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Appalachian Trail museum opens in Cumberland County

By AMBER SOUTH News intern

Hundreds gathered Saturday at Pine Grove Furnace State Park on Pa. 233, north of Caledonia State Park, to celebrate the grand opening of the Appalachian Trail Museum.

Exhibits honoring some of the people to hike the entirety of the Appalachian Trail are currently displayed on the first floor of the museum, which is in a nearly 200-year-old mill on the grounds of the state park, but more will be available in other areas of the building after renovation is complete.

The finished museum will have a children's discovery area, inside and outside welcome areas for hikers, as well as computers that will display thousands of photos taken by hikers near the state park's midpoint on the Appalachian Trail.



Pioneers: The first floor of the Appalachian Trail Museum includes exhibits on early through-hikers. The museum opened Saturday. (Russell Nye/For Public Opinion)

Following a six-mile "hike to history" of about 150 hikers that ended at the site of the opening ceremony, an approximately hour-long ceremony began at 11 a.m. and featured several speakers, including people who played key roles in developing and opening the museum, as well as relatives of some of the first hikers on the Appalachian Trail.

A theme that was carried throughout the day was the importance of volunteers to the museum and the Appalachian Trail, which also goes through Franklin County.

John Quigley, secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources, commended these people and said they have helped give both "the commonwealth and the country," a gift by raising the "first hiking museum in the U.S.A."

The museum honors the early volunteers and through-hikers of the Appalachian Trail, said David Startzell, the executive director of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, because they were the points of inspiration for the people that followed.

Startzell said, "Volunteers made the trail a reality and continue to make the trail a reality today."

Quigley said the history, vision and legacy of the Appalachian Trail and its past hikers will live on through the exhibits in the museum.

Quigley also concentrated on the environment and where it might be in the future if people do not continue to fight against the many challenges it faces today. He urged people to see that the region is only a part of the big picture.

He said inspiration can be taken from the trail and the museum to ensure that clean land, air and water continues to be a "birthright" for future generations.

A speaker who received a long and loud standing ovation even before saying one word was Larry Luxenberg, the man who first developed the idea to create the museum and is now president of the Appalachian Trail Museum.

"It is great to see the support the museum has built over the years," Luxenberg said.

Additional speakers were Rebecca L Harriett, superintendent of Harper's Ferry National Historic Park, and Rick Rovengo, a Cumberland County commissioner.



Driving force: Larry Luxenberg speaks to the crowd gathered... (Russell Nye/For Public Opinion)

Other speakers were relatives of several pioneer through-hikers whose stories, photos and hiking tools are now on display in the museum.

The first was John Shaffer, the man who came up with the idea to house the museum in a 200-year-old brick mill in the state park and brother of the first person to ever walk the entirety of the Appalachian Trail, Earl Shaffer.

Earl Shaffer, a York native, first walked the trail in 1948. Several exhibits in the museum are devoted to him, including a shelter that stood along the trail for years before being dismantled and moved to its new home at the museum. Several of his journal entries, stories and other items can be seen displayed along two walls in the museum.

Other speakers were Gene Epsy, a 1957 hiker; Lucy Seeds, the daughter of "Grandma Gatewood," the first woman to hike Appalachian Trail in one direction and alone; and Sharon Garvey, the daughter of Ed Garvey, a hiker who put together the first true guide to hiking the Appalachian Trail.

The museum will be open daily noon until 4 p.m. through Labor Day.