



Step safely

Officials urge caution for hikers

THE JOURNAL STAFF

MOUNTAIN REST
— With more hikers in recent weeks, rescue workers with Oconee County Emergency Services and the U.S. Forest Service are encouraging those going out to plan ahead and use caution before setting off for a mountain hike.

Officials have reported an increase in hiker rescues and injuries in the Andrew Pickens Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest, which includes the trail at Yellow Branch Falls in Oconee County.

“With the rugged and remote terrain, each moun-

SEE **CAUTION**, PAGE A3

The trail at Yellow Branch Falls has been the site of several recent hiking accidents, according to officials. FILE

SALEM

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tain rescue takes at least three hours and requires 20 or more highly trained rescuers — mostly volunteer firefighters — from the local community,” Walhalla Fire Chief Brandon Burton said. “We know the trails, rivers and waterfalls in Oconee County are special, and the public is enthusiastic about getting outdoors right now. We just ask everyone to take care and be prepared before heading out for a hike. Even a short hike can end up as an emergency rescue if you are not prepared.”

Burton said there have already been five rescues this summer at Yellow Branch and the Stump-house Mountain and Issaqueena Falls areas near Walhalla.

Oconee County interim fire chief Scott Krein said Oconee crews have also responded to four other incidents so far this year to assist hikers in the Bad Creek/Jocassee Gorges, Burrells Ford and Sloan Bridge Falls areas. In addition, Krein said Oconee rescue workers have also helped agencies across the border in North Carolina twice so far this year.

Local officials and the U.S. Forest Service sent out a news release this week asking hikers to keep several things in mind before hiking in these areas, including:

- Yellow Branch Falls is a fairly arduous trip out and back. Many people do not realize that it is a single-track trail with a steady decline in elevation. It is a strenuous trip to get back out. It's about a 3-mile round trip.

- Plan for the weather, as conditions can change rapidly, especially in

the summer with pop-up thunderstorms.

- Wear appropriate footwear. Flip-flops and sandals are not the best choice for trails, especially at Stump-house and Issaqueena Falls or Yellow Branch Falls.

- Drink and carry plenty of water. The humid environment will drain hikers fairly quickly.

- Have a plan, research the area before you trek and tell someone not in your group your plan and when to expect you back. Take snacks and medications, if needed.

- Those with severe allergic reactions should take an EpiPen when hiking. There are many venomous insects — bees and wasps — and poisonous plants in forests.

- Allow plenty of time. Many trips take longer than expected.

- If an area is crowded, look for a less-occupied location or return at a later time.

- View all waterfalls safely from the bottom of the falls or at a clearly designated viewing area. Don't climb rocks at waterfalls or try to view the falls from the top. Many people have been severely injured or killed trying to climb or slipping from the top of waterfalls.

For more outdoor safety tips, visit fs.usda.gov/visit/know-before-you-go. For information on Leave No Trace principles, visit lnt.org/why/7-principles. For recreation information, visit fs.fed.us/ivm/index.html.

For more information or questions, contact the Andrew Pickens Ranger District Office at (864) 638-9568 or visit fs.usda.gov/scnfs.

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SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Oconee County rescuers carry an injured hiker out of Yellow Branch Falls in the Sumter National Forest during one of two separate accidents in June. With the rugged and remote terrain, officials said each mountain rescue takes at least three hours and requires 20 or more trained rescuers — mostly volunteer firefighters — from the surrounding community.

CAUTION: 'Take care and be prepared'