



The Lost *Shortia*: HBS Oconee Bells 2025!
Benefitting the Highlands Botanical Gardens @ Highlands Biological Station

Sunday 16 March 2025 • 10:30 AM - 6:00 PM

with

Dr. Jim Costa
Executive director and professor
Highlands Biological Station of Western Carolina University

A day of exploration to learn about the ecology and curious history of the "lost and found" Oconee Bells (*Shortia galacifolia*), and see some of the largest remaining populations of this rarity at peak bloom in its native habitat!!

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Our program opens in the Holcombe Room at the Visitor's Center of Devil's Fork State Park on Lake Jocassee — very near, as the crow flies (or swims...), to the very site where naturalist André Michaux came upon this mystery plant in 1787! HBS executive director, plant nerd, and historian of science Jim Costa will tell the tale of Highlands' most iconic flower — *Shortia galacifolia*, the storied Oconee Bells — a tale of botanical mystery, intrigue, and perseverance. Learn the story of French Royal Botanist André Michaux and why he came to Highlands in 1787, and the ensuing century-long efforts by Harvard botanist Asa Gray and others to rediscover what became known as Michaux's "Lost *Shortia*." We will also learn what later research has revealed about additional *Shortia* species in the US and Asia, and the origin of the curious eastern North American - eastern Asia botanical connection that mystified Asa Gray when he first discovered this remarkable distributional pattern in the 1850s.

After the presentation we'll take a leisurely walk on the Oconee Bells Nature Trail, where we will see large populations of the fabulous Oconee Bells in bloom, followed by a 3 h pontoon boat trip with Jocassee Lake Tours to see little-known and remote populations of Oconee Bells at peak bloom in its native habitat! Along the way we will visit beautiful hidden coves and waterfalls of Lake Jocassee, learn about the history of the lake, and keep an eye out for wildlife and other early-blooming wildflowers.

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Cost: \$200

[Presentation, optional transportation to Devil's Fork State Park,
and 3 h *Shortia* expedition on Lake Jocassee with Jocassee Lake Tours!]

Note: This program will take place at Devil's Fork State Park on Lake Jocassee, about an hour from Highlands. An HBS van will transport any program participants wishing to ride to Lake Jocassee with us, or you may wish to drive separately. Details will be provided closer to the program date, but the estimated time of departure from HBS will be 9:00 AM.

Program Details

Location: The program will begin at 10:30 AM on Sunday 16 March in the Holcombe Room at the Visitor's Center of Devil's Fork State Park (southcarolinaparks.com/devils-fork; 161 Holcombe Cir, Salem, SC 29676). Optional transportation will be provided from Highlands Biological Station to Devil's Fork State Park, details to be provided (approx. 1 hr drive time via US-64 E, NC-107 S and SC-130 S; pack a lunch, water, etc.).

- 10:30 AM André Michaux and The Lost *Shortia*, by Jim Costa – and Q&A.
- 12:00 PM Oconee Bells Nature Trail: We will not hike the entire 2.4 km/1.5 mi loop trail, but do an out-and-back hike for approx. an hour+ to see the largest populations of Oconee Bells. As a bonus, we'll also follow our noses try to find the rare Sweet Pinesap (*Monotropsis odorata*) in bloom. The trail is easy to moderate. Lunch trailside.
- 1:45 PM Convene at nearby dock area to prepare for 2 PM departure with Kay and Brooks Wade / Jocassee Lake Tours!
- 2:00 PM -
5:00 PM Excursion with Jocassee Lake Tours to see remote *Shortia* populations and other sights on Lake Jocassee.
- 5 PM Return to Devil's Fork State Park; depart for Highlands by ~5:15 PM.
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Sweet Pinesap (*Monotropsis odorata*)

What to pack:

Lake Jocassee is at an elevation of 1,100', some 3,000 feet lower than the Highlands-Cashiers plateau. It should be warmer than Highlands, possibly considerably warmer, but it's best to be prepared with layers as well as a rain jacket (just in case). The boat(s) we will be on with Jocassee Lake Tours have canopy shelters.

The Oconee Bells Nature Trail is easy to moderate, with some small hills:

<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/us/south-carolina/oconee-bells-nature-trail>

<https://www.sctrails.net/trails/trail/oconee-bells-nature>

Recommended items:

- Lunch
- Water
- Hat
- Sunglasses (in case a bright sunny day on the lake)
- Camera (and binoculars if you're into birding)
- Sturdy walking shoes
- Rain jacket and fleece – just in case it's wet and/or cool
- Hiking stick/trekking pole – if you are used to using one, but generally not needed here.
- Enthusiasm!

