

Jim Casada Outdoors

June 2014 Newsletter

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June as I Know and Have Known It

Jim's Doings

The highlight of my recent activities was a visit to [Firefly Lodge](#) in north Georgia. I made contact with these folks thanks to their having joined the [Southeastern Outdoor Press Association](#), a writer organization in which I have long been an active member. This is a trout fishing destination with a number of truly distinctive features.

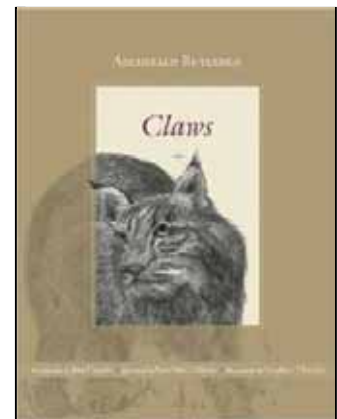
For starters, as I drove up the gravel road leading to the lodge, three lordly longbeards crossed the road in front of me. Of course I had to stop, watch, and venture a couple of yelps using my natural voice. Those gobblers, along with a bevy of hens and a passel of deer, were visible periodically throughout my stay.

The fishing was delightful, with one day spent floating a nearby tailwater and the second fishing a private stretch of Hot House Creek bordering the Firefly Lodge property.

Yet the enjoyable fishing was but part of the experience, because the owners made me feel wonderfully welcome and I think I was able to return the favor in some small way through pointing out several "surprises" they weren't aware of in the form of a pear, a plum, and an apple tree, all absolutely laden with fruit, along with several blueberry bushes and a nice grape arbor. They needed a bit of loving attention but there's bounty for the table in the offing.

The main lodge (and they have a second, do-it-yourself "cabin" in a scenic setting overlooking the creek) is something special. The previous owner built it in a manner which incorporates eye-catching rusticity with comfort. Think stone fireplaces, vintage fishing memorabilia (some of it quite rare), antique tools of all sorts (they were surprised I recognized a molasses skimmer which they thought was a tool for stirring apple butter and I suppose it could have seen such use), and overall architectural design which has to be seen to appreciate it to the fullest. Everything is historic, from the metal work door latches to an old-

This Month's Special



Last month I was involved, as I have been a couple of times in the past, in an annual event known as the [South Carolina Festival of the Book](#). The gathering brings in a goodly number of authors; some of them quite famous (Ron Rash was there this year, for example); others simple scribblers like yours truly. There are presentations based on recently released books, scores of exhibitors, and all sorts of activities to appeal to the reading public.

time claw-foot tub and a grand piano well over a century old, yet the comfort and amenities are as modern as the pickiest of visitors could want.



Suffice it to say I had a great time and left feeling more relaxed and laid back than had been the case for months. If you are interested in one of their fishing packages or maybe just a few days to get away, do some hiking, enjoy nature, and forget the world's cares, visit Firefly Lodge's website, give them a call at 706-374-4489, or e-mail at fireflylodge@tds.net.

Otherwise, I've made a recent two-day trip to Bristol, Tenn., in connection with a position I hold on a newly created Alumni Advisory Council for my undergraduate alma mater, King University.

Beyond that, I've stuck close to home, spent lots of time in the garden, and endeavored to get caught up on a bunch of stuff before moving into a busy July which will see me researching on the life of Archibald Rutledge. I'll spend a fortnight as a research fellow at the National Sporting Library in Middleburg, Va., and then hope to devote considerable time to work in the single largest collection of Rutledge papers at the Caroliniana Library in Columbia, S.C.

Once those stints of work are behind me, I should be ready to finish up writing the biography of Rutledge which has occupied so much of my time over the years. As I've mentioned before, if you are interested in being notified when it appears, [drop me an e-mail](#).

With those preliminaries out of the way, here are some random recollections, accompanied by more photo support than usual, about **why I've always liked the joyous month of June**.

The reason I was in attendance this year in connection with a newly released chapbook bearing the title *Claws*. It is a reprint of a classic, long forgotten tale by Archibald Rutledge and the first of five such works the [University of South Carolina Press](#) will be publishing. All five pieces come from a variant and earlier printing of his well-known book, *Old Plantation Days*. The early printing almost certainly came in the pre-World War I time frame and differs markedly in content from the 1921 edition. It is extremely rare (prices range upward of \$2000 for the original) and the five tales which will form this series are found only in it.

I wrote the introduction to *Claws*, and it features an Afterword by Ben Moise as well as a fetching bunch of original drawings by noted artist Stephen Chesley. I have a small number of copies of the book signed by all three of us and am offering these at \$25 (that includes postage) as this month's special.

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- The beauty of mountain streams, from cool, trickling rivulets to strong, trout-filled rivers.
- The breathtaking impact of a waterfall somewhere in the secret places of the Smokies. Whenever I gaze on one (usually with a fly rod in my hand) I'm reminded of the accuracy of a phrase an old-time poet in my hometown of Bryson City, NC used. He called the region "the backside of heaven."
- The thrills, spills, and often chills of riding an inner tube down Deep Creek. Of course there are countless other streams where you can do the same thing. It's just that I cut my tubing teeth on Deep Creek.



The loveliness of waterfalls never fails to lift my spirits and flood my memories. This is the Middle

- Relaxing on a porch as the gloaming gives way to dark and watching lightning bugs throw yellow sparks in the air.
- Recalling summer evenings as a boy when we would catch a whole bunch of fireflies, put them in a jar, and have our own version of nature's flashlight.
- Catching grasshoppers for fish bait in the cool dews of morning before they get frisky and evasive.
- Frying a mess of fresh-caught trout, all dressed up in cornmeal dinner jackets, at streamside.
- Wandering through fields and along wood edges as blackberries begin to ripen and offer their tasty bounty to anyone willing to brave briars, chiggers, and skeeters.
- Checking to see if mulberry trees bore fruit. Never mind that every berry likely has a tiny worm in it, I've always found them passing tasty. Also, I know of nothing which is widely available in the wild berry line which is more frequently overlooked. They make fine pies and jam and can even be dried for use in pemmican if your inclinations lean in that direction.
- Suckering tomatoes, tying them to stakes, maybe giving the vine a bit of a shake (yes, that actually helps in pollination), and trying my darndest to be patient until the first ones begin to ripen towards month's end.
- Beginning to enjoy the garden's bounty in a serious way—the last of the year's asparagus, early squash and zucchini, the first snap beans, and new potatoes.
- Watching barefoot youngsters running through the grass and remembering those long ago days when I did the same thing. They are heedless of the painful results of an accidental bee stomping, just as I was, and more times than I really care to remember I paid the price for mashing a honey bee while running through a patching of clover.
- Catching June bugs and tying a length of sewing thread to their legs in order to have my own insect helicopter. The only problem was that it soon ran out of gas and refused to fly.
- Going "nightcrawling" after a late afternoon or early evening rain brought these giants of the worm world out of their subterranean hideaways for a night of courtship. They brought a penny a crawler, which was serious money in the 1950s.

Falls on Big Snowbird Creek in Graham County, N.C.



Tubing in Deep Creek, N.C.



Stone-ground cornmeal from old timey mills such as this one (Mingus Mill in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park) makes the best cornbread possible and is the ideal "cornmeal dinner jacket" for fresh-caught trout

- Taking all-day spring lizard catching expeditions (they were actually salamanders, but I never heard them called that until I was grown) with the idea of filling a bucket with them and selling the amphibians for fish bait. They brought three cents apiece for the common grey and brown kind and a big red one fetched a nickel. It was hard work, turning over rocks in spring branches and seeps then scrambling like crazy to catch any lizards which were revealed, but it was also great fun.
- Watching corn tassel out and checking the silks on an almost daily basis, wondering whether there will be home-grown corn on the cob for the July 4 menu.
- Stringing and breaking beans on the front porch with Momma and Daddy in rocking chairs and the rest of us hanging our legs off over the side of the porch. Momma always had a goal of putting up 200 quarts of beans over the course of the summer.
- Enjoying the first store-bought watermelon of the season, usually in company with Grandpa Joe. That was back when watermelons came in proper dimensions (old-time cannonballs, Charleston Greys, or the striped "rattlesnake" variety) and had plenty of seeds. Today's sissified melons don't weigh more than ten pounds or so, lack any seeds, and in view are little more than pantywaist poseurs doing a poor job of trying to be the "real McCoy."
- Camping trips into the backcountry of the Smokies in company with a few buddies. We would fish all day; eat enormous quantities of potatoes, onions, dried fruit, and trout; and be carefree in the fashion only boys without a worry in the world can be. There have been similar trips in adulthood, and while some of the carefree outlook has vanished appetites remain mighty hearty.
- Saturday afternoon matinees at the local theatre. For a dime (about the time I reach my teens inflation hit hard and the price of admission went up to 12 cents) you got a cartoon, the latest installment of a serial, and a cowboy movie featuring the likes of Roy Rogers, Lash LaRue, Johnny Mack Brown, or Gene Autry.
- Watching old men play checkers, swap knives, and share tall tales at the area locally known as "Loafer's Glory" (or more frequently and more pungently, as "Dead Pecker Corner").
- Enjoying a milkshake in one of the local drugstores after a long, hot day helping Daddy in the yard and garden.



Camping and hearty appetites go hand-in-hand. Here my brother works on sausage and scrambled eggs to go with a stack of pancakes. The Coleman stove he is using is some 70 years old and works as well as it did when new.



Looking "down" on sunset in the Smokies.

- Fried chicken for Sunday dinner. I never hear Bobby Bare's great song, "Chicken Every Sunday" without thinking of Mom and her uncanny knack for frying chicken. I've never had better, and as Bare says in the song, "Our little home was blessed." Incidentally, "dinner" at our house meant the mid-day meal. We ate supper at dusk. Dinner in the evening was something for pantywaist city folks. Also, during my boyhood, more often than not, the chicken was free-range straight from Grandpa's tiny farm. If anyone ever tries to tell you the overly fat chicken you buy in today's supermarkets tastes the same as true free-range chicken, you have my permission (and endorsement) to yell BS to the skies.
- Car rides to the main ridgeline of the Smokies where it was possible to look down on the setting sun.
- Cruising around town (it had only two real business streets where there were storefronts) trying to get the attention of girls who were doing the same thing.
- Endless games of roly-bat with three or four buddies.
- Hoeing corn with Grandpa all the while knowing there would be some kind of tasty reward at the end of work.
- Riding my one-speed bike back and forth across traffic counters hundreds of times. I have no idea whether or not that recorded on the counter, but if so the folks who studied the data must have been mightily perplexed as to how the dead-end road which ran by our house could get so much traffic.
- Seining for minnows which could be sold to the local bait and tackle store.
- Days of trout fishing alone. I'd leave home at daylight on foot, fish all day, and get back home at dusk. It was magical and I think offers as good an explanation as any of why I have always so cherished time spent alone in natural settings.
- Thrilling to the beauty of hundreds of tiger swallowtail butterflies "puddling" along a trail.
- The joys of the rare "see forever" day in the Smokies after a rain and the passage of a strong cold front. The skies took on a blue hue which grabbed the soul, temperatures were mild, humidity was low, and all the world seemed lovely.



Fisherman in a stream in the Smokies.



Tiger swallowtail butterflies puddling on a trail in the Smokies.



A scenic view of the sort which explains my passionate love for my native heath, the Smokies.

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Recipes

I probably should have noted above, in the "Jim's Doings" section, that I have recently been honored by being included in the second volume of "A Sense of Place." This is a series, with the first volume already having been published, which features South Carolina writers describing some place which is truly special to them along with trying to convey a sense or feel for the place. My contribution is on a tract of land, totaling a bit under 100 acres, I own in the adjacent county. It's nothing special but it's mine, it's a place to hunt, it has wild berries and morel mushrooms in abundance, and every year since I acquired it I've managed to kill at least one turkey on the place.

In the essay I wrote I offered a number of recipes for possible use with my chapter in the book. I doubt if more than one will be used, but I thought it would be fitting to include the ones I selected here, since all feature bounty for nature found on the place. **One of them, the berry pie, is as simple and scrumptious as it gets.** I've offered it before at some time in the past, but if you haven't tried it I recommend you do so.

CLAM STUFFED MOREL MUSHROOMS

10 medium to large fresh morel mushrooms, sliced in half lengthwise
 1/3 cup butter, melted
 1 garlic clove, minced
 1 (6 ½ ounce) can minced clams
 3 tablespoons finely chopped green onions or chives
 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley
 Salt and pepper to taste
 ¾ cup mayonnaise
 ½ tablespoon prepared mustard

Clean mushrooms well and remove stems. Cut in half lengthwise. Chop the removed stems finely. Melt butter, add minced garlic and mushroom stems and sauté for 8-10 minutes until stems are tender. Drain clams and add to skillet with onions, parsley and salt and pepper. Sauté for 5 minutes. Stuff



morel halves with clam mixture and place in a greased baking dish.

Combine mayonnaise and mustard and top each stuffed morel half with a dollop. Bake for 10-15 minutes at 350 degrees. Serve immediately.

BLACKBERRY COBBLER

1 cup all-purpose flour
 1 cup sugar
 2 teaspoons baking powder
 1 cup milk
 ¼ cup (one stick) butter, melted
 2-4 cups blackberries

Combine flour, sugar, baking powder and milk; stir with a wire whisk until smooth. Add melted butter and blend. Pour batter into a 9 x 13-inch baking dish. Pour berries (amount depends on whether you like lots of berries or lots of crust) evenly over batter. Do not stir. Bake at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes or until golden brown. Serve with vanilla ice cream, whipped cream, or milk.



NOTE: This recipe works equally well with a number of other berries including dewberries, raspberries, elderberries, huckleberries, and blueberries.

PERSIMMON PUDDING

2 cups persimmon pulp
 2 cups packed brown sugar
 ¼ cup butter, melted
 1 teaspoon vanilla
 1 ½ cups self-rising flour
 ½ cup light cream or milk
 2 eggs, beaten
 ½ cup cinnamon
 ½ cup raisins or black walnut meats (optional)

Combine all ingredients and beat just until well mixed. Pour into a greased 9 x 13-inch pan and bake at 350 degrees for 30-35 minutes or until golden brown and just beginning to pull away from the sides. Remove from oven and cool slightly. Cover and seal tightly with foil or plastic wrap. Once cool, cut into squares and serve with whipped topping.

If you like the flavor of bourbon or dark rum, a tablespoon or two can be added to this recipe.

BLACK WALNUT BARS

Crust

½ cup butter
 ½ cup packed brown sugar
 1 cup flour

Filling

1 cup brown sugar
 2 eggs, beaten
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon vanilla

2 teaspoons flour
 ½ teaspoon baking powder
 1 ½ cups shredded coconut
 1 cup chopped black walnuts

Cream butter and brown sugar. Slowly add flour and mix until crumbly. Put into 7 x 11-inch baking dish. Bake 8-10 minutes at 350 degrees until golden.

Combine brown sugar, eggs, salt and vanilla. In separate bowl, add flour and baking powder to coconut and black walnuts. Blend into egg mixture and pour over baked crust. Return to oven and bake for an additional 15-20 minutes or until done. Cut into bars and place on wire racks to cool.

MOREL SOUP

1 pound of fresh morels, cleaned and sliced
 1-2 tablespoons lemon juice
 1 large sweet onion, chopped
 3 tablespoons butter (do not substitute margarine)
 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
 4 cups whole milk
 3 teaspoons chicken bouillon granules
 ½ teaspoon salt
 1/8 teaspoon black pepper

Clean mushrooms and sprinkle with the lemon juice. Sauté in a saucepan with onion and butter until translucent and tender. Sprinkle with flour and stir thoroughly. Gradually add milk, bouillon, salt and pepper. Bring to a rolling boil, stirring vigorously as you do so, and continue for two minutes. Reduce heat and simmer 10-15 minutes. If you like the taste of thyme, add a ½ teaspoon to the recipe, but keep in mind that morels have a delicate flavor.

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