

# 'I can't explain it'



COURTESY OF BOB FAIRES

City of Seneca planning director Ed Halbig, left, and utilities director Bob Faires are seen on a bridge over the Tox-away River along the Foothills Trail last fall. The duo recently completed the Foothills Trail — a nearly 77-mile trek that stretches from Table Rock State Park in Pickens County to Oconee State Park.

## Seneca officials complete lengthy Foothills Trail

BY ERIC SPROTT  
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Bob Faires arrived in Seneca nearly two decades ago to serve as the city's utilities director, and during that time, he's obviously become well versed in what the area has to offer.

However, there was one major draw that managed to elude Faires until recently, when he set out with city planning director Ed Halbig to tackle the 76.2-mile Foothills Trail, which stretches from Table Rock State Park in Pickens County to Oconee State Park.

And with the trek now completed, Faires wonders how he

hadn't gotten around to tackling the lengthy trek until now, as he described it as "wild, beautiful and out of control."

"It's unbelievable that I've lived here 17 years and I'm just now experiencing what's been available to me this whole time," he said. "You get immersed, and we're just 30 minutes away from it. It may be an hour to any trailhead you want to go to, and you can get to any part of the trail within an hour and just go in there and get away.

"I can't explain it — it can only be experienced."

Faires and Halbig — an experienced hiker and no stranger to the Foothills Trail — started their

conquest around Veterans Day, covering roughly 45 miles in four and a half days.

And with the trip coming so close to the Thanksgiving holiday, Halbig said he gained a particular appreciation for the everyday amenities that are so often taken for granted while out on the trail.

"That's another kind of appreciation all together," Halbig said. "That leads you to a real understanding of Thanksgiving when you get back to the house and have a dry, warm place to stay and food you didn't have to carry on your back and a comfortable bed.

# TRAIL: Visitors from far and wide hike the trail

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"We really got a new-found appreciation for all the wonderful things we unfortunately take for granted every day."

The duo recently set out again to finish what they started, as they reentered the trail at Bad Creek and spent three nights on the trail, eventually coming out at Oconee State Park to complete the entire trek in a week's time.

"It was great, and it was beautiful hiking along the river," Halbig said. "The weather was absolutely perfect, and we hiked basically to the point of exhaustion where we couldn't do campfires or anything fun like that."

"It was the first time I've ever done a backpacking trip, and Ed is very knowledgeable and has done multiple of these backcountry-type backpacking trips,"

Faires added. "He was fully outfitted and knew what he was doing, and I was there to learn and enjoy."

As for how Faires fared, Halbig smiled before giving his assessment.

"Well, he's, you know, he's new to this," he said. "I know on day one he got himself turned around and started heading back down the trail the way we came, and that was a little worrisome. But he figured it out and turned back around on the right track."

"But for somebody starting out new being able to do about 77 miles is pretty good."

And, naturally, Faires couldn't help but sing the praises of the trail, where he met hikers hailing from Michigan, Pennsylvania and Ohio, as well as Germany, as the Foothills Trail draws visitors from far and wide in addition

to Oconee and Pickens county residents.

"The Foothills Trail Conference, you have to take your hat off to those guys, too," Faires said. "All the volunteers that maintain the trail are amazing, and it's crazy how they get there and do what they do. It's unbelievable the energy and effort that goes into that,

and I can't thank them enough."

"I think it was us getting a real appreciation for the area we live in and all the natural beauty and resources we have," Halbig added. "We need to appreciate the mountains, rivers and forests every day."

esprott@upstatetoday.com | (864) 882-2385