

Outdoors

ADVENTURE IN THE CAROLINAS

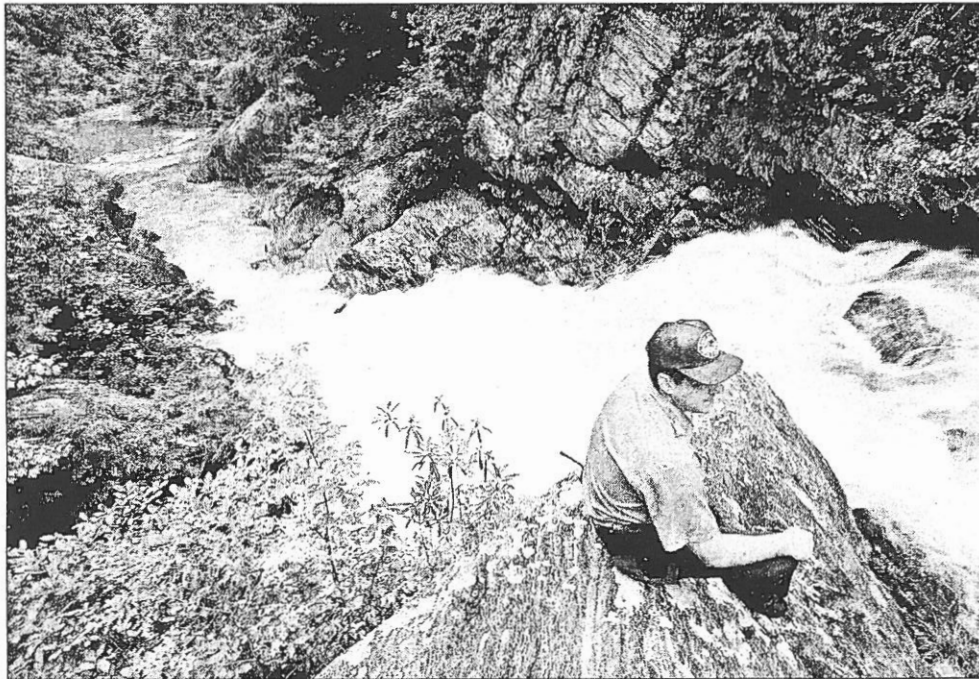
HotTopic

To help restore red porgy, a grouper-like saltwater fish, recreational anglers will be allowed to keep only one fish a day beginning Tuesday. Commercial fishermen will be limited to a 50-pound trip limit. The minimum size limit for both will be 14 inches.

DidYouKnow?

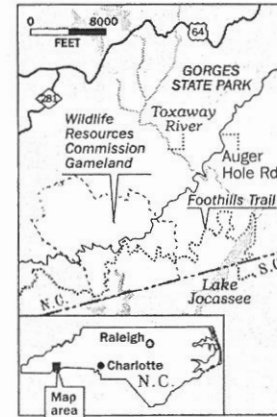
A parasitic disease rarely found in this country has killed 21 foxhounds and has sickened at least 20 others, The New York Times reported Friday. The culprit was identified this spring by researchers at N.C. State as a strain of leishmaniasis, typically found in warm, coastal areas overseas.

Gorges' new view



FRANCISCO KJOLSETH/Staff

Chub Line Falls on the Toxaway River cascades below the feet of Mike Lambert, park ranger in Gorges State Park.



Staff graphic

GORGES STATE PARK

Gorges State Park is 130 miles west of Charlotte, roughly bounded by U.S. 64, N.C. 281 and the S.C. state line.

The park office is on U.S. 64 near the intersection with N.C. 281 at Sapphire.

Reach the park at P.O. Box 100, Sapphire, NC 28774-0100; at (828) 966-9099; and at gorge@citcom.net.

A free brochure contains park regulations and a map suitable for hiking, horseback riding or mountain biking on Auger Hole Road or Chestnut Mountain Road.

Here are other guides to the Jocassee Gorges area:

■ A "Guide to the Jocassee Gorges/Horsepasture, Bearwallow and Toxaway Region," by Bill Thomas of Cedar Mountain.

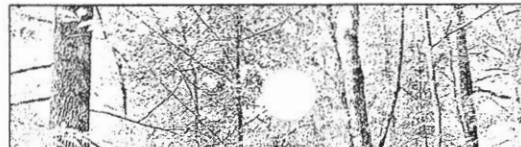
The Sierra Club guide, published in 1998, contains a topographic map covering Gorges State Park and chronic existing trails, waterfalls and

Rustic park offers untamed adventure

By JACK HORAN
Outdoors Editor

SAPPHIRE — North Carolina's newest — and wildest — state park abounds with waterfalls, trout streams and a section of the Foothills Trail.

However, most visitors to Gorges State Park never see those features. They come to walk through a corner of the park to view Rainbow Falls, a spectacular



It's not that waterfall watchers don't know what they're missing. It's that it takes some effort to visit the 7,000-acre, mountainous park purchased in 1999.

The park has no designated trails, no picnic areas, no parking areas and no rest rooms. Temporary park offices are housed in a leased building beside U.S. 64 about 25 miles west of Brevard.

Nonetheless, Gorges park is open to anyone to hike, horseback ride and mountain bike on two former logging roads and to fish any of the streams. The park's streams are designated as wild trout streams, meaning anglers can catch four fish a day with a minimum length of seven inches. Only single-hook artificial lures may be used.

It's easy, and fitting, to mishear "Gorges" as gorgeous. "It's a piece of property perched along the Blue Ridge Escarpment that's been carved by rivers and streams," said ranger Mike Lambert. Some 80 to 100 inches of rain fall a year.

The park was shaped from steep, mountainous land owned by Duke Power Co. In 1996, Duke offered 48,000 acres in the Jocassee Gorges area to North Carolina, South Carolina and the U.S. Forest Service. South Carolina moved first, buying 33,000 acres and turning its tract into a primitive recreation area.

In addition to the park, North Carolina bought 2,900 acres that it designated as game land. Owned by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, those acres are open to the public. The total purchase cost \$8.6 million, far below market value.

The Foothills Trail, a 76-mile-long hiking path, ties the park, the game land and the S.C. Jocassee Gorges area together. The trail cuts across the southern part of Gorges park and the game land.

But park officials recommend against hiking on unmarked, existing trails to get to the Foothills Trail until a designated trail system is built. "It's easy to get turned around," Lambert said. The only overnight camping allowed in the park or in the game lands is along the Foothills Trail.

In the meantime, visitors can use two roads that traverse the interior for hiking, riding and biking. They are the Auger Hole Road and the Chestnut Mountain Road. Here's how to reach each:

■ The Auger Hole Road begins on the northeastern side. From U.S. 64 west of Brevard, go 1.5 miles west beyond the U.S. 64-U.S. 178 intersection. Turn left at Frozen Creek Road (state road 1143). Victory Baptist Church will be on the right. Go 3.2 miles until you see a pullover on the right and a metal gate.

The Auger Hole Road starts at an elevation of 2,200 feet. It passes through cove forest and fords the Toxaway River and Bear Wallow Creek. The 9-mile road meets the Chestnut Mountain Road at Turkey Pen Gap, elevation 1,800 feet. Bear Wallow Falls, a 40-foot drop, is nearby.

■ Chestnut Mountain Road begins on the northwestern side of the park off N.C. 281, about 100 yards north of the trail to Rainbow Falls.

Less scenic than the Auger Hole Road, the road drops 1,300 feet over five miles before ending at Turkey Pen Gap.

Park officials this fall plan to build interim loop trails, picnic facilities, rest rooms and parking areas near the entrance points at Auger Hole Road and Chestnut Mountain Road.

The Division of Parks and Recreation is preparing a master plan to ensure development will be done sensitively, said Carol Tingley, chief of planning and natural resources in Raleigh.

She said permanent facilities, a visitors center, family picnic shelters, drive-in camping and a trail network won't be completed until 2004-2005.

Reach Jack Horan at (704) 358-5042 or jhoran@charlotteobserver.com.



FRANCISCO KJOLSETH/Staff

Doug Mathis and Bobby Henkel descend into Gorges State Park along Auger Hole Road. The park allows horseback riding, mountain biking and hiking.

Included are descriptions of Auger Hole Road and Chestnut Mountain Road.

The guide is available at many outfitter stores or through the N.C. Chapter of the Sierra Club, 112 S. Blount St., Raleigh, NC 27601. The \$6 cost includes postage and handling.

■ Copies of a "Guide to the Foothills Trail" are available at many outfitter stores or from the Foothills Trail Conference, Inc., P.O. Box 3041, Greenville, SC 29602.

The \$16 cost includes postage and handling.

The conference's Web site is www.foothillstrail.org.

■ For a free map/brochure to South Carolina's Jocassee Gorges area, write Jocassee Gorges Brochure, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, 153 Hopewell Road, Pendleton, SC 29670.

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