

MEMBER LIBRARY

ED ZERN — Sportsman, Humorist, Writer, Conservationist



Theodore J. Holsten
EMERITUS MEMBER
Boone and Crockett Club

Many years ago, Ed Zern and fellow outdoor writer Jack Samson were fly-fishing for smallmouth bass. They were in a canoe in Lac Desert in Canada. Samson wrote:

Our Indian guide was quietly paddling us past a sandy bank upon which sat a flock of arctic terns—enjoying the morning sunlight.

“Jackson” Zern said, turning to me, “You got any rocks with you?”

“Hell no,” I said. “Why?”

“Every intelligent person knows,” he said solemnly, “one never leaves a tern unstoned.”

The Indian looked at him as though we were from outer space.

This story was taken from a bulletin of the Outdoor Writers Association. Describing the incident, Samson said:

It must be a genetic trait of humorists that, in person, they don’t appear or sound funny. It took me years to realize Ed Zern really was funny in person, sometimes in a laid-back inscrutable way.

Ed Zern was born in West Virginia in 1910. His early career took him to New

York City where he worked for an advertising agency for many years. One of his principal accounts was American Motors and the advertisements he developed for them were filled with humorous angling anecdotes.

Zern loved fly-fishing and bird hunting, and after complaining about the dreary writing opportunities in the advertising field, his wife convinced him to take up outdoor writing. He wrote stories for sporting magazines, eventually joining the staff of *Field & Stream* magazine where his column “Exit Laughing” was a feature for more than 34 years. He once described his columns as human essays containing, as he put it, “no useful information.”

Field & Stream did a nice feature about Zern’s columns. Although they don’t amount to more than a chuckle, they carried with it the language of a lifetime spent around guns, dogs and fishing gear. He also wrote a number of books, laced with his incomparable outdoor humor, most of them illustrated with his own drawn cartoons.

An avid conservationist, Zern was an early advocate of catch-and-release fishing. He said there is a reason why fishing isn’t just catching; rather the process, the drama, the hunt for fish is what really matters.

Ed Zern was a member of several conservation organizations.

BOOKS BY ED ZERN

- To Hell with Fishing* (1945)
- To Hell with Hunting* (1946)
- How to Tell Fish from Fishermen* (1947)
- How to Catch Fishermen* (1951)
- Are Fishermen People?* (1955)
- A Fine Kettle of Fish Stories* (1972)
- Hunting and Fishing from A to Zern* (1985)
- The Best of Ed Zern* (1985)

He became a Boone and Crockett Professional Member in 1967, and he was so proud of his membership that he applied for and was elected as a regular member in 1975. He suffered from Parkinson’s disease in his later years and joked that his shaking hands gave extra action to his fishing flies on the water! His last “Exit Laughing” column was in 1991. He died in 1994. ■

Theodore J. Holsten Jr.

