

The Herald-Mail^H

Hagerstown, Maryland

Pennsylvania

Appalachian Trail museum set to open June 5

By KATE S. ALEXANDER

MARCH 21, 2010

kate.alexander@herald-mail.com

GARDNERS, Pa. — It took Benton MacKay 17 years to see his dream of an Appalachian Trail come to pass.

It took Earl Shaffer six months to walk that same trail when others told him it couldn't be done.

Yet it has taken more than 70 years to commemorate that passion, that hike and that trail.

Known as The Appalachian Trail Museum, this tribute to the thousands of men, women and [families](#) who have since hiked and maintained the trail will open June 5 in Pine Grove Furnace State Park, said Larry Luxenberg, president of the Appalachian Trail Museum Society (ATMS), a nonprofit organization formed in 2002 to establish the museum.

Stretching between Georgia and Maine, the rugged route through Appalachia envisioned by McKay in 1921 has since defeated more hikers than have conquered it.

Many miles of the trail stretch through the backyards of Jefferson County, W.Va., Washington County, Md., and Franklin County, Pa.

Franklin County is a major supporter of the project, which will not only bring notice to Pine Grove Furnace State Park but neighboring Caledonia State Park, said Joe Patterson of Chambersburg, Pa., a member of the ATMS.

Collaborating at Shippensburg (Pa.) University with members of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, ATMS began in 2001 the process of bringing the museum to life.

The last piece of the puzzle fell into place this winter when the ATMS received permits to renovate the historic Grist Mill at Pine Grove Furnace State Park, said Kent Wilson, head of the society's membership development.

"This building is as old as our country," he said. "And it is two miles from the trail's midpoint."

Leased from the National Park Service for only \$1 to date, the building will [house](#) artifacts and exhibits from the trail's history, Kent Wilson said.

Terry Wilson, vice president of ATMS, said the opening exhibit will center around the last remaining shelter constructed by Shaffer.



Members of the Appalachian Trail Museum Society gather Sunday on the porch of the museum set to open in June in Pine Grove Furnace State Park. From left are Robert Croyle of Savannah, Ga., Larry Luxenberg of New City, N.Y., Terry Wilson of French Lick, Ind., and Kent Wilson of French Lick. (By Kate S. Alexander/Staff Writer)

Piece by piece, the shelter was disassembled from the trail near Harrisburg, Pa., and is waiting to be erected once more in the museum.

Shaffer built approximately five similar shelters in the years after he through-hiked the trail, Terry Wilson said.

While the museum will highlight the history of the trail, including its founder and first major hikers, history will not remain encased behind glass or printed on large exhibits, Luxenberg said.

It will also live at the museum, he said.

One corner of the museum will be a hiker's lounge. There, the men and women through-hiking the trail can become living historians, sharing their experience with guests, Robert "Red Wolf 'o da Smoky's" Croyle said.

For children, the museum will include a section where they can touch hiking equipment and learn about Ziggy, the one and only cat to through-hike the trail, Luxenberg said.

Much of the work being done has been facilitated by the generosity of donors, foundations and organizations, Terry Wilson said.

It was the Quimby [Family](#) Foundation that provided a \$30,000 seed grant in 2008 to start the project, she said.

Since then, other sponsors, including The Hershey Co. and the South Mountain Partnership, have helped make the project a reality.

Between now and the scheduled opening on National Trails Day, volunteers from the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club will work with architect LSC Designs of York, Pa., to transform the building, bringing it up to code, setting up exhibits and making the first floor handicapped-accessible, said Luxenberg.

The artifacts are temporarily being stored at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, W.Va., Kent Wilson said.