

# Jim Casada Outdoors

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## New Month, New Year January 2015 Newsletter

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### January—A Month For Musing, Mental Meandering, and Remembering

In today's sporting world, January seems insignificant. Deer season is at an end most everywhere except a couple of Southern states, the turkey opener seems impossibly distant, and seemingly no one does much small game hunting anymore. Of course that can be explained in part by the fact that some small game populations, in marked contrast to the great comeback stories of the whitetail and wild turkey, have been in abject decline for decades. In many areas that noble little patrician which resided in peafield corners and overgrown fencerows, in broom sedge fields and ditch bank tangles, is no more. The decline of the cottontail hasn't been quite as dramatic, but its numbers are but a pale shadow of the situation which prevailed a half century ago.

During my boyhood growing up the Smokies, a mixed party of adults and my buddies would often, in the course of a full day of rabbit hunting, kill more than 20 cottontails. Invariably, even though the terrain we covered was not top-notch quail habitat, we would also flush four or five coveys of birds. January was THE month of months in the rabbit and quail season, which ran from Thanksgiving week through the end of February. Every Saturday would find us out in full force, usually my Dad and his best buddy, a fellow named Claude Gossett, maybe another adult or two, three or four of my high school buddies, and a solid cadre of canine companions.

The human personnel varied a bit from one outing to the next, but hard hunting, considerable success, and the

#### This Month's Special Offer

Each month of 2015 I plan to focus my special offer on books on one of the many lists found on my website. **For that month, and only for that month, all books on the list will be 10% off the listed price.** Orders must be postmarked by the month's end or made through PayPal during the month. The offer ends with the arrival of the first day of the new month. As part of the promotion, I also plan to offer some coverage of the subject matter, whether it is focused on an individual author or a particular category.

We will begin with my favorite president, Theodore Roosevelt, and perhaps a listing of some of the qualities which make him my favorite, along with various tidbits about his life, will provide an indication of why I'm such a TR fan.

- For starters, use of the nickname "Teddy" in writings about him is so widespread as to be nearly ubiquitous. He detested the nickname and any writer who applies it (and I must admit that early on, before I studied his life in sufficient depth, I was guilty) does the man and his memory a disservice.
- The nickname, while often associated with the "Teddy bear" and his refusal to shoot a small, captured bear while on a Louisiana hunt, actually dated back to boyhood.
- Roosevelt, for all his enthusiasm and exploits as a hunter, was an indifferent shot at best. This was thanks, at least in part, to his exceptionally poor eyesight.

making of memories were constants. Cottontails may not rate very high on the hunting scale in today's sporting world, but in the 1950s, at least in the circumstances and surroundings I knew, they meant a great deal. Anyone who thinks the simple pleasures associated with camaraderie afield, hearty appetites, ample action, and deeds of canine wizardry aren't associated with the sport simply haven't known rabbit hunting at its finest.

I'll offer two examples, from a storehouse chock full of similar memories, as cases in point. The first involved my father's beagle of a lifetime, a male by the name of Chip. We acquired Chip and his mate, a bitch named Dale (yes, they were named for the cartoon chipmunks) when they were little more than pups. A nearby family, non-hunters, had acquired them as pets and soon decided they had made a mistake. They gave them to Dad and thus began well over a decade of magic.

On one of Chip's first hunts, when he was still in the early stages of rabbit running apprenticeship (maybe just running with older dogs and barking because they did, as opposed to truly trailing rabbits), Daddy spotted a rabbit bedded down in a brush pile. There's an art to finding a rabbit in the bed—you spot them by their eyes—and Daddy was really good at it. Anyway, rather than taking the standard route of kicking up the rabbit for another chase, Daddy backed off, called in Chip, and managed to get him to ease up to the brush pile. Chip jumped the rabbit and from that day he was a "made" dog. Also, he learned a lesson which was a standard and important part of his field behavior from that day forward. He never passed a brush pile without investigating it carefully.

If he got in underneath a brush pile and didn't come out almost immediately, or if he started making noises which were half whimpers, half barks, it was time to get ready. Sooner or later a cottontail was going to erupt from that pile of brush. That single lesson learned early in a marvelous rabbit hunting career was one Chip never forgot. Beagles aren't generally considered top-rate "jump" dogs, but if brush piles entered the picture, Chip was an exception to the rule.

A second particularly memorable episode in Chip's years of hunting, although this time he shared credit with the rest of the pack, involved a rabbit the landowner who gave us permission to hunt said couldn't be killed. "After you jump him," the man said, "he'll head straight for the creek and swim it. Dogs lose him every time." That's precisely what happened, but in this case the creek didn't baffle the pack of dogs. The rabbit crossed the creek not once but twice, with nothing more than a momentary pause by the beagles before they figured out what had happened. Eventually the elusive rabbit came within range of someone in the party and thus ended his career.

Speaking of swimming rabbits, I've never had much use for former president Jimmy Carter, although I do rate him higher than the current incumbent in the White House (at least Carter has done something positive in his work with Habitat for Humanity). However, when know-it-all city slickers and junk journalists made fun of him

- He overcame frailty and poor health as a boy through little more than sheer guts and strength of will.
- TR's great African safari, immediately following his second term as president, included extensive correspondence with and planning by some of the great hunters of that time, most notably Frederick C. Selous.
- A tireless correspondent, Roosevelt wrote untold thousands of letters, and he did most of the work in person.
- He was an inveterate reader and even when on hunting trips always carried a "field library" with him.
- One reason I like TR is that he was an avid outdoorsman. He wrote or co-authored more than a dozen books on hunting, exploring, and natural history along with a score or so more dealing with other subjects.
- Absolutely fearless, in person and in politics, Roosevelt was a man's man. He advocated the strenuous life and lived it to the fullest.
- Roosevelt's final grand adventure, and its strenuous nature and associated health problems unquestionably shortened his life, was exploration of the headwaters of the Amazon. He called it "my last chance to be a boy." In terms of enthusiasm, eagerness, and excitement, he was always a boy at heart.

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[Click here to view a sampling of books by and about Theodore Roosevelt.](#)

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If you have any questions, feel free to contact me:

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for mentioning a swimming rabbit, they showed, as is so often the case, their abysmal ignorance. Rabbits can and do swim.

Turning from unpleasant thoughts about politicians, who disgust and disillusion me no matter what their political stripe (stripe is an ideal word, because they smell just as bad as a striped skunk), other fond memories of January revolve around rocking chair storytelling sessions with my Grandpa Joe. Thanks to recently striking up an invigorating e-mail exchange with Steve Bodio, one of the most talented outdoor writers of this generation, I received a copy of his book, *A Sportsman's Library: 100 Essential, Engaging, Offbeat, and Occasionally Odd Fishing and Hunting Books for the Adventurous Reader*. One of the works covered in his book, which I recommend with great enthusiasm, is *The Old Way* by Elizabeth Marshall Thomas. Her book offers a detailed look at the Bushman culture of the Kalahari (in today's countries of Namibia and Botswana) and among many other things stresses how important storytelling and passing on of accumulated experiences was to these remarkable people.

The Bushmen held (I use the past tense because "progress" has for all practical purposes destroyed their way of life) the elderly in high esteem, while increasingly we seem to dismiss, belittle, or ignore the old. That will never happen with me, because for once as a youngster I exhibited good sense and idolized Grandpa Joe even as I hung on his every word. I recall many of our sessions together in great detail, but how I wish I had had the foresight and equipment to record him as he told tales of his own youth and early manhood. Of course the presence of a tape recorder might have silenced his voice, because he didn't put much truck in modern gadgets.

January and its miserable weather often found him in a fine storytelling mood. He would get comfortable in his favorite rocking chair (which sits just over my right shoulder, an ever-present comfort to me, as I write these words), ease close enough to the fire to get some warm relief for the "miserics" (arthritis), and commence reminiscing.

One of his stories I particularly liked went back to when he was a young man, married and just getting started on a family. There were still cougars in some remote areas of western North Carolina at the time, and a "painter," as mountain folks have always called the big cats, had taken to make regular raids on the chicken house. Grandpa figured it was only a matter of time until the panther switched its attention to the family's hogs, and besides that he was tired of losing a chicken or two on a regular basis.

Accordingly, he kept his gun loaded and ready at hand, and late one evening when there was a ruckus out at the barn he grabbed it and headed out the door. Sure enough, it was the cougar, and Grandpa killed it with a load of buckshot while it was in mid-air. The cat had gotten on the roof of the chicken house and leaped when Grandpa came around the corner of the barn. "I was never sure whether it was attacking me or just trying to escape," he said, "but that shot from my 12 gauge put an end to raids on the chicken house."



Grandpa never said exactly what year he killed the painter, and I doubt if he recalled the precise date. It was likely in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and may well have been one of the last of the giant felines, once fairly common in the Smokies, to be killed in the region.

Another of his stories which intrigued me, no doubt in large part because I was fascinated by rabbit hunting, involved an exceptionally heavy January snow when he was a boy. "It commenced to snowing hard about four o'clock one afternoon," he recalled, "and it fell right through the night and well on into the next day. It was a

soft, fluffy snow of the kind we called 'she snow,' and when it finally stopped there was over three feet covering the ground. It was so soft you sunk right through it, and even something as small as a rabbit couldn't run without breaking through the surface."

Grandpa and one or two of his brothers soon discovered that you could locate rabbits, which were plentiful that year, by noticing little puffs of mist coming from the snow where they were hunkered down. "It was like picking up chestnuts," he said. "You just plowed your way to a place where you saw smoke—it wasn't easy going, mind you—and reached down and grabbed the rabbit." In short order the boys had a tow sack full of live cottontails, and for some reason they decided to carry their catch to the house of a bachelor who lived nearby in a single room hovel.

"He was mighty interested in all the rabbits we had caught," Grandpa said, "and for some reason suggested we turn them loose in his shack. You never saw the likes! They were jumping off the wall and peart nigh tore the place apart before we got them back in the sack. We did give him three or four of the rabbits to eat and that made things a little better. The only problem was, other than his place being a wreck, it took him two weeks to get rid of all the fleas."

Throughout my boyhood I wished for such a snow, but it never fell. Mind you, there were plenty of fine snowfalls, and any appreciable one meant a day off from school—snow, winding mountain roads, and school buses are not a safe mix. That translated to an unexpected day afield with buddies and beagles, so in a different way I had my own rabbit-related fun from the snow.

I'll conclude these musings by suggesting that January is a mighty fine time for such doings. I'm now approximately the age Grandpa Joe was when he shared these and countless other stories, and I can only hope that my outlook is as upbeat as his was and can only wish I had memories as varied and vivid as his to recall. I don't, but I'd like to think we share at least one thing in common. Grandpa was just a boy trapped in an old man's body, and I'd like to think that some of the same simple joy, the ability to get great pleasure out of simple things, is part of my outlook on life.

**Let me close by wishing each of you a grand 2015 and encouraging you to cling to things from the past which are meaningful and magical, enduring and endearing.**

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## Savory Soups And Stews

As this is being written the weather here is somewhere the other side of miserable. It rained all day yesterday, fell a flood during the night, and shows no sign of letting up today. It's a good day to be inside, curled up with an enjoyable book and enjoying the tempting smell of a soup wafting through the house as it simmers atop the stove. In our house winter is pretty much synonymous with soups and stews when it comes to meals, and there are few things in the culinary world which bring me more pleasure than a hearty bowl of soup or stew, served along with a pone of cornbread or a heaping plate of cathead biscuits. Accordingly, here are several favorite recipes which you might want to try to take a bite out of winter and sustain the inner man or woman. All are taken from *Wild Fare & Wise Words*, a cookbook Ann and I edited and compiled. We also provided more than half the recipes—and there are upwards of 200 of them. The book is available on my website.

### CATFISH STEW

6 to 7 pounds catfish fillets  
 5 pounds potatoes  
 3 pounds diced onions  
 1 ½ pounds lean hog jowl or side meat, diced  
 1 (27-ounce) can diced tomatoes  
 3 (14-ounce) cans stewed tomatoes

1 (46-ounce) can tomato juice  
 ¼ cup Worcestershire sauce  
 Salt, black pepper, and red pepper to taste

Combine the catfish and enough water to cover the fillets in a soup pot. Bring to a boil and then simmer until the fish flakes easily. Drain and reserve the cooking liquid. Pick through the fish to remove any bones. Refrigerate the fish.

Peel the potatoes or leave peels on if you prefer and cut into half-inch cubes. Add to the pot of fish stock.

In a separate sauce pot combine the onions with water to cover them, bring to a boil, cook until tender, and add to the soup pot.

Fry the hog jowl until crisp. Drain and add the meat to the stock pot.

Add the fish to the pot along with the diced tomatoes. Cut the stewed tomatoes in small pieces and add them to the pot as well.

Add the tomato juice as needed to prevent the mixture cooking down too much. When potatoes and onions are tender, add the Worcestershire sauce and any remaining tomato juice. Simmer for two to three hours, stirring occasionally.

Serves 15 and is ideal for a family gathering or a bunch of hunt club buddies. You can cut the amount of ingredients for a smaller amount if desired.

### OYSTER STEW

2 (12-ounce) cans oysters or the equivalent of fresh ones  
 2 chopped sweet onions  
 ½ cup olive oil  
 1 teaspoon self-rising flour  
 4 cups milk  
 1 tablespoon dried parsley  
 1 teaspoon seasoned garlic salt  
 ½ teaspoon black pepper  
 Oyster crackers or saltines

Drain the oysters, checking carefully for pieces of shell. Sauté the onions in the olive oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the flour, whisking until blended. Add the oysters and stir to combine. Stir in the milk and other ingredients. Bring to a boil and remove from the heat. Serve immediately with crackers or saltines.

4 servings.

### VENISON STEW

2 to 3 pounds venison roast  
 2 (10 ½ ounce) cans beef broth  
 1 ½ to 2 pounds cubed potatoes  
 3 or 4 onions, quartered  
 8 ounces baby carrots  
 Salt and black pepper to taste  
 Worcestershire sauce to taste

Cut the roast into one-inch cubes. Combine in a Dutch oven with the beef broth. Simmer until the meat is nearly tender.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Add the other ingredients, cover, and bake for an hour or until the vegetables are tender.

Serves 6 to 8.

### SIMPLETON STEW

I'm not sure where this stew gets its name, but I reckon it is simple enough for a simpleton to make.

1 pound venison stew meat  
 ½ teaspoon ground ginger  
 1 teaspoon black pepper  
 1 tablespoon soy sauce  
 1 (15-ounce) can potatoes  
 1 (8-ounce) can water chestnuts  
 1 (15-ounce) can French-cut green beans  
 1 (10 ½-ounce) can cream of mushroom soup

Combine the meat ginger, pepper and soy sauce in a slow cooker and cook on low for two hours. Add the remaining ingredients and cook for two hours longer. Serve on its own or over rice.

Makes 8 servings.

### TURKEY AND WILD RICE SOUP

6 tablespoons butter  
 1 cup chopped celery  
 ½ cup chopped onion  
 ½ cup chopped carrots  
 ½ cup sliced fresh mushrooms  
 6 tablespoons all-purpose flour  
 Salt and pepper to taste  
 2 (10-ounce) cans chicken broth  
 4 cups milk  
 2 cups cooked wild rice  
 2 cups cubed, cooked wild turkey (you can substitute barnyard bird if you aren't blessed with the real McCoy)

Melt the butter in a large pan and sauté the onion, celery, carrots and mushrooms until tender-crisp. Stir in the flour, salt and pepper and mix well. Add the chicken broth and milk and cook, stirring, until thickened. Add the wild rice and turkey. Adjust seasonings and simmer until piping hot.

Makes 8 servings.

**Note:** This is a great way to use dark meat from a wild turkey—combine dark and white in equal portions.

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