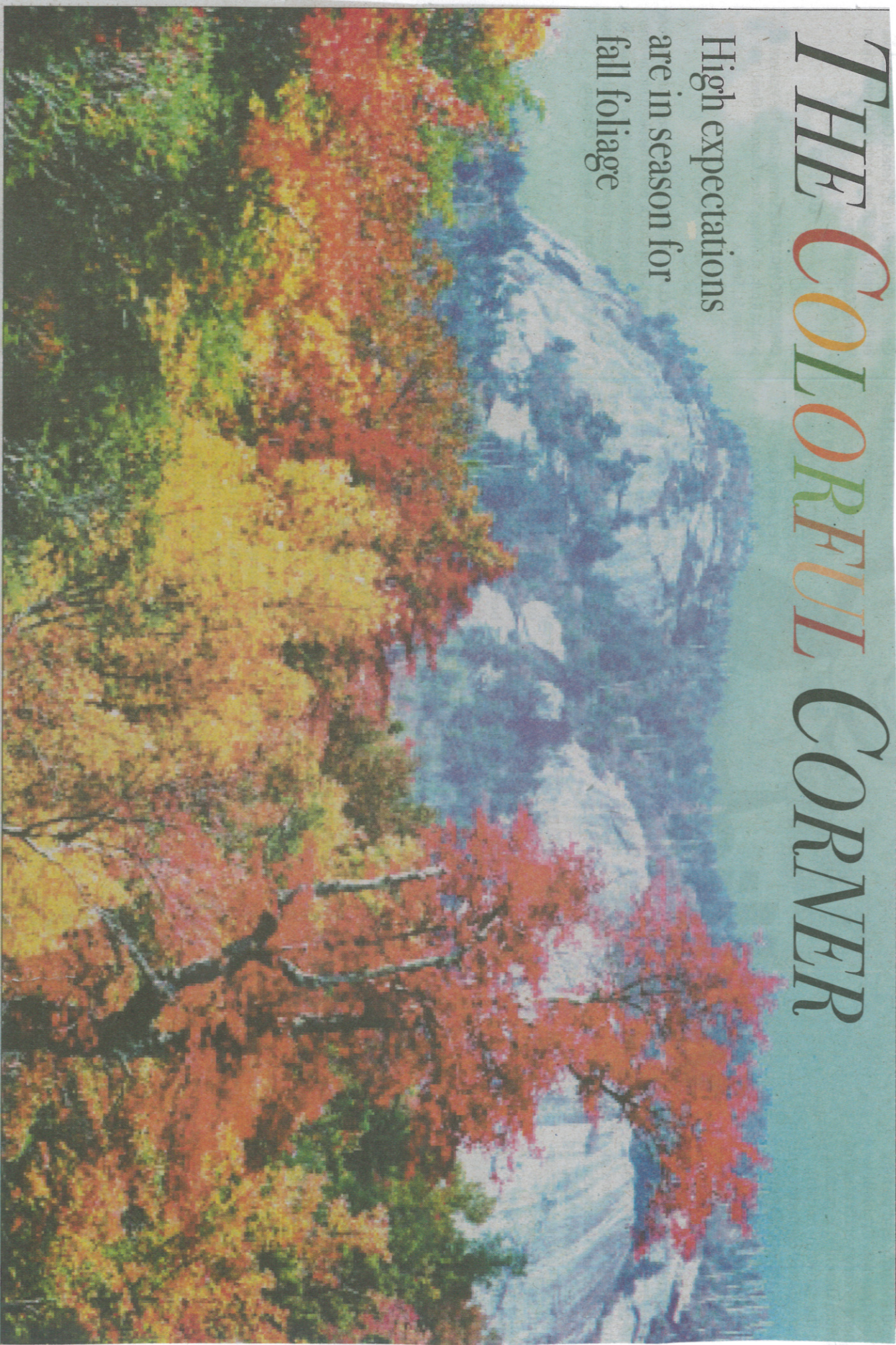


THE COLORFUL CORNER

High expectations
are in season for
fall foliage



This year's fall foliage has the potential to be spectacular, rivaling this 2004 image of Grandfather Mountain near Boone, N.C.

SENECA — Sourwood trees are already dotting the landscape with their rusty red hue — the Upstate's first sign that autumn color is on its way.

Although recent winds may have blown some leaves off the trees, the Upstate is still set up for beautiful fall color, according to Clemson University forest ecologist Donald Hagan.

"The damp gray weather stalled color development a bit, but the majority of the foliage season is still ahead," Hagan said. "Hopefully, the next several days will be mostly mild and sunny, which is exactly what we need to bring out the good colors."

With peak fall

foliage expected

in

hike up and hike back down. It's about five miles round trip."

Some other spots he recommends are Virginia Hawkins Falls and Kings Creek Falls. Both are accessible from the Foothills Trail as day hikes.

"You can go anywhere along the Foothills Trail and you'll see all the color your eyes can take in," he said. "Go up to the top of Sassafras and look north. You're going to see color there two weeks before it gets to Sassafras. You'll see it creeping down from the North Carolina mountains."

Hagan said a bit of summertime drought added just the right touch of stress to help condense the autumn season and cause a bunch of colors to pop all at once.

The best-case scenario for producing vivid fall color is a succession of mild cold fronts. The fronts expedite the leaf-changing process by triggering the trees to begin early preparations for winter dormancy.

"When the cold front comes through, the sky is gray and the air is damp,"

Hagan

late October and early November, it's time to start planning those fall outings. Whether it's a weekend backpack trip, a day hike or simply a Sunday afternoon drive, don't miss out on the natural beauty that draws people to the Upstate.

Heyward Douglass, executive director of Foothills Trail Conference, meets people from California, Montana, Florida and Louisiana visiting the Upstate for its outdoor attractions.

"People come from all over the country," Douglass said. "A lot of them come for the waterfalls — they'll visit eight to 10 waterfalls while they're here."

Many of those waterfalls can be seen along the Foothills Trail. Connecting Table Rock State Park to Oconee State Park, the 77-mile trail follows the North Carolina and South Carolina state lines, skirts the northern shores of Lake

said. "But for the next several days, the air becomes pleasantly cool and the sky brilliantly clear. The sunny weather after a front brings out the reds and purples that can turn an average foliage season into a great one."

So he recommends viewing the fall foliage on a clear day following a cold front.

Deciduous trees, which produce and drop leaves in a single year, work hard during spring and summer. After their buds burst in spring, their leaves begin to grow. All summer they collect the sun's energy and manufacture it into sugars to feed upon.

But by fall, the leaves have literally been flapping in the wind for a while and are worn out. So for the tree, the cost of maintaining its leaves exceeds the benefit of keeping them.

"One of the things that happens when a plant is getting ready to go dormant is it stops rebuilding chlorophyll," Hagan said.

Jocassee and offers vistas at elevations ranging from 1,000 to 3,000 feet.

"The trail winds up and down between the two state parks. It goes up over Sassafras Mountain, down to Lake Jocassee and cuts over the Chattooga River," Douglass said. "If you want to take a pretty hike, walk the eight-mile stretch along the Chattooga River."

With numerous trail heads, the Foothills Trail offers adventures for every outdoor enthusiast. Some backpackers hike the entire 77 miles in five to 10 days, while others might cover a shorter stretch over a weekend trip. For those who don't want to camp overnight, there are plenty of day hikes to explore.

One of the best views in South Carolina is from the peak of Sassafras Mountain, the highest point in the state. A newly paved road leads drivers nearly all the way to the top.

"So the green pigment in the leaf fades and disappears, revealing the orange and yellow pigments that were always

"From where you park, you only have to walk about 200 feet to get to the top," Douglass said. "Just a few years ago, that road was so crummy you almost needed a four-wheel drive to get up there."

But during Douglass' recent trip to Sassafras Mountain, he noticed a motorcycle weaving around the curves on the hillside. Even buses can now use the road.

"They're anticipating getting schoolchildren up there," he said. "Now you can take a school bus right to the top."

Not everyone wants a lift, though. Others like more of a challenge. Hikers can ascend Sassafras Mountain from two different approaches. Either they can start at the bottom and hike seven miles to the top (where they've parked another car for a quicker descent), or they can take an easier path.

"About halfway up the mountain, the trail crosses the road," Douglass said. "Lots of people will park there,



FALL: Table Rock has the best colors

FROM PAGE B1

underneath but obscured by the chlorophyll. But the red and purple colors are not already there. Instead, they are produced by a chemical reaction to bright sunlight, which is why the beautiful days following cold fronts are so valuable in producing the most desirable results."

If Douglass had to select one single spot to view fall foliage, it's from the base of Table Rock. From the east entrance, he said to drive past the old lodge and around a few curves, then pull off at the

clearing with the best and closest view of the mountain.

Neither Douglass nor Hagan can predict the best time to plan to see the fall color because Mother Nature doesn't follow an exact schedule. But Hagan's best advice is to be ready.

"I think it has the potential to be spectacular," he said. "I tell people to keep their eyes on the weather, pay attention to these passing cold fronts. Look at it as an adventure and be spontaneous. That's what makes it so much fun."