



Outdoors

Deer camp is better with a buck

THE HOPE of every deer hunter who takes that opening morning walk in darkness, heading for a blind or tree stand, is that somehow the moon and planets will align and send a whitetail buck in his or her direction.

It's that hope that gets us out of bed so early, eating breakfast, packing gear, making sandwiches and brewing in the anticipation of another opportunity to chase deer with a rifle.

The scribbler had plenty of time to finalize a hunt plan on the more than a mile walk deep into the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. I was packing some doe-in-heat scent strips and their placement, upwind from cover but far enough away from my blind, is always crucial.

I found the perfect small tree about 60 yards from my stand, a place where the southwest winds of opening morning would take that tantalizing scent into heavy aspen, spruce and thickets to the north of the little hardwoods I was watching.

Daylight arrived around 6:30 and there was no sign of life until shortly after 8, when a lone doe passed my stand while sneaking toward that daytime bedding area to the north.

And then shortly before 9 o'clock, a deer snorted in alarm from the west side of the hardwoods, the reason for which was totally confusing. I wasn't even close to being upwind of that deer, so it shouldn't have scented me. All I saw was a brief glimpse of a white tail crashing into the brush.

I was more than a little bummed that what I guessed was a doe had

In the Outdoors
By
Kurt Krueger



busted me and told the whole woods that something was amiss. Deer snorting in alarm, also called blowing, usually puts a damper on the hunt for hours.

But suddenly and surprisingly, hardly five minutes passed before I heard crunching steps in the leaves from that same direction. A deer appeared from behind a wind-felled tree, walking straight into the wind toward my scent strips. And it had antlers between its ears.

This deer showed up like 90 degrees to my right, the worst place for a right-handed aim. So I threw up the 30.06 left handed, got the buck in my sights and squeezed off a shot. Buck down.

It's quite the feeling of elation to have a buck on the ground, for history shows that only about 17 percent of deer hunters shoot a buck during the nine-day gun deer season each November.

Deer camp is a blast for many reasons, but there's just something special about bringing a buck back to camp for all to see. I can't tell you just how many times we've stood around a meat pole drinking beer and telling tall tales, old and new, from the deer woods.

We wouldn't starve without harvesting a deer but doing so brings validation to the tradition, which

includes putting venison in the freezer. Summer sausage, hot dogs and other venison-based products are some of the best eating of the year.

Once again our deer camp was on the shores of Sevenmile Lake east of Three Lakes where my only brother, Mark "Lardo" Krueger of Appleton, has a large and fully furnished "cabin" in the heart of the national forest.

Nobody starves in deer camp. We ate a walleye/crappie fish fry on Friday night and a feast of creamed pheasant with wild rice on Saturday night. The plan for Sunday night was fresh venison tenderloin and a big batch of venison chili.

We visit other camps from time to time and this year was no exception. Friday evening we spent a couple of hours near Stevens Lake at some big camps owned by the Knitt brothers of St. Germain fame. They had quite the crew. Deer stories were flying and numerous photos were shared from smart phones and trail cams, all building the suspense for opening morning.

On Saturday night we hit the Yadro Camp on Anvil Lake and the Ridderbusch "Dirty Shame" Camp on Sundstein Road. Neither camp had a deer hanging from opening day, but some bucks were seen.

The deer hunting tradition is so great because it brings family and friends together. It's a place where young hunters are welcome to take it all in, catching the same hunting fever that's kept the sport going for more than 100 years.

We do it every year here in the national forest despite the fact that today, Wisconsin's most productive



It was a three-point buck, just a yearling, but the sighting of any legal buck in the national forest these days is a huge blessing. —Photo By The Author

deer hunting is found in the farm country units of central and southern Wisconsin. Pictures of monster bucks from those counties were already hitting our phones, via text and email, on Saturday night.

Some of our oldest camps were founded in the 1950s and 1960s when the best place in Wisconsin to shoot a big buck was the North Woods. A lack of logging and too many predators has changed that considerably, but there's still a rich deer camp tradition to pass through the generations here.

There's still a lot of hunting

opportunity for gun deer hunters, as the nine-day rifle season that ends this Sunday will be followed by a 10-day muzzleloader hunt. Anyone with a leftover buck or doe authorization can take advantage of the muzzy season.

The heart of the deer hunting experience is the chase and all the strategy that goes into trying to outsmart a buck. But deer camp reigns supreme regardless of whether we actually harvest something, and nobody can take that fun away.

And the legacy of the deer hunt continues.



RUN ON TIGERS — Tony Williams of Munster, Ind., was fishing with guide "Ranger Rick" Krueger when he caught this 42-inch "tiger" muskie. In three days of guiding this fall, Krueger and his

clients boated four "tiger" muskies and never saw a true muskie during the period. Photos of the other three "tigers" can be viewed on page 11B.

—Courtesy Guides Choice Pro Shop

State park passes to go on sale

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced the 2022 state park and forest admission passes will go on sale Nov. 26.

The passes are for those people looking to find access to some of the most scenic areas in Wisconsin, including thousands of miles of trails, dozens of beaches and a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities.

"We are excited to offer admission stickers and trail passes earlier this year and look forward to welcoming visitors to our state parks, forests and trails for a post-Thanksgiving Day adventure," said

Steve Schmelzer, DNR parks director. "Visitors can celebrate the new year a month early by purchasing admission stickers online, at state park and forest properties or over the phone."

The 2022 stickers and passes for admission to parks, forests, recreation areas and trails are valid from the date of purchase through Dec. 31, 2022.

The vehicle admission stickers provide access to more than 60 state parks, forests and recreation areas across Wisconsin.

The stickers are required on all motor vehicles visiting state parks and recreation

areas. Some state forest and trail parking areas also require the sticker.

People can give the gift of the great outdoors by purchasing admission stickers and trail passes for family, friends and co-workers in time for the holidays. The DNR recommends purchasing stickers by Friday, Dec. 10, to receive them before the holidays.

A state trail pass is required for all people age 16 or older biking, in-line skating, horseback riding, cross-country skiing or off-highway motorcycling on specific state trails. A state trail pass is not required for walking or hiking.

An admission sticker costs \$28 for Wisconsin residents or \$38 for nonresidents. If there is more than one vehicle registered to the same household, additional state park and forest stickers are available for \$15.50 for residents and \$20.50 for nonresidents. A senior citizen annual sticker for \$13 is available for Wisconsin residents 65 years of age and older. Annual trail passes are \$25 for residents and nonresidents.

Resident and nonresident annual admission stickers are available online and at individual state park and forest

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Fishing with the Guides

By George Langley



Ice fishing nears here as lakes freezing up

We are so close to ice fishing now that the hard water anglers can taste it. If it will stay cold now, the ice will form fast. Small lakes and bays already are covered with a thin layer of ice.

This is a good time to remind everyone to carry an ice spud and to be extremely careful when going out on new ice. Be sure to check the thickness wherever you go out on that ice.

The best scenario the North Woods could get is for a week of good cold weather to thicken that ice before the snow arrives. Last year, we got heavy snow right away and it resulted in slush on the lakes.

Open water fishing is done. There were few muskie anglers on lakes during the deer season opener. Ninety-nine percent of the anglers have put their boats away for the winter. It's time.

That early season ice fishing can be productive for both walleyes and perch. Tip-up fishing is great in the evenings for walleyes on this thin ice. Use medium shiner minnows under the tip-ups for best results. Set them on the outside of the weeds and intercept the walleyes as they come in to feed. Locate yourself on the shore side of the tip-ups, so you don't scare the fish before they get to the tip-ups. Remember that the fish will be quite sensitive to noise with the thin ice.

In many cases, there will be some perch bothering those tip-ups. There is nothing you can do except fish for perch with jigging rods in the same areas with smaller minnows or waxies. On occasion, you can end up with some good bags of both fish.

It will be a long time before we'll be able to get onto the ice with vehicles, including four-wheelers or snowmobiles. When the ice thickens, be careful with those machines as a few go through the ice in the early winter season every year.

At least ice anglers have a lot to look forward to in the coming weeks. Check out those auger blades and think about getting them sharpened.

Good luck and good fishin'.



Early ice can be one of the best times for tip-up fishing for walleyes. —File Photo