

# TIME TO CLIMB DOWN

## Overseer Of Pilot Mountain Is Retiring

By Anna Griffin  
JOURNAL REPORTER

### PILOT MOUNTAIN

After 24 years, Larry H. Milton has decided it's time to come down off the mountain.

Milton, the superintendent of Pilot Mountain State Park, is retiring July 1. He has been at the park since 1969, serving two years as ranger and taking over as superintendent in 1971.

But Milton, who has seen the park grow to encompass 3,700 acres in Surry and Yadkin counties, has no intention of leaving Pilot Mountain for good. He and his wife of 25 years, Linda, are moving to a new home in Pinnacle, a five-minute drive from the park.

Although they can't see the mountain from their new home, Milton, 52, says he will get a pretty good view of the knob-by peak on his way to the grocery store.

"I'm going to miss this life," he said yesterday, "but I'll be back. I can't see myself not coming back to visit the mountain."

**AS SUPERINTENDENT**, Milton is responsible for maintaining the park, enforcing its rules, providing educational programs and looking after the 300,000 or so annual visitors. He also lives on the mountain and handles late-night emergencies.

"You get to do a bit of everything," he said. "You're never really off-duty."

Milton says he will most miss talking with park visitors.

"The people I've been able to meet and talk to are what I will remember," he said. "The good park users, the ones who really appreciate the natural resources we've got around here, they're what make the job special."

Over the past 20 years, the park has expanded to include a two-mile portion of the Yadkin River and a five-mile corridor from the mountain to the river. Now, in addition to hiking and picnicking on the mountain, visitors can canoe and fish in the river and ride horses on several valley trails.



JOURNAL PHOTO BY EDDIE MOORE

See PILOT, Page 19 Larry Milton, with Pilot Knob in the background, is retiring as the state park's superintendent July 1.

## PILOT

Continued From Page 13

Milton said he has changed along with Pilot Mountain. "It's been a constant learning experience," he said. "Every day I find out something new about this job and about myself."

Like Milton, who hopes to turn his hobby of carving waterfowl decoys into a second profession, Pilot Mountain is still growing.

The master plan for the park, designed in the late 1960s when the state took over the mountain, includes a visitors center and a 20-acre lake on the east side of the mountain. "I don't know how long it's going to take to get those, but they sure will make this place an attraction," Milton said. "With a visitors center, we would be able to offer folks more educational programs. It would make a tremendous difference."

Pilot Mountain has almost always been strapped for money, and park development has been slow. When the mountain was sold to the state in 1965 by J.W. Beasley, a Pilot Mountain car dealer, there were few trails and roads.

Since then, guard rails have been built around park overlooks, and restrooms have been installed. State workers are upgrading the park's water system this summer.

Milton has spent his career in N.C. parks. Growing up in Stanly County, Milton worked summers at Morrow Mountain State Park.

After graduating from Pfeiffer College with a bachelor's degree in biology, he became a ranger at Morrow Mountain. He also worked as a ranger at William B. Umstead Park in Raleigh before moving to Pilot Mountain in 1969.

For park visitors, Pilot Mountain means a day or a weekend in the great outdoors. For Milton, the park represents almost half a lifetime of memories.

"Seems like almost all the big things in my life happened here," he said. "I've watched my sons grow up, my hair turn gray. As much as I've loved it, it's time for me to move on, time to do something different. After all, you can't stay on the mountain all your life."