
JIM CASADA OUTDOORS

October 2014 Newsletter

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A "see forever" Indian Summer day in the Smokies.

Jim's Doings

October is always a busy month for me if for no other reason than that it involves the opening of deer season. This year, however, there's much more.

I'm the conference chairman for the 50th anniversary conference of the [Southeastern Outdoor Press Association](#) (SEOPA) as well as the organization's incoming president. Planning for that golden anniversary gathering, which will be taking place in my own highland homeland in Fontana Village, N.C., the location where, back in 1964, 18 writers established the outdoor communicators' group.

It's a delight to be able to showcase the part of the world which will always be the home of my heart as well as the place of my birth, and two of the highlights of the program feature people who share my love of the region.

One is my brother, Don, who will be talking about his adventures, in a sort of combo photographic safari and excursion into the past, in a presentation entitled "Bushwhacking Through the Backside of Heaven."



Big Santeetlah Creek (Graham County, N.C.)
in its fall glory.

The second is a good friend, Tipper Pressley, the gracious genius with chinquapin eyes who hosts a daily blog, "[Blind Pig and the Acorn](#)," every day of the year. She will be talking about "Bloggin' from the Heart" as she shares her dedication to all aspects of the mountain way of life.

There are many other programs, all sorts of spouse activities, involvement of a number of young folks of high school and college age who are aspiring or promising communicators, chances to sample and savor all that is new and noteworthy in outdoor products, an awards ceremony and banquet, and dealing with 225-250 people.

Thank goodness SEOPA has an exceptionally devoted and highly competent executive director, because she's the one who makes all of this come together, more or less seamlessly and despite my almost daily blunders which threaten to mess something up (she even reads this newsletter, perhaps just to keep me, as one of her putative bosses, happy). Obviously this is a membership only affair, and I say that because I wish some of you could attend.

I will note that one subscriber, O.P. Holder, who is a resident of Graham County where the conference is being held, was gracious and generous to the nth degree through making a lovely turkey call for an auction associated with the event. A hearty tip of the hat to him.

Once that is behind me, I've got another writers' conference the following week (our little group here in S.C.) and then some duties connected with an alumni advisory group I serve on linked to my undergraduate alma mater, King University in Bristol, Tenn.

Towards the end of the month I'll catch my breath, go deer hunting, and get back to something approaching a daily routine.

Meanwhile, bear with me. I'll try to have a mid-month edition, complete with some book offerings and other information, but for now here are some warm and hopefully winsome thoughts on the enduring wonders of the month we call October. It's a grand time of year.

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October Was Always The Best

I've always had a special fondness for the month of October. To be sure, the earth's reawakening in April is awesome, May carries a special magic, and I can even find solace in the lean, mean times of little February. But

honesty compels me to acknowledge that, all things considered, October has to be reckoned my favorite month of the year. Here's a sampling of why that's the case.

- October is a vision of earthly gold, with hickories serving as sentinels of autumn high atop hilltops and poplars painting a picture no artist can hope to match.
- It's a squirrel high up in one of those hickories, cutting away on a tasty nut or barking angrily when the shadow of a hawk passes by in the sun of Indian Summer.
- It's memories of being alongside Grandpa Joe in the corn field, listening to him tell tales of those glorious days when chestnuts reigned supreme in high country forests and seeing him come about as close to being visibly emotional as would ever happen. The thoughts of those mighty trees and all that they had once meant to the mountain way of life—acid wood for cash money; timber for barns, roofing shakes, or split rail fences; nuts to roast at home, use in dressing, or sell to be shipped to roast chestnut vendors in the city; and the perfect mast for fattening free-range hogs—would bring a catch to his voice and a glistening of moisture to his eyes.
- Mention of chestnuts, hogs, and Grandpa brings to mind another fine feature of Octobers from yesteryear. It was the month for fattening hogs, chestnuts or not, and that meant pulling up armloads of red-rooted pigweed and carrying it to the pig sty, shelling corn by hand after it had been pulled from the dry stalks of the Hickory Cane variety Grandpa favored, offering the swine plenty of surplus pumpkins which maybe had a flaw or didn't quite meet the requirements for household use, and plenty of hard work.
- The month carried its potential burden of pain from yellow jacket stings or a chance encounter with a packsaddle while working in the corn field.
- It was the time of aptly named [October beans](#). Also known as corn field beans, they were allowed to dry on the vine. The pods would then be stripped from the vines, spread atop a big "blanket" made from tow sacks stitched together, and dried a bit more in the afternoon sun. When dry to the point of being almost brittle, they would be thrashed with a flail made from a hickory sapling with one end cut so as to consist of scores of tiny wooden strips. The beans could then be winnowed from the hulls and stored for delicious, hearty meals come dead of winter.
- October meant harvested apples and freshly squeezed cider, apple peeling and drying, and the promise of fried apple pies (see information below) once fall gave way to winter.
- It was big bowls of stewed apples on the table for every meal, maybe hot with a pat of butter at breakfast and dinner, and cold at supper (dinner means the mid-day meal in my vocabulary, and it was often the main meal of the day in my boyhood).
- A regular ritual of October was pulling corn from the stalks where it had dried in the field and hauling it to the crib. If you had a good mouser (cat) available, that would suffice to keep rodents at bay. If not, then other steps, such as carefully set traps, were required. Maybe it's because 12-year-old boys have a naturally bloodthirsty streak along with being three parts poacher, but I actually enjoyed dealing with the mice when it came to setting (and emptying) traps.
- It was the month when fall crops, planted somewhere around Labor Day, began to provide welcome additions to the daily diet and promise of good things to come. Mustard and turnip greens were at the top of the list, along with fall cabbage, but Grandpa Joe also planted radish and black-seeded Simpson leaf lettuce. In my own approach to gardening, expanding on his approach, I've included Swiss chard, spinach, broccoli, and cauliflower.
- I loved being a part of the harvest—carefully gathering pumpkins, which would be stored for protection either in the cool recesses of the cannery or on a bed of dry leaves carefully and fully covered by corn

shocks which were cut with a hand sickle and stacked by Grandpa. He had a way of doing it in a teepee-like shape which shed rain wonderfully well.

- October was and is a time of delight when it came to treats from nature. It's finding ground cherries all through the corn field and picking the best looking ones, golden little globes with a taste that was sweet with just the slightest hint of sour in the background. Or as a boy maybe a stroll down the road along the river would give me a pocket bulging with beech nuts. Hulling them is a lot of work for a tiny treat, but my are they fine. No wonder every critter in the woods flocks to beech trees in the years (rather rare) when they bear mast.
- It once was a school boy rich beyond monetary measure because he had the pockets of his overalls (yes, some school boys still wore overalls) jammed full of chinquapins to share with his buddies and eat at recess. Speaking of overalls, I recently purchased a pair and I've got to say, never mind what my long-suffering wife thinks about their appearance, that they are comfortable and functional to a degree which makes me wonder why they ever faded from popularity. After all, you don't have to worry about a belt, about your overly ample stomach having a bothersome overhang, figuring out where to put your pocket knife or hang a hammer, and they give plenty of crotch room unlike the tight abomination sold as men's britches in today's world.
- October is ground fogs in the morning and ground hogs busily feeding in the gloaming.
- It's yellow jackets in a state of steady anger because they somehow know that their glory days are limited.
- It's molasses time in the mountains, with old-timers reckoning that producing good cane syrup is a vanishing art and a n'er-do-well or two looking for every opportunity to get the skimmings (which usually carry more than a hint of alcoholic content).
- It's a biscuit hot from the oven, split open, generously covered with butter, and then doused with the first run of molasses, the last run of honey, freshly made apple butter, or [fox grape jelly](#) left over from a run of canning.
- It's gathering the fox grapes for that jelly, keeping a wary eye out for hornets and copperheads, knowing that the end result is worth every bit of the trouble involved.
- October is a [persimmon pudding](#) topped with cream, so sweet that it's no wonder a ripe persimmon is sometimes called "nature's candy." Or it's a mischievous country boy managing to get his uppity city slicker cousin to bite into a persimmon which is golden in color but still hard and astringent. The reaction of those city types on such occasions was a glory to behold, as they spit to beat the band and felt like their mouth had suddenly grown a heavy coat of fur.
- It's the slightly earthy, wonderfully sweet, banana-like with a hint of mango taste (if I sound like one of these wine snobs trying to describe flavors, and I probably do, I'll just cease and say the taste is basically indescribable) of a pawpaw picked ripe from the tree just before it fell. No wonder a [pawpaw custard](#) was George Washington's favorite dessert.



Wayah Bald in Macon County, N.C. in early fall.

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Recipes

OCTOBER BEANS

The October beans mentioned above are quite large and speckled with splotches of brown or red color. Used as a soup bean or by themselves, they are as tasty as they are hearty. Both Momma and Grandma Minnie prepared them in a simple way and often used them as a main course for winter meals. They would wash and drain the beans two or three times, checking closely to remove any foreign material from them, and then place in a large pot half full of water and allow to soak overnight. The following day they would add water and generous chunks of streaked meat (salt pork), bring them to a rolling boil, and then cut the heat back to a slow simmer. The beans would cook this way for several hours, perhaps with the addition of a cup of water once or twice during the process.

The aroma from the cooking beans would fill every room of the house with an almost irresistible odor. Often the beans, accompanied by a crusty pone of cornbread and perhaps a bowl of turnip greens, would be our main meal for the day.

FRIED APPLE PIES

Fried apple pies were a staple in the kitchens of both my mother and grandmother throughout my boyhood, and I will still sacrifice all pretense of gustatory dignity, any and all attention to dietary restraint, when you place a hot fried pie made the proper way in front of me. As for what constitutes the proper way, I won't offer a recipe as such but will give the essentials. You begin with sauce made from dried apples, slow stewed and with a bit of brown sugar and perhaps a touch of cinnamon added, with a good, thick sauce being best. Some folks use pie dough while others opt for biscuit dough. I'm partial to the latter, not because of any reservations about calories but simply because I think it lets the apples provide the fullest flavor. Pies fried in a cast iron skillet greased with a liberal coating of lard (the real McCoy in this case, not some of the healthier substitutes—when it comes to fried pies appetite correctness or the dictates of Michelle Obama-like dietary naysayers belong in the trash can or trough), done one at a time and topped off with a slathering of butter when they come hot from the pan, and manna from mountain heaven. Or, as Grandpa was wont to opine, "They'd bring tears of pure joy to a glass eye."

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 whole milk
 2 eggs, beaten
 ½ teaspoon cinnamon
 ½ cup raisins, pecans, or black walnuts (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 of the pan. Remove from oven and cool slightly. Cover and seal tightly in foil or plastic wrap. When completely cool cut into squares and serve with whipped topping. NOTE: This is a very rich dessert and does not require large portions.

EASY PERSIMMON BUTTER

Wash persimmons thoroughly and remove stems and other debris. Drain well. Press through a non-aluminum sieve to remove skins and seeds. Add a bit of honey (to taste) and mix well with a fork. Store in refrigerator and use as a spread on bagels, biscuits, muffins, or toast.

FOX GRAPE JELLY

In my family at least, and study of regional cookbooks suggests this is the case generally in the South, there was a pretty simple, straightforward method for making fox grape jelly. One of its advantages was that there's enough natural pectin in fox grapes to make the jelly set nicely without using anything beyond fruit and sugar.

Start by squeezing the pulp from the skins and placing in separate bowls. Remove the seeds from the pulp. This is easily done with a plastic sieve with small holes. Discard the seeds. Cook the skins until they are tender and then combine with the pulp/juice mix which you have once the seeds have been removed. For each cup of the recombined mixture add three-quarters cup of sugar or to taste (some folks like fox grape jelly with a bit of tart bite to it). Bring the mixture to a slow boil for 10 to 20 minutes, stirring frequently until it becomes noticeably thick. At this point pour into half pint or pint jars and allow to cool. Seal it with melted paraffin or two-piece lids. A cup of fruit with the seeds removed will make about a half pint of jelly.

PAWPAW PUDDING

1 cup of pawpaw pulp with all seeds removed
 1 ¼ cup sugar
 1 teaspoon baking powder



A trio of ripening persimmons, each about the size of a flattened baseball.



A ripe wild persimmon held next to a ripening Asian persimmon to compare size.



Ripening pawpaws in early autumn.

½ cup melted butter (the real thing)
1 teaspoon ginger (optional)
3 eggs
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
2 ½ teaspoons cinnamon
½ teaspoon nutmeg

Strain the pawpaw pulp using a plastic sieve. Mix it with all the ingredients and bake in a well-greased pan for approximately an hour at 350 degrees (when done it will begin to pull away from the sides of the pan). Cool and cut into squares.



Pawpaws nearing readiness to pick.

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