BREAKING OUT

Foothills Trail offers great vistas nearby

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The 77-mile Foothills Trail, linking Table Rock and Oconee state parks, meanders along rivers and streams, up and down mountains, and through thick forests.

Its popularity among hikers and outdoor lovers isn't hard to understand.

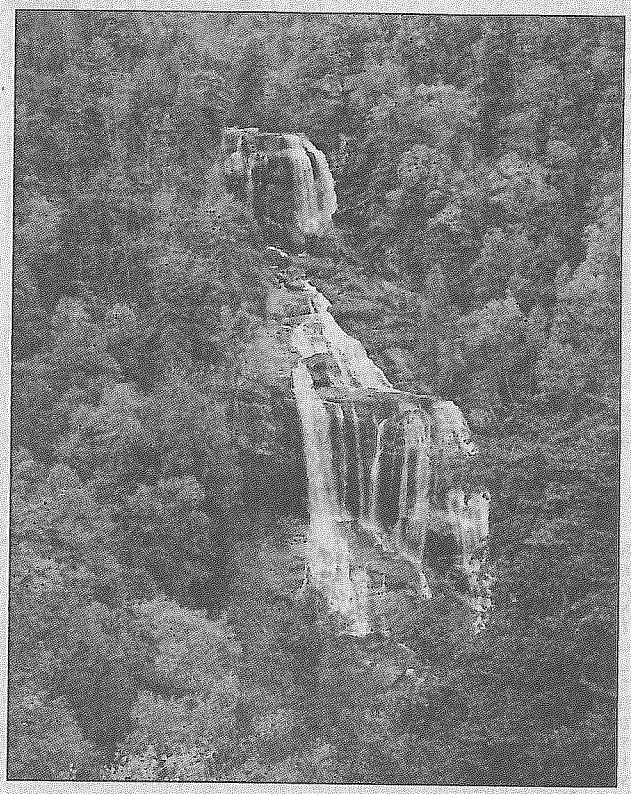
"There's just so many beautiful places on the trail," said Greg Lucas, a S.C. Department of Natural Resources employee and a member of the Foothills Trail Conference board of directors.

"I think it's remained popular because of its proximity to Greenville, Pickens and Seneca," Lucas said. "It's a lot easier to get to than the Appalachian Trail."

The U.S. Forest Service started trail construction in Sumter National Forest in 1968. By 1970, many agencies had joined together to develop a conceptual route.

The Foothills Trail Conference was officially organized May 22, 1974.

Another boost came when the then-Duke Power Co. sought a license to develop the Bad Creek Hydroelectric Projecte Whitewater River. One licensing requirements was a recreational component for the resulting 300-acre lake, Bad Creek Reservoir. The lake, due to its use in the power plant, would have extreme level fluctuations making it dangerous for recreation.



MIKE FOLEY / Staff

Upper Whitewater Falls is visible from the Foothills Trail.

GET THE GUIDE

- The fifth edition of the trail guidebook includes a series of mini-maps for trailheads and spur trails. A new section in the front of the book describes some of the botanical, wildlife and geological features along the trail.
- Buy a copy of the 110-page guide at local retailers, state parks or by visiting: www.foothillstrail.org

That's when the idea of building a hiking trail across Duke lands from Table Rock to Upper Whitewater Falls began in earnest, Lucas said. He cited Glenn Hilliard, president of Liberty Life Insurance Corp.; Bill Lee, president of Duke Power Co.; and Herman Hermelink, president of Crescent Land and Timber Corp., as stalwarts in providing access to a missing trail link.

To mark the trail's 35th birthday, the Foothills Trail Conference is offering a hike a month to help hikers complete the entire trail this year.

The hikes are strenuous over rough terrain. Leaders may refuse participation to anyone they deem unable to safely complete the hike.

- **March 21** — Oconee State Park to Nicholson Ford Road, 7.5 miles.
- **April 18** — Nicholson Ford Road to Burrells Ford Road, 8.9 miles.
- **May 16** — Burrells Ford Road to Sloan Bridge, 7.2 miles.
- **June 6** — Sloan Bridge to Bad Creek Access, 7.8 miles.
- **July 18** — Bad Creek Access to Bear Gap, 10 miles.
- **Aug. 15** — Bear Gap to Laurel Fork Creek at Dawkins Flat Road, 11 miles.
- **Sept. 19** — Laurel Fork Creek at Dawkins Flat Road to Laurel Valley, 7 miles.
- **Oct. 10** — Laurel Valley to Sassafras Mountain, 4.8 miles.
- **Nov. 7** — Sassafras Mountain to Table Rock State Park, 8.8 miles.

Pre-registration and membership in the Foothills Trail Conference is required. Contact the Foothills Trail Conference at: info@foothillstrail.org or call: 864-467-9537.