


The one newspaper in the world most interested in this community

Enterprise-Journal



In search of giant cherry - bark oak

04 April 2020



GARDEN CITY — Russell Bardwell has a good memory. When he saw a recent article on this page about a giant cow oak tree north of Crosby, he recalled a similar giant tree he'd run across in the same vicinity while hunting in the Homochitto National Forest 20 years ago.

Bardwell, a McComb house painter, has an affinity for big trees. Last year he took me to a water oak with a circumference of 14 feet on property he owns in Walthall County.

But when he offered to take me to the Homochitto tree, I was skeptical. If he hadn't seen it in 20 years, who's to say it hadn't been cut down?

So Bardwell went on his own to find out. Not only was the tree still standing, the trip refreshed his memory on how to get to it.

This past Thursday — before the governor's stay-at-home order took effect — I met Bardwell in Gloster and we drove north on Highway 33.

We eased through Crosby, crossed the Homochitto River, passed Knoxville and Garden City and turned west on Old Liberty Road. From there we turned north on the gravel Enterprise Road.

A lane leading off that took us to a gated Forest Service Road, where we parked.

I pulled on snake boots, strapped on a machete and opened the compass app on my smart phone. Russell donned rubber boots, an orange vest (it is turkey season) and his own machete. He had a regular hand-held compass.

We trekked down the lane a couple hundred yards, passing a cowcumber sapling, notable for its giant leaves, largest in North America. Cowcumber, or *magnolia macrophylla*, blooms early, then leafs out. It thrives in the Homochitto River drainage system and in the Ragland Hills south of Hattiesburg but doesn't do so well in-between.

As we walked, Russell yelped like a hen turkey — without using a caller. He sounded as good as any call I've heard. Back in the day he killed several turkey and deer in these woods.

We left the lane and set out into the woods. Though the Homochitto Forest is noted for its rugged hills, this was a big hardwood flat — swampish, muddy, with lots of hardwoods large and small towering overhead, as well as the occasional giant loblolly pine. We crossed a sandy creek and meandered along the bottom of a ridge, checking out the trees and looking for the big one.

Russell spotted a likely candidate but wasn't sure until he saw a flash of white — he had cleverly hung his business card on a nearby sapling on his last trip.

The tree was indeed a hoss — a cherrybark oak with a trunk as straight as a column in a Greek temple.

This tree was easily as tall as the cow oak I saw earlier, which was 117 feet high.

Russell pulled out his dad's old carpenter's tape measure and we wrapped it around the trunk at chest height. The circumference was just over 17 feet.

I later found the formula for figuring the diameter, which is to divide the circumference by Pi, or 3.14. That put this tree's diameter at 65 inches, or nearly 5 1/2 feet. I'm not a professional forester so I didn't try to calculate the height, much less the crown width.

The state champion, located in Copiah County, has a circumference of 221/2 feet and height of 187 feet.

The national champion, in Virginia, has a 271/2-foot circumference and 114-foot height.

Regardless, this was a fine and noteworthy specimen. It's heartening to know we have so many giant trees tucked away here and there in southwest Mississippi, on public and private land.

Source: http://www.enterprise-journal.com/article_4f7d3fd4-75fe-11ea-9a33-bbe4b8ea8853.html