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Preserving Pickens' history

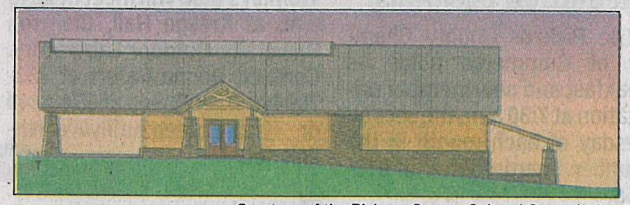


JOHN C. STEVENSON / Staff

Pickens County naturalist Dennis Chastain examines petroglyphs carved into a rock outcropping on what is now the Hagood Mill Historic Site.

Drive begins to save ancient rock carvings

Native American petroglyph center proposed for Hagood Mill



Courtesy of the Pickens County Cultural Commission

Artist's renderings of the proposed South Carolina Rock Art Center at Hagood Mill near Pickens.

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A vision to preserve more than 40 Upstate petroglyphs — rock carvings chiseled into the landscape by prehistoric American Indians many lifetimes ago — pushed forward last week as local residents and officials announced a goal of $400,000 to create a South Carolina Rock Art Center in Pickens County.

It was the official launch of the capital campaign, called "Preserving a Place of Ancient Voices," that is being spearheaded by the Pickens County Cultural Commission in hopes of raising the money to create a state-of-the-art facility at the Hagood Mill Historic Site and Folklife Center.

"They will go away unless we save them, and this will give us a great opportunity to do that," said Allen Coleman, executive director of the Pickens County Museum and the Pickens County Cultural Commission.

Coleman said the center "will be a unique experience of Native American art and culture worthy of academics, as well as tourists."

He said it's hard to determine the age of the carvings but said they are thought to be more than 1,000 years old.

The carvings, including abstracts and 17 rare human figures, were discovered in 2003 in a large rock outcropping on the Hagood Mill property by the S.C. Rock Art Survey team, Coleman said.

Dennis Chastain, a naturalist who was part of the efforts, said many of the petroglyph sites discovered during the survey are at high elevations and are hard to reach.

"That precludes much of the population from going to see them," he said, describing the significance of a location like this on public land that is easily accessible.

Ed Bolt, site manager for the Hagood Mill, said images of those harder to reach sites — sites that many people would never have a chance to see — will also be at the center. He said what is planned is a two-room structure built directly over the mill site's petroglyphs.