

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Riley Brook II

Word from up north. Birds were scarce to zero. 2005 spring was wet and cold. When rain doesn't stop for May month there's another description. And, when the baby partridge puffballs are hatched, cold rain is a killer. So outlook was grim for "St. Partridge Day". The one thing about this group, however, fun and high spirits abound. After tour of "town" we touched off lobster cookers, made a few trips to the refreshment table and by mid-even had everyone in line for red Maine bugs. Each stop on the tour we'd gathered new best friends and word had trickled out to neighbors and friends that sustenance could be enjoyed at Rideout Farm. Wine flowed and bugs disappeared. Music instruments appeared and we became even better friends.

Crowd ebbed and flowed throughout the evening as did the songs and laughter. There were songs with verses, songs with a few lines of French or English (Canada is bilingual) and others we just hummed the title when anyone could remember one. Later, as the evening followed its inevitable course, Dave McClure, guitar-playing outfitter dumped the lobster shells into five-gallon pails for bear bait. Another plus to the evening as five sports shot five bear on Monday.

No surprise, St. Partridge Day started off with less than untrammelled enthusiasm. Yet after Mike Rideout, Allagash guide and breakfast chef extraordinaire, cooked the first of huge country breakfasts, we managed to saddle up and create some dust on the roads by ten.

There's a law in New Brunswick, Canada which really slips a burr neath the skin of those of us who hunt or fish there. Guide required for every two hunters or fishermen. Adds not only another major expense to the trip but not all guides know one track from another or the identity of over six good dry flies. Some are just plain lazy. Friend Mike Rideout is none of the above and I was fortunate for his company that day. Much of the area around Riley Brook is just what was, a sprawling forested ancient volcanic playground in tree growth management. Gorgeous country. We drove the back country, haunts Mike knew and reserved for friends. We slipped our way down roads just hanging to mountainsides. Worked along swollen brooks and rivers and walked a few Alder swales. Nothing. No feathers no fuss no spat. With a day like this, however, life can never be a disappointment. Sun was bright and shone through the late poplar leaves creating yellows and golds in every hue with a sky so clear and blue to make the eyes ache.

Now, Riley Brookers at Rideout Farm are a social lot. Grand lunches on the hunt. Not to be missed with Bloodies to start. This day was no exception, and too boot, there was good news. Susie Rideout Toner newly ordained guide and incantor of ancient partridge chants had taken the girl car to "the road". Spotted by Brenda

Seault, non-shooter, and downed by AJ, there was new blood in the group. AJ was, and remained, top gun, shooting another bird within town limits the next day.

Surviving an attack of “killer hornets” at lunch, we passed the scant remainder of the day still poking. Partridge “always come out at dusk” to eat gravel and take dust baths. But not this day or the week to come. Consolation would have to manifest in another favorite form.

And another form there was. In the true spirit of New Brunswickers and New Englanders, “Muck” Carter and “Toodie” Mulherin put on a “no dish left behind” baked bean supper which became a highlight entry in the annals of hunting trip lore as we began another round of music and laughter. Next door neighbor Dave Parrish, an honest to god character stopped by with guitar to serenade AJ’s crowning day as top gun with “How I Love You Dearly”.

Dave said, “I can sing and I can play guitar and sometimes I can do both.” And the more of his favorite “Mellow Gold” the better he could do of both. I was really proud of my wife that day. This girl who’d said she’d never shoot game had advanced to a good shot and excellent spotter.

Sunday dawned sometime earlier than we stirred. Having fun is hard work and rest becomes essential. As we filtered throughout the morning to the Rideout kitchen and partook of Bloodies and another hunter’s breakfast, Susie let it be known that a new tradition was to be instigated. Punctually at high noon sharp (or thereabout) members of the hunt were expected at the new chip and putt hole in the south pasture. Dress at discretion, shorts advisable due to an inclement 70 degrees. Is this English high society deviation or what. Yours truly was given the honor to mow the course with Susie’s new John Deere and we assembled in serious concentration to knock this silly 1 1/2 ball as close to a six-inch hole with an angled grass whacker as possible. And the winner. The winner was my friend Brian Rogers who doesn’t walk. Not only did he get the first prize but he went on to cook a chili dinner that evening that rated another first prize.

Next on our agenda, our Sunday day of rest, homemade French Fries at Don and Connie McClure’s. Now I’ve no way to know if you’ve ever had French Fries of Aroostook County/New Brunswick style. They’re special. Need older potatoes (sweeter). Wash, cut, then deep fry in peanut oil. When just starting to turn color remove from hot oil and shake. Let set for a few minutes then back into the oil. Pull out when golden brown and dump onto brown paper bag or cardboard boxes. County folks seem to like salt and vinegar as their condiment but I still like catsup. Whichever, they’re the best French Fries you’ll ever eat and Don McClure has developed it as an art form. Decadent as fine chocolate.

Riley Brook and Rideout Farm is a unique place, one that I slip to at memory moments for spirit refreshment. Place filled with real people, no pretensions, and full of fun. My kind of spot.

In lieu of a recipe this month I’d like to pass on this piece from “The Riley Brook Rag”, the local mimeographed monthly newspaper available for \$1.00 at the general store. Great publication, and loaded with jokes.

Why a Farmer Took to the Bush

You take a place the size of this farm and you could hardly raise a disturbance on it let alone a crop.

Three consecutive years I went to the bank and borrowed money to buy fertilizer to plant potatoes and every winter I had to go the woods and earn enough money to pay back the bank. When the fourth summer rolled around I just said, "Well, what's going on here? The bush is where I had to go to earn the money to pay that why don't I just stay there? And I did..

Thorvald Neilson had been a guide and teamster in the New Brunswick woods for over half a century.

Fair winds and good roads.

Lee S. Wilbur