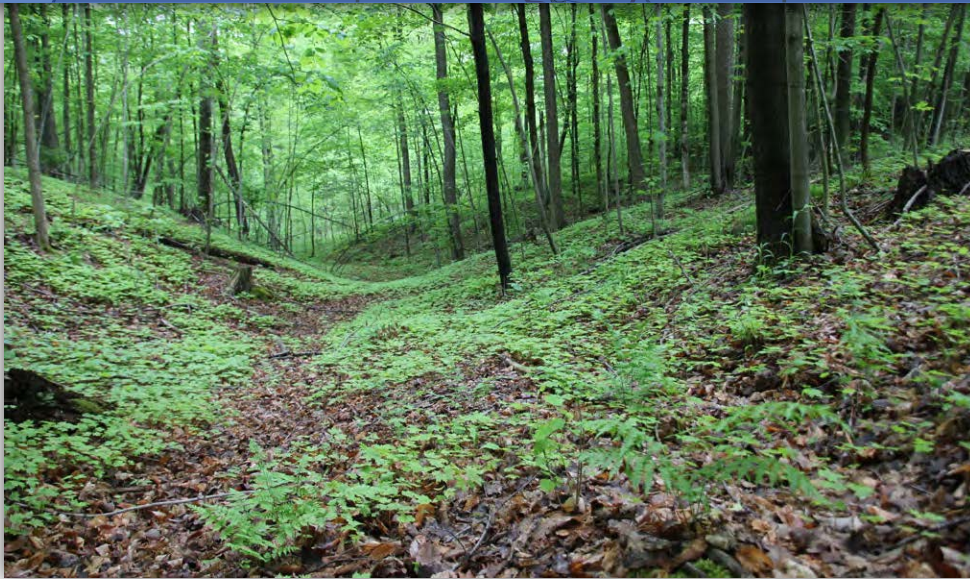
property through the family's commitment to care for both the land and one another.

During her parent's first decade on the plot, Deb spent weekends helping her parents take care of the yard. She also found time to explore, photographing the many wildflowers and birds thriving on the property.

"Even though I was only visiting my parents every other week or so, I fell in love with the land," Deb said. "People leave their homes to see and hike areas like this, and we were enjoying it on a daily basis."

Helping take care of the land brought Deb to Walla Hi on weekends, but helping take care of her family made Walla Hi her home. In 2002, Tom began looking for a new job, and both he and Deb wanted to end up closer to Deb's parents. As it turned out, John and Nancy felt the same way.

"In his dry sense of humor, my father pulled me aside and said 'We have to talk business,'" Deb explained. "He offered to let Tom and me build on the property so we could take care of them as they got older. It was what I wanted — it was what all of us wanted." The next year, the Heiers built a home halfway up the old logging road that John and Nancy happened upon a decade earlier.



The Brownrigg – Heier Preserve features dramatic topography and thick woodlands, whose rich soil support a variety of woodland ephemerals, including jack-in-the-pulpit (below). Photos by Deb Heier.

Preserving “paradise” through a new relationship.

Deb’s nearness to her parents took on a special significance when her father became very sick in 2013. John wanted to remain at home as his health waned, a wish Deb and Tom’s caregiving made possible. In a sense, the land also cared for John during his illness, offering him the deep sense of belonging and repose that only a home in nature can provide.

“My father’s property was paradise to him,” Deb explained. “He could look out the window and watch the deer, turkeys, squirrels, and all the different birds, and that kept him going. The stillness here is a gift, and I don’t think anyone appreciated that more than him.”

Around that time, the family decided Deb would eventually inherit her parent’s property. Knowing how much the land meant to her father — and to the whole family — she questioned the best way to handle the gift. Then, in another turn of coincidence, Kevin Thusius came knocking. Director of Land Conservation for the IATA, Kevin contacted the Heiers and Brownriggs in 2014 to discuss a possible easement of a section of their property for the Ice Age Trail. Corridor planning for the area had already taken place five years earlier, and it was now time to begin turning plans into reality.

“When Kevin knocked on the door and told me about the Ice Age Trail, I had never heard



“It took time, but in the end, my father understood that he wasn’t losing his land, he was gaining a national park.”



about it,” Deb admitted. “I hadn’t realized this particular area in Manitowoc County was such a unique geological realization of what the glacier did.”

Though the family had initial concerns about the effect of a national trail on the property, the conversation with Kevin reenergized their wish to preserve the land. And, the more Kevin shared about the IATA’s conservationist approach to land management, the more confident they felt about entering into a relationship with the Alliance.

A gift worth paying forward.

In April 2015, the conversation surrounding the Brownrigg – Heier property took an unexpected turn when the family offered to donate nearly the entire plot to the IATA, not just a small easement.

“I have to say, I was floored,” Kevin said. “I knew I had to take the offer back to the Board

for approval, but I couldn’t help but express how exciting and inspiring it was that a family would give away something that meant so much to them.”

The decision to donate began with Deb. To her, the land was so priceless that selling it felt inappropriate. “We had talked about closing the deal as a gift to dad before he passed,” she said. “My parents have always felt that the land itself is a gift, and it’s a gift to be shared. It took time,” she added, “but in the end, my father understood that he wasn’t losing his land — he was gaining a national park.”

As John’s health rapidly declined, closing the deal took on a sense of urgency. By December 2015, the paperwork was finalized, and the plot became the Brownrigg – Heier Preserve. More than 130 acres altogether, the preserve will be the first of many acquisitions that will make way for a new Trail segment in the coming years — one that is bound to have significant appeal.

John Brownrigg passed away in early 2016. For Deb, donating the land continues to feel like the right way to honor him. “We are so proud that the land will stay as beautiful as it is today, forever,” she said. “Generations will come to hike, learn, and appreciate the land like my father did. I cannot think of a better legacy.”

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