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Covering ground with AFHA AmeriCorps members



Appalachian Forest Heritage Area

February 2014 E-Newsletter

Greetings,

Did you know that the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area covers approximately 10,500 square miles and spans eighteen counties within two states? You might wonder how we can ever get anything done over such a large area, in the mountains nonetheless.

Our AmeriCorps members are working with nonprofits and community organizations throughout the entire region, assisting with projects in conservation, historic preservation, and heritage development. Read below to hear stories from members working on projects in two very different parts of the state: Kyle Mills in Greenbrier County, and Julie DiBiase in Preston County.

West Virginia Stories

By Kyle Mills

AFHA Heritage AmeriCorps Member



SITES



~OF THE~ MONTH

Experience the heritage of your area! *Sites of the Month* spotlights events and locations within the region, based on AFHA's four themes: forestry,

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Mills, an avid caver, is pictured here (supported by fellow AFHA AmeriCorps members) after leading tours of the Sinks of Gandy and Stillhouse Cave.

I have served with AmeriCorps for nearly 17 months now, and I have spent a lot of time sitting at the same desk. Above my desk is a framed document found in the court house documents donated to the [Greenbrier Historical Society](#), and it is signed by Patrick Henry and dated 1778. 236 years ago Pat “Give Me Liberty” Henry picked up a quill pen and put his John Hancock on this document. In September 2012, my first month at the museum, I was blown away by this.



[Deep Creek Lake State Park](#)

Though the area was heavily logged around the turn of the century, 95% of the park's northern hardwood forest has returned. The Thayerville Fire Tower, also known as the Forestry Tower, was moved to the park and restored for public use. Fire towers were commonly used in the Potomac Highlands during the twentieth century to locate and fight wildfires. Today, in the winter months, snowmobile season lasts until March 15th!



[Philippi Covered Bridge](#)

The Philippi Covered Bridge was built in 1852 by Lemuel Chenoweth, one of America's master covered bridge builders. Made of yellow poplar

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Mills' desk at the Greenbrier Historical Society.

Photo: Kyle Mills.

Looking up at the Patrick Henry document above my desk now as I type this, 17 months from when I first saw it, it means something entirely different to me than when I first saw it. No longer am I star-struck by Patrick Henry's signature, but now the other names on the document mean more to me.

The document is from the founding of Greenbrier County, and it is appointing local residents to Justices of the Peace. The names are of some of the first pioneers in the area, the important movers and shakers who travelled into the wilderness before there was a United States of America. They also happen to have had large, extended families, and now over 200 years later people searching their family histories come in, tell me the surname they are researching, and I point to the document framed above my desk. The stories begin.

I feel like I almost know these past people, although I obviously don't, and I'm not related to them either. The head archivist James Talbert has taught me a great deal about the history of the area, mainly through many genealogical stories.

I have realized as historians, we are really just story tellers and more we know, the better the story is. It has always been this way. However, the [story of Patrick](#)

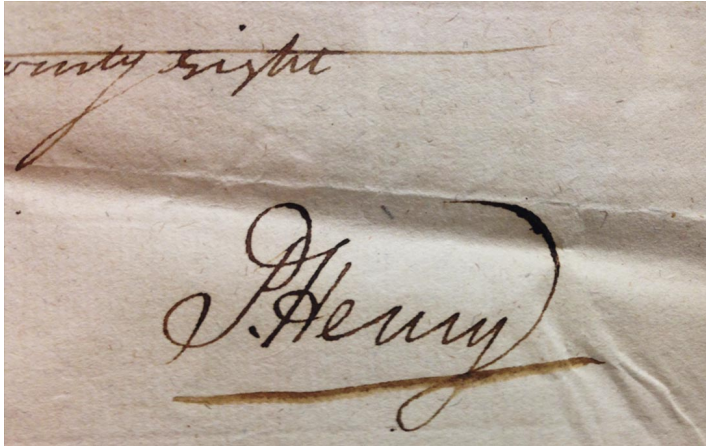
Truss, the 280.5 foot structure is the only remaining "double barreled" covered bridge serving a United States highway. Check out nearby Beverly, WV to see Lemuel Chenoweth's house, as well!



[Fasnacht](#) is a traditional pre-lenten celebration, and is honored in the small Swiss village of Helvetia, WV. Festivities will take place on Saturday, March 1st, featuring food, beverages, music, and browsing in local shops. Don't miss the creative, and quite often frightening, masks in a lively parade at 8:00 p.m., and browse through masks from previous Fasnacht celebrations at the Helvetia Mask Museum. The day culminates in a square dance and in the "burning of Old Man Winter."

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taught me, and now I am empowered tell other people the stories when they come in to research. This means a lot to me.



Patrick Henry's signature. Photo: Kyle Mills.

Little is known histories about people, places, and events fill the mountains of West Virginia. They are the stories that we should learn and tell. This is the natural progression of mankind's understanding of the present by looking at the past. Besides our caves, I believe the stories from the past are West Virginia's greatest "natural" resource. (I might be a little biased concerning that last statement.)

I Live on E Road

By Julie DiBiase
AFHA Heritage AmeriCorps Member

[Lost World Caverns](#)

offers a 4-hour trip through more than a mile of chambers and passageways. Explorers of all ages are welcome, but some agility is required to make your way through the cave. Visitors to Lost World Caverns often emerge from their tour a little dirtier than when they began, but the adventure is usually worth it! Always remember: caves stay relatively the same temperature year-round. Caving a great way to enjoy unique natural wonders during the winter!

Do you have a suggestion for *Sites of the Month*?

Email us at:

info@appalachianforest.us

and let us know your favorite sites throughout AFHA!

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DiBiase, pictured here at Blackwater Falls State Park, is serving with Arthurdale Heritage, Inc. Photo: Stephanie Petersen.

Where exactly Arthurdale, WV, begins and ends is a bit of a mystery. All of the 1,200 acres comprising Arthurdale are a National Historic District with white sided, two-story houses dotting the unusual rolling hills and farmland. It's quiet and serene except for what most residents agree to be the center of Arthurdale; the post office and directly across from it a non-profit named [Arthurdale Heritage, Inc](#) (AHI), where I'm stationed.

Arthurdale takes the meaning of "community" to a whole new level by including the phrase "outsiders welcome" within its definition. The residents of Arthurdale themselves were recently outsiders. As the nation's first New Deal community, many original homestead children (who are now around 60-80 years old) still live in the original family house they moved in to after the Great Depression. That means some of the residents of this community have been sharing adjacent backyards with each other for *over fifty years* which seems pretty uncommon nowadays.



Arthur Dale, West Virginia. Photo: Julie DiBiase.

Such a long standing relationship is pretty intimidating for an outsider. Word around here travels fast and from mouth to mouth. It takes years to figure out who is related to who, especially when everyone is related to someone. I learned quickly that balancing a non-profit in this environment can be tricky. Finding the balance between getting things done in the name of progress and not offending anyone requires a special knowledge of when to keep your mouth shut and when to speak up. Unlike other museums that call the shots on their own artifacts, our donors are still alive, kicking, and very involved.

But, you know, Iâ€™ve come to realize itâ€™s this involvement that separates Arthur Dale from the rest of the world. Just like they did eighty years ago, the residents still stand together to create a community that cares about what happens around them and, most importantly, what happens to each other. Within minutes of being in Arthur Dale I managed to sprain my foot in a ditch. Within the following minutes after the sprain, three people had stopped to make sure I was alright. Whenever my water freezes, two older gentlemen who exemplify chivalry come over to fix it so I donâ€™t have to go out in the cold. Iâ€™ve been invited in for wine while out on a walk. There were carolers at my door this winter. If anything seems off at my house (like a window open for an extended period of time), at least two people make sure everythingâ€™s ok.

So, itâ€™s actually quite bustling around here. You just have to know which barn door to open. Or road to

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