

Horse, car, boat: Area offers many ways to see fall colors

By Charmaine Smith-Miles (Contact)
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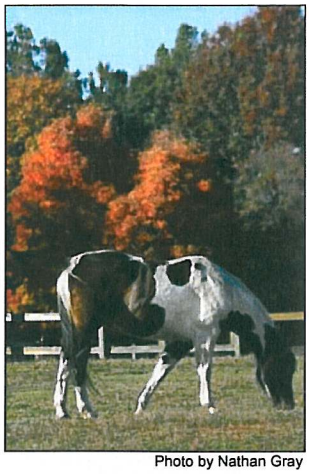


Photo by Nathan Gray

Some trees in the area have already burst into fall color.

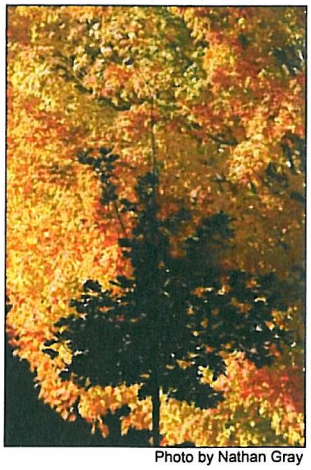


Photo by Nathan Gray

Some trees in the area have already burst into color.

LONG CREEK — There was no long line of traffic, with peering heads, craning to see the brilliance of autumn on the Chattooga River.

While the reds and oranges on leaves are just barely peeping through, Mercedes Branch and her fiancé, Jim Stockman, were undaunted. They boarded a boat and spent about sixhours with 10 otherpeople navigating the river, which stretches along 57 miles of bumpy terrain through North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

Branch said the trip was part of an 11-day vacation. The couple were making a loop from Newberry, where they attended a family reunion, then traveled to Westminster, and were on their way to Atlanta last week.

"We wanted to go whitewater rafting, because of the scenery," Branch said. "The Chattooga River is all mountains and trees. You don't see any cars or roads. Some of the rivers follow along the roads. This one, here, you just see the nature, the mountains and waterfalls."

Branch and Stockman are among the thousands of people flocking to the mountains for the autumn season. And in the Upstate, as well as Northeast Georgia, there are plenty of options, including camping, boating, fishing and even horseback riding as a way to get out and see mountains in the next few weeks as the leaves hit their peak colors.

Those colors were already showing at the end of this week and the trees will likely be in their full splendor, around Oconee County, at the end of this month, said Ken Sloan of the South Carolina Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitor's Bureau.

At Jocassee Outdoor Center, people can rent a guided boat tour on the lake and see waterfalls from an entirely different point of view, Sloan said.

"You could put 10 people on a boat, you can rent the boat yourself or hire a guided tour and kick back to get an incredible tour of the lakes, see the fall colors, and at the same time, see the waterfalls," Sloan said. "There's no bumper-to-bumper traffic there."

In 2008, the center booked more than 100 boat tours on the lake, said Michael Meehan, the center's general manager. Guides give people a history of the lake, explain why there's a solid wall of granite that runs 400 feet below the lake's surface, show off the waterfalls, and

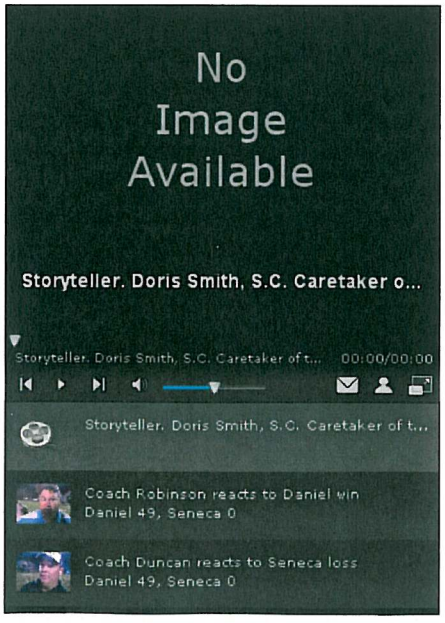
STORY TOOLS

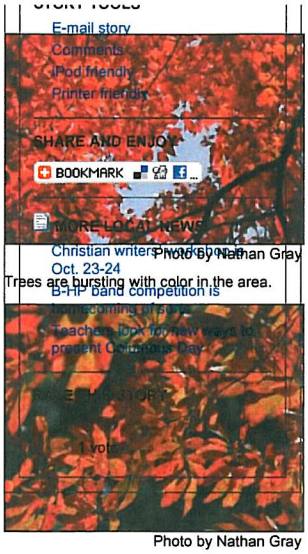


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Trees are bursting with color in the area.

Photo by Nathan Gray

Some leaves have already started to turn red in northern Oconee county.



Photo by Nathan Gray

Rafters and guides in a Wildwater Rafting tour group carry their raft down a trail to the Chattooga River. Rafting is one of the ways to enjoy the fall colors.

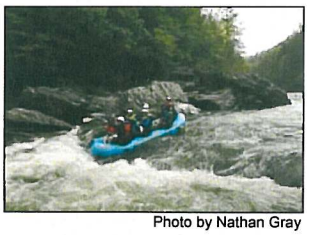


Photo by Nathan Gray

Rafters in a Wildwater Rafting tour group go down rapids on the Chattooga River. Rafting is one of the ways to enjoy the fall colors.

pass along some of the local legends, such as the reason for the name of "Jumping Off Rock."

"We get people from all over the country," Meehan said. "The fall is definitely our busiest time of the year."

Wildwater Ltd. Rafting, based in western North Carolina, offers autumn leaf viewing from the water and from the air. The company books whitewater rafting trips like Branch and Stockman went on Wednesday and it also offers a new adventure in which people can zip along the Nantahala Gorge on a high-tension wire, said the company's marketing director, Carolyn Allison.

The best highway in the Upcountry to view the leaves by car: S.C. 11, which is called the Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway, or the Savannah River Scenic Byway, which runs on S.C. 24, 187, 412 and 81.

There are six parks in Upstate South Carolina that offer scenic views and places where people can camp, fish, hike or even ride their horses. Gwen Davenport, the sales and marketing manager for South Carolina Parks, said she and a co-worker toured the state's Upcountry a week ago, looking for the highlights that tourists — both local and out-of-state — might want to see.

"We got in a boat on Lake Jocassee, and looked at some of the waterfalls; we rented paddle boats at Parris Mountain State Park and we hiked to Caesars Head," Davenport said.

Take Lake Placid, for example. The lake is at Parris Mountain State Park about 15 minutes from downtown Greenville. Much like the other parks, such as Oconee State Park, there are cabins to rent, places to camp and biking trails.

At Kings Mountain State Park there are trails for horse lovers too. Davenport said people can take their horses to travel the mountains. And in northeast Georgia, there are stables such as the ones at The Dillard House where people can book a tour on horseback.

The property is a total of 150 acres and visitors can take a short ride, which lasts about 30 minutes, or they can circle the entire property and ride along the Little Tennessee River, said Penny Youngblood, who works at The Dillard House Stables.

She said most of the riders are people who love horses but have not ridden before.

Leaves have already started their turn, causing their phones to ring.

"We've already got some reds and yellows," Youngblood said. "It's changed a little bit in the last two or three days."

Leaf looking

Here's a short list of local activities for those who want to see the mountains in their autumn splendor, without venturing too far from home:

Routes to take

Savannah River Scenic Byway

It follows South Carolina's western border. Hartwell Lake and the Savannah River are just off the byway. The byway follows South Carolina highways 24, 187, 412 and 81.

Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway

This road, also known as S.C. 11, runs 130 miles along the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Parks and places to visit

South Carolina Botanical Gardens

The park covers 295 acres of woodlands, with streams and