

The Saluda Riverwalk and its Sentinel Destination: Boyd Island Sanctuary

by
Mary Taylor Haque

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The River Alliance, The Darnall W. and Susan F. Boyd Foundation, and their hosts of partners and teams are putting the final touches on a fabulous new project that will transport you into a new year with a revitalizing energy and excitement! The new Saluda Riverwalk in Columbia reveals stunning views, lots of birds, and lush vegetation along the vibrant three-mile pathway. The project is funded by Richland County via the Transportation Penny and will be turned over for the City of Columbia to manage when it is complete. It is not yet technically open, so early visitors are parking along Candi Lane and accessing the trail through a still rugged parking lot. Originally proposed as a part of the Three Rivers Greenway in 1996, the Alliance has been working on the Saluda Riverwalk since 2003.



photo: Mary Haque

The walk leads to the most dramatic destination point I have experienced in the midlands: The Sanctuary at Boyd Island.

Surrounded by swirling waters of various colors due to different sediment loads, the four-acre island stands sentinel above the confluence of the Saluda and Broad rivers as they flow together to become the Congaree.

You may have seen it from bridges, canoed down sections of the rivers, and walked other trails, but the revitalizing yet calming feeling that comes with being surrounded by the turbulent waters of these rivers as they merge to form the Congaree at the tip of Boyd Island is unique.

The island is a glorious destination for the citizens of South Carolina and the world, and provides a perfect exclamation point at the terminus of the magical Saluda Riverwalk.

As I stepped onto the bridge to Boyd Island for the first time....

a Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) soared skyward,



photos: Imtiaz Haque



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Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) floated on the river,

and a Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) hunted along the water's edge.



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Mike Dawson, Executive Director of the River Alliance, says to look for river otters (*Lontra canadensis*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), and North American beaver (*Castor canadensis*) along the trail. Wayside exhibits on cultural and natural history of the area were created by the State museum, so be on the lookout for those as well.

The exfoliating bark of American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) allows the dramatic white new bark to show off against blue skies in the winter landscape. It intercepts logs swept down river during flooding events.



Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) drapes from river birch (*Betula nigra*) trees, giving parts of this midlands walk a low country feel.

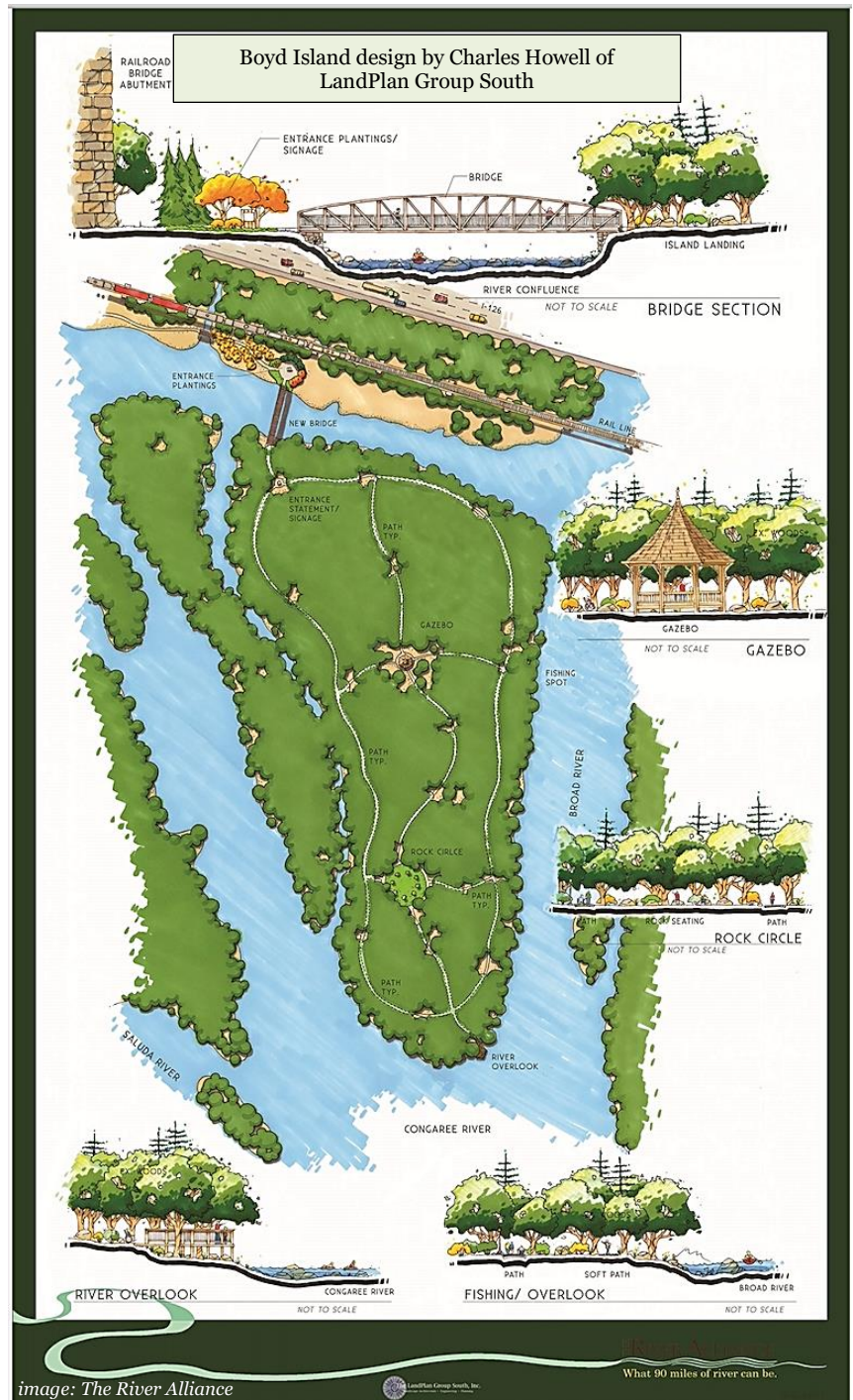
The designed landscape incorporates angular steel and granite benches, seats, and tables by local artist/welder Chris Styke. Before beginning the three-mile return walk, it's nice to sit and contemplate the landscape, absorb the rivers' energy, and ponder the history of this area.

Susan Boyd and George Bailey with the Boyd Foundation are excited about plans for an artistic gazebo at the south end of the island. Charles Howell of LandPlan Group South is designing the island trails and features including the gazebo, which incorporates forms from an elegant and rare colony of Shoals Spider Lilies (*Hymenocallis coronaria*) which live nearby and bloom mid-May to mid-June. They grow in crevices between granite boulders in the riverbed, an unusual habitat for flowering bulbs.

Working through One Columbia, Susan and George have also commissioned Chicago artist Renee Bemis to create sculptures of native animals around the island to highlight the local fauna.

If you want to experience the majesty and power of the three rivers, Boyd Island Sanctuary, and the entire Saluda Riverwalk project, you can access the trail from Candi Lane near another travel worthy destination: Riverbanks Zoo and Botanical Garden.

The Saluda Riverwalk received a prestigious "Excellence on the Waterfront" award from the Waterfront Center, an international organization that recognizes visionary plans and outstanding projects from around the world each year. The South Carolina chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects recently presented Kenneth B. Simmons and Associates a 2020 general design award for this magnificent project. Accessible for wheelchairs, strollers, bicycles, and fishing, this is an easy walk along elevated boardwalks and concrete pathways.



If you are planning other recreational outings on the lower Saluda River, be sure to check the Dominion Energy webpage on "Current Conditions"; be on the lookout for rapidly rising water, and pay attention to warning lights and sirens. Dominion releases water from the Lake Murray Dam, and flows may change dramatically at any time and without prior warning. When sirens or lights are activated, leave the river immediately, and enjoy the phenomenology of water from the elevated boardwalks of the Riverwalk.

It seems counterintuitive to be able to experience nature so close to a hydroelectric power facility, transmission lines, railroad trestles, interstate highways and the center of our capital city, but the urban infrastructure seems to disappear as one experiences the joy of seeing our three dynamic rivers and their greenways highlighted as one of Columbia's greatest assets.