

## **River walk offers nature, history**

South Fork River walk is part of Carolina Thread Trail

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It was Sunday afternoon with no breeze stirring under a scorching sun.

A good time to find a cool spot and stay put.

But we took a river walk anyway.

Sometimes, for whatever reason, the water seems to call. Not for swimming or boating or floating in a tube. What draws you is a need for its soothing power.

My wife and I recently felt that need. And we decided the time was right to try something we'd been thinking about for months: Hiking the new trail along the South Fork River in McAdenville.

In 2010, I wrote about Pharr Yarns and the Carstarphen family donating 95 acres of river front land to the Charlotte-based Catawba Lands Conservancy. Volunteers with the Piedmont Area Singletrack Alliance, Lowe's Home Improvement and Queens University of Charlotte built an approximately two-mile trail on the Pharr Nature Preserve. That path became part the Carolina Thread Trail.

Started in November 2007, the Thread Trail is collaborative effort among cities, counties and groups to link the region's points of interest and open space as well as conserve the most significant natural areas. Completion is years away as segments are gradually being put together.

The South Fork trail was dedicated last October and since then friends have been telling us how nice it is. But they recommended we go when things are fairly dry. Mud holes are messy, they warned.

It hadn't rained much in our locale lately. So we struck out on the trail, even though the muggy afternoon hugged us like an electric blanket.

Trail parking is a small lot at the end of Dickson Road in McAdenville. That's below the Interstate 85 bridge at the R.Y. McAden River Access.

Go under the bridge - pause to hear the hum of traffic - and head north.

### **'Pinhook Mill'**

The South Fork was running strong and the water a deep brown, a sign of heavy rain upstream in Lincoln or Catawba counties.

We soon learned that certain spots along the shady trail don't dry out so fast. Before long, we'd learned the art of negotiating mud holes. It's no big deal. Just plan on washing your shoes when you get home.

Early into the walk we passed under the old Piedmont & Northern railroad trestle I've been looking at for decades as I crossed over the I-85 bridge. From the ground, the towering mass of vine-covered concrete and steel looks like a relic left over from the Roman empire.

As we walked, we imagined the rumble of ghost trains from the past rolling down those rusty tracks.

The whirr of I-85 traffic faded; bird calls rang sharply in the woods; armies of bugs buzzed around our faces. And the river spoke to us.

Along the way, we sat on benches and watched the brown water flow.

The South Fork gets rocky in places and the sound of water rushing over the shoals is particularly sweet music.

At one point, we spotted a large stone pier in the river. Later, Pharr Yarns President Bill Carstarphen told me the structure was part of a 19th century bridge to the west bank of the South Fork where stood the legendary Woodlawn Factory, Gaston County's second cotton factory.

Built by Caleb Lineberger in 1852, the Woodlawn was better known as "Pinhook Mill," so-named because workers fished out of the windows with heavy brass pins. You can find out a lot more about the subject in historian Robert Allison Ragan's book "The Textile Heritage of Gaston County."

Carstarphen said part of the old mill's foundation is still in the woods and historic marker pointing out the site might be possible. That's a good idea - one that will help hikers learn a little more along the way.

### **Another world**

I have to confess: we didn't make it to the end of the trail.

It wasn't all that hot in the shade. But the super-muggy afternoon had taken its toll.

Ringed wet, we turned around and headed back to the car.

Skirting mud holes, we agreed to walk the river trail again. It's a special place and more people will try it as word spreads.

Just a few steps away from one of North Carolina's busiest highways you've entered another world. However long the stay, it's an uplifting taste of nature and history.

<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2011/07/24/2469136/river-walk-offers-nature-history.html>