



Fishing in Colonial Times



96 Creek, near the park's southern boundary, was one of the many tributaries of the Saluda and Savannah Rivers readily accessible from the colonial town of Ninety Six. Trout, sunfish, and other edible fishes native to North America represented a useful food source for Native Americans and colonial settlers alike. Today pollution, overfishing, and the introduction of invasive species have negatively impacted local fisheries but when European settlers first arrived here in the early 18th century the streams and rivers they crossed offered a bounty of game for anglers.

Ninety Six District: A Land of Rivers and Streams

Even before the arrival of European settlers, the area that would become Ninety Six district was a favored campsite for Native American hunters in pursuit of game. Contributing to its appeal were the many waterways that crisscrossed the land, providing water and food to travelers. Today there are three streams and one lake, the man-made Star Fort Pond, within the park's boundaries, providing habitats for twenty-two species of fish.

Native American Fishing

The human history of Ninety Six stretches back 11,000 years, when the mysterious people who created the artifacts known as "Clovis points" inhabited this area. It's likely that these were the first people to take fish from the waters here but they certainly were not the last. For centuries before the arrival of European and African settlers the Cherokee and Catawba Indians took advantage of the rich fisheries of the Saluda and Savannah river systems to supplement their diet. For Native Americans, fishing was an exercise in subsistence, not recreation. Their fishing

techniques reflected this: Native American fishing strategies emphasized efficiently taking the maximum amount of fish possible from a given site in a body of water. They created several types of fish traps or weirs using materials such as *Arundinaria gigantea*, a bamboo-like grass native to North America, to funnel groups of fish into small spaces where they could be easily collected. They also speared fish using forked and sharpened sticks.

Fishing in the Colonial Settlement

For settlers from Europe, where many fisheries were already depleted from overuse, the waters around Ninety Six must have seemed bountiful beyond belief. European and African settlers utilized traps and weirs but also engaged in fishing we would recognize today, with poles, line, floats, weights, and hooks. The same switchcane used to create fish traps could also be used to fashion cane poles. Line was made of cotton or linen thread. A local blacksmith could

create delicately wrought iron hooks; lead weights could be created by anyone with a cast mold. Floats were made of cork or other light wood. Insects and their larvae made for excellent bait. With such materials readily available and many rivers and streams easily accessible, the settlers of Ninety Six would have had little difficulty catching fish.

Fishing for Food and Fun – Then and Now.

Fish was undoubtedly a valuable food source for backcountry settlers. But as modern anglers know, fishing can also be a relaxing and rewarding pastime. This could not have been lost on Ninety Six's early residents. The literate among them may even have read Izaak Walton's famous treatise on fishing, "The Compleat Angler." First published in 1653, Walton's book is one of the most popular ever printed in English. Walton wrote that fishing was "a rest to his mind, a cheerer of his spirits, a diverter of sadness, a calmer of unquiet thoughts, a moderator of

passions, a procurer of contentedness; and that it begets habits of peace and patience in those that professed and practiced it." Today, visitors to Ninety Six who fish the 27-acre Star Fort Pond for bream and bass would surely agree with Walton. Many of today's anglers practice catch-and-release, enjoying the activity as a hobby, a chance to observe wildlife and impart values of conservation to future generations. If you would like to go fishing at Ninety Six, contact the visitor center at 864-543-4068 for rules and regulations.