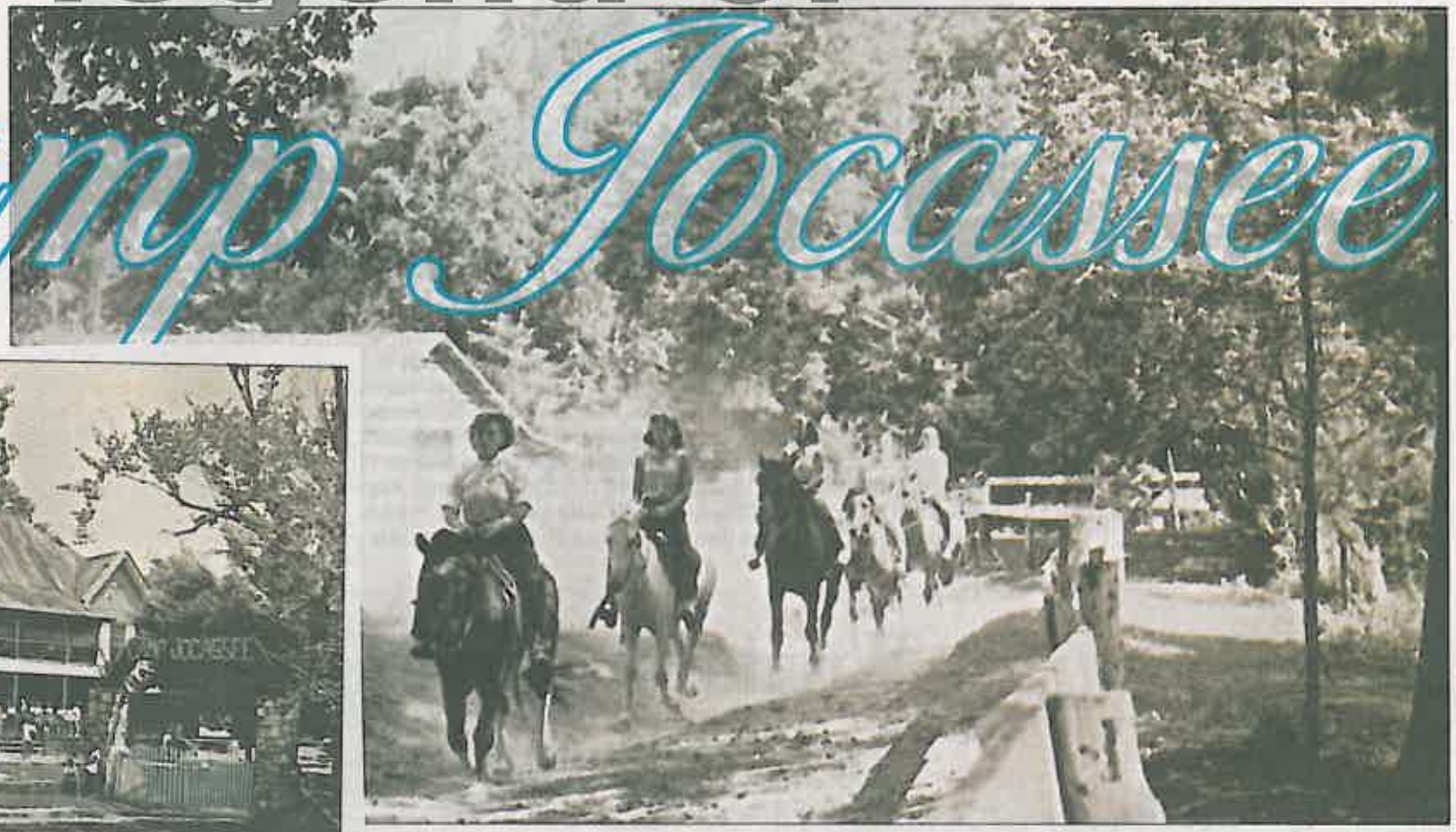
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The legend of Camp Jocassee



DEBBIE FLETCHER | SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Camp Jocassee for girls opened in 1922 and operated for almost 50 years. Elements of the camp are now under Lake Jocassee.



ALLEN HODGES | SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Horseback riding was a popular activity for the girls at Camp Jocasse.

BY MONICA KREBER
THE JOURNAL

JOCASSEE — Once upon a time, Lake Jocassee did not exist.

In its place there was a mountain valley with a river running through it. Debbie Fletcher knows the scene all too well — her family owned property in the valley.

Fletcher, from Columbia, has memories of idyllic summers spent at Attakulla Lodge, a summer hotel run by her family from the early 1900s until 1951. A mile down the road was the site of Camp Jocassee for Girls — established by Fletcher's great-grandfather W. M. Brown in 1922.

Fletcher's summer memories are anchored at her family's homestead of Attakulla Lodge, but she remembers the camp, as well. It held two sessions per summer, each session lasting a month. About 100 girls occupied each session.

Girls would come from all over the country to participate in a mountainous vacation that consisted of arts and crafts, canoeing, kayaking, horseback riding, volleyball, musicals, skits and more.

Some girls would even stay for two sessions, and many kept coming back for years.

"They just absolutely loved it," Fletcher said. "If you were to talk to them now they can remember everything about the camp, and it truly was one of the best times of their lives."

The property had a number of cabins, divided into two groups.

Six cabins known as "The Hill" occupied the mountainside, and the younger girls stayed in a set that bordered the river. The campus had a main house (formerly Brown's home) where the dining hall was, along with a kitchen. There was a pavilion/gymnasium where the girls would do their morning exercises and a small lake on the property with a diving board. Girls would learn how to swim, kayak and canoe on the lake before taking on the river.

Fletcher said the girls remember the small lake very well — it used to have leeches.

"They weren't thrilled about that," Fletcher said. "Even so, they have great memories of it."

The camp ran successfully for nearly 50 years. Now the camp, along with Fletcher's treasured Attakulla Lodge, is 300 feet under the waters of Lake Jocassee.

When the lake was filled in the early 1970s, the camp buildings could not physically be moved. The cabins were cinderblock and ended up being demolished along with the main house.

After the valley was flooded, the camp moved to Lake Keowee, but only remained open for about five years.

Former camper Ann Swiren Cooper said the new camp was just missing something.

"I loved that we had water skiing, but it just didn't have the same 'home away from home' feel," she said. "Maybe it was because it was a bigger area, and I never thought I'd say this, but maybe we all missed not swimming in the lake because of the leeches."

Former camper Rosalyn Owen Swan said Jocassee Valley was a jewel; the setting was cool, and the new camp was miserably hot.

"The sound of the river and community bathing were gone," she said. "The cool feel of clay under our feet was gone. The nightly hiking options were limited, too hot, too repetitive, not as pretty. The water spring, where we sometimes held vespers, was gone. The long Friday hikes to gorgeous spots on the river were gone. The sound of birds was gone."

There is no established reason why the Keowee camp closed. Former camper Penny Mortford suggests it closed because of the changing times.

"Discipline was questioned," she said. "Corporal punishment illegal. Competition discouraged. How could a girl's camp — which required campers to make their beds, scored points for attendance and issued awards and trophies for winning — attract parents to pay for campers to attend under these conditions?"

Nonetheless, Fletcher said losing the valley was difficult to overcome.

"It was very hard losing the valley," Fletcher said. "It was very difficult — and still is. I have family members to this day who refuse to go up there. It was a family gathering place and very much one of a kind."

What made it "one of a kind" to Fletcher was the beautiful valley with the crystal-clear water running through it.

"You see a lot of pretty mountain valleys, but you typically don't see one with a river running through it like that," she said, "And that's what made it so spectacular."

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'Maybe we all missed not swimming in the lake because of the leeches.'

Ann Swiren Cooper
Former camper



Camp Jocassee for Girls
IN THE CAROLINA BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS

DEBBIE FLETCHER | SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Debbie Fletcher says what made Jocassee's valley so special was the "crystal clear" water that ran through it.