BREAKING OUT

Waterfalls 'deceptively beautiful'

Slips, falls a danger as hikers head outdoors

By Charles Sowell
Special to The Greenville News

Twin Falls on Reedy Creek is one of Upstate's most popular attractions, mostly because of the ease of access to a viewing platform at the base of the 75-foot-high waterfall.

It's also among the more dangerous, along with Wildcat Falls in Greenville County.

Dennis Chastain, a noted outdoorsman and author in Pickens County, considers Wildcat the most dangerous waterfall in the state, "largely because it's so accessible. But also because it looks so harmless, not a sheer drop like most waterfalls."

Wildcat Wayside is a short drive from Jones Gap on Highway 11.

News of deaths at the falls in 2012 and 2013 prompted stern warnings for hikers.

"You can't be too careful around waterfalls," Chastain said. "They're seductive and deceptively beautiful. ... But the truth is one slip in the wrong place and you're history."

So it's no surprisethat the recommended route to viewing Twin Falls from the top is the two-mile-long Department of Natural Resources trail from Cleo Chapman Road.

But on a recent hike along the trail, my wife and I had our hearts in our throats as we watched a family with two young children make the treacherous climb up the falls.

We were making the hike to the top, along parts of the old Appalachian Lumber Co. rail line. The company lasted two years, weaving narrow-gage rails through the mountain country in the 1920s.

A monstrous rain in 1928 tore out the tracks and bankrupted the company, leaving behind the rail bed and twisted rails along Reedy Cove Creek.

The trail to the top of the falls is a pleasant one, starting on Cleo Chapman Road about a half-mile from Bob's Place on U.S. 178. There is parking for about four cars in the parking area at a red gate leading to an old logging road to the interior. The gate is on the right side of the road as you head down toward Eastatoe Valley.



Twisted remains of a rail washed out nearly 100 years ago mark the Twin Falls trail. CHARLES SOWELL/CONTRIBUTOR

The view of the falls from the trail was disappointing. We did have a good view of the observation platform below and saw a family taking in the view.

As I was looking for a good access to the top of the falls, Laura called to me. "That family is climbing the waterfall."

I hurried to her side to see a man helping two young children negotiate the treacherous rocks.

After we lost sight of them, I called the DNR hotline (800-922-5431) and spoke with a dispatcher, who promised to send personnel to check on them.

We were about a half-mile from the trailhead when I heard children laughing, so we waited for a few minutes. It was the family. They headed in a different direction, but we know they made it out of the woods safely. We met them on the road down in Eastatoe Valley when we went to check.



Along the hike to Twin Falls is a plunge pool upstream from the falls. CHARLES SOWELL/CONTRIBUTOR