Roots of Virginia Culture: The Great Outdoors

Many outdoor recreations in Virginia began as survival skills. Fishing, hunting, and foraging for wild foods were essential to life in rural parts of the state until the early twentieth century. Out of love for the outdoors and a personal connection to the land, many people continue these traditions.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, market and sport hunters decimated duck and goose populations on the Eastern Shore. Well-crafted duck and goose decoys are still valued not only by hunters, but also by collectors of folk art. By serving delicious local fowl and game, hunt clubs cater to today’s hunters in many parts of Virginia.

The Virginia woods provided food and medicines for Native Americans, and many European settlers and enslaved Africans became familiar with indigenous Virginia plants. Gourmets now prize wild Virginia foods, such as mushrooms and greens. Appalachian ginseng—impossible to cultivate outside its native woods—sells in Asia for thousands of dollars per pound.

Many current pursuits—“communing with nature,” exercising, bird watching, and photography—focus on enjoying quiet time outdoors. Fly-fishing, kayaking, canoeing, hiking, trail riding, and other sports have grown into multi-million-dollar enterprises in Virginia, as well as in England.

Great Outdoor Facts
◆ It is illegal to shoot wildfowl on Christmas Day in England.
◆ One-fourth, or 550 miles, of the Appalachian Trail is in Virginia.
◆ Early waterfowl hunters in Virginia fired punt guns to kill up to eighty birds at once. Some hunters used them for many years after they were outlawed.