Foothills Trail steps up user-friendly efforts



OWEN RILEY JR. / Staff

Frank and Cynthia Fiorelle conclude their day of hiking on the Foothills Trail at Table Rock State Park on Tuesday.

New signs lead the way to better hiking

"We want people to be safe on the trail."

John Park, Foothills Trail Conference

Trailhead info will give visitors distance to next point, location

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PICKENS — Volunteers have put in hundreds of hours working on new signage along the popular Foothills Trail as part of an effort to promote the trail and improve hiker safety.

Thirty-two signs were installed along the 76-mile trail, including from Caesar's Head, Table Rock, Sassafras Mountain and Oconee State Park, said John Park, a board member for the Foothills Trail Conference, a nonprofit organization formed to promote the trail and coordinate its maintenance.

"We feel like having nice signs at these public trailheads is a good way to promote the trail, to make sure people recognize what it is," said Park, who is chairman of the committee created by the conference's board to work on the signs.

"We want people to be safe on the trail, so having signs that let people know where they are on the trail, how many miles it is to the next point on the trail, is important," he said.

Kent Dykes, president of the Greater Easley Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Foothills Trail Conference, said the signs can help promote the trail.

"The Foothills Trail is one of the best-kept secrets in the Upstate and it is nationally known as a beautiful, 76-mile-long trail that is very challenging," Dykes said. "It goes through some very pristine areas through the Jocassee Gorges that you have the opportunity to see true wild waters."



SUZIE RIDDLE / Staff

The Foothills Trail runs from Table Rock State Park to Oconee State Park, he said.

Park said in some cases they replaced old signs, and in other cases there were no signs.

"We have finished a first phase of the project, and that first phase was to put new signs at all of the major trailheads," Park said, describing areas where there is vehicle access so people can get on the trail.

He said the signs include what direction and area they're headed toward, such as Table Rock,

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the distance to those points, and the distance to the next major trailhead.

He said the first phase involved about 300 man hours from the committee members and 20 other trail conference members who volunteered, from working on the design and mounting the signs on posts to installing them.

Park said the trail follows property owned by entities, such as Duke Energy, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, North Carolina and South Carolina state parks, and two districts of the U.S. Forest Service.

The conference worked with those groups and received help in funding and materials from several of them. The first phase cost about $7,500, Park said, with the money coming from donations by the property stakeholders, corporate gifts and the group's general budget.

Although the project started about 18 months ago, the work isn't finished.

"This (phase) focused on the trailheads because we knew that's where most of the people see the Foothills Trail when they're coming and they may hike a short distance on the trail and then backtrack," Park said. "The next thing we're looking into is what we call internal signage."

He said the internal signage may be needed along the trail in the backcountry and more remote areas where there might be a trail intersection or a trail that intersects with an old logging road, Park said.

"We want to make sure that people, when they get to those places that may be confusing, know where the Foothills Trail is, to be on the same trail as opposed to taking a wrong turn and going down an old logging road," he said.