

# Birth of the Ozarks: Interactive exhibit shows Native American history

## The Baxter Bulletin

August 28, 2012

CALICO ROCK — Experiencing the new Native American exhibit at the Calico Rock Museum is like walking through history.

The Birth of the Ozarks, a walk-through, interactive exhibit that officially opens Sept. 8, shows how Native Americans lived in the Ozarks in the early 1800s and how the culture at that time changed.

“It’s finally telling the story of the birth of the Ozarks,” said Freda Cruse of the Sylamore area, an author and historian, who created the exhibit with Sue McCluskey of Guion.

The interior of the exhibit is designed as if it were an 1830s cabin and showcases Native American artifacts found in the area, such as stone farming tools, a nutting stone and arrowheads. It also features objects such as a rawhide drum, water gourd, deerskin dress, a shaman’s headdress, and a copy of Trail of Tears muster roll for the Benge Route.

The exhibit displays a stone tablet that contains the Cherokee alphabet, which was found a few months ago in an area within 10 miles of Calico Rock, Cruse said. She said the stone was authenticated and is estimated to be about 200 years old.

“Not only is it visual, it almost incorporates all the senses,” said McCluskey. “You can smell it, you can see it, you can feel it.”

Those involved with the museum say they hope it will educate others on the history of the area, and even enlighten local residents about their own ancestry.

“So many of our local people have Native American ancestry, but don’t know anything about it,” said Wayne Wood, board member of Calico Rock Museum Foundation. “This is bringing them back to their roots.”

Cruse gave an extensive history of the time, explaining how the Native Americans had allied with the British. In the early 1800s, several factors caused Native Americans to disperse, including a series of earthquakes from 1810-1812 and the War of 1812, Cruse said. Cherokees invited the Shawnees to the area, and Cruse explained how a new culture began to form after the Native Americans lived with the British.

Both Cruse and McCluskey are descendants of Nancy Ward of the Cherokee tribe, who saved Lydia Russell Bean, a white woman who had been captured by the tribe, Cruse said. Ward saved her because she saw Bean had skills they could use, she said.

The end result was “the blending of two cultures that drew the best of each other,” Cruse said.

As visitors walk out of the exhibit, they will see a sign that reads, “What happened to the Native Americans? We’re still here.”

The Birth of the Ozarks exhibit was funded by Nikki Lee Atwell Foundation and is supported by the Calico Rock Museum Foundation.

The opening of the exhibit will coincide with Native American Day, which will be 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sept. 8 at 104 Main Street in Calico Rock.

The day includes Native American dancers with shows at noon and 2 p.m. on a grassy area off Main Street, and a Trail of Tears Walk of Remembrance that starts at 3 p.m. on Main Street. Leading the walk will be Arkansas Supreme Court Justice-elect Josephine Hart and Ron Drown. Anyone may join in the walk.

Throughout the day will be music by Odell Jackson and Roger and Ronny Fountain, and demonstrations by Sandy Conway about cooking over an open fire. A Mountain Man Rendezvous 1800s settlement will be at Rand Park all day Friday and Saturday. A trolley will be available to shuttle people from Main Street to the park.

For more information about the exhibit or Native American Day, call the Calico Rock Museum at (870) 297-1429.



Sue McCluskey of Guion (left) and Freda Cruse of Sylamore stand in the entrance of a new exhibit Monday at the Calico Rock Museum. The two created the Birth of the Ozarks Native American exhibit, which should be a big draw during the Native American Day, Sept 8, at Calico Rock. / Kevin Pieper/The Baxter Bulletin



A stone tablet with what are believed to be Native American inscriptions is featured at the Calico Rock Museum. / Kevin Pieper/The Baxter Bulletin



A Native American grinding stone is part of the exhibit at the Calico Rock Museum. Kevin Pieper/The Baxter Bulletin