

Carolina Conductor



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Monthly Newsletter of the Carolina Railroad Heritage Association, Inc.

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Preserving the Past Active in the Present Planning for the Future

Web Site: hubcityrrmuseum.org

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Hub City Railroad Museum and SOU Rwy Caboose #X3115:

Spartanburg Amtrak Station

298 Magnolia Street

Spartanburg, SC 29301-2330

Wednesday 10-2 & Saturday 10-2

Meeting Site:

Fountain Inn Presbyterian Church

307 North Main Street

Fountain Inn, SC 29644

Third Friday of the Month at 7:00 p.m.

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Articles can be submitted anytime.

Spartanburg & Ashville

Acronym: S&A RR, **Year Chartered:** 1874, **Year Line Operational:** 1878, **Year Service Ended:** 1881, **Original Starting Point:** Spartanburg, SC, **Original Ending Point:** Asheville, NC

1878 - Complete from Spartanburg north to the SC/NC State Line.

1881 - Reorganized as the Asheville & Spartanburg Railroad.

Originally envisioned in 1855 as the Greenville & French Broad Railroad, it never got off the drawing board. Heavily promoted by North Carolina Governor Zebulon B. Vance, a native of Western North Carolina, and his South Carolina counterpart, Governor Wade Hamp-

ton, III, the new Spartanburg & Asheville Railroad quickly encountered financial problems and was placed into receivership in 1881.

Construction started in 1876 and the going out of Spartanburg to the NC/SC State Line was uneventful. In early 1878, the line reached Tryon,

NC. But the Piedmont quickly ran out and the North Carolina mountains loomed in the path. The builders faced an almost sheer wall of rock in the form of Saluda Mountain, with no alternative route anywhere close. The two choices at the time were to go over the mountain or to bore multiple tunnels through it, and with finances becoming increasingly tight, the builders chose to go over it to save money.

One year later, the line finally reached Hendersonville - twenty-one miles, and the money ran out. A bill was introduced to the NC State Legislature to forfeit the charter if construction did not speed up. This

Asheville and Spartanburg Railroad.

SPARTANBURG, S. C., September 1, 1881.
On and after Thursday, September 1, 1881, passenger trains will be run daily (Sundays excepted) between Spartanburg and Hendersonville, as follows:

UP TRAIN.

Leave R. & D. Depot at Spartanburg. 4.20 p m
Arrive at Hendersonville. 7.30 p m

DOWN TRAIN.

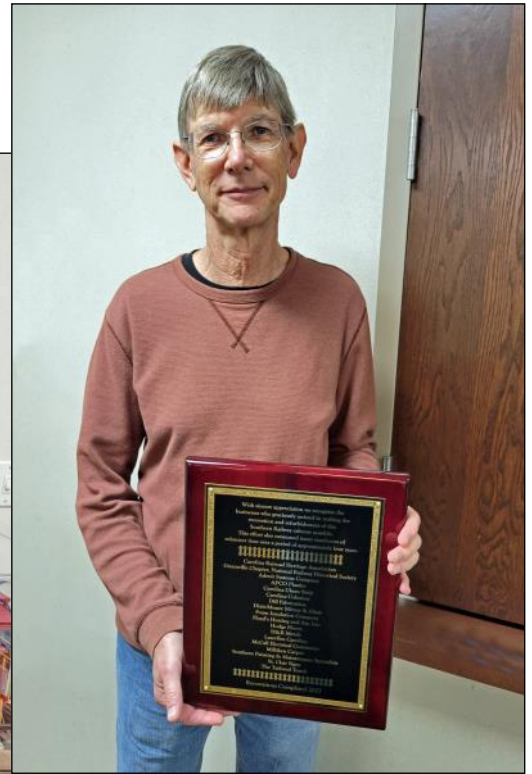
Leave Hendersonville. 6.30 a m
Arrive R. & D. Depot, Spartanburg. 12.00 m

Both trains make connections for Columbia and Charleston via Spartanburg. Union and Columbia and Atlanta and Charlotte by Air Line.

JAMES ANDERSON,
Superintendent.

1882-06-22 Newberry Weekly Herald

CRHA Happenings



← Bo Brown was this years recipient of the Red Caboose Award for his service to the club. ↑ The plaque recognizing those who made the caboose restoration possible was shown. The Christmas dinner meeting was great fun and good food. ↓



↑ Thomas and Friends visited the SPG Library for their Polar Express party provided by HCRRM.



Wanted—Articles for the Carolina Conductor

Submit an article of 200 words or more with some photos and captions and see them in print. Every one of us has some unique railroad experience that would make interesting reading for our membership. Your editor always needs more contributions of railway history and news.

SPARTANBURG AND ASHEVILLE RAILROAD

On and after Apr. 6th, 1885, passenger trains will be run daily, except Sunday, between Spartanburg and Hendersonville as follows:

UP TRAIN.

Leave R. & D Depot at Spartanburg 4 00 p m
 Leave Spartanburg, A. L. depot.... 6 10 p m
 Leave Saluda..... 6 20 p m
 Leave Flat Rock..... 7 00 p m
 Arrive Hendersonville..... 7 15 p m

DOWN TRAIN.

Leave Hendersonville..... 7 00 a m
 Leave Flat Rock..... 7 15 a m
 Leave Saluda..... 7 50 a m
 Leave Air Line Junction..... 10 15 a m
 Arrive E. & D Depot Spartanburg. 10 20 a m

Trains on this road run by Air-Line time.
 Both trains make connections for Columbia and Charleston via Spartanburg, Union and Columbia; Atlanta and Charlotte by Air Line
JAMES ANDERSON Supt. in-charge.

1885-11-24 Abbeville Messenger

2%. The constructors and the owners agreed that this would tax crews to their absolute limit, but they proceeded. Soon after the line reached the town of Saluda in 1878 the first fatalities occurred. In 1880, fourteen men died. In 1886, nine men died. In 1890, three men died. In 1893, another three men died.

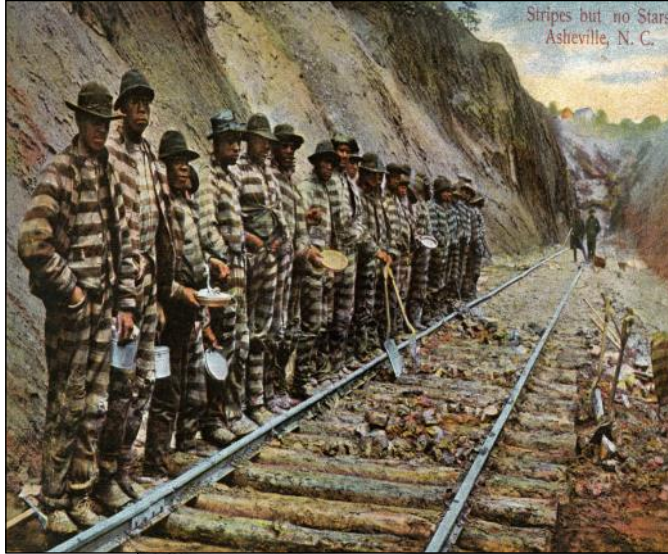
It was not until three successive wrecks happened rather quickly, and twenty-seven men lost their lives in 1903, that Southern Railway (the subsequent owner) was prompted to consider abandoning this section or developing new operating procedures. The result was the origination of the concept of "safety tracks," whereby runaway trains could be switched to go uphill to stop their forward momentum.

Towns on Route in NC: Hendersonville, Flat Rock, Green River, Coleman (1879), Green River #2 (1882), Zirconia (1890), Saluda (1878), Pacolet Falls (1879-1880), Tryon City (1878), Tryon (1891), NC/SC State Line.

Towns on Route in SC: SC/NC State Line, Earlesville > Landrum (1880), Campobello, Inman (1877), Campton (1875), Spartanburg.

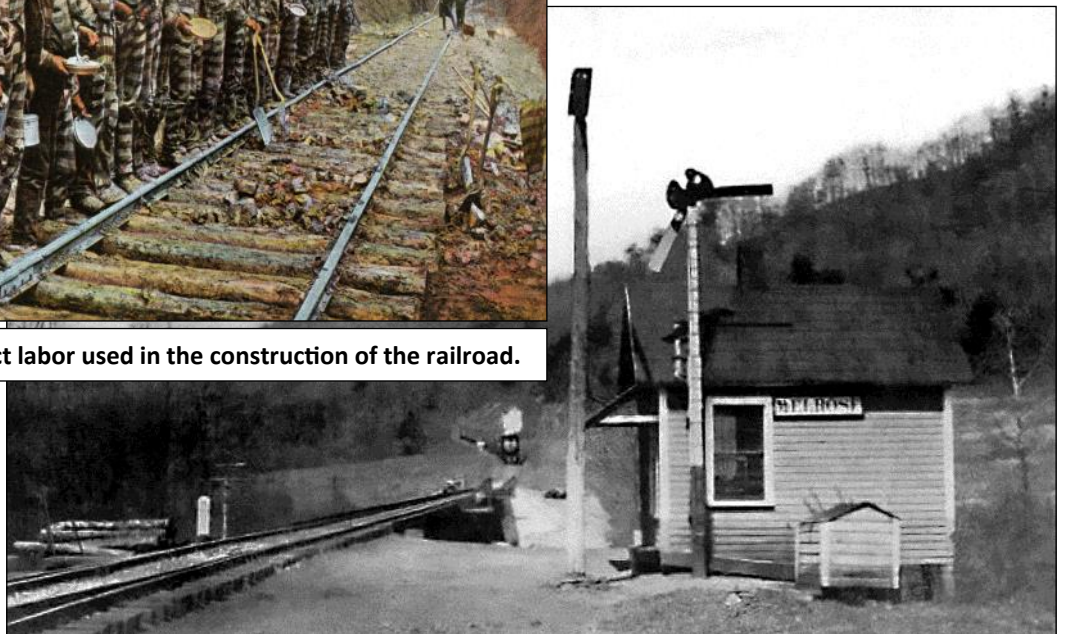
spurred new and increased support for the railroad on both ends and resulted in the reorganization of the company into the Asheville & Spartanburg Railroad in 1881, managed by the Richmond & Danville Railroad, which completed the line in 1886.

The Saluda Mountain section of this line was well known to railroaders everywhere for its dangerous and often deadly grade - 4.7%, when the acceptable limit was agreed to be only around



↑ Convict labor used in the construction of the railroad.

Melrose, NC on the grade. ↓



Saluda Grade



The Saluda Grade is the steepest standard-gauge mainline railway grade in the United States. Owned by the Norfolk Southern Railway as part of its W Line, Saluda Grade in Polk County, North Carolina, gains 606 feet in elevation in less than three miles between Melrose and Saluda. Average grade is 4.24

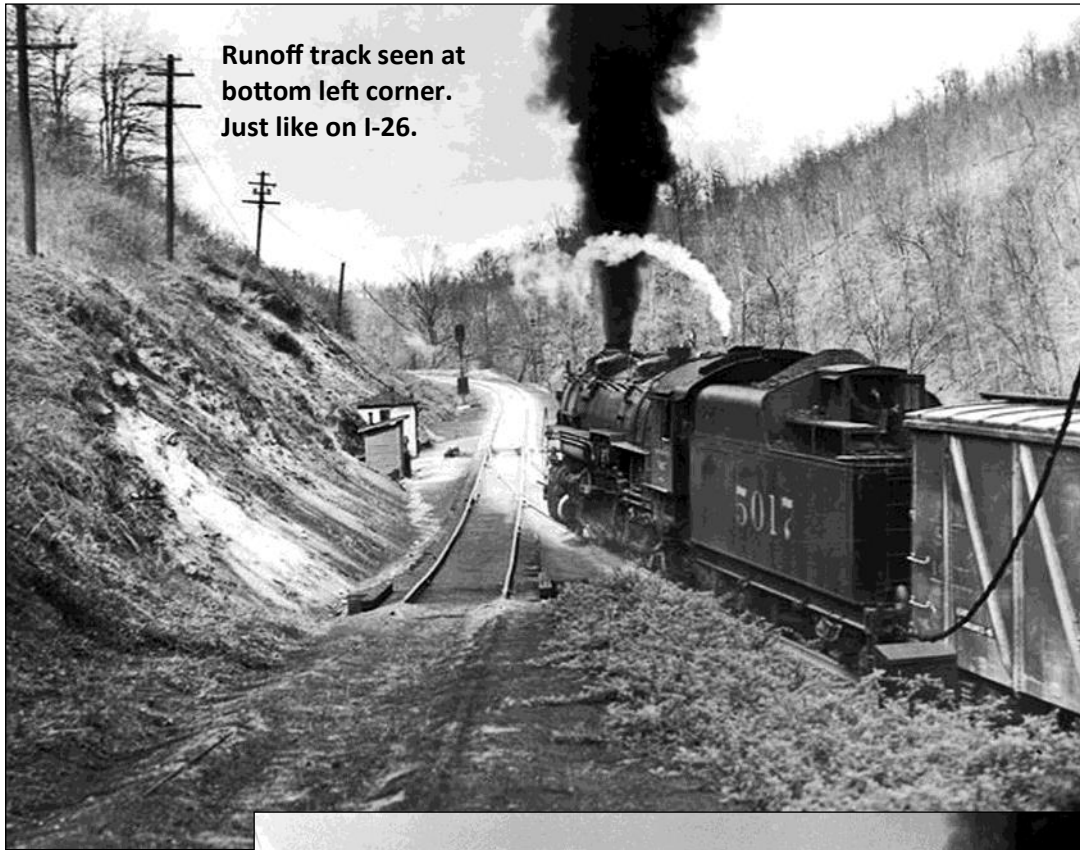
percent for 2.6 miles and maximum is 4.9% for about 300 feet.

Captain Charles W. Pearson was assigned to select a route for the Spartanburg and Asheville Railroad to ascend the Blue Ridge front; the area where the rolling hills of the Piedmont end at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Despite numerous surveys, no route was available for a railroad to ascend the mountains at a tolerable grade, and the best route followed the Pacolet River valley and gorge. The line begins its climb at the bottom of Melrose Mountain, where Tryon is today, at 1,081 feet, and continues on the south side of the Pacolet valley. At Melrose, the Saluda Grade begins and climbs to the town of Saluda, cresting in the center of town at an elevation of 2,097 feet.

Because of accidents involving downgrade runaway trains in the late 1880s, the then Southern Railway built two runaway safety spur tracks. These were originally manned junctions, which were always switched to a 60-foot pile of earth, which could stop downgrade runaway trains. Only upon hearing a whistle signal from the downgrade train would the signalman manning the spur junction throw the switch to keep the train on the main line. In later years, CTC signaling was installed along with automated switches and timer circuits for the one surviving runaway safety track at the bottom of the grade at Melrose. Trains running

Continued on Page 5 - *Saluda*

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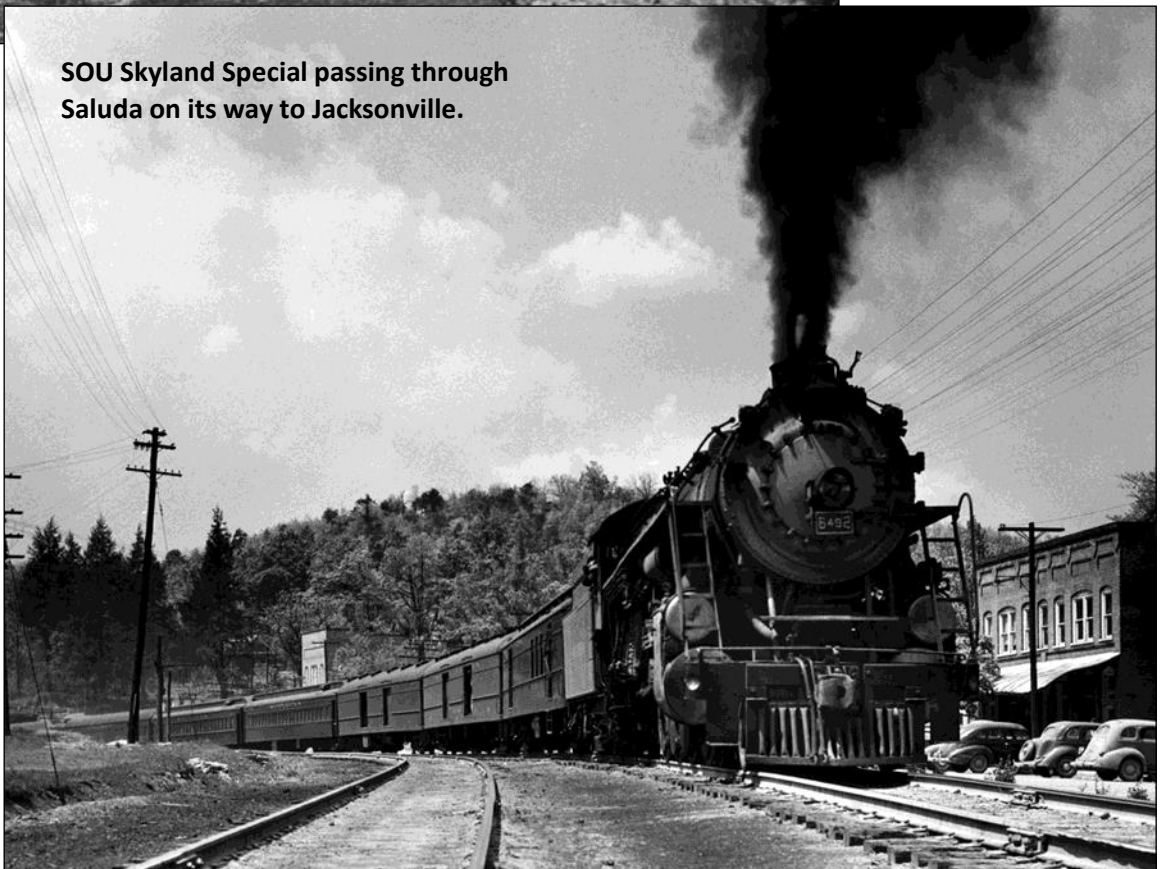


Runoff track seen at bottom left corner. Just like on I-26.

one of the few grades in the country where uphill trains could travel faster than their downhill counterparts. Most uphill trains had to double or triple the grade, splitting the train into sections to be taken up the grade to Saluda one at a time and reassembled there for the rest of the trip to Asheville.

Norfolk Southern suspended freight traffic between East Flat Rock, North Carolina and Landrum, South Carolina in December

downgrade were required to maintain 8 miles per hour when approaching the runaway track switch. This would allow a timer circuit to determine if a train was under control, in which case the switch from the runaway track at Melrose would be aligned to the mainline. But for speed greater than 8 miles per hour the switch would remain aligned for the runaway track. Saluda Grade was



SOU Skyland Special passing through Saluda on its way to Jacksonville.

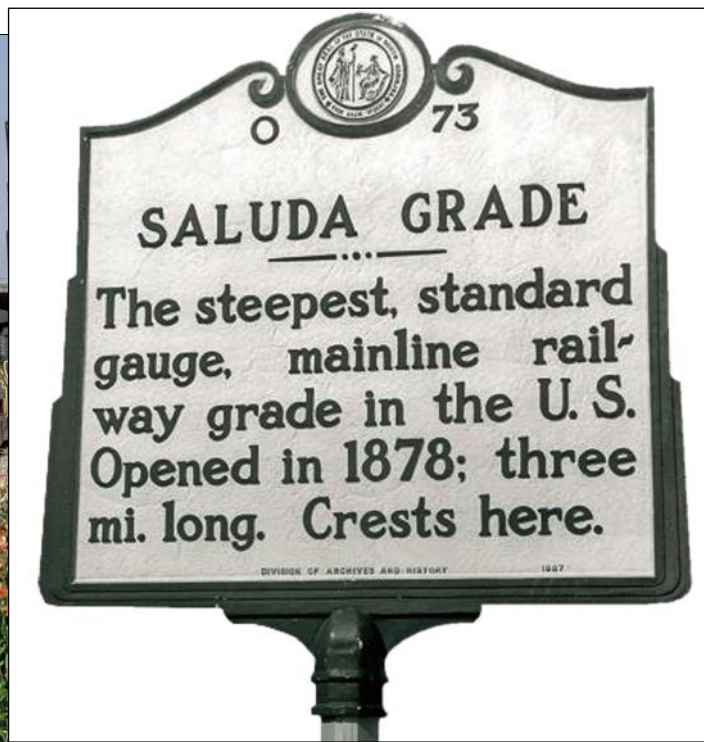
2001, thus ceasing operations on the Saluda Grade. In April 2003, Norfolk Southern severed the line from the rest of its system by placing mounds of dirt over the tracks and disconnecting the rails at mile posts 26 and 45. The signal system is not in use, and grade crossings have had their arms removed and signals covered. Norfolk Southern has inspected and maintained the right-of-way since placing the segment out of service, removing fallen trees and spraying herbicide on encroaching vegetation, but at least four washouts of the roadbed have occurred between Saluda and South Caro-



Wrecks did happen on the grade regularly.



↑ Train about to descend the grade in the town of Saluda.



lina, rendering the line impassable.

Talks of a passenger train excursion and a Rails-to-trails conversion have made no headway in recent years, and Norfolk Southern states it does not intend to abandon the line. However, in 2014, Norfolk Southern sold a portion of the W Line south of Asheville between mile posts 1 and 26 to Watco Companies, L.L.C., a Class III shortline railroad operator. Watco operates the line as the Blue Ridge Southern Railroad. Norfolk Southern

Continued on Page 7 - Saluda

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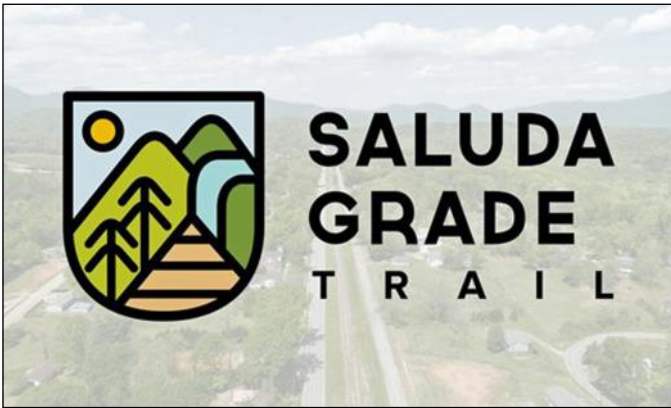
↑ Helper engines returning to push another train up the grade.

↓ Heavy coal trains required doubling the hill.



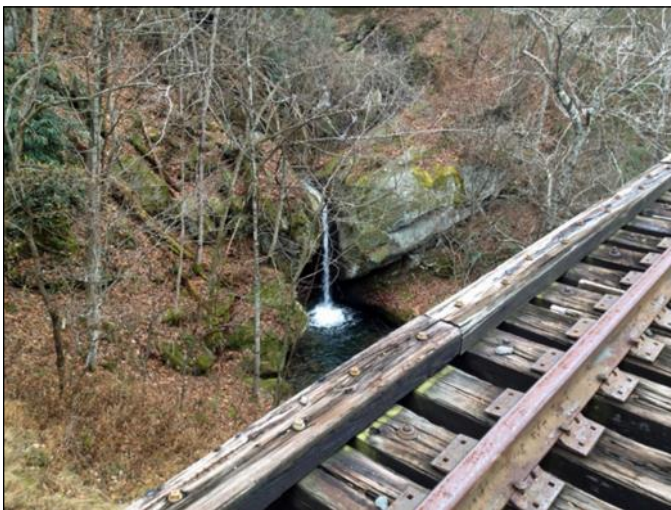
still retains ownership of the out-of-service segment over the Saluda Grade. After the summer of 2014,

Melrose and the rest of the grade have foliage growing on the tracks heavily. ✓



Picture a new rail trail that travels all the way from the rolling countryside of Upstate South Carolina, through historic and vibrant small towns, and into the spectacular mountain scenery of Western North Carolina. That's the vision for a new rail

trail along the route of the historic Saluda Grade Railroad.



The 31.5-mile rail trail would begin in Inman, SC (north of Spartanburg) and pass through Campobello, Landrum, Tryon, and Saluda before reaching Zirconia, NC (south of Hendersonville.) It would include approximately 15.5 miles in South Carolina and 16 miles in North Carolina. Along its route, the trail would feature scenic views, lively downtowns, historic landmarks, unique nature preserves, and gorgeous lakes and waterfalls. The Saluda Grade Trail also offers potential connections to other trails, like the future Ecusta Trail and the growing Palmetto Trail. It could become a major link in a visionary network of regional trails and greenways that spans hundreds of miles. These connected trails would invite people out for everything from a relaxed stroll to an epic journey.



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