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OPERATIONS



Star Watch, page c2

Actor **Ben Stiller** and his wife are expecting a baby.

ASHEVILLE CITIZEN-TIMES

LIVING OUTDOORS

FILE

Editor: Lydia Carrington, 232-5848 or LCarrington@CITIZEN-TIMES.com

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Sperm's shape, swimming ability may enhance men's fertility

By Rita Rubin
USA TODAY

Based on their sperm counts alone, many men may be erroneously classified as fertile or infertile, says a study out in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine.

Researchers at nine U.S. centers compared semen samples from 1,461 men. About half the men came from couples unable to conceive after trying for at least a year. Their female partners had had a normal fertility workup. The other men were considered to be fertile because their partners were pregnant or had given birth in the previous two years.

The researchers found that some men in the infertile group had higher sperm counts than men in the fertile group, casting doubts on the value of a 50-year-old standard established by the World Health Organization.

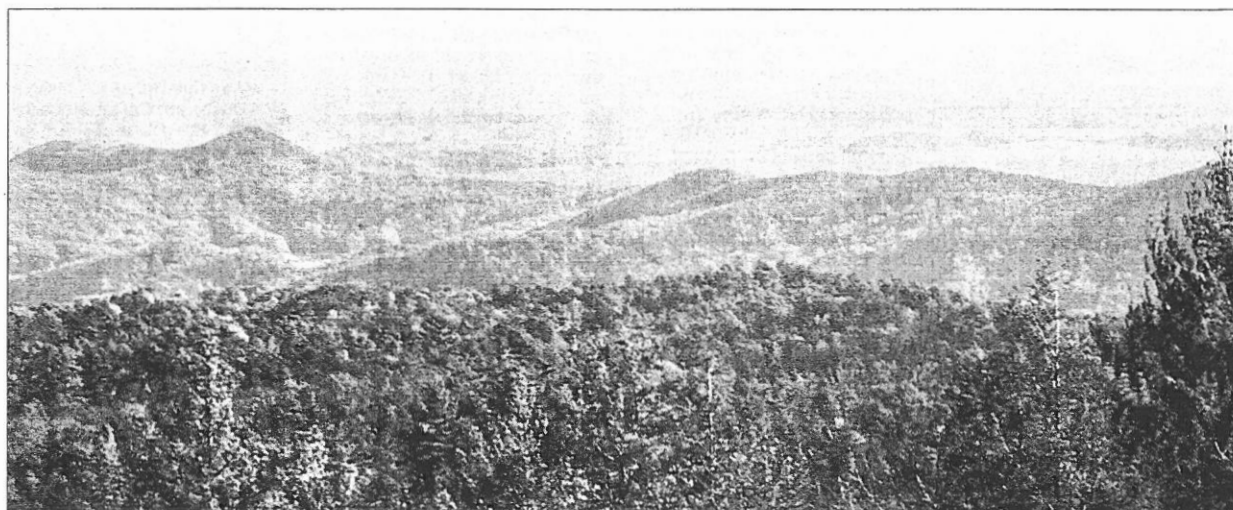
For years, that standard has defined a normal sperm count as at least 20 million sperm per milliliter of semen. In the new study, though, some infertile men had sperm counts above 20 million, while some fathers or fathers-to-be had counts below 20 million.

The shape of the sperm — the more oval-shaped the better — and, to a lesser extent, how well they swam, were better indicators of fertility than sperm count, the authors conclude.

"Not too many people get a chance to build a state park."

— Ranger Mike Lambert

Gorges: State park in in



Lakes Jocassee and Keowee in South Carolina are visible from the Bear Wallow Valley overlook at Gorges State Park.

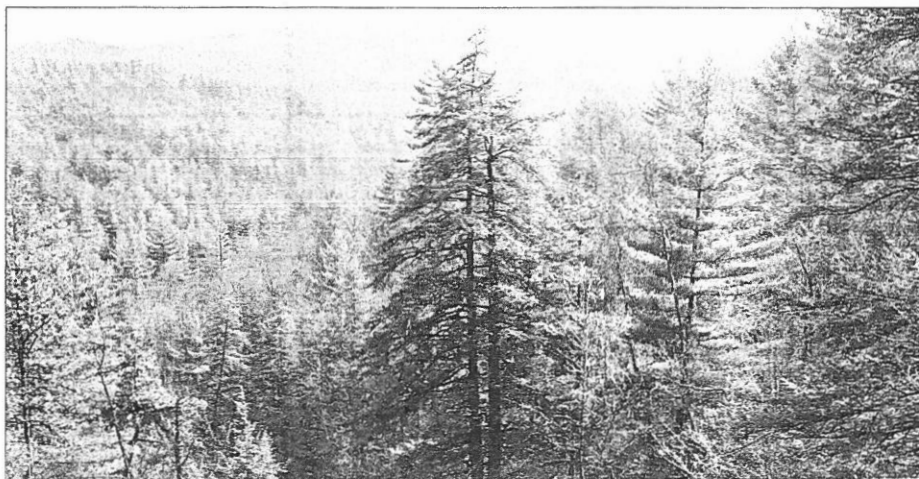
'Naturalist's paradise' awaits key decisions on de

By Karen Chávez
STAFF WRITER

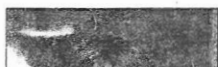
SAPPHIRE — John Punte and Jeanne Yeend came in search of waterfalls and grandeur at Gorges State Park in late October. Faithful visitors to Western North Carolina for the past 20 years, the Boynton Beach, Fla., couple had heard about the new state park and the stunning falls it offered.

Instead of soaking in the spray of a mountain waterfall, though, they wound up playing Scrabble on a picnic table.

At least there was a picnic table. Gorges, the state's newest park and the only one west of Mount Mitchell, lies about 45 miles southwest of Asheville, sprawling through Transylvania County.



ate your own
Potter story



Written by Elaine Walker, concerned an incident wherein employees of the Burger King marketing department walked barefoot over hot coals.

If you're unfamiliar with modern American corporate culture, you're probably assuming that somebody spiked the Burger King coffee machine with LSD.

Nope. The firewalking was a planned activity on a corporate motivational retreat, supervised by a professional firewalking consultant to whom Burger King paid thousands of actual U.S. dollars.

According to the Herald article, the consultant also had the Burger King marketing people bend spoons, break boards, smash bricks, bend steel bars



Dave Barry

national activities that make employees self-confident and unafraid to tackle tough business challenges.

The employees think: "Hey, if I can bend a steel bar with my throat, there's no reason why I can't change the toner cartridge in the printer!"

The Burger King people got off easy. Some corporations motivate their employees by shipping them off to rugged wilderness survival programs, where they learn vital lessons that help them excel in the business world.

Like, if they need to impress an important client, they could use their survival training to, I don't know, catch him a squirrel.

employees would draw the line at walking on hot coals, on the grounds that they could, theoretically, burn their feet. This would seem to be especially obvious to employees of Burger King, a company whose main product is a graphic example of what happens to flesh that is exposed to high temperatures.

Nevertheless, at the Burger King marketing retreat, more than 100 employees walked across an 8-foot strip of white-hot coals, and — in an inspirational triumph of mind over matter that shows the amazing miracles that the human spirit, when freed of self-doubt, can accomplish — about a dozen of them burned their feet.

One woman had to be taken to the hospital. Several people were

article quotes Burger King's vice president of product marketing, Dana Frydman — whose personal feet were among those burned — as saying: "It was a great experience for everyone."

The article also quotes the firewalking consultant, Robert "Cork" Kallen, as saying: "The majority of the people get through it without a nick or a blister. When you see over 100 people and only 10 to 15 people have blisters, I don't term that unusual. Some people just have incredibly sensitive feet."

There you have the REAL problem: Employees with sensitive feet. It's high time that corporations did something about this problem.

Here's my proposal: When you apply for a job, at the end of

GORGES: Park is a unique, temperate rain forest

Continued from C1

You won't hear a single car beep or sound of civilization, and you might expect to see a wild boar or black bear emerging from a dense rhododendron thicket.

Signs warn visitors to stay on the few trails that are in the park. Slippery leaves, cliffs and getting lost are some of the dangers.

Jones State Park is located along the Blue Ridge Escarpment, an area between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Piedmont characterized by drastic elevation changes.

Numerous rivers, including the Toxaway, drain to the ocean, adding to the creation of steep-walled gorges.

This topography provides for some dramatic scenery looking out over deep plunging gorges and at least 14 waterfalls.

The park drops 2,000 feet in elevation from the N.C. 281 access area to Lake Jocassee, which sits at its southern end.

Combined with an average yearly rainfall of 80 inches and high-elevation oak and pine forests, Gorges is a temperate rain forest with nearly 125 rare plant and animal species, including many tropical plant species.

"It's called a naturalist's paradise," Lambert said. "What I like best about this park is the area is undisturbed. The area is unique. It has rare plant features, extraordinary water quality and it has so much potential for recreation for North Carolina citizens."

One of the most rare plants is Occidentalis. Also known as Shortleaf, it is an endangered plant found only in the gorges of the

Southern Appalachians, Lambert said.

The park is also home to the largest known population of green salamanders in North Carolina. This salamander hides in the hidden, damp crevices on cliff faces. Other wildlife include wild turkey, coyote, black bear, deer, bobcats and squirrels.

But the park is hardly an untouched wilderness. It was logged by the Singer Sewing Machine Company in the 1920s and '30s, and was purchased by Duke Power in the 1940s for the development of hydropower facilities. Farmers also lived deep in the park on land that was once clear of timber. Remnants of these families can be seen at the old Ray Fisher place by a chimney foundation located off Grassy Creek Road, where backcountry campsites are now being built.

Brodus Jones, the park's only full-time maintenance worker, grew up in Lake Toxaway and remembers hunting and fishing in the Jocassee Gorges. He said it is some of the most rugged country in the state.

"It's good the park is here," Jones said. Even though hunting is prohibited within the park's boundaries, he said the ranger presence will help protect the land and allow more people to enjoy it.

Looking ahead

Superintendent Pagano estimates it will take up to five years to construct permanent facilities and to implement the master plan. The public will see four versions of the plan, three of which

incorporate a loop road through the park.

"Because the park is so new, there's no history to know how much to appropriate," Pagano said. But he knows it will be in excess of \$3 million, much more than the \$380,000 interim budget.

There are many unknowns right now, including how many staff members the park will eventually need. The park now has a full-time staff of five — the superintendent, an office assistant, a maintenance worker and two park rangers who serve as both law enforcement officers and education specialists — and three seasonal employees. They work out of an interim park office in the same building as the Sapphire Post Office on U.S. 64.

With the help of many volunteers — including the Carolina Mountain Club — and inmate work crews from Henderson County, the park staff have built all the interim parking lots, trails, picnic tables and campsites. The goal for this year is to provide access to one or two of the waterfalls, which now are only accessible by arduous, bushwhacking hikes, and to open up primitive backcountry campsites with fire grills, picnic tables and pit toilets, Pagano said. The public review process will continue until January, and then Pagano hopes to have the final master plan presented to park staff by June.

"Then we have to find funding for the plan," he said. "We have to compete with the other 35 state parks fighting for improvement projects. We need the public's support."

Even without a visitor center, flush toilets or access to waterfalls, as of Oct. 31 the park had 87,614 visitors this year.

"I'd anticipate breaking 100,000 this first year," Pagano said. "That's pretty good attendance. As we offer more access to waterfalls and more programs we'll see a substantial increase in attendance."

Most people visited during the summer and fall foliage season. Some people come just to see the waterfalls, others come to mountain bike or ride horses, and some happen across the park by accident.

Fred and Sandy Rogers and their children, David and Leslie, decided to take a hike on the Bear Wallow Valley Overlook Trail while visiting the Sapphire area.

"We came to see the Grey-stone Inn (in Lake Toxaway) and just saw the sign," said Fred Rogers, of Indian Trail. "We love the mountains. We plan on coming back for a weekend."

As for Jeanne Yeend, she plans to continue coming back to the park even if it's "unfinished."

"I just hope I live to see more trails," she said.

"I find if you take the time to explain to people that this is a work in progress and it takes time, I think they go away with a better understanding of the entire process," said Lambert, who also gives educational programs on the natural history of the park. "Not too many people get a chance to build a state park."

Contact Chávez at 236-8980 or KChavez@CITIZEN-TIMES.com