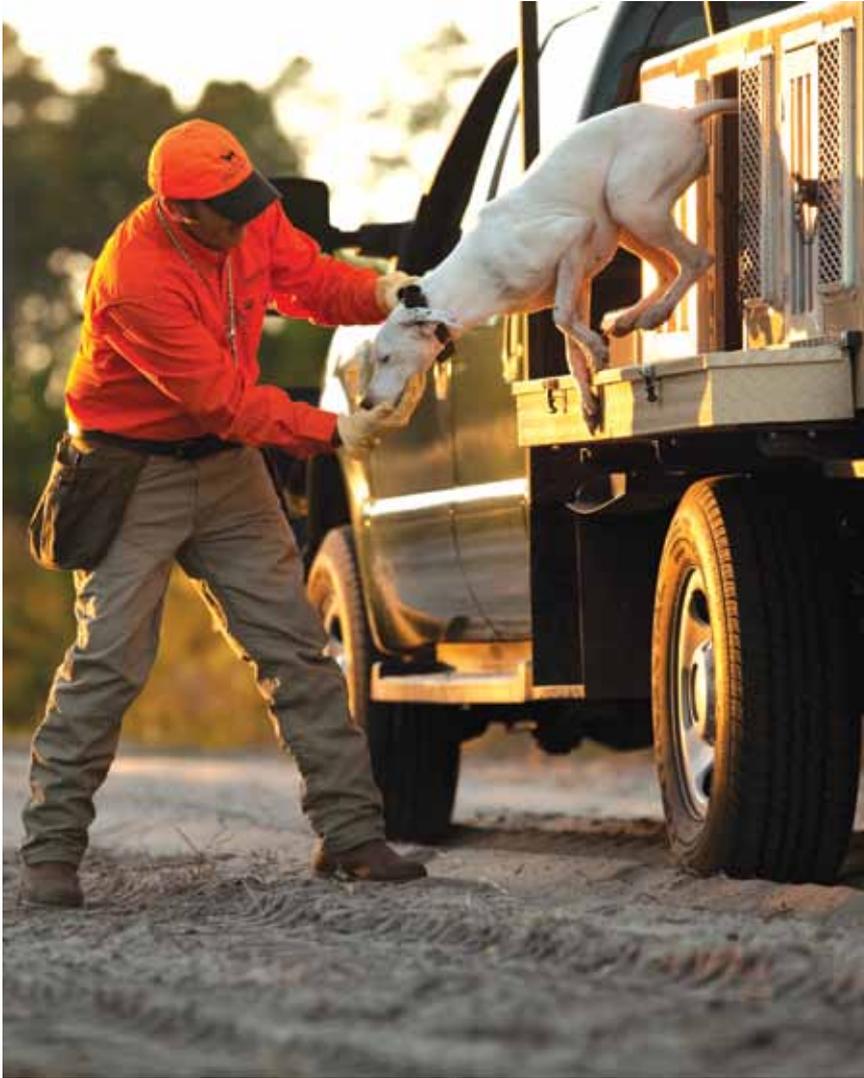


*Hunting in the Shadows of*  
**HISTORY**

*For nearly a century Cabin Bluff has been a prime destination for celebrities, corporate magnates and heads of state from around the world. *by Michael Altizer**

# *I was tired, very tired.*



Pleasingly, pleasantly tired after another long and fulfilling day with my guns and my friends, following the dogs and hunting bobwhite quail.

It was the kind of tired you have to earn, the kind you get by hunting long and hunting hard and shooting as well as you possibly can – the kind of tired you are willing to travel great distances and spend great sums to be.

Dinner that evening had been yet another five course confection, and by the time I crossed the grounds to my lodge and had a hot shower, the seventh game of the World Series was in the bottom of the fifth. And so I slipped into my pajama bottoms and a clean tee shirt, wrapped my old Indian blanket around my shoulders and sank into the plush leather sofa, figuring I would surely fall asleep before the game was over.

But to the contrary, it was a lively, compelling final few innings, well-played and well-seasoned with plenty of drama, and by the time it was finished, it was after midnight and I was wide awake. I knew it would be pointless to try to get to sleep, so I stepped outside into the cool late-October air to take in the stars and feel the crisp nighttime wind and listen to the whisper of the sea running south with the rising tide.



Peering east, I could see a few scattered lights ghosting there in the darkness across the broad channel on Georgia's Cumberland Island, and a hundred yards through the pines loomed the sprawling dock. And so I stepped back inside to fetch my fly rod from the corner where I'd left it 13 hours earlier following the lunchtime break that Kimberly and I had taken at that same dock, then eased barefoot and alone through the dew-laden grass to the water.

I still don't know why I took my fly rod . . . habit I suppose. But once out over the water, I was happy to have it, for the tide was nearing high, and in the lights from the dock I could see undulating schools of menhaden running strong with their faces into the south-flowing current.

I had just begun to wonder what might be lurking below them when suddenly there was a flash, then another beneath the murky surface as some creature higher in the food web tore through the baitfish. Quickly I began stripping line from the reel and sent my chartreuse-and-white Clouser out to survey the depths. But the fly barely had time to sink before something significant tried to take it away from me.

It was an oversized sea trout, at least 24 inches long, much larger than the one

Kimberly and I had caught earlier that day as low tide had shifted from south to north. This one dove deep and away, and the fly line flew from my reel as its song rang clear and sweet through the crisp salt air and out into the night. For a moment I nearly lost her as she dove for the barnacle-encrusted pilings. But the drag was smooth and sure on my little Tibor, and four minutes later I lifted the big trout from the current.

For the next three hours it was as though the night had halted around me as I probed the edges of the darkness with fly and line, shuffling barefoot up and down the wood-and-concrete decking until my feet began to bleed, catching fish after fish as the high cloud cover grew to consume the stars.

But the trout continued hitting and I continued catching them, pausing occasionally to re-sharpen my barbless hook on the exposed concrete pilings, time after time slipping it from the fishes' mouths and returning them to the sea. It was a timeless interlude of nearly unbearable bliss, fishing alone, with the only illumination coming from the dimming stars and the lights from far across the channel and, of course, those close beneath the dock.

I could have fished all night, and in fact I nearly did. But with the temperature steadily falling and the shifting north wind boring inexorably through my thin attire, I finally slipped the point of the tattered little Clouser into the hook-keeper and slogged shoeless back through the cold wet grass to my lodge, where I towed off my cold wet feet, patched them up, slipped into some warm wool socks and drifted off to sleep for what little was left of the night.

I was at Cabin Bluff, just a few miles north of the Florida border, along with Kimberly Juday, Brian Raley and *Sporting Classics* Editor Chuck Wechsler.

From the early 1920s Cabin Bluff has been a prime destination for celebrities, corporate magnates and heads of state from around the world. Such men as Detroit automotive pioneer Howard Coffin, who in 1928 built the legendary retreat known simply as "The Cloister" on nearby Sea Island, were regular visitors at Cabin Bluff. It was Coffin, in fact, who first invited his friend President Calvin Coolidge to Cabin Bluff, initiating a longstanding relationship that lasted for years.



*Above: Two souls from another age share a relaxing moment at Cabin Bluff along with a classic Model 12 Winchester. Quite likely the old gun is still going strong. • Lower right: Brian Raley swings on an early riser while another bird pops up only a few feet from his gun barrel. • Lower left: MeadWestvaco's Kenneth Seeger doubles on the first flush of the morning with his vintage Churchill Imperial XXV side-by-side. • Opposite: Quail Program Manager Chuck Dean releases one of his pointers while Kimberly Juday prepares to photograph the author's hunt.*





*The fireplace in Cabin Bluff's main lodge is still a gathering place for sportsmen, though the accommodations are far more elegant than those in years gone by. • Above: A meandering footbridge passes over a bass/brim pond on its way to the River House. • Opposite: A rock solid point from a perfectly matched pair of setters heralds the beginning of another fine day in the quail woods at Cabin Bluff. • Top: The intricate engraving on Ken Seeger's Churchill Imperial XXV side-by-side is simply stunning.*

Today, Cabin Bluff offers some of the finest fishing, hunting and sporting opportunities on the entire East Coast. But we really hadn't come here to fish; instead, we were here hunting quail and deer and wild hogs, and of course to check out the myriad sporting opportunities and facilities that this historic destination has to offer.

Chuck Wechsler is an inveterate hog hunter and couldn't wait to get out into the pine-and-oak forests to make his mark on the porcine population, and before I had even unpacked on the afternoon of our arrival, Chuck and guide David Bruce were already in the woods.

The following morning had kicked off clear and sunny, and with a cold front moving in from the northwest, the quail hunting had been spectacular. Once more, our fearless editor had gone out hog hunting late in the afternoon and managed to stumble into a whole bevy of barbeque-size porkers, returning with three hogs that night, reminiscent of a fine old late-'60s rock group. And by the time Eli had come and gone and all the girls had hidden their hearts, we had settled down to another fine five-course dinner in Cabin Bluff's Coolidge Tavern.



The next day again dawned clear and cool, and we headed out with Cabin Bluff's Quail Program Manager Chuck Dean, along with Tommy Roberts and as fine a team of pointers, setters and Labrador retrievers as you're likely to find. The lush palmetto stands were punctuated with swaths of coastal bluestem and clumps of blackroot and gallberry that assured the quail plenty of food and cover.

Our old setter Dallas found the first covey within minutes, dutifully backed by Bandit, his young pointer protégé. And when our black lab, Angel, was sent in for the flush, the ground erupted with bobwhites.

I shot too quickly and missed my first bird, then swung on a second one going away and

dropped him cleanly. Meanwhile, Brian calmly doubled, and our day was off to a stimulating start. For the rest of the morning and well into the afternoon we alternated gunners and dogs until it was time for brother Wechsler to head back to the lodge and get ready for his evening hog hunt.

The next few days had been just as good as the first, and we reveled in the luxury of this storybook setting as Chuck continued to put a major dent in the feral pig population. But Brian and Kimberly and I continued hunting quail, until the time came for Chuck and Brian to head back to their offices in Columbia, South Carolina.

The next day Kimberly and I had shared one last outing together for quail and then dinner before she, too, must leave. And so I'd wandered alone back to my lodge, watched the final few innings of the World Series, and late that night had found myself fishing beneath the stars and looking forward to morning and my final hunt for bobwhites, this time with my friend Ken Seeger.

**K**en is president of MeadWestvaco's Community Development and Land Management Division, owners of this 24,000-acre south-Georgia jewel. We met for breakfast in the main lodge at 7:45 the next morning, and an hour later we were in the hunting vehicle with guide Wes Schlosser and another team of great bird dogs. Twenty minutes later we were boots-on-the-ground.

Our first point came next to a tall, stately longleaf pine, and I handed my open-and-empty gun to Wes and eased into position behind Ken with my camera, hoping to get a photograph of the flush. Three birds burst from a thicket of gallberry and palmetto into the open, and Ken promptly tumbled two of them with his little Churchill side-by-side.

Ken's Imperial XXV sidelock was built in 1952 as a true 12-bore, 2-inch gun. It sported 25-inch barrels, was choked Skeet II and IC and weighed in at a rousing 5 1/2 pounds. He'd purchased the gun from Elderkin and Son, Ltd. in England four years earlier and delivered it to Atkin, Grant and Lang, who replaced and lengthened the buttstock and reblacked the barrels and furniture. He was shooting a very light load of 2 1/4 drams of powder along with 7/8-ounce of 7 1/2 shot.

The gun fit him like a glove, and with the 2-inch Polywad Vintager shells that he purchases by the case, it produced a wonderfully uniform pattern and very short shot string, making it one of the most effective short-to-medium range bird guns I've ever seen.

It was an elegant piece, the type of gun that makes a splendid day afield even more gratifying, especially when you're hunting classic quail cover with finely tuned bird dogs. And these dogs were truly superb. Their fire and passion was a thing of infinite beauty and spoke volumes about the love and patience that had gone into their training. Wes hardly ever had to speak to them, and when he did, it was with a soft, kind and caring tone.

By now I had handed the camera back to Wes and reclaimed my own gun from



*Laughter and good cheer filled the air as the dogs continued pointing covey after covey . . . there seemed to be an abundance of birds and thousands of acres in which to hunt them.*



him as the dogs continued sweeping the cover. They soon locked up on their second point, and as Ken and I flanked them, Wes sent Tim, his yellow Labrador retriever, in for the flush. This time it was a bob' and hen that blew out on Ken's side, and again the sweet, abbreviated voice of the little Churchill reverberated through the cool morning air as another double fell.

In seconds Tim and Bandit were at Wes' side with the birds, and a hundred yards farther on we found Bandit frozen on another point. This time it was a full covey, and as they flushed, at least eight or nine birds tore straight away. Ken and I managed a bird apiece and then briefly followed up the singles. We could clearly hear them calling to

one another in an urgent attempt to regroup. And so we backed off and left them to go about their business in peace, confident there would be more birds.

True to form, within ten minutes Bandit found yet another covey. This time they flushed wild before we were in position, but we still managed to drop two birds on the rise and took two more on the follow-up as we delighted in the moment and the fine companionship that is always so integral a part of classic southern bird hunting.

The day was sublime and so was the setting, and the dogs and quail all performed like virtuosos. Eventually we circled back to the hunting vehicle and moved a half-mile to the west, where Ken and I swapped firearms. Our two guns seemed to be very closely matched in their balance and measurements, and Ken promptly doubled with my Purdey and I took three consecutive singles with his Churchill.

Laughter and good cheer filled the air as the dogs continued pointing covey after covey. We never stayed in one location for more than half an hour or so, for there seemed to be an abundance of birds and thousands of acres in which to hunt them. It was one of the finest wingshooting days I can ever recall, and now on reflection, I can remember none better.



**B**y day's end we were tired and content and ready for dinner. Again Chuck Dean and David Edwards joined us, along with Andy Ippensen, Cabin Bluff's sales manager. It was another impeccably prepared and presented five-course masterpiece, perfectly

complemented with fine wines, fine conversation and even finer fellowship, and I slept long and well that night with the whisper of the sea drifting in through my open bedroom window.

Ken and I met for brunch the next morning, and it was midday before I left. But I'll be back in the spring to fish with Cabin Bluff's Marine Program Manager Toby Mohrman, and I still want to try for deer and hogs in the fall.

And who knows . . . I may even take time for a round of golf.

But one thing is certain; I'll always cherish the fine hunting, the gracious accommodations and the wonderful people at Cabin Bluff.

Where the tides still run strong and the birds still fly wild in my memory. 🦋

## *If You Want to Go*

Southeast Georgia's Cabin Bluff offers some of the finest sporting opportunities and accommodations on the entire East Coast.

Call 912-729-5960 or visit [www.CabinBluff.com](http://www.CabinBluff.com).

*Note:* The author always welcomes your comments, questions and input. Please keep in touch at [Mike@AltizerJournal.com](mailto:Mike@AltizerJournal.com).



*Cabin Bluff's early clientele included distinguished gents from around the world who arrived to hunt wild turkey, deer and quail. Below: President Calvin Coolidge strolls across the sprawling dock along Cumberland Sound. • Opposite: Water-oriented recreation abounds at Cabin Bluff, whether swimming is your favorite relaxation or catching speckled trout, redfish and other inshore gamefish.*

