

## **Path to Prosperity: Swamp Rabbit Trail offers family recreation, helped revitalize Travelers Rest**

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Who would have guessed in 2007 the impact that an abandoned rail line could have on Greenville and Travelers Rest? The rusty rails and rotted cross ties, almost obliterated by dense vegetation and hardly visible in areas, were silent reminders of busier times. They made their lonely passage from Greenville to Travelers Rest, rarely noting the passage of humanity along the once-busy line.

Today the trail rings with the excited voices of children, bikers, hikers and casual walkers who have breathed new life into the once dead passageway.

The city of Greenville began to discuss a master plan in 2007 that would lead to development of a network of trails across the city. The completed network would create 128 miles of several different types of trails.

Five major corridors were outlined, and one of these was the Swamp Rabbit Trail that runs from Greenville Falls Park to about a mile north of Travelers Rest, ending near the North Greenville Medical campus. This is the Reedy River corridor and utilizes the abandoned rail line that was known as the Swamp Rabbit Railroad because it followed the path of the Reedy River and passed through several wetlands.

Early days were largely a volunteer effort spearheaded by groups such as Upstate Forever. I remember volunteering with friends and cutting small trees, brambles and weeds along the rail line. Later development, such as paving, was possible by involvement of the Greenville Hospital system, Furman University and the city of Travelers Rest.

Today, the trail has been groomed, paved with asphalt, signs placed at road crossings and is being used by more than 1,000 bikers, hikers and casual strollers daily. It stretches for 13.55 miles and is enjoyed by locals as well as tourists from outside the Greenville area.

The trail has been an important part of development in the area and several businesses owe their existence to the formation of the trail. Joyce McCarrell, co-owner with her sister Nancy of the Cafe at Williams Hardware discussed the importance of the trail.

“It would be hard for me to overstate the impact of the Swamp Rabbit Trail to our business,” she said. “In the first place, we wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for the Swamp Rabbit Trail because that was the factor around which our decision to open hinged. Once we saw that the trail was to be put in, my sister and I saw that there was no place at this end of the trail for bikers to get water or refreshments. It has had a huge impact on our business. We are delighted at the response of the biking community, but also the non-biking locals who have taken advantage of our business. We serve people from the area, but also people from all over the upstate.”

The Cafe at Williams Hardware has converted and added to the historic building and offers a delightful menu for weary bikers and locals alike. There is a charm in the way Joyce and Nancy have maintained the historical integrity of the building but made it comfortable and inviting to diners. In addition to the inside seating, they have tables on an outside porch and deck overlooking where the trail passes only a few yards from the back entrance.

The Trailside Creamery is located in the same building, and the business owner, Jenn Bolcato, is excited about the location. She and her husband moved into the area from Florida and decided this was the perfect spot to start a new business. They saw the opportunity and excitement that the trail has sparked in the area and wanted to be a part of the growth, Bolcato said. They offer basic flavors of soft ice cream and special flavors that change frequently.

Visitors who are not sure about biking on a regular basis can rent bikes from Sunrft Adventures in Travelers Rest, or on the Greenville end of the trail at Reedy Rides and Bike Rentals and Tours, 12 W. McBee Ave., or Tandem Touring and Recumbent Bikes, 101 S. Hudson St.

The Greenville end of the Swamp Rabbit Trail offers myriad things to amuse and entertain a visitor. The trail enters Falls Park, which has a beautiful suspension bridge spanning the river with a spectacular view of the falls and the manicured green spaces with blooming flowers and shrubs. Tables are available for sharing a bag lunch and there are a number of restaurants and eateries open above looking onto the green spaces.

The stadium for the Greenville Drive baseball team is only a short distance from Falls Park and offers an opportunity to take in a game as part of an outing.

An intermediate location on the trail that offers a nice diversion is the Furman University campus. Furman has a network of trails that can be accessed directly from the Swamp Rabbit Trail and is clearly marked for bikers and walkers. Furman’s beautiful lake is a refreshing rest stop along the trail. A peninsula juts out into the lake with a Florentine-style bell tower that is a replica of the original tower that was located at the old Furman campus just off Church Street in Greenville. Waterfowl, turtles basking in the sun, fish splashing and the bell tower with the scenic backdrop of Paris Mountain in the distance make a great stop for photography buffs.

Furman has a 5K jogging trail around the campus as well as several wooded trails

that pass through the shaded woodlands. In addition, if time permits, the rose garden is spectacular and the front entrance passes a beautiful fountain and runs beneath rows of towering oaks lining each side of the road.

Amateur botanists will be delighted by the abundant and varied plant growth along the trail. Birdwatchers will also see a wide variety of species as they pass through several different types of habitat.

The success of the Swamp Rabbit Trail is not only due to the attraction to bikers, but to casual walkers, serious hikers, joggers and amateur naturalists. It is many things to many people.



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