Official opening of the Washburn Heritage Centre

23/06/2011

The development of the Centre has been made possible with grants totalling £630,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), as well as local fundraising of nearly £60,000.00, nearly £70,000 from Dales LEADER, and further support from Yorkshire Water.

Guests of honour at the official opening included some very special members of the local community and Gary Verity, Chair of the HLF Yorkshire and the Humber Committee. Attendance was by invitation, and included many local people who have supported and worked on the centre and its programme, and representatives of the organisations who have supported it through grants or other means.

The Heritage Centre, developed by Fewston with Blubberhouses Parochial Church Council (PCC) with the support of the Diocese of Bradford, is a beautiful new building attached to St Michael & St Lawrence Church, Fewston – itself a two* listed building. The purpose of the centre is to promote and preserve the heritage of the Washburn Valley and it has changing temporary exhibitions on local heritage themes: the exhibition in June and July will be on the old annual Washburn Valley Show, which ran from 1906 to 1973. The church houses permanent exhibitions on the heritage of the Washburn Valley.

Gary Verity, Chair of the HLF Yorkshire and the Humber Committee, said: “The Washburn Valley area has a fascinating history and is visited by many walkers from around Yorkshire and further afield. We are delighted to see this new heritage centre officially open - enabling this wonderful heritage to be shared with the local community and visitors alike.”

From the beginning of 2011 to the end of May, 4,669 people have visited the centre, many of them walkers on the path round Swinsty Reservoir drawn by the tea room at the centre which is open at weekends and Bank Holidays, when volunteer wardens are on duty to greet visitors and provide information. 588 people have attended special events run by the centre, including guided walks, lectures, demonstrations, lambing visits and longer courses.

Ann Johnson, who has chaired the sub-committee of the PCC which developed the centre, said: "I am thrilled with the building and all the very positive comments about it from our visitors. However, the building is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to promote the heritage of the valley to local people and visitors and our programme of heritage exhibitions and events is an enormous credit to the many people working on them."

Notes for editors

LEADER funding is made available through the Rural Development Programme for England, which is jointly funded by Defra and the European Union, and is managed by Yorkshire Forward in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

The total development cost of the Washburn Heritage Centre including fees, archaeology, construction costs and equipment was £682,786.00. Other costs relate to the website, the oral history programme, interpretation, activity and staffing.

The building was designed by Pearce Bottomley Architects of Aberford and built by RN Wooler of Keighley.

Further information

For further information please contact Ann Johnson on 01943 880 000 or ann@apmj.co.uk.