Ed Haile

How did you become a member of the Friends of Dragon Run?
Through Jerry Stokes - he was the local representative of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. In 1987, Louise Boyer McKenna approached Jerry about donating land that she owned in Middlesex to conservation. The land was in the Dragon Run. She didn't have any commercial reason to have it, but she wanted to save the "Dragon." Jerry then came to me, and he said, you were a land surveyor. I need a land surveyor. And so, it all began at that point. I think I just joined the Friends of Dragon Run by default. After doing what I had done, when they founded the organization, they said, Ed, you remember, we must pay, the $500, whatever it was, for example, to be a member. But you were already here. I had been a surveyor almost starting when I was a kid. And always as an employee, I've never been a civil surveyor. I would say probably doing a land survey in a swamp would be challenging at best. Well, I did it all the time. That was another reason Jerry approached me, because anybody who surveys around you is the one who practically live in places like that. And I have been in the Dragon so many times, or at least during that career, that it was almost a weekly event. There were people who challenged my survey of Big Island. And so, I produced it and said, no, sir, you don't own Big Island, or we own that. I can show you the old marks where the boundary line ran. And so that quieted that stuff. I don't think anything has come up about that in 30 years now, but if for a while, there were a couple of landowners who had hired surveys to go in there and say, we're not sure this guy's got McKenna's line right. Well, the survey I did was right. Jerry was with me on all these expeditions to survey what is now FODR Big Island. And honestly, but for him, I don't think I would have seen it through to the end. Jerry was just a ball of fire. He was just full of energy, enthusiasm, and it was always a pleasure to work with. I loved the McKenna property and getting work on surveying what became the first property of the Friends of Dragon Run.

What was the greatest challenge in building the organization at the beginning?
I suppose the biggest challenge would be convincing people that it was for real. Trying to get the citizens to understand that it was trying to be a conservation organization not just a canoe group or duck hunters. All you had to do was meet Jimmy Morgan and you realize that the number one guy was dead serious, and he could bring you along in this quest to save the Dragon.

Do you have a favorite memory of anything about any of your time with the Friends of Dragon Run?
There were a lot of comic incidents down there with Jerry Stokes and I working on the survey in the swamp. I mean, it was an amazing ordeal. If you if you don't mind getting bitten by a couple of 100 ticks a year, then it's a pretty good life. I mean, when people say, good, Lord, I picked a tick off me the other day. Go back and find the other 20. I remember, working down at the southern end of Big Island, and I lost a bush axe, into the swamp. It's about 6 feet deep. And it had to swim out there and find it, and I did find it. I think the water was clear enough to see it once I got down in the water. I could have used a mask at that point but found the axe anyway.

Do you have a favorite place or segment of the dragon from anything you did?
Oh, I love it all. I took a canoe trip down the Dragon in 1965. It was wonderful. I started at Bestland Bridge far up in the Dragon. I thought, gee, as I remember this is wide enough for a canoe to go down. And started paddling merrily towards the Atlantic Ocean. And, uh, got a half a mile, you know, and one log, and then another 100 feet, another log, and then another log, and soon, we were completely bogged now. I had a friend who went with me, and I said, well, we just started too far up. So, we dragged a canoe. I had an "Old Town" canvas canoe, and I dragged it on up to the nearest cornfield, and then I called home, I don't know where we found a telephone back then, but my aunt Mary Esther came down in the car and put the canoe on the car and went down to Byrd's Bridge and if you've done that, you know, the same thing happens. Yeah, it looks so beautiful from the bridge, and you go down and then you're stuck. Absolutely stuck. I tried that with Jerry Stokes. I thought maybe something had

changed over time, but Jerry and I didn't get any further. So then here I was in 1965, so I called my aunt to come down, and she took us to Wares Bridge and put it in down there. And I thought that my golly, this thing looks like a river down here. We went on down past Big Island without knowing it, really. I think we passed Big Island to the east of Big Island. You probably did that because sometimes, depending on the year, that channel looks better than the one on the west. And then when you get out there, you find out it has, may have, less water, may have more trees and everything else. Well, we passed the New Dragon Bridge and went several miles beyond that. But by that time, we've been in a swamp for 4 or 5 days. I don't know how long we've been in there. And we hadn't run out of anything. But I had been dragging a canoe over so many logs that it had opened a hole in the bottom. And so only one of us could then paddle. The other one just had to bail water constantly to keep the thing afloat. We went on and on and on and finally, uh, there was a bank on the Gloucester side. And so, we pulled up on that bank. Didn't make it to the bay!

How can we better protect the dragon?

You're doing a very good job right now. The word is getting around that the dragon is something special. Keep working with all the various aspects of our communities and stay as a responsible member of the communities. I think that getting the word out to the citizenry, that this is something special, and warrants protection. I think that another issue to avoid is that property that people are used to politely being on, suddenly gets a conservation name, and then they're no longer allowed on it anymore. So, I think if you want to get people who live around here to take you seriously, you need to invite them to events where they can experience the Dragon. Get them to experience the Dragon, understand that it's theirs, they need to help preserve and protect it, and you don't want to keep them away from it.

Your work as a historian of John Smith and Virginia is particularly noteworthy. Did John Smith ever cross or visit the Dragon?

Yes. December 24th - Christmas Eve – is the most logical date in 1607 when John Smith crossed the Dragon Run.

I would like to end the interview by sharing an excerpt from a poem you wrote about your 1965 canoe adventure in the Dragon Run titled - *Vacation Days on the Dragon Run, 1965.*

The whole idea
through swampland
threading a stream hardly wider than the canoe
that forked reformed and disappeared like the patterns of long,
blown hair
when you add the narrative overstory had been logged out
thus encouraging a thicket so dense it could be called skillful
in blending the spaces out of vine and briar
was ridiculous
but we were now committed
that is
swallowed down the swift stream
two youths
ready for the age of reptiles in the wild
of days miraculously hot for a regulation summer
flies, leeches, and mosquitos with identical dreams…