

February is a mixed up month

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This is a mixed up month. You never know what to do. One day the crappies are hitting and the next you could freeze your tukus off. You may hear a turkey gobble or get cold hands catching a walleye or sauger. It is a great month for striper...if you have any desire to catch one and one some days; it is just dandy for floating a stream.

I have caught some good smallmouth on Center Hill in Feb. We use to mark the calendar for Timms Ford smallie fishing to start about the same time as the old, Great Lakes of the South outdoor show. However, I do recall one day, it was mid February...

We did not even need jackets that morning. It was that warm at daylight. We pulled up our hip boots and slid the old aluminum boat in just below the bridge. I hear the bridge, the one on Long Branch Road, is no longer there. It was a handy place to launch for a day's float on the Smith Fork. Donnie Winfree, Russ Jackson and I intended to do just that.

This was before there were turkeys in Middle Tennessee and with a rain two days previously, we had perfect water for a float. The tactics and tackle simple. You put the boat in and float downstream to the bridge on the road between Gordonsville and Center Hill Dam. For tackle, you had Rooster Tails, Rapalas and maybe a buzzbait. You stopped at Rosie's Diner and cooked a shore lunch along the way.

Can you think of a better way to spend a spring day with a high forecast of 80? The cold days are better for walleye. Usually that is too cold for me.

I was in the front, running the trolling motor, Donnie had the middle, running the net and Russ was in the rear, giving advice. We started catching fish almost immediately. It was a day when the 1-3 pound smallmouth and Kentucks were hungry. Pre-spawn with fresh water coming in to warm the stream had the fish turned on.

They loved the crawfish color Rooster Tail and in the long, slow, deeper holes, the number five Countdown was catching bigger fish. As I recall, we had a couple in 4-5 pound range.

Where the current made a cut bank in front of a gravel bar, we got out to wade and fish the current. I stood in one spot, water just below hip boot level and caught 13 healthy spotted bass. We called them Kentucks back then. I did not have a stringer so I started putting them in my pockets. Try that sometime. You haven't lived until you have a live bass in your front pocket start wiggling. You can learn some new dance steps.

With the sun high overhead, I took my shirt off just as we hit Rosie's Diner, a long, flat gravel bar that was just perfect for building a small cook fire and making lunch. That day, as I recall, lunch was deer backstrap, new potatoes in cream of mushroom sauce and toast.

In the afternoon, the fishing slowed some but we still caught enough to be interested. Back then, the limit was 10-per person with no size limit. We threw back everything over two pounds. The ideal fish to eat is the one between one and two pounds. I don't think we kept 30 but we had enough for each of us to have a good mess.

I would not mind doing that again. I see Donnie doing his shopping at Kroger now and then. Of course, Russ has been gone for quite a while, that kind of trip is better if you are a few years younger. It requires a little work. Back then, it was no problem. Now, I would want to go with a couple much younger anglers.

I have floated many streams. One that especially comes to mind is the New River up in West Virginia. The fishing action is fast and constant and you get to mix in some white water rafting for giggles. That is a great spring float. It can get a tad costly though.

But, it is sure a great way to spend one of those warm February days. Crappie fishing is not bad, either. Heck, just being outside is a delight when it is above 65 and sunny. I'd like me a bunch of that right about now.

Hunting Heritage banquet set March 1 at the Mill

The Cedar Roost Chapter of the NWTF will host their Hunting Heritage Banquet, March 1, at the Mill in Lebanon. I will be there. Good food and a lot of neat products to be auctioned off.

A single ticket is \$50 and that includes a year membership in NWTF. Pretty good deal and money going to a great cause. Then, we can all get up the next morning and go listen for one to gobble.

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