

Yankee Run in 91

As remembered by: David McNeal

The year was 1991 and summer vacation from the McPherson, Kansas Middle School where I worked as a Par-educator was barely a month old. Those last few days in the classroom had been a major struggle for teachers and students alike with the weather topping the high 80s and low 90s it was hard to stay awake much less focus on the lessons being taught.



Rick with stinger of crappie

So here it was the second weekend in June and my fourteen year old son Rick was beleaguering me with request to take him fishing; to tell the truth it didn't take much badgering because I was anxious to get away from the house and almost certain sentencing to a weekend of "honey can you do this and honey can you do that."

"Come on dad."

My son was persistent if he was anything and on this particular day in that exact moment he found very little resistance on my part.

"Oh go get your gear and let's get the truck loaded and out of here before your mother remembers something she wants us to do;" I said with a half smile.

Ricks' face lit up and out the door he went; headed for the garage where we kept the poles, tackle boxes and assorted old empty gallon ice cream buckets we used for live bait.

By the time I had located my fishing jeans, old black reversible short sleeve P.T. shirt and wading tennis' my young teenager had the old 1984 yellow Nissan pickup loaded and ready to roll.

"Can we take Jake?" Rick asked.

Jake was my eleven year old German Wirehair pointer that I used for quail and pheasant hunting; which I kept in a pen made from hog panels in the back yard.

"Sure why not; he could use a day out of the pen and a dip in a lake on a day like this might do him some good." I answered.

The weather man was calling for a clear hot day with the high reaching 95 degrees F. I looked at Rick, old jean shorts, blue striped short sleeve shirt and wading tennis'.

“You better go get a cap; your mother will skin me if your face gets sunburned.” I said.

Rick reaches behind him and pulls a black Chicago Bears ball cap with orange trim around the bill out of his back pocket and puts it on and says,

“Will this do?”

“Ok wise guy”; I laugh, “Let’s get moving before your mother catches us.”

The fact was that I had already cleared it with my wife who for reasons far beyond me had long ago conceded that some things in life were more important than a few undone chores especially on a summer Saturday morning.

I backed the old truck out of the drive and headed north out of McPherson toward Lindsborg, Kansas about twelve miles away.

“Where we going?” Rick wanted to know.

“Well son I thought we’d try a place I’ve been wanting to try for some time now; I thought we’d go west and try Kanopolis.”

“Do you know a good spot there?” Rick asked.

“Nope never been there; we’ll just have to find a good hole together.”

Kanopolis State Park was the first man made lake in Kansas; it was the first Kansas State Park.

Located in Ellsworth County and situated in the rolling hills, bluffs, and woods of the Smoky Hills region, it was first open for public use in 1955; it is fed by the Smoky Hill River. While not the largest lake in Kansas it offers over 3500 acres of fishing and a vast variety of fish including brown and rainbow trout, black bass, black and white crappie, flat heads; channel cats, saugeye, white bass, walleye, and wipers.

On this day Rick and I were going to try and find some crappie; I had read in the local newspaper, *The Sentinel* that they were beginning to run at the Kanopolis Reservoir.

Once we reached Lindsborg we took highway 4 west until we got to highway 141 and then turn north toward the lake. The drive from McPherson had taken us almost an hour but because of the pleasant early morning temperature, the beautiful day and countryside scenery it seem much shorter.

The first thing I noticed as I got near the dam area was a square white cinder block building on our left with huge lettering proclaiming **DAM SANDWICHES!** The proprietor announced that he had, “The best dam sandwiches in Kanopolis.”

“Oh brother” I thought to myself.

Rick and I just looked at each other and laughed.

Pulling in we met the owner a ruddy rather rotund; jolly fellow with a white beard, red plaid shirt and jeans somewhere in his 60s I guessed and stocked up on all the necessary supplies, two dozen worm, sandwiches, cokes, pasty and assorted jigs.

“We’re new here” said Rick.

“Know any good places to fish?”

I will say this about my son when it comes to finding a good spot to fish he isn’t one bit bashful about asking. I have seen him move right next to people catching fish and query them with a salvo of questions until they would actually not only allow him to fish in their hole but give him some of whatever it is they’re catching them on. The thing that kills me is that he flashes his charm and they’re actually seem genuinely happy to help him take over their spot.

The store owner looks at me then looks at Rick again shrugs and says,

“Boy you get ya’ pappy to take you on over to Yankee Run right straight across from Horse Thief road.”

“How do we get there?” Rick was relentless.

“Go on down here until you see a dirt road on the left and just follow it on around the lake until you go through a little community of trailers and cabins and the road comes to an end at the lake; that’s Yankee Run.”

I paid the clerk, thanked the owner and we were on our way.

All I can say is my hats off to the folks who live in the little community around the “Run”. This was one day I was glad that the little Nissan had four wheel drive and I thought to myself, “How in the world do these people get in and out of this place in bad weather?”

Arriving finally at Yankee Run I was delighted to see that we were the only ones there. Rick and I unloaded the truck and started fishing. Jake hit the water. I started with worms but Rick wanted to fish with the jigs. It wasn’t long before we heard Jake barking and slapping at the water. I laugh and told Rick,

“Look at that crazy old dog, he’s a fish dog.”

Rick didn’t laugh; instead he just walked on down to where old Jake was barking and got into one of the biggest school of crappie I had ever seen. They were spawning and they were hungry. It didn’t matter what color jig you used or how big it was they were hitting anything that fell in that school.

Now it has to be a law that no matter how far away from civilization you are or how difficult it is to get to a place, if you start catching fish the multitudes will appear. I don’t know where they came from but within the hour we had elbow to elbow anglers and half a dozen boats and we were all catching fish and then it stopped. Zilch not another bite and one by one the crowd began to wane. Soon it was just Rick, myself, and a couple of old die hard anglers who had gotten there late.

I began to look for old Jake who hates crowds and had wandered off somewhere to chase a rabbit or perhaps find a covey of birds and then I spotted him way back in a corner of the cove slapping at those darn crappie.

“Rick.” I whispered.

“Get your stuff and let’s move down to where old Jake is.”

It doesn’t take my son long to catch on when it comes to catching fish he doesn’t miss a thing. He gazed down to where old Jake was; got this silly grin on his face and just winked.

As soon as we got to Jake, we were into the fish again and the two folks who had tarried behind were glad they did. Sensing that we wanted that crappie, my dog began trying to retrieve them for us and I had to put a lead on him to keep him from getting a hook in his lip.

Hot, tired and with no more room on the stringer, we gave it up at around 6:00p.m., and headed for McPherson. It would be midnight before we finished cleaning, filleting, and packing that days’ catch and we would be totally exhausted but did we care?

Nope; nary one bit.

