

NOVEMBER TRADITION

Please don't ask me to justify hunting because I can't. If I want to eat meat, I can buy it. Hunting isn't "in my atavistic gene memory" because I suppress many primordial urges far more compelling than hunting. That being admitted, I still go deer hunting in November. It's a tradition. Run away to the woods with a bunch of men, get bloody and dirty without the helpful critical remarks I would receive at home, belch prodigiously after a meal without apology, and go unwashed, unshaven and unrepentant. In short, eschew all the good stuff that an ordered society imposes. My trip isn't about hunting at all.

Deer hunting season in most parts of Ontario begins in November. In fact, in most Provinces of Canada and the Northern US States, the hunt begins at the same time. Commercial enterprises shut down on opening day in many jurisdictions. I've hunted since I was a kid, and though the lust to shoot an animal has largely dissipated, the desire to join my hunting friends hasn't abated. Most of them I only see this one week of the year. Before the week expires, I'm tired of them, they're tired of me, and we're all tired of each other. We're fortunate the season is only a week long. It's a strange group of men, ranging in age from 20's to 70's, in fitness from the indefatigable to the feeble, and from the unemployable to the unemployed to corporate heavies. That's as it should be, because behaviour during hunt week is all that matters.

The deer on Manitoulin Island are a strange bunch. Stalking down a wooded path toward the house one afternoon I was startled to hear a deer barking. It was standing, forequarters and head visible in the cedars, barking like a dog. I could see its teeth when it yapped. By the time I recovered my composure, the animal had gone. I made the dreadful mistake of relating this story to my companions and, in spite of my well-earned reputation for truthfulness, I was disbelieved. My observational skills were made light of, too. Yes, I only have one eye and am deaf to birdsong but, by Ned, I can hear a deer barking. Since then, when I have the good fortune to shoot an animal, I cannot get help taking it from the bush until I swear that it is not a Great Dane.

On a dark and overcast morning, with heavy snow falling, I was once given the task of plunging through a large cedar swamp. The theory was that hunters would be

placed strategically on deer exit points, and when the animals slipped away from my thrashing and crashing they would reveal themselves. Well, it was cold, it was snowing, slush kept dripping on my neck from cedar branches, and I wasn't too thrilled with my assignment. Head down, I slogged mindlessly through the swamp. That is, until I saw the fresh footprints of a person. This was distressing, because we're very careful that we know where all other hunters are placed, and it disturbed me that some clown was in the same swamp with me. Some big, heavy fool. Someone wearing boots with the same pattern as mine. Me! I never fessed up to my circular path, figuring no one would be foolish enough to venture into the swamp and see my tracks. No one did, either.

We do more than hunt, of course. Each year there is "the project". The guys that own the old farmhouse that is our cafeteria, abode and casino always have repairs and improvements that must be carried out. These have included placing new supporting beams in the basement so we won't fall through the living room floor, building an outhouse, constructing new barn doors, building a sauna so we don't stink quite so much, and installing bunk beds to replace mattresses on the floor. The quality of the work suffers as the day and the beer wears on. I have previously related the story of the two holer, surprisingly well built, that faces the road. There was not time to make doors, and the theory is that anyone passing in cars will turn their heads in disgust so privacy is assured. In subsequent years doors were added, not for privacy, but to keep the wind down.

As in any group, there are doers and there are delegators. I am a doer, but unfortunately am inept, so work must be found for me that could be performed by a chimp. Often, this work is claimed by others, who say they are intelligent but are resting their brains. I believe

Continued on page 8

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