

foothills

Winter 2019 **Digest**

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One-Tank Trip

Winter Wonderland Hike
by Kat Dellinger

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by Richard Eller

The Folk Keepers:
Charlie and Susan Frye

Winterfest!

\$6.95



Catawba Valley's Hidden Treasure

By Alicia Wilfong

On the days when the air is crisp, and the sun is radiant, the view is magnificent. From the top of Baker's Mountain, looking over our valley carries you above church steeples and water towers peeking through the tree tops from Charlotte to the famous line of the Blue Ridge.

What's not so visible in that valley are the secluded Jacobs Fork and Henry Rivers. The Catawba Valley offers outdoor enthusiasts a refreshing hike on a beautiful day or a relaxing float down a river in one location.

Bakers Mountain soars 800 feet above the valley. The trails in the existing County Park offer a leisurely hike or a challenging trail run to the top of the mountain platform. There's no need to backtrack as you choose among multiple paths back to the ranger station. As you pass through, the generations of care and appreciation of this park is on display from the historical home site to Eagle Scout projects, the creek and pleasant small waterfall area, picnic tables and park benches.

On the rivers, there are natural areas that are nestled so deeply in the forest that most of us don't know they exist. Floating on peaceful ripples under canopies of trees, there is a feeling of isolation from any thought of civilization. There's always a pleasant spot to stop for lunch.

There is river use now, but most only for those knowing property owners with access. That changes when we add multiple access points along both rivers, making them easily

accessible and minutes from exits on U.S. 321 and Interstate 40.

How do you promote a natural resource while protecting it for future generations? One way is by including it in a State Park. For over a year, the hidden treasures of western Catawba County have been studied by NC State Parks as a possible multi-site park including both rivers and areas around Bakers Mountain like the New River State Park in Ashe County. The connectivity along the two rivers offers multiple options for canoe and kayak trips from two hours to overnight.

Parks are an economic engine. The million residents around Charlotte have easy access to only two state parks attracting two million visitors a year. Those in Raleigh enjoy four state parks attracting six million visitors. That's a gap of four million visits annually between Charlotte and similarly sized Raleigh. The Hickory Metro Convention Center & Visitors Bureau estimate that the average day-trip visitor adds \$50 to our economy. Closing that gap by just one million visits represents \$50 million a year.

Can we do it? That depends on us completing two steps: First, State Parks requires official authorization by the General Assembly before they can operate in Catawba County. Secondly, a State Park needs land, as condemning property is not an option. So, we need to find willing land owners whether public or private, to donate or sell land at a fair market price. Some private owners have already signed on. Some public owners, like the City of Hickory, have offered the possibility of a donation over 100 acres.

Protecting our natural heritage takes time and energy but it is worth it. I hope to see you soon, on the river or along the trail.



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