

Team Name:

Caspr and the Spooks

Submitted by:

Dale Meche

Event Name:

Long Leaf Run

Duration:

One Day Run

Season/Month:

Spring or Fall

Destination:

Long Leaf La.

Destination Address:

Long Leaf La.71448

Accommodations:

Restaurant near by (Fuzzie's)

Accommodations Address:

?

Accommodations Phone Number:

?

Starting Point:

?

Starting Point Address

?

Ending Point:

?

Ending Point Address:

?

Mileage getting there:

80 miles+-

Return Mileage:

80

Points of Interest:

Southern Forest Heritage Museum and Research Center. Old abandon saw mill.

Additional Information:

A walking tour. But can be driven.

Sawmill Frozen in Time

It is one of many sawmills that were harvesting Louisiana's longleaf pine trees in the late 1800's. And along the way, this sawmill in Longleaf, Louisiana played a critical role in World War Two. Today, the town is gone. But the mill remains almost as it was the day it closed more than 50 years ago.



M-4 Railcar used to transport workers

The old sawmill, a working machine shop and a railcar that still runs the tracks are among the attractions at the Southern Forest Heritage Museum. Tour guide Brian Stanley boards the railcar nicknamed 'the doodlebug'. "It's an M-4", Stanley explains as he sits in the driver's seat and starts the engine. "That's a passenger vehicle they used to bring the workers to the woods and back to the mill."

Watch Video: Brian Stanley drives the 'doodlebug' in tour of old sawmill

Railcars like this criss-crossed the forested Louisiana landscape in the 1930's as dozens of sawmills like the one at Longleaf harvested the massive virgin longleaf pine trees. The railbus travels an oval track around the sawmill site, which opened in the 1890's and cut timber until 1969.



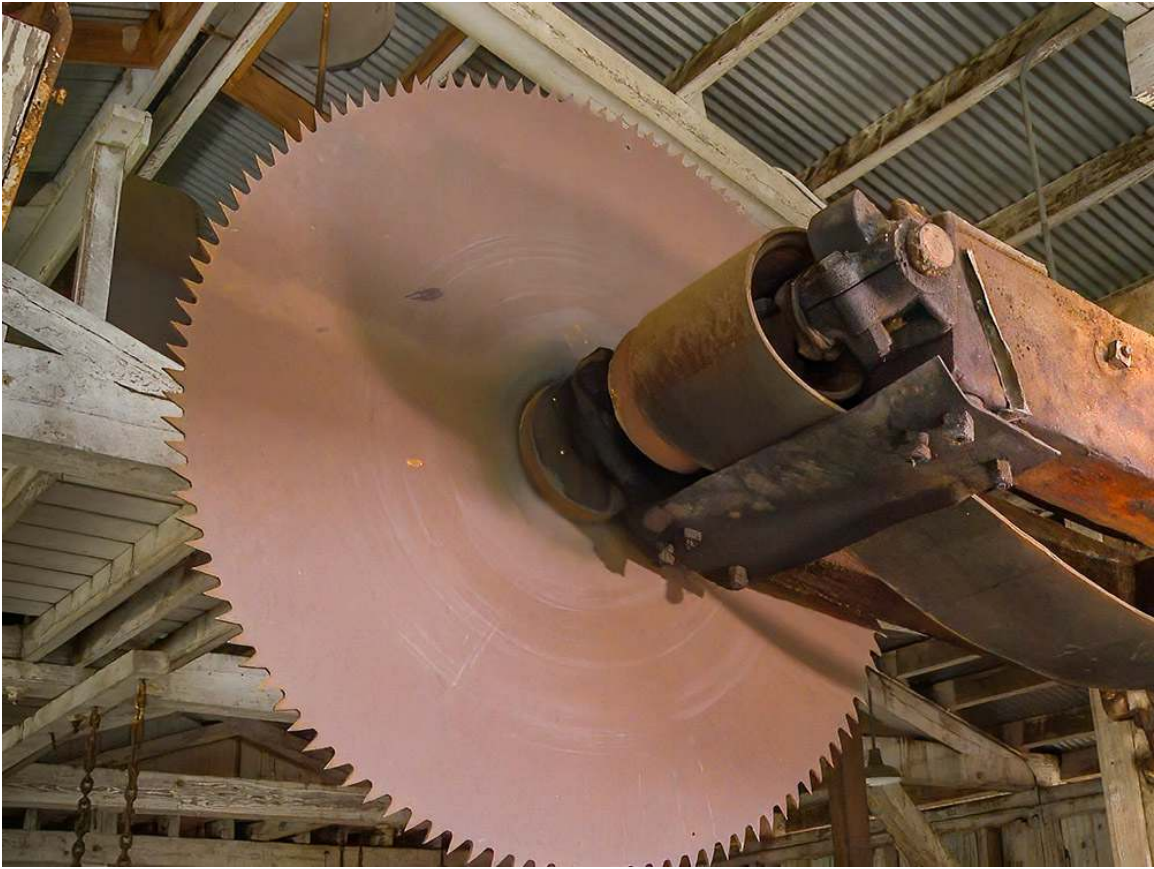
Historic photo of Longleaf sawmill

Stanley has a personal connection to the old sawmill, “My Daddy actually worked in here. He started in 1963 and worked until '69 when they closed”. Now Stanley helps maintain the sprawling sawmill complex and gives tours. He shows off the old mill railroad engines that were used to haul equipment and logs. The oldest engine has been here for more than 100 years.



Engine 400 stopped here to deliver its final load

Stanley knows the story of each engine, “That’s 106 in the shed up there. Then you’ve got 202 in the machine shop. And the 400 brought the last load December 9, 1952, and that’s where they parked it at, right where it sits”.



One of the huge saws used to cut lumber

Almost everything at the Longleaf sawmill is still the way it was the day the mill closed. On Valentines Day, 1969, the red stop button was pushed for the last time. The giant saw blade stopped spinning, the equipment was parked, the lumber stacked and the yard fell silent. Up to 300 employees went home and never returned.



Lunch pail left behind by a sawmill employee

Museum Director Claudia Troll explains, “They just came and said boys go home, we’re closing. That’s it! And it was such a shock that we even have places in the sawmill where the lunch pail is still sitting there where it was left.”



During its heyday, this sawmill played a roll in world history. The heart of the longleaf pine is a tough wood that doesn't splinter and can withstand salt water. It was ideal for the keel of Higgins Boats, the landing craft that put American troops on the beaches of Normandy in World War Two.

Watch Video: Longleaf sawmill's important role in World War 2

The sawmill museum has letters from mill owner R.D. Crowell to Andrew Higgins, and a telegram sent to President Franklin Roosevelt. That telegram states, *'This company and its stockholders, motivated only through patriotism and loyalty to our country are daily depleting their scant resources of virgin longleaf yellow pine timber, which cannot be replaced'*.

Museum Director Troll says, "They were called the boats that won the war. So when you think of it like that, we were very instrumental in winning the war".



Longleaf was a company town with company housing for several hundred families who worked the sawmill. It has a commissary, a doctor's office and post office. Nearly all of the houses are gone but the mill is surprisingly intact. "It's like a time machine," says Troll. "You can actually go back and see how people lived." And you can see how they worked at a time when this area was rich with virgin longleaf pine, and the sawmill and town were a thriving community. The Southern Forest Heritage Museum is located about 25 miles southwest of Alexandria, Louisiana.