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Historic Yavapai Observation Station rededicated at Grand Canyon National Park

Grand Canyon, Ariz. – Seventy-five people gathered under a warm spring sun for the rededication of Yavapai Observation Station on the South Rim of Grand Canyon National Park Thursday, May 24, 2007. Grand Canyon National Park Superintendent Steve Martin, Deputy Secretary of the Interior Lynn Scarlett, and U.S. Geological Survey geologist George Billingsley were the keynote speakers.

The project to renovate Yavapai Observation Station is a cooperative effort that has spanned several years. It has involved the dedication of park staff, the U.S. Geological Survey, the private sector, local geologists and many others. The renovations have resulted in an interpretive setting envisioned by the building's founders.

Originally named the Yavapai Point Trailside Museum, the observation station was first dedicated in July of 1928. It was built so that visitors could observe and better understand Grand Canyon's geology. The founders imagined a series of education and inspirational exhibits that would allow visitors to see and understand the complicated geology of the Grand Canyon. "We begin to comprehend not simply this place, but a whole planet," said Scarlett. "Layer by layer, we walk through 1.7 billion years of time – a stretch of time nearly half the age of this Earth."

A large component of recent renovations was the installation of all new multimedia exhibits. Displays include beautifully crafted artwork, powerful photographs, and interpretive text, which allow visitors to see and understand the canyon's geologic story. Visitors can view a Colorado River video, which explains erosion,

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rock movement and sedimentation. A computer-enhanced movie of plateau building and sea encroachment displays millions of years of geological events in less than 30 seconds. “A lot of effort went into these renovations and the displays help bring the canyon alive for visitors,” said Martin.

Yavapai Observation Station is not only significant for its role as a groundbreaking interpretive structure, but also for its rustic architecture. Inspired by the work of renowned architect Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter, Herbert C. Maier designed the building to blend into its setting and used indigenous Kaibab limestone and ponderosa pine in its construction. “Its architecture reminds us of human achievement and our powers of perception, creation and contemplation,” said Scarlett. Current renovations to the building included stone work; the replacement of the roof, log vigas, beams and exterior lighting; installation of a fire detection and sprinkler system and more efficient interior lighting; and improvements to the asphalt pathways.

The museum’s site was originally selected by a team of noted scientists and scholars led by John C. Merriam, who was also instrumental in securing grant funding for the project from the American Association of Museums. An exhibit is dedicated to these early leaders, whose vision encouraged the cooperative funding and philanthropic efforts that brought this building to fruition. Funding for current renovations comes directly from park entrance fees through the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.

Yavapai Observation Station was built and recently renovated to convey the story of Grand Canyon’s geology, which according to Scarlett is our “greatest teacher of history.” Billingsley, who worked with renowned Grand Canyon geologist Edwin McKee, stressed the importance of Yavapai in how it inspires future generations of scientists. The canyon has much to teach us, not only about the past, but the paths we take into the future.

For historic photographs of Yavapai Observation Station or photographs of the rededication ceremony, go to http://www.nps.gov/grca/parknews/20070524yav_rededication.htm.

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