

FOR THE JOURNAL

Left: Rena Light enjoys riding her trail horse on many different trails in the Upstate.

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TAKE ADVANTAGE OF UPSTATE HIKING spots



BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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CLEMSON – Autumn is prime time for hikers, and the Upstate boasts a multitude of scenic trails. Hiking is a relatively inexpensive way to get away from the cars, bars and concrete of everyday life.

"There are a lot of great places to hike in Pickens and Oconee counties," said Rena Light, rappelling instructor in Clemson. "The great thing about hiking is you can set your own pace."

According to Light, who hikes to get to the perfect rocks for climbing, there is a basic list of supplies to bring on a hike. This includes water, a small first-aid kit and insect repellent.

"Also, bring a map if you don't know the area," she said. "Unless you're carrying a heavy pack, you don't need big hiking boots. Tennis shoes or light hiking shoes are fine. But don't skip on socks — get some with padding on the heel and ball of the foot. Wear comfortable clothes and bring an extra layer in your backpack."

As far as food goes, hikers should remember to carry out what you carry in. Store all food in plastic bags; leave the cardboard at home. Freeze-dried meals work particularly well and are easy to prepare — just add water.

"There are bears around here, but not many," she added. "You're much more likely to attract raccoons with food."

A primary concern when buying a tent for the Upstate area is the heat.

"For around here, you're going to want something with a fair amount of ventilation," she explained. "Weight is another consideration. Some people like having vestibules to store gear, boots or food."

There are a few basic types of backpacks. For short, day hikes there are the aptly named daypacks, which are relatively light. Bigger packs are available with an external frame (the "Boy Scout model") or internal. External frames tend to be a little more comfortable because there is ventilation between the hiker and the pack. But internal frames usually have a larger capacity.

For Upstate campsites, Light recommends a 15-20 degree backpack. Make sure the bags use Polarguard or another synthetic insulation. Down-insulated bags will be too warm and can become weighed down with moisture.

"If you're drinking water from a stream, make sure you purify the water," she advised. "Use iodine tablets, a water filter or chlorine tablets."

Always try to use an established campsite if one is available.

"The Upstate is full of gorgeous natural beauty," she said. "We can all help maintain that luster and enjoy the rewards."

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Rena Light and her husband Matt begin the trek up Pinnacle Trail at Table Rock State Park.

Some favorite Upstate hiking trails:

Yellow Branch Falls, Stumphouse State Park, Walhalla

3 miles (round trip)
(864) 638-4343

This moderately difficult trail leads to the base of a spectacular 50-foot vertical cascade. It also passes through groves of dignified hardwoods and meandering creek bottoms. The incline isn't very tough, just rolling hills. In the winter when the trees are bare, you can see the Walhalla vicinity as you hike. Wear sturdy shoes and use extra caution during wet conditions as this trail skirts the edges of deep ravines. Conversely, if it hasn't rained for some time, the falls may be just a trickle of water over a series of ledges.

Pinnacle Mountain Trail, Table Rock State Park, Pickens

3.3 miles (one way)
(864) 878-9813

This is a fairly strenuous trail. Before starting, register at the Nature Center. Pinnacle Mountain is an adventurous trail with downed trees and rocky passes. Mills Creek Falls and Mills Creek Pass Trail are visible during a hike here. Bald Rock lies further uphill. From there, Greenville is visible in the distance on a clear day. The Pinnacle Trail continues uphill toward the left on a less trodden trail. Hikers can return the same way they came or take the less strenuous Ridge Trail to the Table Rock Trail. This leads back to the Nature Center.

Natural Bridge Trail, Keowee-Toxaway State Natural Area, Sunset

1.5-mile loop
(864) 868-2605

The trail is marked with tags on the trees. This hike features lots of wildflowers, mountain laurel, some wildlife and the natural bridge over Poe Creek. The trail is fairly steep in a few sections and will be very slippery in the fall and after a rain.

Caesars Head and Raven Cliff Falls, Greenville County

Various lengths
(864) 836-6115

Caesars Head provides a panoramic view of nearby valleys, Table Rock and Pinnacle mountains, and other distant peaks of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Raven Cliff Falls, situated along one of the park's many hiking trails, is one of the highest waterfalls in the eastern United States.



Raven Cliff is a 2-mile hike to a set of high falls that are viewed from an observation deck at the end of the trail. The deck faces the falls, where they cascade down the mountain that is across from the end of the trail. The hiking trail passes though rough woods with rare rhododendron and wildflowers, with long distance views of the South Carolina foothills below. Located near the North Carolina state line.

Foothills Trail, Table Rock State Park, Pickens

Various lengths
(864) 467-9537

This is an 80-mile footpath extending from Table Rock State Park at its eastern terminus to Oconee State Park in the west. Its route takes the hiker through the heart of the Jocassee Gorges tract, to mountain crests with scenic views, to shady gorges and coves with special botanical features. Along its route the Foothills Trail crosses or follows most of the major streams and rivers of the Jocassee Gorges and adjacent conservation lands including Eastatoe Creek, Laurel Fork Creek, Toxaway River, Horse Pasture River, Bearcamp Creek, Thompson River, Whitewater River, East Fork Creek and Chattooga River, among others. The Foothills Trail Conference coordinates activities associated with the Foothills Trail.

Indian Creek Trail, Issaqueena Lake, Clemson

.9 mile long

This trail includes a double creek crossing. There is plenty of uphill climbing involved. The recreation area is on SC Hwy 133, north of Clemson.