

SSLA SPRING PACK TRAIL, DUPONT STATE FOREST, NC

By Vickie Sundberg

Weather prediction for April 25 & 26, 2015, is rainy and cold. Oh boy, sure sounds like the type of weather to go camping and hiking out in the woods, right? To get there is a 6-½ hour drive by myself across the state of North Carolina. Why in the world did I go anyhow? Cuz nowhere else in the whole Southeast can llamas get access to such an extensive recreational trail system that contains four major waterfalls, five lakes and 82 miles of trails and roads. I LOVE it!!!

The massive 10,300-acre DuPont State Recreational Forest (DSRF) was acquired in three major phases, spanning from 1995 to 2000. The name Conservation Road refers back to the history of how the Conservation Fund, a national non-profit organization, negotiated an agreement between DuPont and North Carolina



officials which facilitated the public purchase. The barn (above) is one of the few remaining buildings that remains from the DuPont company's executive retreat area. The barn and the foundations of their main lodge, kitchen and other buildings lie close to the old airstrip on the mountain top where we llama owners like to take pictures of the amazing scenery and, if we're lucky, can actually get a cell phone signal.

Left: Covered bridge

Below: First of the triple falls with the covered bridge visible at the top.

Friday, April 24, was comfortable and sunny mid-60 degree weather as trailers with llamas wound their way down Buck Forest Rd after going through the High Falls parking lot. This entry into DuPont leads us across a wooden covered bridge spanning clear rushing water that then cascades over the first of three sequential falls. Taking the next right after the bridge is Conservation Road and approximately 1 mile down that dusty gravel road a right onto Bridal Veil Falls road where we reach the fabulous horse barn. We are very fortunate for the opportunity to participate in a multiple use trail plan. DuPont's trail system is used by hikers, bikers, horseback riders, fishermen, and hunters (during season). They are also used by Hunger Games fans seeking out the sites of various locations in this forest used for scenes in those films.



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SSLA Spring Pack Trail, DuPont State Forest, NC, continued

Above: Horses, dogs, llamas, and bicyclists meet without incident on Conservation Road.

llamas were also weighed to be able to determine how much weight they would need to carry. For the Basic Pack Trail level, llamas carry 10 percent of their body weight and for the Advanced level, 15 percent. The weather was so comfortably warm, when these tasks were completed, all gathered together on the porch and enjoyed renewing old friendships,

catching up on llama news, and relaxing while the llamas rested in the lush paddocks.

Hank and Vickie Balch arrived early to get the barn opened up and ready for everyone to arrive. As participants arrived, and after settling in their llamas and sleeping arrangements, Vickie helped them through the maze of paperwork. Tom Wilson had stepped forward and the Pack Llama Trail Association, the sanctioning national organization for this trial, granted him an emergency trail certifier authorization. At the time, Karen and Kurt Pihera, the only PLTA certifiers in the Southeastern US were dealing with Kurt's serious health battle and so they were unavailable. But Tom did a great job and was very careful to make sure every rule and detail were perfect. And after the paperwork, he watched the participants accomplish the mandatory manageability tasks: Haltering, Loading & Unloading, Picketing, Saddling, and Pack Attachments. The

On Friday night we had rain and it got down into the low 40's but most of the attendees had prepared for the worst. Dawn saw some drizzle but breakfast cheered everyone with all the great food Shay Stratford bought and provided for everyone. Is it just me, or does freshly brewed coffee taste and smell even more delicious out in the woods? The mood was joyful and everyone prepared for the trails. The llamas wore their packs, the rules, safety, timing and routes were discussed, and the Advanced group set out. Tom supervised the Advanced group consisting of Hunter Snow with Chileans Simply Irresistible, Belinda Snow led

Below: 2015 Basic Trial Group on the end of the runway at DuPont State Forest, NC



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SSLA Spring Pack Trail, DuPont State Forest, NC, continued

As the time passed, the skies started to partially clear, the sun broke through occasionally and temperatures rose to make it a very comfortable Spring day—perfect for a pack trial. The various obstacles were all successfully negotiated and all the llamas, both Advanced and Novice, passed. Once back at the barn the group spent the afternoon talking, laughing, and Susan worked on a rug made of llama fiber. Others hiked up to enjoy the magnificence of Bridal Veil Falls.

The weekend of the SSLA Spring Pack Trial was perfect! I am so glad I came and wasn't deterred by the threat of a little negative weather forecast. And yes, I will be back next year. You come too, if you can.

Left: Hank Balch leads The Joker through the water obstacle while steward Kathy Devaul looks on.

Below: Sunny and Queenie enjoy the ample pasture adjacent to the barn.

ALCL Steeler, and Debbie Andrews with her ALCL Spats. Deb and Ulin Andrews travelled from the far north, Oakland IL, for this event. Shortly after that group departed, the larger Basic group left with Shay Stratford and Kathy Devaul as the Basic Trail Stewards. Mary Rose Collins, came all the way from Inverness FL with Casadellama Charlie and Vicki Sundberg led Sanibel Sunshine. Susan Gawarecki led Framework's Captain Canuck and Hank Balch led The Joker. Tanner Queen, a youth in the Balch's 4-H group led their llama Tart's Reflection (aka Jammie). Vicki Sundberg had brought a second female llama and Tanner's younger sister, Hannah Queen led Queenie but they were going along just for fun. Queenie is a llama that was surrendered to Southeast Llama Rescue several years ago. If the previous owner was accurate, Queenie would now be 23 years old but this ccara is still in GREAT shape. Vicki wanted to get her two female llamas out on a fun Girls' Camping Weekend.



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