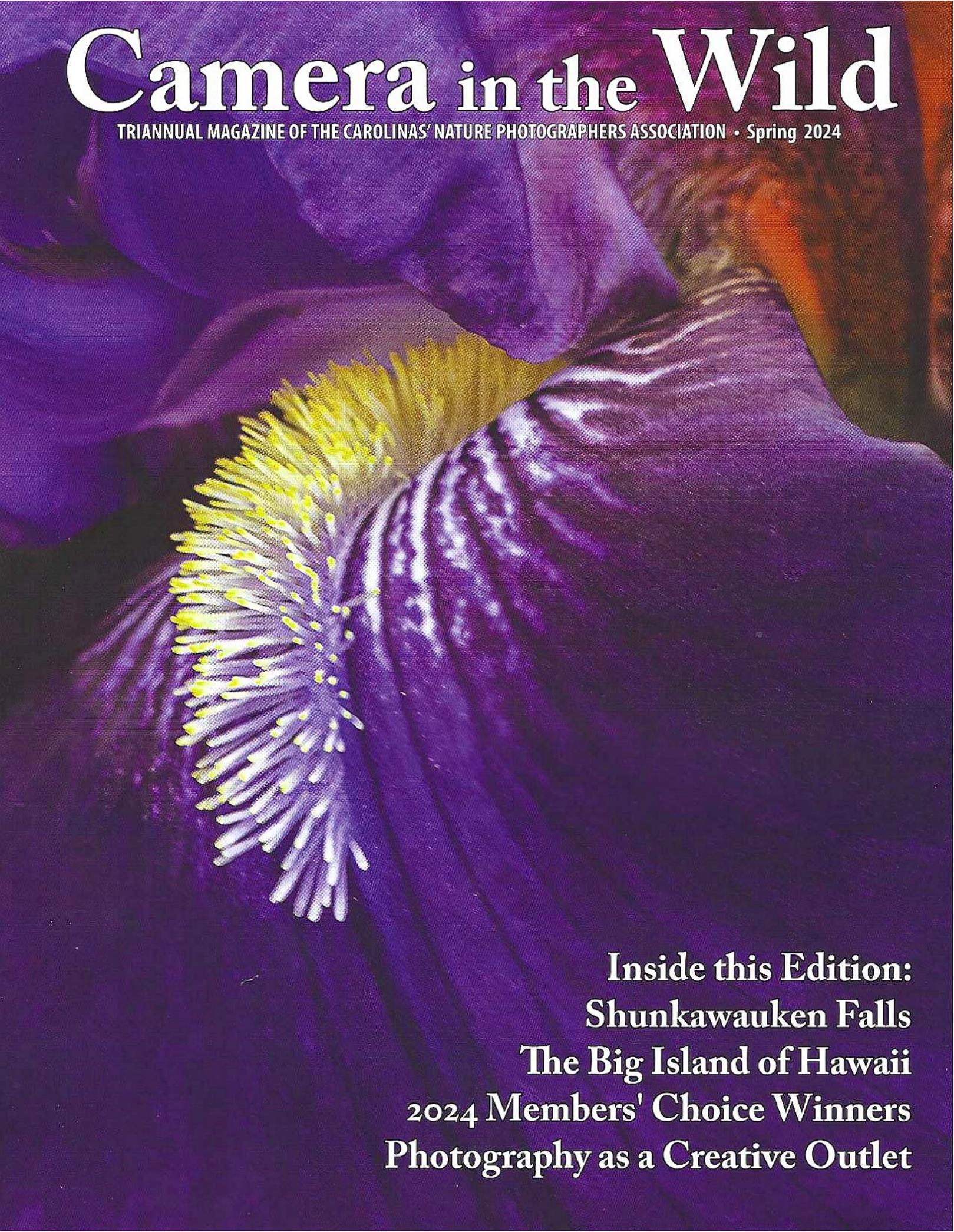


# Camera in the Wild

TRIENNIAL MAGAZINE OF THE CAROLINAS' NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS ASSOCIATION • Spring 2024



Inside this Edition:  
Shunkawauken Falls  
The Big Island of Hawaii  
2024 Members' Choice Winners  
Photography as a Creative Outlet



# Shunkawauken Falls and White Oak Mountain

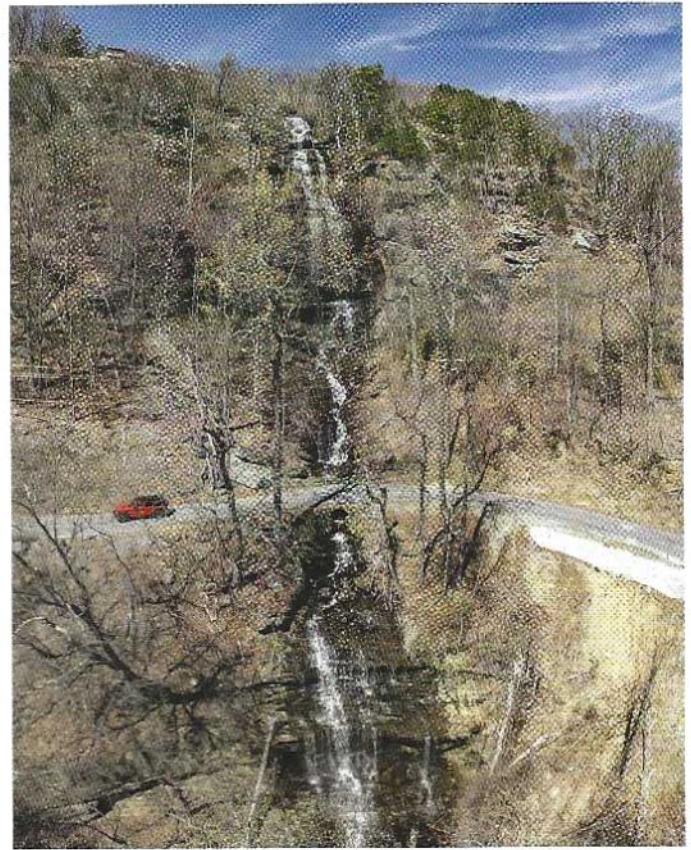
By Hal Bryant  
Charlotte Region  
hbryant1950@gmail.com

**H**ave you ever planned a photo expedition to your favorite waterfall location, only to find yourself, upon arrival, in the company of many other photographers or sightseeing families who are breaking your photographic artistic concentration? What if there is a 150' tall waterfall far away from the hordes of visitors and that you can drive right up to? I am referring to Shunkawauken Falls, near the top of peaceful White Oak Mountain, just north of Columbus, NC in Polk County. The waterfall is on the property of the White Oak Mountain Association (WOMA), which is very protective of the mountain, maintaining a natural and non-commercial environment for the mountain homeowners. Visitors can admire the falls from White Oak Mountain Road, the lightly traveled state road that transverses the falls. You can park nearby and walk to within feet of the falls, camera equipment in hand. But folks are wisely not allowed to cross the rail fence to climb on the rocks or to wade in the water at the base of the falls.

Shunkawauken Falls is fed by small lakes on the mountaintop a few hundred yards upstream. The lakes are fed by mountain streams. The flow is steady but can naturally slow some during a dry spell. Originally, the waterfall name was Horse Creek Falls, but property owners in 1890 thought a Native American Indian sounding name would be appropriate. Hence, "Shunkawauken" – possibly named after an Native American chief or originating from the similar sounding Lakota word for "Horse"?

I enjoy photographing the falls from the roadside, often bracing the camera on the rail fence for slow shutter speeds if I am without a tripod. Traffic is light but be careful since cars will occasionally pass. Another word of caution: there is a very steep drop off on the opposite side of the road (no railing there!). Don't back up – to your doom! – while trying to frame the perfect shot!

With the bare trees of winter, the falls are even more visible, and nighttime long exposures that incorporate light painting are



*This early spring drone photo illustrates how White Oak Mountain Road bisects the waterfall. The water flows under the road through a large culvert.*

much fun. Fortunately, the White Oak Mountain Association encourages "dark skies" on the mountain, so no stray house lights illuminate the falls.

My other photographic pursuit of the falls is to capture their beauty from the air with my drone. There is a house beside the stream near the top of the falls, so I respect their privacy by not flying high enough to be at the house level. Drones should always be within the pilot's visual line of sight and away from the hard-to-spot drone killer tree limbs anyway.

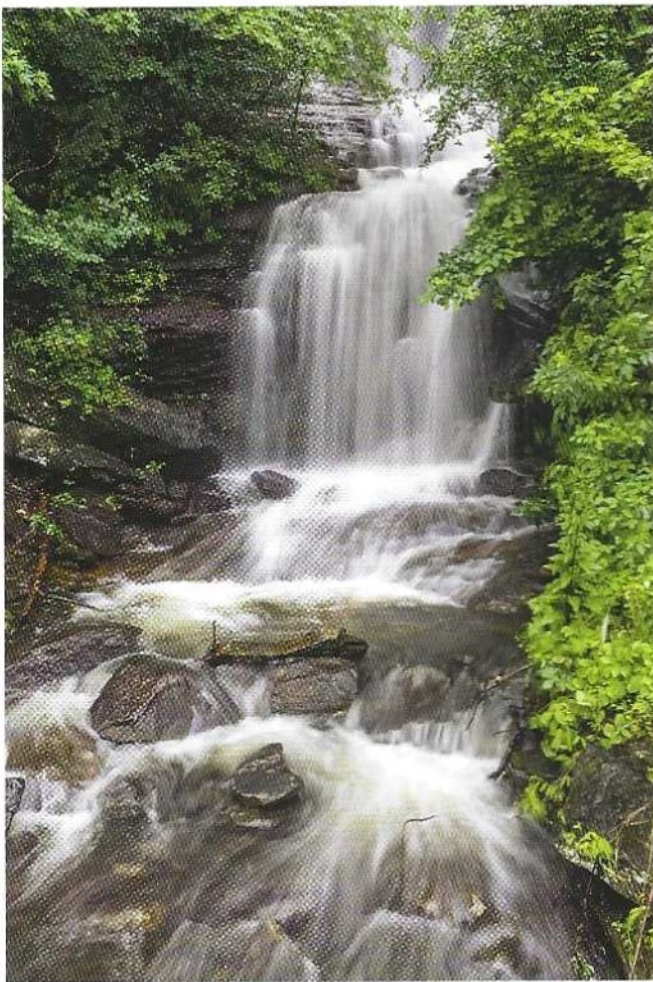
While at the falls, you can park in off-road areas both before and after the falls.

Upon leaving the falls, you can continue up White Oak Mountain Road for two more scenic locations. Past the falls a half mile or so, you will come to a plateau where you can pull over to admire a panoramic view toward Columbus and upstate South Carolina. This area is referred to as "Sunrise Rock." Then continuing for approximately a mile, you will come to another panoramic view looking to the west and northwest, referred to as "Sunset Rock." A friendly nearby property owner allows visitors to pull off to admire the view during daytime hours, but not at night. At this location White Oak Mountain Road changes to Skyuka Mountain Road. Here you can turn around and go back the way you came, or travel down the mountain on Skyuka Mountain Road, which eventually ends at a stop sign. Turning left onto Skyuka Road will take you back to Columbus.

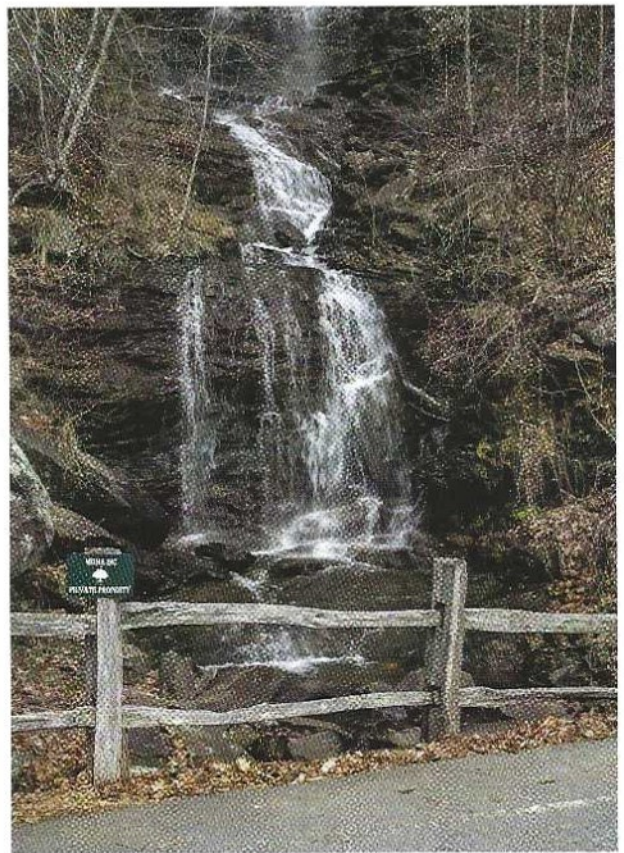


*Continuing about another mile brings you to "Sunset Rock", with a very wide views extending from the west toward Mount Pisgah and to the northwest toward Lake Lure.*





*White Oak Mountain Road usually does not have much traffic, so you should have good luck setting up a roadside tripod for blurry moving water photos. But do watch and listen for vehicles. This photo was at: ¼ second, F18, ISO 100.*



*A rail fence and signs are to discourage folks from climbing on the rocks or getting in the water, which can be especially dangerous.*



*While on the mountain, you may drive another one-half mile to "Sunrise Rock." The view there spans from the southeast to the southwest.*



*Another drone aerial photo with a dizzying view of water falling toward the rocks and road below. The distance to the road is exaggerated with the drone's 24mm (equivalent) lens.*

**Getting There: Shunkawauken Falls**

**White Oak Mountain Road, Columbus, NC**

**Elevation: 2360 feet**

**GPS: 35.272191, -82.214723**

**Stream: Horse Creek**

*From the town of Columbus, turn north in front of Columbus Baptist Church onto Houston Road. In approximately ½ mile bear to the right (still on Houston Road). Go another ½ mile and turn left onto White Oak Mountain Road (do not turn into the White Oak subdivision, which is right before the main turn). The falls are about two miles up.*