The next big thing

Get out and go with a new adventure or two

By Mike Foley
Staff Writer
mfoley@greenvilleonline.com

What's your next big adventurous event? The one you have underlined, circled and highlighted in red on your calendar?

Or maybe it hasn't even gotten that far. Maybe all you've done is think about it, dream about it or wish you could do something one of your friends brags about.

It could be the event you do every year, with family, with friends, or by yourself to test your mettle or just because it's fun and you like it so much. Heck, maybe it isn't an event at all, just an accomplishment or outing you'd like to attempt

Let's say 2012 is your year to do the "big thing." It could be you have no goals and are looking for something new to try. Over the years, there have been plenty of races, hikes, rides, paddles and the like that others have told me about or I've found on my own — or just dreamed up — and each is special in its own way.

Here are some of the events or challenges I know of, some I've done, and some that are yet to be done, but all are worthy of the varying amounts of effort. What about you? If you have an event that's special to you, let me know about it and I'll spread the word to other readers.

Hikes

Table Rock: I like to call the hike to the top of Table Rock the "classic Carolina mountain hike." It's difficult enough to be a challenge, not so hard you need any special equipment or training, and the reward is huge, as in an awe-

The basic 3.7-mile hike to the 3,124-foot summit includes scenic vistas along the way, large boulder fields, forest coves and more. Start at Table Rock State Park off Highway 11 in northern Pickens County.

Foothills Trail: Through-hiking the 77-mile Foothills Trail is a slice of the best South Carolina has to offer. It's rugged and it's beautiful.

A fit hiker — some trail runners have completed the stretch in less than 24 hours — can complete the entire trail in a three-day weekend. Others will take up to a week to hike between Table Rock and Oconee state parks. The hike follows along the Blue Ridge Escarpment and summits the state's tallest mountain, 3,560-foot Sassafras, along the way. Other highlights includes Whitewater Falls and the Eastatoe Creek Heritage Preserve.

Waterfalls: When I started looking for interesting trails in South Carolina, I searched for trails offering a "reward." Whether it was a mountain summit, an interesting natural phenomena or just a challenge, I found myself drawn again and again to hikes to waterfalls.

Using the best-selling "The Waterfalls of South Carolina" as my guide, I finally completed hikes to all 31 waterfalls in the book.



Hike to Rainbow Falls from Jones Gap State Park. MIKE FOLEY/STAFF

Assault on Mount Mitchell: There are plenty of century rides in the Carolinas and Georgia, but none are as big or beastly as the Assault. About 1,000 people from across the country and around the world take on the ride to the tallest mountain on the East Coast that begins in Spartanburg.

Ride across South Carolina: Nearly every state has a cross-state ride, and The Palmetto State is no exception. The Greenville Spinners have hosted the David Sutton Memorial Cross State Tour 31 times. The 2012 information isn't available yet, but the ride usually takes four or five days.

Swamp Rabbit Trail: You can do this today by starting in Travelers Rest and riding south until you get to the Reedy River at Greenville Tech some 13.5 miles away. Turn around and ride back. Stop along the way at various locations for sustenance.

If you're adventurous, don't stop at the river, and pick your way along surface roads to where the trail begins anew on Parkins Mill Road and ride the last 3.5 miles of trail to Lake Conestee



It's a long way to the top of Table Rock, but the hike and view from the summit are worth the effort. MIKE FOLEY/STAFF

Nature Park. This makes your round trip nearly 40 miles long.

Runs

Cooper River Bridge Run: It's big. It's beautiful. It's a big, beautiful bridge, and you get to run over it. The 10K is the largest race in the state, and at times it seems as if the entire state is running alongside of you as you trek from Mount Pleasant over the bridge and on to Charleston where a huge party awaits.

Can 45,000 people be wrong?

Paris Mountain Road Race: The oldest continually held road race is in Greenville, and it summits 2,010-foot Paris Mountain. It's the only 20K in the state, but the bonus is, it feels a lot longer than 12.4 miles. You'll hate running up the mountain, and while it's fun running down it, the next day your legs will be very unhappy with you. Lucky it's only held once a year.

Moonshiner 5K: Trail runs are everywhere now. Night races are no longer unique. But there's only one trail run in the dark hereabouts, and it has sold out each of its two years. Some finishers are bloody, some ask if they can do it again, but everyone loves the nighttime run on Paris Mountain State Park's trails. Half-Moon Outfitters will host the third Moonshiner on the full moon in September. Try it, you'll like it.



You'll never be lonesome when you and 45,000 other runners run across the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge during the Cooper River Bridge Run. ASSOCIATED PRESS

RESOURCES

TRAILS

» The best site for guides, maps and descriptions of South Carolina's trails is: www.sctrails.net.
» For information on the Foothills Trail, visit: www.foothillstrail.org.
» Palmetto Conservation now has the third edition of "The Waterfalls of South Carolina" available at: www.palmettoconservation.org.

RIDES

» All you need to know about the Assault on Mount Mitchell and the accompanying Assault on Marion is at: www.freewheelers.info/assaults.
» The 32nd David Sutton Memorial Cross State Tour will likely be held in May. Info: www.greenvillespinners.org.

PADDLING

» The 2012 Tame the Tyger River Race and Festival is April 12. Visit: www.spartanburgparks.org/LEAF/tame-the-tyger.php.
» Learn about South Carolina's lakes at: www.sciway.net/tourism/lakes.html.

Paddling

Tame the Tyger: This may be the largest paddling event in South Carolina. Spartanburg Parks and Recreation puts on the race and river festival every year. Hundreds of paddlers take on the Tyger River and learn there is paddling on some of the tamer rivers in the region.

Broad River: My favorite paddling route is from downtown Hot Springs, N.C. Get a local outfitter to agree to pick you up at a predetermined location and you hop in the river and go. You don't even need your own kayak; the outfitters will rent you that, too. You can picnic and loll on the river all day if you want.

Local lakes: Beginners are blessed with many local lakes on which to learn to paddle and tour. The biggest lakes are Jocassee, Keowee and Hartwell. But local lakes such as Lake Cunningham and Lake Robinson in Greer and even Saluda Lake on the Greenville-Pickens county line offer interesting day trips.

■ Staff writer Mike Foley can be reached at: 864-298-4744.