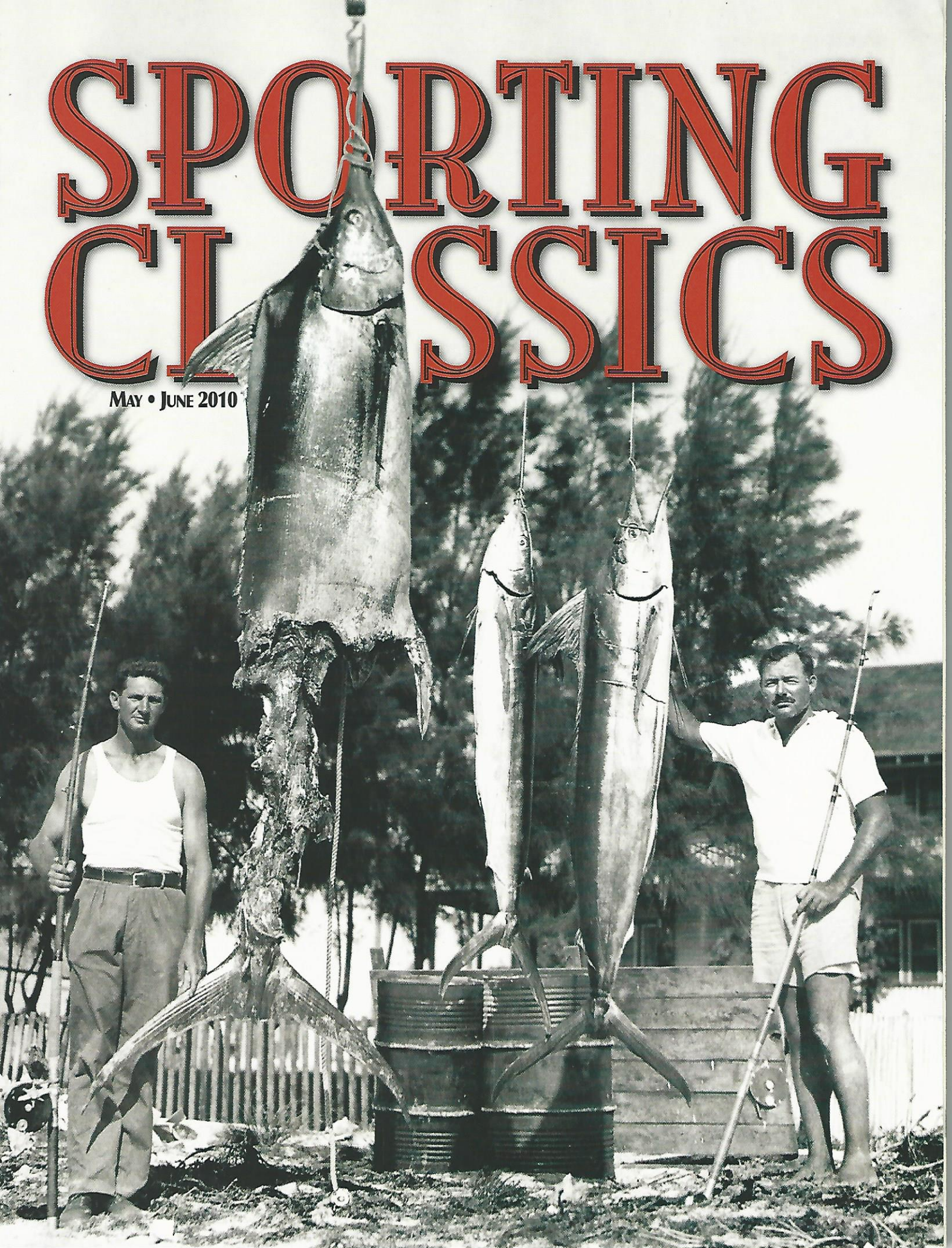


SPORTING CLASSICS

MAY • JUNE 2010





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By John Ross

Were I to choose the best month to fish the Great Smokies, it would be May.

Rainbows abound in the larger, lower-elevation streams – Little River, Little Pigeon, Abrams Creek – on the Tennessee side. Crossing the main ridge into North Carolina opens up Cataloochee on the park's northeast end, Oconoluftee above Cherokee, and that quintet of marvelous rivers southwest of Bryson City – Eagle, Hazel, Forney, Noland and Deep creeks. Only the latter two are reachable by road. You'll need a boat or shank's mare to get into the other three.

A stout pair of rubber-soled fishing boots will carry you into the headwaters where park fisheries biologist Steve Moore, his park colleagues and volunteers from Trout Unlimited have waged an extremely successful campaign to restore southern Appalachian-strain brook trout.

Ever rapacious, these little trout will hit virtually any well-presented #16 or #18 dry fly, but a parachute Adams is hard to beat. If you're fishing floaters, a 7½-foot 3-weight, fiberglass or cane if you can lay your hands on one, is perfect. Nymphers will do better with a 9-foot stiffish 4-weight. The extra length enables you to dead-drift weighted Hare's Ears, Pheasant Tails or Tellico nymphs through deeper pocket pools where larger brookies may lie.

It's for wildflowers as much as wild fish that I love the Smokies this time of year. Summer comes to the

In late spring, fly fishing the picturesque trout streams of the Great Smoky Mountains can be simply sublime.



Guide Dusty Young (left) and Activities Manager Thomas Krajewski relax on the porch of Blackberry Farm's cabin along Hesse Creek. Opposite: Krajewski watches Young work a riffle on the spring-fed creek.

mountains from the bottom up. Along the lower reaches, you might still see crested dwarf iris, lady's-slippers and trillium, but you're more apt to encounter them as you fish your way up to the headwaters. Brightening the banks of high and tiny tributaries are patches of bluets, their petals echoing the blue halo surrounding the red dots on a brookie's flank.

Fishing the Smokies in late spring is simply sublime. Generally speaking, though, accommodations are not. No matter where you choose to park your Dopp kit, ice your libation and prepare for a night's rest, you'll likely to encounter standard

motel fare. The only difference is whether a room is appointed with a coffeemaker and wireless Internet access. Boring, but you didn't come to the mountains for the lodging.

If stellar accommodations and cuisine are high on your Great Smokies must-do list, there's one place where you will not, and I mean not, be disappointed. Located near the Townsend entrance to the park rambles 4,200-acre Blackberry Farm, one of the best small hotels in the world. You'll find it in all top-tier travel guides: *Relais & Chateaux*, *Zagat* and *Travel & Leisure*. For two years running Blackberry Farm was the Orvis' endorsed fishing lodge of the year.

When I say Blackberry Farm rambles, that's what I mean. The two-story white-frame main lodge rides the crest of a ridge overlooking ponds for bass and trout. Down the hill, cabins are sprayed through the woods, arranged so that each seems nestled by itself. Across Miller Cove Road and up near the new restaurant stands a restored farmhouse outfitted for families or groups. Rooms are spacious and private, and for the most part there's nothing faux about the antiques that convey a rustic and relaxing charm to the place.

Cuisine is eclectic. It blends berries and fruits, herbs, heritage tomatoes, beans and okra raised on the farm with meats and dairy from its livestock into meals that, on one hand, reflect mountain self-sufficiency, and on the other, would complement the menu of a five-star restaurant. And surely in Blackberry's



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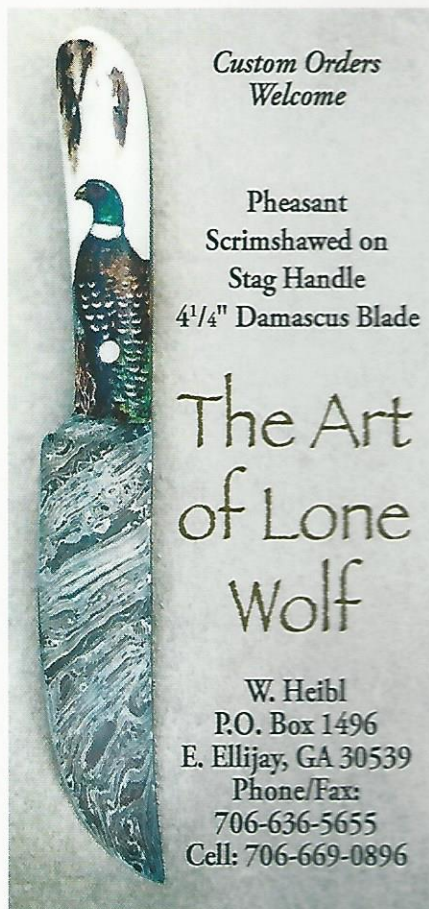
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The flanks of the cove that enfold Blackberry Farm meet at Hesse Creek. Freestone and fed by springs, a mile of the creek has been groomed to present anglers with challenging but not impossible trout fishing. Stone structures shape the currents, which in turn create pools and runs favored by stocked rainbows of 12 to 20 inches.

Bank-fishing isn't easy; the canopy of hardwoods that shades the creek demands tight loops and accurate roll-casts. Only eight rods are allowed on the stream per-day and waders are required (hippers won't quite do). Guides are there to help those who wish it. A nearby pond, the site of Blackberry's fishing school, is available for practice. Guided excursions to park streams and the Clinch River tailwater can be arranged.

Should you be headed to the Smokies this spring, time your trip for May 14 and 15 to coincide with Troutfest, the annual fly-fishing exposition in Townsend, Tennessee, sponsored by the Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited. This year's headliners include Lefty Kreh, Joe Humphreys and a bevy or other angling notables. Arrayed in the main tent will be the latest in gear and tackle, and strains of bluegrass and scents of barbeque will fill the air. Proceeds support restoration of brook trout in the park and scholarships for budding conservationists.

Check out Troutfest.org for more information on the exposition, and Blackberryfarm.com for rates, packages and special events. 🐟

NEW FLY FISHING BOOKS

Two excellent fly fishing books are now available from *Sporting Classics*. *The Last Best Day, A Trout Fisher's Perspective* by Mike Altizer; deluxe signed and numbered edition, \$75; hardcover trade edition, \$40. *Fly Fishing in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, An Insider's Guide to a Pursuit of Passion* by Jim Casada; paperback, \$25; hardbound, \$38.

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