

The Man and Little-River Canyon

Little-River Canyon is the largest canyon east of the Mississippi River; it runs almost its entire length down the middle of Lookout Mountain in northeast Alabama; shown to the right, it extends from Fort Payne and proceeds southwest toward Gadsden.

According to Wikipedia the River is said to be among the cleanest and wildest waterways in the South, undammed aside from a small and derelict hydroelectric project at DeSoto Falls. Covering an expanse of some 14,000 acres, this area is said to be the nation's longest mountaintop river.

Besides its length and other topographical features, the canyon offers the breathtaking vistas, trails, swimming, canoeing and kayaking, camping and lodging. It a truly a wonderful, majestic place and, for my father, was the backdrop for his boy-scouting and similar experiences from his boyhood through the present.

His first recollection of this River was as a scout; a winter campsite, an event in 1949 where it was acceptably cold...but also snowing flurries. Ill-equipped for this type of weather, his troop spent several nights in these conditions. In some association, it was like the time my sons and I went to Camp Rainy Mountain in Georgia - but we did not campout.

Another experience in DeSota Park - this time as an advanced, Explorer scout, he went several miles north (along the canyon rim) with two others (no adults). Again, the cold weather proved to be challenge beyond expectation. With winter camp occurring over several years, Howard became very familiar with this nearby reserve; you might say that it was his "backyard" when it came to camping and the scouts.

Aside from scouts, he made a practice of hiking the River as well as the downstream Coosa River. Whether hunting or simply out for the serenity of the woods, he would tread this familiar trail for much of his youth to the present. The man and the River are inseparable.



I remember a somewhat ill-planned canoeing trip in which Howard and a cousin of his braved the River at its low watermark. Anticipating a three hour trip, they had nothing in the way of emergency supplies or rations. With such low water at the time, they ended-up damaging the canoe and being forced to hike their way out - rather than canoe their way. Needless to say, "the family" was concerned without considering that the two could easily improvise being familiar with both land and general skills of survival.

At the mouth of the River, in Cherokee County, is a beautiful camping and swimming area. Over the many years, Howard has taken us (his children) and our children as a somewhat introduction and reminder of the gems offered to young and old alike. With water that is cold enough and rapids that are sufficient, kids can find the experience to be exhilarating from the first toe to the entry of a tube or raft.

Howard recalls one experience where he took an adult Sunday school class on the trail. Starting at the mouth and continuing north, their hike upriver was more than many realized it would be; and only hours into the trip, the ranks of the class became disgruntled - bordering on insubordination. As he recalls this additional "ill-planned trip", the primary cause was that the class did not follow instructions...and some were not physically fit for the course.

In the picture to the right, he stands down below the falls - near water level where one can feel the power as well as the spray of the surge. What is he thinking at the time...or anytime the opportunity comes his way? Perhaps he is remembering that winter camp, the walks along the river, or some other events of the River. Maybe this place (and time) reminds him of the many times he has invited and introduced others to this area; or maybe it reminds him that some things do not change except by force of nature.

