

Scent of the Season

Written by Mark Shaffer

Tuesday, 01 November 2016 13:30 - Last Updated Wednesday, 02 November 2016 09:32



It's beginning to smell like fall; the Backyard Tourist



follows his nose...

Story and Photos by Mark Shaffer

Southerners have an inborn appreciation of the autumnal equinox for a number of reasons. It signals the gradual demise of summer's stifling tyranny - a time when our primary occupation is staying cool and still as possible. With the cooler weather talk turns to football and weekend oyster roasts. Overnight the oppressive murky haze that blurs the summer horizon is gone, replaced by a brilliant blue. The breeze off the marsh is crisper, fresher even as the brilliant green of the spartina grass begins to drain away. The scent of wood smoke hangs in the air.

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Fall resuscitates us. We begin to move again and enjoy it. Instead of avoiding heat we seek it by the edge of backyard fire pits. Visitors of all sorts – feathered and finned included – return and suddenly there is more to do in a single weekend than all of August combined. Even a hurricane can't dampen our enthusiasm for the season. It comes with the territory. Welcome to Fall in the Lowcountry.



We're naturally predisposed to the supernatural around here and the Lowcountry is loaded with specters to spare. One of the best known is the Land's End Light, famous for spooking locals and tourists alike for decades and luring some to their end. Find it if you dare by taking highway 21 out to St. Helena Island and hanging a right on MLK Road in the heart of Frogmore. A few miles past Penn Center where the road turns long and straight, pull over and watch for a glowing phantasm over the road. Some say it's the spirit of a decapitated confederate soldier searching for his head. Others believe it's the ghost of a slave separated from his family and literally sold down the river. Should you catch sight of it you might think twice before giving chase. At least two people have followed it to their doom.

In historic Beaufort the Old Point is particularly lousy with ghosts, the most famous is the ironically named Monsieur Gauche, said to be the spirit of a 16th century Huguenot dwarf. Appropriately enough Gauche haunts the old home called The Castle and is known for tapping out coded messages and leaving red handprints on windows – gauche, indeed.

The privately owned Castle is off limits, but you can still get intimate with the indigenous undead (or at least their stories) with Evelene Stevenson's The Spirit of Old Beaufort Tours. Check out her entire slate of tours at www.thespiritofoldbeaufort.com. The "Whispers From the Grave Lantern Tour" tour is a half-mile, 90-minute walk by lamplight through the centuries with Evelene leading the way in period costume. Call for details at 843-525-0459.

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In downtown Beaufort most of the tours are headquartered in or near the City Marina at Bay and Charles Streets. Climb aboard one of the famous horse-drawn Southurn Rose Buggies (www.southurnrose.com) for a leisurely carriage ride while your driver guides you through time and history.



For a different perspective on this 300 year old river town climb aboard Captain Dick's 30 passenger Prince of Tides. Large pods of bottle-nosed dolphin are not unusual and sometimes come right up to the boat (remember, no feeding). The cruise runs right past some of the town's harder to see estates, including Tidalholm where both *The Big Chill* and *The Great Santini* were filmed. Pack a camera and binoculars. Snacks and beverages are available for purchase on board. Call ahead to 843-524-4422 for tour times and reservations.

If you prefer to get on the water under your own power Kim and David at Beaufort Kayak Tours offer options for experienced and novice paddlers alike. Both are certified Master Naturalists and City of Beaufort History Tour Guides. "This time of year we really emphasize the ACE basin tour," says David. ACE is the acronym for the estuarine system created by the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto Rivers. Float among giant cypress trees through the remnants of ancient rice plantations while snowy egrets, herons and ibis stalk the tall grasses and bald eagles circle overhead. BKT offers both a two-hour and four-hour ACE paddle, the latter covers 9 miles of unspoiled Lowcountry wetlands. Check out the options at www.beaufortkayaktours.com.

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<http://www.studioandco.com>



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