



Park Life

Winter 2020/2021

GREAT OUTDOORS UNIVERSITY + NCFSP CONNECTING KIDS TO NATURE

At a NCFSP board meeting back in April of 2018, Tim Aydlett gave a report for the Environmental Education Committee by Mary Bures, the Director of the Great Outdoor University (<https://ncwf.org/programs/great-outdoors-university/>), a program started in 2012 by the North Carolina Wildlife Federation. Mary presented how GoU works with kids from the Boys and Girls Clubs in Mecklenburg County and other counties in NC and how they explore parks for three or four hours with volunteers and environmental educators. Their efforts also include connecting parents, along with their kids in the parks on family fun days where the entire family gets introduced to regional parks and increasingly to the wonders of NC State Parks.

Organizers from several groups, including GoU, NCFSP and the NC State Parks began this effort on October of 2019. Park Ranger Maggie Miller with Morrow Mountain State Park and Sean Higgins with the NC State Parks specifically worked to get the program off the ground to provide NC State Parks exposure to youth and families that lived in cities. They planned other GoU trips, events, and family fun days for spring of 2020 which were later postponed because of CoVid-19. Organizers are already planning events for later in 2021 and into 2022 to help ensure that more kids from Boys and Girl Clubs along with their families learn about the natural wonders of NC Parks.

By: John Young, Secretary, North Carolina Friends of State Parks

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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: DAVID PEARSON

Hello Friends,

We have now passed twelve months of COVID restrictions and are still facing many challenges for North Carolina State Parks. As citizens locked down and quarantined, parks were closed for months due to the pandemic and because of overcrowding, with no safe access to public facilities. Compounding this situation, the Deputy Director of Operations had retired and Dwayne Patterson, Director of State Parks was asked by the governor to work at the Pandemic Recovery Office, leaving both key Park leadership positions vacant. But, as we have observed many times before, our amazing state park staff stepped up to the task and we found ourselves with an acting Parks Director, an acting Deputy Director of Operations, and to fill the positions vacated, acting regional superintendents and acting park superintendents. Park staff found ways to meet the challenges of the continuing virus restrictions so most parks have been able to open back up and address the increasing demand of our citizens to get outside.

Although 2020 looked bleak, the staff at NC State Parks achieved many accomplishments for the year, not least of which was a record visitation of 19.8 million people. The system also passed an important milestone of conserving over 250,000 acres of land and water. Some of the recent acquisitions that pushed the system over that milestone are 230 acres at Deep Creek State Trail and 300 acres added to Salmon Creek State Natural Area. Park staff completed 5 of the NC Connect Bond projects which added 19 new permanent field positions. And despite the 2020 work pressures involved, 29 State Parks received department of labor safety awards.

Significant work was completed on State Park's three mission priorities:

Conservation: In addition to the key acquisitions listed above, staff completed 68 prescribed burns covering over 6000 acres. And many key invasive species projects were completed. The Conservation Corps of NC and State Parks staff completed a successful fall partnership adding over 5 miles of critical trails at Morrow Mountain, Crowders Mountain, Lake James, Raven Rock and Lake Waccamaw.

Education: The division received a \$100,000 NC Outdoor Heritage grant which allowed the Interpretation and Education staff to build 1,000 neighbor nature toolkits that were distributed to schools throughout the state. And the Interpretation and Education staff also shifted the entire Schools in Parks program online and adapted all the Interpretive and Education programming to virtual and videos.

Recreation: The NC Legislature appropriated \$2 Million Dollars in Cares Act Funding for State Parks through the Parks and Trails for Health (PATH) program for expansion of trails, which allowed staff to purchase numerous pieces of equipment to continue to build and repair trails across the system. Also, many of the bond projects completed in 2020 were instrumental in allowing access to parks including access improvements, parking lot expansion, a new campground, and other campground improvements.

Recent staff announcements include Katherine Capps, a veteran of parks and recreation with the Raleigh Parks Department, becoming the new Deputy Director of Operations in December 2020. And in January 2021 Dwayne Patterson returned as the Director of State Parks with new energy, ideas, and vision. Also in January 2021, Governor Cooper appointed our friend Reid Wilson as the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. We are happy that NC State Parks has a passionate leadership team with a great vision for the future!

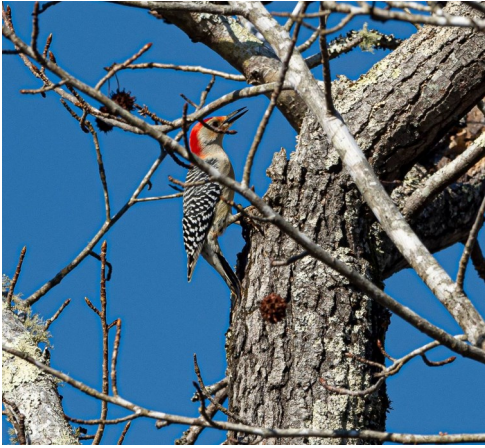
Friends of State Parks leadership knows there is much work to do and many programs could not be done without the support and advocacy of friends like you. Many of the projects and education programs that are so important to North Carolina State Parks visitors are completed or enhanced through the efforts, advocacy, and donations of friends who support NC State Parks and their staff.

To help facilitate support and donations Friends of State Parks plans to display QR-Code signage in parks at locations where visitors can use their cell phones to make donations or go to NCPARKS.org. These donations will support local friends groups, designated park projects and programs, the division, and the FSP annual fund.

Thanks,

David M. Pearson
Executive Director
Friends of State Parks

BIRDS IN WINTER – LOWER HAW RIVER



Bird watching in winter can offer wonderful sights. Birds are active year-round, and the species of birds that can be seen in a geographic region may vary with the seasons. Bare trees in winter makes it easier to spot birds, and winter offers an opportunity to see migratory visitors to your area. The Lower Haw River State Natural Area in Chatham County is a great place for bird watching along the banks of the Haw River from the historic Bynum Bridge. Bynum is a popular place for beginners and experts alike. Enjoy watching the birds, but please keep your distance and leave them undisturbed since food can be scarce in winter and birds need to conserve their energy. So bundle up, grab some binoculars if you have them, head out in the mornings (the earlier, the better), look and listen for birds and you should be rewarded. Here are some birds spotted this winter by Dr. Kevin Ricker, who considers the Lower Haw River State Natural Area one of his favorite places for nature photography.

By: Gretchen Smith, President of Friends of Lower Haw River State Natural Area

Nature Spotlight By Gretchen Smith

Elusive Creatures

Some wildlife are so elusive you may only see signs of their activity without actually seeing them. Sometimes it takes a wildlife camera trap to catch a glimpse of these shy creatures.

Friends of Lower Haw River State Natural Area has installed wildlife camera traps to capture the secret life of wildlife.

Pictured below are a Bobcat, Beaver, American Mink, and Wild Turkey.



Have a submission for the Nature Spotlight? Submit your write-up and photo to LauraH@NCFSP.org

FIRST FAMILY TO FINISH THE MST 40 DAY HIKES – HIGHLIGHT OF STONE MOUNTAIN TOLD BY 12 YEAR-OLD ZAKARIYYA EL-GENKA

This summer, my family and I hiked a lot of trails on the Mountains to Sea Trail (MST). We were doing the 40 hike challenge! To our surprise we were the first to complete the challenge. Our thirteenth hike of the challenge was located at Stone Mountain State Parks.

I learned that Stone Mountain is 1,686 feet high so I knew it was going to be a challenge. When we were heading to the hike I thought it was going to be similar to our other hikes because a lot of the mountains looked the same. When we were half way through the hike we finally saw Stone Mountain! It looked like the moon's twin that fell from the sky and planted itself there.

When we reached the base of Stone Mountain we saw The Historic Hutchinson Homestead. The family who built it and lived there in the mid 1800s came from two different backgrounds, German and English. They drew from those two backgrounds to build their really cool because there houses like that back



After touring the home- to go up the steep side of were about a couple hun- top. The steps were pretty tall and they looked like they were made from logs and dirt. My brother and I raced each to the top and got our work out for the month.

When we got to the top, the view was amazing. We saw all the mountains below and other landscapes. When I was going down, I wondered how the trees on top of the mountain survived because there was not much soil and the trees were standing strong and tall despite this. When we were nearing the bottom, we saw a tall waterfall and a lot of salamanders.

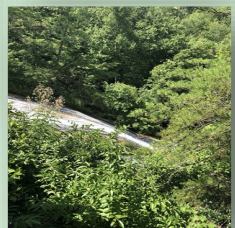
It was so cool to see the salamanders in various colors. I always reflect on how different and unique this area is from other mountains I have been to, making Stone Mountain State Park one of my favorites and I look forward to hiking it again.

By: Zakariyya El-Genka, 6th Grade at Brogden Middle School, Durham, NC



Zakariyya (blue shirt) with his father and siblings.

stead, it was a fun challenge Stone Mountain where there dred steps that led to the



Postface : A special thanks goes to The Friends of Mountain to Sea Trail for their continued support to provide us with awesome stories where we can connect our readers to State Parks where the MST trail travels.

STATE PARKS RUN DEEP: A PERSONAL STORY WITH A FOCUS ON HANGING ROCK STATE PARK (HARO)

I've been going to Hanging Rock State Park as long as I can remember. I actually can't remember the first time we went. But I will always remember the first time it grabbed my heart and wouldn't let go. My family was camping and hiking for the weekend. My Mom, brother, and boyfriend (now spouse) went hiking up to Wolf Rock and House Rock. Any day hiking we hiked with Mom was incredibly special to us! We all had an amazing day but it was what happened next that sealed my love for this park.

After a difficult hike, my mom and boyfriend were worn out: done for the day! My brother, Landon, and I weren't even close to done. Oh, the craziness of youth...

We decided to go up Moore's Wall on our own while they took a nap with the dogs. This was before they added the steps to the Moore's Wall trail. So starting and ending at the campground was pretty much guaranteed to wear us out for the day. We climbed up together while investigating as much as we could. I don't remember the struggle of the climb at all. I remember being with my brother, spending time together, exploring, and what happened next!

Landon and I ascended Moore's Knob together, completely out of breath but stoked about this hike. We saw the fire tower, with its rickety staircase (they have replaced it since then) and we just didn't have any choice but to climb it. The view was indescribable. You feel like you can see forever from there! One direction is so flat and the other is so mountainous you just know you are on the edge of something grand! Finally we both had a realization: there was a large storm approaching from the West. I'm not sure which of us said it first but we knew it was time to go. We turned back down the trail and moved as fast as we could back to the campground. The trail was difficult to begin with. Then the rain started! We slid and slipped the two miles back! At first it was just a thing we had to do. But somewhere around a mile into the trek we both suddenly real-



I REMEMBER BEING WITH MY BROTHER, SPENDING TIME TOGETHER, EXPLORING...

ized we were having an adventure we could never replicate.

We have had crazy adventures since then but I'm not sure I've ever been so invigorated! We finally reached camp just as the rain slacked off to find everyone, including the dogs, napping happily. It seemed surreal after the adventure we had just been on! We sat at the picnic table for a long while so we didn't wake them up. After a few minutes we looked at each other and one of us said "we're already wet, we might as well go play in the mud and see if we can dry off some." So off we went! As best I can remember we hiked down to the lake, around, and back up. It doesn't seem like a huge trek anymore but it is still one of the best of my whole life!

Ever since this crazy, wet, muddy, insane day my heart has lived at Hanging Rock State Park. I have so many memories, experiences, and learning moment from there. Some of my best family and friend moments have been there. I even got married there at the Lake Shelter! My heart belongs there and I love that I now have the opportunity to pay things back.

By: Valley Rich, Member of Friends of Sauratown Mountains

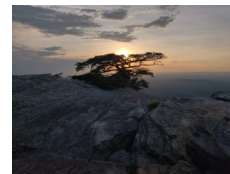
How can I volunteer to help State Parks amid COVID-19?

There are still an abundance of ways you can help your local Friends' group and State Parks. While State Parks at the local government level have canceled/postponed most events and volunteer opportunities, the folks that work tirelessly at both levels, would like to hear from you!

One area where there is ALWAYS a need, is clean-up. Since COVID-19, all North Carolina State Parks have seen an increase in Park patrons. While this is fantastic news, unfortunately, this causes stress on the ecosystems of the Parks.

By contacting your local Friends' group, they will be able to point you in the right direction of a trail or area where your help is needed and provide you with the necessary information for you to do a independently or family clean up.

If you are unable to find what you are looking for, please email me at LauraH@NCFSP.org and I will point you in the right direction!



WOMEN WORKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT HANGING ROCK STATE PARK

On Monday October 19th 2020, after a year of planning, Girl Scout Troop 2335 painted a crosswalk across the main road at Hanging Rock State Park (HARO). The previous October, Ranger Sam Koch said there was a need for a crosswalk so folks walking from the visitor's center to the lake, would know where to cross. Sometimes, visitors end up walking in the road causing unsafe driving conditions for people traveling towards the lake parking lot.

Before we painted the crosswalk, my mom and I spent most of the day making a huge cardboard template for us to use. It was really worth all that taping, cutting, and measuring!

When we arrived at the park on Monday, Ranger Carla Williams had already blocked off the road and had paint and signs ready for us to use. When we started painting it was really fun and surprisingly easy. Along with me and my mom, a few other girls and their mothers helped out a lot! We would make sure the template was lined up right before we painted the lines. When we were all done painting, the girls took interest in the Men Working Sign and had to take a picture with it, using our hands to transform the sign into WOMen working.

I grew up in Stokes County and I have been visiting Hanging Rock since I was little. It's a nice place to go hiking at and the events the rangers put on are pretty fun. I remember doing school activities at the park, like challenge games and such. It's fun to go there!

The troop and I had a great time volunteering at our local park and can't wait to help paint the Upper Cascades crosswalk and work on a few walking paths. I had such a great time and enjoyed working with Ranger Koch and Ranger Williams so much that I have decided to do my gold award project at Hanging Rock.

By: Samantha Hunsucker, Girl Scout Troop 02335, King, North Carolina



*Proud of their accomplishments!
Left to Right Center Picture: Anna Haynes, Samantha Hunsucker,
Elizabeth Hunsucker, Cameron Smith, Sarah Smith*

A HISTORY LESSON ON PILOT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK TOLD BY A BOARD MEMBER OF FSP

Pilot Mountain is half-way between the mountains and the sea. Drive north on Rt. 52 from Winston-Salem, look to your left. You can't miss it. A quartzite monadnock formed millions of years ago, it appears like a top hat on the horizon. The Saura people, one of its first inhabitants called it Jomeokee, which translates to guide or pilot, hence its name. It is in the Yadkin Valley, through the centuries inhabited by Paleo-Indians, Saura (Cheraw), Cherokee, and British and Moravian settlers. Thomas Jefferson's father, Peter Jefferson, surveyed the property, and it was privately owned until the 1960's.

The mountain soars 1400 feet above the valley with the knob adding 200 feet of awesome beauty! In the late 1920's, a road was built nearly to the top with a 200 foot staircase completing the last segment. One person climbing the stairs, remembers saying: "You were afraid to



look down, and afraid to look up. You just had to keep going!" Now, the top is reserved only for the hawks and eagles. Rock climbers are only allowed to reach the small pinnacle. Before becoming a State Park, there was a swimming pool, a dance floor attracting live bands, and even a landing field for airplanes. Local citizens, fearing further commercialism and rowdy behavior, banded together and raised funds matched by a Federal Grant to buy the area for the state.

It became a NC State Park in 1968. There are miles of hiking and horseback trails, rock climbing areas, canoe trails and camping sites. For those less athletic, just driving through affords wonderful sights. So pack a picnic lunch and plan your trip for a pleasant surprise and one vista you will not forget.

By: Jane Hunt, Director, NC Friends of State Parks,

SUPPORT THE FRIENDS: MAKE A DONATION TODAY

Make a donation today to highlight a special occasion, to honor a friend or loved one or to commemorate a lost loved one. Also consider making a donation in support of a specific Friends group.

*Send gifts to:
Friends of State Parks, Inc.,
PO Box 37655
Raleigh, NC 27627*

Make donations online at www.NCFSP.org

We thank you for your support!

Local Friends' Group On The Move

A message from Friends of Stone Mountain State Park on their Facebook Page. Please visit them at:

www.friendsofstonemountainnc.com

On December 22, 2020, Friends of Stone Mountain State Park posted on Facebook, "Christmas came early for Stone Mountain State Park! Thanks to all the generous donors in 2020, we were able to purchase a TV/monitor that will be used for educational programs and videos within the park and the Visitors' Center. Happy Holidays!"





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NCFSP.org

If your current membership has expired, please visit our website today www.NCFSP.org and click on 'Join' to re-new or use our form below. New members, please complete the form and become a supporter of your parks!

To become a member, fill out the form, clip and mail with your check to:

Friends of State Parks, PO Box 37655, Raleigh, NC 27627

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2021 Board Meetings

| | | |
|--------------|-------|------------------------------|
| January 30th | 10 am | Virtual |
| April 24th | 10 am | Pilot Mountain SP or Virtual |
| August 2nd | 10 am | Chimney Road SP or Virtual |
| October 30th | 10 am | TBD |

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