

Deer season sparks memories

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By ART BRIGGS JUDE

It's hard to believe the deer season is here again. Would you believe a whole year has passed since the frosty leaves fell, your crunching feet as you headed out to an early morning stand?

To many of us, the annual hunt for this most sought-after big game species is as traditional as tapping the trees for the maple sap.

And like the roots of the giant sugar maple, the origin of this autumn pastime is deeply embedded in the groundwork of this country's development.

I think it's important to know these things and to remember them in this often artificial world in which we live. Many people today are caught up in some sort of over-protectionist sphere.

A well-meaning but misinformed segment of the populace por-

trays hunters as nothing short of out-and-out murderers.

Conversely, a quick look under the bark of their own family tree often reveals their grandfathers, uncles, and yes, even their own fathers, were not really such bad ogres despite the fact they annually went afield with a gun.

Leaving such serious thoughts behind, it's off to the woods to follow in the steps of woodsmen that have gone before, to listen to the pine boughs nudged by a scented breeze, to watch the early sun clear the rise of silhouetted trees and hear the red squirrel scold you from the safety of a favorite limb.

There you sniff the cleanest air you ever breathed and feel the expectancy that only a snapping twig can bring.

There's plenty of time for thinking in this waiting whitetail game. Most of us who have racked up more hunts than racks invariably reminisce at some moment about that very first buck.

That past segment in time when all the previous pieces of the fantasy picture came together and the buck was there.

Only you can tell how you managed to squeeze off that all-important first shot with instant results. Though I've taken my share since, that first buck was by far my biggest deer.

Standing along the shores of a Haliburton lake, that huge hardwood buck with the heavy, 12-point spread looked for all the world to me like a woodland elk.

Though we'll never know how much it actually weighed, we knew it was something special when six of us couldn't drag it out.

It was 1946, and we all chipped in \$2 apiece to hire a rock farmer to haul that deer the two miles to our camp on a stone boat. That,

however, is the story's end. The tale really began several hours beforehand.

After watching a rugged hardwood ridge behind the north shore of Blue Hawk Lake until early afternoon, four of our group decided to move closer to camp. As we skirted the lakeshore with me lagging behind, I heard a hound bark somewhere across the lake.

I left the trail and made my way through some bordering cedars to the edge of the water. It was then that I noticed a light-colored hound moving back and forth on the far shore a mile or so distant.

My curiosity was soon rewarded when I saw the object of the hound's pursuit. A buck deer was swimming across the lake. The hound refused to follow.

Quickly fading into one of the cedars, I regained the trail and ran to tell the others. As they had moved some distance it took more time than I anticipated to tell them what was happening and to place them in position to intercept the buck.

As a result, by the time I reached my original sighting spot, the deer was moving right into the pebbly shoreline of a nearby point. As he stepped out on that driftwood beach, my shaking arms somehow steadied momentarily and my old Lee 303 dropped him with a single shot to the neck (not a good place to aim for, I learned later).

The checking station at Norland gave us the information that the deer was more than seven years old and probably weighed more than 300 lbs. To me, he looked heavier than that but then again, it was my first buck.

Of course, as you know, shot deer are like caught fish. They just seem to keep gaining weight and growing in size with each passing year.

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