

# SOUTH PARK

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# HUNT CLUB

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## Stay at Recreational Facility Yields Plenty of Surprises

**F**ingerville. Have you ever been there or even heard of this town? When I learned that Fingerville, S.C., was home to one of the finest sportsman's resorts in this part of the world, I began to give this Southern town a little more respect. But even after accepting an invitation from my friend Bruce Hensley to be his guest at River Bend Sportsman Resort, I had second thoughts about heading off to do who knows what, in a place that I had never heard of and joining up with a group of people I knew nothing about.

Why did I keep humming Arthur Smith's "Dueling Banjos," the theme song from "Deliverance" that keeps your pulse doing double time? After all, I had been promised a private room, three squares prepared by a gourmet chef and professional instruction in the proper use of firearms.

As I headed south then west toward the town of Chesnee, S.C., I began to think that my seven-year-old 4-Runner was a little too shabby for an upscale resort. On the other hand, my expectations of the town where the resort was located weren't exactly high.

I pictured a place whose town center had a big general store with an expansive front porch where the local farmers, hunters, construction workers and an occasional preacher sat and played checkers, spun yarns and drank a bubbly liquid from a passed-around Mason jar. This was farm country, so a grain elevator or two would be adjacent to a tractor repair and tire garage. A combination beauty



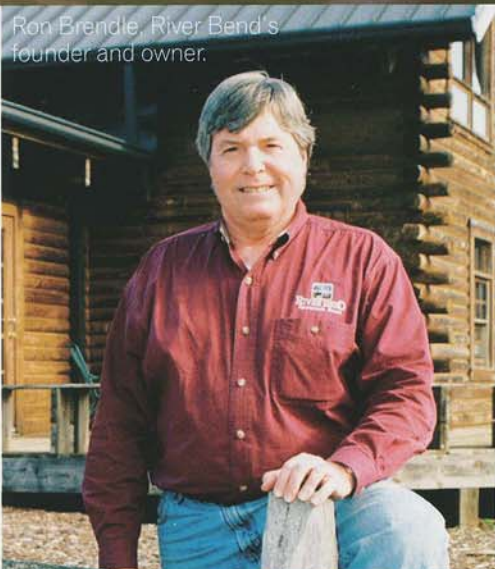
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BY DARRELL MYERS  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF  
RIVER BEND SPORTSMAN RESORT

A hunter at River Bend Sportsman Resort.



Dogs and their human companions form teams during hunts at the facility.



Ron Brendle, River Bend's founder and owner.



Dan Schindler, chief instructor.

and barbershop attached to the Piggly Wigly would surely be across the street, right next door to the Baptist Church. Just the perfect setting for a sportsman's home away from home.

My idyllic, erroneous image began to falter as I saw the sign for Fingerville at the bottom of the hill. There was no store, grain elevator or even a beauty shop, just a very small church. After two right turns, I came upon a sign that read "No Outlet — Dead End."

"Da da, da, da, da, da, dum, da, dum," I hummed to myself before I came to my senses.

### A Resort, of Sports

River Bend Sportsman Resort: what a very pleasant surprise. Being the first of the guests to arrive on this incredibly beautiful fall Sunday morning, I took the liberty of strolling around the grounds just to give myself the benefit of a good first impression. Every vista from this hilltop setting was stimulating. Fall colors cloaked the rolling foothills as well as every valley. A cool breeze grabbed the smoke swirling up from the lodge chimney, sending out a woody invitation that lured visitors inside.

Perfect, just perfect; no one was around, and a fire was roaring in the huge stone fireplace. I couldn't pass up a spot on one of the inviting leather couches, the perfect place for me to clear my head and bask in the warmth of the fire while gazing at the 40-foot expanse of timber-peg construction that formed my own private cathedral. When I fell asleep is a mystery, but I was awakened in due time by the sound of voices.

Within minutes, Lee Whitehurst, the chef, was announcing lunch to all of the guests. Out of the game room came several men with adult beverages in hand and peanuts shells clinging to their shirts. A huge and very robust Sunday lunch was served and I — as usual, when good food abounds — availed myself of more than one helping. It felt like nap time again, but no, it was time to meet Wally. (Wasn't that the name of the guy with no teeth and a crazed laugh in "Deliverance"?). Boy, oh, boy was I surprised when this four-foot-nothing of a person with hair the color of straw and sparkling baby blue eyes strolled up to me, stuck out her hand and announced that she was Wally Schneider, my instructor.



The lobby at River Bend.

## Aww, Shoot

Out on the shooting-clay course, I soon learned that Schneider was well versed in the art of handling and firing guns. The safety video shown before we left the lodge was no match for the fierce recitation of safety rules that peppered every one of Schneider's little speeches. After the get-acquainted-with-your-gun demonstration, we were allowed to hold our 12-gauge shotguns. The flying clay target instruction was interesting but seemed unnecessarily obvious that when the target comes up ... shoot it. The clay is a round disk about five inches in diameter that is painted orange for visibility. When an electronic device activates the launcher, this saucer-shaped object is propelled in a specific direction that the shooter is to track and, when ready, squeezes the trigger on the gun. The hope is that some of the little metal fragments projected from the 12-gauge shotgun shell strike the clay, sending pottery fragments and dust in all directions. Just that simple ... right?

It became immediately apparent to Schneider that I was not a professional marksman. What was especially difficult for Schneider to understand was why my shooting partner, a somewhat frail young lady from Atlanta, was destroying clays at the rate of three out of four shots and I was lucky to be able to knock a chip out of one every once in awhile. Schneider began to take my failure personally and began to pound me in the back every time I missed. She was trying to be pleasant but questions like, "How in the heck did you miss that?" were beginning to hurt my feelings, and her pummeling was certainly hurting my spine.

Finally, Schneider asked the perfect question: "What do you see?" My lame response of "nothing" made her realize that I was not blind but was using my non-dominant eye when shooting. She had me change the gun to my left side, as if I were left-handed.

Almost, immediately the sounds on the course were Schneider's commands to "pull," followed by a bang, then a spirited "atta boy." My pride had been restored, thanks to the orange dust clouds my shots were creating, and I was getting pats on the back from Schneider, who could now concentrate on other techniques of shooting. I think she was relieved that I did not fail as a shooter and her reputation was restored.

## The Hunt

Day two, and I was up early, as usual. I took advantage of the early morning to walk off the night and enjoy the stillness and first-light

beauty of the predawn. In the distance, I heard the spirited barking of dogs that must have sensed the coming of an exciting day. This was my time to think and engage in some level of meditation, as I do every day, but this was not just another day. I was not sure that I was prepared for shooting at something other than the orange clays.

After breakfast I was caught up in the events of the morning: getting a license, qualifying as a shooter, watching another video on safety and rules of the events to follow. Guns were checked out, ammo and dogs loaded into the trucks and off we went. Every portion of the hunt was organized. The birds had been raised much like chickens, for the purpose of being consumed as delicacies, regardless of how they got to the table. All of the game birds taken in the hunt were later prepared for consumption. The game birds were placed at strategic locations for the dogs to track and then point. This is where much of the real beauty and thrill of the elements that can be experienced at the resort were most evident.

I have watched field trials of hunting dogs on TV and video, but Jake and Sallie were the first that I witnessed doing what their breed does instinctively and in tandem with Hank Rogers,

their trainer and our hunt master. I found myself mesmerized by each of these amazing animals as they singularly performed their hunt, in their own style and with an energy that only came to a screeching halt when they went on point. Rogers directed their movements with a whistle and voice and hand signals.

Jake, a very large muscle of a dog, was a dynamo in the field and was often brought under complete control only through the use of multiple signals, along with at least one gruff verbal command. Sallie, a dog displaying a frenzy of nervous actions, was all business when she was released. More thorough in her hunting style, she was quick to the point without having to double back or overrun the covey.

The hunt was a history lesson in how, in years past, men were the families' providers. I gained respect for our forefathers' use of firearms as a means of obtaining provisions for living. I marveled at the relationship between man and dog to form a team that worked in the best interest of both. I understood the thrill of the hunt and the sounds, sights and smells of nature. I also overcame the concern that the birds that were hunted would be wasted for the pleasure of destruction, but would also be consumed as food. To Schneider's credit, I fired

the gun only nine times and six of those were successful. In the end, I learned the purpose of Ralph Brendle's development. There is great pleasure and camaraderie amongst men and women who share the American tradition of living in and surviving nature.

## Enter the Owner

After the hunt and before leaving River Bend, I spent some time with Ralph Brendle, the facility's founder and owner. I learned that in 1985, at the ripe old age of 34, Brendle left a prominent position as sales manager of Milliken Chemicals to fulfill his dream of developing River Bend. He envisioned a 600-plus-acre preserve that would provide a high quality sportsman's resort for a private membership base and offer an entertainment experience for the general public and corporate clients. Over the years he has developed a resort that features a 6,000-square-foot lodge, a 2,000-square-foot conference center and 14 private guest rooms. The lodge can accommodate up to 125 guests for a sit-down dinner and 135 for theater-style seating in the conference center.

To learn more about the home of Jake and Sallie or for more information, go to <http://rvrbend.com>. 