

Jim Casada Outdoors

August 2016 Newsletter

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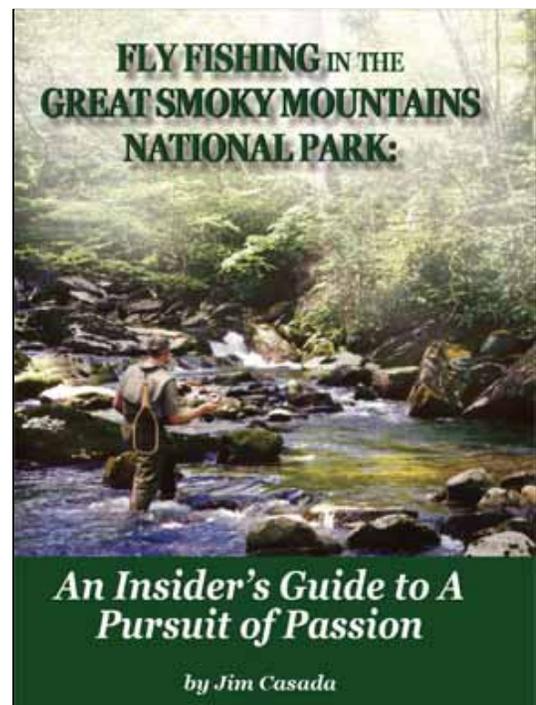
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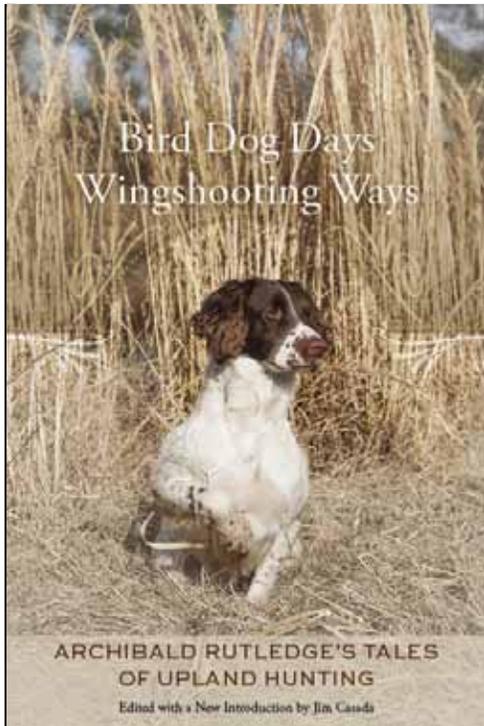
Jim's Doin's

There's not a lot to report on this front. The summer issue of *Carolina Mountain Life* carries two pieces of mine—a column on the joys of picking (and eating) blackberries and a feature article on the sad saga of the American chestnut. Similarly, in the July/August edition of *South Carolina Wildlife*, a model state wildlife magazine for which I've written for decades, you'll find my article on "The Simple Pleasures of Cleaning Guns." Beyond that I've somehow been busy all the time with little in the way of immediate or concrete results to show for it. I completed another story for *South Carolina Wildlife* on "Dreaming of Duxbak Days" which will appear in an upcoming issue, and the magazine's editor, Joey Frazier, has indicated the publication will be excerpting some material from my latest Rutledge anthology, *Bird Dog Days, Wingshooting Ways*. I've been busy promoting the book and will be participating in some signings in upcoming months. If you are a bird hunter, dog lover, or have friends who fit in that category, the book might make a great Christmas gift, and at \$29.95 plus \$5 shipping and handling it's a good deal.

This Month's Book Special



When it appeared in 2009, in conjunction with the 75th anniversary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, I described *Fly Fishing in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park: An Insider's Guide to A Pursuit of Passion*, as my "book of a lifetime." While I actually hope that I have one or two more books yet to come that will merit that description, at least from my personal perspective, still left ahead of me, the work remains one which gave me a great deal of satisfaction. At some 450 pages and weighing two and a half pounds in the hardbound



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I'll be signing copies of the book and some other Rutledge-related publications with which I've been involved at 2 p.m. on Friday, September 9 at Litchfield Books in Pawleys Island, S.C. Prior to the book signing I will be talking at a luncheon at Sea View Inn. For details on Pawleys Island Moveable Feast events, of which this is a part, visit www.classatpawleys.com/feast.php or call Vicky Crafton of Litchfield Books at 843-237-8138.

I did get a bit of good news in the form of a phone call indicating I had won something in the Southeastern Outdoor Press Association's annual Excellence in Craft competition. You are never told the category, what place, or indeed anything beyond "you are among the winners," until the actual presentation ceremony. Still, I'm excited, because any award in the highly competitive contest is one to be prized, and I cherish those I've won over the years.

Finally, I'd love for any of you who live in the area to attend the inaugural Hall of Fame induction ceremonies for the Fly Fishing Museum of the Southern Appalachians on September 24. The event, which I mentioned in last month's newsletter, has been moved to a new location. If you are interested [contact me](#) and I can provide full details.

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August Musings and Memories

version, it's a hefty book. Whatever its merits or lack thereof, at least it's big enough to serve as a doorstop or something to throw at 'coons marauding in the trash barrel. I hope the contents are more worthy than that, and the book won a couple of awards when it appeared and has since garnered consistently solid reviews.

I've never before offered it at a reduced rate, and contrarian that I am, I have studiously avoided offering it to Amazon. I won't say much about Amazon other than to indicate that this mega-operation is the great Satan in the eyes of many authors and certainly mom-and-pop book businesses. You may find the book on Amazon (in fact, I just checked and there are a good many listings, although the prices for all of them are far above the offer here, with hardback copies going for as much as \$360).

The book, which is fully illustrated, with a map and all sorts of information on rainfall, stream flows, elevation changes, monthly temperatures, and the like, is part "where to go" but also rich in history and anecdote. There's a lot of me in the book, because it describes a place where I've spent countless wonderful hours doing something especially close to my heart. It's available in both hardback and paperback form, with the retail for these being \$37.50 and \$24.95 respectively. **I'm offering the hardbound version for \$30 postpaid or the paperbound version for \$20 postpaid.** The offer is good only until October 1.

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Although there are some things to recommend it, taken as a whole I reckon August is my least favorite month. By this time of year gardening, which has always given me considerable pleasure and continues to do so, has lost some of its enduring appeal even as I once again lose my annual battle with weeds. Heat and humidity lay their heavy hands on the land in unwelcome fashion, and the occasional late afternoon thunderstorms that break their pall seem far too infrequent. Then, although it's now a consideration for my 15-year-old granddaughter rather than me, there was once the specter of returning to school. In truth I rather looked forward to a new academic year, new teachers, and new classmates, but no teenager worth his salt was going to admit as much. To do so, and borrow a phrase from my granddaughter, was "social suicide."

Yet there were always memories in the making and good things to be said about August, and I'd like to think that I am, on the whole, an optimist. With that mindset, let's wander down roads into August's past for a time. These aren't darkening or dimming roads but ones with features that seem as clear and bright to me now as they did a full six decades ago. Hopefully some of these memories are shared ones for many of you. If not, I would simply note it's never too late to be making them. Incidentally, if you have some particularly fond August recollections not mentioned here, by all means [share them with me](#). I'm always intrigued by such things.

- Chasing lightning bugs in the gloaming. They were plentiful in my highland homeland, and until I developed an allergy to their smell which would leave me sneezing like a pup wallowing in dry ragweed, they were fun to catch. Sometimes they went into jars to make a "lantern," but with the curiosity that has always been part of my innermost being, I also had to squeeze some of them to death to see if their lighting mechanism would survive (it doesn't).
- Dealing with those disciples of the devil, brothers of Beelzebub, sidekicks of Satan, minions of pure evil, or however you want to characterize them—yellow jackets. Over the years I've been stung countless times and today I have a healthy fear of the critters that isn't too many steps removed from paranoia. Maybe a small part of that is thanks to a cousin having died of a bee sting many years ago, never mind that it was a wasp rather than a yellow jacket. Also, without question some of my angst derives from the fact that the darn things are so plentiful. Seldom does a summer pass that I don't locate at least one nest somewhere on the three acres I mow, garden, and try to keep in order. Already this year I've rumbled across a nest with the riding mower, but fortunately I saw them swarming my next time around before I got too close. Some observation, a careful mental note on the whereabouts of the hole to their underground nest (yellow jackets usually, although not always, build in the ground), and a nighttime dose of some gasoline down the hole took care of things.

The only positive about these painful, stinging wretches is that their larva make wonderful fish bait for about any species found in freshwater. I've used them to catch bream, perch, smallmouth and largemouth bass, crappie, trout, hogsuckers, knotty heads, and red horse, and I have no doubt whatsoever that other species would find them tasty as well. Although I've never tried it, yellow jacket soup was a favorite traditional dish among the Cherokees (I grew up just a few miles from the Qualla Boundary, the formal name for the reservation where most of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians live). Obviously it provided protein in the same way that grasshoppers have done for generations untold in Africa, but flexible as my dining habits are, I'm going to stick with what a Cherokee woman of my acquaintance recently said about the yellow jacket soup in an e-mail to my brother—"nasty, nasty."

- Listening to the katydid chorus as daylight gives way to night. Depending on how you approach the sound in your mind, it can seem as much "katy didn't" as "katy did," but anyway you view (or hear) it the fact remains, at least in my mind, it's amazing that a small green insect can make such an infernal racket. One longstanding bit of weather wisdom says that the year's first frost will come 90 days after you hear the first katydid. I've never taken the trouble to verify the accuracy of that particular piece of folklore, but since you generally start hearing them in the latter part of July and the first frost in these parts is usually sometime after the hunter's moon in October, it's at least somewhat accurate.

Incidentally, many folks are under the mistaken belief that katydids and cicadas are the same insect. That's not the case. I never knew what a cicada was until well into my adult years, although we had them around throughout my youth. It's just that mountain folks, or at least the ones I knew, called them by another

name. They were known as jar flies, and the name was an apt one, as is so often the case with mountain colloquialisms. A cicada singing its mating song sounds like a Goliath of a house fly trapped in a jar.

- Speaking of colloquial names, one of my fonder memories of August days in yester-youth involved a plant known as a ground cherry. It isn't really a cherry at all but rather an edible relative of the deadly nightshade. I've also heard them called Cape gooseberries and tommytoes, although to me the latter is any of many types of small tomatoes.

Ground cherries, once established, will come back year after year, and they were common as pig tracks in the long rows of Grandpa Joe's annual planting of Hickory King corn. Once the husks enclosing the little globe-shaped berries dried they were ready to eat, and they have a sweet-sour taste I find just as refreshing today as I did when gobbling a few of them when Grandpa and I took a break from pulling weeds to feed the pigs or offering anything from cull tomatoes to scratch grain to his chickens 60 years ago. If you want to read quite a bit more about ground cherries, my dear friend Tipper Pressley featured them in one of her blogs not too many days ago (just visit www.blindpigandtheacorn.com and check out her August 16 entry and the accompanying comments). Incidentally, for anyone deeply interested in the lure and lore of southern Appalachian ways, Tipper's free blog is hard to beat. For 365 days a year, with a degree of energy and ingenuity I wish I could merely come close to replicating, she churns out little tidbits of wisdom and tales of ways of old.

- Catalog shopping was a regular part of August during my boyhood. We didn't get a whole lot of new clothes, and from about the time she became a teenager my sister made much of what she wore. But each year as summer began to wane Momma would let us take out the "dream book" (the Sears & Roebuck catalog) and browse through its pages to pick out a few items of attire. I can still remember a nifty blue jacket with white trim I ordered one year, and on a wall just down the hall from where these words are being written there's an eighth-grade school picture of me wearing a shirt in a checkered pattern which left me feeling like I was about the sportiest thing walking on two feet. Alas, I don't recall many if any young teens of the female persuasion sharing my thoughts, but then that's been an abiding situation throughout all my years.
- River rat days waiting for a bobber to bounce, checking trot lines and throw lines, or maybe just skipping rocks to break the boredom. I spent a world of time along the Tuckasegee River as a boy, never mind the fact that it was then badly polluted thanks to untreated sewage and effluent from a paper plant upstream. The river today, as opposed to then, is one case (to me they are rare) where the passage of time has seen things get better. It's now clean enough to support a healthy population of smallmouth bass and portions of its flow are annually stocked with trout which are available on a catch-and-release basis through the cooler months in what the state of North Carolina describes as delayed harvest. I strongly suspect, although I don't know it for a fact, that the river even has some naturally reproducing brown trout.

I used the phrase "one case" above, because there isn't a great deal about today, as opposed to the situation in my youth, that I consider better. I grew up without a television, and that was a blessing because it gave me the great gift of love of literature—I've always been a keen reader. By the time I was 12 years old my parents pretty much let me be out and about on my own during the summer, giving me a degree of independence that isn't available or at least not wise in today's world. What I now realize is that the little community where I grew up (Bryson City, N.C.) actually had a whole host of sort of extended parents keeping an eye on me, and rest assured if I got out of line word would get back to my parents. We now live in a world which is so unbalanced, so filled with problems, that kids aren't free to be kids the way I was.

In fact, of all the many joys associated with my boyhood, probably the greatest of them was the freedom I had to be outdoors, entertain myself, explore nature, and just play. I didn't need a smart phone (we had a telephone on a party line but I didn't dare talk to any sweetheart of the moment because prying ears were all too likely to listen in, and besides that, I was in some ways painfully shy), a computer, or store-bought gewgaws for enjoyment. A home-made sling shot, a whimmydiddle, a corn stalk atlatl, a flutter-mill,

dammed up branches, a seine fashioned from tow sacks, a bike, a grape vine to swing on, a BB gun (when I was flush and could buy a packet of ammo), or an old inner tube patched and suitable for floating in the creek served quite nicely. With other boys I whiled away wonderful hours building forts, riding down slender saplings, playing war, and the like.

- Eating (and throwing) maypops. I reckon maypops have a proper name. Both Daddy and Grandpa Joe called them wild apricots. All I know for sure is that they produced the prettiest flower imaginable (passion flower—a vision in purple and white), made wonderful “hand grenades” to lob at other boys, and once the fruits yellowed and began to wither about this time of year, were tasty to eat. You ate the seeds on the inside, or more accurately, the translucent, juicy pulp around the seeds).
- “Barefooting” it. By August my feet would be as tough as shoe leather, and it was a badge of honor to be able to step on a smoldering cigarette butt and twist your foot to extinguish it without feeling any pain whatsoever.
- Putting up summer produce. Second only to July, the month of August was a time for storing, through canning, pickling, and drying, the bounty of the good earth. Momma had an annual goal of canning 100 quarts of green beans and 200 quarts of apples (we had a small orchard), not to mention soup mix, tomatoes, corn, crowder peas, and various other vegetables. She also canned peach halves, made peach preservers, apple butter, blackberry jam and jelly, bread and butter pickles, and more. Add to that leather britches (for the uninitiated, that’s dried green beans), dried apples and peaches (the makings of fried pies, a cholesterol-laden gift from the culinary gods), pickled okra, watermelon rind pickles, and the like and by late summer shelves in the basement began to groan and things looked good for the coming lean times of winter. I’m not sure when my parents got a freezer, but I’m fairly certain it was sometime after I went off to college. At any rate I have no boyhood memories of preparing things for the freezer but powerful, poignant, and aromatic ones of a canner full of whatever was being processed that day. Similarly, we spent many an evening on the porch stringing and breaking beans, hulling crowder peas, shelling limas, and the like.
- Day dreaming. By the time August rolled around I had always caught a passel of catfish and had spent untold wonderful hours, day after day, on Deep Creek and its major feeder, Indian Creek. They were the two trout streams most readily accessible to me—roughly three miles one way by foot or bicycle to the point where I could begin fishing—but in those bullet-proof, energy-filled days I thought nothing of leaving home at daybreak, hiking five or more miles before beginning to fish, covering another two miles or so of stream over the course of an entire day, then hiking back home wonderfully weary as evening approached. Today just thinking of the ground I covered tires me, but I can still dream about it and say “those were the days.”

I did plenty of dreaming then as well, and during summer’s dog days those dreams invariable focused on the coming hunting season. In today’s world, with deer and turkeys to hunt, it seems almost amazing that I could get excited about squirrels, rabbits, quail, and grouse, but rest assured they held me in thrall. Opening day of squirrel season in mid-October was almost like Christmas, and by mid-August I was already figuring out how to lay in a supply of shotgun shells. I never bought a full box but whenever I had a dollar to spare (not often) at that time of year I would head to the little sporting goods store owned by a local dentist and purchase a baker’s dozen. The shells sold for eight cents each but for a dollar bill you got the final one of your 13 shells at half price. I’d also be doing some scouting to check on where there were trees with plenty of mast and to make the crucial decision about my destination come opening day.

- Summer’s final camping trip. As I’ve likely noted before, my family never went on what most folks would call a real vacation. I don’t think I ever stayed in a motel until after I finished college other than on a few special occasions. One was my junior year in high school, when the basketball team of which I was a member made it to the state playoffs in Raleigh. Then my final year in high school the senior class took the traditional trip to Washington. I don’t know when that stopped but it was a really big deal in 1960. In college there were a few overnight trips involving soccer and golf, two sports I played while pursuing my undergraduate studies, but I’m almost certain (or else my memory fails me) that I had graduated from

college before I first paid to stay in a motel room. Of course I was 25 and on my honeymoon before I first saw the ocean (I hadn't missed a thing—I can get dirty in the garden without plundering around in sand).

All of that is by way of background to say that for me, camping trips were “big doings.” There were several of them each spring and summer, and they almost always involved backpacking. In fact, in my book *Fly Fishing in the Great Smoky Mountains: An Insider's Guide to a Pursuit of Passion*, this month's special, there's a photo of me at the age of 13 or 14 heading out on such a trip. I am carrying enough stuff to have staggered a seasoned pack mule, although I rather suspect that my buddy who took the photo (and whose eulogy I gave a year and a half ago or so), added a bit of stuff for purposes of exaggeration.

What wasn't exaggerated though was carrying half my weight or a bit more on such trips, using a blanket for sleeping purposes (I was in my 30s before I first owned a sleeping bag), thinking nothing of toting cans and a sack of potatoes rather than dehydrated stuff or stuff that may be almost weightless but also approaches being tasteless, and being so in earnest about the whole deal that I would literally “train” for such outings by sleeping on the floor at home rather than in the bed.

Those were carefree days and maybe foolish ones, but I sure did have a lot of fun and the same was true of every youngster I knew. We created our own joys and didn't need store-bought stuff to do so. I look back on them with enduring fondness and more than a bit of longing. These words are being written in the aftermath of my morning walk of perhaps three miles or a bit more. It lasted just over an hour and left me comfortably tired. As a youngster I could whip out four miles an hour when walking without any undue trouble, and I never thought about being tired. Age does take its toll, as three score years and a bunch more remind me on a daily basis. But I remain young in outlook and one thing that keeps me that way is indulging in these longing looks back. I hope the same holds true for you.

That's enough for this month, and I'll finish, as is always the case, with a sampling of recipes.

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Recipes—Fire up the Grill

Although it's in some ways counter-intuitive, since grilling means heat, and in a hot outdoor setting at that, who am I to argue with a different twist on the old “if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen” adage? Accordingly, here are a bunch of recipes, most of them simple, for the grill. The majority come from a cookbook, *Backyard Grilling*, which Ann and I co-authored in cooperation with two other veteran cookbook authors.

QUICK AND EASY GRILLED HORS D'OEUVRES

Bacon-wrapped shrimp, scallops, water chestnuts, or mushrooms. It's difficult to go wrong with bacon, and any of these items wrapped with a portion of a slice, skewered with a toothpick, and grilled until the bacon crisps up are tasty.

Smoked venison kielbasa bites. Cut venison kielbasa into one-inch sections (use beef or pork kielbasa if you aren't fortunate enough to have venison) and grill until juice begins to drip. Serve with mustard for dipping.

Grilled bread chunks with topping. Slice any hearty, crust bread (baguettes are excellent) into small chunks, brush with olive oil, and grill. Top with chopped tomatoes and onions or chopped tomatoes and black olives.

Miniature kabobs. Marinate small chunks of venison (you can use lesser cuts, because the marinade combined with small pieces and quick grilling will offset the comparative toughness), place on small skewers, and grill over hot coals, initially searing and then removing farther from heat to finish cooking. Don't overcook.

GRILLED VENISON FLANK STEAK

Marinate in your favorite marinade (it needs to contain some type of meat tenderizing ingredient, such as vinegar or citrus juice) for four to eight hours.

1 ½ to 2 pounds flank steak—grill it over direct medium to medium high heat. Slice thin and across the grain, as you would London broil, to serve. A simple marinade that works well is a quarter cup of canola oil, a quarter cup of lemon juice, 2 tablespoons of soy sauce, 2 tablespoons of sugar, and 2 crushed garlic cloves.

SWEET VENISON KABOBS

This recipe comes from a longtime and dear friend, Gail Wright, who recently lost her husband and who has been much in my thoughts of late. She's always been a marvelous cook.

Marinade

½ cup soy sauce
½ cup packed brown sugar
¼ cup olive oil

Kabobs

2 pounds venison loin
1 ½ jars button mushrooms drained or fresh button mushrooms
1 pint tommatoes (cherry tomatoes)
1 can pineapple chunks, drained

Mix marinade ingredients in a saucepan and heat until sugar dissolves. Set aside to cool. Cut venison into two-inch cubes and transfer to a nonmetallic bowl. Pour cooled marinade over the chunks and refrigerate for at least four hours. Stir every hour or so.

When you are ready to cook, prepare grill for medium heat and lightly oil the grate. Alternately thread the venison, mushrooms, tommatoes, and pineapple on skewers. Cook for 20 to 30 minutes until steak reaches desired doneness, rotating the skewers regularly.

BLUE CHEESE VENISON STEAK

4 venison steaks of about six ounces each
Freshly ground black pepper
5 ounces crumbled blue cheese
½ cup minced green onions

Season steak by rubbing with pepper. In a small bowl, combine the blue cheese and onions. Stir and set aside.

Prepare the grill for indirect medium heat and lightly oil the grate. Place steaks on grate directly over heat and sear each side quickly. Move steaks away from direct heat and continue cooking until they approach desired doneness. When almost done, top each steak with the blue cheese/onion mixture and finish. Serve immediately.

CHILI VENISON BURGERS

2 pounds ground venison
4 small onions, minced
1 cup seasoned bread crumbs
¼ cup finely chopped fresh parsley
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon dried oregano
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 tablespoon rice vinegar

1 tablespoon chili sauce
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 egg, lightly beaten
8 to 10 hamburger rolls, toasted if you like

Combine all ingredients in a mixing bowl (except rolls, of course). Mix gently but thoroughly with your hands. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for two hours to let the flavors marry.

Shape into patties and let stand at room temperature while you ready the grill at direct medium high heat. Oil grate and after oiling arrange burgers on grate to cook. Cook four to five minutes per side or to desired doneness. A covered grill will help avoid flare ups and cooks the meat more evenly. Serve immediately with buns and your favorite condiments.

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