

Fish Camp

Blue Mountain Lake has always been a special place for Mr. Outdoors. It all started out in the late seventies when a close friend wanted to go camping. We had a great time swimming and fishing. The water was up in the old concrete block dressing facility at Waveland Park and we caught little bait stealers (one pound black bass) all day long. Those were the care free days of adolescence. Little did I know at that time that I would get the opportunity to live there some day.

So, let's fast forward to the mid-nineties. It is no secret that I love to duck hunt. I was hunting with Larry Hillyard from Dardanelle when he said that he had some land around Blue Mountain Lake. We drove over and Larry showed me a tract that was pretty rough. It had a path around the perimeter where the dozer had cleared a path. It was located on what is now known as North Lake Road and would become known as Wood Duck Retreat on Duck Camp Lane. I was coaching at West Fork at the time, but I had gotten to know Larry when his wife Margaret Hillyard who taught at Dardanelle Middle School introduced us and we became hunting buddies. Larry (Big Daddy) Hillyard and I were very involved in the Yell County Wildlife Federation and loved to improve wildlife habitat and take our fair share of game for the freezer.

As Wood Duck Retreat became a spring break and camping destination for Mr. Outdoors, a vision was taking shape. Let's have a deer camp and invite all my friends to come. Phone calls were being made and discussions were being held around the camp fire at Carden Bottoms dove camp on the Petit Jean and Arkansas Rivers. There was one problem, just about everyone that I talked to already had a deer camp to attend. So, the idea of fish camp was born. The fall was covered, so it was decided that spring was the best time to have it. The only problem was that Spring Break was usually reserved for family gatherings.

The stories and guest that have attended fish camp over the years are many. However, the one thing that every camp revolves around is food. Fish have been caught, but it is mainly a time for the guys to unwind and tell fish stories. As a matter of fact, at one time it was suggested that fish camp be called chicken camp because one of our connections could get chicken from Tyson and there were a few years when we ate a lot of chicken. One year we had a crawfish boil and then we got smart and asked Pete Colclasure (the old man of the lake) if he would supply the fish for camp. Luckily he said yes. We all had full time jobs you know. Pete always said, he fished during the week, so the tax payers could have the weekend and pay for his retirement.

It has been eighteen years now and Wood Duck Retreat was sold a couple of years ago, but fish camp lives on. A close friend has a house on Table Rock Lake in Missouri. We haven't fished there yet, but we have played a lot of golf. So, this year the debate was if we wanted to rename the event golf camp instead of fish camp. Everyone voted to keep it fish camp and I'm sure we'll

fish there someday. However, after eighteen years, the compromise was that we decided to have fish camp during The Master's week every year from now on.