BREAKING OUT



CHARLES SOWELL
The views at Jumping Off Rock are spectacular.

Jumping Off Rock

By Charles Sowell
Special to The Greenville News

Jumping Off Rock is an iconic viewpoint looking over the eastern section of Lake Jocassee that draws visitors from all over the country to see and experience the place.

The Jocassee Gorges Nature Preserve has been called one of the top 50 wild places in the world by National Geographic Magazine for its seemingly endless supply of rare and endangered plants and animals.

There are ferns in the Eastatoe Gorge, which is on the way to Jumping Off Rock, which are also only found in Central America.

At the rock are nesting site are peregrine falcons another rare species found only at Jocassee in the state. Indeed the area just behind Jumping Off Rock is restricted to protect them and Mark Hall, the forest supervisor for the Department of Natural Resources, is very protective of the birds.

Hall is proud of the birds, but he will hold viewing tours in season so that people will get a chance to see the birds without disturbing them. But you will need to call in advance. Hall can be reached at (864) 878-9071.

Getting there isn't easy. Using the Horsepasture Road from U.S. 176 there are nine of the roughest miles in this part of the world separating you from the view. Fortunately there is a road, but it is a tough one and you need to make sure your car, or truck, is in good shape before you take it on and you need to make sure road conditions are good too.

There are several places that are simply impassable after a heavy rain not to mention snow – and they do get snow, quite a bit of it in the winter months.

The views on the way to Jumping Off Rock are spectacular, particularly the views set up by the bear hunting club of Laurel Creek valley. You can see nearly 100 miles north there.

But you have the best views from Jumping Off Rock with an unparalleled view of the lake and the mountains beyond. One rare feature at the vista is that few signs of human development are seen there.

A few years ago all of the roads were closed at Jocassee for the summer. That has changed now vehicular access is allowed for all licensed cars and trucks year-around. Roads are still closed to ATVs during the summer.

Coming in on Horsepasture Road there are two main areas of difficulty. The first is on the way up at the entrance to the Laurel Creek trail system. It is one of the steepest on the whole road and is impassable after a heavy rain.

The second is in the way down to Jumping off Rock.



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A sign honors Dr. James A. Timmerman Jr., who was instrumental in South Carolina's purchase and protection of land surrounding Lake Jocassee.

HOW TO GET THERE:

Take U.S. 25 north from Greenville and change over to Highway 11 at the base of Caesars Head. Turn right on U.S.178 at Holly Springs Grocery and do about eight miles past Rocky Bottom. At Eastatoe Creek turn right and then near left on Horsepasture Road and follow it to the Rock.

This is a long series of hairpin turns that are extremely steep and dangerous.