

Trout Talk

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**Big Bear Resort owners find
their place as canoe outfitters**
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by Laura L. Valenti

July 2023

Home on the Niangua

Big Bear Resort owners find their place as canoe outfitters

BY LAURA L. VALENTI

When Ronny and Michelle Berry moved from Wichita Falls, Texas, to southwest Missouri to take industrial managerial positions, they never imagined that would lead to life on the



LCR Photo/Laura Valenti

Michelle and Ronny Berry, owners of Big Bear River Resort on the Niangua River, in front of one of the murals in their office.

Niangua River as canoe outfitters, but as they can tell you, life sometimes takes unexpected turns.

"I came here as a manager for Detroit Metal Products," Ronny began to

explain their odyssey. "And I liked what I was doing. Michelle came out here to the river and discovered something new and different and beautiful."

Through a friend, they were intro-

duced to Brian Wilson, the owner of One-Eyed Willie's, a Dallas County canoe and lodging concession, and soon, the Berrys had a new home. They purchased Brian's

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Features at Big Bear River Resort



Michelle and Ronny are surrounded by their kids and grandkids for a visit to the resort at Thanksgiving.

One of the cabins awaiting visitors at Big Bear River Resort.



The store at Big Bear River Resort is seen with a map done by Laughingwell Studio of Long Lane.

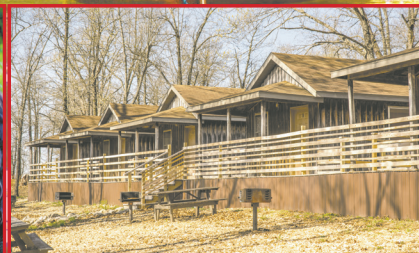
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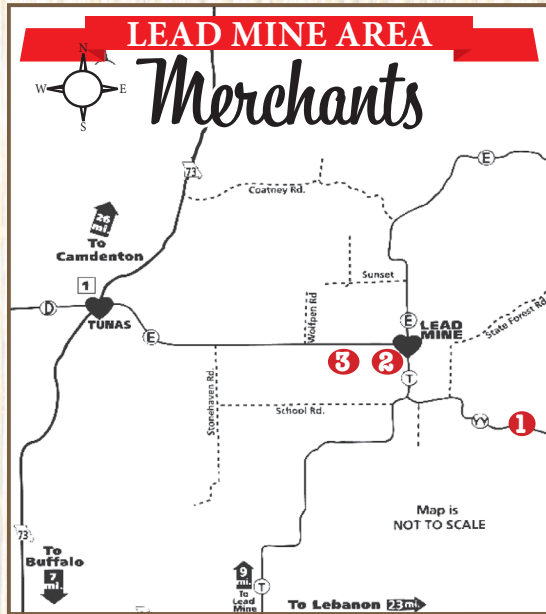
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RESORT

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business, originally named for his one-eyed dog, and after some research, they re-named it Big Bear River Resort.

With their purchase in the spring of 2021, Michelle began a new adventure as Ronny continued his employment in Lebanon until this past May.

"We found out that Niangua was the name of an Osage Chief, who once lived in this area, and it means Big Bear," Michelle laughed. "And so, we started with a new name."

Big Bear River Resort rents canoes, kayaks, rafts and tubes. Ronnie continued. "We have 4, 6, 8 and 10-person rafts. We offer a 15.5 mile float, an 8 mile float, a 5 mile and a one mile river adventure. We take people to the launch site and let them float back down to the property here and that's the best way for everyone.

"We have a Taco Truck down by the river on Saturday nights. Saturday mornings we have breakfast, like biscuits and gravy, at a little restaurant and

store and pizza and hamburgers there on Saturday afternoons. We have our liquor license and a frozen margarita machine. We also have rum stumblers



as well as beer sales here at the store and then all the stuff people need for camping."

He continued. "We offer primitive camping sites, seven RV sites, four of which have 110 electric. We have cabins

with all of the amenities, like bathrooms and kitchenettes and dry cabins, those with no bathrooms. We have shower houses with bathrooms for those. All of our cabins have beds, refrigerators, microwaves and air conditioning."

The Berrys hired Roberto Regalado and Linda Spencer, professional muralists of Laughingwell Studio from nearby Long Lane, Mo. who transformed their store's interior to a further celebration of the area's unique culture and history. Their artwork includes a detailed map that graces the store's entrance.

Michelle added, "The people are the best part. We meet so many people during the season each year. We've had some come down here just to look around, even to just see the big map at the door. We start out with business, but so many become friends, almost like family."

And speaking of family, their close relatives have also stayed at the resort.

"Between us, we have seven kids and 12 grandkids, all ages and sizes," Michelle continued. "We were open all year round this past year, all through the winter."

Ronny added. "When you have a big family, owning a resort like this with places to stay is perfect for celebrating holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas. That's what we did last year.

"We're small enough to feel really personal when someone is looking for a place to stay or camp. We still deliver firewood or ice to your door. People comment on the hospitality here all the time.

"It was pretty crazy," he concluded, "working full-time in Lebanon while working out here evenings and weekends. It's certainly less stressful for both of us now that I'm here full-time, but I have to say, Michelle basically ran this place by herself all last season. Anything good out here, it's because of her!"



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Scenes of the Big Bear River Resort



Left: On Saturdays canoes and rafts are at their peak on the Big bear Resort. Above, most will recognize Big Bear as the former One-Eyed Willie's.

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Michelle and Ronny Berry stand with some of the many kayaks they rent each summer.

'Catch and release,' leaves more fish for future anglers

FRANCIS SKALICKY
MISSOURI DEPARTMENT
OF CONSERVATION

"Catch and release" has become an important phrase in the fishing world.

In addition to being a good way to sustain the fishing resource for future anglers, this self-explanatory angling procedure is necessary for those who fish in areas (or fish for species) that have minimum length limits, minimum length limits and other restrictions. However, catch-and-release fishing works only if anglers know how to release the fish they catch.

Unhooking a fish and getting it back in the water without doing any harm to the fish can be a trickier feat than many people realize. Improper handling can do as much damage to a fish as the sharpest treble hook. Releasing a fish is a technique that involves several considerations.

One of these that many people don't think about is how you hold a fish. The basic fact about this is a simple one to remember – the more you handle a fish, the more likely you are to harm it. That's because all fish are covered with mucus that reduces the friction with the water and also increases the fish's resistance to disease. Removal of this mucus, which can happen through rough or prolonged handling, can lead to infection and death for the fish.

While we're on the subject of what you shouldn't do with your hands, here's something else to remember: Holding up a large fish by its gills may look good on television but, if you plan on releasing that fish back into the water, it's not the best thing you could do for the fish. Gills are fragile and can be easily damaged. When gills get damaged, it often results in excessive bleeding which, in turn, can have fatal results for the fish.

If you must hold a fish, hold it firm enough to measure it or remove the hook, but as gently as possible. Keep your hands behind the gill



MDC Photo

A fisherman snags a crappie while angling in a Missouri stream.

area and your fingers out of the gills.

Remove hooks as carefully as possible. Hooks on the edge of the mouth do little damage to the fish. Hooks in these locations can usually be removed with needle-nose pliers (and often with your fingers). Barb-less hooks can be purchased for those who want to make the catch-and-release process easier. (Barbs can also be filed down on hooks, too.)

Problems may arise when a fish is hooked deeper in its mouth or down in its throat. Trying to disengage these hooks sometimes does more harm than good. By the time you've wrestled the hook free, chances are you've done enough internal and external damage to the fish to severely hamper its chances of survival. For that reason, when a fish that you want to release is deeply hooked, it's usually best to clip the line and leave the hook in the fish. Fish hooked deep in the throat have a better chance of survival if the

hooks are left in the fish than if you try to pull the hooks out.

The most important thing to remember about the catch-and-release process is that, if you're going to release the fish, do it quickly. Catch the fish, measure it (if you want to or need to) and put it back. This doesn't mean you have to avoid photographs: They're important - particularly if kids are the ones catching the fish. Just remember that if your goal is for the fish to survive, the sooner you can accomplish all the out-of-the-water stuff and get the fish back into the water, the better the fish's chances are of surviving.

As added insurance to fish that appear to be stunned, you can hold them for a few seconds in the water and gently move them back and forth. This moves water over the gills and allows more oxygen to enter the blood.

While you're practicing catch-and-release, remember that it doesn't hurt to practice "catch-and-keep" fishing every now and then, too. After all, part of the fun of fishing is to be able to bring home a few for the frying pan. But it's also important to leave fish behind for the next trip or the next angler.

Tips for releasing fish and other fishing information can be found in the 20237 edition of the "Summary of Missouri Fishing Regulations." This free booklet is available at all Missouri Department of Conservation offices and most locations that sell fishing permits. Fishing information can also be found at mdc.mo.gov.

Francis Skalicky is the media specialist for the Missouri Department of Conservation's Southwest Region. For more information about conservation issues, call 417-895-6880.



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Trout Talk

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LUNKER CATCHES



David Hoskins, Rockville, caught a 3.5 pound trout in Zone 1 using an orange mop fly as bait.



Debi McCarty, Belton, caught a 7 pound 1 ounce trout in Zone 1 using a hi glue crackle as bait.



Larry Slater, Quincy, Ill., caught a 3.8 pound trout in Zone 2 using a wooley as bait.



Christopher Pringle from Holt's Summit caught a 3.8 pound trout in Zone 3 using a worm as bait.



Tina Jarvis, Lebanon, caught a 4.5 pound trout in Zone 1 using a mop fly as bait.

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