

Jim Casada Outdoors

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June 2013 Newsletter

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June's Magical Barefoot Days

First of all, my apologies for being a couple of weeks late with this newsletter. I've been bogged down with gardening, some welcome magazine assignments, speaking engagements, and duties connected with an office I hold in the [Southeastern Outdoor Press Association](#). Of course these ramblings cost you nothing, so I'm not going to prostate myself in total, abject forgiveness. All I'll say is that I'll try to be a bit prompter in July. Now to the newsletter.

When I was a boy the arrival of June meant freedom from daily drudgery in the form of school. Actually I enjoyed school for the most part and was blessed with a bunch of wonderful teachers, including three or four who provided me with richly deserved doses of hickory tea, but by the time spring was in full spate being stuck in a classroom wasn't exactly my idea of fun. I wanted freedom to explore my peculiar flights of fancy, and one of those involved doing so with feet free of shoes. I would have been making occasional pleas for foot freedom from sometime in April when a short warm spell seemed, at least in the mind of a small boy, to make it perfectly logical. Momma, far more sensible and practical, would dismiss such notions with a comment to the effect of, "absolutely not, you'll catch your death of a cold."

Mom would be unrelenting through May, answering my bothersome requests with reminders such as "we've just had dogwood winter and even a young fool ought to know blackberry winter's yet to come." I still don't know whether she finally gave up the ghost by June or decided, with school out, that I could be truly footloose for the coming months. At any rate, there was a special feel of freedom when I could get rid of shoes for the whole day, although there were always reminders to wash my feet before I came in the house.

Special Offers

Summer basically means the cessation of any and all types of hunting, unless you happen to hunt some of the predators for which there is no closed season, but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy some plinking, work on your marksmanship, fine tuning the performance of rifles, or the like.

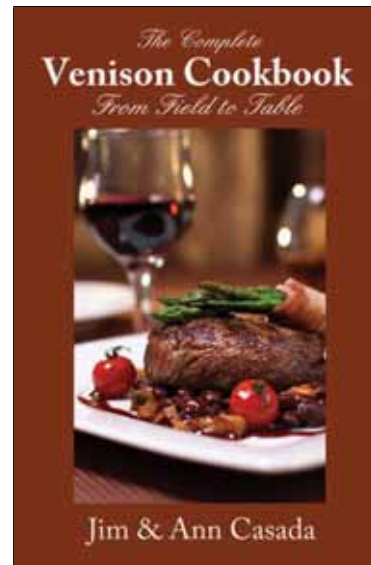
With that in mind, my first special is a copy of a handy work for the pistol or rifle shooter, *The Experts' Guide to Rifle & Handgun Marksmanship*. This is a book I edited and compiled, and it features the expert advice of a whole bevy of shooters from yesterday and today—from Jack O'Connor and Townsend Whelen to Bryce Towsley and Wayne Van Zwoell. It runs to 468 pages in a handy paperback format. Only \$12.50 postpaid.

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The second special offer is for *The Complete Venison Cookbook*, which my wife and I wrote. It features hundreds of venison recipes, and we tested every one of them (along with a bunch which didn't make the cut) before inclusion in the book. All the recipes offered below come from this work. \$15 postpaid.

In early days there would inevitably be some "missteps" in the form of encounters with broken glass, briars, or even the by-products of a honey locust tree which grew close to the house. I still chuckle about an unfortunate encounter with one of those thorns, which pierced the ball of my right foot to the bone. I must have hollered to the heavens, because Mrs. Marianna Black, our wonderful next door neighbor, came hustling over to tell Mom she shouldn't whip me so hard. When she saw Mom with the thorn still firmly grasped in a pair of pliers and a goodly flow of blood from my foot, she was struck silent, a state which was exceedingly rare for this delightful but garrulous woman.

In time though, constant exposure to the good earth, in delightful forms such as mud squishing through the toes after an afternoon shower, walking freshly plowed ground, or hoeing row after row of corn, my feet would toughen up. By mid-summer they would be tough as whit leather (I've never known what that was but I've heard it all my life), graced by thick callous and able to withstand pretty much anything. Two of the favorite tests of toughness involved walking on newly spread asphalt, with the hot tar still about as much liquid as solid, and stepping on a still glowing cigarette butt. When you could take those steps without pain there was a sense of pride in having your feet at a satisfactory level of summer fitness.



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One of the few times I did wear shoes in the boyhoods of my early summers, other than on Sundays, came with trips to the local library. However, I do remember going to federal court unshod on more than one occasion. Federal court sessions were often occasions for first-rate entertainment. Whenever you got an old-time mountain defense lawyer with fine oratorical skills wound up, there was sure to be some merriment. That held doubly true for a couple of local characters who were courthouse "regulars" thanks to their propensity for turning their corn crops into liquid form. They were unashamed of their behavior and proud of their product, much like the late "Popcorn" Sutton, who grew up in the county adjacent to the one of my boyhood. The same holds true for one of the characters seen regularly on the "Moonshiners" program on today's television, Jim Tom Hedrick. Sutton was from Haywood County, NC, while Hedrick calls Graham County, NC home.

Incidentally, if I can be permitted a side trip down a literary rabbit trail (and since the newsletter is mine and you as readers aren't paying anything for it, I reckon I'm entitled), I have to share a Popcorn Sutton tale. I knew him in his later years, and on one occasion I was helping host a group of writers in Maggie Valley, where he lived, and the local tourism folks arranged for the group to meet him.

We chatted a while, and in a moment of mischief, I decided to ask Popcorn if he had ever met a fellow by the name of Colin Flack. Flack was the local ATF agent and a man well known for being pure poison when it came to his pursuit of moonshining. "Know him?" Popcorn spluttered. "That son of a bitch cost me four thousand, seven hundred and eighty-two dollars and forty-two cents!" (That may not have been the amount he mentioned, but he did name it down to the last cent).

Realizing I had broached a decidedly touchy subject, I quickly changed topics and asked the grizzled old moonshiner (he looked every bit of 90 years old although I subsequently learned he was my junior by several years) if he would like to join us for breakfast. "Eat breakfast?" he snorted. "If I so much as looked at a plate of scrambled eggs I'd puke from here to the highway." At that point the eyes of some of those in the group were rolling a bit, and I decided we had best cut our exchange short. However, once breakfast was over, I did manage to acquire multiple jars of his "cherries" (white lightning poured over maraschino cherries stuffed into a quart jar).

Of course not all of my hours in the good old summer time were spent in carefree barefooted wanderings. Sure, I fished a great deal, both for river/lake species and trout, and I spent a goodly amount of time in various bait-

gathering pursuits. In part these focused on my personal plans (for river fish such as bream and catfish—I was always a fly fisherman when it came to trout), but mostly time devoted to collecting bait was a money-making activity. Salamanders (we called 'em spring lizards) brought from three cents to a nickel each, depending on size and color, and night crawlers fetched a penny apiece. There was also a market for minnows of the right kind. One of the great things about bait pursuits was that they combined ample fun with some welcome pocket change.

Then too there was work. I had some lawns which provided regular income, and I did a great deal of caddying at the local nine-hole golf course. Once I reached my teens I also worked on the golf course, and I'd love to have a \$100 bill for every hour I rode an old tractor pulling gang mowers as I kept the fairways in proper shape. Most of the real work, however, was of the unpaid type. Mowing our lawn, weeding, hoeing (both in our garden and in Grandpa Joe's), using a mowing scythe to keep weeds at bay, helping Mom with all sorts of things associated with the hundreds of quarts of fruit and vegetables she canned every year, and myriad other chores were an integral part of life in the summer.

Maybe memory of some of that work (it is the kind of stuff I still do on a daily basis as I look after a large garden; all sorts of other foodstuffs such as blueberries, thornless blackberries, raspberries, muscadines, and scuppernongs; tend to a sizeable flower bed, and generally try to maintain a semblance of order on three acres (not to mention another 100 where I do much of my hunting) is why I found myself somewhere between bemused and irate when I attempted, a few months back, to volunteer for what I considered a good deed.

The bureaucrats who run the Great Smoky Mountains National Park are, in my view, a pretty sorry lot. Mind you, I'm not talking about the rangers, trail maintenance crews, biologists, and others of their ilk. I'm referring to the grand Pooh-Bahs at the top of the bureaucratic list. They do a flat-out miserable job of maintaining the dozens of cemeteries scattered throughout the Park. In fact, as best I can tell, they clean the trails to them and do some basic maintenance (very basic) in the actual grave site areas once a year. Accordingly, I volunteered to look after two or three of them on my own, never mind that I live 150 miles away.

After the passage of more time than it should have taken to get a response, I received a reply thanking me for the gesture BUT informing me that I would have to have training on how to use hand tools such as a rake, hoe, and swing blade; that I would need to go through general instructional sessions; that I would need to use Park tools; and that I would need to have oversight whenever I did work. After more than six decades of handling tools, and possessed of at least a modicum of common sense, I let the individual with whom I was in contact know just what I thought of this idiocy. To me it is a microcosm of what is wrong with our government and our world in general. There are far too many bureaucrats sucking at the taxpayer teat while seemingly thinking up ways to impeded common sense and good intentions. Incidentally, unless I was terribly unaware of the world in which I lived, that kind of nonsense was pretty much nonexistent in my youth.

Well, that's two rabbit trails which have sidetracked me, so let's get back to the sweet of summer. While the outdoors loomed large in my boyhood summers, there was another important feature of them through my pre-teens and teens. For that matter, it remains a key factor in my life even now. That's the inexpressible joy I find in reading.

By great good fortune, and I am serious in stating this, I grew up in a home where there was no television. As a result, on the occasional gloomy, grey day of rain, as well as times when the heat was withering or falling darkness meant staying in the house, I often turned to books for entertainment. I read, and continue to read, almost anything and everything—labels on cans and boxes, anything which happens to be at hand when I don't have a book within reach, magazines, newspapers, and most of all, books. So it has always been with me.

My parents were keen readers, although paradoxically there was relatively little reading material in their household—several Bibles, recent issues of the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Reader's Digest* (the two magazines to which they subscribed), the area's daily newspaper (*Asheville Citizen-Times*), the local weekly newspaper (*Smoky Mountain Times*—I contribute a weekly column to it), and a few books. However, they took advantage of the local library, which had been founded by our next-door neighbor, utilized "pass around" paperbacks, and encouraged their children to read.

I didn't need a lot of encouragement. By the time I had reached high school I had devoured everything the Marianna Black Library had to offer on the outdoors; consumed the nature writings of folks like John Burroughs, Theodore Roosevelt, and Archibald Rutledge; and made serious inroads into various types of fiction. In the latter context, Westerns by the likes of Zane Grey Max Brand were among my favorites; as were mysteries by Adrian Conan Doyle, Erle Stanley Gardner, and Agatha Christie; adventure tales (true as well as fictional) by H. Rider Haggard, Thor Heyerdahl, and Sax Rohmer; and much more.

I haunted to poorly lit, dusty, disheveled aisles of the understaffed and underfunded library, thinking it was a portal to paradise. Much later, when all of us were gone from home, my mother would serve as librarian for a decade and oversee a move into an expansive, modern building. Mom had no training in librarianship, but she had two qualities which serve any small-town librarian wonderfully well—she loved to read and was a splendid “people person.” In her memory, along with that of Marianna Black (our neighbor who founded the library, and in gratitude to a whole bunch of teachers who endowed me with a love of reading, I am now grateful to be able to give something back in memory of those joyous boyhood days of reading. A hundred or so books at a time, as the folks at the Marianna Black Library can process and catalog them, I am making sure that never again will there be a mountain youngster who exhausts the available outdoor literature available to them in Bryson City or Swain County.

Maybe that's as good a point to conclude as any. If you care about something deeply—whether it's the Second Amendment, conservation, the future of this country, or something as simple as my love of books—make a point to give back a bit. You'll feel better about yourself and you will have an impact whether it is obvious or not. Those teachers who helped give me a love of reading are prime examples. My only regret is that I didn't personally thank each and every one of them, when they were alive, for the gift they helped give me.

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Recent Reading

Last month I forgot to include a list of some of the books I had been reading, but I'll get back on track here.

1. C. J. Box—I went through a spate of reading everything the local library had by this author. If you like adventure with an outdoor setting, his novels featuring game ward Joe Pickett are first rate.
2. J. D. F. Jones, *Teller of Many Tales: The Lives of Laurens van der Post*. I've long been an admirer of the books Van der Post wrote about the Bushmen of the Kalahari, and I knew he was an advisor to England's Prince Charles and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. What I didn't know was that he was also, in many ways, a scoundrel and a deceiver. I've personally known a couple of plausible scoundrels in my life, but it is both depressing and fascinating when one sees the real historical figure of one revealed.
3. After I wrote one of my periodic book columns for *Sporting Classics Daily* (check it out and sign up to receive it if you wish—the price is precisely what you pay for this monthly offering) on the great South African adventure writer Wilbur Smith, a reader brought Tony Park to my attention. Park is an Australian who has written a bunch of first-rate, rollicking tales, just about as good and fast-paced as those of Smith, and they all have an African setting. Thus far I've read *Safari*, *Silent Predator*, *Zambezi*, *The Delta*, and *African Sky*. I highly recommend Park, although his books are a bit difficult to find in this country.
4. After a few years “off,” I've renewed my acquaintance with Nelson DeMille's works and have gone through three or four of them recently. He's good.
5. Quite different in nature, but right up my alley from the standpoint of personal interest, is Jim Sterba's *Nature Wars: The Incredible Story of How Wildlife Comebacks Turned Backyards into Battlegrounds*. One theater of that war is my own backyard, and the enemy coalition consists of squirrel and deer, with

an occasional bit of plant sniping by rabbits. At best I'm holding my own, although the battle is an unending one and the enemy numbers at times seem overwhelming. I enjoyed this book, although it might be a bit too academic for many readers.

6. Finally, I've read several books by prolific author Susan Wittig Albert. She combines rather lighthearted mystery with considerable plant lore, recipes, and the like. She's incredibly prolific and an easy read.

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SUMMERTIME EATING

To me, thoughts of food connected with summer mean grilling, picnics, family reunions, celebration of Independence Day, church revivals, class reunions, and the like. It means watermelon eaten the way it should be, in big crescent slices which leave you dripping from the chin. It's home-grown tomatoes atop two slices of bread or a cathead biscuit, with salt and pepper and a slather of mayonnaise. It's children chasing lightning bugs in the gloaming while older folks, full of fine food, sit talking in gentle breezes. It's a division of delicious desserts aligned across a table top. It's extended members of a family vying with one another in a friendly competition to see whose pickles, fried chicken, ham biscuits, or relishes look and taste the best. It's a time to loosen belts, momentarily forget waist lines and cholesterol, and dig in or, to use the words with Grandpa Joe invariably ended prayers when the family had gathered for a meal, "You'uns see what's before you; eat hearty."

One approach to eating hearty is the time-honored and distinctly American tradition of enjoying hamburgers with all the trimmings. If the burgers happen to be made from venison, so much the better. Here are some recipes using deer meat which ought to tickle your fancy and that of others.

VENISON BURGERS WITH HORSERADISH SAUCE

1 pound ground venison
 2 tablespoons steak sauce
 ½ teaspoon garlic salt
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper

Gently mix ground venison with seasonings and shape into patties. Be sure to chill patties well before cooking. Lightly oil grill top and grill over medium coals about 10 minutes, turning over once. Serve on warm buns with horseradish sauce (see below) and your choice of condiments.

HORSERADISH SAUCE

½ cup plain yoghurt or sour cream
 1 tablespoon prepared horseradish
 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Blend yoghurt, horseradish, and mustard in a bowl. Use as spread just as you would do with mayonnaise.

TOMATO TOPPER FOR VENISON BURGERS

If you aren't fond of the pore opening, sweat raising taste of horseradish (I am), try this as a substitute.

2 tablespoons olive oil
 2 tablespoons lemon juice
 1 teaspoon dried basil (or chopped fresh basil leaves)
 Salt and pepper to taste

Mix ingredients with a wire whisk and then pour in diced fresh tomatoes and, if desired, onions. Toss gently and serve atop burgers or as a side dish.

CAROLINA STYLE VENISON BURGERS

1 pound ground venison
1/3 cup uncooked oats
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

Mix these ingredients lightly and shape into four patties (recipe can be doubled or tripled). Grill, broil or pan fry burgers. Do not overcook and turn only once. About seven minutes should be long enough. Serve on buns with chili, cole slaw, mustard and raw onions. Napkins are a necessity. I suspect this recipe originally evolved as a way to extend the meat. I know that my mother regular made relatively little meat go a long way by use of oats in burgers and in meat loaf.

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