

The Post and Courier

Cool Climblings: Seasonal weather and colorful fall sights draw Charleston area visitors, second-home shoppers to mountains

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Rocking chairs line the lengthy front porch of Legrand Guerry's second home in Mars Hill outside Asheville. Guerry lives in Mount Pleasant (Provided).

They're set apart by a few hundred road miles, 3,000-plus feet in elevation and 20 degrees temperature-wise, but the Carolinas coast and mountains share a trait.

Their inhabitants regularly spend spare time on each others' turfs.

Just ask Reggie Bray. Formerly of Hilton Head Island, the marketing director of 6,200-acre Blue Ridge Mountain Club in Blowing Rock, N.C., has lived 25 years in and around North Carolina's high peaks.



Stainless steel appliances mark the plush kitchen in this home near Highlands, N.C. (Provided).



Four Charleston couples own this house in Saluda, N.C., and rent it out on a regular basis (Provided).



This stone house in the North Carolina mountains near Highlands showcases a courtyard-like entrance (Provided).



A stone hearth sets off this cozy family room in the Saluda Mountain Home (Provided).

“People at the beach go to the mountains; people in the mountains go to the beach,” says Bray, who vacationed at Hilton Head this week.

Historically, the bulk of the visitor migration flows uphill but isn’t permanent. In pre-air conditioning days, Charlestonians and other coastal residents relocated to the mountains in the summer to flee the heat, returning when the oceanside weather moderated.

“You think about Charleston, an old historic town. The travel patterns to Blowing Rock are 160 to 200 years old,” Bray says.

Such upland vacation movements continue today, although the reasons for the trips aren’t just climate-related any more. “People escape to the mountains for peace of mind,” he says.

Take Mount Pleasant wife and husband Joyce Whitwell and Paul Whitwell. They own a second home in Rutherfordton, N.C., not far from Asheville. The couple enjoys the roomy residence, which they don’t rent out. The house serves as an ideal spot to entertain the grandkids.

“It’s like a second home: We bought it about eight years ago,” Joyce Whitwell says. “The house is new – literally. It’s very close to everything: the (Blue Ridge) Parkway, Lake Lure, Carl Sandburg house (in Flat Rock).”

While Charlotte’s just an hour away, Rutherfordton is “like an Andy Griffith town,” she says. “One main street with everything convenient — antiques, post office, hospital.”

In recent years, mountain trips grew fewer for the Whitwells. The grandchildren, now young adults, have “gone their own way,” she says. Paul Whitwell, executive chef at Charleston Place, can’t free up vacation time as easily.

“It’s foolish to have a beautiful home (that goes unused),” she says. The couple recently put the property up for sale for \$249,900.

The move comes as the mountain real estate market remains soft, according to real estate professionals and second-home owners.



The house in Mars Hill sports a green roof (Provided).



This extra-large bedroom in the stone house near Highlands showcases a knotted pine ceiling (Provided).



The Coon Dog Day parade, held in July, goes through downtown Saluda (Provided).



A large front lawn accentuates Paul and Joyce Whitwell's second home in Rutherfordton, N.C. (Provided).



A stream runs below the Nellis house outside of Highlands

East Cooper resident Legrand Guerry recently listed his 3,400-square-foot mountain home with scores of covered porches near Mars Hill, N.C.

"It is a beautiful place." An appraisal in 2011 set the value of the now nine-year-old residence at \$550,000. "The market has been stalled three to four years," Guerry says. "We just reduced (the price) to \$375,000." The tide may be turning. A recent Zillow report predicts an up to 2 percent yearly price appreciation in the mountains. "This is an opportunity to get in on the ground floor," he says.

Thomas L. Mathewes II, associate broker with Roadstead Real Estate Advisors in Charleston, joined with an Upstate agent to list a house in Cliff Ridge at Caesar's Head South Carolina. The mountain development stands near the small town of Cleveland. They've priced the home for sale at \$699,000.

The mountain market, he says, is "moving slower." Still, a buyer could come from Atlanta, Charlotte or Charleston and make a solid offer. "We just feel like Charleston is a great market for someone looking for second homes," he says.

Just as shoppers can scoop up value-priced properties for sale, travelers can find vacation rentals at competitive rates.

Four related Charleston couples pooled resources to purchase a mountain residence outside Saluda, N.C., that they share for vacation times and also lease out.

"We rent by the weekend and by the week," says Helen "Nitsa" Demos, who with husband Andrew Demos are among the ownership group. "We've had people rent three weeks," she says. Lease and rate information is available at www.saludamountainhome.com.

Before they bought the property, the Demos' would rent mountain homes for vacation trips. On one early July excursion during the Coon Dog Day festival in Saluda, a Realtor lead them to a three-bedroom property that sleeps 12. They rented the home for five years; then it went up for sale and they bought the house.

(Provided).



The Demos and kin residence, known as the Saluda Mountain Home, boasts an extra-long kitchen with plenty of seating (Provided).



Fresh fallen snow highlights Guerry's mountain house (Provided).



Greenish-yellow walls and children's motif make this bedroom in the Saluda house distinctive (Provided).



Wood floors and high ceilings set off the dining area of the Highlands home (Provided)

The ownership couples consist of Andrew and Nitsa Demos, son Harry Demos and wife Lindsey, daughter Andrea and husband Bill Turner and daughter Deborah and husband Brent Jonas.

They're enamored with the quaint town of Saluda, which claims a number of transplanted or vacationing Charlestonians in part because of its location – the first exit off Interstate 26 in North Carolina.

"It's meant less travel time," Nitsa Demos says.

Bray, of Blue Ridge Mountain Club, says the mountain market slogged through a rainy few months but the year's been good. "Our business history is the third and fourth quarter." After the spring and summer downpours, "the fall has been spectacular," he says.

For more information, visit www.blueridgemountainclub.com.

Another mountain resort with an upbeat outlook is The Reserve at Lake Keowee, which stands near the Georgia border in the South Carolina hamlet of Sunset.

"A sign of vacation home sales improvement, the Reserve will open a second phase of its Village Point neighborhood and open a model home within the Village Point neighborhood this fall," the resort said in an August release.

Backers cite National Association of Realtors figures that vacation home sales rose 10.1 percent from 2011 to 2012 and accounted for 11 percent of all purchase transactions last year.

"With the increase in vacation and second home sales in the past year, we want to meet the market demand and continue promoting the Village Point neighborhood," says Rutledge Livingston, director of sales.

Built 12 years ago by Greenwood Development, The Reserve boasts 700 members. The residents take advantage of a 200-slip marina, village center, signature golf course and more than 1,400 acres of parks, preserves, trails and green spaces. Homesites start in the \$100,000s and homes for less than \$500,000. To learn more,



Brilliant sunsets highlight the view from Guerry's 3,400-square-foot vacation home (Provided).



The Saluda mountain house includes a screened-in porch (Provided).



This house in the Highlands area shows off an exotic, carpeted bedroom (Provided).

visit www.ReserveAtLakeKeowee.com.

Not every mountain property is included in a resort, however. Some homeowners looking to sell face tough choices as the market just now slowly begins to recover.

Florence Flanagan, whose sister lives in Mount Pleasant, splits time between a condominium in Florida and a house near Cashiers, N.C., in Sapphire Valley. "We've lived here (in North Carolina) for 21 years," she says. "The colors are just beautiful (this year)," she says, citing the leaves changing as fall approaches.

The four-bedroom house provides sweeping views overlooking Hogback Mountain.

"I have a big family, 23 in the immediate family," Flanagan says. There's a large family room, and all the kids bring sleeping bags, she says.

Sapphire Valley provides plenty of amenities including golf, tennis, indoor and outdoor swimming pools and a fitness center.

But Flanagan notes that she's getting up in years. She recently put the house up for sale. Originally priced at \$600,000, the property's now listed at \$375,000.

"It's a beautiful place to live," says Flanagan, who may rent a place after the home sells. "I have mixed emotions."

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