

Spartanburg history emerges from overgrowth

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The latest efforts by the Trees Coalition to clear invasive species along the Mary Black Foundation Rail Trail has uncovered a bit of Spartanburg history.

Since April, the coalition's volunteers and trained contract workers have suited up in gloves and bright orange vests to remove invasive plants along the bank of the trail, starting at the trailhead near II Samuels restaurant and continuing parallel to Union Street.

While using an excavator to clear the dense growth this week, Trees Coalition volunteers discovered remnants of a railroad spur and trestle, silo-like concrete structures and other items.

Newt Hardie, a master gardener who is leading the team, learned from colleagues that the Trees Coalition had uncovered parts of the former Metromont Materials Corp., a concrete manufacturing company. Prior to that, the two-acre site had been part of Spartanburg Concrete Co.

Hardie's team cut ivy loose atop one of the concrete structures to reveal an opening in the roof. Hardie said the hole in the ceiling appears to have been used to convey material into waiting vehicles under the structure.

“We think that they had some sort of spout where they would blow the cement mix and so forth through a hole here into the trucks below,” he said.

The trestle helped bring sand, rock and cement mix to load the trucks.

The Trees Coalition has also attempted to remove vines from what Hardie referred to as two silos. There are remnants from a mechanical device, maybe a pump, within the circular base of one silo, he said.

Although Hardie and his team have a better understanding of some of the items they've uncovered, they continue to learn more about the site each day.

“All of this was covered and we couldn't see any of these structures. This is like an archaeological dig in the jungle,” Hardie said with a smile.

Hardie said the combination of wisteria, kudzu, privet, ivy and Tree of Heaven has likely been growing at the site for 50 years or more.

Coalition for Active Youth, a Spartanburg nonprofit, is considering the site for its proposed Hub City Bike Park, a public multi-use bike park for riders of all skill levels, and has been raising money for the project.

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