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Enjoy a lake, hiking and camping

By Mark Alan Hudson - Correspondent
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The 1,000-acre Keowee-Toxaway State Park is in the midst of several large state parks along the Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway – S.C. 11 – in South Carolina's Upstate. Don't let its relatively small size fool you: This is a great place for a peaceful excursion for a hike, a picnic or an extended stay.

Distance

From Raleigh, it's about 300 miles, roughly 5 hours, one way.

To see and do

The park, nestled alongside 18,372-acre Lake Keowee, is popular with fishermen who angle for catfish, crappie, bass and bream. It is increasingly popular with canoeists and kayakers; the park recently added an outstanding put-in for boats, along with parking.

Details

What: Keowee-Toxaway State Park

Where: Near Sunset, S.C.

When: Day-use hours through March: 9 a.m.-6 p.m. daily (to 8 p.m. Fridays).

Cost: Free admission; day-use activities like hiking, fishing and kayaking have no fee. Camping fees range from $8-$20 per night.

Park info: 864-868-2605or southcarolinaparks.com

Shelter reservation info: 866-345-7275 or check the website.

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The park's primitive camping spots can be reached through its trail system, behind the park's visitor and education center. For RV and "car camping," a 24-site campground is nicely laid out for maximum privacy between sites (10 for RVs, 14 for tents). Amenities include tent pads, fire rings, picnic tables, and hot-water bathroom and shower facilities. The park has one three-bedroom, fully furnished cabin, complete with a private boat dock.

Three interesting trails are within the park, two of which are accessible from the visitor center. The Natural Bridge Trail is a moderate 1.5-mile or so loop that meanders through beautiful terrain offering unexpected vistas (especially in cooler months), rock outcroppings and beautiful Poe Creek, complete with a small waterfall.

More adventuresome hikers can connect with the Raven Rock Trail and add 4 miles to the excursion. It is also the route to the primitive camping sites. A short trail leads from the main campsite to the lake.

The park has several picnic tables in day-use areas and five large shelters that can be rented.

Other activities include swimming (at your own risk), geocaching and bird watching; seasonal wildflowers include some rare species. Biking is allowed on the park's roadways.