



## Iron Masters Event a Hot Time on the Wayne NF

*The Vesuvius Recreation Area on the Ironton Ranger District hosted a 2-day festival revolving around the historic Vesuvius Iron Furnace.*



Richard Pauling and Susan Taylor doing first person interpretation of people from the era when Vesuvius Furnace was in its hey day.

Under threatening, stormy skies the Ohio University Southern Nature Center employees, numerous volunteers, and Wayne National Forest employees prepared for the first-ever Vesuvius Iron Furnace Festival on June 24. The festival was held in conjunction with festivities and events in the City of Ironton called Iron Masters Days.

Iron Master Days has been held for the past several years, but this year, primarily through the efforts of District Ranger Gloria Chrismer, Virginia Bryant, and Dr. Robert Culp, the OUS Nature Center added a new dimension by hosting this special event with the help of several community partners. The goal of the Vesuvius event was to highlight the history and heritage of the Vesuvius area.

Lake Vesuvius Recreation Area consists of a 140-acre lake with an accessible boat dock and boardwalk, walking trails, horse trails, a sandy beach, boat rentals, campgrounds and a Nature Center run by Ohio University's Southern campus in Ironton. It is one of the main regional attractions for tourists and locals alike from early spring through the late fall.

The Lake Vesuvius Recreation Area is the perfect setting for a festival of this kind since it hosts the remains of an iron furnace built in 1837, a small amphitheater for a wide range of performances, several picnic areas, and ample parking below the dam that

created the lake.

The event kicked off late Friday with the arrival of numerous antique tractors, steam engines and small-engine equipment running, working and on display. The tractors went on a lengthy parade through the recreation area late Friday evening to the delight of visitors and campers in the area.

As a special feature for the event, the Postmaster of Pedro, Ohio, arranged to have a special first-day cancellation stamp cast and offered during the day's activities. Special cancellations are

promoted through the US Postal Service to collectors around the world.

Postmaster Justin Jackson was on hand at the Festival to cancel and distribute almost 300 special cancellations on envelopes and letters. Postmaster Jackson received numerous requests for the Vesuvius Furnace special first day cancellation from US and French, British and German collectors.

Saturday was a full day with exhibitors demonstrating their crafts or equipment, or discussing their displays of the art of forging iron and operating iron furnaces. The region was once the largest provider of bulk iron for the nation, and fed the steel mills in Pittsburgh, Cleveland and other major cities until the turn of the 20th century.

There were several re-enactors in period costume on hand to bring the workings of the old furnaces and the lifestyles that surrounded them to life for the more than 500 visitors who passed through the area during the day.

The Ironton Ranger District arranged for a special appearance by Richard Pauling, an historical interpretive specialist, who performed two shows at the festival. In his first performance he portrayed an iron ore furnace owner, and explained the workings of the business and the historic impact iron production had on the region and the nation. In his second performance he portrayed a furnace worker, explaining the operation and its inherent dangers to the delight of the crowds.

Another event that drew hundreds of visitors was an interpretive walk through the Vesuvius Cemetery that sits above Lake Vesuvius dam, and is the resting place of civil war veterans and families from as far back as the 1830s. A local resident and descendant of some of those buried in the cemetery gave a historical tour through the cemetery.

Upwards of 300 people participated in these historical walks throughout the day.

Throughout the day a variety of music and entertainment was presented at the amphitheatre. There were period and modern music played by local musicians. The day's various music performances and interpretations truly provided a great range of entertainment and learning for a cross-generational experience.

The inaugural Vesuvius Iron Furnace Festival was a tremendous success and plans are already underway to improve and expand the event for next year with more artisans and demonstrations, more specialty or cultural foods, and different historical interpretations that relate to the iron furnace region.

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