

## Just Sittin' on the Fox Springs Bridge

By Darren Shell

Most of our lake lovers of Dale Hollow have never even heard the name *Fox Springs*, but it was once a special little spot along the old Obey River. At the mouth of Mitchell Creek, where the lake now bends toward the dam, is the location of what was once a thriving little community. Tennessee Highway 53 followed alongside the Obey River from about Dale Hollow Marina, up through and beyond First Island. On its journey northward (against the current), the old highway crossed the clear waters of Mitchell Creek with one of the few bridges that the old road possessed. The old foundation pillars and wooden planks of the bridge saw a lot of history over the years, as families traversed miles of road and shoreline in the early years of the 1900s. These people loved it here at the mouth of Mitchell Creek, where days and nights were far simpler than the days of hustle and bustle of our modern times. They loved this rich valley land beyond the old bridge, where time now seems to stand still...only remembering those fond days of old.

In reality, we lake lovers can float comfortably in our boats and watercraft at the beautiful juncture of Mitchell Creek and the main lake, but let's take a moment to let our minds drift back into yesteryear. Let's view the times when life was simple. Let's sit ourselves down on this old bridge and take a look around. The old road is quiet today, and the currents of the Mitchell are lulling us into daydream. Ah, smell the honeysuckle on the air. Hear the scampering school kids racing into the old school house as the old school bell echoes through the hollows. Feel the cool breeze on our dangling bare feet above the cool and misty waters of Mitchell Creek. Welcome to Fox Springs.

Now, as we sit comfortably on this landmark of days long gone, let's cast our gaze up into the hollows of Mitchell Creek. About a quarter mile up into the hollow on the right is the old church. Its white clapboard siding is slightly tinted with the shadows of the old cedar trees offering shade and shelter from above. Its tiny cemetery in the back is holding a few freshly-cut flowers placed lovingly by family members. Its bell also chimes through the quiet hills and hollows.

Let's look farther up into the hollow. With every bend of the creek, there are more and more little cemeteries. It seems that every other point has some sort of myrtle growing on the once heavily-trodden, but now forgotten sites of family burial. It's almost heartbreaking to see what was once a beloved spot now so quickly overlooked. But we see you, our fallen Dale Hollow friends. You are not forgotten.

Let's look even farther upstream. We can't quite see it from here, but I can picture it so easily. About a mile past Mitchell Creek Marina on the Mitchell Creek Fork, there is an old road that enters the water on the right. That cove where the road enters has seen its share of history. Aside from the heavily traveled wagon trail that now serves as a launch ramp, a wonderful cascading waterfall enters the Mitchell here. A couple of

hundred yards up into the far left fork of this little creek is the cool and soothing waterfall known as the Mitchell Creek Cascade. From a dark hole in the bluff, a fresh flow of water eases out onto a long staircase of dark shale rock. These waters are music to my ears and these mossy stones are soothing to my feet. But as much as I hate to let our minds wander from here, let's look around some more.



All up and down this long hollow, the name *Chilton* has plowed its fields and sown its crops for centuries. Every point has been traversed by the feet of a wandering Chilton. It is a little known fact that Chiltons were on the Mayflower. On this first voyage of this famous boat to the new world, that name graced the list of onboard travelers. Some of the very first foreign folks to these lands were Chiltons. They traded with the Native Americans and tamed much of the early American lands...especially in this hollow. I don't care who you are...that's WAY back.

But let's get back to our bridge. As we sit here enjoying our views upstream, the point on our left is full of people stirring. Most of the houses of Fox Springs centered around this point. The hand-dug well still resides on this point. Its hand-carved rocks are still diligently fulfilling their purpose, holding back the soil of this deep hole. Be careful here. It's a long way to the bottom of this one.

At the north end of our bridge is the schoolhouse. Chiltons and Davises, Rileys and Browns all scampered the wagon roads and foot paths to the old school that rested at the mouth of Mitchell Creek. At one time, the building was also the Clay County Board of Education. This well respected school educated many of the local families up and down the river. Shoot, I bet there's a Chilton with his nose in a circle on the chalk board right now.

Behind us now, the Obey is winding its way toward Celina, Tennessee. Mr. William Dale II and his wife, Martha Goodpasture, were buried right along side the river...here in the Goodpasture Bend, a half-mile behind us. It seems many of these hollows were *Dale* hollows.

Also behind us, are the long and bending paths of the Red Oak Trail. What was once a series of horse trails and logging roads, is now a long and very well kept hiking/horse trail. It covers many miles, winding in and out of the points and hollows just upstream from us. The entire eastern shore between here and First Island is a maze of fantastic trails with wonderful overlooks of the main lake. One can start on any point of this long flat and either wind along shore or take a walk up the ridge to view the lake from high above. There are several great places to view both up and down the main lake from the rocky outcroppings above the old river.

One of these rocky overlooks is still home to one forgotten and unknown person. That's right...unknown. It seems that this one individual still holds one fantastic eternal view of our little bridge and the mouth of Mitchell Creek. On one of my many trips up onto this placid trail, I meandered off the beaten path and walked out onto a splendid stone overlook. Few of us modern-day folk have ever looked out over the mouth of Mitchell Creek from this vantage point. Only those of long ago enjoyed this great view of the old river. But there is one fallen soul that still enjoys this special spot. One unknown person was laid to rest on this rocky overlook. A stone and rock covered grave still stands much like it did over one hundred years ago...still resting comfortably where this person chose to spend eternity. The dilapidated and weathered stones of this grave are barely discernable on that high ridge. But they are there. Those stones still stand as a

reminder that there were others before us. There were people calling this place home long before we called it lake.

I share this person's special view every now and then. I walk up the old trail and look out over the vast terrain where there were homes and barns, churches and schools. I still see our pleasant little bridge much like how my unknown friend must have seen it many years ago.

So, when my boat glides through the waters of the mouth of Mitchell Creek, I glance back over my shoulder and think of someone I never knew that just might be looking down on me...and I smile. I smile because where this little bridge once was, is a very rich place to be, both then...and now.~