

He Dug His Own Water Ski Lake

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

Avid water skier Kevin Fraker was tired of competing with fishermen for open water on the lake where he lived. So he decided to dig his own lake near Pompeii, Mich.

The 16 1/2-acre lake is 2,150 ft. long and 300 ft. wide with doglegs at each end for turnouts. To meet professional ski lake regulations, the lake drops 1 ft. to every 10 ft. to dissipate boat wakes, has a boat landing and dock, and 42 ski course buoys.

As the third generation owner of Fraker Trenching, Inc., Fraker had equipment and was able to do much of his own work with the help of his crew. The 40 acres he started with also had a marketable product - about 2/3's of the lake was sand, and the rest was clay.

"All clay would have been best for creating a lake," Fraker notes. "But I couldn't sell clay, so at least I had a product I could sell."

The sandy soil made the project more expensive and time consuming, however. Working with engineers and meeting environmental regulations required more excavation to build the foundation for the perimeter wall that was 10 to 15 ft. wide and 8 to 25 ft. deep. It had to be dewatered for two months with tile, well point pipe and four 8-in. vacuums. After it dried, a foot of clay was packed over the entire surface.

The pressure was on in 2008 to get the dirt moved and the rest of the lake packed with a foot-deep clay liner before the fall rains hit.

"Engineers thought the walls would be sufficient," Fraker says, "but I wanted the clay bottom as an insurance policy. What are

you going to do if it isn't sealed enough?"

By spring 2009, it was evident that the work paid off. Between 3 1/2 and 4 ft. of water held steady from fall rains and winter snow. With the help of friends Fraker drove buoy anchors he made out of galvanized pipe and rebar about 2 ft. into the lake bottom, using GPS to accurately place them.

Fraker installed an 8-in. well to maintain the water level. Snow and spring rains will help bring it up to full level, and the well compensate for summer evaporation. Though not filled to its full depth (6 to 10 ft. deep), it was ready to use by July 15.

"It's everything I expected," Fraker says. "It's very rewarding, and people say how beautiful it is."

Altogether, about 325,000 yards of dirt were removed to create the lake. Fraker replaced the topsoil around the lake, seeded it and planted 200 Blue Spruce trees. He's working on a website and setting up a membership structure for Lake Charles Water Sports, LLC. Eventually he hopes to hold tournaments at his lake.

Creating a water ski lake is not cheap, Fraker says. Costs can range from \$300,000 to \$500,000. Despite some of the challenges of the 2 1/2-year project, including high fuel prices, he's glad he did it. Now he enjoys it as often as he can, waterskiing when he has free time before and after work.

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Calf Fitted With Two Artificial Legs

Thanks to two prosthetic hind legs, Meadow, a yearling Black Angus calf, runs and grazes with other animals at her home in northeastern New Mexico.

While the cost of surgery and prosthetic limbs doesn't make sense for most livestock, Meadow falls into the pet category. Her new owners rescued her after her ears and back hooves were severely frostbitten.

She was taken to Colorado State University veterinarians who coordinated with OrthoPets in Denver, Colo., to make suitable prosthetics.

"First, the calf was fitted with temporary prosthetics," explains Dr. Rob Callan, head of the university's livestock unit at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital. "Then a surgery was performed to amputate the distal right rear limb at the level of the fetlock. After surgery, we waited about three weeks for the calf to acclimate, and then a second surgery was performed on the left rear limb. Finally, castings were made of the amputated limbs and the prosthetics were made to conform to the legs. It took about another two weeks to get the final prosthetics and try them on. There have been some minor adjustments to the prosthetics since then."

Prosthetics have been used on other livestock, but Meadow may be the first double amputee. Callan notes that the yearling surprised everyone with how well she did.

"While this is not cost effective or practical for regular commercial livestock, it is something that can be considered for pet livestock or livestock with high genetic merit," Callan says.

Martin Kaufmann, owner of OrthoPets says that 90 percent of their patients are dogs. Often things such as ACL injuries can be treated with a \$600-\$800 orthotic brace or prosthetic instead of expensive surgeries. But, the company he and his wife started 6 years ago has also worked with larger livestock including llamas, horses, goats and two calves.



Despite having two prosthetic hind legs, Meadow, a yearling Black Angus calf, runs and grazes with other animals at her home in New Mexico.

"Our tagline is that if we have an animal with a heartbeat and an appendage, it's a candidate," Kaufmann says. They take molds and build a Stage 1 device. Then they tweak it to create the final prosthetic that can be adjusted slightly if the animal grows. Cost for prosthetics for larger breeds ranges from \$1,500 to \$2,000.

The biggest challenge, Kaufmann says, is making the prosthetic durable and easy to clean in the dirt and manure environment cattle live. Meadow wears her prosthetics 24/7, but they are checked often to make sure they aren't rubbing or causing problems. The prosthetics are made out of hard plastic, silicone and foam, and fasten with Velcro straps.

Months after amputation, Meadow is doing fine according to her owners. They were willing to pay thousands of dollars for the surgery and prosthetics to save her, because she quickly became one of their cherished family pets.

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"I made it portable so I could easily put it away in the off-season," says John Siefker about his wood-fired maple syrup cooker.

Portable "Sugar Shack" Cooks Maple Syrup

"After tasting some pure maple syrup that my daughter and son-in-law made, I decided to build a wood-fired maple syrup cooker of my own," says John Siefker, Saline, Mich. "I made it portable so I could easily put it away in the off-season."

Siefker's home is located in the middle of a 15-acre woodlot, which supplies him with ample firewood and sugar maples to tap. He uses his pickup or ATV to pull the 2-wheeled cooker, which has a distinctive rounded roof.

"The local cemetery had a 2-wheeled trailer frame which they gave me. And a local fireplace installer had a reject double wide steel fireplace insert on his junk pile. The only thing I bought was the chimney pipe, which cost \$35," says Siefker.

"The fireplace insert's glass doors allow me to check on the fire without losing any heat. And the enclosure allows me to work in most weather conditions."

The fireplace insert had a 2-level top. Siefker welded the fireplace insert to a 1-in. galvanized tube frame that's bolted to the trailer. He puts two pans on the top level and two on the lower level. The upper "pre-cooker" pans drip sap down into the lower pans for final cooking.

"Most maple syrup sap cookers are stationary. Because mine is portable I can bring it closer to our house where I can watch it, then store it in my barn for the rest of the year or move it to my daughter and son-in-law's place a mile away from where I live. I can also orient it away from the prevailing winds," says Siefker.

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