

There's **GOLD** in Them Thar Hills... or is there?

There is a new game in town. Namely the Pots-Of-Gold "casino" in Blairsville. Basically they are some type of gaming parlor that seems to have found a loophole in the law regarding gambling. These establishments have been popping up all over North Carolina to the consternation of both government officials and the general public there.

You basically walk in and sit down at what looks like a gaming terminal. The words "Internet Café" and "Sweepstakes" are featured prominently throughout. This is key to the loophole. You exchange money for "credits" in which you get one credit for every penny you pay (\$10 = 1000 credits). The credits are stored in an account which remains in your name so if you don't use all of the credits they will be waiting for you the next time you come in. You then select the type of game you wish to play, poker, slots, etc. The amount you "win" in the game is the money you can collect.

The issue seems to be that this is basically gambling. Since it is technically internet gaming it seems to bypass the gambling laws. I know I am using terms like "basically" and "seems" but this is one great big grey area so all bets are off... so to speak.

The following is a letter received by a concerned citizen after an inquiry to the Union County Commissioner, Lamar Paris, regarding Pots-of-Gold.

Dear Mr and Ms. Robitaille,

I was informed by Commissioner Paris about your inquiry into the Pots-of-gold business in Blairsville.

After I left to go to Atlanta for the 2011 session, I discovered that this business was operating in our town. I have heard from other sources that they have started other businesses in other Georgia towns.

HB 164, which recently passed the House of Representatives was drafted to shut whatever loophole that these businesses were operating under here in Georgia. I am told by the bills sponsor that this should stop these businesses ability to operate in our state. The bill is headed to the State Senate and if passed there it will head to the Governor for his signature or veto.

I will continue to monitor this situation.

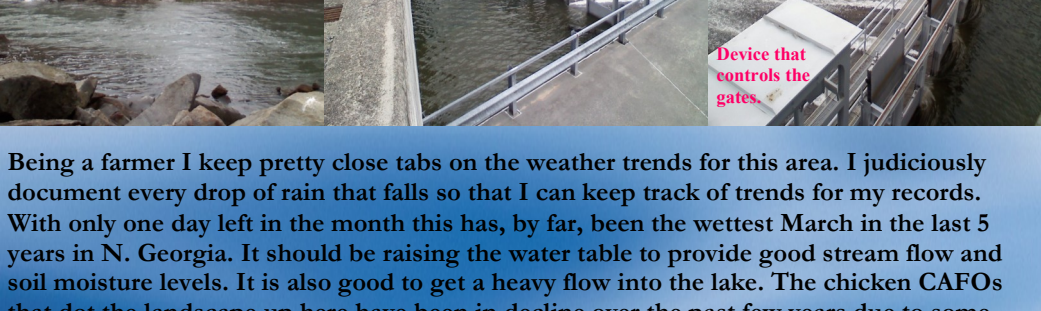
Sincerely,

Stephen Allison

So there you have it. Problem solved... or is it? Gambling is illegal in Georgia unless it is state sanctioned bingo or lottery. The government hates competition, don't ya know. With the amount of money involved I doubt this will be the end of the story. In litigation happy America things aren't always as black and white as they seem. In North Carolina these same folks recently got the court to rule on a legal definition which will allow them to operate under more "controlled" conditions. "Games of chance" are being replaced with "Games of skill". How 'bout that? The "free market" strikes again. I suppose if you are against it you can simply refuse to grace the establishment with your presence. In this case that wouldn't shut them down because... "There's a sucker born every minute" and "A fool and his money are soon parted". Nuff said.

Lake Nottely is a Rising!

If you haven't made it up in a while you may not know that the Lake is just over full pool. "How could this be so early in the season?", you may ask. Well it seems that the turbine through which the draw-down usually occurs malfunctioned about a month ago. They have a smaller old turbine that they are using to draw water out of the lake but it cannot keep up with the natural flow of water into the lake, much less all of the rain we have been having. As a result the lake rose so fast that many were unprepared and many docks have been submerged or otherwise damaged. While it looks beautiful at this level it is much earlier than usual. I don't think I have ever seen it so full in the 12 years I have lived here.



Being a farmer I keep pretty close tabs on the weather trends for this area. I judiciously document every drop of rain that falls so that I can keep track of trends for my records. With only one day left in the month this has, by far, been the wettest March in the last 5 years in N. Georgia. It should be raising the water table to provide good stream flow and soil moisture levels. It is also good to get a heavy flow into the lake. The chicken CAFOs that dot the landscape up here have been in decline over the past few years due to some short sighted actions by some of the major poultry producers, namely abandonment of many of the very producers that helped build their business. In the past the dumping of raw chicken house litter onto pasture for fertilizer raised the level of nitrates and phosphates in the lake. This happened by action of the rainfall leaching aforementioned bird doo-doo into the watershed and eventually into the lake. With the decline in the number of chicken houses so went the amount of manure. These fast flushes of the lake certainly lend a helping hand to the health of the water, not to mention those taking a dip on a hot summer's day.



To get the 2 previous pics someone must have stood at the end of this wall. What a nut!

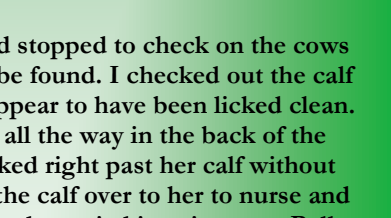
TVA said that they hope to have the large turbine repaired sometime in May. In fact just the other night they had to open the spillway at the dam to keep the lake at it's current level. I've included some pics for your viewing pleasure.

On another note the work seems to be proceeding apace on the penstock at Lake Blue Ridge. TVA said the unusual amount of rain is slowing work down a bit but they expect to begin allowing the lake to begin refilling on schedule, if Mother Nature co-operates.

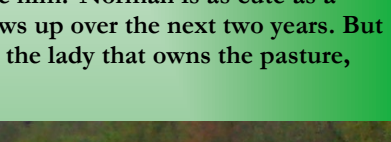
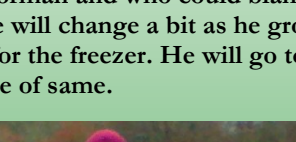
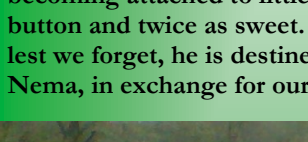
Child Abandonment!

How's that for an attention grabbing headline? Well, it's a serious subject, even when humans are not involved.

This is the story of a heifer named Bella. She's a beautiful girl, the result of breeding to produce a herd of mama cows to be bred by my Lowline bull, Valentino, to produce grass fed beef. Bella was a well adjusted heifer from a great cow, Blackie, who has a wonderful mothering instinct and raises great calves. Blackie's sister, the late Brownie, had a little bull calf a couple of years ago named T-bone. T-bone had a hard life and got weaned early when his mom died from pneumonia after she fell in the creek, got stuck and bled in too much water. I was there to jump in and wrestle a 1000 lb. cow out by myself but, alas, it ultimately wasn't enough to save her. He was old enough to pull through like a trooper, unlike me, who lost some sleep over that one. Since T-bone was destined for the freezer he was slated for castration. Through different circumstances and a bit of poor management on my part I was a little later getting the job done than I would have liked. I thought it was done in time but I'll be danged if he didn't slip one in and knock Bella up. She was old enough to breed but I still had wanted to wait. That was last June.



Fast forward to March 18th. I'm on my way home and had stopped to check on the cows and there is a new calf in the grass and Bella nowhere to be found. I checked out the calf and he had some dried placenta on his head and didn't appear to have been licked clean. Quite unusual! I then went looking for Bella and she was all the way in the back of the pasture. So I walked her back up to the front and she walked right past her calf without even a sniff. Hmmm, not a good sign. I then tried to get the calf over to her to nurse and she kept walking away. I called Patti and she came over and we tried in vain to get Bella to stand still to nurse but she would have no part of it. So off to the house I go to get the tractor, move the corral panels to the pasture, set them up and get Bella inside. I then haltered her. No small feat considering she was resisting and out-weighted me by a fair amount. We then got the calf up to her udder and she proceeded to try and kick him off. So now I was faced with the prospect of having to restrain her so the calf can get first milk with the extremely important colostrum, a temporary immune system boost all calves need to resist illness and disease in the first weeks of life until their own immune system kicks in. So we restrain her with some difficulty and get the calf on the teat. He's going at it like there is no tomorrow! So for the next three days we go over morning, noon and evening to get the boy a feeding. We then accept him to twice a day for another 5 days. It becomes apparent that Bella will not accept him we resign ourselves to bottle feeding. We have been doing that since Saturday and he is taking to it quite well. Cindy's husband, Harvey, has taken to calling him Norman after the abandoned calf in the movie "City Slickers." Little Norman is doing quite well and Bella is too. Her bag is a little swollen and if she continues to deny him access she will eventually begin to dry up.



Out of all the cows and calves I have had this is a first. It has been very aggravating and frustrating. Of course we can't blame poor Bella. She associates Norman with the pain of childbirth and resents him for it. Perhaps a form of post-partum depression? She continues to receive our Love and understanding and we hope that her next calf will be the love of her life. If not... well, we certainly can't keep them all as pets. You think keeping some dogs and cats can be expensive? Try some 1000 lb. animals on for size! As for Norman, we will feed him steady for a couple of months and then begin to wean him off to pasture, which he is already sampling. His sire had a similar experience with the untimely death of his mother and has turned out to be a great steer. Norman should as well. Of course Harvey is well and will produce a playmate and companion for Norman. Blackie is happy to be becoming attached to little Norman and who could blame him? Norman is as cute as a button and twice as sweet. He will change a bit as he grows up over the next two years. But lest we forget, he is destined for the freezer. He will go to the lady that owns the pasture, Nema, in exchange for our use of same.



Well, Norman, it's time to bid everyone adieu. I'm sure they all wish you well on your journey. We'll keep them updated from time to time.

Now, let's go find Bella and get you back to the herd so I can head to the house!

Eatin' In Season

Our eatin' in season recipe is very special this month. Thanks to an inquiry from one of our clients ya'll are going to get an education on one of the local delicacies from these parts. That would be RAMPERS! Yes, that is right – I said ramps. If you are like me you may have never heard of them before. A ramp is also known as a wild leek which comes into season in spring. Country folks have eaten them for generations but in the last few years world class chefs have discovered their excellent flavor. They are wild and have a wild flavor, similar to onions and scallions but wilder. You can dice and sauté them and add them to things like eggs or fried potatoes or put them raw in your salad. In the Appalachia the Ramps are strong. They are loved (or hated) for their powerful aroma. Ramps are high in Vitamin C and A and full of minerals.

There are even Ramp Tramps where you can go and procure Ramps to plant in your Mountain Property. AND there is one up here in our neck of the woods. April 27-30,2011 is the date of the Polk County TN Ramp Tramp Festival. www.polkagextension.com/rampage.html. It is located between the Ocoee and Ducktown on Hwy 64. You can estimate 45 minutes from Blairsville, closer from Blue Ridge and farther from Hiwassee.

Following is a recipe (which I have not tried yet) featuring Ramps. Give em a try and let us know what you think!

Ramp and Fingerling Potato Soup

This is a classic springtime soup, easy to prepare and wonderful to eat. Serve it as a luncheon dish, or as an appetizer for an elegant dinner. Though the recipe doesn't call for it, I like to drizzle just a bit of white truffle oil over the hot soup. It adds depth and interest.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 stick unsalted butter
- 1 pound fresh Ramps, cleaned, trimmed, and cut into 2-inch pieces
- Sea salt
- fresh Cracked Pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 tablespoons minced garlic
- 10 cups chicken stock
- 2 1/2 pounds fingerling potatoes, quartered
- 1/4 cup heavy cream

Melt the butter in a 6-quart pot over medium high heat and add the ramps. Season the ramps as well and with the freshly ground black pepper. Sauté the ramps until they're wilted and soft, about six minutes.

Add the bay leaf and the minced garlic and continue to cook for about two minutes. Stir continuously.

Add the chicken stock and the potatoes. Bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium. Simmer the soup, uncovered, until the potatoes are very tender. The mixture should be thick and creamy. This will take about one hour.

Remove the soup from the heat and discard the bay leaf. Add the cream very slowly, stirring continually to blend thoroughly. Re-season the soup with salt and pepper according to taste. Re-heat and serve immediately.

...a note from Cindy

It's April! The dogwoods are blooming, birds are singing, tourists are beginning to come up to the Mountains. The other thing that has arrived are the LADY-BUGS!!! Yes, it is that time of year. As the days warm the Asian Ladybeetles come out of hibernation and are attracted to the sunny side of your house. There colors vary from tan to orange to red. They are very abundant as they have few natural enemies. To make things even more interesting they secrete a foul smelling yellowish fluid from their leg joints when they are disturbed (or squished). When you get to your home and find dead ladybugs don't feel alone. It is our experience that more homes have them than not.

Rule #1 - Don't smash, vacuum.

Rule#2-Don't blame your significant other for leaving something open. (Those things can get thru the tiniest of cracks around your windows)

Rule # 3 - Complete Home Services did not plant them in order to get you to call us for a cleaning!

If you have not gotten here yet this spring we hope to see you soon.