



Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges



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A group of hikers on a walk with the SCDNR's Diversity Outreach Program pauses for a moment at Teeter-Totter Rock on the Foothills Trail in the Jocassee Gorges. (Photo by Keya Jackson)

Diversity group explores Jocassee via Sassafras, Foothills Trail

Hispanic community experiences beauty of birds, wildflowers near South Carolina's highest point

By Brian McGarrahan

A crisp spring morning atop Sassafras Mountain, South Carolina's highest peak, brought stunning views of Lake Jocassee and Currahee Mountain, Ga., in the distance. Twenty participants from the local Hispanic community joined us along the Foothills Trail for a hike into the natural and cultural history of the South Carolina mountains. The plan was simple: introduce this group to the natural wonders around them to get them interested in conservation of this beautiful place.

Participants in the April 21 hike are residents of Greenville, Pickens and Spartanburg counties and speak

mostly Spanish. None have visited this area and only a few had ever been on a hike. We began our trek at the overlook where Alix Pedraza, Diversity Outreach Program manager with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), gave a little background of the area. She introduced us to the natural formations of the mountains and their historical importance to the peoples who have lived here for thousands of years. She spoke of the Native tribes who made their rock drawings along Pinnacle and Table Rock mountains, and to the Cherokee whose homes existed among these hills into the 1830s.

"Because of the great deal of historical and natural facts about the area it is important to get the local communities involved regardless of their language and cultural background," said Pedraza.

After the short historical conversation, we

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Alix Pedraza (right), Diversity Outreach Program manager with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, talks with participants on a walk in Jocassee Gorges from Sassafras Mountain to Chimneytop Gap along the Foothills Trail. (Photo by Keya Jackson)

Hispanic hikers learn natural, cultural history of Jocassee Gorges

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began our descent through the forest on our way to Chimneytop Gap. As we moved along the trail we were introduced to several species of trees and learned of the numerous deforestation and reforestations that have taken place over the last 200 years. SCDNR Bird Conservation Biologist Amy Tegeler stopped us several times when interesting birds were singing their incredible songs. She pointed out where we can find these birds and helped us learn the calls of the Carolina chickadee, red-eyed vireo and the hooded warbler.

Halfway through our hike we stopped at Teeter-Totter Rock, where we again got to take in the stunning views this area provides. Teeter-Totter Rock is an interesting geological formation where one rock is resting on top of another. Here we took out copies of the new Jocassee Gorges map, which was provided by the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund. We compared the topographical map to the landscape around us to see what we could find.

After the short rest we continued down through the forest viewing the various tree species and listening for new and interesting birds. We heard hawks and even

a pileated woodpecker. What a great morning for a walk in the woods. Unfortunately, it had to come to an end as we reached the road at the end of this hike.

“Taking families to a nature hike and letting them experience the great outdoors is not only rewarding but also one of the best tools for conservation,” said Pedraza. “The children that come with us today might become the biologists and conservationists of tomorrow.”

Our companions today all enjoyed the trip, and many had questions about other great places to visit. We were pointed to resources like the websites for SCDNR and the Foothills Trail to find hiking opportunities in the area. One family even asked questions about logistics for backpacking the Foothills Trail after seeing several who were doing a through-hike of the entire 77-mile trail.

Thanks to the SCDNR staff and volunteers for making this possible and a huge thanks to the 20 participants without whom this hike would not have happened. Hopefully we will all encounter each other as we hike in these mountains again..

(Brian McGarrahan is a volunteer with SCDNR's Diversity Outreach Program.)

Launch of first statewide volunteer river monitoring program has roots in Upstate

Trained volunteers report water quality, quantity in Adopt-a-Stream program

By Katie Callahan

South Carolina's rich water resources offer something for every kind of outdoor enthusiast. From the mountains to the coast, one can fish, paddle, swim, bird watch, hunt, float, and surf. You can sit back on a black river, throw your boots on and look for wildlife in the swamp, or brave a waterfall and fast-moving waters in our gorges and rivers. Knowing myself, I can tell when I need to get out along or on a waterway. It's about every two weeks! Waterways set the stage of my greatest childhood memories and are the inspiration and rejuvenation in my adulthood.

So, how do we report on the health of our waterways? For recreation, we greatly rely on bacteria data to let us know if fecal matter in the river or lake could cause illness, beach closings, and shellfish closings, impacting more than just our skin and digestive tract. For the life that supports our fishing industry, we can look at other parameters of sedimentation and the diversity and population of the bugs, or macroinvertebrates, that begin the food chain at the bottom of the stream. We can also document impacts of land cover change and the need for protection of our stream corridor. Often forgotten, we can document and keep record of how much water is flowing through a stream and how that flow may be changing over time. The quantity of water being so critical for recreation, economic vitality, water supply, and more.

To help boost observations of these conditions across the state and to involve all stakeholders in the conservation of our state's greatest resource, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) has launched the first statewide water monitoring program, in partnership with Clemson's Center for Watershed Excellence. The collaboration was energized by the hard work of individuals that forged ahead, bringing expertise from Georgia to begin to certify volunteers and report data. This mobilized efforts in the Palmetto State to develop a platform and response system

so that South Carolina trained volunteer monitors can report data formally and see expedited follow up – quick and local solutions to local water concerns.



Volunteers in the Adopt-a-Stream program learn under the tutelage of Anderson University professor Carrie Koenigstein (left).

The first phase of the SC Adopt-a-Stream (SC AAS) program launched in June 2017, with the release of the SC Adopt-a-Stream Freshwater Monitoring Handbook and SC AAS Database. In just six months, nearly 200 individuals are certified and recording water quality and quantity data. Cities and counties can sign up to receive alerts of abnormal conditions, so that they may quickly respond. Consecutive reports of high bacteria in surface waters also get sent immediately to DHEC Bureau of Water staff for appropriate response.

The program still has a lot of growing to do and will be available for interested participants long-term. Currently, only resources for freshwater river monitoring are ready for use. Much of the monitoring is happening in the Upstate; however, interest from the Pee Dee to Aiken has the program bringing in data from new areas and new eyes and ears in the field. Only SC AAS certified volunteers may enter data into the database.

If you are interested in being involved, please consult the SC AAS website to find training events and sign up for the e-news. The website is www.scadoptastream.org. This is a program built for the volunteers and the communities that utilize these results. Our state team, DHEC and Clemson, thank those original volunteers who mobilized these collaborations, and the many communities, organizations, and colleges now broadening this program's reach.

So, next time you're out recreating or enjoying our shared waterways, think about taking a few simple measurements and sharing them real time. Your recorded observations are documenting conditions across the state!

(Katie Callahan directs Clemson University's Center for Watershed Excellence and enjoys fishing, hunting, kayaking, hiking, and overall, being outside! In her role at Clemson, she works with communities and organizations in conserving and better understanding our water resources and challenges in their protection.) 



Hawk migration counters at the top of Sassafras Mountain during Hawk Migration Week were (from left) Ed Moorer, Andrew Bowers, Tami King, Skip Beavers, and Elizabeth Galloway.

Hawk migration numbers bountiful at Sassafras Mountain in 2017

Record number of raptors flew over South Carolina's highest point

By Ed Moorer

This past fall was a good season for hawk counting at the summit of Sassafras Mountain. After three months of migration, the final tally ended up with a record number of 11,641 raptors. The highest species was the broad-winged hawk at 9,583 being seen. As normal, the third week of September brought most of these hawks through our mountains. Sept. 21 was the biggest day with 4,571 being recorded that single day. Other top species for the season were turkey vultures, sharp-shinned hawks, red-tailed hawks, cooper's hawks, ospreys and bald eagles.

A highlight of September was a golden eagle that migrated over the site just after Labor Day. In addition to checking the skies, I dodged a timber rattlesnake

that tried to join us at the highest point marker. High numbers of monarch and cloudless sulphur butterflies were enjoyed as they floated past the mountain. Frequent hikers on the Foothills Trail stopped to converse with stories of what they had seen on the trails.

October and November sent mostly red-tailed hawks and turkey vultures flying by as the leaves turned color and the weather got cooler. After 169 observation hours, the third season at Sassafras ended. A full report of each of the 15 species counted can be found at hawkcount.org.

Anyone interested in assisting with the 2018 count, contact Ed Moorer at moorer03@bellsouth.net.  (Ed Moorer, a retired teacher, is the site coordinator of Sassafras Mountain Hawkwatch and works at Table Rock State Park part-time as an assistant naturalist in the Nature Center and with the Discover Carolina school program.)

Volunteers work on campsites at Canebreak near Toxaway River

Six existing campsites rebuilt, three new ones added at site along Foothills Trail

By Steve Pagano

During the first weekend in February, about 17 volunteers donated more than 235 volunteer hours at Gorges State Park to rebuild six existing primitive campsites and add three more at the Canebrake campsite on the Foothills Trail near the Toxaway River.

Each site now consists of a 16-by-16-foot tent pad, concrete and steel fire ring, lantern hook and picnic table. This project was a combined effort and partnership between Gorges State Park, Foothills Trail Conservancy, the Wilds Christian Camp and Friends of Gorges State Park.

The weekend started at 9 a.m. Friday morning when 12 volunteers arrived prepared to put in a hard day's work and then camp on the Foothills Trail at the top of Lake Jocassee at the Toxaway River. While day time was full of sun, beautiful surroundings and fantastic fellowship, the night-time lows were barely above 20 degrees! Saturday started at 8:30 a.m. with the arrival of five new energetic volunteers. Work progressed very smoothly and all worked extremely hard to meet their goal of eight campsites; in the end nine were completed!

Lunch was catered by Bobbie Wilhite of the Foothills Trail Conservancy and transported by Jocassee Lake Tours



Each finished campsite now consists of a 16-by-16-foot tent pad, concrete and steel fire ring, lantern hook and picnic table.

by pontoon from Devils Fork State Park. Lunch was a feast of baked ham, fried chicken, potato salad, pimento cheese sandwiches, cookies and tea! Work continued until 6 p.m. when all sites were complete, tools and equipment had been loaded back into trucks and everyone was transported back to the Wilds Christian Camp access site.

All materials for the campsites were furnished by Gorges State Park, through a trail grant from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

The two-day project was a HUGE success and could not have been completed without everyone's hard work and dedication. Special thanks to all involved! 🍂

(Steve Pagano, the original park superintendent at Gorges State Park in North Carolina, recently retired and is currently touring the United States and Canada with his wife in an RV.)



Volunteers put in more than 235 hours of work at Gorges State Park to rebuild six existing primitive campsites and add three more at the Canebrake campsite on the Foothills Trail near the Toxaway River.

Seeing a ruffed grouse in mountains make

‘Partridges’ stir passion among hunters

By Rob Simbek

The ruffed grouse is a cold-weather specialist whose winterization process starts at the bottom with fleshy, comb-like rows of bristles called pectinations that grow on its toes to help with walking on snow and clinging on icy branches. Combine that with feathers covering its legs and nostrils, add the ability to fluff its feathers to retain heat, and you’ve got a seasonally adjusted bird. Winter dining is then a matter of finding the seeds, buds and catkins that remain.

“In the winter in South Carolina,” says Michael Hook, the SCDNR’s small game program leader, “grouse utilize rhododendron and mountain laurel thickets in oak-hickory forests on a regular basis and will often use the buds and leaves as a food source. They will also eat beech, birch and cherry buds, acorns, wild grapes, and the leaves and fruit of greenbrier.”

Only a fortunate few of us can expect encounters with them.

“South Carolina is at the southernmost portion of their range,” says Hook, “so they are just barely found here. They like early successional habitat or young forests in the highlands, so primarily they’re found in the upper reaches of Oconee, Pickens and Greenville counties.” Ruffed grouse are found throughout much of Alaska, Canada, the northern Rockies, the northeastern United States and their range just dips into the Southern Appalachians.

Conventional wisdom says they live above 2,000 feet in elevation, but Hook can cite plenty of anecdotal evidence of grouse at lower elevations. Watson-Cooper



The male ruffed grouse is magnificent during breeding season. (



In the first year of a ruffed grouse survey, scientists found that grouse occur in the South Carolina mountains where habitat is appropriate, but they occur in low numbers and are difficult to detect. (Photo by Dan Garber)

Heritage Preserve in Greenville County has been called “the throne room for the ruffed grouse,” although Hook says, “the few grouse hunters we have, or, as the old-timers called them, ‘partridges,’ are quite tight-lipped about their hunting spots.”

Grouse hunters are “a very small but passionate, rather fanatical group—and I mean small. There aren’t many folks willing to put in the effort to hunt grouse in South Carolina, where a good day may be flushing a couple of birds and possibly getting a shot at one.”

Figures from a 2005 survey estimate a breeding population density of five birds per square mile, and a 1990 SCDNR study, says Hook, “estimated a hunter would have to go 80 hours before killing a bird, so it’s not exactly thrill-a-minute hunting!” In Pennsylvania, by contrast, a 2008 study reported “the flushing rate increased from 1.25 birds per hour of hunting to 1.42, the best since 2001.”

Regardless, this is a magnificent creature. The ruffed grouse is a mid-sized bird, 18 inches or so in



Photo courtesy of Ruffed Grouse Society)

length, with a two-foot wingspan. It's plump, with mottled feathers of gray, brown, black and buff. Though it's not colored for flash—it wants to dine unobtrusively on insects, small invertebrates, fruits, seeds and berries in the underbrush—the male turns spectacular when it's time for mating. Male birds in general use color, strutting and the like to drum up interest among females, and the ruffed grouse's presentation is among the most dramatic. He finds a stump or fallen log on which to stand (you can tell them by the presence of feathers and feces), ruffles his black neck feathers, fans his tail and flaps or “drums” his wings in a back-to-front motion that begins slowly and builds in speed, creating a drumming sound that attracts females. He is defending a territory of from five to 20 acres and may mate with several females.

Each female nests in a shallow depression next to a fallen log or amid low branches, laying from eight to 14 cream-colored eggs in leaf litter and incubating them

Ruffed grouse survey completes first season in S.C. mountains

At southern tip of ruffed grouse's range, Palmetto State has fewer of the game birds than surrounding states because it has far less appropriate habitat

The first year of a ruffed grouse survey spearheaded by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) was recently completed in the South Carolina mountains.

Preliminary results from the survey confirm what scientists have long suspected: South Carolina does not have an abundance of ruffed grouse, and detecting grouse is difficult.

The survey, which ran from March 15 through April 30, included the mountain counties of Greenville, Oconee and Pickens. Partners in the research included the U.S. Geological Survey, Clemson University, U.S. Forest Service, the Ruffed Grouse Society and S.C. State Parks. Dr. Michael Small, a wildlife biologist with SCDNR's Small Game Project, is the principal investigator of the multi-year survey.

“We are at the very Southern tip of the ruffed grouse's range,” Small said, “and we don't have nearly the mountain habitat that North Carolina and Georgia have.” There is little to no hunting pressure on ruffed grouse in South Carolina, according to Small, because there is little chance of success. Most Palmetto State grouse hunters go out of state to hunt.

The ruffed grouse survey consisted of 19 survey routes with listening points located every 400 meters. The number of points on a route ranged from seven to 22. Routes were driven beginning at official sunrise and continued until two hours after sunrise. Stops were made at each point for five minutes, and all grouse heard drumming or seen along the routes were recorded. All points were surveyed between one and four times, depending on personnel availability.

Preliminary results had one grouse heard drumming and one grouse seen along a route. However, grouse were seen in the vicinity of routes anecdotally, with sightings made by biologists and turkey hunters.

According to Small, the takeaway from this survey is that grouse occur in the South Carolina mountains where habitat is appropriate but occur in low numbers and are difficult to detect. 

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Grouse hunters are a passionate, secretive group

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for about 24 days. The chicks leave the nest soon after hatching, following their mother and learning to feed. She covers them with her wings at night and may feign injury to draw attention from them at a sign of danger.

Grouse uses hisses, peeps, clucks and chirps to communicate. The young eat insects and spiders and quickly move to an adult diet, with leaves and shoots in the spring, and fruits like blackberries and blueberries in the summer.

As with any young bird, life is precarious and most will not make it to adulthood. Pretty much everything likes ruffed grouse. Its predators include foxes and coyotes, hawks and owls. They are also susceptible to diseases and parasites, to extreme weather, and to hitting tree trunks or branches when flushed suddenly,

In the fall, the young disperse to find their own territories. Females are known to travel up to 15 miles to new home ranges. Once a male finds a drumming spot, he will stick close for the rest of his life.

Grouse were plentiful in the 19th century. Audubon remarked on the huge numbers of them in the Ohio River Valley in 1820 and said they were sold in Cincinnati and Pittsburgh markets for as little as 12 and a half cents apiece. He said the grouse “far surpasses as an article of food every other landbird which we have in the United States, except the wild turkey, when in good condition.”

Nothing has changed, according to author and outdoorsman Jim Casada, who says, “When

it comes to fine fare on the table, properly prepared grouse takes a back seat to no type of game.”

It’s worth noting that management for grouse and other species favoring recently deforested or burned-

over areas, abandoned fields and the like is on the rise.

“There has been a renewed interest in early successional habitat,” says Hook, “and that carries up to the mountains as well. Folks are realizing these young forests are just as important as old growth, and that they provide different habitats that are quite important to a whole host

of species that thrive in their environments.”

That bodes well for the future and for those of us who crave exposure to wildlife, although the grouse is feathered proof that wild creatures, like wildlife watchers, are not created equal. Appreciation of some species takes effort, knowledge and stealth, and this is one of them. Sometimes you’ll find the ruffed grouse along the edge of

a country lane, but more often they’re in thickets where we hear more often than see them. That, however, is a great excuse for a long walk in the country, hoping to earn the sight and sound of one of these little marvels that can more than brighten a day in any season. ❁

(Rob Simbek is an award-winning freelance writer who lives near Nashville, Tenn. This story is excerpted from *South Carolina Wildlife* magazine. To subscribe,

visit www.scwildlife.com.)



During courtship, the characteristic “drumming” of the ruffed grouse is accomplished by flapping its wings in a back-to-front motion that begins slowly and builds in speed. (Photo by Dan Garber)

‘There has been a renewed interest in early successional habitat. Folks are realizing that young forests are just as important as old growth, and that they provide habitats that are important to a whole host of species.’

—Michael Hook



Madi Howard (center), a student at Vox Bivium Christian Gap Year School near Travelers Rest, joined the OLLI at Clemson University Jocassee Gorges class as an intern to learn more about outdoor leadership. (SCDNR photo by Greg Lucas)

Gap-year student joins Jocassee Gorges class

School near Travelers Rest helps students find their passion

By Madi Howard

After graduating from Blue Ridge High School, I decided to take nine months and dedicate them to learning about who God is, who I am, and my part in His story.

Vox Bivium Christian Gap Year School is a nine-month gap-year program based at Look Up Lodge in northern Greenville County, where college-age students can take a year of their life to take college classes, travel monthly, and make lifelong friends.

In Latin, Vox Bivium means “voice at the crossroads,” and that’s exactly the goal: to help students find out what the world needs, what you’re passionate about and where those two things intersect. Part of what

In Latin, Vox Bivium means “voice at the crossroads”

Vox does is getting students plugged in with micro-apprenticeships in a career area they’re interested in. For me that was outdoor recreation.

Since outdoor recreation is so broad I got plugged in with a several different businesses and companies, one of those being the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). With SCDNR, I was able to join in on a few hikes with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Clemson University Jocassee Gorges class, which is taught by SCDNR.

It was such a great opportunity to be able to shadow Greg Lucas and get to know everyone involved in the program. 🌿

(Madi Howard is a student at Vox Bivium Christian Gap Year School near Travelers Rest in northern Greenville County. For more information on Vox Bivium, visit www.govox.org, e-mail info@govox.org or call (864) 869-8020.)



Scenic prescribed fire

During the early hours of the first day of May 2018, smoke lingers over the landscape adjacent to Jumping-Off-Rock in the heart of Jocassee Gorges. The 500-acre section of woodlands contains 20 research plots, where scientists from Western Carolina University gather data to measure vegetation changes that result from the careful application of prescribed fire. Mark Hall, Jocassee Gorges project manager, implements the burns with a small but highly trained Jocassee management staff. Hall has about 9,000 acres under a regular prescribed burning program designed to enhance wildlife habitat and restore natural, fire-adapted plant communities. (SCDNR photo by Mark Hall)

Sassafras Mountain project rises up

Observation tower work is moving steadily along on Palmetto State high point

The arrival of spring and the ensuing warmer weather has accelerated the construction of an observation tower on South Carolina's highest point, Sassafras Mountain in northern Pickens County.

"It was too cold to pour concrete for most of the winter, but we're moving along now," said Tom Swaynham, assistant chief of wildlife for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR).

The \$1.1 million project, which has been a few years in the making, is expected to be completed in July or August. It represents Phase I of a plan to make the 3,553-foot peak more accessible to the public.

Even in warm weather, constructing the 40-foot diameter circular tower 16 feet above the ground in a remote area is a slow process. "It's hard to get equipment to it, and hauling equipment is hazardous on roads that are steep with tight curves," Swaynham said. "So it's slow going. But when it's finished, we'll have something that we can all be proud of."

Phase I includes the observation tower, a 500-foot access trail from the parking lot to the tower that meets Americans with Disabilities Act standards, and primitive restrooms. Phase II is scheduled to feature a pavilion with modern restrooms, picnic area, accessory trails,

informational kiosks and improvements to the parking lot.

The tower will feature a visual representation of the South Carolina-North Carolina border, which bisects the mountain. The peak, about 20 miles north of Pickens, also sits on the Eastern Continental Divide. Until now, it has been accessible primarily to hikers on the Foothills Trail, a 77-mile path between Table Rock and Oconee state parks that travels to the Sassafras peak. During construction, the Foothills Trail is being diverted away from the top of the mountain for a short distance to rejoin the trail down the road.

The general contractor for the unusual project is Lazar Construction of Anderson. Funding for Phase I came from a variety of sources, including Duke Energy, the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund and from private supporters through commemorative brick sales.

Sassafras Mountain is about a one-hour and 20-minute drive from both downtown Greenville and downtown Anderson, and a 35-minute drive from Pickens.

A smaller viewing platform on the west side of Sassafras, erected in 2010 by Clemson University architectural students, will remain open, along with the parking lot next to the platform. That overlook provides a view primarily to the west and south, looking out onto the mountains of South Carolina, Georgia and North Carolina.

Sassafras Mountain is part of the Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges, and the Franklin Gravelly Wildlife Management Area, managed by SCDNR. 

Friend of Jocassee gets hooked on sporting clays

Daniel sophomore wins prestigious shooting tournaments

By Gabe Boggs

I am 15 years old and have been shooting for about three years now. I love shooting clays, and just anything to do with shotguns. I am a sophomore at Daniel High School. I live near Six Mile and attend Alive Wesleyan Church. My family has a small farm. We have a couple of mules and 21 head of Simmental cattle. I like tending to the cows and really like helping in the hay field as I get to drive the tractor a lot while raking hay. I hope to grow the cattle into a source of income as I get older.

I enjoy hunting and fishing. I really like hunting anything with a dog like bear, raccoon and squirrel. I killed my first bear at age 11. I have spent a lot of time shooting rifles but had never gotten into shotguns. When I went to the Clemson 4-H practice for the first time I was a bit reluctant and embarrassed to try something new in front of people that I didn't know. So I just watched for almost a whole round of skeet. My coach knew exactly what he was doing as he talked me into trying it on Station Seven. After a bit of dry-ball routine, he loaded the gun and, lo and behold, I broke a clay on my very first ever time to shoot a shotgun.

It started a revolution in my house; I was hooked.



Boggs gets ready to shoot at a sporting clays tournament.



Gabe Boggs, a frequent volunteer in the Jocassee Gorges, has advanced through the sporting clays ranks to become an expert shooter.

Now all I think about is shooting, and those people that I didn't even know have become MY family. I wouldn't trade the experiences and the friendships that shotguns have brought to me for the world. I could shoot sporting clays and FITASC around the clock and never stop. I now compete with my team of three, in all the youth events that are available. We have become good friends and have a blast at every shoot.

I also have moved into shooting registered shoots and really like that as I am always shooting with folks who are better than me, and I think it helps me to be a better shooter. I made it from "E" class to "B" class in 2017, and just made it to "A" class at the Krieghoff classic. I am excited and nervous to be in the "A" class. I'm looking at it as another level of challenge, and I will stick with it until I figure it out. I really like the circuit shoots because I now know most of the regular shooters and it's fun to see everyone and talk about where we messed up. And of course, the circuit shoots have one thing to really brag on: THE FOOD. They always feed us well with really good food!

Bottom line is I love the Lord, I love my family, I love the outdoors, and I love this sport and hope I can do it forever.

(Gabe Boggs, son of Allan and Freda Boggs of Six Mile, was featured in the Fall/Winter 2015 issue of Jocassee Journal in a story about Boy Scouts from Troop 134 building a Carolina Fence at Keowee-Toxaway State Park. He frequently helps with Jocassee events. Gabe, who has now advanced to "AA" class and is working on Masters, recently won the North Carolina state championship and the Masters Cup in New Jersey. This story first appeared on the S.C. Sporting Clays Association's Spotlight on Youth website.) 



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For information on subscribing to the Jocassee Journal contact:

Greg Lucas, DNR

311 Natural Resources Drive
Clemson, SC 29631-3253

Phone: (864) 380-5201

e-mail: LucasG@dnr.sc.gov

website:

www.dnr.sc.gov/managed/wild/jocassee/index.htm

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New Year's Eve hike not as festive as previous year's

Upstate hikers vow to return to visit state parks once again

By Odell Suttle

Going to the state parks is one of the things my wife, Sadie, and I enjoy most. The quiet, the beauty of nature is so relaxing and enjoyable.

For four consecutive years we have gone to Oconee State Park and rented a cabin on New Year's week end. On New Year's Eve at 11:45 p.m. we go out on the trail for a hike and return to the cabin at 10 minutes past midnight. This way we are on the trail when the New Year gets here.

We were in cabin Number One last New Year's Eve, but something went amiss. We were checking in on Dec. 30 when Sadie had a horrible accident. The grate over the heating vent was not secured properly and tripped Sadie. She has osteoporosis, and when she hit the floor her right shoulder was shattered.

The park personnel were very helpful. Ranger

Everett Ernst called EMS, and they carried Sadie to Oconee Hospital, a division of Greenville Health System. At the hospital, they did X-rays and that is when the doctor told us the shoulder was "shattered and would need surgery."

I did the walk alone Dec. 31, 2017, because Sadie had to stay in the cabin. I have never felt as alone as I did on that hike, knowing Sadie would have to undergo surgery.

The surgery was done Jan. 31, 2018, at St. Francis Hospital in downtown Greenville by Dr. Benjamin Koch. The surgery was a success, and Sadie is healing. She has her arm in a sling and will have to go to a physical therapist to regain full use of the arm.

We have been going to state park cabins since 1986 and this was our first experience like this. We will return to the cabins at the state park, however, after Sadie is totally healed.

(Odell Suttle is a lifelong resident of Fountain Inn in Greenville County. His wife, Sadie, is the person who got him interested in hiking back in 1986. Suttle says they both love S.C. State Parks, especially Oconee and Table Rock.)

