



National Barbecue News

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Bobby Q's is Cookin' in Cookeville **By Lynda Harrill**

An invitation to judge at the sixth annual Tennessee State Championship in Cookeville gave Roy and me a great excuse to venture beyond the confines of North Carolina BBQ. We shipped right over Western North Carolina (that tomato-based stuff, you know) and headed straight for Eastern Tennessee. We arrived in Cookeville around lunchtime Friday after touring the cook off site. We asked Ricky Shelton, Judging Chairman of the Cookin' in Cookeville Championship Cook Off, to point us in the direction of a good BBQ spot. He recommended Bobby Q's Barbeque and Catfish. Once we turned into the parking lot, that feeling of deja 'que overwhelmed us. We had briefly explored Cookeville a few years ago early one Sunday morning and remembered spotting Bobby Q's. But they were closed that day, so we had to go away hungry. This time our luck was better. The smells emanating from the back of the building were terrific. We couldn't wait to get inside.

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Decisions, decisions...so hard to decide what to get. Spence Migliore, son of the owner, was most helpful in steering us in the right direction. I opted for a pork plate (pulled pork shoulder in the “true Southern tradition”) with fried okra and “half ‘n’ half” slaw – half new coleslaw and half poolroom slaw. Roy ordered barbecued chicken and a side order of ribs with barbequed beans and a full order of that “killer” poolroom slaw. That stuff is so spicy it’ll make you sweat right there at the table, but it sure is good. The food wasn’t just good, it was outstanding – all of it.

It isn’t very often that we’ve had competition quality BBQ in a restaurant. Those wonderful BBQ experiences are usually reserved for cook-offs. There we were, sitting in the restaurant feeling the need to grab a KCBS score sheet and get serious and start spittin’ 9’s. The pulled pork was shredded perfectly. It was smoky, it was flavorful; definitely straight 9’s. The chicken was moist and tender and full of smoke. The skin glistened with a mahogany-colored sauce with a kick. Another set of 9’s. The ribs were off the scale! Gorgeous looking, just the right texture, and the taste.... We were in heaven. You’ve never seen food fly so fast.

Then there is the matter of that deadly poolroom slaw – red and HOT, loaded with cayenne! The barbecue beans were smoky and delicious. The fried okra was sinful, but worth every fat gram. Spence suggested we split an order of banana pudding. Well, we’ve never tasted banana pudding like that before. When you see the list of ingredients, you’ll know why. Junior Bennett is the pit-master in residence at Bobby Q’s. They replaced the original pit four or five year ago with a Southern Pride unit, and he’s been cooking up a storm ever since. And he and Bobby Q’s have received some good press – Road Food, Good Food and Real American Food by Jane and Michael Stern. They’ve even been written up in Ladies Home Journal. Bobby Q’s catfish is another specialty. The catfish looked real good too, but we just didn’t have any room to taste it. They serve tender pond-raised, grain-fed catfish, breaded and deep fried to order or grilled with lemony pepper seasoning for the fat gram conscious. Big fat homemade hushpuppies accompany the fillets. For the totally deranged, there are filet mignons on the menu. I can’t imagine eating a steak when the BBQ is so outstanding! They like to offer their regular patrons a choice. Don’t forget about Bobby Q’s outrageously delicious banana pudding.