

To: Friends of Old Apples
From: Tom Brown

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Apple Search---2012

Much effort was spent during the past year expanding my home orchard; I now have 270 additional apple trees in the ground and many more will be added this year. Apples found during 2011 include the following: Green Wolf River, Gully (Mangum), Koger (Cougar), Larkin Sweet, Millhorn, Raspberry June, Sam Steele, Spice (med., round, red), Sookie, Summer Horse, Yellow Gano, etc.; also possibly the Chestoa (Rabbit's Head).

Boone (NC) has several apple treasures; one tree is located about five blocks west of the Post Office beside a law office. The apples are very large, greenish yellow, with an occasional patch of red, sour, and ripe September and reportedly a very good keeper. My introduction to this tree occurred when a lady mailed me some of the apples about seven years ago. In late October I was passing through Boone and noticed that the tree had many apples and stopped and collected a few. As I more closely examined the apple, I realized that they perfectly fit the description of the Koger apple I had been searching for near Jonesville, VA; prominently mentioned in the Miller's Chapel community. I then mailed some of the apples to three Jonesville people who remembered the Koger, they all said that, "Yes, this is the Koger"; also called the Cougar apple. It made a delicious apple pie with equal parts of Koger, King apple, and an unknown central Tennessee apple.

This year I would like to share with you my love of apple trees. They are trees which provide us with delightful fruit for many uses, shade on a hot afternoon, habitat for wildlife, are great climbing trees for youngsters, and add stories and lore, enriching our enjoyment of life. The trees can be very tall such as a Howard apple, or more dwarfing like a Sheepnose Delicious, have a drooping branch structure as do some Limbertwigs or grow "straight-up" similar to a Winter Spice tree, or have a horizontal branch structure of a Green Biscuit tree, have very rough bark like a Traphill Sheepnose or the very smooth bark of an unknown apple tree in Buchanan County (VA); what an amazing diversity.

Scott County Giant---Randy Moore and Jim Elam took me to see what they describe as "the largest apple tree in Scott County" (VA). From their level of excitement I knew that I was about to see something special. The tree was located high up on a hillside overlooking the former Addington/Dougherty home site, near Addington Frame Church. I was astounded to see this giant; its straight trunk had a circumference of 135 inches (an average diameter of 43 inches). It is known as "the Ma Deli tree" and referred to as a "type of Winesap". When Randy and Jim saw the tree about six months earlier, it still had one massive live branch; sadly the winter storms had taken their toll and the final branch had broken off. I was able to get cuttings and successfully grafted several trees. I returned in August hoping that there had been enough life in the tree to send up some new sprouts for even better grafting wood. I found that there were two sprouts growing from a jagged bark edge, high up on the tree. Upon closer examination, I saw something mysterious about the sprouts. Normally on sprouts, you would see leaves and buds (the buds are for future year's growth). The tree apparently "knew" that there might not be a next year, thus the shoots did not have any buds, but instead fleshy hollow growths where the buds were usually located. It is my opinion that apple trees have a biological intelligence and can do out-of-the ordinary things when necessary for their survival.

Survivors---In a cove behind Roan Mountain (TN) I once saw an intriguing apple tree in late fall; it was a small tree, about 16 feet in height, almost all the leaves had dropped

better showing the large number of bright red apples; making it look like a Christmas tree decorated with red balls. Hale Hughes lived at the home and called it a Jelly apple; some locals said that it was a small Black Ben Davis. The next year this prolific tree was dead. Was the final large crop of apples an effort of the tree to propagate itself into the future?

One of my favorite people was Ora Burnette who lived in the Cruso section of Haywood County; Ora had extensive knowledge about old apple varieties. Near his home were the mostly dead remains of an old apple orchard. The trunks were Stine apple trees (McAfee) which had been "top grafted" with Wolf River at the 8 foot height level. One tree stood as a silent sentinel with its Wolf River branches long dead and now missing; the wooden trunk core was easily visible since 90% of the bark was gone; the only life consisted as a narrow line of live bark that ran from the ground and then high up on the trunk, coming from the top of this bark "run" was one sprout. I got cuttings and the resulting grafted tree was the lost Stine apple. Apple trees are truly amazing survivors.

Lazarus Apple---In eastern Wilkes County (NC), I was impressed by an apple tree at a fallen-down barn, across the road from the East Wilkes Middle School. The beautiful apples were medium sized, firm, whitish in color, and tart. Due to poor scion wood my first grafting attempt was unsuccessful. Mr. Raymond Collins, of the Thurmond Community, recognized the apple as a Canning apple, and told me where a former tree stood. The next year I was horrified when I drove by and saw that the tree was flat on the ground, the tree had fallen months earlier, since the branches seemed to be very dried out. With exhaustive searching I finally found a branch with a very slight hint of green wood. I realistically thought that grafting was probably hopeless, but I grafted six trees anyway. To my surprise one lived. As I was letting my prized tree grow to eventually get more cuttings for grafting, an Ambrosia Beetle attack killed the tree. For the next week I moped around due to the tree loss. I then remembered that I had pruned the trees late and had not yet cleaned up the dropped cuttings. The cuttings were weeks old, but I was able to find the proper cutting. Again, I grafted six trees and miraculously one lived. I now have several grafted trees; which should now probably be called the Lazarus Apple.

Most Beautiful Apple Tree--- Surely, without a doubt, this distinction belongs to a Jenny Beauty apple tree in northeastern Wilkes County. The tree is about 20 feet tall with a branch spread of 40 feet. It has a short massive trunk with two immense limbs, which form an unusual limb structure. One limb grows to the right and then it turns and eventually forms the left side of the tree; the opposite is true of the other branch. The Jenny Beauty tree is an ancient, perfectly formed apple tree, with great mostly red apples.

Lost Friends---As time passes, I have begun to think of these apple trees as dear friends I look forward to revisiting each year. Sadly two of my "best friends" have been lost; one such tree was a Green Bellflower in western Yancey County (NC). It had round green apples the size of a softball; a beautiful green color, juicy and great tasting. Goats killed the tree. Another favorite lost tree was a Red Horse apple which grew in the Dehart section of Wilkes County. The tree was lying down near an old home site; each year it had perfect large flattened red apples and put up a profusion of disease-free sprouts (my favorite grafting tree). One year when I returned I found the tree gone and in its place a mobile home. In both cases I sadly felt that I had truly lost a best friend; but happily I have grafted trees of both. The next time you go to an Indian restaurant, order goat.

I wish you and your family a prosperous 2012. [The Mayan calendar ends 12-21-12.]
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