



April Amblings: The Old Foundation

J.B. Duke's original vision for his rolling estate included a grand mansion that was to be built on a hill overlooking Vista Lake. In 1909 final plans were drawn up by the architect Horace Trumbauer for a 78-room French chateau with formal landscaping. The site was prepared, fountains were installed, and a 14-acre terraced lawn was created at the base of the hill. In 1911, construction began on a two-level basement and service court for the mansion that included a tunnel entry from the road. The double metal doors to the tunnel can still be seen tucked into the hillside on the way up from the Orchid Range.



For reasons that are not completely clear, J.B. Duke abruptly halted construction on the mansion soon after the landscaping and foundation were completed. Fast forward a hundred years and what was originally intended to be a statement of opulence and status has been reimagined as a showcase of ecological restoration.

Today, much of the site that was abandoned more than a century ago is being reclaimed by nature. The Old Foundation walls are covered with lichens and moss and walnut trees have grown up out of the floor. Red and grey squirrels scamper along the tops of the stone walls and turkey vultures sometimes nest within them. What were once bubbling fountains are now planting beds for native flowers. And instead of water, these cement pools are filled with butterflies, bees, and pollinators galore.



The cement pools from the Old Foundation are planted with native flowers for pollinators.



Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds feast at the flowers in the old fountains

The Old Foundation is also a wonderful spot for bird watching. Birds of every kind find the mixed landscape surrounded by lakes and mature woodlands a desirable place to stop for a rest or a song as they go about their busy lives. Three showstopper birds that are often observed here include the ruby-throated hummingbird, the Baltimore oriole, and the indigo bunting. Look for the hummingbirds hovering in the fountain flower beds. The male Baltimore orioles are hard to miss with their bright black and orange plumage; they often nest in the mature woodlands around the foundation. The male indigo bunting has spectacular azure blue feathers. You sometimes



see or [hear](#) him as he flits about the trees around the central ornate fountain and in the shrubby areas by bridge to the Great Falls.



Male Baltimore oriole



Male Indigo bunting

Perhaps the most compelling reason to visit the Old Foundation is the spectacular view. Gazing south-east from what would have been the rear of the mansion, you see the terraced slope that once led to the manicured Great Lawn. Today that lawn has been transformed into a healthy meadow filled with diverse native grasses and flowering plants. It's a habitat where grassland birds and pollinators thrive.

The grand staircases from the wall lead down to the base of the hill and the paths that meander through the meadow. In April, when the allees of redbud trees that line the terraced slope are in bloom, the view from the steps is absolutely breathtaking. But don't be fooled by their visual beauty, redbuds are native trees in the pea family.



Their early fuchsia blooms are incredibly important sources of pollen and nectar for our migrating hummingbirds and bumblebees emerging from hibernation.

The Old Foundation is a unique landscape that truly links the past with the future of Duke Farms. Come see it for yourself!

Activity: Observe Wildlife at the Old Foundation

Plan a visit to the Old Foundation. Before you visit, make sure you check out the [Duke Farms Website](#) to help you plan your trip. After that, download the [Duke Farms App](#) for your mobile device. This will provide instant valuable information about Duke Farms, including the Old Foundation.

If you are interested in birding or observing wildlife, check out the online [Guide to Duke Farms](#) before your visit. There are pages of information about some of the highlights that might be encountered on the property.

Finally, if you want bird information at your fingertips, also consider downloading the Cornell Lab of Ornithology App called [Merlin](#) for your mobile device. This free App will help you identify the birds you observe. It will also let you listen to the calls and see numerous photos of birds like the ruby-throated hummingbird, Baltimore oriole and indigo bunting.

Wishing you azure skies and azure birds on you next visit to Duke Farms!

Interested in (really) old foundations?

See if you can identify these...

1.



2.





3.



Answers

1. Machu Picchu, Peru (source: Travel Peru)
2. Ruins of Corinth, Greece (source – National Geographic)
3. Circular monolithic stone structure site in Mpumalanga, South Africa (source: Atlanta Black Star)

NJ Student Learning Standards

Social Studies

World History/Global Studies: All students will acquire the knowledge and skills to think analytically and systematically about how past interactions of people, cultures, and the environment affect issues across time and cultures. Such knowledge and skills enable students to make informed decisions as socially and ethically responsible world citizens in the 21st century.

The NJDOE social studies curriculum includes climate change!

Standards in Action: Climate Change At the core of social studies education, is the goal to prepare students with the essential knowledge and skills to make their local and global communities a better place to live. The intent is for students to begin developing the requisite skills – information gathering and analysis, inquiry and critical thinking, communication, data analysis, and the appropriate use of technology and media – at the youngest grades for the purpose of actively engaging with complex problems and learning how to take action in appropriate ways to confront persistent dilemmas and address global issues. As an example, leveraging climate change as an area of focus, provides an opportunity to design authentic learning experiences that are integrative of the disciplines within social



studies, addresses an issue that has persisted across time and space, connects the past to the present and future, and leverages the use of disciplinary literacy skills to communicate their ideas and solutions for change. A well-designed social studies program addresses the totality of the human experience over time and space, and provides opportunities for students to engage in inquiry, develop and display data, synthesize findings, and make judgments. The NJSLS-SS provide a foundation for this type of learning. For example, the impact of human interactions on the environment is central to any course involving geographic concepts. However, new to this set of standards is a more intentional focus on addressing issues related to climate change. The intent is to foster learning experiences which involve students asking their own questions, seeking the perspectives of multiple stakeholders with diverse points of view, using geospatial technologies to gather data; all for the purpose of planning/proposing advocacy projects or analyzing current public policy regarding climate change and determining its effectiveness. Many of the standards that relate to climate change can be found in Standard 6.3, Active Citizenship in the 21st Century. Additionally, the Human Environment Interaction disciplinary concept and its associated performance expectations provide opportunities for students to engage with this topic.

For more information about how to include Duke Farms resources into your formal or nonformal teaching and learning, contact Kate Reilly, Manager of Education at Duke Farms at kreilly@dukefarms.org.