

Work progresses at mill's Rock Art Center

'Still a few dollars short'

By Julie Howle

Pickens County News

jhowle@greenvillenews.com

Construction is nearing completion on the South Carolina Rock Art Center that will preserve a piece of the area's history and serve as a tourism destination in Pickens County.

The center is designed to protect and display petroglyphs that were found carved on a large rock at the site of the Hagood Mill Historic Site and Folklife Center near Pickens.

More than 40 petroglyphs, including 17 human stick figures, were discovered on the rock in 2003, said Ed Bolt, site manager for the Hagood Mill Historic Site and Folklife Center.

Bolt said it is believed the carvings date back more than 1,000 years and were likely created by prehistoric American Indians.

Allen Coleman, executive director of the Pickens County Cultural Commission, which runs Hagood Mill and the Pickens County Museum of Art and History, said, "It's kind of hard to date them exactly, but we know they're at least 1,000 years old."

Construction on the center could be finished in a few weeks, and then work on displays and interior presentations will begin, Coleman said.

"We're still a few dollars short on getting everything we need to build those (interior presentations), and so we're still trying to raise a few funds," he said.

Coleman said they need about \$25,000 to \$30,000 to help complete what needs to be done, and donations can be made to the Pickens County Mu-



Ed Bolt, site manager for Hagood Mill, said fundraising is under way to help complete the South Carolina Rock Art Center. PAUL BROWN/CONTRIBUTOR

seum specifying they are for the Rock Art Center.

If fundraising goes well, Coleman said he hopes the center will open by summer.

"I think it will be a real target for school groups as well as higher education, scholarly research and archeological buffs, people that just are interested in those kinds of things," he said.

"We're trying to make this completely accessible to mobility-impaired, sight-impaired and hearing-impaired," Coleman said.

Bolt said the center has two rooms.

One will have displays and photographs, including hands-on exhibits for

the sight-impaired and others and a photo gallery of other rock art in the state, he said. The other room will have a ramp around the rock with proper lighting to exhibit the petroglyphs, Bolt said.

"I don't know of anything exactly like this center anywhere close around here," he said.

Coleman said the construction cost for the center was about \$250,000. About \$200,000 came from private donations and grants, and about \$50,000 came from Pickens County's accommodations tax fund, he said.

"I think it could bring a lot more visitors to the area," Coleman said.

"Not only is it some-

thing that our local day trip visitors from neighboring counties would enjoy ... but being such a significant site it will, I think, increase the Lowcountry and out-of-state visitors," he said.

He said this is a "wonderful piece of our history."

"It was almost gone, and we were able to save it in such a way that it can be shared with everyone," Coleman said. "That's something that all of us can be very proud of."

Many petroglyph sites are not accessible to the general public, Coleman said. "They're either on private property or very difficult-to-reach places," he said.