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Shall Glover-Archbold Park be Destroyed?

A matter of national principle is involved in the proposed destruction of Glover-Archbold Park by a truck expressway. This park, which is a part of the National Park system, and one of the larger fine natural areas remaining in Washington, was given to the people with specific stipulations that it be preserved as an unspoiled native woodland for all time. Mrs. Anne Archbold and Mr. Charles C. Glover gave this land in 1924 as a park and children's playground, a purpose which it has served superbly. Recent decisions of the National Capital Planning Commission disregard government commitments, legal obstacles, and public welfare in order to provide a "cheaper" route for one leg of Maryland Route 240 into the heart of Washington. If this threat is carried out, what assurance will we have that the terms of any gift of property to the government will be honored? What becomes of the supposed sanctity of our other national park holdings?

Visitors to Washington from other parts of the United States and from foreign countries have been incredulous that we still possess such an unspoiled area, and aghast that any planner would think of putting it to lesser use. Authorities on city planning emphasize the need for just such strips of park and woodland throughout a city, not only for the vital recreational and educational opportunities only possible here, but for the peace and beauty of the city itself. Glover-Archbold is one of our most readily accessible parks, due to its long, narrow shape. From any neighboring street, paths go down into the park to pleasant glades, where one can relax and enjoy the scene, walk for a mile or two along trails through varying landscape, or picnic. Nowhere are you more than a block or two from a street, but everywhere you have the sensation of being completely removed from urban rush and noise. The park serves an area of growing population, some distance from Rock Creek Park, and it is now one of the safest areas among our parks for children or adults. Casual loiterers do not invade the park as they would if any road, even a small park road, ran the length of the valley. (And even a two-lane park road would be highly destructive of the park and its usefulness, besides making a precedent for larger roads in the future.) As it is now, this park illustrates the ideal plan for a narrow stream valley. Access is from the sides, with the heart of the valley left intact. This protects the more

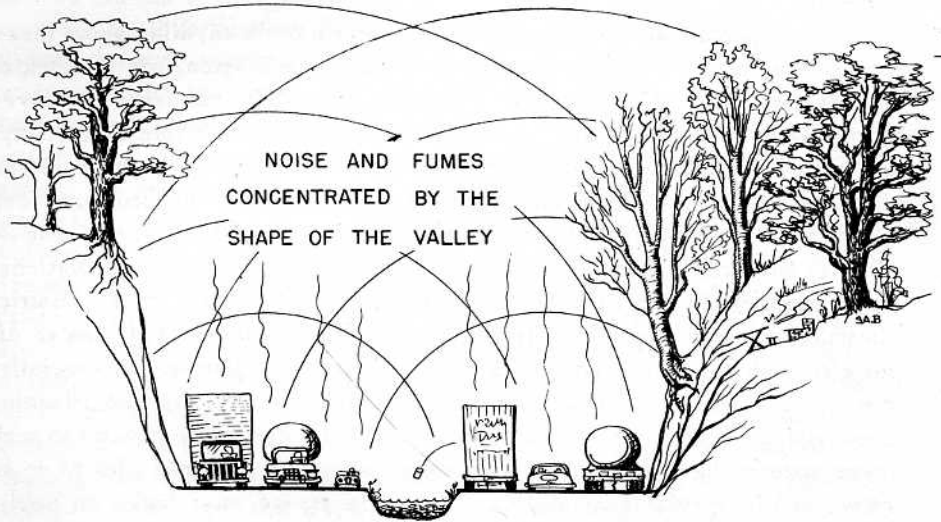
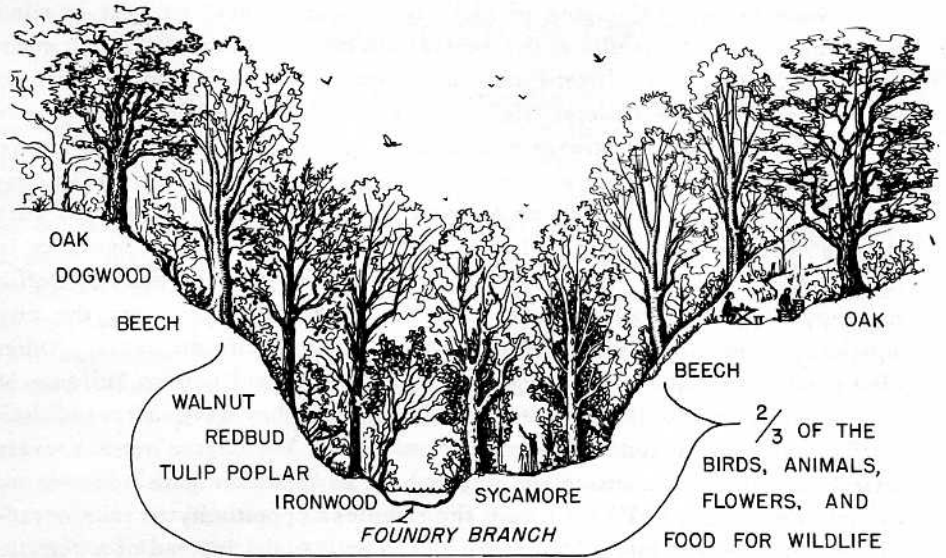
easily damaged natural features, and the part most vital to plants and animals.

Those who consider such areas simple "undeveloped" real estate should realize that such a natural woodland as Glover-Archbold, so exceptionally endowed with native plants, animals, and birds, takes a slow evolution of hundreds of years to reach this complexity and richness. Here, to an extent that cannot be approached in the usual manicured, artificial park, a child can really begin to learn the wonders and intricacies of his real world. It can be wiped out by bulldozers in no time, but only nature undisturbed for more hundreds of years can ever recreate it. This fact alone should give us some pause to consider its merits before we so casually eliminate it.

The splendid natural areas on which Washington depends for so much of its unique character and pleasant living conditions are fast disappearing. Rock Creek Park, large as it is, has already reached capacity use in some respects, and as it becomes increasingly interlaced with traffic arteries, its value as a park is continually whittled down. The threat of another leg of Route 240 entering Rock Creek Park is just another example of official disregard for keeping faith with the public. All such commercial expressways must be kept out of park lands. But even so, Rock Creek cannot long satisfy the District's need for outdoor recreation. The Soldiers' Home Grounds have already been sacrificed for more urban construction. Glover-Archbold remains to help provide for these ever-increasing needs.

Though Rock Creek Park is still one of our finest heritages, many developments have seriously undermined its physical condition. It is well known that a watershed needs special care to protect the valley floor. In Rock Creek Park, roads and picnic areas of excessive use have been allowed to invade sections which should have been kept in shrubbery and effective cover planting. The destructive erosion resulting is an eyesore to all who have any understanding of sickness in a landscape. Glover-Archbold remains relatively unharmed, in the main section given by Mrs. Archbold and Mr. Glover. (map, page 16) If a road is cut through, it will become a classic example of the most complete and senseless kind of destruction for a stream-valley park. We still have the opportunity to preserve it as a prime example of the wisest plan for such an area.

For several years, the District plans have included, on dubious legal authority, a four-lane divided highway down the length of Glover-Archbold. (map, page 12) No date for construction has been given, and there has been no opportunity for the citizens affected to have a voice in the matter. Now, since June of 1957, the threat to the park has become explicit, immediate, and much more alarming than former plans. The National Capital Planning Commission, over the protests of some District authorities, has voted to recommend the route through Glover-Archbold for the truck branch of Route 240. This multi-lane superhighway would mean the complete obliteration of the park and the serious deterioration of valuable communities all along the route.



EFFECTS OF A HIGHWAY
THROUGH GLOVER-ARCHBOLD PARK

The plan would be very costly in terms of immediate destruction as well as the ultimate downgrading of one of the finest sections of the city.

Some general principles of highway planning should be kept in mind when considering the merits of the several alternate routes possible. In many respects, indeed, this Glover-Park routing appears to be in contradiction to the provisions of the Federal Highway Act providing for such inter-city expressways. One of the strongest arguments against this sort of plan is the fact that its whole concept may be wrong in the light of present traffic conditions. To bring any such main artery down through a city to dump its masses of traffic intact in the already overcrowded heart of the community is foolish and obsolete. Every possibility should be given for through traffic to by-pass thickly settled areas, and that which must come into the city should be tapered off and dispersed all along its path into the center. Other cities have gone alone this sequence of excessive and unwise building of superhighways on outdated routes, only to find that they have increased their traffic impasses instead of helping them. Must Washington retrace every mistake of other communities and finally have to spend far more money to try to undo the damage? We still have the priceless opportunity to take advantage of the best and latest knowledge and to be a model instead of a horrible example.

Many people are discouraged in their efforts to do anything about these problems by the multiplicity of authorities ruling Washington, and the lack of ways for ordinary citizens to take effective action. We can make ourselves heard, however. The National Capital Planning Commission vote is advisory, and other officials must still make their decisions. Everyone who deplors these plans and the authoritarian way in which they are handed down can write to Mr. Harland Bartholomew, of the National Capital Planning Commission, to Mr. Fred A. Seaton, Secretary of the Interior (including the National Park Service), to the District of Columbia Commissioners, to the District Committee of the Senate, and to the Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs of both the House and the Senate. Citizens of Maryland, especially, can speak effectively to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. If your own Congressman serves on a committee concerned with these matters, be sure to let him know your views; it is a good idea to do so whatever his special assignments. At the least, we must insist on public hearings. The authorities can be persuaded to enforce a wiser policy for our parks and for our city.

The following articles, published over the past four years in the ATLANTIC NATURALIST, the magazine of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, describe the park, tell of its history and present use, and show how any road construction through the park would be not only a breach of faith but a senseless destruction of an irreplaceable area.

The Glover-Archbold Freeway

The third project deserving immediate attention and public opposition is the freeway in the Foundry Branch valley. In 1924 Mr. Charles C. Glover gave to the city over seventy-seven acres of beautiful wooded land in this valley to the city of Washington, to constitute the Glover Parkway and Children's Playground. It was a generous and foresighted gift to meet the future needs of a growing residential section where no city parks had been provided. It was so accepted by Act of Congress. Mrs. Anne Archbold, also inspired by a desire to provide for the future needs of her city, almost immediately deeded twenty-eight acres of her property in continuation of Mr. Glover's. The Archbold Park was to be a memorial to her father, and it was so accepted by the authorities, with the legal designation that it was for park and no other use. In the years following, the National Capital Planning Commission recognized the special value of this valley, and acquired its upper part as far as Upton Street.

On the 1898 Highway Plan, there was a paper-plan street called Arizona Avenue, running along the bottom of the valley. This street had never been built because of topographic difficulties. In order that the city might build a sewer in the valley, adjacent property owners were persuaded, before the Glover-Archbold Park was established, to dedicate the ground within the proposed street lines to the city. This dedicated street right-of-way was therefore not included in the gifts or in the purchases of the Commission, being already in public ownership. In 1932 the District Commissioners promised in writing to transfer this right-of-way to the National Capital Parks as soon as authorized to do so by appropriate legislation. The Act giving this authority was signed by President Hoover on December 15, 1932. However, the District Commissioners never made the promised transfer. Perhaps naively depending on the promise, the Commission continued its purchases and acceptance of gifts to complete the park, with the approval of the District Commissioners for each purchase.

Now it is proposed to build a four-lane divided freeway along the whole length of the valley. Because of its narrowness, the valley's natural beauty would be utterly destroyed by such a freeway, and the traffic would be a mortal danger to the children playing with what space remained to them. The hope of Mr. Glover and Mrs. Archbold to preserve their land in its natural state for future generations would be thwarted.

Glover-Archbold Park

Photographs by Shirley A. Briggs except as noted

If a narrow stream valley, its slopes covered with unspoiled native woodland, could be threaded past two miles of heavily populated residential sections in any of our crowded cities now trying to remedy their lack of past planning, the feat would be worth a fabulous sum. But, of course, it could not be done. The best such communities can achieve by great effort and expense is a synthetic arrangement of lawn, trees, and shrubs whose variety and interest are bounded by a landscape architect's mind. The complexity and fascination of a natural woodland is limited only by the possibilities of ages of evolution and interrelationships of plants and animals, and no man's mind has yet been able to understand more than a fraction of what he finds there. It is a place where one may come to observe and wonder, to find the serenity of a community of creatures who have been living in balance and harmony long before we disturbed the scene.

In Glover-Archbold Park, Washington has just such a priceless asset. It answers the description of an ideal woodland park in many ways. Being a stream valley, it contains the elements of a self-sufficient area, with the various habitats needed to support a small cross-section of our native wildlife. In the bottomlands, where the streams join, the moisture and fertility are most favorable to life. Twice as many birds and animals are found here as in an equal area of upland woods. The thickets and tangles of vines and bushes give them shelter, with a plentiful supply of seeds and fruits for food. The towering sycamores provide for the birds of the forest canopy as they move across the valley.

Each plant, each bird, and each animal has its own niche and territory, and those which flourish in the bottomland cannot adjust to higher slopes if their homes are destroyed. Only if the valley is preserved intact can we observe the normal life of our woodlands, with each type of habitat contributing its share to the natural community. Foundry Branch and its valley and guardian hills would be irreplaceable even if it were remote from the city. What makes it a priceless Washington asset is its location nestling along one of our most crowded sections, below the towering apartments of Massachusetts and Wisconsin Avenues, and Glover Park and Burleigh.



The Park is just wide enough to preserve its integrity as a woodland and its peace and charm as a place for us to escape the hubbub of the city. Since it is a long strip, it borders the maximum number of neighborhoods and any part of it is easily accessible from a bordering street. Many good trails lead down into the valley from its boundaries. A few steps down one of the many entrancepaths remove one with startling suddenness from distracting urban sounds. And once within the woods, the walker may by paralleling the stream enjoy several miles of paths through woods and meadow, over hilltops and through the lush valleys. Yet he is never far from a trail which will takehim quickly back to the city.

The woodland sounds are subtle, with a mingling of overtones and harmonies pleasant to our ears. The soft murmur of flowing brooks, the rustle of leaves as a towhee rummages for insects on the forest floor, the liquid notes of the wood thrush and the wild, ringing song of the water-thrush, the scurrying of a squirrel and the distant staccato of a woodpecker accent the peacefulness of the park. The shouts of children playing in the woods are often heard.



that come with the fall migration—to know these things by right of personal discovery is a singular joy.

Birds are a small part of the adventures in the park. Others may seek different discoveries along Foundry Branch. We know of no adequate study of the diversity of wildflowers that cover the ground in the spring. The trees and shrubs have their story to tell—not only of their search for living space but also of their compromises with the landscape man left for them. To the couples strolling home through the woods, or the children scouting the hillsides, the beauty and variety of the park may be sufficient in themselves, to be enjoyed emotionally and spiritually. To the amateur naturalist, the extent of his pleasure and discoveries here are only bounded by

Stately tulip trees and towering sycamores rise from the valley floor, and occasionally wild apple trees mark old orchards and aging pines tell of gardens untended for a century, for some of the valley was once cultivated. On the uplands, the beech groves stand in graceful majesty. As Dr. John C. Merriam has written of the beeches of Rock Creek Park, ". . . one remembers the grove . . . as having a mood and a meaning varying with the infinite changes of surrounding conditions. It can have a somberness approaching gloom when the trees are dashed and soaked with rain. Or in the nebulous light of a heavy day the gray trunks almost fade into the mist. They are never twice the same. In bright light and clear atmosphere the brilliant stems and branches have a tint of silver. It was under such high illumination that the beauty of the place first made for me its deep impression, and it remains in memory as the silver forest."

In fall the beauty of the beeches is all color and light as the sun comes golden through the foliage and reflects again from the fallen leaves that carpet the open forest floor. In winter, a wet snow makes a delicate filigree of the silver branches, and the structural grace of the trees is proclaimed.

Some years ago a junior member of the Audubon Society made Glover-Archbold Park his personal adventure. Early and late in all seasons, he visited the wood, keeping careful notes on its bird life. To the amazement of his elders when the Society published his report, he developed authentic records of some 150 kinds of birds visiting the park during migrations or making it their summer or winter home. (THE WOOD THRUSH, Volume 4, No. 6, July 1949.)

Despite the wanton destruction of the area below Reservoir Road, most of the birds that Napier Shelton found in Glover-Archbold could be found there again. The nest of the red-shouldered hawk, the day-time roost of the barred owl, the favorite spots revisited by successive generations of the more than twenty kinds of warblers

Young blue-gray
gnatcatchers in
Glover-Archbold
Park.

by Paul Bartsch



his own curiosity and insight. An artist sensitive to subtle perfections of color and form, of shifting moods and patterns, can find infinite inspiration here.

To many of those who enjoy the park, it has been a very personal discovery, following an uncertain period of wondering what that forested valley was, and whether it might be a private estate. Finding a well-worn path to invite them into the woods, they had the zest of exploring it, and also of skirting the poison ivy on a few stretches of the main trail. For this has been one of our most neglected parks. No signs on the boundaries indicate that this is a national park, which all of us should take pride in keeping unsullied. Most of those who frequent the park come to enjoy, not to destroy, but there are exceptions. Little is needed beyond a minimum of attention to trails and some publicity, by signs and other means, to attract many more people to the park. Certainly it must be kept free of one of the "development" programs that have turned other of our woodland parks into the standard, trite landscape gardener's manicured areas.

Worse than its studied neglect of the area has been the National Capital Parks' actual devastation of the valley below Reservoir Road. In the fear that a road might be built through the park, the Park Service got an agreement with the District Government giving the Service some say about the design of the highway. They then gave up any pretense of either opposing the road or of maintaining the park. Having a chance to obtain some cheap fill, they decided to level the trees in this area, and deposit their bargain dirt and trash here in hopes it would come in handy if the road were authorized sometime. Trees were left where they fell, and blocks of concrete piled in, topped with raw dirt. This dangerous tangle of debris, an awful eyesore, replaces an attractive area

The Park below Reservoir Road in the spring of 1953.



that had been intensively used as a playground for children. Even if the highway is built, which would be a tragic mistake, the small sum of money which the authorities may have saved by dumping this fill is absurdly tiny compared to the loss to the community of the park area in the meantime. Nor does the helter-skelter mess of trees and rubble look like a sound foundation for a highway.

In the highway plans of the District Engineer's office, a four-lane freeway is designed to run the length of Glover-Archbold Park. It is scheduled for immediate construction, which may mean this year or within the next eight. The wisdom of this plan from the standpoint of traffic control and the city plan as a whole is dubious, for it would only funnel some motorists from Massachusetts Avenue down into the bottlenecks at MacArthur Boulevard, Canal Road, and then into the jam of traffic from Virginia through Georgetown. It is past time for our city planners to realize the obsolescence of plans designed to get everyone into the center of town at the same time, especially as our community is evolving more and more of a circumferential traffic flow, rather than a radial design. We both work and shop more in suburban areas, and the center of town has no capacity to cope with any more of us simultaneously.

But let us realize that engineers will always find excuses, no matter how lame, for running their roads through parks, which are to them just available land that the city does not have to pay for. It can be our task to see just how much the city loses from the destruction of park areas in this way. In the case of a narrow park like Glover-Archbold, the destruction is almost complete. It would, first of all, eliminate the woodland as a wildlife community. With the removal of the bottomland habitat, at least two-thirds of its wildlife would be obliterated, and the remnants of upland woods could not by themselves support even their present population. Many kinds of trees and plants would be destroyed, and traffic would continue to kill many birds and animals.

The value of the park to us would be even more drastically reduced. The spell of the quiet woodland sounds would be gone forever. Serenity and detachment are hard to find in a roar of traffic. And children would no longer have a secluded woods in which to play.

The highway plan has been pushed in direct opposition to the intention of Mr. Charles C. Glover and Mrs. Anne Archbold, who gave most of the tract to the District in 1924. It would be, in Mrs. Archbold's words, "a violation of the purpose for which so much land has been given, so that it might be kept in its natural state for a bird sanctuary and the enjoyment of people in this rapidly

Exploring Glover-Archbold Park

by Napier Shelton

A hawk's-eye view of northwest Washington would reveal, among other things, two parallel streams flowing south into the Potomac. One of these is Rock Creek, and the other is Foundry Branch. Everyone in the city knows Rock Creek, but comparatively few have had the pleasure of discovering Glover-Archbold Park, the narrow strip of woodland which follows Foundry Branch.

In many ways, Glover-Archbold Park is a smaller edition of Rock Creek Park. It contains a largely deciduous upland forest that covers hills plunging down to a swift-running stream. Its plant and animal life is much the same as that of the larger park. But somehow, a walk into this forest gives one an intimate sense of discovery and privacy that is often impossible in Rock Creek. Although the path is there attesting to the weight of many feet gone before, the towering tulip trees and protecting hills erase almost all sights and sounds of human civilization, which is never more than a few hundred yards away.

The small size of Glover-Archbold Park (two miles long and never more than half a mile wide) gives the illusion that it is graspable, that it can be known to its heart, but here again is illustrated the infinite variety in one small piece of unspoiled nature. I have lived within a block of the park for over twenty years, and have spent a total of months exploring it, but had to be told by others recently that there were pileated woodpeckers and foxes living there. How much more possible is the presence of undiscovered plant rarities! The artist will never twice find the same combination of color, light and shadow, and then, of course, you and I are never the same on two different days, and will always encounter nature with a new self.

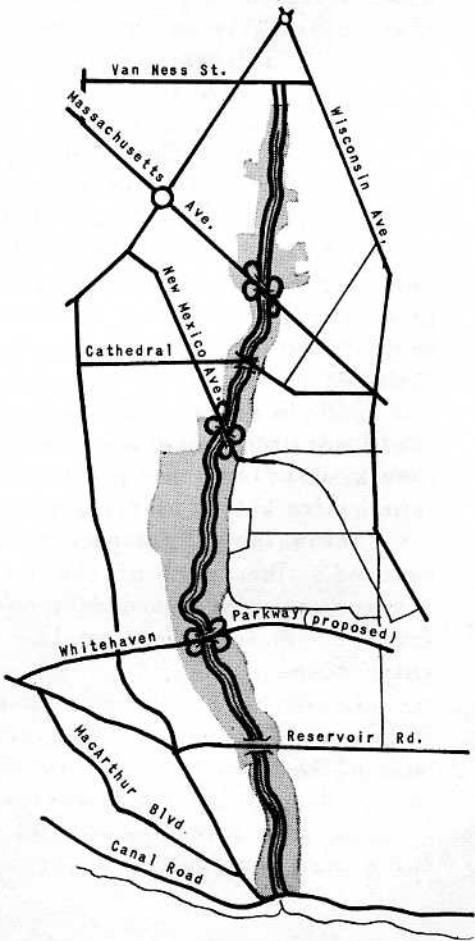
On one May morning last year, I saw twenty-three species of warblers in the park. This feat could probably be duplicated on a number of May mornings. Over 150 species of birds have been seen in the area, and this notwithstanding the fact that there is little variety in the habitats represented in the park. Aside from a few scattered areas of open brush, and honeysuckle tangles

growing part of the city, . . . who now enjoy it in great numbers. Certainly this was my intention and understanding in giving it. . . . Both of us were making these gifts to the city in order to assure the preservation of this very beautiful valley in its natural state for the enjoyment of not only the residents of the District but for the visitors who come to see their Nation's Capital from all over the country."

Ironically, the very qualities which make the park especially valuable as a strip of woodland in a growing city are those which make it especially vulnerable to engineers' highway plans. The narrow, steeply sloped valley which excludes so well the sounds of the adjoining streets would reverberate the more stridently from traffic roar along its floor. No areas of woods on either side would be sufficient to maintain even a fragmental wildlife. It could only serve as a classic example of needless park destruction.

GLOVER - ARCHBOLD PARK
shading indicates park area

Proposed four-lane freeway



in the creek bottom, the vegetation consists of mature deciduous forest occasionally sprinkled with pines.

Now as I look out my window a faint trace of white snow shows through the brown of tree branches in Glover-Archbold Park. Except for the absence of two or three soaring vultures the picture is the usual winter one. At this time of year the birding is simple and not too exciting unless we are just beginning in the sport. We are out mainly for the zest of walking in the woods on a cold winter day. However, from time to time, a band of birds will show up, and the leaves being gone we can see them much better than at other times of the year. This band will consist of the usual chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, downy woodpecker, and perhaps a kinglet or two, with a sapsucker along for good measure, and sometimes a brown creeper. Occasionally we find bluebirds, hermit thrushes, and winter wrens.

For excitement we will have to depend on the possibility of discovering one of the resident barred owls, or a fleeting glimpse of a Cooper's or red-shouldered hawk gliding through the trees. If we are lucky, the pileated woodpeckers will be noisy today, and will betray their whereabouts. A pair of these magnificent birds has moved into the park in the last year, and will, we hope, become a permanent feature. I know of few birds which give as great a sense of wildness as the pileated woodpecker.

In late March the spring show of wildflowers begins. While fox sparrows scratch in the thickets and purple finches warble in the tops of the tulip trees, hepaticas silently and secretly bloom among the leaves of last fall. After this inauspicious beginning, the show gains momentum day by day. Spring beauties and bloodroot carpet the floor as if overnight, and with them come anemones, wild ginger, and violets of several species. Later on the green umbrellas of may apples take over from the bloodroots, and in company with jack-in-the pulpits and Solomon's seal, assure us that we are in the full flush of spring.

Two flowers which particularly intrigued me when I first discovered them were the wood betony and shooting star. In late April and early May they bloom on the hills in the southern end of the park. Even rarer flowers may be there, but vandalism is always a threat, so these you must seek for yourself.

Around April first will be heard one of the most beautiful sounds in our spring forests — the musical cascade poured out by the Louisiana waterthrush. Coming soon after is the yellow palm warbler, quietly wagging about in the bushes along the stream and on the hillsides. Throughout April the spring migration of birds gradually builds up, and in the first three weeks of May reaches its peak. Then most of the warblers, vireos, thrushes, flycatchers, and other songbird migrants that pass through Washington may be seen in Glover-Archbold Park. Some days there are swarms, and other days few, but if you keep at it you will see most of the smaller spring migrants in these few hundred acres.

When the rush and mystery of spring is gone, we find that many birds have remained to raise their families. Ovenbirds, Kentucky and hooded warblers proclaim territorial rights from hill and valley; chats and white-eyed vireos sing mysteriously from the thickets. Morning and evening the wood thrush creates his spell, and throughout the day the explosive pronouncement of the Acadian flycatcher punctuates the other forest sounds.

In recent years a new species has appeared among our summer residents. Not long after its discovery in Rock Creek Park, the veery was found nesting in Glover-Archbold. The appearance of this northern species reminds us that nature does not stand still, and in this little piece of woodland we get evidence of sweeping changes occurring on the face of the earth.

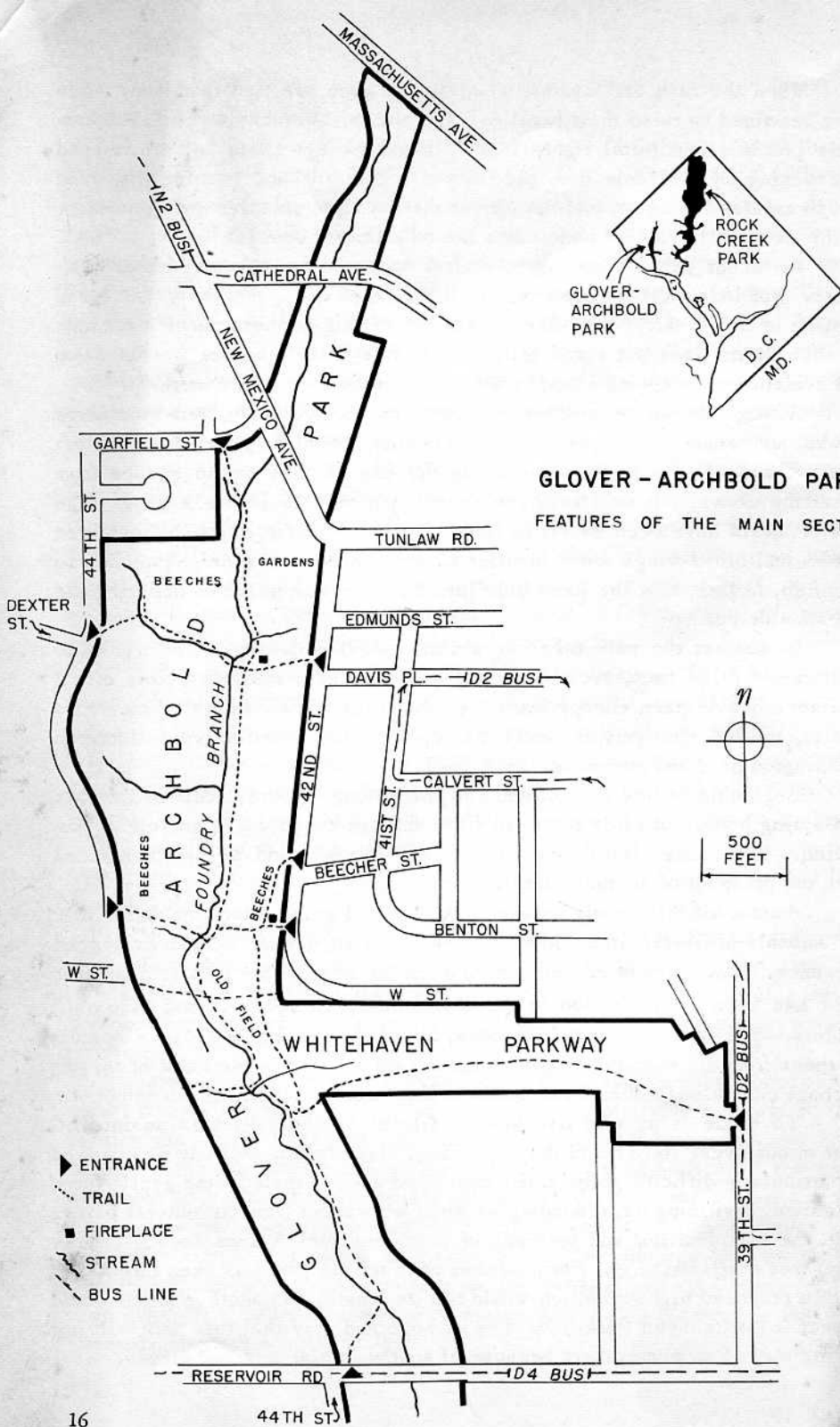
Among the larger summer residents are barred owls, red-shouldered hawks, and broad-winged hawks. The owls sound off nightly during the warmer months, and often may be seen during the day as they try to escape from pestering crows, but so far I have never been able to locate a nest. The hawks' nests have been easier to find. The cries of circling red-shouldered hawks and broad-wings are a familiar summer sound in the neighborhood, so much so, in fact, that the local blue jays have become adept at imitating the red-shouldered.

In summer the park takes on a cathedral-like quality. The trunks of century-old tulip trees, sycamores, and oaks rise skyward with Gothic effect to form a heavy green canopy many feet above the earth. Below is created a cooler, hushed, and private world that can provide an effective antidote to Washington heat and busyness.

Beginning in late August and carrying through to the middle of October the spring hordes of birds return to filter through the trees in noiseless profusion. The foliage flames out in reds and yellows, and we are then faced with the prospect of another winter.

Amidst all this yearly parade of coming and going, blooming and dying, the animals of Glover-Archbold maintain a constant, though seldom evidenced presence. Some friends of mine who live on the edge of the park told me that they had seen - in addition to the ubiquitous gray squirrels and cottontail rabbits - red and gray foxes, raccoons, possums, skunks, and weasels, most of these from the windows of their house. One fox was in the habit of raiding garbage cans along Hoban Road, and was thus seen by several of the neighbors.

To those of us who live nearby, Glover-Archbold Park is an integral part of our lives. Here our children and dogs play. In this solitude we resolved a particularly difficult problem one day. And always there is the gentle force of nature, civilizing us, reminding us when we wander from our natural selves into the complexities and tensions of a modern society that does not know what true civilization is. For a number of years the park has been threatened with a proposed highway which would run its length, and another which would bisect it (Whitehaven Parkway). Let us hope and pray that this park will not go the way of so many others because of apathy in high and low places.



GLOVER - ARCHBOLD PARK

FEATURES OF THE MAIN SECTION