

Ozark

National Scenic Riverways



Superintendent Bill Black

Monday, May 12, 2014

Riverways Reflections

Lately I've received some questions about the preservation work that is beginning at Alley Mill and the timing of the work this summer, rather than in the winter. I want to address a couple of concerns I've heard, discuss some of the issues that have prompted the critical preservation efforts, and share some improvements that we will be able to incorporate at the same time.

In the past couple of months we've provided some updates about engineering assessments that were recently done on Alley Mill. As a result of the recommendations we received from specialists in historic preservation, we determined that there is a need for immediate repairs to protect the mill from possibly falling down. In addition to fixing some extremely serious damage to the foundation of Alley Mill, we will be replacing the roof, painting the exterior, upgrading the alarm system, and making the walkway to the mill and the first floor fully accessible to our visitors with mobility impairments.

The overriding issues are the safety and preservation of Alley Mill. We were informed by our engineers that the previous 100 years of water running through the mill race has eroded the concrete foundation and that it could fail. We will be installing a sheet of steel between the concrete and the water to insure there is no further deterioration until the race can be fully repaired in the future. At the same time, the large tree at the edge of the mill will need to be removed because the roots have grown into the foundation and impacted the stability of the mill. Between these two major structural problems, we feel that the repairs need to be done as soon as possible to insure that we do not lose this historic icon which has so much meaning to our visitors and the local communities. It would be an irreplaceable loss to the park and the state of Missouri.

This work requires an extensive scaffolding system that is expensive to rent and erect, but which will be used for both the roof and exterior painting. It would have been very expensive to have done this in two stages. Work needs to be done in the summer when the weather conditions are better, because we would have lost too many work days if done over the winter. The construction work for the new walkway and ramp into the mill will cause the ground to be in disrepair for a time and could not be done easily during wet spring or fall weather.

During this period we will have a lot of heavy equipment near the mill, which is a safety hazard for the public. We have installed safety fence, but made it possible for visitors to get as close to the building as is safe. Starting in mid-May we will station a ranger at that location during the day to answer questions and explain the work. I understand the disappointment at having Alley Mill closed this summer, but feel the end result will be worth the temporary inconvenience.

In reviewing our Facebook page, people seem to understand the need for this preservation work. Some have expressed concern about the large tree at the corner of the mill that has to be removed. Everyone seems to understand the need for its removal, but many expressed hope that the wood from the tree could be used and not just discarded, and we are working on a number of ways to do so.

Unless we run into unforeseen problems or delays, our goal is to have Alley Mill completely open for the Haunting in the Hills special event in October. 2014 is also the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Riverways and having the work done this year seems to be a nice present to the community and a good way to start off the next 50 years. Also, in 2017 Alley Mill is scheduled to be on the "America the Beautiful" quarter for the State of Missouri which the U.S. Mint will produce. We expect this will generate even more tourism to the park and surrounding region.

I hope this has addressed any questions you have about the work at Alley Mill this summer. We invite the public to visit Alley Spring to view the work as it proceeds and visit with a park ranger about the progress of the preservation efforts. We will continue to provide updates on the park's Facebook page. For additional information, you can call park headquarters at (573)323-4236.

Ozark National Scenic Riverways preserves the free-flowing Current and Jacks Fork Rivers, the surrounding natural resources, and the unique cultural heritage of the Ozark people. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/ozar or Facebook.

Comments? Write to:

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