

Jim Casada Outdoors

June 2012 Newsletter

Jim Casada
1250 Yorkdale Drive
Rock Hill, SC 29730-7638
803-329-4354

Web site: www.jimcasadaoutdoors.com
E-mail: jc@jimcasadaoutdoors.com

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June With All Its Joys

June meant many things for me as a youngster, foremost among them being freedom from the daily grind of school. Don't get me wrong. I was a decent student, although I could have been much better with a little more application and a lot less mischievousness, and I was the top-ranking male in my high school graduating class. Of course there were several diligent females with a bit of the bookworm in them ahead of me. I too was a bookworm of sorts, but my inclinations in that direction took the form of being a voracious reader rather than an adolescent given to careful study and devotion to classroom duties.

In fact, reading formed an integral and important part of my summers. School normally let out the last week in May, although I can remember at least two occasions when we were still slogging away the second week in June thanks to having missed a bunch of days because of snow. All that snow and ice was welcome when it came—it meant lots of fun and one day after another of rabbit hunting—but in the end there was a price to be paid.

The only problem I faced when it came to reading, at least once school was out, focused on a lack of material. I had pretty well devoured everything the small local library, the Marianna Black Public Library, had to offer in the way of outdoor literature by the time I reached the 9th grade. Incidentally, Marianna Black was our next door neighbor and my mother would serve as head librarian for a decade after her kids were grown and gone. Once I had exhausted the sparse outdoor offerings—Robert Ruark's two "Old Man" books, some Hemingway stuff, several of Roosevelt's

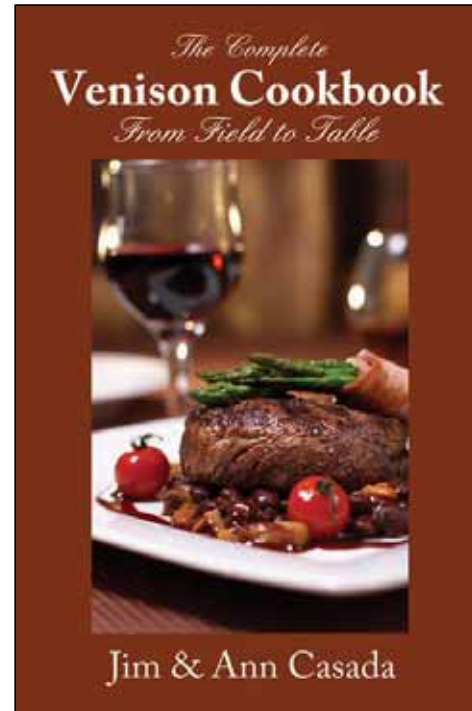
This Month's Special

You've already received a special mailing on the reprint of our new venison cookbook, so this is just a reminder that through the end of June I'll pay the postage on the \$14.95 book.

There are sample summertime recipes at the end and I feel confident that if you enjoy venison or maybe if you have always wanted to do so but have been uncertain, that you'll be happy with the book. Give it a try!

volumes, and other odds and ends—my literary appetite looked elsewhere.

I went through Zane Grey's books (Westerns—the library didn't have any of his fishing works) like a dose of salts, and any and all mysteries were fair game. I read John Buchan, Sax Rohmer, Erle Stanley Gardner, and a bunch of others. Biographies also attracted me then, as they still do, and there were occasional forays elsewhere. Two of them, surreptitious reading of Grace Metalious' *Peyton Place* and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, got me in trouble. They are pretty tame by today's standards, but in the 1950s they were considered far too racy for a mountain adolescent.



You can [order through my website using PayPal](#), or just send a check to me c/o 1250 Yorkdale Drive, Rock Hill, SC 29730. Bon appétit!

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Reading, however, was a pursuit for nighttime and the occasional day when what we called an “all day soaker” set in and didn't let up. Most of the time I was outdoors, which was then, as it should be now, the proper place for a rambunctious youngster. Before turning to some of my favorite June pursuits in the world of the outdoors, however, let me note that I have taken it upon myself to correct the situation in the local library which I faced as a boy. I have already given the Marianna Black Library upwards of a thousand volumes on nature and the outdoors, with a heavy emphasis on hunting and fishing. I intend to supplement that donation with roughly another thousand volumes in the next three or four years. I just hope there will be the occasional boy or girl who will take advantage of what I didn't have.

When it came to outdoor activities in June, one part of the equation was work. Throughout my teenage years I held summer jobs of some kind or the other. That included driving a tractor to mow fairways on the local golf course along with doing other chores there, mowing lawns, spending one summer renting rooms to flatlanders who came to visit the nearby Cherokee Indian Reservation, and of course chores at home and at Grandpa Joe's. These included all sorts of garden work such as hoeing out corn, pulling weeds, helping Grandpa slop the hogs and feed the chickens, and whatever chores Mom and Dad set for me. Some of these I detested, with washing windows and digging up patches of Bermuda grass being two of the worst.

Still, there were wonderful idle hours without end. Many of them involved juvenile entrepreneurial endeavors designed to put a bit of money in my pockets. I regularly caddied at the golf course on weekends, and I enjoyed that because the sport was one which meant a lot to me in my younger years (I haven't played a round in at least five years). Then there were “bait gathering” and “pickin'”.

The local bait/sporting goods stores would buy all the night crawlers, minnows, and spring lizards (salamanders) I could provide. Anytime there was a good rain shower in late afternoon in June, or perhaps the rare all-day rain which ended at dusk, an outing for night crawlers was in the offing. I had several prime destinations, with the lawn of the local Presbyterian Church and the fairways on the golf course being at the top of my list. A quick

hand and good reflexes, along with knowing how to deal with a tenacious crawler caught only half out of its hole, could produce as many as 100-150 of these giants of the worm clan per hour. Since they sold for a penny apiece or thereabouts (the starting offer was always a dime a dozen but a bit of bargaining could usually raise the ante to a penny each, especially if you had several hundred crawlers), there was the opportunity to make some serious cash money in the course of an evening. After all, caddying 18 holes paid only \$1.25 (unless one carried double, which I often did). Do the math, and the comparable bounty from "crawling" becomes obvious.

If anything, catching spring lizards was even more fun. They weren't as plentiful or predictable, in part because there was plenty of competition. Finding a little branch or seep spring where there was no evidence of overturned rocks or previous "lizarding" efforts wasn't all that easy. Also, it takes a great deal of quickness, agility, and downright recklessness of precisely the sort any red-blooded boy possesses to catch lizards with regularity. The difficulty made for fun, and the return could be significant. A big red salamander (usually found under rotting logs rather than in branches) could bring a nickel, small brown ones fetched three cents, and really big brown ones were four cents each. They sold for three or four times what one was paid, and bait shops could never get enough of them.

Seining for minnows was also an adventure, and I loved piddling around in branches—building dams to get water deep enough to place wire cages holding catfish in, piddling with water snakes, fishing for tiny fish in tiny waters with tiny hooks, and the like. Seining however, had the singular virtue of promising a bit of money. Minnows, depending on size, could bring as much as two bits a dozen. My approach as a boy was one I guess you could describe as that of a minimalist, although that word wasn't even in my vocabulary at the time. I just followed the good old mountain approach of "make do with what you've got."

What I had was plenty of burlap tow sacks. You could rip the seams out of the bottom and one side of two sacks, use black nylon fishing line to stitch them together, add wooden handles stapled or stitched to the ends of the resultant piece of burlap, and you had a two-boy seine. We would work our way up little branches which were three or four feet wide, carefully seining each little pool as we went. The catch would be a mixture of tiny minnows (which were released), fishing size minnows (which were sold), spring lizards (put in a lidded bucket with some moss in it, also to be sold), crayfish (turned loose), and the occasional water snake (a source of excitement. You never knew what the next dip of the net would bring, but the mixture of anticipation and excitement, with a bit of moneymaking potential thrown in for good measure, was great stuff for a boy.

All these moneymaking endeavors had their appeal, but the true heart of summer for me, day after day, year after year, right up until I finished college at the age of 22, was fishing. How I wish I had kept an angling diary for those years, but by a conservative guess I would estimate I averaged spending some portion of two out of every three days either on a trout stream or piddling around along the banks of the Tuckasegee River which ran right through the heart of the little town, Bryson City, NC, where I grew up. It wasn't more than a quarter mile's walk from the house, and two trout streams were also within walking distance. Up until about the time I reached my teens I spent more time along the river, thanks to it being so close and the fact that Grandpa Joe and Grandma Minnie lived in a big house right along its banks. So did my favorite aunt, so I had two additional bases of operation. If you wonder why that mattered, given how close the river was to our home, just keep in mind that a greedy gut boy can always use additional places to get a snack such as a cold slice of watermelon, a tomato sandwich slathered in mayonnaise and featuring two slices close to a half inch thick from a big old mater, an icy pickled peach or two, or maybe just a big chunk of cold cornbread and a glass of buttermilk.

When I reached my teens though, Mom and Dad allowed me to venture farther afield, and time and again my footsteps (or maybe my one-speed bike) would carry me to Deep Creek or its major feeder, Indian Creek. I thought nothing of putting in 10 or 12 miles of walking in a full day of fishing, and in my mind's eye I can still savor those long trips, ones where I walked five miles before even beginning to fish, and times when I might catch 50 or 60 rainbows in a single outing. By my mid-teens I was a moderately accomplished hand with a fly rod, and when shank's mare took me far enough away from the crowds to have the stream all to myself, I could hold my own when it came to putting fish in the creel.

There were, of course, other adventures. Every summer embraced three or four backpacking/camping trips, usually on a trout stream but occasionally on the shores of nearby Fontana Lake. Many of these were taken with

my best fishing buddy, a fellow named Bill Rolen who conveniently happened to be a park ranger's son, but at least once a summer there would be the special occasion of an overnight outing with Dad. He worked hard and didn't get a lot of time off, but he loved fly fishing almost as much as I did. Indeed, I owe him a lasting and loving debt of gratitude for having introduced me to the sport, for it has been a constant companion now for parts of seven decades (I caught my first trout on a fly at the age of nine and I'm now 70). The thrill has never waned although honesty forces me to admit that the days of hiking a dozen miles and wading icy streams all day without even getting tired belong to a world I have lost.

There were a couple of family reunions and/or brush arbor revivals every summer. About all I recall is the food, but my, oh my was that the stuff of memories. We never took what is today standard fare in the form of a family vacation, but there were Sunday rides with stops at the local ice cream parlor. There were Saturday matinees at the theater and, later on, the rare and wondrous occasions when I could use Daddy's car and take a date to the local drive-in theater. For casual entertainment there were always old-timers gathered at "Loafer's Glory," as the local hang-out for whittling, knife swapping, and telling of tales was known (it had another name, maybe a bit raunchy but too descriptive to resist—the regulars, and I suspect some of their spouses, quietly referred to the location on the town square as "Dead Pecker Corner"). Throw in Bible-thumping street preachers, federal court sessions, tent revivals, Friday night pickin' and grinnin' sessions at someone's house, and Saturday night square dances at the "stomping grounds" up Cherokee way or over in Maggie Valley, and you have a fairly full picture of what summer embraced for me.

I never saw the ocean until I was 25. I never stayed in a motel room until after I graduated from college. I probably didn't eat a half dozen sit down, order from the menu meals until well into my college years. I never had more than \$10 in my pocket and probably never managed to save more than \$100 in any summer. But I had a hand-me-down fly rod, several home-made cane poles that I had cobbled together starting with cutting the canes, knew how to knock down wasp nests for bait and how to catch crickets in the dews of early morning, I could shoot a slingshot like nobody's business, I went barefooted every day but Sunday if I so desired. I ate like a king on country vittles prepared by world-class mountain cooks. I had stern but understanding and nurturing parents. I had a paternal grandfather who was just like me except that he was a lot older and much wiser. In short, I was rich, and it didn't matter if we were poor and what outsiders viewed as part of a deprived and backward part of a downtrodden region known as Appalachia. Let me assure you I was rich as only a country boy living close to the earth can be. As Archibald Rutledge put it so perfectly in the title he chose for one of his books—*Those Were the Days*.

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SUMMERTIME VENISON RECIPES

A couple of weeks back you received a special announcement that our first cookbook, *The Complete Venison Cookbook*, was once again available after the original publisher let it go out of print. We were quite surprised at this, since the book sold briskly throughout the time it was in print, but I guess in one sense the move was a plus. I meant no longer having to deal with royalty statements, orders at crunch time (usually the holiday season), and best of all, whatever money is now earned comes to us rather than the bulk going to the publisher.

As a sort of tidbit of information, normally the author of a commercially published book only gets 10-15 percent of what it brings, and that becomes even smaller when you realize that the book may be sold to retailers such as Barnes & Noble or Amazon at a 40-50% discount.

At any rate, the special offer to send the \$14.95 book postage free continues through the end of the month, and maybe a trio of its 200+ recipes will tempt your tastes.

QUICK AND EASY VENISON TACOS

1 pound ground venison

½ cup chopped onion
 1 medium clove garlic, minced
 1 can (8 ounce) tomato sauce
 ½ teaspoon chili powder (or to taste)
 Generous dash freshly ground black pepper
 Salt to taste

Heat non-stick skillet over medium high heat. Spray with Pam. Add ground venison, stirring to break up. Add onion and garlic; continue cooking until venison is brown and onion is tender. Mix in tomato sauce, chili powder, salt and pepper. Heat thoroughly.

Spoon venison mixture into prepared taco shells. Top with grated cheese, shredded lettuce, onions, source cream and salsa (or your favorite toppings). Serve hot.

PARTY MEATBALLS

1 ½ pounds ground venison
 ½ cup dry bread crumbs
 ½ cup milk
 1 egg, beaten
 ¼ cup onion, finely minced
 1 ½ teaspoon salt
 ¼ teaspoon pepper
 ¼ teaspoon garlic powder or 1 clove garlic, minced

Mix above ingredients and shape into balls. Place in a baking dish and brown in 350-degree oven for 30 minutes.

Heat a jar (10 ounce) of red currant jelly and a jar of chili sauce (12 ounce—make sure you use chili sauce, not chili) in large skillet. Add meatballs and simmer for 30 minutes. Transfer to chafing dish and serve hot. These disappear like magic and we've found them an ideal way to introduce folks who swear they won't eat venison to the meat.

HOT DOG/BURGER CHILI

1 pound ground venison
 1/3 cup chopped onion
 1 package Sauer's Chili Seasoning (or use your own)
 1/3 cup water
 1 can (8 ounce) tomato paste

Brown venison and onion. Add seasoning package or your own personal choices, water, and tomato sauce. Simmer 10 to 15 minutes until thick. Serve with hot dogs or burgers.

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