

Enjoying the

OPENROAD



Oconee Forever enjoyed another successful Rally in the Valley on Saturday. Riders, guests and volunteers enjoyed a beautiful day, a great meal and helped raise funds to continue the work of Oconee Forever — enhancing Oconee's natural beauty through sensible growth and conservation.

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Cyclists descend

upon Oconee for annual Rally in the Valley

BY STEPHANIE JADRNICZEK

THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — More than 165 cyclists took to the roads Saturday for the sixth annual Rally in the Valley.

After selecting a 30- or 60-mile course, riders left for an early departure from Lake Jemiki near Walhalla and headed toward the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Event co-coordinator Emily Hitchcock said while many local cyclists liked starting the Memorial Day weekend with a ride through the valley, the majority of the cyclists were from other areas. They came from throughout South Carolina, as well as Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Florida and even as far as Maine.

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Lake Jemiki is located about 5 miles west of Wallalla in the mountains. The cyclists headed north into the foothills, into the valleys and mountains, ended up in Tamassee and then came back down to the event site.

"This year the route of both the 30- and 60-mile rides were tweaked to improve the rides," Hitchcock said. "The cyclists commented favorably on the changes, and many indicated that they would be back next year. The event also added a few more toys to improve the experience for the children."

Event co-coordinator Tracy Waldroup said one of the things that makes the event unique is the post-ride festival atmosphere.

While cyclists made their way into the foothills, friends and family waited at the event site with slow-cooked barbecue, an array of sides and brownies and cookies for dessert. With local brew and local bands on tap, the post-ride experience was the perfect way to cap off the day, organizers said.

Rally in the Valley is

Oconee Forever's main fundraiser. The local organization is an all-volunteer outreach group of Upstate Forever that works to preserve working farms, forests, natural areas and historic sites.

Oconee Forever supports Oconee County's recycling efforts and has always recycled cardboard, plastic and aluminum after Rally in the Valley. But Waldroup said an improvement to this year's event was a stepped-up effort toward recycling during the race and meal afterward.

"This year we took the recycling efforts a step further by composting all paper, including plates, and food waste," she said. "The waste from Rally in the Valley will be in Atlas Organics compost in the near future to benefit future gardeners. Also, two of the three rest stops had Terracycle boxes to collect the wrappers from energy bars and gels for recycling."

With these additional efforts, only minimal waste from Rally in the Valley went to a landfill, which Waldroup said benefited both the taxpayers and the environment.

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