



SUCCESS STORIES

REPORTING EXAMPLES OF OUR PROGRESS IN CARING FOR THE LAND AND SERVING PEOPLE

IRON FURNACE CEMETERY RESURRECTED!

Ironton Employees Assist with Restoration of Historic Cemetery

May 31, 2012

On May 17, 2012, a group of Wayne National Forest employees conducted a massive clean-up of the historic Vesuvius Cemetery located on the Ironton Ranger District. The cemetery is associated with nearby Vesuvius Iron Furnace (1833-1906) and was established in 1842 as a resting place for furnace workers and their families. Most furnace cemeteries in this area – known as the Hanging Rock Iron Region – have several graves due to the hazardous nature of furnace work.

Over the past year, Edie Gillenwater (Ironton frontliner) has conducted a considerable amount of research on the Vesuvius Cemetery site. With assistance from fellow Ironton District employees, Edie's efforts have begun to tell the stories of the families who rest here. Her work has revealed that there may be up to 100 people buried at this location, including at least 12 veterans. As is often the case with 19th century cemeteries, many of the grave stones have disappeared. Over time, the stones break or fall over. Without repair, they get covered up or discarded. Consequently, most of the Vesuvius graves are unmarked because no detailed plot records have been found.



Employees work to restore the Vesuvius Cemetery.

The Elizabeth Township Trustees have had a Special Use agreement since 1941 to mow the cemetery and grade the road into the site (the cemetery is located about a quarter mile off of County Road 29). A gate was erected several years ago to discourage vandalism and trash dumping because the Vesuvius Cemetery is still an active cemetery where people bury and visit their loved ones. However, the site is in desperate need of stabilization and additional investigation.



The objective of clean-up day was to remove vegetation that either poses a public safety risk, or has impacted/concealed graves. Two hazardous dead trees and an extensive ground cover were removed from a few locations (invasive yucca plants and several small trees). Fifteen Forest employees and a crew from the STAR Community Justice Center removed six pick-up truck loads and four large bags of trash and debris.

The fruits of this labor uncovered several grave stones. The crew was even able to reassemble one stone after discovering its broken fragments (left photo). For a long time, Edie thought she was the only one who cared about the cemetery. She was very pleased with how many of her co-workers came out to clean up the cemetery and how nice the cemetery looked afterwards. She called it, "The best day I've spent working for the Forest Service."

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Now that the harmful vegetation has been removed, the work of locating additional stones, mapping the site, stabilizing stones, and site restoration can begin. Edie has found sites where three generations of families associated with the furnace are buried in the cemetery. One woman comes almost daily to visit the grave of her husband. Edie suggests benches and interpretive signage would be a nice addition to the cemetery for visitors. She already put a temporary sign commemorating the 12 veterans that are buried there. The local Veterans Affairs office gave her 12 flags to mark their graves. Edie's phone number is posted, asking for any information on the cemetery. In the meantime, she continues to research the graves to uncover the stories of the workers buried on the hill above the Vesuvius Recreation Area.

This multi-year restoration project presents excellent volunteer and partnership opportunities such as "Passport In Time" and "Stories Behind the Stones" character reenactments. It's a wonderful example of how heritage resource projects can connect people to the land.

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