

Jim Casada Outdoors

October 2013 Newsletter

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Quotations of the Month

"Give me October twelve months of the year and I'll know what heaven's all about."

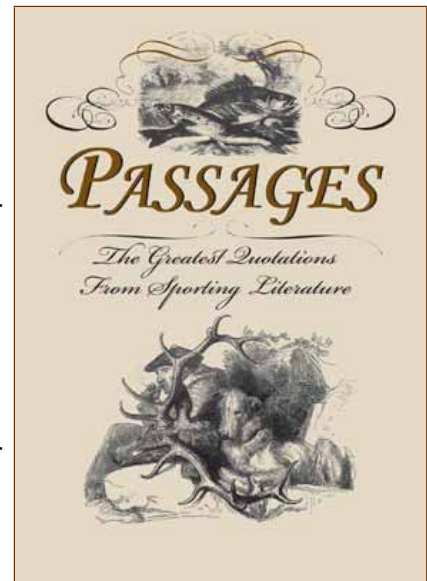
Ken M. Blomberg, *Badger Sportsman*, 1992.

"Hunting is one of the last genuine, personal adventures of modern man. Just as game animals are the truest indicators of quality natural environment, so hunting is the truest indicator of quality natural freedom."

John Madson, *Out Home*, 1979.

This month's quotations are taken, as is the case each month, from *Passages*, a book I co-edited with the editor of *Sporting Classics* magazine, Chuck Wechsler. Copies of the paperbound edition, which I'll gladly sign and inscribe, are available from me for \$20 postpaid.

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An Ode to October

In so many ways, October is irresistible. It's the sight of a big buck, his neck swollen and his glands in secretion overdrive thanks to the annual rut and the rituals of procreation. It's a hunter's moon breaking the evening horizon and seeming near enough to touch as its glow



Special of the Month

Over most of the country whitetail season has either already begun (as it has here—I spent yesterday afternoon, a quiet and restful time of peaceful contemplation, in a stand) or else lies just around the corner.

With that in mind, this month's special is the first cookbook Ann and I wrote, *The*

bathes the earth with hints of gold and orange. It's a hard-working subsistence farmer, a throwback to another era but a man filled with pride and the work produced by his hands and the sweat of his brow, with crops laid by, hogs fattened and ready for slaughter come the first cold spell, and a chance after many a month of non-stop labor to rest a bit. Chances are such men, who know and understand the earth's rhythms and the special blessing of living close to the earth, will use that rare freedom to hunt.



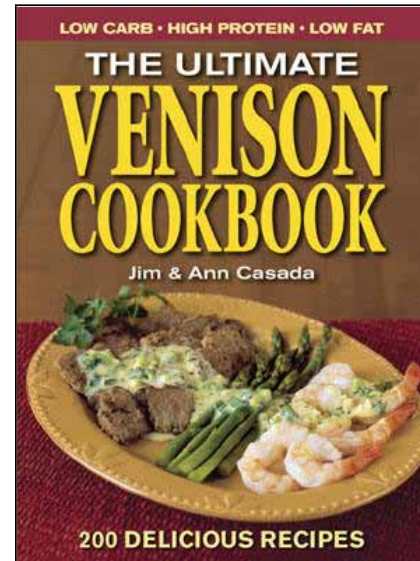
October is a squirrel barking in a hickory tree high up on a mountain ridge, and that tree, a true sentinel of fall, will be decked out in a mantle soft gold which it will soon lose as leaves tumble earthward when stirred by autumn thermals or the blustery winds of a passing cold front. Merely thinking of hickories and bushytails takes me back in time, now a full six decades, to my first squirrel. By today's standard a boy killing his first treetop trickster may not seem like much, but rest assured in was a momentous occasion in my boyhood. In my mind's eye it remains that way, and I'm fairly confident, whether that tree is still standing or not, that I could make my way back to within 50 feet of the spot where I was first "blooded" and became a hunter forever.

October is so much more. It's a bracing chill in the air which puts a bit of added energy in a fellow's step. It's a good flush with a turkey dog and a scattered flock yelping and kee-keeing at all points of the compass as they try to reassemble. It's fall festivals in my highland homeland, with molasses makin' and square dancing, seeking "sang" (ginseng) and gathering black walnuts for cakes and cookies to come. It's milkweed spores drifting on gentle breezes, ironweed and Joe Pye blooms in meadows, wild asters along country lanes, and the brilliant red of sumac leaves and berries. October is ripe persimmons dropping to the ground and tempting every creature in the woods to beat us to this sweet, sticky bounty.

For me, the month is special in another way, because each year it brings the annual meeting of the [Southeastern Outdoor Press Association](#) (SEOPA). I've been a member of the organization almost as long as I've written on the outdoors, and since joining I've never missed a conference. My feeling is that you get about as much out of any group as you are willing to put into it, and that lies at the heart of the reason I served SEOPA as president back in 1994, when I was of an appropriate age for such endeavors. Now I'm in the officer succession line again, and will progress from my current position of first vice-president of the organization to its leader at the end of next year's conference. "Why," you might well ask, "would a fellow who must be reckoned a bit long in the tooth and definitely sparse and grey in the hackle agree to such service a second time around?"

The key reason, and it is one with which many of you should be able to identify, is that next year's conference will be SEOPA's

Complete Venison Cookbook. Never mind the rather inept choice of a title, since it pretty much painted us into a titular corner, leaving only *The Ultimate Venison Cookbook* as a sequel. It's a book which took us a lot of time and which sold well during its commercial run.



Ultimately close to 40,000 copies were purchased. I remain mystified as to the publisher's reasoning for letting it go out of print, since it was still selling between a thousand and two thousand copies annually when they did so.

Maybe it was a blessing though, because it led me to my first and to this date only venture into self-publishing. **You can get the book in electronic form through the standard Kindle outlets or acquire it as this month's special from me, in printed form, for \$12 postpaid.**

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Maybe sharing a bit of the background to the work's preparation will help convince you that it contains some fine venison recipes. While we were preparing the book, Ann and I ate venison once or twice a day, mostly the latter, for the better part of a year. We went through ten processed deer that year, and by any standards that's a lot of meat eating.

Not all the recipes, by a long stretch, made the cut, and we already had a goodly number which we knew were worthy of inclusion. One thing is certain—we tasted and tested what we included, and there's not one of the 200+ recipes we didn't like.

50th anniversary. The golden anniversary will be celebrated at Fontana Village, NC, where it all started way back in 1964. Fontana Village just happens to rest squarely in the heart of the southern Appalachians where I grew up, and what son of the Smokies could resist the opportunity to plan a program for his peers and join them in a festive atmosphere where mountain days and ways will be heralded in the warmest of fashions?

Maybe I can make the special warmth and congeniality of SEOPA a bit clearer by pointing out that it is really an extended family of hundreds of writers, photographers, videographers, radio show hosts, television producers, and folks on the business side of the equation. All of us share one thing in common—an abiding passion for the natural world and all it offers in terms of hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, and the like.

All of that was on grand and glorious display earlier this month in Lake Charles, LA, where our annual conference was hosted by the Southwest Louisiana/Lake Charles Convention and Visitors Bureau. Attendance at the event also offers the primary explanation for the lateness of this edition of the newsletter.

Obviously I'm powerful partial to my Appalachian traditions, whether they focus on food, culture, music, life in the outdoors, or other aspects of the mountain way of life. Yet I've got to give it to the folks down in Cajun country, when they utter what might well be their guide to life, "*laissez les bons temps rouler*" (let the good times roll), they mean it. Smiles on Cajun faces are as common as acorns under oak trees at this season of the year, and in some sense their music isn't all that far removed from the mountain rhythms and instruments I have known and cherished all my years.

In the music of both cultures the fiddle and the guitar play prominent roles, as do songs revolving around the nature and glories of life lived in simple and satisfying ways; i. e., ballads. Where mountain musicians have the mandolin and dobro, Cajuns have the squeeze box (accordion) and wash board or maybe a triangle. Cajuns are dancing fools, like mountain folks, although their one-step and two-step approaches differ appreciably from mountain square dancing, clogging, and buck dancing.

When it comes to foodstuffs, those folks sure know how to live off the land and make the most of the bountiful natural goodness their part of the world provides. Think in terms of sweet, succulent shrimp; freshly tonged oysters; mudbugs (what locals call those scrumptious morsels, crayfish, found in rice fields and flooded areas); redfish, sea trout, and flounder; or ducks and geese fattened to delicious perfection by locally grown rice and prolific vegetation of the kind which turns teal and greenheads, canvasbacks and even the lowly coot (yes, Cajuns will use coots in gumbo), into the makings of mighty fine fare.

Also, we are easygoing, down-to-earth folks and with only a few exceptions these are simple recipes—just good home cooking with healthy meat straight from nature's larder. All but one of the recipes offered this month come from the book.

New Offerings

Although I sent out a special mid-month newsletter drawing attention to them, I also want to note a second time that there are three new lists of out-of-print books on my Web site. They cover [Nash Buckingham](#), [George Bird Evans](#), and [Upland Game and Waterfowling Miscellany](#).

A few of the books have sold but most remain available. Keep in mind that Christmas isn't that far off, and maybe you have a good hunting buddy whom you'd like to favor with a special book.

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Upcoming Schedule

October 25-27—Camping at the Deep Creek campground in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park near Bryson City, N.C. A group of us in the [Southern Forest Watch](#) who have been at the center of an ongoing struggle against imposition of an onerous and quite possibly illegal fee to camp in the park backcountry will be gathering to share tales, do some hiking and fishing, and enjoy time with others who not only care about the park but who are willing to speak out (to the point of filing a lawsuit) against bureaucracy run wild.

November 7-9—Attending annual fall meeting of the [South Carolina Outdoor Press Association](#).

November 10-14—Sea duck hunting in Maine with Linda Powell of [Mossberg](#) and four fellow outdoor writers. Local DU folks will serve as our guides.

My favorite outdoor writer, Robert Ruark, captured much of the flair of Cajun outdoor life and the flavor of their foods in a story from his timeless book, *The Old Man's Boy Grows Older*. In the tale, entitled "The Old Man Paid My Passage," he relates how harkening back to a trip he took to Cajun country with his grandfather (the "Old Man") enabled him to deal with the tyranny of a boat captain when he was working as a lowly ordinary seaman on a merchant vessel during the depths of the Great Depression. He tuned the captain out by dreaming about the good times on the bayou, and his description of the trip is Ruark the writer at his finest. When you read his accounts of food prepared in a Cajun hunt camp you better don a napkin or bib—they so convincing your salivary glands kick into involuntary overdrive and you'll be hungry, even if it hasn't been a half hour since your last meal.

December 6-7—Speaker (and I will have a booth as well) at the [WNC Fly Fishing Expo](#) in Asheville, N.C.

December 9—Talk and book signing in Charleston, SC.

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Ruark writes on the marvels of hunting pintails and teal, mallards and Canadas, and of the magic of life on a boat in the marsh or pirogues taking hunters to a duck blind. He waxes eloquent on the winning personalities of their Cajun companions, friends of the Old Man, reckoning how "they were magnificent hunters, trappers, fisherman, and marshmen" then adding that "a Cajun in hip books could walk a marsh which would bog up to your neck in the ooze as if it were a sidewalk." He writes lyrically of the breathtaking beauty of the marshes and the wildlife which they call home. Most of all though, he captures the essence of the sporting experience as offered by Cajuns in Cajun country and the manner in which the results of hunting and fishing are turned to exquisite use in the kitchen.

Ruark reminisces of stoking "myself pretty well with raw oysters and clams," but adds that was just a way of avoiding becoming overly peckish prior to the main course a Cajun named Pierre was making "in an iron cauldron big enough to boil a hog in. It was jambalaya—call it *pilaf*, *payloo*, *pilau*, *paella*, or anything you want—but its main ingredients are rice and red peppers. Into this rice had been mixed shrimps, oysters, clams, crayfish, pork sausage, great white slabs of fish (Ruark had caught redfish and sea trout), a chicken for the stock, and the whole business cooked together until it was one great big wonderful adventure. Pierre had cooked the rice with saffron, so that it came out yellow, and the juices from the seafood and the chicken had got married in a tremendous soupy ceremony so that the rice, while dry by grain, was damp by volume, and the hunks of fish and the shellfish hadn't lost any of their flavor but were nuggeted through the rice."

Now if that doesn't whet your appetite and give you a hankering for some Cajun food, well I've just got to figure that yours is and always will be a life of culinary deprivation. Small wonder that the Old Man, who in his pithy and wise if somewhat curmudgeonly way had a knack for getting to the heart of matters in short order, summed things up by saying: "This is the land of plenty."

Over the years I've been privileged to fish and hunt waterfowl a number of times in the same general area Ruark and the Old Man (his grandfather) visited in the 1930s. It's still a land of plenty; the residents still speak with a lyrical, pleasing accent; the sport can still be grand; and the food is so delicious that it is better experienced in person than described in words.

Nonetheless, two examples from the recent SEOPA conference should suffice to give some indication of the region's culinary wonders. The opening night banquet, sponsored by our host, was a seafood feast—heaping mounds of crabs and shrimp along with those delicacies prepared in a host of other ways including jambalaya, etouffee, and gumbo; fluffy mountains of locally grown rice; fried and baked fish; and enough side dishes to challenge the most tenacious trencherman. It was truly a grand repast, one of the sort only folks in Cajun country can offer. All the while a Cajun band played in the background, and if you didn't end up stuffed in a fashion worthy of the finest turkey ever to grace a Thanksgiving table, there was post-dinner dancing.

The other “foodie” event came on the final afternoon of the conference when noted chef and cookbook author Poppy Tooker simultaneously prepared gumbo while entertaining her audience with delightful doses of good humor; an account of how she “kicked ass” in a gumbo cook-off with celebrity chef Bobby Flay; and all sorts of tips for things such as roasting okra, making a roux, preparing seafood stock, and step-by-step instructions on how to make proper gumbo. Best of all, the demonstration ended with the audience sampling the finished product (honesty compels me to admit I had two heaping bowls of gumbo and savored every spoonful) and getting a signed, inscribed copy of Tooker’s cookbook, “Louisiana Eats! The People, the Food, and Their Stories.”

Her choice of a title for the book is certainly an appropriate one, for eating takes pride of place when Cajuns decide to let the good times roll. Over the course of a week my wife and I enjoyed, in addition to the previously mentioned delicacies, local delicacies such as boudin balls, shrimp pistolettes, grilled oysters, shrimp and oyster po-boy sandwiches, and a seafood salad so toothsome second helpings seemed mandatory. As for my waist line and its expansion, that’s a subject sort of akin to dealing with a fine “meat dog” of indeterminate lineage. The less said the better. All I can safely acknowledge is that my mid-section might nigh out-stretched my belt loops, and I’ll be in “recovery” mode featuring short rations for weeks to come (probably until I head to Maine for a sea duck hunt in November—can’t resist those lobsters).

If you visit the wonderful world of the Cajun in seasons other than early autumn, there’s the opportunity to enjoy crayfish, fine waterfowling and the equally fine fare which can come from properly prepared ducks and geese, and no matter what time of year you will find yourself in a world where folks know how to bring a full measure of pleasure to their daily lives. Stress becomes a stranger and smiles are seen everywhere. In short, the Cajuns understand a great deal about what they call “*joie de vivre*,” which loosely translated means joy of living. I’m not much for hyping specific places or particular items of gear in these monthly musings, but I think so much of the Southwest Louisiana/Lake Charles area that I felt an exception to standard operating procedure was richly deserved. If you have never been to the region or would like to learn more about the area’s history, food lore, and sport, visit www.visitLakeCharles.org. I strongly recommend you put the area on your “must visit” bucket list.

That’s about it for this month, other than the recipes offered below (I decided to include the simple instructions for Poppy Tooker’s roasted okra, and if you like it you might want to acquire her cookbook). I need to do a bit of hoeing and weeding in the fall garden, catch up on a couple of story assignments, and perhaps most importantly, spend some quality hours in a deer stand.

I’ll readily admit I don’t get all worked up dealing with deer the way I do with turkeys, but when it comes to a suitable setting for ruminating, for shedding life’s daily worries and woes, and forgetting the aches and pains which are part and parcel of an aging body, the deer woods are a mighty fine place to be. If and when a fine buck walks by or a fat old long-nosed doe shows in range, well that’s just, as a great old writer by the name of Havilah Babcock put it, “lace on the bride’s pajamas, a cherry atop the hunter’s sundae.”

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RECIPES

Since I’ve just returned from Cajun country, where crabs and shrimp loom large in their culinary magic, let’s start with a dish which blends these seafood wonders with venison. If you want to treat guests to venison at its finest, gourmet fare of the kind which would turn chefs at a four-star establishment green around the gills with envy, offer them this dish.

LOIN STEAK WITH CRAB AND SHRIMP SAUCE

1 pound loin steaks—cut ½-inch thick
1 tablespoon olive oil

1 tablespoon margarine or butter
Salt and pepper to taste

Heat olive oil and margarine in a large skillet and quickly cook venison loin until medium rare. Place on a platter and keep warm. It is best to cook loin after your sauce has begun to thicken.

CRAB AND SHRIMP SAUCE

2 tablespoons olive oil
½ pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
2 cups whipping cream
¼ cup white Zinfandel wine
¼ cup margarine or butter, cut into 12 pieces
½ pound crabmeat
12 medium shrimp, cooked and peeled

Heat two tablespoons oil in a large skillet. Add mushrooms to skillet and sauté for five minutes. Add cream and wine and reduce until thickened (10-12 minutes). Season with salt and pepper. Stir in margarine one piece at a time incorporating each piece completely before adding the next. Add crabmeat and shrimp and heat through, about one minute. Pour over venison and serve immediately.

VIDALIA VENISON

4 tablespoons margarine (divided)
3 or 4 venison steaks
Salt and pepper
1 Vidalia onion, sliced
1 cup sliced mushrooms
1 cup red wine
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley

Heat two tablespoons margarine in a heavy skillet and fry steaks over high heat quickly (about three minutes per side). Season with salt and pepper to taste. Remove from skillet and keep hot. Add remaining two tablespoons margarine to skillet and sauté onions and mushrooms until tender. Add wine and bring to a boil to reduce for two to three minutes. Pour sauce over steaks and sprinkle with parsley. Serve immediately.

GAIL'S PRESSURE-COOKER VENISON PILAU

This recipe came from a longtime friend and superb cook, Gail Wright, one of several dishes she shared with us which made it into our cookbooks.

4 to 5 pounds cubed venison
2 boxes Lipton's onion soup mix
2 large jars of button mushrooms (use freshly sliced ones if you prefer)
8 cups cooked rice
2 large onions
1 stick margarine (or butter)
1 teaspoon rosemary
Salt and pepper to taste

Mix four cups water and the soup mix in a pressure cooker. Add the cubed venison and cook under pressure for 40 minutes. Chop the onions and sauté until translucent. Add the onions and remaining ingredients to the cooked venison. Heat thoroughly or place in a large crockpot on low for several hours. Add more water if necessary.

RANCH VENISON PARMESAN

8-10 strips venison loin
 ½ bottle Ranch dressing
 1 egg
 1 ½ to 2 cups bread crumbs
 ¼ to ½ cup Parmesan cheese
 2-4 tablespoons olive oil

Add one beaten egg to Ranch dressing (liquid dressing, not dry mix) poured into a shallow dish. Mix bread crumbs and cheese. Dip venison strips in dressing/egg mixture and then dredge in crumbs/cheese mixture. Place oil in a non-stick frying pan. Have oil hot before adding strips in order to brown nicely and prevent sticking. Brown venison strips on both sides and serve immediately.

VENISON QUICHE

1 unbaked 9-inch pastry shell
 ½ pound ground venison
 ½ cup mayonnaise
 ½ cup milk
 2 eggs
 1 tablespoon cornstarch
 1 ½ cups shredded cheese
 1/3 cup sliced green onions

Brown venison in skillet over medium heat. Drain, if necessary, and set aside. Blend mayonnaise, milk, eggs, and cornstarch until smooth. Stir in venison, cheese, and onion. Turn into pastry shell. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes until brown and knife inserted in center comes out clean.

ROASTED OKRA

Unlike the previous recipes, all found in *The Complete Venison Cookbook*, this one comes from Poppy Tooker's *Louisiana Eats!* I am sure you can order it on line or from the publisher (www.pelicanpub.com). According to Tooker, during roasting "the mucilaginous nature of the okra is transformed into a silken mouthfeel." That's a sentence mixing some mighty interesting words, and I say that as someone who has always been fascinated by what a high school English teacher of mine styled "ten-dollar words." Mainly though, it suggests that here's a delightfully different way to enjoy okra.



2 tablespoons olive oil
 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
 2 pounds okra—the smaller, the better—for larger pods, cut into one-inch lengths
 Salt to taste

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Lightly grease a baking pan. Combine olive oil with balsamic vinegar in a large bowl. Add the okra to the bowl and toss until lightly coated. Arrange in a single layer on the baking pan. Roast, shaking or stirring every five minutes for 10-15 minutes or until the okra is lightly browned.

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