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The Hagood Mill Petroglyph Site
By Tommy Charles

Built in 1825 by Benjamin Hagood, Hagood gristmill is the centerpiece of a National Register property owned by Pickens County, South Carolina. The Hagood Mill Historic Site and Folklife Center is managed by the Pickens County Museum, and the mill and several surrounding acres serve as a public park that attracts thousands of visitors annually.

Hagood Mill is located at the head of a small floodplain and adjacent to a boldly flowing creek entering the valley from hills lying to the north. Approximately 75 meters north of the mill, a boulder extends across the creek, creating a small cascade. This boulder extends westward onto land, becoming considerably larger in that direction. Remnants of a road constructed during the 1820’s, the first public road from Pickens, South Carolina, to Rosman, North Carolina, cover the westernmost portion of the rock. This rock contains a number of recently discovered petroglyphs.

In January of 2003, Michael Bramlett, a volunteer with the South Carolina Petroglyph Survey, was passing near Hagood Mill on a rainy day and decided to inspect the rock under those conditions. Although only faintly visible, Mike was able to determine that a number of small human figures were carved into the rock. We followed up on Mike’s discovery by visiting the site at night to inspect the rock with lights. By using lights to skim the rock’s surface, we were able to better define the carvings. Examination of the rock resulted in discovery of several additional petroglyphs that were eroded almost to extinction.

Returning to the site during the day, we removed a small portion of the old roadbed and discovered several additional human figures buried beneath the soil. Encouraged by discovery of these buried petroglyphs, we requested and received permission from the Pickens County Museum to remove the remainder of the roadbed. Prior to excavation, we used a steel rod to probe and determine the rock perimeter and soil depths; we then removed the shallow soils by hand.

A backhoe loaned to us by the City of Pickens was used to remove the thicker and harder packed roadbed and to place a trench around the exposed rock. Loose soil was then shoveled into the trench by hand and the rock washed with a hose to remove the clay residue. After cleaning, the rock was again examined with lights at night. Eight petroglyphs were found beneath the road fill and a total of 31 were discovered on the entire rock.

Eighteen are human figures, predominately male forms. Four of the...
male figures are enclosed in separate ‘boxes,’ or structures; all of these were located beneath the old road that covered a portion of the site. None of the human forms on the portion of the rock that was not beneath the road are similarly enclosed. There are nine abstract motifs, a single ‘deer track,’ a cupule and two historic carvings consisting of a name and a set of initials. The name and initials are scratched into the rock, as opposed to all of the other carvings, which are pecked and believed to be prehistoric.

All but one of the buried carvings was in a better state of preservation than those that were exposed. The discovery of the carvings buried under the roadbed indicates that they were there prior to its 1820s construction and supports a probable prehistoric origin for most of the glyphs. The historic period name and initials are on a portion of the rock that was never covered by the road.

A new South Carolina Rock Art Interpretive Center is now in construction and should be completed by December 2011. The center will be a two-room structure built directly over the mill site’s petroglyphs for their permanent protection and display. The center will be located about 200 feet upstream from the old Hagood Mill. One room will house the rock and viewing platform. Artifacts, photographic images, and displays from the 10-year South Carolina Rock Art Survey will occupy the second room. The building exterior will echo the historic mill with lap siding and rock foundation. We also encourage the public to visit Hagood Mill on the third Saturday of each month, register for the numerous field school classes offered each year, and walk the tremendously diverse nature trail.

In South Carolina and the Southeast, the South Carolina Rock Art Center will be a unique experience of Native American art and culture, worthy of academics and tourists. It will become a significant site for academic field trips, suitable for every third or eighth grade South Carolina history class in the state. The facility will serve to protect and preserve a significant piece of our cultural and archaeological history in a manner that also makes it accessible and easily available to the public.

The Pickens County Museum is operated by the County of Pickens and is recognized by the South Carolina Secretary of State’s Public Charities Division as a Charitable Non-Profit Institution. As such, this contribution to the Museum and Rock Art Center is fully tax-deductible. It is our hope that you will enjoy the opportunities to be made available through this wonderful endeavor as well as the many programs and field school offered through the Hagood Mill Historic Site and Folklife Center and the Pickens County Museum of Art and History.

Part of this article has been taken from a brochure printed by Pickens County. For more information on the South Carolina Rock art Center, please contact the Pickens County Museum, 307 Johnson Street, Pickens, SC, 29671, (864) 898-5963, http://www.co.pickens.sc.us/CulturalCommission/CurrentEvents.