

Beavers, Man Coexist On Dutton's Ponds

BY SUSAN USHER

A few beavers are all Wilmington needs to clear the algae and vegetation from its Greenfield Lake, suggests Aubrey Dutton of the Regan's Crossroads community.

Not expensive chemicals or imported algae-eating fish, just a few borrowed giant rodents from Brunswick County, he says.

He'd be happy to let them take a few from his 300-acre spread in western Brunswick County, where man and beaver have coexisted in more or less harmony for about 10 to 12 years on this natural preserve.

Dubbed the Horseshoe Farm, the name lingers though the horses owned by Aubrey and Iris Dutton's children are gone—as are all but one of their four girls and three boys.

Scott, the youngest, remains on the farm, the sixth generation of Duttons to clear and plant the land in this particular niche.

Dutton's farm and surrounding woodlands drain into three manmade ponds ranging in size from 10 to 30 acres. The ponds were built over the years by pushing up earthen dams with spillways. Dutton, an engineer by training, created the largest in the early 1950s by flooding old rice fields farmed by his grandfather.

Ditches that once drained the fields are clearly visible as he slowly paddles a large john boat into a crazy quilt pattern of thin, crackling ice.

A fishing cap and a lightweight pastel sweater are Dutton's token gestures toward the cold. His toughened hands, stiff and swollen with arthritis, grip the paddles firmly as the former World War II Navy pilot paces the trip across the pond. In his mid-60s, he still has the look and gentle strength of the outdoorsman he is.

Crinkles around Dutton's eyes hint at the self-proclaimed "great kiddie," a man of both property and convictions—and laughter.

"I don't understand people who go around all the time and never smile at anything," he noted, guffawing over the story of a pond gator named Wally and some unbelieving guests.

No friendly alligators in sight, the acid-stained waters stand dark and clear, casting perfect reflections of the cypress trees that tower above the flat-bottomed boat.

Hundreds of ducks that usually roost on the farm left mysteriously following a storm earlier in the month, leaving the pond abnormally quiet and barren even for winter.

An occasional bird flits by, but no furry creatures with sharp teeth and flat tails are visible on this cold, mid-December day.

However, evidence of their past activity is all around as the trip across the pond continues:

- Trees cut with expert ease into nothing but pointed stubs—some years old, others cut perhaps only yesterday.

- Other trees stripped entirely of their protective bark and left to die.

- Well-worn trails used by beaver, otter, muskrat and other animals to cross from the pond to Scipio Swamp.

- Dams blocking the ditches that drain Scott Dutton's corn and soybean fields.

From a distance Scipio Swamp to the west looks unchanged from years past, but inside its dark hollows, the beavers' work is taking a different kind of toll. Their dams have cut off the flow of water through the swamp, leaving the giant hardwoods and pines standing in water year-round. They will die, the pines first, then the hardwoods, said Dutton.

"They're both a liability and an asset," Dutton says of the beavers who have built enormous lodges in the middle of the big pond. In anticipation of winter food needs when the pond ices over, the bark-eating beavers have bundled piles of fresh-cut saplings all around their lodges—mostly gum and willow, no cypress.

"They cut a lot of trees down," he continued, surveying the pointed stumps and half-submerged logs. "But they won't touch the cypress and they only eat the bark of the pine a little when the sap is rising in the spring."

The beavers also pay their dues around the farm. When muskrats bore large holes or dens in Dutton's man-made dam, he says, "they double it right back up."

Like other creatures in Dutton's woods, the beavers rights aren't ignored.

"They're part of nature," he says. "It takes all of it to make the wheel go around, so I don't let it bother me none."

Dutton's favorite time of day is just before daylight, when the animals first begin to stir around the ponds. He sits quietly, listening and observing, closer to God in these moments than any other time.

A lover of all nature, when the beavers first appeared on his ponds 10 or 12 years ago, said Dutton, "I was tickled to death."

Some time earlier he had seen his first beaver dam up on Simmons' Bay, off the Waccamaw River in Columbus County, when a canal was cut to Cattail Bay. He never thought he would have beavers on his ponds.

Even today, he said, "Nearly everybody I talk to in the county says they've never seen or heard of no beavers in the county."

"They haven't been here."



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

AUBURN DUTTON of Regan's Crossroads says beavers are a liability as well as a boon. However, this lover of all wild creatures lives in harmony with the

colonies on his farm. Dutton said he prefers watching beavers to killing them, but he did trap one (above) which he had mounted.

GUITAR LESSONS

Bolivia & Varnamtown

CALL STAN

253-5534 or 253-5540

Professional LAUNDRING AND DRY CLEANING



SHALLOTTE DRY CLEANERS
754-4435 Shallotte



Happy New Year

In Stock:
Dutch Bulbs
Shrubs
Tropical Plants
Ornaments
Hanging Baskets
Orchids

1 mile south of Shallotte
Hwy. 17 754-6373

Fern Baskets

\$6.00

Bird Feeders
Wild Bird Seed



Your Complete Farm Center
And Grain Market

871 Deeds Recorded

During November, 871 deeds and deeds of trusts were recorded by the Brunswick County Register of Deeds office, generating \$6,723 in revenue.

Irregular instruments, which include filing of corporations, contracts, marriages, births, deaths, financial statements and other services, generated \$4,485. Real estate excise tax collections totaled \$14,306. Thirty plats were recorded for \$418; for \$25,932 in total revenues.

Expenses for the month include postage, \$147; telephone, \$222; departmental supplies, \$496; equipment rental, \$11,293 contracted services, \$4,245; dues and subscriptions, \$40; for a total of \$16,443, excluding wages.

In Bolivia
BRING HOME



On Sale At
COMPLEX CAFETERIA
SOUTHBOUND SERVICE
STATION & GROCERY

HAPPY NEW YEAR

It's count-down. A New Year's about to ring itself in. Our wish — that it's great!

BRUNSWICK ANIMAL HOSPITAL
Supply 754-8165

Island FURNITURE

After Christmas Sale

Lacquer By LANE

- 1-Queen Headboard
- 2-Night Stands
- 1-5 Drawer Chest
- 1-8 Drawer Dresser
- 1-Mirror
- 1-Cedar Chest

\$1500⁰⁰

"On The Island"
Ocean Isle Beach 579-6279
Owned & Operated by
Mrs. Steve Gore

All Merchandise Must Go To Get Ready For 1986
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Season's Greetings

We count all our fine customers among our very special assets! May each and every one of you have a most joyous Christmas!

Loris & Little River, South Carolina
MEMBER FDIC

Remember that SANTA is coming to Horry County National Bank. He will be in Loris Dec. 13 & 20 from 3:30 - 6:00 P.M. and our Little River Branch Dec. 16 from 3:30 - 5:00 P.M. and Dec. 23 from 3:00 - 5:00 P.M.