



Tennessee  
**Home & Farm**

tnhomeandfarm.com  
Summer 2010

# MIDWAY MAGIC

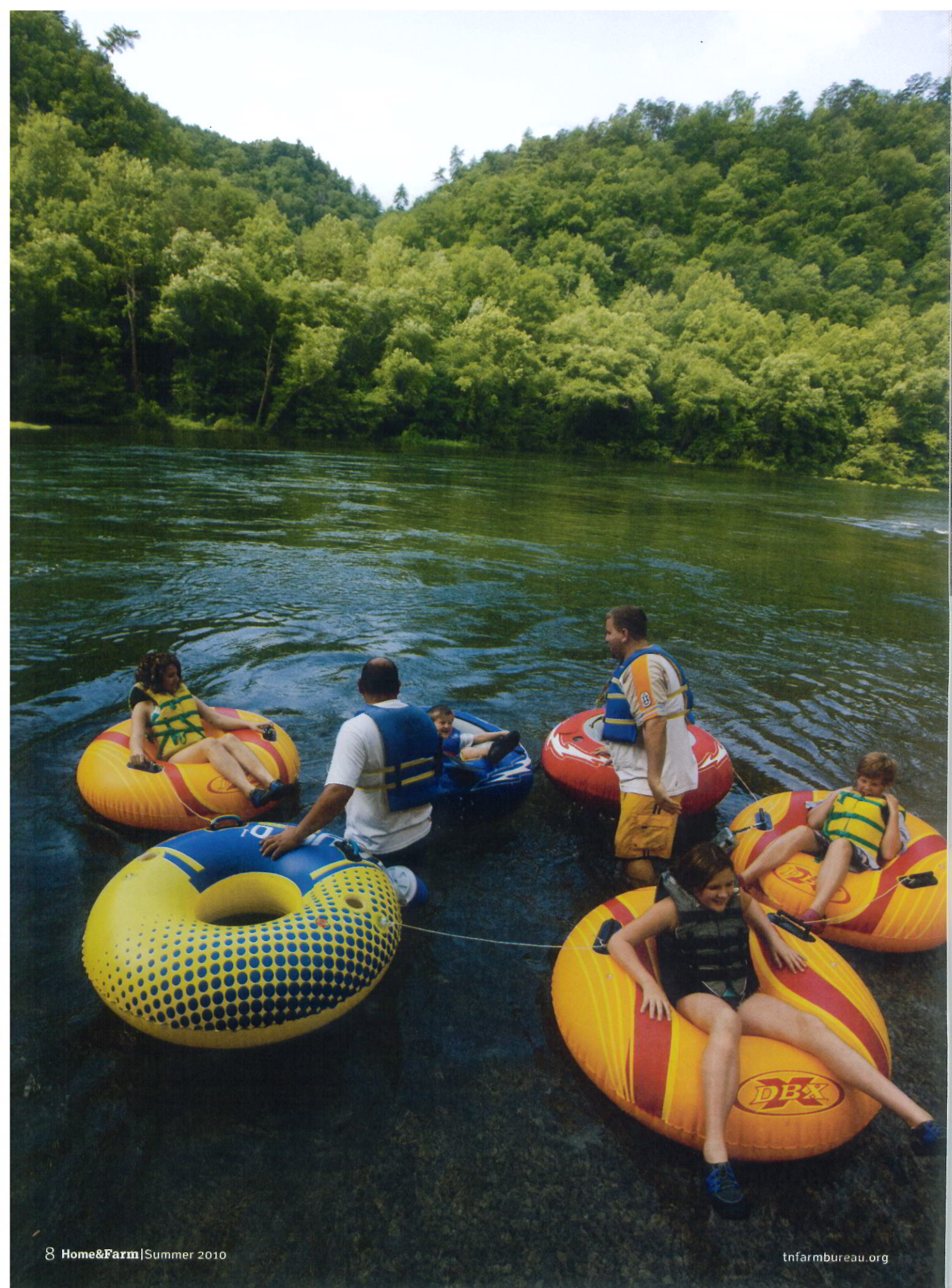
Tennessee fairs provide an irresistible combination of education and fun

## **A DAY IN THE (FARM) LIFE**

Kids learn firsthand about the agricultural way of living

## **SEE TENNESSEE**

Win a trip to the Grand Ole Opry!



FO  
OI

STC  
PHC

“ [

esp  
the  
my  
wat  
bac  
M  
wa  
Jam  
Wel  
Sto  
wat  
clec  
W  
for  
to k  
E

Cusi  
tnho

# Down a Lazy River

FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, THE WEBB FAMILY HAS OPERATED A FLOAT SERVICE ON THE HIWASSEE RIVER

STORY BY CASSANDRA M. VANHOOSER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY J. KYLE KEENER

“Do it,” she says, a glimmer of devilment dancing in her eyes. “I dare you.”

Never one to ignore a challenge, especially from a sassy teenager, I saunter to the edge of the Hiwassee River and plunge my sandaled feet ankle-deep in the rushing water. Before I can edit my response, I jump back and squeal: “Brrrrr! That’s frigid!”

My friends laugh as I hop about trying to warm my blue toes. So does our driver, Jamie, as he unloads the rafts we rented at Webb Brothers Float Service & General Store. “I can’t tell you why,” he says, “but the water here seems to be colder somehow. It’s clearer, too. Y’all have a good trip.”

With that, he waves goodbye. We stand forlornly by our rafts, trying to figure out how to launch our watercraft without getting wet.

Even on the hottest days of the summer,

the Hiwassee’s chilly temperature comes as a bit of a shock. The water makes an 8.3-mile trek through a pipeline at the base of Appalachia Dam in North Carolina to a powerhouse just above Reliance, in the southeast corner of Tennessee. From here, the Tennessee Valley Authority releases the water back into the river after using it to generate hydroelectric power.

Most days, TVA irrigates this natural playground from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., delighting legions of rafters, kayakers and fishermen. In drought years, the flow can be less, but with normal rainfall, recreational floaters can count on having water. The boat launch at the base of the powerhouse enjoys a steady stream of traffic from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

“My friends over on the Ocoee say, ‘Why do you fool with that second-class river over there?’” says Harold Webb, whose family

## What To Know Before You Go

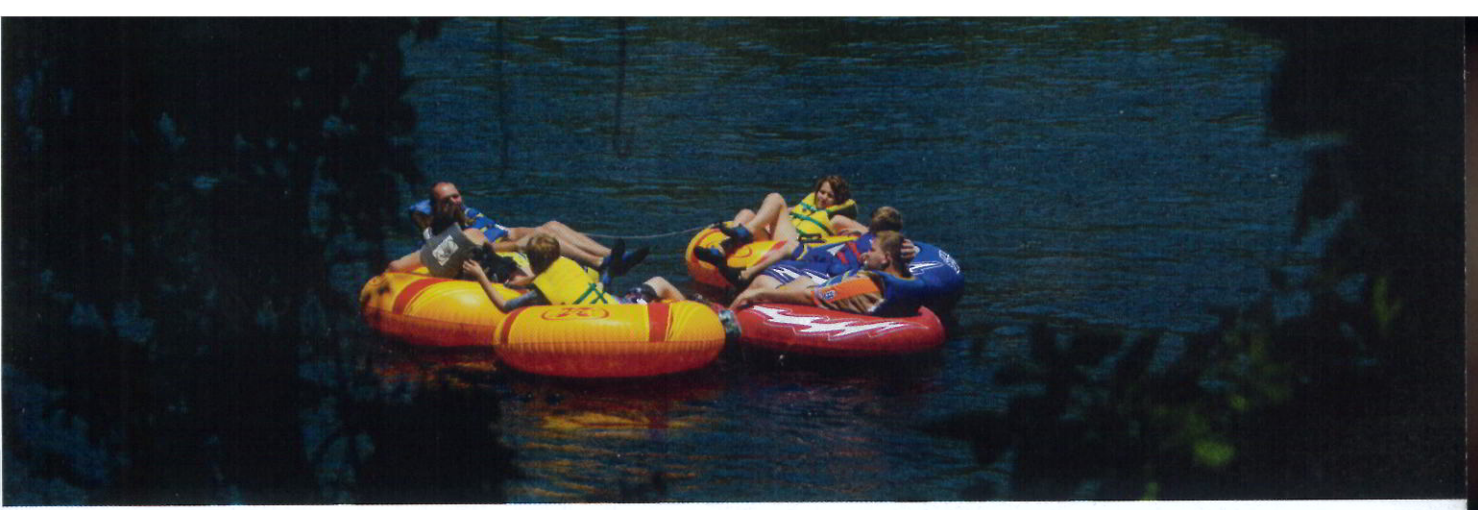
Webb Brothers Float Service & General Store

Rates: One-person duckies rent for \$25; 2-person duckies, \$50. Rafts cost \$20 per person. Shuttle prices vary.

3708 Highway 30, Reliance, TN 37369  
1-877-932-7238,  
(423) 338-2373  
[www.webbbros.com](http://www.webbbros.com)

Please call ahead before traveling long distances.

Customers of Webb Brothers Float Service bravely wade into the chilly water of the Hiwassee River.



## Always a Farmer

If you ask Harold Webb his occupation, he'll reply that he's a farmer.

The Webb Brothers Float Service & General Store sits at the edge of a 690-acre farm that has been in the Webb family since the 1800s. Harold still raises corn and cattle on the banks of the Hiwassee River, but he has placed the family farm in a conservation easement with the Land Trust for Tennessee ([www.landtrusttn.org](http://www.landtrusttn.org)).

He's worked tirelessly to preserve many of the historic structures in the tiny community of Reliance, including the Hiwassee Union Baptist Church and the Watchman's House, which he rents to visitors. Future plans include restoration of the Higdon Hotel.

started the river's first rafting service. "But they don't know what they're talking about. They've got the white-water, but we've got a great outdoor experience here. It's an easy paddling experience, great for families, church groups and beginning kayakers."

Few people know this river valley better than Harold. He grew up in the back rooms of the old country store his father and uncle founded during the Depression. For generations, it was a post office, supply center and gathering spot for the community. While his parents tended the store, Harold got to know the river.

After his first year at college, Harold came home to find that he no longer had a boat – his dad was renting it to strangers. His Uncle Oscar had even absconded with Harold's old inner tubes and was renting those out too. The brothers would load folks up in the farm's cattle truck, haul them up the

winding Forest Service Road and drop them off upriver.

Harold recalls how the Hiwassee has become more regulated over the years, since becoming a State Scenic River in 1972. "Alcohol was banned in 1975," he says, "and life jackets became mandatory in 1976."

The Webb Brothers General Store still sits at the intersection of State Roads 30 and 315. Though the rafting experience has changed some, the store still serves as the launching point for many a trip down the river. In addition to gasoline, Harold sells cold drinks, snacks, sunscreen and basic supplies. Lots of people sport T-shirts they buy here after their trip.

Yet, it's the Hiwassee River Valley's natural beauty that continues to draw visitors. The peaks of the Blue Ridge press against the sky. Black-eyed Susans, Queen Anne's lace and wild touch-me-nots flower the river's banks, while brown and rainbow

trout swim through deep pools.

Along the way, gentle Class I and II rapids punctuate wide stretches of placid water. "Every rapid on the river has a pool afterwards," Harold says. "If you turn your boat over, you are not crashing into another rapid."

The Hiwassee turns out to be the perfect hostess for my day of fun and family. It takes only minutes for our party to adjust to the water's chill. Later in the day, when the sun chases the clouds away, a dip in the river becomes a welcome relief.

We swim, play and embrace the splashing rapids as we steadily tumble toward our journey's end. When at last we cross Devils Shoals, a series of rapids we hear long before we reach them, the bridge marking the end of our trip comes into view. We approach the takeout point with laughter and smiles, knowing we've already finalized plans for our next trip. **FB**

In addition to the float service, Harold Webb, bottom left, also runs Webb Brother's General Store, which opened in May 1936.