

Although primitive, many campsites on AGFC WMAs are ideal for small travel trailers. Photo by Randy Zellers.



Haulable Hunting Lodge

Campers Convert Wilderness into Comfortable Destinations

BY RANDY ZELLERS

Heated floors, satellite televisions and five-star meals prepared by live-in chefs wait for some hunters when they reach their lodge on opening day. Others prefer roughing it in primitive tents with down sleeping bags. Hunters who want to be comfortable but can't afford an exclusive lodge, lease or guided trip have another option – one with wheels and the amenities of home.

Rolling Residence

Arlene Green, a regional education coordinator for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, has enjoyed the benefits of a mobile hunting lodge for years. She started using a camper out of necessity, and it has transitioned to a hobby and, perhaps, an obsession.

"I used to lease some Georgia-Pacific land to hunt, and we couldn't put up any permanent structures," Green said. "The nearest hotel was still a long drive from my hunting area, and it was expensive to stay for a week at a time."

In addition to a roof over her head, a camper offered Green fast access to her hunting area, a comfortable bed and a way to enjoy downtime between morning and afternoon hunts.

"I had to steal a coffee maker from home, but it was worth it to have a thermos full of hot coffee for the hunt without trying to track down an open gas station when I should be in the woods."

Although motivated by necessity, Green quickly remembered how the camaraderie of camp completes the hunting experience.

"The camper lets you stay at the hunting club with everyone else instead of going back and forth every morning and afternoon. You get to enjoy each other's company. Huddling around a small heater in the dark isn't much fun, but it's one more thing to laugh about later and one more memory from the hunt."

Pop-up Progression

Green said her first camper was a used pop-up model that she and a hunting buddy shared.

It was light, inexpensive and convenient, but during winter, they found themselves wanting more.

“The camper had two nice king-sized beds in it on either end, but the wind would rip through it and freeze you,” she said. “I remember waking up one morning after an all-night snowfall and the canvas roof had sagged to within inches of my sleeping bag from the weight of the snow. I knew I was ready for an upgrade.”

The next camper Green bought was a 10-foot long Shasta, with hard sides, heat and air conditioning.

“I completely restored that little pull-behind. It was great when I pulled into campsites with it. People would walk over from other campsites to look at it and strike up conversation. Camper brands have a following; you don’t find too many strangers when you pull up to a campsite.”

Although the small Shasta served her well for many years, Green has since acquired a 22-foot Airstream and is in the process of updating it for her needs.

“My heart was in that little camper, but I still wanted a bigger one,” Green said. “Fixing these old campers isn’t as hard as it seems, and you have a real sense of pride every time you hitch it up for a new adventure.”

On the Move

Green’s favorite feature of the mobile base camp is its year-round readiness. Her lease in southern Arkansas has a few turkeys on it, although she prefers to chase spring gobblers in the Ozarks and Ouachitas. In less than an hour, she can have her entire hunting camp ready to move.

“I use it all over the state,” she said. “When hunting season is over, it’s great for taking a long weekend and camping at a lake. White Oak Lake State Park is one of my favorite places to go during the summer. It’s secluded, but the park has all the amenities you need.”

Perfect for Permits

Hunters on AGFC wildlife management areas can benefit immensely from mobile hunting camps. Some of the best public land in the state is regulated by permits that are drawn in a lottery every June. Hunters have access to prime



hunting areas with reduced pressure, but often don’t know until August whether they’re drawn for the hunt.

According to Ricky Chastain, AGFC assistant chief of wildlife

management, camping access is within easy reach of almost all WMAs.

“We have primitive campsites on almost all of our larger WMAs,” Chastain said. “Some of the smaller WMAs don’t have campsites directly on them, but there’s usually a state park, city park or private campground not too far away.”

Some state parks and RV parks offer electrical hookups, sewer outlets and the occasional cable television access, but campers at AGFC facilities should plan for primitive sites.

“We maintain the areas by mowing and filling in soft spots with gravel,” Chastain said. “But our primary goal on WMAs is habitat management, so we keep the costs of the campsites as low as possible. Many hunters prefer to have a rough site close to their hunting area over a Motel 6 that’s miles away.”

The rough nature of AGFC campsites also helps preserve the natural beauty surrounding them. Chastain said many beautiful areas on WMAs would be ruined if they were covered with gravel or pavement.

“People camping are trying to get away from concrete and buildings when they go to the woods,” Chastain said. “Our sites are perfect for that.” **AW**



Campers are perfect for hunters who may visit new hunting areas each season. Photo by Arlene Green.

The value of a camper is immeasurable minutes before it’s time to hit the woods. Photo by Arlene Green.

Salty, Sweet and Spicy

Everybody's Got a Favorite Camp Snack

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

Guilty pleasures are innocent at hunting and fishing camps.

I'll be the first to confess. Mine is the Nutty Bar by Little Debbie. Why? Just read the description from the manufacturer: "Classic crunchy wafer bars, full of the great taste of peanut butter enrobed in fudge."

They're hard to resist – and why should we?

The Nutty Bar is a sweet snack, just part of a huge camp foods pantry – stuff like beef jerky, nuts and snack crackers. We know these are not healthful and, no, we're not going to read the nutritional facts. We know what binds these treats – fat, salt and sugar. That's why most of us save it for camp, whether we're waiting for whitetails in a deer stand or chasing large-mouths in a boat.

The funny thing about Nutty Bars and many camp foods is they're almost never found in the cupboard at home. As soon as they're purchased, they're whisked away to the middle of nowhere to be enjoyed without witnesses – or at least witnesses who aren't talking. And they come in a bunch of tastes and textures.

By the way, Little Debbie has an Arkansas connection. One of McKee Foods' major plants, which employs about 1,500 people, is in Gentry. The McKees – O.D. and Ruth – started the company from scratch in 1934 in Chattanooga, Tenn.

King of Camp

The King of Canned Meats – SPAM – rules at camp, too. Think of all the easy recipes SPAM anchors, from breakfast burritos to mac 'n' SPAM 'n' cheese. SPAM,

first canned in 1937, is best skillet-fried and combined with whatever else is at hand. Look up recipes if you will, but winging it is more fun. If you're a huge fan, visit Hormel Foods' SPAM Museum in Austin, Minn.

It makes great catfish bait, too. A one-time world-record blue catfish from the Mississippi River was lured by a tasty chunk.

SPAM is a twig on a big branch of meats on the camp food family tree. There's potted meat, deviled ham, Slim Jims, jerky of all varieties and the noble Vienna sausage – the "wienerwurst."

"Vy-innies" come packed in ring-top cans in groups of seven, each about 2 inches long. The proper procedure is to pull out the middle sausage first, which makes removing the others easier.

Supper in a Stick

The Slim Jim must be as revered at camp as any other meat-product snack. Adolph Levis came up with this salty, spicy whip in his Philadelphia basement in 1928, during the Great Depression. That tall guy on the package (not the modern maniacal version) dated from the early jars that dispensed Slim Jims for a dime. ConAgra Foods makes Slim Jims today in several flavors.

Like SPAM, Underwood Deviled Ham is a rustic chef's dream. Mix it with mayonnaise and whatever you prefer and you've got a quick sandwich filling or cracker spread. Chicken, turkey, roast beef and liverwurst are available, too.

We haven't mentioned cheese (real and canned), snack crackers, chips, sardines, peanut butter, all kinds of nuts or canned chili and stew, and many others. If you have a favorite guilty pleasure you take to camp, let us know and we'll share it with others. We won't use your name if you'd rather we didn't. E-mail jfwilliams@agfc.state.ar.us or send it to Jeff Williams, 2 Natural Resources Drive, Little Rock, AR 72205.

In the meantime, trade a Nutty Bar for a Slim Jim? **AW**



Many hunters and anglers fill their pockets with comfort foods for deer stand or fishing boat enjoyment. Photo by Jeff Williams.

Let Your Fingers Do the Checking

New Deer Check Station Fits in Hunters' Pockets

BY RANDY ZELLERS

Country stores and gas stations bustle with activity during deer hunting season. People come and go, buying food for the hunt and coffee and gas for the ride home. Hunters at those stores and check stations chatted while they waited for deer to be checked.

These traditions remain, although the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission streamlined the check-in process with a call-in system.

"We adopted a new automated telephone checking system and did away with the old check-in sheets," said Matt Hodges, AGFC assistant chief of wildlife management.

"Telephone checking is not only more convenient for the hunter, it's much faster and less labor-intensive on wildlife management staff."

Hodges says biologists, wildlife officers and technicians spent many hours delivering, returning and recording the old check sheets – hours that could have been used for habitat management work and other important in-the-field tasks.

"We've had automated checking available on the Web site for years, and it's slowly gained momentum," Hodges said. "The Telecheck option is a further move toward making things as convenient for the hunter as possible, while reducing paperwork and errors involved in hand-recording data."

Numbers Up

Hodges says there was concern that people would find the system confusing and not check their deer successfully.

"But we're very pleased with the results. So far, more people have checked deer than this time last year. Once we add in the Deer Management Assistance Clubs (the only hand-entered check sheets), we may see a record harvest."

Hodges says 56 percent of deer checked through the bulk of the season were checked via telephone. Internet checking accounted for 41 percent of the harvest.

Brad Miller, AGFC Deer Program coordinator, says it will be hard to tell how much

impact telephone checking has had on the harvest this season because many regulations changes were made.

"We switched to doe days instead of lottery-drawn doe permits in some zones and made a few other significant changes that may increase the harvest," Miller said. "And hunters may just be having a great year, so we can't say with certainty to what extent telephone checking has impacted the checked harvest."

Fast Data

Miller's excitement for telephone checking is spurred by time. When the AGFC was using check sheets, each one had to be manually proofed and hand-entered. The whole process could take months because biologists and technicians were busy with other seasons and projects.

"When the regulations for the next season needed to be set, we still didn't have complete information," Miller said. "We had to rely on a lot of two-year-old data to make decisions. Although we still need to manually enter biological data we get from check sheets used on (wildlife management areas) and DMAP clubs, our harvest information will be ready to go before we look at next year's season structure."



Telephone checking is faster, more reliable and more convenient than previous methods. Photo by Mike Wintroath.