

Uprooted

Geologically, Glen Echo Park teeters on a fall line, the transition from where the river changes from quartz and bedrock to the Atlantic coastal plain. Along this corridor, the river drops from an elevation of 140 feet to 10 feet above sea level.

Satellite imagery through Landsat and Google Earth Engine provide a bird's eye perspective on Glen Echo Park's land, a 15 mile span on the piedmont plateau. Over the past 35 years, urban sprawl, water quality of the Potomac River, deforestation, and changes in the plateau shelf can be seen. With climate change, the proliferation of invasive species accelerates to endanger the natural habitat by crowding the canopy. At Glen Echo Park, the English ivy creeps over the historic site's amusement park foundations and forests. The sculpture replicates the process by integrating the ivy on the steel armature.

Evidence of cultural delineations are also tied to the land. Only three feet below the surface, thousands of indigenous artifacts have been uncovered. Archeologists investigating these artifacts suggest the Anacostan tribes used sites along the river for approximately 4,000 years, from 2500 BC to AD 1500. Indigenous claim to this land has been disputed for centuries.

Historically, the Potomac served as the border between the Union and Confederacy during the Civil War. The rolling hills and rocky gorges served as sources of quarries and iron pits that fueled the war. Clara Barton, founder of the Red Cross, lived adjacent to the park and her house is open to the public. Defying traditional gender roles in the 1800s, Clara Barton coordinated medical supplies and aide to soldiers on regional battlefields.

Founded in 1891 by the National Chautauqua Assembly, Glen Echo Park became an amusement park in 1899. In 1921, the first bumper car pavilion was built and ten years later, a swimming pool opened to host up to 3,000 swimmers. In 1960, a sit-in by Howard University students spurred the desegregation of the park. In 1968, the park closed and was added to the National Registrar of Historic Places.

As the National Park Service and Glen Echo Park community focus on the principles of preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and reconstruction, the sculpture considers humanity's impact on the land through time.

- Stephanie Garon