

Perry, Norman: Redbone Hounds And Wood Pile Dogs ^[1]

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Norman Perry: Redbone Hounds And Wood Pile Dogs

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 10/14/2001. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

They call him "Big Norm" in Bertie County. His name is Norman Perry Sr., and he's 82 years old, tough as old leather, and passionate about big swamps, hot-nosed dogs and coon hunting. He has been a successful farmer and ran the cannery at the Perry-Wynn herring fishery for 50 years, but to this day there's nothing he'd rather do than chase raccoons in a swamp on a cold autumn night. He talked about his lifetime of coon hunting while we drove to his hunting camp in the swampy bottomlands by the Roanoke River.

In Norman Perry's words:



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I can name near about every one of my coon dogs. The best one I ever had was named Sadie. She was not a hundred percent broke coon dog, but you could take her at night, have four or five friends with you, and this dog would strike. I had a Treeing Walker, that's the best breed of dog you can have for hunting. They don't mess a lot on the track. They're good hunting dogs, and maybe some of them might be hot-nosed dogs. They don't mess with cold tracks. Where the blue foxes live, you take a woodpile dog--that's one where you don't know his daddy. Years ago, when you didn't have to confine dogs, he could stay out on the farm. They ran loose on the farm. They'd take up treeing themselves. You find a dog is treeing, you try to get him on the coons to start with. If you don't, deer will run some dogs crazy. You got to just keep hunting, hunting, staying in the woods with that dog. If it runs a deer, you kind of give him a good thrashing, because dogs are crazy about a good dog is one that when you turn him loose, you can handle and call in. My dog Crook was a good tree dog, but not a good locator. A good tree dog will put his feet up on a tree and bark and bark. You have no trouble locating him. Some When I was a kid, my dad was working. He wouldn't hunt. I used to go possum hunting with an old colored man, Charles Spruill. Sometimes we'd catch possums, and sometimes we wouldn't. I was about 10, something like that. He knew I was in the fall of the year, I would go out in the woods squirrel hunting and rabbit hunting, and I started deer hunting when I was about 15. Some of the other boys were happy to hang around the house. Some of them learned to play the piano. I started in the woods coon hunting when I was about 17. My brother was a little older than I was, and he got interested in coon hunting. We started coon hunting together a lot. When I was going to Wake Forest, I'd go to bed early Sunday night. I used to love to deer hunt, but I got out of that. Deer are plentiful everywhere now, but Roanoke River was about the only place you could find deer when I was 16 years old. I don't think there was one bear in Bertie County when I was a boy. Foxes have always been here too. They come and go like the coons. Right about 12 years ago, there was a lot of rabies in the coons, and distemper, and they died out. There's still some coons, but they are very scarce now. Where I'm taking you, you can't believe how it looked 20, 25 years ago. You had big tupelo gum trees and the oak woods was open. I love the oak woods. Good place for raccoons to feed on acorns. See, there's nothing in a pine woods for game. The timber companies cut down the oaks and there's nothing much for game to eat in those places. There are very few oak stands left anywhere. They've been cut down, they sure have. It was beautiful oak land, but it's gone. Up here there's an eight-mile pocosin. I like going in there, but it's tough. It doesn't look tough, but it's mired, no trails. I got lost coon hunting in there one night. Walking along, if you see a clear spot, you don't go there. You go from, I call it, "the swamp." You go into this big swamp at night, as long as you can see the stars, you're all right. You know there's seven little stars that rise in the east and west, and you know the river runs north and south, and east will carry you to the river, west to the river. That's where you did most of your coon hunting, to tell you the truth, in swamps. Raccoons, they love water. He's a water-loving animal. He eats frogs. He'll dig up turtle eggs and eat them. He loves to swim. Water doesn't bother him at all. I've caught a few on the ground, but not many. Just a very few that stop and fight the dogs, and they put up a good fight. All of them are mean. When he falls out the tree, he's ready to fight to the last breath. I love the woods at night. Never had any trouble much, no more than getting cold and falling in a ditch or a swamp and had on hip boots and filled my boots up with water. I've been pretty lucky. Getting lost don't count. You go in the woods, you

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