

GIVE THE BUCK EVERY ADVANTAGE & EXPERIENCE A FULFILLING HUNT

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Last week's column was about my observations and experiences on the relationships between deer and coyotes. This one is on my relationship with deer and how it has changed over the years.

Hunting has been a tradition in our family for as long as anyone can remember. I started by accompanying my father and uncle on hunts for small game. I became a pickup man, I retrieved the rabbits and pheasants they harvested.

I was taught the strict rules of gun and hunting safety. By the time I was 14 and eligible to hunt small game, I was well prepared to be a responsible hunter. The move into the realm of big game hunting was a big step.

Deer hunting was much more dangerous and required more restraint because of the more powerful big game rifles and their longer range. Deer were nearly nonexistent near my home in Oswego County and scarce at our camp on Tug Hill. Deer were plentiful in the southern tier counties where only shotguns with slugs were allowed. They reached nuisance proportions and both sexes were fair game.

My first few years of deer hunting were exciting and rewarding. My early training of being stealthy and a part of the woods as the dogs circled the rabbits and foxes was even more essential in deer hunting.

It was not long before I began hunting deer in the Adirondacks and I learned that there is a big distinction between that and my original deer experiences. I had been shooting deer in the southern tier and had to hunt deer in the Adirondacks.

There are several ways to hunt deer. One is with groups of hunters that take turns driving the deer toward each other. This is without doubt the most effective method of harvesting deer.

If you do not like crowds, especially in dangerous situations, you hunt alone or with a partner or two. Many like to sit and watch for moving deer from vantage points overlooking natural runways.

I have always preferred hunting alone or with no more than two others. We usually do what I can "line hunt." The hunters hunt parallel to each other a safe distance apart, meeting later at a prearranged point and time.

I particularly enjoy hunting alone in the remote areas where one must rely on a map and compass. Previously unexplored areas offer challenges and enjoyment that add to the hunt and are fulfilling regardless of whether or not the hunt is successful.

I prefer to hunt along slowly, taking advantage of wind, terrain and weather to outsmart old mature bucks on their own ground. In short, I am most fulfilled giving them as much advantage as possible.

If I am successful, I in no way have to feel guilty in providing a magnificent wild creature a more humane end than it could ever expect in nature. I feel no more remorse in enjoying the meat than I do a good beefsteak or veal and lamb chops. Unfortunately, this, like many of the better things in life, has more demanding requirements. I have reached the point in time where I have had to modify my participation in one of my favorite past times.

The deer are going to have to forgive me if I compromise my principles somewhat. I am considering hunting from my butt in a tree or other vantage point. I still expect to cover a fair amount of territory under the right conditions and terrain, but nothing like I did in the past.

I am not ready yet to give up hunting entirely, or ever will as long as I am able, I will, however, before I resort to canned hunts over bait or planted forage where the deer are shot from sophisticated blinds. I am and have always been, ever since I learned better, a hunter and not a murderer.

All things considered, in view of how well I once performed other tasks, the deer as they always have, will still have the advantage.