

TAKING TOURISM TO A NEW LEVEL



BILL CROWELL/THE EXPRESS

Members and supporters of the River Town Task Force gathered recently at the Lockport Park Boat Launch in Woodward Township, prior to a team of Lock Haven University students starting a leg of the River Towns Mapping Project between Renovo and Wayne Township. From left are, kneeling in front: Dusty Guerra, Brad Slaughter, Cody Wheeler, Bethany Shaffer and Abigail O'Connor; and standing in back: Nick Lentz, Bill Baney, Natasha Gorham, Zach Pyle, Bridget Kane, Pat Marty, Dr. Mohamed Khalequzzaman, Rick Conklin, Marc Gates, James Fricke, Angela Harding, Clayton Good and Bob Rolley. "Dr. K" is leading the student team, Gates is co-owner of Lock Haven Outfitters, Pyle and Kane are with the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership and Marty is with Anadarko Petroleum.

River Towns mapping team working on ambitious, interactive tourism map

From staff reports

LOCK HAVEN — It really is beautiful and inspiring beyond belief.

It's mostly unspoiled as far as the eyes can see, with an American eagle or two soaring overhead.

It's where the water and the mountains meet — Mother Nature's gift to us all.

We're talking about the West Branch of the Susquehanna River watertrail between Renovo and Pine Creek.

What a treasure!

So why not boast about it to the world?

That's just the impetus for an ambitious, fun and educational project that partners Lock Haven University, Anadarko Petroleum, the Clinton County Economic Partnership, county government, Downtown Lock Haven Inc., and the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership.

With a \$2,500 donation from Anadarko that is matched by a county tourism grant, a "River Towns Mapping Team" of LHU and other students — with assistance from a new outfitter in town — has spent the last two months kayaking the water-trail in segments.

And with each leg, the students —

New outfitters in town



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under the guidance of Dr. Mohamed Khalequzzaman (Dr. K), a professor in LHU's Geology and Physics Department — have taken some 2,000 GPS coordinates and water-

depth measurements. These are being overlaid onto a geographic information system (GIS) with the goal of

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River Towns Mapping Project underway

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creating an interactive watertrail map to promote tourism and recreation in Clinton County.

With the extensive field mapping having been recently completed by LHU students Bethany Shaffer, Cody Wheeler, Brad Slaughter and James Fricke — along with help from Lycoming College student Clayton Good — work is now underway in LHU's East Campus, state-of-the-art Science Center laboratory.

But the students aren't doing the work alone.

Besides its financial contribution, Anadarko Petroleum is providing 80 hours of in-kind expertise by its GIS professional, Chad Kline, who is helping Dr. K supervise and mentor students in the laboratory

to help create the map and make it suitable for online application.

This won't be just another watertrail map.

Yes, it will include public access points, nearby parks, institutions and natural and cultural landmarks.

But it will also include river water-depth measurements based on seasonal variations, information on water quality that can be updated as time goes on, campgrounds, nearby ATV and hiking trails, and tourism-related businesses to include hotels, B&Bs, restaurants and more.

What's more, the goal is to create informational profiles of each that "pop up" when a viewer places his or her cursor over the location.

And, the map can be linked with the existing,

online webcam now above the J. Doyle Corman Amphitheatre in downtown Lock Haven and any additional webcams placed along the watertrail in the future, including at Renovo, which has tentative plans to build a public boat launch along the river right in the borough.

"We see this project as a catalyst to strengthen partnerships and, importantly, identify all tourism-related aspects and businesses in the county in one map that can be accessed on the World Wide Web," said Bob Rolley, a member of the River Town Task Force created upon Lock Haven's designation as a River Town by the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership.

Amid the students' field work of kayaking the river, digital photographs were taken along the way, including by Dr. Khalequzzaman.

Moreover, video of the watertrail and mountains was taken using a GoPro attached to a kayak — video that can be linked to the map to show the watertrail through a limited virtual tour.

"This is an exciting project," said Trish Carothers, executive director of the Susquehanna



BOB ROLLEY/THE EXPRESS

Lock Haven University students start the first leg of the mapping at the informal launch near the bridge connecting Renovo and South Renovo along the West Branch of the Susquehanna River.

Greenway Partnership (SGP). "The River Towns Interactive Watertrail Map helps to make the Susquehanna Greenway vision a reality. The project will help to enhance economic vitality, increase environmental awareness, encourage healthy lifestyles, help to protect the water quality — and importantly, it should help to improve safety."

Pat Marty, Anadarko's government relations advisor for the Appalachian Basin, said the energy exploration company also is excited to be a part of the mapping effort, to work with LHU and SGP.

"We share the SGP's larger goals for a landscape of walking and biking trails, river access points, unique river towns, working farms and conserved

the 500 miles along the Susquehanna River. The greenway provides opportunities to exercise outdoors, experience nature and explore historic river towns. It also inspires stewardship and civic pride," he said.

One of the lead mapping team students, Bethany Shaffer of Dubois, said she's "amazed by what our mapping project has turned into."

"It started out as a senior research project and has expanded to a community effort. It is a great feeling to know that so many people are interested in your research. The opportunity to continue with the research Cody and I started last year is really exciting. We never dreamt it would turn into such a huge project. It has become a great

and everyone in our lab," she said, referencing her student colleague, Cody Wheeler of Towanda.

"I feel that this project is important for promoting tourism in Clinton County. The finished product will be an online interactive map that will be a great resource for local and visiting boaters. Now that all of the data has been collected, our next step is to continue working on the interactive part of the map. This is a step further than we went with the original project, but we are working with Anadarko Petroleum to figure out the best plan of action," she said.

Dr. Khalequzzaman is elated for the students and the experience they're gaining.

"This project is very different from all the other research projects that I am involved in, because this project provided me and my students an opportunity to contribute to the community we are a part of. The students not only have an opportunity to get their hands dirty and feet wet through this project, but also learn firsthand the GIS and mapping techniques that are commonly used in the industry," he said.

"Hopefully, the people living in Clinton County and those who visit our region will benefit from the interactive river maps that we will produce."

For the field work, the team broke the river down in five segments: Renovo to Gold Star Bridge; from there to Baker's Run, from there to Queens Run, from there to the Woodward Township Boat Launch, and the last leg to Love Run in Wayne Township.

The student team has begun overlaying the GPS coordinates and water-depth measurements on the GIS map, and is working with Anadarko's Kline on technical issues.

A next step is identifying all tourism-related locations, and for that, the team is considering engaging stakeholders individually or, more likely, inviting them to a public meeting to review the maps and gather information and ideas.

The team expects to coordinate its information gathering with the Clinton County Economic Partnership and its Tourism Committee, along with CCEP Tourism Director Julie Brennan.

The team, in writing the grant to the county, said the CCEP website, www.clintoncountyinfo.com, is a logical place for the interactive, online map, along with www.lockhaven.org, Downtown Lock Haven Inc.'s website.

Meanwhile, LHU also has provided the foundation for a proposal to have primitive, waterside camping at Peddie Park along the West Branch, with a team of four students of Professor Lenny Long's offering plans last fall on what it would take.

The idea is provide a place with riverside access for kayakers to camp overnight as they sojourn.

"One of the very exciting aspects of this project is that it links the river towns in the county and can be a catalyst for all of us to work together to inventory our tourism assets, and to find new ways to promote the county as a mecca for outdoor enthusiasts," Rolley said.