

History of Keowee Bowmen

As remembered

Jim Edens

On Feb. 2, 2001, the Keowee Bowmen paid off their 40 year mortgage and the club now owns its property outright. The loan was paid off with money from timber sales several years ahead of schedule. Not many archery clubs own their own land, so this is truly a milestone in the history of the Keowee Bowmen.

Since not many of the newer members know the real history of the club, I thought this would be a good time to give a brief history of the club. In 1967, the old original members had a club know as The Oconee Archery Club at a community named Bounty Land just north of Seneca, SC. Crescent Land and Timber Company purchased the land we had leased from Dr. R. K. Nimmons and we found ourselves a club without land. I contacted Ronald Bost with Crescent Land and Timber in Charlotte, NC to see if they would consider leasing the 40 acres back to the Oconee Archers. He sent back a proposal offering to lease the 40 acres to the club for \$7,500 per year. At that time, our entire yearly budget couldn't come close to that figure. We had been paying Dr. Nimmons \$1.00 per year for his lease.

Several of us got together and decided we would not build another archery course unless we owned the property. I was commissioned by the club to look for land and the present tract of land now known as The Keowee Bowmen Archery Club was located. I was offered the entire 30 acre tract for \$6,200. We paid a small deposit and the club now had to figure out how to pay for the land. We raffled off a jon boat to help raise money. Soon we learned about recreational loans being made to rural communities under President Johnson's Great Society Program. Thousands of recreational loans were made across the United States and we were the only archery club to apply for such a loan in South Carolina. The club commissioned me to look into the possibility of getting a loan. The Farmers Home Administration gave me a stack of papers and figured they wouldn't see me again. Bill Shain knew all kinds of people at Clemson who could help with our plans and in less than a week; we had completed all the requirements given us. Bill had a draftsman draw up the plans for the clubhouse and range as we had laid it out. In addition, we had to not only list all of our members, but also had to outline how we planned to pay back the loan. We had a meeting of the club members that week and decided we would bid on both the Southeastern Field Archery Championship and the Southeastern NAA Championship at the same time and would do so every year and we further planned to bid on the NFAA Field Archery National Championships within eight to ten years. When I delivered all this information to the loan officials along with a stack of paperwork, they informed me that they didn't expect to see me again and had not given me all the paperwork I really needed to apply for the loan. Disappointed, I went back to Clemson with another stack of papers and we processed these papers even faster than the last batch. This time around, I had the blue prints for the clubhouse, the water and sewer systems laid out and we were ready to go. Our loan was approved in 1968 and we immediately began building the clubhouse. Harold Thomas of Walhalla built the clubhouse for \$15,000, which was considered cheaper than anyone else would have built it. Mr. John Stancil sold us a half acre of land for a campground and we built the shower house with volunteer labor from the members. Everyone helped in the range construction. Bill Shain and I laid out the three ranges and Tom Wright furnished his tractor and bush hog for creating shooting lanes for the Red and Blue ranges. Norman Canoy furnished a bulldozer to open up lanes in the hardwoods, which became the Black Range. Norman's dozer also opened up service roads. Everyone else helped with chain saws, trucks and other equipment and by June of 1968, we were ready for our first Southeastern tournament. Those pine trees, which paid off the loan, were small enough in 1968 to

cut with a bush hob. As best as my memory serves me, the annual loan payment would be \$1,386 for forty years due on March 1st of each year.

The club won the bids on both the Southeastern Field and the NFAA Southeastern and they were highly successful and we were on our way. The rest is history. The Keowee Bowmen have held many Southeasterns, Silver Dollar and bowhunter tournaments to keep the club going. In 1975, we decided it was time to think about placing a bid on the NFAA Nationals, so the club commissioned me to engage the Clyde Beatty/Cole Brothers Circus as a fundraiser. The members of the club per-sold admission tickets on the circus and earned a commission on each ticket. We made a considerable amount of money on the circus, but the club decided not to send me off to bid on the NFAA tournament that year. In 1976, the club sent me to Aurora, Illinois to place a bid on the tournament. We won the bid for 1977 and that is when the fun started. We would need eleven 28 target filed ranges, practice ranges, campgrounds, motel accommodations and many faithful workers to get the job done.

Bill Shain got the Clemson Forestry Department to let us use several hundred acres of land to lay out eight new ranges, the Clemson University Dept. of Parks Recreation and Tourism furnished students to help with the project. The Clemson Little Theatre furnished help, scout troop members and their families, and after nine months of intense labor, we were ready for the Nationals. We had support from our neighbors on both sides of the club. John Stancil let us use his pasture for a campground and our neighbors to the right of the club as you get near the club house let us park in their field. We had 1,026 archers for a week and Fred Bear was our guest speaker at our banquet. The logistics for this tournament were something to behold. We had a concession stand on every seven targets on each of the eleven ranges for a total of forty four concession stands. We sold 24 thousand cans of soda, 550 gallons of iced tea along with food and 3,500 cans of beer. When all was said and done, the club had several thousand dollars in cash and all the many groups who helped made money for their clubs and lots of friendships and memories were made which many will cherish for many years to come.

In addition to all the men who enjoyed shooting at the Keowee Bowmen facility, we must never forget the role the ladies played in keeping this great facility going. Some of the original ladies were; Francis Wright, Nita Canoy, Jimmie Smith, Dottie Gantt, Margaret Bailey, Mary Bright, Norma Owens, Emogene Phillips, Ann Browning, Delsey Bibb, Jo Ann Pelfrey, Mary Reamer and a few others I can't think of at this time. These ladies kept everyone fed for countless tournaments and other activities. God bless them all.

The original members who voted on getting the loan were to the best of my memory were: Bill Shain, Joe Edens, Tom and Francis Wright, Jack Wilson & family, Jim Deens, W. H. Purser, Walt Bonnevier, Bill Owens, Charlie & Norma Owens, Norman & Nita Canoy, Harold Thomas, Dan Thomas, Gene Graham, Jim & Imogene Phillips, Teat Bryant, Roy Bryant, Jack & Dottie Gantt, Bobby Lanford, Monty & Ann Browning, Larry & Mary Reamer, Charles Bright, Mike Bright, Mike & Delsey Bibb, Jim Brown, Ronnie Gossett, Hubby Willimon, Irby Pelfrey & Wife Jo Ann, & I think Larry Nix came along about that time also.

To all the original members, your dream came true and most of the original members have lived to see it happen. Hubby Willimon, Mike Bright, Jim Brown, W. H. Purser & Walt Bonnevier are now deceased. All past & present members of the Keowee Bowmen were given a legacy to be proud of. Now that the loan is paid off, we can't get slack. There will always be improvements to make, maintenance to run & a bright future for archery in the Clemson area for those who are willing to continue carrying the torch. I don't know all the current members, but I want to congratulate the past and current officers plus the membership on a job well done.