

Camp Camo Inn:

TROUT OPENER FAMILY AFFAIR

by WCO Joe Russell

Camp Camo Inn, as they have named it, consists of 20 individuals from four different families. The Boehms, Burgesses, Latskos and Valentines all travel about two hours to fishing camp for their yearly trout-opener event. Some of the guys in this group have been fishing Conneaut Creek for the past 17 years. However, it has been a big family gathering over the past eight or nine years.

Ages vary in this group. The eldest, "Pop," is 67 years old and the youngest, Wendy Latsko (the only female of the camp) and Andrew Valentine, were both 7 last year. The group is comprised of eight adults and 12 kids and spans three generations. Pop boasts that he buys a "4-hour license" for just this event and he "still has 3 hours and 45 minutes left on it," since most of his time is spent helping the younger more inexperienced anglers untangle reels or tie on new hooks.

The day starts with cooking breakfast at streamside by chief cook and bottle washer Tom Boehm, a title he proudly wears. He prepared seven dozen eggs, bacon, sausage, home fries and pancakes. To say there was plenty of food is an understatement, and it would rival any fancy restaurant for quality. Tom says he has been the "chef" for the last three years, since he saw that the previous system was just not working. Tom is normally a landscaper by trade. However, he could land a job in a restaurant in a minute, I have no doubt.

After breakfast at exactly eight o'clock, the anglers hit the stream to see who will be the first to land an elusive trout. Last year, I featured young Wendy Latsko, then age 6, in my WCO report as the first angler able to produce a trout. This year, she was beat out by a mere few minutes by her brother, Joe Latsko, age 11. Joe came in first this year and Wendy came in second with both anglers landing nice brook trout. This may not seem like a lot, but these two very young anglers outfished anglers senior to them in both years and experience. The levels of determination and patience were unbelievable.

Lunch occurred around noon with bacon cheesebur-



photo-WCO Joe Russell

gers and hotdogs prepared by chef Tom. Deputy Waterways Conservation Officer Jeff Giardina and I, who were patrolling together, were invited to lunch, and I can say without reservation that it was one of the best meals I have had in quite a while.

While the younger, more determined anglers continued to fish, some of the older anglers who thought the fish just weren't hitting walked up and down the stream and picked up trash left by other people. The experience and lessons taught to these young kids were evident when young Tom Boehm, age 10, developed a grapefruit-sized bird's nest. Instead of panicking and running it back to one of the adults to fix, he remained on the bank and straightened it out, and within five minutes he was fishing again. His only comment was, "You can't take my picture with a bird's nest!"

The nicest thing about this entire experience was not who caught the biggest fish or if they were going home with a cooler full of trout. It was the sharing of past memories and the making of new ones. It is obvious to me that if we are going to maintain our fishing and hunting heritage that we have enjoyed in the past, we are going to have to follow the examples of this outstanding group and include our youth in these activities.

When I asked several members of Camp Camo Inn how long they planned to continue this tradition, they pointed to the youngest members of the camp and said, "When they are bringing their kids and grandkids and we can't come anymore." With this kind of attitude, the future of fishing in Pennsylvania has a chance. ☐