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CABIN FEVER

Explore Table Rock State Park

MAKING THE GRADE

ADVENTUROUS FUN

FIBER MODERNIZING THE EXPERIENCE AT TABLE ROCK STATE PARK

FOOTPRINT

Story by MORGAN SIMMONS

Reaching the summit of Table Rock Mountain was never meant to be easy. The shortest route is a steep, rocky trail that ascends 3.6 miles from the park's Nature Center to the top of the iconic, 3,124-foot granite dome for which the park is named.

It's a hike Bart Joy knows well. As assistant manager of Table Rock State Park, Bart has seen visitors from far and wide flock to this corner of the Blue Ridge Mountains to test their legs and lungs against the steep-sided Table Rock and its neighboring peak, Pinnacle Mountain. "The pain is part of the reward," Bart says. "From the exposed rock outcroppings on Table Rock, it feels like you can see forever. You know how some places seem to take your breath away? The summit of Table Rock is one of those places."

Built during the Great Depression, Table Rock State Park covers 3,083 acres and welcomes all kinds of outdoor

enthusiasts. The 10-mile trail circuit that connects Table Rock and Pinnacle mountains is a legendary hiking route, but that fact doesn't overshadow the shorter, lower-elevation trails that lead visitors to the park's mountain streams and waterfalls. The park marks the eastern terminus of the Foothills Trail that stretches 80 miles between Oconee State Park and Table Rock State Park.

Anglers can rent a boat and ply the waters of Lake Pinnacle, or they can launch their own boats and enjoy stunning views of Table Rock Mountain from the park's second lake, Lake Oolenoy. In terms of overnight accommodations, the park offers a wide range of creature comforts that include 14 renovated cabins and a campground with 94 sites suitable for tents and RVs.

Table Rock State Park officially opened on April 4, 1938. Native plants from the Pinnacle Lake bed were used to landscape the grounds, and the

combination of hiking trails and rustic cabins enabled the park to serve its dual mission of preserving natural resources while serving the public.

On the second Saturday of each month bluegrass musicians come to the park for an acoustic jam session. The music takes place in a historic lodge, which the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built in the 1930s as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Other prominent examples of the CCC's handiwork at Table Rock State Park are the dam, spillway and stone boat landing located along the 1.9-mile Lakeside Loop around Pinnacle Lake. "This park was built for people to make connections with their surroundings," Bart says. "The young people who joined the CCC built our dams and made our lakes so that people could fish and swim. They cleared trails up the mountain. They wanted to build a park people could experience."



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: A group of hikers explore one of the trails in the park.

Carrick Creek Falls gently flows into Carrick Creek and trickles toward Pinnacle Lake.

Table Rock State Park Assistant Manager Bart Joy welcomes visitors to the park.

Upcountry Fiber Business Solutions Consultant Brandon Smith connects an optical network terminal on a cabin at Table Rock State Park.

Photos by Matt Ledger



HIGH-TECH OVERHAUL

Last summer, Upcountry Fiber installed high-speed broadband that reaches practically every corner of Table Rock State Park. Bart says the new fiber optic network represents one of the most significant changes the park has seen since the CCC days when rural electrification was relatively new.

“Switching to high-speed internet has been a huge deal for us,” he says. “Before, everything operated off cell-phones, and where we are, the cellphone signal is not always great. Switching to fiber has not only given us more speed, but much greater reliability as well.”

The park’s rustic cabins now have their own high-speed internet. The general store and visitor center are also connected to the network, and campers staying in tents or RVs can hook up to WiFi at campground bathhouses that also have fiber connections. “With our old internet, there were times when we couldn’t



do business out of our retail store or do reservations,” Bart says. “It’s a pretty serious business problem when your internet keeps going down. During the worst of the COVID pandemic, we saw a huge influx of visitors who wanted to enjoy the outdoors but needed to stay connected. State parks have a role to play as more and more people do their jobs over the internet.”

Inside the park, fiber optic strands have been pulled from a mainline cable and connected to routers inside the cabins

and other service points. Upcountry Fiber partnered with Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative to hang the fiber cable on local power poles just outside the park.

Brandon Smith, business sales consultant with Upcountry Fiber, says an increasing number of state parks are considering fiber as a high-speed, reliable option for visitors who have come to expect access to online conveniences while roughing it outdoors.

Brandon says the several months it took to install the fiber at Table Rock State Park were well worth it. “We ran into a lot of rock. Sometimes we had to dig manually. Staying underground gives the project a cleaner look, and visitors at Table Rock obviously value the views.” 📷