

Jim Casada Outdoors

February 2014 Newsletter

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Jim's Doings

An Interview and (I Guess) an Honor

Last fall an energetic, enthusiastic student from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill named Alex Teller called me to inquire as to my willingness to be interviewed in connection with an upper-level journalism course he was taking. The key project in the course was to interview a Tar Heel literary figure with an established reputation, transcribe the interview, write a biographical sketch of the interviewee, and include the material in a [Web site maintained by UNC](#). After asking whether I qualified, since I'm a North Caroliniana by birth but a longtime resident of South Carolina, Alex assured me I did thanks to the fact that quite a bit of my literary work has the Old North State as its setting. He also said we had once met on a dove shoot a number of

Alabama Cast & Blast—What A Grand Time

Late last month I enjoyed a wonderful "Cast & Blast" event at Sumter Farms, located just outside the little crossroads village of Geiger in Alabama's famed Black Belt region. What a grand time it was—never mind that one morning waterfowlers had to break ice in order for ducks to have a place to land while that same day fishermen needed enough clothing to have been worthy of an ice fishing expedition.

I came home with a bunch of wood ducks, and those of you who are outdoor gourmets will know that they are among the finest of all waterfowl when it comes to table fare. Nestled alongside them in the cooler were backstraps and tenderloins from a fat doe, while tucked away in the corridors of my mind was realization that I had enjoyed a whopping good time and WAY too much to eat.

Here are a couple of photos to give you a bit of feel for the experience, and if you enjoy sport in its finest Southern incarnations I encourage you to visit the Web site of the [Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association](#) and navigate to the coverage of Sumter Farms.

years ago, and that was the catalyst which led him to suggest me to his professor as his interview subject.

At any rate, we did the interview, some 52 minutes worth of my rambling and ruminating about my background and the writing life, and in due time Alex sent me a transcription. Other than being appalled at how many times I began my comments with “and” or “well,” I guess it went all right. Evidently the professor thought so, because in addition to being posted on the website listed above (where you can read the whole thing if you are so inclined), the interview has been chosen for inclusion in the University’s Southern Oral History Program.

NWTF Convention

If you plan to attend the [National Wild Turkey Federation’s annual convention](#) in mid-month, [let me know](#). I’ll be there the entire time although I don’t expect to walk the crowded floors non-stop. However, I’ll spend a lot of time browsing and talking to folks I know.

Also, if you have some books you’d like to acquire from my turkey list (or other ones, for that matter), [contact me](#). We can arrange a time and place to meet and you’ll save shipping costs.

Old College Days and a Major Concern



Just wading out into flooded hardwood timber in the last of night before the last of light, with a grizzled black veteran of 45 years at Sumter Farms leading the way, almost made me feel like a reincarnation of Nash Buckingham and his trusted sidekick, Horace. Mind you I didn’t, don’t, and never will shoot like Mr. Buck, but seeing three woodies, all of the drakes, laid out on a log and knowing the special thrills of ducks weaving their way through timber in what has to be among the most challenging of all wingshooting situations, was a morning to cherish. The Model 9300 from Mossberg functioned superbly (a fellow hunter dropped one in the water and it froze almost instantly but resumed working as soon as he dealt with the ice), the Winchester steel shotshells did their duty when I managed to be on target, and the first morning out we were treated to a display of the dog work by canine companions of one of the country’s best-known trainers, Mike Stewart of [Wildrose Kennels](#).



Throw in an opportunity to look at a bevy of true American classics in the shotgun field—a Parker, a Fox, a Winchester Model 21 and an early Remington side-by-side—all passed down through generations to members of the Bell family which owns the place, and you should get the idea I was as happy as a hungry country boy looking at a bowl of speckled butterbeans cooked in fatback.

Incidentally, since I’ve used a culinary analogy, we consumed meals which featured items such as duck and venison, pork tenderloin, a bread pudding laced with rum which was FINE, and breakfasts of the sort the cold, hungry hunter welcomes at mid-morning with all the

enthusiasm of a long-lost lover.

I know that quite a few of you who are regular readers are also fellow alums of King College (now King University). This message is specifically for you.

Our beloved alma mater is in real trouble, thanks to a misguided president and a board of trustees which apparently is tone deaf. When an academic institution shuts down the alumni portion of its Web site so as to censor criticism, and when faculty members are scared to express their thoughts on academic affairs, there's trouble in paradise. [Click here for details](#) or [contact me](#).

Hopefully you get a bit of the picture, but if you want to sample and savor the experience to the fullest, put it on your bucket list. I guarantee you won't regret it (and I didn't even get to sample the superb bass fishing).

A Bodacious Blog on my Beloved Smokies

As is probably quite obvious from the tone and tenor of this newsletter's contents, I have a deep-rooted love for my highland homeland and maintain close connection with the Smokies. I write a column for the local weekly newspaper, the *Smoky Mountain Times*, and have done so for a decade or more. It pays less than any publishing outlet I have but brings ample rewards in comments, contacts, occasional controversy, and general satisfaction.

Two of the local folks with whom I am in most frequent contact are my younger brother, Don, and a woman a generation behind us, Wendy Meyers. I've known Wendy since she was a small child, and indeed our daughter regularly played with her whenever we visited my parents. Don and Wendy are both indefatigable researchers and keen students of local history, and in recent years they have undertaken a major, ongoing project connected with old home places in what is now the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Once in a great while, thanks to my training as a historian and because I have a sizeable library of books dealing with the area, I'm able to help them a bit.

Eventually there will be some truly significant and enduring material for public consumption to come out of their efforts. Meanwhile though, Wendy writes a periodic blog which offers a grand glimpse of aspects of local history. The price for reading the blog is precisely what you pay for this newsletter—nothing—and if you enjoy the past, particularly as it played out in the southern Appalachians, I think you will find her offerings fascinating. [Check it out](#) and subscribe if interested. The Swain, incidentally, is Swain County. Bryson City, the little town where I grew up, is the county seat.

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February Fun (and Frustration)

Let's start in reverse order as far as the above title goes. My Grandpa Joe always got a bit frustrated about this time of year. He would grouse about having the mollygrubs, moan about the miseries, mutter about Ms. Minnie (his wife), and opine that it looked like cabin fever had "took holt" like he'd never seen it before. There would also be some barely audible comments about "they are out to get me."

Grandpa always suffered from a degree of paranoia, and he was never happier than when alone or maybe accompanied by his trusty and obedient sidekick (me). He couldn't and wouldn't work for another man if that involved any oversight at all, and his favorite phrases were "you'll learn" and "they'll learn." Looking back I realize Grandpa was, to use the mountain vernacular, a tad "tetched," but it didn't seem that way to me. Furthermore, the older I get, and I'm now pretty much of the age he was when we spent the most time together, the more I realize that maybe he was far more insightful than folks thought. I just happen to share his deeply rooted distrust of the government, of officialdom, and of bureaucrats in general. All he wanted was to be left alone, and I'm firmly convinced that we, as a country, would be a lot better off if there was a lot more "hands off" on the part of government and a lot less meddling.

To Grandpa's credit though, his moments of being down in the dumps were far outweighed by those involving a bright outlook, optimism, and looking towards the future with a twinkle in his eye. That's precisely why he always complained about February having to be the shortest month of the year. "I reckon," he'd say, "that a body couldn't stand more than 28 days of this mess, and it takes a passel of tolerance to add a day once every four years." The next moment, however, chuckling at the way he'd just condemned "poor little February," he would launch into an extended session of storytelling or maybe start discussing what sort of outdoor-related project we ought to undertake once the weather became bearable.

Those projects ranged widely but they were always fun, and that's what I remember most about those halcyon days of youth. No matter the month, they were filled with fun, and even then I had one joy to keep cabin fever at bay which Grandpa didn't. That was the sheer joy of reading. As a boy and now as a man, I'm an inveterate, devoted, and endlessly delighted reader. I devour books the way I used to deal with Momma's fried chicken.

Recent Reading

At this time every year I make a point of re-reading some of Robert Ruark's timeless tales of the "Old Man and the Boy." If you read them and don't enjoy them, let me put it bluntly—you've got a black hole in the middle of your soul. The stories are down-to-earth, as real as the feel of cool dirt beneath a boy's toes the first day of spring he is allowed to go barefooted, and deeply moving. You can find samples of them (there were dozens in all) in one of four places—in two books published in Ruark's lifetime, *The Old Man and the Boy* and *The Old Man's Boy Grows Older*, in an anthology I compiled the better part of a half century after his death, *The Lost Classics of Robert Ruark*, or if you are a collector or willing to do some digging, in the place they originally appeared, the pages of *Field & Stream* magazine.

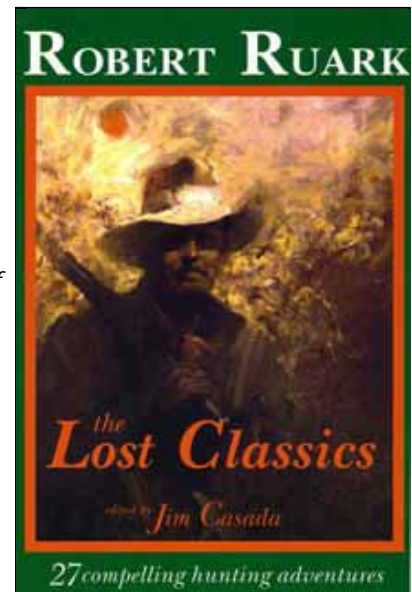
They always sustain and uplift me, and anyone who has yet to delve into Ruark has a grand treat awaiting them.

Speaking of Ruark, most of the rest of my recent reading has focused on biographies, and to a somewhat lesser degree, autobiographies, of noted outdoor writers. The reason is simple. I'm struggling on how best to handle a biography of Archibald Rutledge I'm writing (if you want to be on the "notify" list when it appears, which lies a ways off yet, just [drop me an e-mail](#) and I'll be sure you know). He was a complex character who lived a long and exceptionally full life. It was a life with a fair share of controversy, and how to handle it presents one challenge. Another comes from the fact that he was a man of so many parts, a true polymath. All this makes for a real challenge and a keen desire to do it right. I've always felt that one sure way to get a feel for such matters is through studying the strengths (and weaknesses) of others who have labored along similar lines.

As a result my recent reading includes, among other books, Jack Samson's life of Lee Wulff; the autobiographies of Elmer Keith and Jack O'Connor (both, *Hell! I Was There* and *The Last Book*, make great reading); Elizabeth Burroughs Kelley's life of her father, *John Burroughs: Naturalist*; the biographies of Ruark by Terry Wieland, Alan Ritchie, and Hugh Foster; Robert Anderson's *Jack O'Connor*; Tony Hayter's life of the great English fly fisherman, G. E. M. Skues; Charles Kroll's *Fred Bear*; and several others.

At this point I still don't know how to handle Rutledge—probably with an approach which combines straight chronology with side steps viewing key aspects of his life such as analysis of his overall production as a poet and narrative write along with his relations with blacks—but it's useful to see how others think and enjoyable in the process.

Mind you, I intersperse such weighty matters with light reading, mainly detective stories and adventure novels, and thanks to the fact that I read quite rapidly I get through a lot of books. If nothing else, armchair adventure is



a mighty fine antidote for days like today, when it is raining, temperatures hovering just under 40 degrees, and a time best spent indoors.

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If nothing else, I can think comforting thoughts of a hearty meal, and my personal inclinations lean heavily in the direction of soups, stews, chili, and the like this time of year. Here's a sampling of recipes from some of the cookbooks I've written with my wife, Ann, along with a couple of "use what you've got" approaches.

VEGETABLE VENISON SOUP

Take whatever leftover vegetables you might have in the refrigerator (corn, field peas, limas, green beans, and the like) and combine with other vegetables. I like to chop up a whole onion, several stalks of celery, a few carrots, and a couple of potatoes. Cook in beef broth (you can buy canned broth or use the paste which mixes with water) until almost tender. At that point, if you like them (I do), add two or three sliced turnips. They don't take as long to cook as the other veggies. Meanwhile, brown ground venison in a bit of olive oil. When it is completely browned, add it and the leftover vegetables to the cooked ones. Salt and pepper to taste and allow to simmer slowly for an hour or so in order for the flavors to blend. Served with a big piece of cornbread this makes a fine meal.

You can take pretty much the same approach with the carcass of a baked wild turkey or the dark meat of a turkey which has been cooked until it comes away from the bones. In this case, be sure to use the turkey stock.

GAME BIRD CHOWDER

1 chopped onion
 1 green bell pepper, chopped (optional—I don't care for bell peppers)
 Bacon or fatback drippings
 1 ½ pounds potatoes, skin on, cut into small pieces
 3 cups cooked game birds (pheasant, dove, duck, quail, turkey, etc.)
 2 cups game bird stock or chicken stock
 1 quart milk
 2 cups heavy cream or half-and-half
 Salt and pepper to taste
 Red pepper flakes or a dash of hot pepper sauce
 10-12 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled, or 4-6 slices of fatback cooked to crispness and crumbled (if you use the latter, cut back on salt)
 Chives or green onion

Sauté the onion and bell pepper in drippings until translucent. Add potatoes and cook until they are fork-tender.

Add the meat and stock and simmer for 10 minutes.

Add the milk and cream just before serving and heat until serving temperature. For a thicker soup you can add a bit of cornstarch. Season and top with crumbled bacon or fatback and chives.

SIMPLE VENISON CHILI

2 pounds ground venison
 1 large onion, chopped
 2 (15-ounce) cans chili beans, drained
 1 (15ounce) can tomato sauce
 Garlic powder, chili powder, cumin, and black pepper to taste
 Salt to taste

Brown the meat, onion and bell pepper in a skillet, being sure to break up the meat, until brown and crumbly. Add the remaining ingredients and enough water to bring to the desired consistency. If the chili becomes too thick while cooking (at least 40 minutes), add enough water to bring to the desired consistency. Serve with extra sharp grated cheese as a topping, use to top hot dogs, or use for a taco salad.

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