

# Jim Casada Outdoors

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## July 2012 Newsletter

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### July—hotter than . . . or just the good old summertime?

As I'm writing this newsletter (on July 1) it is witheringly hot in my part of the world. We've had two days of triple digit temperatures and at least two more are predicted before we get some slight relief. I had been taking a three to four mile walk every day at dawn and for much of June those occurred in quite comfortable temperatures. That has come to a screeching halt and this is the second consecutive day I decided it was simply too hot to undertake the exercise regimen. In fact, my daily turn in the garden gathering veggies, picking berries, pulling weeds, tending flowers, suckering and tying tomatoes, and the like have been about all I wanted. Yesterday I was back in the house by 10:00 a.m. soaking wet and slap dab worn out.

All this heat, along with a blog about it on my good friend Tipper Pressley's daily "Blind Pig & the Acorn: offerings, set my mind wandering down all kinds of avenues. Mind you, it doesn't take much to do that, and if an active mind is a good sign as one grows old, I reckon I qualify in spades. First of all, my thoughts turned to expressions I've heard over the years describing heat. Most, though not all, are similes, and I'll share some of them. Chances are you will recognize many of them while others will like be new. Most are associated with hell or things from the animal kingdom.

- Hotter than a two-dollar pistol.
- Hotter than the hinges of Hades.
- Hotter than Beelzebub's belt bucket.
- Hotter than Satan's shins.
- Hotter than Lucifer's legs.
- Hotter than the Fourth of July.

### Special Summer Offer



As most of you likely know, the good Miz Ann and I have written a number of cookbooks and contributed to others. All focus primarily on the good earth and its wild bounty, and all feature precisely the kind of fixin's we enjoy on a daily basis.

One of these cookbooks is *Field to Feast: The Remington Cookbook*. It is beautifully illustrated (in color) using original art work held in the Remington Collection at their Madison, N.C., headquarters. Scores of recipes for everything

- Hotter than melted asphalt.
- Hot enough to fry an egg.
- So hot trees are paying dogs to do their business.
- So hot the egg's cooked soon as it leaves the hen.
- Hotter than a summer kitchen with a wood burning stove.
- So hot that I saw a rabbit race with the cottontail and the beagles just walking.

Think about these "sayings" for a moment and chances are you can add to them. Colloquialisms of this sort give spirit and meaning to our language, and I suspect every region of the country has its own particular way of describing heat. I might note that there are a couple of other similes I've heard often over the years, but they simply won't pass muster on the political correctness front (I'm talking about "correct" in the sense of being risqué, not politics, because when it comes to the latter I'll say flat out I'm more worried about our country and more dismay with our national leadership that at any time in my life). Enough of that though, for thinking along such lines for too long a time can lead to a state of depression or elevated blood pressure. I'd rather think about good things, good experiences, and good people associated with the good old summertime.

from small game bird and animals to big game are included, along with suggested foods for campers and a number of full menus. In terms of format, materials, and printing, the book was "done right." It is in hard cover with wrap-around spiral binding. That means that it is durable yet will lie flat on a table or counter top for ease of use.

The book's chapters cover "Venison," "Waterfowl," "Wild Turkey," "Upland Game," "Foods from Nature," "Recipes from the Folks at Remington," "A Dozen Menus for Great Meals," and "Camp Cookery." I include narrative material at the start of each chapter.

**The book's original suggested retail price was \$29.95, but thanks to a "deal" I got as co-author, I'm able to share copies as long as I have them in stock at a special price. Send me \$15 and the book is yours—I'll tote the postage costs.**

All of the recipes at the conclusion of this month's newsletter come from *Field to Feast*.

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Hot weather takes me back to boyhood and the ways we dealt with it then. Air conditioning was unheard of in the North Carolina mountains where I grew up in the late 1940s and 1950s, and while I think Al Gore is a bloated buffoon full of himself and the kind of material we used to fertilize the garden, I will admit this is the hottest it has been in my lifetime. On the other hand, I don't ever remember a finer June with more moderate temperatures, and to my way of think global warming, at least insofar as being caused by mankind, is a monstrous fraud. Enough of that though, let's talk about pleasant things like "doings" in summertimes of yesteryear.

- Ice cream cranking. There may be a few things which taste better on a hot summer day than a creamy dish of hand-churned ice cream, but to my way of thinking they are mighty few. In fact, the next two items mentioned below are the only ones I personally consider to be in the ball game. I think part of the delight of homemade ice cream is that it features fresh ingredients (I particularly like peach) and the fact that it involves real "hands on" work. When it gets so stiff that every turn of the handle requires real effort, and when you've got sweat beading on your brow from the cranking, you know you have earned your treat. Maybe the only thing better than a brimming bowl full is being able to lick the dasher where all those wonderful bits of fruit have accumulated.
- An ice-cold watermelon. If there has ever been a soul on God's green earth who enjoyed watermelon more than my Grandpa Joe, I haven't met him. After an arduous session of hoeing out row after row of corn or maybe pulling so many weeds it seemed to a youngster that the garden stretched over five acres, Grandpa would pull one of his endless rabbits out of a hat. "Son," he'd say, "I reckon it's time we rested from our labors. Your Grandma Minnie won't want us underfoot in the house, but this morning I put a big old cannonball watermelon in a washtub filled with ice. It's sitting out behind the cannery in the shade and ought to be cold enough to set your teeth on edge. Let's check it out."

We would proceed to do just that, and the sound and sight of a dead-ripe watermelon splitting wide open as soon as the knife is inserted remains as satisfying to me now as it did more than a half century ago. I don't know what the proper name for a cannonball watermelon was, but I do know you never see them

today. A good one weighed 50 to 75 pounds, had a rind which was so dark green it seemed almost black, and the bottom where it had rested on the ground would be a deep yellow when it was fully ripe. They might not have been as round as a cannonball, but they weren't too far from it. There was nothing sissy about a cannonball watermelon. It had plenty of sizeable seeds for spitting (or saving for planting if it was a sure 'nuff prize), and when it came to taste these fancy little seedless things you find today simply can't compare.

I could eat watermelon (and still can) to the point where my bladder felt fit to burst, but Grandpa was in a class by himself. My, did that man love his food, and he had a cast-iron stomach which could eat anything it seemed. He'd cut a big slice for both of us, and we ate it the way watermelon was meant to be eaten—holding the slice in both hands, working from one end to the other like you do with an ear of corn, and spitting out the seeds as you went. It was a glorious mess, but we could always clean up when sated to our heart's content. The only real "rule" other than eating it the messy, seed-spitting, had to be outdoors way was that we saved the rinds. Most of the time they went straight to the slop bucket for the hogs, but occasionally Grandma Minnie had left instructions to save the rinds. She would use them to make a run of watermelon pickles, which were in their own right a treat on the summertime table.

- Cobblers. While I can do some damage to a properly made lemon chess or brown sugar pie, and while there's a lot to be said for a pecan pie absolutely coated with nut halves or for a deep-dish apple pie with homemade crust, my druthers run distinctly in the direction of cobblers. It doesn't matter whether it's a berry cobbler (think blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, elderberries, dewberries, blueberries, or huckleberries) or one made from apples or peaches, give me a cobbler with plenty of crust, hot in the bowl and swimming in "real" milk (I mean milk with the cream still present), just give me room and turn me loose. Lots of years as a trencherman and too much indulgence mean I need to watch myself with such dangerous delights, but fortunately you can substitute Splenda for sugar and pretty much get by. I had a blackberry cobbler earlier this week, and since peaches are now available in a big-time way I reckon that will be next on the menu.
- One final food memory and then will see if we can find a path leading to another rabbit hole or two from days gone by. By my standards of raising, dinner was the meal you ate in the middle of the day and supper was the one in the evening. Lunch wasn't on the menu or in the mountain vocabulary when it came to practical usage. Dinner was the big meal of the day, especially during the summer. While the fare varied, it was overall pretty predictable and leaned heavily towards produce from the garden. Standard menu items included green beans cooked with streaked meat (also known as fatback or side meat and sold in grocery stores today as salt pork), corn (either on the cob or creamed), slice tomatoes and cucumbers, squash cooked in any number of ways (fried, stuffed with a cornbread and bacon mix, stewed, or prepared in a casserole with plenty of cheese), slices of raw onion, fried okra, butterbeans or crowder peas, greens, an assortment of pickles (watermelon pickles, sweet-and-sour, pickled okra, and the like), sliced cantaloupe, and always a big pone of cornbread. There might or might not be meat, although if it formed part of the meal it came in a frugal form such as hamburger gravy or slices of streaked meat fried to the point they were so crisp every bit crunched in a most satisfying fashion. Some sort of scrumptious dessert such as those mentioned above would round things out quite nicely, and after a morning of hard work in the garden or corn field every calorie was fully earned. Milk or ice tea washed everything down in a most satisfactory fashion.

Supper was simpler. It would normally be leftovers from lunch or, often as not, just a big chunk of cold cornbread along with a big glass of sweet milk or buttermilk. There was always some kind of dessert to satisfy the sweet tooth, and both Mom's and Grandma's refrigerators held plenty of delights for a greedy gut boy who just might get peckish somewhere between meals.

- Along with work there was plenty of play. I reckon that there's a bit of an engineer in every boy. My brother took it from youthful pleasures to a career, while it became pretty obvious somewhere in my teens that I lacked the mental skills, the mindset, and the motivation to go down that road. Meanwhile though, there were plenty of construction and engineering projects in boyhood days.

There were two branches, both of them only two or three feet in width, within a few hundred yards of my

home. They were perfect for dam construction, rechanneling efforts, and the like. Water containment and redirection efforts in Bryson Branch and Toot Hollow Branch may have been a far cry from the building of Boulder Dam, but in a boy's mind it was big stuff. Along with water-related projects it was, of course, necessary to construct some forts in case members of the nearby Cherokee tribe should rise up and go on the warpath (never mind they had suffered the agonies of the Trail of Tears more than a century before), a bunch of outlaws suddenly appeared on the local scene, or a mythical gang of bad boys somehow became reality.

Dams involved rock moving and forts cutting down of saplings, and there was also more than a little digging. After all, any red-blooded youngster needed at least one hidey-hole that resembled a cave, and if you could figure out how to re-route a small mountain stream it was a disgrace. Assorted with these engineering activities was expenditure of lots of energy, plenty of target practice with BB guns, lobbing cones from white pines or magnolia trees and pretending they were grenades, construction of bows and arrows and slingshots to round out our artillery, and plain, innocent fun.

- Bike riding also loomed large. This was well before the days of multi-speed bikes with gear systems, and you applied the brakes with pressure on the foot pedals, not by squeezing levers with your hands. My trusty little 26-inch bike took me pretty much everywhere I was allowed to go and where roadways or paths made it possible (although a great deal of my adolescent travel was by shank's mare).

All sorts of bike adventures come to mind. One time the highway department strung one of those traffic counters across the road leading to our house. I have no idea whether a bike exerted sufficient pressure to record as a vehicular passage, but if it did there had to have been some head scratching at the highway department in regard to traffic on a dead-end street. I rode my bike (by count) back and forth over the strip a full 500 times.

Then there were the occasions—two of them—when I had an abrupt collision with a car door downtown. Bryson City, my boyhood home, runs to precisely two streets of substance now as it did then. That is to say, there are two streets where most of the local businesses are situated and where there is parallel parking. I rode my bike on them regularly, but somehow folks getting out of parked cars never bothered to look for oncoming traffic as small as a bike. Once I plowed squarely into a just opened door without much damage to anything but my pride. The other time though, a decidedly portly gentleman opened his door and emerged with singularly bad timing. I plowed into him at a pretty good pace, and after he regained his equilibrium he was furious. He lit into me verbally like nobody's business and threatened me with bodily harm. That was as far as matters got because this happened within 30 yards or so of Loafer's Glory, the local hangout for elderly gentlemen and tellers of tales.

The poor victim of my bike was a flatlander, which didn't exactly redound to his advantage in this situation, and his threats to a 12-year-old youngster just didn't go over well with the Loafer's Glory crowd. A couple of the elderly loafers sauntered over to assess the situation, and pretty soon one of them had heard enough. He told the fellow, in no uncertain terms: "You need to shut your pie hole. Most fools would have checked to see if anyone was coming before they opened their door, and if that had been a car instead of a bike, you'd be a greasy spot on the street." Things got tense for a moment, but when the man realized that the fellow who was speaking may have been on the elderly side but he had a bunch of back up. That pretty much ended matters, and I rode away with ruffled feathers, a slightly bent front bike fender, and the stuff of a tale to tell many decades later.

- Fishing of course figured mightily in my summers, and I did a world of it. I've written about trout, catfish, and the like before, but there was one special joy which normally was available only once or twice a summer. This came when there would be a major rainstorm and rainfall of three or four inches in a short period of time. The creeks and river would get up, and this was all the excuse needed for a rambunctious inner tube ride down Deep Creek or maybe a night of bank fishing. The flooding often put the fish on the prod and you never knew what you might catch—trout, redeyes, knottyheads, suckers, redhorse, or bream. The rainfall also brought water snakes out in droves, and riding an inner tube down the creek knowing that a snake might fall from any limb was exciting indeed (we called them moccasins but there were no cottonmouths within a couple hundred miles, although copperheads and rattlesnakes were plentiful).

- I'll finish by running through a whole bunch of other summer activities in a hurry. All were pure joy. There were "wars" using maypops (the fruit of the passion fruit flower) as weapons, slingshot shooting contests, throwing rocks using corn stalks as a sort of homemade atlatl (Grandpa Joe taught me that trick, but the educational experience cost me a week of pulling weeds to stop the hogs—I simply couldn't believe a man of his age could throw a rock as far as he did), making war clubs and spears from hickory sprouts or a sassafras root and stump, building rabbit gums for use come late fall, skipping stones across the river, making popguns from elder sprouts, gigging frogs, gathering all kinds of natural fish bait and sometimes selling it, training to be frog men by seeing how long we could hold our breath in the old swimming hole, savoring a twenty-cent milkshake on that rather rare occasion when two dimes burned my pocket, raiding watermelon patches like some band of desperate pirates (I'm pretty sure the owner knew of our depredations, and he raised enough a few melons going to wayward boys didn't matter), smoking and choking on rabbit tobacco, and just being a boy. It was a good time of simpler days and simpler ways. I know now that mine was a singularly privileged boyhood, never mind that we were anything but wealthy. My riches were measured in the treasure of pleasure, not in the form of goods or money. They've endured and those joys are there to be resurrected from the vaults of my mind at any time. That's true wealth.

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## Recipes From *Field To Feast: The Remington Cookbook*

### SHRIMP STUFFED VENISON TENDERLOIN

1 whole venison tenderloin  
 ½-1 cup Italian salad dressing  
 12 large whole shrimp, cooked and peeled  
 1 tablespoon butter, melted  
 2 teaspoons lemon juice  
 1-2 slices bacon

### WINE SAUCE

½ cup butter (use real butter)  
 ¼ cup finely chopped onion  
 ½ cup sliced mushrooms  
 ½ large garlic cloves, minced  
 ½ cup white wine  
 ½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

Cut loin lengthwise to within ¼-½ inch of bottom to butterfly. Place loin in Italian dressing to marinate for at least four hours. Cook shrimp in water seasoned with Old Bay and lemon peel. Place shrimp end to end inside loin. Melt butter in a microwave and add lemon juice; drizzle over shrimp. Close meat around shrimp and secure with toothpicks (or string). Place bacon strips over shrimp and secure with toothpicks. Place loin on a rack in broiler pan and roast at 400 degrees for about 40 minutes or until rare (an instant-read thermometer is most helpful).

Meanwhile prepare wine sauce. Melt butter. Sauté onion, mushrooms and garlic until tender. Add wine and Worcestershire sauce and simmer slowly to reduce to about half. To serve, slice loin, remove toothpicks, and spoon on wine sauce.

### VENISON MEATBALL LASAGNA

#### MEATBALLS

**½ pounds ground venison**  
 ¼ cup finely minced onion  
**1 garlic clove, finely minced**  
 ½ cup quick-cooking oats, uncooked  
 1 egg, lightly beaten  
 ½ cup milk  
 ½ teaspoon kosher salt  
 1 teaspoon dried Italian seasoning  
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper  
 1/3 cup flour  
 1 teaspoon paprika

Combine first nine ingredients. Mix gently and shape into one-inch balls. Chill meatballs for at least 30 minutes. Mix flour and paprika; gently roll meatballs in flour mixture and place on a lightly greased rack in a 9 x 13-inch pan. Bake at 400 degrees for 15-30 minutes. Drain on paper towels if needed.

## LASAGNA

1 (15 ounce) container ricotta cheese  
 1 (8 ounce) container soft onion & chive cream cheese  
 1 teaspoon dried basil  
 ½ teaspoon garlic salt  
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper  
**cups shredded mozzarella cheese**  
 1 12/ cups Parmesan cheese  
 2 (26 ounces each) jars tomato-basil pasta sauce  
 1 (9 ounce) package no boil lasagna noodles  
 50-60 cooked venison meatballs

Stir together first five ingredients until blended. Stir in half cup mozzarella cheese and half cup Parmesan cheese; set aside. Spread 1 cup pasta sauce in bottom of a lightly greased 9 x 13-inch baking dish. Place four lasagna noodles over pasta sauce. Top with meatballs. Spoon three cups pasta sauce over meatballs; sprinkle with three-quarters cup mozzarella cheese. Arrange four more noodles evenly over mozzarella cheese. Spread ricotta cheese mixture evenly over noodles. Top with four more noodles and pasta sauce. Bake, covered, at 350 degrees for one hour. Top with remaining mozzarella cheese and Parmesan cheese. Bake, uncovered, fifteen more minutes or until cheese melts and is slightly browned. Let stand for 15-20 minutes before serving.

**NOTE:** these baked meatballs are quite versatile. It is handy to keep several batches in the freezer. To freeze, cool completely and seal in an airtight container. Use in lasagna, pasta sauce with spaghetti, meatball subs or as an appetizer with your favorite sauce.

## MEXICAN BURGERS

1 pound ground venison  
 ¼ cup finely chopped onion  
 ½-1 teaspoon chili powder  
 ¼ teaspoon ground cumin  
 ½ teaspoon finely minced jalapeno pepper (or to taste)  
 ½ teaspoon salt  
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper

Combine all ingredients and shape into four patties (quantities can be doubled or tripled for a larger group). Grill, broil or pan fry to desired doneness. Serve burgers on tortillas (cut in half for a better fit), pita bread, or hamburger buns with traditional taco toppings of your choice. They might include salsa, shredded cheese, guacamole, sour cream, lettuce, tomato, or diced green onions.

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