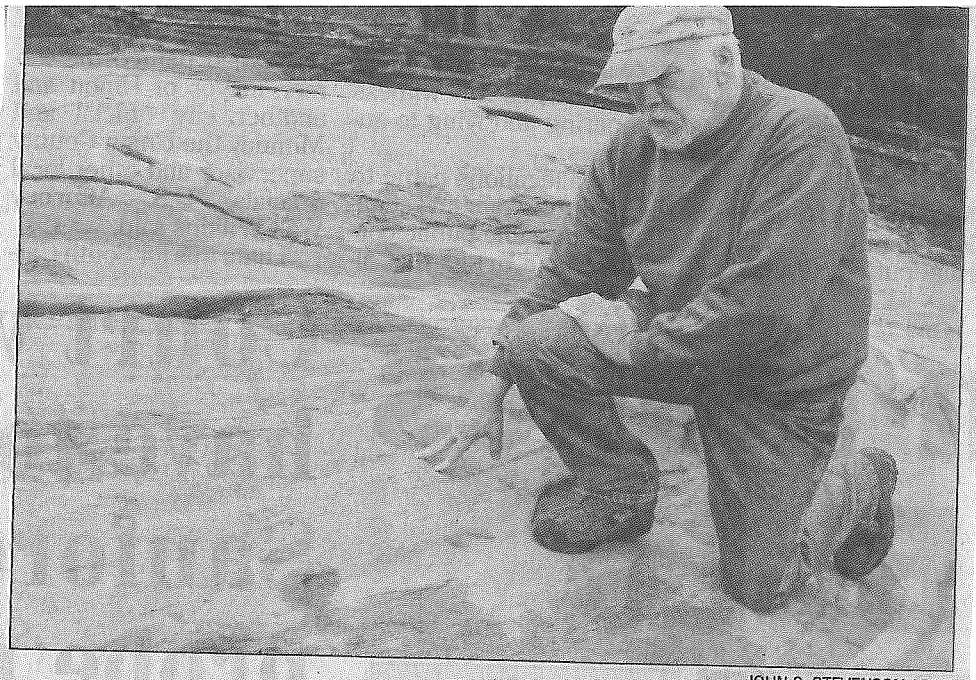


JOHN C. STEVENSON / Staff

Pickens County naturalist Dennis Chastain examines some of the petroglyphs that were carved into a rock outcropping on what is now the Hagood Mill Historic Site more than 1,000 years ago.

Experts urge preservation

Local effort begins to protect petroglyphs

Historic rock carvings at Hagood Mill near Pickens

By Julie Howle
STAFF WRITER
jhowle@greenvillenews.com

A vision to preserve more than 40 Upstate petroglyphs — rock carvings chiseled into the landscape by prehistoric American Indians centuries ago — took on new life Monday 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.

"The S.C. Rock Art Center, not just in South Carolina and the Southeast but also nationally, will be a unique experience of Native American art and culture worthy of academics as well as tourists," said Allen Coleman, executive director of the Pickens County Museum and the Pickens County Cultural Commission.

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 more than 40 carvings, including 17 rare human figures, were discovered in 2003 in a large rock outcropping on the Hagood Mill property.

Dennis Chastain, a naturalist who was part of the S.C. Rock Art Survey efforts, said many of the petroglyph sites discovered 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 harder-to-reach sites — sites that many people would never otherwise have a chance to see — will be at the center as well.

Coleman said $70,000 has been raised so far, including some grant money, for the project.

Plans to raise the rest include donations from the community, a variety of events to seek donations, corporate sponsorships, naming opportunities and grants.

He said work on the building can start as soon as the money is raised and said officials would like to see the center complete by 2011.