

What’s going on with the historic Caves Chateau?

Anita Savio
IVN contributing writer

The long-awaited renovation of the Oregon Caves Chateau has become more of a saga than anticipated, due largely to discovered structural issues. According to Oregon Caves Supervisor Jeremy Curtis, the renovation contract was awarded to the Grants Pass-based Ausland Group.

After a four-week late start when the park was evacuated, due to the 2020 Slater Fire, Ausland was able to start work removing the Chateau wall coverings down to the beams and studs. But once the coverings were stripped off, concerns arose about how sound the building was. The Park Service brought in geo techs and some engineers,

who found that the foundation was cracking and there was movement and significant damage that required seismic and structural upgrades.

“Among the surprises,” said Curtis, “A flood happened in the 1960s and it damaged the Chateau quite a bit. In some places mud was found packed up in the walls, upwards of 18 to 24 inches high.”

A team came in to look at options, and those plans were completed in spring of this year. Ausland is now working on a revised bid, with the tentative goal of resuming work in March 2023. Some of the plans include trenching around the whole structure, to expose the original concrete foundation. Other plans include temporarily removing some of the bark shingles on the walls, and some of those walls are going to be replaced with reinforced steel.

“We expect we’re looking at a minimum of another year of work,” Curtis said. “So the best case is that we will reopen in the summer of 2024. But it could end up being into summer of 2025.”

The Illinois Valley News also spoke to Sue Densmore, executive director of Friends of the Oregon Caves and Chateau. Friends is a nonprofit organization that has been supporting the Oregon Caves Monument and Preserve since 2009 with the goal of restoring the Chateau.

“Our role is to restore the historic character,” said Densmore. “The work the park service is doing is all structural, mechanical, seismic. We’re taking care of everything that people will remember and that people can see.”

For instance, the Friends will be restoring 105 doors: all the doors

going into the rooms, closet doors, bathrooms, hallway doors and all the remaining exterior doors. The doors are 89 years old and all the exterior doors have a lot of wear and tear. “But they’re beautiful original doors,” said Densmore.

The Friends will also be restoring the red stools in the diner. The Friends have also ordered reproductions of the dining room chairs because they all went down the canyon in the 1964 flood. The flood that also tipped the Chateau a little bit off of its foundation came down through the dining room. But similar chairs are now available for purchase; donors can sponsor a dining room chair at \$650 per chair. Or you can honor someone by sponsoring a chair.

The Friends have all the original 240 items of Monterey furniture, plus an additional 150 pieces that

have been donated. The Chateau will be the only lodge in the park service with the original furniture in the guest rooms.

The Friends will be restoring the little creek that goes through the dining room. They are restoring furniture for the lobby. They are restoring the lighting. They will also be bringing back the balconies, thanks to a grant from the Oregon Legislature. There’s a balcony off the dining room and a balcony off the lobby.

For many photos of the work being done and information about Friends, you can check out their website at <https://friendsocac.org>.

Potential donors can call Densmore at 541-944-1139 or email her at densmore@mind.net.



Restoring the doors of the Chateau above is Ryan, Ben the Builder contractor (left); Mark Friis, Ben the Builder contractor; George Kramer, historic preservation consultant; and Jay Treiger, door restoration specialist from Ben the Builder. The photo on the right is one of the Chateau balconies that was removed in 1950.





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6pm Boys Basketball V Bandon @ HOME
7:30pm Girls Basketball V Bandon @ HOME

Tuesday, January 13, 2023
4:30pm Boys Basketball JV Gold Beach @ AWAY
6pm Boys Basketball V Gold Beach @ AWAY
7:30pm Girls Basketball V Gold Beach @ AWAY

Wednesday, January 25, 2023
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