Local attractions among Best of the Road

Staff Reports

PICKENS — American map maker Rand McNally has brought nationwide attention to Table Rock State Park, Kudzu Kabin Designs, Hagood Mill and Split Creek Farm as "must-see" destinations in the annual Best of the Road program.

The Pendleton District's State Park, artist's studio, historic site and goat farm are recognized in Rand McNally's 2010 Road Atlas. The Atlas contains five Best of the Road trips and editor's picks, along with helpful trip-planning tools, from detailed maps to mileage charts.

"Every year our editors seek out and drive some of the best, most scenic road trip routes in the nation to find our Best of the Road winners," said Rand McNally Editorial Director Laurie Borman. "The spots we've highlighted really capture the charm and local flavor of the destination."

Table Rock State Park, Kudzu Kabin Designs and Split Creek Farm are among of a handful of stops identified on the trip through the Pendleton District, the historic name for Anderson, Oconee and Pickens counties. Each trip also contains photos, an inset map and other similar destinations.

"Research shows that Americans are increasingly choosing to take shorter trips closer to home," Borman said. "These road trips give out-of-towners as well as locals a taste of 'the best' in that region."

Table Rock State Park hosts thousands of visitors annually to enjoy the natural beauty of the region. Hiking trails, a lodge and picnic shelters built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, monthly bluegrass jam sessions, and overnight accommodations are among the amenities found at Table Rock.

"The natural beauty of the 1930s lodge overlooking both the Table Rock Lake and Table Rock Mountain appeal to young couples who are planning their weddings, so we host quite a number of weddings here. And, the lodge has a long history as a community gathering place. The bluegrass weekends that showcase our indigenous music are a great extension of the park's outreach to local folks and visitors alike," said Poll Knowland, park manager at Table Rock.

Cherokee artist Nancy Basket's studio, Kudzu Kabin Designs, features products made from the leaves, vines and blossoms of the kudzu plant. "With tubers that can weigh as much as 300 pounds, kudzu has thrived in this region of South Carolina," said the artist who saw beauty in the kudzu plant and recognized its potential as a medium for her art. Her kudzu paper, kudzu vine baskets, kudzu jelly and other products made from locally available natural products have made her eco-friendly work highly sought after.

As a part of the Pickens County Museum, Hagood Mill brings history to life. The gift shop and office are open Wednesday thru Saturday from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., but the site, open during daylight hours as a park, comes alive the third weekend of each month when the mill is grinding corn into grits and meal and artisans and re-enactors are demonstrating historic techniques for cooking, making musical instruments, blacksmithing or spinning wool into yarn, the same way local residents performed these daily tasks when the mill was a vital part of the local economy.

Recently discovered near the millstream are petroglyphs, which provide evidence that Native Americans enjoyed this site long before the arrival of the white settlers. "When the Rock Art Center is completed, these petroglyphs will become the only handicap accessible rock art drawings we know of," states Allan Coleman, Executive Director of Pickens County Museum.

At Split Creek Farm, visitors get more than a trip to the farm. They can sample award-winning products made from the milk produced by the largest goat farmstead operation east of the Mississippi — cheeses, fudge and yogurt, to name a few — or visit The Hen House to see the work of folk local artist, Pat Bell. Watching the kids at play takes on new meaning as the baby goats cavort with one another in the playpen.

"Split Creek Farm has enjoyed entertaining visitors to the region for many years," states Evin Evans, who co-owns the farm with artist, Pat Bell. "But, the 2010 Road Atlas recognition has definitely put us 'on the map'."