

Going interactive

Caddo Lake: New exhibit explains the history and importance of the lake

By CHARLENE DRAPER

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Marshall residents who are considering what to do during the Christmas holidays might want to consider the new exhibit at Caddo Lake State Park.

The park has replaced a 30-year-old exhibit with a new interactive one that gives the history of the lake and highlights what makes Caddo Lake unique.

Wally Reinhardt, project designer, said the new exhibit should give visitors a broad-based appreciation of what the lake has to offer.

"The displays are filled with interactive activities that showcase the many different types of animal and plant life at Caddo," he said. "It will also feature what life was like for the Caddo Indians who were last there around 1840."

Hours for the exhibit are 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Monday through Sunday. The park is open 365 days-a-year and visits can be made to the park for outdoor enjoyment anytime.

Reinhardt said he hopes people who visit the center will go away caring about the lake.

"I know there is a lot of controversy surrounding the lake, and we're not saying who's right or wrong, we want people to care," he said. "Once people see what we have to offer, we know they will care."

The Texas Department of Wildlife's design team went out in canoes on the lake, he said.

"And everywhere we turned there was something different to see," Reinhardt said.

The public can also go to the park and rent canoes to see the lake. Visitors wanting to spend the night can stay in newly renovated cabins or camp out in the great outdoors, he said.

"You can choose your level of adventure," Reinhardt said.

Caddo Lake is the only naturally formed large lake in Texas. There are two common legends of how the lake was formed. Both versions are colorfully illustrated in the exhibit, he said.

One says a great chief fell asleep and dreamed of "a great flood." He was told to move the people to higher ground. The rains did come, and when the flood had subsided the village and rivers were gone, and in their place was a large lake.

The other said, long ago a knotted old oak tree stood on the muddy banks of the wide, winding Red River. Heavy rains fell on the oak. Water flooded the river and covered the tree's roots. The oak tree grew older and its roots weakened. One rainy spring day rushing floodwaters uprooted the oak and many other trees. The oak floated downstream and snagged on another log.

Over centuries, hundreds of floods washed thousands of trees like the oak into the river forming giant logjams. One logjam was so big that it choked the Red River from bank to bank.

By the late 1700's or early 1800's the jam stretched for 100 miles. In some places, the massive tangle of tree trunks and driftwood rose 25 feet high. Roots and mud bound the pile together. Young trees sprouted from the top. People called this logjam "The Great Raft."

Heavy rains still fell on the river every spring and fall as it had for centuries. But the Great Raft formed a natural dam that blocked the water. Floodwater backed up into the river channels and created swamps and lakes. One of these was Caddo Lake.

Reinhardt said no matter which version people choose to believe the exhibit will give an appreciation for the lake.