

Jim Casada Outdoors

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November 2016 Newsletter

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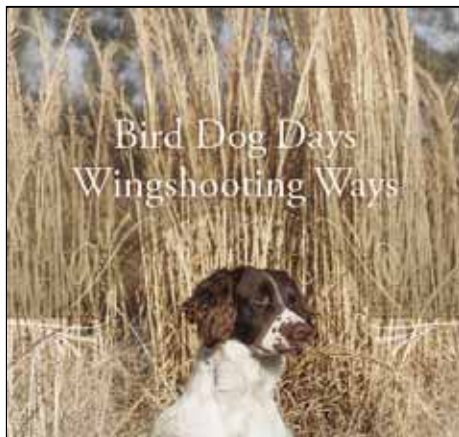
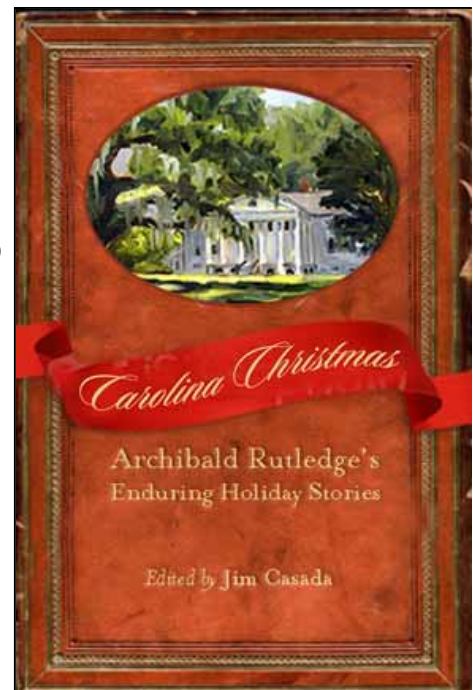
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This Month's BIG Specials - 10-15% OFF!

November is Christmas shopping season, at least for reasonably well-organized individuals, although honesty compels me to admit that I'm an absolutely rotten gift buyer. Fortunately my loving and long-suffering daughter is willing to do most of the work for me, and about the only hints of originality I show in this arena involve impulse purchases or buying some vintage item I feel will be a hit for decades to come.

For example, since I know my daughter never reads this blog, I can reveal that I've got her a dandy cast iron frying pan. It's not new and in fact has every evidence of having been used for decades. But it's well-seasoned, in good shape, and shows every indication of being suitable for turning out ponies of cornbread for many years to come.

One area where I do feel comfortable, however, when it comes to Christmas gifts is in the area of books. Properly chosen, they are a gift that keeps on giving, and rather than select two or three books the way I normally do, I'm taking a different approach.



EVERY BOOK on my [website](#) I've written or edited is available at 10% off list price, AND, if you are doing some shopping for a bunch of outdoor-related friends or maybe want to make a real impact, literary wise, with a reading sportsman, orders of \$100 or more are 15% off.

In fact, in the spirit of the season (and in realization that I need to bring some modicum of order to the huge stock of books I have), **I'll make exactly the same offer for out-of-print books on the various specialized lists I have.** To access these, just go to my website's home page, click on the books tab, and a whole bunch of lists will open up on the left. Click on any one of them to read more and see what books are listed.



PLACE YOUR ORDERS TODAY by contacting me:
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Jim's Doings

Other than attending meetings of a couple of groups in which I'm involved as a council or board member, there's not a lot on the horizon for November. I'll slip away in the afternoon two or three times a week to sit on a deer stand, enjoy the quiet of the woods, and maybe have an opportunity to deal with a whitetail. Beyond that, I'll be on the road to the Smokies on three occasions.

The first trip involves a talk to the Jackson County Genealogical Society beginning at 7:00 p.m. on the evening of November 10 in the Community Room of the courthouse wing of Jackson County Library. The event is free and open to the public, and I'd love to see any of you who live in the area. I'll be doing some talking about regional characters and using episodes from their lives as examples of mountain ways and storytelling traditions. I'll also have a selection of books I have written or edited available for sale after the talk (and remember, books make a grand Christmas gift).

Then, on Saturday, November 19, I'll join a bunch of other local authors at the Marianna Black Public Library in Bryson City for a book signing/meet-the-authors event. It is to raise funds for construction of a new public library for Swain County. Since my mother served as local librarian for a decade, given the fact that the library was founded by and bears the name of our next-door neighbor when I was a youngster, and recognizing the fact that I've been a devoted reader and book collector from an early age, the endeavor means a great deal to me. I'd love to see some of you readers there. There will be a bunch of local authors offering their books. The topics will range widely but all those present will share something in common—either they live in or have close ties to the area or else their book(s) is set in the Smokies.

At the end of the month, after enjoying Thanksgiving with my daughter and her family, I'll journey to my beloved Smokies a third time. On this occasion the reason involves joining fellow board members of the Southern Forest Watch, a non-profit organization with a keen interest in trying to do what is best for the high country, for a **meeting with the new superintendent of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Cassius Cash.** We hope to bring to his attention a number of areas of concern in the Park such as questionable matters connected with concessionaires, maintenance (and abandonment of some) backcountry trails, infringement on Park property by some high-placed Tennessee bigwigs, and more. I have no idea what will unfold, since a similar meeting with Cash's predecessor, Dale Ditmanson, was a singular exercise in frustration. However, I've always been one to feel that talking things over with a goal of finding some common ground is a good thing, and that's what is at work here.

On the writing front, I continue to plug along on various projects, write columns for the two newspapers for which I provide outdoor material, and put together magazine articles. The last month or so has seen several of my efforts come to printed fruition. The current (Nov./Dec.) issue of *South Carolina Wildlife* has an article of mine entitled "Dreaming of Duxbak Days." It's a longing look back to boyhood and a time when Duxbak attire ruled the roost in the world of clothing for sportsmen. The piece leads with a grainy photo, dating back to the late 1950s, of a bunch of boyhood buddies and me, along with a pack of beagles, ready to set out on a rabbit hunt. I've written for *South Carolina Wildlife* virtually from the time I became a sporting scribe, and over the years the magazine has produced dozens of my stories. It's a quality publication in every sense, and they always manage, thanks to careful editing and especially fine photographic support and design, to make me look good. A number of pieces I've contributed to the magazine have won awards. Along with my article, there's also an

excerpt from one of my most recent books, the Archibald Rutledge anthology I edited with the title *Bird Dog Days; Wingshooting Ways*. Incidentally, really nice review coverage of the book has appeared in three newspapers, *News & Observer* (Raleigh, NC), *Observer* (Charlotte, NC), and *Herald* (Rock Hill, SC) in recent weeks. Also, there was a lengthy review essay on the book in the Autumn issue of *Charleston Mercury Magazine*.

Elsewhere, in the Fall issue of *Carolina Mountain Life*, you'll find a story I did on "Autumn Walks to Waterfalls" and the column I'm contributing to each edition on "Mountain Wisdom and Ways." This column deals with "The Bounty of Black Walnuts" and includes recipes for Black Walnut Pound Cake and a cream frosting to top it. The autumn issue of another quarterly publication, *Charleston Mercury Magazine*, includes my "Whitetail Wisdom from Old Flintlock." "Old Flintlock" was the nickname given to Archibald Rutledge by his sons and close hunting friends.

Right now I'm working on a turkey-related article for *Outdoor Life*, and I recently sent to *Turkey Country* the manuscript of one dealing with "little things" in turkey hunting that can make a big difference. Other than that, most of my energies are focused on completing my book, "Profiles in Mountain Character." I'm behind, as seems ever to be the case these days, but I'm plodding manfully (and hopefully meaningfully) along.

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November as I Have Known and Loved It

In those idyllic, long ago days of yester-youth, November meant three things I treasured then and have come to value even more in the intervening decades. Let's look back with them in longing fashion, and any of you who read this and experienced some of the same doings in November likely have similarly warm memories of those days in a world we seem to be losing to a greater degree with each passing year. Maybe it's just my advancing years talking, but I truly believe I can make a solid, even staunch case for those times of no television, not to mention all those pestilential gadgets (iPhones, various kinds of "berries" although I'd like to condemn them all to dingleberry status, phone cameras, selfie sticks, and the like) being better times. I'm appalled at the way gadgets seem to have become an extension of many people's bodies, and it is absolutely ridiculous the way folks feel compelled to text everything from their most recent meal to bouts of constipation. Thank you, but I'm just as happy not knowing, and I'm even happier when someone in my company can look me in the eye and carry on a conversation rather than being transfixed by a hand-held device. I better get back to the past before thoughts on the present raise my blood pressure.

The first really significant annual development in November was hog-killing time. The first Saturday when a heavy frost was in the offing (Grandpa could tell it was coming with a degree of accuracy that today's weather prognosticators would envy) would be the day. It was an "all hands" operation, running from first light to night, and involving the killing and butchering of a whole bunch of pigs that had been fattening on Hickory King corn, table scraps, pumpkins, red-rooted pigweed, and other delicacies for a couple of months.

It was a messy business from the start. Grandpa Joe would separate the hogs one at a time and shoot them. He insisted that each succeeding victim be out of sight of the others pigs in the sty, saying that otherwise the meat would be tainted as panic set in among the sounder. That may or may not have been the case, but when it came to matters of folk wisdom and traditional ways only a fool would have argued with this tough old man.

After a shot to the head (if this bothers you, all I can suggest is that you need to pause and ponder the cycle of life a bit—pork chops don't just magically appear, all wrapped up in a package, on grocery shelves) a whole chain of events kicked into action. The hog was gutted with the entrails being carefully set aside for cleaning and use in everything from liver mush and head cheese, the fat was cut away and dumped into a big black cauldron already heating over an open wood fire, the hide was boiled and scraped, the hams cut away and set aside for curing, and the various cuts of meat butchered to proper size. There was sausage to be made, lard to be rendered, canning jars to be readied for storing much of the meat after it was cooked, and more. At some point Grandma

Minnie would find time to fry up some tenderloin, bake cathead biscuits, make sawmill gravy, and set out a dinner spread for a bunch of hungry folks.

This went on until every hog had been slaughtered and worked up, and the follow-up work might continue for a day or two more. Of course curing of hams and bacon was something that went on for weeks to come. Pork was the main meat of mountain folks in those days, and no household felt fully prepared for winter until they had a bunch of sausage canned (this was done by pouring lard over cooked cakes of sausage), hams and bacon hanging in the smokehouse, cracklin's ready for giving a pone of cornbread a taste and texture that was indescribably delicious, and lard aplenty available for a season of cooking that would continue for a full year and arrival of another hog-killing time. It was bloody, smelling, arduous work, and I loved every minute of it.

The second joyous development connected with November involved the opening of rabbit (and quail) season. We raised beagles throughout my boyhood, and the same was true of Daddy's hunting and fishing buddy, Claude Gossett. As a result we always had a fine pack of dogs to take to the cottontail trail. Rabbits were plentiful then, far more so than is the case today, and on most outings there would be close to non-stop action from the time the dogs were first turned out and, after taking care of business and shaking off the stiffness of a vehicle ride, got down to doing what they loved.

Memories of some of our favorite dogs—Chip and Dale, Lead and Lady, Drum and Tiny—still course through my mind. Indeed, I feel confident that if it was somehow possible to hear Chip's voice when he first roused a rabbit from a brush pile, that I would still recognize it today. Unlike many beagles, he was a first-rate "jump" dog, and the excitement in his voice when he first got a strong whiff of rabbit scent as he examined a brush pile (he never passed one by) was a joy to hear.

On most outings we'd kill a dozen or more rabbits, and occasionally upwards of twenty, and chances were pretty good there would be a few quail, a bushytail or two, and maybe a brace of grouse in the overall bag as well. Just as the dogs had been in training for opening day since late summer, so did I await that glad morning with unbridled eagerness. Squirrel hunting was dandy, and it filled many an after-school hour and fall weekend with delight, but by Thanksgiving week, which was when rabbit and bird season came in, I was ready for something else. What squirrels there were within walking distance of the house that hadn't been killed were wild and wary as a fox, and besides that, it was high time for some hound music.

The grand finale to November came, as anyone familiar with my love of food would readily figure, with Thanksgiving. In our family it was a big day from a gustatory perspective; indeed, bigger than Christmas if that was possible. Throughout my childhood the day of thanks and feasting was celebrated at the home of Grandpa Joe and Grandma Minnie, although all the women in the family contributed foodstuffs in a major way. Mom would have been busy for several days prior to the actual meal preparing some of her specialties that could be done well in advance. Among them were chestnut dressing, a cranberry relish that featured fresh cranberries (not my favorite but most folks loved it), pumpkin chiffon pie, and a couple of vegetable dishes. Grandma Minnie would handle the bread end of things, and she could make biscuits and biscuit bread so fluffy and toothsome they almost floated from the plate to your mouth unless you took precautions to hold them down with a good ladling of gravy or maybe a drenching of molasses. She also provided pickles, preserves, and relishes of all sorts along with an apple stack cake. My Aunt Emma, Daddy's youngest sister, could be counted on for a butterbean casserole with slices of pimienta in it, ambrosia, and orange slice cake, among other things. Aunt Hildred, the spouse of my bird-hunting Uncle Hall, specialized in pickled okra, corn casserole, and cookies.

All the womenfolks (and I don't use that word offensively but rather as a term of deep respect, because they were the "making" of Thanksgiving as I knew it) would pitch in on last-minute duties, although I know Grandma handled the giblet gravy, with the others readily acknowledging she did it better than any of them. I don't recall who baked the turkey although I guess Grandma Minnie cooked it and one of her children bought the bird. Sometimes we didn't have turkey but instead three or four baked hens that paid the supreme price for having become neglectful in their egg-laying duties. I actually preferred baked chicken because sometimes I got lucky enough to get the little row of eggs to be found inside the hens. There would likely be pork as well, maybe slices of cured ham so thick you could see light through them, or backbones-and-ribs if hog-killing time had been recent enough.

There were, of course, lots of vegetable dishes—scalloped potatoes, squash casserole, sweet potatoes prepared with pecans and brown sugar, one of two kinds of dried beans, maybe a candy roaster or kushaws that had been worked up and turned into a sauce-like dish with the addition of butter and brown sugar, applesauce or stewed apples with tiny cinnamon candies added, greens with little tidbits of turnips in them along with a chunk or two of streaked meat, corn, and much more.

It was also the time of year when Mom got down to the serious business of making applesauce cakes. She usually baked them, maybe as many as a half dozen, sometime during Thanksgiving week. One would likely be consumed at that time, but most were set aside in a cool room or out on the back porch (covered with tinfoil which would be lifted every few days for periodic application of apple slices or a dollop or two of wine). By Christmas all those flavors and that moisture had married with the key ingredients of the cakes (applesauce, black walnuts, and raisins) to produce a dessert that I have to reckon as tasty as anything I've ever eaten.

One of the special things about Thanksgiving feasts is that there would be enough leftovers to last the rest of the week. Given the fact that Friday and Saturday always meant all-day rabbit hunts and being famished at day's end, that was of considerable importance to a greedy-gut boy. In fact, I've got myself halfway worked up to drooling just thinking about how much I enjoyed taking a big helping of leftover chestnut dressing, covering it with gravy and slices of chicken or turkey, and warming the plate up in the oven (microwaves were still a distant dream). With a big glass of milk and a bowl of applesauce, and maybe a bowl of pinto beans as well, I would stuff myself to repletion. Well, almost to repletion. No matter how much I ate there was always room for a piece of Mom's pumpkin pie.

All those memories belong to a world I have largely lost. Come Thanksgiving, I'll enjoy a great meal with my daughter and her family, and without any question it will be more than ample and more than delicious. Still, I'll miss those family gatherings of long ago, with a great crunch of aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and of course my own family, all sharing laughter, tales, good spirits, and wonderful food. Looking back on those times and those family members, I know that I had a lot to be thankful for then and I'm grateful beyond mode of expression for what they gave me not only in the form of memories but, to use the simple yet expressive mountain term, in terms of "raisin'."

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Recipes

CHESTNUT DRESSING

I'm not going to offer a recipe for dressing, as such, but here are some secrets to turn to ordinary into something special. If you have Chinese chestnut meats, by all means use them in the dressing mix. They are a pain to work up (have to be boiled, peeled, and chopped in advance) but my do they add something. If you want to take an easy way out, use pecans instead. Beyond that, good dressing starts with good cornbread. Just take my recipe for cornbread which I've shared her in the past. The key considerations are slow-ground cornmeal and use of buttermilk. Use plenty of chicken broth to keep your dressing moist, and don't overcook it, thereby rendering it too dry. I like lots of chopped celery, onion, and black pepper in my dressing, but since I'm not a fan of sage I leave it out.

CROCKPOT VENISON CHILI

- 2 pounds ground (or chopped) venison
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
- 2 ribs celery, chopped
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 16-ounce cans kidney beans, rinsed and drained

2 16-ounce cans tomatoes
 1 ½ tablespoons sugar
 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
 1 package chili seasoning (or 2 tablespoons chili powder). Uncle Buck's Chili Seasoning is a good choice.
 1-3 cups water
 Salt and pepper to taste

Brown venison, onion, mushrooms, garlic, and celery in oil. Place in crockpot and add all other ingredients. Mix well and cook on medium for 6 to 8 hours. This is a great deer camp recipe because it is quickly put together and the crockpot then works its magic.

SIMPLE SHEPHERD'S PIE

1 tablespoon olive oil
 ½-¾ pound ground venison
 1 package Knorr Hunter Mushroom and Gravy Mix
 ¼ teaspoon black pepper
 1 cup water
 1 package (10-ounce) frozen peas, thawed
 ½ cup carrots (frozen or canned), cooked
 ½ cup canned pearl onions, drained
 1 20-ounce package prepared mashed potatoes (such as Simply Potatoes)
 ½ cup Romano cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large, non-stick skillet cook ground venison until it is no longer pink. Add the gravy mix, black pepper and 1 cup water. Stir constantly until the sauce comes to a boil and then cook for 1 minute. Spray a deep-dish pie plate or 9-inch square baking dish with vegetable cooking spray. Spoon in the meat. Top with peas, carrots, and onions. Spread mashed potatoes evening over vegetables. Sprinkle with cheese. Bake 20-25 minutes or until heated through and the top is golden brown.

APPLE AND VENISON QUICHE

I've always been an enthusiast for unusual dishes, and this one combines two of my favorite foods—apples and venison.

½ pound venison sausage
 ½ cup chopped onion
 1/8 teaspoon thyme
 1 ½ cups apples, cut into small cubes
 1 tablespoon lemon juice
 1 tablespoon brown sugar
 1/3 cup dried cherries
 ½ cup grated cheese
 3 eggs
 2 cups half-and-half or light cream
 1 pie shell

Cook sausage, onion and thyme until sausage is browned. Drain if necessary. In a bowl, toss apples with lemon juice and sugar. Add sausage mixture, cherries, cheese, eggs, and cream. Mix well. Bake in a large pie shell at 350 degrees for an hour or until the center is set and does not shake.

NORTHERN BEAN AND VENISON SOUP

2 tablespoons olive oil
 ½ cup chopped onion

1 cup chopped carrots
 2 garlic cloves, minced
 ½ pound venison kielbasa, cut into chunks
 3 cups chicken broth
 ½ teaspoon dried Italian seasoning
 ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 1 16-ounce can Great Northern Beans, drained and rinsed
 4 ounces fresh baby spinach or ¼ package frozen spinach
 Grated Romano cheese

Heat olive oil in a large sauce pan over medium-high heat. Add onion, carrots, garlic and kielbasa and sauté for 5 minutes. Add broth, Italian seasoning, pepper and beans. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until carrots are tender (about 5 minutes). Add spinach, stirring until spinach wilts. Top with Romano cheese.

VENISON AND CHERRY STEW

Venison marries nicely with any fruit that has a hint of tartness, and sour cherries are right at the top of the list in this regard. Here's a delightfully different way to prepare venison that is hearty and delicious.

1 pound venison stew meat
 1 cup dry white wine
 3 tablespoons olive oil
 ½ medium onion, sliced
 ½ teaspoon dried thyme
 1 bay leaf
 2 slices bacon, diced
 ½ medium onion, chopped (yes, you use both sliced and chopped onion)
 1 garlic clove, minced
 1 14-ounce can beef broth
 1 can tart pie cherries in water
 1/8 teaspoon rosemary
 1 bay leaf (again, instructions will make it clear why you are "repeating" on the bay leaf)
 1/8 teaspoon thyme
 Freshly ground black pepper to taste
 Salt to taste

Combine wine, oil, onion, thyme, and bay leaf in a re-sealable plastic bag. Add venison cubes and marinate for 24 hours in the refrigerator. Drain venison well and remove onion. Pat the meat dry and discard the marinade.

Fry the bacon in a Dutch oven over moderate heat until almost crisp; remove with a slotted spoon. Add chopped onion to bacon drippings and cook until tender. Remove from pan with slotted spoon. Add some additional oil if there is not enough bacon grease to brown the venison. Dredge the venison in flour, shaking off excess, and add venison to oven and brown on all sides. Add garlic and cook for a minute. Add beef broth, juice drained from cherries, rosemary, thyme, bay leaf, black pepper, and salt. Bring to a boil and then reduce heat, cover, and simmer until venison is tender (about 2 hours). Remove lid during last 30 minutes to thicken stew. If needed, add slurry of water and flour to thicken. Add cherries during final 15 minutes of cooking.

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