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Take a hike, see the area's fall glory

Outdoors pros talk about their favorite spots

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For the *Herald-Journal*

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The temperatures have begun to drop and so have the leaves — that can mean only one thing, perfect fall hiking weather.

While the trees in the mountains have shed most of their leaves, locally we still have a good amount of vibrant color. Knowing where to hike this time of year is important, and if you call the Upstate home, you have a ton of choices.

For this fall hiking article, I decided to talk to several people who work or spend a lot of time thinking about and walking in the outdoors. I asked each of them to share with me a favorite fall hike.

What follows are a sampling of four great hikes in our area, some very close by and others a nice drive up into the mountains.

UPPER WHITEWATER FALLS

Seth Novak, an avid outdoorsman, says one of his local favorites is Upper Whitewater Falls. Just over the North Carolina line, the 411-foot waterfall is said to be the largest east of the Mississippi. Novak says this hike has something for everyone.

The first overlook is just a quarter of a mile from the parking area on a paved trail. If you follow the steps down, you can see the falls from the lower overlook.

“For the more adventurous hiker, you can follow the Foothills trail back into South Carolina for a view of the Lower Whitewater falls,” Novak said.



Julie Lonnon/Provided

Hikes in Linville Gorge, in North Carolina's Pisgah National Forest, offers spectacular views of the Linville River.

LINVILLE GORGE AREA

Julie Lonnon with the Spartanburg Area Conservancy said hands-down her favorite hike is the Linville Gorge in North Carolina. "It is fairly easy, with a great trail, so even the boys can do it, and the view of the gorge is phenomenal," Lonnon said.

Novak agreed, "The gorge is a great area to enjoy the fall colors." Novak also likes the options for day hikes and backpacking trips.

The rugged terrain has given the area the nickname "Grand Canyon of the South." Whether it is a hike with friends or a full-fledged wilderness excursion, the Linville Gorge Area has something for every ability.

RIM OF THE GAP TRAIL

This difficult trail can be accessed from both Caesars Head State Park and Jones Gap State Park and is less than an hour's drive from Spartanburg. Both Jean Crow with Partners for Active Living and Ned Barrett from Upstate Forever list this scenic trail as their favorite.

Crow is especially fond of trails that have a combination of the following four things: views worth waiting for, rushing water, a sense of escaping the city, and hikes that are strenuous enough to make your muscles ache. "Rim of the Gap Trail has all four, with a strenuous ascent, abundance of waterfalls and ridgeline vistas," Crow said.

Barrett agreed. "The trail is full of narrow trails with short, steep rocky ascents," he said. "The trail, if walked as a loop, is spectacular."

CROFT PASSAGE

A favorite that is right in our backyard is the Croft Passage. Both Novak and Barrett recently ran parts of the trail and their assessments were that it was "stunning." Novak especially liked the proximity to Spartanburg; the trailhead is located just behind the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind off Highway 56. "The trail is truly beautiful and provides amazing solitude, just outside the city," Novak said.

Whether you are a novice or seasoned hiker, these options should fill your fall weekends with scenic beauty. Just be sure to stretch out those muscles — some of these hikes are hard.

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