

south carolina

WEST ASHLEY GREENWAY



Waterways and trailways braid into gently meandering paths in South Carolina's Lowcountry, where the West Ashley Greenway thaws the chill of winter with sweet Carolina sunshine.

South Carolina lends Lowcountry style to the West Ashley Greenway.

Ambling down the extra-wide path of the West Ashley Greenway, smiling at passers-by, maybe pausing at a bridge to watch an egret poke around in the silvery water and muddy banks of Stono River, you might as well get used to the easygoing feeling of this South Carolina rail-trail.

Running 10.5 miles in the Johns Island and West Ashley neighborhoods outside of Charleston, the greenway is 100-percent backyard ease coupled with the charm of a remote nature preserve. Never mind that Highway 17 is just a block or so to the north at all times—you'll barely hear it and rarely see it. But the accessibility can't be beat.

Pick up the trail near the base of the West Ashley Memorial Bridge behind the South Windermere Shopping Center, where the trailhead has a distinct pocket-

park feel, and start heading west. (You can take a brief jog east on the trail, but it dead-ends in approximately one mile near the Ashley River.) The first half of the dirt trail is the most popular with after-dinner walkers and families stretching their legs. Many of these trailside residents use make-

shift bridges—fashioned from abandoned rail ties and laid across gullies—to access the raised berm of the former rail line.

The trail is lined in a thick pine canopy that also sports Live Oaks draped in Spanish moss; Dwarf Palmettos dot the wood- and marshland floor; and scarlet Azaleas light up like small brush fires in yards along the way. Enjoy the shady, cool greenery while you can. Near Mile 6 the trail opens up to sun-baked agricultural fields. For the remainder of the trail, the tree-lined path is less protective, so sunscreen is a must, even during the peak of winter.

At this point in the trail, the corridor narrows to a gravelly causeway, and

you begin crossing the latticework of Lowcountry waterways that mark this region. Broad wetlands flank the trail, and in the reedy distance you can spot wooden boardwalks stretching over the tide toward docked boats. At each of the several trail bridges, you're likely to meet laidback anglers fishing for "whatever

will bite." And since this is the more secluded section of the trail, bicyclists (preferably on hybrid or mountain bikes) will often clip along at a speedy rate, possibly with their dog gamely romping along behind them.

As the trail arcs to the south toward its woody end, keep your eyes and ears open for the sound of a train whistle from the CSX line across the water to the north. As reminders of rail-trail history go, it's an impressive site, especially when you consider that the corridor you're standing on owes its peaceful presence to the iron horse age. With that in mind, and the scent of sweet grass on the wind, enjoy your return trip as backyards and playgrounds blend into one on the West Ashley Greenway.



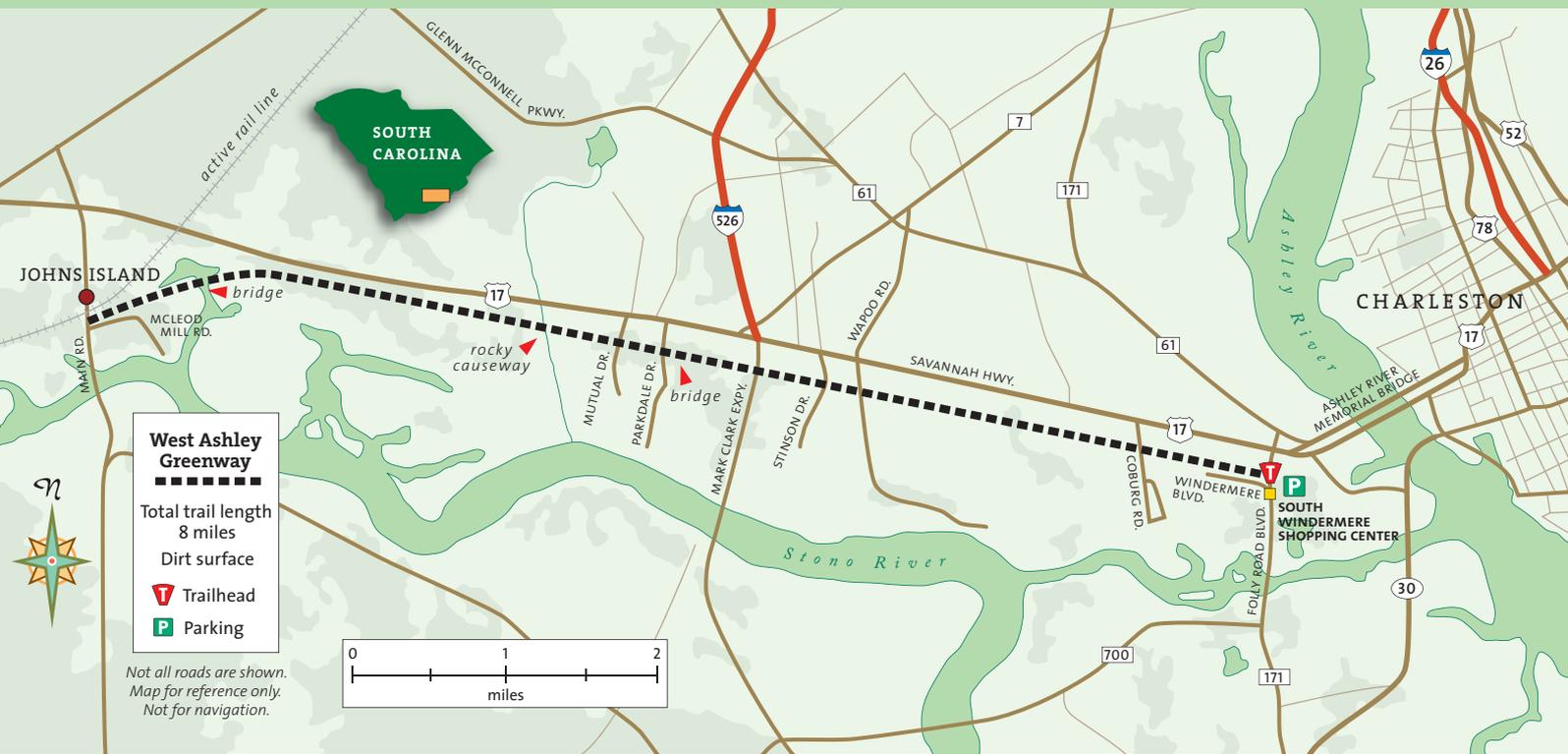
(Clockwise from top) A young angler on the causeway hopes for a catch; the wide pathway accommodates all users—four-footed and otherwise; a family takes a late afternoon stroll on the rail-trail; the marshy waterways of the Stono River off the rail-trail.



GETTING THERE: To reach the trailhead from downtown Charleston, take U.S. Highway 17 west across the Ashley River Memorial Bridge. Half a mile past the bridge, turn left on Folly Road. At the second light, turn right on Windermere Boulevard and enter the South Windermere Shopping Center. Park beside the trailhead on the north side of the shopping center parking lot. Though there is a trailhead on the western terminus, beginning at the eastern endpoint is recommended.

WHERE TO STAY AND EAT: The Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (www.charlestoncvb.com; 423 King Street, Charleston, S.C. 29403; 843.853.8000) is a comprehensive resource for accommodations and dining in the region.

RENTALS: While several places in the region provide bicycle rentals, most offer single-speed beach cruisers and street bikes. Hybrids are recommended for the West Ashley Greenway, and some visitors might even be more comfortable on a mountain bike toward the end of the trail. A better option than renting is to bring your own bike if feasible, or plan for a leisurely day of walking.



WANT MORE: For an interactive map, visit www.TrailLink.com and enter West Ashley Greenway in "Find a Trail." For more information, visit www.sctrails.net/Trails/ALLTRAILS/Railtrails/WestAshGreenway.html or call the Charleston Department of Parks at 843.724.7321.

On the western end of the West Ashley Greenway, time your trip right and you'll spot a train on the active CSX line across the marsh.

