

FISHING DERBY OR HUNTING CAMP: A TOUGH CHOICE FOR MANLY MEN 03/07/00

As hard as it is to believe, I screwed up the weekend of February 26. I committed to an engagement for the weekend some weeks earlier, forgetting it was the annual ice fishing derby weekend.

I had a particular interest because an unfortunate chain of events did me out of the top prize last year. I touched on the sad fact in my column following last year's event. Faithful readers may recall I vowed that old age and treachery would insure that there would be no repeat. I hereby renew the vow to make amends next year. Stay tuned.

My diversion was a retreat at a friend's hunting camp near Schroon Lake. Please note I refer to the event as a "retreat." Although I am not impressed with the proliferation of euphemisms spawned by those of the liberal persuasion, I unconsciously incorporate their use. I admit "retreat" sounds much more consequential than "get together."

Initially I believed it to be a simple male bonding case with perhaps six participants. It turned out to include 11, and a much more auspicious occasion than I originally anticipated. A good friend and three of his compadres celebrated the burning of the mortgage on their mutually owned camp.

We were feted with wine and food of a quality and quantity men come to know as a prerequisite of camp life. A short speech presentation of hats bearing the camp image and name, and "Cedar Rock Camp, Schroon Lake" became official.

One of our hosts and another camper left their cigars and poker long enough to don immaculate chef hats and jackets to prepare our repast. The main course was a crown center cut pork roast with dressing and a whole grilled beef tenderloin. Mashed potatoes, squash and salads with beverage of choice rounded out the meal. Coffee and pie followed after a necessary interval for the main course to settle for those who could find room for it.

By far the oldest member of the group, I reveled in the status and difference usually associated with the position. In other words, I weaseled out of many of the camp chores, as well as being assigned the best bed in camp next to the convenience of the door necessary for the nightly call to nature. A not-too-shabby perk considering the over indulgence in coffee that seems to be my bent on such sojourns.

We were an admirable group of modern males reaching out for a bit of the pioneer spirit still smoldering in the genes. Ostensibly, I was the only retired member of the group. From what I gathered, the rest consisted of a good cross section of today's taxpayers and government supporters.

They included, among others, a network marketer, Mercedes dealer, phone repairman, pharmacist, computer systems sales rep, state construction inspector, and printers. There was a Tom, Richie, Roger, Dominic, Chris, Mike, Miles and a Ronnie, who was the father of a 14 year-old student, John.

Ronnie, a divorced father, had only gained custody of son John a month earlier. The elders did their best to welcome John into the outdoor fraternity. We succeeded with the target shooting, but sensed we may have fallen short in the country music and some of our choices for hors d'oeuvres.

The camp can only be described as typical. It is a vintage 40s two-story wood frame affair 14 x 28 feet with an adjacent open woodshed. It is located in a wooded site off a dirt town road, at the end of a mile of seasonal use access road.

It sports an old Army wood-fired range, gas range and boxwood heating stove. The walls and ceiling are festooned with cooking utensils and gas lights. A steep stairway leads to a loft with bunks for seven. The floor has a trap door over a small root cellar where food items can be stored safe from freezing.

A picture of Bill Smith, Adirondack storyteller, has a place of prominence with two posters that captured my attention and sense of humor. One poster features pictures of Hitler, Castro, Qaddafi and Stalin bracketed with the notation: "The experts agree. Gun control works." The other states: "When the white man discovered this country Indians were running it. No taxes or debt. Women did all the work. White man thought he could improve on a system like that?"

A marten provided us with an unusual sight as he approached quite near for handouts of bacon. Long endangered in New York, they have staged a comeback and may be trapped in limited numbers once again.

It's a small world. Former Limekiln camp owners Gene and Marge Foster have a home on the town road near the entrance to the camp. They asked me to give their regards to Nancy Sehring, Al Drake, Gary Lee and the rest of their friends in the area.

I missed the fishing derby, but enjoyed the trip from start to finish. The early morning ride up on Saturday through the hamlets of Weavertown and Loon Lake to Schroon was great. The return trip via Olmstedville and Minerva to North Creek was beautiful, as the day was Sunday afternoon.