



Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges



www.dnr.sc.gov

Spring/Summer 2022

Volume 23, Number 1



With Table Rock Mountain in the background, author Dennis Chastain spins a tale during the grand opening of a new overlook and historical marker along SC 11.

Table Rock overlook, marker dedicated

South Carolina's iconic mountain is feature of new pull-off on SC 11

By Dennis Chastain

On March 18, the familiar South Carolina phrase: "Smiling Faces, Beautiful Places," was on full display along the Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway at Table Rock. An enthusiastic crowd of more than 50 folks, who appreciate the natural beauty of Table Rock and the adjacent Grant Meadow, attended the grand opening of a freshly paved scenic overlook on SC Highway 11 with a full-frontal view of the historic granite dome.

The event also featured the unveiling of a new state historical marker, (sponsored by Pickens County and the Pickens County

Historical Society), which tells the story of the mountain before it became a state park in the 1930s.

Dr. Edwin Breeden, coordinator of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History's Historical Marker Program, said that it was rare for a historical marker to focus on a natural feature, but this one was a significant and welcome addition to the program.

Pickens County Administrator Ken Roper, who coordinated the entire project, proclaimed Table Rock at Grant Meadow the "most-photographed spot in South Carolina." He also took the opportunity to recognize several people who helped make the event possible. Among that group were: Mike Hayes, the now-deceased Pickens County safety coordinator, who was an ardent

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History of Table Rock told on new historical markers along SC 11

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advocate of the scenic pull-off; Rodney Robinson, the county engineer and project manager; Hoyt Grant, who has permanently protected the Grant Meadow property through a conservation easement with Upstate Forever; and perhaps most importantly, Anne Sheriff, his fifth grade teacher, who instilled in him a lifelong love of local history.

As the keynote speaker for the event, I told the group that based on my decades of research on the history of Table Rock, dating back to the very early 1800s, I had the tough choice of deciding which of the topics that could be covered in the limited space on a historical marker.

I considered as one of the must-do stories to tell, the decades old, oft-repeated story of how Governor's Rock got its name. I have been hearing the story since I was a teenager. The story appears in print as early as the WPA (Works Progress Administration) Guide to the Palmetto State (published in 1941). It goes something like this: In 1845, when William Sutherland built the first of four Table Rock hotels, Col. Benjamin Hagood of Pickens arranged a grandiose celebration of the event.

The governors of both Carolinas were in attendance, and get this – they dragged a cannon to the top of the mountain and fired it off in celebration. A sudden thunderstorm forced the group to seek refuge in a rock shelter near the peak, and the Governor of North Carolina is alleged to have said to the South Carolina Governor, “You have a beautiful state, but it’s a damn long time between drinks.” And because of that event, the rock outcropping has since been known as “Governor’s Rock.”

Great story, right? But, as I told the group at Grant Meadow, the only problem is that it’s not true – never happened. Pearl McFall, a Pickens historian in the 1950s, once wrote that the event was indeed planned, but it rained all day and the mountain ascent was cancelled.

So, how did the rock come to be known as Governor’s Rock? Well, after some pretty intense research, the answer finally came when I ran across an obscure notation in Governor John Drayton’s book, “A View of South Carolina.” Governor Drayton was a noted naturalist and wrote that in 1801 he was with a party of friends on top of Table Rock when they were overtaken by a thunderstorm and spent the night in the aforementioned rock shelter. And he goes on to say that the outcropping has since been known as Governor’s Rock. Mystery solved. To put that date (1801) into perspective, that was only 10 years after George Washington made a cross-country trip through South Carolina on his 1791 tour of the southern colonies. Yes, that George Washington.

And finally, I told the story of an intriguing phone call I had many years ago from Glenn Oeland, who at the time was managing editor of South Carolina Wildlife magazine and is now a senior editor at National Geographic. Glenn said he was sitting at his desk reading a first-person journal of a lady from Charleston



A new state historical marker, sponsored by Pickens County and the Pickens County Historical Society, tells the story, front and back, of Table Rock Mountain before it became a state park in the 1930s.

who described, in breathless detail, a trip to Table Rock in the 1840s, whereupon she had climbed a set of steps that had been erected up the face of the mountain.

I told Glenn that I could not imagine how that could be true, and I didn’t see how it would even be physically possible. Nevertheless, I suggested that if he would come up here, we would go look and see if there were any signs of the old steps. He did just that and we invited Jill Gerber, the S.C. State Parks naturalist at the time, to come along.

After a tough two-hour hike, we made our way to the point on the south face of the mountain (the one you see from S.C. Highway 11), at the point where it makes a 90-degree turn to the dramatic, vertical north face. When we got there, the rock surface was steep and there was a 1,000-foot sheer drop in front of us. I was looking for a place to put down my walking stick when I spotted a round hole in the rock and planted my walking stick in it like a flag pole. Then the light bulb came on and I wondered out loud, “Why would there be a perfectly round hole in the rock way off up here?” I stood dangerously close to the cliff edge and looked up the sloped face of the rock. There was a series of paired holes just like the one I had found. Then I saw a foot-long iron pin sticking out of the rock about 100 feet above us.

Bingo. We had found the only remaining signs of the old fabled Table Rock steps. I now have three journals and diaries of Charlestonians who made the ascent in the 1840s, along with a hand-drawn map of Table Rock with the wooden ladder or “steps” depicted. So, this legend turns out to be true, but was in real danger of slipping off into the abyss of “lost history.” The story is now permanently preserved in the text of the Table Rock historical marker at Grant Meadow Scenic Overlook.

(Dennis Chastain is an Upstate naturalist, hunter and historian who has written for South Carolina Wildlife magazine since 1989. He is also a frequent contributor to Jocassee Journal.) 

Fire improving habitat on heritage preserves

SCDNR wildlife staff reflects on first prescribed burning experience

By Kollby Taylor

As an employee for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), I get to see and do a lot of cool things. I work on Heritage Preserves within Region 1 (Upstate) and that covers a lot of ground. From the mountain ecosystems of Oconee, Pickens, and Greenville counties to relic populations of plants in McCormick County, we manage for countless different things.

But even though we manage for a variety of different plants and wildlife within our region, the one thing that seems to always be present is fire. Our ecosystems evolved with fire, and it is an important aspect on our natural landscape here in the Southeast. SCDNR uses fire to improve our wildlife habitats and to help preserve the natural history of our state.

On Feb. 10 of this year, I was able to participate in my very first prescribed burn on Ashmore Heritage Preserve in Greenville County. For this burn, we had six people present and burned about 50 acres total. The purpose of this burn was to mainly help improve the habitat that is present on the property. This property contains pitcher plants, which are insect-eating plants, and the burn was conducted to remove low-growing vegetation that was possibly overcrowding the pitcher plants. The burn would also remove a relatively dense fuel layer on the forest floor to help improve growing conditions for native forest-floor species.

As this was my first burn, I was both excited and nervous. At first, fire seems like a very scary thing that is uncontrollable and dangerous. Yet when used as a tool, fire is manageable and extremely beneficial. After the initial jitters were gone, and I was



Matt Norris of SCDNR wildlife staff lights prescribed fire with a drip-torch filled with a mixture of diesel fuel and gasoline. (SCDNR photos by Greg Lucas)

taught how to properly burn lines with a drip torch, it became a fun experience.

Our fire burned relatively well that day, even with changing weather conditions and some slow going at times. After the burn was complete, I was very tired, but happy with how my first prescribed burn had gone. The landscape looked quite different from before and seemed almost from another planet. Even though it looked barren in the moment, I knew that it would be overflowing with green come spring.

To know that you are helping preserve the natural history of the state that you so happily call home is an awesome feeling that I almost can't describe. I am beyond happy to have such a rewarding job where I get to work outside and see nature in all its glory. Since the Ashmore burn, I have completed multiple prescribed fire courses and even helped burn in Jocassee Gorges. In the end, I would say that the burn at Ashmore Heritage Preserve has sparked a fire within me when it comes to prescribed burns that is going to be hard to extinguish and I look forward to many more burns in my future with SCDNR.



Ken Forrester (in ATV) and Matt Norris of SCDNR wildlife staff talk over strategy during a recent prescribed fire in Jocassee Gorges in northern Pickens County.

(Kollby Taylor is a wildlife technician with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources assigned to Upstate heritage preserves. He is a graduate of Clemson University with a degree in wildlife and freshwater fisheries.) 🌿



Horsepasture River is setting for world-class paddling

North Carolina paddler recounts adventurous trip on Jocassee Gorges scenic river

By Clay Lucas

One of the main tributaries of Lake Jocassee, the Horsepasture River provides world class whitewater kayaking in a pristine, dramatic gorge falling off the Eastern escarpment. The federally designated Wild and Scenic section of river is only 4.2 miles long, and the commonly navigated section is even shorter. But the abundance of difficult rapids, walled-in gorges, and astounding scenery makes it into quite the adventure for its length!

On a frosty bluebird January day, following a good rain, a couple of friends and I made the drive to Gorges State Park. We began the day with a mile hike into the base of Rainbow Falls, a popular hiking destination. Fighting numb hands, we used ropes to lower our boats down the icy hillside to the river. Putting in the river was surreal. We caught glimpses of the 125-foot waterfall in front of us while being blinded by the intense spray coming from the base of the falls.

Working our way downstream, we soon passed Stairstep Falls, the last trail access for several miles. From here we were committed to descending through the gorge at river level until the next access point, Windy Falls.

The group settled into a rhythm, catching eddies, hopping out to scout horizon lines, and picking apart the multitude of giant bedrock rapids within the gorge. After a couple miles of amazing whitewater, we reached the crux of the run at a series of rapids called Exit Ramp A and B, and Highway to Heaven. Here the Horsepasture cascades over stacked sets of large granite slides, culminating in a tight pinch where the river chokes down to just a few feet wide between sheer rock walls.

After successfully navigating the most difficult part of the river, we made sure to not let our guard down as we paddled the rest of the way to the top of Windy Falls. We eddied out well above the lip of this behemoth waterfall and hiked down to the precipice to enjoy one last view of the river as it tumbled out of view off the 700-foot cascading waterfall on the last leg of its trip to Lake Jocassee. After fueling up with a quick snack at the lip of the falls, we began the grueling 2.5-mile, 1,000 vertical foot climb out of the gorge with our kayaks on our backs, exhausted from an incredible day but already hungry for the next adventure.

(Clay Lucas is an avid kayaker, cyclist, and outdoorsman residing in western North Carolina. In his free time, you can usually find him outside, exploring the rivers, trails, and peaks of the Appalachians and beyond.) 

‘Chicks with Kicks’ embrace adventure on the Foothills Trail

Ladies who enjoy the outdoors hike scenic mountain trail in sections

By Alison Rauch

The Foothills Trail is a special place. It gives hikers a splash of everything you might want out of a trail—waterfalls, rivers, views, beautiful trees and the possibility of animal sightings.

While many people opt to thru hike, completing the 77-mile trail in a week or less, there’s also beauty in section-hiking it too! Since early January, I’ve hiked with a group called “Chicks with Kicks Hiking SC.” We’re a group of ladies who enjoy the outdoors and the camaraderie hiking brings. The group started section hiking the Foothills Trail with the hopes of leaving Oconee State Park in January and ending at Table Rock State Park in May.

Section-hiking requires a lot of communication, pre-planning and shuttle coordination. I’m thankful for our lead organizer, Shari, and her diligence in planning out the sections. What I’ve realized in the few sections we’ve done is that each section is beautiful in its own unique way. Oconee State Park to Cheohee Road includes a spur trail to Hidden Falls (don’t skip the spur trails!) and Cheohee Road to Burrell’s Ford is the relaxing section that parallels the Chattooga River with options to see Kings Creek Falls and Pig Pen and Lick Log Falls.

Burrell’s Ford to Sloan Bridge includes a winter view of Whiteside Mountain and Hiker’s Peril Falls. Soon we’ll catch boat shuttles to cross Lake Jocassee and tackle the Jocassee Gorges section, which will prepare us for Sassafras Mountain and the finish line.



Section-hiking the Foothills Trail requires a lot of communication, pre-planning and shuttle coordination, as the Chicks with Kicks learned during their hike.



The “Chicks with Kicks” started section-hiking the Foothills Trail at Oconee State Park in January and planned to end at Table Rock State Park in May.

Whether you are a beginner or seasoned hiker, there is something on the Foothills Trail for you. I highly recommend the Foothills Trail Conservancy map and guidebook. These books are detailed, and money raised goes towards the maintenance of the trail.

As the weather warms and you get the itch to explore, maybe you’ll run into the Chicks with Kicks group out on the trail! I’ve included our mileage breakdown below and how we chose to section hike the trail. (Letters and numbers in parentheses correspond to Foothills Trail guidebook and map locations.)

- Oconee State Park to Cheohee Road (A14- A12)– 6.0 miles
- Cheohee Road to Burrell’s Ford (A12 – A11)– 10.4 miles
- Burrell’s Ford to Sloan Bridge (A11 – A9) – 7.2 miles
- Sloan Bridge to Bad Creek Access (A9 – A7) – 7.8 miles
- Bad Creek to Horsepasture Road (boat shuttle with Jocassee Lake Tours) – 8.5 miles
- Horsepasture to Canebrake (boat shuttle with Jocassee Lake Tours) –7.9 miles
- Canebrake to Laurel Fork Falls (A6-A5) (boat shuttle with Jocassee Lake Tours)– 5.8 miles
- Laurel Fork Falls to Laurel Valley (A5-A4)– 8.1 miles
- Laurel Valley to Sassafras Mountain (A4- A2)– 4.8 miles
- Sassafras Mountain to Table Rock (A2- A1)– 9.7 miles

(Alison Rauch is the public information coordinator for Greer Commission of Public Works. Follow her on Twitter @alisonrauch and Instagram at alisonrauch.)

Pickens native tells story of hunting black bear in Jocassee Gorges and how her family influenced her conservation journey

By Anaston Broom Porter

Growing up in Pickens, South Carolina, is a unique experience that only a few people get to live. My name is Anaston Porter, formerly a Broom until I got married to my sweet husband, Isaac Porter, in December 2020. I come from a family that has a strong hunting heritage in this area and the surrounding states. I absolutely love hunting, fishing, camping, and all things wildlife thanks to my family.

My love for this heritage is extraordinary considering that I am a female with a career in natural resources education. I have a bachelor of science degree in wildlife and fisheries biology and a masters in agricultural education, both from Clemson University. Go Tigers! I am currently 24 years old, but feel like I have experienced a lifetime of memories in my 24 years. I would like to share a little bit about my hunting heritage, a few family stories, and my recent record kill with you!

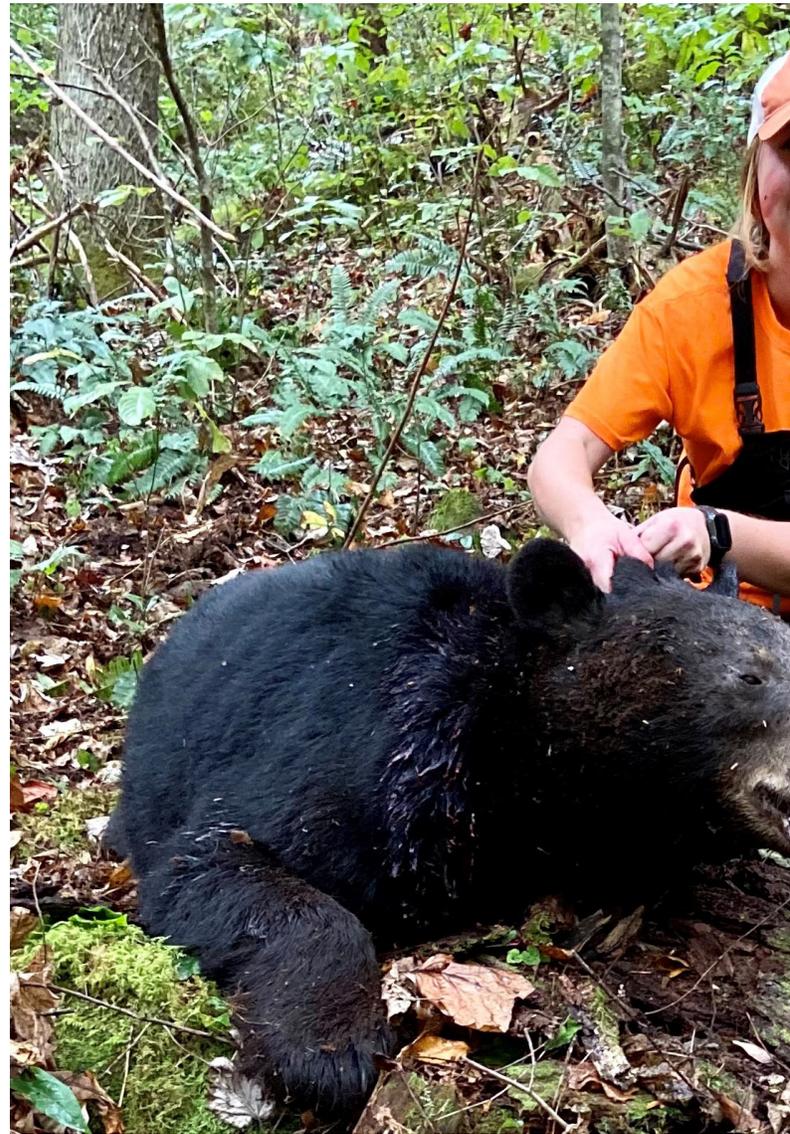
My father, Shannon Broom, grew up hunting in this area. He has shown me countless pictures of harvest seasons when he was growing up where family is gathered together to harvest what species is in season. They always made sure to respect those animals that were harvested and use the meat, hide, and whatever else was useful from that animal. Species such as Eastern wild turkey, white-tailed deer, Eastern grey squirrel, raccoon, eastern cottontail, and black bear were prime species to be hunted. Most of the hunting was done because it allowed them to spend time outside and enjoy nature. I can remember when I was little, walking alongside my dad with the leaves crunching underneath my feet during the fall when deer season arrived. I was always told to be as quiet as possible or I would scare the deer away. To me, this



Posing with a turkey he harvested in the Horsepasture is the author's grandfather, Clifton Broom.

meant stepping in the EXACT spot my dad stepping in while following behind him. I assumed this would reduce my noise, but it may have just made me look like Elmer Fudd tip-toeing through the field saying "be vevy vevy quiet, we're hunting wabbits!"

This past 2021 bear season, I killed my first black bear



The author, Anaston Broom Porter, and her husband, Isaac, pose with the bear during the 2021 bear season.

in the Jim Timmerman Natural Resource Area at Jocassee Gorges, also known as "The Horsepasture." It was one of the largest black bear killed in the area, weighing in at 380 pounds. It was so large, the biologist's scale would not pick it up off of the ground and we had to take it to be weighed at a weighing station. I was hunting with my uncle, Randy Broom, and the legendary Roy Clark, who is a Tennessean and has been running bears with hounds since he was a child. Roy raises his own strain of Plott hounds called Clark's Laurel Mountain Plotts. This strain of hounds has been bred over the past 60-plus years to run bear. The "houndsmen" culture is a unique one with lots of unspoken rules and strategic planning involved. A variety of hunting tools is also needed to be successful in this art. Things such as a Garmin tracking device, TT15 dog collars, radio systems for communication, and of course, plenty of snacks (because you are in the woods majority of the day with no cell service or access to food). Many of my family members would probably say otherwise, but it sure does help to have wireless

ting heritage'



with the 380-pound bruin that she harvested in Jocassee Gorges

tracking devices and the ability to somewhat control your dogs while hunting.

My husband, Isaac, and my father were also with us during this hunt. We had been riding roads most of the day listening on the radio and watching our Garmin trackers to see where the dogs were running. If you are not familiar with hound hunting, you typically send out lead track dogs first to strike a track and ride roads until you get a good race going. This can take anywhere from a few hours to an all-day process. Luckily, this was day two of hunting and the dogs were warmed up and struck a track early that morning. They ran it most of the morning until about lunchtime when they treed on a steep mountain near a creek bed. The hike to where the dogs were treed was straight up and covered in thick mountain laurel. If you have never climbed through a thicket of mountain laurel, I would compare it to needing the stamina of black belt karate student while crawling on your belly and some safety glasses to keep from getting poked in the eye by sticks.

When we got to where we had to start climbing up, my husband and I met a few men standing along the creek watching. They asked me, “Are those your dogs treed in there?” We said, “Yes, there are already a few people at the tree, but we are trying to make it in to see the bear.” Their immediate response was, “GOOD LUCK! We ain’t going in there – that’s way too thick and steep for us.” I looked at them and said, “Well I’m going! I wanna see that bear up a tree!”

With that, my husband and I took off towards the tree. When we got there, most of the men were surprised to see a girl had made it to the tree. I was just there to observe, since I knew they had gotten to the tree first and were a part of our hunting party. However, the guys took tally of who was there and realized I had never shot a bear. They asked me if I wanted to take a shot at it. I made sure to tell them they shouldn’t let me shoot it just because I was a girl – that if they wanted to shoot it, to go for it. After lots of bickering back and forth, I finally decided to take the shot.

At this point, I don’t think the guys realized just how big this bear was in the tree – or they may have made a different decision to let me shoot the bear. After the shot was made, the bear came tumbling out of the tree and we all gathered around to take a look. I made sure to thank all the guys for letting me take that bear, and I had the traditional blood smeared on my face since it was my first bear. Feeling the excitement from everyone present at the tree after my shot really is what hunting is all about. Being humble, respectful of other hunting parties, respectful of the kill, and enjoying fellowship is what it is all about.

I am so thankful to be surrounded by family and friends who do just that. My career, hunting heritage, and lifestyle is something I am so appreciative of. The way I have been raised here in the small town of Pickens, South Carolina has impacted my life and driven me to where I am today in my career.

(Anaston Broom Porter is an education and outreach coordinator for the Anderson County Soil and Water Conservation District. She runs the Anderson County Seed Library, located in the main Anderson County Library, where community members can “check out” up to five seed packets if they have a library card. The program helps low-income areas in Anderson County to have access to free garden seeds to grow their own food.)



Anaston’s first white-tailed deer was taken while she was a student at Pickens High School.

South Carolina archaeology legend passes away

Tommy Charles made important contributions to his field, helped discover Jocassee-area petroglyphs

By Dennis Chastain

Benjamin Franklin once advised, “If you would not be forgotten, do things worth remembering.” My dear friend, retired archaeologist Tommy Charles, who died last summer, did things worth remembering; so many things that to detail them all would require a book-length manuscript and that still would not tell the larger tale of who this remarkable man was.

Tommy Charles was, first and foremost; one of most genial, most genuine and most perennially positive people I have known. He and I spent many, many hours walking old logging roads, climbing the Palmetto State’s tallest mountains, crawling around in remote rock shelters and riding around in his station wagon; all in search of petroglyphs, pictographs or some other potential archaeological site. Now that he is gone, I cherish the memory of every moment that I spent with him.

A few months before he passed away, our friend Gene Johnston, called me and suggested that we ought to see what we could do to get the coveted Order of Palmetto award for Tommy. The Order of Palmetto is the state’s highest civilian honor bestowed on its citizens.

It took several months, but with more than a little help from Tommy’s extensive network of friends and colleagues, along with state Sen. Rex Rice and Rep. Davey Hiott, we were able to pull it off. The presentation ceremony was held in the State House in Columbia before an audience of nearly a hundred friends and family.

Of course, Tommy was very gracious, humbled and maintained that we shouldn’t have gone to all that trouble. But more than anything else, all who participated in the process know that Tommy went to his grave knowing just how much we all loved him and respected him, and how much we will long mourn his passing.

Nena Powell Rice, one of Tommy’s longtime friends and colleagues at the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, coordinated the process of getting letters of support from the folks at the Institute and others. The testimonials from his colleagues were detailed, heart-felt and compelling; and they came from some of South Carolina’s most prominent archaeologists and other notable experts in the field. Nena Powell Rice is also editor of the Institute’s magazine-style newsletter and put together an extensive, loving tribute to Tommy’s decades-long service to the field of archaeology and the people of South Carolina.

Tommy had a way of influencing people, and in a good



Tommy Charles (left), here at the groundbreaking for the Petroglyph Center at Hagood Mill in Pickens, was one of archaeology’s most visible and enthusiastic practitioners in South Carolina. Joining him at the groundbreaking were friends Michael Bramlett and Dennis Chastain.

way. This past autumn, Michael Bramlett, a long-time friend of Tommy’s, (the fellow who discovered the first stick-figure on the rock outcropping, now the centerpiece of the Hagood Creek Petroglyph Center), put together a small memorial service at Hagood Mill.

Michael, Gene Johnston and Hagood Mill manager, Billy Crawford, all gave truly impressive testimonials of how Tommy had changed the direction of their lives. Who knew that it was Tommy Charles who, long ago, had encouraged a young Billy Crawford’s innate love of history and Indian artifacts? According to Billy, it was Tommy who led him to pursue a college degree in archaeology at Coastal Carolina University, which later led to the important work he does today at Hagood Mill.

For more than 40 years, Tommy was the affable human face on the sometimes-arcane field of archaeology. Above and beyond everything else, Tommy was a “Regular Joe,” someone all of us regular Joe’s could relate to. As I said at the Order of Palmetto ceremony, “Tommy Charles is almost certainly the only South Carolinian who has driven a huge, rubber-tired excavator all the way from Columbia to Allendale.”

With two books, numerous academic papers and conference presentations, an artifact collection that numbers in the thousands to his credit, along with the untold numbers of human lives he affected in a positive way, I think even old Ben Franklin would agree that Tommy Charles did things worth remembering.

Tommy was 89 years old. With his passing, he now joins several other truly legendary figures associated with the Jocassee Gorges region: Tommy Wyche, Dot Jackson, Franklin Gravely and Sam Stokes Sr., all of whom are now gone, but left their footprints on the remote dirt roads and footpaths of the Jocassee Gorges. Farewell old friend.

(Dennis Chastain is an Upstate naturalist, hunter and historian who has written for South Carolina Wildlife magazine since 1989. He is also a frequent contributor to Jocassee Journal.) 🌿



Year-round access to Jumping-Off Rock keeps SCDNR staff constantly working to keep the road open and shaping it to prevent water from causing major damage. (SCDNR photo by Greg Lucas)

Jocassee Gorges road work is never-ending task

Limited staff spend days making sure area attractions are accessible to vehicles

By Tom Swaynham

Jocassee Gorges Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is in high demand for visitors. While some want a walk-in experience, most of our users want vehicular access to their favorite place. We try and balance the wishes of road users with the resource protection mission of the property and the outdoor experience of all.

We have many destinations on the area that people want to visit. The most popular are Sassafras Mountain Overlook and Jumping-Off Rock Overlook. We have year-round vehicular access to these two sites, except during inclement weather or road construction. Some other sites are open all year including several overlooks on Horsepasture and Camp Adger roads. Other roads are open seasonally.

We have 13 miles of roads that are open year-round. We have an additional 42 miles of roads that are open seasonally. The seasonal roads are open from March 20 – May 10 and Sept. 15 – Jan. 15. This schedule accommodates the heavy spring and fall use times for hunters, anglers, wildflower enthusiasts, hikers and other users. The closures allow us to maintain the roads, allow wildlife to have time without motorized disturbance and allow those users that want a quieter experience time to enjoy. We could not keep the roads up without the closures on the seasonal roads.

At the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), we pride ourselves in our property management. Road maintenance is difficult, expensive, and continuous, particularly in the

mountains. We spend more than \$40,000 a year on gravel on the Jocassee roads. We spend at least 30 percent of our working time on them. Almost all of this expense and effort is on roads open to public vehicular use. This represents a large investment for public access on the area.

The roads on Jocassee WMA were originally designed as occasional use logging roads. They were not engineered for the heavy use they receive. We have had landslides impact the roads, water management issues and many other challenges. The three most important things in road maintenance are drainage, drainage, and drainage. Our objective is to get water off of the roads as quickly as possible and in as many places as possible. The rock stabilizes the roadbed but only in non-saturated conditions. Managing water on mountain roads is the biggest road challenge we face.

We have limited staff (three field staff) and funding. Luckily, we have some help. Duke Energy has been a valuable partner in our road management. They contribute funds for gravel each year and help maintain a good portion of the roads in the Musterground portion of Jocassee, on Oconee Countyside. We are thankful that Pickens County maintains the road to Sassafras Mountain as a county road.

The roads on Jocassee WMA are a wonderful drive leading to some beautiful spots. Keeping them open and safe is one of our many missions in managing the property.

(Tom Swaynham recently retired as the S.C. Department of Natural Resources' land manager at the Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges. Tom worked for SCDNR for 33 years.) 

Friends of Bald Rock Heritage Preserve working to restore, preserve and cherish Upstate landmark

Public/private collaboration tackles difficult, long-standing problems

By Susan Jordan

Since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, we have all been looking for something to capture our attention, some newness, a distraction from the daily challenges. So it was no wonder that on a random day of scanning for change, my husband, John, noticed a glaring spot at Bald Rock on a one-mile sightline from our house. When he went to Bald Rock Heritage Preserve to investigate, he found a large area of brand new white spray paint.

This discovery prompted an e-mail to “Ask LaFleur” at The Greenville News. Why, John wanted to know, had nothing been done about the decades of graffiti on Bald Rock? Elizabeth LaFleur’s response introduced us to Austen Attaway at the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). Austen had been pondering the same question in her job as biologist and manager at the Preserve. She talked with us about the challenges of removing graffiti, picking up litter, and deterring vandalism in general. Following some discussion, Austen proposed the creation of a nonprofit, Friends of Bald Rock Heritage Preserve, to work with SCDNR to return Bald Rock to its natural state.

We agreed that a public/private collaboration would be a powerful way to tackle the Preserve’s difficult and long-standing problems. We quickly accepted and started contacting representatives of the residential communities near Bald Rock, the Upstate Master Naturalist Association, and other conservation groups about our plans to work with SCDNR to clean up and restore the Preserve.

We held an organizational meeting in August 2021. The participants quickly listed concerns, including easy access to the Preserve, visitors at all hours of the day and night, unsafe parking issues, car accidents, drug deals, vandalism, campfires on the rock, fireworks, evidence of drug and alcohol use, broken glass, household garbage, litter of all kinds, and decades of garish and obscene graffiti. The group thought the mission was daunting, but encouraged us to move forward. Something had to be done to protect Bald Rock’s natural resources!

In September 2021, we registered as a S.C. Public Charity with the S.C. Secretary of State and filed an application for 501c3 status. During August and September, we recruited volunteers to pick up litter and pressure wash graffiti off the



Dave Redden and many other volunteers with Friends of Bald Rock Heritage Preserve have worked an incredible number of hours to remove years of graffiti paint from the iconic Upstate landmark. (SCDNR photos by Greg Lucas)

rock on the first three work days scheduled for October. We got a very enthusiastic reception and heard lots of comments like, “I’ve been waiting for somebody to do this!” And we were in business!

The River Falls Fire Department was recruited to provide a volunteer fireman to man their pumper truck providing water for pressure washing. Greenville County Litter Ends Here provided supplies and support for litter pickups. We tried weekend and weekday events in order to attract a variety of volunteers. We varied the work day plans by scheduling litter pickup and pressure washing together, on the same day, and also on separate days. On different clean-up days, we worked with the Preserve open, or closed, or partially closed to the general public. These experiences have helped us plan safer, more manageable and productive work days for future events.

In our first five months, 102 volunteers worked 260 man-hours, collected 1,470 pounds of litter, and used 9,300 gallons of water to remove graffiti. We have learned a great deal. There is still a tremendous amount of work to be done to enhance the safe public use and enjoyment of the Preserve while protecting its natural resources.

We have learned about heritage preserves, the history of Bald Rock, and its rare and threatened plants, animals, headwater streams and forest. We have gained a better understanding of the amazing work the SCDNR staff does to protect the natural beauty of South Carolina. There is so much to appreciate and enjoy at the Preserve beyond the rock opposite the bridge and the stunning views.

Thanks to a dedicated volunteer’s game camera and laborious counting, we know that Bald Rock Heritage
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Regular pressure-washing, clean-up days changing face of Bald Rock

continued from page 10

Preserve's 165 acres averages 3,000 visitations a week. That includes 1,000 on the weekdays, and 2,000 on the weekends. Many of these visitors have no idea they are in a Heritage Preserve, or what that means. Visitors often don't know or care that graffiti, litter, fires and alcohol are illegal. Many of them have been visiting the rock for decades, long before SCDNR acquired the property and began managing it in 2001, and they feel entitled to use the property in any way they choose. Many other visitors are shocked by the graffiti and litter, and ask how it was ever allowed to continue. They want to be involved with the restoration work. Obviously, education about the Preserve, its history, and the importance of protecting its natural resources will be an important focus of the restoration. To start, SCDNR has already posted the rules on a new highly visible sign at the entrance. Also, a new light has been installed in the parking area.

The story of Friends of Bald Rock is all about our volunteers who share their time, energy, expertise, and tools to work toward restoration. They are amazing! They are enthusiastic collectors of litter, who take great delight in the total number of pounds of litter we collect each clean-up day. Our pressure washing volunteers are a more serious group, directing all their energy to wash off decades of paint. Because the work is tedious, each pressure washing volunteer has a sub who will relieve them for rest periods. This keeps the work going as long as the water supply lasts. Our volunteers care about the environment and are renewed by the work and making new friends. On the first day of pressure washing, our volunteers ranged in age from 18-88!

Other projects include:

- Friends of Bald Rock's website, which will be live soon. Please visit us at friendsofbaldrock.com where it is easy to learn about our events, volunteer, join and donate. Check

out our logo featuring grass of parnassus, one of the rare and threatened plants at the Preserve.

- SCDNR and Friends of Bald Rock have begun discussions with the Clemson Landscape Architecture Department to study Bald Rock's 165 acres and propose designed solutions to resolve the challenges to preserving and protecting the property. This is the first step in developing a sustainable master plan to enhance the public

use of the Preserve while protecting its natural resources. We look forward to working with them.

- We look forward to developing a team to research and publish a book on the history of Bald Rock to honor decades of memories and personal stories. We want to celebrate self-expression, and memorialize milestones in a new era of conservation and education. Spray painting RIP and a loved one's name on the rock is illegal, subject to fine and possible jail time. Rain gradually washes chemicals in the paint into headwater streams and rivers. It invites more graffiti. Is this the best memorial? Some visitors bring a beloved and symbolic possession of the person they have lost, photograph it on the rock,

and take it home. This is only one way to create a lasting tribute to the memory of that person and Bald Rock.

We want to hear from you! Let your friends and family know how they can get involved in the restoration of Bald Rock. We are looking for a wide variety of experience in our volunteers to participate in future volunteer events, and provide support and leadership to grow the organization. Please visit our website friendsofbaldrock.com or send an e-mail to friendsofbaldrock@gmail.com. We hope to see you on the Rock!

(Susan Jordan is the president of Friends of Bald Rock Heritage Preserve.) 



Bald Rock Heritage Preserve must sometimes be closed during cleaning days to protect the safety of visitors, as pressure-washing often slings broken glass like a projectile.



Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges

S.C. Department of Natural Resources
Director, Robert H. Boyles Jr.

Editor: Greg Lucas

Funding for this publication provided by:

Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund

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<https://www2.dnr.sc.gov/ManagedLands/ManagedLand/ManagedLand/53>

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, national origin, disability, religion or age.

Direct all inquiries to the Office of Human Resources, PO Box 167, Columbia, SC 29202.

Total cost: \$2878.00

Total copies: 3,000

Cost per copy: \$0.96



Printed on Recycled Paper

19-12419



Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund

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Columbia, SC 29202

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Table Rock manager is local Pickens boy

Park features two of South Carolina's hardest hiking trails

By Odell Suttle

Michael Trotter, a lifelong resident of Pickens County, is now park manager at Table Rock State Park. Trotter grew up in Pickens and played football at Pickens High School. After high school, Trotter went to Furman University. He graduated from Furman in 1998 with a degree in geology.

"I did not grow up planning to be a ranger," Trotter said in an interview in his office at Table Rock State Park. "I got interested in it at Furman. A ranger came to Furman and made a talk. That is when I got interested in being a ranger."

Many people take their vacations at the various state parks. Since Trotter lives in Table Rock State Park, where does he like to take his family for vacations?

"We like to visit coastal destinations," Trotter said. "My wife and I are both from Pickens and we love the mountains, but we like to vacation at the coast."



Michael Trotter, park manager at Table Rock State Park, likes to visit South Carolina's coast when he's not hanging out in the mountains. (Photo by Scott Stegenga)

Table Rock State Park has two of the most challenging and scenic hiking trails in the state—Table Rock Trail and Pinnacle Mountain Trail. It is difficult for hikers to determine which one is harder. Trotter added his input to the discussion.

"They will both challenge you," Trotter said. "Most people can do them but you have to stop and rest. When you hike or backpack, listen to your body. The body will tell you when it is time to rest. It is best to have a hiking buddy when people hike."

Trotter enjoys seeing families get together at the park and having fun with each other.

(Odell Suttle is a lifelong resident of Fountain Inn in Greenville County and is an avid hiker. 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.) 