

Jim Casada Outdoors

October 2012 Newsletter

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A Month of Enduring Wonder

I looked back just to see what I had written about October in previous years and noticed that the title for my 2011 newsletter was "October Was Always Grand," while an earlier one was styled "An Ode to October." Those two titles offer a pretty accurate assessment of what I think about the month. It is truly a time of enduring wonder, and what I hope to do is capture a few of its many moods and endearing characteristics in the series of snippets that follow. They are offered in a format and style often employed by one of my favorite Appalachian writers, the late John Parris. Although not particularly well known outside of the hills and hollers of western North Carolina, for decades Parris captured the essence of mountain days and ways in his column, "Roaming the Mountains," which appeared in the *Asheville Citizen-Times*. Scores of those columns subsequently found their way into his books – *Roaming the Mountains; My Mountains, My People; Mountain Cooking; These Storied Mountains; and Mountain Bred*. The titles of the books suffice, quite nicely, to tell anyone where home was when it came to John Parris' heart. He simply couldn't offer a title without the word "mountain" or "mountains" in it. Those Smokies will lay hold of a corner of your soul and never let go. I know. Here's my tribute to October (and to John Parris).

- October is a hunter's moon, cold gold just clearing the eastern horizon while one is roaming in the gloaming. If you don't feel close to the earth and a bit awestruck under such a moon, I humbly suggest that an appointment, and make it soon, with their nearest qualified psychiatrist is in order.

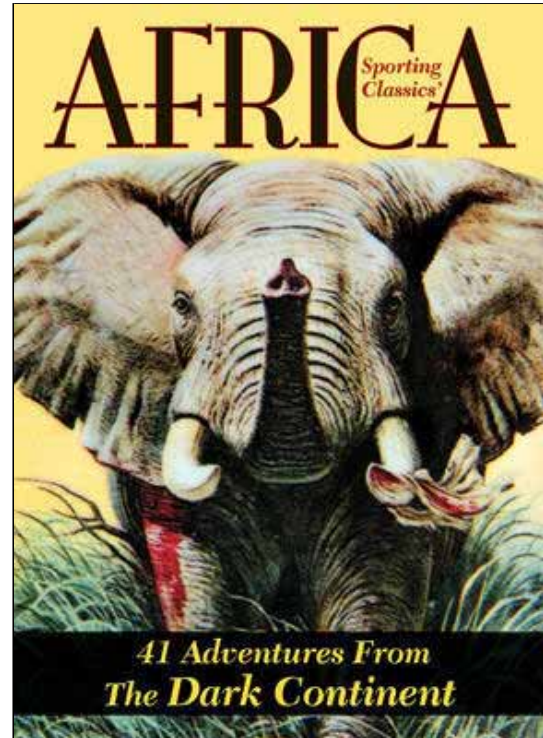
October Specials

As at least a few of you know, in a previous life I was a university history professor. Fret not, for I'm pretty well fully recovered. My specialty as a researcher was British explorers in 19th century Africa, and they formed the subject matter of my doctoral dissertation at Vanderbilt University. Later, doing part of what is expected if you are to move up through the faculty ranks and attain tenure, I wrote several scholarly books on various explorers including Dr. David Livingstone, Sir Henry Morton Stanley, Harry H. Johnston, and Sir Richard F. Burton. All these works were highly specialized and I doubt if any of them sold as many as 2000 copies. In fact, that number could probably be halved. On the other hand, virtually all the major explorers were also great hunters (Cornwallis Harris, Roualeyn Gordon-Cumming, Sir Samuel Baker, John Hanning Speke, Frederick C. Selous, James A. Grant, and others), and this side of my researches actually provided my entrée into the wonderful world of writing on the outdoors.

Just over 30 years ago I approached the editor of a new magazine, *Sporting Classics*, which had just come out with its premier issue. Although I knew absolutely nothing about pitching a story, he liked my concept and I agreed to write a feature on the man who was arguably the greatest of all the Victorian hunters in Africa, Fred Selous. By happy coincidence, soon after that article appeared the magazine did a reader survey. My Selous story ranked right at the top of the list in terms of popularity. Suddenly I had a masthead presence on the magazine, began contributing features several times a year, and established a relationship with *Sporting Classics* which continues to this day (I am the publication's Editor at Large). Amazingly, a

- It's a buck in the prime of his years, full of virility and driven by the ages old impulse to reproduce. He wanders the woods, neck mightily swollen, as he works scrapes, leaves his scent on limbs, and searches for a doe in estrus.
- It's a wizened and wise country farmer, a man who has lived on land which has belonged to his family for generations, pursuing the timeless rituals of the harvest—picking apples from the farm's orchard; filling a corn crib with full ears that will fatten hogs and feed chickens that lay eggs that taste far superior to anything ever find on grocery store shelves; gathering pumpkins to make leather, bake into pies, feed raw to the hogs, or carefully store in a root cellar for use in the months to come.
- It's October beans drying on standing corn stalks.
- It's golden persimmons, wrinkling as they ripen and drop to the ground. If you have sufficient gumption you can beat the critters—deer, 'possums, 'coons, coyotes, and foxes—to this candy from nature. If that results in a persimmon pudding, consider yourself rich beyond any measure which ever appeared on a bank statement.
- It's an old man and a young boy, one carrying a single-shot .22 and the other an old hammer shotgun, heading to woods marked by that sentinel of autumn, hickory trees clad in cloaks of gold, for a day of squirrel hunting.
- October is table fare from the product of such a hunt, squirrel and dumplings with recently dug sweet potatoes flanking one side of the platter and a heaping mess of turnip greens cooked with diced young turnips and streaked meat on the other. Add cathead biscuits and a big gravy boat full to the brim with squirrel gravy and you have a meal of the sort royalty is seldom privileged to sample and savor.
- It's apples enjoyed in so many ways—cider, apple butter, dried and turned into fried pies, apple sauce, fritters, deep dish pies, and more. I might add that in my boyhood home, which featured a small but highly productive orchard, we had apples two and often three times a day from October right on into winter.
- It's a lot full of hogs, eating red-rooted pig weed, corn fodder, more than a fair ration of shelled corn, inferior pumpkins, bruised sweet taters, the last of the year's watermelons, and whatever else the good earth has to offer. Little do they know that

hillbilly from the Great Smokies of North Carolina had a foot in the door as an outdoor communicator. From that point forward I've lived an unfolding and wonderful dream that dates back to boyhood—writing about the outdoors I so dearly love and traveling to hunt and fish literally all over the world.



This month's specials both have close links to my beginning as a communicator. The first is a work published by *Sporting Classics'* book division celebrating the magazine's 30th anniversary. Simply entitled *Sporting Classics' Africa*, it is a collection of 41 grand adventures from the Dark Continent. All of the selections appeared in the magazine at some point over the years, and I was honored for my story, "The Lunatic Express," a tale on the man-eating lions of Tsavo, to be selected as the first tale in the book. Making this doubly gratifying was the fact that Fiona Capstick, the widow of Peter Capstick and a first-rate wordsmith in her own right, offered a most gracious comment on how happy she was to see my contribution lead off the book. It includes a tale from her late husband along with stories from the likes of Beryl Markham, Theodore Roosevelt, Robert Ruark, Jack O'Connor, and a host of others. The hardbound book with a great dust jacket of a rampaging elephant runs to over 400 pages and is graced by the fine artwork of Bob Kuhn. **I'm offering *Sporting Classics' Africa* for \$30 postpaid (retail is \$35).**

The second book, also with an African focus, is my anthology of writings by and about Fred Selous entitled *Frederick C. Selous: A Hunting Legend*. It includes plenty of vintage photographs and wonderful insight on this fascinating individual. **This Selous anthology also retails for \$35, and again it's on**

their world of plenty will soon give way to an Armageddon Day for swine. As soon as the first hard freeze arrives towards month's end or maybe early in November, their salad days will be no more. In my adolescent world hog-killing time was incredibly busy but if you've never eaten fried tenderloin taken from a pig that very day I would submit that yours has been a life of culinary deprivation.

- It's the sweet and satisfying smell of newly plowed ground, with everything turned under to rot in the winter before plowing and planting time returns once more with the glories of spring.
- It's the heady aroma of nature's perfume floating on gentle breezes, a mixture of fall flowers, just a hint of dust, ripe or ripening fruits, a touch of sweet decay, a bit of manure from the barn, and more. If you can't smell autumn, about all I can say is you ain't country.

special for \$30 postpaid. Here's a good opportunity to stock up on some first-rate fireside reading for the coming cold months.

One final note before getting to this month's newsletter. Keep in mind that Christmas lies not all that far off. There are lots of good gift options on my [website](#), and you could do far worse than to choose a game cookbook or my popular anthology of Archibald Rutledge's holiday tales, *Carolina Christmas*. Also, for those who belong to the turkey hunting clan, keep in mind that my book, *Remembering the Greats: Profiles of Turkey Hunting's Old Masters*, is still scheduled to be out sometime in November. If you are interested and haven't notified me, be sure to do so. You'll hear from me as soon as the book is in stock.

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

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- October is dust devils dancing a crazy path across sere fields which have lain fallow since the harvest, milkweed spores diving and darting in afternoon thermals, and a sense of quiet satisfaction in knowing that another year of hard work, good crops, and simple fulfillment has come to an end.
- It's a broom sedge field turned into a treasure chest of sparkling diamonds as the morning sun glistens with a million beams of brightness after the season's first heavy frost. It's a kid rich in freedom and having no idea he is poor in worldly goods riding sleds made of cardboard in that same field once it has dried in the sun of an Indian Summer's day.
- It's a flock of turkeys, with the jakes already bigger than their mothers and the hens of the year almost as big, working their way along a pasture edge, flipping turds and dining on a buffet of grasshoppers and other insects.
- It's a pack of beagles in training for the soon-to-open rabbit season hot on the trail of a cottontail in the cool of the evening.
- October is walnuts dropping to the ground and providing promise of both hard work in the gathering and cracking and rich rewards in the form of cookies and cakes.
- It's added pep in an old man's step on a brisk morning and a sense of urgency in a young boy anxious to be home from school and out in the afternoon squirrel woods.
- It's shelves groaning with canned goods, freezers full of garden truck but with space left for plenty of venison, and dried goods hanging beneath barn rafters in mesh bags. It's a pot of leather britches simmering on the stove or maybe one of October beans holding a chunk of streaked meat for flavor.
- It's old-timers celebrating the long-established ritual of molasses making, with yellow jackets half drunk from the skimmings and the sweet juice turning from light amber to dark richness as it heats and thickens under the control of a master 'lasses maker.
- It's a well-worn Duxbak jacket hanging on a peg silently begging to be used, and an old dog which recognizes that jacket means good times in the fields and woods.

- It's the incomparable perfume of Hoppes' No. 9 and burnt gunpowder.
- Most of all, October is a month which blends the fulfillment of a spring and summer of hard work on the land with the promise of the special joys associated with the death of nature in her never-ending cycle of death and rebirth, grey grimness and green richness.

I can't say it is my favorite month, because in truth I can never decide whether it is preferable to May. Suffice it to be my judgment that, as the title of the newsletter suggests, October is filled with enduring wonder. I have conscious memories of well over three score Octobers, and the richness of autumn in all her glory eternally stirs the soul and uplifts the spirits.

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Recipes

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 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-inch 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. Cover and seal tightly with foil or plastic wrap. Cut into squares when ready to serve (with whipped topping).

BLACK WALNUT CINNAMON OATMEAL COOKIES

½ cup sugar
 ¾ cup packed brown sugar
 1 ¼ cup margarine
 1 egg
 1 teaspoon vanilla
 3 cups oats, quick cooking or regular
 1 ½ cups flour
 1 ¼ teaspoons cinnamon
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 ½ cup raisins
 2 cups black walnut kernels

Cream sugars and margarine; add egg and vanilla. Place dry ingredients in a separate bowl and mix well. Add raisins and walnuts to dry ingredients. Combine creamed mixture and dry ingredients well. Drop by tablespoons onto cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees for 8-10 minutes or until golden brown.

VENISON LOIN STEAK IN BRANDY CREAM SAUCE

The first deer of the season is cause for celebration, and there's no finer way to celebrate than with a festive feast

featuring prime cuts. Here's an example.

2 venison loin steaks (8-10 ounces each) cut to one-inch thickness)
2 tablespoons liquid margarine (plus one tablespoon with sauce)
1 cup evaporated milk
2 tablespoons brandy
½- 1 teaspoon salt
¼ cup mushrooms
3 slices small onion, divided into rings

Place two tablespoons margarine in non-stick skillet. Have pan hot before adding venison steaks, onions, and mushrooms. Cook steaks on medium high for 5-6 minutes per side. Inside of steak should be pink. Remove onions and mushrooms when tender. You may need to add about one more tablespoon of liquid margarine while cooking; be sure to have some left in the pan. Add milk, brandy, and salt. Remove venison to serving dish. Cook sauce until thickened and reduced by about half. Stir constantly. Add mushrooms and onions to re-heat. Pour sauce over steaks.

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