Free day out for all the family… new-look Fort Nelson is unveiled

08/08/2011

In just under a year, this unique Victorian fort has undergone a £3.5m redevelopment to create a museum fit for the 21st century, supported by a grant of over £2m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The Fort, on Portsdown Hill, near Fareham, has been open throughout the construction phase but now the waiting is over and the new facilities are officially launched.

Admission and parking are **free** – offering a great day out for all the family during the school holidays, and all year round.

Highlights include:

- A breathtaking new glass-sided gallery – The Voice of the Guns – showcasing some of the Royal Armouries' most famous exhibits.
- Exciting new galleries, telling the history of the fort and the people and stories that shaped history.
- State-of-the-art education centre – allowing children to see the past spring to life in a historic setting, but harnessing the latest technology.
- Brand new visitor centre – including Café 1871, which is open to passers-by and walkers.

The Royal Armouries – Britain's oldest museum - believes the major investment in Fort Nelson will attract tens of thousands of visitors every year – boosting tourism and the local economy generally. Museum entry is free, ensuring the national collection is accessible to all.

Director General and Master of the Royal Armouries Lieutenant-General Jonathon Riley said, "This is a proud and historic week, even by Fort Nelson's standards.

"We are delighted to unveil this contemporary new museum, which still blends in perfectly with a traditional Victorian fort. I am sure it will entertain and educate hundreds of thousands of visitors for decades to come. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our partners and sponsors – in particular, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Hampshire County Council, without whom none of this would have happened."

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the South East, said, "Fort Nelson's new state-of-the-art galleries are a fitting home for its comprehensive artillery collection, enabling the story of Portsmouth's role in both World Wars to be told properly for the first time. The Heritage Lottery Fund is proud to have supported this ambitious project which will help bring an important part of our military and social history alive for a 21st-century audience."

Leader of Hampshire County Council, Councillor Ken Thornber, added, "Hampshire County Council is delighted it has been able to work with the Royal Armouries to help transform Fort Nelson and ensure the county continues to be a great place to visit. It will undoubtedly help further develop Hampshire's £2.4bn tourist economy."

The building project to transform Fort Nelson started last August, when construction company Mansell were awarded the contract to build the new gallery and visitor centre.

With glass sides and high ceilings, the new Voice of the Guns gallery has guaranteed “wow factor” and showcases 14 of the most famous exhibits, including two sections of the infamous Iraqi Super Gun, two anti-aircraft guns used to defend the South Coast, and the Great Turkish Bombard dating to 1464.

There are also social history galleries, exciting new interactives, and a 19-acre fort to explore – plus all the old favourites such as underground tunnels and ramparts with panoramic views over Portsmouth and the Meon Valley.

Built in the 1860s, the Portsdown Hill Fort is home to the national collection of artillery and historic cannon, with over 350 exhibits from all over the globe. The museum’s new galleries tell the fascinating stories of the objects, their history and the people who used them.

The collection originated at HM Tower of London and has been on display in Hampshire since 1995.

Notes to editors

The Royal Armouries at Fort Nelson houses the national collection of historic cannon and big guns. The museum houses one of the world’s finest collections with over 350 cannon dating back over 600 years and from every corner of the earth. The collection originated at HM Tower of London and has been on display in Hampshire since 1995.

Hampshire County Council has worked in partnership with the Royal Armouries since 1988 to provide a home for the national artillery collection. This has included leasing Fort Nelson to the Royal Armouries, maintaining the structure and providing ongoing support from the council’s property services team.

Further information

Andrea Long, Royal Armouries Head of Communications – andrea.long@armouries.org.uk or Joss Loader – 07838 379 599

Laura Bates, HLF press office, 020 7591 6027 or lbates@hlf.org.uk