

Jocassee Gorges

When people in the upstate of South Carolina hear the word Jocassee, they immediately think of Lake Jocassee. However, the lake makes up only one third of the Jocassee Gorges.

In November 2012, National Geographic identified Jocassee Gorges as one of the top 50 "The World's Last Great Places", in its special additional magazine. This gorge offers breathtaking waterfalls and dramatic landscapes.

Jocassee Gorges is a steep mountain gorge with old growth hemlocks, dramatic rock cliffs, rare ferns and flowers, streams filled with rainbow trout, and much more.

Most people have no idea that the South Carolina part of Jocassee Gorges encompasses around 33,000 acres. This mass acreage includes Sassafras Mountain (highest mountain in South Carolina), Twin Falls, Lower Whitewater falls and more. The North Carolina part is another 43,000 acres. The North Carolina area includes Whitewater Falls and Jocassee Gorge State Park.

In South Carolina, the Gorge goes from Table Rock State Park on SC Hwy 11 to the other side of Lake Jocassee on SC Hwy 130 and from SC Hwy 11 to the North Carolina State line following US 178.

Jocassee Gorges is a sportsmen's paradise. It offers hiking, fishing, hunting, birding, horse back riding, boating, swimming, scuba diving, etc (When I was teaching scuba diving, we did all our open water training in Lake Jocassee) and of course photography.

There is plenty of wildlife in the area, ranging from Black Bears, White Tail Deer, to Bobcats (rarely seen). There are more than 50 species of birds; Wild Turkey, various Warblers, Common Loom, Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, etc.

To take a driving tour of the Gorges, start at the intersection of SC Hwy 11 and US 178,

- Drive North on US 178 towards Rosman, NC to the Rocky Bottom community approximately seven miles.
- Turn right onto F. van Clayton Hwy. Drive approx. 4.6 miles to the top of Sassafras Mountain. Park and walk up to the overlook. From the overlook, you can see Lake Jocassee, and beyond into Georgia. Standing on the geographic marker, you will be in both North Carolina and South Carolina at the same time.
- From Sassafras Mountain go back to US Hwy 178, turn right and drive approx. 2 miles to Laurel Valley Rd. Turn left and bear to the right onto Horsepasture Road. Horsepasture Road is a dirt and gravel road.
- Once on the Horsepasture road, you will come to a parking area for the Foothills Trail. The trail itself bisects the entire Jocassee Gorges. It takes several days to traverse.

- Continue driving on Horsepasture Road for approximate 9.8 miles. After climbing a steep hill, you will come to several overlooks with spectacular views of the North Carolina Mountains and Lake Jocassee. The highlight of the views is Jumping Off Rock (marked with a small sign). Stop and park and walk to the overlook. It is highly recommended that a high clearance vehicle be used on Horsepasture road.
- From there backtrack to US Hwy 178 Road. Turn right and drive approx. 5 miles down the mountain until you come to Cleo Chapman Road, make a sharp right turn and follow this road into Eastatoe Valley.
- This will be approximate. 2 miles to Eastatoe Community Road and turn right. Drive approx. 9/10 mile to Waterfall Road on your right. Follow this road to the end (parking lot). Park and take the flat ¼ - ½ mile trail to Twin Falls.
- From Twin Falls go back to Cleo Chapman Road turn right and drive to Roy F Jones Road and turn left.
- Follow this road to Hwy 11, Turn right onto Hwy 11 and drive approximately 7 miles to Boone Creek Road, turn right. Follow it to a stop sign next to the church, turn right onto Jocassee Lake Road and follow it to Devil's Fork State Park.
- The boat landing will be on your left. This is the gateway to Lake Jocassee. This park Visitor's Center is on your right. Note: At the stop sign, the church on the right "Boone Creek Baptist Church was the church used at the end of the movie in "Deliverance". At that time the church was a wooden structure.

Devil's Fork State Park offers something very unique, a rare plant that blooms in mid-March called the Oconee Bell. It is found in only several locations in both North and South Carolina. In the State Park (right side) parking lot, drive to the end and take the steps down and follow the nature trail to the right. After approximately, ¼ - ½ mile to you come to several wooden bridges and you can see the plants blooming in the creek. Great photo experience! Note: on the nature trail, the dogwoods will be blooming in April, Mt Laurel in May and the Rhododendron in June.

The highlight of our tour is taking a boat ride on Lake Jocassee, a 7,565 acre lake. It has 75 miles of shoreline which is mostly undeveloped (only two small areas where houses are allowed). On the lake there are numerous waterfalls that are unnamed mostly smaller falls at the end of coves on the northern end of the lake. There are three spectacular falls: Wright Creek Falls, Mill Creek Falls and Laurel Fork Falls. These falls can be reached only by boat.

Lake Jocassee is a photographer's dream, especially on a fall crisp day. The fall colors are superb, especially early in the morning. You can get some great reflection shots and you can have the lake almost to yourself during the week, except for the occasional fisherman. If you are lucky, you may see or hear a

belted kingfisher swooping across a small cove.

You do not need to own a boat to access the lake. There are several local companies that rent boats as well as give guided tours. When we did our CNPA Fall Photo Weekend in 2019, we used Jocassee Outdoor Center.

This whole area is rich in history. Claudia Hembree, former school teacher wrote a book about her experiences growing up in the Jocassee area (before the lake was created). The book is "Jocassee Valley". The book was the recipient of 2004 Best South Carolina Local History Book Award.

For more detailed information on some of the local areas to photograph in the Upstate of South Carolina, see

http://www.bobspalding.net/Photography/PhotoAreas/photo_upstate.htm.