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ACRES Land Trust Announces Acquisition of Hanging Rock Property in Wabash County

Hanging Rock is a geological treasure with a rich history

WABASH- ACRES Land Trust has acquired Hanging Rock National Natural Landmark located near Lagro, Indiana. The former owner whom ACRES Land Trust leased the property from in the 1960s through 1980s, donated the landmark to ACRES in order to ensure its permanent protection. ACRES' involvement with Hanging Rock began in 1958, two years prior to ACRES officially incorporating as a non-profit corporation. 51 years later, ACRES is now the owner of this significant geological feature.

“Hanging Rock is such a significant natural icon for the region, ACRES is thrilled to maintain and preserve the property for the public to enjoy”, stated Jason Kissel the Executive Director of ACRES.

Hanging Rock is located along the Wabash River east of Lagro, Indiana and about a mile upstream from the mouth of the Salamonie River. The large rock rises about 80 feet above the surface of the river and offers a flat surface on its pinnacle. The surrounding countryside can be viewed for miles. Because of years of undercutting, Hanging Rock juts out over the river and was historically used as a reference point in navigating along the Wabash River.

Hanging Rock is a remnant of an ancient bioherm—a localized, reef-like mass of rock formed from the remains of shelled organisms—which was exhumed (uncovered) by glacial and stream erosion during the Ice Age. In fact, Hanging Rock has endured attack by oceans, glaciers, streams and weathering agents for hundreds of millions of years. The dolomite that makes up Hanging Rock is much harder than the enclosing rock, which helps to explain why Hanging Rock has endured for so long, and now stands up above its surroundings as a “pinnacle reef”. Hanging Rock is part of the Wabash reef, which is one of the most famous in the world.

The history of Hanging Rock began during a period of time called the Silurian, about 400 million years ago, when a shallow, warm sea covered much of North America. Corals, sponges and many other marine organisms flourished in this environment and locally grew in coral reefs, some of which formed exposed mounds and islands that stood close to sea level. Over time, all of these reefs were buried in the seafloor mud and were later compressed into layers of rock hundreds of feet thick. Ice Age glaciers stripped off much of the softer surrounding rocks before burying the reef again with layers of glacial till and sand and gravel.

About 13,000 years ago, the Wabash River Valley was affected by a cataclysmic event known as the Maumee Torrent, when a volume of water larger than modern-day Lake Erie drained down the valley in a matter of days or weeks. This huge torrent scoured out the bottom of the valley, removing most of the glacial sediment as it carved a deep, wide valley into the bedrock; the resistant dolomite of Hanging Rock was left behind as a pinnacle projecting out into the river's path.

Hanging Rock consists of silty dolomite and limestone. There are very few fossil remains in their original growth positions because the central part of the reef has been eroded away, and because many of the fossils were altered beyond recognition when the rock was converted to dolomite. The Hanging Rock of today is only a small part of the original reef that undoubtedly extended well across the present Wabash River, but the force of the Maumee Torrent and subsequent post-glacial erosion by the river removed the northern flank and central reef core, leaving behind the smaller remnant we see today.

“Beyond its geological significance, Hanging Rock is a landmark that is culturally important to current and past generations of Wabash County,” stated Kissel.

Hanging Rock has inspired the Legend of Hanging Rock which tells the story of two native American braves fighting to the death on top of the rock over a maiden, who in the end throws herself off the rock after her true love was thrown off during the fight. Numerous poems and songs also use Hanging Rock as their focal point.

The U.S. Department of the Interior designated Hanging Rock as a National Natural Landmark on May 23, 1986. This designation is given only to areas of national significance in order to preserve America's natural heritage.

ACRES is currently developing plans to improve the parking lot, add interpretive signage, and improve the trail. A grand opening event will occur once these improvements are completed. In the meantime, Hanging Rock is open to the public daily from dawn to dusk. Hanging Rock is ACRES' fourth nature preserve in Wabash County. ACRES now owns a total of 69 nature preserves totaling over 4500 acres within their service area of northeast Indiana, northwestern Ohio and southern Michigan.

For more information about Hanging Rock or other ACRES preserves, call (260) 637 – 2273 or visit their website at www.acreslandtrust.org.