

# First-day hikes promote healthful lifestyle

BY JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL  
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Those with a New Year's resolution to be more active can go take a hike.

South Carolina state parks in Oconee and Pickens counties are participating in the park service's First Day Hikes program on New Year's Day, according to a S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism news release.

Oconee State Park assistant manager Everett Ernst said First Day Hikes is a program the S.C. State Park Service can get behind

because it gets people outside and brings visitors to local parks.

"New Year's Day is a big time for resolutions, and a top resolution is losing weight," Ernst said. "The First Day Hikes program gets people out and active and kicks the year off on the right foot. It's a great introduction to the new year."

The first-day hike on Monday at Oconee State Park in Mountain Rest starts at 1 p.m., Ernst said. A ranger will lead the 1.5-mile hike around a manmade lake and answer questions about wildlife and plant life.

Hikers will also get to learn about the Civilian Conservation Corps, an organization that President Franklin D. Roosevelt created during the Great Depression to put people to work while building and improving park systems across the U.S.

Ernst said the ranger will talk about the park's history, the architecture of buildings and cabins on the trail that the CCC constructed, how the cabins have changed over the years and the lifestyle of men who worked in the CCC.

The CCC also built the man-made lake that hikers will get to view on the trail.

"It's a very easy hike with mostly flat terrain and some uneven terrain, which is expected because of roots," Ernst said.

Hikers should expect to be on the trail for about two hours.

The park service's First Day Hikes is part of a national movement by America's State Parks program to encourage people to get outdoors on New Year's Day and "rediscover the beauty and significance of their natural heritage," the news release said.

S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism director Duane Parrish said the events have become very popular.

"Visitors are using this time to recharge and restart and to enjoy some of the most scenic settings in South Carolina," Parrish said.

Table Rock State Park in Pickens is hosting a 2-mile first-day hike on the Lakeside Trail at 11 a.m. Park manager Michael Trotter said interested hikers should meet for the moderate-to-easy hike at the Lakeside picnic shelter.

The ranger leading the hike

will also talk about the CCC.

"The first-day hikes are a great way for people to be introduced to parks, get outdoors and meet fitness goals," Trotter said. "Hiking is a great physical fitness activity for staying in shape and promoting a healthy lifestyle."

Most of the first-day hikes are easy 1- to 3-mile walks on beaches and historic trails, near marshes and lakes and in forests, according to the news release. A few parks will also host 5K runs and "quick, exhilarating" dips into the water called "plunges."

One of those 5Ks and plunges is at Devils Fork State Park in Salem. Assistant park manager Ray Felton said the 5K and first-day hike will start at 1 p.m. on the Oconee Bells Nature Trail, where the Oconee Bell flower grows.

## HIKE: 'Enjoy the day with us'

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"The Oconee Bells Nature Trail is one of the best areas for the public to see that flower, because it's very rare," Felton said. "About 80 percent of the plant's habitat was destroyed when the area where Lake Jocassee is flooded."

For kids and the young at heart, an easier 1-mile "fun run" hike starts at noon. The hike is tailored to children, but Felton said anyone is welcome to walk it. The plunge into icy cold water starts around 2-2:30 p.m.

All proceeds from the 5K go to Devils Fork State Park and the nonprofit 501(c)(3) Friends of Jocassee, Felton said.

"The first-day hike is a fun event for the general public to get out with family on New Year's Day and start the year right," Felton said.

Ernst, Trotter and Felton all encourage hikers to wear clothes appropriate for weather, and suggest layering clothing, wearing comfortable boots or tennis shoes and bringing a snack.

"We just hope folks will come out and enjoy the day with us," Trotter said.

Visit [southcarolinaparks.com](http://southcarolinaparks.com) for information about first-day hikes and other events.

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South Carolina state parks in Oconee and Pickens counties are participating in the park service's First Day Hikes program on New Year's Day.