

BREAKING OUT

TOP STORIES OF 2009

You know what happened this year, but let's look ahead

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This is the time of year newspapers across the country relate the top stories of the year. But instead of telling you what you already know, let's polish the crystal ball and take a look at the top stories of 2009.

Some of these will undoubtedly come true, while others may be nothing more than a pipe dream. If you have your own stories, headlines or the like for 2009, send them along and if we get enough of them here, we'll run those at a later date. Until then, these prognostications will have to suffice.



OWEN RILEY JR. / Staff

Swamp Rabbit Trail

The No. 1 story is completion of the 10-mile former railroad line turned greenway linking downtown Greenville to downtown Travelers Rest.

This should be the year it is completed, and then Greenville County can begin working on ways to add to this recreation-transportation spine.

The northern half of the Greenville Hospital System Swamp Rabbit Trail is complete, except for a final surface. It's the last five miles or so of the trail with its half-dozen rickety railroad bridges that's currently the hold-up.

Greenville greenways

A very close second — or maybe it's a tie for first — is the city of Greenville's efforts in building miles of trails and planning for much more.

Already, the city has built about 3.4 miles of trail both north from Linky Stone Park and south from Cleveland Park. Plans are underway to cross the Reedy River and connect to Greenville Tech and Pleasantburg Drive.

Nine Times tract

Ranking No. 3 on the list for 2009 is the Nine Times tract in northern Pickens County. In 2008, a 560-acre section of this valuable land was secured by The Nature Conservancy and Upstate Forever. In

The Swamp Rabbit Trail should be finished in 2009.

2009, the other 1,700-acre piece of the puzzle should be acquired.

The land includes mountains, streams, wildlife and an astounding variety of wildflowers that several botanists say is largely unduplicated in the Upstate.

Rich Mountain

As valuable as the Nine Times tract is, so is Rich Mountain, a linchpin between the Mountain Bridge Wilderness (Caesars Head and Jones Gap state parks, among other lands) and DuPont State Forest over the border in North Carolina.

The Rich Mountain Conservancy has a purchase agreement to acquire the land for \$500,000. The grass-roots effort to complete the purchase has raised \$228,000. Find out more at <http://saverichmountain.com>.

Bigger and bigger

At No. 5 are the people who are getting out in droves to local road races. Record 2008 attendance at *The Greenville News* Run Downtown, where more than 2,000 runners officially finished, and at the Reedy River 5K, which topped 1,800 finish-



FILE

Expect to see more people taking part in more local running events in 2009.

ers, are prime examples of events that grew and will continue to grow.

Look for even more runners at the best local events as running, fitness and the never-ending pursuit of weight loss combine to keep these events growing and growing.

Get green

Still sending in a paper application for that charity bike ride? Do you buy bottled water and then not recycle the plastic?

You can do better, and you should. Greening outdoor sports and activities makes sense, and more and more event organizers and participants are doing their part to save the envi-

ronment they enjoy on a regular basis. Look for more events to turn green — or greener — in 2009.

New sports

Still haven't tried riverboarding? What about paddle surfing or bike polo? If you haven't, chances are your neighbor might have, and you could soon be giving it go.

Sports such as mountain unicycling will drive the pursuit of the weird and wonderful and make these new adventures No. 7 on our 2009 list. These may not be for everyone, but they're another twist to the wide smorgasbord of outdoor offerings, and there is no telling what creative minds will think of next.

Palmetto Trail

No. 8 on our list is further construction of the 425-mile Palmetto Trail. With about 290 miles of the trail complete, the most undeveloped area of the trail is in the Upstate.

Look for major announcements, and more and more challenges, as the easiest sections of the trail have been completed, leaving the hardest parts yet to come. The trail won't be completed in 2009, but it will keep heading that way.

Give back

Here's a prediction you will donate time or money or both to help others enjoy the outdoors or recreational activities in 2009.

Encourage others to join you in the woods, or help repair a washed-out trail, or any other effort you make is invaluable.

You

And finally, at No. 10, is you.

I predict this coming year you'll find something new to try, or somewhere new to try what you've already been doing, or attempt to do what you've already been doing either better, faster or longer.

The crystal ball is a little hazy on this, but chances are strong you'll find the time, energy and nerve to give it a go. When you do, maybe you'll make a newspaper Top 10 list of 2009 stories in review.