



Yavapai Observation Station Re-Dedication

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act has allowed for more than \$1.5 million to be dedicated to the structural rehabilitation and more than \$300,000 to the exhibit redesign of Yavapai (YA – vah - pie) Observation Station. This cooperative effort between the National Park Service, including the Harpers Ferry Design Center; the U.S. Geological Survey; Cal Wadsworth Construction; Chase Design Studio; Southern Customs Exhibits; noted local geologists; park staff; and many others has resulted in an interpretive “trailside museum” much as was envisioned by the founders in 1928.

Yavapai Observation Station – Making “the out-of-doors intelligible”

The founders of the museum, originally named the Yavapai Point Trailside Museum, imagined a series of educational and inspirational exhibits that would allow visitors to see and understand the complicated geology of the Grand Canyon with simplicity. Their vision included construction in the spirit of local architect for the Fred Harvey Company, Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter – a building that would seem to blend into the landscape with a flat roof to mimic the canyon rim. The use of this pueblo-style architecture led to the semi-circular observation terrace, rough-hewn limestone boulders, and exposed wooden beams.

One of the first interpretive and educational facilities in the national park system

Herbert C. Maier designed the museums for Norris Geyser Basin in Yellowstone National Park, and Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park to great acclaim. John C. Merriam, then Chairman of the National Park Service Educational Committee, a University of California – Berkeley trained paleontologist and later president of the Carnegie Institute of Washington, collaborated with an impressive group of noted scientists and scholars to design this museum as a way to bring the park to the people. Funding came from private benefactors including John C. Merriam, as well as the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, American Museums Association, National Academy of Sciences, and the Carnegie Institute of Washington.

The building allows visitors to experience the grandeur of the canyon while giving them the tools to understand the geology. This building’s importance to the park, and our history as a service, is expressed in the founders’ significance statement - “The Yavapai Observation Station is a spectacularly designed example of the Park Service’s pursuit of a singular and aesthetically appropriate architecture for the park system.”

The Yavapai Observation Station began the educational and interpretive movement at one of the grandest parks in the system. This building gave park visitors a chance to understand the seemingly incomprehensible ideas of geologic time and space. It gave park rangers a place to teach about the rocks, and the river, and climate change, and scenery. It provided an “exhibit-in-place” - an example of what water can do to rock, and what rock contributes to a landscape. The beautifully crafted artwork, powerful photographs, and interpretive text allows visitors to experience and understand the complicated geologic story. These exhibits serve as a catalyst for visitors to seek out the canyon resources on their own, and to experience intellectually and emotionally the powerful geologic processes still at work on the canyon today.

The Re-Dedication of an NPS Classified Structure

Yavapai Observation Station is significant for its role both as a ground-breaking interpretive structure, and its rustic architecture – that of “melding the built environment into the natural landscape”. The new exhibitry allows the visiting public to make connections, intellectually and emotionally, to the forces that sculpted the canyon walls. Using multiple sensory experiences (sight, touch, sound) these exhibits encourage participation and active understanding of the forces that formed the Grand Canyon. Housed within a building of historic significance both locally and nationally, visitors may also get a sense of atmosphere anticipated by the early founders.

From a social science perspective, visitors may also learn about the founders, as they become immersed in the full story of this interpretive structure.

Keeping the continuity of partnership

Much as was the original plan, the current exhibit plan was completed in a partnership. Without the participation of the following, and many others too plentiful to name, this project would not be what it is today:

Major Partners

Grand Canyon National Park staff, with special thanks to Ellen “Sissy” Seeley, Branch Chief of Interpretive Planning and Media Development; Carl Bowman, Air Quality Specialist; Jim Heywood and Allyson Mathis, Interpretive Rangers, and Michael Terzich, Project Management;

Paul Cloyd, National Park Service, Denver Service Center; Chris Dearing, Justin Radford, Neil MacKay and Terry Lindsay, National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Design Center;

Grand Canyon Association;

Michael Lieber, Cal Wadsworth Construction;

Greg Morrow, Southern Customs Exhibits, and Terry Chase, Chase Studios;

Many well known photographers; including Gary Ladd, Michael Collier, Liz Hymans, Tom Bean, and Michael Buchheit;

Wayne Ranney, local author on Grand Canyon geology, Dr. Ron Blakey geology professor at Northern Arizona University, and Drs. Karl Karlstrom and Laura Crossey from the University of New Mexico Department of Geology;

George Billingsley, Geologist, United States Geological Survey.

More information at: http://www.nps.gov/grca/parknews/20070524yav_rededication.htm

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