

OUTDOORS

Angler has long-distance love affair

Long drive can't keep Florida angler from competing, winning at Jocassee

By Scott Keeper

OUTDOORS WRITER
skeeper@greenvillenews.com

Bill Terrill first discovered Lake Jocassee almost 20 years ago.

He was fresh out of school at the University of Central Florida and working in management at a Greenville hotel when he befriended Warren Page, a longtime fisherman who spoke so highly of Jocassee that Terrill simply had to try it for himself.

"I fell in love with it the first time," Terrill said.

And he's still in love with Jocassee, despite relocating to his native Orlando, Fla., 15 years ago. So in love, in fact, that he makes regular pilgrimages to his trout-fishing "mecca" as often as possible — particularly when a trout tournament is on the schedule.

His latest 10½-hour trek came a couple of weeks ago as he joined Page to compete in the March edition of the Lake Jocassee Trout Tournament, the series' fifth event of the season. Terrill made the trip his most worthwhile ever, catching a 6.1-pound

brown trout to take top honors in the event for the first time.

"I'd finished second, third, fourth, fifth, but never had taken home the 'wood,'" Terrill said. "Now I can finally trash talk a little bit. The fish is being re-created (for a replica mount) as we speak, and I've already got a spot picked out in my office."

The tournament-winning catch — his best-ever at Jocassee — may also qualify as his fastest ever. The tournament began at 8 a.m.; by 8:15, Page was netting Terrill's winner.

"We made a 10-minute run up into Bad Creek and nobody followed us in there," Terrill said. "We dropped our lines and it couldn't have been 2½ minutes before it struck. Then the rest of the day I had to put up with the stress and Warren."

Terrill caught the big brown while trolling a spoon about 28 feet deep, and they remained in the area all day, boating 14 fish, including a couple of four-pounders by Page.



JOCASSEE OUTDOOR CENTER

Bill Terrill of Orlando, Fla., savors the moment with his tournament-winning 6.1-pound brown trout at Lake Jocassee.

"We had a great day," Terrill said.

But Terrill wasn't about to take anything for granted: He'd brought nice trout to the weigh-in many times before, only to be thwarted time and again. Like the time he was nipped by a couple of ounces in February of 2004 and finished second; or on Dec. 14,

2002, when again he brought a hefty trout to the scales but managed only third place. He still has photos of both of those catches on his refrigerator.

Now he finds himself humbled.

"It's nice that I finally get to put a plaque on the wall, but anyone will tell you it's a team effort to catch a fish

on that lake," Terrill said. "And there are so many good guys and great trout fishermen in those tournaments."

He holds his partner, Page, and longtime Jocassee stalwart Larry Essick — whom he refers to as "mythical" — in the highest esteem.

"I won't lie to you — it

Jocassee Trout Tournament March 21, Lake Jocassee (45 anglers)

1. Bill Terrill, Orlando, Fla., 6.1 pounds; 2. Zan Maddox, Rock Hill, 4.8 lbs.; 3. Mark Oliver, Greenville, 4.65 lbs. Youth division: 1. Dillon Roper, 1.75 lbs.

would've meant a whole lot more if Larry Essick had been in the field," Terrill said.

Still, Terrill proved best among a field of 45 anglers, winning by more than a pound over his nearest rival and good friend Zan Maddox, who reeled in a 4.8-pound brown.

Now the 44-year-old Terrill, who works as a director of national accounts for Radisson Hotels, already is planning his next trip from Orlando to Jocassee.

"I can make that drive with my eyes shut," said Terrill, who is known among fellow anglers as "O-Town." "I try to make it up there for at least three tournaments a year, and there have been several years — as long as my wife doesn't shoot me — that I've been able to fish every tournament. I only got up there for one this year, but I guess I made it count. My batting average is pretty good right now."