

We thought we would bring you some vintage outdoor sporting news, or rather stories about fishing, as we did more extensively in the 2021 Old Settlers Gazette. The Gasconade and Big Piney rivers were favorite hunting and fishing destinations for sportsmen, particularly from St. Louis, in the early decades of the 20th century. They came first to Old Pulaski by train, taking horse and wagon rides to their chosen resorts and rivers. As roads improved beginning in the mid-1920s, automobiles increased the tourist travel.

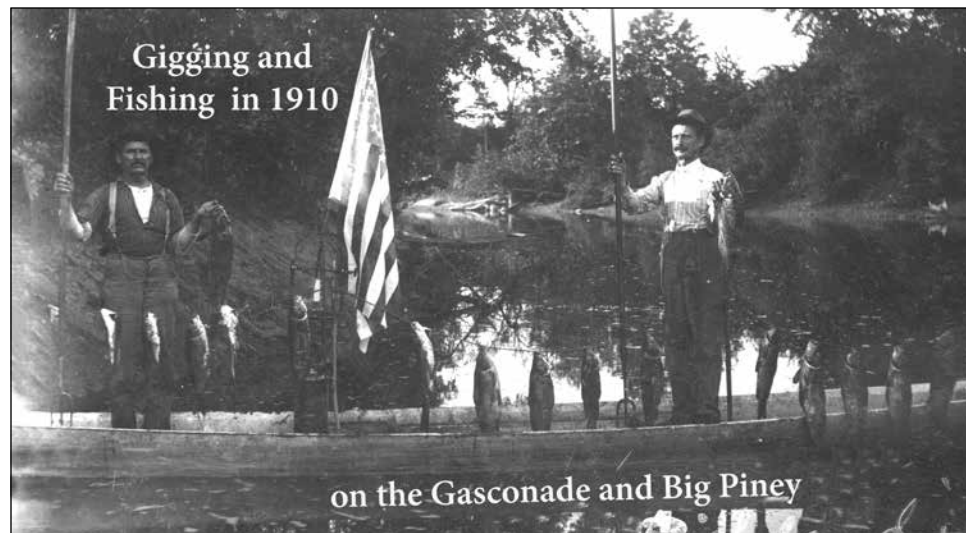
Fishing conditions, game status, and sportsmen's activities were covered in the "Rod and Gun" column of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, edited by E. T. Grether. Local conditions and news came to Editor Grether by mail from outfitters and sportsmen in the Ozarks. The first article about gigging includes a letter from a gigger in Richland.

September 25, 1910

Gigging Fish at Night.

There are many persons who strenuously object to the practice of spearing fish, and there are still others who believe no fish should be caught except with a delicate fly rod and artificial flies. The man who uses a trot line, as well as the expert artificial bait caster, who uses a wooden minnow, bristling with a dozen or more hooks, is also condemned by others who do not themselves hesitate to lure the mother bass from the spawning beds during the spawning season. All of these methods of depleting the state's supply of fish are in vogue and are legal under Missouri laws. Much has been written upon these subjects by contributors to the Rod and Gun department of this paper, but never before has a communication been received about spearing fish. The following letter on that subject has been sent by H. C. Shubert of Richland, Mo.

"Of anglers and sportsmen generally there are legion, but only a chosen few understand the fine art and can enjoy the rare sport of just sim-



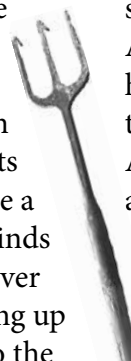
ply 'gigging' at night, when the river gets clear. A stern apprenticeship as a 'paddler' is the first requisite of a competent 'gigger,' and the next thing to overcome is that crook to the line of vision that exists in looking at objects in clear water. Ozark rivers are a series of eddies and shoals, winds and bends, and going down over a shoal is as dangerous as going up is strenuous and dangerous to the inexperienced, but the competent paddler who knows every bend in the river, the location of every sandbar, log, rock, treetop and snag, swirls, currents, eddies and pockets, nothing is further from his thoughts than letting the boat turn over.

Dark Nights Are Best.

"It is usually in the fall and winter months that the river gets clear enough to see the bottom in 4 or 5 feet of water. Dark nights are most favorable for gigging, as the moon



Ozarkers first learned to bow and spear fish from Native Americans. Modern gigging with 12-foot poles developed along with the stable wooden johnboat. Light at night was first provided by pine knots burning in suspended metal baskets. Carbide lamps were next used which gave way to gasoline lanterns. Today, bright floodlights are powered by portable generators.



produces a reflection that an artificial light can not overcome. A satisfactory light is very important. A high-pressure "outside" gas lamp, hung in the bow, about 2 feet above the boat, affords a fine range of light. A home-built pine boat, 20 feet long and 3 feet athwart; a good paddler, with a good paddle, two giggers, a ten or twelve mile pull up the river in the afternoon; supper on a sandbar, two miles up the river, just for luck, while the stars are getting ready to twinkle, and then we land and "light up." The well-sharpened gigs, with 12-foot handles, are poised for action. The paddler guides the boat off down the river, and woe be to the gigger who misses the first big fish or strikes at the first little one.

"The bottom of the river is a moving picture show. You make a careful estimate of how deep you can see, and you glance at a school

of little suckers, which taunt you for a throw. The boat quickens pace as you approach a rapid shoal; four or five big red horse, feeding in the shallow, swift water, take fright and rush like lightning for the deep water above. Now you strike; no indecision. Not at all of them, but at one fish. Glancing ahead, you see a catfish stand trembling in the rushing water. You reach for him and observe that he is twice as big as he looked when in the water. Your blood is up now, and you strike at the first sheephead you see. Your partner admonishes you for breaking up a nest and you either tell him you struck at a bass or that you caught a glimpse of a buffalo 6 inches longer than the boat.

"You reach the eddy below the shoal; the bottom recedes, and you can't see a thing. The paddler guides the boat to the side of the stream that affords the best prospect of picking up a carp or buffalo as it feeds among the logs and roots along the bank. A wide expanse of 3 or 4 foot water comes in view, and as you move out in the river, silently gliding along, a big fish may appear any time. The bottom passes along under you, and small fish feed and play all around. Another shoal is reached and if you are quick and sure you will get a couple of good ones before you come to deep water again. And so the night goes on, but you don't know it, and when you reach your landing, as the pink begins to show in the east, you sit on the bank, while Charlie and John arrange a pose for themselves and the catch, and you press the button as you wonder where the night has gone to."

H. C. Shubert
Richland, Missouri



Sportsmen often relived their latest fishing or hunting trip with a letter to the newspaper. A float trip of five to ten days was quite common then. Here is an account of a fishing outing on the Big Piney.

October 30, 1910

Editor of Rod and Gun—After our outing of ten days, floating down the Big Piney and finding, even in the heart of the Ozarks, that the Rod and Gun Column is read with interest and expectation among the native guides and hunters, I concluded that it would be of interest to not only these typical woodsmen of the Big Piney but to all lovers of the game in St. Louis as well to recount our experience on the most beautiful float that any angler out of St. Louis ever experienced. A man naturally becomes a little bit sentimental in recounting events and experiences, surrounded as we were with grand scenery of woods, stream and mountain. But now to recount. After a tedious drive of thirty-seven miles to Slabtown from Arlington [a shuttle by wagon for which Perry Andres charged \$7.50 in 1903], we pitched our first camp. Each camp was named in honor of our wives' first name. At a point on the Piney called Dog Town (Camp Lullie) [see map at right for camp locations], we nestled down in front of a majestic bluff on a gravel bar, where the waters of the Piney sounded like a lullaby within 10 feet of our tent flaps. After a good dinner, prepared by that good old guide, John Bean,

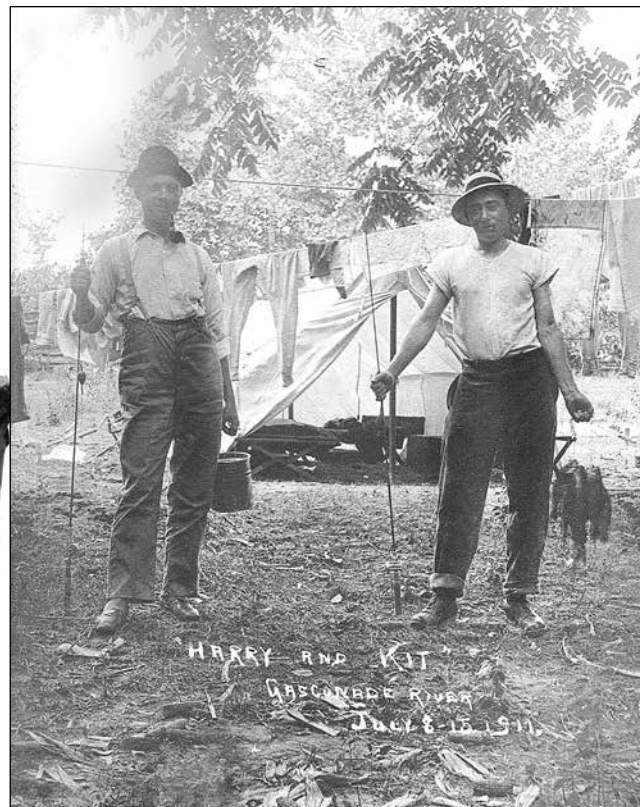


We found William Atwood's 1910 plaque under flood debris still attached to a dolomite block but have not found Henry Miller's.

assisted by that old-timer, Ellis, we sat in front of a log fire. Then to bed and up by moonlight an hour before daybreak. By the time the sun's first beams peeped over the hills we were on our way whipping both sides of the Piney River with flies that no smallmouth bass in the Piney could resist. As we would hook one of these thorough breeds of the finny tribe, it would be a battle royal to determine who was the best man. We lost as often as the bass.

At a quiet nook in a shaded spot, we would gather for lunch and recount our experiences for an hour or more and, of course, the big ones always got away. But still we brought some of them back that weighed up to 5 pounds. And then we went on our way again for the afternoon catch.

Our second camp, at Turkey Neck (Camp Net), verified its name for after the usual fine dinner, campfire and our cots, we were awakened at daylight by the call of a wild turkey and if ever you heard a tantalizing sound, listen to the wamp!wamp!Wamp! of one of these rascals when the season was only a few days off. Honor bright, my boy,



Two fishermen on an eight day float trip on the Gasconade in July of 1911.

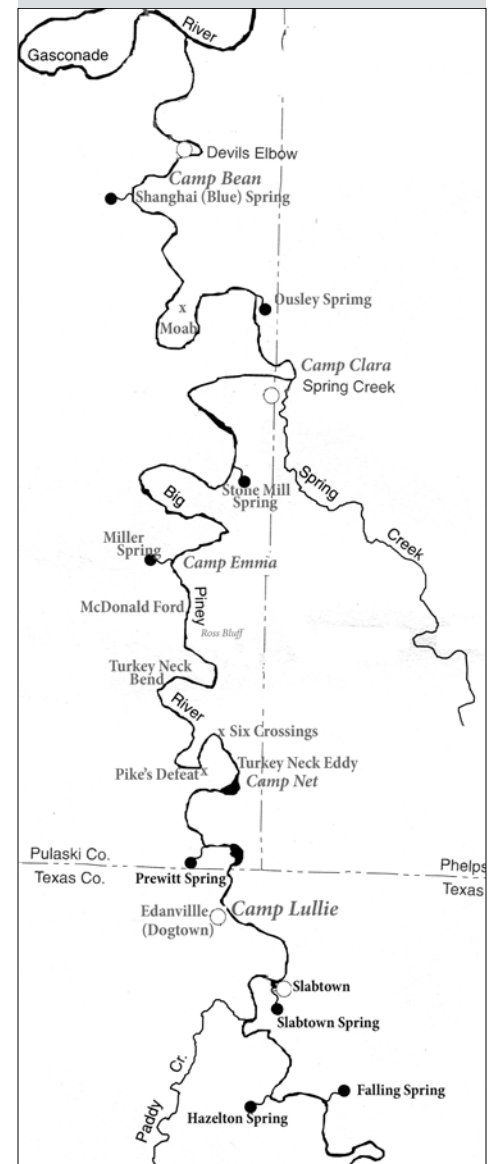
we did not eat turkey, but did eat squirrel and duck galore.

At this point sprang up the rivalry between Ellis and Jacobs as to the biggest bass that either might catch. Jacobs at that time was the proud possessor of a 4-pound small-mouth bass, which was doomed to be relegated to the rear by Ellis' 82-ounce bass before the trip was finished.

Our third camp, at Ross's Bluff (Camp Emma) was established after we had passed a spot at Miller's Spring where a touch of pathos had come into our jubilant spirits, that made us all take off our hats, not only to the sentiment that inspired it, but to the club that completed it. Fastened upon a granite [limestone] block were two iron tablets, erected in honor of Henry Miller and Thomas Atwood, at a point on the Piney River that was evidently their favorite fishing spot, placed there by the members of the Moark Fishing Club. These sentiments, expressed in cold letters, in the heart of the wild Ozarks, could only make men's hearts softer and kinder to their fellow-men. [Memory may be at fault here. Ross Bluff is three miles upstream from Miller Spring. Also see one of the tablets below left.]

Our fourth camp (Camp Clara) at the mouth of Spring Creek, was in the front of a bluff that the government says is 970 feet high and what the government says is correct, although Billy Moore says "they are off." At the same time he would not buy his life preserver from the Eagle Boat Store without the government inspection "O.K.". Such is the inconsistency of man. [The elevation of the top of the bluff is 1094 feet above sea level. The floodplain is at 768 feet. That makes

The map below shows the 43-mile stretch from Slabtown to the Big Piney's confluence with the Gasconade that was very popular with anglers.



the bluff 326 feet high.]

Our fifth camp (Camp Bean) was named to honor our guide John Bean and to show our appreciation of the services of this good old woodsman, we decided to eat nothing but beans for dinner. [The location of the fifth camp is not mentioned but, based on the average number of miles floated each day, Camp Bean was probably located at or between Blue Spring and Devils Elbow, making the last day's float about 15 miles if they floated to the origin of their trip at Arlington on the Gasconade.]

Yours truly,
W. T. Moore, W. W. Ellis, Thomas S. Warnack, F. E. Jacobs.