



NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF PINE CREEK MILL

WINTER 2023

“complicated gadgets performing simple tasks”

It was a busy year at Pine Creek. Here are the highlights. A big thank you to all involved. Volunteers. Heather and Rita and the rest of the interpreters. Park staff. And teachers who brought their students.

INTERPRETATION

Attendance broke a record with 11,353 visitors. For part of the 2023 season, Friends experimented with increasing hours that the mill is open. It was a **huge success**. The mill was open 33 hours per week during peak season, as opposed to the traditional 20 hours.



What did we do? It was open in the morning for the first time. Afternoon hours were increased. Attendance was up about 30% in the months we increased hours. We also experimented with opening Fridays in the fall -- 10 AM to 5 PM.



The world came to Pine Creek. Visitors came from 39 states and the countries of Ukraine, Kuwait, France, Canada, Australia, Brazil, England, Spain, Mexico, Germany, and Ghana (Africa). It was probably more than that since many people do not sign the guest book. One day we had about 100 refugees from Burma.

The mill was part of the Park's expanded summer day camp program. About 366 campers came, mostly from Ys in Iowa City and Rock Island.

In the spring, 930 children with adults came for school field trips. They came from schools in Muscatine and from surrounding communities. We also hosted home school groups.



Our interpretation program relies on donations - corporate, private, and visitor donations. Even though the mill is in a state park, no funds for interpretation come from the State of Iowa. Because of expanded hours our expenses increased to \$20,000 in 2023. We hope to continue the expanded program in 2024.



BIG NEWS for 2024 American Cruise Lines has scheduled 10 passenger side trips to the mill in 2024.

TAKING CARE OF THE MILL AND CABIN

If you participated on the restoration crew in the past and would like to be involved again, please contact Chuck at 618-977-3909. If you have not been involved before but would like to help, please contact Chuck.

Chuck has finished rebuilding and staining the shutters for 38 windows. Due to settling and aging each window needed a custom-built set of shutters. There will be a period where the shutters will appear a different color than the body of the mill.

This massive project will help keep the pesty bats out of the mill. Some people will miss them. But bats are a health hazard to humans. They carry Histoplasmosis. With the excess wood, Chuck has made some beautiful cutting boards and trivets to sell in the store.



Friends member Ryan Schneider sprayed wood preservative on the cabin logs this fall.

Chuck sealed the wood on the deck to preserve it.

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) created a new "State Parks of Iowa Fund 2023" small grant program. We were lucky to be one of only 6 projects in Iowa to be funded. It will be used to replace worn out flat belting such as in the photo. These pilot grants will be used as case studies and stories to share with future potential applicants and with potential donors.



Chuck gives us this interesting perspective: "If you've ever wondered how much it would "cost" Mr. Benjamin Nye to build the Mill today in 2023, think about this. Keeping things very, very simple...please keep that in mind. Mr. Nye "spent" approximately \$10,000 in 1848-dollars to build the Mill. Inflation rates in the United States only began to be tracked in 1913, with the creation of the Federal Income Tax, the Federal Reserve and the tracking of the Consumer Price Index (basket of things). So, if we take the \$10,000 and track what that would be equivalent to in 2023, starting in 1913, the first set of recorded data (even though the Mill was built in 1848), the Mill would "cost" well more than \$314,070 to build. Probably closer to \$380,000, but without reliable, recorded data, it's still interesting to look at the numbers."

A NEW FACE



If you see this new face around Wildcat Den, say hello. This is new staff member Jordan Parsons and his family. Jordan is the new State Park Technician.

"My name is Jordan Parsons, and I am the new State Park Technician at Wildcat Den State Park. Working for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources has been a goal of mine since I was a kid. I grew up in Fort Dodge, Iowa. I obtained my Bachelor of Science degree from Southern New Hampshire University. I have worked seasonally with the Department of Natural Resources in 2022 at George Wyth State Park and recently finished my service term with Green Iowa AmeriCorps. I gained valuable, hands-on experience at George Wyth and through AmeriCorps that helped prepare me for the position at Wildcat Den State Park. I have been married to my wonderful wife, Jennifer, for seven years. My wife and I have two amazing daughters, Aspen and Laurel. I enjoy spending time with my family. I'm an avid fisherman and enjoy spending time outdoors. I'm grateful for the opportunity to work for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and am excited to get to work."

IOWA PUBLIC TV SHOOT

We had some VIPs at the Pine Creek Grist Mill this summer. Dan and Kenny came out from Johnston, IA, to shoot some video, and to interview two of our volunteers. The final product will air on IPTV next spring, as part of a series showcasing Iowa's portion of the Great River Road. The journalists posed questions about the mill's history, the mill's machinery, and what makes this place so extra special.



WEB SITE

Our Web site is long in the tooth (that means it has been around a while). In the near future we plan to begin updating and modernizing it.

DO YOU WANT TO BE INVOLVED?

Do you desire to become one of our members? We have a good crew of active volunteers that do much to help us interpret the mill, restore/preserve it, promote it, or just help out as needed. Contact any of the officers.

BANDAG TO THE RESCUE

After a record breaking year, the mill needed a good cleaning. Bandag did it for us. A big thank you to this crew from Bandag #4. They were part of United Way's corporate Community Day of Caring.



Here is our newest interpretation display. The grinding stones and the turbine (in the middle) were donated a few years ago and now are finally on display outside the Mill. The bronze turbine weighs about 1,500 pounds. The power of flowing water is incredible.



MILL HISTORY WE DIDN'T KNOW

Recently the park received a letter from Alan Chittick. He was a summer staff member in the 1970s. He confirmed that there was a non-functional water wheel on the mill installed in the 1950s. But it was destroyed after about 2 weeks by a tree brought downstream by a flood. This photo depicts the reinforcing concrete that he describes (at the top of the stone wall). Below is part of his letter.

Hello,

My name is Alan Chittick. I am so happy to see the restoration work on the mill and one room school.

In the summer of 1971 I worked as a Park Attendant with Gary Gallart (Park Officer) at Wildcat Den. That was a special year in the history of the work on the mill and also the one room school. During that summer the schoolhouse had just arrived and was set on the current foundation. One of my jobs that summer was to paint the inside of the schoolhouse. Every day of paint was stepping back into history.

Also during that summer every Thursday I took some time to sweep out the mill so I could open it on weekends to allow people to come inside to walk around. The basement was closed off so no one could see the old steamboat boiler, but people enjoyed walking around the rest of it.

Why was it an important year for the mill ... it was the summer Gary and I formed up and poured the concrete retainer wall around the foundation that you see today. One of my assignments that summer was to daily crawl through the hole in the corner of the mill that had been broken out from a tree that had hit it during a previous spring flood. Over time it had filled up with mud that had to be removed so we could build forms behind the stone foundation. At the time a person could not stand up under that area so I had to crawl under, then scoop out the blue-green smelly stuff with a shovel. When I got that dug out we were able to build the forms behind, then in front of the old stone foundation. To get the original look of the foundation my other assignment was to wade into the creek to find the original stones that had broken out of the wall. At first I thought that would be a tough order, but found those stones pretty easy to identify. Maybe interesting to know ... wading back and forth to bring the foundation stones back to the stream bank was too time consuming, so I asked Curt Noble, the officer at Fairport Station to bring down his new International tractor with the front end loader so I could throw the stones into the bucket.



To this day I have a lingering smell of the daily “mud shoveling” from under the mill. It was awful!

I am so happy that the “Friends” organization has formed, and hope it will continue to provide a glimpse of history to future generations.



The generosity of donors makes it possible for us to host visitors and provide our school program. Below is a list of the donors as of the writing of the newsletter. In addition to those listed below, many people have donated important smaller amounts.

“When you see the folks giving tours of the Mill and working on the Mill, know that they are part of the Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill and not state employees. The Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill is a registered 501(c)(3) non profit organization. So, when you graciously give a cash donation in the donation box or on your credit/debit card at the Mill, please know all of your donation stays with the Mill and gets turned right back in to keeping the Mill open for your enjoyment and education.” (Comment from Chuck.)

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How to contact us

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