

## Willmore Lodge

### Lake Ozark

**S**ome places beg for more time than a perfunctory stop. Such is the case with Willmore Lodge, located north of Bagnell Dam in Lake Ozark.

Although you could reasonably visit the lodge (and museum located within) and soak up the history of the area in an hour, I recommend spending at least a weekend in this playground of Missouri. Only then can you begin to appreciate the history, the beauty and the good-natured, service-oriented people who will host your visit.

A long, tree-lined drive sets the scene for the sudden appearance of the 6,500-square-foot Adirondack lodge. The story of the lodge stretches the imagination. Built out of Western white pine logs in Oregon, then disassembled and transported by train to Missouri in 1930, it played host to Union Electric's upper echelon executives and engineers during the construction phase of Bagnell Dam. In fact, the boardroom, where many planning meetings were held, sits behind the front desk. Before being disassembled and transported from Oregon, the lodge underwent a personal inspection by UE President Louis A. Egan, whose name the building originally bore.

In 1945, scandal caused UE to sell off some of its luxurious holdings associated with the lake, and St. Louis real estate developer Cyrus Crane Willmore purchased the property as a vacation home, which he enjoyed for four years before he died. The building went unoccupied for the next 20 years.

Renamed Willmore Lodge, it belonged to two other owners, but an impending bankruptcy resulted in Union Electric once again taking ownership of the property and about 30 acres associated with it in 1996. This time, though, UE made a deal with the local Chamber of Commerce: UE would provide the facility to the Chamber for a lease of \$10 per year and the Chamber would use the site for its visitors center, offices and an historical center promoting the lake's history. The Chamber would also be responsible for repair and maintenance, as well as renovations. It now stands listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

It is a fitting place to tell the story of the development of the area, the account of how the Osage River created the Lake of the Ozarks. Although comprising only three rooms for the museum, the overall impact of the 29-room building is much larger. Upon entry into the lodge's great room, a visitor is treated to a view of the lake and woods that surround on three sides. The reasons as to why this setting was chosen become clear as the building appears to melt into its

The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Lake of the Ozarks Eagle Days, scheduled for January 7-8, provides plenty of opportunities to view these majestic birds as they winter near Willmore Lodge and below Bagnell Dam. Check with the Chamber of Commerce for more information about the weekend's events.





(ABOVE) Western white pine logs were used to build the lodge in Oregon before it was disassembled and rebuilt in the Missouri Ozarks. (TOP RIGHT) The grizzly bear rug hanging over the museum door was taken by some college students in 1940 but was returned to the lodge nearly 60 years later. (LEFT) This state record paddlefish, measuring 6 feet, 4 inches and weighing 134 pounds, 12 ounces, was caught at the lake in 1998. Rumors are that the lake is home to others like it.

surroundings. Outside the building, it is believed that an Indian mound lies, untouched.

The museum relates the history of the region in three parts: before the dam's construction, during the construction and after the construction. Perhaps the most poignant exhibit is the video collection of interviews of the men who worked to construct the dam. In their own words, they explain living conditions, working hours and how they felt fortunate to have work during the Great Depression. One farm boy said he ap-

preciated making 35 cents an hour and having three meals provided daily.

Photographs, maps and primitive equipment tell of the creation of a lake boasting more shoreline than the state of California.

One of the best stories concerns the grizzly bear rug hanging over the door to the museum. According to Nancy Woodward, who works at the museum, the



bear's tale involves being "kidnapped" in 1940 by some college boys from Kansas City after a party at the lodge. One of the boys kept the bear for almost 60 years in an acclimated setting. In 1999, that fellow read in the newspaper about the renovation of Willmore Lodge. He called the executive director of Willmore, confessed to the deed and returned the bear.

"At that time, this place was a mess," says Woodward. "The floor was black, and it had scorpions in it. If that bear had been here, he wouldn't have survived it!"

The lodge, which can accommodate up to 80 people, hosts weddings, meetings and other social functions. ▲

*Willmore Lodge is located one-quarter mile north of Bagnell Dam at #1 Willmore Lane. Hours are Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, call 800-451-4117, 573-964-1008 or visit [www.WillmoreLodge.com](http://www.WillmoreLodge.com).*



We enjoyed the hospitality of a tidy little resort called Point Randall, located at Lake Ozark. One of a few "mom and pop" places to be found, this establishment features a beautiful setting with clean surroundings. We especially like that it's close to the older section of the Lake and near the lodge.

Supper was at a Touch of Asia on Highway 54 in Osage Beach, where we enjoyed a mix of our favorite sushi in a friendly atmosphere. We ate a hearty breakfast at another mom-and-pop place, Stewarts, located at 1151 Bagnell Dam Boulevard in Lake Ozark. Don't forget to either order or take a cinnamon roll to go.