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Fun by the boatload

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Fun by the Boatload!

By Leslie Westlake

EXPLORE THE CRYSTAL CLEAR WATERS OF LAKE JOCASSEE.

There is no doubt that Lake Jocassee is one of the most idyllic lakes in the nation, perhaps the world. Located in the northwest corner of the state, it is surrounded by the beautiful foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Most of its shoreline is protected and unspoiled by development, and Devils Fork State Park makes a perfect entryway to enjoy these translucent waters.

SO DEEP, SO CLEAR, SO MUCH FUN.

It's hard to believe that as recently as 1970, this lake didn't exist. The Jocassee Valley was a beautiful, quiet and lush dip in the Blue Ridge Mountains where four wild rivers flowed. Whitewater, Toxaway, Horsepasture and Keowee rivers were flooded in 1973 by Duke Power Company's multi-million dollar Keowee-Toxaway hydroelectric dam project. The result is the deepest (more than 360 feet), most pristine lake in the state. Today you can look into these crystal waters and often see 20 or 30 feet down.

Mountain laurel overhangs the shore, the scent of pine and moss is intoxicating, and there is a refreshing coolness in the air as you drift into one of the many coves along Jocassee's shoreline. The absence of development allows nature to wander right down to the lake shore. This is home to beautiful wildflowers, including the Oconee Bell, and wildlife such as bald eagles, peregrine falcons, deer and beaver. The lake holds the world record for redeye bass, and state records for rainbow and brown trout, and smallmouth, spotted and redeye bass.

AND EVEN MORE BELOW THE SURFACE!

Lake Jocassee is the area's premier freshwater scuba diving location. Because it was flooded, there are many interesting sights to be found in these clear waters, including man-made structures and a rock quarry wall. A favorite spot among divers is an old cemetery where you can still read the tombstones and a bridge that once crossed the river. Trees still standing many feet below the surface are now laced with silt rather than leaves, and a few years ago a skilled diving team discovered the Attakulla Lodge that had been a bed-and-breakfast for more than 50 years. It still stands 20 yards from what had been the Whitewater River shore.

MOON PIES, RC COLAS AND MOTORBOATS.

Although the park offers wonderful campgrounds, facilities and villas, there's one small catch to fully enjoying this paradise—a boat. Since the beauty of Jocassee lies both on and under the water, the very best way to enjoy it all is by boat. Not everyone owns one, or wants to drag one along on vacation. Never fear, there is a simple solution nearby in the form of the Jocassee Outdoor Center (864-944-9016).

The Jocassee Outdoor Center (JOC) was first introduced in 1979 as "Hoyetts Grocery & Tackle," a popular place to pick up supplies, a "Hoyt" dog and get the latest fishing news. Greatly expanded and evolved in recent years, JOC is now a full-service provider of quality merchandise, outdoor recreational activities and adventures; a one-stop shop for vacation memories by the boatload.

In fact, JOC has everything you need to sprout water wings. Pontoon boats, fishing boats, single and tandem kayaks and electric "paddle" boats are at your service. They will even deliver the watercraft to the lake, show you how to operate it, provide you with a map and point you in the direction of beautiful waterfalls that can only be accessed by water. They even offer scuba equipment for investigating the fascinating world below Jocassee's glass-like surface. Then, when you're through, they will meet you at the boat ramp and haul everything away, leaving you with an absolutely stress-free, memory-filled day on some of the most pristine waters you'll find anywhere—Lake Jocassee.

