BREAKING OUT

Ready, set, HIKE

Fall colors are coming, slowly but surely

By Mike Foley
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Week in, week out, Greenville's Anne Martin is on the trail of new sights, new sounds, new vistas.

This fall, she's planning hiking trips to new places, old favorites and anywhere that she can enjoy being outdoors and sharing the experiences with others. Martin is a hike leader for one of the classes offered by the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Furman University. As such, she'd already done her homework on 12 hikes for this fall.

But for fall color, she's more likely to stay with the tried and true.

"One place I love is Sassafras Mountain," Martin said. "Particularly now that we have the overlook there.

"Now you can get great colors on the trails and go to the overlook for the view."

South Carolina's highest mountain at 3,564 feet does offer a variety of options. And just because it's the state's tallest mountain, doesn't mean all of the options are strenuous. A motorist can actually drive to almost the top of the mountain, and then hike a relatively flat section of the Palmetto Trail along the ridge top east toward Table Rock.

Another of Martin's top choices is the Ashmore Heritage Preserve, adjacent to the Mountain Bridge Wilderness.

"You get some high elevations and some water there," Martin said about the 1,125-acre property. "It's very nice."

Martin likes the area for another reason, and that's grass of parnassus. It's not actually a grass, but a delicate white flower.

"When you see it in October," she said about the five-petal flower that grows in seepages, "it takes your breath away."

Find more information and directions to Ashmore, at: www.dnr.sc.gov/mlands/heritage

While his vocation keeps Scott Stegenga busy at Table Rock State Park where he's the park interpreter, he said during his forays away from the park he's seen fantastic fall foliage off Highway 130, toward Whitewater Falls and the fish hatchery.

"That road corridor is often beautiful," he said. "If people get on the Foothills Trail they can see it up close."

Back at his home base, Stegenga said you can't beat a hike to the top of Table Rock for fall colors on the way and then a magnificent reward at the top of the 3,124-foot mountain.

"It's hard to beat the view up there anytime," he said, "but fall is especially pretty."

Coming soon for those who find the hike to Table Rock's summit too strenuous: a flat trail completely encircling the 36-acre Pinnacle Lake. Currently, the trail stretches from the swimming area to the dam and back, but this fall a bridge is being constructed near the dam which will allow the trail to continue around the entire lake.

"We got a grant for this, so it has to be completed this fall," Stegenga said about the timetable. "It will be 1.6 miles around when it's finished."

Here are some group outings coming up that offer opportunities to get out and see fall colors:

» **Saturday — Three fall foliage** kayak tours are set for Spartanburg's Croft State Park on Saturday. The tours of the park's Lake Craig offers participants the chance to see blue heron and picturesque fall colors. Tours are set for 10 a.m., 11:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. Deadline to register is Thursday. Fee is $10. E-mail: jenna.walker@spartanburgparks.org or 864-804-5815 to register.

» **Oct. 22** — Enjoy a leisurely walk to Paris Mountain State Park's Mountain Lake from 1-3 p.m. and see fall colors on the trees and reflected in the calm waters. The park interpreter will help participants identify leaves and investigate the reasons for their colors. The fee is $5 per person and the admission fee is waived. Registration is required by e-mailing: ctaylor@scprt.com or calling 864-244-5565.

» **Oct. 30** — Expect fall colors to be at their peak during a fall foliage walk at Table Rock State Park from 2-3:30 p.m. This guided walk follows a section of an old CCC trail along Pinnacle Lake. Insights about seasonal changes within the forest ecosystem will be shared along the trail. Registrations closes a week before the hike. The fee is $5. Call: 864-878-9813.



Leaf color isn't the only scenery you might catch on a fall hike. Local groups offer several chances to take in the view. GANNETT

FALL COLOR VIEWING

» **Hot spots:** South Carolina's state parks offer numerous locations to see fall colors in all their glory. For some of the hot spots to see cool colors, visit: www.southcarolinaparks.com/beautiful-places/fall_foliage/best_places_to_view.aspx

» **Fall color updates:** To help you find when the colors hit their peak, log on to the park's website to see fall foliage updates. The updates began Wednesday. Visit: www.southcarolinaparks.com/beautiful-places-/fall_foliage.aspx

» **Table Rock web cam:** Watch fall colors turn from in front of your computer. Of course, you might want to get out and see them for yourself, but the web cam pointed at Table Rock will let you feel as if you're there. Visit: www.southcarolinaparks.com/beautiful-places/webcams/table_rock_webcam.aspx