

FRANK RITZ TAKES HONORS AS THE BEST DEER HUNTER 9/12/95

Old Forge in its day has seen many good deer hunters, as did every Adirondack community. There were none better or with any more incentive than Frank Ritz.

With 10 children to feed, venison was about the only meat he could afford. On at least two occasions Frank, however, paid dearly when Joe Jenkins, the local game protector, tripped him up. Frank and his partner, George Sperry, would retaliate by decorating Jenkin's lawn with leftover deer parts.

George Sperry would never load more than one shell in his rifle, especially when they were poaching. It's hard to locate a single shot, but the second one is easy to pinpoint. Frank must not have adhered to that principle because he shot one barrel out of his old 32 Remington model 81 rifle. His son, Red, still has it.

June was usually the earliest that deer were in condition to eat. When the attic window was open with just the screen covering it, the locals figured Frank had started the season.

George Elthorpe had inquired one day as to whether Frank had any meat to date. Frank replied in the negative.

That evening, George stopped at Frank's to pick him up for a fishing trip. They had not finished supper and George overheard one of the kids complained he didn't like the meat; it seemed it was sticking to the roof of his mouth. After that, George always inquired whether or not Frank had any of that meat that "sticks to the roof of your mouth."

After Frank's home was searched another place had to be found to hang the deer. There was no end to their ingenuity in that regard. The deer were stored in the rough boxes that were kept in the garage in back of Leon Eldridge's funeral home.

Frank had a camp on the south shore of Nick's Lake. He spent as much time as possible there hunting, fishing and trapping. Red recalls running his trapline with his father at night with a lantern to take advantage of the crust during the spring thaw.

Like most reformers, Frank could not stand the thought of game law violators in his later years. One night the crew brought a short-horned buck into camp and Frank packed up to leave. They left with the deer, so he wouldn't go.

Providing for his large family did not leave much time for Frank to relax. When he did, however, he knew how to entertain.

Jim Patrick was operating the Band Box, a local watering hole located where the Tow Bar is now. It was late one winter evening, business was slow, no one was in the place and Patrick was busy in the back room. He took his time before coming out to attend to whoever had come in.

When he came out, there was Frank, standing on his head on the bar, soaking wet in his long underwear. They had been cutting ice on Old Forge Pond that day and Frank had jumped in to win a bet. (I would like to see Dick Bird top that!)

Frank was a woodsman to the end. He had been having serious heart problems and had been cautioned to slow down.

One fall day Red and his nephew, Jack Foster Jr., were hunting the Pug Hole on the south end of Nick's Lake. Red looked over across the swamp and saw his dad still hunting along the other side. He hollered over and asked the old timer what he was doing there.

Frank's reply was typical: "What the hell do you think I'm doing? I'm hunting deer."

See you further on down the ridge, Frank!