



## LAKE JAMES STATE PARK IN THE TIME OF CORONA VIRUS



Acknowledging that the Summer of 2020 will be unlike any other is the first step in making the most of the COVID-19 version of Lake James State Park.

From the complete park closure that lasted more than a month during early Spring, to the limited re-opening of facilities in the weeks that followed, the staff at Lake James and all other state parks in North Carolina has continued to try to provide visitors a healthy environment to enjoy the outdoors.

Admittedly, the results haven't been perfect. At the time of this writing the swim beach at the Paddy's Creek Area

remains closed, as well as boat rentals and concessions. Combined, these three services represent the most-popular visitor activities at the park. Not having them available has been an understandable disappointment to so many Lake James users and has dramatically changed the way people interact with the park.

For starters, "Stay At Home" and "Safer At Home" orders from state government have lead to a tremendous increase in the amount of boat traffic on Lake James and the public access areas, including the ramps at Canal Bridge and Hidden Cove. During weekends it is normal for the Hidden Cove Access Area to run out of parking

spots before noon. Similarly, vehicles with boat trailers quickly spill outside the guardrails at Canal Bridge when the weather is nice.

It seems a great many people in WNC have recently acquired or rediscovered the joys of paddle sports. Canoeists, kayakers and paddleboarders are flocking to Lake James in record numbers, contributing to the stiff competition for weekend parking spaces at area boat ramps. Paddlers are reminded that the day use areas at Lake James State Park are excellent alternatives for putting in their boats and enjoying the water. The law enforcement boat ramp at the Paddy's Creek Area is now temporarily available for public access, though the gate

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## NATURE NOTES

Without the marvel of modern air conditioning or the uniquely human ability to sweat, the animals of the forest must adjust their periods of activity to avoid the heat of summer. That means early mornings and late evenings are best for wildlife viewing in the park now that we are living through the dog days of summer.

An exception is the birds nesting within the park. The breeding season has been going on for more than two months now and some mated pairs are working on their third broods of the season. You may notice the bluebird boxes erected along the park road in the Paddy's Creek Area. These iconic songbirds are thriving in the artificial cavities maintained by



the park staff. During the 1970s and 80s, eastern bluebirds had declined to the point that biologists were getting concerned. The subsequent campaign to provide nest boxes in suitable habitat resulted in a surge in the bluebird population and today we enjoy bluebirds as a fairly common resident around Lake James.

Another exception to the midday siesta rule is a resident black bear that has been occasionally spotted by hikers and bikers in the Paddy's Creek Area. Black bears are typically shy around humans but they can become habituated quickly if they make a connection between people and food. If you encounter a bear, or any other wild animal for that matter, do not, under any circumstances, offer it something to eat. Feeding a bear is the surest way to turn it into a destructive and potentially dangerous nuisance.

Be aware as you drive the park roads that young animals are on the move. Spotted fawns, fuzzy turkey poults and miniature raccoons and opossums are following their mothers around as best they can, but they're slower than the adults and have yet to learn the hazards of cars and roads.

Sure it's hot outside, but the park trails are shaded and cool, so come on out for a hike or a picnic. See you on the trail!

### WHO WE ARE

A group formed in 2010, made up of dedicated people work together to help Lake James State Park meet its mission of providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education while still protecting the natural beauty and historic integrity of the State Park.

### BOARD MEMBERS

**Eric Jenkins** - President  
**Robert Hunter** - Vice President  
**Mike Sewell** - Secretary  
**Annette Bryant** - Membership Coordinator  
**Randall Conley** - Member at Large  
**George Milner** - Member at Large  
**Greg Norell** - Member at Large  
**Molly Sandfoss** - Member at Large  
**Jeff Stark** - Member at Large  
**Jim Williams** - Member at Large  
**Mickey Lewis** - Member at Large  
**Charles Abemathy** - Member at Large  
**Bryant Lindsey** - Member at Large  
**Blair Melton** - Member at Large

To contact the Friends of Lake James State Park Group please email [info@lakejamesstatepark.org](mailto:info@lakejamesstatepark.org)

## YEAR OF FIRE

Given normal conditions, this installment of the “Year of Fire” series would have included an update on numbers of acres burned at Lake James State Park during the spring. These have been anything but normal conditions and the prescribed fire program here has been halted for the time being.

That said, fire managers within the division are keeping options open for a “warm season” burn if weather conditions and personnel availability ever align. A warm season burn is a fire that takes place during late spring and into the summer; when plants are actively growing and green, leafy material is at its highest abundance. Such prescribed burns are difficult to pull off. Green leaves and supple branches do not burn easily and high humidity tends to quash fire activity. When the stars do align, however, growing season burns can be especially beneficial for habitat restoration efforts. Non-fire adapted species, like tulip poplar, sweet gum and Virginia pine are rendered especially susceptible, while trees that evolved with fire, like hickories, oaks and shortleaf pines thrive.

It remains to be seen whether or not any of the Lake James State Park burn units will receive a warm season fire, but if they do it will represent a new and exciting chapter in the park’s fire program.



## **CAMPFIRE COOKING**

~  
**RANGER VICK'S  
OLD-FASHIONED  
PADDY'S CREEK  
CAMPFIRE COOKED  
SAUSAGE PEPPER  
PACKETS!**  
~



Prep: 10 minutes  
Total Time: 30 Minutes  
Serving Size: Serves 4

### Ingredients

- 4 link sausages
- 1 large red onion, cut crosswise into 4 (1/2-inch-thick) slices
- 1 yellow bell pepper, cut into 1/2-inch slices
- 1 chile pepper of your choice (spice it up!), cut into 1/2-inch slices
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 cup torn fresh herbs, such as basil and oregano
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 4 hoagie rolls, split
- 8 (3/4-ounce) cheese slices (a local Hoop cheese is highly recommended!)

### Directions

1. Heat a camping stove or grill to medium-high heat, or fit a grilling grate over the direct heat of glowing campfire embers. Place the sausages, onion slices, bell pepper slices, and chile slices on a cast iron pan directly over the heat source; grill, turning occasionally, until charred, about 10 minutes.
2. Tear or cut 4 (18-inch) squares of aluminum foil. Divide the sausages and vegetables evenly among the foil squares. Drizzle evenly with the oil; sprinkle evenly with the herbs, salt, and black pepper. Toss to coat. Gather the edges of each foil sheet into a packet, and crimp to seal. Place the packets on the grill grate; grill until the sausages are cooked through, 10 to 15 minutes. \*Pro tip: add apple slices to the packets for an unexpected flavor twist!
3. Top the bottom half of each roll with 2 cheese slices, if desired. Divide the sausages and vegetable mixture evenly among the rolls.
4. Sit back, relax, eat heartily and enjoy the call of the whippoorwills on the winds.

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Each year when the busy summer season ends, park staff take the opportunity to catch up on maintenance projects, training, and program development. Last winter we were fortunate to have a volunteer in the Catawba River Office to digitally record our park's scrapbook collection. Brandy Fender, a Nutritional Services manager at the J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center, logged in over 100 hours, scanning in newspaper articles and slide photographs, and the captured park history is a treasure trove.

A native to the Lake James area with a long-time love of the outdoors, Brandy proved an invaluable asset to the project by scanning historical materials for inclusion in the NC Division of Parks and Recreation's online databases. "I have wanted to volunteer with the park for quite some time now," Brandy said, "so I was excited when the opportunity came for me to help out with the archive project. I have so many fond memories playing and swimming at Catawba River area in the early 90's. We would bring a picnic lunch and stay all day." Staff likewise enjoyed reviewing her finds, remarking on the changes that have taken place since the park's creation in 1987.



*Brandy Fender*

Brandy brought local knowledge to bear when preparing newspaper article abstracts and examining unmarked slides. "I did find it very interesting to see familiar names and faces. Not only did I know several people in the newspaper articles, but I also recognized people in the slides. It was a blast from the past for sure." As she became immersed in the development of the park through the decades, she was struck particularly by the passion felt by the residents of McDowell and Burke counties about protecting and preserving Lake James. We are fortunate that that passion is still felt today.

Brandy and her family still enjoy visiting Lake James State Park and look forward to when it can reopen to the public. "I'd say my favorite thing to do at the park would be

kayaking. My son and I also enjoy the Holly Discovery Trail. I can't wait to see what the future holds for the park! I think the new Visitor Center will add so much to the experience." Thank you, Brandy, for helping preserve the park's history for future generations. We can't wait to add to this rich history in the years and decades to come!

# VISITOR CENTER UPDATE

## **COMPLETE**

- Parking lot rough grading
- Walking trail rough grading
- Well house tanks set
- Footings for Visitor Center in place

## **NEXT UP**

- Underground utilities
- Electrical utility install
- Walking trail stone placement



## LJSP IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

*Continued from page 1*

remains closed and the dock is off limits to fishing and swimming. Private vehicles must not block the gate and anyone using the ramp must be aware that first responders receive priority in the execution of their routine patrols and emergency responses.

The camping areas are operating at full capacity, with very few openings to make reservations even during the middle of the week when normally there would be a selection of unoccupied sites for walk-in campers and vacationers. At the time of this writing, all campers must have a reservation to occupy a site and protocols have changed to allow folks to make a reservation up to 9 p.m. on the day of their stay. It is hoped these provisions will keep the amount of close contact between campers

and campground hosts to a minimum so that everyone can practice social distancing.

Similarly, the picnic areas at both the Catawba River and Paddy's Creek areas are open, including the picnic shelters, but some tables have been moved to create safe space for unaffiliated groups to occupy. The shoreline picnic sites at the Paddy's Creek Area remain closed to discourage unlawful use of the sandy lakefront between the East and West shelters.

Happily, hiking and mountain biking trails remain unaffected by the social distancing measures required to combat the spread of COVID-19.

As state leaders and health officials monitor the virus, it is likely these

guidelines for parks will evolve to meet the challenges presented by it. In time, we hope to remove restrictions on how visitors utilize the park and a return to normalcy happens soon. We also remain vigilant and flexible to the possibilities of implementing future COVID-19-related measures, depending on trends in testing and active cases across the region.

Thank you to the thousands of Lake James State Park supporters for your understanding and cooperation these past few months. Together, we will succeed in finding a path toward a future filled with the outdoor activities we all enjoy and love so well.

## LJSP TRAILS



### CATAWBA RIVER AREA:

- Fishing Pier Trail (0.3 mile, easy)
- Fox Den Loop Trail (2.25 miles, moderate)
- Lake Channel Overlook Trail (1.5 miles, moderate)
- Sandy Cliff Overlook Trail (0.5 mile, easy)

### PADDY'S CREEK AREA:

- Holly Discovery Trail (0.75 mile, easy)
- Mill's Creek Trail (3.6 miles, moderate)
- Overmountain Victory Trail (2.0 mile, moderate)
- Paddy's Creek Trail (2.0 miles, moderate)
- Tindo beginners' mountain bike trail (4.0 miles)
- Wimba intermediate mountain bike trail (11.25 miles)

## PARK GENERAL INFO

- Gate hours for July and August are 7 a.m. until 10 p.m.
- At the time of this writing, the swimming area at Paddy's Creek remains closed. Concessions and canoe/kayak rentals are suspended.
- The park offices and gift shops at Catawba River and Paddy's Creek areas are closed. Call 828-584-7728 or visit [www.ncparks.gov/lake-james-state-park/home](http://www.ncparks.gov/lake-james-state-park/home) for up-to-date information on closures due to COVID-19.

# FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Do you have an interest in Lake James State Park? Whether you enjoy hiking the trails, swimming at the beach or just picnicking with your family, there is some part of the park for everyone.

Join the Friends of Lake James State Park group and learn about all the opportunities to help make the park a better place for everyone to enjoy. The Friends of Lake James State Park focus on working together to help Lake James State Park meet its mission of providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education while still protecting the natural beauty and historic integrity of the State Park.

There are a variety of opportunities to get involved from trail work days, to volunteering at RiverFest and other festivals. Become a member of Friends of Lake James State Park, and know that you are helping to preserve the natural beauty and historic resources of Lake James for generations to come.

## FRIENDS CONTRIBUTIONS

The Friends of Lake James State Park is proud to support the hardworking staff at Lake James State Park and contribute wherever we can to help improve park operations and offer new recreational opportunities to visitors. If you think these efforts are meaningful, please consider joining our group using the form at the bottom of this page.

- Boat Camping Project; partially funded, purchased equipment including rebar driver and auger
- Stand-up Paddleboards; purchased two for rental fleet and one for lifeguard use
- Funded instructor for Waterfront Safety training for lifeguards
- Linville Overlook picnic area
- Assisted with Overmountain Victory Trail 2 construction
- Holly Discovery Trail; partially funded and dedicated, annual funding for upkeep
- Park of the Year celebration
- Sponsored night rides on mountain bike trails
- RiverFest Sponsor

## HOW TO JOIN THE FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK GROUP

Become a member of Friends of Lake James State Park, and know that you are helping to preserve the natural beauty and historic resources of Lake James for generations to come.

**For more information please visit [www.lakejamesstatepark.org](http://www.lakejamesstatepark.org) or email [info@lakejamesstatepark.org](mailto:info@lakejamesstatepark.org).**

## FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK - MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Be a Friend of Lake James State Park

Select class of annual membership:

- Individual      \$10  
 Family          \$25  
 Corporate       \$50  
 Patron/Industry \$100 - \$999 \$\_\_\_\_\_  
 Lifetime         \$1000 (or more) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities with the Friends of Lake James State Park

Where did you hear about us? \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Return to:  
Friends of Lake James State Park, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1327  
Nebo, NC 28761**

*Friends of Lake James State Park, Inc. is a registered 501(c)3 charitable organization. Receipt of membership will be supplied upon request.*