

Jim Casada Outdoors

January 2016 Newsleter

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Jim's Doings

For me, much of December was a wipeout, especially on the hunting front. We had day after day of rain, temperatures in the 60s and 70s, and deer movement during daylight hours was virtually non-existent. More than once I asked myself, "Why aren't you reverting to your boyhood and hunting squirrels?" This month I intend to answer that question by making up for lost time, and fortunately I have a friend who has a first-rate squirrel dog along with another canine in the learning process.

Probably the biggest development of note during the month, other than checking my wife out of assisted living for a couple of days with our daughter and her family at Christmas, was a visit from a video crew. These fellows are producing a Robert Ruark documentary and wanted to interview me thanks to the fact that I've written and researched his life extensively. I had expected a one-man operation with a simple video camera, but it turned out to be three hours of setting up all sorts of lights and microphones, getting the sound just right, and eventually digging into the life of the "Old Man's Boy" in detail.

Hopefully what I had to say stopped somewhere short of being totally nonsensical. My view of Ruark is tinged by ambivalence. I think he's the greatest of all American outdoor writers, but my views on him as a man and his personal life fall in another stratosphere. He was a shameless chauvinist; treated Virginia, his wife, in terribly

This Month's Specials

One of this month's specials, *Forgotten Tales and Vanished Trails*, is mentioned in the newsletter below.

Perhaps a bit more information on the nature of the book is merited. Years ago, as I researched Theodore Roosevelt's life in connection with a couple of magazine articles, realization dawned that he wrote a great deal of material on nature, conservation, and the outdoors which appeared exclusively in magazines or else was secreted away in dust-laden volumes of the type of sporting compilations which were so popular for two decades on either side of the turn of the 20th century.

Accordingly, it seemed logical to compile a TR anthology of "lost classics" in much the same fashion I have done for other writers whom I admire such as Robert Ruark, Archibald Rutledge, Jack O'Connor, Fred Selous, and Horatio Bigelow.

The result was a 225-page book containing 31 pieces ranging from little essays on wapiti (elk) and wild turkeys to accounts of a hunt in Louisiana and an outing to harpoon devilfish. There are also profiles or tributes to some of his friends who were great contemporaries such as John Muir and Fred Selous.

The book, which is in an unbound state (but ready for simple buckram binding) is only \$8 postage paid.

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Since it includes considerable information on Roosevelt's staunch friend, fellow naturalist, and confidante on all things Africa, Selous, it seems fitting that the second book being offered is a volume of a similar nature featuring writes by Selous.

shoddy fashion; lacked the strength of character to beat Demon Rum; was endowed with an incredible degree of narcissism; lived the life of a wastrel; and in many ways, to put it pithily, was an unbridled sonofabitch.

This month I pretty much have a whole lot of nothing in the works. I'll finish editing a dandy manuscript on one man's incredible adventures in hunting dangerous African game (if the book makes it to print, which it definitely should, I'll provide more details), do some squirrel hunting, endeavor to acquire a tombstone for the unmarked grave of one of my boyhood fishing mentors (he was a convicted murderer and that's a story I need to share with you in detail at some point), and try my darndest to get at least a bit slimmer and fitter. My daughter gave me a neat device known as a Fitbit for Christmas, and maybe its appealing gadgetry will keep me on course.

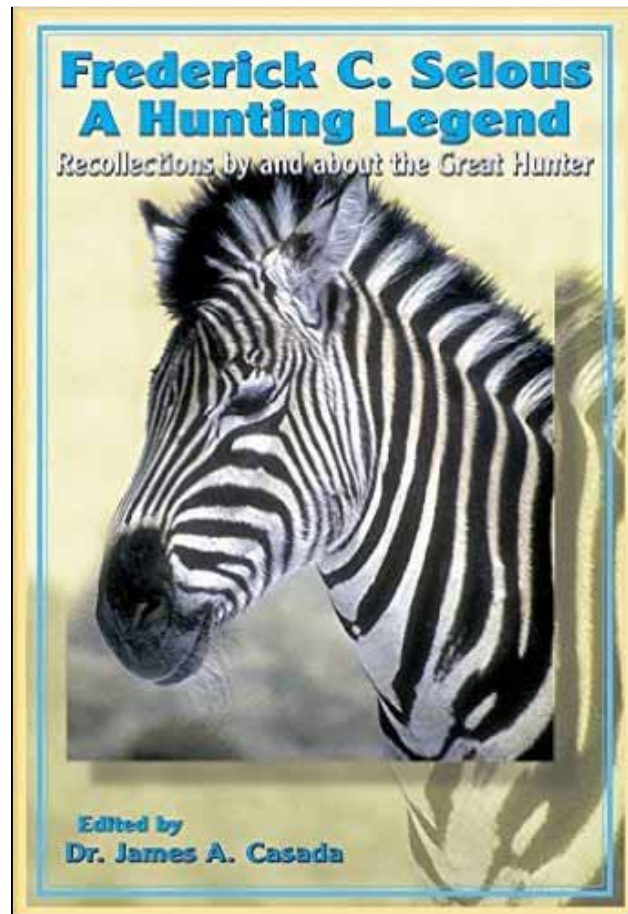
I may have mentioned my involvement with Leica Sports Optics before, and if so simply attribute the repeat information as the product of a cluttered mind. At any rate, once a month I'm doing a food blog, with a bit of narrative, several recipes, and a number of photos, for Leica. If you want to view it just visit the [Leica Hunting Blog](#).

Also, I do a weekly food blog for *Sporting Classics* magazine, with which I have been associated for more than three decades, entitled "Wild Harvest Wednesdays." You can view it or subscribe to the free daily blog by visiting [Sporting Classics Daily](#).

SPORTING CLASSICS DAILY
A Daily Taste of Sporting Classics Magazine

Beyond that, and perhaps this is most significant of all, I fully intend to write more and go about the process of getting some words and concepts committed to paper (well, more accurately, the computer) not only in January but throughout the year. I find a lot of solace in work and it keeps the dark dogs of anxiety about my wife at bay, at least temporarily. At the front of the list, other than the usual magazine assignments and newspaper columns, are books on Archibald Rutledge and memorable characters from my highland homeland.

Oh, by the way, HAPPY NEW YEAR to each of you.



This is *Frederick C. Selous—A Hunting Legend: Recollections By and about the Great Hunter*. A well-illustrated volume of 201 pages, hardbound and with a colorful dust jacket, it comprises 14 lengthy pieces. In print at \$35, I'm offering it for \$22 postpaid.

[Add to Cart](#)

Both works contain extensive introductory material I wrote, commentary accompanying individual selections, and detailed bibliographical information.

I think you'll find them offering first-rate armchair adventure to help you while away the hours of cabin-fever time.

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January: The Sheer Joy of Being a Boy

As this newsletter is being written, I'm smack in the middle of a grand book by Michael R. Canfield, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Field*. It came to me as a delightful Christmas surprise from a fellow, Dick Crowell, who has recently written a first-rate work on waterfowling culture and traditions in Louisiana entitled *Chenier Plain*. I've long been an admirer of TR and some years back edited and compiled an anthology of his writings on nature, sport, and the outdoors entitled *Forgotten Tales and Vanished Trails*. It's been out of print, at least in the original leather-bound version, for some time. However, I do have perhaps a dozen copies which were never bound. In other words, the entire book is there, all sewn together at the spine and awaiting binding. I'll sell them for \$8 postpaid if you are interested.

Another indication of my longtime interest in Roosevelt (you do him a disservice if you call him "Teddy," never mind that I see the moniker used all the time, because he disliked it) came some three decades ago, back in my "professing" days, when I was selected as Winthrop University's Distinguished Professor. The distinction brought a small stipend and a semester's sabbatical, but it also carried a requirement that the recipient give an address at the institution's annual awards banquet recognizing outstanding student academic achievement. I spoke on "The Strenuous Life" which Roosevelt not only advocated but lived to the fullest.

To me, one of the distinguishing and most endearing characteristics of Roosevelt's life is that in some ways he never got over being a boy. His unbridled enthusiasm for life, especially in the outdoors, never waned, and his eager curiosity matched that of the most ebullient of boys even when he was in his final, fading years. Indeed, in speaking of his last grand adventure, a trip to the remote reaches of the Amazon which he described in *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*, Roosevelt stated that it was "my last chance to be a boy."

That's the theme of this month's newsletter, a longing look back on January days of my own boyhood along with recognition of the fact that I am blessed to be able to enjoy some aspects of those halcyon days of youth in the present. Here's a sampling of some of those memories, and where it seems appropriate I comment on how this aging fellow, less fit than he was in those days when the only way I understood "quit hunting" was with the arrival of darkness, still enjoys some of these things and still has a bit of the outlook of a kid.

- **Squirrel Hunting.** By the time January rolled around I would have been pursuing bushytails since mid-October, and all surviving squirrels within walking distance of the house were paranoid as a cat surrounded by occupied rocking chairs. Still, when Daddy wouldn't let me take the beagles out after rabbits (they needed some days of rest), never mind that I never thought about doing anything other than hunting from dawn to dusk when the opportunity was available, I went after squirrels. Mostly I still hunted them, but if there had been a recent rain and movement through the woods with minimal noise possible, I would adopt that approach. Once in a while there was an opportunity to hunt with a dog, and for pure excitement and a high likelihood of a hefty game bag, that's the way to go after squirrels. About all I'll add is that there is probably no type of hunting where you can fine-tune the many aspects of first-rate woodsmanship. You learn patience, persistence, stealth, marksmanship, how to read sign, understanding the quarry's habitat preferences, and more.
- **Various bean and pea preparations.** Looking back on my boyhood I realize that we consumed enough beans to produce inner sensations fit to rival the bovine flatulence which seems to worry the likes to that pantywaist poltroon named Al Gore (if you think I have a great deal of disdain for the man, multiply that thought by a factor of nine, then raise it to the tenth power – at that point you might be close). Pintos, crowder peas, black-eyed peas, October beans, canned green beans, and leather britches (dried green beans) all found their way to the family table with regularity. Invariably they were cooked with pork – maybe a leftover ham bone, a ham hock, or just a chunk of streaked meat. Whatever the case, the toothsome flavor pork brought to the beans has stuck with me. Right now I've got a big pot of black-eyed

peas simmering on the stove, and they are doing so with a ham bone, still carrying a good bit of meat, left over from Christmas feasting.

- **Sledding.** Any and all snow meant an opportunity for sledding. Much of mine was done with a homemade sled featuring wooden runners, a riding platform made from wooden slats nailed to the runners, and a rope for holding on and pulling the heavy, cumbersome device back up the hill. It lacked any steering mechanism and when you reached the end of the downhill run one of three things happened – you coasted to a stop (that was ideal), a briar patch or some other vegetation brought an abrupt halt to your progress, or you bailed off before hitting larger obstacles such as trees.

Not all my sledding was during periods of snow. Get a south-facing field or pasture with a good growth of broom sedge, take advantage of a sunny day when Old Sol has dried the broom sedge, and you have a situation where friction is reduced to a minimum. The broom sedge is slick as a mole's hindquarters and a big piece of cardboard will zip along it at a heady pace. There are problems, to be sure – a total lack of steering, minimal protection for body parts should you hit a protruding rock, and the highly uncertain matter of simply staying aboard your chariot. I had many a wonderful day enjoying this type of sledding.

- **Rabbit hunting.** As a boy beagles and bunnies were central parts of my winter existence. Accompanied by a series of canine companions—Chip, Dale, Lead, Lady, Queen, Tiny, Drum, and others – I enjoyed countless days afield. Rabbits were plentiful and on a really good all-day outing a party of men and boys (usually my father; his stalwart fishing and hunting buddy, Claude Gossett; one or two other adults; and a comparable number of my boyhood buddies) would account for 20 or more cottontails. We'd always let the dogs run the first rabbit or two we jumped, but after that we'd kill them on the jump if possible. If not, we always had our faithful dogs to take to the trail. I don't know of anything I miss more in the outdoor field than those glorious days when small game ruled much of my free time in winter.
- **Skating.** I've never owned a pair of skates, and as a woman whom I still see once a year at college reunions invariably reminds me, my one venture on them, with her as my date, wasn't exactly an exhibit of grace. The only redeeming consideration was that she had skating skills about equivalent to mine. Just two country-raised kids trying something totally alien to them. However, that does not mean I didn't do any skating. If it got cold enough to freeze local ponds solid we'd be on them, but leather shoes substituted for skates (and gave a much wider base of support). Alternatively, we'd pick a patch of concrete, give it a good, extended "watering" in cold weather, and once it glazed over nicely we had a homemade skating rink. It was great fun although I paid a price that is still with me. A friend pushed me from behind when I wasn't expecting it and the first thing to hit the ice was my face. The end result was a hospital visit, the good luck to have a dentist who was ahead of his time and saved the teeth, and eventually, root canals and caps. Over the years that incident has probably cost first my parents and then me close to five figures in dental bills.
- **Quail hunting.** Much like rabbit hunting, this was something I took for granted in youth and which is, at least as far as wild birds are concerned in this part of the world, largely a thing of the past. Where whopping coveys were a standard part of the world in which I grew up, and where most every little farm or patch of land had its "back yard" birds, this past spring I heard the lovely mating call of the male bobwhite exactly one time. Sure, you can see a fine dog work and get plenty of shooting on a preserve, but if you never knew the real deal, take my word on the matter: It ain't the same.
- **Nut cracking.** One of the family activities I remember with great fondness involved cracking walnuts or, more accurately, picking the meats out of walnuts Daddy had already cracked. We often did this on a Saturday or a Sunday evening while listening to "Gunsmoke" or some other weekly program on the radio. Others included "Amos and Andy" and "The Lone Ranger," and I loved the country music offered on WCKY out of Cincinnati, Ohio. I can still hear DJ Wayne Raney saying the music was coming over the air waves thanks to "50,000 watts of pure power." We'd patiently pick through the walnuts, putting meats into a bowl or jar while knowing that in time there would be a rich reward in the form of scrumptious desserts.

- **Gun cleaning.** In the next few weeks I'll be working on a story for *South Carolina Wildlife* on this subject, and I already know how it will begin – with words from Daddy to the effect that just as “oil is the life of a machine so is regular cleaning the life of a gun.” I'll mention the heady aroma of Hoppe's No. 9 and the manner in which he insisted, no matter how long the day had been or how tired I might be, that two things came before comfort or food. You made sure the dogs were put in the kennel and had an extra ration of food (it was about the only time they got canned dog food to supplement the dry grain we'd dose with warm water as their normal rations) and that your gun was cleaned, covered with a thin layer of protective oil, and properly stored. It was a ritual that, in time, became an exercise in pleasure.
- **Stamp collecting.** My Aunt Emma, who didn't marry until I was eight or nine years old and didn't have children for a few years after that, spoiled my sister and me outrageously. There were various gifts from her over the years, but far and away the most important was a stamp album. It started me on a life of enjoyment as a collector, and philately remains an integral part of my existence. This is especially true in winter, when I can sort through stamps, organize them, or place them in albums while half-way watching a ball game on TV. It's an educational and entertaining hobby which has enriched my life.
- **Reading.** Anyone who has read this newsletter with anything approaching regularity surely knows that I'm a voracious reader with wide-ranging tastes. I've always enjoyed “whodunits,” especially those by British authors like Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Dick Francis, Ngaio Marsh (she was a Kiwi but wrote in the traditional British manner), Josephine Tey, Ellis Peters, John Buchan, Michael Innes (the pseudonym of J. I. M. Stewart), and Dorothy Sayers. Similarly, I love a rollicking adventure tale with Wilbur Smith being tops in my view, although some of the early Clive Cussler books (before he started “farming” out the writing in an excess of greed) are dandies, and all of Bartle Bull's stuff is first rate. Biographies and autobiographies have always interested me (just now I'm reading an account of how life in the field influenced the shaping of Theodore Roosevelt), especially when they deal with figures I admire such as Winston Churchill, TR, and any number of the great hunters of Africa. Add material on about any aspect of the outdoors and you have at least scratched the surface of my reading interests. I'm fortunate enough to read rapidly and usually have two or three books going at once. On average I'll go through four or five a week.

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Some January Recipes

SOUP BEANS AND HAM HOCK

“Soup beans” always meant navy beans in my family, but this recipe, the essence of simplicity, will work with any kind of dried beans. In fact, my personal favorites are either pintos or October beans. No matter what kind of dried bean you start with, it is highly advisable to rinse them thoroughly in a colander as your first step. Any grit or dirt left from the harvesting process should be washed away. The next step is to put the beans in a large stew pot or soup pot and cover with water. Remove any beans that float immediately to the top or appear questionable in color.

Soaking can go in one of two directions. I usually cover the beans, with a couple or three inches left in the pot clear of the beans, and let them soak overnight. Rest assured they will soak up all the water and you'll likely need to add more when you are ready to cook. Alternatively, you can bring the dry beans to a rolling boil and then back off, letting the beans set for 20-30 minutes.

Either way, once you are ready to cook, add a ham hock (or soup bone if you are lucky enough to have one left from a ham) and bring the pot to a boil before turning the heat back to a slow simmer. I like to add black pepper and a bit of red pepper at this point, although I hold off on any salt until the beans are tender and ready to serve. That's because the ham or ham hock will have considerable salt and there's nothing more distressing than getting a big pot of soup beans too salty. Cook until thoroughly done and tender, but avoid overcooking and

having the beans turn to mush. Serve with a big pone of cornbread and a fruit salad and you are every bit as well off as folks eating fancy fixin's in five-star restaurants.

CORNBREAD THE CASADA WAY

Since soup beans and cornbread go together like sausage and eggs, here's my simple recipe for cornbread. To my way of thinking, there are three keys to really good cornbread: (1) If at all possible use stone-ground meal. Most cornmeal you buy in stores has been exposed to too much heat in the grinding process and it affects the taste. I also like the texture of stone-ground meal, although you can always sift it if you want the larger bits of hull removed. (2) Use bacon grease rather than vegetable oil in preparing your batter. It may not pass the "healthiest foods" approach, but I refuse to toe the dietary line when it comes to cornbread. (3) Use buttermilk, not sweet milk. Here's a recipe that will make just the right size pone for a standard nine-inch cast-iron skillet.

1 extra large egg
 1 1/3 cups butter milk
 ¼ cup bacon drippings
 2 cups stone-ground corn meal

Mix all the ingredients in a large bowl and whisk until thoroughly blended. Preheat your oven to 400 degrees and place the pan, well-seasoned by rubbing in a bit of the bacon grease or by running a piece of streaked meat across it after the pan is hot, in it for a few minutes. Then take out and pour the batter into the pan, return to oven, and cook until golden brown.

TIPS:

- If you have access to cracklings, add a handful to the batter when you stir it up and cut back just a tad on the bacon drippings.
- For a bit more moisture and a nice texture surprise, add a third cup of frozen corn kernels (thaw them in advance) to the batter.
- When you remove the cooked pone from the oven, place a couple of pats of butter atop it and, as they melt, spread them across the crust.

BACKBONES-AND-RIBS

As I have discovered to my considerable dismay, today's butchers and grocery stores either don't have a clue what I want when I mention "backbones-and-ribs" or else simply don't process hogs that way anymore. About the best you can do is to take one of two possible routes to get the "raw material" for a pot of backbones-and-ribs. One is to buy a rack of ribs and cut them up. The second is to buy slices of pork advertised as being for the grill or barbeque. Neither will have the combination of the whole rib and the meat-laden backbone, so you'll just have to make do. I love to put two or three pounds of this type of pork in a crockpot and let it cook until the meat falls off the bones. There's more fat than is good for you, but my, oh my, is the taste fine. You can use leftovers with your favorite sauce for barbeque sandwiches, and if you are like me the best part of the whole glorious, cholesterol-laden dish is the bones. Cooked long enough they become sufficiently tender to chew and suck the marrow out. My, is it fine. Add a baked sweet potato with sugary juice oozing out of the skin and a big pone of cornbread and you have some mighty fine eating.

CHICKEN SOUP

My approach to chicken soup probably isn't acceptable in proper culinary circles, because it doesn't have any noodles or pasta. Furthermore, it often isn't chicken at all but rather the "lesser" parts of a wild turkey, which is to say all the dark meat, along with the carcass and perhaps the giblets. Cook a chicken or breasted turkey carcass in a big stock pot until so tender meat falls from or is easily pulled from the bones. Discard the bones but reserve the liquid. To the stock add chopped carrots, chunks of potato (or rice if you prefer), a couple of onions cut in quarters, a couple of stalks of celery (be sure to use the green, leafy part, because it is full of flavor) and

salt and pepper to taste. If necessary, add to the stock with chicken broth or chicken base. Cook until the vegetables are tender and then add the meat back into the pot. Simmer until all the flavors have mixed and married. Serve with Saltines, toast points, or cathead biscuits for a hearty, filling meal. Leftovers freeze nicely.

VENISON SCHNITZEL

I just finished preparing this recipe and writing it up for the Leica blog mentioned in "Jim's Doings" above, and if you think chicken-fried steak using deer backstrap or tenderloin you have the idea.

2 tenderloins or one backstrap
1 egg
¼ cup milk
Seasoned bread crumbs
Bacon grease or vegetable oil
Salt and pepper to taste

Pound the venison thin using a meat mallet or hammer (I have a dandy device from Pampered Chef which is reversible, with pounding teeth for tenderizing on one side and a flat surface on the other). You should pound it until it is about a quarter inch thick.



Use a blender or food processor to make your bread crumbs. I have found left-over portions of baguettes do particularly well, but you can use any type of bread.

Whisk your egg and milk thoroughly.

Once the meat is ready, dredge each piece in the egg-and-milk mix and then the bread crumbs, making sure to get the surface thoroughly coated. Place the prepared cutlets in a hot pan and cook, turning once, until both sides are nicely browned. You can serve the schnitzels that way or make gravy to top them. Nice accompaniments are baked or mashed potatoes and a salad.

VENISON MEATBALL STEW

Cold weather demands, at least from my tummy's perspective, hearty, stick-to-the-ribs meals. Here's a main dish that certainly fits the bill.

1 pound ground venison
½ cup soft bread crumbs
½ teaspoon dried basil
1 teaspoon dried parsley
1 egg
1 garlic clove, minced
2 tablespoons canola oil
1 can (10-ounce) French onion soup
¼ cup water
2 medium potatoes, peeled and quartered
3 medium carrots cut into one-inch chunks
½ cup celery, chopped
1 medium parsnip (or substitute a turnip) cut into one-inch chunks

Combine venison, bread crumbs, herbs, egg, and garlic in a bowl. Mix thoroughly but gently. Don't over mix. Shape into meatballs—about 20.

In a 10-inch skillet over medium heat, in hot oil, cook meatballs until browned on all sides. Drain.

Stir soup and water into skillet. Add vegetables. Heat to boiling. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Add more water if needed. Add meatballs to reheat them and then serve immediately. Four hefty servings.

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