



Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges



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Fall/Winter 2023

Volume 24, Number 2



With the South Carolina mountains serving as their backdrop, the four intrepid counters from the 2023 Sassafras Mountain Hawk Watch—from left, Bill Brady, Elizabeth Galloway, Betsy Lewis and Ed Moorer—pause beside the Sassafras Mountain Overlook on Nov. 29, the final day of the seasonal count. (SCDNR photo by Cindy Thompson)

Sassafras Mountain Hawk Watch counts record number of raptors

Volunteers spent three months counting migrating raptors and entertaining visitors on South Carolina's highest point

By Ed Moorer

My "office" for three months every year happens to be atop a mountain that offers ever-changing weather patterns and beautiful views of natural wonders to observe and count.

Plenty of songbirds are feeding nearby, and more than 700 monarch butterflies flew by this season, migrating over the

mountains. Timber rattlesnakes appear from the bush, and the leaf colors this year were fabulous. At least 8,221 visitors and hikers were counted walking to the Sassafras Mountain Overlook from Labor Day until the end of November. There, our counters would assist and take questions on everything from topography to trails to hawk migration.

'We gave talks to schools, colleges, and adult groups. Most all visitors had their picture taken with the mountains as a backdrop.' —Ed Moorer

We gave talks to schools, colleges, and adult groups. Most all visitors had their picture taken with the mountains as a backdrop. One of our local TV stations, Greenville NBC affiliate WYFF News 4, along with The Greenville News and South Carolina Wildlife magazine.
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With binoculars and a spotting scope trained to locate migrating raptors, (from left) Elizabeth Galloway, Bill Brady and Betsy Lewis of the Sassafras Mountain Hawk Watch carefully scan the skies from the Sassafras Mountain Overlook in northern Pickens County. (SCDNR photo by Cindy Thompson)

Turkey vulture numbers set record at Sassafras

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covered our season with cameras and interviews. Amongst all this activity, why try to drive up the curvy roads to here anyway?

Our regular counters—Bill Brady, Betsy Lewis, Elizabeth Galloway, and myself—attempt to identify, count, and then record on hawkcount.org every day any migrating raptors as they make their annual trip to southern environments for the winter. Other helpers arrive when they are able to help keep more eyes on the 360-degree sky. This ninth year on Sassafras set a record for the most raptors with 14,203. Turkey vultures set another record with 5,651.

Observation hours were at an all-time high with 307 hours put in by volunteers. Three more species tied with previous year's totals, including osprey, red-shouldered hawk, and American kestrel. With no major weather events coming our way, this may have led to more observation hours, and more raptors counted. Hawk Migration Association of North America will analyze data from all sites on all flyways, including us, for a later report this spring. Visit hawkcount.org for more information.

Rare sightings this fall included five bald eagles in the air at one time, a passing snow goose, a family of five red-shouldered hawks flying at the same time, and a magnificent frigate bird aloft over the viewing platform. (Look that one up from the coastline!) Nature will surprise you.

The office is closed until next fall. I encourage all to get outside and take a child with you. Come join us next fall on the mountain.

(Ed Moorer, a former schoolteacher, and park ranger at Table Rock State Park, is the site coordinator for Sassafras Mountain Hawk Watch. He can be reached at moorer03@bellsouth.net.) 🍀



Ed Moorer (right) points out to two Clemson University OLLI Jocassee Gorges students where hawks often fly toward the Sassafras Overlook from the north during migration. The triangular peak that can be seen in the distance, to the left and above Moorer's outstretched hand, is Mount Pisgah on the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina. (SCDNR photo by Greg Lucas)

‘Happy Trails to You’

Retired Devils Fork park manager still a public servant but now on the Palmetto Trail

By Kevin Evans

If you are of a certain age you may know these Roy Rogers lyrics, “Happy Trails to You,” or at least have heard them before. Oftentimes they have been sung as someone is departing from somewhere. These words now have a new meaning for me.

In 2021 I retired from the South Carolina State Park Service after serving for 30 years. Eighteen years of that I called the Jocassee Gorges my home. At Devils Fork State Park, I served as both assistant manager from 2001 until 2004 and then returned as park manager in 2007. Being the park manager, I was able to work with many different partners and build relationships with many amazing people, who I still stay in contact with today.

As we all know, a lot has changed for the Jocassee Gorges, and Lake Jocassee, once a hidden gem, is now a well-known tourist attraction. The role of being a park ranger has changed from when I began my career. Back in the day, a good bit of time was focused on being a steward of the resource and managing the daily operations of a park. While that part hasn’t changed, now park rangers have to focus on those things along with managing the large number of visitors that come to the parks each week, often having to direct traffic due to reaching social carrying capacity and parking capacity. One of the things all park rangers enjoy is what I used to call “Going Outside to Play,” which to me was going out in the woods to work on a project. The Oconee Bell Trail at Devils Fork State Park was one my favorite places to “play.” Whether it was clearing trails, re-routing the trail to make it more sustainable,

‘Most people when they retire look to travel, or having the leisure time to do the things they were not able to do while working. So what does a retired park ranger do? This one wanted to “go outside and play.”’

—Kevin Evans



“Going outside to play,” retired park ranger Kevin Evans (center) works with an AmeriCorps trail crew to build a bridge at Keowee-Toxaway State Park.

or building boardwalks to protect the Oconee bells, I enjoyed that work.

Now, most people when they retire look to travel, or having the leisure time to do the things they were not able to do while working. So what does a retired park ranger do? This one wanted to “go outside and play.” One of the partners I was able to work with in the past was helping the folks at the Palmetto Trail. The Palmetto

Trail, which will be celebrating 30 years in 2024, has 31 trail passages from the Ross Mountain Passage in Walhalla to Awenda Passage in the Lowcountry. The opportunity arose for me to work part time with the Palmetto Trail as an Upstate Trail and Volunteer Coordinator, and I could not resist and began working with the Palmetto Trail in September 2021. To me, it has been an awesome transition.

I continue to work with S.C. Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, S.C. Native Plant Society and Upstate Forever, just to name a few; but now in a different way. I still get to help people connect with the amazing natural resources South Carolina has to offer but in a different way. The best thing is I get to hit the trail, hike the areas that I didn’t have the time to in the past. Don’t get me wrong—hiking the Roundtop and Blue Ridge Electric Co-op passages is not easy, especially carrying a chainsaw clearing blowdowns, but when you look at work as “going outside to play” it’s a win, win!

Next time you are out on the trail, and you see a smiling but maybe tired face, just remember “Happy Trails to you, until we meet again.”

If you have not taken the time to hike the Passages of the Palmetto Trail I encourage you to do so. Please visit our website for passage maps or for opportunities to volunteer: The Palmetto Trail – Palmetto Conservation Foundation.

(Kevin Evans is Upstate Trail and Volunteer Coordinator for the Palmetto Trail.) 🌿



Kevin Evans gets low and stable as he works to drill into granitic gneiss while working on a footpath for the Palmetto Trail.



SCDNR staff (from left) Parker Sharpe, Wesley Moore, Hailey Goyette and Bryeton Morris remove Eastern brook trout out of Pig Pen Branch by using electrofishing. The trout were removed from the Oconee County creek and relocated to the Walhalla State Fish Hatchery, where they could be spawned.

Eastern brook trout restoration underway in Pig Pen Branch, Lick Log Creek

Partnership includes state, federal agencies

By Hailey Goyette

The Eastern brook trout restoration project on Pig Pen Branch and Lick Log Creek in Oconee County had a big push in Fall 2023 involving many conservation partners, and it will be an ongoing effort of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR).

Pig Pen Branch and Lick Log Creek held an introduced population of creek chub (*Semotilus atromaculatus*) that were displacing the native Eastern brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*). Creek chub is a native species, but we knew from historic sampling that it did not occur in Pig Pen Branch—it was introduced. SCDNR’s goal is to restore a reproducing Eastern brook trout population in about 3.6 miles of stream by removing creek chub using a piscicide called Antimycin.

The project started in 2005 when SCDNR worked with the U.S. Forest Service to do a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review to determine if the trout restoration would have any significant environmental effects. The land around the area was acquired by Greenville-area land trust Naturaland Trust. The pond dam was removed by funding and construction support by Tripp Boltin’s U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fish Passage Team with equipment operator support from the U.S. Forest Service Andrew Pickens Ranger District staff. SCDNR assisted by removing non-natives from the pond before and stabilizing the pond bed after dam removal.

The Burrell’s Pond dam removal was an essential part of the project by eliminating the non-native invasion of fish living in the pond into Pig Pen Branch. Burrell’s Pond also


caused thermal pollution and sedimentation downstream, making it crucial to remove the dam so the stream could return to cooler temperatures more adequate for Eastern brook trout.

Once the dam was removed, SCDNR then removed the “remnant” of Eastern brook trout from the treatment area and relocated the trout to the Walhalla State Fish Hatchery to be spawned—there were less than 100 fish left in the creek. The remnant Pig Pen Brook Trout removed to the Hatchery represent a unique native genotype, or strain, that is only known to occur in Pig Pen Branch and one other stream in the Chattooga River Drainage. This is why we moved them to the Walhalla Hatchery, trying specifically to save these fish.

SCDNR along with National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Trout Unlimited, and other volunteers then performed the Antimycin treatment on Pig Pen Branch and Lick Log Creek in Fall 2023 to remove the invasive creek chub.

A detox station running Potassium Permanganate was set up downstream at the Chattooga River to neutralize the Antimycin from Pig Pen Branch and Lick Log Creek to prevent impacts to non-target fish and insects.

Dr. Jeremy Pike with Clemson University is studying the waterway, before and after, to document there are no negative impacts. In addition to invertebrate surveys, the studies include salamanders and crayfish.

(Hailey Goyette is a freshwater fisheries biologist with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, based in the Clemson office.) 

With Central youth, Foothills Trail improvement projects are ‘All in the Family’

Parents wanted children to give back in taking care of ‘wild places’ for the future

Three children from one Central family have chosen to complete trail improvement projects on the Foothills Trail as Girl Scout Gold Awards or Boy Scout Eagle projects.

The most recent project was completed in October by Isabel Sexton, 17, an 11th-grader at Daniel High School near Central in Pickens County. She is the daughter of DeWayne Sexton and Connie Crane of Central. Isabel, a member of Girl Scout Troop 1191 in Clemson, built steps in a steep part of the Foothills Trail between Sloan Bridge (SC 107) and Whitewater Road (SC 130) to improve safety and help with erosion. The project was for Isabel’s Girl Scout Gold Award.

In September 2021, Isabel’s brother, Ethan Sexton, a member of Liberty’s Boy Scout Troop 227, rebuilt an eroded section of the Foothills Trail along the Chattooga River about 1 mile south of Burrell’s Ford by digging out and creating a drainage system for a spring under the trail. Ethan also moved large stones to make steps over the newly reworked trail. This project was for Ethan’s Eagle Scout Award. Ethan is currently a freshman at the College of Charleston.

In March 2014, their older sister, Katie, refurbished the Whitewater River campsite with new benches, upgraded firepits, new steps and a new water cistern with pipe. This project was for Katie’s Gold Award with Girl Scout Troop 202 of Clemson. Katie’s project was featured in the Spring/Summer 2014 issue of Jocassee



Ethan Sexton helped rebuild an eroded section of the Foothills Trail along the Chattooga as part of his 2021 Eagle Scout project.



Isabel Sexton (far left) is shown with her work crew from the Foothills Trail project that she completed in October 2023 for her Girl Scout Gold Award.

‘It is extremely gratifying to see these young adults take an active role in improving their outdoor environment.’

—Heyward Douglass

Journal. Now Katie Hall, she is currently a therapist in Columbia.

Heyward Douglass, retired executive director for the Foothills Trail Conservancy and currently its special projects coordinator, was the advisor for all three Foothills Trail

projects completed by DeWayne and Connie’s children.

“It is extremely gratifying to see these young adults take an active role in improving their outdoor environment,” Douglass said, “and their parents are to be commended for encouraging

their efforts. Each of them was a pleasure to work with on these improvements, and the Foothills Trail Conservancy was the beneficiary of three valuable projects.”

“We feel blessed to live so close to the beautiful and unique Jocassee Gorges and wanted our kids to know how fortunate they are to have this amazing place in their backyard,” said Connie Crane, mother of the three Foothills Trail project-doers. “The many trails and waterways have been our playground and our sanctuary since they were small children with so many wonderful memories made while camping, hiking, backpacking, and fishing. We wanted them to have many experiences in wild places so they would learn to value it and understand why it needs to be taken care of. We hope by doing these projects they have learned the importance of taking care of wild places for future generations.”

Bald Rock Heritage Preserve

Among changes will be relocating entrance to Persimmon Ridge Road

By Austen Attaway

To the members and volunteers of Friends of Bald Rock Heritage Preserve:

We have appreciated the hard work, time, and energy that you have volunteered to us over the past (almost) two years! We need your continued support and hard work to continue moving forward with our goal of restoring Bald Rock Heritage Preserve.

Recently, we have pivoted away from pressure washing the graffiti off the rock toward a more sustainable approach of restoring our beautiful and rare landform. The work that the Clemson University grad students did with their research project on Bald Rock Heritage Preserve helped us come to this decision. I thought I would take a minute to go into more detail about what this new approach will look like and why we decided to go in this direction.

While pressure washing the graffiti off the rock gave us immediate results, we realized that it was also taking off the dark patina layer on the rock surface. This patina layer is important for two reasons: it serves as a barrier between graffiti and the bare rock and, most importantly, it is the foundation (chemically and physically) for mosses, lichens, and some vascular plants (i.e., elf orpine) to grow and thrive on the rock face.

Rather than stripping the patina layer off, we decided that it would be more sustainable to encourage the establishment of it. Establishing the patina layer will protect the rock face from graffiti because the paint will erode faster (since it's not attached to the porous bare rock). Paint that is sprayed on the rock will not be as noticeable because of the darkness of the patina, rather than the light grey color of the bare rock. Additionally, having this patina will encourage the growth of lichens and mosses on the rock face that will eventually cover up much of the rock, leaving less rock available to spray paint.



Here is an example of rock moss, elf orpine, and sandwort on a similar granitic outcrop at Glassy Mountain Heritage Preserve.



Here is a great example of a granitic rock outcrop in Pickens County. This is what SCDNR managers hope that Bald Rock will one day resemble.

To help the patina establishment on Bald Rock HP, we will start by filling the shallow depressions with soil and, where appropriate, putting sticks and logs to “dam up” the depression. The dam will keep the soil in place. When it rains, the water runoff from these depressions will carry soil particles with it as it runs downslope. When the water dries, it will leave behind a layer of dirt on the rock, eventually forming the patina. We expect the soil filled depressions will also recruit the establishment of annuals, perennials, shrubs, and small trees, creating vegetative islands among the rock face. See this interesting article about plant life on granitic outcrops [Plant Life on Granite Outcrops - New Georgia Encyclopedia](#).

We will monitor the depressions that we fill to measure

“Recently, we have pivoted away from pressure washing the graffiti off the rock toward a more sustainable approach of restoring our beautiful and rare landform.”

We're moving in new directions



...y that has the patina and is mostly covered in lichens and mosses.
...semble.

their progress. In the fall and/or spring we will plan on doing some transplanting to help establish vegetation in the soil-filled depressions. In the future, we hope this restoration work will deter vandalism, return Bald Rock to a beautiful mosaic of diverse vegetation, and add value to the visitor's experience.

*...oted away from
...graffiti off the rock
...able approach of
...l and rare landform.'*

—Austen Attaway

Other Projects

To help manage visitation rates and vandalism, we have decided to relocate the parking area and access point to Persimmon Ridge Road. The current parking area and access point along U.S. Highway 276 will be closed off to all visitors. There is a half-mile trail from the future

parking area on Persimmon Ridge Road to the rock face that visitors will use.

We believe that the half-mile walk to the rock will


significantly cut down visitation rates and deter the types of visitors that are carrying cans of spray paint. Reducing visitation rates to the rock will allow it to heal and return to the natural granitic outcrop community of plants that it once was.

In addition to relocating the parking area, we are also planning on improving the current gated management/emergency access road along Highway 276. Improvements will include adding gravel, road-widening, and replacing a culvert. This work will allow emergency vehicles to use the road to get to the rock in case of an injured or missing person.

We are planning to have the road improvements and parking area relocation completed by July 2024.

I sincerely appreciate the work that the members and volunteers of Friends of Bald Rock have done to help SCDNR restore, preserve, and protect Bald Rock Heritage Preserve. We hope that you all continue to volunteer and assist us in reaching our goal to restore Bald Rock!

Thank you, Austen Attaway

(Austen Attaway is the SCDNR Upstate region Heritage Preserve wildlife biologist and manager. She wrote this letter as a thank-you to members of the Friends of Bald Rock Heritage Preserve. Friends of Bald Rock Heritage Preserve is a volunteer service organization working to enhance the safe public use and enjoyment of Bald Rock Heritage Preserve while protecting its natural resources. Bald Rock Heritage Preserve is home to 165-acres of forest and granite outcroppings overlooking the foothills of Pickens and Greenville counties. The preserve is one of the best viewing sites of Table Rock, a massive rock formation and nearby state park that serves as a major South Carolina attraction. Bald Rock Heritage Preserve is part of the Mountain Bridge Wilderness Area, which includes Wildcat Falls, Caesars Head State Park, and Jones Gap State Park. The Wilderness Area covers more than 10,000 pristine acres featuring waterfalls, lakes, hiking trails and nature viewing. For information, visit <https://friendsofbaldrock.com/about>) 



Volunteers with Friends of Bald Rock Heritage Preserve have put in hundreds of hours removing trash from Bald Rock Heritage Preserve since its inception more than two years ago.



Members of the Friends of Lake Keowee Society Lake Sweep Crew get ready to comb the lake for trash during one of the many litter pick-ups that are held during the year. (Photo courtesy of FOLKS)

Friends of Lake Keowee Society celebrates 30th anniversary

FOLKS, engaged in conservation work for three decades, looks to the future

By Dale Wilde

In 1993 a group of Lake Keowee residents, mostly from Keowee Key, met with representatives from the Lake and Watershed Association of South Carolina (now defunct) to discuss their concern that Lake Keowee had no group dedicated to focus on lake issues. The association and representatives of Clemson University and the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) encouraged the Lake Keowee residents to create a nonprofit organization that would address and advocate for their concerns.

In April 1993 the forming members, who became the original board of directors, produced the first issue of The Sentinel newsletter to pose and answer the question of “Why organize?” and introduce and explain how advocacy, conservation, and education would become the mission of the Friends of Lake Keowee Society Inc. (FOLKS). The newsletter’s specific goal was to enroll members. By June of that year 103 families had become members and three years later the rolls had grown to 625 families. Current membership is just under 85 members and growing.

Over the past nearly three decades, FOLKS has made significant impacts to the Lake Keowee watershed with DHEC 319 grants (part of the federal Clean Water Act to deal with or prevent nonpoint source pollution in a watershed), Keowee-Toxaway Habitat Enhancement Grants (from Duke Energy), water quality monitoring programs and regular lake litter cleanups. FOLKS served as a stakeholder in Duke Energy’s Keowee-Toxaway relicensing and is currently serving on the stakeholder committee for the Bad Creek Hydro Project

relicensing.

Since its incorporation, FOLKS has received more than \$1 million in dedicated habitat improvement grants and funds supporting water testing initiatives. Given the generosity of contributors and the distribution of environmental grants, FOLKS has had more than \$5 million of impact in the greater Keowee watershed.

Conservation efforts are driven by a desire to preserve Lake Keowee for future generations. Our volunteers understand this even though many of them may be new to the area. They were drawn here by the beauty of the watershed, purity of the water and abundance of wildlife.

For decades FOLKS has conducted water testing to monitor the quality of Lake Keowee. Our testing methods have focused on measuring turbidity, Chlorophyll A, and E. coli. In recent years, we moved to monitoring streams using the Adopt-a-Stream methodology and soon we will roll out new lake testing accepted protocols.

Our Lake Sweep and Island Keepers programs reflect our long-lasting commitment to preserving this beautiful environment and keeping it litter-free. Since 1994, Lake Sweeps are carried out twice a year—in the spring (before the busy boating season) and in the fall (to tidy up the lake for the winter months).

From 1994 to 2022 FOLKS volunteers have picked up more than 20,000 bags of litter and identified hundreds of over-sized objects for Duke Energy to remove. Each event takes about one week, and we have anywhere between 60 and 80 boats participating, with 150-200 volunteers, to collect hundreds of bags of litter each event.

(Dale Wilde is president of the Friends of Lake Keowee Society.)

Clemson, Duke Energy partner to teach teachers about wildlife, ecology

Duke Foundation funds workshop to show conservation, energy production can co-exist
By Angela Nixon

A group of K-12 teachers from across the Upstate took a field trip to learn about wildlife and land management ecology from Clemson faculty, thanks to a grant from the Duke Energy Foundation.

Fourteen teachers from schools in Oconee, Pickens, Anderson, and Greenville counties participated in the workshop June 12-15 at Duke Energy's Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom. The teachers studied several ecosystems, learned about the natural history of the Jocassee Gorges, discussed methods used to research different types of animals and toured the Bad Creek hydroelectric facility. Each participant received more than \$300 worth of books and materials to use in their classrooms to help them teach about wildlife and ecology.

The workshop was organized by Barbara Speziale, associate director of the Clemson University Watt Family Innovation Center and professor of biological sciences, and taught by Mallory Maher, Oconee County Clemson Extension agent; Skip Still, retired bear biologist from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources; John Hains, associate professor emeritus of biological sciences at Clemson University; and Allan Boggs, civil and regulatory supervisor for Duke Energy.

Speziale said Clemson and Duke Energy have been working together to host these kinds of programs for teachers since 2012. "The goal was to give K-12 teachers an opportunity to

"Teachers have a lot on their plates, and I want to help them in any way possible to aid them in the classroom and connect them and their students to the natural world."

—Mallory Maher



Allan Boggs (left) of Duke Energy gives teachers a tour of the Bad Creek Hydroelectric subterranean powerhouse.

experience the natural environment in the context of learning how societal needs—such as energy—and conservation can co-exist. I am grateful to the Duke Energy Foundation for supporting these efforts," she said.

"Teachers have a lot on their plates, and I want to help them in any way possible to aid them in the classroom and connect them and their students to the natural world," said Maher. "That is why the Bad

Creek Workshop is so valuable to teachers. It gives them ideas and lessons that they can take from real world experiences and use them in their own classrooms."

"Environmental education is a key focus for the Duke Energy Foundation," said Amanda Dow, manager of corporate giving for Duke Energy South Carolina. "These sessions at Bad Creek give teachers real-world experiences in ecology and conservation that they can then bring back to the classroom. Prioritizing this kind of environmentally engaged education is critical to our state's sustainable future."

"This was the best professional development that I have ever attended. It was perfectly balanced between hands-on applicable activities and lecture," said Cynthia Wanser, a teacher at Nevitt Forest Elementary School in Anderson who participated in the workshop. "I left with a variety of ideas of ways to give my students similar opportunities in my classroom to open their eyes to the world around them in a new way."



Fourteen teachers from schools in Oconee, Pickens, Anderson, and Greenville counties participated in the workshop June 12-15 at Duke Energy's Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom.

(Angela Nixon is a writer for Clemson News, where this story first appeared in a Clemson University publication about Public Service and Agriculture.) 



1998



Today

Jason Knapp

Missing for over 25 Years – Time for Answers

Call 1-800-THE-LOST® (1-800-843-5678)
or Pickens County Sheriff's Office
1-864-898-5500



This age-progression photo was released in 2022 to help people visualize how Knapp would look as a 44-year-old.

Clemson student's disappearance still a mystery 25 years later

Jason Knapp's car was left at Table Rock State Park, but extensive searches have never revealed a clue about what happened

A student "mysteriously vanished" from an Upstate South Carolina college town in 1998 — and hasn't been seen since, officials say. Now, 25 years later, deputies are still seeking clues about the disappearance of Jason Knapp.

The York, Pennsylvania, native was 20 years old when he reportedly was last seen at his apartment in Clemson, South Carolina, on April 11, 1998. Then, 10 days after he was last seen, his Chevrolet Beretta was found abandoned about 30 miles from his apartment. It was found in a parking area at the vast Table Rock State Park, which spans 3,000 acres of mountain terrain, according to the Pickens County Sheriff's Office and the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System. The discovery sparked extensive searches of the area, and a lake was drained at one point after Knapp's

disappearance. Pickens County Chief Deputy Chuck James told McClatchy News in a phone interview that the parking lot is a gateway to miles of trails at the park.

"It's dense trees and vegetation in a mountainous area," James said. "Searching those types of areas can also be very difficult because there are areas that are in some cases inaccessible just due to the danger." At the time of his disappearance, Knapp was a mechanical engineering student at Clemson University. He had just gotten into the "elite" Pershing Rifles ROTC program and shared his excitement with his mom days before he went missing, officials said. Dennis Chastain, Pickens County historian and naturalist, was on a local search and rescue team at the time Knapp went missing.

"I spent nine days on the search for Jason Knapp," Chastain said. "Three of those days were guiding three different cadaver dogs with their handlers all over Table Rock and Pinnacle mountains, along with the Table Rock

Local searcher calls Clemson student's disappearance 'baffling'

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watershed. We came up empty handed each time, and these cadaver dogs all have a remarkable track record. I have been on quite a number of search and rescues, and this is by far the most baffling. I interviewed both his parents on the first day of the search. They told me that Jason was not a hiker, had never been to Table Rock, and did not have any camping equipment or even hiking shoes.

"Here's the bottom line: Jason definitely came through the entrance to Table Rock on Easter Sunday. There are always a lot of people who climb Table Rock on holidays. Despite all the press attention this case has garnered, no one has ever come forward to say they had seen him along the trail. He was especially close to his mother. They talked a couple of times each week while he was at Clemson. At some point, you would think that he would have gotten in touch with his mother to let her know he was okay, if he could," said Chastain.

"He was totally looking forward to the future," friend Amanda Outen told *The Greenville News* in 2014. "He had so many things to look forward to. He was just in a happy place." Knapp, who has brown hair and blue eyes, was "wearing a T-shirt, blue jeans, and blue sneakers" when his roommates last saw him leaving their apartment complex. They believe he was going to a restaurant over Easter weekend in 1998, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and a post that deputies shared in 2015.

After Knapp's car was found in Table Rock, his mother Deborah Boogher said she met with the park manager for years to get search updates. Her son wouldn't go hiking alone and didn't tell his friends about going to the park, she told *The York Dispatch* in 2018. "That's the one thing to this day that I don't understand," she told the newspaper. "It's all a mystery to me."

Twenty years after the disappearance, Boogher told the newspaper her son had been declared legally dead, despite no body being found. Deputies said there isn't evidence of foul play in the case, but they haven't ruled it out in their investigation. Then in 2022, an age-progression photo was released to help people visualize how Knapp would look as a 44-year-old. But the release didn't produce leads, and tips slowly have been trickling in over the past few years, James said.

'I interviewed both his parents on the first day of the search. They told me that Jason was not a hiker, had never been to Table Rock, and did not have any camping equipment or even hiking shoes.'

—Dennis Chastain



Table Rock State Park, where Jason Knapp supposedly disappeared 25 years ago, is a 3,000-acre wilderness area that serves as one end of the 77-mile Foothills Trail.

"Twenty-five years later Jason's mom, Deborah Boogher, still holds on to the hope that she will find the answers she has been searching for and longs to bring her son home safely," the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children wrote April 12 on Facebook. "Deborah told

NCMEC that several years ago she created scrapbooks filled with cherished photographs, mementos, and belongings of Jason. She holds these close to her heart and hopes that they will be passed down through their family."

Jason Knapp is listed in the national NamUs database as a missing person. To view the

entry, visit: [Missing Person Case \(namus.gov\)](https://www.missingperson.gov)

Anyone with information about the case is asked to call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 800-843-5678 or the Pickens County Sheriff's Office at (864) 898-5500.

*(Portions of this article originally appeared in *The State* newspaper April 23, 2023.)* 🌿



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New 'John Garton Trail' sign placed at Lower Whitewater Falls spur trail

Retired Duke Energy biologist has spent a lifetime working in conservation

The Foothills Trail spur trail that goes to the overlook at Lower Whitewater Falls in northern Oconee County has been named the John Garton Trail for a number of years, but the trail sign had gone missing, until it was recently replaced and returned to its rightful spot by the Foothills Trail Conservancy.

The trail honors John S. Garton, a long-time biologist with the environmental section of Duke Energy, who was one of the early members of the Foothills Trail Conservancy board. Along with other Duke employees, Garton was one of the Foothills Trail's route-finders back in the 1970s. Garton has had a life-long interest in wildlife and its conservation. He holds a bachelor's degree in wildlife management and a master's degree in biology from Tennessee Technological



The Clemson University Osher Lifelong Learning (OLLI) Jocassee Gorges class shows off the newly erected "John Garton Trail" sign. The trail, named after conservationist John S. Garton, leads to Lower Whitewater Falls. (Photo by Heyward Douglass)

University in Cookeville, Tennessee. Garton has served on the boards of directors for the North Carolina and South Carolina Wildlife Federations, the Foothills Trail Conservancy and other conservation organizations.

He has written numerous articles for conservation publications, including writing the text for "Quiet Reflections: The Clemson University," a 2007 book that also featured the photography of the late Tommy Wyche, the Greenville attorney and conservation legend. Garton was employed for 28 years in the environmental department of Duke Energy, where much of his time was spent cataloging

natural resources of the mountains and piedmont of the Carolinas.

After his retirement, Garton worked part-time for Clemson University, cataloguing special elements of the Clemson Experimental Forest. 