Your Ramsey Creek Preserve
Burial Planning Guide

A death is a devastating time for families. Imagine being able to create instructions for how your death care is to be handled so there is no panic about what to do or who to call. Imagine creating a ceremony that reflects your wishes, that helps to celebrate your life and ease the pain for those left behind. It is a real luxury to be able to do this when you are healthy and able to discuss these decisions with family members so they are aware of your wishes and more prepared to carry them out. We can assist you in preparing for natural burial now to ensure that your wishes will be known.

MEMORIAL ECOSYSTEMS
The Leaders in Conservation Burial

Basic Requirements for a Natural Burial

- No embalming
- Burial within 24-36-hours from the time of death is recommended
  This can be longer if:
    - *a funeral home is used that has a cooler*
    - *a coroner's office has cold storage available (Oconee County has space for use by family of residents)*
    - *a hospital will allow the deceased to stay in the morgue or release the body to the family for a home funeral*
    - *the family has access to cooling methods such as dry ice or Techni-Ice*
- Burial containers may include:
    - Caskets must be biodegradable—plain wood or cardboard cremation caskets

    - Shrouds are an inexpensive, simple and even elegant option; some use family quilts or other textiles
    - Street clothing with a face covering
- It is legal for families to provide their own containers
- No vaults or grave liners are used

The Ramsey Creek Preserve Funeral Experience

How to Prepare

- To find the Ramsey Creek Preserve, **use our directions**, as some navigation software routes you to the far end of Cobb Bridge Road.
- Please carpool; the parking at Ramsey Creek is very limited. We do have a port-o-potty, but no inside bathrooms, so consider a potty break before arrival.
- Dress appropriately, especially with regard to shoes, which should be flat walking shoes, not high heels. The weather can be very hot (upper 90's) and bitterly cold (we do get snow and ice). Check the weather on the day of the funeral. Ramsey Creek reserves the right to reschedule or delay funerals in the event of severe, dangerous weather.
- We suggest bringing an umbrella for rain and for protection from the sun in very hot weather. The chapel has space heaters; it also has fans and functional windows, but no AC.
- Those with medical conditions that make walking difficult or dangerous should notify staff and we can provide a golf cart, although some of the sites are not golf-cart accessible all the way to graveside. During warm weather, we have stinging insects including yellow jackets and wasps, so

those with severe allergies should bring their Epi-pens. Snakes are rare, but do not harm them and do not attempt to capture and hold them. We also have some areas with non-stinging gnats, ticks and mosquitos, so bring insect repellant, although we generally have some on hand.

- Some of the trails are rustic and uneven, so a walking stick could be desirable. Especially in hot weather, bring water. Please pack up all trash. No smoking. Animals are welcome, but all waste should be disposed of, and dogs should remain on their leads. Do NOT pick wildflowers.
- Please do not bring sprays of flowers containing metal, plastic or glass tubes or other difficult-to-recycle materials. Avoid bringing garden flowers or sprays with seeds (for example, the highly invasive, red-seeded *nandina*). Carolina Wild Nursery in Anderson, SC, can provide an arrangement of site-appropriate living plants that can substitute for the spray. Otherwise, RCP will provide a limited number of plants at the end of the funeral service/closing (see list below). As beautiful as they are, we do not allow non-native plants such as chrysanthemums, daffodils, non-native roses, etc., to be planted. All plant material must be approved prior to establishing it on the grave.

What to Expect at the Service: Order of the Ceremony

- Upon arrival, family and friends generally gather in the shaded parking area, the porch of the barn (the plain wooden structure with the cupola), under the spreading oak behind the barn, or at the chapel. Staff will direct you to one of these areas, depending on the family's wishes.
- Some families choose to have a procession beginning from behind the barn to the graveside; others might have the casket in the chapel or on the grave for lowering, or already lowered into the grave. A few families prefer for the grave to already be closed.
- Families often choose to have a service in the chapel or at the gravesite itself. During hot weather, the chapel can become very warm, and hand fans are recommended.
- In the case of a procession to the gravesite, we use an Amish-made funeral cart. This cart is human powered and will require the pallbearers to assist in propelling the cart, as well as braking (it has no intrinsic brakes). Staff will assist in placing the body/casket on wooden slats across the grave. Each slat has a rope or strap across it.
- Some families have a brief graveside service, with words, music and prayers. Six pallbearers then raise the casket with the straps as a staff member removes the slats, and the body is lowered into the grave. At that time, some final prayer or memories are offered. The family and friends can then put a scoop of earth or drop flowers into the grave.
- Families are allowed to, but are not required to help, close the grave. Those with back conditions, heart problems, etc., should not participate. The closure is done with the deeper clay going in first and then the topsoil, then any plants rescued from the site, then any nursery plants provided by the preserve or purchased by the family.
- Some families and friends stay until the grave is closed and participate in a flower planting and watering ceremony; others choose to leave after the lowering and final words. All are welcome to take a walk on the preserve's

miles of trails (see **Trail Map**), and all are welcome to come back. The RCP is open dawn till dusk. Hike at your own risk.

- During the covid-19 pandemic, we are limiting funeral parties to 10 people, and we request masks and social distancing during the service. If the family does not have enough able-bodied persons to help with transport or lowering, our staff will substitute.

More Details

Grave Markers

To mark your grave you may choose a rock from the preserve, which will lay flat on the ground, to serve an ecological purpose. We have an engraver who comes to the preserve to engrave the rocks. Trees, shrubs, and wildflowers can also be used, but must be appropriate for the location. Families may not plant on the graves without the express permission of the preserve steward. You can also choose to have no marker. You will automatically be entered into our database so we have a permanent record of where you are buried.

Because of our computerized location system, and reference markers along the trail, stone markers are not required. They are allowed but must meet certain specifications. All stone monuments must be of native stone, consistent with the geology of the site. Ramsey Creek can provide an appropriate stone on request. Stones brought from the outside must be approved prior to placement.

- In general, stones should be flat to the ground.
- Carvings and artwork other than names and dates must be approved by the Ramsey Creek staff.
- Families may not gather rocks from other areas of the preserve without the permission of the staff.
- Families may not build stone piles.

- In some cases, to create a more natural look, more than one stone can be used to create a monument, but such a marker must be pre-approved.

Hiring Funeral Home Professionals

When speaking with a funeral home, inform them that you are having a natural or green funeral, with no embalming. Ask them if they have a cooler or refrigeration unit. It is legal for you to provide your own casket or shroud when working with a funeral home. We are happy to furnish a list of local funeral homes or talk with a funeral home of your choice if you need our assistance or if they need some additional information.

Transportation

It is legal to transport a deceased person who is not embalmed across state lines and to the other side of the world, if necessary. We can arrange for transportation of the deceased through our local funeral home. This avoids charges from tow mortuaries for what is called forwarding and receiving.

Many of our clients just use the funeral home for paperwork, pick up, storage, and delivery to the preserve. Remember there could be an extra charge for transportation, depending on how far you live from the funeral home. If you are coming from a great distance or another state, you might want to transport the deceased yourself. Funeral homes require additional charges by the mile for transportation out of their pick-up area. You can hire the funeral home to do the paperwork and get the permits, and then take responsibility for the driving. Most caskets can fit in a minivan, or you could rent one. This does take more planning, so it might be more convenient for the funeral home to provide the service for you. The choice is yours.

It is also possible to fly people without embalming all over the world. Inman is the name of one company that provides shipping services, but they will not deal with individuals, only funeral homes. Our nearest airports are Atlanta, 2 hours away, and Greenville/Spartanburg, 1 hour away.

Burying Pets

Many of our clients have animals that have become an integral part of their family, and the death of these pets is heartbreaking. Pets can be buried with families or in a special pet section of the preserve.

Scattering of Cremated Remains

The term scattering suggests an open-air release, but it is also used for in-ground burial of cremated remains. Many of our cremated remains burials are of loved ones who chose cremation at some point in the past and whose family is now looking for a more environmentally congruent final resting place.

When burying cremated remains, we first remove any leaf matter, then the superficial root mat called duff, followed by the removal of a small amount of soil. We then mix the removed soil with a proven enzyme buffer that will further reduce the calcium phosphate and sodium of the cremated remains. That mixture is then spread prior to replacing the forest floor layers.

Family Guidelines to Burial and Maintenance of Graves

Ramsey Creek Preserve is a nature preserve, dedicated to restoring and maintaining a home for native plants and animals while offering natural burial for humans and pets. We believe that maintaining and restoring this natural native beauty is a most important monument to the memory of your loved ones. Accordingly, we have carefully developed a number of guidelines and opportunities for families to ensure that they can participate in preserve restoration, and create personal memorials that do not detract from the overall naturalness of the preserve. While some of the rules might seem arbitrary, our staff can explain why specific restrictions are necessary.

Plantings and Grave Care

Families often want to plant a wild shrub or flower at the gravesite. In most cases, we encourage the practice, but within our guidelines:

- All plants must be native and appropriate to the site. No artificial plants are allowed
- Plants should be selected from the list below. A source for finding and purchasing the plants will also be provided
    - Herbs
        - Green and gold *Chrysoganum virginianum*
        - Smooth leaved cone flower *Echinacea laevegata*
        - *Yucca filamentosa*
        - Blue-eyed grass *Sisyrinchium angusitfolium*
        - Rattlesnake master
        - Rattlesnake plantain
        - Liatris species (including *Liatris pilosa*)
        - Carolina Phlox *Phlox carolina*
        - New York Ironweed *Vernonia noveboracensis*
        - Black Eyed Susan *Rudbeckia hirta*

        - Wild Quinine *Parthenium integrifolium*
        - Wild Bergamot *Monarda fistulosa*
        - Bearded Tongue *Penstemon australis*
        - Hollowstem Joe Pye Weed *Eupatorium hyssopifolium* (moister meadow)
        - Pussytoes *Antennaria neglecta*
        - Downy Lobelia *Lobelia puberula*
        - Mountain Mint *Pycnanthemum incanum*
        - White Mountain Mint *Pycnanthemum pycnanthemoides*
        - Woodland Sunflower *Helianthus divaricatus*
        - Pale Woodland Sunflower *Helianthus stumosus*
        - Goldenrods (various species) *Solidago caesia* and others
        - Silvery aster
    - Grasses
        - Indian grass *Sorghastrum nutans*
        - Little blue stem *Schizachyrium scoparius*
        - Big bluestem *Andropogon gerardi*
- A staff member should be present at the time of planting or can do the actual planting if the family prefers. In certain backcountry areas where plant diversity is already high, families might prefer to do a memorial planting elsewhere in the preserve where it is needed more. Families will not prune, weed, or otherwise harm native plants on or near the gravesite without explicit and specific permission from Ramsey Creek staff for each time such modification is desired
- If a client or family picks an interment site off existing trails, families may not create a trail to the site. In the case of large tree blow-down, staff should

be notified. In general, however, the trees will not be moved, even if the tree falls on a grave. Dead wood on the forest floor is a vital part of the forest ecosystem.

- The Ramsey Creek Preserve is a work in progress. We will notify families of larger scale ecological restoration activities (such as wildflower meadow restoration) when they occur and will encourage active participation. Small-scale seed collecting for planting at home is allowed but should be coordinated with a staffer. Picking wildflowers is strictly prohibited.

For more information, contact us at:

Memorial Ecosystems

Ramsey Creek Preserve

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