The First Known Middle River Cleanup

By R.E.B. Stewart III

In May, 1999, Jill Dorsch was on the staff of the now closed Staunton office of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. I suggested that she check out the wonderful little rivers of Augusta County. I planned an easy initial trip on the Middle River form the second bridge above Route 11 down to Route 11. With some companions along for a shuttle we launched at the class V poison ivy patch at the put-in below the bridge.

As we floated downstream, I cast my flies along the shady bank to catch some smallmouth and red-breasted sunfish—just to show her that the Middle had more recreational features than just scenery and mild rapids. Along the way, Jill noted, “This is a nice, remote river, but there is a lot of trash, junk and even rusty cars along the way. What can we do about it?”

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That was a challenge! “Clean it up!” I said. I had my work cut out for me, but it didn’t take long to find that I had a whole lot of help. Jill got her Department on board, and that gave us a lot of credibility.

Manpower was essential. We called on members of the canoe clubs. There was a good turn-out from recent graduates of canoeing classes from the Waynesboro Parks and Rec. The word got around.

Support was also a major factor. The County landfill agreed to provide trucks to pick up the trash bags and junk at designated riverside road points. On the Big Day, we had a great turn-out. We picked up lots of trash, tires and junk that would fit in canoes. Also, we marked a number of items, like several stolen golf carts, to be pulled out later with heavy equipment. Our strangest find was several uprooted parking meters.

Our friends at Verona Car Care sent a wrecker and flatbed. Our volunteer divers hooked them up to be pulled out and taken to the junk yard. These rusty hulks had been eyesore for years.

The KOA Campground (now Shenandoah Valley Campground) had a great picnic for us at the end of the day—right across the river from that beautiful little waterfall. Everyone left that scene with a feeling of great accomplishment.

My thoughts of making that cleanup an annual event ended with my retirement to the Big Bend of Florida. I enjoyed that adventure on the Gulf until I returned to my beloved Valley two years ago. When I returned, I was delighted to hear from old friends, the Fullers, that FOMR was doing a fantastic job taking care of one of my favorite rivers.

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