



Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges



DNR

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A 360-degree view on the SassafRAS Mountain observation tower will allow visitors to see a panoramic view from the highest point in South Carolina. This rendering was done by Clemson University's Community Research and Design Center.

Corporate partners needed to fund SassafRAS Mountain observation tower

Once-in-a-lifetime opportunity presents itself for corporate sponsors to make a positive, long-term impact on the highest point in South Carolina

Here's a chance to take part in South Carolina history!

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources is working to construct and manage a unique observation tower on top of SassafRAS Mountain, South Carolina's highest mountain peak. Visitors will be able to see more than 50 miles in all directions. Funding for this project is being sought from corporate partners. This is a unique opportunity for corporate partners to make a long-term impact on the highest point in South Carolina, along with the added bonus of placing their name in a prominent place that many thousands of people will see in the years to come.

For more information on the SassafRAS Mountain fund-raising effort, contact Tom Swaynham, DNR Upstate

wildlife coordinator, at SwaynhamT@dnr.sc.gov or by calling (864) 654-1671, Extension 21.

South Carolina residents and other admirers of SassafRAS Mountain also have a unique opportunity to take their place in Palmetto State History by placing brick pavers atop SassafRAS Mountain, which will also help raise funds for the project.



Visit www.dnr.sc.gov and click on the SassafRAS brick icon to purchase a brick.

To purchase a brick visit www.dnr.sc.gov and click on the SassafRAS Brick Icon, (like the one shown). Honor a loved one by purchasing an engraved brick to be placed at the base of the observation tower. Bricks may be designated in honor or memory of a child, friend, or loved one. This is an exceptional, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for special

recognition on the highest point in South Carolina. Act NOW to take advantage of this opportunity to "make your mark" atop SassafRAS Mountain.

Brick Pavers donations are as follows:
\$100 – 4 x 8 brick, 3 lines with 23 characters per line (including spaces)

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A new viewing platform designed and built by Clemson students overlooks a breathtaking view from Sassafra Mountain.

Clemson University students build new Sassafra Mountain viewing platform

Overlook built on Clemson campus using sustainable construction techniques

A team of Clemson University graduate students in architecture and landscape architecture recently designed, constructed and installed a new overlook at Sassafra Mountain in northern Pickens County.

The collective motivation was to provide a universally designed viewing platform accessible to all who visit the highest point in South Carolina, Pickens County and the Foothills Trail, according to Dan Harding, associate professor of architecture and director of the Community Research and Design Center at Clemson University.

“The concept hinged on an idea that used a primary wood structure with a light, sky-blue-painted steel railing designed to leave visitors feeling as if they are floating over a wonderful rock out-cropping while remaining safely contained by the railing, which disappears into the expanding horizon,” Harding said.

Built entirely on the campus of Clemson University employing best practices associated with sustainable construction and resource management, the pre-fabricated overlook platform and the project

components were transported and mobilized to the job site by the design team with assistance from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR). At the Sassafra parking area, about 80 feet in elevation below the top of Sassafra Mountain, the parts were efficiently re-assembled over several days. Currently, work is still being performed to sculpt the existing trail to improve the connection and access to the overlook.

The student design team, from Clemson University’s School of Architecture and Department of Landscape Architecture, includes Nick Barrett, Thomas Campbell, Priyanka Jagdale and Thomas Punzo. Project professors are Harding and Paul Russell, assistant professor of landscape architecture. Funding was provided by DNR.

A fund-raising campaign to build an observation tower atop Sassafra Mountain, the highest point in South Carolina, is currently underway. For more information on the Sassafra campaign, visit www.dnr.sc.gov/sassafrasmountain.html. 

National Geographic names Jocassee Gorges one of '50 of the World's Last Great Places'

Special edition features four pages on region described as 'an intense concentration of waterfalls'

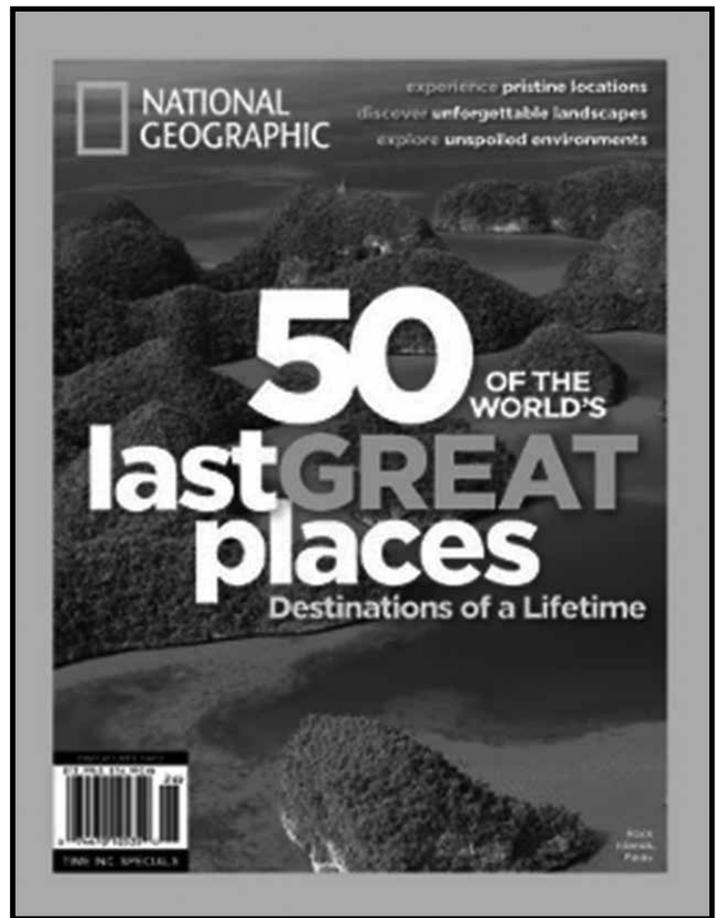
The Jocassee Gorges was recently named one of "50 of the World's Last Great Places—Destinations of a Lifetime" in a special edition of National Geographic magazine.

"National Geographic's special recognition of Jocassee Gorges is quite an honor," said Mark Hall, Jocassee Gorges land manager for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. "We have one of the great wild places on our planet. It's an exciting place to be, with the peregrine falcons appearing, more bald eagles showing up, Audubon designating Jocassee as an internationally Important Bird Area, and now we're working to place an observation tower on the highest mountain in the state. Who knows what's next?!"

One of the best vantage points to see Jocassee Gorges is Sassafras Mountain in northern Pickens County, where a fund-raising campaign is underway to build an



The special edition of National Geographic features photos of Upper Whitewater Falls and Oconee bells, which bloom mid- to late-March around Lake Jocassee.



A recent special edition of National Geographic features a four-page spread on the Jocassee Gorges region.

observation tower on the highest point in South Carolina. For more information on the Sassafras campaign, visit www.dnr.sc.gov/sassafrasmountain.html.

The four-page spread in National Geographic's special issue, titled "Jocassee Gorges: an intense concentration of waterfalls," features photos of Upper Whitewater Falls and Oconee bells.

"Thanks to the second highest rainfall in the continental United States," the article begins, "the Jocassee Gorges area of North and South Carolina supports rare plants and one of the highest concentration of waterfalls in the eastern United States. The area was given added protection by the purchase of 40,000 acres by both states and several nongovernmental organizations, which connected some 200,000 acres and guarantees that plant and animal species would not be isolated. Living here are black bears, bobcats, wild turkeys, and the highest number of salamanders found anywhere in the world. Included among some 60 species of rare plants are 90 percent of the world's Oconee bells, whose nearest relatives are in China and Japan."

The National Geographic special edition can be ordered online at <http://secure.customersvc.com/maitrd/ngs/50WorldsGreatPlaces/giftin.html>. ❁

Duke Energy's Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom wins S.C. Wildlife Federation conservation award

Innovative learning center used by elementary, middle, high schools

The Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom at Duke Energy's Bad Creek Hydroelectric Station in northern Oconee County was recently awarded a Conservation Award by the South Carolina Wildlife Federation in the Industrial category.

The award was presented at the South Carolina Wildlife Federation's 48th Annual Conservation Awards Banquet Feb. 1 at the Phillips Market Center at the S.C. State Farmers Market in Columbia. Duke Energy's Allan Boggs, Outdoor Classroom coordinator, was on hand to accept the award.

The Bad Creek Hydroelectric Station is located in the Blue Ridge section of South Carolina, in the northern reaches of Oconee County. Because it adjoins some of South Carolina's best mountain trout streams, Lake Jocassee, and mountain wildlife habitats, the personnel at the Bad Creek Hydro have had considerable opportunity to become involved with important natural resources. They have taken those opportunities in full.

Over recent years teams of Bad Creek personnel have taken leadership roles in the Wildlife and Industry Together (WAIT) Program, in Trout Unlimited's Scoutin' For Trout Program, and in the National Hunting and Fishing Day event. All of these programs were made successful, in part, due to the efforts of the teams from Bad Creek. Now a Bad Creek team has successfully initiated the Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom, a new educational facility and program that is providing unique opportunities for teachers and students (elementary through high school) to learn about South Carolina's special mountain natural resources.

The Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom's three major components were constructed in 2012 and include: A) a woodland environmental education shelter (approx 35 x 12 feet), B) a pair of new loop trails (Eagle Trail and Bear Trail) that originate at the shelter, and C) a meadow habitat area featuring a Carolina Fence, butterfly garden and a vernal pond.

In spring 2012 the Outdoor Classroom was used by more than 100 area school children and scout groups.



Proudly standing beside the Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom are John Garton, Allan Boggs and Skip Still, three people who were most responsible for the innovative learning facility.

In summer 2012 a group of Oconee and Pickens County elementary, middle, and high school teachers attended a highly successful two-week teacher workshop at the Classroom. The workshop focused on South Carolina mountain resources including forest communities, fisheries, wildlife, botany, aquatic biology, and water quality, among other related subjects. The classes for the teachers were in-depth. For example, the wildlife class featured cover boards, scent lines, DNA hair snares for bear, and furbearer scent posts. There were many hands-on opportunities. Teachers received 3 hours of master's degree credit for their participation and completion of required items.

Similar opportunities will be available for students again in 2013, and another teacher workshop is planned.

Bad Creek is developing a website related to the Outdoor Classroom. Much information is already on the site which can be accessed at <http://www.badcreekoutdoorclassroom.com/home>.

Exploring the links in this site can explain a great deal about the Outdoor Classroom.

The South Carolina Wildlife Federation award said the Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom is an outstanding example of an industrial site allowing employee teams to initiate environmental projects. In the case of this Classroom, employees have found a way to use their interests and skills to provide a program that will have a positive impact on environmental education for many in the Upstate region of South Carolina.

The mission of the South Carolina Wildlife Federation is to advocate for wildlife, habitat and the environment, educate citizens in the conservation ethic, and support outdoor traditions. More information can be obtained about the organization by visiting www.scwf.org or calling (803) 256-0670. 



Are there ghosts in them-thar hills?

By Mike Galloway

Have you ever wound your way along a laurel choked stream deep in the heart of the mountains where the energy from the sun seldom if ever graces the earth—one of those special places where you can't help but pause and wonder if any other human being has ever been there? Then you happen upon a strand of an old rusty broken cable or a can so faded that you can't read the label and you suddenly know that not only have others been there but somehow you are no longer alone. There is a certain comfort that comes with that feeling.

Can we not safely say that we need a connection with other humans and that the comfort we feel in that connection soothes an ache that comes from somewhere deep within us? If the answer is yes, then that gives rise to an interesting question. How is it that we get that feeling of comforting connection when there is no one around? Is it enough to simply see the evidence that someone has been there or is there something more and if so—what is it? If you believe it is something more and then the real question becomes “what is it”?

For those who believe that the world is simply the movement of atoms governed by the laws of physics and chemistry and that life itself is simply an accident somehow springing from chaos, there is no possible answer - nor is any answer necessary. For those of us who believe that an act of creation by an external force was necessary to bring order from chaos, a huge range of possibilities opens up. Many of us believe that in that act of creation, humans were endowed with a spiritual nature as well as an animal nature and it is in this belief that we find a possible answer.

When the animal part dies, does the spiritual part live on? If so, in what form does it exist and can it somehow reveal itself to those of us who remain? This is where most of us lose it – we simply do not know. What we do feel is that there is something there that can't be explained by the laws of science. Can it be that the spirits of those who have gone on before bring us just as much

comfort as the more popular ideas of dread and terror? Are we in the company of Cherokee braves traveling from one village to another - perhaps in search of a maiden? Are we visited by the poor farmer desperate to feed his family who sought these remote locations to convert the corn he could not sell into a more marketable and profitable liquid form? Does the eternal drama between hunter and hunted still play out on some level? Do those tough loggers who in the mid century harvested the timber from those rugged slopes and left behind the rusted broken cables and faded cans still connect with us? Is some part of them still there? Are there still echoes of Franklin Gravely, Wint Galloway and others who dedicated their lives to protecting these special places and are they somehow still watching to see how well we carry out these stewardship responsibilities?

These are questions science can never answer. They are not scientific questions—they are questions about what we believe about who we are. Maybe that is why we are so uncomfortable with them—we seek comfort in the clarity of scientific proof and tend to shun questions that science can't answer—but that does not mean the questions are not there? If you walk the mountains and go into those special places, open your heart to the possibilities and you just may feel the magic of

something far beyond yourself. Only then can we begin the search for answers to some very important personal questions. ❁

(Pickens County native Mike Galloway is a graduate of Easley High School and Furman University. Most of his work life has been in human resource management and self employment. He is currently retired but continues to work in facilities maintenance with Miracle Hill Ministries. He says: “The mountains have been a significant part of my life from childhood summers in cabins on Thompson River to hunting camps in the Musterground for the past 48 years. The Musterground is where I go to make sense out of life.”)



This photograph of a mountain stream was taken by Heather Davidson, an 11th-grade student at Pickens High School.

Sassafras Mountain observation

Continued from page 1

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\$1,000 – 16 x 16 brick, up to 6 lines with 23 characters per line (including spaces)

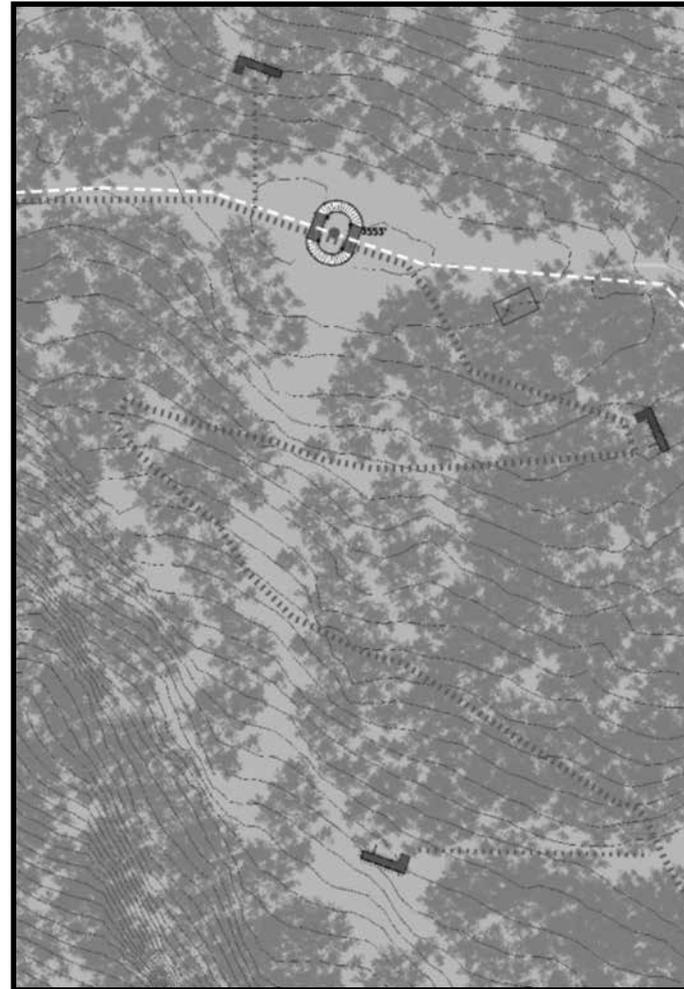
Bricks will be permanently set in the foundation around the observation tower.

“The beauty of Sassafras Mountain is a part of every South Carolinian’s heritage, and we want everyone to have a chance to help build this observation tower, from corporate executives to schoolchildren,” said Alvin A. Taylor, director of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

In addition to being the highest point in South Carolina at 3,553 feet, Sassafras Mountain also sits on the state line with North Carolina, is along the Eastern Continental Divide, and is one of the important features of the Foothills Trail (www.foothillstrail.org), a 77-mile footpath between Table Rock and Oconee state parks. Other amenities will feature new trails, including a barrier-free section, and public-use facilities such as restrooms. The Harry Hampton Fund, Pickens County, Clemson University, S.C. Forestry Commission, S.C. Wildlife Federation, Foothills Trail Conference, The Highpointers Club and other partners are working diligently to make the project come together in the near future.

The DNR is seeking donations from all interested parties in any amounts. Corporate and individual donors are needed to sponsor the tower with generous gifts. DNR will recognize large donations on the tower with several options available. Smaller donations can be made by check to the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund at PO Box 2641, Columbia, SC 29202, or by purchasing a brick paver that will be placed on the mountain with the donor’s name engraved.

The Sassafras Mountain Improvement Project officially got underway Sept. 17, 2012, on top of the 3,553-



The design proposal for Sassafras Mountain, created by the Design Center, is one that includes amenities such as a

foot mountain in northern Pickens County, highlighted by remarks from U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham. Another highlight came when The Conservation Fund announced at the ceremony that it would donate 4.8 acres at the top of Sassafras, on the North Carolina side, to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.

“One of the challenges of any generation is to preserve and protect the God-given beauty of our state,” said U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham. “Today we are taking an important step forward in preserving for future generations this wonderful area of South Carolina. Not only are we preserving the Sassafras Mountain area for the future, we are also making it more accessible. It is important we continue to push for thoughtful conservation, combined with economic growth, to ensure the natural beauty and wonders of our state are protected for decades to come.”

“We are pleased that South Carolina’s highest point will now and forever be accessible to the public and are honored to be a part of this effort,” said R. Michael Leonard, vice chairman of the Board of Directors for The Conservation Fund. “The Fund intends to convey the remainder of the



Observation decks along the trail offer the opportunity to provide handicapped or physically challenged individuals with a significant outdoor experience.

tower to look out over four states



by Clemson University's Community Research and handicapped parking, bathrooms and picnic areas.

adjacent property—the first phase of the 8,000-acre East Fork Headwaters property—to the North Carolina Forest Service later this year, preserving the awe-inspiring views surrounding SassafRAS Mountain and creating additional recreational opportunities nearby.”

“We are truly grateful to The Conservation Fund for their generous donation to the citizens of South Carolina and to all of our partners who are working to develop SassafRAS Mountain into a premier destination point for the state,” said DNR Director Taylor.

Daniel Harding, an associate professor of architecture at Clemson University with extensive experience in designing structures in natural areas, has completed a conceptual plan for SassafRAS Mountain.

SassafRAS Mountain, which sits on the border of South Carolina and North Carolina, has for years been a neglected landmark in northern Pickens County. Since the 77-mile Foothills Trail (www.foothillstrail.org) passes over SassafRAS on its way between Table Rock and Oconee state parks, about the only regular visitors to the landmark were hikers and backpackers. However, when DNR erected a

viewing platform on the western side of the parking lot in 2010, interest and visitation increased significantly and the idea of a more extensive observation platform on top of the mountain began to take hold.

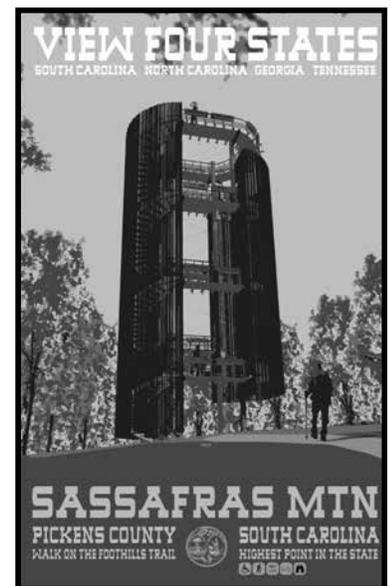
Pickens County has made major contributions to the SassafRAS project, including grading and repaving the road that leads to the top of the mountain, cleanup of the area around the mountain and funding. Pickens County has been an enthusiastic partner, recognizing the importance of SassafRAS Mountain as a tourist destination.

“It is important that we celebrate the assets that make Pickens County unique,” said Jennifer Willis, Pickens County Council chairman. “SassafRAS Mountain, the highest point in South Carolina, is a treasure here in our backyard. The completion of the lookout will enhance the site and improve the views and accessibility of this treasure for residents and visitors.”

The Highpointers Club (www.highpointers.org), a group that promotes the highest points in all 50 states, has lobbied for years for improvements atop SassafRAS Mountain. “We at the Highpointers Club are excited about the plans on SassafRAS Mountain that will promote and preserve the beauty of South Carolina’s tallest mountain,” said Sid Collins, CEO of the Pickens County YMCA and Highpointers Club member. “This project will create better access while maintaining the integrity and wonder of SassafRAS. The Highpointers Club supports this effort and will help in any way possible.”

In December 2004, DNR purchased the South Carolina portion of SassafRAS Mountain from Duke Energy. Duke retained rights to important communications facilities located on the summit.

The state line between South Carolina and North Carolina runs precisely along the ridge top of SassafRAS, bisecting the top of the mountain. The North Carolina portion of the mountain was recently acquired by a coalition of conservation interests in the Tar Heel state, led by The Conservation Fund (www.conservationfund.org) and the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy (www.carolinamountain.org).



In order to achieve a 360-degree view at the top of SassafRAS Mountain, a tower that rises above the treetops is proposed.

Oconee State Park Foothills Trail parking lot expanded

Previously small parking area
will now hold many more vehicles

By Heyward Douglass

If you haven't been to Oconee State Park lately, then you have missed seeing the expanded parking lot at the trailhead for the Foothills Trail, the trail's western terminus.

Hikers who have driven to the park over the years have often had difficulty getting a spot to park in the small parking area, especially on nice weekends, when people wanted to hike on the trails within the park as well as on the Foothills Trail. The parking area could be really crowded, and when drivers parked their cars along the road, park personnel and other visitors had difficulty getting by safely. It was not a satisfactory situation.

Oconee State Park Manager Joanna White discussed the situation with the Foothills Trail Conference board, and the park went ahead with a plan to expand the parking area from a capacity of perhaps six vehicles to as many as 22 to 24. During the time of the Foothills Trail Conference annual meeting in November 2012, construction had already begun on the new parking area, and hikers temporarily parked in the lots near the park office for a while.



Lots more parking is now available at the Oconee State Park trailhead for the Foothills Trail.

As part of the expansion, the hikers' information kiosk has been moved to the trailhead entrance, trees have been removed, grading and leveling have taken place, and gravel has been spread across the area. When the heavy equipment work is complete, members of the Foothills Trail Conference may be asked to help with finish work and landscaping around the new area.

More improvements are anticipated in the coming months to make the lot more attractive and long-lasting. Also, repair and restoration of the initial section of the Foothills Trail will also be undertaken by Foothills Trail Conference volunteers and others. 
(Heyward Douglass is executive director of the Foothills Trail Conference.)

2012 bear harvest second-highest on record

By Scott Keeper

It's amazing what a little dew can do.

Just ask Richard Morton, the wildlife biologist who helped monitor this year's black bear season in South Carolina's Mountain Hunt Unit.

"We had some heavy dews in the morning, so that probably helped a lot," Morton said.

The success of hunters during the dog, or "party" hunt, for bear often is dependent on some rainfall during the course of the six-day season, as it enables hound dogs to pick up on a bear's scent more efficiently.

But with no rainfall, hunters had to rely on moist mornings.

"What surprised me was that it was dry, and typically dogs don't do as well (trailing) in dry weather," said Morton, who works out of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Clemson office. "But we had some cooler mornings with some dew, and apparently they did just fine because of that."

Apparently so.

A total of 57 bears were harvested in during the party

hunt in Pickens, Oconee and Greenville counties.

Combined with the 26 bears killed during the six-day still hunt conducted the previous week, the 2012 harvest totaled 83 bears – the second-highest number on record.

Only the 2009 season, which yielded 92 bears, produced more.

"We didn't have as many hunters in the woods (this year) as we had in 2009, but if we'd had some rainfall we would've broken the record I believe," Morton said.

A spotty acorn crop categorized as "fair" by Morton may have benefitted hunters during the still hunt, as hunters who were able to locate acorn hot spots often were rewarded by bears who made repeated visits to those areas.

The biggest bear was a 422-pound male killed by James Pimlott of Pickens during the party hunt. It was one of 34 bears taken in Pickens County, a total that included 14 males and 20 females. 

(Scott Keeper is Outdoors Editor for The Greenville News, where this article first appeared.)

Friends of Jocassee group now underway

BellFest kicked off 2013 season at Devils Fork State Park

What do you get when you take kayakers, campers, hikers, divers, a couple of park rangers, and a handful of naturalists out of the woods and off the water, and put them around a table in a very small room? You get a diverse group of people with one common goal: improving the main portal to Lake Jocassee and the Jocassee Gorges.

That portal would be Devils Fork State Park, and that initial meeting has led to the formation of a non-profit Friends group, known as Friends of Jocassee.

Friends of Jocassee is the brain child of Kevin Evans, park manager at Devils Fork State Park. Faced with deepening budget cuts in Columbia, and a growing list of projects for the park, Evans cast around for ideas and was inspired by Friends groups from other state parks.

“The mission of the Friends of Jocassee is to help serve as an alternate funding source for projects that do not get funded, such as removing and replacing non-native plants and trail expansion,” said Evans. By making it independent of the park system, funds raised by the group can also benefit groups outside Devils Fork State Park, which have a direct connection to the Gorges area.

Officially, the mission of Friends of Jocassee is to “Preserve, protect, and promote the natural and cultural resources of the Lake Jocassee area, and the recreational

opportunities it provides.” With that in mind the membership potential is as deep as the lake itself. The group plans to draw Friends from surrounding communities, park visitors, campers, boaters, hikers, fishermen, and other nature-oriented groups.

Friends of Jocassee is already busy with two major membership events for 2013.

The first annual BellFest at Devils Fork State Park was held on Saturday, March 16, and the third annual VIP

Day will be held the second Saturday in September. VIP stands for Volunteer, Improve, and Protect (though ‘project’ could well be substituted for ‘protect’!) and is a volunteer work day geared towards cleaning up and making improvements on the lake and at Devils Fork.

BellFest was a kick-off to the local festival season and was a fun, relaxing day to enjoy the park. It featured a silent auction, and local authors were on hand to sign their books. Boat tours were available to show visitors some of the many beautiful waterfalls on the lake, and private collections of artifacts from an earlier time in history were on display. The star of the day was the Oconee bell itself, *Shortia galacifolia*, which was in full

bloom along the Oconee Bell Trail. Master Naturalists were on hand to escort groups along the trail, pointing out the rare native wildflower and sharing a little of its interesting place in history.

For more information on joining the Friends of Jocassee, please e-mail friendsofjocassee@gmail.com. 



Oconee bells were the star attraction at the March 16 BellFest, sponsored by the newly formed Friends of Jocassee at Devils Fork State Park.

A hale and hearty tale of

Naturalist and dog have a rollicking good adventure on Devils Fork State Park trail

By Brooks Wade

I was just walking my dog, for Pete's sake. That's Pearl, the Ship's Dog for Jocassee Lake Tours, a.k.a. the Hound of Love. She requires a daily walk to maintain her youthful figure. She's a puppy-like, demure 12 year old. So anyway, we were walking on the Oconee Bell Trail, the famous wildflower trail at Devils Fork State Park. People come here for Lake Jocassee, and so they should, but there is also this lovely little trail behind the park office, which winds up the hills and down the hollows that frame the southern end of the lake. People come here in March, to see the rare and lovely Oconee bell. They flower for a couple of weeks, and then they're gone. The flowers and the people. For the rest of the year, the trail is mostly mine. And Pearl's, of course. And Kay's, my wildly knowledgeable horticulturalist wife. But for this walk, it was just Pearl and me. We snuck in. Don't tell the rangers, but I have a secret entrance to the trail. Through the bushes and brambles, up and over barbed wire fences, they'll never find me, and you'll never know where it is. You'll just have to trust me.

"My goodness, Pearl, what's that?" I said to myself, and probably aloud as well, as we all know that certain dogs know exactly what you're saying when you talk to them. We were on top of the back ridge to the park, just at the park boundary. In front of us was a steep drop down to a stream and beaver pond, and then up again to the crest of the next hill, as is normal for the topography here. I had my binoculars with me, as I am always watching, watching, watching, for the first arrivals of the spring migratory song birds. I had never heard a herd of wild bucking buffalo before, nor a steaming flock of spring turkeys, for that matter, but I'm hearing something that is clearly one or the other! Pearl and I sit

quietly. Well, she's pulling like crazy on her leash, trying to get loose to go see (and chase, no doubt), what's happening just across from us. But she's not barking.

Have you ever tried looking with binoculars through a heavily forested area, to see something on the ground far in front of you? It ain't easy, even in winter, when the leaves are resting comfortably on the forest floor. To state the obvious, I couldn't see a thing. The bellowing sounds continued, but I could not find the source. Watching for movement, there was none. There was no option but to move down to the bottom of the hill, by the stream. Probably we would flush out and chase away whatever was making these sounds, but we had no choice. We might be trampled to death, but Pearl and I are nothing if not daring-do risk takers. So off we go. Well, down we go actually, and awkwardly, and noisily. No self respecting wild and dangerous animal would stand still for such a rude intrusion, yet the



Wood frog

sounds were still there when we reached creek level. It was quiet for a minute or two, then the trumpeting resumed. The Oconee Bell Trail runs along the creek and by the pond, so we stealthily joined the path of the trail.

Did I mention that this day is January 2? Dead

middle of winter. It has been raining this week, when it should have been snowing, so the creek was fat and fleet, and there was a temporary pool right beside the pathway. In the spring, such ponds are called vernal pools, but it's January 2, for Heaven's sake, so let's stay with temporary pool. While the bloom of the Oconee bells, the wild departure of migratory loons, and the explosion of botanic life in the forest are this area's signal signs of spring, there is this frog, this lowly amphibian, that to those of us who get down there, is also a harbinger of spring. But it's early January, not March, so this sound we are hearing surely is not a frog. For that matter, I've been listening to frogs since youngunhood, and I've never heard frogs make the tumultuous sounds we were

frogs, bison and spring!

hearing. Bullfrogs on steroids just don't exist. But then, I had never heard before the mating sounds of the wood frog, *Rana sylvatica*.

So there we are, Pearl and I. Crouched to see wild, dangerous animals, Pearl tense and ready for the chase, me frozen in near fear. (Well, it was pretty exciting!) The sound was coming from right beside the pool. The naturalist side of me, dejected, gave out a deep sigh and begrudgingly, humbly, gave into the obvious. Pearl went back to scratching herself. Despite all the aforementioned drama,

it was frogs. Wood frogs. They live most of their lives far from water, residing under logs and in the leaf litter deep in the forest, but they come to these vernal pools in the early spring (or the middle of the winter) to mate. They are a pretty interesting frog for lots of reasons, including the fact that they

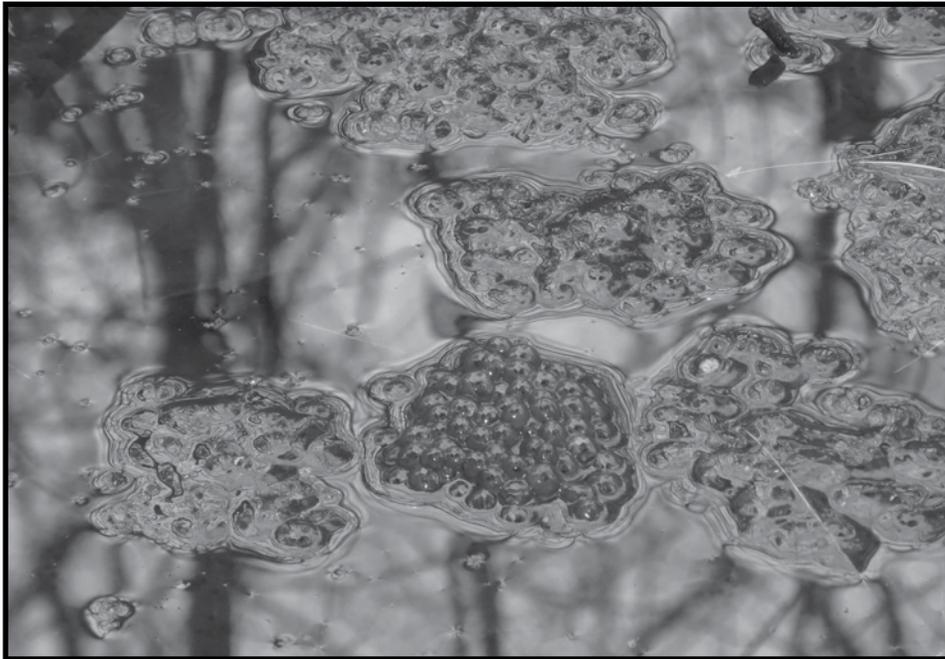
can freeze solid in winter and then thaw out (really!). Our neighborhood is about as far south as they go. In fact, they are the state amphibian of New York (think New York City, for obvious reasons). Here's what happens. The males enter the water first, then boom out their call for females to join them. And booming it is.

The plan is for the female to come on in, and then they, well, get friendly and stuff. But there's more. It gets even more exciting. Sometimes, oh mercy, a male will enter a pond that already has a booming male in it, and (quite mistakenly), join up (or get joined up) with the male that is already there. (That's the 'stuff'

part. I apologize. I write shyly.) Well, the male who is coupled upon is clearly not a bit fond of this unwanted friendliness, and therefore lets all froggy hell break loose. You remember the herd of bucking buffalo, the flock of steaming turkeys. I found them. Three frogs in a pond. Two males, doing their best to disentangle, and a quite well behaved female, whose charming call is much less boisterous than those of the males. That figures, now doesn't it. I watched all this, which seemed to last for hours, but was probably minutes, and finally the two boy frogs went their separate ways. The girl frog swam away with vigor. Smart girl, I would imagine. As I look up and away from all this suspended animation, I notice egg sponges all over the tiny pool. Just three frogs that I could see and hear, so clearly some really serious friendliness had occurred here.

—Brooks Wade

'I had never heard a herd of wild bucking buffalo before, nor a steaming flock of spring turkeys, for that matter, but I'm hearing something that is clearly one or the other!'



Wood frog egg pouches

We've been back to the pool several times since this day, but haven't caught the wood frogs in heated spring residence since. The egg sponges are still there, though. I'll be watching for tadpoles now, wondering and listening as these little things learn to bellow like a buffalo. 🌿

(Brooks Wade has previously written about Lake Jocassee winter loons in the Jocassee Journal and South Carolina Wildlife magazine. He and his wife, Kay, both graduates of the Upstate Master Naturalist program,

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Harry Hampton Fund kicks off Sassafras Mountain tower fund-raiser with \$25,000 donation

The Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund, a non-profit organization that has raised millions for conservation in South Carolina, recently kick-started the Sassafras Mountain observation tower fund-raising effort with a contribution of \$25,000.

For more information on the campaign to build an observation tower atop Sassafras Mountain, South Carolina's highest point, visit www.hamptonwildlifefund.org.

"The Hampton Wildlife Fund is proud to kick off fund raising for this unique conservation project," said Jim Goller, executive director of the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund. "We feel it vital to preserve and protect the breathtaking beauty of the highest point in the Palmetto State while helping make it more accessible to not only South Carolinians, but all who visit our state. This

unique partnership of public and private entities will help ensure future generations benefit both recreationally and economically. We challenge individuals, businesses and corporations to follow suit with donations."

The Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund is a private, non-profit corporation that partners with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources for the promotion of education, research, management and the administration of game and fish laws, which will benefit conservation of wildlife, marine and other natural resources in South Carolina.

Just a few of the many conservation projects that have been funded by Harry Hampton include the Jocassee Gorges Visitors Center at Keowee-Toxaway State Park, Operation Game Thief and youth fishing rodeos held all around the state. 

