

Jim Casada Outdoors

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April 2017 Newsletter

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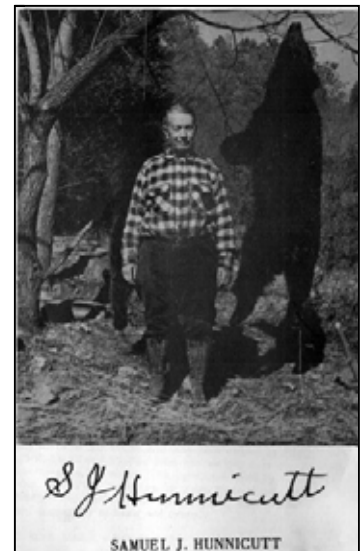
Jim's Doings

On the publication front, I have several articles which have appeared in recent weeks. These include a profile of Beulah Sudderth, "With Beulah by Our Side," in the April/May issue of *Smoky Mountain Living* (pages 26-27). Beulah was a beloved black neighbor of ours when I was a boy and a community treasure for all her years. It is the latest in a series of ongoing profiles of mountain characters I'm doing for the publication. The next issue will carry coverage of Britt McCracken, the funniest man I ever knew. I have a feature, "Decoration Day Doin's" (pages 52-53) and a column, "Mountain Wisdom and Ways: Spring Traditions from Yesteryear" (pages 120-21) in the Spring issue of *Carolina Mountain Life*. In the May/June issue of *Sporting Classics* you'll find "a High Old Time at Highland Hills," on pages 184-89. It's an account of a grand bird hunting trip I made to this Oregon lodge last September.

Just prior to this reaching your computer I'll be attending the Hunnicutt family reunion in Bryson City, where I hope to hear and share

This Month's Book Special

After I was grown and off on my own, for a decade my mother served as librarian in the little public library serving our town. One thing she often bemoaned was the fact that an extremely rare book in the library's collection, **Sam Hunnicutt's *Hunting and Fishing in the Great Smokies***, had disappeared at some point before she became librarian. As she realized, it should never have been available for circulation. Eventually I obtained a copy of the item, and to me it was a treasure thanks to the fact that the dozens of little tales it contained all took place in environs I knew intimately.

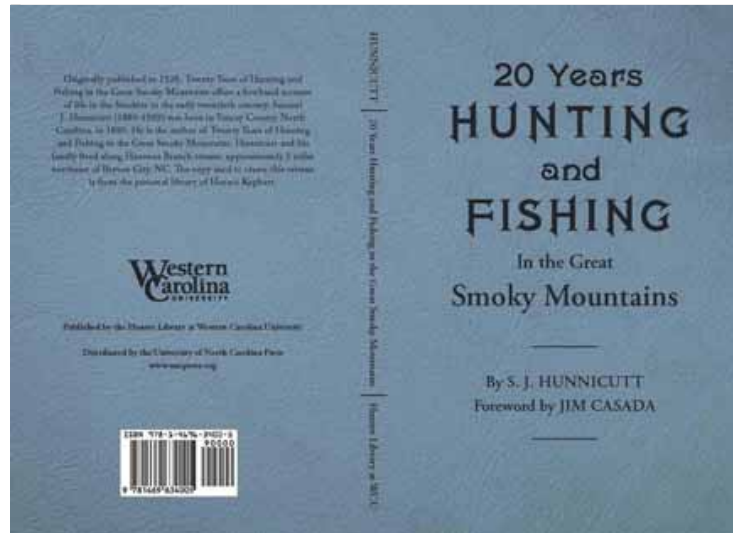


Old Sam was barely literate, but his storytelling rang with authenticity, and when he said "I claim to be the perfect hunter and fisherman," he really wasn't bragging. He was simply stating the facts. Often in company with his boon companion, Mark Cathey, the most famous of all Appalachian fly fishermen, Hunnicutt caught trout, ventured into places seldom seen by man, hunted bears, called turkeys with his natural voice, and lived a life most of us have to envy.

Recently his book, which in either the 1926 edition or the revised 1951 version fetched prices in excess of \$1000 on the out-of-print market, has been reprinted by Western Carolina University, in cooperation with UNC Press, as the first volume in a planned series bringing back to ready availability rare works on the region from their special collections.

I was privileged to write a detailed Foreword for the reprint, and it is now available. You can order a signed, inscribed copy from me for \$23.50 (includes shipping) via [PayPal](#) or by check (to Jim Casada, 1250 Yorkdale Drive, Rock Hill, SC 29730).

tales of this grand old man of the Smokies. There will also be some moving moments connected with the gathering as family place three grave markers on the final resting spots of an infant daughter of Sam and his wife along with at the graves of his father and a brother. Then, on May 4, I'll be speaking to the Swain County Genealogical and Historical Society on Hunnicutt's life. The event is free and open to the public. It takes place at 6:30 p.m. (Swain County Regional Business Education and Training Center, 45 East Ridge Drive, Bryson City, NC 28713).



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April As I Have Known It

A noted English writer, I believe it was T. S. Eliot but I wouldn't bet the farm on it and I'm too trifling to take time out to look it up, once stated that "April is the cruelest month." In some ways I reckon he might be right, because a late frost that kills your fruit crop or blackens those tomato plants you foolishly put in the ground too early can be might cruel. Similarly, getting your butt kicked by turkey gobblers on a consistent basis or, worse still, not hearing any gobbling, is mighty cruel. Of course the English don't have wild turkeys so he didn't have that in mind. Then there are destructive spring storms, frog strangler rains, the plague of canker worms which bid fair on the local scene to rival the locust plagues of the Bible, and more.

Still, giving all those producers of April angst, I have to differ on the matter of April being cruel. After all, it sees trout once more feeding on the surface in southern Appalachian streams, turkeys in love and hunters entranced, earth's rebirth and greening up after grim and grey months, morel mushrooms popping to the surface, ramps adorning high country hillsides and promising a gustatory treat only the rare and privileged few get to eat, gardens coming alive with early vegetables, blackberry winter coming and going and as it does so reminding us of luscious treats a couple of months down the road, added pep in an old man's step as he celebrates the passage of yet another winter, and the joy of walking about while birds sing and temperatures have not yet risen to uncomfortable levels.

Almost a decade ago (in the April, 2008 newsletter) I wrote that the main problem with the month, borrowing words from my Grandpa Joe, is "there just ain't enough of it." Grandpa absolutely loved April. Of course he held strong opinions about other months as well, such as suggesting that February was a month of misery and even at 28 days was still too long. But with the arrival of earth's greening-up time and the promise of May's balmy days, he was full of energy and maybe even fuller of himself. He lived closed to the good earth and spring put a bit of extra pep in his step.

Since I'm now roughly the age he was when we were such boon companions, I can appreciate his perspective in full fashion. I'm not sure about the extra pep in my step (aching hip and knee joints argue otherwise at times, and through those joints offering what Grandpa called "the miseries" I've become a passing fair weather forecaster), but there's no arguing about the way in which April uplifts



one's spirits. Mind you, unless something different happens in the next week, I'm going to go through the first turkey season in the better part of four decades turkeyless. That's in part because I haven't hunted as much, thanks to my wife's condition and a growing reluctance to do much travel, but it's also because our turkey numbers on the local scene are down dramatically. Still, I can look out on a flourishing garden, joy in the fact that my blueberries will have a good crop despite a late cold snap, watch the umpteenth generation of bluebirds raising young in a birdhouse my Dad made many years ago, and appreciate, as Grandpa did, the miracle of earth's rebirth.



I'm late with this month's newsletter, and I'm not as longwinded as is the norm. Put it down to a spate of house and garden work, a number of writing assignments and related work coming due in a short period, and the fact, much as I hate to admit it, that I somehow don't seem to have the boundless energy which once possessed me. Mind you, there's nothing wrong with my work ethic, but increasingly I realize the wisdom inherent in what Grandpa Joe would variously describe as "sittin' a spell" or "wandering and pondering." In other words, doing nothing but doing it creatively. Maybe that's why I believe some of my best thinking, and some of my finest story concepts, come while I'm holding the business end of a hoe handle or just walking about in the woods with no particular destination or duty in mind.

Enjoy April as I do, and here's a promise that I'll try to be a bit earlier with May's newsletter.

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SPRING'S BOUNTY ON THE TABLE

WILD STRAWBERRY TRIFLE

Izaak Walton, somewhere in his writings, quotes a Dr. Boteler on the deliciousness of strawberries: "Doubtless God could have made a better berry, but doubtless God never did." This is the month to note wild strawberries in bloom, and next month brings them to ripeness over much of the country. They are far better than their tame brethren, but if you don't have access to the red jewels in the wild, substitute their domestic cousins in this recipe.



- 1 yellow cake mix, baked according to directions
- 1 quart wild strawberries (cooked slightly with sugar and a dash or two of Grand Marnier if desired)
- 3 large vanilla pudding mixes (enough for 6 cups of milk) mixed according to directions
- 2 large containers whipped topping (24 ounces total)

Cover bottom of large bowl or trifle dish with a layer of crumbled cake. Place a layer of strawberries over cake, followed by a layer of pudding and a layer of whipped topping. Repeat layers twice, ending with whipped topping and reserved fresh berries.

WILD STRAWBERRY SPINACH SALAD

- 4 cups washed and torn spinach
- 1 cup hulled and washed wild strawberries (you can substitute tame ones)

1 kiwi, peeled and sliced (optional)
2/3 cup chopped macadamia nuts

Combine and set aside, then prepare dressing using 2 tablespoons strawberry jam, 2 tablespoons cider vinegar, and 1/3 cup oil. Blend jam and vinegar then add oil gradually as you continue to process. Use this to dress the salad.

TURKEY TENDERS

1 egg
1 tablespoon water
1 pound wild turkey breast, cut into strips (cut across the grain)
1 cup all-purpose flour
½ cup canola oil
Salt and black pepper to taste

Beat egg with water. Dredge turkey strips in flour, dip in egg mixture, and then dredge again in flour. Fry in canola oil in a cast iron skillet until brown and tender. Serve immediately.

If the turkey is not tender (and an old gobbler likely won't be), pound with a meat hammer before frying or else cover and steam a few minutes after you have browned the strips. They will not be as crisp with the latter approach.

MATCHLESS MORELS

Although they were not as plentiful as is sometimes the case, I once again was blessed this month by a fine harvest of morels on my little "farm" (it isn't a farm at all, just 90-odd acres of woodland interspersed with regrowth from where pines were cut 20 years or so ago, but everyone locally calls such retreats farms). There may be finer fare from the wild, but when it comes to nature's bounty morels have to rank well towards the top. They have a delicate taste that doesn't go well with more powerful things such as bacon grease, but here's my favorite way to savor morels. Clean the mushrooms thoroughly and cut larger ones in half (or for really big ones, in quarters). Dap dry with paper towels then dredge each piece through egg batter (beaten eggs), covering it thoroughly. Next coat with a crumb mix made by mashing up Saltine crackers (you can also give them a quick whir in a blender or food processor). Fry the battered and coated morels in butter (the real thing) until golden brown and eat while piping hot.

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