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Flat Rock Trail Opens At State Park

by SARAH FAY CAMPBELL

🕒 Friday, October 04, 2013 Facebook Twitter Comments



Girl Scouts from Troop 10322 build a cairn on the Flat Rock Trail.

Visitors to Chattahoochee Bend State Park can now visit the park's iconic "Flat Rock" granite areas, following the completion of the Flat Rock Trail. Volunteers completed the one-mile loop trail in just a few hours Saturday during a volunteer event held as part of Your State Parks Day.

The trail, which traverses the flat rock area and several boulder fields, and crosses the park's highest elevation, is the first trail to be accessed from the "trail head one" parking lot.

In addition to being the first new trail built in a year- and-a-half, it also connects with the first trail built in the park — a 100-foot ceremonial trail created for the ground-breaking ceremony in 2009. And it was built almost exactly four years after the ground-breaking ceremony. Your State Parks Day was recognized on Saturday, Sept. 28. The ground-breaking ceremony was held Sept. 29, 2009.

"It was satisfying to see the spot we started at four years ago finally become a part of the hiking trails," said Dean Jackson of the Friends of Chattahoochee Bend State Park. "We had some of the same volunteers and Friends board members who were there and active in 2009 working on the new sections of trail we built on Saturday, and they have accomplished so much in the four years between," Jackson said.



"It was a great feeling and there's a lot more to come."

Girl Scout troop 10322, with about 20 scouts and leaders from Madras Middle School and Northgate High School, joined veteran park volunteers to clear, grade and blaze the one-mile trail.

"We had a great volunteer turnout, with veteran trailblazers leading the Girl Scouts. We managed to get the one-mile trail completed in just a few hours," said chapter President Steve St. Laurent. "That's something to be proud of. We were all very dirty, maybe a little tired, but I bet most of us would go back out there and work some more."

Admission to the park, usually \$5 per vehicle, was free as part of Your State Parks Day. Visitors took advantage of the day at Chattahoochee Bend, enjoying the fall weather by hiking, picnicking, camping, fishing and boating on the Chattahoochee River. The park's RV, platform and backcountry campsites were full Saturday evening.

State Representative Lynn Smith, R-Newnan, visited the park on Saturday with her grandson, Charlie, and hiked the park's Riverside trail.

"We met a lot of visitors just out to enjoy a hike or the river," said Smith. "We met individuals, families and a whole Boy Scout troop from Paulding County who were there for the first time ... several folks who had heard about the park but who had never visited before that day, and they loved it. We got to play trail-guide for people looking for the overlook tower."

Over the next few months, Friends volunteers will build the 1.4-mile Boulder Valley Trail, which will connect to the Flat Rock Trail in three places to create a "choose your own adventure" trail system. East-west loop trails will also be built from Trail Head One to the park's visitor center, which will connect the new trails to the existing nine miles of trails that Friends volunteers have built over the past four years.

"The flat rock area is a very pretty place to hike and will be a great amenity for visitors," said Park Manager Tim Banks. "It's actually significant from an ecological point of view, too. The upper end is an example of Southern Flatrock, which is a level 2 imperiled ecosystem, and the lower end of the loop contains examples of Montane longleaf pine, which is globally imperiled level 1 ecosystem. It is a great asset for educating visitors about these natural systems."

The trail construction was the culmination of a week's worth of work, including the laying of sod on a spot at the park's campground one on Sept. 23. Coweta County provided inmate labor, and the park managers from FDR State Park, Fort Yargo State Park and Sweetwater Creek State Park, along with Friends volunteer Dick Brunelle, helped out with the project.

A team from Caterpillar Inc. in LaGrange volunteered on Sept. 27, laying the groundwork for the loop trail construction by building a footbridge and a stone and slate gravel entranceway for the new trail. It was the second time Caterpillar has sent a volunteer team.

In all, four tons of flagstone, 18 tons of slate gravel and 36 tons of sod were used in the week's projects, said Banks. The sod was donated by Department of Natural Resources Board member and North Georgia Turf owner Aaron McWhorter, of Whitesburg. The gravel, stone and footbridge timber were provided by the Friends of Chattahoochee Bend.

"We've been busy," said St. Laurent. "And as usual, we were able to do it because we have such great support for our state park. The partnership with Coweta County, the donations of funds and materials, and the dedicated volunteers who come out to the park keep allowing us to bring Chattahoochee Bend up to a higher and higher level for visitors."

Over the past year, Friends volunteers have worked with park management and other groups to maintain and improve current trails, build foot bridges and improve blazing on the trails, provide shade trees and other improvements for campsites, lead river clean-ups, purchase rentable canoe/kayaks for use on the river, remove silt fencing lead from the park's construction, provide plantings and beautification projects, and lead community programs and activities at the new park.

In addition to new trail building, Friends volunteers will build new trailhead kiosks to provide maps and information for hiking trails at the visitor center and at the day-use area. The Friends group is also gearing up to add improved footbridges and improve trail signage on the nine miles of existing trail and the additional trails that will be built in the coming months.

The Friends group, park management and Department of Natural Resources officials are also working to plan and prepare for future volunteer projects at Chattahoochee Bend, including the construction of future equestrian trails, mountain bike trails, the inclusion of Chattahoochee Bend as a part of the planned middle Chattahoochee

Blueway water trail, and the development of other new activities at the park.

Chattahoochee Bend State Park is located on Flat Rock Road in northwestern Coweta, along the Chattahoochee River.

For more information about the Friends of Chattahoochee Bend State Park, or to volunteer, visit www.BendFriend.com. For more information about Chattahoochee Bend State Park, visit www.gastateparks.org/chattahoocheebend or call 770-254-7271.

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Nora Schumm Maloy · University of West Georgia

Wow More than 9 miles of trails. That's great! It's a beautiful park and every year more improvements.

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Chattahoochee Bend Friend · Following · Works at Friends of Chattahoochee Bend State Park

We have actually built NINE miles of trail.

We built the 5-mile Riverside-Bend Trail in one year, at first working one Saturday a month, then two, from March 2010 to March 2011. Then we built the 2.2-mile Tower Trail and Wild Turkey Trail from the Visitor's Center to the Observation Tower in just four months, from March 2011 to June 2011. The 3/4 mile Campground Loop we knocked out in two volunteer days, and the Flat Rock Trail we completed in ONE!

Of course, we can't build trails all the time. We have to maintain them as well. And before new trails are built, they have to be scouted, flagged, reviewed by archaeologists, botanists, engineers, and other folks. Budget cuts, office relocations, and short staffing at the DNR led to long delays in getting those reviews done. But now that we've been given the greenlight, the 5+ miles of hiking trails, 12+ miles of bike trails and 11 miles of horse trail will be built just as fast as we manage.

Of course, the more volunteers that come out to help, the more we can get done. So y'all come on out! Next Volunteer Day is October 12!
<http://bendfriend.com/bendtrails.html#newtrail>

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Denise Gunnels · Newnan, Georgia

That's very nice. I'm very glad they are finally making some progress. If it took four years to build 1.5 miles of hiking trails I suppose they will never finish the biking trails which are so badly wanted for this area.

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Marilyn Berger Williams · Newnan, Georgia

Denise, this is ALL done by volunteers, and they have completed 9 miles, not 1.5 miles of trails. Again... all volunteers.

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