LOCAL NEWS

Pickens' Issaqueena Lake hides secret past

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SIX MILE — Built in the 1930s as a New Deal project along with Table Rock, Oconee and Paris Mountain state parks, lesser-known Issaqueena Lake holds an almost forgotten secret.

Issaqueena Park, in the foothills of Pickens County, included a 120-acre lake with a bathhouse, diving tower, picnic shelters, barbecue pits, hiking trails and hundreds of acres of trees planted by Civilian Conservation Corps workers who lived in a camp on the property, said Larry Reamer, a retired Clemson University forestry professor.

The park was the pride of the community until World War II, when projects nonessential to the war effort were abandoned or converted to other uses and Issaqueena Park became a practice bombing range, Reamer said.

"Thousands of sand-filled bombs with a small explosive charge to mark the strike were dropped at targets located on the higher ground around the park and floating targets in Lake Issaqueena," Reamer said. "A small contingent of troops quartered in a large frame house on Keowee River operated the bombing range and coordinated the day and night drops."

By the end of the war, most of the structures near the lake had been destroyed. Others were in disrepair and the roads and bridges were deteriorating.

The former park eventually was deeded to Clemson University — then Clemson College — and today is part of the university's vast Experimental Forest. It's also regaining some of that early popularity, especially among fishermen, picnickers, hikers, mountain bikers, horseback riders, photographers, birdwatchers and other nature lovers.

For Reamer, who came to Clemson to study forestry in the late 1950s and eventually became Clemson's forest manager from 1970 to 1988, watching the land heal and seeing the refurbishment of some salvageable structures has been a labor of love.

Beginning in 1956 when the college was authorized to offer a bachelor of science in forestry, academic and research use of the forest increased and part of the revenue generated by selling surplus timber was used to begin gradual restoration of some of the recreation facilities at Lake Issaqueena.

That effort is reflected today with the Indian Creek Picnic area and trail, Willow Springs, Wildcat Creek shelter, Holly Springs shelter, a new handicapped-accessible parking lot and trail located near the site of the old bathhouse and the Falls Shelter at the west side of Issaqueena Dam.

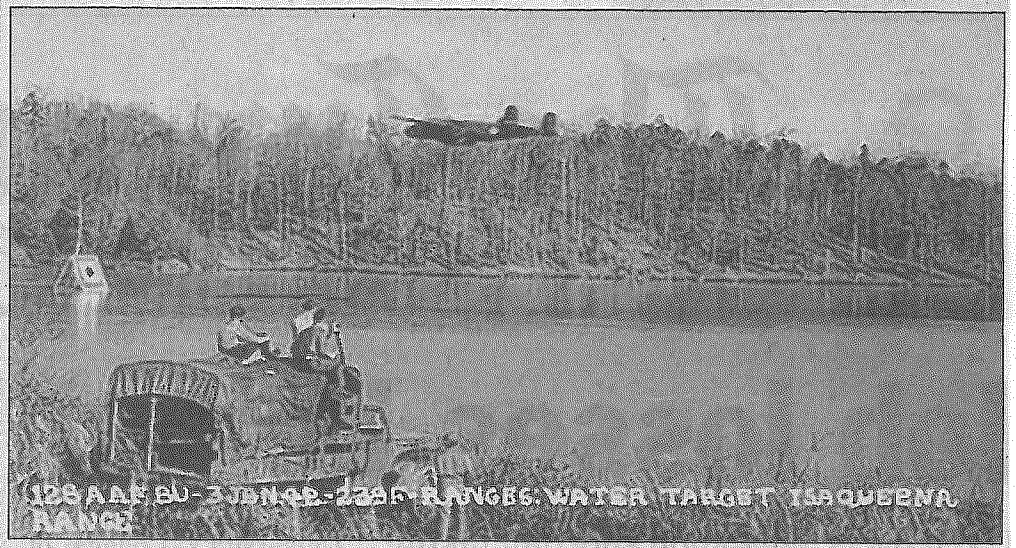


Photo courtesy of LARRY REAMER

A B-25 takes aim at a target floating on Issaqueena Lake in this 1943 photo.

The Issaqueena Lake area is open year around for free use by the public with vehicular access restricted from November through March.

Reamer's hope is that as Issaqueena is rediscovered by a growing Upstate population, its past won't be forgotten or taken for granted.

"Although Issaqueena never gained the popularity of sister parks in the Upstate of South Carolina, it should ever be remembered that many of its features that could have made it a premier attraction were sacrificed to aid the World War II effort," Reamer said.