
JIM CASADA OUTDOORS

October 2015 Newsletter

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October Musings: An Apology and Explanation

As many of you have noticed, as evidenced through e-mails and a few phone calls, I have not produced a newsletter since May. The explanation for that four-month hiatus is as simple as it is sad. My wife has Alzheimer's disease. As those of you who have had any close-up contact with the malady through family or friends will know all too well, it is a horrible and devastating disease which presently has no cure. Indeed there are only a few steps to delay or ease its ravages. It takes a toll not only on the person who is afflicted but on everyone close to that individual. In particular, it places a major burden on the primary caregiver. They receive not only the workload associated with care but are often the object of frustration, anger, and other emotions.

I've been on this roller-coaster ride since Ann was first diagnosed a year ago, but things didn't really begin to go downhill until shortly after Christmas. In just three-quarters of a year she has gone from a bright, fit, perky personality to someone who finds it extremely difficult to cope with the most basic aspects of daily life. On the flip side of matters—I've done more cooking, something I enjoy, than had been the case in years. There's also been plenty of opportunity for two other favorite pursuits, gardening and reading. But Ann cannot be left alone so time on the water or in the woods, hours I've always cherished but now appreciate to a degree far greater than ever before simply because they aren't available, has pretty much ceased to exist.

That's about as much as I want to say. It's our problem. Our daughter and her family have been wonderfully supportive and fortunately live close by. My brother and sister-in-law have likewise been most helpful, as have local friends together with folks from the outdoor community. I would ask each of you to try as best you can to understand and accept my explanation of why there hasn't been a newsletter. I'll assure you I'm someone with a dedicated work ethic who frets anytime I'm behind with anything, but this has pretty well overwhelmed me. I've now managed to get things a bit closer to where I feel I have some control. If things go as I hope, henceforth you'll be receiving the newsletter monthly as has long been the case. Now, let's offer a special book for sale and talk about my favorite month of the year.

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This Month's Special

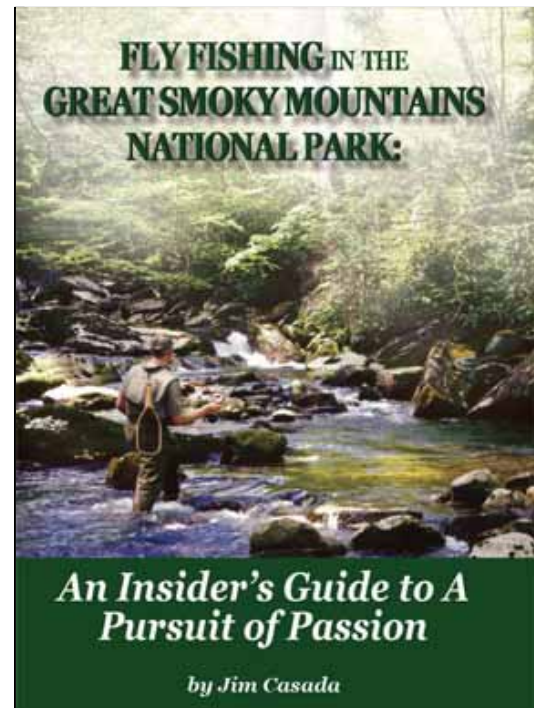
The first book I ever self-published was *Fly Fishing in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park: An Insider's Guide to a Pursuit of Passion*. I took the self-publishing route because the book was exceptionally long, some 450

pages, and I was confident enough and committed enough to my subject matter that I didn't want some self-righteous commercial editor making or suggesting wholesale changes.

I got a highly skilled proofreader to go through the material for me, hired a skilled layout and design man, and bit the appreciable financial bullet to produce a quality book (in addition to the text there are graphs, a removable map of the Park, scores of photographs, and more).

Of all the books I've done this is probably the one of which I'm proudest, and it won some awards when it came out. Now in its second printing, I have never until now offered the book at any discount whatsoever. Likewise, if you find it on-line from the likes of Amazon, it didn't come through me. I've always refused to sell to them.

The paperbound version retails for \$24.95. I'm offering it for \$20 and free shipping. That's a savings of almost \$9. If you want the hardbound version, it's \$37.50 and again, I'll pay the postage.



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Jim's Doings

For reasons explained above, I've been very much a homebody in recent months. That does not mean, however, that I've been totally unproductive. One recent development of note is that every Wednesday I'm offering a pair of recipes and a bit of commentary on the "[Sporting Classics Daily](#)" blog under the title "Wild Harvest Wednesdays." I urge all of you to sign up to get this five-times a week blog with its many interesting pieces of information in the world of sport.

I will also begin writing, as of October, a monthly wild game piece for a blog offered by [Leica Optics](#). It will feature recipes, thoughts on care and handling of game, and some narrative material. Since I'm spending more time in the kitchen as the new head chef for the household, that will give me an opportunity to try new game recipes as well as revisiting old ones.

In the middle of October I will be attending the annual meeting of the [Southeastern Outdoor Press Association](#). This year's convention, the 51st annual one, is slated for Eufaula, Alabama. I'll be on hand as the outgoing president of the organization, and that means making speeches, attending meetings, sitting at the head table far more than I would like, and other duties. Mostly though, it's an opportunity to see old friends, make a few new ones, get my creative batteries recharged in a major way, listen to some wonderful music. The event always concludes with an evening of picking and grinning, and there are some wonderfully talented musicians in the organization's ranks (rest assured I'm not one of them—when musical talent was passed out in the Casada family, and there's actually a lot of it, somehow I was under a big wash tub where not so much as a glimmer of genetic light penetrated).

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An Ode to October

How can you not like October? Sure, over most of the country it marks the beginning of a time of temporary death in nature's endless cycle, but even as that happens experience tells us that rebirth and reawakening lie only five or six months down the road. Meanwhile, think about these hallmarks of a month of magic. I'm describing them in a literary style favored by one of my favorite writers, John Parris. Most of you, unless you happen to live in the mountains of western North Carolina, likely never heard of him. But he was a gifted writer who penned a column, "Roaming the Mountains," for the *Asheville Citizen-Times* for decades. In it he captured the ways and wonders of the North Carolina high country, and many of his thousands of columns were subsequently collected in books. All his books had the word mountain in their title. Here, with a tip of the literary hat to John Parris, is my feeble attempt at an ode to October.

- October is hickory trees adorning ridgelines with gold, harbingers of frost and freezes soon to come.
- It's a noisy bushytail feeding in one of those hickories and letting a passing hawk know he's been spotted and isn't appreciated.
- The month of magic is a shrewd old buck tending his scrapes and thinking of procreation.
- October it nutting time, with black walnuts and hazelnuts there for the taking, at least by folks with enough gumption to do the gathering, storing, and cracking. Those who do will enjoy the fruits of their labors in glorious fashion come winter with its short days and long nights.
- It's a time of purple asters, goldenrod, and cardinal flowers abloom; of sourwood trees and sumac cloaked in gaudy shawls of scarlet; of sweet gums, black gums, and dogwoods sporting rich and varied hues of maroon and magenta.
- October is jewel weed lining ditch banks and sporting its final showy blossoms of orange and gold; it's a mountain boy taking simple joy from touching the plant's seed pods and watching the seeds jump out like a haint from a graveyard.
- The month is the time of the Hunter's Moon, a worthy successor to the Harvest Moon of September. Slung low like a golden ornament adorning nature's breast as it crests the eastern horizon at turkey fly-up time in the evening, the Hunter's Moon seems so close, so tangible, you almost feel as if you could reach out and touch it. For the deer hunter walking home by its light, bright enough to cast shadows, it's a comfort and a friend.
- October is a wizened old persimmon tree at the edge of a pasture laden with golden globes of fruit, newly ripened and so filled with sugar they are sticky to the fingers. It's seemingly every critter in the woods—deer, foxes, bears, 'coons, and 'possums—competing with humans to enjoy this candy straight from nature's rich larder.
- It's a cathead biscuit for breakfast slathered with home-churned butter and anointed in new-run molasses.
- It's a pot of pintos simmering on the stove and a pone of cornbread made with stone-ground meal baking in the oven.
- It's a sportsman's supper of squirrel and sweet taters, with turnip greens on the side and biscuits to sop up the rich gravy made from the squirrel drippings. Maybe, if that particular hunter is truly blessed, there will be a persimmon pudding or mayhap a chunk of persimmon bread redolent of the flavor of bourbon for dessert.
- October is an old man in his rocker, sitting in the afternoon sun and allowing its warmth to ease his aches.
- It's candy roasters and acorn squash, Hubbard squash and pumpkins, gathered from the field and stored for hearty meals to come.

- October is crops laid by and fields plowed to await spring; it's a boy gathering maypops and feasting on the sweet-sour pleasure of the seeds found inside this fruit of the passion flower; it's October beans awaiting hulling and free-range chickens eagerly dining on a garden that's done its duty for another year.
- It's the simple pleasure of a handful of ground cherries to munch on, or maybe a rich, ripe pawpaw for a snack.
- It's a boy in love with the outdoors hustling home from school to grab his gun and get into the squirrel woods as quickly as possible, pausing only to grab an apple or two or maybe a raw onion and a chunk of cornbread in case he gets peckish before supper.
- It's that self-same boy, whistling in the gloaming as he heads home, two squirrels in his pocket and just a tiny taste of fear of things of the night moving his steps right along.
- It's early frost and old-timers checking the signs—the stripes on wooly worms, the thickness of corn husks, the height of hornet's nests, and countless other traditional means of predicting how harsh or mild winter will be.
- October is a wizened and wise old hunter sharing tales of yesteryear with a star-struck boy, smiling as he reminisces and reckons "Ah yes, those were the days."
- It's the inexpressible delight of Indian Summer, with chilly mornings putting pep in your step, bluebird skies filled with blackbirds flocking up, and monarch butterflies floating in zephyr-like breezes.



October is, in short, a wonderful time to be alive, the season of harvest and of hunting, of quiet satisfaction in another summer gone and assurance of being ready for winter to come.

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October Recipes

All of this month's recipes relate, in one way or another, to foods of the season and things mentioned above. It's a month for hearty eating and celebration of the harvest.

CAN'T FAIL COBBLER

Earlier today I picked what was pretty much the last of this year's fall crop of raspberries. My initial thought had been that they would make a mighty nice companion for a few bowls of cereal, but then, realizing I had an extra

mouth to feed since a sitter is coming tomorrow to give me my once-a-week break of four hours to get things like visits to the post office, bank, and grocery store done, I decided on a can't fail recipe. Right now I've got a raspberry cobbler cooking in the oven, and the recipe below will work for any kind of berries and well as apples and peaches.

1 cup sugar
 1 cup self-rising flour
 1 cup milk
 1 stick of butter (melted)
 2 teaspoons baking powder
 2 to 3 cups fruit

Place the sugar, flour, milk and baking powder in a bowl and whisk until smooth. While this is being done, place the stick of butter in a 9 x 9 baking dish and melt it in a 350-degree oven. This also pre-heats the oven for baking. Once the butter melts, pour it into the batter and whisk everything together. Pour the thick liquid back into the baking dish and distribute the fruit evenly atop the batter. Do not mix or stir. Place the baking dish in the oven and cook for 30-35 minutes or until the crust is golden brown. Serve with vanilla ice cream, whipped cream, or milk.

PERSIMMON PUDDING

2 cups persimmon pulp (if you don't want the considerable work associated with readying wild ones, get the huge seedless Oriental persimmons)
 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 or black walnuts (optional)

Combine all ingredients and beat just until well mixed. Pour into a greased 9 x 13 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 before cutting into squares. Serve with whipped cream.



ORZO WITH HAZELNUTS

As a youngster growing up in the Smokies I spent an incredible amount of time on local trout streams. While my fly fishing was in many ways a single-minded, intense pursuit, I was always sufficiently aware of my surroundings to keep an eye out for edibles. This might be ripe serviceberries in June, blackberries at streamside in July, fox grapes in September, or hazelnut bushes laden with mast. In the case of the latter you had to keep a close eye on things come the onset of autumn, because once squirrels got to working on the nuts they did so until every last one was gone. Usually though I got my share. Here's one fine way to use the easily cracked nuts (with the right touch you'll get the whole nut most of the time).

8 ounces orzo
 ¼ cup butter, softened
 1 teaspoon lemon juice

¼ cup finely chopped hazelnuts
 Salt to taste
 Few dashes black pepper

Cook orzo according to package directions. Meanwhile, mix softened butter, lemon juice, hazelnuts, and salt and pepper with a fork. Stir desired amount of butter mixture into drained orzo and serve immediately.

MY FAVORITE SQUIRREL RECIPE

Although she didn't do much in the way of fancy foods, my mother was a splendid cook. Having been a young woman in the depths of the Depression, she always belonged to the "waste not, want not" school of thinking, whether the subject involved culinary matters or something else. Small game dishes were a regular part of our family diet in the fall and winter, just as trout loomed large on the table during the warmer months. I killed lots of squirrels as a boy, and Mom prepared them in various ways. This recipe, however, was the family favorite.

2 squirrels, dressed and quartered
 Water to cover the squirrel
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 1-2 tablespoons butter

Place dressed squirrel in a large saucepan and cover with cold water. Add the baking soda and bring to a boil. Remove meat from the water and rinse squirrel well under running water, rubbing to remove the soda. Return to the rinsed pan and cover with fresh water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer until tender. Place the squirrel in a baking dish, dot with butter, and bake at 350 degrees until browned and crusty.

VENISON STEAK AND POTATOES

Appetites seem to kick into overdrive come autumn, or at least mine does. I can come in from a day of hunting famished and consume enough to do a blue-ribbon trencherman proud. Here's a dish sure to please the hungry meat-and-potatoes guy.

1 pound cubed venison steak
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 1 (10 ¾-ounce) can cream of celery soup
 ½ cup milk
 ½ cup sour cream
 ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 16 ounces frozen hash browns (cubed style) thawed
 ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese, divided
 1 (3-ounce) can French-fried onions, divided

Brown venison steaks in olive oil in a skillet and set aside. Combine soup, milk, sour cream and pepper. Stir in thawed potatoes 1/3 cup of cheese, and ½ can of onions. Spoon mixture into a 9 x 13 inch baking dish. Arrange steaks over the potatoes. Bake, covered, at 350 degrees for 45-50 minutes. Top with remaining cheese and onions and bake, uncovered, for 5 to 10 minutes longer.

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