



# Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges



www.dnr.sc.gov

Fall/Winter 2017

Volume 18, Number 2



The breathtaking view from Sassafras Mountain, South Carolina's highest point at 3,553 feet, is like no other. Construction on the long-awaited observation tower on the Sassafras summit recently got underway. (Photo by Bill Tynan)

## Sassafras Mountain tower construction underway

Depending on weather, tower could be in place by May 2018

The long-awaited construction of an observation tower on Sassafras Mountain, South Carolina's highest point, began on Nov. 27, the Monday after Thanksgiving.

A \$1.1 million bid on the Sassafras Mountain observation tower project was accepted from Lazer Construction of Anderson, the general contractor for the project. The summit of Sassafras Mountain closed once construction began, with a chain-link fence erected around the top of the mountain for safety and security reasons during construction. The Foothills Trail, which travels to the Sassafras summit, is being diverted away from the mountaintop while the tower is being built.

The finish date on the observation tower project could be as early as May 2018, but completion depends on the cooperation of weather. Since the top of Sassafras

is the highest point in the state at 3,553 feet, winter weather extremes include ice, snow and powerful winds, which would delay construction.

A construction superintendent is staying on site at the top of Sassafras until the project is complete. Funding for the first phase of construction on the observation tower atop Sassafras Mountain came from a variety of sources, including Duke Energy, the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund and from hundreds of private supporters through commemorative brick sales. The first phase will include the observation tower at the summit of the mountain, a hiking access trail and restrooms.

The current viewing platform on the west side of Sassafras, put in place by Clemson University architectural students, will remain open for the time being, along with the parking lot next to the platform. The overlook

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## Halfway Shelter falls to Irma winds

The Halfway Shelter, at the halfway point on the Table Rock Trail, was destroyed Sept. 11 by high winds associated with Hurricane Irma. Ironically, the shelter, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal, survived the Pinnacle Mountain Fire a year earlier despite being in the fire's direct path. The wrecked shelter has since been dismantled by S.C. State Parks staff and some materials were put aside to use again. A Clemson Outdoor Recreation and Education (CORE) group carried new shingles and roof materials up to the shelter site. Work is expected to begin to rebuild the shelter in Winter 2018, and State Parks plans to hew trees from around the shelter site to make the larger beams or posts, to avoid the arduous task of carrying them up the mountain. (S.C. State Parks photo by Adam Wyatt)

# Sassafras Mountain observation tower to offer spectacular view


## Continued from page 1

provides a view primarily to the west and south, looking out onto the mountains of South Carolina, Georgia and North Carolina.

Phase two of the Sassafras project, which will require additional funding, is scheduled to include a picnic area, accessory trails, informational kiosks and improvements to the parking lot.

Poised on the South Carolina and North Carolina border, Sassafras Mountain is about 20 miles north of Pickens. It sits on the Eastern Continental Divide, is the tri-point of three distinct watersheds, and is home to the Foothills Trail ([www.foothillstrail.org](http://www.foothillstrail.org)), a 77-mile footpath between Table Rock and Oconee state parks. The Palmetto Trail ([https://](https://palmettoconservation.org/palmetto-trail/)

[palmettoconservation.org/palmetto-trail/](https://palmettoconservation.org/palmetto-trail/)), which will one day link the South Carolina mountains to the sea in a continuous trail of 500 miles, also is on the flanks of Sassafras Mountain.

Sassafras Mountain is part of the Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges, managed by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). It is also within the Franklin L. Gravelly Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and is part of SCDNR's WMA Program, which provides public land for the enjoyment of all wildlife enthusiasts. 

*Sassafras Mountain is also listed as a tourist destination by Pickens County. For more information, visit <http://www.visitpickenscounty.com/vendor/124/sassafras-mountain/>.*



# 2017 mountain bear harvest is second highest on record

## Hunting season important management tool to deal with growing bear population

A less-than-average acorn crop in the mountains during the fall of 2017 contributed to 108 black bears being harvested during the two-week season in October, which was the second-highest harvest ever.

With lower numbers of acorns on the forest floor, it forced black bears to become more active in their search for food, making them easier targets for hunters, according to Tammy Wactor, black bear biologist with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR).

With more and more conflicts between people and bears in urban areas, the annual two-week hunt is an important management tool to help deal with an expanding bear population, according to Wactor.

The mountain bear harvest included a 597-pound bear that was taken Oct. 19 in Greenville County near the Spartanburg County line. Of the 108 total bears harvested, Oconee County led the bear harvest with 46 bears, followed by Pickens County with 35 and Greenville County with 27. In all, 61 male bears were harvested, along with 47 females. The two-week black bear season in the South Carolina mountains, typically the last two weeks in October, is divided into two parts. The first week is a still-hunt season, when dogs are not allowed, and hunters rely on stealth and scouting to find bears. The limit during the still hunt is one bear, no sow with cubs, and no bears 100 pounds or less. The second week of bear season is the party dog hunts, where groups of up to 25 people hunt bears with dogs. The limit during the dog hunts is five bears per party.

In 2017, 62 bears were harvested during the still hunts, 46 during the dog hunts. Over the past 48 years, the bear harvest has averaged about 21 bears per year. However, during the

past 11 years, since 2006, the average harvest has been around 77 bears per year. Wactor attributes the increase in the bear harvest since 2006 to an expansion in the black bear population in South Carolina's mountains, both in range and in numbers.

The highest bear harvest on record was 2013, when 127 bears were taken.

In the annual mountain bear-hunting season, hunting is allowed only in Greenville, Pickens and Oconee counties. The state also has a limited coastal hunting season in Horry, Georgetown, Marion and Williamsburg counties, where there is a 30-quota limit on bear harvest. The coastal bear harvest this year was 14 bears.

Black bears can be found throughout North America. In South Carolina, there are two resident populations of black bears, one in the mountains and upper piedmont and one in the coastal plain.

Home range for bears must include den sites, food, water and cover for adults and young. Typi-

cally, male bear home ranges can be 18 to 160 square miles, while home ranges for females are smaller, around 6-19 square miles. A shortage of natural food sources and lack of rainfall can cause home ranges to vary greatly. Black bears will travel great distances to find adequate food sources. In addition, juvenile bears, especially males, must disperse to find new home territories. Dispersing juvenile bears have been sighted in many South Carolina counties. These bears are usually transient and do not stay in the area for long. 🌿



**A 350-pound black bear was harvested Oct. 30 in the Franklin Gravelly WMA in northern Pickens County by a hunting party led by huntmaster Brian Medlin (second from right). From left are Mark Martin, who harvested the bear, Chad James, Jason McKinney, Medlin and Travis Whitehead. (SCDNR photo by Tammy Wactor)**



A large and eclectic group gathered at Sassafras Mountain, South Carolina's highest point, to observe the Great Eclipse. (SCDNR photo by Ken Forrester)

## The Great Jocassee Eclipse!

What better place to watch the solar event of the century than from one of the Last Great Places?

By Brooks Wade

Hoots, hollers and tears: A Lake Jocassee Eclipse Watching the Great American Eclipse on Lake Jocassee. It was a perfect Jocassee Gorges eclipse.

As we began our day on the lake, towering clouds hovered over the blue wall of the Southern Blue Ridge Escarpment, and on the horizon rain was threatening to soak the North Carolina mountains. We chose our viewing spot about half way up the lake, on the eastern shore, just under Jumping-Off Rock. It was a risky decision, being so buried up in the mountains, so interior to the East's only rainforest. We could have chosen the open water of the lower lake, farther out from the mountains, but we wanted to be in the wildest, most remote place we could find on the lake that still had a big sky above. We shared this cosmic event with a large group of wonderful, like-minded nature lovers.

As the time of totality approached the clouds that had held their position over the mountains most of the day decided to venture our way, no doubt to show us who was in charge here, in this dense wet wilderness. Sighs of anxiety and disappointment could be heard throughout as the clouds approached. Just moments before the time of totality, the

clouds abruptly ate the sun, all in one bite. Then, in just an instant, they opened wide and let the sun escape. Huge sighs of relief could be heard, just to be stifled as the clouds took another big bite out of the fading fire. Then, right at the time of totality, the tease was over, the clouds graciously parted and the entire eclipse could be witnessed by all.

As darkness enveloped us, as the corona blazed above, hoots and hollers rang out across the crowd, and tears were surely being shed. And me? Sitting on the water's edge,

**Continued on page 5**



An eclipse-watcher wearing solar eclipse glasses watches the celestial event at Lake Jocassee. (Photo by Kay Wade)

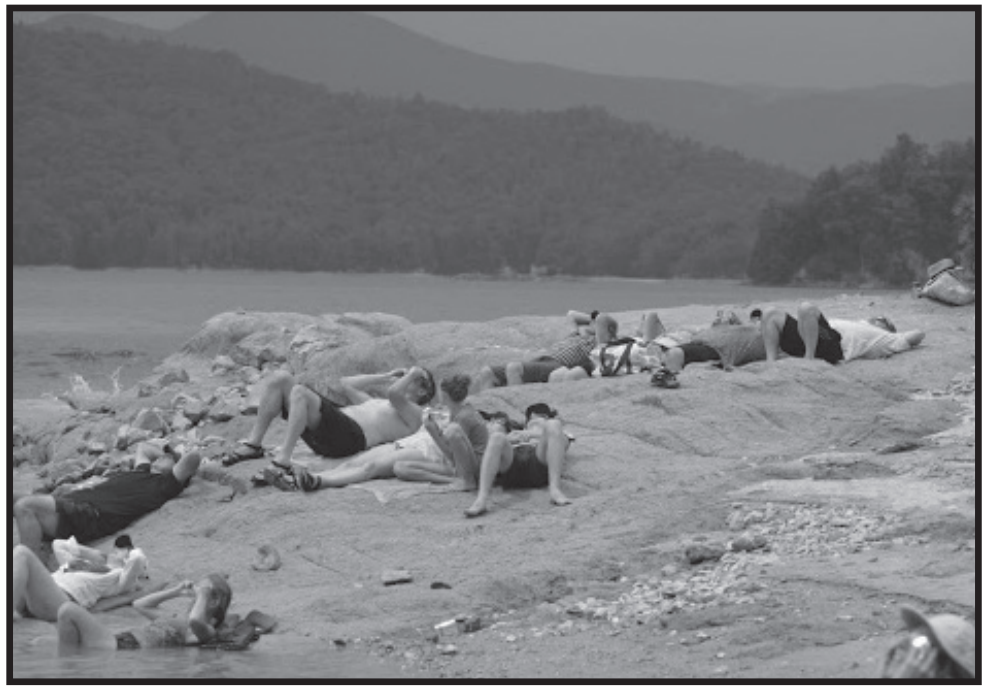


## Continued from page 4

holding tight to my wife and dog, tears ran down my face throughout the period of totality, and when the sun began to reappear, hoots and hollers came uncontrollably, right along with most everyone else. It was a chorus of astonishment. It is days after the eclipse now, and I am still filled with the emotions of the day, as I attempt this impossible task of describing the indescribable, that moment when we all fell into the Mystic, at the base of the Blue Wall.

I would like to give a special shout-out to SCDNR law enforcement for their fine job of keeping order on Lake Jocassee the day before and the day of the eclipse. There was the inevitable temptation, not allowed by law, to camp along the shores of the lake the night before the event. SCDNR law enforcement was there to keep that from happening, thereby retaining the wilderness essence of Lake Jocassee that attracted so many people there to enjoy this spectacular celestial event. Thanks so much, guys!

*(Brooks Wade is co-owner, with his wife, Kay, of Jocassee Lake Tours, a natural history focused tour and guide service to Lake Jocassee and the Jocassee Gorges. Brooks serves as*



**Is it sunbathers or eclipse-watchers? At Lake Jocassee during the Great Eclipse, it could be both! (Photo by Kay Wade)**

*vice president of the Friends of Jocassee and serves as well on the board of the Foothills Trail Conservancy. Brooks has contributed articles to both the Jocassee Journal and South Carolina Wildlife magazine. You can contact him at [brooks@jocasseelaketours.com](mailto:brooks@jocasseelaketours.com). The website for Jocassee Lake Tours is [www.JocasseeLakeTours.com](http://www.JocasseeLakeTours.com).)* ❁

# Eclipse viewed on state's highest point

By Ken Forrester

On August 21, 2017, the Upstate of South Carolina was a focal point for amateur astronomers searching for the perfect view of the solar eclipse sweeping across the nation.

The Jocassee Gorges did not escape their attention. About 350 people visited Sassafras Mountain, South Carolina's highest point at 3,553 feet, to view the eclipse. Visitors came from nearby areas like Spartanburg, Atlanta and Charlotte. Others came much further. Illinois, California, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Canada were also represented. That many visitors put a definite strain on the available parking. SCDNR had staff on site to direct vehicles and assist as needed.

Due to heavy rain clouds in the area, the highest point in the state may not have delivered the best view of the eclipse, but it did offer a most unique experience. Jumping-Off Rock also had its share of visitors. Around 75 adventurous people made the trek to the overlook for their eclipse viewing.

*(Ken Forrester is an SCDNR technician who works for wildlife but lives to fish. When Ken isn't fishing, he is supervising the field activities in the Jocassee Gorges.)* ❁



**The sun's corona blazes in the heavens above briefly during the Great Eclipse at Lake Jocassee. (Photo by Kay Wade)**



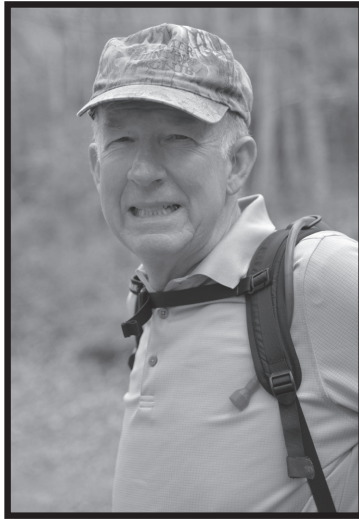
# New study reveals significant

## Expert determines site is eligible for the prestigious National Register of Historic Places

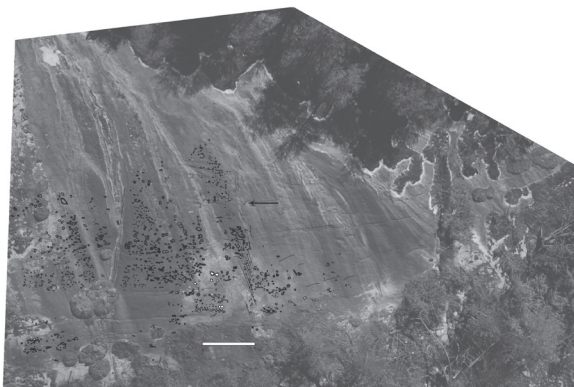
By Dennis Chastain

The Jocassee Gorges property has long been known for its abundant and diverse natural resources. Now we find out that it is also a hotspot for ancient cultural resources, specifically the circle-type petroglyphs on Long Ridge and adjacent rock outcroppings.

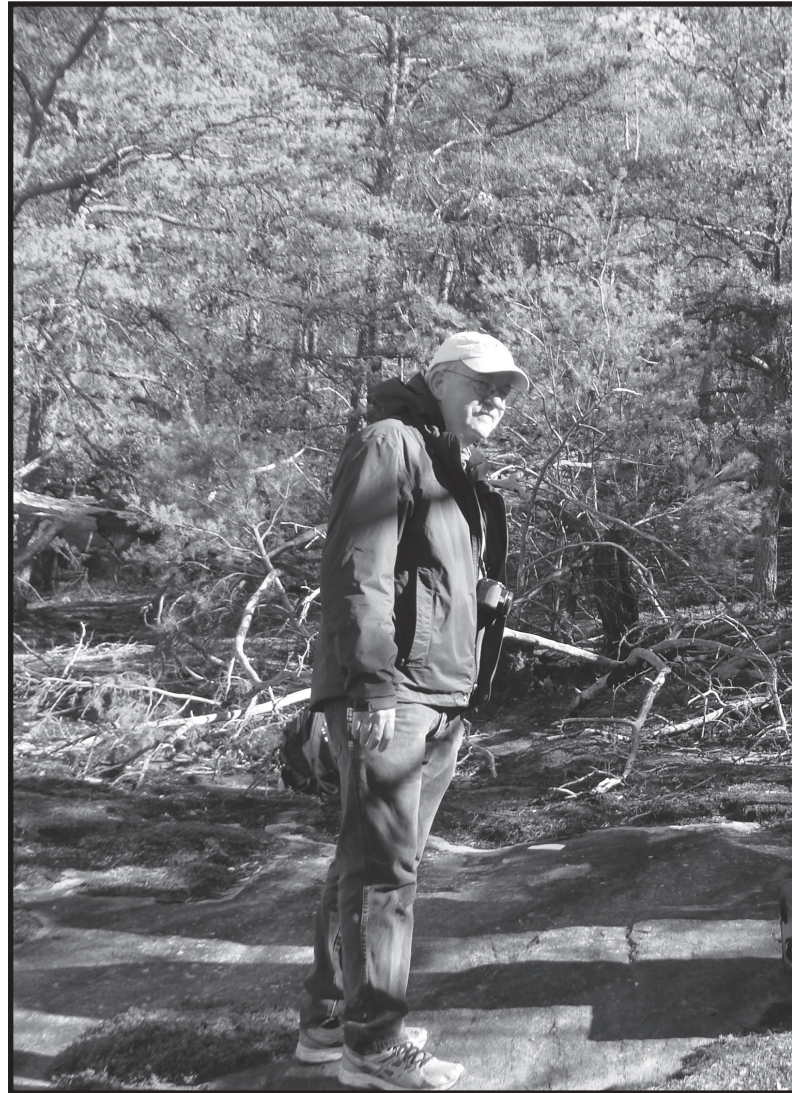
Back in March of this year, Dr. Johannes Loubser, a nationally recognized expert in Southeastern rock art, conducted an exhaustive study of the Long Ridge site located near the peak of Pinnacle Mountain. Using direct observation, aerial drone photography, scaled tracings, along with both daytime and night photography, Dr. Loubser determined that first of all, these curious carvings on the Long Ridge rock outcropping are the real deal. That is; they are man-made, not the result of some quirky natural erosion of the rock surface, as some have speculated. He also dates the origin of the symbolic carvings to the Middle to Late Woodland periods of prehistory, placing them in the range of between 1,500 and 2,000 years old. And finally, while it had previously been estimated that there were in the vicinity of 600 circle-themed petroglyphs on the steeply sloped site, there are in fact a grand total of 1,043 carvings of various and sundry



Gene Johnston



A drone photograph with overlay shows 1,043 petroglyphs at the Pinnacle Mountain site. The researcher dates the origin of the symbolic carvings to the Middle to Late Woodland periods of prehistory, placing them in the range of between 1,500 and 2,000 years old.



A group photo of the workers at the petroglyph site are (from left) volunteer drone pilot from Atlanta. (Photo by Dennis Chastain)

shapes and forms, including 730 true circle petroglyphs. All of which, according to Dr. Loubser's detailed written report, makes the Long Ridge Petroglyph site eligible for the prestigious National Register of Historic Places.

The story would not be complete, however, without giving credit where credit is due. This project would likely never have happened, had it not been for the dogged, determined efforts of Gene Johnston, a resident of nearby Pumpkintown and dedicated "circle glyph hunter."

More than 15 years after Tommy Charles (a now retired archaeologist) and I first recorded the circle petroglyphs on Long Ridge and several other sites on Pinnacle and Table Rock mountain, I had an epiphany. It occurred to me that, when considered in their totality, these mysterious rock carvings were unlike anything I had ever heard of or read about. They all occur at high elevation sites above 2,000 feet; they all appear to be circles, ovals and variations on that theme; and the sheer number of them is



# ence of Pinnacle petroglyphs



(left) Dr. Johannes "Jannie" Loubser, Gene Johnston and a

remarkable. We now know that there are about 2,000 circle-themed petroglyphs on 17 different sites, in two states.

So, a little more than a year ago I told Gene that for all the reasons stated above, I thought that we had grossly under-appreciated these circle petroglyphs and that they may indeed represent a phenomenon of national, if not global, significance. To say that Gene took the bull by the horns would be an understatement. He took the bull by the horns, grabbed the beast by the tail, threw him to the ground and dragged him kicking and bellowing across the finish line. After our phone conversation, he quickly began communicating with archaeologists around the country and as far away as Australia, sending them birds-eye-view drone and close-up photos of the site. Almost without exception, they agreed that the site was unique and quite remarkable. Gene pretty quickly ferreted out the fact that Dr. Loubser had done a documentary study of the three circle sites at DuPont State Forest in North Carolina. He then tracked

him down and contracted with him to do the Long Ridge study. He leapt through and over the bureaucratic hoops and hurdles required to obtain a permit to do the research on South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) property. He recruited an enthusiastic group of volunteers to trek into the remote site and assist in the actual field work. That group included dedicated hikers and rock climbers, Tom and Bev Parlier from Rosman, N.C., who not only assisted with the Long Ridge research and the documentation of several other known circle sites but managed to find several previously unknown circle sites in both North and South Carolina.

Gene also recruited long-time circle glyph hunter, Michael Bramlett, and several family members to help with the overall effort. After obtaining permission, the Bramletts removed a dead Virginia pine that loomed over the lower edge of the outcropping and found nearly 250 previously unrecorded petroglyphs that had been obscured by the tree's roots and soil.

Finally, Gene also spent many, many frustrating hours, over months and months, trying to get the known circle sites recorded on the S.C. Institute of Anthropology and Archaeology database, and then, when it came time to raise funds to actually pay for the project, he and his wife, Dottie Grantham, made a generous donation to help fund the study after a substantial donation from Greenville Water failed to fully fund the research. And after all of that, he recently asked me, "Okay, what do we need to do next?" Stay tuned on that one.

*(Dennis Chastain is an Upstate historian, naturalist, hunter, angler and adventurer. He has written extensively about South Carolina's natural and cultural resources for South Carolina Wildlife magazine, Jocassee Journal and many other publications.)*



**The famous Tiger Paw Petroglyph is modeled by a participant in the OLLI at Clemson University Jocassee Gorges class.**



# New Jocassee Gorges map funded by Harry Hampton Wildlife Fund

Improved map and driving tour publication now available

A new version of the Jocassee Gorges map and driving tour has been printed by the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund.

The 38-inch-by-27-inch map and driving tour is the most comprehensive publication available for the 33,500-acre Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges in northern Pickens and Oconee counties. The new map features numerous enhancements, including many new trails, thanks to Tanner Arrington, a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) manager with SCDNR.

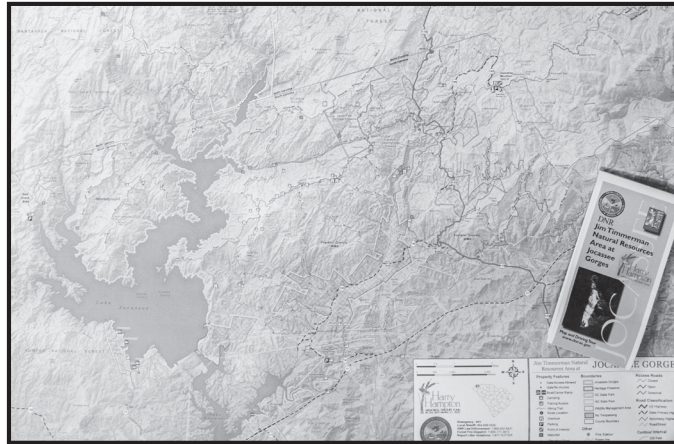
This is the third printing of the map and driving tour; the last version was released in 2012. The Hampton Fund recently contributed \$5,000 to print another 20,000 copies of the improved map and driving tour.

The maps are available at most mountain state parks and at the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources office in Clemson.

The Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund ([www.HamptonWildlifeFund.org](http://www.HamptonWildlifeFund.org)) is a private, non-profit corporation that partners with SCDNR for the promotion of natural resources and natural resource education, which benefits the conservation of wildlife, marine and other resources in South Carolina. Funds are obtained solely through private donations and special promotional projects and fund-raising events. Although some of the funds are donated to special projects run by SCDNR, they are not used to replace any of the department's programs already supported by state-appropriated funding.

Earlier this year, the Hampton Wildlife Fund presented SCDNR with a check for \$170,050 to be used for statewide projects during 2017. The total donated to SCDNR by the Hampton Wildlife Fund over the years now stands at more than \$3.5 million.

"Our primary mission is to support SCDNR in its role as stewards of South Carolina's vast and precious



**The new Jocassee Gorges map features numerous enhancements, including many new trails. This is the third printing of the map and driving tour; all versions were paid for by the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund. The maps are available at most mountain state parks and at the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources office in Clemson. (SCDNR photo by Taylor Main).**




natural resources," said Deidre Menefee of Wadmalaw Island, board chair for the Hampton Wildlife Fund.

"We owe our success to the environmentally aware and generous citizens of the Palmetto State, allowing us to assist in funding SCDNR's great work here," said Jim Goller of Beaufort, Hampton Wildlife Fund executive director and an SCDNR retiree.

Public education of wildlife and marine resources management and conservation is a major thrust of the Hampton Wildlife Fund's purpose. Scholarships are annually awarded to South Carolina resident students

who attend state institutions of higher learning majoring in wildlife, fisheries, forestry, biology, zoology, marine science, environmental science or related fields, with a scholarship awarded annually in the field of law enforcement/criminal justice and another annually in the field of journalism. Since 1995, the Hampton Wildlife Fund has awarded \$438,800 in scholarships.

Projects supported and funded by the Hampton Wildlife Fund include:

- Sassafras Mountain Observation Tower project
- Jocassee Gorges Visitors Center educational displays
- Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic
- SCDNR Law Enforcement
- Operation Game Thief
- Hooked on Fishing Not on Drugs youth fishing rodeos
- Take One Make One youth mentoring program
- SCDNR Shooting Sports and Archery in Schools
- Aquatic Education
- Marine Education
- Tiger Shark research and tagging in Port Royal and St. Helena sounds
- Camp Wildwood 





A trio of executives addresses a ceremony held Nov. 3, 1997, at an overlook above Lake Jocassee, announcing the acquisition of Jocassee Gorges lands in South Carolina. At the podium is Patrick Noonan, chairman of The Conservation Fund, and he is flanked by South Carolina Gov. David Beasley and Jim Hendricks of Duke Energy.

## 20-year anniversary marked for Jocassee Gorges land protection ceremony

### Public, private funds helped secure mountain lands

On Nov. 3, 1997, South Carolina Gov. David Beasley stood on an overlook of Lake Jocassee and Lower Whitewater Falls and announced the land deal that protected 32,000 acres of mountain lands in Pickens and Oconee counties.


Surrounded by executives from Duke Energy, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) and The Conservation Fund, Beasley made the announcement amidst a backdrop of mountains in full autumn foliage.

"It takes your breath away, the beauty of this land," Beasley said of the uplands that he likened to the Biblical Garden of Eden. "It's second to none anywhere in this part of the United States."

Duke Energy agreed to sell the 32,000 acres to the state for about \$21 million following a year of intense negotiations. At the time of the ceremony, Duke said the property was worth more than \$54 million. The State of South Carolina committed \$10 million through a bond bill and \$1 million from SCDNR. The Richard King Mellon Foundation,

through The Conservation Fund of Arlington, Va., also gave \$10 million toward the purchase.

The state's agreement with Duke Energy preserved a highland area larger than many national parks in a region of the state increasingly pressured by urban sprawl. The Jocassee Gorges land stretches from the Sumter National Forest in Oconee County to Table Rock State Park in northern Pickens County. The property also includes the state's highest peak, Sassafras Mountain, and one of South Carolina's largest populations of black bear.

Despite almost unanimous support for the land acquisition, the ceremony drew sharp criticism from a protestor who sat quietly in the crowd until Beasley prepared to sign papers making the property transfer official. The woman, claiming only to be a chief of a local Indian tribe, yelled that Duke Energy and its real estate division had virtually stolen her family's land years ago. The woman was peacefully escorted from the ceremony by SCDNR officers. A Duke Energy official later said that the company paid fair-market value for the land as far back as 1915, with most of the acreage purchased in the 1960s. 



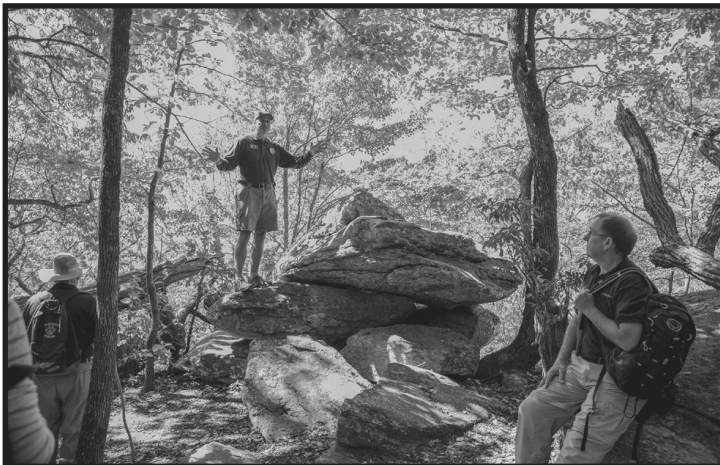
Sassafras Mountain is the highest peak in South Carolina at 3,553 feet. (SCDNR photos by Taylor Main)

## Roof of the Palmetto State

The view from Sassafras Mountain, South Carolina's highest point, is awesome, and it's about to get a whole lot better

If you visit the website for the Discover Upcountry South Carolina tourism organization ([www.upcountrysc.com](http://www.upcountrysc.com)), one of the first things you'll see are some beautiful images of our mountain region with the tagline, "Plan to be Inspired."

Truer words were never written. As one description



If you hike the Foothills Trail between Sassafras Mountain and Laurel Valley, be sure and check out "Teeter Totter Rock."

has it, "South Carolina's Upcountry region is tucked into the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The area boasts more than 150 waterfalls, three major freshwater lakes, The Chattooga National Wild & Scenic River, The Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Byway, thousands of acres of parks, and hundreds of miles of hiking, biking and horseback riding trails."

In short, there's lots to see, experience and learn here, including one very special "high point," as one group participating in a Clemson University-sponsored outdoor class discovered on a recent trip with South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Upstate Outreach Coordinator Greg Lucas. Tag along with the group as they take a hike to the very top of the Palmetto State.

"This is the day that the Lord has made. Rejoice and be glad in it!"

My Sunday school teacher recently used this Bible verse from Psalm 118:24, and it seems an appropriate start to a program that begins on a gorgeous October morning at Sassafras Mountain in northern Pickens County, the highest point in South Carolina at 3,553 feet. The program is part of an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Clemson University Jocassee Gorges class.

The mountain air is crisp as we look out at a breathtaking view of the Blue Ridge, which includes Lake Jocassee, nearby Roundtop Mountain and even distant

**Continued on page 11**



# Clemson OLLI group makes trek on Foothills Trail

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Currahee Mountain near Toccoa, Georgia. The viewing platform where we stand on the west side of Sassafras was designed, constructed and installed in 2013 by a team of Clemson University graduate students in architecture and landscape design.

Accompanied by the ever-cheerful Taylor J. Main, videographer/photographer with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), we walk to the top of Sassafras, where a plaque marks the highest point in the state and soon-to-be the site of a viewing tower that will offer an unparalleled view of the Blue Ridge Mountains of South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia.

The observation tower, expected to be built in spring 2018, will also include restrooms. A later project, for which additional funding will need to be raised, will include

improvements to the parking area, a picnic facility, accessory trails, informational kiosks and educational pavilions. In addition to being the highest point in South Carolina, Sassafras Mountain sits on the state line with North Carolina, is along the Continental Divide, and is one of the important features of the Foothills Trail, a 77-mile footpath between Table Rock and Oconee state parks. The Palmetto Trail, which when completed will be 500 miles between the Mountains and the Sea, also now travels on the flanks of Sassafras.

The Foothills Trail beckons to us from the summit of Sassafras. The plan is to hike the 2.7 miles to Chimneytop Gap, where we left a vehicle on our way to the top. On our walk down from the highest point in the state, we pass through a rich cove forest, which in the spring is home to showy wildflower displays. This community, with its incredible diversity, provides an attractive palette of leaf colors in autumn, along with a tasty array of fleshy fruits that provide an important food source for numerous birds and mammals.

We also visit Teeter-Totter Rock, an interesting geological formation alongside the Foothills Trail where one rock sits atop another, and you can actually make the rock teeter-totter by getting on top and jumping up and down. Some members of the class give the rock a try, while others stand aside with incredulous looks on their faces!

If you would like to plan a trip to Sassafras Mountain, and maybe even Teeter-Totter Rock, the peak of autumn leaf season, during the last week in October or the first week in November is a great time to go. From the intersection of S.C. Highway 11 and U.S. 178 north of Pickens, head west on U.S. 178 toward Rosman, N.C. You'll reach the community of Rocky Bottom after about 8

miles; turn right at the sign for Sassafras Mountain, on F. Van Clayton Highway. It's about 4.5 miles up to the top, and don't make any turns until you reach the parking lot. The overlook on the west side of Sassafras Mountain is at the end of the parking lot.

(Editor's note: The top of Sassafras Mountain will be closed until construction is finished on the observation tower. The Foothills Trail remains open but is diverted away from the summit while construction is ongoing.)

More information on Jocassee Gorges and its management by SCDNR can be found on the SCDNR website. And for general trip planning, to find great places to stay, eat and experience during an extended trip, be sure and visit Discover Upstate South Carolina. So what are you waiting on? Get out there! 🌿

(This article, written by Greg Lucas, first appeared in *South Carolina Natural Resources*, a blog on the SCDNR website, <http://scnaturalresourcesblog.com>.)



**A group with Clemson University's OLLI continuing education program recently made the journey to the peak of Sassafras Mountain. (SCDNR photo by Taylor Main)**



## Jocassee Journal

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the Jocassee Gorges

S.C. Department of Natural Resources

Alvin A. Taylor, Director

Editor: Greg Lucas

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# Five years after surgery, he's still kicking up his heels on Foothills Trail

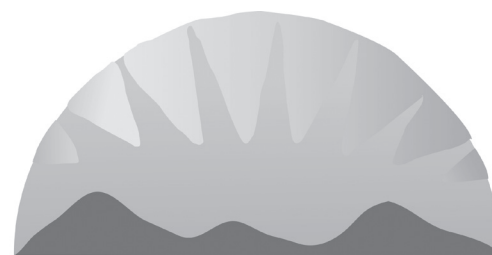
Hiker celebrates milestone  
by getting back to the mountains

By Odell Suttle


August 28, 2017, and I am alive and hiking. Some may ask what makes that date important. It is important to me because five years earlier, on August 28, 2012, I had a 6.8-centimeter aneurysm removed from my heart. At the time the surgeon told me 93 percent of the people that had the surgery didn't live to get off the table.

Five years later and I am still alive and hiking. I did a four-hour hike on August 28 this year to celebrate my anniversary. I hiked in the Bad Creek area, some on the Foothills Trail and some on the Musterground Road.

It was so much fun and gave me a big boost in confidence. The doctors had told me to go; however, the doctors telling me to do it and me actually getting up on the mountain are two different things. The best thing of all is I did it all by myself, with no help or hiking partner.



**Foothills Trail**  
[www.foothillstrail.org](http://www.foothillstrail.org)

I want to say thank you to everyone who was saying prayers for me five years ago. God took care of me again. There have been so many times in my life that God picked me up and got me going again. I thank Him daily for that.   
(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 the S.C. State Parks, especially Oconee and Table Rock.)