

Waccamaw River Stirs Memories, Delights First-Time Traveler

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

I confess to a little apprehension about water travel, especially in small boats. Nevertheless, I gathered my courage one cool April morning and stepped into LeRoy Carlisle's little motorboat at Babson's Boat Ramp on the Waccamaw River.

"All in the day of a journalist," I muttered to myself, adding, "This man knows what he's doing."

A burly, mild-mannered man, Carlisle's expertise on the river did, indeed, foster confidence. As we churned through the muddy waters, however, it was his wonderful stories of a childhood spent on these riverbanks that captivated me completely.

The narrow, crooked Waccamaw, where once Waccamaw Indians made their settlements, stretches nearly 100 miles between its mouth at Lake Waccamaw and its termination in Georgetown, S.C. The hovering oak, pine and sweet gums on either side provide a bucolic beauty. In the quiet, we could hear the snap of a branch in the woods, the whine of a mosquito.

"But, where are the birds?" I asked.

Carlisle reminded me, "They're all building nests right now. Look, there's a crow with a twig in his mouth. He's working on a nest."

Carlisle has the eyes and ears and instincts of one who is at home with nature and is aware of every movement.

"There's a young squirrel," he suddenly exclaimed, idling the motor and cruising close to shore.

Try as I might, I couldn't see it, but I liked the little side excursions along the bank, where we could peer deep into the woods. On one side of the river was Columbus County woodland, with Brunswick County on the other. Both were dense and endless expanses of timber and underbrush in a hundred shades of green.

The squirrel reminded Carlisle of a story from his childhood.

"Me and my daddy were camping out here one night," he said. "I got up early in the morning and saw a squirrel run down to the river to take a drink. When he put his face in, a bigmouth bass came up and

slapped that squirrel right out of the water!"

One story led to another....how a big bear growled nearby as they fried a late-night supper of fresh fish....how he and his friends swam "in our birthday suits" at one bend of the river....and how the whole family enjoyed camping out together "after we got the crops in."

All these treasured memories came from a rich childhood when fish of all kinds were plentiful and when fishing here with Dad was a little boy's greatest treat.

As we glided around the sharp bends of the Waccamaw, Carlisle spun tales of its history, too.

"Back in the 1800s, they brought logs here to the river and floated them to Conway," he said. "They'd put a few together, pile dirt on top of them and cook their supper as they went down the river."

Another reminder of the past brought a frown.

"See those cypress stumps?" he said, pointing. "When my daddy was a boy, this land was full of tall pines and cypress, but in the 1920s, the Jackson Brothers Lumber Company came up from South Carolina and logged them all out."

"It grew back with thick underbrush, but I can just visualize how beautiful it was when those tall trees would let you look right through the woods and see the deer running."

Carlisle knew the exact spot where Reeves' ferry once served as a river crossing point, halfway between the bridges.

"It was the only way to get from Columbus County to the Brunswick beaches," he said.

"People took barrels of salt and fished over there. Then they salted it down to preserve it for winter, and they had a good time while they were doing it."

The folkways have changed since then and, to some extent, so has the river. As Carlisle occasionally adjusted the motor to clear the blades, or pointed to soft drink bottles floating nearby, he grumbled with disgust, "How can people throw trash in the river like that?"

At the turn of the 19th century, the federal government launched ambitious projects to clear the



STAFF PHOTOS BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

ALONG THE RIVERBANK one can occasionally see bare and worn patches of ground, where families once fished together. Very little fishing is done from the bank today.

Waccamaw along its entire route to improve navigation, but none of the plans were completed. It became in this century simply a haven for the boater and fisherman.

Carlisle's appreciation of the river is very much present tense; since his retirement four years ago, he has gone fishing at least twice a week.

"There's good fishing on the Waccamaw!" he said enthusiastically. "That's why Babson built his boat ramp last year."

His eye was caught by a string tied around the base of a tree on the water's edge.

"Look!" he said. "Those lines are set for catfish. The line goes down into the water and over to the other side of the river."

I learned more ways to fish than I would ever remember during that trip up the river, and discovered more intriguing names for them: goggle-eye, more-mouth and crappie.

I learned how pleasant it is to sit in a boat, forget the press of a schedule and let a trip on this ancient river bombard my senses. The cool, damp air, the stench of brim beds as we floated over them, and the spray of river water when we sped around a curve—all were a treat to this landlubber.

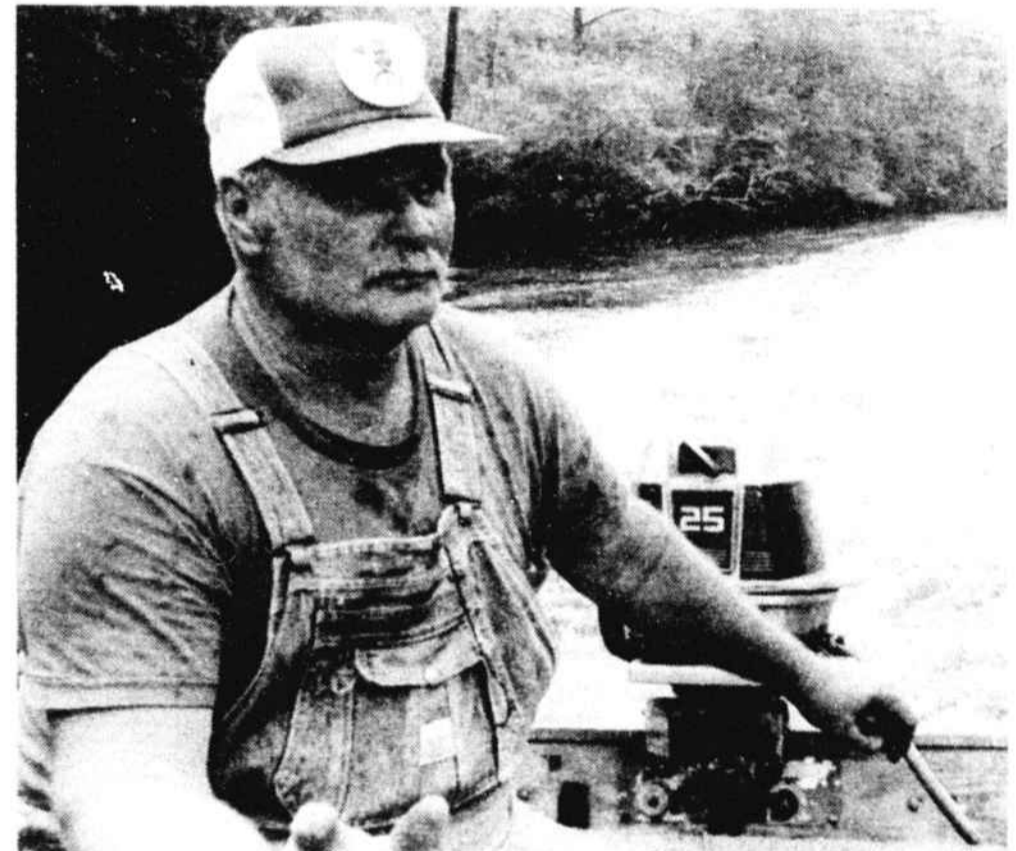
Most of all, however, I relished

the grandeur of those trees....twisted, soldier-straight, dead and barren, lush with spring growth.....all manner and condition of trees that frame the lively Waccamaw and make a home for deer, rabbit, bear and squirrel.

After an hour on the water, my schedule reasserted itself and I had to ask Carlisle, reluctantly, to head

for the boat ramp.

Now I was ashamed of my timidity in strapping on his muddied, little-used life jacket. I wondered why I'd ever entertained any apprehensions about this trip and I hoped this delightful man might pilot me again some day along the peaceful, crooked and scenic Waccamaw River.



LEROY CARLISLE of Ash grew up fishing and camping along the Waccamaw River.

CAROLINA AMERICAN TOURS

CALL LINDA HEWETT
(919)642-4085
Rt. 4, Box 134F, Whiteville
1-800-682-1165

THE BEST: MOTORCOACHES, CHARTER TRIPS, TOUR, DELUXE TRANSPORTATION & SUPER PRICES.

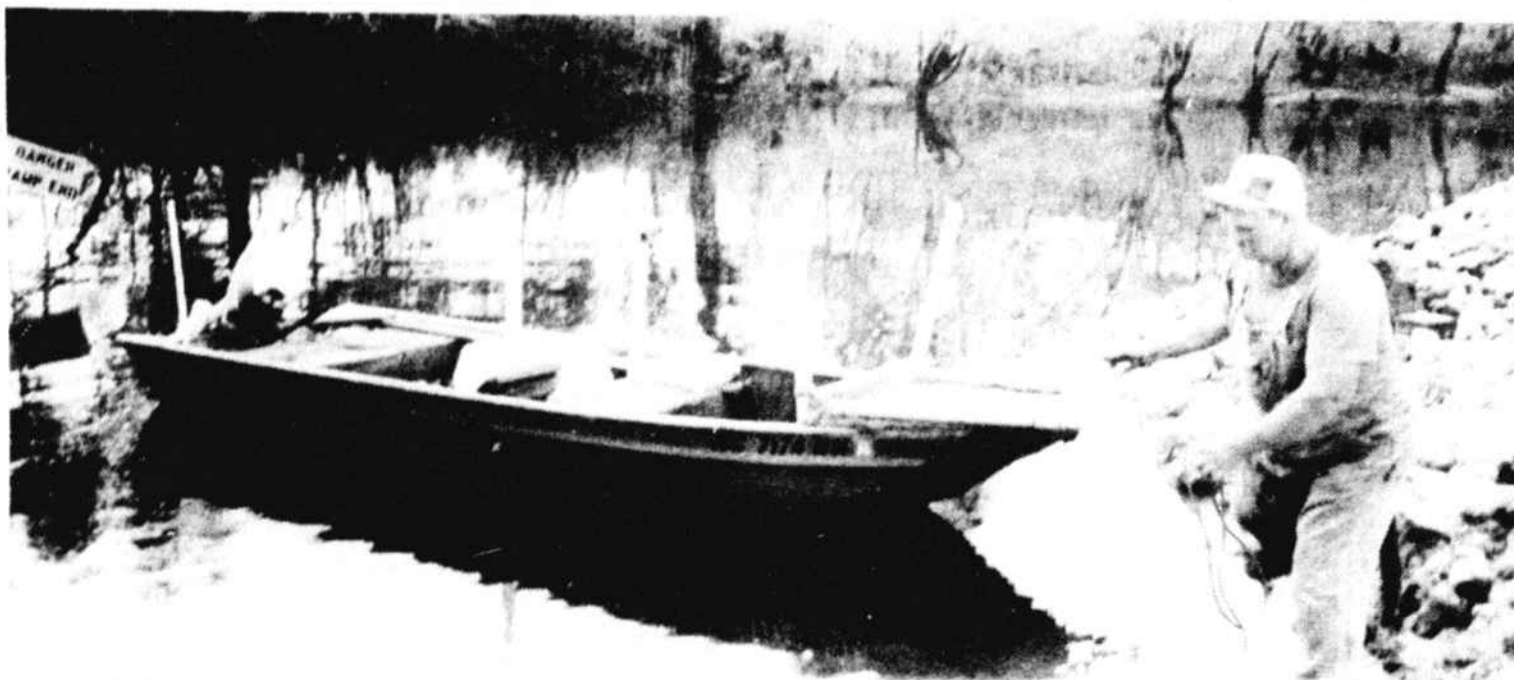
WE LOVE GROUPS



Linda & Johnny Hewett

Prices are per-person rooming four people to the room-(quad). Single, double & triple prices are just a phone call away.

TP 9161 June 9-14, 1992	Nashville Country Music Fan Fair	\$374.00
July 6-11	Niagara Falls	\$347.00
TP9154 July 31-Aug. 2, 1992	Amish Farmlands & Hershey	\$185.00
TP6904 Aug. 13-16, 1992	Ameriflora, 1992	\$228.00
TP1465 Sept. 19-25, 1992	Southern Vermont In Autumn	\$607.00
TP1475 Oct. 17-Nov. 1, 1992	Southwest Adv./Mexico. Needles, Cal	\$922.00
TP9152 Nov. 25-29, 1992	At Thanksgiving/Nassau, Bahamas Cruise	\$473.00
TP6947 Dec. 4-6, 1992	Amish, Hershey and Dutch Apple Theatre	\$205.00
TP1466 Dec. 10-12, 1992	Savannah, Ga./Charleston, SC & Carolina	
	Opry At Christmas Time	\$143.00
TP1431 Dec. 27-30, 1992	New York City After Christmas	\$382.00
T15965 Dec. 29, '92-Jan. 2, '93	Disney Epcot Universal Studios	\$303.00



BOATERS GAIN access to the Waccamaw River at the public Wildlife Resources Commission boat ramp above Longwood at Pireway, or, as Leroy Carlisle does above, at one of the few privately-owned ramps along its banks.