Mixing SMARTPHONES & water



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Opossum Falls is listed as being a strenuous hike, but maybe one of the most rewarding.

BY JOSIE RABBITT
THE JOURNAL

What were once nature's hidden treasures are now easily accessible on a downloadable app to all smartphone users seeking waterfall directions, descriptions and detailed GPS coordinates.

For free, users can access the inside details on Oconee County's scenic waterfalls and hikes. The Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau, in partnership with Oconee County, has launched the free "Mountain Lakes Waterfall Tour" app on both Google Play and Apple's app store.

To check it out, search "Oconee County, South Carolina."

"National Geographic has named Oconee County 'the destination of a lifetime' because of our natural diversity," President and CEO Ken Sloan of Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) said. "Oconee County has over 150 waterfalls with 29 that are accessible by trails. You can see pictures of the waterfalls in our visitor's guide or online at our website. However, now you can see more with constant updates and videos."

Users can now identify and access 25 of those waterfalls with video clips highlighting historical and geographical significances of each waterfall. Voice narration of each hike to the waterfalls furthers the users' experience, as it enlightens users to the wonders of the Golden Corner.

"We've been working with a tourism association out of Atlanta on working through some kinks and making it the best app it can be," Sloan said. "We've been beta testing it for months now, as it was created and released November 15 of 2013. I've been using it since the beginning to test the overall app, and we are hoping the videos for all the waterfalls will be in perfect condition by summer."

Text descriptions are provided as well for users to look back on and refer to when deciding which hike to take perhaps for an outdoor excursion, romantic date or family outing.

'People always have their phones on them and this is a great way to place information literally right into their hands.'

Ken Sloan
Mountain Lakes CVB

But wait — there's more!

The app features photographs with each waterfall as well as a directions to each waterfall with a reliable rating feature from park departments that help users determine the difficulty of each hike.

"I used the app just the other day while hiking to make sure I had reception and that everything was in line," Sloan said.

"There is also a Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau app, but the waterfall app comes close second to most used on my phone. They're both such clever marketing tools for Oconee County as well as genuinely beneficial to locals — not just tourists."

An interactive map explains in detail each part of a selected hike to one of the 25 waterfalls, which helps users realize the type of hike before trekking on and can prevent hikers from getting lost.

"This is a cool, crisp perspective on what we've got in Oconee County," Sloan said, calling the waterfall app a "living product."

"It's an interactive feature that encourages people to get out and discover Oconee County," Sloan said. "It's more than just a way to promote tourism — it's a way to get people to know about the waterfalls and want to go visit them."

The easiest hikes begin with Riley Moore Falls in Westminster and range to the most difficult falls such as Opossum Creek Falls in Mountain Rest.

"We're hoping by summer, since that's the time everyone's hiking and being outdoor adventurous, to have all waterfalls featured through videos," Sloan said. "We want people to share with friends and say, 'Check this out!' when sharing with others."

That's why the app is free, according to Sloan.

"We're more concerned with making our natural landmarks and features completely accessible to the public," Sloan said. "People always have their phones on them and this is a great way to place information literally right into their hands."

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The app currently has two ways to view the waterfalls. List view gives users a photo, quick synopsis and directions, while the map view shows the location of each fall with a link to its information.