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ON THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

Tales from the Trail

%%headline%%**Old hikers shelter to be dismantled, rebuilt at museum**

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BY CHRIS A. COUROGEN
Of The Patriot-News

Sometimes you need to destroy something to save it. That is why a legendary Appalachian Trail hikers shelter atop Peters Mountain will be torn down Saturday.

Built in the early 1960s by the first guy to walk the entire 2,175-mile path from Georgia to Maine in one continuous hike, the tiny lean-to -- constructed by trail legend Earl Shaffer from 55 small logs, a few buckets of mortar and a sheet of tin -- has not gotten much use since a new shelter was constructed nearby in 1993. Officially it doesn't even have a name, not since the designation "Peters Mountain Shelter" was usurped by the new shelter, which dwarfs the original.

"It was supposed to be removed when the new shelter was built," said Jeff Buehler, trailmaster for the Susquehanna Appalachian Trail Club, which maintains the shelter and about 20 miles of the trail.

But some club members balked. The shelter is the last standing of a half-dozen constructed by Shaffer, who died in 2002 and whose status stems from more than just his pioneering 1948 trek.

When the York-area native was not hiking the trail -- he completed three through hikes, the last at the age of 79 -- he was busy helping care for it. In the 1950s, he was instrumental in relocating some 70 miles of the trail in the midstate to what, for the most part, is its current path.

"The club decided to leave the shelter as long as it was usable, but it was no longer actively maintained," Buehler said.

The new shelter sleeps more than 25 people. Shaffer's shelter is the smallest still in use on the trail, according to Appalachian Trail Conservancy spokeswoman Laurie Potteiger. The shelter provides cramped quarters for four hikers.

"It has the feeling of belonging to a different era. Especially juxtapositioned next to the Peters Mountain Shelter, which is one of the largest, most elaborate shelters on the trail," Potteiger said.

Hiker Bert Connelly, 68, of St. Petersburg, Fla., was examining the old shelter, but sleeping in the new one, last weekend.

"That's real primitive living," Connelly said. "It's a true lean-to. It couldn't meet today's requirements, with the numbers of hikers."

That does not mean it was not still used. The stone ring in front of the open end of the three-sided structure holds ashes from recent fires. Many initials carved in the wood note that those visits were made in recent years.

"It still gets use," Buehler said. "People go down there to get away from the crowds at the big shelter."

After Saturday that won't be an option. A work party will convene on the site for a small ceremony honoring the 60th anniversary of Shaffer's first through hike. Then they will dismantle the shelter, hauling it out on foot three miles to the nearest trailhead parking area, to be preserved as a centerpiece exhibit for a proposed Appalachian Trail Museum.

"We will consider that our most important artifact," said Larry Luxenberg, president of the Appalachian Trail

Museum Society.

Not all of the shelter will be saved. In 1983, the conservancy modified the structure, which was then known officially as the Earl Shaffer Shelter, adding a wooden floor and covering the original metal roof with a sheet of rubber roofing material. Those additions displeased Shaffer enough to bring him to ask the club to remove his name from the shelter.

Plans call for the museum to be housed in the 150-year-old mill building near the general store in Pine Grove Furnace State Park, the unofficial halfway point of the trail. A concept plan was accepted by the state.

Luxenberg hopes the museum society will navigate remaining red tape in time for hiking season next spring, though, he says, "I don't know how realistic that is."

The museum will house a variety of artifacts, including one of the wheels used by Myron Avery to measure the original sections of the trail. It also hopes to become a central repository for trail registers, notebooks signed by hikers at locations along the route.

And it will house the Shaffer Shelter, most likely indoors, protected from the elements, sans floor and rubber roof.

"[Earl Shaffer] was a pathblazer. He was a unique person," Luxenberg said. "We will restore it to the way Earl built it as much as we can."

CHRIS A. COUROGEN: 255-8112 or ccourogen@patriot-news.com

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