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## Giant crab one of top five U.S. roadside attractions

**ROSE COOPER**

County Editor



Jim Rankin, pastor of the Freedom Worship Church in Blanchester, stands beside the horseshoe crab. (News Journal file photo/Rose Cooper)

insulated foam and fiberglass skin makes the crab warm in winter and cool in summer. A wooden post props up its long, spiky tail.

The horseshoe crab was constructed by Academy Award winning designers Faren & Associates for the Baltimore Maritime Museum in Baltimore, Md. After the museum went bankrupt, it was purchased by the Creation Museum in Hebron, Ky., for a creation fossil display. Museum management decided to get rid of the crab after determining it was too big for the display.

Rankin was giving a talk at the museum when he learned about the crab and accepted it as a donation to his church from the management of the Creation Museum.

“Five semis drove up and dropped it right here,” Rankin said, pointing to the parking lot. “It was nine huge pieces. We had no drawing, no nothing.”

Without an instruction manual, Rankin remembered he had horseshoe crab shells at his home which he collected in Florida as a child. He took them to the church and successfully used them as a blueprint for assembly.

The world’s largest horseshoe crab — which is located in Blanchester — has been named one of the top five roadside attractions by the publisher of RoadsideAmerica.com.

The horseshoe crab is located at the Freedom Worship Baptist Church along State Route 28 on the west side of Blanchester. Jim Rankin is pastor of the church.

Doug Kirby, publisher of RoadsideAmerica.com, picked the crab for CNN as one of five “world’s largest attractions” for adventurous road trippers. On May 25, RoadsideAmerica.com selected the crab as the top site of the week.

The crab is 28 feet wide and 68 feet long from head to tail and can hold up to 65 people inside. The

“We have seen everything from bus tours from Chicago to vacationers from all over the United States,” Rankin said. “We have had visitors from 35 states and seven different countries who have come to see the crab. It’s absolutely amazing that folks are coming from around the world to see this.”

Weddings have been held there and curious travelers from all backgrounds have stopped to check out the crab.

Rankin also commented on the phenomena and why the crab is generating so much interest. “Since the original roadside sites on Route 66 and down the coastal towns of Florida, people have always been fascinated with unusual sites. The crab is grabbing the eye of thousands annually because it’s not every day you see a crab in the Midwest. And coming into Blanchester on State Route 28, there is no way to miss this roadside eye catcher.”

Rankin estimated 4,000 people have visited the horseshoe crab every year since the display was set up in 2006. In addition, 8,000 people attended the first annual CrabFest last year on Labor Day weekend.

One of the featured attractions during CrabFest was Gene Sullivan, Evel Knievel’s former bodyguard, who jumped his motorcycle through fire and over the crab. He slid to a safe stop.

Rankin said this year’s festival will feature a double motorcycle jump, two stages hosting national entertainment and many other activities.

The crab, located in a Biblical scripture garden at the church, is used as a pavilion. At the back of the church are replicas of Calvary and the Holy Tomb.

In one of the rooms at the church is a jungle display, complete with life-size replica dinosaurs and a fossil display. “Right now we are refurbishing a dinosaur we got from Pigeon Forge (Tennessee),” Rankin said. “The museum is also being enlarged. Soon we will have a live display of horseshoe crabs.”

The church has its own Freedom Biblical Museum. Included in the display are Roman dice, Greek coins and a Sumerian tablet. “These are all real ancient artifacts,” Rankin said.

Also in the display is a replica of a scourging whip and crown of thorns, three “authentic crucifixion nails” that were reportedly unearthed near Jerusalem, and an 1864 Abraham Lincoln campaign torch.

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