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SPORTS

Enjoying all the outdoors has to offer

By Luke Clayton

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In the half century or so that I have been kicking around in the outdoors in search of fish, game and excitement, I've amassed more than my share of memories that I'm sure will give me a great deal of enjoyment when I ultimately reach my "rocking chair days." I thought a few of my adventures and, sometimes, misadventures might be of interest.



Luke has enjoyed a great deal of the outdoor life during his career as a writer. Here's Luke up in Saskatchewan last summer with one of many big walleye he landed while fishing with Cree River Lodge. *photo courtesy of Luke Clayton*

A couple decades ago, I was on story assignment in Japan, doing a series of stories about fishing in the country. During this period, the elite Japanese were crazy about everything in the U.S. that pertained to bass and bass fishing. U.S. made bassboats were being shipped to Japanese anglers in astounding numbers. I will never forget fishing with two Tokyo outdoor writers that tried their level best to make a displaced Texan feel right at home, and that included making me pretty uncomfortable when they wouldn't allow me to rig my own soft plastic bait, Texas style, of course! I remember fishing from a modern day (at the time) bass boat on a very rural little lake with old Japanese farmers with Calcutta poles fishing for carp from the bank; there were even a few water buffalo the farmers used to plow the rice fields grazing nearby. I will never forget dining at a little town about three hours from Tokyo at a restaurant owned by the local mayor. We were sitting in the "Japanese" room upstairs, on the floor, enjoying some of the best food I have eaten, anywhere. This was where I was first introduced to the traditional Japanese rice wine, Sake, which of course, was served hot. We were served by the mayor's daughters, all dressed in snow white kimonos. The kind people I met there, the fishing and the food, I will never forget.

MEXICO IN THE SEVENTIES- Fishing in Mexico used to be quite a third world experience. Nowadays, with American ownership in many of the fishing and hunting operations, visiting a lodge in Mexico is really a lot like fishing in the U.S. in many instances.

The rest of my fishing party decided to sleep in one morning and my guide Jose' and I headed out in one of those long, canoe looking crafts common to the period. We had a 40 HP tiller steered Mercury engine and Jose' had taken us a good ten miles from our lodge. We were catching lots of bass and the very good eating Rio Grande' perch were tearing up our smaller spinner baits. Jose' spoke very little English and I little Spanish but he understood I LOVED catching the perch. I also loved eating the snow white meat of the big two pound fish and planned to bring some back across the border. Back "in the day", gill nets were legal in Mexico and I believe they still are in certain places. The shoreline was dotted with very rustic Mexican fishing camps with thatched huts and home made boats. Fishermen could be seen during the day relaxing around camp, waiting to run their nets. Jose' eased our boat up to the end of a very long gill net, lifted it from the water and the first twenty feet or so visible above water held six or eight of the big perch. With a happy smile and shake of his head toward the fish dangling from the net, Jose' indicated the perch were ours for the taking. About half way down the net, the bottom of our boat was filled with huge perch. Then, I heard the hum of a little outboard coming through the timber. A craft identical to ours but filled with four Mexicans, pulled up to our boat. The guys didn't look too happy and I began to wonder if we were running their nets instead of Jose's as I had assumed. After a couple minutes of very fast talk, little of which I understood, I watched Jose' pass our cooler filled with drinks over to his fellow Mexicans who proceeded to pop the tops of their favorite beverage. Then, a few minutes later after much laughing and talking, the Mexicans disappeared back in the direction they came. To this day, I don't know whose net we were running but I was sure happy Jose' had a way with words AND beverages!

WAY BACK THERE- Back in about '64 when I was a fourteen year old kid, I used to go spend a week each fall hunting with Poppa Dinkins, down in Waller County, not far from Hempstead in southeast Texas. Poppa was about 85 years old at the time and weighed about 140 pounds soaking wet. He was tough as a boot and I can imagine what he must have been like as a younger man. He had spent his entire life ranching, hunting and living in the outdoors. Poppa's ranch consisted of 2,500 acres, much of which was in prime deer hunting country. In his ranch house, hung the mounted heads of 35 big white tail bucks, he had used his old double barrel Damascus twist steel shotgun with buckshot to take them all. I remember Poppa telling me, Boy, (that's all he ever called me-Boy), "I sold that 300 acres we call the Prairie Field to a race car driving fellow. He's running a few head of cows on the place now so make sure and don't hunt up there, we don't own it anymore. You know where it's fenced off, don't you? Of course, I did and agreed not to go over there. Back in those days, Poppa turned me loose with his new Ford truck; he was rough on trucks and bought a new one every year. On that crisp November morning, a long, long time ago, I dressed early, ate a quick breakfast with Poppa, loaded my Marlin 336 C 30/30 and headed out in his new pickup for the hunt.

My intention was to hunt a patch of woods known as The Glass Field. I got to thinking about how many deer I had seen around a pond at the Prairie Field and the truck just sort of naturally wound up near the fence line that separates Poppa's land and that of "that race car driving fellow". I remember being drawn to that pond like a magnet was pulling me. I had no more than set down against a big oak growing on the upper end of the pond than I saw a man come walking over the dam, coming right at me. I set tight, knowing I was in the wrong.

The big man (I remember him being big, maybe he really wasn't all that big) walked up to me and said, "Good morning, son, I'm A.J. Foyt and you are hunting on my land."

He let me off the hook easy when he showed me the property line, told me about his cattle and I promised to stay on Poppa's side of the fence. I never met Mr. Foyt again but always had fond memories of a man that was that nice to a kid that "happened" to get on the wrong side of a barbed wire fence.

BOOK SIGNING Luke will be at Hootens Hardware in Emory, Texas Saturday Jan 23 from 10 am until 2 pm. to celebrate the publishing of his new book, "Kill to Grill, the Ultimate guide to hog hunting... and cooking. Stop by and visit!

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