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Progress Report: 2008

THE BEST YEAR YET

It seems indisputable that this was the most productive year yet for the Appalachian Trail Museum Society. This is true in a number of areas: fund raising, artifact procurement, and site location, among others. Noted below are some of the highlights of this memorable year.

The Old Mill at Pine Grove Furnace

Clearly, if we are ever to achieve real credibility as a museum, we need a structure to house this much dreamed of goal. A search has been under way for a frustratingly long time. Now it appears that we may—finally—be within sight of that elusive goal.

What is looking more and more like the perfect spot is a 150-year-old grist mill at Pine Grove Furnace State Park, an hour's drive north of Baltimore near Gettysburg and close to the midpoint of the Appalachian Trail. The park gets 500,000 visitors annually, and every thru-hiker passes within 20 feet of the mill. The small general store is the scene of an AT rite of passage: the Half-Gallon Club, in which ravenous long-distance hikers try to consume a half-gallon of ice cream in one sitting.

This historic old mill remains in surprisingly good physical condition, although work will be needed to make it compliant with current safety and accessibility codes. The building has three floors and a basement, with the first floor being already handicapped accessible. The second floor, which has better light, could be made accessible by the addition of a ramp. Heating and climate control would also be needed.

Negotiations are under way with State Park personnel, and it is hoped that all issues can be resolved shortly.

Quimby Grant

Thanks to the hard work and persistence of ATMS Vice President, Terry Harley-Wilson, the Museum Society was awarded in August a \$30,000 grant for a project that proposes to digitize, duplicate, catalog, and provide archival housing for more than 12,000 Polaroid photos taken of

through-hikers who passed through Harpers Ferry since 1979. These important primary documents of the Trail experience will be incorporated into an online searchable database that will be linked to other Trail-related websites. The project will also begin creating a website designed for the hiking community, historians and researchers, students, educators, and others from around the world to come together to reconnect, reminisce, study and build upon lessons learned about the Trail and about life.

For nearly all through-hikers, the journey's psychological halfway celebration begins at the moment they hike into the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Visitors Center in Harpers Ferry. Until now, any hiker wishing to revisit the image taken by the ATC on that day had to travel to Harpers Ferry. Sadly, many hikers never have the opportunity to see the image of the person they were during that part of their life's journey. With the completion of this project the half-way point photos, as well as more than 1,400 completion photos, will be accessible on the Internet from any computer anywhere.

Earl Shaffer Shelter Saved for Museum

On Saturday, August 2, 2008, some 40 dedicated volunteers assembled at the site of the Earl Shaffer Shelter on Peters Mountain between Clarks Valley and the Clarks Ferry Bridge. The purpose of this gathering was to carefully disassemble the shelter to be temporarily stored and ultimately reassembled as one of the premier artifacts of the Appalachian Trail Museum. This shelter is the last surviving one of several that were built by Earl himself.

Walkin' Jim Concert

With the cooperation and assistance of numerous volunteers and other hiking and outdoor organizations, a fund-raising concert was held in November at the Carlisle Theater in Carlisle, PA. The featured performer was folksinger Walkin' Jim Stoltz who brought his acclaimed multi-media show *Forever Wild* to Central Pennsylvania. This performance was donated by Jim in recognition of the importance of the work of the Museum Society and the leadership of Larry Luxenberg, a longtime friend of Jim's.

Well over 200 persons attended the concert and a total of more than \$2,000 was raised to replenish the Museum Society's needy treasury.

Cesar Becerra A.T. Exhibit

Cesar Becerra has donated to the Museum Society a highly flexible A.T. exhibit that he assembled several years ago at an original cost of \$6,500. At its maximum size the exhibit extends to 2,000 square feet. Many of the panels, however, can be used separately or for smaller exhibits. We will be able to use the exhibit in whole or in part, and it will be very useful for traveling exhibits or as part of our permanent displays. Cesar has had experience working on exhibits for seven parks in Florida.

Funding Needs

It should be clear from the items noted above that a great deal has been accomplished through the loyal efforts of many volunteers and supporting organizations. More money will be needed, however to make the Old Mill usable — assuming that this site does in fact become the Museum's home. The securing of the Quimby grant was an outstanding achievement for which Terry deserves the warm thanks of all of us. But the use of these funds is limited to a specific project and cannot be diverted to any of our other needs.

The Walkin' Jim concert is a perfect example of the kind of fund raising efforts that we need more of. Museum Society members—and others—should think hard about other fund raising activities that we can undertake.

Beyond money-making events and grants, the most obvious sources of money are members dues, and the contributions of members and others. Let's all do what we can to solicit more members and to encourage contributions.

The Museum Society has made a strong beginning, and the path ahead is becoming steadily more clear. Let's not lose our momentum.