



The area historically known as the Horsepasture is underneath Lake Jocassee, and is just out of view when looking north from Jumping Off Rock.

Where in the world is the Horsepasture?

By Dennis Chastain

It's an amazing phenomenon. Every year several thousand people pile into the pickup truck or other means of four-wheeled conveyance and head for "the Horsepasture." Not one in a hundred has any idea where the Horsepasture actually is—or rather, was.

You can drive the entire length of the road that people call "the Horsepasture Road" till the cows come home, but you will never even get close to the true Horsepasture. That road, the gravel road that bisects the Jocassee Gorges property, the one that turns off of US 178 at Laurel Valley Lodge with the green sign that says Horse Pasture Road, was constructed over a period of years for logging purposes.

The real, historical Horsepasture road originated in the Eastatoee Valley. It ran up what is now Mill Creek Road, then along the stream bank of Cane Creek to a twisty, winding section of the Cane Creek Road known as the Katy Wind, up Bully Mountain to the modern Horse Pasture Road near the Gantt Field. The Gantt Field is the well-known campsite in a hemlock grove with the conspicuous jiffy-johnny. The road then crossed over the ridge at the point where the Dockins Flat Road turns off the Horse Pasture Road near the Gantt Field, then down the Dockins Flat Road to the real Horsepasture.

Interestingly, people will say that they are "back in the Horsepasture" when they are just about anywhere in the vast area bounded on the east by US 178, on the south by the Eastatoee Valley, on the west by Lake

Jocassee and to the north by the North Carolina state line. This is the same area variously known as the Jocassee Gorges, the Franklin Gravelly Wildlife Management Area and the Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area. No wonder so many people manage to get themselves lost each year "back in the Horsepasture."

So, where in the world is the Horsepasture? Well, the correct answer is, it doesn't exist. It exists only in the minds and memories of those few people whose ancestors once lived there or those who visited the area before 1971, the year that Duke Power closed the gates on the Jocassee dam. The real Horsepasture is forevermore buried under about 40 feet of emerald green water in the Toxaway arm of Lake Jocassee.

The real Horsepasture was a prominent floodplain located at the point where the Toxaway River, the Horsepasture River and Laurel Fork Creek all merged. Today, the area is just out of view when looking north from Jumping Off Rock. About the only way to see the old historical Horsepasture, or where it used to be, is by boat. The area can be located precisely by taking a boat to the mouth of the Laurel Fork arm of the lake and motoring slightly back toward the Toxaway River. Any good topographic map of Lake Jocassee will clearly depict the area of the original floodplain. ❁

(Dennis Chastain is a Pickens County naturalist and outdoors writer who has been hunting, biking and fishing in the Jocassee Gorges for more than 30 years. Next issue: How did the Horsepasture get its name?)

Whose horses really were hidden in the old historic Horsepasture?

By Dennis Chastain

If you ask a dozen people in northern Pickens County about the origins of the name "Horsepasture," you will likely get one of two responses. The first group will tell you very matter-of-factly that it dates back to the time of the Civil War and Sherman's march across South Carolina. The story goes that people heard that Sherman was coming and hid their horses in what later became known as the Horsepasture. The other half will assert, just as emphatically, that; no, it goes way back to the time of the Cherokees. It was the Cherokees who stole the settler's horses and hid them in the Horsepasture.

The one thing we know for sure is that at some point in time, someone hid somebody's horses in the Horsepasture. But whose horses? And when?

The Civil War version of the story goes something like this. Rumors of William Tecumseh Sherman's march through the Carolinas spread panic throughout the upcountry. Fearing that their livestock would be confiscated or destroyed, people took their horses, (and cattle too, according to some sources), and hid them out in the remote floodplain where the Toxaway River, Laurel Fork Creek and the Horsepasture River (at one time known as the Green River) all converge. Because of that, they will tell you, the area came to be known as the "Horsepasture." Hmmm. Sounds like it could be true.

Let's take a closer look at this version of the story. The truth is that Sherman, even though he wreaked havoc on the lower and central parts of the Palmetto State, never came closer than a 100 miles to the area now known as the Horsepasture. Furthermore, even if Sherman was in Pickens and was headed this way, you would have to think a lot of your horses to take the trouble to take them way back up in the Horsepasture. There would have been a hundred more easily accessible places to hide livestock.

There were only three reasonable routes in and out of the Horsepasture during the 1860s, and all three would have been arduous and more than a little



The Horsepasture River snakes its way through the mountains of Jocassee Gorges. (Photo by Tommy Wyche. Reprinted with permission from "Mosaic: 21 Special Places in the Carolinas.")

treacherous. It is possible, however, that someone could have taken their horses up the Toxaway River gorge from Jocassee Valley. They could have gone up and over Big Laurel mountain on the old "Horsepasture Road"

Document reveals origin of Horsepasture name

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and then down the backside or finally, they could have come in from North Carolina through an area known as the Canebrake, and then down the Toxaway River. But anyone who traversed any of these three routes before the entire area was inundated by Lake Jocassee will tell you that the horses would have been at greater risk of breaking a leg or dying from exhaustion than suffering confiscation by General Sherman.

The biggest threat that people living in the mountainous northwestern corner of the Palmetto State faced during the Civil War was from organized raiders and small bands of renegades and rouges, known as outliers. One of the most feared organized groups, known as Stoneman's Raiders led by General George Stoneman, did in fact come as close as Clemson and Anderson, where they were engaged by a contingent of Citadel cadets. Stoneman's storm troopers later looted the city of Greenville. Whether word of these raids or those of the many small bands of outliers that harassed the settlers throughout the mountains of North and South Carolina caused people to panic and send their livestock into the wilderness is simply not known.

So how about the Indians? Well, true enough, from the time the Cherokees obtained their first horses in 1740, they took a shine to the early European settlers horses and evidently were fascinated by them. And having a totally different concept of ownership than the Europeans, (they pretty much subscribed to the principle of "possession is ninety percent of the law"), there are numerous historical accounts of Cherokees having procured settler's ponies.

It is entirely possible that this version of the story has some merit. But one has to wonder if there is not some historical record that could clear all this up. Well, it turns out that there is. An archival plat of a tract of land owned by one Samuel Maverick, located on the North Carolina/South Carolina state line, just upstream of the area that we call the Horsepasture, shows a hand-drawn dotted line

across the property that says, "From the Horse Pasture to the Negroe trail". The plat is dated 1819, one year before William Tecumseh Sherman was born.

There is even more compelling proof that the name, Horse Pasture, pre-dates Sherman and the Civil War. Back in 1813 when the two Carolinas decided to survey their common border in the mountainous northwestern corner, a certain Professor George Blackburn, a professor of astronomy and mathematics at South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina) was commissioned to take astronomic observations to help guide the surveyors. He spent a considerable amount of time in the area now known as the Jocassee Gorges, including the Jocassee Valley.

George Blackburn was an interesting fellow, a real character. He was a meticulous scientist, an ardent adventurer, a self-styled poet, and such a stickler for discipline in the classroom that his students in Columbia once burned him in effigy. A melee ensued and the Governor had to call out the State Militia to quell the riot. But the important part of his resume is the fact that he was a meticulous scientist and kept extensive notes of his travels around the state.

One notation in his journal, excerpted in Claudia Hembree's recent book, "Jocassee Valley," is perhaps definitive. While describing the Jocassee Valley, Blackburn wrote, "There are two other vales of this kind—the horse pasture—I named from the Indians hiding stolen horses there. It has but two families—the canebrake as yet uninhabited."

So, at long last, by this cryptic notation from 1813, we finally know with a fair degree of confidence whose horses were first hidden in the old historic Horsepasture. ❁

(Dennis Chastain is a Pickens County naturalist and outdoors writer who has been hunting, hiking and fishing in the Jocassee Gorges for more than 30 years.)

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