Paris Mountain a natural for play

1,540-acre park on city's outskirts features abundant outdoor activities

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Call it Greenville's back yard. Or maybe Greenville's playground. However you label it, Paris Mountain State Park is the convenient location for people to get out and enjoy natural activities of a wide variety.

Wednesday morning, for example, visitors were hiking, dog-walking, mountain biking and camping in abundance. Later in the day, Lake Placid was sure to fill with swimmers and paddling enthusiasts.

Other popular activities include fishing, picnicking and a host of educational activities.

Nature lovers can find wildlife in abundance around the lake's nature trail. On Wednesday, ducks, geese, turtles and squirrels were everywhere. The trees were filled with songbirds. And fish could be seen in the shallows of the water's edge.

Fran and Chris Marsh were out for a morning hike. The Greenville residents visit frequently, with Chris coming to the park about three times a week and Fran accompanying him once or twice weekly.

"Sometimes it's just for a quick hike," Chris Marsh said. "Other times we'll go all the way to the back lake."

With more than 16 miles of trails, Paris Mountain offers routes varying in difficulty from flat, short and easy, to rugged, long and difficult.

"It's a beautiful park," Chris Marsh said.

The park averages about 350 visitors a day during the week, but that number skyrockets to three or four times that on weekends, often filling every parking space.

While Greenville residents do make up a good number of those daily visitors, others travel some distance to get to the urban oasis.

Mother and daughter Rachel and Lora Carlton visited the park Wednesday for an outing from Fountain Inn.

"We're trying to get our puppy used to different places," Lora said about her chow-German shepherd mix, Kaylee. "They don't allow dogs at Heritage Park."

Atop the mountain, Dale Dangler, a Dacusville resident, was finishing a 5-mile trail run. Although the park is 30 minutes from home, Dangler said he tries to run at the park a couple of times a week.

"I like the dirt trails," Dangler said. "I used to run on pavement, but now I try to be easy on my knees."

Mountain bikers Chris Harrigan and Jimmy Tillery paused atop the mountain before heading out for another loop of the trails, but they weren't too busy to rate Paris Mountain's trails.

"These are as good as any in North Carolina," Harrigan said. "I ride in Pisgah, Clemson and in Spartanburg, but the trails here rate right with those."

Tillery said he just moved to Greenville from Simpsonville and now the park is less than a mile from his home.

"I'm trying to find a back trail to get here so I don't even have to get on the roads," he said. "Greenville is such a great place for the outdoors."

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- **Music in the Woods:** July 31, Aug. 7, 14, 21 and 28. Held in the park amphitheater, summer concerts begin at 6 p.m. Saturdays and continue until dusk. Adult admission is the $2 park fee. Those 15 and younger get in free.
- **Boat rental:** Kayaks, canoes and paddle boats can be rented at the Park Center for $5 per half hour. Hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Friday and 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday-Sunday.
- **Swimming in Lake Placid:** Hours are Wednesday-Friday, from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturday-Sunday, from 11 a.m.-6 p.m.
- **Creek Ranger hikes:** Creek Ranger program hikes are at 10 a.m., July 30 and Aug. 13. Participants will hike to Mountain Creek, search for animals and their homes, and investigate nature. Pre-registration is required. Fee: $5 payable at fee booth instead of admission fee. Call 864-244-5565 or e-mail ctaylor@scprt.com.



MIKE FOLEY / Staff

Jimmy Tillery, front, and Chris Harrigan head out for a ride on the Sulphur Springs Trail. Paris Mountain State Park has miles of hiking and biking trails of varying difficulties.

ONLINE

For a map of the park's most popular hiking trails, go to GreenvilleOnline.com.

PARIS MOUNTAIN INFORMATION

- **Office** hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday-Monday
- **Phone:** 864-244-5565
- **Online:** www.southcarolinaparks.com/park-finder/state-park/722.aspx. The Paris Mountain State Park Friends website is www.pmspf.org.