

Pickens exhibit touted as a destination

Petroglyphs will be protected in new facility

By John C. Stevenson

STAFF WRITER
jstevens@greenvilleonline.com

PICKENS — The latest attraction in Pickens County is centuries in the making — at least.

A groundbreaking ceremony Thursday afternoon at the Hagood Mill Historic Site officially marked construction of the South Carolina Rock Art Center,

the main portion of which will protect and highlight a rock outcropping that bears more than 30 prehistoric carvings.

Work is already underway, and the people who turned out in the mid-afternoon heat could see how the building's footings actually fit the contours of the outcropping it will house.

Tommy Charles, a retired state

archeologist and author of "South Carolina Rock Art," touted the accessibility of both the center and the site itself, and he predicted it will become "a very, very special place in Pickens County."

"What makes this site so important — so special — is where it is," Charles said.

"Most of the sites that we have discovered are out in the boonies where you have to be in excellent condition to hike into them, if you

can get to them at all, or they're on private property where they are off limits. Or they are right here."

The petroglyphs first gained attention when Charles, then a professor at the University of South Carolina, was creating a survey of rock-art sites in the state.

Of the 64 sites on the survey, Charles said, Hagood Mill is "the

See **ROCK ART** on page 5B

ROCK ART

FROM PAGE 1B

only place in the state that lends itself to preservation and presentation."

Local outdoorsman and environmentalist Dennis Chastain put the center's importance in a different context.

"Every year, the Pickens County School District sends busloads of children down to the coast of South Carolina to learn about coastal ecology and the Gullah culture," he said.

"I think now the tables are going to be turned. I think there are going to be people not only from the coast of South Carolina, but from throughout the Southeast coming to see this really unique, one-of-a-kind example of rock art."

The center will include an interpretive gallery featuring images from other rock-art sites in the state, in addition to a second room which encloses the petroglyphs themselves.

The carvings are worn and can be difficult to see, so the viewing area will feature special lighting to accentuate the petroglyphs, and a handicapped-accessible catwalk from which they can be viewed.

There is no way to accurately date the petroglyphs, Charles said. They are at least centuries old, and could be much older.

In describing the petroglyphs, which include 18 drawings of people in addition to several abstract carvings, Pickens County Museum Executive Director Allen Coleman said, "Those ancient voices pecked into that outcropping were created before American history was ever written."

Fundraising for the construction of the center began in 2005, and construction started this spring. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of the year.