

Jocassee's story gets told on national TV

Lake's history featured on cable news network

By Anna Simon
PICKENS COUNTY NEWS
asimon@greenvillenews.com

LAKE JOCASSEE — Debbie Fletcher's most treasured childhood memories are of the Attakulla Lodge, 300 feet below the surface of Lake Jocassee.

The lodge owned by Fletcher's grandmother and then her mother once welcomed travelers in the Jocassee Valley and "was the most special place in the world," Fletcher said.

In 1971 Duke Power began flooding the valley to make the lake.

Memories of the former Jocassee Valley are resurfacing as divers explore the remnants of Fletcher's family lodge, a girls' camp and an old cemetery deep underwater.

The story of Jocassee's past received a national spotlight in a recent feature segment on "News to Me," on HLN, the sister network to CNN.

Brenda Foy Springfield, whose parents ran Jocassee Camp for Girls, near the Attakulla Lodge, recalls her parents speaking in low whispers about the possible flooding of the valley.

Publish club, church news

Tell everyone the news about your club, church and community group. Your neighbors will read all about it online and in the Pickens County News.

Post your news and photos at YourUpstate.com.

"I couldn't believe it," Springfield said. "My grandmother had been the riding instructor there, my mother and aunt had been campers, and then my parents took over the camp when I was only 5. My brother and I had grown up there, along with hundreds of girls from all over the country."

A new camp on the lake shore never held the same magic.

"When I looked at the lake and drove the ski boat over it I remembered the mountains that had for years gently cradled us — blasted and scraped bare to form it. I hauntingly thought about what lay beneath it," Springfield said.

In recent years divers began to explore the lake bottom. They found the old Mt. Carmel Baptist Church cemetery, where a scene of the movie "Deliverance," was filmed, and began searching for the old steel bridge that crossed the Whitewater at the entrance to the girls camp.

Bill Routh, owner of Lake Jocassee Dive Shop, and a friend used a side-scan sonar unit and a submerged camera and located what they believed to be the bridge. It was. Divers went down and found not only the bridge, but also the stone pillars with gates still attached at the camp entrance.

"It was neat to find the bridge at 320 feet. You can see the graffiti on it. And the girls camp (entrance)

looks just like it did when the lake filled up. It's pretty eerie," Routh said.

About that time, Routh met Fletcher, who was finishing a book, "Whippoorwill Farewell: Jocassee Remembered," to pass memories of the lost valley to her children, and they planned a dive the following summer to find the lodge.

Fletcher and her family waited on the boat as divers swam down with a camera. Fletcher watched the underwater images on a monitor and cried when she learned the lodge was still there.

"To realize there is this part of Jocassee that I thought was lost forever, and to find it again was just incredibly wonderful for me," she said.

Divers continue to explore the old lodge and piece together the past.

"I'm a treasure hunter," Routh said. "I can't get enough of it. There's so much still that we don't know. There's still mystery. There's still mystique. It's a blast."

The television feature focused on Fletchers' re-discovery of her past, said Mike Kane, the coordinating producer, who is a southerner and a history buff himself.

"It's a childhood revisited through the discovery of the Attakulla Lodge," Kane said. "She has photos and video now and she can be 300 feet away with just a nylon cord separating her from the lodge down beneath the water."