

The Augusta Chronicle

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Enjoying a five-day fishing trip on a lazy river in Florida

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

Published 4:11 a.m. ET May 31, 2024 | Updated 4:11 a.m. ET May 31, 2024

I took some time off last week to take a fishing trip with a group of guys down to the St. Johns River in the middle of Florida. The excursion was a little out of my comfort zone because it has been a long time since I took a four-night trip without someone living within 40 feet of my living room attending. It was all guys for five days.

This was not the inaugural journey to the St Johns River for this group of fellows, but it was mine. Some of the guys have been going for 30 years and I can see why they keep heading back annually.

The trip down was typical of anything my buddy Ed and I do; we had a tire blow out before we hit Millen and lost a large cooler to the 70 mph winds on I-16, but we made it down in time to get the boat in the water before dark. We stayed in the fishing community of Astor, Florida in a cool, open house that slept at least 13 comfortably. The front room had windows all across the front and was literally an underhanded rock throw to the water in front of us. There was a large dock for sitting and tying up boats. As soon as we arrived, we all hopped in the boat and rode about half a mile down the river to a restaurant directly on the water. And we repeated this dining experience four nights in a row.

The St. Johns River is the longest river in Florida at 310 miles and flows north. The headwaters are at Blue Cypress Lake about 80 miles southeast of Orlando. The river meanders inland but finalizes its journey to the Atlantic Ocean near Jacksonville.

If there is anyone who doesn't think that Florida isn't flat, the St. Johns River's headwaters are only 27 feet higher in elevation than where it ends. That makes for a lazy river with a drop of about an inch per mile over its total length of 310 miles. The watershed for the St. Johns is about 9,000 square miles which is almost 16% of the state.

Where we stayed in Astor is part of the middle basin of the St. Johns, which is home to more than 100 springs, one-third of the manatee population in Florida and the second largest lake in Florida, Lake George. The water is mostly brackish, which means it is a mixture of salt and fresh water. We saw alligators, snapping turtles, all kinds of wading birds, more osprey than you could count and plenty of rednecks with lots of interesting tattoos.

The fishing was great. We rode around looking for bream beds and between our group found some great spots. We fished hard for two days and caught plenty enough shellcrackers, bluegill and redbreast to have several large fish fries.

Campbell Vaughn: Mosquitoes are seemingly everywhere. Here's how to keep them away.

The third day on the water we loaded up and went to Silver Glen Springs off Lake George. "The Glen" was an experience. The spring itself is back up in a nook that looks like a little creek off the big water. The spring has crystal clear water measuring about 200 feet in diameter which uses two large vents to pump out 65 million gallons of water a day. The water flows from this head a little over half a mile back to Lake Georgia with the entire area of water encompassing 22 acres. Hopping in the water after being in 90-degree hot Florida sun can open your eyes a little because the spring maintains a 72-degree temperature year around. Once you get acclimated, it feels great.

There were no less than 250 boats back in the Glen with some huge house boats that looked like they stayed year around. Everyone was having a great time barbequing, swimming, listening to music and just enjoying a fun Memorial Day weekend.

It is fun to get out and see and do some new things that are not part of my normal routine. Getting to hang out with friends, make some new friends, eat well, fish a bunch and enjoy some amazing nature was just what this extension agent needed after a busy spring. If you get a chance and enjoy that kind of fun, that area of Florida was an incredible place to visit and be with folks you enjoy.

