

It Still Lives. Season 2 Episode 11: Transcripts

Taylor Crockett, 1970

TC: You asked me, if we get anything out of the woods to eat. Well, some of the people that were, that didn't raise so much, maybe enough stock, and were real close to the end of the woods, did depend on the woods quite a bit for what they ate. They would catch nearly any kind of game they could, such as groundhog, coon, and dry 'em--smoke 'em--dry 'em. And it'd keep pretty well through the winter that way. 'Course, while there were still deer and bear, they depended on that; for limited, smaller game, they used smaller game on towards when the other'un got scarce, or scarcer. When they went back to the mountains to look at their hogs, 'course there'll be field turkeys, squirrels, coons--for the sport of it, as well as food value. Although I think one occasion when we were on a trip to feed our hogs in cold weather, when the snow was on the ground, the food got a little scarce, why to keep the hogs doin' well, to keep 'em from starvin', keep 'em kinda gentle, we'd take a little feed out there and hunt 'em up. We were on a trip like this one time, and found a bunch of old sows and shokes (?) and an enormous big, wild boar with 'em. Well we didn't want him with 'em 'cause we was afraid he'd feed them young hogs off and make 'em wild too. So we had to get rid of him.

We'd like to, if we could, have some fun out of it, so we went back and got two or three of our catch dogs, 'cause the dog we had with us that day was just a little dog, he was just to hunt for the hog and to bay the tame hogs. When we found the wild hog, we had to get a little rougher dogs, so this feller with me, he had one that was pretty rough and I had one too, and we went and got them and came back and the dogs took the track. And pretty soon we heard it bay. Feller's with me said that's bound to be the big hog, Old John wouldn't bay, wouldn't bark if it wasn't. He'd just catch him. We lit out runnin', we caught up to where you could hear the dogs barkin', and sure enough, they had the big boar bayed. He weighed about 350, 400 pounds and had great big bristles. Wicked lookin' fella. He's standing there, chomping his teeth--popping his teeth--and Old John, he caught him alright, but he cut Old John. He's standin' there with a big gash in his side. And we didn't have a gun; we generally didn't--we just depended on catchin' one and tyin' him with a rope. We'd take him in, and keep him a while, you know, maybe use him.

But this 'un was just a little too much of a customer for that. So we stated about what do we do. He took off again--this feller had a short club, sort of like a baseball bat, just here before we'd gotten there, the hog we'd got after pretty easy. And he made to brag that he could catch--he and Old John and that club could handle any hog there was. He had his club, so we lit out. We got over there and the hog had gone back under a little rock cliff, just a little narrow trail leadin' to him. And the old dog was standin' in that trail at the mouth of kind of a semi-cave, barkin'. And the young dog got in his mind to go 'round below and was peepin' over through some bushes, barkin'. And I thought, well now, that dog has got sense. I'll do the same thing, if I got right where that hog run off. So I climbed over and peeked in, and I noticed my buddy, he was standin' right in the mouth--right in the bend of the trail. And I said, "You better watch that hog will get after you." 'Bout that time, I said, "Here he comes!" And he ran out, and then my friend,

he didn't have anywhere to go. He's standin' there on that little side of the rock cliff and he just went runnin' straight up and down in place. He wasn't a'goin' anywhere, he was just goin' through the motion. Then he forgot about his club, and the big hog passed him and just made a pass at 'em. Big ol' tooth hooked into his overall bib and just took the whole--cut his overalls in two. I asked him why he didn't use his club, he said he forgot about it. The last we saw of that hog, it was jumping a big tree, with his big ol' tale standin' out behind him. So we just gave him up for that day. We counted that as fun as well as kind of taking care of our hogs.

FF: When a pioneer family would come into an area, and they couldn't bring but just, you know, a few things, if they had to bring just one thing, it was really important, that they'd have to have, maybe, what would be that thing? Most important thing they could have?

TC: Well, of course the most important thing, first, was their rifle. The next was their axe. And the next was something to cook in. That was the three main items that they considered essential. That pot, or a skillet, the axe and the rifle.

FF: Do you think, you know, when people came into an area or somethin' that, do you think that nature was a good provider for people if they knew how to take advantage of it? I mean, you know, like if somebody came in and they didn't have much and they had to live off the woods for a while?

TC: Well, of course, that's one of the things they were looking for, is a spot where nature did look like it was a good provider. Or there's evidence of a lot of game and the timber was big, which would indicate that the ground was rich and would grow good crops. So yes, I would say that nature was a good provider for those that were willing to work, and understood how to cash in on it.

Minyard Conner, 1970

FF: Minyard, tell us what kind of dogs and what kind of places you hunt bear and stuff at.

MC: Well, most of the time, Plott dogs.

FF: What kind of places do you hunt?

MC: Well, where there's apples, berries, or huckleberries is awful good.

FF: What time of day do you go?

MC: Any time you take a notion.

FF: Well, what do you do when the dogs get after one, do you go to another place, or do you try to follow the dogs or what?

MC: Well, no, you have to get 'em up like you's--for instance, say you were goin' up Darnell's creek. Get a bear up there, somebody'd have to get out on top. Turn his dog loose up there, put the dogs at it, and then somebody up above on each side, they hear the dogs a'comin', cut him off. Shoot 'em.

Way back yonder on this small, small ?, I had an old hog rifle, you know, muzzle-loader. And it just had one load, then he'd have to reload it. Laid my gun up on the shore, started up in the mountains and started getting further and further back. And wanted to kill somethin' for dinner, or Thanksgiving turkey or somethin'. And I seen some turkey sign, I kept pullin' around there and directly I scared 'em up. They all flew up on a limb, up in the tree. I just had one shot. I looked up there and I sighted the biggest. I think there was ? more than gettin' just one. So many turkeys. I decided I'd shoot and bust the limb, you know, hit the limb. I shot and the limb split and the toes all went down through there and there they was--my whole catch was the toes on the limb. Well, I just set my gun down. Up the tree I went. Come up there and I had a rope in my pocket. I slipped out a little ways, tied the rope around me, and I took a hold of one turkey and I tied him to the rope, and I jerked him out of the limb. Ease on up a little more, and tied another. I give him a jerk and off he come. I had two, ease on out there for another'un, you know. Tied him and I jerked him out. And about that time, they begin to flop, just a'wings a'goin' every which way. They get me up in there air and here I went. I just a'goin' over one ridge and over another, directly I was comin' pretty close to the top of a timber. I took my knife and I cut that, to swing into them trees. And I went down into an ol' holler stump and just kept goin' down, down, hit the ground directly. There's a big ol' holler tree. Felt somethin' sort of warm down there around my feet and I kept feelin' at my feet, you know. And it was just warm around there. And I reached my hands down and took ahold of it, and I seen this cub of bears, just small ones, just been born. I throwed my head back and says, "Oh Lord, that ol' bear'll get me, right in here." Directly I heerd somethin' comin', hit the tree, just, "Rap, rap, rap!" Comin' up and I thought she'd come down head first, you know. Well she got up there and she wheeled around, here she come down back'ards, comin' backin' down. Just backin' down the tree. She backed down and I grabbed that short stubbed tail and wound my knife in her and she started up the tree with me. Went up the top and she went off one way and I went off another'n. They brought the old mule up there and I left.

Way back when I was growin' up there in the Smoky Mountains, they'd kind of got out of dogs and feller by the name of Stallcup, he'd decided to order him some. And he'd seen some advertising up in Walton, Virginia. He sent and he bought 'em and brought 'em down. Had these big ol' dogs, and this old boy, he talk funny and couldn't hardly understand him lots of times. And he was tellin' us about gettin' his dogs and takin' 'em out to the woods and he said he got, the big ol' dog come in and said he took 'em way up in the Smoky Mountains. Said he took 'em down to Big Cove and said he went along and said directly he'd found an old bear's track and said he kept lookin' on where the old bear had been and said directly he stuck his fingers down, *whistles* "Get 'em boy!" Said the old dog, he just fell on scratchin' and barkin' like the bear went in the ground.

Jake Waldroop, 1970

JW: We went one time and there was some boys, went out to feed our hogs, you know, back here in the Nantahalys. Up in the Frog Mountain. And they'd come up--a wild boar had got into their general hogs, so he run some boys up a tree. And they stayed treed along in the evening and some of the older ones come into the camp, and they hollered and went up and got him scared away. So the next morning, why we rounded up a posse and we were gonna capture him. So I had a Plott hound, she was really a catch dog and she was gonna catch any hog that might near walk the mountain. So this, when we first put the dogs on the hog, why they run right down the edge of the laurel and they bayed him and he made a lunge at one big dog. It killed him, cut him down. He bled to death right there on the ground. Well, I tied mine. I wouldn't let her in. So they went to bayin' him and they'd get in and he'd go by 'em and they'd get shots at him. They shot him with shotguns about 24 times. Never did stop him. He had great thick shields on his shoulders, you know. And them shot wouldn't have penetrated deep enough through that to kill him. So he'd fit the other dogs, the other two dogs down, they'd fit him just about all day. And they got on to me to turn--call mine Khan--turn Khan loose and I finally agreed and turned her loose, and he went out up the river past Harrigan Creek. Turned up through and was going up Harrigan Creek. And she caught him up on the falls where he was tryin' to climb them falls on Harrigan Creek and he come back down through there. And there was an ol' feller with an old-fashioned double-barrel, muzzle-loadin' shotgun and he had it loaded with buck shot. And the old hog come right down by him and he shot him and killed him. So that, I'll always remember that, that was quite a chase we had after that old feller.

I've called up and killed lots of wild gobblers, wild turkeys. I remember one time I went from the Black Gap. Some more fellers, we went out and fished up Little Buck Creek. And we caught about 75 little speckled trout. So we hiked back up on top of the Kimsey Bald, it was the 20th day of March. And I told 'em now, we'll see if we can hear a gobbler. So I went out over the bald, what they call the head of the Dismal, and I owled--I could owl like a hoot owl. And I owled, and this old gobbler, he answered me. *Makes gobbling noise* So I got the boys and come back, went back around, surround him, stayed on the back side. And we went to the camp. I got, I put them in the camp and told them to stay there. So I went back up on the ridge, sort of opposite to where he was at, and that was about the time the sun went down. And I laid there in a beech thicket and directly he went to gobblin' right down under me and I heerd him fly up. He lit up on his roost. Well when he went up on his roost, why I yelped a time or two, like a hen turkey. And oh, he was just a'rarin' and a'gobblin'. So I went back the next morning, got my blind, got to where I was gonna call him out, and the owls hooted and the robins sanged and different rackets took place and I heerd nothin' out of him.

Directly there was some hogs off down in the cove and they had a bell on'. The old sow, she got up and shook her head and rattled that bell: "Ding-a-ling-a-ling!" That bell went, so that ol' gobbler, he went to roarin' then. And he flew from me, he flew way over onto another ridge. And he hit the ground. And when he went down, when he went to gobblin' again, why, I called to him, yelled like a hen, and he answered me twice. *Makes gobbling noise* Well I just got ready

and laid still. I knew he'd come; they come right to that spot. And I guess it was about ten or fifteen minutes and I heard him comin' struttin' out, you know, *makes noises*, strut them wings on the ground. He walked out about 20 steps of me and I give him a load in the head and that was it for him.

What you want to do--what we always did in the spring of the year, we'd pretty well know, you know, you could see where they'd scratch the leaves and where they was feedin'. And the spring of the year, they'd pick off those ramp leaves and eat them. And you'd, we'd always go back late in the evenin', about sundown--between sundown and dusk and dark--and he'd fly up on his roost. You'd hear 'em go to roost. Well then we'd try to get to a--close upon him as we could like to be to a gap. 'Cause they love to come out into a gap. And there, why sometimes we'd get a log or if a tree'd fell, any tree lap or limbs, get in there and sort of lay in a little brush and stuff out in front of you, you know, and slip your gun through that. Now you couldn't move that gun, you couldn't bat an eye. Now that turkey gobbler could really see you. And so if he answered you, if he gobbled to you when you yelped to him. And he gobbled as many--as much as twice--why you might be assured, if you didn't get him excited no way, why he'd come right to that spot. So he'd, if there was some brush or limbs in front of you, to sort of blind him, why he wouldn't recognize you.

FF: Did you use a turkey caller or did you just go out and...?

JW: I used a bone. I've got a bone. The little bone out of a turkey hen's wing is what we used always for a caller. You want to hear me try to yelp a little in it?

FF: Yes sir.

turkey noises

JW: See, it's just a holler bone, just a holler bone. You've heard turkey hens yelp, have you? Did it seem to imitate her?

FF: What part of the turkey did you say you...

JW: That comes--that's the little bone out of a turkey hen's wing. Went up there that morning, the morning that I killed him, and I knew where he was roosting. So I got right in the Frank Gap, and he was sort of right down under me on the Devil Prong side--what we call the Devil's Prong on Kimsey Creek. And when I called to him, why he answered me. I waited til he flew down on the ground off his roost, gobblin', and then I yelped. And called just a little and he gobbled back to me. Well then I didn't do a thing til he--just kept quiet til he walked out in shootin' distance. Killed 'em.

FF: They all have one tree that they roost in?

JW: Oh no, they roost just about, they'll work in the same section of the woods, maybe, for quite a while at a time, but they'll roost in different places. They don't have no certain trees to roost in.

JW: There wasn't no way much to make much money, and you could dig a little ginseng and ship that off to the market and get a little money in the fall of the year. Why, pick up some chestnuts or maybe have a few apples and sell them. Somethin' like that. I tell, money was really--back in them days--hard to come by. Especially here in these mountains. It just didn't hardly exist. Biggest thing was, we loved to go back out there in them mountains; about the only enterprise there was of any kind. We'd go and fish, fish and hunt. That was the biggest part leisure time, was fishin' and huntin'.

FF: Do you think, you know, when somebody come in, that nature was a pretty good provider? I mean did it give 'em about everything they need, if they knew how to take advantage of it.

JW: If they knew how to take advantage, why they did have any trouble of gettin' along. They could just make it fine.