

Exploration

Rose River Farm

Michael Simon

“In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately
pleasure-dome decree. . .”

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Driving 25 miles an hour through the picturesque town of Madison gets an urban mind into the proper mood for what is to come. What follows is a leisurely meander down state Route 231 and what seems to be a brook or river to be crossed every three or four minutes. Between Madison and the hamlet of Banco, there’s the Rapidan, Mulatto Run and White Oak Run. A bit farther on, you cross the main branch of the Robinson, then its main tributary, and now you are motoring along Rose River.

In the pleasant little town of Syria, best known as the home of Graves Mountain Lodge, you can stop at the general store across from the nursery, buy a fresh country ham biscuit and ask directions. The good ladies there will inform you in a friendly way that you missed, by a quarter mile, the inviting entrance to Rose River Farm.

Douglas Dear is the man who discovered Rose River Farm. Actually, the farm originally came into being in 1739 as a crown grant to a Tory colonel, but it was Dear who created from it a small piece of Xanadu. His large, sprawling log house sits atop a hill at the high point of the farm, and there you will enjoy a 360-degree



**Looking out over the
Rose River with Old Rag
Mountain in the distance
(Photo by Ed Felker)**



**The author netting a
trout at
Rose River**

panorama of the central Blue Ridge Mountains. To the south your eyes follow the hilly pastures where Black Angus graze, across a good-sized pond stocked with bass

and bluegill to a splendid view of Double Top Mountain. From the north side of the house, your eyes follow an ancient peach orchard (from which Dear makes his crisp

peach wine), down the hillside to the lovely Rose River. Beyond the river, on the horizon is the iconic profile of Old Rag Mountain. All in all, Rose River Farm is as beautifully situated a farm as you are likely to find in the Old Dominion.

In recent years Rose River Farm has become a magnet for anglers from all over the mid-Atlantic. They come here for the chance to fish over an abundant stock of large, free-rising rainbow trout in a setting similar to the best of western spring creeks. The farm's strict catch-and-release policy yields an additional bonus: the opportunity to catch an occasional, very substantial native brook trout. Dear created the conditions for this exceptional fishery by implementing a variety of green practices. Upon his arrival, this stretch of the Rose River was in rather sorry shape as a result of the impact of two-hundred-year floods; the most recent was in 1995. The Rose River no longer flowed between well-defined banks, nor was it shaded by a canopy of old-growth timber. Soil erosion was a major problem. After the floods, the Commonwealth found remedies in the selective placement of boulders and cobble to create structure and to stabilize the banks. Dear followed up their efforts with the planting of sycamore, willow, redbud, dogwood and native groundcover. Additionally, the small herd of Black Angus was denied access to the banks of the Rose River. Finally, the introduction of a good head of superior strain rainbow trout completed the picture.

As a rule, Dear has little problem filling the four rods daily throughout the open season, September through June 15th. The farm is closed to fishing during the hot summer months for the benefit of the fishery. With nearly a mile and a half of river on the property, anglers have more than ample water to themselves with an inviting pool to be found around each riffled bend.

Despite the popularity of the fishery, Dear annually holds events to



Healing Waters participant fishing in the 2011 2-Fly at Rose River Farm (Photo by Steve Hasty)

benefit Project Healing Waters, Casting For Recovery and Trout Unlimited Youth Camp. Last year's Project Healing Waters 2-Fly event raised \$165,000 and was the most successful of such events in the nation. Additionally Dear puts on a very popular Bamboo Classic event in conjunction with *Virginia Sportsman* where guests may fish the Rose River with the wonderful cane fly rods of Jerry Nonnemacher, Chris Bogart, Bob Hosack and others. Several wine tastings are held through the season featuring the farm's own peach wine along with Rose River Red and Rockfish White, which are vinted by a Charlottesville neighbor.

With such a variety of pleasurable events going on at Rose River Farm, it most certainly can be considered Xanadu – but what Xanadu is complete without a pleasure-dome? So two “pleasure-domes” were built on this Xanadu in Madison County.

On a steelhead trip to Washington state, Dear had enjoyed a Mongolian yurt experience and realized that herein lay the answer to the lodging needs of his weekend visitors. The yurts would afford his guests a distinctive and luxurious residence to

retire to after a long, pleasurable day astream or hiking the trails and peaks of Madison County.

The yurt's design is based on the traditional round, tent-like portable dwellings of Central Asia. Still in common use today, they are known as *yurts* in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and are called *gurs* in Mongolia. The yurts and gurs of Central Asia are constructed with a circular wooden lattice frame and covered with felt fabric held in place by elaborately woven tent-bands extending around the circumference. The felt blankets are placed over the roof-beams to create a lofty ceiling while leaving an opening at the apex as a smoke-hole.

The yurts at Rose River Farm follow the same general construction method but are not portable. These yurts were built on a poured-concrete foundation and framed in cedar and glass. The ceiling is a lofty 17 feet high and the cedar roof-struts and metal-domed roof make a stunning architectural statement. Employing the latest green construction methods, the yurts are not only energy-efficient but also make the most of the 1,100 square feet of interior floor space. In



A yurt by the pond at Rose River
(Photo by Michael Smon)

A lofty 17 feet high, the cedar roof-struts and metal-domed roof make a stunning architectural statement. (Photo by Michael Smon)



keeping with the nomadic theme of the cabins, they are furnished with authentic Balouchi and Turkmen carpets. A custom-made fly-tying desk is included for the visiting angler wishing to replenish his fly box after a day on the Rose.

The yurts are situated to make the most of this handsome Madison County landscape. One is perched on a hillside affording guests a splendid view south overlooking the river. The second is located

on the bank of an attractive pond stocked with trout, bass and bluegill for the sole enjoyment of the yurt's occupants.

So – having spent a wonderful weekend at the yurt at Rose River Farm I can heartily recommend it to the discerning traveler. When next you venture to Madison County, whether you are attending the Bluegrass Festival at Graves Mountain or hiking the Old Rag Mountain trail, do consider the yurts at Rose River Farm. You will have no regrets.

For more information, visit www.roseriverfarm.com.

Michael Simon is a writer, watercolorist and a lover of trout, trout streams and the literature and tackle associated with them. His writings have appeared in *Art of Angling Journal* and *Atlantic Salmon Journal*. Simon's art has been shown at Crossroads of Sport, Madison Square Garden, Museum of the Rockies and the Catskill Museum of Fly Fishing. See more of Michael Simon's art: www.michaelsimonanglingart.com.

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