

Small town's history, name still uncertain

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Thursday, August 16, 2012

UNCERTAIN — Yes, Uncertain, Texas is an actual place, although — appropriately — no one knows exactly how the town of 110 came to be named.

Nestled in a bend of mysterious Caddo Lake in East Texas, the town can be found at the end of Farm-to-Market Road 2198 east of Texas Highway 43 and about 15 miles north of Marshall. There is only one road in to town and one road out of town and that is FM 2198.

Dottie Carter and her husband Billy said the town is seeing a boom of city folk looking for an escape from the hustle and bustle and their several cottages and all of the other cottages in town are booked each and every weekend.

“Caddo about died when the man-made lakes started popping up, but now people are rediscovering Caddo Lake again,” she said.

The couple owns the Johnson Ranch Marina, which is the oldest lake marina in the state, several cottages and a tour company.

A fishing and tour guide, Billy knows the lake's every twist and turn, its history and his 50 plus years of experience shows as he maneuvers his flat bottom boat called a Go Devil through trails in patches of giant water lilies and down dark sloughs lined with giant moss-covered Cypress trees stretching upwards to the heavens.

Carter said there were many stories of the area, but some of the known history of the lake was more interesting than the legends.

“Monterey was an old town northeast of Vivian and that is where outlaws would go to get away. They would change their names and hide out there. We have some that come to Uncertain today to get away and kind of hideout,” he said.

The 65-mile long Caddo River has been flowing through the region for 10,000 years and was settled by the Caddo Indians for a few hundred years. The Spanish and the French both had explorers check the area out and in 1536 Cabeza de Vaca named the area Laguna Espanola.

Some believe it was a December night in 1811 when Texas' only natural lake was formed due a shift in tectonic plates along the New Madrid fault.

The Carters believe it was the earthquakes that caused the earth to break apart spilling the mighty river's waters outward covering some 150,000 acres. The couple says the same earthquake

caused a similar lake to be formed in Tennessee.

But others say as early as the late 18th-century there was a shallow lake in the area and a huge log jam of downed trees backed up the Red River and flooded the low lying area.

However it was formed, the new lake between Texas and Louisiana gave way to thriving trade and Steamboats began routinely ferrying passengers.

Uncertain City Council Member and business owner Joann Hodges said one tale into how the town became named centered on some captains hauling freight to the area.

“Some much-needed supplies were dropped off over here, but people couldn't find them so when they asked the riverboat crew where they left the supplies, the captain replied in the bend of the lake, but where exactly I'm uncertain,” she said before adding, “But I can't be certain if that is how it was named or not.”

Mrs. Carter, whose father built and ran the now defunct Fly'n Fish, said though she grew up in Marshal, the town of Uncertain played a huge role in her life.

“My father combined his two loves, fishing and flying and opened the Fly'n Fish and when we were not in school we were out here on the lake,” she said.

Back in its heyday the property featured an Olympic sized pool, a landing strip for small planes, and a lodge.

Portions of the old Fly'n Fish building is still erect, but the property is now owned by a musician that she says a few people might just know.

“Don Henley of the Eagles bought it and he owns it now, but it hasn't been open for years,” she said pointing a 1950s pamphlet on the lake and area.

Turning the pages she pointed to a young woman doing a somersault off a high dive board, “That was me a few years and a few pounds ago,” she said. “My father built the pool because I was into diving at the time.”

A sea of white cattle egrets sprung from the lily pads and filled the air while a gangly Blue Herron flapped its giant wings as the boat's motor sputtered loudly.

Occasionally a Wood duck would pop up only to seek shelter in a cypress grove and dragonflies darted to and fro from lily pad to lily pad.

Carter said wood Storks, various finches and other birds are in abundance and almost immediately he pointed skyward to a lone Cypress where a huge Osprey's nest was in mid construction.

“I've been watching them build that over the past several days. It really is something to see them fly over with huge branches to build the nest,” he said.

Carter said the past year has proven difficult to navigate the lake because of the current drought, but he adds it is much better this year than last.

And of course with the drought, the work of beavers keep Carter, other guides and lake goers constantly watching for problem areas.

“The river has been here 10,000 years and the lake since the earthquake, but each day holds something new,” he said as he navigated around a large beaver home.

Turning the boat back to Wildfern, the couple's homestead, Carter said he has taken film crews out on the water and has even carried Bigfoot seekers around the lake.

Carter says he has never seen Bigfoot, but he knows the legends of the creature and those of ghosts of the doomed Mittie Stephens, a riverboat that caught fire in 1869 killing between 60 and 70 passengers, supposedly haunting the enchanting lake.

“There is a lot of stuff out there in the lake, but I don't know about ghosts or bigfoot,” he said.

Back at the couple's home, which is filled with so much neat stuff the History Channel's American Picker guys would fawn over, Billy and Dottie reminisced about some of the people they had met over the years.

“We get a lot of people out here on the lake that came out here with their father and their father came out here with his father. It's pretty neat to hear some of the stories people tell about how they came out here when they were just a kid and now they have grandkids of their own,” Mrs. Carter said.

The couple said they would never dream of living anywhere else and just leaving their town to shop is something they dread doing.

“When we get down to having no dog food or toilet paper then it's time to go to Marshal or Jefferson,” she said laughing.

Though Carter said he's never seen Bigfoot, only a few blocks from his front door the legendary creature is spotted in mid-stride behind a bush. Oh wait that is just a cutout of the beast at the Bigfoot Retreat.

Uncertain has a flea market, several fishing camps, two restaurants, that Mrs. Hodges said are to die for, and even a church with the name of; you guessed it, Church of Uncertain.

Though the origin of the town's name might not be known, one thing is for certain, the residents of Uncertain welcome you to their hideout.