

Clayton Spoor and Kristopher Bouldin

“Big Fish Story”

by James Smith, River Ridge Inn
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River Ridge Inn has been an outfitter for a major corporation in Dallas, TX, Schneider Electric. Mr. Richard Wilson, Area Sales Manager, has been bringing guests here since 2002. We have seen over 2,000 guests sponsored by Schneider Electric, their distributors and the contractors who the distributors sell to. These guests have been responsible for over 1,500 days of our guides teaching the art of fly fishing on the North Fork and White Rivers. We have over 20 fly fishing guides that we have used during this period of time. They are the absolute best instructor/guides on north Arkansas trout waters. As you can expect, we have caught a lot of trout over this period of time. The average guest, new to fly fishing, catches between 25 - 40 trout per day. Those that are experienced will average 60 - 100. Mr. Wilson, himself, has caught over 135 in one day's time. Being conservative, one might do some math and come up with over 110,000 trout, Caught and Released, in that period of time.

When AGFC changed the trout limits about 5 years ago, the one regulation that everyone supported, and that everyone was anxious to see the results of, was the increase in size limit and quantity limit for the Brown Trout. The limit went from 2 Browns greater than 16", to 1 Brown over 24". No one expected results to occur over night. We waited 5 years to see these results. We have owned River Ridge Inn for over 17 years and have never seen so many of our guests brag about the number and size of Browns that they have caught and released. The stories, taken home and spread around, have resulted in a renewed interest in fly fishing for all trout, but mostly in hopes of catching that "Big Brown".

On April 30, 2018, one of our guests was a guest of Schneider Electric, and a guest of their distributor, Rexel USA Electric. His name is Clayton Spoor, from Spoor Electric. Clayton is from Sunnyvale, Tx and has come here to River Ridge Inn on several occasions over the past 5 years. His guide was Kristopher Bouldin of Norfolk, AR. Kristopher has taken Clayton and Clayton's father, Mike, on guided fly fishing trips on the White and Norfolk Tailwaters several times in the past. In fact, both Clayton and Mike argue over who is going to go with Kristopher during the Corporate Outing. The afternoon, when the guides returned to River Ridge Inn, there was a lot of talk about the number of Browns caught and the size of some of them. In one instance, a guide and 2 guests landed over 20 Browns, all within 18" to over 24". This should tell you that the fishery for Brown Trout has been healed and is continuing to grow year by year. When Kristopher and Clayton returned to the Inn, you could tell by the looks on their face that they pulled off something special.

Attached you will have photos showing two of the many Browns caught on Kristopher's boat that day. The story of the guided trip was better than the smirk coming from the

guide and his client' faces. They could not wait to tell everyone the story of how their day went.

THE STORY.....The day started off with a bang. Clayton hung a Brown that did what Brown's do. It teased Clayton into thinking this was not going to be that hard to land. Kristopher said he thought it to easily be a 30" fish. Kristopher told him to be ready, the Brown had his head down and was getting ready to take a run. It did just that. Clayton, a bit over anxious, did not react quick enough to give the Brown his due. The line snapped and Clayton was left with a limp fly rod and a thought of what might have been, a 30 incher, his first and only 30 incher, and, the biggest trout he had ever seen.

The mark of a great fisherman, for that matter, a great individual, is one that will learn from his mistakes, and a driven desire to get better as a result of a mistake or error in judgement. Clayton is that kind of "kid". Kristopher explained to him what had happened that caused the fish to escape. Clayton listened and then began to ask many questions related to catching big fish. All the why's, what's and where's were explained the best a great instructor/guide could do. Did Clayton listen? That afternoon, Clayton caught what none of the guides, or experienced Trout fisherman, had ever seen. Clayton caught and landed his first Brown over 24", a fat, beautifully colored, hook nosed male that measured 27 1/2". This is a big male, a big male.

The day was ending. Boats were headed to the ramps. Kristopher's best guide friend, Brock Dixon, was getting ready to head back in. And then it happened. Clayton hooked what he knew was another really big Brown. And it was. Kristopher got excited, the fishing partner got excited, and Clayton tried to remain calm, thinking all the time of the lessons he had learned earlier that day. Running through his mind was the loss of a 30 incher, the instructions Kristopher had given him and, the answers to all the questions Clayton had asked. Everyone left on the river knew what was happening. The boats stopped running with open throttles and the attention went to Kristopher's boat and the angler in it. Kristopher yelled to Brock to bring his better camera. Clayton carefully, and with the most respect, continued to feel the line strip between his fingers, all the time watching his rod orientation. When the fish gave back some of what he had, Clayton stripped the line in, bringing it into the boat and laying it on the floor. Clayton took extra care not to step on the line or wrap it around his leg. Meanwhile, Kristopher got the net, took one look at it, looked at the sow that was tiring and thought, "This ain't going to work so good." The net was too small to take the chance of slipping it under the sow's belly. He wasn't about to be the cause of losing this magnificent fish. Kristopher noticed a nearby shallow area next to a shoal and figured it was his best chance of netting the fish. He jumped out of the boat and had Clayton guide the tiring Brown over to the shallow water. With one quick jam of the net, it went under the fish, through the gravel, and out the other side, this beauty was now "in the bag".

The female Brown measured out to 31 1/2" with a 22 inch girth. No weight was able to be taken, but suffice it to say, who cares. Clayton had missed a "30 incher" to begin the day. Not counting all the Browns caught that day, Clayton had put the two fish in the boat that he and Kristopher will remember, and to tell and laugh about, for years to

come. They will be forever bonded. Two fish that came an inch from totaling 60"!!! Two fish that I dare to say you would not have heard about, or seen, over the last 20 or 25 years. A female Brown sow, and her mate. What a mount they will make!! The best part for the rest of us is that they are still out there, waiting for that next #16 fly to come their way. Congratulations to both Clayton and Kristopher. This is one fish story where the teller will not have to exaggerate on how big the fish was. No need to make the "one that got away" any bigger than the two that were landed. Clayton will be back to River Ridge Inn, and Kristopher will still be guiding and teaching his fly fishing skills. Both will have expectations of bettering the best day of trout fishing they have ever had. That is what trout fishing on the White and North Fork rivers will do to you.