

A canoeing adventure

Outdoor enthusiasts battle millpond waters

By LEISHA PHILLIPS

It was just going to be one of those Sunday summer outings. The kind that takes you to the great outdoors, promising a bit of adventure and daring but mostly just plain fun.

I thought it was great idea. So did my brother, Darryl, and our two friends, Lynne and Wally. Or at least that's what they said as the four of us drove from my house in Murfreesboro, a small town in northeastern Hertford County, across the scenic Chowan River into rural Gates County.

But somehow by the time that July afternoon had faded into night, my great idea was all washed-up — literally.

Destination? Merchants Millpond State Park, located in the center of Gates County just a couple of miles northeast of the largest community and county seat, Gatesville.

Quiet, undeveloped (improvements totaling over \$355,000 are expected to begin sometime late this fall), this 950-acre park offers camping and canoeing to nature-loving groups, families and individuals. Spanish moss drapes the cypress trees creating old men's beards and bringing to mind storybook memories of the Deep Old South. Cypress knees, lily pads, parrots feather, swamp rose and wax myrtle, to name a few, add color and charm to the 600-acre pond.

Fish jump, turtles play peek-a-boo on rotting logs and the water seems to go on for ever. Oh, and don't forget the snakes. Well, they may leave you alone.

What better way to spend a Sunday afternoon than canoeing in the rustic outdoors and enjoying a summer day, the four of us thought. And it was a perfect day with only a hint of rain in the forecast for late afternoon.

"Equipment" for the afternoon can include bathing suits (just in case of an unforeseen accident), a towel, shorts or jeans.

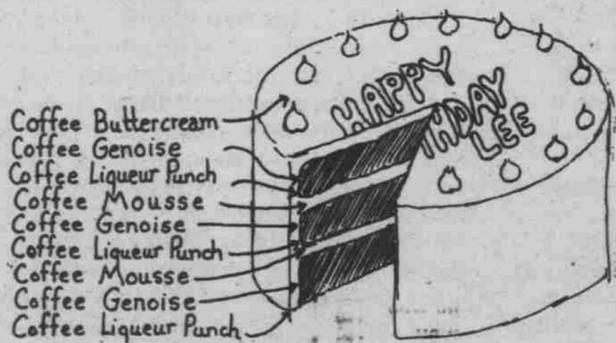
Canoes can be rented for \$1 per hour or \$6 per day. We paid for two for two hours. The fellows got the paddles and cushions and we were off.

What a breeze! The first hour we paddled around marvelling at the serene beauty of the park, yet all the while making sure to keep those little red marker flags on the trees in sight.

Strokes, stroke, stroke. This was easier than I had thought. But had I thought too soon?

Somewhere during the second hour I noticed those little red marker flags had disappeared. And suddenly Wally and I had trouble with cypress knees and stumps appearing out of nowhere and bringing us to an abrupt halt. Naturally, they didn't bother Lynne and Darryl's canoe. But fearless sportsmen (or is that sportspersons?) that we were, we refused to let that deter us. Well, only periodically.

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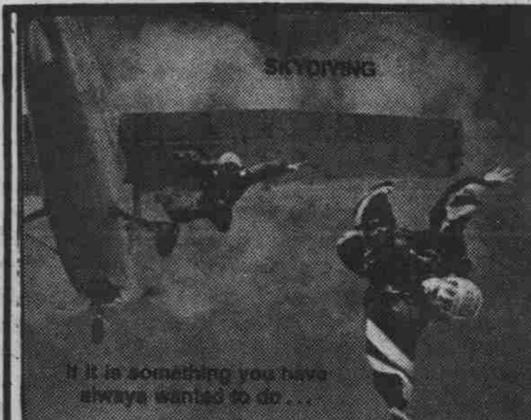
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