

## History, legend and lore of the Appalachian Trail packed into Pennsylvania's newest museum

By **MARCUS SCHNECK, The Patriot-News**

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The hiking community will gather in Pine Grove Furnace State Park in southern Cumberland County on Saturday, June 5, for the opening of the Appalachian Trail Museum.

Hikes, trail work outings and other activities will surround the opening, which both caps more than a decade of planning and effort by volunteers and marks National Trails Day.

The new museum, housed in the historic grist mill at the state park, "will open as the only museum in the United States dedicated to hiking," according to Larry Luxenberg, founder and president of the Appalachian Trail Museum Society.

And, while the 12 years that have passed since the idea for a museum first surfaced may have been longer than anticipated, "I believe that it's good that it took us so long," said the man who thru-hiked the trail in 1980 and was then inspired to research and write the book *Walking the Appalachian Trail*. "It helped us to crystallize our ideas and it got us into a great location."

The stone, grist mill building is located among several similar structures erected in the late 1700s and early 1800s, including the iron master's mansion, which operated as a hostel visited by many AT hikers until it was closed for renovations on May 1. (The Central Pennsylvania Conservancy and the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, which manages the park, hope to reopen the building next year.)

The entire complex, which was entered into the National Register of Historical Places in 1977, stands about two miles east of the midway point of the AT in nearby Michaux State Forest. In addition, a part of the trail that passes through the park is within an easy walk from the new museum and the nearby park store, with its "half-gallon club" ice cream tradition among thru-hikers.

Restoration of the 200-year-old grist mill has been done by volunteers, led by the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club's North Chapter "Yankee Clippers" crew.

From 75-100 volunteers have worked on the restoration or put their names on the list to work in other aspects of the museum, such as serving as docents for visitors, according to volunteer coordinator Margi Schmidt.

"The response we've had has been just amazing," she said. "Every time we think of a need, someone steps forward. The trail community is so vibrant to begin with, in doing work on the trail" that many were eager to help with a trail museum. "There's this whole culture of the trail. This is a way to contribute and give back, like all the people who have gone before us."

Museum exhibits will tell the stories of the founding, construction, preservation, maintenance, protection and enjoyment of the 2,178-mile, Maine-to-Georgia trail, which was first proposed in 1921 but not completed until 1937.

The museum's interior space was designed by LSC Design of York and Bonnie Ralston of New York, N.Y., designed the interior space and exhibits respectively to portray not only the history of the trail but also the essence of the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual human experience of the Appalachian environment and the culture of hiking.

Hard-core thru-hikers aside, said Schmidt, "the average person who hikes the trail doesn't how the trail is thought of and the actual work that goes into creating and maintaining the trail."

Several trail pioneers will be featured in the exhibits, including Earl Shaffer, the York County man who was the first to hike the entire AT end-to-end (see accompanying article); Gene Espy, the second person to thru-hike the trail; Grandma Gatewood, who at the age of 67 in 1955 became the first woman to solo-hike the entire trail; Benton MacKaye, who first proposed the idea for the trail; Myron Avery, who spearheaded construction of the trail; and Ed Garvey, the Falls Church, Va., man who popularized long-distance backpacking in the 1970s.

A trail shelter built by Shaffer in 1959 on Peters Mountain, north of Harrisburg, was dismantled two years ago and stored until earlier this year, when it was reassembled as an exhibit at the museum.

Luxenberg explained, "A lot of people are intensely devoted to the AT and they get a lot out of the trail and the trail community. The museum will preserve that, to inspire future generations."

The museum's hiker center will display thousands of photos of AT hikers and house a registration and message center for trail hikers.

Admission will be free to the museum, which will be open noon-4 p.m. daily through Labor Day and then noon-4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through October.

Speakers for the 11 a.m. grand opening ceremony will include DCNR Secretary John Quigley, Appalachian Trail Conservancy Executive Director David Startzell and Harpers Ferry National Historic Park Superintendent Rebecca Harriett. Local dulcimer, banjo and harmonica musician and recording artist Tom Jolin, who has performed on National Public Radio and for the Vice President of the United States, will perform before and after the ceremony.

After the ceremony, throughout the afternoon, programs will feature tales from relatives of pioneer thru-hikers, information sessions about hiking the AT, briefings on the history of the area and activities for children.

In addition, hikes on area trails will be held on Sunday morning, June 6. More info: Karen Balaban with the Susquehanna Appalachian Trail Club at [KMBalaban@BalabanLLC.com](mailto:KMBalaban@BalabanLLC.com) or 232-3708.

And, trail maintenance outings will be hosted on Sunday at Peters Mountain, north of Harrisburg, and South Mountain, the mountain range that includes Pine Grove Furnace State Park. More info: For Peters Mountain, Jim Hooper with the York County Hiking Club at [j.e.hooper@ieee.org](mailto:j.e.hooper@ieee.org) or 252-3784. For South Mountain, Jim Foster with the Cumberland Valley Appalachian Trail Club and the Mountain Club of Maryland at [cvatclub@gmail.com](mailto:cvatclub@gmail.com).

"Hiking and trail maintenance go hand-in-hand. The Appalachian Trail hiking community prides itself in not only using the trails but keeping them maintained so others can enjoy them safely," explained Luxenberg. "Both the hikes and the trail work will be significant parts of the Appalachian Trail Museum opening."