

# Engaging the Untapped Community of “Not-Your-Typical” Hikers for the Benefit of Trails

Whitney Harris Wallace

# How are hikers typically pictured?

## Getty Images

Hiker: 556,422

Woman Hiker: 234,584

Man Hiker: 198,400

Older Hiker: 138,076

Black Hiker: 14,577

BIPOC Hiker: 6,907

Disabled Hiker: 2,023

LGBTQ Hiker: 1,240

Fat Hiker: 802



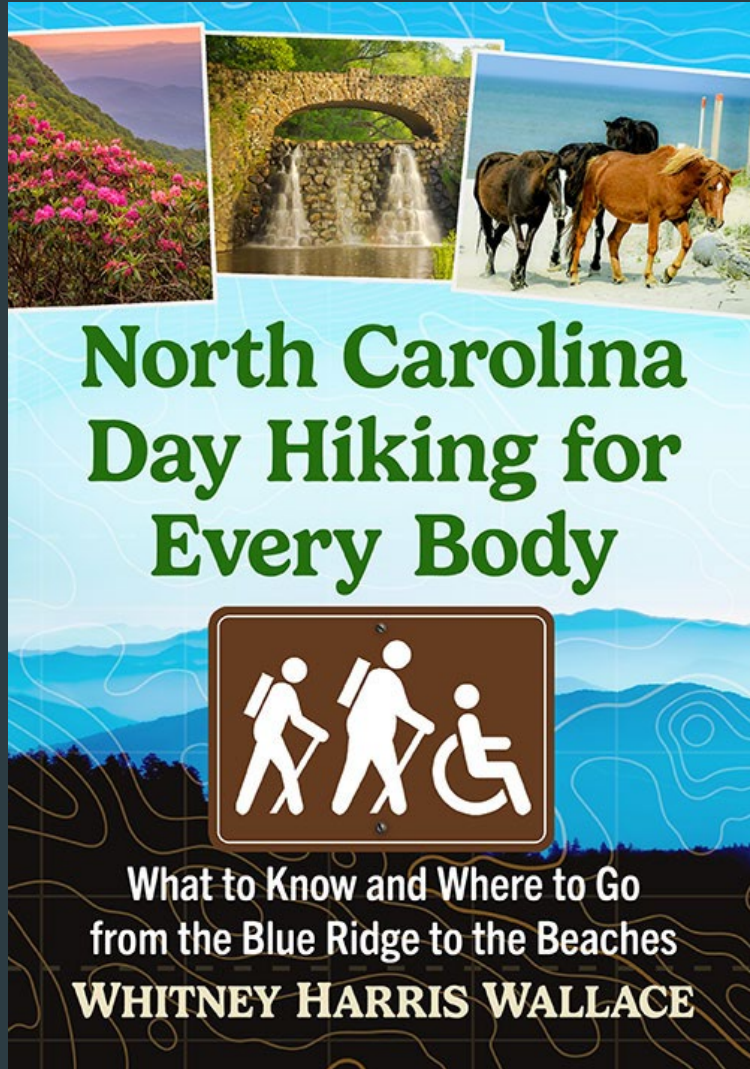
# Not-Your-Typical-Hikers

Hikers who lack the expected “athletic” build or ways of moving

This can lead others to assume certain things about their motivations, experience levels, and abilities without evidence to support those assumptions.







## A Bit About Me

- ▶ 255 hikes since October 2020
- ▶ 210 unique stretches of trail
- ▶ 57 North Carolina counties
- ▶ WFR, certified Forest Therapy Guide, Associate in Wilderness Medicine (University of Utah School of Medicine)
- ▶ IG: @whitneygoeshiking  
FB: Whitney Goes Hiking

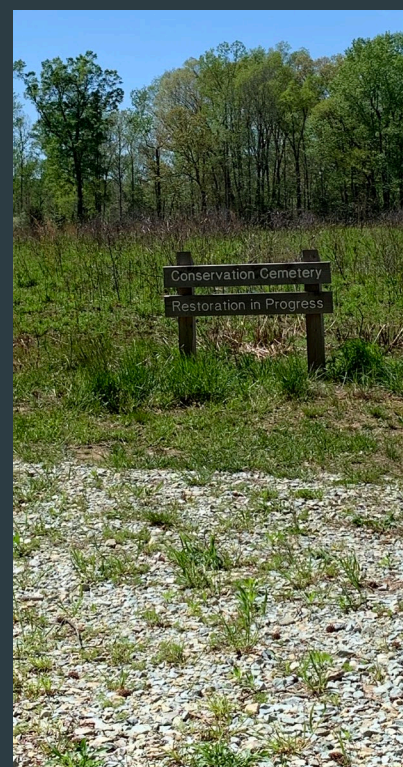
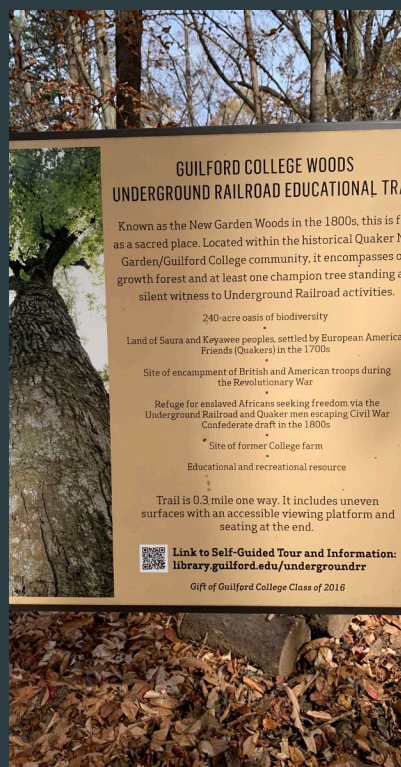


# Piedmont Plus Size Hikers

- ▶ Started in 2023
- ▶ Private FB group with over 440 members
- ▶ At least monthly planned group hikes October-May + “pop-up” hikes
- ▶ Other outdoor activities
- ▶ Welcoming, accepting, encouraging environment with specific conversation guidelines







# Why should you care?

## Why do YOU hike (or paddle, bike, etc.)?

# Why should you care?

- ▶ Linking people to places, and communities to each other
- ▶ Inspire all through conservation, education, and recreation
- ▶ Partner. Advocate. Build.
- ▶ Permanently protect natural resources with agricultural, cultural, recreational, ecological and scenic value
- ▶ Dedicated to saving land and connecting lives to nature
- ▶ Advocating for increased state investment in all types of trails statewide - hiking, paddle, mountain bike, equestrian, paved



# Why should you care?

Hikers in bigger bodies are members of a group that includes anywhere from 40 to 70 percent of Americans depending on how you define “obesity.”  
(NC=45%; SC=35%)





# Why should you care?

These people could prove to be valuable volunteers, advocates, and donors to the trail-related causes we all care so much about!





I am *not*  
saying...



But maybe...





# Fears



Same fears as  
many other  
hikers.



Being slow and being left  
behind.

# Barriers

- Access to appropriate gear that fits
- Access to skill-building opportunities in a safe situation
- Appropriately planned events



Counteracting these fears and barriers *starts* with offering a variety of events, providing complete information and setting the right vibe!





# Event Planning: Event Type

What type of events are you offering?

- ▶ Variety of types
- ▶ Variety of lengths
- ▶ Variety of trail types
- ▶ Variety of difficulties
- ▶ *Variety of paces*

Variety is the spice of life! (And one way to engage people with diverse needs!)

# Event Planning: Information

## Group Hike Event Description Sample



# Event Planning: Information

## What did you notice?

- ▶ Difficulty Description: Not just easy, moderate, difficult/strenuous
- ▶ Trail Description: Give specifics
- ▶ Pace/Timing Information: Give clear expectations
- ▶ Other information that might help someone be more comfortable



# Event Planning: Information

## Other Hike Description Thoughts

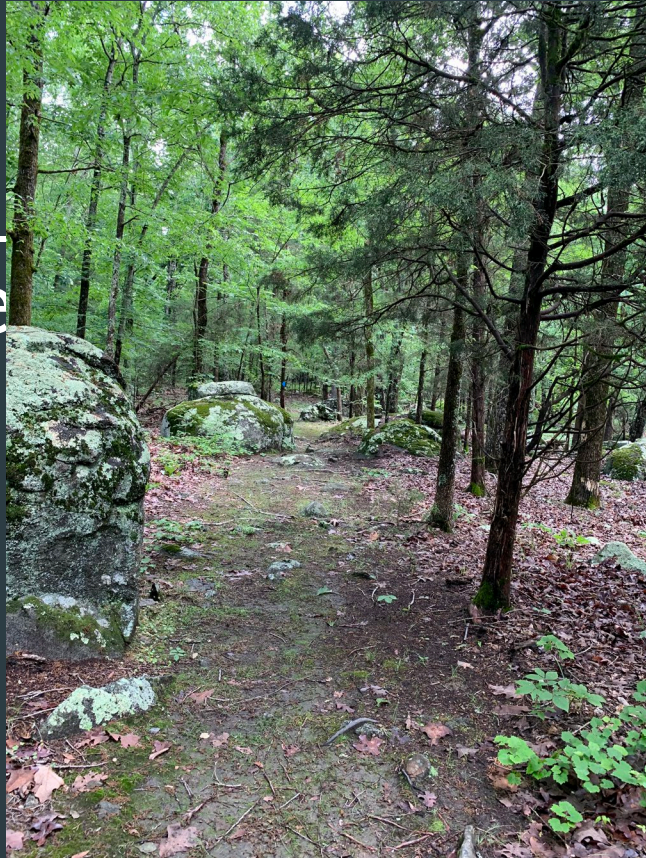
- ▶ “Just,” “Only,” “Beginner”; walk vs. hike
- ▶ Not just the “social media” picture



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# Event Planning: The Vibe

How would you define a successful event?













# Event Planning: The Vibe

## Leading Guided Hikes

- Set the tone and expectations.
- Don't make assumptions and provide a way to share information.
- Where do you lead from?
- Plan some stops.
- Everyone deserves a break.







“Wow! Just  
look at you  
go!”

If you  
wouldn't say it  
to a fit hiker,  
don't say it to  
a fat hiker!



# Volunteer Opportunities

- ▶ Raise your hand if your organization engages with volunteers.
- ▶ What types of things do they do?



# Volunteer Opportunities

- ▶ Trail maintenance and construction
- ▶ Trail steward
- ▶ Trail guides
- ▶ Habitat restoration and invasive species removal
- ▶ Special event support
- ▶ Community engagement
- ▶ Greeting and informing visitors
- ▶ Office support
- ▶ Serve on a committee







# You Belong

